

**The National Committee for
Liberation ("ARM"),
1960 - 1964**

**Sabotage and the Question of the Ideological
Subject**

Andries du Toit

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degree in History at the University of Cape Town

For my Parents

"All of us are living and thinking subjects. What I react against is the fact that there is a breach between social history and the history of ideas. Social historians are supposed to describe how people act without thinking, and historians of ideas are supposed to describe how people think without acting. Everybody both thinks and acts."

Michel Foucault

"To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."

Walter Benjamin

Abstract

Title

The National Committee for Liberation ("ARM") 1960 - 1964: sabotage and the question of the ideological subject.

Subject Matter

The dissertation gives an account of the history of the National Committee for Liberation (NCL), an anti-apartheid sabotage organisation that existed between 1960 and 1964. The study is aimed both at narrating its growth and development in the context of South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, and explaining its strategic and political choices. In particular, the reasons for its isolation from the broader struggle against Apartheid and its inability to transcend this isolation are investigated.

Sources

Discussion of the context of the NCL's development depended on secondary historical works by scholars such as Tom Lodge, Paul Rich, C. J. Driver and Janet Robertson as well as archival sources. The analysis of liberal discourse in the 1950s and 1960s also drew heavily on primary sources such as the liberal journals **Contact**, **Africa South** and **The New African**.

Secondary sources were also used for the discussion of the NCL's strategy in the context of the development of a theory of revolutionary guerilla warfare after the Second World War: here the work of Robert Taber, John Bowyer Bell, Kenneth Grundy and Edward Feit was central. The history of the NCL itself was reconstructed from trial records, newspapers and personal interviews. Archival sources such as The Karis-Carter collection, the Hoover Institute microfilm collection of South African political documents, the Paton Papers, the Ernie Wentzel papers were also extensively used.

Methodology

The discussion of the discourse of liberal NCL members depended on a post-structuralist theory of subjectivity. The conceptual underpinnings of the thesis were provided by on the work of Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Michel Pêcheux, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Slavoj Žižek. Pêcheux's elaboration of the Althusserian concept of interpellation formed the basis of a discourse analysis of

NCL texts. In the interviews, some use was also made of techniques of ethnographic interviewing developed by qualitative sociologists such as James Spradley.

Conclusions

The analysis focused on the way NCL discourse constructed a NCL members as "ordinary persons", a subject-position which implied a radical opposition between political struggle and ideological commitment. The NCL's strategic difficulties were related to the contradictions this discourse, related to metropolitan political traditions that valorised civil society, manifested in the context of post-Sharpeville South Africa. These contradictions were explored in terms of the Lacanian notion of the "ideological fantasy". The dissertation thus closes with a consideration, both of the importance of the ideological traditions identified in the analysis of NCL discourse, and the methodological importance of non-reductive conceptualisations of political identity and ideology.

Andries du Toit

University of Cape Town

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Preface

And you may ask yourself: Well... how did I get here?
 And you may ask yourself: Am I right?... Am I wrong?
 And you may say to yourself: MY GOD. WHAT HAVE I DONE?

David Byrne, *Once in a Lifetime*

In the pages that follow I have tried to tell the story of the National Committee for Liberation;¹ of how their moral and political concerns led to the decision to abandon non-violent, peaceful protest and to consider sabotage and armed insurrection, and how that choice led, eventually, to disaster and ruin for many of its members. In telling this story I have focused on NCL-members' intentions, their hopes and the values that impelled them to turn to sabotage. But besides this I have also tried to show the broader discursive network which shaped these concerns and gave them their particular meaning. For although nothing seems more obvious than the feeling that we know ourselves and know what we think, this sense of self-presence, this belief that our own identities are transparently available to us, obscures the extent to which our intentions are shaped by a greater text, and hides the broader discursive frameworks that give us our positions as subjects, and install us in the places from which we survey the world.

That is one way of telling the story. There are other ways. Certainly, when I set out to study the political thought and practice of liberal intellectuals after Sharpeville, I never suspected that I would end up focusing on the NCL/ARM to the extent that I did: that my course of research would lead me far from the archives and libraries of the University of Cape Town, to interview ex-saboteurs in England and Europe. Neither did I expect that my research would lead me to question many of my own assumptions about ideology and subjectivity; that my decision to move away from philosophy to history would eventually lead me back to philosophy, so that at the moment I do not belong comfortably or completely in either realm. In this preface, therefore, I hope to give an account of the process by which this thesis became a narrative of the history of the NCL/ARM, and how that narrative came to be so closely concerned with the nature of ideological subjectivity.

¹ The fact that the name of this organisation changed from the National Committee for Liberation (NCL) to the African Resistance Movement (ARM) just before its demise may be a source of confusion. I have used the term "NCL/ARM" when I refer to the entirety of the organisation's existence, from 1960 to 1964. When referring to it at any specific moment, I have used the name applicable during that time: i.e. "National Committee for Liberation" before June 1964 and "African Resistance Movement" thereafter.

My own decision to move from the Department of Political Philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch to the Department of History at the University of Cape Town was in itself what Althusserians like to call an "overdetermined" event. In part it was motivated by practical considerations; in part to a growing sense that the Socratic tradition that informed the Department of Political Philosophy, a tradition that had sustained us as students in our commitment to philosophy, was being thrown increasingly into crisis by the events of the mid-1980s. That critical intellectual and moral tradition, articulated above all by the Head of Department, prof. Johann Degenaar, had made the Department a crucial reference point for generations of students, and had turned it into an important base from which their own dissent and criticism of the Nationalist hegemony at Stellenbosch could be articulated. As that hegemony became less monolithic, and as a pluralist and reformist pragmatism started to replace the ideology articulated by Malan and Verwoerd, that critical tradition was itself placed in an ambiguous position. For me, these ambiguities became especially manifest in our Honours year, in 1986. I believe that these difficulties were shared in some measure by my fellow-students in that year, Lou-Marié Kruger and Jaco Malan. I cannot, however, speak for them; and must set out the difficulties as I saw them.

In the intellectual tradition articulated in the Department, two concerns were paramount. The first was a commitment to rational and critical thought as essential to human freedom. The second was the imperative that such a critical commitment had to be lived out in engagement with concrete political problems. In other words, for us the commitment to reason was a commitment to **emancipatory** reason, and was intimately concerned with the project of building a free South Africa. In earlier times, the Department's overriding philosophical character had been overwhelmingly existentialist. By the mid-1980s, its critical commitment was increasingly being seen in terms of the textual strategies of deconstruction and post-structuralism. The enterprise of a critical questioning that never lays down its tools was articulated in terms of the post-structuralist refusal of the metaphysics of self-presence and closure.

But what became of this tradition when it had to confront the South Africa that lay outside Stellenbosch, the South Africa of the first national State of Emergency, of detentions, necklacings, of oppression and mass resistance? Not to take a stand here would be to fail to live up to the demands of the Socratic tradition. But when we tried to take our philosophical commitment into the struggle, it seemed curiously impotent and irrelevant. In our political work, it became more and more evident that the stance of a "gad-fly", concerned to problematise that which seems self-evident, was not at all welcome. Indeed, such an attitude was seen as the symptom of an irresponsible anarchism or an obscurantist Trotskyism.

In the South Africa of 1986, a choice was not difficult. In its unremitting insistence on problematising any given position, post-structuralism seemed unequal to the challenge of being part of the process of changing South Africa. Instead, I felt increasingly attracted to a more orthodox and reductionist Marxism.

This move was not conceived as a simple rejection of the Socratic tradition as such. Rather, it was a rejection of one way of articulating that tradition. In fact, part of the power of a more Marxist approach seemed to lie in the fact that it enabled us to ask critical questions about that Socratic tradition itself. In other words, the crisis of the Socratic tradition could (and had to) be historically understood. It seemed to me that the crisis we experienced related precisely to the undialectical way in which we ourselves had seen the dichotomy between criticism and political practice. It seemed to me that this was but a particular example of a wider problem: the manner in which, in South African intellectual history, the project of critical enquiry had often been seen as standing outside and in opposition to the terrain of political practice. The paradigm case of this distance seemed to be J. M. Coetzee's magistrate in **Waiting for the Barbarians**: his distance from the simple immediacy of experience led not to rational action, but to an absolute vacuum where no choice was safe from thought's corrosive and cynical logic. A similar problem seemed to exist in the thought of N. P. van Wyk Louw: his commitment to rationality was inscribed in a world view which made a systematic and deep division between the terrain of reason and that of political action. Reason was a sacred tradition of its own, the service of an ahistorical and acontextually valid realm of universal absolutes. Political action belonged to the broken world after the Fall, the sublunary realm of particularistic claims and interests. The two could never be reconciled. Those committed to truth should search for it in logical argument, Louw seemed to say, while a commitment to justice could only be lived out in terms of some kind of noble martyrdom the concrete purpose of which was obscure. And this world-denying vision of the nature of rationality seemed to form part of a kind of fascist ideology, a glorification of the artist/leader/thinker, lonely and pure, rising far above the complacent, unreasoning and, yes, stupid masses of the *volk*. Our problem at Stellenbosch was therefore part of a broader tendency to see critical commitment as something external to and outside the terrain of South African political struggle, something which belonged, not to ordinary, struggling people, but to an intellectual elite. To conceive of the project of emancipatory reason in such terms was to doom it from the outset.

That is how I came to study, as a student at UCT's Department of History, the fate of Liberals in South Africa after the Sharpeville massacre. For Liberalism seemed to me a key example of this general problem. From an earlier confidence that South Africa could become a "fair and

reasonable" social order, many committed Liberals had become pessimistic, seeing South African politics as a chaotic realm upon which rational discourse could find no hold. If one could understand the historical nature of such a vision and show how this dichotomy between "reason" and South African politics took shape - if one could show from what assumptions it proceeded and what social processes determined its development - it would be a step towards transcending the false dilemmas that flowed from its terms. I therefore turned to an examination of the political theory and social practice of the Liberal Party of South Africa, and set myself the task of showing how this practice was affected by the Sharpeville massacre and the broader social processes that preceded and followed that event.

Research has its own imperatives, and I quickly found that my studies were taking on a direction of their own. Firstly the problem as I stated it was impossibly vague. I had conceptualised the problem in very broad and sweeping terms: such a conceptualisation was well suited to the discipline of philosophy, but history was concerned above all with concrete problems, problems that could be addressed in the course of a specific and coherent narrative. Secondly, the enterprise of talking about Liberalism in such global terms seemed to me more and more problematic. There was not one liberalism in South Africa, but several, and within these streams there were still more specific liberal discourses. Tempting as it was, one could not without mystification reduce to one tradition the Hegelian Liberalism of the philosopher Alfred Hoernle, the impetuous radicalism of a Patrick Duncan, the economic Liberalism of an O'Dowd and the plain-speaking moral judgements of an Alan Paton. If one tried to talk confidently about Liberalism as if it had some overwhelming and monolithic logic, some *Zeitgeist* of its own, one would only obscure the complex and problematic nature of the relationships, the similarities and dissimilarities, between specific Liberal discourses.

Although I still related my research to the broad questions I asked when I set out, I therefore concentrated increasingly on the fortunes of what Tom Lodge has called "radical liberalism". If the Liberal Party was a desperate attempt to intervene politically in the Liberal cause, the radical liberals that formed such a vocal part of its younger membership seemed to be the persons who had confronted in its most extreme form the task of making Liberal principles mean something in the extra-parliamentary arena. And here, the story of the NCL/ARM interested me more and more. On one level, I was drawn in simply by the drama of their story. And on another, they seemed to be an essential part of the story of radical liberalism. Even then my attention was focused, not so much on their own story but on the greater failure of which (I supposed) they were a symptom and example. Their story was important to me because the mere fact of their existence illustrated the extent to which radical liberals had failed to resolve

their problems in the arena of above-ground political struggle. This failure could, I reasoned, be explained through the sort of account of social struggles and the material conditions underlying them that recent Marxist social history had made possible. I supposed that I had spent enough time deciding what to write about, and that I could now go ahead, relatively unproblematically, with research.

I was wrong. As my research progressed, doubts again started to plague me; doubts which became more insistent. Besides the questions of focus sketched above, there was a third problem I faced in my work. This problem was methodological. The perspective I had adopted seemed less and less suited to an understanding of the NCL/ARM. In particular, its imperatives seemed always to lead me **away** from the NCL/ARM, rather than **towards** it. At the root of the centrifugal tendency of my research was Marxism's distinction between a correct understanding of the social forces at a given period, and the illusory ideas, the 'false consciousness', of social actors (in my case, NCL/ARM members). In my own research, this distinction had led me to disregard this 'false consciousness'; the task of understanding their consciousness did not seem as important as the task of explaining how that consciousness had been "produced". But what was the use of a study of the NCL/ARM which remained silent about the NCL/ARM, and which did not see them as interesting except as an "example", a symptom of a general problem? What about the possibility of focusing on them in their own right, and trying to explain their course of action? Could one not, rather than **explaining away** their discourse, seek to **understand** it?

Once the mountain had laboured and brought forth this simple question, many of my objections to post-structuralism started to disappear. Indeed, the sorts of questions asked by post-structuralists seemed precisely geared to this enterprise. In their problematising of the subject, in their investigation of the ways in which consciousness is inscribed in the network of a broader text or system of difference, writers like Foucault and Derrida seemed to be looking at precisely the right sort of question. While I had originally turned to orthodox Marxism in an effort to close off or suspend the sorts of questions asked by authors like Derrida and Foucault, it now seemed that I could harness these questions and lay open the project by which the NCL/ARM came to take the road it did.

Thus it came about that by May 1988, in addition to my research on the NCL/ARM, I was re-reading and re-discovering many of the post-structuralist texts I had rejected earlier. Throughout the ensuing two years, this cross-pollination continued. Thus, as my research progressed, I slowly gravitated towards Althusser's emphasis on the ideological subject. Althusser's conception of the subject seemed to provide a point of reference which made it

possible to address a whole range of issues that seemed to me bound up with the NCL/ARM's rise and catastrophic fall. Pêcheux's elaboration of that concept made possible a strategy for implementing these insights and formulating a method of discourse analysis that could be used to "unpeel" the central texts of the NCL/ARM. At the same time, this framework made it possible to use the techniques of ethnographic interviewing borrowed by American qualitative sociologists from the discipline of ethnography.² The results of such rudimentary analysis impelled me, in turn, to take more and more seriously the Lacanian elements in Althusser's writings.

During my stay in England, I was fortunate enough to make contact with post-graduate students at the university of Essex who, together with Dr Ernesto Laclau, had been working through the implications of a Lacanian re-interpretation of Althusser with far greater rigour. These students made available to me the writings of the Yugoslavian Lacanian Slavoj Zizek. Initially, I could not see the specific relevance of his thought to a study of the NCL/ARM. It was only in January this year, when my own detailed analysis of NCL/ARM and liberal discourse was almost at an end, that I saw how a range of apparently divergent and problematic features of that discourse could be understood in terms of Zizek's conception of the "ideological fantasy".

In the end, therefore, this dissertation occupies an ambiguous position. Like the social historians who have tried to make audible the voices of working-class people, who have tried to supplement the abstract theoretical categories of structuralist Marxism with a look at the experiences and the texture of working-class lives, I have tried to write an account that is alive to the complex nature of social consciousness. Like these social historians, one of my concerns has been to "rescue" (to use again an oft-used phrase) the voiceless subjects of structuralist, reductionist analyses from the "enormous condescension of posterity"; to allow these subjects to speak, and to show the ways in which they conceptualised the world. In other ways, however, my approach diverges from that of social history as it is presently conceived. Though elsewhere social history has embraced discourse analysis and the insights it provides, this "rescue-operation" has in South African social history always had a curiously limited sweep. The narrative of the "experience" of working-class persons has tended to be a subsidiary voice, complementing and filling out ("adding nuance and texture", as Shula Marks has put it³) to a master-narrative that still unfolded in terms of the overriding categories of class identity.

² James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (New York, Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1979)

³ Shula Marks, "The Historiographies of South Africa: Recent Developments", in Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (eds.), *African Historiographies: what history for which Africa?* (Beverly Hills, Sage, 1986), p. 174.

Reacting to this tendency to see consciousness simply as a reflection of a more or less transparent "experience" of the objective conditions recognised by Marxist analysis, T. Dunbar Moodie has called, in a recent review of a collection of South African social history, for a return to Gramsci and a consciousness of hegemony:

"These essays confirm my impression that the incredibly rich array of historical work which has been inspired by the paradigm shift of the 1970s has outrun its theoretical origins and underpinnings... [M]ore nuanced theories of politics and ideology need to be elaborated to make sense of twentieth-century South African History... The best articles in this book point to political opportunities lost not least because of undialectical conceptualisation and inadequate ideological initiatives..."⁴

As David Atwell has pointed out in a recent essay, this complexity means that historical writing shall have to "show what goes into the making of discourse, not only by attending to its conditions of possibility, but by attending to discourse itself, to the way it negotiates a path for itself in those conditions."⁵ This approach has, I believe, much to offer social history. It emphasises the complexity of the task, not just of making heard the voices of ordinary South Africans, but of **listening to** and **understanding** (which means analysing!) these voices. It insists that these voices should be listened to not only because they "express" people's "experience", but also because they are political acts; and that as political acts we should be alive to the ways in which they, too, deny certain alternatives, close off undecidable questions, contain fault-lines, blind spots, instabilities. It shows us how persons construct political space and political identity in their most everyday discourse, how they represent to themselves and each other (and thus appropriate and hegemonise) the world in which they find themselves; and it also shows how these representations are in turn vulnerable to crisis.

It is from precisely these concerns that my own work has sprung, from a conviction that "consciousness", "discourse", "ideology" has its own weight and its own complexity. Outside South Africa, there are many social historians who have taken up these issues. Gareth Stedman Jones, for example, has addressed these questions some time ago, insisting that class could not be understood as an aspect of a social reality that existed outside and/or prior to its articulation in language.⁶ Another example is the work of Robert Darnton, also working under the banner of "History from below", and who has shown the immense power of post-structuralist approaches to

⁴ T. Dunbar Moodie, Review of Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, *The Politics of Race Class and Nationalism* (London & New York, Longman, 1987) in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 15 No. 3 (April 1989), p. 530.

⁵ David Atwell, "Political supervision: the case of the 1990 Wits History Workshop", *Pretexts*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (Winter 1990), p. 80.

⁶ Gareth Stedman-Jones, "Introduction", *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832 - 1982* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983).

French cultural history.⁷ In the USA this approach is also well-established. Again, I cannot provide a survey; examples of this approach are Clifton Crais's work on the discursive logic of settler ideology⁸ and the Comaroffs' work on the constitution of African working-class subjectivity.⁹

Inside the country, however, there is comparatively little published work on this terrain, and it has been in the fields of archeology, anthropology and literary studies that the insights of discourse analysis have been deployed in analysing South African politics. It seems, however, that some current research is starting to address these questions in the field of South African history. Andrew Merrifield's analysis of the discourse of the Natives Representative Council has already received some exposure,¹⁰ while Shamiel Jeppie has deployed some of the analytical tools of an Althusserian approach to the study of popular culture in District Six.¹¹ Lou-Marié Kruger's current work on *volksmoeder* discourse, which looks in detail at the discursive constitution of social identity and gender among Afrikaner women also takes forward this project.¹² My own work on liberalism should be seen as occupying the space opened by these projects, and as an attempt to continue and further this work.

Where does this leave me in relation to my original project? On one level, and almost to my surprise, I saw many of my original concerns figure in my eventual account of the NCL/ARM's career, albeit in a changed form. For eventually, the story of the NCL/ARM is the story of how Liberalism came to see South Africa in terms of an ever-increasing divide between the ideal and the actual, between the world of reason and the violent realm of irrationality.

But on another level, I was able to write this account only because I had left behind me the way in which I had originally formulated my question. Firstly, as my work progressed, it became clear that many of the initial difficulties I had experienced - the trouble I had had to formulate my project in less general, more concrete terms, for example - had flowed from a logical

⁷ Robert Darnton. *The Great Cat Massacre and other episodes in French cultural history*. (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984).

⁸ Clifton C. Crais. "The Vacant Land: the Political Mythology of British Expansion in the Eastern Cape, South Africa". Paper presented at the Departmental Seminar, Department of History, University of Cape Town, 8 October 1989.

⁹ John L. and Jean Comaroff. "The madman and the migrant: work and labour in the historical consciousness of a South African people". *American Ethnologist* 14 (1987)

¹⁰ Andrew Merrifield. "Beyond Class Politics: The Political Practice of the Natives Representative Council" (typescript of paper prepared for the Class Analysis Working Group of the Association for Sociology in Southern Africa, 3 July 1985).

¹¹ Shamiel Jeppie. "I.D. du Plessis and the 'Re-invention' of the 'Malay', c. 1935 - 1952" (Paper presented at the Africa Seminar, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 28 September 1988).

¹² Lou-Marié Kruger. *Gender Community and Identity: Women and Afrikaner Nationalism in the "Volksmoeder" discourse of Die Boerevrou*. Unpublished draft typescript of MA Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1990.

incoherence at the heart of my original project. Originally, I had been concerned about the problematic nature of many South African intellectuals' understanding of the relation between rational criticism and political practice. I had hoped that it would be possible to start resolving this problem if one could place it in a global way and show its historical nature, if one could, in other words, show from the "privileged" viewpoint of historical materialism the social processes that made such a misconception possible. The problem of such an enterprise was that it had something of the character of pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps: there is something incoherent about a project in which one recognises that one's own understanding of society is problematic - and then tries to explain that problem in terms that lay claim to an (in principle) unproblematic, privileged perspective on society! This is a problem I believe my fellow-students from the Department of Political Philosophy Honours class also found. A discourse which simultaneously asserted and denied its own radically problematic nature condemned one to shuttle futilely between these two poles: one was doomed to be continually aware of the 'flawed' or 'distorted' nature of social understanding, yet always straining to produce a global, transparent, all-encompassing explanation of that distortion; to be continually hovering on the edge of describing concrete problems, yet always postponing that description because one first has to understand the general context in which this problem occurs. It is precisely in the ability of post-structuralism to sidestep such circularities that its attraction lies for me. It acknowledges the discursive nature of political understanding without exempting itself from the consequences of discursivity; and it rejects the project of providing global, totalising accounts in favour of a concept of enquiry as a provisional and open-ended activity.

This awareness of the status of its own interpretations has prompted some South African scholars to take the post-structuralist viewpoint as implying a sort of relativism that prohibits the analyst from making any conclusions.¹³ It is exactly this reading of post-structuralism we reacted against in 1986. Post-structuralist reading has often been interpreted in this way; as Nicolas Visser pointed out recently in his keynote address to the University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop, the failure of post-structuralism to attract any serious attention from South African social historians is at least partly due to the way in which current theory "can indeed function as a sort of intellectual black hole, from which no light can escape". Visser observes that

"... many progressive historians would be likely to feel frustrated and even outraged by the work of Hayden White on narrativity in historical inquiry... Unless read with due suspicion, and within a broad context of current theoretical work, White and others working in a similar vein can have the effect of altogether disabling historical and social

¹³ See for example Edward French, "The Reading World of Black Workers" (Paper presented at the Africa Seminar, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1 August 1990).

inquiry, since there appears to be, in a particularly infamous (and to be fair, misunderstood) formulation by Derrida, nothing outside the text, no world of experience and conflict available for examination."¹⁴

If I have moved back towards an appreciation of post-structuralist analytical strategies, it is partly because this emphasis on the "relativist" implications of discourse analysis seems to me misplaced. Though the post-structuralist insistence on the provisional nature of every interpretation does make a return to the search for absolute, ultimate grounding impossible, that does not seem to me a serious or even a very interesting problem. It means merely that every position is also a position in struggle. Thus my work has not displayed the involved self-reflexiveness that has come to be the trademark of much deconstructive criticism. I have attempted to provide a coherent account of the logic of a specific set of discourses. I am thoroughly aware that I am providing "just another interpretation" and that this interpretation is structured by a discourse which has its own blind spots. That observation is implicit in the post-structuralist methodology. But I have not seen it fit to make this comment explicit, to make my analysis, as it were, a commentary upon its own provisionality. If post-structuralist thought has no more to contribute to political struggle and theory than the dictum that every reading is also a misreading, or (as I shall argue in the pages that follow) every political identity is always-already unfixed, it is doomed to marginality. Very little is to be gained simply by disappearing into a pre-existing discourse of impenetrable technicality which simply mirror Derrida's moves without making them mean something to "outsiders". I believe that the deconstructive strategies of Derrida and others do have a crucial role to play in South African scholarship. But if that is to happen, the concrete implications of these positions should be set out.

In this thesis, I have tried to do this: I have endeavoured to show how post-structuralism **can** say something definite about specific problems, and that it can do so in simple English. The conclusions I draw in the pages that follow should therefore not be seen as attempts to attain closure, attempts to "end the conversation", to put myself outside the critical text and to establish an authoritative reading which is itself impervious to critical analysis. Indeed, insofar as they are conclusions, they are invitations to criticism, points for re-opening debate.

Andries du Toit
Cape Town
September, 1990

¹⁴ Nicholas Visser. "Towards a Political Culture". *Pretexts*. Vol. 2 No. 1 (Winter 1990). pp. 74 - 75.

Acknowledgements

This thesis has been the work of many hands and minds. Though I must take responsibility for its final form and content, I must also acknowledge the debts I have incurred in writing it. These debts are too numerous to mention: since its inception, this project has been the subject of countless discussions, formal and informal, with friends and colleagues; their comments and criticisms have been invaluable in shaping my own thoughts and influencing the course my research eventually took. If this dissertation succeeds in synthesising different disciplinary approaches, if it has succeeded in showing how philosophy is relevant to history, and how history can inform philosophy, this is because it was to a large degree born in dialogue and discussion with many people across disciplinary lines.

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Lastly I must thank the ex-members of the NCL/ARM and their friends and families. The business of oral history, of turning people's private lives into material for an academic dissertation, has at times an element of the vampirical about it. Though we, as historians, may be impressed with the broad political justifications for what we are doing, such justifications must never allow us to forget that we are not only listeners but also invaders. The people we interview may object to being put under a microscope, and may find our inquisitiveness, guided by the imperatives of research, alienating and far removed from their own concerns. Throughout this project, I have been impressed and moved by the generosity of the people I interviewed. Their readiness to help me, and their honesty and frankness in reliving often painful events have made working on this thesis a rewarding, involving and often unsettling project. I cannot repay

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Andries du Toit
Cape Town
September 1990

1

Introduction: Sabotage and the Politics of Frustration

1.1 The NCL/ARM in history

At approximately 4.15 pm on Friday 24 July 1964, John Harris, an accountancy teacher at Johannesburg's Damelin College, placed a large brown suitcase containing 8 sticks of dynamite, 2 gallons of petrol and a timing device in the centre of the concourse at Johannesburg's main railway station.¹ At 4.20 he telephoned the South African Railway Police at their office in Johannesburg, announcing that he was from the African Resistance Movement, and told them about the bomb. He asked them to clear the concourse at once. He also called the **Rand Daily Mail** and the **Transvaler**.²

There is no question that the phone calls were received: that fact was later admitted in court. For some reason, though, no action was taken.³ When the bomb went off at 4.33, therefore, the public had not been warned about it in any way. Twenty-two people were injured in the blast; one of them, a 77-year old woman called Ethel Rhys, died in hospital on August 19 of complications resulting from injuries sustained in the blast.⁴ Thus it came about, paradoxically, that the first person to die as the victim of an anti-apartheid bomb attack was killed by a white liberal member of an organisation unequivocally and explicitly opposed to the taking of human life.

¹ **S v Frederick John Harris**, Supreme Court, Transvaal Provincial Division, Pretoria, Case no. 453/64, pp. 392, 402, 415 - 433.

² **Op. cit.**, p. 421, 439-440.

³ South African Institute for Race Relations Press Clippings Collection (William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, AD 1912), "Three got calls before time bomb blew up", **Rand Daily Mail**, 22 September 1964. (I can unfortunately not provide any more specific reference to any newspaper report in this collection: since my perusal, the Institute's original cataloguing system has been replaced with the library's own. I have therefore included story titles for clarity of reference.) Gordon Winter alleges that the Railway police in turn phoned the head of the Bureau of State Security, General H. J. van den Bergh, who immediately informed the then minister of Justice, John Vorster (**Inside Boss: South Africa's Secret Police** (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981) p. 96). No independent corroboration of this allegation exists. Winter also does not explain why action was not taken to clear the concourse

⁴ "Fears for girl victim of bomb", **The Argus**, 10 September 1964.

Indeed, the story of the African Resistance Movement - as the grouping that called itself the National Committee for Liberation came to be known - is marked by paradox. It was a small organisation composed mainly of middle-class South African whites, whose aim was to fight for a democratic, non-racial and socialist South Africa. Their strategy for achieving this goal was not the organisation of the black South African working class, but the sabotage of power pylons, railway signal cables and standards. The group never numbered much more than fifty people, and its core of active members was even smaller. Its conception of concrete political goals was vague, and the role of sabotage as a strategy was never theorised or explicitly stated. Though some of its members saw their eventual role as that of building a mass liberation army, and though many hoped that their actions would spark off a mass uprising, they made no attempt at organised contact with the African people they wanted to liberate: their contacts with the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan African Congress (PAC) were minimal, and except for a few mostly putative links with black politics they operated almost entirely outside the dominant stream of mass politics in South Africa. Though the organisation presented a defiant facade to the South African government when it was active, it offered surprisingly little resistance to the government when uncovered by the security police. To make matters worse, a key member of the organisation, Adrian Leftwich, who seemed to personify the idealism, determination and integrity of the NCL's youthful members and who had himself emphasised the need for secrecy in the organisation, ended up confessing to the police far more than he was even supposed to know, and betrayed his erstwhile friends and comrades by testifying against them in court.

It is no surprise, then, that evaluation of its short career, both inside and outside the democratic movement, has been consistently negative. Critics sympathetic to the Congress tradition have generally criticised their failure to work effectively with the ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP) and have traced this failure to the fact of their liberalism; others have again seen their cardinal sin as lying precisely in their betrayal of liberalism. In either case they are usually represented, as Eddie Webster has pointed out, as a "naive, arrogant and egotistical grouping".⁵ Gail Gerhart, for example, describes the NCL/ARM as "an amateurish underground sabotage organisation of white university students and members of the Liberal Party",⁶ a summary that has been echoed by critics as ideologically removed as Martin Legassick and Alan Paton.⁷

⁵ Eddie Webster, "Elegy for a Revolutionary by C. J. Driver (Africa South paperbacks, David Philip 1984), a review", *Africa Perspective* No. 25 (1984), p. 76.

⁶ Gail Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: the evolution of an ideology* (London, University of California Press, 1978), p. 253.

⁷ For examples of the way the NCL/ARM has been portrayed, see G. Carter and T. Karis: *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Vol. 3 (Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1977), p. 655; Maurice Hommel, *Capricorn Blues: the Struggle for Human Rights in South Africa* (Toronto, Culturama, 1981), p. 157; R. W. Johnson, *How Long will South Africa Survive?* (London,

Such a view of the NCL/ARM is not altogether inaccurate. But in the pages that follow I shall suggest that it fails to come to grips with the complex problems raised by the history of this strange and fascinating organisation. It is true that its members were liberals, suspicious of the ANC and the SACP and unable to link up their struggle with that of the people they wished to liberate. It is also true that some of them were in the end shown to be out of their depth, unable to live up to the high stakes of the grim and violent game they were playing. But it is necessary to go further than this.

In the first place, it is interesting to note that, universal though the dismissal of the NCL/ARM is, remarkably little is known of the actual history of the organisation. The only book-length treatment of this organisation, Miles Brokensha and Robert Knowles' **The Fourth of July Raids**,⁸ is somewhat lacking as a historical work. Not only is the authors' explanation of the organisation's choice of strategy quite problematic,⁹ but their story also suffers from factual deficiencies. The book's almost exclusive reliance on material from the Cape Town trial means that almost the entire history of the group before 1963 is left out.¹⁰ These deficiencies have tended to be duplicated by later accounts of the organisation.¹¹

In this thesis I shall therefore attempt two tasks. In the first place I shall try to set straight the historical record on the career of this paradoxical grouping. But more than that is needed: I shall also, in the second place, explore the political and discursive underpinnings of this organisation's commitment to sabotage. A closer investigation of their history does not only challenge some of the accepted truisms about the NCL/ARM story, it will also throw up new questions. It will become evident that it is not sufficient simply to state that they were amateurish liberals: that

MacMillan, 1977), p. 20; R. Gibson, **African Liberation Movements: Contemporary struggles against white minority rule**, (London, Oxford University Press for the Institute for Race Relations, 1972) p. 58.

⁸ Cape Town, Simondium, 1965.

⁹ These will be discussed later - see pp. 16 - 20.

¹⁰ While in some places this has resulted merely in gaps, there are others where the authors seem to have resorted to outright guesswork to fill in the blank spaces. We see, for example, Leftwich forming the NCL along with Randolph Vigne and Dennis Higgs (during, they speculate, drinking sessions at the "Pig and Whistle" in Rondebosch! (*op. cit.*, p. 17)), with the decision to go over to sabotage being taken **after** the formation (*loc. cit.*, see also p. 40). They accord Robert Watson and Vigne an excessively central and commanding status (*op. cit.*, p. 66; see my comments on p. 131 below). This elevation of personalities who were not at all in central control creates real inconsistencies in their account: in an effort to make sense of these they speculate that Watson, Higgs and Vigne may have been members of a greater, as yet undiscovered conspiracy (*op. cit.*, p. 49).

¹¹ More accurate discussions of the NCL/ARM are to be found in NUSAS, **Dissension in the Ranks: white opposition to Apartheid** (not stated, 1981), pp. 33 - 39. Tom Lodge correctly emphasises the role in the origin of the NCL/ARM of the growth of a left opposition to the SACP in the Emergency. (Tom Lodge, **Black Politics in South Africa since 1945** (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983), pp. 240 - 241). Paton's account of the NCL/ARM relies heavily on **The Fourth of July Raids**, press reports of the Cape Town trial, and information about the Harris case made available to him by Ernie Wentzel and Ruth Hayman. (see **Journey Continued: An Autobiography** (Cape Town, David Philip, 1988) p. 225; Randolph Vigne, "Journey's End", **The South African Review of Books**, Vol.2 No. 1, () p. 14).

statement does not help us understand why these liberals came to act in the way they did. To understand the meaning of their choice for sabotage, its significance for them as a political act, we shall have to look more closely at the history and logic of South African liberalism. We shall have to try to unravel some of its discursive fabric, and investigate the implications of its underlying philosophical presuppositions in the context of the South African political struggles in the 1960s.

My purpose is thus not to question the negative terms of the popular judgement on the NCL/ARM. In a sense, the strongest argument against their strategy is the fact of its failure. But to simply dismiss them because of that failure is not enough. Such a dismissal does not amount to a political understanding.

The question may of course be asked whether this task of understanding the failure of the NCL/ARM politically is at all worthwhile. The answer, it should be stated at the outset, does not lie in their impact on South African history. It would of course be wrong to say that the NCL/ARM vanished from the arena of politics without a ripple: the crushing of NCL/ARM dealt a painful blow specifically to the relatively small and cohesive network of South African liberals.¹² But the Liberal Party foundered on the much more massive and treacherous rocks of black radicalisation and white reaction.¹³ Compared to the weight of state repression in general and the Prohibition of Improper Interference Act in particular,¹⁴ the NCL's role was minor and contributory, merely a subsidiary paragraph in the story of liberalism's troubled fortunes in South Africa.

In the field of action it had chosen for itself, moreover, its failure was pitiful. Next to the massive and oppressive weight of apartheid and the immense task of socialist liberation the

¹² The NCL/ARM's collapse provided the government with valuable ammunition with which it could attack the Liberal Party (See, for example AD 1912, "87 van Eng. Universiteite al aangekeer". **Dagbreek en Sondagnuus** 15 November 1964, in which much play is made of the high percentage of Liberal Party members and people associated with the "open" universities in the membership of the NCL. See also Janet Robertson, **Liberalism in South Africa, 1948 - 1963** (Oxford, Clarendon, 1971) p. 224. The collapse of the NCL was therefore also significant in its effect on other liberals. For many ex-members of the Party, the "betrayal" of liberalism by members who had joined the NCL/ARM at a time when the Party was beleaguered by its enemies to the right, and when its earlier hopes seemed doomed to failure, was a bitter and sometimes demoralising blow. Alan Paton, for example, has described the discovery of liberals' membership and the Station Bomb as a two of the "most painful" events in his life (*op.cit.*, pp. 236, 240). According to Paton, the episode "was a shocking experience for the National Chairman and the National President. For the Nationalists, and especially for... B.J. Vorster, it provided the justification for all their security legislation, for the power to detain without charge or trial, for the power to ban and banish, and for the taking away of vital powers from the judiciary and handing them over to the Minister. It justified the Minister's famous remark that the communists killed people but that the liberals led people into ambush so that they might be killed." (*op. cit.*, pp. 227 - 228.)

¹³ Janet Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

¹⁴ *loc. cit.*

organisation had embarked on, its list of exploits, though speaking of a certain bravery, are puny indeed. When measured against the other organisations that have taken up arms against the South African state, its failure is even more obvious: Poqo, short-lived as it was, made more of a mark than did the NCL, mobilising thousands Africans to go over to insurrectionary violence against the state: some years after its internal leadership had been destroyed, its legacy still inspired sporadic outbreaks of resistance.¹⁵ And though Umkhonto we Sizwe has never become a major and independent force in South African politics comparable to the role of guerilla movements elsewhere, it attained for a time a sole and undisputed centrality in the armed struggle against apartheid that, retrospectively, make the NCL/ARM seem insignificant indeed.

Why then pay attention to their story? Their demise has some value as a cautionary tale, to be sure, and the courage of most of its members in actively opposing apartheid and facing the consequences of their actions must be acknowledged. But is our energy not more usefully spent in looking at the political movements that **have** made a difference - in chronicling, for example, the struggle of South Africa's workers from the ICU to COSATU, the growth of popular militancy in the townships, the history of the ANC, the rise of Black Consciousness in the seventies, and the resurgence of the Congress tradition as a vehicle for mass mobilisation in the eighties?

I can only begin to respond to this question in the final pages of this dissertation. By then it will be clear that the problems raised by the history of the NCL/ARM are of a particularly open-ended kind, and do not admit of a final and closed-off answer. I can however make two introductory points at this stage. Firstly, their story provides us with a valuable chance to look in detail at some of the political and moral traditions that characterised the discourse of liberalism at the time. Understanding the failure of the NCL/ARM will help us understand some aspects of the more general problems faced by liberalism in South Africa. Furthermore, as I shall explain in my final chapter, these traditions are significant for an understanding, not only of South African liberalism, but also of the white left more generally. In that concluding argument I shall attempt to explain more fully why and how the issues raised by the failure of the NCL/ARM are of some importance to us in the changing politics of the 1990s.

Secondly, this dissertation also serves a purpose beyond accounting for the birth and death of the NCL/ARM. Intertwined with the consideration of the political and historical problematic of this ill-fated grouping there is also a set of theoretical problems regarding the theory of

¹⁵ See Tom Lodge. "The Poqo insurrection. 1961 - 1968". (Paper presented at the Conference on "Class, Community and Conflict: Local perspectives" at the History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 31 January - 4 February 1983).

subjectivity and ideology. Although my primary intent has been focused throughout on the task of explaining the organisation's career, the path of my research has time and time again brought me up against these theoretical questions. These problems, far from being marginal or external to an understanding of the NCL, will provide an important key to comprehending their course of action. This dissertation thus also functions as an extended methodological argument for the deployment by historians of the tools of discourse analysis.

These two concerns - the historical and the methodological - are by no means separate and external to each other. Indeed, the force of the methodological argument for discourse analysis hinges precisely on the degree to which the narratives of history and theory are here knotted together: the centrality of the theoretical questions to my story, and their power in providing a perspective from which one can understand the NCL/ARM. My theoretical concerns grew out of my concrete research, and each shaped and influenced the other. In writing this thesis, I have tried to preserve something of this process. I have therefore tried to limit the extent of the purely theoretical digressions: instead of plunging head first into the heady waters of theoretical speculation, I have traced the theoretical questions as they emerge "organically" out of the story of the NCL/ARM.

1.2 Understanding the NCL/ARM: How did it fail?

At first glance the story of the NCL/ARM appears to confront us with the same sort of problem as that posed by the growth of middle-class radicalism in the United States, Britain and Europe. It seems, indeed, to prefigure in an uncanny manner the careers of groups that were to emerge elsewhere at the end of the decade: the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) or "Weather Underground" in the USA and the Angry Brigade in England. The NCL's leftism - like that of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) from which the RYM grew - had its roots, not so much in the traditions of Marxist and working class politics but in the moral outrage of middle-class radicalism. And like these groups, its central political and strategic problem lay in its effort to identify itself with those whose oppression it strove to overthrow.¹⁶

Looking at the NCL/ARM in this light, one might be tempted to consider their decision to go over to violence as the crucial problem to be explained. This has been the approach adopted by many authors addressing the radicalisation of youth in the late 1960s. Conservative analysts of

¹⁶ See Kirkpatrick Sale. *SDS* (New York. Random House. 1973) for a detailed account of the political development of the RYM and a critical consideration of the failure of militant middle-class radicalism in the 1960s.

the NCL/ARM have taken a similar tack, asking themselves the question why the middle-class children of comparatively wealthy parents should turn on the society that had nurtured them in so radical a way.¹⁷ I have deliberately chosen not to make this the central focus of my study: instead I have chosen to look in more detail at the specific strategy the NCL/ARM used. In consensual industrial democracies such as the USA, the very existence of a radical and massive challenge to the legitimacy of the state might in itself seem to need explanation; and in the absence of any larger and broader struggle, this fact rather than questions of specific strategy might seem to dictate the focus of study. In South Africa however, where after the mid-1950s the very foundations of the state's legitimacy was a politically contested issue and where a broad tradition of popular struggle existed, we cannot stop at the mere existence of radicalisation. The course of action chosen by the NCL/ARM must be analysed and its relationship to the rest of the democratic and socialist left should be examined.

In other words, besides the existence of the NCL we also have to understand its failure. We need to understand how they could embark on such a radical course of action and cut their ties so decisively with the world that created them. But we also have to explain how they could act with apparently so little notion of what they were doing and why; how they could entertain such sanguine and seemingly baseless hopes of victory. The story of the NCL is the story of people so radicalised by the events of the late 1950s and early 1960s that they had to act, even if it exposed them to danger - but it is also the story of people who ended up acting so suicidally, so self-destructively, that their defeat ultimately overshadowed their sacrifice and courage. Today they are remembered, not as liberals who forsook the safe politics of the letters page and the meeting hall for the risky life of the saboteur, but for their antagonism to the Congress Alliance, the pointless violence of the "Station Bomb", and the inexplicable betrayal of his comrades by Adrian Leftwich.

To ask this question is to some extent to discount the simple answer - given by some NCL members - that they failed simply because they were caught.¹⁸ It is to imply that the NCL/ARM was stillborn; that even if they had not been crushed, success would have eluded them, that there was something fundamentally problematic about the strategy chosen by this grouping. This is of course nothing new. It is a prevalent assumption in the popular negative evaluation of the NCL/ARM. It is therefore probably not necessary to argue for it at great length. It is, however, essential that the basic reasons for this position are made clear, and that the context of NCL/ARM's acceptance of this strategy is understood.

¹⁷ See my discussion of Miles Brokensha and Robert Knowles's attempt to do just this on p. 16 below.
¹⁸ Interview with Randolph Vigne, London, 28 February 1989.

The problematic nature of their strategy can best be understood through comparing them with Umkhonto we Sizwe.¹⁹ In the first place, Umkhonto we Sizwe and the NCL failed in much the same way.²⁰ And though this failure was partly due to the effectiveness of state repression and the material conditions of guerilla struggle,²¹ it was also due to another, more serious flaw. Thus Bill Johnson, for example, has argued that activists should rather have laid low and waited for political space to open up again: according to him, sabotage was "the politics of individualist, liberal machismo... after their 1905 the South African revolutionaries... adopted the tactics of the pre-1905 Russian narodniks and anarchists"²²

Turok's comments are less sweeping: According to him, sabotage, while providing the government with every excuse for unleashing a brutal wave of terror "failed to ignite the prairie fire as many had hoped." According to Turok the strategy "failed on the main count - it did not raise the level of consciousness of the masses themselves."²³

¹⁹ In spite of the huge differences between the two groups there is some ground for fruitful comparison between them. Both movements conceptualised sabotage in similar ways. Members of the NCL/ARM tended to see sabotage primarily as a form of symbolic protest. But at the same time there was a growing conviction in the minds of some central members that it should be seen as the first step towards protracted guerilla war. Similarly, Umkhonto we Sizwe's campaign was also aimed crucially at influencing white political opinion. Some scholars have pointed out that sabotage seems initially to have been seen not so much as a stepping-stone to guerilla war as a strategy for change in itself (Doug Tilton, *From Non-Violence to Sabotage: the African National Congress of South Africa and the Formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe* (Unpublished MA thesis, Oxford University 1985), p. 8.) It seems, in any case, that though the High Command of Umkhonto we Sizwe saw sabotage as an introductory tactic to other forms of struggle, this intensification was envisaged only if the first wave of attacks did not succeed in toppling apartheid, (Stephen Davis, *Apartheid's Rebels: Inside South Africa's Hidden War* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987), p. 16.; see also Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa*, p. 236.). When explaining the NCL/ARM's failure as opposed to MK's relative success, seeing the bare choice for sabotage as the main reason would therefore be imprecise. Indeed, Tom Lodge has pointed out that the emphasis on rural struggle proposed in the NCL/ARM towards the end of its career was probably based on a more realistic assessment of the South African situation than that of MK (Tom Lodge, *op.cit.*, p. 241).

²⁰ Some Umkhonto cells remained after the onslaught of the Rivonia raid and the arrests that followed it, and judging by the numbers in training camps outside South Africa, recruitment for training continued after 1964. There is, however, little evidence of any success in infiltrating trained cadres back into the country, and lines of communication between the external ANC and the internal organisation appear to have been shattered. (Tom Lodge, *op. cit.*, pp. 298 - 300; Edward Feit, *Urban Revolt in South Africa: A case study* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1971) pp. 8 - 9. See also *African Communist* no. 18 (July - September 1964) for an contemporary evaluation of the heaviness of the blow.

²¹ Though some commentators have simply blamed the successful crushing of Umkhonto on South Africa's security laws (See for example Peter Janke, "Southern Africa: End of Empire" (*Conflict Studies* No. 52. (December 1974)), p. 20; J. B. Bell, *The Myth of the Guerilla, Revolutionary Theory and Malpractice* (New York, Alfred A Knopf, 1971), p. 111), others have provided a more careful analysis. Thus Lodge has pointed out the absence in South Africa of the middle peasantry that, as Wolf has argued, is so important to the success of guerilla war (Tom Lodge, *op. cit.*, p.296; Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (London, Faber and Faber, 1971), pp. 290 - 293). Turok has also observed that in South Africa at the time, no inaccessible and difficult hinterland or friendly border existed that can provide guerillas with a rear-base area (Ben Turok, *Strategic Problems in South Africa's Liberation Struggle, a Critical Analysis* (Richmond, B.C., Canada Liberation Support Movement Press, 1979), p. 49).

²² R. W. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

²³ Ben Turok, *op. cit.*, p. 46. Original emphasis removed.

"Sabotage remained the weapon of an elite corps in the liberation movement. As a consequence, sabotage had the effect of isolating the organised movement from the mass who felt unable to join in the new phase or even to defend the actionists when they were seized"²⁴

Joe Matthews of the ANC was later to make essentially the same critique, arguing that "...the masses had no inkling of these events. Here we were, embarking on the most important of decisions, and the people knew nothing. We were going to war without the people with us."²⁵

Instead, Turok suggests, sabotage and guerrilla struggle might have been started with the "simplest methods" that were available. He points out the importance of simple methods of struggle in explaining the depth of the involvement of the Vietnamese peasantry, and argues that "if the assessment that the people were deeply disturbed by Sharpeville and subsequent events was correct, then the more effective methods were those that the masses could use, too."²⁶

The complex questions pertaining to Umkhonto's own choice of strategy, the way in which that strategy was carried out, the relationship between it and the broader mass of Africans cannot be discussed here. What is relevant to my argument is the implications of this criticism for the NCL/ARM. If Turok's critique is applicable to Umkhonto, then it is all the more valid for the NCL/ARM, which emphasised the accomplishing of complex and technically sophisticated acts of sabotage.

The second point of comparison lies in Umkhonto's resurgence during the 1970s. While the NCL/ARM and MK were alike in their initial failure, they were very different in their eventual fate: while the state's crackdown on the NCL/ARM flayed it open to the core, MK was able to rise from defeat to become an important actor in the South African arena after 1976. While MK weathered the blow of Rivonia and the later disasters of the Rhodesian campaign, the NCL/ARM was simply too weak and ideologically disunited to continue, let alone rebuild an organisation within the country. One crucial factor was the ANC's link to the SACP. As Stephen Davis pointed out, this association made it possible for the ANC to tap into the experience of people who had organised underground for a number of years, and to build a structure some remnants of which survived the security dragnet.²⁷ The association with the SACP had further advantages. The dependability and continuity of Soviet aid enabled the ANC to survive as a strong organisation, and it managed, unlike the PAC, to steer clear of dependent relationships with African host countries.²⁸ The Communist Party was probably also responsible for the way

²⁴ Ben Turok, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

²⁵ Joe Matthews, interviewed in S. Davis, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

²⁶ Ben Turok, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

²⁷ S. Davis, *op. cit.* pp. 16, 34.

²⁸ Tom Lodge, *op.cit.*, p. 304.

in which the ANC managed to maintain a degree of ideological cohesion and stability even in the fissiparous context of exile politics.²⁹ But far more important than this was MK's link to the ANC, a political organisation which, although it was badly decimated, had left behind a history and a tradition of mass struggle around which people could be mobilised again in later years.

This was of vital importance to the story of the young activists who had left South Africa after the Soweto uprisings in 1976, and who were to revitalise the ANC. The complex processes that underpinned the resurgence of Charterism since that year have still to be examined in detail, and the particular dynamics of the exodus to the ANC fall outside the scope of this thesis. Suffice it to say that though Charterism was at the time nowhere near as central a political tradition as it has become in the 1980s³⁰ the ideological heritage and memory of the Congress alliance cannot be discounted. As Edward Feit put it, though Umkhonto's "roots among the masses ... may have been thin, they ran deep".³¹

To state all this is to set out in detail the simple point that the central problem with the NCL/ARM was its lack of contact with the mass of oppressed South Africans. Though Umkhonto we Sizwe shared with it a conception of sabotage that underemphasised political work, it was linked to a broader political movement and the popular traditions and consciousness that movement had built. This point has serious implications for the NCL/ARM and our attempt to understand it. There have been groups - the "July Plot" against Hitler is one example - that have tried to overthrow governments or rulers in political isolation. But the NCL/ARM was very unlike the "July plot"; if they resemble any anti-fascist organisation, it would probably be the "White Rose" group:³² many key members were committed to mass struggle, and all of them saw themselves as appealing to their fellow-South Africans to rise up against oppression. Though some members did see their actions in terms of symbolic protest, its founders and most central members took part in sabotage cognisant of its use by insurgents elsewhere in the world, and hoped that they would eventually be part of a mass movement for national liberation. Yet, in order to achieve this they consciously operated in a fashion that, as they seemed to be well aware, excluded the participation of all but a tiny technically sophisticated elite, and chose to organise in formal isolation from the political movement which

29 **Ibid.**

30 Thus it has been argued that many post-Soweto exiles may have been only vaguely aware of the ANC when they left, and ended up there simply because it was at the time strategically placed to receive them. (Stephen Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 56. On ANC activists' efforts to win over youths caught up in the Soweto uprising, see *op. cit.*, pp. 28 - 31.)

31 Edward Feit, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

32 See Bundezentrale für politische Bildung (eds.) *Germans against Hitler* adapted by Hans-Adolf Jacobsen and trans. by Allan Yahraes and Lieselotte Yahraes (Bonn, Federal Government of Germany, Press and Information Office, 1969), pp. 153 - 178.

did have some form of mass support. What is more, they persisted in this course of action even when it was clearly fruitless. Theirs was a course of action apparently so irrational as to be almost inexplicable.

The mystery deepens when we look at the available texts produced by members of the organisation itself. It appears that the connection between the strategy of sabotage and their understanding of the South African struggle remained almost untheorised. Its value seems to have been assumed without question. As Hirson would say almost 25 years later, there seems to have been an inexplicable rupture between the rigorous class analysis some of the socialists in the NCL/ARM prided themselves on, and their eventual course of action.³³

An example of this disjuncture is provided by two documents produced by members of the NCL between September 1963 and April 1964, later used as exhibits in the trial. One document was produced by NCL members in London; the other was written mainly by Randolph Vigne in Cape Town.³⁴ What is noticeable about them is the apparent discrepancy between the situation the NCL found itself in at the time, and the role they project for their organisation. After the passing of the Sabotage Act in 1962 and the Rivonia Raid in June, 1963, the picture (we would think) must have looked bleak. As we shall see in later chapters, the NCL had by that time failed to establish themselves as a mass based or even an effective organisation: they were isolated from what remained of Umkhonto we Sizwe and Poqo, and the South African state was consolidating its strength. What could a tiny band of saboteurs hope to achieve? Yet, in both texts, to a greater or lesser extent, we find them conceiving of themselves as having a surprisingly central role in the liberation of South Africa. Thus, in the London document, they speculate that the organisation could become the "sinews of the struggle" and a crucial element in a "joint command" with other organisations.³⁵ The optimism of Vigne's text is even more striking: not only does it see the "NCL's business" as recruiting, training, and leading a "National Freedom Army" which will overthrow the National Party regime;³⁶ it also sees the members of the NCL as ultimately being "the **controlling force** in a strong, central Government".³⁷ The central question - how a sabotage strategy would lead to the building of a mass liberation movement - does not seem to be answered or even asked; its value is taken for granted.

³³ Baruch Hirson. "The State of Emergency" (Unpublished typescript, 1989), p. 3.

³⁴ The documents are reproduced in the Appendix.

³⁵ *S v Hirson and Others*, Supreme Court, Transvaal Provincial Division, Pretoria. Case no. 508/64. Exh M4(1)

³⁶ *S v Hirson*, Exh M4(4), p.3.

³⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.6.

In other words, a critique of the NCL's strategy should not merely point out that the NCL was mistaken in supposing it did not have to work directly with the masses, organising and politicising them - that would be facile. It would have to go further, and show the reasons for this failure. This is the task I will now address.

1.3 Sharpeville and Sabotage (or, Che Guevara in Stuttafords)

Part of the answer to the question of why the NCL/ARM chose sabotage as a strategy lies in a consideration of the context in which its members found themselves. The initial decision to turn to sabotage was taken just after the Sharpeville crisis, a time when the legitimacy of the Verwoerd government had been challenged as never before.

The shooting at Sharpeville, coming as it did a mere six weeks after Harold MacMillan's "winds of change" speech,³⁸ seemed indeed to herald a coming storm. With the assassination attempt on Dr Verwoerd by David Pratt,³⁹ and Acting prime minister Paul Sauer's subsequent announcement that with Sharpeville, "an old book of South African history was closed" ⁴⁰ and, above all, the catastrophic slide of the stock exchange which plunged the country into its biggest financial crisis since 1932⁴¹ those winds seemed to be mounting to a gale. Small wonder that it seemed, as the liberal lawyer Ernie Wentzel was to put it later, that "Blacks had shaken the cages in which apartheid imprisoned them",⁴² and that opponents of the Nationalist government - from the Liberal Party members at the Congress immediately after the shooting⁴³ to central individuals in the SACP⁴⁴ - felt that a change was imminent.

38 Colin Bundy, pers. comm.

39 R. W. Johnson *op. cit.*, p. 18.

40 *Ibid.*

41 Douglas Tilton, *op. cit.*, p. 83. The plunge started immediately after the shooting ("Riots cause share drop", "Rand Market closes on weak note", *The Cape Times*, 22 March 1960) and by May 1961, foreign exchange reserves were down to R153 million (R. W. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 26). This crisis powerfully concentrated the minds of industry and finance: By 20 May the Executive Committee of the Association of Chambers of Commerce (ASSOCOM) issued a statement that the Union's economy was in jeopardy and that the Association must take part in the "widespread reassessment of the economic aspects of the race policies which have contributed towards the present crisis" (J. J. Human, *South Africa 1960 - A Chronicle* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1961) p. 107) In another statement submitted to Dr. Verwoerd, the Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut, ASSOCOM, the Federated Chamber of Industries, the Steel and Engineering Industries Federation and the Chamber of Mines suggested that the "unrest" could be traced, among other things, to genuine grievances among urban Africans and recommended the reform of pass laws and curfews (*op. cit.*, p. 120).

42 Ernie Wentzel, Unpublished Memoirs, (Ernest Wentzel papers, William Cullen Library, university of the Witwatersrand, AD 1931 Aa), p. 60.

43 *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

44 Douglas Tilton, *op. cit.*, p. 81. See also the article "Freedom is in our grasp", *New Age* Vol. 6 no. 6., 8 September 1960.

Even the brutal repression that followed the declaration of the State of Emergency seemed amateurishly applied. It was evident that the detentions that accompanied the State of Emergency proceeded according to old and out-of-date lists: they missed many central activists, while picking up Communist Party members who had dropped out years before.⁴⁵ Many people had to be released and redetained as the Emergency regulations had not been properly promulgated, and in Johannesburg the state's efforts to oppose their release by deferring the court hearing in order to fly the properly-promulgated Emergency regulations up from Cape Town ended in a farce when Mealie Board control regulations were sent up by mistake.⁴⁶ To many of those who were to join the NCL/ARM, the state appeared to be holding on to power with a desperate but fumbling grasp.

At that stage the strategy of sabotage seemed also to offer exaggerated promise. The NCL/ARM was of course only one of a number of groupings that adopted this course of action in the South African 1960s. Besides the obvious example of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the Yu Chi Chan Club also embraced guerilla theory, and as we shall see, even separatists in Natal toyed with the idea. It is indeed significant that the various groups that came together in the NCL had all decided for sabotage relatively independently from one another. In the early 1960s, it seems, sabotage was simply part of the general political vocabulary, one of the choices open to opponents of the Nationalist government. This popularity in turn was only part of the wider resurgence of guerilla wars after the Second World War. Partisan fighters had been using guerilla strategies during that war in much of Nazi-occupied Europe, and by the time of the founding of the national NCL in 1962, guerilla strategies had already been used in China, Viet Nam, Cuba, Cyprus and Algeria, to name but a few examples.

In South Africa, as in the rest of the world, this was partly a function of the deep social changes that accompanied the War itself. The struggle in South Africa would not have been keyed to the pitch of armed confrontation were it not for the vast increase in African urbanisation and the accompanying rise in political consciousness and militancy. Equally essential was the growth and flowering, in the worldwide context of heightened popular and anti-colonial struggle, of new and powerful theories of guerilla warfare. Though the mere tactics of guerilla warfare had been known for years,⁴⁷ it was fully developed and integrated with revolutionary theory only by Mao Zedong⁴⁸ Throughout the 1950s the proliferation of partisan and anti-colonial warfare was

⁴⁵ Interview with John Laredo. Leeds. 22 April 1989: AD 1931 Aa p. 37.

⁴⁶ AD 1931 Aa. pp. 26 - 27. See also Ronald Segal. *Into Exile* (London. Jonathan Cape. 1963) p. 283.

⁴⁷ See T. E. Lawrence. *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom: a Triumph* (Harmondsworth. Penguin. 1978). pp. 193 - 202. John Bowyer Bell comments powerfully on the use of guerilla tactics in Europe in Bell. *op. cit.*, pp. 3. 6.

⁴⁸ Mao Zedong. *Guerilla Warfare*. in *Guerilla Warfare by Mao Tse-Tung and by Che Guevara* (ed. by B. H. Liddel Hart. London. Cassel. 1969) pp. 1 - 90.

accompanied by the consciousness of and the elaboration of the principles enunciated by him,⁴⁹ with the writings of Giap and Che Guevara being notable examples.

Guevara's writings have, however, a problematic relationship towards Mao's text. Although the romanticisation of the guerilla was only to attain its full flowering in the writings of Régis Debray in the late 1960s,⁵⁰ Guevara's writings already constitute an important modification of Mao's thought. This shift can indeed be found in the contribution of Castro himself, who tended to foreground the guerilla's position, instead of the mass of the oppressed.⁵¹ This was taken even further in Guevara's well-known statement that "one does not necessarily have to wait for a revolutionary situation to arise; it can be created."⁵² While Guevara does not argue against the importance of building a mass struggle, his privileging of the technical aspects of guerilla warfare seems built on the assumption that a few guerilla-revolutionaries, given the existence of certain "grievances", would by their mere example "vitalize the people";⁵³ the book thus encourages the interpretation that direct political work with the peasantry is not really necessary. As Kenneth Grundy has pointed out, it is in essence "a manual of military techniques and tactics" with little attention to strategic problems.⁵⁴

The NCL/ARM was doubtless deeply influenced by these developments. Some members of the organisation had served in World War II and had been impressed by the example set by partisan resistance movements like the Maquis. Others had studied the Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese and Cuban experiences, and had analysed these in their discussion groups. Guevara's treatise on guerilla war was particularly important: it was freely available in Cape Town and could, for example, be bought at Stuttafords, a well known department store in the city;⁵⁵ it was thus

49 See Ernesto Guevara, *Guerilla Warfare*, in *Guerilla Warfare by Mao Tse-Tung and by Che Guevara* (ed. by B. H. Liddel Hart), pp. 97 - 156. Overviews of the development of insurgency theory from Mao Zedong abound: a cogent (and enthusiastic) exposition is Robert Taber, *War of the Flea: A Study of Guerilla Warfare, Theory and Practice* (New York, Citadel, 1970) while John Bowyer Bell, *The Myth of the Guerilla*, analyses both the spread of the theory and some of the misunderstandings in its reception. Kenneth W. Grundy provides an account of the reception of guerilla strategies and theory on this continent in *Guerilla Struggle in Africa: an analysis and preview*, (New York, Grossman, 1971). A wealth of comparative literature exists on the subject; particularly useful is E. R. Wolf, *op. cit.* The struggle of the EOKA in Cyprus provides a valuable look at guerilla struggle in an densely-populated urban context (George Grivas, *The Memoirs of General Grivas* (London, Longmans, 1964) while Edward Feit, *Urban Revolt in South Africa 1960 - 1964* provides an important South African comparison.

50 See Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America* (New York, Grove, 1967), esp. pp. 95 - 104.

51 J. B. Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 40 - 41.

52 Ernesto Guevara, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

53 J. B. Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

54 Kenneth W. Grundy, *op. cit.*, pp. 47 - 48.

55 Dot Cleminshaw, Cape Town, pers. comm. According to Jameson's index, the book was only banned in 1974. It appears that it was submitted by the Pretoria Customs Office shortly after publication. The Censorship Board recommended however that the book not be banned. As an Afrikaans weekly said with admirable candour,

widely read in the white left at the time.⁵⁶ Indeed, one of the documents uncovered by the state in its swoop on the NCL/ARM was a typewritten summary of **Guerilla Warfare**, compiled by Baruch Hirson and circulated in the organisation.⁵⁷ Other documents written by members of the NCL/ARM seem to reflect an acute consciousness of the strategies and problems of guerilla warfare. The NCL/ARM's choice of sabotage could therefore be at least partly explained with reference to the impact on them of this body of thought. In the context of the Sharpeville crisis, where the state appeared to be floundering and inefficient, the Cuban revolution must have seemed a seductive validation of Guevara's theories.

But though satisfying in the short term, this answer suffers crucial defects. All it does is to defer the problem, to displace it across the Atlantic Ocean. Guevara's own modification of Mao is itself a development in need of careful political analysis! How did Guevara, once such an able strategist and guerilla fighter, come in the end to embark on the futile and suicidal Colombian campaign that was to lead to his death? This question needs careful analysis to be answered; and we might even find that an understanding of the NCL/ARM sheds valuable comparative light here. And such an understanding would have to deal with the question of why his thought resonated so powerfully with that of NCL/ARM members. As Kenneth Grundy has pointed out, it would be dangerous to posit too direct a relationship between the flowering of insurgency theory and the development of sabotage and guerilla strategies in an African context - even when we know that the group concerned was aware of 'classical' texts on the subject.⁵⁸ Insurgency theory arose out of very specific **local** conditions, and an understanding of the NCL/ARM would therefore have to proceed at the same level. That is not to say that knowledge of the 'classical' texts of revolutionary guerilla warfare are irrelevant. But it would be wrong to suppose that NCL/ARM members simply rushed into action, unreflectively "applying" Guevara's doctrine. Thus Baruch Hirson had, for some years prior to his joining the NCL/ARM, mounted a critique of Congress strategy which emphasised the need for mass organisation. Though he and his allies had studied the Cuban revolution, they did not consider it as a model that could be unproblematically applied to the South African context.⁵⁹ In other words, important as the **availability** of notions of guerilla warfare was, the crucial problem facing us is how it could make sense to NCL/ARM members, how it meshed with their own

Guevara's book contained information that "every white person should know" (AD 1912, "Boeke vir Saboteurs Vrylik in S.A. te koop", **Dagbreek en Sondagnuus**, 16 December 1961).

⁵⁶ Douglas Tilton, *From Non-violence to Sabotage*, p.90.

⁵⁷ **S v Daniels and others**, Supreme Court, Cape Provincial Division, Case no. 349/64, Exh. C10

⁵⁸ Kenneth W Grundy, *op.cit.*, pp. 47 - 48.

⁵⁹ Baruch Hirson, "The State of Emergency", p.3. See also Ben Turok *op.cit.*, p.43.

beliefs. I will now go on to consider the attempts made to resolve this problem, and to show what we can learn from their failure.

1.4 Some instructive misunderstandings: "frustration" and the question of political discourse

In considering the question of the appeal of sabotage for members of the NCL, the solution most readily to hand is an appeal to romanticism and frustration as motivating factors. This is indeed a seductive answer when considering the prevalence and appeal of Guevara's thought worldwide during the 1960s. Thus scholars like J. B. Bell have analysed the prevalence of theories of guerilla warfare in terms of a "revolutionary myth", often "twisted into fantasy by the desperate and naïve".⁶⁰ The reasons for the persistence of this myth, he says, is "largely an unanswerable question". He can only attribute it to factors like "[love] of glory, hope of power, an excess of pride, unexploited talent, ambition, some deep psychological drive, fate, or friendship... each may play a part."⁶¹ In black Africa, he argues, "the [guerilla] campaign soothes the... anxiety of Black Africa, maintains the cause of liberation as a fact, and... gives meaning and justification to men on the edge of despair".⁶²

This kind of explanation suffers, however, from a serious defect: by psychologising the issues in this way, it obscures a **political** understanding of the "guerillaism" he sees as such a dangerous myth. I will develop this criticism more concretely by looking at the case of the NCL/ARM itself. I will thus proceed by analysing the weakness of an appeal to notions of "blindness", "frustration", or "romanticism" in understanding their strategy.

It is indeed in terms of these very notions that the NCL/ARM has been approached by most writers. Two cases in point are Brokensha and Knowles' account of the Cape town trial, **The Fourth of July Raids**, and the NUSAS publication, **Dissension in the Ranks**. It is notable that these two works, probably the major analyses of the NCL/ARM to date, are remarkably similar in their view of the organisation. I will demonstrate how the terms of these analyses produce in both texts a similar political incoherence.

Especially important to my critique is the fact that both texts constitute themselves as political interventions. In the introduction to **The Fourth of July Raids**, its authors explain the purpose of their history of the NCL/ARM. It is a remarkable text, and worth quoting at some length:

⁶⁰ J. B. Bell. *op.cit.*, p. 42.

⁶¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 251.

⁶² *Op. cit.*, p. 261: see also p. 267.

"Sitting in South African gaols today are a number of young men and women. Most of them are in their early twenties, a few in their early thirties. The prospect they face is up to 15 years behind those prison walls before they are again free men and women. They are paying the price for their stupidity.

This book is neither an attempt to excuse their actions nor to condemn them. It is an attempt only to try to set out factually the circumstances that led to the rise of the African Resistance Movement, to record its sabotage raids and explain how the police were finally able to smash the organization.

It also makes no attempt to analyse the policies of any political party nor to justify or deny the policy of apartheid. apartheid is a fact and it is a fact that apartheid led largely to the rise of ARM...

The African Resistance Movement is shattered. If this account of its short life should dissuade anyone from planning to create a similar organization it will have achieved its purpose."⁶³

Note how Brokensha and Knowles conceive of the NCL/ARM's actions in terms of "stupidity". Throughout the book, members' actions are conceived of in terms of irrationality, frustration, obsession, romanticism and guilt.⁶⁴

The authors of **Dissension in the Ranks**, in contrast, are avowed opponents of apartheid. It is important to remember that this text emerged out of a very different context to the one quoted above. While Brokensha and Knowles wrote in 1965, in the context of the decimation of the liberation movement by the state, and provide an argument for political quietism, the NUSAS text was produced during the early 1980s, at a time when NUSAS as an organisation was drawing closer to Charterism. It should therefore be seen as a political intervention aimed at inserting NUSAS into the Congress movement. This text, like the **Fourth of July Raids**, is a political intervention and states its intentions as clearly:

"This booklet is not a history of white opposition in South Africa. Although it relies primarily on this history, it is not an attempt to analyse or describe the progression and dynamics of this opposition. It rather focuses on the various organizational responses that whites have adopted in opposing the nature of South African Society. By examining historical examples of these responses, it attempts to explain the lessons to be learned from these past victories and errors - in a sense, the "do's and don'ts" - for the operation of white democrats in formal organizational structures today."⁶⁵

But although the purpose of their intervention in the struggle is diametrically opposed to that of Brokensha and Knowles, they articulate the reasons for the formation of the NCL/ARM in remarkably similar terms:

⁶³ Miles Brokensha and Robert Knowles. *op. cit.* p. 1.

⁶⁴ See for example *op. cit.* pp. 7, 10, 16, 148.

⁶⁵ NUSAS. *op. cit.* p.2.

"... a sense of frustration, together with a feeling of guilt,... underlay the formation of ARM and the adoption of its strategy of sabotage. The failure of this group of white intellectuals to relate to the organizational groundswell of resistance which formed the Congress Movement... caused them to initiate... a futile act of desperation."⁶⁶

Such an explanation does indeed look plausible - what besides frustration could have driven liberals to abandon the non-violent forms of struggle they had hitherto adopted? And did not NCL/ARM members themselves later admit that in their adoption of sabotage they were driven by frustration?

It may of course be that NCL/ARM members were indeed frustrated and that their frustration lay at the bottom of their actions. But this explanation does not answer our own question, does not help us understand the **politics** of the NCL/ARM. Attributing their course of action to frustration immediately leads to the question: how did it come about that in this case, frustration led specifically to sabotage; sabotage, what is more, in conscious isolation from any of the mass organisations in South African politics?

The consequences of resorting to this explanatory category can be illustrated by a closer look at these texts. In the final paragraph of **The Fourth of July Raids**, for example, it looks as if the authors are suddenly and inexplicably pessimistic of their cautionary tale's chances of ever achieving its end.

"The African Resistance Movement is dead - but only a blind man will see in its demise the end of resistance. There will be others like Leftwich, Schneider and Harris.... For that is the tragedy of South Africa. There can be no reconciliation between diametrically opposed forces without violence."⁶⁷

From the stern opening lines we have arrived at a conclusion that is oddly resigned; actions that were initially described as due to stupidity are now described in terms of inevitability. **The Fourth of July Raids** vacillates between being, on the one hand, an active intervention in the name of sanity and good sense, and on the other, the impotent and futile chronicle of tragic and unstoppable events.⁶⁸

In **Dissension** we do not find quite as sudden and abject a statement of defeat, perhaps because the "lessons" it draws from the NCL/ARM story are a little more concrete. In opposition to the

⁶⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.39.

⁶⁷ Miles Brokensha and Robert Knowles. *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁶⁸ This schizophrenic vacillation between rationalist optimism and impotent pessimism was in fact, as I shall show, a major characteristic of South African liberalism at the time and is especially marked in the discourse of liberals in the NCL (see p. 159 ff).

NCL/ARM's "frustrated" response it poses a different possibility - that of action rooted in a **correct understanding**:

"The flaw in the ARM response lay largely in the inadequacy of their analysis of conflict in South African society and the process of change aimed at eradicating that conflict. Although ARM members evidently did not see South African conflict in simple Black/White terms, they failed to recognize the extent to which it is, in the final analysis, a contest between democratic and anti-democratic forces. Although the vast bulk of whites are likely to defend their privilege, this does not exclude certain white groupings from joining the opponents of this system of privilege. The basis of this alliance, however, must not be a feeling of guilt or frustration. It must be a carefully considered decision which takes into account the nature of the movement for change and allows white democrats to utilize their skills and privilege, to their greatest capacity within that movement."⁶⁹

Though initially appealing, this explanation suffers from two crucial defects, both of which make it deeply ambiguous as an intervention in the South African struggle. In the first place, when it comes to the "do's and don'ts" promised in the introduction, its message is perhaps surprising. To put it rather crudely, it comes perilously close to telling us that the NCL's members failed to recognise that it was unnecessary for **whites** to endanger their skills and their (admittedly unjust but no doubt strategically useful) privilege... Whatever one's understanding of the historic role of whites in the armed struggle, this approach does not much help us to formulate a critique of the NCL's **specific** trajectory.

And it is when we look at how the text addresses this question that we encounter its fundamentally ambiguous character. As in the case of the **Fourth of July Raids** the relation of the category of "correct understanding" to the misapprehensions it is supposed to counter is ambiguous and indeed undecidable.⁷⁰ Their frustration is described as being **caused** by their "failure ... to relate to the organizational groundswell of resistance which formed the foundation of the Congress movement during the 1950s and early 1960s". That failure, in turn, is caused by a failure of analysis, a failure to understand the role of whites in the struggle. What did they fail to understand? That the basis of that alliance could not be "a feeling of guilt or frustration". The analysis is in the end circular. The notion of frustration plays a double role: on the one hand it is the **result**, on the other the **definition**, of an incorrect analysis which precluded them from relating to the Congress movement. As in Brokensha and Knowles' account, the text functions as a voice of reason (or a "correct" analysis) which is so systematically opposed to categories like "guilt", etc that it both **has** to and **cannot** function as their antidote.

⁶⁹ NUSAS, *op. cit.*, p. 39. The emphasis is mine.

⁷⁰ I am using the concept of undecidability in the full deconstructive sense of a **structurally irresolvable ambiguity**, an ambiguity in which the discursive framework "both urges choice and prevents that choice from being made" (Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, (London, Routledge Kegan Paul, 1985).

It is the logic of these psychologistic explanatory categories - guilt, frustration, romanticism - and the presuppositions that underlie their almost spontaneous appeal that I will explore now. For these make possible both poles of the contradictory movement we have seen. It is this notion that permits both optimism and pessimism in **The Fourth of July Raids**. This is true also of **Dissension**. In both texts these categories have an aporetic logic that cannot be mastered by the text. Fanaticism, frustration, guilt are precisely **outside** the field of reason, are not susceptible to it at all, constitute a surface so slippery that the language of rational analysis cannot get a hold on them. They are categories conceived of as being essentially **undetermined**, amorphous, unstructured, having no political logic of their own; in other words, **they are seen as belonging to a field beyond politics**.

The course of my argument so far has been to assert two points. Firstly, I have tried to show that the story of the NCL/ARM presents us with the task of understanding their strategic choice for sabotage in isolation from any mass political organisation. Secondly, I have argued that existing accounts of the NCL/ARM fail to provide this explanation. Interestingly enough, the failure of these explanations is not due to a lack in the factual data about the material context of the South African political struggle in the 1950s. It can be traced, instead, to the logic of the explanatory categories that are appealed to. These categories appear to have been resorted to simply because our knowledge of that social context still leaves some of our questions unanswered. In a context where that material context by itself does not explain their choice, an appeal to categories like "guilt" and "frustration" may have some persuasive force. The problem is however that such notions, because they can explain almost anything, end up explaining nothing. The assumptions that underlie the appeal to "frustration" - the notion of an aspect of human subjectivity that lies beyond political determination - ultimately scuttle the argument. Although such notions can be summoned up with ease to fill the gaps in our explanation, they seem in the end to have a contradictory logic, and fail to help us to come to a **political** understanding of the choice for sabotage.

This is a crucial point. If we wish to understand the NCL/ARM politically, we cannot appeal to fundamentally apolitical explanatory categories. In other words, we have to look at them from a perspective that, while giving weight to the importance of their frustration and conceding their romanticism, allows us to understand the logic of that romanticism, the politics of that frustration. In the next chapter I will argue that the task of understanding the NCL/ARM is therefore fundamentally a question of **discourse**. Coming to grips with this question will necessitate a short excursion into theory. I shall therefore briefly sketch the outlines of the underlying theory of the human subject. This theory will open a new perspective on the human

subject that will make possible a set of different discourse-analytical strategies. With the aid of these tools I shall be able to "unpeel" the NCL/ARM's politics layer by layer and show how they came to act as they did.

2

A Theoretical Interlude: The Ideological Subject and the Politics of the Signifier

"... Identity is what is naturally given and is therefore considered a possession, yet it is also that which possesses the individual. If, on the one hand, identity is constituted by a personal experience and an individual history, it is also and inevitably a product of the otherness of cultural, social and linguistic determinants. As the individual reconstructs and reflects upon an imaginary identity, he/she cultivates an illusion of conscious control that only serves to occlude the aleatory nature of this imaginary essence."

Karlis Racevskis¹

2.1 Why discourse analysis? Some general remarks

In this chapter I will briefly explore the theoretical underpinnings of discourse analysis and delineate its methodological starting points. In the previous chapter I have set out the arguments that confront us with the need for a kind of analysis that can go beyond previous attempts to make sense of the NCL/ARM's strategy. I did not do much more than indicate vaguely that a different sort of research was needed. Beyond this attempt to indicate the existence, in the jungle, of a hitherto elusive animal, I did not go: my argument was a list of blind alleys, a concatenation of absences. In this chapter I shall try to go into more detail and try to describe what this beast looks like, how its paw-prints can be recognised, and how it can be caught.

Such a move may require some justification. Although history is an analytically self-aware discipline, it tries to fuse theory with narrative in a seamless way, and to embark suddenly on a detailed theoretical discussion is to disrupt and jar this narrative flow. In addition, such a discussion is perforce rather technical: it is difficult to describe the post-structuralist theory of subjectivity which underlies discourse analysis without reference to some of the rather outlandish terminology that characterises the writings of thinkers like Althusser and Pêcheux. In the rest of this dissertation I have tried to avoid the use of such terminology: the language in which the theory of the subject has been couched has been partly responsible for its

¹ Karlis Racevskis. "Foucault, Rameau's nephew and the Question of Identity". in *The Final Foucault* .ed. by James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1988), p. 21.

inaccessibility to non-specialists. My own analysis has therefore proceeded as far as possible in what passes, in the academic world, for plain English. Why, then, is a detailed theoretical chapter necessary?

My main consideration has been that discourse theory has not received extensive attention within the field of historiography. Without an explanation of the underlying considerations that direct my analysis, my analytical moves might therefore not make sense: my sudden departure, in Chapters 6 and 7, from the chain of the narrative could seem inexplicable and the bearing of my detailed examination of NCL/ARM texts and interviews on the rest of the story might seem obscure. And though the theoretical concepts I will explore in this chapter will gain meaning and content only by being related to the story of the NCL/ARM as it unfolds, such a weaving back and forth between theory and narrative cannot **on its own** convey the full meaning of these central theoretical concepts. For that, an explicit account of their logic and their relation to each other is necessary.

This is particularly so because discourse analysis does not merely add on another array of analytic tools to our common-sense ways of thinking. Indeed, it is suspicious of "common sense", and is concerned with questioning notions very deeply rooted in Western culture. These ideas are so much part and parcel of our day-to-day thinking that they seem not to bear talking about; so "obvious" that we are usually not even conscious of them and so natural that alternative approaches seem paradoxical and counterintuitive. What could be more obvious, for example, than our experience of the link between words and their meaning, more spontaneous than our sense that we know who we are? Yet these are precisely the certainties that discourse analysis seeks to undermine.

In the first place, discourse analysis is concerned to focus on the apparently uncomplicated fact of **subjectivity**, on our spontaneous assumptions about who we are and why we do what we do. It questions the spontaneous notion that our own experiences and articulations about our social identities are simply reflections of an authentic private experience or of an objective fact. It emphasises that the spontaneous experience of self-identity masks the **socially constructed** nature of our identities. It insists that while we, like Popeye, may feel secure in the comfortable, tautologous knowledge that "I am what I am", we are what ideology has made us. This is not to say that discourse analysis takes the route of a reductionist Marxism, and dismisses such articulations and experiences as "false consciousness". In its terms, there is nothing to gain by making a distinction between who people think they are and who they "really" are. Social identity and discursive self-representation are not separate, extraneous matters; they are

intimately bound up with each other: the question of who we are (and, therefore, what we are going to do about it) is indissolubly bound up with the question of who we take ourselves to be.

And in the second place, discourse analysis subverts the seemingly transparent link between language and the world that language says it is merely describing. We are accustomed to thinking that the world is one thing and language is another, separate thing. On one level, that is true. But such a view often shades into a tendency to see words as labels that hang around the necks of previously-existing meanings. A discourse-analytical approach argues that this view misses the way in which language itself helps divide up and categorise the booming and buzzing confusion for us.

Through concentrating on this, discourse analysis is concerned to make us alive to the many different ways in which the world can be divided up. This does not mean that we descend into relativism. Rather, it unveils to our gaze the ubiquitous and deceptively innocent world of taxonomies. What can be more trivial than the arrangement of wares on a supermarket shelf? Yet what speaks more eloquently of the social construction of gender than our own acceptance of the division between the hardware section and the cooking utensils? Discourse analysis, through looking at the way the world is divided up in language, points out how ideology dichotomises political space and installs us on this or that side of a hierarchical opposition. Through a problematisation of the order of the signifier, and through an insistence on the interdependence of the subject and that signifier, discourse analysis thus reveals a different level of the political: a politics which exists, not primarily at the level of explicit political demands or programmes, but in the everyday distinctions and assumptions which make up the unspoken and invisible bedrock of everyday life.

This approach has a diverse genealogy and there are many different ways to implement its insights. To use its insights is to work in the shadow of Gramsci, whose concept of hegemony went beyond the Leninist concept of class alliances, in which participating sectors retained their separate identity, and opened up the question of the way in which subject positions can traverse a number of class sectors.² This problematic has subsequently been developed in many ways. I have chosen the course of investigation opened by post-structuralist theories of language and the social. Initially demarcated in the writings of (among others) Barthes, Kristeva, Derrida and Michel Foucault, it has grown to a many-sided and elaborate theoretical field. It would be impossible to explore all its ramifications in this dissertation, or to consider the complex challenges these theoretical developments throw up for South African Marxist historiography.

² Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: towards a Radical Democratic Politics* trans. by Winston Moore and Paul Cammack (London, Verso, 1985). pp. 65 - 71.

Instead, I shall narrow my vision down to the concepts developed by a particular set of thinkers - Louis Althusser, Michel Pêcheux, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Slavoj Žižek. All of these writers owe a common philosophical debt to the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. In their writings the Lacanian concept of the subject is given a political edge, and its implications for the study of ideology are clearly shown. The relationship between this constellation of writers is complicated: Louis Althusser and Michel Pêcheux in particular do not fit neatly into the post-structuralist pigeonhole.³ Nevertheless the concepts they develop can function as a springboard, and can be used to explain many of the features of the post-structuralist subject.

2.2 Lacan, Althusser and the concept of interpellation.

Lacan's thought is far too elaborate and multi-faceted to be discussed in this dissertation. Lacan's works are notoriously difficult: His deliberately unsystematic treatment, the shifting meaning of his key terms and his dense, allusive style mean that any brief summary such as this must perforce be a crude oversimplification of complex issues.⁴ In this chapter, I can only state

³ Thus, as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe point out, Althusser's writing is torn between the anti-reductionism implicit in his concept of "overdetermination", and the tendency to a return to essentialism in his insistence on determination by the economy "in the last instance" (*op. cit.*, p. 97 - 100). In addition, his conception of the subject never explicitly addresses the problem of the unconscious; his concept of interpellation seems to presuppose a transparency of the subject to itself which Lacan would deny (Colin McCabe, "On Discourse", in Colin McCabe (ed.), *The Talking Cure: Essays in Psychoanalysis and Language* (London, MacMillan, 1981), p. 212). Furthermore, both Pêcheux and Althusser see their own discourse as the discourse of science, which does not have (or at least strives not to have!) a subject-position (see Althusser, *op. cit.*, p. 45; Pêcheux, *op. cit.*, p. 142); a conception which Andrew Merrifield has criticised in his paper ("The art of insurrection - a discursive analysis of Lenin's writings September - October 1917", (working draft of paper prepared for delivery at the 1986 Annual meeting of the American Political Science Association The Washington Hilton, August 23-31, 1986) pp. 1 - 2; 15 - 16). My interpretation of Althusser's concepts should therefore be seen as an attempt at a post-structuralist re-reading in which his debt to Lacan has been borne in mind.

⁴ Good introductory surveys of Lacan's main works are provided by Bice Benvenuto and Robert Kennedy's *The Works of Jacques Lacan: An Introduction* (London, Free Association Books, 1986) and Anika Lemaire in her *Jacques Lacan* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986). Anthony Wilden provides, in *The Language of the Self* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), illuminating notes and commentary on Lacan's famous "Rome discourse". Turkle's book *Psychoanalytic Politics: Freud's French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1981) helps situate the development of Lacanian psychoanalysis within the context of French radical politics, though Stuart Schneiderman's elegant *Lacan: The Death of an intellectual hero* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1983) often gives a more profound insight into many of the themes she addresses.

In the general field of the theory of the ideological subject, theoretical introductions abound: Colin McCabe, *op. cit.* and Mark Cousins' "Jokes and their relation to the means of production" (*Economy and Society* Vol 14 (1985), pp. 94 - 112) provide surveys of the field charted by Althusser and Pêcheux. Besides these articles, there is Diane McDonnell, *Theories of Discourse: an introduction* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986); Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); and Kaya Silverman's lucid *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1983). Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (*op. cit.*) attempt a sustained argument to develop the problem of political subjectivity within the framework of Marxist thought on hegemony; their discussion seems informed by a reading of Lacan although the connection with the Lacanian subject is never explicitly made. This has been left to Slavoj Žižek, who has drawn close links between Laclau and Mouffe's view of social antagonism and the implications of a Lacanian re-reading of Althusser's theory of ideology. Žižek's book *The Sublime Object of Ideology* will to my knowledge, be published later this year. Meanwhile, his unpublished

my theoretical bearings, and point out why I consider Lacan to be central to this field. Broadly speaking, his thought is crucial in two main ways.

In the first place, the basic point of departure of discourse analysis must be Lacan's concept of **lack**. This concept is central to an understanding of the Lacanian subject. In fact, for Lacan, the subject is crucially the subject of a lack.⁵ This is a complex concept, but crudely speaking we should see Lacan as questioning the idea of a central human essence forming the core of subjectivity. Such an essence, for example, is presupposed by the metaphor of 'socialisation'. This metaphor implies an irreducible kernel around which layers of socialisation accrete, like a pearl forming round a grain of sand. Lacan denies that there is any such irreducible and concrete human essence at the "centre" of the subject. That is not to say that there is nothing universal about subjectivity. What is universal is the **structure** of subjectivity, subjectivity as a **process**: the subject, for Lacan, exists precisely in its ceaseless endeavour to overcome the experience of lack. The Lacanian subject is not a positive given that springs, full-blown, into the world at birth. For the newly born infant the possibility of differentiation between its own undefined self and its surroundings first arises when it experiences a concrete lack, through the absence of the mother's body. But this is only the beginning: From this initial experience onwards, the subject is formed through a series of identifications with what is **external** to it; each of these, though making possible some degree of positive identity and consistency, are also the occasions for further self-loss and a progressive alienation. In a manner of speaking Lacan puts, in place of **identity**, the process of **identification**. He focuses on the movement by which the subject, striving to overcome its experience of self-loss and alienation objectifies and externalises itself, in an external image.⁶

This movement of identification has its own complex logic. We can look at it here in terms of the interplay between the interlinked orders of the **Imaginary** and the **Symbolic** (Lacan recognises a third order, one he calls the **Real**: I shall consider its role in the final pages of this dissertation). Again, I have to emphasise that none of these terms can be given a reductive, self-contained meaning. They are terms for different yet interdependent orders of being, and it is their interplay that constitutes the possibility of subjectivity.⁷

articles, "Beyond discourse analysis"(unpublished typescript) and "Identity, Identification and Beyond" (unpublished typescript) and "Approaches to the Lacanian Real (unpublished typescript) are engaging, masterful and innovative discussions of the Lacanian subject.

5 Kaya Silverman, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

6 The lack in the subject can therefore be seen in two complementary ways. On the one hand the subject never wholly transcends this lack, and in every identity is therefore always-already in itself blocked, marked by an impossibility. On the other hand the subject is possible **because** of this lack it is the desire to transcend the lack that is the motive force for its identifications with what is outside it. Lack is the central condition of possibility of subjectivity; it simultaneously precludes the subject's full realisation and forms the condition of possibility of what positive consistency it attains (S. Zizek, "Beyond discourse-analysis", pp. 6 - 9).

7 Bice Benvenuto and Robert Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p.82.

self-contained meaning. They are terms for different yet interdependent orders of being, and it is their interplay that constitutes the possibility of subjectivity.⁷

The Imaginary order includes the field of fantasy and images,⁸ and is that order of the subject's experience which is dominated by the experience of **identification**.⁹ Some essential characteristics of this order can be explained with reference to the paradigmatic case of identification - what Lacan calls the "Mirror stage". This is, for Lacan, a crucial and constitutive moment in the formation of the human ego. It occurs when the infant, as yet an inchoate bundle of perceptions, with no conception of itself and control over its own limbs, recognises its image in the mirror as its own.¹⁰ Because the infant has, until then, had no conception of itself as a coherent entity, stable and delimited from the world, this moment of recognition-identification is also a moment of **transformation**.¹¹ A useful way to put it is that the movement of "recognition" is one whereby the infant **assumes** its own image. This is a crucial moment in the development of the subject. It is important not only for the formation of the child's conception of itself as a unified, coherent whole, but is also the basis for its ability to relate itself to its surroundings: only on the basis of this identification with an image of itself as coherent can the infant postulate objects of permanence and identity in the world.¹²

Two features of the mirror stage merit special emphasis. Firstly, the fact that the infant's recognition of itself lies in identification with a virtual, **external** unity that cannot actually be touched. The moment of identification is therefore also one of **alienation**: the subject's realisation lies in an a sphere outside itself, it depends on an imaginary "other".¹³ Even more crucial is a second feature of the mirror stage - that it is "a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation"¹⁴. With this phrase Lacan points out the fact that the identification of the infant is with an image that **has a unity and coherence that the infant, with its unformed sense of self and unco-ordinated motor functions, in actuality lacks**. The notion of a unified, coherent self is not something that **pre**-exists that instant of recognition; in fact it is the other way round. It is on the shaky foundations of this glimpsed **image** of coherence that the bastion of the coherent ego is built. The formation of the subject through imaginary identification therefore means that its constitution proceeds from a state of

⁷ Bice Benvenuto and Robert Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p.82.

⁸ *Op cit.*, p.81.

⁹ Kaya Silverman, *op. cit.*, p.157.

¹⁰ Bice Benvenuto and Robert Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p.52.

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, "The mirror-stage as formative of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience", in Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* trans. by Alan Sheridan (London, Tavistock, 1985) p.2.

¹² Jacqueline Rose, "The Imaginary", in Colin McCabe (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp. 137 - 138.

¹³ Bice Benvenuto and Robert Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p.55; S. Zizek, "Identity, identification and its beyond", p.18.

¹⁴ Jacques Lacan, *op. cit.*, p.4.

fragmentation and insufficiency to the subordination to an **illusory** image of unity, an image of unity that the infant does not yet have.¹⁵

Though the mirror stage itself is a limited, specific moment in the constitution of the human subject, its real importance lies in its paradigmatic value: these two features will henceforth characterise all subsequent identifications. The initial identification with an image seen as stable, self-contained and autonomous, as Lacan says, "situates the agency of the ego... in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone".¹⁶ The subject's knowledge of itself and the world is characterised by what Lacan calls **méconnaissance**, or "misrecognition";¹⁷ it is constituted by its identification with that which is external to it, and by the "forgetting" of the conditions of its own constitution.¹⁸

For Lacan, though, the decisive moment in the constitution of the subject is its entry into the world of meaning through its identification with some signifying trait in the **Symbolic order**. Though the mirror stage and imaginary identification leads to the experience of some illusory unity, it is only in the universe of **language** that the subject's thoughts, feelings and desires can be represented.¹⁹ Indeed, for Lacan the Symbolic order dominates the subject. It is not merely the vehicle for expression of the subject's self, but prior to and constitutive of the subject.²⁰ As he has put it in a famous passage,

"Symbols... envelope the life of man in a network so total that they join together before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him by 'flesh and blood'... so total that they bring to his birth, along with the gifts of the stars... the shape of his destiny, so total that they give the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not and yet and even beyond his death, and so total that through them his end finds its meaning in the last judgement, where the Word absolves his being or condemns it."²¹

Lacan thus emphasises the anteriority of the Symbolic Order to the subject, and the dependence of the subject on the signifier. The subject has identity insofar as that identity is represented and articulated in the pre-existing world of language.

15 **Op. cit.**, pp.2-3; Bice Benvenuto and Robert Kennedy. **op. cit.**, p.52, 56.

16 Jacques Lacan. **op. cit.**, p.2.

17 Kaya Silverman. **op. cit.**, p. 158; Bice Benvenuto and Robert Kennedy. **op. cit.**, pp. 60 - 1.

18 Michel Pêcheux. **Language, Ideology and Semantics**, p. 113.

19 Bice Benvenuto and Robert Kennedy. **op. cit.**, pp. 60 - 1.

20 Martin Thom. "The unconscious structured like a language", in Colin McCabe (ed.) **op. cit.**, p. 13

21 Jacques Lacan. "The Function and Field in Speech and Language in psychoanalysis" in Jacques Lacan **Ecrits**, p. 68.

This emphasis has been taken up in Althusser's critique of the idealist notion of ideology as a "set of ideas".²² Althusser has given Lacan's thought an explicitly political point by showing the primacy of the signifier as the surface of ideological identification. In other words, Althusser emphasises the moment at which the subject recognises itself in or assents to the **ideological sign**. To describe this moment Althusser has used the concept of "hailing" or "interpellation". According to him, ideology operates by interpellating or hailing **individuals** as **subjects**.²³ He illustrates the moment of interpellation in a Kafkaesque "theoretical theatre", an imagined scene in which a policeman hails an individual with the shout "hey you!" The individual turns and

"[b]y this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a **subject**. Why? Because he has recognised that the 'hail' was really addressed to him, and that it was **really him** who was hailed', (and not someone else)"²⁴

Through the very act of recognising that the call was addressed to him, the hailed individual assents to the full meaning of the policeman's call. The Kafkaesque dimension of the drama lies of course in the fact that (as in **The Trial**) the existence of an actual crime, an original sin, is irrelevant: what matters is that the individual renders him or herself a suspect through the very act of turning around. In this way Althusser questions the notion that a prior essence must underlie the moment at which the subject recognises itself in a particular identity: it is the moment of identification **itself** that constitutes the individual as a subject.

This point must be understood in relation to the influence on Lacan and Althusser of Saussurean linguistics. Saussure's points of departure - his distinction between the signifier and signified,²⁵ his insistence on the non-natural and "arbitrary" nature of the link between the two,²⁶ and his argument that linguists should focus on the system underlying concrete speech acts and not only the speech acts in themselves,²⁷ have all functioned to sever the apparently natural link between word and meaning that exists in our common-sense view of language. In its place there has grown up a view of the identity and value of signs as **relational**. In terms of Saussure's view, meaning does not lie in the relationship between a word and what it "refers" to. Meaning is constructed and created in language: it subsists in the relations of synonymy and substitutability between one signifier and another.²⁸ The act of understanding can no longer be seen as some

²² See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" in Louis Althusser, *Essays in Ideology* (London, Verso, 1984), pp. 39 - 44.

²³ *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

²⁵ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (trans. by Roy Harris) (La Salle, Open Court Classics, 1988) p. 67.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 73.

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

²⁸ Peter Hudson, "Causality and the subject in a 'discourse-theoretical' approach to Marxism", *Studies in Marxism* no. 7 (December 1986), p. 6.

essentially private psychic act of comprehension or in the apprehension of individual signs, but in the possibility of relating them to each other. By extension - and here is the rub - identity, too, is caught up in this relational network. When the subject recognises him or herself in a given signifier, whether "worker", "white", "African" or "saboteur", the full meaning of that identity lies, not in some inner essence, the private intentions of the subject, nor in the objectivity of a transparent "experience", but in the external, publicly available network of relationships and practices which give those signifiers their value.

This point gives us the key to the interpretation of Althusser's statement that ideology installs us "in an imaginary relation to real relations".²⁹ By this he should not be taken to mean that our experience of conditions of existence is **illusory** or **fanciful**. One way of thinking about it is rather that these experiences are produced on a different level from that at which they are experienced: our own experience of being subjects, the self-evident obviousness in which the world presents itself to us, the sense we have ourselves of being spontaneous centres of action and initiative - this is nothing but the "elementary" effect - of ideology.³⁰ In terms of this reading of ideology, a juxtaposition of the "illusory" nature of ideology with the concrete experience of "reality" is meaningless - experience is ideological; ideology is our way of being-in-the-world. As Althusser puts it, rephrasing St Paul, "it is in the Logos, meaning ideology, that we 'live, move and have our being'"³¹ Ideology gives us our "spontaneous" experience of the social,³² while concealing from us the signifying network that shapes that experience. This is what Pêcheux means when he says that ideology "supplies-imposes 'reality' for the subject in the general form of miscognition",³³ and that its operation is one of imposition-concealment.

We should however not take Althusser's statement that the subject is installed in an imaginary relation to real relations as meaning that we are doomed to live trapped in the illusory world of a "political imaginary". This would be to miss the importance of Lacan's emphasis on the constitutive role of the symbolic order. This emphasis opens up the possibility of "unwrapping" political identity by analysing the web of relations in which it is caught up and which give it its meaning and value. Lacan and Althusser focus our attention on this underlying web and so give us access to the "ideological unconscious". As Pêcheux puts it,

29 Louis Althusser, *op. cit.*, p.38.

30 *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

31 *Op. cit.*, p.45.

32 M. Cousins, *op.cit.*, p.95.

33 Michel Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious* trans. by Harbans Nagpal (London, MacMillan 1982), p. 120.

"...the drama of interpellation is presented from behind the scenes, from the place where one can grasp the fact that the subject is spoken of, is spoken to, before the subject can say, 'I speak!'"³⁴

Though their approach does deprive us of the opportunity to appeal to a viewpoint claiming to be grounded in a privileged access to reality, it does not rob us of a critical perspective on the discourses we are confronted with: as I shall show in my analysis, post-structuralist discourse analysis is an analytic strategy aimed precisely at detecting the hidden points of crisis, the "fault-lines" in the ideological edifice. In this chapter, though, I wish to emphasise mainly the extent to which Saussure can be seen as laying the foundations of a **materialist** theory of meaning. The sign, says Volosinov, is "a phenomenon of the external world" and so are the relationships between them. He has explicitly stated the consequences of a view according to which "understanding is a response to a sign with signs":

"...this chain of ideological creativity and understanding, moving from sign to sign and then to a new sign, is perfectly consistent and continuous: from one link of a semeiotic nature... we proceed uninterruptedly to another link of exactly the same nature. And nowhere is there a break in the chain, nowhere does the chain plunge into inner being, non-material in nature and unembodied in signs."³⁵

In other words, though we are concerned with the 'interior' of the subject, that interior can only be grasped through the exteriority of the symbolic order.³⁶ Here it is helpful to remind ourselves of the parallels between discourse analysis and Lacanian psychoanalysis. As Benvenuto and Kennedy point out,

"According to Lacan psychoanalysis does not deal with feelings as such, but with a questioning of emotional states; that is, it is concerned with their meaning..."³⁷

A further valuable aspect of the Althusserian approach to ideology lies in the way in which it has built on this point and given it an explicitly historical and political twist. In his essay, Althusser problematises the subject in the context of a broader discussion of the apparatuses through which society reproduces itself. This has on occasion been interpreted as a narrow functionalism, in terms of which Althusser is understood to explain "ideological state apparatuses" simply in terms of their functionality to a ruling class. Another interpretation is however also possible, which focuses upon Althusser's comment that these institutions are in themselves both the site and the stake of ideological struggle. This has important implications

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 106.

³⁵ V. N. Volosinov, "The study of ideologies and the philosophy of language", in **Culture, Ideology and Social Process: A Reader** ed. by T. Bennet, G. Martin, C. Mercer, J. Woollacott (London, Batsford Academic and Educational, in Association with Open University Press, 1981), p. 147.

³⁶ Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p.116.

³⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 168.

for the way in which the functioning of ideology itself is understood: meanings and identities can themselves be seen as being shaped in political struggle.

Thus Michel Pêcheux, taking Althusser's project further, has argued that Saussure's focus on the general linguistic system of **langue** as determining the value of any given element should be shifted instead to concentrate on the importance of historically specific political **discourses**. Besides the general relational system of the English language, in other words, there is the way in which English is used in schools, armies, prisons, hospitals, universities, etc. Discursive formations exist on a different level from either **langue** or the concrete speech acts of Saussure's **parole**: They have a historical and political specificity that the orthodox notion of **langue** lacks.³⁸

Pêcheux's remarks on the historically specific nature of discursive formations help us further understand the meaning of Althusser's theoretical theatre. Althusser's use of the policeman-figure (in another example, he uses God) is a metaphor through which he draws our attention to the way in which ideological subjection is always subjection to what Lacan calls an Other - or in Althusser's terminology, a "Subject" with a capital S.³⁹ But this does not mean interpellation is a literal hailing by a concrete empirical individual. The centrality of the "Subject" is the result of its place in a wider system, and Althusser's policeman is a stand-in for the Ideological State Apparatus, the entire range of rituals, practices and institutions that make up the discursive formation.

Two important points flow from this understanding of discourse. Firstly, it implies the material nature of every discursive structure. In the words of Laclau and Mouffe, discursive practices

"cannot consist purely of linguistic phenomena, but must instead pierce the entire material density of the multifarious institutions, rituals and practices through which a discursive formation is structured."⁴⁰

In other words, though I shall approach the discourse of the NCL/ARM through the texts that it left behind, its discourse does not consist only in these texts. The movement of identification, the construction of a subject position and the dichotomisation of political space that I shall trace in my analysis of NCL/ARM discourse - all these processes occurred only through the diverse practices that made up the NCL/ARM's activities. The very act of sabotage itself, in other words, was as much part of the discourse of the NCL/ARM as the documents I shall look at later; it, too, was a "statement", a metaphor, implying a certain subject-position.

³⁸ Michel Pêcheux. *op. cit.*, p. 58.

³⁹ Louis Althusser. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses". pp. 53 - 57; Michel Pêcheux. *op. cit.*, p.93; Slavoj Žižek. *op. cit.*, p.17.

⁴⁰ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. p. 109.

Secondly, discourses, because they involve institutions, practices and hence relations of power, also involve political struggle. Precisely because ideologies do not exist primarily as abstract ideas, they cannot be seen as independent world views that pre-exist their coming together in ideological struggle. They do not have a unitary, monolithic, homogeneous logic: Instead, they are deeply heterogenous, taking shape in relation to each other, marked by what they oppose.⁴¹ Hence, no identity, no signifier, is ever free from the marks of an ideological struggle, the stakes of which are precisely the way in which crucial signifiers will be articulated.⁴² As Laclau and Mouffe put it, every discourse takes shape against the deforming influence of a discursive exterior, an exterior that is constituted by other discourses, and is therefore always vulnerable, open to destabilisation.⁴³

2.3 Analysing historical texts

These points of departure have a number of clear implications for the analysis of concrete historical discourses. Perhaps the most obvious consequence is the implication that we can no longer take the words people use to describe their experiences or their decisions as self-evident. The very question of their meaning is thrown open. The notion of a social context to which statements must be related now expands to include **ideological** context, and the specific political weight and value of any statement has now to be determined with reference to its position in a particular discursive formation.

Through problematising meaning, therefore, Althusser's theory of ideology opens up a whole new level of the political. The really important level of operation of ideology is not that of systematic political theory nor is it to be found only in the explicit content of manifestos and programmes. Rather, it lies in the interstices of everyday thought: its most important influence lies in the way in which it shapes the most spontaneous and basic assumptions of historical subjects and conditions their most everyday experience of the political. When we want to understand how subjects act politically we should investigate, in other words, the ideological resources that were at their disposal, which rendered their world intelligible and presented them with their choices.

⁴¹ D. Macdonell, *Theories of Discourse*, p. 34.

⁴² S. Žižek, "Identity, Identification and its Beyond", p.2.

⁴³ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 110 - 111. See also their comment on this point in footnote 20 (p. 146).

In looking at the discourse of the NCL/ARM, therefore, we should not pay attention only to the explicit content of their documents, and we should go beyond asking ourselves whether the perceptions enunciated in them were accurate or not. Discourse analysis depends on a move that Žižek has compared to the Brechtian alienation-effect: a deliberate "freezing", as it were, of the text itself, in which we bracket the question of whether the statements we are reading are true or not, and suspend our own "obvious" experience of its meaning. In terms of this approach, texts should not only be seen as windows on a world of facts; we should also look at their own internal structure. We should ask ourselves how their central concepts and the relations that gave these their meaning shaped the experience of the subjects in question and gave them a perspective on the world.

A perspective that enables these imperatives to be translated into concrete and practical analysis has been worked out in some concrete detail by Michel Pêcheux in his book, **Language Semantics and Ideology**. I am not going to dwell on the details of Pêcheux's complex and subtle argument, much of which is concerned with the analysis of the problem of the distinction between explicative and determinative relative clauses since Port-Royal's Grammar. Suffice it to say that he shows that these fail for the reason that such relatives cannot be understood only in terms of their grammatical function, that it is their discursive functioning that is crucial.⁴⁴ In the process he isolates the two central discursive mechanisms whereby ideology interpellates and sustains the subject in discourse: **preconstruction and articulation**.⁴⁵

Preconstruction is the operation whereby language constructs objects in the world for us by referring to them "as if [they]... were already there".⁴⁶ As an example of the way preconstruction operates, Pêcheux cites a joke recounted by Freud: "Is this the place where the Duke of Wellington spoke those words? - Yes, but he never spoke those words." The point of the joke is that it is irrelevant whether or not the Duke actually spoke "those words": the fact that we can refer to them as if they existed is enough to enable us to identify the place. Whether they existed or not, language constructs them **as if they did indeed exist**, before and outside it. Pêcheux's point is that this modality is the way language makes all objects available to us; and that this is how discourse can have material effects of its own. In assenting to such preconstructions, then, by seeing them as referring to existing objects and not as objects constructed in discourse, we are interpellated as subjects. We act as if these categories are real entities; they are real **for us**.⁴⁷ This is what I take

44 C. McCabe, "On Discourse", p. 208.

45 M. Cousins, "Jokes and their relation to the Mode of Production", p.101.

46 Michel Pêcheux, *op. cit.*, p.64. (They exist therefore on much the same level as Lacan's concept of the signifier, and Laclau and Mouffe's concept of "elements".)

47 And it should be added that once they are real for us, they start developing a life of their own. This is where many preconstructed are qualitatively different from the "words" in the joke. Once a subject has assented to the preconstructed "Afrikaner" and the discourse and practices it is bound up in, she is an Afrikaner. Though later she

Pêcheux to mean when he says that the preconstructed "...corresponds to the 'always-already there' of the ideological interpellation that supplies-imposes 'reality' and its 'meaning' in the form of universality"⁴⁸

But these preconstructed do not contain their full meaning in themselves; their meanings are contained in their relations to one another. To interpellate us as subjects, ideology has to construct the relations between them. For Pêcheux, ideology does this by "reminding" us of these relations. But the word "reminder" is deceptive: the main point Pêcheux seems to make by using the concept of "reminding" is that ideology does not explicitly relate its crucial signifiers, but operates simply by presupposing them, operating as if they already existed. In other words, it invokes relationships as if it is only reminding us of something we already know - but it is through this very operation that the relationships are constructed.⁴⁹ This "return of the known in thought"⁵⁰ is what Pêcheux calls **articulation**.

Consider, for example, the following phrase, taken from the discourse of an imaginary biologist: "men and women, being rational animals...". On one level, the words "rational animals" mean precisely the same as the words "men and women": they are mere redescriptions, focusing on an already-known feature of humanity. But on another level we can see that the second phrase acts in part to (re)define the words "men and women". Think of the very different definition of humanity implicit in the phrase if a fundamentalist Christian substitutes the word "fallen angels"... The operation of articulation, in other words, actually **gives** the preconstructed it articulates their meanings and gives the subject its relation to these objects. Articulation thus "constitutes the subject in his relationship to meaning"⁵¹

A few last remarks are in order before concluding this chapter. As the previous pages show, the analysis of NCL/ARM discourse entails a careful and meticulous parsing of their texts for preconstructions and a systematic reconstruction of the way in which they interrelate. It thus has a very "mechanical" aspect, and it is no coincidence that Pêcheuxian discourse analysis has at times been done with a computer.⁵² This aspect of discourse analysis has been strongly

may come to question this identity, it will only be by assenting to a **different** set of preconstructed ("worker", "woman"...).

48 Pêcheux, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

49 *Op. cit.*, p. 74.

50 *Ibid.*.

51 *Op. cit.*, p. 115.

52 See Michel Pêcheux, "Are the Masses an Inanimate Object?" in *Linguistic Variation: Models and Methods*, ed. David Sankoff (New York, Academic Press, 1978), pp. 251 - 266.

influenced by its roots in the discipline of structuralist analysis. It is also rooted in a profound suspicion of an "intuitive" understanding of a given text and a consciousness of the way in which the analyst can be blind to the "obviousnesses" he or she is trying to uncover. The methodical and careful "unpeeling" of the text into its constituent parts is partly a strategy geared to avoiding too great a trust in our own experience of its meaning.

At the same time discourse analysis is not at all reducible to such mechanical tactics, a mere **description** of those relationships. In a sense, such a description would be a task both unmanageably huge (given the diversity of constructions in a text and their interrelations) and ultimately pointless (since it would lack a focus and organising logic). Besides this mechanical aspect, it is therefore also necessary to emphasise the status of discourse analysis as an interpretive strategy. In the course of an analysis, specific constructions are focused on, others are ignored and certain relationships are singled out for emphasis. Any analysis will always be an interpretation from a specific point of view. Therefore the analyst's own position, his or her nature as an interpellated subject is a crucial determinant of the analytical process. During the conclusion of this dissertation, I shall take up some of these points. But before we come to the business of analysing the NCL/ARM texts or considering their implications, we need to look first at the NCL/ARM itself, and the history from which it arose.

3

The Development of Radical Liberalism in South Africa

How can one change the world if one identifies with everybody?
How else can one change it?

Arthur Koestler: *Darkness at Noon*

3.1 Liberalism and Radical Politics in South Africa

The NCL/ARM occupies an unusual, indeed unique place in the history of the armed struggle against apartheid. While it was only one of a whole range of groups to abandon peaceful protest in favour of sabotage, it was the only liberal group to do so. This is the fact which at first glance has appeared to be their most paradoxical characteristic, for South African liberalism, especially in the 1950s, was marked centrally by its commitment to non-violent protest. The story of the NCL/ARM must therefore be set in a broader context: it must be shown how liberals could reach the point where they could even consider sabotage as a strategy against apartheid. We have to understand the NCL/ARM, in other words, against the broader ideological background of the development of a new kind of liberalism in the late 1950s and early 1960s - a political tendency that Tom Lodge has described as "radical liberalism".¹ The NCL/ARM should be seen as merely one of its manifestations: it was the most radical and desperate reaction to the increasing contradictions and tensions facing liberals during this time.

Liberal and revisionist historians' bitterest disagreement has perhaps centred round the historical role of liberalism in South Africa. Liberal accounts have portrayed it as a moral force in South African politics, a repository of civilised and rational principles South Africa ignores at its peril - and a tradition which, though it never became politically central, still had a meliorating influence on state repression.² Revisionists have been harsher in their judgements,

¹ Tom Lodge, "Patrick Duncan and Radical Liberalism" (University of Cape Town, Centre for African Studies, 1977, Paper 2).

² R. F. A. Hoernlé, *South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1945); C. W. de Kiewiet *The Anatomy of South African Misery*, (London, Oxford University Press 1956); Leo Marquard, *Liberalism in South Africa*, (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1965), Mathew Midlane, "Aspects of the South African Liberal Tradition" in *South African Research in Progress: Papers given at a conference for Southern African Studies, University of York, December 1974*.

seeing it as the (albeit unwitting) handmaiden of capitalism's oppression. In a classical statement of this position, Martin Legassick has summed up liberalism's role in South Africa as one of "social control".³ In a series of articles he has continually emphasised its dimension as

"a force trying to minimise or disguise the conflictual or coercive aspects of the social structure and... to convince selected Africans that the grievances they felt could be ameliorated through reforms which liberals could promulgate."⁴

This social role is, for him, deeply rooted in liberalism's complicity with capitalist interests, in particular with those of "secondary industry of a particular kind".⁵ In another study, Paul Rich has argued that the political liberal intellectuals "played an important part in the evolving policies of segregation up to the Nationalist's triumph in 1948"⁶. In his judgement, thus liberalism shares some of the responsibility for the doctrines of apartheid they denounced so passionately after 1948. Other scholars have warned against too global a condemnation of liberal policy, arguing that liberalism cannot without qualification be seen to be a force striving for social control.⁷

A study of the politics of the NCL/ARM will throw light on some of the issues involved in this debate. It was but one example of a phenomenon that was growing more and more widespread in the late 1950's and early 1960's: the emergence of liberals who broke with tradition and started to enunciate an increasingly radical, sometimes even revolutionary perspective on South African society. In this chapter I shall consider the development and discursive logic of this radicalism. I shall also explore some aspects of its relationship to more conservative traditions of South African liberalism: how it tried to transcend this conservatism, and in what respects this attempt failed. Before I analyse the phenomenon of radicalism in any great detail, however, it might be useful to gain some idea of its positive historical manifestation.

For the sake of clarity, it may help to distinguish between different senses in which we can look at the liberal community in South Africa. In the limited sense, there was the tightly knit community of South African liberals that had grown up around the South African Institute for

³ Martin Legassick. "Liberalism, social control and liberation in South Africa" (unpublished typescript, 1975) p. 1.

⁴ Martin Legassick. "The rise of modern South African liberalism: its assumptions and social base" (paper given at African Studies Faculty Graduate Seminar, University of Sussex, 1975). p. 1.

⁵ **Ibid.**

⁶ Paul Rich. **White Power and the Liberal Conscience: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism 1921 - 60** (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1984). p. 127.

⁷ See, for example, Phyllis Lewsen. "Cape Liberalism in its Terminal Phase", in **Working Papers in Southern African Studies**, ed. by D. C. Hindson (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983), pp. 33 - 50; Tom Lodge, **op. cit.**: Charles Simkins. **Reconstructing South African Liberalism**. (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1986). p. 4.

Race Relations, the churches, and the universities; a community that Michelman has described as

"... a kind of interlocking directorate of organisations and individuals who serve the liberal cause. They co-operate with one another in organising protests. They swell one another's membership lists, serve on each other's committees, and underwrite each other's expenses."⁸

But we should also look at a broader community, a community that includes a larger part of the South African left. Of course, the word "community" is used advisedly here. Its borders cannot be sharply defined. It was on the whole composed of English-speaking South Africans whose antagonism to apartheid had sharpened into an opposition - sometimes vague and unformed, sometimes programmatic and theorised - to white supremacy and inequality; but an account of this community would also have to include figures like the coloured LP member Eddie Daniels, Africans like Jordan Ngubane and Selby Msimang, and Afrikaans speakers like Breyten Breytenbach. Furthermore, as much divided this "community" as united them. Though sometimes its ties stretched across political divides and bound together Liberal Party and COD members (for example in the defence of Treason Trialists) it was at other times characterised by an internecine distrust and bitterness that almost exceeded their antagonism to the Nationalist enemy. But for all this, what they shared was important. When Ronald Segal, for example, decided not to nail the flag of his journal to the mast of any particular political movement, he did so in the hope that the magazine could serve as a platform "... on which spokesmen of the Liberal and Labour parties might sit with those of the non-white political movements and free-lance rebels like myself."⁹

That hope was based on the recognition of the degree to which different streams within the South African left shared a common ideological heritage. Driver, in a thumbnail sketch of the broader community of the white left, has pointed out how much "free-lance rebels" such as Segal held in common with liberals and communists:

"... in South Africa, white liberals, white socialists and white communists tended to live rather similar kinds of lives, though their backgrounds were often very different. They tended to be intellectuals - that is, they cared about ideas, books and the arts. Because they were in opposition to the government and because they were in a small minority within their own class and race, they were generally non-conformist and tended to be anti-authoritarian; even those who accepted the authority of a creed or ideology tended to be critical within that creed or ideology. They tended to look outwards from South Africa, to have links abroad, and many were able to choose to leave South Africa temporarily or permanently. It is worth noting that one is discussing no more than a

⁸ Cherry Michelman. *The Black Sash of South Africa: A case study in liberalism* (London. Oxford University Press for the Institute of Race Relations. 1975) p. 9.

⁹ Ronald Segal. *Into Exile*. p. 119.

few thousand people... That is, for all their ideological differences, they had sociological links... and in that sociological sense there was a certain 'liberality' linking them."¹⁰

Of course, this is not to say that all white South Africans opposed to apartheid should suddenly be seen as radical liberals. But it does mean that the degree to which liberal ideology has left its mark on radical thought in South Africa should not be underestimated. I have in mind here the liberalism that marked much of the politics of movements further to the left, such as the Congress of Democrats, the tradition Legassick was referring to when he pointed out the existence in South Africa of a liberalism that is not rooted in "the timidity of English Bourgeois thought" but in "the diffuse populist radicalism which is one major theme of E.P. Thompson's **Making of the English Working Class**". This tradition, according to him, was not so much expressed in the institutions of liberalism itself, but mainly "through a popular front Marxism, and anti-Fascism, or in terms of African Nationalism or even 'African socialism'".¹¹

By the mid-1950's however, a different species of liberalism arose, one that was set apart from both these communities. There was an aspect of liberal politics that was **not** completely contained within the bounds of mainstream South African liberalism, but which was not accommodated within the Congress alliance either. Here again we cannot point to the existence of a cohesive "radical liberal" community or delineate the outlines of radical liberal politics with any finality. Though it was to some extent self-conscious it never had its own manifesto, its own programme, its own newsletter or organisation.¹² It existed merely as a tendency, a submerged current in the broader stream of South African liberalism. For all its elusiveness, however, it did have a real presence: throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, it is possible to detect the emergence of a liberal discourse well to the left of the main stream.

This is illustrated most powerfully by the history of the Liberal Party.¹³ At its founding the party seemed to embody the conservative traditions of "classical" South African liberalism.¹⁴ Its

¹⁰ C. J. Driver, **Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan-African** (London, Heinemann, 1980), pp. 129-130.

¹¹ Martin Legassick, "Liberalism, Social control and liberation in South Africa", p. 13.

¹² Towards the mid-1960s the Radical Students' Society played this role to some extent, but it did not strive to challenge the more conservative varieties of liberalism or to formulate its own political programme. For a short discussion of the RSS, see p. 44 below.

¹³ What follows is not an attempt to write a history of the Liberal Party. That is already provided elsewhere: see Peter Brown, "The Liberal Party: a chronology with Comment" (paper presented at Liberal Party workshop, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 17 - 19 July 1985); David Everatt, "Frankly Frightened: the Liberal Party and the Congress of the People" (paper presented at the conference on "South Africa in the 1950's", Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Oxford University, 25 - 26 September 1987); Douglas Irvine, "The Liberal Party, 1953-1968" in J. Butler, R. Elphick, D. Welsh (eds.), **Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: its history and prospect** (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), pp. 116 - 133; Janet Robertson, **Liberalism in South Africa: 1948 - 1963**, pp. 106 - 146, 161 - 231.

¹⁴ See for example the advertisement placed in the liberal journal **Forum**, in October 1952, by members of the Cape Town-based South African Liberal Association, and which indirectly led to the founding of the party. Its signatories' concern with the need to win over the disenfranchised elite, their "dismay" at social unrest, and the call for "equal rights for all **civilised** people and equal opportunities for all men and women to

leaders were the same liberals who had dominated the liberal institutions with their accommodationist and meliorist stance for the past 30 years.¹⁵ Its policy was conservative, calling only for the qualified franchise, and though the party was vaguely concerned with poverty and economic hardship, it remained tied to free-market principles: talk about the possibility of a planned economy or equitable distribution of land was not even entertained.¹⁶ Furthermore, even after the Defiance Campaign's challenge to parliamentary struggle, the party professed its commitment to constitutional methods.¹⁷ In Ronald Segal's acid summary, the whole movement at the time appeared "as a salon culture to which sofas were more the instruments of change than barricades."¹⁸

Yet such a judgement was an oversimplification. Segal himself conceded that the Liberal Party's younger members were reaching for a "new and vital policy":

"They would grow in numbers and influence as white supremacy struck out ever more savagely at all those who opposed it, and at last they would transform the programme of the party to an acknowledgement of economic realities."¹⁹

For the LP leadership did not represent the opinions of the general membership.²⁰ Indeed, the early years of the LP were characterised by a struggle between a conservative leadership centred in the Cape, and a far more radical membership, represented by members such as Violaine Junod and Hans Meidner in Natal and by Jock Isacowitz in the Transvaal;²¹ a struggle which soon threatened to tear the party apart.²²

Thus, in 1954, the commitment to a qualified franchise was successfully challenged and the universal franchise was accepted in principle.²³ In 1956, controversy over the exclusive commitment to constitutional means flared anew as a result of the arrest of several LP members in congress-related activities.²⁴ The Cape Town leadership's attempt to bind the party

become civilised" (my emphasis) are classical enunciations of conservative liberal ideology. (*The Forum*, Vol.1, No.7, p. 34.)

¹⁵ Tom Lodge, "Patrick Duncan and Radical Liberalism", pp. 3, 11.

¹⁶ Janet Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

¹⁷ Peter Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 4; Janet Robertson, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-114.

¹⁸ Ronald Segal, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 118-119.

²⁰ See for example Jock Isacowitz's letter to Patrick Duncan quoted in C. J. Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

²¹ An account of some of these early struggles can be found in David Everatt, "Frankly Frightened: the Liberal Party and the Congress of the People", p. 4ff.

²² *Op.cit.*, p. 7.

²³ As a sop to the Cape leadership the possibility of the universal franchise only being introduced in stages was retained. Party unity was in any case seriously threatened, and was maintained only by the decision to transfer the leadership of the Party to Natal. The universal franchise was only fully accepted at its May 1960 National Congress (Janet Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 197; Douglas Irvine, *op. cit.*, p. 117).

²⁴ Patrick Duncan had been arrested for attending an ANC conference in Queenstown without a permit: Violaine Junod of the National Committee and others were arrested for taking part in a women's march

to the policy that extra-parliamentary activity should be seen as "purely ancillary and secondary" to conventional electoral activity was foiled, and a compromise resolution was adopted according to which extra-parliamentary activity was seen as having a "complementary" role.²⁵

In subsequent years, the extent of extra-parliamentary activity grew, and despite resistance by the Cape Town leadership the LP soon had for all intents and purposes relinquished the parliamentary arena and ceased operating as a political party.²⁶ Freed from the need to win white votes, its tactics changed: instead of making appeals to the institutions of authority it started organising opposition against them.²⁷ From 1955 onwards the leftists in the party became increasingly involved in the organisation of grassroots resistance.²⁸ Partly due to this work, and partly due to the banning of the ANC and PAC, the Liberal Party's membership changed to include more and more Africans so that by 1961, though whites dominated on its National Committee, the majority of the delegates to the Party's National Congress were African.²⁹

The Liberal Party also drew closer to other extra-parliamentary organisations. Some liberals were, for example, sympathetic to the Pan Africanist Congress when it broke with the ANC in 1959.³⁰ This was of crucial importance to the Liberal Party during the State of Emergency that followed the Sharpeville shooting. In fact liberals would demonstrate their radicalism perhaps most convincingly after Sharpeville. It was during the crackdown that

²⁵ Peter Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

²⁶ See for example Paton's argument in the wake of the 1958 election that "the Nationalist Government will, by all ordinary reckoning, never again be defeated in an election", quoted in Janet Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 195. The National Chair, Peter Brown, argued that the Party should make extra-parliamentary politics its main arena of action, and in fact advocated that the party consider a policy of civil disobedience (Douglas Irvine, *op. cit.*, p. 122.). Paton and Brown also endorsed the use of the boycott as a legitimate weapon against the Nationalists, arguing that white supremacy would never yield to "mere verbal persuasion". (*Ibid.*, p. 125; Janet Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 196; Peter Brown, *op.cit.*, pp. 30-31). The Liberal Party also supported the ANC sponsored Boycott Movement initiated in London in 1959 (Patrick Van Rensburg, *Guilty land* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1962), pp. 39 - 40).

²⁷ Tom Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

²⁸ For details of liberal involvement in the ANC and NIC's resistance to black spot removals in Natal and the Eastern Cape and information on their involvement in resistance to the destruction of Sophiatown, support of the Alexandra bus boycott and legal defense of the Treason trialists, see Janet Robertson, *op. cit.*, pp. 177, 181; Douglas Irvine, *op. cit.*, p. 124; Peter Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 29. For a participant's view of the importance of extra-parliamentary activity see Violaine Junod, "White liberals and the Treason Trial Arrests", *Africa South*, April/June 1957, pp. 23 - 24.

²⁹ Janet Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 178; Peter Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 41; Douglas Irvine, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

³⁰ Tom Lodge, "The Poqo insurrection, 1961 - 1968", p. 3. Although there were never any official links with the PAC, individuals such as Vigne and Duncan both personally supported the PAC, finding common ground with it in its suspicion of the activities of white Communists (C. J. Driver, *op.cit.*, p. 163, 165). It is, of course, easy to exaggerate LP sympathy with the PAC. Many liberals remained suspicious of the PAC's racial ideology, and Patrick Duncan, for all his PAC sympathies, remained intermittently supportive of the ANC as well, granting huge prominence to the young Nelson Mandela in the pages of *Contact* after 1960..

followed Sharpeville that the newfound extra-parliamentary fervour of the Party was tested, and on the whole it stood the test. Instead of retreating, the Party's position became more defiant, especially in Cape Town, where liberals supported the PAC stayaway after the Emergency.³¹ Duncan's journal *Contact*, which had been first to publish an eyewitness account of the Sharpeville shooting, became almost the only source of news about the Emergency in the country, in defiance of the Emergency's restrictions on printing news.³² Throughout the country, liberals showed that they were prepared to work illegally in opposition to apartheid.³³

The party's radicalisation did not end here. The Party had been edging in the direction of calling for fundamental economic change since April 1959, when its National Congress had accepted a minimum living wage as a cardinal element of party policy.³⁴ In the early 1960's, with a membership vastly different from the conservative liberals of its early days,³⁵ this trend continued. At the National Congress in Cape Town in July 1963 the party debated whether a socialist bias should be given to Party policy, and a resolution was adopted committing the LP to secure "economic, social and political equality and justice for all people in a democratic South Africa".³⁶ A resolution put forward by Ernie Wentzel proposed that a commission should report back in the next year to recommend whether the Party should change its name to the Social

31 See Peter Dreyer, *Martyrs and Fanatics: South Africa and Human Destiny* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), p. 175 for a description of liberals' enthusiastic solidarity with the PAC. The role of liberals in this time, especially the question of Duncan's behaviour regarding the Langa march, has been something of a controversial issue. According to one account Duncan persuaded Kgosana to call off the march in favour of the promise of a meeting with the Minister, misusing the "enormous" trust Kgosana placed in him to dissipate the militance of the marchers (NUSAS, *Dissension in the Ranks*, p. 11); according to another Duncan himself called on the marchers to disperse. (R. W. Johnson, *How Long will South Africa Survive?*, p. 19. See also Martin Legassick, "Liberalism, Social Control and change in South Africa", p. 15.) A different version of what happened is however advanced in C. J. Driver, *op. cit.*, pp. 179 - 180 and Tom Lodge, "Patrick Duncan and Radical Liberalism", p. 9; according to these accounts Duncan could never have "betrayed" the Langa March, not having been present at all. This version of events is corroborated by Kgosana himself who presents the promise of an interview as a concession won by himself and the marchers without Duncan's intervention (see Philip A. Kgosana, *Lest we Forget: An Autobiography* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1988), pp. 34 - 35). Lodge argues that liberals indeed played an important supporting role, both in getting the police to accept the authority of the PAC leaders in the confrontation that occurred on 25 March, as well as in bringing food into besieged Langa after the State of Emergency. According to him, liberals worked with the aim and with the actual effect of contributing to the power of the PAC in the area. (Tom Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 11)

32 *New Age* was not being produced - it was banned on 8 April and most of its staff were in detention (C. J. Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 183, 189).

33 Tom Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

34 Janet Robertson, *op. cit.*, pp. 197 - 198.

35 Since the party had in principle accepted the universal franchise, it had become a haven for left-wing whites who were opposed to the Communist Party: a prominent example is the ex-Communist Eddie Roux, who joined in 1957 (See Eddie Roux and Win Roux, *Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux* (London: Rex Collins, 1970), pp. 203 - 213) and eventually played a major role in the Party's committee on the Land Question (AD 1931 Aa p. 98). At the same time many of the more conservative members of the LP were leaving: Between 1959 and 1960 more than 50 people left the Party, among them Gerald Gordon and the LP founder, Oscar Wollheim both of whom went over to the PFP (Janet Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 198).

36 Peter Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

Democratic Party, while two other members argued that the commission should consider a change of name to the Socialist Party.³⁷

It is not only the Liberal Party that broke sharply from mainstream liberalism. Indeed, from 1960 onwards, radical liberalism of one kind or another was making itself heard in other contexts. The Black Sash, for example, originally founded to protect the constitution against the procedural manipulations of the Nationalists, had soon gone beyond a commitment to formal constitutionality, and had confronted the inequalities that constitution itself embodied. By 1956 many of its members had already begun to argue that the South African political order had in any case already been unjust.³⁸ For a few years, in the interests of preserving cohesion and preserving its credibility and appeal to the white electorate, the organisation avoided confronting this issue.³⁹ In 1959, following the 1958 elections, Sash leaders came to feel that they could no longer soft-pedal their own criticism of South African racial policies. They turned their back on the electorate, strongly criticising the United Party for its opportunism and conservatism.⁴⁰ The Black Sash's concern with black, not white, rights, led to an exodus of its own more conservative members, but left the Sash freer to endorse the cause of constitutional rights for non-whites.⁴¹

Further manifestations of the prevalence of a more radical liberal position can be found in the general leftward drift of white campus politics. C.J. Driver's "Botha's Hill" seminar was probably to become the most well-known articulation of a more radical student opinion, but it was only one of a number of phenomena. NUSAS itself had moved leftward since 1957, and under the guidance of presidents like John Shingler, Adrian Leftwich, Driver and Maeder Osler, became an outspoken organ of legal opposition to the government.⁴² One of the most interesting of these is the rather self-consciously named Radical Students Society, founded in 1960 by Alan Brookes, who was later to join the NCL/ARM.⁴³ It took a strong non-racialist stance, hoping to break down the gap between white and non-white on campus. Its politics, as reflected in its publication **The Radical**, was characterised by the anti-communism that marked most liberal publications of the period but at least some of its members seem to have been interested in recent developments in Marxist thought.⁴⁴ At the University of the Witwatersrand,

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³⁸ See Janet Robertson. *op. cit.*, p. 142

³⁹ Cherry Michelman. *op. cit.*, pp. 63-68.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 80.

⁴¹ Janet Robertson. *op. cit.*, p. 143.

⁴² Martin Legassick. "The National Union of South African Students: ethnic cleavage and ethnic integration in the universities". (University of California (Los Angeles). African Studies Centre. Occasional Paper no. 4. 1967). p. 40.

⁴³ *Varsity*. 3 August 1960.

⁴⁴ In 1962, for example, the society came under fire from the *Varsity* editor for presenting a discussion of "Modern Marxism" (*Varsity*, 22 August 1962).

a Student Fellowship Society was founded (some members of which were also to end up in the NCL), which, in its radical libertarian aspect seems to have been very similar to the RSS.⁴⁵

3.2 The NCL/ARM, social control and the reception of Marxism in South Africa.

In the previous pages I have tried to give an impression of the range of activities in which radical liberals were involved. To describe these activities as being part of the ideology of "social control" is clearly tendentious. Instead, historians like Tom Lodge have argued that the Liberal Party should be seen as an "essentially radical force" - that is, "a party which aimed at social and political change rather than conservation".⁴⁶ Instead of being agents of social control, radical liberals tried to identify with the social transformation that would result from majority rule.⁴⁷ Unlike traditional liberals, they did not shrink from identifying the ending of white supremacy as their political task. They believed in a unitary, democratic and non-racial South Africa. Many of them saw economic inequality as an injustice as great as that of apartheid. Increasingly, they rejected piecemeal reforms and opted for a radical transformation of that society. And in some quarters, this transformation was described in terms of a transition to socialism. Their only clear and explicit similarity with the liberalism of the original Cape leadership was in their anti-communism, and their insistence, despite their acceptance of the need for radical transformation, on non-violence. Radical liberalism was, in other words, a new creature in the South African political bestiary.

But this break was never complete. Though radical liberalism had changed its spots it still bore many deep structural resemblances to its parent creature - and according to some accounts, had not even cut its umbilical chord. Thus in his essay, "Liberalism, social control and liberation in South Africa", Martin Legassick argues that though radical liberals rejected the overtly conservative policies of their more staid fellow-LP members, that rejection was simply a negative reaction and did not amount to a transcending of liberalism. They failed in short, to escape from liberalism's **conceptual** hegemony and therefore remained unable to elaborate "an alternative theory and practice."⁴⁸ Here Legassick refers in particular to their lack of an understanding of the class nature of South African society. The NCL/ARM's radicalism was thus simply a clutching at "straw superficialities". Although Legassick does not go so far as to characterise them as agents of industrial capital, he does seem to see them as the children of the

45 Interview with Raymond Eisenstein. London 16 April 1989.

46 Tom Lodge. *op. cit.*, p. 2.

47 *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

48 Martin Legassick. "Liberalism, social control and liberation in South Africa". p. 15.

English middle class, struggling to break free but ultimately trapped in the web of bourgeois ideology. For him, their failure is directly linked to this conceptual imprisonment.

In focusing on the ideological context of the NCL/ARM, Legassick has embarked on an avenue of research that seems more fruitful than the other attempts we have seen so far. His analysis is however ultimately untenable and incoherent: although he seems to be asking the important questions, his answers seem deeply suspect and, as I shall show, do not stand up to a sustained critical scrutiny. It is, however, an interesting failure, and therefore worth exploring. I wish therefore to make two points, one building on and elaborating Legassick's point, and the other criticising it.

Firstly, Legassick's analysis reminds us of an important fact: the members of the NCL/ARM were part of a historically specific, indeed unique, intellectual and political generation. Here we have a section of the middle class that had been radicalised to the point where they saw a need for fundamental social change in South Africa. But if they were, in a sense, revolutionaries, they were revolutionaries without Marx. This fact should be understood historically. That the liberals in the NCL/ARM did not embrace a Marxist analysis of South Africa was not a simple failure, a mere error of omission. It relates to the complex historical and philosophical question of the reception of Marxism as an intellectual and ideological tradition in South Africa.

As Andrew Nash has argued in a seminal paper,⁴⁹ Marxism has developed in a specific fashion in South Africa because of the unique character of South Africa's development as an industrial society.⁵⁰ Nash emphasises the extent to which Marxism, as it developed in Europe, was marked by the fundamentally contradictory nature - the simultaneously **traditionalist** and **modern** aspects - of the Hegelian notion of history on which it drew. This was an unstable ambiguity, and Marxism, as it developed, had to opt for one or another of these moments. The different strains of Marxist thought in Europe were thus sundered from each other (among other things) precisely by the question of which of these two strands they embraced.⁵¹ When the dichotomy between Stalinism and Trotskyism, both wedded to the metaphysics of progress and the notion of scientific socialism, threatened to stultify the development of Marxist thought, an alternative Marxist tradition more critical of modernity could still survive in the thought of the Frankfurt

49 Andrew Nash, "Aantekeninge oor die assimilasië van die Marxisme in Suid-Afrika" (unpublished typescript).

50 *Op. cit.*, pp. 8 - 14.

51 One strand, emphasising the status of Marxism as a science of revolution and invoking the **Science of Logic**, culminated in the thought of Lenin and was institutionalised in the Soviet Union. This strand was nourished by the systematic, scientific Hegel; the other related its interpretation to the dialectical Hegel of the **Phenomenology of Mind** (*op. cit.*, p. 18.)

School. This tradition, along with the thought of Gramsci, lived to shape the rejuvenation of Marxist theoretical creativity in the post-Stalin period.

In South Africa, Nash argues, this could not happen. According to him the radically different context in which Marxism developed locally made it impossible for South African Marxists to come to terms with this ambiguous relationship between traditionalism and modernity in Marx's Hegelian roots.⁵² South African society was characterised by a contradiction between development and backwardness of a particular kind, and this meant that the deep suspicion of the discourse of progress and science embodied in the Frankfurt school could not find purchase here.⁵³ No alternative Marxist tradition existed, therefore, beyond the opposition between a theoretically vacuous Stalinism and a pedagogic and barren Trotskyism.⁵⁴

This is a bold argument, serving more to raise a historical problem and to outline the course of future enquiry than to present a host of historical detail. The implications for the NCL/ARM, however, seem fairly obvious. Its members were of a generation for whom there could be no alternative Marxist tradition, no Marxism that would enable them to formulate an independent critique and understanding of the events that were to plunge the socialist world in crisis after 1956.⁵⁵ Instead, their perceptions had been shaped by the Cold War. In the context of the revelations about Stalinist totalitarianism and the invasion of Hungary, it is not surprising that radical liberals should be deeply suspicious of a Marxism that seemed to them inextricably associated with the heritage of the Kremlin.⁵⁶ But in the long run Legassick's explanation is deeply unsatisfactory. The crucial test of his hypothesis is its ability to link their ideological failure to leave liberalism behind to their

52 **Op.cit.** pp. 17 - 18.

53 **Op. cit.**, p. 18.

54 **Ibid.**

55 Indeed, the members of the NCL/ARM can ironically be seen as almost the last such generation. At the very time of the NCL/ARM's existence came the first signs of a rejuvenation in socialist thought internationally: the recrudescence of a critical tradition of Western Marxism in journals like *The New Reasoner* and *The Universities and Left Review*, the formulation of an independent Marxist critique both of post-war capitalism and Soviet Russia, and the general rise in the 1960s of a new Left in Europe and America.

This rejuvenation was in turn to make its impact on South African Marxism through persons who were very much contemporaries of the NCL/ARM: academics like Shula Marks, Stanley Trapido, Charles van Onselen, Colin Bundy, Richard Turner and Legassick himself were almost at that same moment coming under the influence of these new developments. While some of the NCL/ARM members were still in prison, the first salvos had been fired in a debate in South African historiography that was eventually to play an important role in Marxism's hegemonic position in the social sciences at South Africa's central universities (see J. Butler and D. Schreuder, "Liberal Historiography since 1945", in J. Butler, R. Elphick and D. Welsh (eds.) *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: its History and Prospect*, p. 158; Christopher Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past: Major Historians on Race and Class* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1988) pp. 167 - 176.

56 Interviews with Norman Bromberger, Cape Town, 10 December 1988; Randolph Vigne, London, 16 March 1989; John Laredo 22 April 1989.

historical defeat. When he attempts this his argument goes seriously wrong. Speaking about the various non-Marxist challenges to the more conservative aspects of liberalism, he points out their failure to transcend the root assumptions of liberalism and escape from its conceptual hegemony:

"In this... lay their mistakes - the over-hasty anti-pass campaign which brought on Sharpeville, the realiance with liberals and the betrayal of Kgosana by Duncan, the blunders, lack of security and strategy which characterised Poqo, the attempt to undertake sabotage without violence by the A.R.M., the rapidity of the breakdown of Leftwich (a lack of faith, through nothing positive to have faith in), the mindlessness of John Harris. All this, erratic, without apparent **moral** purpose, served only to intensify repression rather than hasten freedom. Is it only coincidental that it was with these kinds of activities that there was circumstantially... associated the C.I.A. and the United States foreign policy machine? For even if 'successful' in overcoming their apparent enemy, such organisations, only rejecting but not transcending liberalism, could reassume the mantle of social control."⁵⁷

Besides the factual errors⁵⁸ this is a tendentious argument. Firstly, his contention that Leftwich's breakdown occurred because he had nothing positive to have faith in is deeply suspect. In terms of Legassick's argument throughout his article, the NCL/ARM's conceptual failure lay in their inability to transcend liberalism in favour of Marxism, and to embrace a **class** analysis of South African society. I do not think I am twisting his words if I take him to imply that if Leftwich had the correct materialist understanding of South African society he would not have collapsed! It is difficult to take this argument seriously - unless we would turn every true socialist into a person of steel and every Communist Party or ANC member that broke down under police interrogation into a closet liberal! Legassick therefore does not succeed in linking the NCL/ARM's failure convincingly to their liberalism.⁵⁹

But is this not rather unfair? Can Legassick's basic argument be discredited simply by refuting this particular illustration? It seems, indeed, that his overarching hypothesis survives this criticism. In the above passage Legassick is making an assumption about the nature of the NCL/ARM's failure which is quite incorrect. Without this assumption his argument's more

⁵⁷ Legassick. *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁵⁸ I have already commented on the fact that Duncan cannot be said to have 'betrayed' Kgosana (see p. 67 above). Furthermore, the NCL/ARM does not seem to have received its money from the CIA (see p. 74). It is not clear how the PAC's "over-hastiness" led to Sharpeville: its fruit seems rather to have been the low turnouts that characterised the campaign generally, and to which Sharpeville and Langa were exceptions.

⁵⁹ It should of course also be pointed out that his general contention that the NCL/ARM's ideological failure led to the intensification of repression (and that it by implication therefore also served as an agent of "social control") is also very suspect. Though it may be correct to argue sometimes that individuals sometimes unintentionally facilitate social control, Legassick's argument here threatens to make the term meaningless. By the same token, his definition of the NCL/ARM as unwitting agents of social control would seem to include Umkhonto we Sizwe, Poqo, and every revolutionary movement, including the Paris Commune itself, that failed and thus put the rulers on their guard sufficiently to prevent, for the time being, greater conflagrations in the future.

problematic features disappear. The real problem with his article is not only that he fails to explain what he says he can explain, but that (as should be clear from my argument in Chapter 1),⁶⁰ he is trying to explain the wrong problem! The NCL/ARM's real failure does not lie in their collapse in the face of security police interrogation, but in the initial hopelessness of their entire strategy. It might be that Legassick's argument stands a chance of being more cogent if their lack of Marxist theory could be related to their strategy. Legassick does not do this in his article, but his analysis might still have some real challenge if thus re-interpreted. And at first sight, it does indeed look as if this reinterpretation stands more chance of surviving: the NCL/ARM's main error lay in their distance from mass struggle. If they had possessed the conceptual tools of Marxism, might they not have avoided this mistake?

But on further investigation even this re-interpretation is still problematic. For underlying the various problems I have pointed out, there is an even more fundamental problem. This in its great level of abstraction. Legassick's analysis of the NCL/ARM's strategy sees it as rooted simply in an **absence**, in a **negative** reaction to liberalism: there was a void (says Legassick) in their understanding: if that void had not existed (if it had been filled with a Marxist understanding), they would not have made the mistakes they did. Legassick's characterisation of the limits of the NCL/ARM's liberalism comes down to the observation that it did not make possible a materialist analysis of South African society - which is to say that its liberalism was limited because it was not Marxist.

That may be true. It is also tautological. In Legassick's argument, the notion of a materialist understanding plays the role of a pure and undifferentiated **potentiality**: whereas liberalism obscured social reality (and is thus automatically counterrevolutionary), Marxism unveils it (and thus is automatically liberatory). If such an argument is not to be, in the end, mere circular assertion, it should **demonstrate** this point. That means that we should not only look at what was **missing** from the NCL/ARM's theoretical background, but also at what was **there**. This is what Legassick's argument does not do. He does not show which elements of liberal ideology lay behind their decision to go over to sabotage, and how their liberalism made it impossible for them to go beyond sabotage. He avoids precisely the main problem: what was the positive content of their liberalism? What were the problematic aspects that Marxism would have transcended?

Connected to this problem, there is another - a feature that may explain just why Legassick's arguments seem so misdirected here. It seems that Legassick, now that he has advanced a thesis

⁶⁰ See above, pp. 6 - 12.

that seems to explain a large part of liberal politics, seems to believe that if it is valid, it must be so for **all** liberal politics, without differentiation. It seems inconceivable to him that his thesis could still be correct as far as most South African liberalism is concerned, **and** that there could still be important exceptions. His is in other words, an all-or-nothing position. This is linked to an aspect of his analysis which is at first glance its most attractive feature: its broad and sweeping terms. The broad, wide-ranging nature of Legassick's argument is well illustrated in his seminal article on the development of modern liberalism, where he asks, rhetorically, whether there is any form of liberalism in South Africa which is not merely a form of benevolent paternalism:⁶¹ from the terms of his argument the answer is clearly "no". In the 1970s, this thesis played a politically very important role, helping the nascent radicalism of the white left to articulate its suspicions about, and define itself against, the ideology of liberalism. Much of the power of this thesis lies in its apparent ability to make sense, at one blow, of a number of contradictory aspects of liberalism.

But this generality has its price - as is evident in the work of some of the scholars who followed in Legassick's footsteps. Stephen Watson, in a searching critique of the failure of the liberal novel in South Africa, quotes Legassick's rhetorical question approvingly and makes that implicit denial quite explicit.⁶² He then sums up the dilemma of liberal politics in South Africa as follows:

"In a situation so polarised, and therefore commanding a specific choice in one direction or another ... the liberal is prevented from responding to this demand by the very nature of the principles in which he places his faith.

In short, if he is to act effectively on a political level in South Africa, he has to cease being a liberal."⁶³

Watson is absolutely correct to point out that liberals' discourse has rendered political choice a problematic matter. The problem with his statement, however, is that it is too neat and abstract. The NCL/ARM's history shows that liberals in fact **can** and **have** tried to make "a specific choice" in one direction: they opted without qualification for radical change. Its failure raises precisely the question of how their liberalism enabled and constrained that choice, how it made specific moves possible and others impossible. Watson's argument obscures the concrete ways in which these limits work. In the absence of such a concrete explanation his point that liberals can by definition not act effectively begs the question. The NCL/ARM's is one of the ghosts of liberalism his epitaph fails to lay to rest.

61 Martin Legassick, "The rise of modern South African liberalism: its assumptions and social base", p. 3.

62 Steven Watson, "The Fate of Liberalism in South Africa" in D. Riemenschneider (ed.) **The History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature** (Tübingen, Gunter Narr, 1983), p. 120.

63 **Ibid.**, p. 126

At the root of this sweeping analysis lies not the class reductionism for which Legassick and other early radical historians have been criticised, but rather the opposite. We have here, an **idealist** move, a reductionism on the level of ideological meanings. Legassick's mistake does not so much lie in arguing that the NCL/ARM is directly linked to liberalism's social base in manufacturing capital but rather in an assumption identified by Tom Lodge: that the "conceptual hegemony" of liberalism in which they were trapped had a single homogeneous and reductive logic. Beyond the wide diversity of concrete contexts in which South African liberalism has been articulated, beyond the divergent range of historical projects it has been part of, Legassick seems to see a unified, monolithic aspect: an ideological essence which is everywhere basically the same. Liberalism is characterised for Legassick by a certain essential core of assumptions, concepts, presuppositions: any given instance of politics is liberal insofar as these concepts manifest themselves in its discourse.

As Lodge has pointed out, this presupposition is one Legassick shares, ironically, with apologists for liberalism in South Africa.⁶⁴ Liberal historians and intellectuals, faced with the fragmented nature of the South African liberal tradition, tend to postulate in the abstract a list of liberal principles, and then judge parties, individuals, etc. as liberal insofar as these elements can be found in their thinking. An example of this trend is Janet Robertson, who tends to talk, uncritically, of "liberals" in the ANC without trying to relate the elements of liberal ideology in their discourse to the other strands that can be found there.⁶⁵ Legassick does exactly the same, but in reverse.

The problem with this assumption seems to be not only that, as historians like Trapido and Lewsen have argued, liberalism in South Africa has been a fragmented tradition, that one cannot simply abstract a broad list of principles from the concrete practices of which it was part.⁶⁶ It is also that this assumption does not allow us to come to terms with the specificity of each such set of practices.⁶⁷ It obscures the **concrete** insertion of liberal discourse in the political process; it reduces the "Liberalism"

⁶⁴ Tom Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Janet Robertson, *op. cit.*, pp. 28 - 39.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Stanley Trapido, "The friends of the Natives': merchants, peasants and the political and ideological structure of liberalism in the Cape, 1854 - 1910", in Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore (eds.), *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (Hong Kong, Longman Group, 1980), pp. 247, 251-2, 259, 267 - 8; Phyllis Lewsen, *op. cit.*; "The Cape Liberal Tradition - myth or reality?" (Institute for the study of Man in Africa, Paper 26 (November 1969).

⁶⁷ Thus Michel Foucault argues that any attempt to define the identity of a given discursive field with reference to an underlying essence is bound to be metaphysical and logically circular (*The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York, Pantheon, 1972), pp. 31-39). Foucault's point relates to the discourses of the social sciences, but is equally applicable to ideology. The position he is left with at the end (see p. 38) seems to be close to that of the later Wittgenstein. Instead of looking for an underlying unifying essence, one should look at the concrete "family resemblances" between different traditions, projects, institutions, etc. that have **in fact to come be known** as liberal. Thus we circumvent the question of whether they are "really" liberal or not and whether they share a common core. (For an introductory discussion of the Wittgensteinian concept of "family resemblances", see Oscar Hanfling, *Philosophy of Language I: Meaning and Use in Wittgenstein's Blue and Brown Books*, (Bletchley, The Open University Press, 1973), pp. 49 - 62.)

in liberalism to the horizon of theory, an invisible ideological phlogiston that permeates liberal politics and whose presence can only be detected, teleologically, afterwards.⁶⁸

It seems necessary to assert, against this, that South African liberalism is a fragmented tradition. To use Pêcheux's metaphor, ideologies are not fortresses, they are paradoxical spaces, they are **texts**. We should thus be alive to the extent to which the meanings of the ideological text are not fixed, but are open to rearticulation, are themselves the objects of ceaseless struggle and are thus articulated and rearticulated in every new context. South African liberalism, in other words, was a tradition continually constructed, contested, and reconstructed.

It might look as if I am exploding the body of liberalism in order to save it from the deep cuts of Legassick's analytic scalpel. I am not arguing that liberalism is without limitations. Indeed, this thesis has grown precisely from the conviction that liberalism in South Africa is deeply problematic. We need to understand how liberalism enables the subject to take up a political position in the struggle for the transformation of South African society - and the limits of this enablement. By looking at what the NCL/ARM's liberalism led its members to do, the drawbacks of their course of action, and the ways in which they sought - and failed - to go beyond those drawbacks, I hope to contribute to this understanding.

In the rest of this chapter, I will explore the complex issue of the relationship of radical liberalism to "classical", conservative liberalism. To do that, I will trace the development of liberalism since the Second World War.⁶⁹ The seeds of radical liberalism of which the NCL/ARM was the most desperate expression had been sown during the war, and its development and the dilemmas that constrained that development flowed out of the social nature of the new South Africa, and the new world, that the war had created.

⁶⁸ The theorem that the presence of phlogiston was the cause of fires was simple and appealing. If something burned, it contained phlogiston. If not, it obviously did not. The problem with this thesis was that the only way to ascertain the existence of phlogiston was to see whether it would burn! The greatest weakness of the phlogiston thesis was thus its very irrefutability. Its explanatory power was of a post-hoc, after-the-fact kind, and it failed to relate the fact of combustion to the **concrete, material** properties of objects that burned.

⁶⁹ The early stages of this development, and the first manifestation of a democratic challenge to the limits of conservative liberal politics is traced in Paul Rich's analysis of the political fortunes of Leo Marquard, Solly Sachs and Hymie Basner (See P. Rich, **White Power and the Liberal Conscience**, pp. 77 - 97. In a sense the limits of its development and its essential dilemmas were already to some extent prefigured in their careers. But Rich is more concerned to discuss the role of more conservative institutions like the Institute for Race Relations, and his focus on the period before 1953 means that his analysis of radical liberalism's final and failed attempt to intervene decisively in South African politics is confined to his cursory concluding pages (see pp. 123 - 126). My discussion of the war years as well as the period from 1953 onwards is however still indebted to Rich's work.

3.3 Liberalism and the Second World War: Democracy, anti-fascism and world opinion.

The story of the transformation wrought locally by the Second World War is well known. The period between 1939 and 1945 represented the concluding period of an economic boom which began with South Africa's departure from the gold standard in 1932.⁷⁰ This had been a time of unparalleled growth in the manufacturing sector. From 1936, the industrial workforce grew at an annual rate of 6.2%, doubling its numbers by 1951.⁷¹ A large percentage of this workforce was African: between 1936 and 1946, according to official statistics, the African population doubled in Johannesburg, while in Cape Town it quadrupled from 15 000 to 60 000.⁷² The war accelerated and deepened these transformations: South African industry had to make a substantial contribution to the allied war-effort in terms of ship repair work, and added to this was the fact that local consumer demand was now cut off from its overseas supply.⁷³ The effect of the resultant growth in the manufacturing sector on the industrial workforce was particularly concentrated on Africans, partly because of the absorption of 186 000 whites into military occupations: while white employment in industry still rose by 20% during the war, African employment increased by 74%.⁷⁴

This resulted in a dramatic increase in the political militance and economic muscle of black workers, as is indicated by the rising incidence of strikes, the Alexandra bus boycotts and the initial success of the anti-pass campaign initiated in 1944.⁷⁵ At the same time, a new, more militant political leadership emerged in the African intelligentsia. This radicalisation had serious consequences for liberals: even relatively moderate ANC leaders like Xuma were starting by 1943 to challenge the accommodationism of the Institute of Race Relations, asking it to clarify its position on issues such as the pass laws, the registration and recognition of Trade Unions and the Union's native policy,⁷⁶ while Luthuli, himself no radical, refused to support the Native Representative Council when it came under fire by the end of the war.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Tom Lodge, "Class Conflict, Community struggle and Patriotic Unity: the Communist Party of South Africa during the Second World War" (Paper presented at the African Studies Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, October 1985), p. 1.

⁷¹ Jill Natrass, *The South African Economy: Its Growth and Change* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 165, 167.

⁷² Tom Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁷³ D. Hobart Houghton, *The South African Economy*, (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 119.

⁷⁴ *Loc. cit.*

⁷⁵ See Jack and Ray Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969), p. 547. See also Tom Lodge, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 10 for an analysis of Communist Party and ANC's failure to tap into this rising militance.

⁷⁶ Rich, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁷⁷ A. Luthuli, *Let my people go* (London Fontana, 1982), p. 94.

But besides the economic context, the ideological context should also be understood.⁷⁸ As Lodge points out, the war's full meaning cannot be found by only focusing on the socio-economic changes it implied.⁷⁹ It did play a role in sharpening the contradictions that were already taking shape in the structure of the South African economy, but it did more than that. Its specific importance lay in the way in which it altered the **ideological** context of liberal politics, in its implications for government policies and the wider political environment. The Second World War differed from the First in one crucial way: the manner of its legitimation. In South Africa, as in the rest of the Allied world, it was construed, not so much as a war against Germany, Italy or Japan, but a war against **fascism**. This had fundamental consequences for other aspects of official discourse at the time: the war against fascism was simultaneously a war **for freedom, for democracy, for human rights**.

The equation of the war against Hitler with a war for political freedom was articulated in a number of different contexts, and characterised more than one ideological discourse of the period.⁸⁰ As far as

⁷⁸ The distinction between economic and ideological context made above deserves some comment. Though I am conscious of the genealogy of this term and its strong suggestion of the base-superstructure model, I should not be taken to be accepting, implicitly, the thesis of the ultimate determination of the ideological by the economic frequently associated with that metaphor.

Firstly, such a reductionism has limited use for understanding liberal politics. Efforts to provide a materialist account for oppositional white politics have had some explanatory power, but only where the link between the interests of monopoly capital and liberal politics is fairly straightforward. An example of such an analysis is Brian Hackland's treatment of the social base of the Progressive Party. (See "The Economic and Political Context of the Growth of the Progressive Federal Party" *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 7 No. 1 (October 1980), p. 1). Though he can explain the growth of the party in the mid-seventies in terms of the growing organic crisis of capitalism after 1973, the birth of the party and its continued existence during the economic boom of the 1960s is simply glossed over. If liberalism's "roots" in manufacturing and monopoly capital cannot explain Helen Suzman's gadfly presence in Parliament for the duration of the 1960s, how then shall it explain the Liberal Party and the NCL/ARM's acts of sabotage in the cause of a radically democratic South Africa? Even in the most jaundiced perspective they cannot be seen to have been the agents of monopoly capital or secondary industry of whatever kind.

The same goes for Belinda Bozzoli's discussion of ideological changes in the 1960's ("English-speaking ideology and advanced capitalism in post-Sharpeville South Africa" (Paper prepared for the Workshop on the Social and Economic History of South Africa, Oxford, September 1974)). This paper describes the development of the ideology of industrial capitalism itself, and looks at the way the transition into diversified monopoly capital was conceptualised and legitimised. Though in such a case, the ideology of management does seem to be closely related to transformations in the nature of South African capitalism, extrapolating from this discourse to that of liberalism seems a dubious enterprise.

As should be clear from my argument in Chapter 2, my analysis asserts the independent logic of the ideological. This does **not** mean that I advocate an idealist **ideological** determinism. The challenge of the Lacanian theory of the subject lies precisely in its power to transcend undialectical oppositions such as these. Some of the complexities of the relation between the orders of the Real and the Symbolic are explored on pp. 204 - 206 below. I am here simply distinguishing between two levels of context, and am not making any assertion as to one's being more central to the other.

⁷⁹ Tom Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁸⁰ In England, it was an important element of the radical populism of the period (Legassick, *op. cit.*, p. 30; see E.P. Thompson, "Mr Attlee and the Gadarene Swine" in E. P. Thompson, *The Heavy Dancers*, (London, Merlin, 1985) pp. 240 - 242 for a discussion for the shift to the left that characterised British politics for the six years after 1945).

In South Africa these themes were articulated by Smuts as well as by the Communist Party, by Leo Marquard as well as the Springbok Legion. It formed an ideological accompaniment to the liberalisation of government policy at the time; though Legassick is doubtless correct that the liberalisation of government policy towards Africans was due to the need to preserve National unity and prevent black harassment of the war effort (Legassick, *loc. cit.*) it is significant to note that the government's arguments for national unity were also couched in

can be seen, for example, in the wartime policy of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), which reacted to the increasing conservatism of the Afrikaans campuses by identifying more closely with a democratic, anti-fascist position: it admitted the University of Fort Hare and Hewat Training College and amended its constitution to include the defence of democracy and the promotion of opportunities for the "underprivileged" in its list of aims.⁸¹ The wartime career of Leo Marquard serves as a further example. In his lectures at the South African Military College there is clearly reflected the notion that the war's anti-fascist nature also meant that it was a fight for democracy.⁸²

This rearticulation of liberalism was of crucial importance in two ways. Firstly, it meant that liberalism itself was increasingly open to challenge and criticism. As I have pointed out in Chapter 2, ideologies are shaped in relation to other ideologies that form part of their broader discursive context. Though liberals were to a certain extent free to articulate their ideology in new ways, that articulation could not happen wholly on their own terms. A crucial source of tension, for example, was the way these changes made liberalism increasingly vulnerable to ideological challenge from the left.⁸³ Between the wars liberalism and Communism had been

In South Africa these themes were articulated by Smuts as well as by the Communist Party, by Leo Marquard as well as the Springbok Legion. It formed an ideological accompaniment to the liberalisation of government policy at the time: though Legassick is doubtless correct that the liberalisation of government policy towards Africans was due to the need to preserve National unity and prevent black harassment of the war effort (Legassick, *loc. cit.*) it is significant to note that the government's arguments for national unity were also couched in terms of a fight for freedom. Thus Smuts described the swastika as "the symbol of past tyrannies and the enslavement of the human spirit" ("Broadcast by J. C. Smuts, Commander in Chief of the South African Forces, on his return from a visit to his Boys up North, November 1940") while the war was "a new Crusade, a new fight to the death for man's liberties..." ("The Offensive Phase: Speech delivered by General Smuts to Members of the Two Houses of Parliament, on Wednesday, October 21st, 1942", London, St. Clement, 1942).

81 Benjamin Kline, "The National Union of South African Students: a case study of the plight of Liberalism 1924-1977", in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 23 1 (March, 1985), pp. 139-140. See also Martin Legassick, "The National Union of South African Students: ethnic cleavage and ethnic integration in the universities", p. 16.

82 During the war, Marquard was an instructor at the Army Education Services, which he had helped institute, lecturing soldiers on the ideological implications of the war against Nazism (Anthony Egan, *Leo Marquard: A Biographical Case Study in the Growth of South African Liberalism until 1953* (Honours dissertation, University of Cape Town), pp. 15 - 16). These lectures included a critique of South African racism and the idea of racial inferiority, and covered topics such as "Principles of Democracy" and "Democracy and the New Order" (See Leo Marquard papers (Jagger Library BC587) D3.2 p. 3.; D3.9, D3.38, Annexure D.) This may in fact be a worthwhile avenue for further research: Jack and Ray Simons, for example, refer (*Class and Colour in South Africa*, p. 540) to the way in which the Army Education services "opened the minds of front line troops to progressive ideas".

83 Rich emphasises the important role of criticism of liberals from the political left in shaping wartime liberal ideology (see, e.g., *White Power and the Liberal Conscience*, p. 89). His explanation however does not focus on the essentially *dynamic* nature of this process. He does not address the question of why liberalism was open to such criticism during the war. Nor does he look at the rearticulation of Communist Party ideology in the years of the popular front - a shift as important as that of liberal ideology. During the war, the Communist Party and some of its ex-members like Hymie Basner became prominent in *white* politics in a way in which they had ever done before or since. By the end of the war, within a space of six years, it had grown from a small grouping of less than 300 members, divorced from the mass political movements to an organisation whose membership could be counted in the 1000s and which was capable of winning white

sundered by a vast gulf. When liberals were rearticulating their ideology, linking up in their discourse the traditional liberal concern with Western civilisation with notions of democracy and anti-fascism, they were far more open to being challenged by Communists and other leftist critics. During the Second World War a grouping of radical activists and writers increasingly questioned its right to speak with the voice of European civilisation and challenged it to render concrete and meaningful its talk of equal rights and justice.⁸⁴ Not only was liberalism now being criticised from the left: it was being criticised in its own terms. This produced serious problems for liberal discourse and forced many liberals to consider the challenge of extra-parliamentary action.⁸⁵

These processes did not, however, immediately result in the birth of a more radical strain of liberalism. The Liberal Party, from whose ranks would rise the first generation of clearly identifiable radical liberals, was only founded almost a decade after the war and its leftward drift would begin still further into the future. But even then, the discourse of radical liberalism was still influenced by the legacy of the Second World War. For though the processes I have sketched here were crucial in contributing to the fragmentation and crisis of liberalism, they also shaped radical liberalism in a second way: they lay down the crucial terms of reference of liberal

local government elections. (Tom Lodge, *op. cit.*) And though it did not succeed in tapping effectively into black militance at the time, (Tom Lodge, *op. cit.* p. 11) it did manage to speak for the disenfranchised masses in terms much more radical than those of liberalism.

84 One such radical critic of the liberals was the ex-Communist Hymie Basner. He was not a member of the Communist Party, but his political platform contained many of the anti-fascist, democratic aspects of popular front ideology. His election to the Senate as Native Representative was a shock that powerfully concentrated the minds of many liberals. His victory broke the ideological homogeneity of Native Representation in government and challenged the hegemony of the Institute of Race Relations there. Specifically, he attacked the Institute's refusal to take political sides on the "Native Question" in South Africa (Paul Rich, *op. cit.*, p. 81). His radicalism meant that he had far greater appeal to the more militant sectors of African political opinion, and this deeply threatened the position of the liberals.

Another critique from the left was voiced by the trade unionist Solly Sachs, who pointed out that liberalism had progressed in America and England only through an understanding of workers' needs and co-operation with their mass organisation. He wrote in *Trek* that "Liberalism in South Africa is doomed unless ... it learns to understand the workers' problems and finds a concrete base of co-operation with the masses and workers..." (Solly Sachs, quoted in Paul Rich, *op. cit.*, p. 90). It is, incidentally, difficult to understand Rich's classification of Sachs as a radical liberal (*ibid.*, p. 89). Sachs had been a member of the Communist Party until he was purged in September 1931 (Eddie Roux and Win Roux, *Rebel Pity*, p. 102). Though his non-racialism shared some themes with liberal ideology, his preoccupation with working-class unity across the colour lines renders classification of him as a liberal extremely problematic. For an account of Sach's non-racial trade unionism, see Leslie Witz, *Servant of the Workers: Solly Sachs and the Garment Workers' Union, 1928-1952* (MA Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1984), and E. S. Sachs, *Rebel's Daughters* (London, McGibbon & Kee 1957), especially pp. 11 - 15, 128 - 147, 168 - 229.

85 I rely here on Rich's account of the realignments within the field of liberal politics during the War years. During the War, for example, Marquard's position became characterised by a sharp awareness of the limitations of liberalism: his pseudonymous *The Black Man's Burden* contains a clear exploration of liberalism's narrow focus on parliament and its futile efforts to influence government policy through co-operation and dialogue. In it, he argued that liberalism could do no more than fight a "gallant rear-guard action against the forces of reaction in South Africa". According to him it was "apparent that the limits of reformism have been reached and that any further improvement will have to be achieved along the lines of industrial action rather than by liberal influence in politics." (Leo Marquard (Pseud. John Burger), *The Black Man's Burden* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1943), p. 244.)

discourse and gave to radical liberals the ideological framework in which they would act out their opposition to apartheid.

Thus, though Marquard's own views, for example, were not much to the left of traditional liberalism,⁸⁶ and though he could still understand notions like "democracy" in conservative ways, the ideological rearticulation of liberalism reflected in his discourse opened up the possibility of further radicalisation by later generations of liberals. Indeed, the equation of the struggle **against fascism** with the struggle **for democracy** was to provide the main matrix within which apartheid policies were seen. This theme is a very obvious one in the liberalism of the 1950s and 1960s. It is clearly expressed in the **raison d'être** of the Torch Commando, summed up in the words of 'Sailor' Malan, their National President, when he said that "our aim is to defeat the Government, which is fascist in spirit".⁸⁷ But, as many historians have pointed out, this formula united a wider range of themes. Legassick has for example observed how

"... liberals came to represent the ideological antithesis to militant Afrikaner nationalism ...the themes were individualism against collectivism, Western civilisation against Teutonic race culture, the free market against the involvement of the State..."⁸⁸

This association is hardly surprising. There were many concrete historical links between National Socialism and Nationalist ideology. Liberals needed little reminding of Herzog's refusal to agree to South Africa's involvement in the war, of the Ossewa Brandwag's campaign of sabotage, and of Verwoerd's anti-semitism and open support, as editor of the **Transvaler**, of the German cause - and these were only some of the facts that seemed to indicate a close connection between the policies of the Nationalists and those of Hitler.⁸⁹

But more crucial than these facts is the **meaning** with which liberals invested them. This significance was deeply connected to the issue of South Africa's relationship to the Western powers. This issue, and the problem of South Africa's growing isolation from the international community from 1946 onwards, was a perennial concern for liberals after the War. For the

⁸⁶ His political position was in some respects different from those of other liberals: during his studies at Oxford he had picked up a faith in the inevitability of socialism which does not seem to have been shared by many of his fellow-liberals (Anthony Egan, *Leo Marquard, a Biographical Case Study in the Growth of South African Liberalism until 1953*, p. 3) - but this seems to have indicated more of a belief in a Labour Party Welfare-statism than a commitment to Marxism (*ibid.*, pp. 21, 26, 95). In other matters, (for example in his faith in the superiority of European culture (*ibid.*, p. 41)), he fell squarely in the paternalistic and conservative mould. Indeed, the question of gauging the extent of Marquard's radicalism (or the lack of it) needs critical attention, and the underlying dynamics for his apparently contradictory and vacillating position deserve further analysis.

⁸⁷ See also Eddie Roux, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

⁸⁸ Martin Legassick, *op. cit.*, p. 29; Janet Robertson, *Liberalism in South Africa*, p. 142.

⁸⁹ For a contemporary liberal account of Verwoerd's anti-semitism and sympathy with the National Socialist cause, see Stanley Uys, "Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, Prime Minister of South Africa", *Africa South*, Vol.3, No.2, (Jan-March 1959), pp. 1-5.

South African intelligentsia, as with that of any colonial outpost, their links with the metropolitan countries had of course been very important in any case. If they were an outpost of Western Civilisation, and if Europe and Britain were the sources of that civilisation, then South Africa's links to the metropolis were an umbilical cord it would be disaster to sever.

In South Africa, however, the pain of increasing isolation from the Western world was made all the more bitter by the special place South Africa was conceived to have in that "civilisation". Here, an important part was played by probably the most prominent South African to concern himself with his country's relationship with Europe: J. C. Smuts. Not only were his local and foreign policies powerfully shaped by a concern with these links, but he also transformed their significance, the whole idea of what it was they linked South Africa to. Throughout his career in international politics⁹⁰ Smuts was centrally concerned with the concept of the peaceful co-operation of a family of mature nations bound together by civilised values - a concern symbolised, above all, by his involvement in the drafting of the Preamble to the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights.⁹¹ In terms of his thought the Commonwealth, the League of Nations, and the United Nations were more than forums for power-politics: they embodied and safeguarded the highest human values - which were, for him, synonymous with the supreme values of Western civilisation. For Smuts, remarks his biographer Hancock,

"the British Commonwealth of nations seemed a secure toehold humanity had already won upon the cliff of world unity and freedom. The League of Nations was a second toe-hold - if only it could be made more secure - higher up the same cliff."⁹²

If South Africa was a peripheral society, its ties to the outside world represented its hope of one day being admitted to the circle of truly mature nations that existed as equals, guarding the values of civilisation for future generations. And after the Second World War, it seemed to many South African liberals that precisely because of the stature of Smuts, "a world-personality in the very widest sense of the word"⁹³ that this possibility had come closer to fulfilment. Through Smuts, South Africa had (even if only intermittently) a crucial place in world politics.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ See W. K. Hancock, *Smuts: The Sanguine Years, 1870-1919* (London, Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 377, p. 423 - 432 for his membership of the War Cabinet during the First World War; and pp. 429 - 432 on his role in the formation of the Commonwealth. His role in the formation of the League of Nations is recounted on pp. 438, 454, 460, 463, 491, 500 - 504, and in W. K. Hancock *Smuts: The Fields of Force, 1919-1950* (London, Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 7, 17, 36 - 39, 229 - 231. For his role in the Second World War, see *op. cit.*, pp. 267 - 268, 308 - 325, 409, 427 - 433.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹³ The words of the Rt Hon. Viscount Cranborne in his introduction to Smuts's address, "Thoughts on the New World" (London, Empire Parliamentary Association, 1943), p. 3.

⁹⁴ Thus Hofmeyr saw as one of the benefits of the war the enhanced "prestige and honour" of South Africa amongst the nations of the world (James Barber, *South Africa's Foreign Policy, 1945-1970* (London, Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 7). As Barber has pointed out, before the war the Union had seen itself as a peripheral state with no international role; in Smuts she however seemed to produce "a statesman of world repute" (*Ibid.*, p. 11). A colleague would later almost wistfully recall how "Repeatedly he, the Prime Minister of a small country, remote from the centre

This, then, was the context within which South Africa's fall from international grace must be understood. To hear South African racial policies criticised in a forum which a South African statesman had helped create, to hear its policies rejected in terms of the very declaration of human rights of which Smuts had written the preamble, made that fall doubly humiliating. Many South Africans, Smuts included, reacted with the truculent defensiveness that has characterised South African relations with the United Nations Organisation ever since.⁹⁵ Other liberals echoed the UNO's criticism, and held up what they now saw as the world's rejection of apartheid to illustrate the depth to which the Nationalists had dragged the country. Thus Edgar Brookes, for example, argued that "I am sure our present policies must be very drastically revised if we are to find any sort of safe or harmonious place in the family of nations to which we inescapably belong."⁹⁶

This concern was centrally linked to the association in liberal discourse of apartheid policy with Nazism. Smuts's identification of the aims of the Commonwealth and the United Nations as guardians of civilisation invested the conflict against Nazism with a very specific meaning. In the minds of South African liberals, the Allied victory was a victory for civilisation *as such*; the Charter of the United Nations stood for rationality itself and embodied the highest values of humanity. And over and against these values, liberals saw in Nazism their opposite: a romantic irrationalism, a backward, archaic and emotional identification with blood and race. And these categories, by extension, became the framework in which they understood Nationalism.

The effects of this identification can be clearly seen, for example, in the political writings of Patrick Duncan: it formed a basic thread in his faith in Satyagraha-like non-violent action. Writing in *Africa South* in 1956, he announced that

"It is becoming clear that our country has only one future - a non-racial future. Once the social and economic forces begin to act strongly in any situation, then he who defies them does so at his peril. I was moved to read the summing-up of Hitler by... his interpreter, Paul Schmidt.... Schmidt's judgement is that there are at work in the world irresistible moral and economic forces, and although dictators can construct false moralities and phoney economics which have dazzling short-term success, yet in the end such people are crushed and their systems with them. Now these social and economic forces are at work with great strength in South Africa, working for change in the direction of greater equality and democracy. However great the will-power may be that

repute" (*Ibid.*, p. 11). A colleague would later almost wistfully recall how "Repeatedly he, the Prime Minister of a small country, remote from the centre of events, took the world stage to drive home his ideas, when the Presidents or Prime Ministers of the most important countries lost their drive or sense of direction." (Ben Cockram, "General Smuts and South African Diplomacy", p. 9.)

⁹⁵ Jack Spence, "South Africa and the Modern World", in *The Oxford History of South Africa, Vol II: South Africa, 1870 - 1966* ed. by Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson (Oxford, Clarendon, 1975), pp. 518-520.

⁹⁶ Edgar Brookes, "South Africa's race problems: the world background", *Contact*, October 1954.

attempts to dam them, it will not succeed... The doctrine of White Supremacy is doomed."⁹⁷

Note the very specific meaning the equivalence between Nationalism and Nazism had for Duncan. The struggle against each were alike in precisely one dimension - that they were the clash of "irresistible moral and economic forces" against "false moralities" and "phoney economics". This is the significance of the way in which liberals at the time, as Legassick has remarked, saw the works of nationalism in terms of the curious category, "invalid".⁹⁸ The Nationalists were out of touch, in contradiction to the ideals of humanism and freedom **and for that very reason**, they were doomed. More than the empirical details⁹⁹ of the narrow margin of Nationalist victory in 1948, it was the notion that Nationalist ideology was an attempt to resist the onrushing stream of world history itself that underpinned liberal faith in their eventual triumph. Even after the Nationalists gained a majority of seats in the 1953 election, for example, the Liberal Party mouthpiece *Sokhel'Umlilo* could still write:

"Anyone who has troubled to glance in even the most casual manner at world trends since 1945 knows how hopelessly outmoded nationalist and UP thinking is. Anyone who bothers to look at events in the last five years in Africa can come to only one conclusion: white domination in any form whatsoever is on the run."¹⁰⁰

As this passage indicates, the defeat of Hitler was seen as only the beginning of a much larger process - the long, slow victory of humanist, enlightened values over despotism and tyranny. Nowhere was that victory more clearly embodied for them than in the establishment of the United Nations Organisation and the wave of decolonisation and independence sweeping the hitherto subjugated peoples of Africa and Asia. The signs, for them, were everywhere: with Ghanaian independence in 1957, the first All-African People's conference in 1958, the tensions in the Central African Federation, the international sanction given to this by the United Nation's Charter, the liberals were convinced that 'white man's overlordship' had passed in a multiracial world.¹⁰¹

97 Patric Duncan, "Passive Resistance". *Africa South*, Vol.1, No.1, (Oct-Dec-1956), p. 78.

98 Martin Legassick, "Legislation, Ideology and Economy in Post - 1948 South Africa". *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol 1 No 1 (October 1974), p. 5.

99 The Nationalist electoral victory was for a long time still seen by liberals as something of an aberration - which ironically delayed the formation of a Liberal Party for some years. The hope could still for the time being be cherished that the United Party would regain power in the next election, and that liberals could play a valuable role in the United Party. (See for example the editorial exhortation to liberal UP members not to "lose heart" in *The Forum*, Vol 1, no.1, April 1952, p. 2.) This was partly because there were at the time empirical reasons for seeing the Nationalist Party's rule as insecure (J. Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 41). Their victory had been a close thing, a scant 9 seats more than UP/Labour Party alliance, and, what is more, seemed an aberration of the electoral system, with the UP alone still winning 126 186 votes more than the NP and Afrikaner Party combined. (See Hancock, *op. cit.*, p. 505.) But these figures only gained that meaning in the context of the broader ideological framework in terms of which liberals interpreted them.

100 "The Election". *Sokhel'Umlilo*, February 1958.

101 Janet Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 115, 182, 195. See also E. Brookes, *South Africa in a Changing World*. (Oxford University Press, 1953).

Two consequences flowed from this view. In the first place, liberals did not only see this sweeping change as inevitable. They also welcomed it. It is possible to detect in the liberal discourse of the later 1950's a trend that could perhaps be described as an "africanised" liberalism, a growing interest in and identification with the continent of Africa itself. It is reflected, for instance, in the very titles of new journals like **Africa South** and **The New African**, the latter of which appeared with a scrawled logo of linked human figures that suggested both the humanist freedom of modern Western art after Picasso and Miro as well and the repetitive shapes of ethnic African paintings. It is reflected, too, in the enthusiastic reception in **Contact** of the All-Africa Conference in Ghana to which the Liberal Party had also sent a representative,¹⁰² and in the growing interest, in the columns of **New African**, in the "African Socialism" enunciated by Nkrumah and Senghor.¹⁰³

Secondly, the identification of decolonisation and democratisation with the flow of history itself powerfully sustained radical liberals in their stance. Though they represented a pitifully small grouping in parliamentary terms, though they stood no chance of winning elections and gaining power, they believed that they represented the deeper stream of universal history. This made it possible for liberals to oppose the white electorate on the grounds of abstract principle, and to cast aside the considerations of *realpolitik* - and even to **redefine** *realpolitik*: in a surprising inversion, liberals appear at times to have seen the **Nationalist** proposals as impractical, as abstract fantasizing blueprints, while their own non-violent politics of abstract principle was seen as concrete realism! In the Duncan article already quoted, he concludes his article for satyagraha in South Africa by exhorting on his readers: "Let us realise, as all the rest of the world realises, that White supremacy is doomed. Let us build realistically on the real, and aim at the possible."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Peter Brown. *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28. For liberal participation in the All-African People's conference in 1960, see Patrick Van Rensburg. *op. cit.*, p. 41. Note his reference to himself as a "white African": a self-conception unthinkable to the more conservative liberals who had dominated the institutions of liberalism before the Second World War. The gap between leftist liberalism before the war and after it is neatly encapsulated in the difference between this notion of a "white African" and the name of William Ballinger's "Friends of Africa".

¹⁰³ For an interesting contemporary debate on African socialism, see Clive Wake, "Senghor and Socialism", *New African*, Vol. 1 No. 11 (November 1962), pp. 2 - 3; J. Molefi, "Approach to African Socialism", *op. cit.*, Vol. 1 no. 12 (December 1962), pp. 4 - 5; Margaret Roberts, "What kind of Socialism for South Africa?", *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (February 1964), p. 2 - 3. Ronald W. Morris, "Africa's Favourite Fallacy", *op. cit.*, pp. 46 - 48. R. Leather, "The word 'socialism' has lost its meaning", *op. cit.*, Vol. 3 No. 3 (March 1964), p. 55; Reginald H. Green "The Conditions for National Economies in Africa", *op. cit.*, pp. 63 - 65; M. Legassick, "Socialist Algeria and Autocratic Morocco", *ibid.*, pp. 69 - 70; B. D. G. Folsom, "Marxism through African Eyes", *op. cit.*, Vol. 3 No. 4, (May 1965), pp. 74 - 76; M. Legassick, "Africa and Marxism - 1", *op. cit.*, Vol. 4 No. 1 (March 1964), pp. 8 - 9; M. Legassick, "Africa and Marxism - 2", *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (April 1965), pp. 35 - 6. According to Vigne it was *New African's* decision to place this series of articles that led to their funds being cut off by the CCF (interview, London, 2 May 1989).

¹⁰⁴ Patric Duncan, "Passive Resistance", *Africa South*, Vol.1, No.1., p. 84.

This self-confidence is pervasive, and many examples could be quoted. In an article in *Contact* which commented on the way in which both the Liberal Party and the then Prime Minister had accused each other of a disrespect for the law, *Contact* rather smugly observes that "Mr Strijdom and the Liberal Party share much the same opinions of one another... But the Liberal Party has one great advantage: the rest of the world agrees with it."¹⁰⁵

Underlying this faith in the power of "world hostility" was this teleological vision, this tendency to equate the struggle with apartheid with progress itself, and to see this progress as unstoppable. Note how, in the following passage, the focus moves from the particular (Nationalist educational policy) to the general without any sense of disjuncture:

"Until the Nationalists evolve some new brain-washing technique to which they can subject all teachers in this country they will be unable to destroy the liberal tradition which permeates so much of South Africa's school system. Long before then they will have gone the way of **all who have sought to thwart man's quest after truth.**"¹⁰⁶

Here we see clearly how ideology works through articulating crucial terms in chains of equivalence. From the perspective of the discourse analyst we can see that the Nationalists are doomed not so much by definition as by redefinition. Here, in fact the Nationalist's attempts to destroy the "liberal tradition" are described in terms of (and thus defined as equivalent to) the thwarting of "man's quest after truth". This link is not argued for; it is simply assumed, and the implicit equivalence that underlies this slide from one term to another makes it that much easier to see them as doomed from the start.¹⁰⁷

This set of equivalences - this vision of the fight against Nationalism and white supremacy as essentially a fight for the triumph of civilisation as such and the human values it embodied - inspired and sustained radical liberals in their radicalism. It made it possible for liberals to act

¹⁰⁵ "Criminal Tendencies in South Africa". *Contact*, March 1956.

¹⁰⁶ "Submit and Teach". *Contact*, May 1955.

¹⁰⁷ This faith in inevitable victory could of course not exist unchanged and without strain as the 1950s wore on and gave way to the 1960s. With time, of course, its meaning changed. As the Nationalist grip on South African politics grew, as they persisted in succeeding in what liberals had predicted they would fail, as it became more and more obvious that they were not going to be swept like matchsticks before the tide of "man's quest after truth", liberals could not predict Nationalist defeat with the same blithe confidence. Yet that faith in the **ultimate** defeat of Nationalist thought and the final validity of world opinion still remained a powerful thread in liberal thought. Though no longer the guarantee of eventual victory and no longer permitting an easy scorn of the success of the government it became an underlying thread in continued defiance when all other certainties had fled. It is possible to detect in much of the radicalism and liberalism of the 1960's a strong existentialist undertone in which the last echoes of this faith in the inevitable triumph of human freedom over tyranny can be heard. When Duncan wrote in *Contact* that "We do not believe that these restrictions will stop those who suffer them. Men and women in the ageless struggle for freedom have endured worse and still won in the end" ("Evasion by Banning", editorial in *Contact* Vol.6, no.5 (7 March 1963), p. 2.), it was the equivalence between the immediate struggle against Nationalism and the "ageless struggle for freedom" that provided some of the underpinnings for his refusal to admit defeat.

far more radically than had previously been the case. But this intellectual tradition imposed deep limitations on radical liberals and even as they were driven to identify with the cause of the African oppressed, rendered their relationship with African politics deeply ambiguous.

These limitations become apparent through a scrutiny of the meaning of key terms in liberal discourse - terms like "world opinion", "man's quest after truth", etc. When the signifying relationships in which these terms are embedded and which give them their meaning are uncovered, it soon becomes clear that they are understood in a very limited sense:

"There are two great political movements in the world today. One is a demand by men throughout the world for a full say in the way in which they are governed; the other is a universal rejection of discrimination based on such artificial criteria as race, or colour, or creed. The ideas behind these great movements are not Communistic; they are simply the acceptance by Non-Western people of the lessons which Western missionaries and teachers have been teaching over many years."¹⁰⁸

On the one hand, identification of anti-colonial struggles with "the lessons [of] Western missionaries" made possible liberal identification with African liberation. But on the other, this passage illuminates the powerful limitations on that identification. It seems that it was impossible for some liberals to identify with African decolonisation unless it could be "laundered", unless its entire meaning could be contained within the values of Western, "civilised" thought. We have here nothing less than the return, through the back door, of the Eurocentrism implicit in the more traditional liberal formula of "equal rights for all civilised men". The universal culture, the world opinion, the human freedom liberals fought for were conceived quite explicitly in terms of the "civilised" world,¹⁰⁹ European culture, Western opinion, and the institutions of Western-style parliamentary democracy. Reacting against Strijdoms Union Day exhortation to South Africans to "respect each other's cultures" **Contact** remarks that

"...it seems to us that it is the Government who will decide what that cultural heritage will be, certainly in the case of African culture. In any event, whatever cultural heritage we may possess, there is a **technological 'culture'** which is modern man's way of living on the earth. It does not belong to any race or nation, but to **man**, and the African people have as much right to it as anyone else."¹¹⁰

As this passage shows, the process of African liberation is seen, not simply as the cessation of domination of the West, but in terms of African **entry** into a cultural order which already exists. Here we see revealed most clearly South African liberalism in its dimension as a **colonial** discourse. Its commitment was to values it saw as enshrined in Western civilisation and its

¹⁰⁸ "Wither the United Party?". **Contact**, September 1954

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, J. K. Ngubane, "The two moralities." **New African**, Vol.2, No.1, (January 1963), p. 2.

¹¹⁰ "The Prime Minister and Union Day". **Contact**, June 1956. My emphasis.

opposition to colonialism grew chiefly from its conviction that these values had been successfully imported to Africa, and that political colonialism and Western connivance with apartheid and colonialism would serve only to drive Africans into the arms of Soviet Communism - which was certainly not seen as an embodiment of the values of Western culture! Liberal support for African politicisation thus often tended to be qualified and ambiguous.

Perhaps the most important consequence of this was the deeply ambivalent relation of liberals to the arena of black politics. Liberalism was sometimes oddly incapable of seeing Africans as rational political actors in their own right. This was a marked theme in the discourse of the Liberal Party. Paul Rich has remarked on the prevalence, in the liberal discourse of the 1950's, of the assumption that liberal institutions (the IRR, the Churches, etc.) were the only repository of political rationality; African political militance, unless it was curbed and informed by these influences, was seen as an anarchic and potentially destructive force.¹¹¹

These assumptions did not characterise only the liberal Party of the early 1950s, but also marked its more radical phase. An example is the discourse of someone who was to become a prominent member of the NCL, Randolph Vigne. Writing in the *New African* after the Bashee Bridge killings, he said that

"The Bashee Bridge confirms the appearance on the scene of a new force, of men who will kill in defiance of tradition and teaching...

In 1927 the prophetic Lord Olivier warned 'the Western civilised man... whether he be white, coloured or black' of the threatened destruction of his forces by "an irreconcilable Jacquerie of oppressed... natives..."¹¹²

Note Vigne's approving quotation of the idea of black persons being included in the category of "western civilised man". Here we see clearly how radical liberalism, though opposed to white domination, still saw civilisation in explicitly Eurocentric terms, and could accept black politics only if it conformed to these terms. Later in the piece Vigne speaks of "western civilisation" as synonymous with "world culture". And opposed to this rational world culture embodied in Western values, there is a notion of a blind destructive force, the anger of disgruntled peasants that would kill "women and children and even the stranger in our midst."¹¹³ Radical and conservative strands were thus inextricably mixed in the liberalism of the late 1950's. A faith in the inevitable triumph of humanist values was an important thread in many liberals's

¹¹¹ Paul Rich, *White Power and the Liberal Conscience*, p. 118-119.

¹¹² *New African* (editorial), Vol.2, no.2 (Feb. 1963, p. 1.)

¹¹³ This retention of Eurocentric elements in even explicitly radical liberal discourse, where even exhortations to identify with Africanist nationalism and the militance of the P.A.C. is bound up with a hidden yet real suspicion of that militance is very clear in Patrick van Rensburg, *op. cit.* (see esp. pp. 137 - 198), which will be the subject of a future paper.

identification with radical politics. But that faith was still premised upon a Eurocentrism which could only accept African political militance if it could comfortably fit within the parameters of European liberalism.

This ambiguity was to have a crucial effect on the liberal politics of the 1950s. Any articulation of African demands in terms different to those conceived in liberal discourse, any articulation that seemed to exceed these limits would be regarded with deep suspicion. If African militance tended either in the direction of African nationalism or Soviet-style communism, liberals could not support it. Liberalism's relationship to mass political movements like the ANC and the PAC was therefore fraught with difficulty. In the words of an anonymous member of the Congress alliance, "the Liberal Party was one or two steps behind the Congress Movement. The liberals always moved with history. But they were always a step or two behind. They changed, but they never radicalized. They could never get into the action."¹¹⁴

This problem, that of never being able to get "into the action", is indeed a perennial feature of the organisation's history. For although many liberals in the LP did move closer to the ANC and mass opposition politics than any liberals had before, the LP's official relationship with the organisation had been strained from the beginning. This is nowhere better encapsulated than in the Party's failure to participate in the Congress of the People in 1955. Though they had been invited to the C.O.P. at an early stage, some party members feared that they would be unable to control the C.O.P.'s outcome, and that the eventual demands of the Congress would be too radical.¹¹⁵ Fearing that this would cause a polarisation in the Party they resisted more radical members' insistence that they should take part. ANC-LP relations never fully recovered from this event.¹¹⁶ Instead, the rift remained, and, throughout the late 1950s, the liberal suspicion of communist control of the ANC remained a divisive issue.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in NUSAS, *Dissension in the Ranks*, p. 13.

¹¹⁵ See Dave Everatt, "Frankly Frightened: the Liberal Party and the Congress of the People". The concern over lack of liberal control is evidenced in a letter to Margaret Ballinger by Walter Stanford quoted by Everatt (p. 23): "I think it frightfully dangerous to come in at a late stage such as this when we have not, and as I see it will not get, any real control over this organisation."

¹¹⁶ Here an important role was played, ironically, by three prominent ex-ANC members who did join the liberal Party: Selby Msimang, Jordan Ngubane, and Joe Nkate. Together, the three became the core of "a small influential group" in the LP who were highly critical of the Communist Party's role in the ANC (Tom Lodge, "Patrick Duncan and Radical Liberalism", p. 6) and who fanned the fires of many liberals' anti-communism.

Msimang, co-founder of the ANC by the standards of the 50s and 60s deeply conservative, had left the ANC because of the influence of the Communist Party, which he saw as an organisation of extremist "rabble-rousers" (Tom Lodge, *op. cit.*, p. 6; for Msimang's close erstwhile ties with conservative liberal politics in the Gamma Sigma club in Durban, see Rich, *op. cit.*, p. 13 - 14). Joe Nkate's opposition to the SACP stemmed from divergent reasons - he saw them as a brake on African radicalisation. Ngubane, a co-founder of the ANCYL and an important editor of *Inkundla ya Bantu* in Natal, was deeply opposed to Communist influence, arguing that it sabotaged African Nationalism (Switzer and Switzer, *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: a descriptive bibliographic guide to African, Coloured and Indian newspapers, newsletters and magazines, 1930 - 1977* (Boston, G. K. Hall and Co. 1979) pp. 43-44).

By the late 1950's therefore, radical liberalism was subjected to a series of stresses and dilemmas that only grew sharper as time wore on. Though many of the younger liberals passionately identified with the goal of a non-racial and democratic society, their party had never quite managed unequivocally to align itself with African political movements fighting for that goal. Though they tried to identify with militant African nationalism, they could do so only in an ambiguous and qualified way. Although this may not be true of all radical liberals, and though some liberals seem to have had far fewer reservations about mass politics, these themes were prevalent enough to render the LP as a whole incapable of forming any close alliance with Congress politics. Though the Party had soon gone beyond the parliamentary pale of white politics, and though they had in principle accepted the desirability of essentially revolutionary change in South Africa, they had not worked out what sort of restructuring would have to take place.¹¹⁷ On the one hand, the Liberal Party forsook all chances of gaining any power via the parliamentary route. On the other it never succeeded in allying itself with any other political force of transformation.¹¹⁸

Radical liberals were thus caught between an ever-more repressive state and the increasing militance of African mass politics. Ernie Wentzel, sensing that the Party's younger members were becoming increasingly unhappy with its vacillation, grew alarmed. In 1963 he tried to keep the loyalty of some of the more discontented radicals by involving them in devising a economical

Believing that communists had sought - successfully - to dominate and control the Youth League, that they had manipulated the Congress of the People in 1955 and that the Freedom Charter was the result of Communist Party policy decisions, he resigned in 1956 (For Ngubane's own views on Communism and the communist domination of the ANCYL, see J.K. Ngubane, *An African explains Apartheid*, (London, Pall Mall, 1963) esp. pp. 99, 162-4, 166).

Another important part was played by the undiplomatic and impetuous behaviour of prominent LP members like Patrick Duncan. (For a sensitive discussion of the nature and roots of Duncan's anti-communism, see C.J. Driver, *Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan-African*, pp. 122 - 124.) Though Duncan himself wished for closer ties with the ANC - he hoped at one stage that the ANC could become a non-racial mass movement that would ultimately make the Liberal Party itself redundant - this did not lead him to contain his militant anti-communism or to meliorate his criticism of the SACP in his newspaper, *Contact*. Contact was not a Liberal Party organ, but the association was close enough for his attacks to sour the relation between Congress and the LP. His "open letter to Luthuli", in which he accused the Chief of being blind to Communist influence in his organisation, was a case in point, coming as it did during the Treason Trial, in which many Congress Leaders were accused of furthering the aims of Communism. Though many liberals were critical of this letter, (see *op. cit.*, pp. 160 - 161.) this did not endear him or the Liberal Party with the ANC leadership.

117 Tom Lodge, "Patrick Duncan and Radical Liberalism", p. 5.

118 It was not only the Liberal Party's relationship to black mass politics that was ambiguous. If on the one hand it never fully entered the arena of black politics, it also never quite left that of white politics. Even though members of the Sash and the Liberal Party had made a political choice that had alienated them from most of the white electorate, and even though their stance was anathema to the interests of most white voters, they never quite ceased looking over their shoulder at that electorate and continued to pin its hopes on the possibility of a white "change of heart". Similarly the Black Sash, though deeply conscious of the fact that constitutional means were useless or (for blacks) simply not available, remained committed to constitutional means of change (Cherry Michelman, *op. cit.*, pp. 78, 152 - 159).

political programme for the Liberal Party. If they could become interested in helping steer the Party towards a policy which acknowledged the need for a radical distribution of wealth in South Africa, their disillusionment might fade.¹¹⁹ He was mistaken. "In truth," Ernie Wentzel writes, "the radicals had abandoned us in spirit..."¹²⁰ They had decided to turn to a more forceful method of articulating their protest: sabotage.

119 AD 1931 Aa pp. 98 - 100
120 **Ibid.**

4

The Founding of the National Committee for Liberation (1960-1962)

4.1 The State of Emergency and the formation of the early NCL

The NCL was born where, four years later, it was to end: in prison. It was founded by Monty Berman, who was one of 29 detainees thrown together in the Johannesburg Fort and later in Pretoria Local after the detentions that followed the imposition of the State of Emergency on 30 March 1960. John Lang, a liberal co-detainee, also formed a group which was, along with a Trotskyist organisation called the African Freedom Movement, to merge with the NCL two years later.¹

That, at least, is the official version of the facts, as set out by the prosecution in the trial of NCL/ARM members four years later. The full story, as we shall see, is much murkier, much more tangled: it is a story in which organisational boundaries are vague, where the intentions of central actors are often unformed and ambiguous; a story where the initiative belonged to everybody and nobody, where actors who conceived themselves to be at the centre of events suddenly found themselves overtaken by the margin.

The complete and unabridged version of this story will probably never be told. The organisation left few records and, with some fatal exceptions, successfully limited the flow of information between its own cells. The main body of evidence about its activities today is the trial record of the court cases; the testimony given here is thus subject to all the doubts and problems such sources entail.² Many of its erstwhile members are today reluctant to talk about often painful memories; those who are willing can speak only of their own limited experience. What follows can therefore only be a patchwork story, a jigsaw puzzle constructed from a sparse scattering of facts, hints, and contradictory rumours.

¹ A general account of the formation of the group is given in an anonymous memorandum in the Paton Papers (Jagger Library, University of Cape Town, BCZA C4(ii)h, p. 2). Circumstantial evidence suggests that this memorandum was compiled by Hugh Lewin: it is one of a series of memoranda (written with the same typewriter, and all marked with the letter "L" at the top) at least one of which was definitely compiled by Lewin (there are clear references to his failed marriage and his friendship with Leftwich). It is therefore likely that the "L" refers in fact to the initial letter of his surname, and that the other memoranda were also compiled by him. The others, it seems, may have been compiled by Eisenstein.

² Edward Feit, *Urban Revolt in South Africa, 1960 - 64*, pp. x - xi.

This problem is intensified by the fact that many members' experience of the NCL/ARM was limited to their knowledge of their own cell and should not automatically be taken to be valid for the whole organisation. The NCL/ARM was no monolithic, unified entity. Organisationally, it was not a coherent and centralised body, but rather an umbrella under which groups that had originated separately and independently in different parts of the country could work together. The history of the NCL/ARM is therefore that of the alignment in one organisation of a handful of even more shadowy groups. These were more often than not loose associations of individuals with divergent views who had been shaken together by the flux of left-wing politics after 1956: people who had split off from - or were fairly dissident in - political organisations such as the Communist Party, the Non European Unity Movement (NEUM) and the Liberal Party for reasons not explicitly documented at the time, and who had kept in contact with each other for a host of different reasons and for no explicitly formulated political purpose.

The NCL/ARM, in other words was ideologically heterogeneous: besides liberals it included Trotskyists, ex-members of the Communist Party and COD, and some disillusioned members of the ANC Youth League. Their experiences were shaped by their own ideological subject-positions, their insertion into the discourses of the organisations to which they belonged. Though all these groupings shared, for instance, a commitment to socialism and an opposition to the Communist Party, and though all of them were committed to the strategy of sabotage, even these areas of agreement were interpreted in widely differing ways. It is therefore doubtful whether one can speak of any common purpose prevailing throughout the NCL/ARM. Some of the most basic points of departure were in fact contested terms from the beginning. Even when these ideological differences were not explicitly addressed, they still had effects: one view of the political point and aim of sabotage could prevail in the NCL/ARM only by marginalising other views. When using trial evidence and oral interviews as material, we shall therefore have to be on our guard against reducing the complex nature of the NCL/ARM to that of one of its component ideologies.

It is probably best to start such an account with the smaller grouping from which the broader alliance took its name - the circle of leftist dissidents who decided to form an underground sabotage organisation called the National Committee for Liberation during their detention. in April 1960. A glimpse into those days in prison, and of the circumstances of the founding of the early NCL is provided in the memoirs of the Johannesburg lawyer and Liberal Party member Ernie Wentzel.³ According to him the 35 white detainees lumped together in the Fort and in Pretoria were composed of three main groups. Firstly, there was a sizeable group of about 18 -

³ Ernie Wentzel, Unpublished Memoirs, (Ernest Wentzel papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, AD 1931 Aa and Ab)

20 Communists led by Cecil Williams; other prominent figures were Joe Slovo, Rusty Bernstein, and Harold Wolpe. Then there was a group of liberals such as John Lang and Ernie Wentzel. Lastly, there was a group of dissident leftists which included Monty Berman, Hymie Basner, Michael Muller and Archie Levitan.⁴

Not all of these dissidents were to become part of the NCL, and the NCL included members who had not been part of this group. It is, however, out of their reactions to the State of Emergency, and the interactions between them and the other two groups of detainees, that the organisation was to grow. They were people who, though they seem to have been involved with the SACP in earlier times, were at the time of their detention no longer in its ranks.⁵ Berman, for example, had lifelong close links with the SACP; his father, Leon Berman, had been an early member of the Communist Party in Johannesburg.⁶ Berman and his wife had for some time adopted a critical position within the SACP⁷ and Berman had apparently been expelled from the Communist party at some date after 1956, possibly because he was suspected of Africanist sympathies.⁸

The State of Emergency had been an attempt to regain control after the crisis that had shaken South Africa after the Sharpeville shootings. The detentions had, however, some unintended effects. Firstly, the throwing together of members of the left in the close confines of Pretoria Jail provided them with an opportunity to reassess the situation after the turbulent days that had just passed. This was especially so in the case of the Communist and ex-Communist detainees. Ernie Wentzel was later to comment wryly on the Communists' propensity to see whatever happened to them in the light of its historical significance:

"There was an air of great events-about-to-be about the Communists. To me the reality of arrest very quickly asserted itself as a demonstration of the power of the State. The Communists, on the other hand, were elated. They saw their arrest as the logical [outcome] of an historical process. They felt that this was the beginning of the end of white rule and they were exhilarated to be participants ... Their sense of great

4 AD 1931 Aa, p. 50; Ab, p. 15.

5 Interview with Issy Hayman, Johannesburg, 11 September 1989.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Hirson also says they had refused to join the COD because of their objections to being part of a colour-bar organisation (Baruch Hirson, "The Socialist League" (unpublished typescript, 1989), p. 3).

8 Interview with Issy Hayman, *loc. cit.* Oral testimony conflicts on this point. Monty Berman (interview, London, 5 May 1989) downplays his differences with the SACP and has it that he left them after the invasion of Hungary in 1956. Hirson contradicts this, and concurs more with Hayman's version, saying that the Bermans remained inside and were later expelled. He appears to think that this expulsion was at least partly due to the fact that they were being associated with himself. (See Baruch Hirson, *op.cit.*, p. 3.) What had estranged the others from the SACP is not clear: Hayman characterises all of them merely as dissidents who did not fit into the SACP or the COD.

[excitement] at historic events - and my growing amazement at their romantic detachment from any sense of reality - never [ceased] to interest me."⁹

This propensity was shared by Monty Berman and other dissident leftists. To them and the mainstream Communists it really was the best and worst of times: the situation seems to have appeared simultaneously grim and unexpectedly hopeful. On the one hand, legal mass organisation appeared to have been crushed. The banning of the ANC seemed imminent, and the state had demonstrated its determination to counter even non-violent protest with brutal repression. All non-violent strategies, it seemed to Berman, had failed; the legal space for mass struggle was closing. At the same time South Africa also seemed to contain unexpected revolutionary possibilities.¹⁰

Until then, Berman had agreed with the SACP that it was too early to move to armed struggle in South Africa. Though the question of armed struggle had often come up before, it was always rejected as a strategy

"...because at that stage there were still means, legally, to challenge politically without violence. ... [T]he people would not be able to take [up] violence, because they were neither organised nor ready for such action."¹¹

But after Sharpeville they felt that conditions had changed. Firstly, the level of repression for which the state was prepared seemed to show that freedom was going to be unattainable without a "real fundamental struggle". To Berman the pass burning campaign seemed to show that the African working class was "much more vociferous about their needs... and getting angry". Furthermore, the massacre "was such a gross miscarriage of justice, such an appallingly violent thing, that what was going to flow from that was the total and absolute antagonism of the blacks for whites."¹² Berman and his co-detainees seem to have felt that this anger, if it was not to lead to mere destruction, would have to be channeled in some way. In this context, their previous arguments against violence seemed to be outdated.

But how to take up the challenge of going beyond the politics of non-violent protest? Some of the members of the group had been in the armed forces during the Second World War, and had been very impressed by the example of underground resistance movements like the French Maquis.¹³ They felt, according to Berman, that now there was a need to leave the terrain of

⁹ AD 1931 Aa. pp. 24 - 5. The words in square brackets have been omitted from the typewritten version of the memoirs due to the illegibility of the manuscript: an attempt to decipher the manuscript itself has made it possible to insert them here.

¹⁰ Interview with Monty Berman. *loc. cit.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

legal work for that of underground activity. It was time to do "something more active", and to go over to a strategy of sabotage. They decided to "set up a National Committee for Liberation", a small group of activists who would form the nucleus around which a broader sabotage movement could grow. Through their acts they hoped also to create a general insurrectionary atmosphere: individual acts of sabotage would, they hoped, encourage others to carry on in the same way.

This decision, although it was the product of a period of reassessment and discussion in prison, was not in itself very deeply theorised. In the context of the government's repression of mass politics, sabotage seemed so obvious a next step that it was almost a foregone conclusion. As Berman puts it, "... because all of us... were already committed... there was no need for political discussion.... It was a question of... moving out of passive legal action into active military action."¹⁴

The detentions were to have another long-range consequence for the NCL/ARM besides the bare fact of their providing the opportunity for reassessment and discussion. This flowed out of their wide-ranging political spread. Liberals, Communists, and dissident leftists - long-time foes outside prison - were forced into close contact with each other, and had no option but to close ranks to some degree against a common enemy. This was especially true of the Communists, who took the line that in spite of political differences a common front had to be formed¹⁵ and went out of their way to draw in the liberals.¹⁶

It was an uncomfortable solidarity, partly because it necessitated the lowering of political defences. In addition, the liberals seem to have been suspicious about the Communist enthusiasm for solidarity: Wentzel, for one, felt that it was merely a public-relations exercise on the part of the Communists. The Communists knew, Wentzel reasoned, that public sympathy for the liberals would be much greater than for themselves. While liberals remained in jail there was every possibility that the Emergency would come to a more rapid end. He suspected that the Communists' sudden non-sectarianism was due to their concern to prevent a rift forming which could result in the Communists being released later than the liberals.¹⁷ Though the liberals did not go so far as to make a separate peace with the authorities, they spurned the Communist advances: they refused to participate in collective action like hunger strikes¹⁸ and started early

14 **Ibid.**
 15 AD 1931 Ab p. 20.
 16 **Op.cit.**, p. 16.
 17 **Op. cit.**, p. 17.
 18 **Op. cit.**, p. 19.

on to involve Communist Party members in long ideological arguments. Tensions quickly rose, and relations became strained.

A three-cornered confrontation ensued, with the liberals and the Communists as the main sparring partners. The dissident leftists appear to have sided first with the one side, then with the other and in the accompanying jockeying for position some of them drew closer to the liberal position. As Wentzel was to remark,

"One of the factors which I think disturbed the Communists was the fact that these ex-Communists who in a sense held the balance of power, were clearly more attracted by the Liberal point of view than by the Communist. And there were several of them who were very eager to get to know the Liberals and discuss matters with us."¹⁹

This was especially true of Monty Berman, who from the beginning seemed to enjoy the liberal lampooning of Communist Party arguments. During the course of their detention, he became "very very close" to John Lang, and "seemed to be establishing some common ideological ground with him".²⁰ Although John Lang did not join the new organisation he agreed with Berman and his colleagues about the need for sabotage. Their friendship was to become the basis of a close but informal working relationship between him and the NCL. Lang had access to prodigious funds, and in the ensuing months he was to provide the NCL with valuable resources.²¹

Once out of prison, Berman and his comrades tried to put their plans into effect. This proved difficult. Firstly the group was small, involving only "four or five" people.²² Secondly, any attempt to expand the group had to take place secretly. Thirdly Berman seems to have stood in a fairly ambiguous position vis a vis the SACP and ANC. Although he had left the SACP and therefore found himself, for the time being, outside the organised Congress alliance, it is obvious that the estrangement, as far as he was concerned, was far from total. He still believed that some co-operation between them was desirable and possible. This added to the problems of expansion, since it had to be done "without falling over the feet of the ANC".²³

¹⁹ **Op.cit.**, p. 20.

²⁰ **Ibid.**

²¹ For a discussion of John Lang's activities, see pp. 88 - 95.

²² Interview with Monty Berman. **loc. cit.** It is difficult to say who these members were. It seems that Mike Muller of SACTU may have been a member (**ibid.**, supported in interview with Raymond Eisenstein, London, 16 April 1989) Alex Cox, a liberal businessman who owned a shoe factory in Johannesburg, was later recruited because of his skill as an aeroplane pilot (Baruch Hirson "The state of Emergency", p. 4). Michael Schneider may also have been a member of this early group (interview with Raymond Eisenstein. **loc. cit.**, interview with Randolph Vigne, 16 March 1989). Harry Hartwell, a dissident member of the COD, seems also to have been peripherally involved (Baruch Hirson. **op. cit.**, p. 3; interview with Issy Hayman. **loc. cit.**).

²³ Interview with Monty Berman. **loc. cit.**

Although they knew in general that the ANC was "moving in the same direction", they were excluded from discussions inside the SACP and ANC and did not suspect that the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe was already being planned. According to Hirson, Berman approached SACP members and invited them to join with the NCL in a programme of action, but these overtures were rejected.²⁴ Berman himself says that he met members of the ANC ("Walter and Nelson") to discuss possible co-operation. The ANC, probably unwilling to disclose their own plans regarding the possible formation of Umkhonto at so early a stage, apparently decided to play along for the time being. It was therefore agreed that the NCL "would ... do a very important job, and that was to take people out of the country who needed to go."²⁵ The NCL thus became involved in securing the safety of many people whose liberty and lives were in danger now that the state had cracked down on the liberation movement, and while that movement was planning to continue its operations underground. Not very much is known of this aspect of the NCL's activities. The extent of the co-operation between the NCL and the SACP/ANC has been the subject of conflicting claims.²⁶ A careful piecing together of clues affords us a glimpse, however, of the extent of its role in the immediate aftermath of the lifting of the Emergency. In this picture, the figure of John Lang occupies a central place.

According to the Bermans, Lang had obtained funds from Ghana through Kwame Nkrumah's legal advisor and Attorney-General of Ghana, the Labour Party MP Geoffry Henry Cecil Bing.²⁷ Some record of their association exists in Bing's autobiographical account of Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana, **Reap the Whirlwind**. According to Bing, Lang held a post as Professor of Law at the University College of Ghana and as head of the Law School²⁸ after leaving South Africa. Bing indicates that he knew Lang even before this. Significantly, he also mentions that Lang's second-in-command at the Law School was the ex-senator Leslie Rubin, Neville Rubin's father.²⁹ How Lang had convinced Bing and the Ghanaian government that they should grant

²⁴ Baruch Hirson *op. cit.*, p. 3.

²⁵ Interview with Monty Berman. *loc. cit.*

²⁶ Thus Umkhonto we Sizwe was later to deny that it had anything to do with the NCL (see footnote 42 below), while at the other extreme Muriel Horrel alleges that Umkhonto "operated under the guidance of the National Committee for Liberation" (**Action, Counter-action and Reaction: a brief review of non-white political movements in South Africa** (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1971), p. 53).

²⁷ Interview with Myrtle Berman, London, 3 June 1990. That the money came from Ghana has also been alleged in interviews with Baruch Hirson (London, 15 May 1989), and Eisenstein (*loc. cit.*). Hirson's unpublished autobiography gives ex-senator Leslie Rubin as Lang's contact (see *op. cit.*, p. 4.). Rubin was a friend of Lang's, and as I point out here he did have links with Bing as well. This may account for Hirson's version.

For a summary of Bing's career see D. M. McFarland, **A Historical Dictionary of Ghana**, (London, The Scarecrow Press, 1985), p. 50.

²⁸ G. H. C. Bing, **Reap the Whirlwind: An Account of Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana from 1950 to 1966** (London, Macgibbon and Kee, 1968) p. 323.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

him the money is not clear, but in 1960 he was granted a substantial sum of money - apparently about £25 000.³⁰

Lang retained control of the purse-strings, but seems to have made some of his funds available to the NCL for its projects. Thus he organised transport for twenty African nurses whose services were needed in Tanzania, but who could not get passports. The NCL, which had investigated possible "escape routes" across the border, covertly took them out of the country.³¹ The NCL also had the use of a single-engined aircraft Lang had bought with the Ghanaian funds. After the end of the Treason Trial, the NCL took Robert Resha out of the country in this aircraft.³² The NCL also helped "kidnap" persons banished to remote areas and take them out of the country.³³ According to some claims they "rescued" 16 people in this fashion.³⁴

Further clues to the extent of this "rescue operation" is provided by two widely disparate sources. The first is an article in a Quaker journal³⁵ by Ronald Watts, who had been a Tribal Agricultural Officer in Serowe, a town in Bechuanaland as it then was. According to Watts, he was involved in a plan for the evacuation of South African political exiles he claims had been devised with the help of Oliver Tambo and George Clay of the *Observer*. Exiles coming from South Africa, usually via Swaziland, landed at Serowe, were taken to Francistown, and were from thence flown to Ghana. Among these refugees were Robert Resha and, he claims, Adelaide Tambo.³⁶

A further piece to the jigsaw puzzle is provided by Bing's book. According to this account, Bing's own wife was involved in activities that look as if they more than touched on those of the NCL. After Sharpeville, she was to "pioneer" an "organized rescue attempt by which refugees of all colours were collected in Bechuanaland and airlifted over the Federation of Rhodesia ... landing in the Congo and from there on to Ghana."³⁷ According to Bing, the "rescue operation", which involved the synchronisation of illegal flights across South Africa and clandestine border crossings, involved a total of about 24 people.³⁸

Individually, each of these pieces of information appears of doubtful value. But taken together they complement each other and provide a fascinating glimpse of a single scheme. The airlift

³⁰ This is the amount mentioned in *The New African*, anonymous MA Thesis, (Documentation Centre for African Studies, University of South Africa, AAS 143) p. 158. For a discussion of this bizarre document and its claims, see pp. 91 - 94.

³¹ Interview with Monty Berman, *loc. cit.*

³² *Ibid*; Interview with Helen Joseph, Johannesburg, 14 September 1989.

³³ Baruch Hirson, "The State of Emergency", p. 3.

³⁴ AAS 143, p. 149. See also the NCL pamphlet reproduced as Document 1, Appendix 1.

³⁵ Ronald Watts, "Escape after Sharpeville", *The Friend*, March 9 1990.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ G. H. C. Bing, *op.cit.*, p. 326

³⁸ *Ibid.* Bing's wife's adventures are more fully recorded on pp. 326 - 330.

Bing and Watts refer to seem to have been the very one of which Lang and the NCL organised the South African end. If this is so, the NCL seem to have been part of quite an ambitious and well-organised rescue operation.

Besides these rescue operations, the NCL also embarked on a campaign of sabotage. On 26 September 1961 it launched an arson attack on the offices of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development in Johannesburg.³⁹ On 8 October, it toppled a power pylon in Lombardy East, apparently by dint of sawing through its legs.⁴⁰ This last attack, according to the Bermans, was done in cooperation with members of the Communist Party who blew up - or attempted to blow up - a telephone line in Pretoria. According to Myrtle Berman "We did a joint programme. We knocked out a pylon and they were supposed to knock out telephone lines and none of their stuff came off. They were as badly organised as we..."⁴¹

This tentative working relationship would not last. In the first place, the resources of the NCL would become less valuable to the ANC once their own underground movement was established.⁴² Secondly, although Berman saw the NCL's distance from the formal Congress Alliance as a temporary affair, this was not to be the case. In the following pages we shall see how the social and discursive context after Sharpeville meant that this separation would grow and solidify. Factors beyond the control of the NCL's founders would work to widen the gap between them and the Congress Alliance, and choices and working arrangements made in the fluid early stages of the NCL's development would acquire their own logic, a logic that was to steer the organisation down a path far from that originally envisaged by Berman.

39 According to some claims these attacks were due to take place in May "but were postponed at the request of Mr Mandela" (see AAS 143, p. 156). If this is true it confirms the Bermans' statements that there was some attempt to co-operate with or at least stay out of the way of the ANC.

40 Richard Gibson, *op. cit.* p. 58; interview with Hugh Lewin, Harare, 3 February 1990.

41 Interview with Myrtle Berman. *loc. cit.* In a report that appeared at the time ("Planned sabotage campaign in South Africa alleged", *The Cape Times*, 16 October 1961), all three incidents of sabotage are reported. All of them, including the sabotage of the telephone line, are attributed to the "National Liberation Committee."

42 This process of disentangling itself from the NCL can already be seen in the very first public statement of the newly-launched Umkhonto we Sizwe: In a statement drawn up on 6 December and released simultaneously with MK's inaugural attacks on 16 December, it acknowledged the NCL's existence if only to announce its distance from it, saying that it was "not connected in any way with the so-called National Committee for Liberation, whose existence has been announced in the press." ("Umkhonto we Sizwe", statement released by the high command of Umkhonto we Sizwe. This document is contained in the Hoover Institute on War, Revolution and Peace's microfilm collection entitled "South Africa: a collection of miscellaneous documents, 1902-1963". (Documentation Centre for African Studies, University of South Africa library, AAS 254) Reel 7 (FI 691).)

4.2 The Socialist League of Africa

Berman's was but one of several groups outside the Congress Alliance who were now, after Sharpeville, contemplating sabotage. One such group was the Johannesburg-based Socialist League of Africa (SLA), a Trotskyite group led by the physicist Baruch Hirson. Though the SLA was by no means a large group, and though its activities were fairly limited, it was to play an important role in the creation of the nationwide network that eventually drew together the groups that merged to form the NCL/ARM.

Writing about this role presents the historian with some difficulties. In one sense, as some of its members point out, even to talk of the Socialist League is to participate in a fiction.⁴³ It appears to have been little more than a study group, with no formally constituted structure. Its career lacked continuity and it had little cohesiveness. Its membership was not only loose and undemarcated, but had changed almost completely between its formation in 1957 and the moment when it joined forces with Berman's NCL and other organisations five years later. In fact, the only connecting link between the earlier and later Socialist League seems to have been the person of Baruch Hirson himself and his own political project. Rather than being an organisation in the full sense of the word, the SLA seems rather to have been an informal grouping of people with whom Hirson was in contact and who he saw as being potential members of an organisation which could form an alternative to the SACP or the ANC in building a working-class movement in South Africa. This means that it is rather difficult (to say the least) to gauge the exact size of the Socialist League. Hirson, for example, says that about 20 persons were involved in the later League, while another SLA member puts the number at "four or five".⁴⁴ Hirson's figure seems to refer, not to a clearly-demarcated core group, but rather to all the people he was in contact with and saw as crucial political allies. These, it appears, were included by Hirson in his conception of the Socialist League even if they had never explicitly committed themselves to his own political programme. This seems to characterise much of the style of Hirson's politics: he was a lone operator, isolated even by the standards of the left opposition to the SACP. While he would on occasion be part of a collective political enterprise, he seems to have operated according to his own agenda, and to have interpreted these enterprises always in the light of his own eventual intentions. As Bernice Kaplan, a member of the later Socialist League, would later put it, looking back at the discussions that characterised her experience of the organisation,

⁴³ Interview with Raymond Eisenstein. *loc. cit.*

⁴⁴ Interview with Raymond Eisenstein. *loc. cit.*

"I think we were actually preparing. Baruch was preparing himself. That was what the activity was all about. Laying the ground, ... making as many contacts as he could; learning things, discussing the direction we were going in."⁴⁵

And as Hirson himself observes,

"I am not certain whether what I describe as Socialist League activities were my activities or group activities."⁴⁶

Hirson, a physicist by training, had become involved in Trotskyist politics before World War II. In the 1930s and 1940s, he was a member of the Workers' International League (WIL), but left upon their fragmentation after the Second World War.⁴⁷ After a period of inactivity he joined the Progressive Forum, a NEUM affiliate. His support does not seem ever to have been unqualified and his disillusionment gradually grew. In 1957 he left it, partly because of its refusal to join the protest against the Universities Apartheid legislation, and partly because of its support for the Soviet invasion of Hungary. He also disagreed fundamentally with Tabata's account of the All African Convention.⁴⁸

Hirson met with others who had also left the Progressive Forum and together they decided to launch the SLA.⁴⁹ They were united in their opposition to the SACP, their belief that the ANC could not provide viable political leadership, and also agreed that the Unity Movement did not provide a viable alternative.⁵⁰ Hirson hoped to build a working class party on the basis of this common agreement. But on another level, this group had little in common. The other SLA members did not even seem to share Hirson's reasons for leaving the NEUM: the principal reason for their linking up with him was the fact that they had left at more or less the same time. According to Hirson, "It was a most peculiar situation in which these people, having broken [with the NEUM], did not quite know where they were and they linked up with me."⁵¹

Hirson found discussion in the SLA barren: the other members were theoretically unsophisticated, and their time in the NEUM had left them closeted inside its ranks, isolated from the broader black community and thus unable to intervene in trade union or township politics. It was clear that this group would never make contact with the organised working class

45 Interview with Bernice Laschinger (née Kaplan). London. 27 May 1989. When referring to her activities in the NCL, I will use her maiden name: my references to interviews however make use of her married name.

46 Interview with Baruch Hirson. *loc. cit.*

47 For this information I am indebted to Alison Drew. See also the Carter-Karis Collection of South African political documents (Jagger Library, University of Cape Town, BCZA 79/15) 2:DW2:41 and 2:DW2:85/1.

48 Hirson's views on the All Africa Convention were set out in a paper he wrote under the pseudonym of R. Mettler, "Time to awake! a critique of I. B. Tabata's **The awakening of a people**" (unpublished paper, 1957, African Studies Library, University of Cape Town).

49 Baruch Hirson, "The State of Emergency", p. 1.

50 *Ibid.*

51 Interview with Baruch Hirson. *loc. cit.*

which Hirson saw as his prime target. Feeling politically isolated, he decided to change tactics and enter the South African Congress of Democrats (COD) as a strategy. In this way, he hoped, he would find the contacts through which he could build up a socialist movement: his objective was to find people "who agreed on the need for a working-class movement"⁵² and who could form the nucleus for an alternative group. He was particularly interested in making contact with people who had influence within the ANC and SACTU.

Initially, he only succeeded in increasing his isolation. His decision to enter Congress alienated his ex-Unity Movement contacts. Moreover, he was far from welcome in COD. Hirson's critical position towards the SACP meant that he had accumulated some measure of notoriety in its ranks and among its sympathisers. The name Baruch Hirson, as an ex-member of the Communist Party was later to recall, was a "swear-word" even among Cape Town SACP members.⁵³ In COD, he was "always under suspicion, always an outsider, always the wrecker who had to be watched".⁵⁴ Members of COD who did not share his political concerns found him "pernickety" and difficult to understand,⁵⁵ and his insistence that contact had to be made with African workers merely succeeded in alienating members instead of winning them over.⁵⁶

But in the long run, the strategy bore fruit. COD gave Hirson access to others who, like him, were disillusioned with SACP policies. He made contact with Mike Muller who, though banned, was still acting as an advisor to the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU)⁵⁷ and with Phyllis Altman, also involved in the SACTU.⁵⁸ Hirson saw them as valuable contacts. He also met Vic and Marcelle Goldberg. They did not agree with him on the need for an independent working-class party, but like him they took exception to the notion that as white activists they should work only in the white areas.⁵⁹ They became important political allies, and Hirson supported Vic Goldberg when, in 1958, he called for "one congress" in which the four pillars of the Congress movement would be united in one organisation.⁶⁰

52 **Ibid.**

53 Interview with Bernice Laschinger. **loc. cit.**

54 Baruch Hirson. "The Socialist League", p. 5.

55 Interview with Helen Joseph. **loc. cit.**

56 Interview with Issy Hayman. **loc. cit.** It is worth noting, though, that in spite of this unpopularity he was voted onto the Transvaal Executive (Baruch Hirson. **op. cit.**, p. 6). This support may have come from another dissident group in COD itself.

57 Baruch Hirson. **loc. cit.**

58 **Ibid.**, Baruch Hirson. (interview. **loc. cit.**).

59 Baruch Hirson. **op. cit.**, p. 6

60 Baruch Hirson. **op. cit.**, p. 7. Vic Goldberg "One Congress", the article by "B. T.". (possibly Ben Turok), "In defence of the Congress", and the discussion "Fusing the Congresses?" in **Liberation: A Journal of Democratic Discussion** No 37, July 1959. All these are contained in collection by the Hoover Institute for War Revolution and Peace. "South Africa: a collection of miscellaneous documents, 1902 - 1963". (Documentation Centre for African Studies, University of South Africa AAS 254) Reel 6 (FI 690)). Ronald Segal. (see **Into Exile**, p. 211) also offers an account of the "One Congress" issue. Why he mentions only his own contribution to the debate is not entirely clear.

But far more important to Hirson was the access which the Goldbergs, through their refusal to limit their involvement to the "white community", gave him to ANC activists and township politics. At their home and later, when he joined them in their trips to the townships, he succeeded in making contact with dissident members of the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) who were unhappy with the ANC and its relationship to the SACP.⁶¹ These included Stephen Segale, who was at the time the president of the Transvaal Youth League,⁶² "a great agitational peasant kind of leader, a salt-of-the-earth kind of guy," as a SLA member later described him.⁶³ Segale was accompanied by Milton Setlhapelo, his Provincial Secretary.⁶⁴ Their political conviction seems to have been a mixture of Africanist and socialist sentiment. They were dissatisfied with the ANCYL, and seem to have shared the PAC's distrust of the SACP. But they did not agree with the PAC in its opposition to the Freedom Charter, and according to Hirson they were unhappy with its leadership, especially after rumours that figures like Leballo had connections with the CIA.

Of their own political position they had as yet no clear appraisal. They had come into contact with Marxist pamphlets, and were interested in reading more about socialism, but their own understanding was still vague. Though Stephen Segale "had socialist slogans", Hirson's impression was that this reflected very little detailed comprehension:

"They expressed an interest in wanting a better society which would be socialist.... [T]he word 'socialist' flourished all the way from Sukarno in Indonesia to Mao Zedong in China... So there was something called 'socialism' which was better than this thing called capitalism which controlled South Africa... I don't think there was any way in which they could have formulated it very precisely."⁶⁵

All the same, Hirson maintained contact with them: "I was not going to probe about what their discontent was. I was trying to spread socialism. And if they want to come talk socialism to me: fine!"⁶⁶ They, though wary, seemed interested in talking to Hirson. A group that included

an account of the "One Congress" issue. Why he mentions only his own contribution to the debate is not entirely clear.

61 Baruch Hirson, *op. cit.*, p. 9. For comments about the existence of secret groups in the ANC and developing tensions in the ANCYL, see Edward Feit, *op. cit.* pp. 96 - 7.

62 In a letter from African ex-emergency detainees at Pretoria Jail to the Minister of Justice, B.J. Vorster, dated 6 August 1960, complaining about medical and other conditions during their detention, (AAS 254, Reel 7 (FI 691)) he is referred to as the President of the Youth League. As there is no record of anyone by this name occupying such a prominent position, this may have referred to the Transvaal branch. This is corroborated by Fred Prager, who indeed alleges that he held that position (Interview with Fred Prager, Vienna, 20 July 1989).

63 Interview with Raymond Eisenstein, *loc. cit.*

64 The above-mentioned detainees' letter gives "Sethlapelo"; Hirson's spelling for this name is "Sethlopele" and in the court records his name is given variously as "Setlapello" or even "Setlogello". I have chosen to stick as close as possible to the spelling given in the detainees' letter; "Setlhapelo" seems, however, more in accord with standard spelling conventions.

65 Interview with Baruch Hirson, *loc. cit.*

66 *Ibid.*

Segale, Setlhapelo and an ANCYL member called Theo Musi started meeting him in his office at the Physics Department at Wits University, discussing socialism and the need for a socialist movement.⁶⁷

Hirson was also regularly meeting other socialists who were not affiliated to the Congress movement. These included Raymond Eisenstein, a young Jewish immigrant who had survived the Warsaw ghetto as a child⁶⁸ and who had studied in France, where he had been involved in Trotskyist politics. Eisenstein was studying at Wits, and through him Hirson made contact with members of the Students Fellowship Society (SFS).⁶⁹ In 1960, this group was joined by Bernice Kaplan, a UCT graduate who had been suspended and then expelled from the SACP because of her associations with Unity Movement members in Cape Town,⁷⁰ and also because of her continuing leftist critique of Congress campaigns such as the 1958 potato boycott.⁷¹ Other members were Fred Prager, a Jewish Austrian who had come to South Africa in 1936, and his South-African born wife, Rhoda Prager. They were both from the Liberal Party but had socialist leanings: Fred Prager had been a social democrat in Austria. Though, as I have pointed out, Hirson seems to describe the Socialist League as comprising the entire "loose alliance" of about 20 people he had met through joining COD, it looks as if this grouping was its core.

Other people were in informal contact with this grouping. Dennis Higgs, who was later to be a prominent member of the NCL/ARM, was also known to the core group of the SLA, although he does not seem to have joined them.⁷² Informal links also existed between this group and a grouping in Cape Town - Neil Talbot, Anthony Eastwood, Edmund Trosser and Hillil Ticktin, who had earlier been active in the Congress-oriented Modern World Society but who had since become leftist dissidents.⁷³

Though this core group was ideologically diverse, there were strong common threads that brought them together. Besides their common commitment to socialism and opposition to the Communist Party, they also shared strong radical libertarian sentiments. Although Hirson today

⁶⁷ Baruch Hirson, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁶⁸ See AD 1912, "Eisenstein's suffering in ghetto told of by mother", *The Star*, 20 November 1964, "Court Officials weep as mother recalls ghetto", *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 November 1964.

⁶⁹ Baruch Hirson, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Interview with Neville Alexander, 17 August 1989.

⁷¹ Interview with Bernice Laschinger, *loc. cit.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Interview with Baruch Hirson, *loc. cit.*; Interview with Bernice Laschinger, *loc. cit.* In his account of the formation of the NCL/ARM, Tom Lodge (*Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, p. 240) mentions the existence in Cape Town of an organisation called the Workers' Democratic Party which distributed SLA pamphlets in its own name. This appears to be a reference to the above-mentioned grouping. It is to be doubted, however, whether the WDM should really be seen as contributing to the formation of the NCL/ARM: almost certainly none of its members played any role other than this.

characterises this group as broadly Trotskyist, it was thus Trotskyist with a difference. According to at least some of its members, it tried to transcend some of the features that had hitherto characterised the divide between Stalinism and Trotskyism in South Africa. Bernice Laschinger remembers a strong feeling that the development of Marxist ideas had stultified in past years, that "there was nothing new, there was nothing creative, there were no developments in Marxist thought at all".⁷⁴ The discussions in the Socialist League were thus directed towards re-evaluating some of those ideas and providing a "fresh, independent Marxist perspective": "If you did not agree with every word Marx wrote" she recalls, it was not the... end of the world. Neither did Trotsky have to be treated as Jesus Christ."⁷⁵

Although the SLA's roots were deep in Trotskyism, its formation should thus also be seen in the light of the development of Marxism in the aftermath of Khrushchev's secret speech and the invasion of Hungary. To an extent its own formation was a result of the fluidity that characterised - even in South Africa! - Marxist politics in this time of crisis. It was also influenced by the international intellectual rejuvenation in Marxism at the time. John Saville's journal the, **New Reasoner**, was read avidly by some of its members, and the SLA seems to have taken a lively interest in any revolutionary developments such as the Chinese or Cuban Revolutions that seemed to explore alternative paths to socialism. The Socialist League took a great interest in the guerilla strategies used there, and according to Kaplan, Guevara's **Guerilla Warfare** was studied by the group and summarised in a 26-page typescript by Hirson.⁷⁶

The Socialist League was also engaged in formulating a position on the South African struggle, and here Hirson used it as a sounding board for his own ideas on the subject. Over the years between 1957 and 1960, he was to write a series of texts under the auspices of the Socialist League which amounted to a detailed critique of a whole range of aspects of Congress strategy.⁷⁷

Hirson's plans to use Congress as a hunting ground for political allies were however changed completely by the Sharpeville shooting and the events that followed. There had been shootings before; Sharpeville was distinguished, however, not only by the number of people slain but also by the tide of spontaneous black protest that followed it, an upsurge that according to R. W.

⁷⁴ Interview with Bernice Laschinger. *loc. cit.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* See **S v Daniels** Exh C 10; the document is also included in the Hoover Institute microfilm collection (AAS 254 Reel 7 (FI 691))

⁷⁷ The Socialist League of Africa. "Ten Years of the Stay at Home: A critical discussion". (AAS 254 Reel 2 (FI 686)); "Once more on the Stay at home". (Papers on the Socialist League of Africa. Institute for Commonwealth Studies, London); **Lekhotla wa Basebenzi** No. 1, April 1959 (AAS 254 Reel 1 (FI 685)); **Analysis** nos. 1 (February 1958), 2 (April 1958), 3 (May 1958). (Papers on the Socialist League of Africa. Institute for Commonwealth Studies, London).

Johnson took even organisations like the PAC and ANC by surprise.⁷⁸ This indirectly led to a sequence of events that finally alienated Hirson from Congress politics. On March 30, when it was broadcast on the radio news that thousands of Africans were marching on Cape Town, Hirson was electrified: he was convinced that an insurrectionary moment had arrived, and that it was time to intervene decisively. At this crucial juncture, the Congress Alliance seemed to fail. SACTU did not act decisively enough for him: a call for a Johannesburg stayaway was delayed, mostly, it seemed, for bureaucratic reasons, and a pamphlet calling for a stayaway which had already been printed by Phyllis Altman of SACTU was not distributed.⁷⁹ Whether the stayaway would have been any more successful if the pamphlet had been distributed is an open question, but for Hirson, frustrated at the difficulties of organising in Congress, this was the last straw, and he decided to abandon the strategy of organising inside its ranks.⁸⁰

The wave of detentions that followed the Sharpeville crisis missed the core of the Socialist League, and as the emergency wore on, they continued to meet. At this time, a number of policy issues solidified. Firstly, the other members of the SLA agreed with Hirson that it was time to leave the Congress Alliance.⁸¹ Secondly Hirson started producing a clandestine sheet called **Spark**, which was distributed in the townships. Thirdly, they felt a need for new strategies and considered a move to sabotage that most of them had previously rejected.

According to Bernice Kaplan, they were influenced in this decision by the Cuban revolution.⁸² Hirson points out that the decision to go over to sabotage was not a simple decision to "apply" Castro or Guevara's ideas to the South African situation.⁸³ Though the grouping had at some time or other discussed events in Cyprus, Palestine, Cuba, Viet Nam and China, and had also compared recent events in South Africa with the activities of partisans during the Second World War, this was what he calls "ordinary run-of-the-mill political discussion", and the group had no clearly-formed intention at the time of following in their footsteps. Now, however, with

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R. W. Johnson. *How Long will South Africa Survive?* p. 18.

⁷⁹

Baruch Hirson. "The Socialist League". p. 14; interview. *loc. cit.* Some participants in these events who were more sympathetic to the ANC and SACP than Hirson deny that anything of the kind ever happened and insist that the stay-at-home went ahead with resounding success (interview with Monty Berman. *loc. cit.*) According to this interpretation, Hirson's version of events is the purest fantasy. Contemporary comments on events seem, however, to indicate that there had indeed been some division about the organisation of a stay-at-home. See for example the article "The stay-at-home call: why did it fail?" (*Congress Voice*. Vol.2. No.2 (May 1960) AAS 254 Reel 8 (FI 692)). This article states that "On the recommendation of some excited and overenthusiastic activists who urged for a strike on the 31.8.60 and who swore that the people were ready and just waiting for the word, a call was made for that date." That very evening another group of activists had decided on other dates "As a result, the confusion was confounded.... [E]ventually order was restored and once this was done all concerned worked enthusiastically for the stay-at-home" (*Ibid.*, p.2.) Even though it conveys a different judgement, this bears out Hirson's version of the facts.

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Interview with Baruch Hirson. *loc. cit.*

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Baruch Hirson. "The State of Emergency" p. 1

⁸²

Interview with Bernice Laschinger. *ibid.*

⁸³

Baruch Hirson. *op. cit.*, p. 3.

with the banning of the PAC and ANC it became clear that in the context of renewed repression, above-ground mass politics would be impossible. Like Berman and his co-detainees who were in prison at this very time, Hirson's group now felt that the "old methods" of legal and non-violent protest could no longer be used any more.

The fact that other groupings had come to the same conclusion strengthened this conviction. Members of the ANC and CYL who had not been arrested were thinking, Hirson knew, along the same lines.⁸⁴ Furthermore, a message from Mike Muller had been slipped out to them from prison. Muller was at that stage apparently one of the people involved in the formation of Berman's grouping, and he, too, urged them to consider moving to sabotage.⁸⁵ A new stage in the struggle, it seemed, had arrived.

New stages take a while to manifest themselves and the SLA's commitment to sabotage did not immediately lead to action. For most of 1960 and 1961, discussion continued as before. But throughout this time, as a political underground grew apace, new contacts were slowly being made, and it was only a matter of time before the SLA stretched out feelers to the NCL. Harry Hartwell, an ex-SACP member peripherally involved in Berman's group, told Hirson about it and its activities. Hirson did not know much about the group - only that it had been formed in prison, and that the Bermans were involved. This last fact stood in the way of a merger between the groups, because Hirson and Monty Berman did not see eye to eye politically. Berman, with his attachment to the Congress tradition, had little patience for what he saw as Hirson's divisive and sectarian politics, and there was little chance of a political alliance between them. It was to be some time before the two organisations could merge; by that time, ironically, Berman and Hirson's differences would be rendered more or less irrelevant by the presence of another ideological tendency: liberalism.

4.3 Radical Liberals in Durban: John Laredo and David Evans

In spite of the differences between Hirson and Berman, it should be remembered that they were ideologically bound together in an important sense. Ironically, this bond can best be described by referring to their common link with the Congress alliance. This is an important point to bear in mind when discussing any deeply fissive politics such as that constituted by the relation between Stalinist and Trotskyist groupings generally: for all the fact that they disagreed strongly, even bitterly, with each other and with the Communist Party, they shared many of the fundamental concerns of socialist politics. Though there was no central or essential element which they

⁸⁴ Baruch Hirson, *op. cit.* p. 1
⁸⁵ Baruch Hirson, *op. cit.* pp. 1 - 2.

all held in common, there were what Wittgenstein would call certain "family resemblances" between the groupings. The debates which occurred between different positions, and the differences of opinion which divided them from each other, only made sense within a larger and more or less shared world of discourse, and the different positions could to some degree be situated on a matrix defined by the theoretical and strategic issues raised by mass politics and the struggle for socialism inside the Congress tradition itself.

The political tradition of liberalism that now started to impinge on the politics of the NCL and the SLA had a very different set of concerns. In the previous chapter I have shown how a new generation of liberals had come to the fore in the late 1950s - persons who had in some measure broken with traditional South African liberalism and were seeking to identify with the political struggle of the disenfranchised. Their political course was now to intersect with that of Berman and Hirson, and radically change it. Liberalism had, so far, existed at quite a distance from the traditions represented by Marxism and African Nationalism, and therefore, did not have much of a chance of influencing the direction of their politics. Ironically, it was precisely because this radical liberalism came closer to the revolutionary impulse represented by the former two tendencies that it was able, eventually, to change the nature of the NCL fundamentally.

The liberal strand in the NCL/ARM did not come from one, clearly defined source. As we have seen, both Hirson and Berman had made contact with liberals who supported the strategy of sabotage: Hirson with the Pragers and Berman with Cox and Lang. These liberals came from a variety of backgrounds and followed different paths before they reached that decision. It might however be useful, by way of example, to narrate the political journey of one such liberal as a more or less representative example. In this section, I shall therefore discuss the political development of John Laredo, a liberal who along with David Evans, made contact with Hirson at this time.

Laredo had grown up in Pretoria in a household sympathetic to Afrikaner Nationalism. While studying at Stellenbosch he became increasingly alienated from the militant Nationalism and xenophobia of his fellow-students. By the time he continued his studies at Cambridge he had completely rejected apartheid. During a year of teaching at the University of Cape Town he had met Jack Simons, who had exposed for the first time to Marxist analysis. Though he did not go over to a Marxist position himself, he started shifting away from a reformist perspective:

"There is this moment of crystallisation. You can talk about things and say 'things will change' and then you suddenly realise, looking back, that if you are going to change you

are looking at something that is so radical ... that it isn't just reforming the system, that one is talking about a completely new system."⁸⁶

He was not alone in this. In Durban, this position was shared by what was according to Laredo a fairly well-denoted tendency in the Liberal Party, especially among the younger members. There was a growing feeling among them "that the powers-that-be are beyond reforming; that there had to be some sort of a radical solution." This therefore meant a commitment to extra-parliamentary action:

" ... at that time I think people were talking about this kind of thing fairly often, you know... The question would be posed to you: what are you doing politically. Partly it was a question of what organisation you belong[ed] to and partly it was a question of, if you belong[ed] to an organisation, what were you doing about the organisation. It is obvious that what lay behind the question was that ... we did not even think about the official parliamentary opposition. This was the great army outside Parliament that was waiting to batter down the doors. It was your place in this army."⁸⁷

This also meant that friendly relations existed between these more radical liberals and other extra-parliamentary organisations. The antipathy between the Liberal Party and the COD that was so marked in Cape Town was not nearly as intense in Durban. In a paradoxical way, the absence of a well-defined tradition of socialist thought as existed in Johannesburg and Cape Town meant that the ideological boundaries were policed less conscientiously; though the COD and the Liberal Party kept their distance from each other organisationally, Liberal Party members and COD members often co-operated on an individual level. Laredo's circle of friends in Durban was thus composed not only of white LP members, but contained some Africans and COD members as well.⁸⁸

"At the level of co-operating, as far as Natal was concerned, we knew and got on very well with people who, though you could not call yourself a Communist at that stage, would, all things being equal, call themselves Communist."⁸⁹

But Laredo's nascent socialism did not lead to a break with the Liberal Party. This was partly because COD and the ANC were widely believed by liberals to be under Communist control. In the context of the Cold War, particularly after the events of 1956, liberals regarded Communists with some suspicion. "You did not have to be very reactionary", remembers Laredo, "to have all sorts of doubts about the way in which Stalinism was being implemented in the Soviet Union."⁹⁰

86 Interview with John Laredo. Leeds. 22 April 1989.

87 **Ibid.**

88 **Ibid.**

89 **Ibid.**

90 **Ibid.**

Under the circumstances it is not surprising that Laredo and Evans would meet Hirson. As we have seen, Hirson's very political isolation was to lead him to make political contact with groupings across a very wide political spectrum. While on holiday in Amanzimtoti he met a group of people with whom he discussed the possibility of co-operation.⁹¹ They were not interested - possibly because they were more sympathetic to the SACP: Lionel Gay, a member of this group, was later to join MK.⁹² Through this group he was introduced to two young men: John Laredo and David Evans. They were liberals, but they had enough in common politically for Hirson to want to keep up the contact.⁹³ Hirson did not, however, make any overt references to a specific political organisation: "Nothing was said that wasn't a sort of general political discussion about the situation in the country... there was nothing which was not a general discussion about what people could do."⁹⁴

Hirson did indicate, though, that he would be interested in remaining in touch, and that there was a group of people in Johannesburg who were involved as well. He indicated that this co-operation would not supersede Laredo's Liberal Party activities, and that it would indeed be essential for Laredo to remain in the Liberal Party. They parted on this inconclusive note, but Laredo was interested enough to talk to Evans who, "in a desultory way", indicated that he would also like to maintain contact with Hirson.⁹⁵

After Sharpeville, however, this meeting attained a new importance for Laredo and Evans. Now, they and other radical liberals faced a whole new set of questions regarding their political commitments. Like Berman and Hirson, it seemed to them that after the Emergency crackdowns and the banning of the ANC and PAC, the scope for legal extra-parliamentary mass-politics had decreased decisively.

"Almost unthinkingly we said: right, you ban the two major mass organisations; other organisations can continue but they only continue on sufferance. Therefore the time had come that we actually consider alternative means."⁹⁶

But what could take the place of mass, above-ground extra-parliamentary politics? The problems this posed for radical liberals had a special sharpness. They were very conscious of the advantages they had in this new context of heavy state repression. The relative leeway they

⁹¹ Baruch Hirson, *op. cit.*, p. 5. There is some confusion here: Hirson gives the date of his introduction to Evans and Laredo as 1961; according to Laredo it is 1959. It may be that Hirson had already informally met Laredo two years before and that his account of their meeting refers only to their introduction to each other after 1960 as possible members of an underground resistance.

⁹² Interview with Baruch Hirson. *loc. cit.*: Interview with David Kitson. Harare, 4 February 1990.

⁹³ Baruch Hirson, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁹⁴ Interview with John Laredo. *loc. cit.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

had as whites seemed to them to place on them an even greater responsibility to act; the question "what are you doing politically?" was now being posed with increasing insistence by those of their post-graduate African friends at the University of Natal who had escaped detention. As Laredo puts it, "One felt a political imperative, perhaps even a moral imperative that given what was happening in the country, that we had to do something."⁹⁷

And almost as unthinkingly, it seemed clear that this "something" was sabotage. Laredo and Evans were conscious of the writings of Guevara, and the collapse of the Cuban regime seemed to have particular relevance for the explosive situation that followed the Sharpeville massacre. In these conditions it seemed that even a small group of guerillas, given the correct political conditions, could spark a major uprising. The notion of an underground sabotage organisation had become increasingly attractive and seemed all of a sudden realistic. This was especially so because of the extent of the crisis the state had apparently been plunged into after Sharpeville:

"There was definitely a feeling in the aftermath of Sharpeville, in the financial crisis that occurred because of all the money that was withdrawn from the country; in the shooting of Verwoerd, that the government did not quite know what it was going to do, that things were never going to be the same again."⁹⁸

It was only in 1962, however, that the possibility of sabotage was to become real.

4.4 John Lang's group

Laredo and Evans were not the only - and definitely not the main - grouping of radicalised liberals that influenced the development of the NCL/ARM. There was another person who was involved, like Hirson, in making contact with different underground groupings at the time: John Lang. Lang is perhaps the most enigmatic single figure in the story of the NCL/ARM, and the lack of information about his activities certainly constitutes a serious gap in our story. If the history of the NCL/ARM as a whole has to be pieced together from incomplete sources, this goes doubly for Lang.

Lang was in some ways the political opposite of Hirson. Though he was a member of the Liberal Party, he had a range of political friends and contacts which stretched across a wide spectrum, including people with backgrounds as diverse as the Torch Commando and the

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

Communist Party.⁹⁹ Lang, as Myrtle Berman remembers, was "a man with a good network",¹⁰⁰ closely linked to his aptitude for making and maintaining such contacts was his flair - of which he was quite proud - for fund-raising.¹⁰¹ An investigation of the way in which he handled the money he acquired from the Ghanaian government reveals something of his eventual political intentions.

Lang's own political agenda seems to have extended beyond merely aiding and abetting the NCL in their activities. The larger part of this money Lang spent on a boat, named **Torquil**, which was capable of carrying a load of up to 16 tons, and which he kept at Southampton docks in England.¹⁰² While Hirson and Berman were preparing for sabotage, he was evolving an underground network of his own. By the end of 1961 he was in contact with a wide range of groupings. Firstly, he had made contact with a group of Liberal Party members, based mainly in Cape Town, who were contemplating a shift toward sabotage. Among these were Randolph Vigne, the vice-chair of the Liberal Party and later editor of the liberal journal **The New African** and Eddie Daniels, "coloured" member of the Cape provincial executive of the Liberal Party and brother of the Cape Town city councillor N. J. Daniels. Also among his Cape Town contacts was the ex-National president of NUSAS Neville Rubin.

Lang had also made political contacts in the Transvaal. Once again, only indirect evidence is available, in the form of a confidential memorandum, dated 15 August 1961, from the Rand Daily Mail journalist Benjamin Pogrund to his news editor.¹⁰³ According to this memorandum, Pogrund had been informed by an African friend, (a "former ANC official") that he had been employed by John Lang at a salary of R70 a month to do "organisational work". This work consisted in the formation of "committees" of up to five Africans each, with the purpose of destroying grain bins and dams on white-owned farms in the Transvaal. Lang had been vague on the precise methods of destruction, but had said that these would be made clear later. Pogrund's informant was under the impression that explosives would be brought in from overseas. Lang had also told him that negotiations were under way for Israeli instructors to be brought in to train them. The plan was for the Israeli trainers to be based on farms in Swaziland and Bechuanaland, where they would train "committee members" who would visit them, posing as farm labourers. Pogrund's informant told him that between May and August

⁹⁹ Interview with Monty Berman. *loc. cit.* According to some sources, Lang's wife was rumoured to have been a communist: this may have accounted for some of these links (G. H. C. Bing. **Reap the Whirlwind**, pp. 323 - 324.)

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Myrtle Berman. *loc. cit.*

¹⁰¹ According to an anonymous memorandum in the Paton Papers (BCZA C4(ii)a. p. 2.) he liked to boast of his ability to get money from abroad.

¹⁰² Interview with Adrian Leftwich. York. 24 April 1989.

¹⁰³ AAS 254. Reel 13 (FI 697).

1961 he had already organised 85 such structures, working with former ANC members known to him.¹⁰⁴ Pogrud adds, interestingly, that his informant had told him that this activity had nothing to do with "Mandela and his crowd", though he had heard that Mandela was doing something "along similar lines".¹⁰⁵

Lang also had some connection with a shadowy secessionist grouping based in Natal variously called the "Horticulturalists" and the "Cricketers".¹⁰⁶ Not much information is available on this grouping,¹⁰⁷ but some clues as to their activities and political agenda are provided by reports surrounding the arrest and trial of some of their members in a police crackdown on 22 May 1961, just days before the Republic celebrations.¹⁰⁸ Four people,¹⁰⁹ some of them members of the United English-Speaking South Africans (UNESSA) were arrested, and at the Durban home of one, police found explosives and home-made bombs. Evidence seems to indicate that these were probably members of the "Horticulturalist"/"Cricketer" group.¹¹⁰

According to a memorandum submitted during their trial as evidence by the state, the purpose of the group was to bring Natal "into a state of spiritual and moral insurrection" so that "at the appropriate moment", the organisation's leadership could step in and "proclaim Natal's physical independence".¹¹¹ The memorandum stated that "the arbitrary use of force, while not contemplated at the present time, cannot be ignored" but warned that "[the] Natal stand cannot succeed if it is to depend on armed action, at least not under present circumstances". The sought-after "state of spiritual and moral insurrection" would instead be built up by a campaign of affirmative and defiant acts by citizens. Examples of such "acts" were the periodical boycotting of government transport and postal services, preferential purchase of Natal produce, and insistence on the playing of "God save the Queen" in all Natal cinemas. The accused were

104

ibid.

105

ibid.

106

Hirson, "The State of Emergency", p. 3.

107

See P. S. Thompson, *Natalians First: Separatism in South Africa, 1909 - 1961* (Johannesburg, Southern, 1990), pp. 163 - 166 for an account of some of their activities.

108

"Late-night swoop on Natal homes", *Cape Times*, 24 May 1961

109

According to *The Cape Times* of 14 September 1961 ("Beethoven and V-Sign at Durban trial") they were Michael Mallinick (Johannesburg), A.P. Bannon (Durban), P. Graham (Durban) and a woman, G.Lee.

110

According to Thompson (*op. cit.*, p. 165) the Horticulturalists as a group opposed sabotage, and rejected the suggestion of some members of UNESSA that the Nationalists should be "driven into the sea". A connection between the arrested grouping and the Horticulturalists should therefore not be made automatically. There is, however, some circumstantial evidence that does indicate such a link. Firstly, Thompson observes that some of their more hot-headed members did vocally support the idea of arming against the Nationalists (p. 166). Furthermore, he links the Horticulturalists to the very Freedom Radio activities of which the four arrested persons were accused (see footnote 112 below). More evidence as to their links with Lang is discussed in footnote 115 below.

111

Op. cit., *Cape Times*, 14 September 1961

also charged with running an illegal radio station, which had broadcast in the 1950s and after the Emergency under the name of "Freedom Radio".¹¹²

How Lang saw his relation to these groupings is not clear. There are few indications of his own political views and eventual agenda. An interesting clue to his possible intentions is provided in a document reproduced in *The New African*,¹¹³ an anonymous and undated MA thesis in the possession of UNISA's Documentation Centre for African Studies.¹¹⁴ This document, according to the author of the thesis, is an unsigned report written by John Lang in late 1961. It is an application for funds from an anonymous donor who seems to be sponsoring underground resistance activity in South Africa. The application provides a great deal of factual information, but this is not what makes it important for our purposes. Its most interesting feature - and one that gives us some insight into Lang's purpose - lies in the way in which the different assertions are linked together.

It details a wide list of underground activities, many of which can be confirmed, either through documentary evidence or by the affirmation of erstwhile NCL/ARM members. The activities of the "Freedom Radio" monarchists in Natal, are thus described,¹¹⁵ as are the doings of the NCL

¹¹² **Ibid.** See P.S. Thompson's description (*op. cit.*, p. 164) of the Horticulturalist's "Freedom Radio" activities. Although Thompson's description relates to the early 1960's, some newspaper reports indicate that there had been earlier broadcasts, which had ceased after June 15, 1958. Broadcasts took place again on 30 October 1960 and 2 and 9 April 1961 (see AD 1912 "Freedom Radio on air again", *The Rand Daily Mail* 31 October 1960 and "Freedom' Broadcast", *The Rand Daily Mail*, and 10 April 1961). No more broadcasts took place after the police raid.

¹¹³ I thank Doug Tilton for drawing my attention to this document.

¹¹⁴ AAS 143. This document provides a wealth of surprising evidence about Lang's activities. Its claims should however not automatically be accepted as beyond doubt. Some discussion of its credibility seems therefore to be in order. The thesis, which appears to have been written in the late 1970's, seems to be the same text as a research work of the same title referred to by Gordon Winter in his book *Inside Boss*. Winter mentions a book called *The New African* written by Piet Swanepoel, the then head of the white suspects division in BOSS (see *Inside Boss*, p. 572). Although it is generally not clear how trustworthy Winter's information is, his account of the contents of this work seems to correspond with the contents of the mysterious thesis.

In the thesis, the writer attempts to prove the existence of links - if not a conspiracy - between the CIA and international socialist movements. The lynchpin of his argument is his conjecture that the NCL/ARM was itself funded by the CIA. The main evidence for this argument is the fact that Randolph Vigne an NCL/ARM member, seems to have received CIA funding for his journal *The New African* through the Congress for Cultural Freedom (AAS 143, p. 3). It should be stated that although this allegation seems to be correct - the *New African* did unknowingly receive CIA funds (interview with Randolph Vigne, London, 2 May 1989; see also editorial, *New African*, December 1966) - that does not by any means prove that the NCL/ARM was thus funded. As I show, there is far more circumstantial evidence that the money came from Ghana. The CIA thesis, for example, does not account for the funding difficulties the NCL/ARM encountered once Lang had left (see my discussion on p. 113 below).

The **documentary** evidence quoted by the unnamed author in support of his claims seems, however, to be authentic, and tends in its concrete details to be confirmed by other independent accounts. Though the thesis itself should therefore not be seen as an incontrovertible source of information, I have made judicious use of the facts quoted in evidence. I have discussed the weight and reliability of individual allegations where I have made use of them.

¹¹⁵ The document refers to a group in Natal, more than forty in number, who broadcast on Sunday evenings under the name of Freedom Radio, and who had access to explosives. Lang refers to the fact that

in Johannesburg.¹¹⁶ The discussions of the Socialist League are mentioned¹¹⁷ and the document also refers to Lang's own efforts, described in the Pogrund memorandum, to build underground cells in the townships.¹¹⁸ Other allegations are more difficult to verify and indeed surprising - for example, that there were large groups operating in Pretoria and Cape Town,¹¹⁹ that headquarters had been established in Swaziland adjacent to an airfield¹²⁰; that £500 had been donated towards the organisation of the ANC's stayaway on Republic Day in 1961 and that money had been given to the PAC.¹²¹ All this information seems to indicate that Lang had a surprisingly wide range of contacts in South African underground life.

But what is interesting is that Lang creates the impression that all the activities mentioned have been organised by a single entity - which he calls "The Group".¹²² To this "Group" he attributes an agency of its own, an agency that supersedes and includes the activities of the various smaller groupings. It suggests that there were close links between "The Group" and the ANC regarding the establishing of Umkhonto. It claims, for example, that after the failure of the April 1961 stay-at-home "when Mr Mandela announced that his followers were considering direct action," a meeting took place at which Duma Nokwe of the ANC and a representative of the "Group" were present. Nokwe had told the representative that the ANC were contemplating a turn to sabotage, and the "Group" representative had reportedly responded that there should be close links between the two organisations, promising to supply explosives and detonators as soon as it was in a position to do so.¹²³

Upon close scrutiny, though, it is clear that these claims need to be treated with caution. Lang alleges, for example, that the "Group" decided, at a National meeting held over a weekend, to

116 **Op. cit.**, p. 156. According to this document, this group had "recently... undertaken the destruction of certain pass offices and tax offices". This is a clear reference to the NCL's 26 September attack (see p. 76 above).

117 Lang mentions that contact has been made with "a group of socialists" who were planning to organise Africans "in every town and village", but who have made very little progress (**op. cit.**, p. 154). This was almost certainly the SLA - see my discussion of Lang's relation with this organisation on p. 100 below.

118 **Ibid.** Lang's reference to the fact that he is employing three persons, one of whom was an ex-member of the African National Congress, seems to be a clear reference to the person mentioned by Pogrund (see p. 89 above).

119 **Op. cit.**, p. 155.

120 **Op. cit.**, pp. 148 - 149, 156. According to the Bermans, Lang's reference to a base in Swaziland may have been a reference to his friend Robin Scott Smith, who could fly and who was in Swaziland at the time. As I point out later (see p. 93 below), Lang's document is marked by a distinct tendency to exaggeration.

121 **Op. cit.**, p. 150.

122 Doug Tilton suggests in his thesis, *From non-violence to sabotage*, that this "Group" refers to the NCL (p. 88 footnote 79). As I show in these pages, this is highly improbable, since many of the activities attributed to the "Group" had nothing to do with the NCL.

123 AAS 143, p. 154.

complete a thorough reconnaissance of the areas of operations, and to select limited objectives for training purposes:

"It is therefore proposed to attempt at an early stage to achieve the disruption of the telephone services by the wholesale destruction of telephone lines on a night in August. Thereafter selected targets for burning such as the pass offices, police stations, granaries should be tackled systematically".¹²⁴

It also decided that its most urgent need was explosives and training in the use of explosives. To this end it decided that it ought to seek a "suitable instructor from Europe" who would be taken to Swaziland to run "weekly courses for groups and cells from all over the country".¹²⁵

NCL members - even those who knew and co-operated with Lang - strenuously deny that anything of the kind could have happened. Lang, according to Monty Berman, had no say in the direction of the early NCL, and no-one ever discussed policy with him. His role was only to provide resources. But there does seem to have been at least a grain of truth in the story. As I have shown, the NCL was involved in the destruction of at least one telephone line, and this operation may have been discussed in its ranks.¹²⁶ Furthermore, as I have indicated, there is independent evidence in Pogrud's memo that Lang **had** contemplated bringing instructors to Swaziland.¹²⁷ But these developments occurred **independently** from each other. Any allegation that these two decisions are linked through the agency of a national "Group" is, at least according to those who were involved, pure fiction. It is of course not impossible that the NCL members, without knowing it, were simply cell members of an even larger group. But this is unlikely, to say the least, seeing that no independent evidence can be found of any such "National Meeting" taking place. If "The Group" existed, it left no trace of its existence other than the claims made in this document - and, furthermore, it mysteriously evaporated after 1961.

What is far more likely is that the "Group" as portrayed in the fund application was an entity that existed only in the imagination of John Lang himself. This is supported by Monty Berman, who argues that "I think John really thought he was in charge of everything... I think that [we had] done some things and John knew about it, and all he was doing was expanding it in a way that made him look important".¹²⁸ Or, as Myrtle Berman puts it,

124 **Op. cit.**, p. 56.

125 **Ibid.**

126 See p. 76 above.

127 See p. 89 above.

128 Interview with Monty Berman. London. 3 June 1989.

"So far as I know there was a lot of discussion going on... but we never took it seriously.... This is where John is infinitely creative. If he is going to do a broad plan, he will take something that was once discussed... casually and put it into a... sequence".¹²⁹

What, in the end, can we learn from the claims made by this document? Was Lang merely fantasising? What is the meaning of the curious web of truth, half-truth and exaggeration we find in the fund application? One hypothesis alone seems to account for all the facts: that Lang was indeed in contact with a wide range of groupings, and that he hoped to bring them together in a single organisation. It seems that he hoped ultimately to control and coordinate the activities of the smaller groupings through his access to funds and resources. The exaggerated nature of his claims may help explain why Lang had been at all successful in getting funds from Ghana; as Monty Berman remarks, the document gives the reader the impression of dealing with "half the liberation movement" instead of a few small and scattered groupings.¹³⁰

John Lang's hopes were not to bear fruit in the way he had intended. He did, however, play an important role in bringing together the different groupings that were eventually to form the NCL/ARM. Through his own and Hirson's activity, a network of sorts already existed, connecting the NCL, the Socialist League, John Laredo and Evans in Durban, Vigne, Daniels, and Rubin in Cape Town, ex-ANCYL members in the Transvaal, as well as the "Freedom Radio" group in Natal. Towards the end of 1961, these groupings now started moving closer to each other. Some time before August 1961, Rhoda Prager introduced Hirson to John Lang. Lang suggested the possibility of fusion between the NCL and Hirson's group, but Hirson rejected this, apparently because of Berman's SACP connections.¹³¹ He agreed to maintain contact, however, a fact that Lang seems to have found encouraging.¹³² As a result of this, Hirson attended a meeting of some of Lang's contacts. Besides Hirson and Lang the meeting was attended by Cox (from the NCL), Vigne and Daniels from Cape Town, and what Hirson called "Unessa types" - the remaining members, it seems of the "horticulturalist/cricketer" group.¹³³

¹²⁹ Interview with Myrtle Berman, *loc. cit.*

¹³⁰ Interview with Monty Berman, *loc. cit.*

¹³¹ See BCZA 77/25 C4(ii)h, p. 1.

¹³² Lang claims, in the New African document, that a merger *did* take place. In his reference to his contact with the "group of socialists" in Johannesburg (see footnote 117 above), he says that "this group has united with the main group and its leader is a member of the planning and executive command of the whole organisation" (AAS 143, p.154). This is another example of the difficulties this document presents to the person wishing to get at the truth of politics of the underground movements of the 1960s. There is no evidence that the SLA amalgamated with Lang's group at the time. Neither is it likely that Lang is referring to another organisation: the meeting between Lang and Hirson did occur more or less at the time (late 1961) referred to in the document. Lang's allegation therefore seems to be due to his already mentioned tendency to stretch the truth: Hirson's willingness to remain in contact with him could conceivably (at a pinch!) have been interpreted as a "merger".

¹³³ Baruch Hirson, "The State of Emergency", p. 4.

At this meeting, many of the hitherto loose threads of this network seemed to be slowly drawing together. Reports on the various groups' activities were given, notably on the airplane and discussions on mapping illegal routes across the country's borders.¹³⁴ Neither Hirson nor Vigne were however very impressed. According to Hirson, "most of the meeting was devoted to madcap ideas about putting bent nails on the Durban-Johannesburg Road..." Vigne was just as uncomplimentary. In his opinion, many of the members, particularly the Natalians, were "still fighting the Boer war".¹³⁵ Hirson reported his disillusionment to the other members of the SLA, but he was told to keep in touch.

At the end of 1961, a series of events occurred that were to remove the last remaining obstacles to union. Firstly, Berman was tipped off by a friendly source in the Security Police that he was in danger of being arrested. Berman does not think that this was due to his membership of the NCL; it is far more likely, according to him, that although he was no longer listed as a member of the Communist Party, the security police still suspected him of membership. This had been a difficulty already discussed in the organisation: Berman's prominence might attract attention to the organisation. Not wishing to expose the NCL to such risk, he and his wife decided to leave the country.¹³⁶ Shortly after this, Lang also had to leave South Africa in a hurry. Accounts of the reason for his decision to leave vary: according to one version his second fund application to Ghana had been intercepted by the police at Jan Smuts Airport as it was being taken out of the country by Ambrose Zwane, a Swazi politician.¹³⁷ Other sources have it that he had been accused of embezzling trust fund monies.¹³⁸

These developments left Hirson in a crucial position. He had remained in touch with Vigne and Daniels and was now probably the only person linking together all the groups in the loose network. The slow process that had started with the Sharpeville crisis was now quickening, and soon irrevocable steps towards the constitution of a new national organisation would be taken.

134 **Ibid.**

135 Interview with Randolph Vigne, *loc. cit.*

136 Interview with Monty Berman, 5 May 1989.

137 This is alleged by Hirson *op. cit.*, p. 4. If this version is correct, it would tend to corroborate the authenticity of the document quoted in the *New African* thesis, and make Gordon Winter's claim that the thesis originated from BOSS more credible, since it would explain how the report fell into the hands of the authorities.

138 Interview with Hugh Lewin, Harare, 4 February 1990; AD 1931 Aa p. 138 - 139.

4.5 The African Freedom Movement

The next crucial step in the unification of the different groupings occurred when the person who introduced Hirson to the Durban group told him of still another organisation which had independently decided to go over to sabotage.

It was called the African Freedom Movement (AFM), and it had been formed simultaneously with the NCL but in the black section of Pretoria Local.¹³⁹ When this grouping contacted Hirson, they found to their mutual surprise that they knew each other. The AFM included the ANCYL dissenters he had met through the Goldbergs.¹⁴⁰ Hirson's AFM contacts were Milton Setlhapelo, Johannes Dhladhla and Willie Tibane, who apparently led the group.¹⁴¹ Another member, Samuel Olifant, was also an ex-ANC member, though he had joined the Liberal Party and now worked at the South African Institute of Race Relations.

The African Freedom Movement was organised according to a cell system, and Hirson never made contact with any but a small part of it. Its full membership is therefore unknown. It is worth pointing out, though, that although Stephen Segale, the dissident ANCYL member Hirson had met before, is never mentioned as a member of the AFM, he was also among those incarcerated at Pretoria Jail when the grouping was formed.¹⁴² Also among the same group of detainees were Theo Musi, who had also been present at some of the discussions with Hirson, and Jerry Mbuli, who would later be involved in the NCL/ARM's sabotage activities.¹⁴³

The AFM is no less shadowy than the other groups described. According to later testimony for the State by Willie Tibane, their aims were socialist,¹⁴⁴ and although there was no clarity on the exact course of action to be taken to realise this goal,¹⁴⁵ there was at that time already a "consensus of opinion" that they "were prepared to use violence as a means".¹⁴⁶ Samuel Olifant

139 Baruch Hirson. *op. cit.*, p. 5.

140 *Ibid.*, also interview. *loc. cit.*

141 BCZA 77/25 C4(11)h, p. 1.

142 His name is one of the 89 mentioned in a letter from black ex-emergency detainees at Pretoria Jail to the Minister of Justice, B.J. Vorster, dated 6 August 1960, complaining about medical and other conditions during their detention (AAS 254, Reel 7 (FI 691)).

143 *Ibid.*

144 **S v Hirson**, testimony of Willie Tibane, p. 14. Because the Hirson trial was never the subject of an appeal to a higher court, no finally sorted and numbered court record is available in the archives of the Pretoria Supreme Court. The task of sorting the often misnumbered, chronologically jumbled and incorrectly attributed trial record is therefore left to the reader. To ascertain clarity of reference I have numbered the evidence of each witness separately and have tried to indicate the few instances where evidence was given by a recalled witness. For brevity's sake, I have used a system of notation with the name of the main defendant in bold to identify the trial in question, followed by a slash (/) and the name of the witness. The above reference would thus be rendered "**Hirson/Tibane**, p. 14". Because numbering is explicit in the other court records quoted, I have not had to resort to that system there, and it is used only to refer to the Hirson trial.

145 *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

146 *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

would later also turn State witness, and would testify that the AFM had a membership which numbered "an average of between 1500" (sic). This figure seems inflated, however: "...when we formed the National Committee for Liberation and I was given to maintain contact with the groups from a list that Milton had given to [Eisenstein] and I went around to these people and tried to find out whether they were members of the organisation, I continually reported that membership was decreasing".¹⁴⁷ Raymond Eisenstein remembers that at the time of fusion with the NCL, AFM strength was counted at about 140 members, and even this figure seems to have referred to "paper" members.¹⁴⁸ According to Dhladhla, who also testified for the State, the black membership of the Transvaal NCL in 1963 included the entire AFM, - in other words, a figure of about 5 or 6 people.¹⁴⁹

The extent of the co-operation between the AFM and the Socialist League is just as unclear. According to AFM members who testified in later trials, Tibane and Setlhapelo from the AFM and Hirson, Rhoda Prager and Raymond Eisenstein from the Socialist League met at Hirson's house in March 1961 and discussed the aims and objects of their organisations in order to see whether there was any basis for the two organisations merging.¹⁵⁰ There was consensus on the need for a transition to violence as well as a commitment to socialism.¹⁵¹ About two weeks later they met again, this time with SLA member Philip Green and Olifant present as well. At this meeting the two organisations merged, keeping the name of the African Freedom Movement.¹⁵² The new enlarged AFM appointed Willie Tibane as their full-time organiser, a position for which he was to be paid R14 a week.¹⁵³ After the merger the AFM had regular fortnightly meetings at Hirson's house attended, apparently, by Olifant, Setlhapelo, Hirson, and Green.¹⁵⁴

Aside from these meetings, the merger does not seem to have meant any major changes for the Socialist League. The AFM had a membership oath promising loyalty to the AFM under pain of death,¹⁵⁵ but according to trial evidence efforts to make SLA members take it met with resistance; even Hirson and Eisenstein refused to take it.¹⁵⁶ In fact, the accounts of SLA members such as Eisenstein, Kaplan and NCL/ARM members such as the Bermans do not

147 **Hirson/Olifant**, p. 46.

148 Interview with Raymond Eisenstein. *loc. cit.*

149 **Hirson/Dhladhla**, p. 18.

150 **Hirson/Tibane**, pp. 2 - 3.

151 **Hirson/Olifant**, p. 14.

152 **Hirson/Tibane**, pp. 3 - 4.

153 **Ibid.** He occupied this post for two months, and then went "on leave" (see p. 4). According to Olifant's testimony, Hirson was at this stage the leading figure in the organisation (**Hirson/Olifant**, p. 11).

154 **Ibid.**

155 **Hirson/Olifant**, pp. 11 - 12; **Hirson/Dhladhla**, p. 13.

156 **Hirson/Olifant**, pp.13 - 14.

even mention any such merger. Kaplan took four Africans for a study group on the Chinese revolution, but she did not even know who they were or whether they belonged to the AFM.¹⁵⁷ Hirson and the AFM members' discussions remained abstract, revolving around the logistics of sabotage - "the grading of compasses and the reading of maps".¹⁵⁸ Eventually the AFM decided to go over to action, and the group embarked on what they called "Operation D". Milton Setlhapelo was to be sent to Morocco to be trained in sabotage.¹⁵⁹ The AFM would pay for his trip there and for the maintenance of his wife while he was gone.¹⁶⁰

"Operation D" misfired from the beginning: Setlhapelo never came back.¹⁶¹ Later it transpired that he had lost touch with his contact in Tanganyika and had to stay in England. According to Samuel Olifant, he later went to Cuba, from which he was "suddenly pushed out"¹⁶² - allegedly because Tennyson Makiwane of the ANC had spread a rumour that he was a spy.¹⁶³ He returned to England, and though he was in contact with the Bermans, he was never again to be involved in the NCL/ARM. He later became a member of the ANC.¹⁶⁴

4.6 The formation of the NCL as a national grouping

In April 1962 there was a renewed attempt at fusion between the SL/AFM and the other groups.¹⁶⁵ On the weekend of 19-20 May 1962 - scarcely two months after the SLA's merger with the AFM and on the eve of Setlhapelo's departure to be trained as a guerilla - there was a long meeting in the house of Alex Cox, the liberal associated with John Lang and who had on occasion acted as a pilot for Monty Berman. The meeting lasted from early that afternoon till late in the night. It was attended by Hirson, Eisenstein and Green of the Socialist League; Olifant and Tibane of the AFM; Laredo and Evans from Durban, as well as persons who had some association with John Lang: Cox, Vigne, Daniels and a person called Yusuf Omar, who worked at a factory Cox owned.¹⁶⁶

157 Interview with Bernice Laschinger. *loc. cit.*

158 Hirson/Olifant. p. 209.

159 *Op. cit.*, pp. 16, 19; Hirson/Tibane p. 4.

160 Hirson/Olifant. p. 19.

161 BCZA 77/25 C4(ii)h p. 3.

162 Hirson/Olifant. p. 28.

163 Interview with Raymond Eisenstein. *loc. cit.*; Monty Berman *loc. cit.*

164 Ironically, he and Makiwane were later to be part of the "Gang of Eight" expelled from the ANC in 1976. Interview with Raymond Eisenstein. *loc. cit.* For a detailed discussion of their expulsion, see the Communist Party publication "The enemy hidden under the same colour: statement by the central committee on the Gang of Eight." **South African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party, 1915 - 1980** ed. Brian Bunting (London, Inkululeku, 1981) p. 402. See also Tom Lodge. **Black Politics in South Africa**. p. 303.

165 BCZA 77/25 C4(ii)h p. 3.

166 *Op. cit.*, p. 2. See also Hirson/Olifant pp. 17 - 18: it is worth noting that Olifant omits the names of Tibane, Laredo and Evans. The latter two omissions may be due to the fact that Olifant did not know them. This

Also at this meeting, to Hirson's amazement, was Monty Berman. Rhoda Prager had informed him of developments¹⁶⁷ and he had flown back to South Africa on a false passport supplied to him, along with funding for an airline ticket, by John Lang.¹⁶⁸ Berman shared Hirson's surprise: he was in fact privately horrified and mystified by the ideological turn the organisation seemed to be taking:

"I went back to South Africa - and at this meeting was Randolph Vigne and Baruch Hirson! That was a combination I could not believe. Baruch and I had actually come to [be] totally opposed to each other politically. I found his Trotskyism and rigidity quite awful. And suddenly all these **liberals** were part of the organisation, which had me floored! That really had me floored! I did not know where they had come from. I did not know them. I did not know who they were."¹⁶⁹

Berman seems however to have swallowed his doubts on that occasion, and Hirson and Vigne were able to go ahead with the process of fusing the two organisations. In the conversation that followed, it became clear that there were some areas of agreement: firstly, there was consensus that the different groups did indeed share similar socialist aims. Secondly, they agreed on the correctness of sabotage as a strategy. There was no in-depth discussion here. The advantages of sabotage seemed to have been simply assumed, and the discussion that followed seems to have skirted the ideological differences between the different people present by avoiding excessive concentration on questions of political principle and eventual goals. Most of the debate focused on practical and logistical arrangements:

"They were not talking about objectives. There was an assumption that what we were doing ... the activities of whatever political organisations we were in, [were continuing]. It was clearly anti-apartheid ... it was clearly part of the liberation struggle. But a great deal of time was spent at the meeting talking about when something was undertaken, how we were going to publicise this. More time was spent talking about how you distributed leaflets ..."

It was decided that the organisations would pool their resources and form a coordinating body called the NCL.¹⁷⁰ The organisation was to operate under this name until 1964, when it changed to the "African Resistance Movement". Hirson was elected secretary of the organisation, while Cox was to be its treasurer¹⁷¹.

would help to explain the confusion in the testimony about membership of the NCL/ARM's subcommittees, where Olifant regularly omits their names from subcommittees.

167

Baruch Hirson, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

168

Interview with Monty Berman, *loc. cit.* See also Hirson/Olifant, pp. 17 - 22; BCZA 77/25 C4(ii) h p. 2.

169

Interview with Monty Berman, *ibid.* Emphasis by interviewee.

170

Hirson/Olifant, pp. 21, 33; Hirson/Tibane, p. 5.

171

Hirson/Tibane, AD 1912. "U.K. committee mentioned in sabotage indictment" *Rand Daily Mail* 5 November 1964.

This caught at least some of those present a little unawares: Laredo and Evans had come to Johannesburg expecting more of the diet of tentative discussions they had become used to. Now, "what we came back with was the notion that this thing existed, that it was up and running."¹⁷²

¹⁷² Interview with John Laredo, *loc. cit.*

5

Sabotage in the NCL: 1962-1964

There is no more usual basis of union than mutual misunderstanding.

Henry James

5.1 The new NCL: its structure and political programme

The NCL was now an organisation with something resembling a national structure. In the first place there were the two main branches in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Then there was a small branch in Durban, composed of Laredo and Evans. In addition, branches later seem to have existed in Grahamstown or Port Elizabeth.¹ Another committee was in London, consisting of the Bermans, assisted at least for a while by John Lang and Neville Rubin. This branch had no real power to make decisions; all decisions had to be approved by South Africa.² Its main purpose was to raise funds.

At the merger meeting Baruch Hirson read out a manifesto or political programme for this new group. This document, which apparently reflected Hirson's perspective on the thinking in the SLA and the AFM, was accepted as reflecting the NCL's policy as well.³ They also adopted a constitution which spelt out the structure of the new organisation.⁴ A National Central

¹ No Grahamstown cell of the NCL was ever uncovered and none of the co-conspirators mentioned in the State's accusations were members of a cell there. There seems to be some evidence that such a cell existed. These relate to the mysterious goings-on at that campus during the time of the state crackdown on the NCL/ARM. According to contemporaneous reports, four Rhodes students (Anthony Carter, Malcolm Sobey, Jillian Gane and Gavin Trevelyan) disappeared from the campus on 7 August 1964 ("Rhodes University Students: Security Find in Garden", *The Argus*, 12 August 1964). Shortly after that security police were reportedly observed to dig up an "object" variously described as a radio and a tin trunk from the garden of a house occupied by two of them. The four were later granted political asylum in Swaziland (*ibid.*) Police later denied knowledge of the "object" or any search of the grounds of the house in question ("Police deny finds in garden", *The Argus* 13 August 1964).

Further hints regarding the existence of a Grahamstown branch can be found in the court records. Rosemary Wentzel testified in court that she and another member, Michael Wade, had traveled to Grahamstown "to make Grahamstown feel that they were not isolated and on their own". (Hirson/Wentzel, p. 17) Eisenstein also apparently accompanied her on this trip. Eddie Daniels also seems to have made NCL-related trips to Port Elizabeth (Eddie Daniels, *Spent 15 years on Robben Island*, (unpublished typescript, n.d.) p. 10). It may be, of course, that the two branches were one and the same: the University of Rhodes incorporated both campuses, so that a branch in either centre could conceivably have had some presence in the other.

² Hirson/Olifant, p. 42.

³ Interview with Baruch Hirson, London 15 May 1989. The text of this document is reproduced in Appendix 1, Document 1.

⁴ *S v Hirson*, Exh M5(1).

Committee (NCC) was to be the central authority in the NCL. It was to function as its "active political centre" and would "direct the action and organisation of the membership".⁵ Membership was drawn from every centre in the country.⁶ Between full meetings, its work was to be carried out by a Working Committee consisting of those of its members who resided on the Witwatersrand, together with members from other centres who could attend.⁷ It was decided that a National meeting would be held once every three months.⁸ Each region was to have its own Regional Committee which was to be completely autonomous as far as was compatible with the centrality of the NCC.⁹ It was supposed to meet once a fortnight and besides having to take all decisions affecting the region in matters of political activity, was responsible for all recruitment in the area.¹⁰ The actual work in each region was to be carried out by subcommittees drawn from the cells.

That both these documents - Hirson's "manifesto" and the constitution - were accepted is quite clear. What is problematic is the question of their status as texts inside the organisation. At first glance, it seems surprising that groupings so ideologically dissimilar could have fallen in so easily with Hirson's description of their purposes. Hirson's manifesto (which described the SLA as "the independent movement of the workers of Africa")¹¹ could hardly have been taken by all present as an accurate reflection of the NCL's nature. Yet fall in they did - almost without discussion. Instead, talk was devoted almost entirely to the practicalities of sabotage, while the manifesto itself appears to have been ignored henceforward. Indeed, accounts of the acceptance of that manifesto are absent from all but a few members' later description of the merger meeting. People who joined the NCL/ARM later seem to have been ignorant of such a document being accepted at all.¹² This seems to indicate that the lack of argument about the manifesto reflected not so much a total agreement with Hirson's views by the politically divergent members present but rather a disinterest in ideological issues and an overriding desire to go ahead with concrete action.

This interpretation is supported by a close investigation of the constitution. Here, too, it seems as if there is a conflict: while members describe the purpose of the NCL as nothing but a "co-ordinating committee", the constitution with its talk of political centres gives an impression of a much more centralised body. But the constitution, for all its elaborate descriptions of the

5 **Ibid.**
 6 **Ibid:** see also **Hirson/Olifant**, p. 35.
 7 **Ibid.:** **S v Hirson**, Exh M5(1)
 8 **Ibid.:** **Hirson/Olifant**, p. 34.
 9 **Ibid.:** **S v Hirson**, Exh M5(1)
 10 **Ibid.**
 11 See Appendix, Document 1.
 12 **Hirson/Leftwich** p. 34

relation of the various Regional Committees to each other, did not affect the working of the different groupings to any great degree. The text of the constitution itself contains some clues. The National Central Committee is described as the "supreme authority", responsible for directing the action of the membership, while at the same time the Regional Committee is made responsible for taking "all decisions in the region in matters of political activity, leafleting, action, etc." The effect of this is that the issue of the relation between the Regional Committees and the NCC is left crucially vague.

This is most obvious in the statement that the Regional Committee was to be "completely autonomous" as far as was compatible with the final authority of the NCC. This seems to have meant that in practice, each branch was left more or less to its own devices. As one member was to point out during the trial, the National Committee, without any sanctions with which to enforce its authority, simply had to trust the Regional Committees, which were in return "free to disobey" the high command.¹³ In other words, it looks as if the National Central Committee was not so much a "political centre" as a co-ordinating body at which matters like the allocation of resources and the national co-ordination and timing of attacks could be sorted out.¹⁴

This should help clarify some of the factors that bound the NCL together in spite of the differences between the groupings and made co-operation worthwhile. Unification did not mean that any group had to make much of a compromise vis a vis its own programme. Groups were left free to pursue their own ends as before. The consent to Hirson's programme shows, not that he had won them over, but that what he was saying simply did not matter much to them. For some members, ideology was genuinely irrelevant: there was an enemy to be fought and what mattered was the willingness to join the fight. Some of them, like Laredo and Lewin, seem to have ended up in the NCL, not through any principled refusal to be involved with Congress-affiliated organisations, but because of their political roots and the vagaries of the process of their recruitment.¹⁵

But although there were no overt divisions, differences still existed. The fact that battle was not joined at the ideological level indicates simply that some of the members pursued their aims on another level. It is quite clear that more than one person saw the formation of the new organisation as an opportunity for their own group to extend its influence. Monty Berman still had "a certain attachment to Congress"¹⁶ and in spite of his doubts regarding Hirson and the liberals he seemed to keep on hoping that he could swing the organisation closer to Congress,

¹³ *S v Daniels*, p. 120

¹⁴ Interview with John Laredo, Leeds, 22 April 1989. *Hirson/Olifant*, p. 24.

¹⁵ Interview with Laredo, *loc. cit.*: Interview with Hugh Lewin, Harare, 3, 4 February 1990.

¹⁶ Interview with Baruch Hirson, London, 15 May 1989.

"because I believed that we ought to be working together in parallel."¹⁷ According to him "our hope was that we would form a sufficiently strong - 'military wing' if you like - that would support the ANC to take over power."¹⁸

Other NCL members like Baruch Hirson and Bernice Kaplan were far more antagonistic to Congress. For them the aim was still to build an alternative workers' movement. Sabotage was desirable because it would hopefully inspire the most militant workers to unite around the NCL. It seems that they hoped thus to fulfill, in the long term, Hirson's hope of building a working-class party. Unification brought the SLA the advantages of the resources which the NCL seemed to have at its command. In addition, Hirson had hopes of influencing the direction of other groups in accordance with his plans for the Socialist League. This was the reason behind his apparently mystifying description of the NCL as the independent workers of Africa. Once again (as with Hirson's descriptions of the Socialist League) this description seems to reflect his intentions for the group rather than any illusions as to its actual nature. Though he was conscious that this organisation was far from the grouping he had in mind, and had no illusions that the constitution really reflected their point of view, he proposed the constitution because that is what he hoped the NCL would become.¹⁹ Later he was to state that, while he was conscious of the NCL's nature as an umbrella organisation, he also saw it potentially as an "extension of the Socialist League"²⁰.

A third position was occupied by Vigne and other liberal members. Though they shared Hirson's suspicion of the Communist Party to some extent, their hope was to win the ANC away from the Communist Party. They were concerned about the deep divisions between the ANC and PAC, which they saw as irrelevant to the struggle that lay ahead. If the mass support of the ANC could be won away from an ideologically preoccupied leadership which included the SACP, they felt, the main obstacle to unity between the ANC and PAC would be removed.²¹ Meanwhile Lang, as we have seen, tried to use his funds to bring together a group in which he could have some influence.

This situation, though promising advantages to each of the different organisations taking part in the merger meeting, was to constitute a serious problem in times ahead. Indeed, the NCL's

¹⁷ Interview with Monty Berman, London 5 May 1989.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* According to Eddie Daniels, there had been approaches by members of Umkhonto we Sizwe, who suggested the groups work together on a joint project: an unnamed NCL member objected, however, and threatened to leave the group if they worked with "communists" (interview with Eddie Daniels, Hout Bay, 18 October 1987).

¹⁹ Interview with Baruch Hirson. *loc. cit.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Interview with Randolph Vigne, London, 16 March and 2 May, 1989.

position was almost paradoxical: here was an organisation, engaged in the grim and serious business of underground armed struggle against apartheid, with no clear long-term programme about which its members were genuinely in accord. Indeed, the NCL was disunited about everything except the ultimate goal of a socialist South Africa, various shades of antagonism to the Communist Party, and a certain consensus about the immediate political value of demolishing power pylons. This consensus was never seriously discussed, and no serious attempt was ever made to theorise sabotage as a strategy.

This lack of unity was to be a crucial weakness in the organisation. In the first place, some informal "sabotage" of the NCL's own activities was committed. One of the AFM members, it later transpired, was in fact working for Umkhonto we Sizwe. NCL members were mystified: "His explosives never seemed to go off", writes Hirson, "... we learned later that he took the explosives straight to his contact in Umkhonto we Sizwe and handed them over."²² Furthermore, though the lack of a genuine political programme could to some extent be disregarded in the immediacy and excitement of disrupting ESCOM's services to the South African public, it would cause serious difficulties once the initial enthusiasm wore off and members had to confront the political problems facing them.. Given the lack of clarity about ultimate goals and suitable strategies to reach them, the NCL was unable to act in a unified and co-ordinated way on any basis other than that of simple pylon demolition. It was to take many months before even a beginning could be made to remedy these deficiencies.

5.2 Going over to action: sabotage after 1962

In the short term the NCL thus did not spend any more time in political discussion but set about becoming an efficient sabotage squad. First, the new organisation obtained access to explosives:²³ 7 boxes (350 lbs) of ammon dynamite were stolen at Witbank by Dhladhla, Eisenstein²⁴ Higgs and Green.²⁵ These were distributed at the first national meeting in September. Two were sent to Cape Town and one to Pietermaritzburg.²⁶ Then there was recruitment. Although there never was anything resembling a recruiting drive, the NCL did increase in size dramatically after the merger meeting in 1962, as a number of new recruits joined the organisation, drawn mostly from the ranks of the Liberal Party. In Johannesburg, new recruits included Harry Cohen, Rosemary Wentzel, Hugh Lewin (the features editor of

²² Baruch Hirson. "The State of Emergency". p. 5.

²³ Eisenstein recalls that the organisation, besides stealing dynamite, acquired the ability to manufacture explosives out of fertilisers (interview with Raymond Eisenstein. London. 16 April 1989).

²⁴ Hirson/Olifant. p. 39.

²⁵ See BCZA 77/25 C4(ii)a. p. 1.

²⁶ Hirson/Olifant. pp. 37. 39. 40. 62. 61.

Post, an African weekly)²⁷, John Lloyd (another journalist),²⁸ John Harris, and Dennis Higgs, a mathematics lecturer from Wits.

Here, Higgs was an especially valuable new member: to blow up pylons required much more than just dynamite and detonators. Skills were needed: members had to learn how to manufacture timing circuits, how to shape charges and how structures could most efficiently be brought down. Initially Philip Green was in charge of the explosives and the "technical side of things",²⁹ but it was Higgs who really made the NCL a technically viable operation. Higgs took care of the dynamite³⁰ and perfected a rudimentary timing circuit that could be sent to the various centres and re-assembled by members before they embarked on a job.³¹ Later, Wentzel was to describe him as the "driving force" behind the Johannesburg group.³² But by far the biggest influx of new liberals came from Cape Town, where new recruits included Alan Brooks, Tony Trew, Millie McConkey, Lynnete van der Riet, Stephanie Kemp, Spike De Keller, Robert Watson and a young man named Adrian Leftwich.

Watson was an especially important recruit. If the Johannesburg branch was lucky in recruiting Higgs's technical skill, Cape Town seemed doubly fortunate in acquiring Watson. Watson is another of the enigmatic figures that populate the history of the NCL/ARM. Born in South Africa, he had studied engineering for a while before working for the Chamber of Mines. Turning down the offer of an opportunity to study at the University of the Witwatersrand, he had enlisted in the Royal Engineers in 1956. He served as an officer in its paratroop brigade until October 1961, gaining experience of counter-insurgency work in Malaysia. In October 1961 he resigned and returned to South Africa. After serving as a minor official in the Department of Education he became disillusioned with the policies of apartheid.³³ How he came eventually to join the NCL is not clear; his chequered past meant, however, that he was the single NCL member with the most practical experience in working with explosives. His expertise was thus a vital complement to Higgs's technical knowledge.

Watson travelled to Johannesburg either at the end of 1962 or the beginning of 1963, and met Eisenstein, Rhoda Prager, Green and possibly Olifant, in order to discuss training. In 1963, he trained Leftwich, Daniels, van der Riet, McConkey,³⁴ Brooks and De Keller³⁵ from Cape Town

27 See AD 1912 "5 Jo'burg men named", *The Rand Daily Mail*, 2 October 1964.

28 AD 1912 "Sabotage in Dark Room". *The Rand Daily Mail*, 12 November 1964.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

30 *Hirson/Wentzel*, p. 14.

31 *Op. cit.*, p. 8, 14; see also *S v Daniels*, pp. 58, 132, 135.

32 *Hirson/Wentzel*, p. 23. It should be borne in mind that Wentzel may have been trying to shift the blame away from the members who were standing trial.

33 AD 1912 "Sabotage secrets revealed by Watson". *The Cape Times*, 1 June 1965.

34 *S v Daniels*, p. 47.

as well as (at least) Dhladhla and Green from Johannesburg³⁶ in the handling and use of explosives. He also worked out much of the mathematics and engineering of bringing down pylons, drawing up detailed diagrams and documents.³⁷ These were unaccountably saved, and would later be part of the State's overwhelming case against the organisation.

Besides this group of full members, there were others who were drawn only into the fringe of the organisation for limited tasks. Thus contact was made in Cape Town with a doctor³⁸ who would be willing to deal with injuries on a no-questions-asked basis,³⁹ while Higgs in Johannesburg stored dynamite in the flat of a student in the science faculty where he worked, Denis Capatos.⁴⁰ Later, he stored a suitcase of papers and explosives in the study of Helmstedt, a colleague at the University.⁴¹

The storage of explosives and other incriminating material was a serious problem. In Johannesburg, a steel trunk containing maps, clocks, gloves etc. was stored at Barnetts, a local firm,⁴² while in Cape Town members tended to take the risk of looking after the explosives themselves, which meant that the aging Witbank dynamite, growing progressively more unstable as the months went by, was passed on from member to member: it was stored for a time in Schneider's flat, after which it was in Watson's care. Later, it was stored in a room rented by the organisation in Claremont. It was moved to a new flat Schneider had taken, but when Schneider "took ill" it was finally moved, in what proved to be a fateful decision, to the flat of a very junior member of the organisation, Lynette van der Riet.⁴³

Security was also an important consideration. Letters were written in a "concealed" language: inside the country letters were disguised as business letters, while overseas correspondence paraded as family letters.⁴⁴ The NCL inherited from the AFM its cellular structure.⁴⁵ Each cell was to consist of two to five members⁴⁶ and were known to each other only through code names. These arrangements were far from perfect, and quite soon after the merger meeting, events occurred that nearly spelt disaster for the NCL before it had even got properly into its stride. Between April and June 1962, while Cox was overseas, Omar was caught with explosives that he

35

Op. cit. . p. 127.

36

Hirson/Olifant. p.44.

37

S v Daniels. p. 47.

38

Probably Bill Hoffenburg (interview with Amy Thornton. Cape Town, 14 November 1988).

39

S v Daniels. p. 122.

40

Hirson/Capatos. p. 1.

41

Hirson/Helmstedt. pp. 2 - 3.

42

Hirson/Viktor. pp. 1-3.

43

S v Daniels. pp. 59, 130, 157-158.

44

Hirson/Olifant. pp. 52, 72.

45

Hirson/Olifant. p. 27.

46

Hirson/Olifant. p. 25.

kept in a suitcase at Cox's factory and was charged with illegal possession of explosives. He was convicted, and imprisoned for 18 months.⁴⁷ Though the existence of the NCL remained a secret, Cox left the organisation as a result of this.⁴⁸

By 1963, the new NCL was ready to launch its national campaign of sabotage. Again, no central decision had been taken as to the nature of targets members had to attack. Later Adrian Leftwich was to testify in court that there was no specific view as to where sabotage would most hurt the South African government: "objects were selected [randomly] and almost flippantly".⁴⁹ Decisions rested with individual branches and, in practice, the members who were actually involved in the attack had to make up their minds for themselves.

"When you went out on reconnaissance trips... you decided on your own whether a target was good enough... We usually chose a likely target and we discussed it at a group meeting. Members of the group would then be aware of where the target was ... but they did not specifically know exactly where it was."⁵⁰

There was only one clear directive, and that was that human life was on no account to be endangered.⁵¹ This considerably complicated the business of sabotage, and increased the risks involved for NCL members: every target had to be carefully surveyed so as to make certain that there was no risk of injuring innocent bystanders.

Despite these problems, the NCL managed to become quite an active sabotage grouping. According to the charges later brought by the State - and it should be remembered that the State only alleged the attacks that it could prove - it launched 11 "attacks" on 16 different targets between 25 August 1962 and 18 June 1964, sometimes causing extensive damage.⁵² Altogether 11 power pylons were attacked.⁵³ Signal cables were also blown up on several occasions. In

47 Cox's mother paid his legal costs (BCZA 77/25 C4(ii)h. pp. 3 - 4).

48 *Ibid.*: See also Hirson/Olifant. p. 147.

49 Hirson/Leftwich. p. 18.

50 Hirson/Wentzel. p. 15.

51 Interviews with Eddie Daniels. Hout Bay 12 November 1989; Hugh Lewin. Harare. 3 February 1989; John Laredo. Leeds, 22 April 1989.

52 I refer only to acts of sabotage attributed to the Johannesburg and Cape Town groups. The Durban grouping was not accused of any acts of sabotage. According to Olifant (*Hirson/Olifant* p. 204) the Natal group was incapacitated because they were known to - and watched by - the police.

53 According to the state, the pylon attacks were:

25/26 August 1962 A power pylon near Putfontein police station, Benoni District (AD 1912 "Judge says no to squash plea from Prager". *The Rand Daily Mail*. 10 November 1964; Edward Feit. *op. cit.*, p. 329. item 45).

24 September 1963 Power Pylon between Denneboom and Eerstefabriek. (*op. cit. The Rand Daily Mail*. 10 November 1964).

9 October 1963: Power pylon between Phomolong and Mzimhlope (*ibid.*).

18 November 1963 attempted sabotage on pylon at Muldersvlei (This attack failed as the charge went off on the site (interview with Eddie Daniels. Hout Bay. 12 November 1988))

24 January 1964 Power traction mast between Irene and Lyttelton (AD 1912. *The Rand Daily Mail. op. cit.*, 10 November 1964.).

what was to be one of the NCL's most successful operations, it blew up cables at Woodstock, Mowbray, Rosebank, and Kenilworth on 3 September 1963,⁵⁴ causing a major disruption for commuters. The Johannesburg group emulated this on 24 January and 12 February 1964.⁵⁵ Other attacks, planned for equally spectacular effect, were not successful. There were two failed attacks on the Constantiaberg FM tower in Cape Town - one which had to be abandoned and another on 18 August 1963 in which the charges failed to go off as planned.⁵⁶ A number of attacks on power-lines in black townships around Johannesburg also failed, apparently because the explosives were simply being handed over to MK.⁵⁷

There were also projects that never got beyond the planning stage: a plan for burning down the Government Garage in Cape Town, for example, was abandoned as too complex and because the risk of taking human life was too great.⁵⁸ In addition, the NCL considered the possibility of harming agricultural production, either by incendiary attacks on wheat fields,⁵⁹ or by dusting crops with bacteria.⁶⁰ The complexities of blowing up really large targets, such as reservoirs, were investigated, and members speculated about the possibility of rescuing Robert Sobukwe from Robben Island⁶¹ - a project which seems to hark back to the early NCL's rescue-operation days.

Other plans stretched beyond the limitations of the field of sabotage to include preparation for a possible stage of guerilla warfare. In Cape Town, some members drew up a "do-it-yourself-sabotage pamphlet" that explained basic techniques such as the manufacture of petrol bombs and forms of low-level industrial sabotage. This pamphlet was to have been distributed in the townships, but the original had to be destroyed in a security scare.⁶² And in London members

11 May 1964 Pylon between Dube and Ikwezi (*Ibid.*).

18 June 1964 The Cape Town group attacked pylons at Fisantekraal near Durbanville, Stellenbosch Kloof and Lynedoch (*S v Daniels*, pp. 52 - 3, 147, 151). The attack on the Lynedoch pylon was not successful and had to be repeated on the following Sunday, 21 June 1964 (*op. cit.*, p.150).

In the Transvaal, power pylons at the farms Welgedacht and Vlakfontein in the district of Nigel were hit. The attack on the Nigel pylon was unsuccessful (*Hirson/Khumalo* p.1. *Hirson/Viktor*, p.1., *Hirson/Wentzel* p. 11).

54 *S v Daniels*, pp. 50., 84

55 AD 1912 *The Rand Daily Mail*, 10.11.64. *op. cit.* John Harris took part in the January attack. *Hirson/Wentzel*, p. 8.

56 *S v Daniels*, p. 135; Interview with Eddie Daniels, 12 November 1963.

57 See p. 105 above; *Hirson/Wentzel*, p. 13; AD 1912 "Judge says Defence is entitled to full talks". *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 November 1964.

58 *S v Daniels*, p. 57.

59 Interview with Eddie Daniels, Hout Bay, 5 June 1988.

60 *S v Daniels*, p. 63; AD 1912 "Use of germs was discussed - girl in court". *The Rand Daily Mail*, 3 November 1964.

61 *S v Daniels*, p. 163. See *S v Daniels* charge sheet, p. 4.

62 Interview with Eddie Daniels, Hout Bay, 18 October 1987.

investigated the possibilities for shipping arms to South Africa in the **Torquil**, offloading them on the Pondoland coast.⁶³

Another long-term project was the formation in 1963, by Rosemary Wentzel and Hugh Lewin in Johannesburg, of an "escape committee".⁶⁴ If members were being watched by or actually on the run from the police, it would be to the organisation's benefit if that member could be whisked out of the country quickly. It was therefore imperative that a detailed knowledge of the unmarked routes into Bechuanaland be built up, and a routine be worked out to deal with such eventualities. Wentzel's account of the routine is revealing:

"... anyone on the run would contact me... My home was to be phoned... They were to ask for Jack Rossouw four times. And I was to say "Sorry, wrong number". Within the hour of that they were to be picked up outside the cathedral. A black armad round their left arm and a newspaper underneath it. And I would take them out."⁶⁵

Rosemary Wentzel was later to be characterised as someone who was interested only in action, "in a somewhat boy-scoutish, devilish manner",⁶⁶ and the rather self-consciously cloak-and-dagger tone of the escape procedure⁶⁷ reveals something of the atmosphere of the NCL's activities at this stage. I have already pointed out the commitment to immediate action that characterised the NCL/ARM: to be part of the NCL/ARM was to be part of something that implied great risks, that demanded loyalty, courage and trust. This sense of shared moral commitment and trust made membership of the NCL at once an intensely demanding and greatly rewarding experience. In the words of Eddie Daniels:

"It felt good, you know. Because you were with like-minded people. And you realised that the people who you were with were people whom you could trust. Because they held your life or your future in their hands. And you held theirs in yours. And that brought about a great trust in each other. That there was that feeling of goodwill when we would meet... it was a wonderful thing! Here you had something in confidence, something of great danger... [W]hat always thrilled me about the people I knew: they were such lovely people, they were such gentle people, they were such nice people. And here they were taking all these tremendous risks because of an ideal. And... I really saluted them for that."⁶⁸

⁶³ Interview with Monty Berman. *loc. cit.*

⁶⁴ **Hirson/Wentzel**, pp. 4, 48.

⁶⁵ **Hirson/Wentzel**, p. 13. The Johannesburg escape committee functioned only once, when a man called Johnny Vilakazi, apparently connected with the AFM section of the organisation, was taken across the border (see **Hirson/Olifant**, pp. 69-70; **Hirson/Wentzel**, pp. 4, 6).

⁶⁶ See BCZA 77/25 C4(ii)f, p.2.

⁶⁷ The escape procedures in Cape Town had much the same flavour: "Wendy will be carrying a small red book and orange head-band. The escapee approaches her and asks, 'What is the time?' She will reply, 'What makes you think I've got a watch?' He will say, 'Because you are carrying that red book.'" (**S v Daniels**, Exh C18.)

⁶⁸ Interview with Eddie Daniels, Hout Bay, 12 November 1988.

This simple commitment to and fulfillment in action was not, however, enough to sustain the organisation indefinitely. As time went by it became more possible to evaluate the impact of the sabotage strategy, and to assess its implications for members' own political involvement. This assessment, given the nature of the NCL, was of course unsystematic and uneven. Before I discuss members' different reactions and the effect on the NCL's political programme (or lack thereof), it would be useful to sketch the concrete problems that faced the NCL on a general level.

Firstly, the NCL now functioned in a context very different from that in which the initial decision to go over to armed struggle had been made. It is true that NCL members had never expected the South African state to collapse at the first puff of breath, and they were very conscious of the fact that the struggle ahead would be a long and arduous one. But it must be remembered that the founder-members had all decided on sabotage as a strategy in the heat of the post-Sharpeville crisis, when the end of apartheid had to many seemed close at hand. As the 1960s wore on, however, South Africa entered its boom years. The South African state seemed stronger than ever. The government recovered completely from the crisis that shook it in the early 1960s, and indeed set about consolidating its position. Not only was it able to bring a growing array of security legislation to bear on the liberatory movement, but in doing so it had the support of parliament and the white public. This was perhaps most concretely indicated by the 1961 referendum which could be seen as a vote of confidence in the policies of Verwoerd. In this area, the policy of sabotage could even be seen to play squarely into the government's hands. It acted as a challenge to the government to put the lid on dissent and to rally white support behind it through promises of effective security action. Sabotage was a matter where even those critical of the government suspended their criticism and gave their tacit consent to government action.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ A case in point, for example, is the Cape Times' reaction to Umkhonto's first attack. According to the editorial (AD 1912 "Useless Bombs", *The Cape Times*, 18 December 1961) "It would be the earnest hope of most responsible people in South Africa... that the flurry of would-be terrorism during the weekend is not the prelude to more... [A] campaign of terrorism **would compel** the authorities to make use of... the formidable special powers with which successive parliaments have armed them..." The word "compel" (emphasised by me) is a telling indication of the newspaper's attitude to state action. *The Rand Daily Mail's* approval of the possibility of a state crackdown was, if anything, more explicit. In its editorial it said that "[i]t is not too much to hope... that the police will quickly manage to break up whatever organisation exists at present...." (AD 1912, "No Cause for Alarm", *The Rand Daily Mail*, 18 December 1961).

Some indication of the relative mildness of these reactions can be gleaned from the sentiments of Prof. Herman Venter, Professor of Criminology at the University of Pretoria, who stated (AD 1912 "Stel Saboteurs summier tereg", *Die Burger*, 22 October 1962) that the niceties of criminal procedure were luxuries in the South African context and that saboteurs should be summarily shot. Although he amended his opinion slightly when challenged (AD 1912 "Professors clash over sabotage", *The Star*, 23 October 1962), even his ameliorated statement clearly showed that the notion that saboteurs should be supposed innocent until proven guilty still rankled deeply.

An additional limitation of the sabotage strategy lay in its effects on members' general political involvement. Security considerations compelled members to remain in whatever other political organisations they had belonged to, but also meant that they could not act there with their earlier effectiveness. Their very security consciousness and fear of exciting suspicion meant that they felt less free to speak out and hampered their political lives.⁷⁰

A different set of strategic problems related to the NCL's position within the broader sabotage movement. Even if the problems inherent in the sabotage strategy were ignored, it was clear that the NCL's part in sabotage operations in South Africa was to be very limited. An analysis of the two-year period after August 1961 shows that the NCL's activities for this time comprised less than 3 % of the known acts of sabotage committed at that period.⁷¹ Moreover, when it came to public impact, the NCL was vastly overshadowed by Umkhonto we Sizwe. Although the NCL, in its chosen terrain of technical competence, was more sophisticated than the ANC's military wing, it made far less of a public impact than it or Poqo. Whereas Berman's NCL had attacked its first target well before 16 December, that event had initially made no press impact at all, and was reported in South Africa only after overseas journals picked up the story.⁷² Sabotage only exploded onto the media with Umkhonto's own inaugural attack, which seems to have guaranteed sabotage attacks extensive media coverage for a while. Only **after** this event did acts of sabotage by other organisations such as the NCL gain extensive publicity. Thus, though the NCL's sabotage of pylons near Rembrandt Park on 20 December 1961 were covered with some prominence in Johannesburg newspapers,⁷³ this only serves to underline Umkhonto we Sizwe's acknowledged predominance in this field. Even official government reports of the time

⁷⁰ Interview with John Laredo, *loc. cit.*

⁷¹ Statistics for this period are difficult to calculate exactly. According to Muriel Horrel (*Action, Reaction and Counter-Action*, p. 59) the Minister of Justice asserted that 203 acts of sabotage had been committed by 10 March 1964. Elsewhere she alleges that Rivonia trialists were charged with 222 acts (*op. cit.*, p. 57). Stephen Davis (*Apartheid's Rebels*, p. 17) gives a figure of 193 acts of sabotage committed between August 1961 and July 1963. This figure seems to be based on the annexure to the Rivonia indictment reproduced in Edward Feit (*Urban Revolt in South Africa*, pp. 325 - 345), which lists that number of acts. Davis thus seems to assume that the Rivonia list does not include only the acts that could specifically be attributed to Umkhonto we Sizwe, but in fact covers all known acts of sabotage committed in that time. This assumption does not seem to be unwarranted. The indictment does not include only those acts of sabotage that can be specifically attributed to Umkhonto we Sizwe. Quite a few of the items (no.7, p. 325; no. 9, p. 326; no. 29, p. 328; no. 45, p. 329) can positively be identified as NCL/ARM attacks. This still does not explain the discrepancy between their figures. In either case, it would appear that the NCL was responsible for a scant 2.5% of the acts of sabotage committed during this time. If the figures are incorrect and the list is in fact incomplete for that period, then this percentage is of course smaller.

⁷² See *The New York Times*, 13 October 1961 (Carter-Karis Collection, Jagger Library, University of Cape Town, BCZA 79/65, 2:Z13/2/46(a): "Planned Sabotage Campaign in South Africa alleged", *Cape Times* 16 October 1961.

⁷³ AD 1912. "Time Bombs hit Rand". *The Rand Daily Mail*, 21 December 1961: "We bombed two pylons' group claims". *The Rand Daily Mail* 22 December 1961.

seem to concentrate on the birth of MK to such an extent that they ignore the existence of the NCL.⁷⁴

To make matters more complicated, the gap between the NCL and the ANC seemed to be widening. The ANC's newly formed military wing went so far as to publicly deny that it had any links with the NCL, and in London, Joe Slovo rejected Berman's advances. "Joe Slovo," Berman remembers, "felt uncomfortable with the idea that there should be a separate movement. They wanted control..."⁷⁵

Neither was there much chance of the NCL expanding its operations extensively in the near future. For all the resources that their association with John Lang had seemed initially to promise, the organisation was now drastically short of money. According to Myrtle Berman, an initial sum of money had been made available to the NCL with the assurance of regular payments later on. "But so far as I can remember," she says, "we struggled like hell and no additional funds came".⁷⁶ No money from Ghana was forthcoming⁷⁷, and the London committee responded to repeated enquiries by promising that they would try to sell the boat and aeroplane,⁷⁸ but as time passed, no further monies arrived.⁷⁹ The organisation's activities had therefore to be financed out of subscriptions by its own members.⁸⁰

All these factors meant that the NCL could not long continue merely blowing up one target after the other. The increasing obstacles that were being flung into its path meant that sooner or later a major reconsideration of policy would be needed if it was to play a meaningful role. Although no such major revision ever occurred, members did increasingly start debating the future of the NCL. Before looking at the course of these discussions, I shall however describe the underlying organisational processes that the NCL underwent after its formation.

⁷⁴ See the **Annual Report of the Commissioner of the South African Police** for 1961 (R.P.15/1963) pp. 4 - 5 which, while covering Umkhonto's attack, does not even mention the existence of the NCL.

⁷⁵ Interview with Monty Berman. *loc. cit.*

⁷⁶ Interview with Myrtle Berman. London, 3 June 1989.

⁷⁷ There are two possible reasons for this. Firstly, if Hirson's conjecture about Zwane's arrest is correct, Bing may simply never have received any more fund applications. The Bermans conjecture that after the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the Ghanaian government may also have been more reluctant to make funds available to a white-represented organisation (interview, London, 3 June 1989).

⁷⁸ **Hirson/Leftwich**, p. 9, p. 22.; **Hirson/Olifant**, p. 43.

⁷⁹ According to Eisenstein the boat was finally sold, but funds were never sent to NCL (interview, *loc. cit.*). Berman alleges that this was because the boat was almost worthless and was resold for only a fraction of the initial outlay.

⁸⁰ See **Hirson/Olifant**, p. 43. In Cape Town, the NCL monies were paid into an account opened in the Trust Bank under the name of the Independent Students Bursary Fund (**S v Daniels**, p. 129).

5.3 The growth of radical liberalism in the NCL after 1962

In the light of the story so far, it should be clear that it would be wrong to suppose that the NCL reacted as a co-ordinated whole to the problems I have just sketched. The organisation was simply too loose for that. The regionally uneven nature of its response to developments in South Africa, as well as its ideological diversity preclude any easy generalisations, and we have to be very careful of being over-hasty in seeing any local developments as evidence of general and overarching trends.

It is however possible to detect a definite trend in the overall ideological character of the NCL. In the years immediately after the merger, the ideological trends represented by the Socialist league, the AFM and Berman's NCL would be increasingly marginalised, and the organisation would fall more and more under the sway of radical liberal members. This is not to say that there ever was a direct ideological showdown, or that liberals even self-consciously started exercising control over the direction of the NCL. Rather there was a slow process of change which left liberals the most influential group in the organisation. Not only were they *de facto* the most numerous, but from 1963 onwards the most energetic and influential members in the organisation all happened to be liberals.

This is an important change in the internal politics of the organisation. One could even go so far as to make a distinction between the politics of the NCL's origin on the one hand and the politics of its career as a national organisation on the other. The politics of the NCL's origin was bound up with the vicissitudes of Congress politics: the three original groups that had played a vital, even a dominant, part in the coming together of the organisation - Berman's NCL, the SLA and the AFM - had all split, one way or another, from the Congress alliance. They however played the part only of planting the seed crystal around which a radically different organisation was to take shape. After the merger the alliance of convenience with liberals like Lang, Vigne and the Pragers was to attain a new importance, and the concerns that animated the original groups were to fade increasingly into the background.

Why did this happen? Superficially, the answer lies simply in their numerical predominance: liberals constituted from the beginning by far the greatest majority in the organisation, dominating not only Lang's group but having a definite presence even in Berman's NCL (through his links with Lang and Cox), as well as in the Socialist League (through the presence of the Pragers). Furthermore, after 1962 members who were not liberals tended more and more to withdraw from the NCL: Berman was in London and could not influence the events inside the country very easily. Hirson, involved in pioneering a new physics course at the University of the

Witwatersrand, withdrew almost totally from the NCL and buried himself in academic activity, to the extent that dissatisfied members demanded that he be jettisoned.⁸¹ Though some socialists continued to play a role, they lacked Hirson's interest in giving ideological direction to the organisation as a whole. Raymond Eisenstein was less inclined than Hirson to see sabotage as an instrument for his socialist beliefs. Bernice Kaplan, another relatively marginalised SL member, disapproved of the alliance with liberals, but was in no position to intervene. Disillusioned with politics after her expulsion from the SACP and the growing liberal presence in the NCL, her reaction was rather to withdraw more and more from the organisation.

But these facts only explain part of the story. They do not explain the difference between the crucial role non-liberals played in the founding of the organisation as opposed to their later irrelevance. Their early, if evanescent influence - as evidenced, for example, in Hirson's ability to dictate the NCL's constitution - stands in sharp contrast to their later marginalisation.

The factors outlined above could only have the effect they had in the context of the discursive and institutional conditions which shaped the NCL's being. To understand this dynamic, we have to pay attention, firstly, to the differing ways in which the discourses of the various groupings constituted their members as subjects and enabled them to define themselves in opposition to other political tendencies. Secondly we should bear in mind the changed institutional context in which the NCL existed once it had left the shadowy world of informal discussion groups and tenuous political contacts and constituted itself formally as a discrete body.

Three factors contributed to Hirson's apparent initial success in putting his stamp upon the organisation. The first lay partly in the fact that liberals, though numerically more prominent in the organisation, had hitherto existed in relative isolation from each other in the different centres, and were consequently in no position to act in a co-ordinated way. Secondly, there was another important difference in the ways in which Hirson and the radicalised liberals tended to conceptualise their own activity. I have already pointed out that radical liberalism had no independent political existence, and was as yet an evolving and nascent political position. It existed mainly as a tendency inside the Liberal Party, defined by its antagonism towards the more conservative liberals on the one hand, and the SACP on the other. Splits were not even on the horizon; and consequently the occasion had never arrived for the radical liberals to articulate their differences from the LP in programmatic and independent form. Thirdly, Hirson had been schooled in the ideologically sophisticated and fissive tradition of Trotskyist politics in

⁸¹ See Hirson/Hirson, p.8. This proposal came to naught, since he was in any case due to depart for England at the end of 1962 for a year's study scholarship (*ibid*).

WIL and the NEUM. Trotskyism was a discourse which placed a far higher premium on theoretical and ideological clarity, and tended to treat ideological difference as such very differently. Hirson had articulated his position in a number of documents, could formulate an independent political programme with clarity, and related his whole political involvement to that programme - seeing even informal contacts within COD in its light. He was therefore in a position to act **hegemonically** in the organisation, defining its nature, goals and strategies, and gaining other members' assent.

But the very disregard for doctrinal issues which made it so easy to win assent for his manifesto undermined the importance of this advantage. If Hirson thought that he could transform the NCL into a socialist body, he was wrong. As I have shown, the assent he won at the merger meeting in May 1962 was empty, indicating more of a disinterest in ideological issues and a desire to get ahead with action than commitment to Hirson's program. In addition, the formal existence of the NCL created a new situation in which the Socialist League and the AFM suffered a crucial strategic disadvantage. In the context of a formal organisation, the liberals' numerical and regional predominance gained a new importance. Liberal control of the NCL existed on a national scale: while ideological trends closer to the Congress and Trotskyist traditions were represented only in Johannesburg, liberals were present in every branch throughout the country.

This meant that though fundamentally the same political tendencies continued to exist side by side in the NCL, they now interacted in a fundamentally different context - that of an active, to some extent nationally co-ordinated underground organisation operating outside the institutional context of Congress politics. A crucial feature of this new institutional context was the advantage it gave to liberalism when it came to the recruitment of new members. The organisation was initially formed out of a series of splits from the Congress alliance, splits that occurred in the semi-underground catacombs of the Congress alliance itself. But in the act of splitting, each organisation put itself outside the context of its own genesis. The NCL's formal constitution as an independent organisation created a distance from Congress, which meant that new members could no longer be drawn from those networks, which were in any case going deeper underground. For the liberals the situation was different: none of them had abandoned the legal and above-ground politics of the Liberal Party. Each of them was therefore still in contact with a network of social and political ties from which recruits could be drawn. The community of liberal whites was a small, tight-knit one, and it was inevitable that at parties, social functions and discussions, "like-minded people" crossed paths and noticed each other.

This meant that even in a context where there was a danger of police spies, recruitment could be carried out with relative ease and security. As Eddie Daniels has pointed out,

"...you chat and you get to... know people and... discuss their ideas and some will tell you that we must continue to pray... others say well you know let us do something more definite like slogan painting. And others say that won't bring us anywhere, and let us do something more positive: violence. And your ears prick up. And ... that is the way you recruit."⁸²

Though members' attitudes towards the ANC and the SACP continued to be a very important issue inside the organisation, no new members were drawn from their ranks - each and every one of the new members recruited after the formation of the NCL as a national group in 1962 was a member of the Liberal Party.

When Hirson returned to South Africa in 1963, he found a changed NCL.⁸³ In Johannesburg, new recruits included Liberal Party members like Hilary and Ronnie Mutch, Rosemary Wentzel and Hugh Lewin, a journalist on the Rand Daily Mail. Rhoda Prager, the Socialist League member who had taken his place as secretary had died in mid-1963 of a heart attack. On the Johannesburg Action Committee, Hirson and Green of the Socialist League had been replaced by Lewin, Wentzel, Higgs and Dhladhla, of whom only the latter was not a liberal.

In addition, it was now liberal members, not Trotskyists like Hirson, who were behind attempts to fuse the organisation into a more cohesive unit and formulate some sort of political plan. It is difficult to gauge the importance of these efforts. Very few facts about such developments are available, and one has to patch together a picture of their dynamics from conflicting and divergent accounts. The importance and influence of such initiatives are made even more difficult to judge by the fact that the organisation was crushed before any of them could bear fruit. Nonetheless it is clear that from late 1962 or early 1963 onwards, transformations in the structure of the organisation were being suggested, and that liberal members were behind these suggestions. Though on the whole, the NCL remained an ideologically diverse association of groups, liberals came to exercise more and more of an influence on the organisation's direction.

Initially, Watson seems to have been a central person in this process. Watson had made suggestions that the NCL reorganise itself in a more unified way, proposing the creation of five departments with one person at the head of each. This discussion continued at a meeting between March and July 1963, attended this time by Leftwich.⁸⁴ According to another source,

82 Interview with Eddie Daniels, Hout Bay 5 June 1988.

83 Hirson/Hirson.

84 Hirson/Leftwich, p. 13.

there was a further meeting during this time attended by Watson, Leftwich, Higgs, Rhoda Prager, Olifant and Dhladhla, at which a new national executive of five people was proposed,⁸⁵ which would also have meant a more unified and coherent NCL. But as time went by, more and more of a central role seems to have been played by Adrian Leftwich.

The recruitment of Leftwich by Neville Rubin seemed a major coup for an organisation as fragmented and loosely organised as the NCL. Leftwich was one of a new generation of NUSAS presidents: literate, intelligent, with great skill in constitutional maneuvering. Even among their number, he seems to have been a remarkable individual. Albie Sachs describes him as

"... a young liberal whose unusual drive and personality had quickly made him a leader of thousands of White English-speaking students angered by Government interference with their universities... At the many public meetings which he had addressed, his fervent and witty speeches had invariably aroused his audience to passionate opposition of Apartheid. Both young and old were attracted to him, and so potent were his resilience and integrity that he seemed to typify a spirit of urgent and indestructible idealism."⁸⁶

He had been the youngest person ever elected to the position of NUSAS president,⁸⁷ and his two years in this post had shown his marked organisational and administrative ability - according to some accounts he was the "best president NUSAS had ever had".⁸⁸ According to Raymond Eisenstein, it was in part due to his talents that the NCL, initially so diverse and informal, first started to function in a more coherent and unified fashion:

"The first person who actually tried to introduce some kind of more formal structure was Adrian Leftwich. He was the only person with organising ability among all of us. He knew how to go about organising things."⁸⁹

Leftwich must occupy a prominent place in any account of the NCL. But today he is most commonly remembered, not for the characteristics mentioned above, but as the most crucial figure in the destruction of the NCL. The issue of his role as a central force inside the organisation is therefore a difficult and complex question, one about which, as I shall show, there is seriously conflicting evidence. It also raises questions about his personal motives. Although I have argued that the problems raised by NCL's career should be analysed on the level of political discourse and not that of personal psychology, a knowledge of some of the private concerns that informed Leftwich's political decisions will be valuable. My purpose is not

85 BCZA C4(ii)h, p. 5.

86 Albie Sachs, *Stephanie on Trial* (London, Harvill, 1968) p. 28.

87 C. J. Driver, "Looking at Leftwich", *Varsity*, 3 August 1960.

88 Dot Cleminshaw, pers. comm.

89 Interview with Raymond Eisenstein, *loc. cit.*

to explain his actions by reducing them to the psychological level: armchair psychology is in any case bound to be specious, especially when detailed information is lacking. Something can, however, be learned from looking at the way in which Leftwich related to his own political life and the concerns which formed the background to his attempts to work through the political problems which faced him.

These concerns are reflected in a series of letters Leftwich wrote to Hugh Lewin during 1960 and 1961.⁹⁰ Lewin and Leftwich met in July 1959 after both had been elected onto the National executive of NUSAS, and cemented a close friendship.⁹¹ Though Lewin lived in Grahamstown and Leftwich in Cape Town they kept in contact, and Leftwich's letters speak of a close, indeed trusting, relationship between them. Though the letters tended to dwell on news about NUSAS in Cape Town and his own political activities, Leftwich would occasionally articulate his alienation from the society in which he lived. South Africa, he says in one letter, is slowly turning into a Sartrean hell "where all that is meaningful to man is the knowledge of the unpleasantness of uncommitted people."⁹² In another letter he remarks that "...in this vicious country one must try to keep within the bounds of objectivity - otherwise one will wander down a murky alley of emotional depression and snarling hatred."⁹³

This sudden observation is surprising: it comes in a letter that is characterised mostly by cheerful comments about the year that awaits them both on the National Executive (with Leftwich warning Lewin that "as Pres[ident] I am going to be putting bombs up your arse" if he does not pull his weight in the organisation). For all that, it is a theme which crops up time and again in the letters. Leftwich's prose seems to vacillate between a confident, businesslike discourse about the political work that occupied so much of his time, and intense and even hyperbolic statements of personal alienation. In a later letter, in the midst of a discussion of the pressure on his time, he writes that

"... I wish the political environment were more soothing - but the brutality and sadism mixed with mania and obsession, rabbit punching and rabbit courage, only serves to make one's outlook tainted with two screaming colours - black and white, black and

⁹⁰ These are letters which eventually ended up as part of the exhibits for the Johannesburg court case (*S v Hirson*, Exh N/18). The letters have usually not been fully dated. Usually I have been able to establish the date; in these cases I have supplied this information in square brackets ([]). Where necessary I have supplied the clues and hints used in the determination of dates.

⁹¹ Memorandum (almost certainly by Hugh Lewin) on Adrian Leftwich, BCZA C4(ii)c, p. 1.

⁹² Adrian Leftwich, letter to Hugh Lewin, Saturday 7 May [1960] (*S v Hirson*, Exh N/18 (22)). The letter was written while Leftwich was staying at a flat in Clapham Court, Claremont. This was during 1960. In addition, reference to a contemporaneous calendar shows that 7 May 1960 was a Saturday.

⁹³ Adrian Leftwich, letter to Hugh Lewin, [2 February 1960] (*S v Hirson*, Exh N/8(22)). The letter is dated simply "Tuesday eve" and speaks of Leftwich's imminent departure for Accra on "Friday 5th". Friday, 5 February 1960 was immediately before a major conference in Accra, attended by more than one liberal from South Africa (see Patrick van Rensburg, *Guilty Land*, p. 41).

white. It even effects (sic) our language, and even how we drink our tea and coffee. It pervades, like a fine poisonous dust, every aspect of our living in this country and poses an immense moral problem. Our consciences can **never ever** be clear in this country.... Yet what the hell can we do? What the hell can we do.⁹⁴

Like the previous passage, this outburst does not only show Leftwich recoiling from the inhumanity of South African society; it also conveys a sense that he personally was also being polluted by it. It thus reflects a rejection and alienation from his own identity as a white South African.⁹⁵ As he put it in a letter written more than a year later, "... we seem to be quite abnormal and we are unaware of our abnormality because we move in circles which are as abnormal as we are and hence do not meet with the brutality of normality."⁹⁶

It is not surprising, then, that despite Leftwich's ability and commitment as a NUSAS administrator, he sometimes seems to be alienated particularly from his political work. Coming back from a trip to Europe in 1961 he wrote to Lewin that

"... I have experienced the thing which I most fear: an inertia, and I have continually to say to myself, now get cracking man, move, get energetic, man, pull - there is work to do. I suppose that at the end of the year when I take two weeks off completely the old drive will come back. Pray god, daddy."⁹⁷

The corollary of this feeling of alienation which made it necessary for him to force himself to work was a separation of this political life from his private life and free time. This is evident in a certain longing idealisation of Lewin's life as a newly married man:

"How is Liz? How is married life? From the tone of your letter there is a calmness about you... [T]his is wonderful, and I am pleased. We all have to try to keep calm... Sanity is so important now. I sometimes feel that we should all get away for three months just so as we can look back and gain some perspective. You will be a far more valuable person in the fight if you do get that respite..."⁹⁸

In the above two passages, the way in which Leftwich talks about his need for a holiday is revealing. On the one hand he is simply articulating an understandable need for rest. At the same time, the passages seem closely related to the expressions of revulsion quoted earlier. His alienation from the "brutality" of political life in South Africa which, as he saw it, corrupted even those who opposed it, meant that he looked to his personal friendships as a haven from the stresses of his responsibilities in NUSAS. But this field, the area of Leftwich's identity as a

⁹⁴ Adrian Leftwich, letter to Hugh Lewin, 27 April [1960] (*S v Hirson*, Exh N/8(22)) - emphasis mine. The letter was written from Clapham Court.

⁹⁵ Later, in Chapter 7 (see pp. 157 ff below), I shall comment on the wider political logic of this revulsion.

⁹⁶ Adrian Leftwich, letter to Hugh Lewin, 11 November 1961 (*S v Hirson*, Exh N/8(23)).

⁹⁷ Adrian Leftwich, letter to Hugh Lewin, 23 September 1961 (*S v Hirson*, Exh N/8(24)).

⁹⁸ *Op cit.*, p. 2.

private individual, was not without its own alienating aspects: At the end of 1960, he wrote to Lewin that he was arranging to move to a cottage in Rouwkoop Road:

"I am sick of this bloody flat[:] the only thing which is personal about it is the number on the door, because no-one else in the bloody bloc[k] has the SAME one. The cottage has a little garden and will be more of a home."⁹⁹

In another letter, deeply moved by a letter Lewin had written to him, he said that he was at his happiest when he was with Lewin and his fiancée Liz. He went on to confess that

"Sometimes I think that there is something missing in my life, like love, and John and the boys egg me on about 'getting a girl-friend'. I think that such egging on is foolish. One doesn't 'get' a girlfriend (and even that word girlfriend is stupid). What one needs is friends and love from them. It doesn't really matter what they are, or who they are, as long as there is compatibility and rapport. I believe that the 2 of us have that and I pray God it never breaks."¹⁰⁰

In this letter, some of Leftwich's most private feelings are revealed. It is true that to expose these letters to public scrutiny seems like voyeurism. These letters are nevertheless relevant to understanding Leftwich's political choices. They are illuminating, not only for the personal sentiments they express, but also for the clues they give about the network of presuppositions and expectations that underpinned those sentiments. In discourse-theoretical terms, my attention is focused on the **system of differences** in which these personal feelings are expressed. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, discourse analysis is concerned, not so much with feelings as with what they mean.¹⁰¹

What is significant about Leftwich's letter is the way in which his notions about love and personal recognition presuppose an underlying distinction between the sphere of his public, political self and that of recognition and acceptance of himself as a private person. This is not a unique personality quirk; indeed, it forms part of an ideology of personal identity which is a central stream in Western thought since the Renaissance. It is the presupposition that the self is deeply different from the external details through which that self acts; that, as Hamlet puts it "I have that within which passes show".¹⁰² It is this notion of an yawning gap between the private

⁹⁹ Adrian Leftwich, letter to Hugh Lewin [6 or 13 November 1960] (S v **Hirson**, Exh N/8 (number illegible)). The letter was written on a "Sunday Afternoon" after Leftwich's exams had finished on 31 October: Leftwich also sends a message through Lewin to a third person that he is welcome to visit on 21 November. The letter was thus written on a Sunday between these two dates.

¹⁰⁰ Adrian Leftwich, letter to Hugh Lewin, 4 October [1960] (S v **Hirson**, Exh N/8(21)). The letter was written from Leftwich's Clapham Court address.

¹⁰¹ See p. 31 above.

¹⁰² William Shakespeare, **The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark**, ed. Edward Hubler (New York, Signet, 1963), l.ii.85. See Lionel Trilling's **Sincerity and Authenticity** (London, Oxford University Press, 1974) (pp. 3 - 4, 10) for comments about the way in which **Hamlet** is suffused with this then relatively new notion of the nature of personal identity.

self and the accidental details of its external manifestation that I want to highlight in Leftwich's letters. Underlying his alienating sense of being tainted by the corrupting influence of politics in South Africa, there seems to be the notion that the details of his public self (the "abnormality" of "normal" life, the number on the door of his impersonal flat) are only distorted reflections of his own private identity, separated from it by an unbridgeable gulf.

This is why his confession in the last letter quoted is important. Leftwich seems to deny that the accidental differences of external identity matter (note his rejection of the word "girlfriend" in favour of "friend"; his insistence that "it doesn't really matter who they are and what they are") and articulates, instead, a belief in a personal recognition ("compatibility" and "rapport") that transcends these details:

"Does one go out and get it? Does one coldly and calculatingly cause it? No, I don't think so. It must arrive, and it must arrive mutually. I hate the idea of 'chasing' a girl, and then being the great victor in a cave man sense.... I feel it is a very **private** thing and a very **personal** thing, tied up with the **spiritual** relationship which is the cement... Anyway the main thing is love in the world, and so many of us have forgotten how to do it. It is non-sexual in the sense that it has **nothing to do with the sexes - it is an independent factor ...**"¹⁰³

This distance between these two worlds - his public, political self and his sense of his private identity - is also reflected in a profile of him by C. J. Driver, published in the University of Cape Town student newspaper, *varsity*, when Leftwich first became NUSAS president. Leftwich, writes driver

"... had intended to go to London university to continue his studies and to "get free from the continual dirt of politics... and live like a human being"¹⁰⁴

This division between his external identity as a white South African and his private self as a "human being" was to have serious consequences in the NCL/ARM. Its implications are prefigured in the way in which Leftwich, as NUSAS member, handled the occasions where he faced administrative choices that he could not reconcile with his own personal feelings. Writing to Lewin about a decision in which he removed a fellow-NUSAS member, Martin Bobrow, from a NUSAS delegation to a Seminar on Racism held in Kampala 1961 by the Makerekere Students' Guild of the University College of East Africa in late March and early April 1961¹⁰⁵ Leftwich confesses that:

¹⁰³ Adrian Leftwich, letter to Hugh Lewin. *loc. cit.* My emphases.

¹⁰⁴ C. J. Driver. *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁵ See NUSAS papers. (Jagger Library, University of Cape Town. BC 586) V.1.30: Obed Katikaza, letter to NUSAS, 9 March 1961. : BC 586 V.1.30. Adrian Leftwich, letter to O. M. Katikaza, 15 March 1961

"My christ I have never hated taking a decision like that in all my life and I felt so shit that I was sick, physically. I was force[d] not to see the thing in personal terms, but it seems that it was taken like that in Joburg. I believe that it was the right decision."¹⁰⁶

It therefore seems that, as long as Leftwich was active as a member of NUSAS and the Liberal Party, there was little chance that his feeling of alienation from his identity as a white South African could be resolved. Indeed, the contradictions that these letters bear witness to seem only to have become more intense in the next few years. As Ernie Wentzel recalls, Leftwich seemed more and more to be under severe emotional stress: "From being gay, witty, extrovert he became increasingly introvert and even morose. There was a sense of sin in being a participant in the fruits of white supremacy..."¹⁰⁷ In a letter written to Leftwich near the end of his career as NUSAS president, Wentzel closed a message of thanks and appreciation for his service on a note of fatherly concern:

"And now also some advice which may be difficult for you. The struggle is long and bitter and many of us will know suffering in the years ahead. We will need men who are mature in every aspect of their personalities. The next few years are crucial in your development as a personality. Use those years to develop yourself in every field. Relax and laugh and you will be much more use in the days which make us cry bitter tears. Bless you."¹⁰⁸

By then, Leftwich had already heard about the NCL from Neville Rubin.¹⁰⁹ In August or September he joined it.¹¹⁰ To this his activities here he brought the same administrative and organisational flair that had distinguished his career in NUSAS. Though he was recruited substantially later than Watson, he rose to prominence far more quickly. His old NUSAS friend Lewin saw him as being definitely "the most energetic and effective person" in the NCL's administrative affairs.¹¹¹ In a memo compiled after the organisation's breakdown, he remembered getting the impression that Leftwich's "whole life" was concerned with the organisation. By July 1963 Leftwich had already become a central figure in the Cape Town branch, giving Johannesburg members the impression that he was definitely the "C.T. [Cape Town] Kingpin", and by December of that year he *de facto* ran a National meeting in Cape Town even though Vigne, and not he, was in the chair.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Adrian Leftwich, letter to Hugh Lewin 29 [March 1961] (*S v Hirson*, N/18(21)). The letter, dated only "29th" was written while Leftwich was in Kampala for the conference, in other words in late March/early April 1961.

¹⁰⁷ AD 1931 Aa p. 96. See also p. 125.

¹⁰⁸ Ernie Wentzel, letter to Adrian Leftwich, 19 June 1962, AD 1931 E, pp. 80 - 81.

¹⁰⁹ According to Leftwich he first heard of the NCL in the second quarter of 1962 (*S v Daniels*, p. 125).

¹¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 126.

¹¹¹ BCZA 77/25 C4(ii)(c) p. 1.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

In mid-September 1963 Leftwich left on a journey in his capacity as ex-NUSAS officeholder to the Netherlands, where he was to meet members of the International Student Conference (ISC) to discuss certain matters regarding a projected conference.¹¹³ He took the opportunity to visit the NCL's London committee, and, at a meeting attended by the Bermans, Lang, Rubin and Hirson, Leftwich represented the South African branches of the NCL. It is perhaps dangerous to over-interpret this meeting. Leftwich's mandate, after all, concerned fairly routine and technical matters - he reported back on sabotage activities, enquired about the funding situation and the sale of Lang's boat,¹¹⁴ and handed over a watch to the London committee so that they could gain advice on how to change it to a timing device.¹¹⁵ But Leftwich's presence here is still significant. He was, after all, a relatively junior member of the organisation, and his presence at a meeting attended by people who were the founders of the organisation, seems to be an indication of his growing centrality in the NCL. While Hirson played a passive role Leftwich, appears to have acted in an assertive manner: Monty Berman alleges, for example, that he took a very strong and aggressive stance on security in the organisation, insisting that all communication with the NCL in South Africa should henceforth happen through him.¹¹⁶ It is also important to note that the meeting ranged over a much wider area than mere routine matters. They also apparently discussed the matter of the NCL's name: the name was not "sufficiently indigenous", they argued, some other name, preferably containing the word "African" had to be found.¹¹⁷

On his return to South Africa Leftwich was in a more powerful position than any other person in the organisation. Through his contact with members in Johannesburg and London, he had acquired much authority. At a meeting held some time after October 1963, Lewin remembers, he appeared to be the spokesman for the Cape " - and obviously in touch with London and others." He gave, according to Lewin, "an impression of [being the] sole organiser"; this impression, according to him, did not seem to be merely to boost his personal ego¹¹⁸ but seemed, apparently, to reflect real centrality. Leftwich in fact now had an unparalleled knowledge of the organisation. While most members' knowledge of their organisation was confined to their own cells, he had a broad understanding of its extent and workings - even to the extent of knowing other NCL/ARM members' real names. In the long term, as we shall see, this knowledge was to spell disaster for the organisation.

113 Hirson/Leftwich, pp. 21, 2: BCZA C4(ii)h p. 5.

114 Hirson/Leftwich, p. 22.

115 Hirson/Leftwich, p. 27.

116 Interview with Monty Berman. *loc. cit.* It should be pointed out that this fact is not mentioned in Hirson's account of this meeting.

117 AD 1912. "A.R.M. title came from London, says Leftwich". *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 November 1964.

118 BCZA 77/25 C4(ii)c, p. 2.

But the immediate meaning of these processes for the NCL lay in the way in which liberal ideology gained a dominant role in its structures. In analysing the process by which members dealt with the political questions thrown up by the strategy of sabotage, the ideological underpinnings of radical liberalism are therefore of prime importance, and for that reason it is in a deeper understanding of liberal discourse that I will seek the key to an understanding of their course of action.¹¹⁹

5.4 The politics of sabotage

The NCL/ARM has been seen by some commentators as having broken with liberalism, and even as having "betrayed" it. To some extent this is true: the decision to go over to violence was indeed a dramatic departure from Liberal Party policy and from the commitment to non-violence that had characterised liberal attitudes to conflict in South Africa. But on another level, of course, NCL/ARM members still remained liberals, and their thinking remained characterised by many of the themes that marked South African liberalism. Their antagonism to the Communist Party was one aspect of this. But their liberalism is evidenced even more powerfully in their understanding of the purpose and meaning of sabotage as a political act.

A central theme in the liberal thought of the late 1950s and early 1960s, a theme underlying their faith in the eventual triumph of liberal opinion, was a faith in the luminous self-evidence of their values, the sensible, reasonable common-sense aspect of their ideology. This notion was articulated with blithe cheerfulness in an early edition of *Contact*:

"Where belief is strong enough and an idea big enough and the organization strong enough, even race prejudice must take to its heels. In the political arena the Liberal Party has an idea much bigger than anyone else has on offer - that of a common society. Given sufficient faith and the strength of our purpose and organisation to get the idea across, the Party can look forward to putting prejudice throughout South Africa on the run."¹²⁰

This conception effectively dictated the nature of the political programme of the Liberal Party. Its political interventions were always aimed at "bringing people to their senses", showing them,

¹¹⁹ In doing so I am deliberately disregarding the other political discourses which also existed within the organisation. It would, for example, be possible to show, through an analysis of the publications of the Socialist League between 1957 and 1961, how it was possible for a group concerned with mobilising the working class to embark on such a strategy. Considerations of space however force me to narrow my scope, and radical liberalism, as I have argued here, played a much more important role in the eventual fate of the organisation than did the socialist discourse of the SLA. Where Hiron's grouping had only been one of several whose decision to go over to sabotage resulted in the formation of the NCL/ARM, the direction of the organisation in the end was determined by the ways in which liberals understood their context.

¹²⁰ "Christmas Cheer". *Contact*, December 1955.

signifying, in some way, the "big"ness of the Liberal Party idea and the insanity of government policy. Though many liberal activities were important for what they accomplished, they were even more important for what they **showed**. Christopher Gell, for example, lauded liberal participation in the Alexandra bus boycott in the following terms:

"If the boycott has one lesson for Liberals it is this - that their way forward lies in repeatedly rescuing the white majority and authorities from the consequences of their own folly. Only by successive **demonstrations** that generous white attitudes and positive cross-colour contact do evoke generous non-White responses will it gradually permeate the 'traditional' South African way of life that we must learn to co-operate as people at all levels or our society will fall apart."¹²¹

This conception was also dominant in the NCL's conception of sabotage. It is true that the element of damage was vital. Eddie Daniels, for example, denies that the NCL's acts of sabotage were acts merely of symbolic protest, and points out that they would never have considered, say, a statue as a target for sabotage.¹²² But, though essential, damage was not the sole reason for sabotage. It was not the deed in its heavy materiality, in the physical harm it inflicted upon the enemy, that mattered. What was more important was the point that this material harm made. Sabotage was above all a **sign**, a signifying act. "We at least **showed** the world," says Eddie Daniels, "that there were people who were prepared to resist".¹²³

Sabotage, through signifying resistance in this way, was thus an act that the members of the NCL/ARM saw as speaking to a whole range of South Africans. In the first place it was a message to whites - a message that they had to come to their senses before their policies plunged South Africa into irreversible conflict. The controlled damage of sabotage seems to have signified the real destruction that could result if the madness of apartheid continued. It appears that its extremity was important precisely insofar as it reflected, in an inverted mirror, the destructiveness of Apartheid. Furthermore, it was a sign to oppressed South Africans. Sabotage, it was hoped, would "boost the morale" of the masses - maybe even "inspire" them to rise up. As John Laredo put it, such an act would show that the government was not as invincible as it seemed:

"... what [we] wanted to show... to people at large is that the state does not have absolute control over what is going on. Isolated acts of resistance would demonstrate to people that there is some resistance. The mere demonstration of this resistance would revive the idea that whilst the state has power, it does not have complete control."¹²⁴

121 C. W. M. Gell. Correspondence to *Contact*. June/July 1957. My emphasis.

122 Interview with Eddie Daniels. Hout Bay. 18 October 1987.

123 *Ibid.* My emphasis.

124 Interview with John Laredo. *loc. cit.*

This illustration might then make it more possible for the mass of the people to rise up in an insurrection. Sabotage would thus be a sign precipitating "some sort of chain reaction".¹²⁵

But, as I have shown, this did not happen. White South Africa showed no sign of "coming to their senses", and as the mass expressions of outrage that followed Sharpeville faded further into the past it became clear that such sustained outburst of popular resistance could be expected in the near future. How did NCL members react to this?¹²⁶

One course of action was to abandon the NCL altogether for other organisations that were part of the Congress alliance. This was the course taken by Allan Brooks and Stephanie Kemp, both of whom became more and more troubled by the organisation's distance from Congress politics. While still an NCL member Brooks became increasingly interested in Marxism and soon joined the Communist Party.¹²⁷ Though Stephanie Kemp was not to join the SACP just then, she also became increasingly active in Congress activities.¹²⁸

Other members simply dropped out of the organisation and went on with their personal lives - a move which was made even easier by the organisation's security precautions: in a context where fellow members did not know each others' names, it seemed possible to leave one's NCL membership behind simply by withdrawing from it. Thus, John Laredo left Durban for Port Elizabeth to take up a lecturing post, and though there was a local NCL branch, he never actively linked up with it. Bernice Kaplan left for England in 1963. For a while, she was peripherally involved in the NCL there, helping dispatch by sea a large crate of cut glass with a hidden consignment of plastic explosives to the Cape Town branch; but, disillusioned by the increasing prominence of liberals in the NCL, she soon withdrew and lost all contact with the organisation.

Matters developed still further with Leftwich's return from meeting the NCL's London committee. When he arrived back in Cape Town he reported back at a National meeting.¹²⁹ At this meeting, there was a long discussion on the need to formulate a broad policy for the NCL. The meeting decided that the groups in Cape Town, Johannesburg and London would submit their views so that a cohesive policy could be constructed on the basis of the collected ideas.¹³⁰

125

Ibid.

126

I am deliberately referring here to individual NCL members: Though the NCL was later forced to confront the question of whether or not to go ahead with sabotage, individual members were for a long time left to work out their own course of action for themselves.

127

Interview with Amy Thornton. Cape Town. 14 November 1988.

128

Interview with Stephanie Kemp. London. 14 July 1989.

129

Hirson/Leftwich, p. 23 - 25.

130

Ibid., p. 25.

How far this process progressed, and in what measure the different centres contributed is not clear. Though a number of documents relating to NCL policy were to serve as damning exhibits in the State's case against NCL members accused of sabotage, only two of them can be positively identified as having their origins in this process. One of these documents was produced by the London Committee¹³¹; the other was written by Randolph Vigne.¹³²

It can be stated with some certainty, however, that these issues were the subject of intense discussion in the NCL. During the trial, NCL/ARM members stated - from the dock as well as from the witness box - that there had been growing doubts inside the organisation regarding the efficacy of sabotage as a strategy. Care must be taken in the treatment of evidence here. The testimony of witnesses as to their comrades and their own growing second thoughts should be read in the light of the fact that they were, during trial, concerned to minimise damage and therefore under pressure to exaggerate such doubts as there were.¹³³ In some cases, as in the case of Lewin and Daniels, trial evidence seems to be borne out by other testimony. In other cases, as with Leftwich, evidence is contradictory and accounts conflict.

Doubts as to the value of sabotage was raised, according to trial evidence, by Spike De Keller, who felt not only that sabotage was ineffective and counterproductive, but also that the NCL was an undemocratic structure, and that he was being used by people whose decisions he had no chance of influencing. De Keller put these doubts to Leftwich.¹³⁴ Leftwich testified in court that he accepted their objections and was convinced of their position. According to him, "Mr Schneider, Mr De Keller and myself had an informal discussion and we had decided to abandon sabotage: we considered that it was dangerous and futile, we decided to drop it."¹³⁵

Leftwich has it that the Cape Town Regional Committee agreed to this decision and the organisation was then divided up into four sections.¹³⁶ The groups, which would have more of an above-ground existence, were

1. "Political intelligence" headed by Vigne (De Keller was also a member). Its task was "to ascertain current political attitudes and situations";
2. "Long Term intelligence" headed by Leftwich;

¹³¹ *S v Hirson*. Exh M4(1). According to Leftwich (*Hirson/Leftwich* (recalled), p. 2) it was sent to them from London by Myrtle Berman.

¹³² *S v Hirson*. Exh M4(4). It was mainly Vigne's work, though it incorporated ideas by Leftwich and Watson (*Hirson/Leftwich* (recalled), pp. 3 - 4).

¹³³ Baruch Hirson, pers. comm., 28 March 1989.

¹³⁴ *S v Daniels*, p. 108-9

¹³⁵ *S v Daniels*, p. 140.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 140. See also BCZA C4(ii)a, p. 5), which seems to refer to the same discussion.

3. "Short term intelligence" headed by Schneider;
4. "Action" headed by Daniels and charged with "keeping people *au fait* with what they had learnt thus far".¹³⁷

None of these committees, Leftwich avers, was concerned with sabotage. "We felt uncertain and unsure in our minds," Leftwich said later, "we felt it [sabotage] was futile but we remained uncertain."¹³⁸ If this is accurate, splitting up the organisation in this way seems to have been a way in which the organisation could continue to exist in an "underground" form while abstaining from sabotage.

There is, however, some evidence for doubting Leftwich's trial evidence. A different perspective on the restructuring of the organisation is provided by the exhibits used by the State in the NCL/ARM trials. One of the documents seized by the state in its crackdown on the Cape Town grouping was a text in which just such a change-over is argued for.¹³⁹ This text, which I will analyse extensively in the next two chapters, seems to suggest that the Cape Town NCL's "uncertainty" over sabotage did not extend to actually abandoning it. The document, which Leftwich alleged in court had been written by himself, does not call for an abandonment of sabotage. It argues, rather, that it should be placed on a more long term basis. Sabotage, according to this text, should be seen as merely one of a range of different insurrectionary activities which would lead to the demise of apartheid. The document argues that the NCL had to plan, not for big, ambitious projects, but for low-key, low-profile attacks and await the maturing of popular resistance. If the evidence of the document is to be believed, Leftwich had by no means decided to abandon the strategy.

Even more doubt is cast on Leftwich's evidence by Hirson's account of developments. According to Hirson, he met Leftwich in early 1964, while delivering a "carload of dynamite" to Cape Town. It turned out that Daniels had started raising objections to the strategy of sabotage. According to Hirson,

"There was a delegation of two to meet me. They felt that Eddie Daniels was opposed to sabotage and therefore there was no place in the NCL for him. I rejected this, saying that there was nothing in the constitution that demanded that any person agree with the tactic, and that Eddie could not be faulted on those grounds."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ *S v Daniels*, p. 140. This is confirmed by Hirson ("The State of Emergency", p. 10) according to whom Vigne suggested that the NCL should start a parallel organisation which would have a legal, above-ground existence.

¹³⁸ *Hirson/Leftwich*, p. 28.

¹³⁹ *S v Daniels*, Exh C6. See the appendix for the full text of the document.

¹⁴⁰ Baruch Hirson, *op. cit.*, p. 11. Daniels himself has stated in an interview that reports in the trial of his opposition were exaggerated; other NCL members however remember that opposition to the strategy did in fact come from him (see below).

Matters were forced to a head in April 1964, when the National Central Committee met for what was to be its last and most crucial meeting. Daniels had apparently persisted in his opposition to sabotage and had now come to Johannesburg to urge that it be stopped. The meeting was attended by Leftwich, Hirson, Higgs and Lewin. At the meeting,

"Daniels said the organisation had been started to... show that there was opposition but also to try and get - to try and motivate people into opposition as much as to demonstrate that there was opposition. And he said if we look at what has happened and take the successes... what have they in fact done, what have we achieved in this way. We haven't in fact achieved anything. We have shown that there is a little bit of opposition but our organisation has not grown, nor has there been any evident sort of remotivating of the population. He was saying that in fact... we should rethink the whole thing."¹⁴¹

This was the first time that the question of the continuation of sabotage had been raised formally and at a National meeting. The very commitment to sabotage as a strategy was now seriously challenged - especially since other members seem to some extent to have shared his doubts. Lewin has it that he tended to agree with Daniels, and Lewin was in fact considering leaving South Africa at that stage¹⁴² and while Hirson had not taken a decision on the matter, he too was nagged by a suspicion that "the work we were doing might be getting us nowhere".¹⁴³

What Leftwich's role was at this point is not clear. According to his own evidence he did not argue either for or against sabotage, and it was Higgs who strongly rejected the notion of discontinuing sabotage.¹⁴⁴ Whether this is quite true is however to be doubted: Lewin's version of events certainly does not depict him as having such an unequivocal role. According to Lewin, Leftwich had visited him before the meeting and warned him that Daniels had become a coward. In the meeting itself,

"Leftwich then launched into a very strong attack on him [Daniels]. Said this was... chicken and yellow and the rest of it and obviously we have to continue and it was very important that we continue."¹⁴⁵

Be that as it may, Daniels' proposal was not accepted. Instead, a new notion was floated: after the Rivonia trial, ARM was to act in a concerted way to hit pylons on the Rand and in the Western Cape in a co-ordinated attack.

141 Interview with Hugh Lewin. Harare, 3 February 1990.

142 *S v Hirson*, statement by Lewin, p. 4.

143 Baruch Hirson, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

144 *Ibid.* Statement by Hirson, p. 12; testimony of Adrian Leftwich, p. 27.

145 Interview with Hugh Lewin. *loc. cit.*

How did this happen? Why were Leftwich (and possibly Higgs) able to prevail, to convince their fellow-members to continue with sabotage? In his *Elegy for a Revolutionary*, C.J. Driver imagines the crucial meeting degenerating into physical and psychological violence as James Jeremy, who is obviously intended to refer to Leftwich,¹⁴⁶ bullies his fellow-saboteurs into submission.¹⁴⁷ In *The Fourth of July Raids* Brokensha and Knowles similarly refer to the psychological hold of dominating personalities on the "wavering desire" of weaker-willed, doubting members: according to them, "[i]t was not hard to bring them round. Stronger minds were at work. Higgs was determined to continue it. Harris was bent on it. In the background there lurked the shadow of Watson."¹⁴⁸ "Every form of intimidation", they allege, was used on members who seemd to waver.¹⁴⁹ According to them, Watson was "particularly adept at this - especially blackmail",¹⁵⁰ and was able to "sway and mould them like the plasticine he used in the lessons."¹⁵¹

This is, however, not very convincing. Neither Harris nor Watson were present at this last meeting: Harris was a peripheral member and Watson had by this stage already left the organisation. Brokensha and Knowles are also unable to explain why the other members, already opposed to sabotage, swallowed their growing doubts yet again, and say only that "Somehow he [Higgs] convinced them that the organisation's future lay in violence...".¹⁵²

The real answer, I would suggest, is at once more prosaic and more interesting. There is no need to invoke a bullying Leftwich (or a sinister Watson and Harris, for that matter) as the evil genii of the NCL. The crucial role was played not so much them as by the elusive yet concrete fact of ideology: by the invisible and unconscious network of tacit equivalences and oppositions, the system of differences in terms of which sabotage made sense and which shaped their efforts to think through their political dilemmas. It is in the dissection of this structure that the key to the NCL lies.

146 Interview with C. J Driver, Cape Town, 11 November 1987

147 C. J. Driver. *Elegy for a Revolutionary*, pp. 96 - 104.

148 Miles Brokensha and Robert Knowles. *The Fourth of July Raids*, p. 66.

149 *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

150 *Ibid.*

151 *Op. cit.*,d p. 62.

152 *Op. cit.*, p. 71.

6

"Ordinary People": Ideology, Fighting Unity, and Technical Competence in the Discourse of the NCL.

"The jingling music seemed full of the vivacity, the vulgarity, and the irrational valour of the poor, who in all these unclean streets were clinging to the decencies and charities of Christendom.... [He felt himself] as the ambassador of all these common and kindly people in the street, who every day marched into battle to the music of the barrel-organ. And this high pride in being human had lifted him unaccountably to an infinite height above the monstrous men around him. For an instant... he looked down on all their sprawling eccentricities from the starry pinnacle of the commonplace."

G.K. Chesterton. *The Man who was Thursday*

6.1 Analysing NCL discourse

We now face the task of investigating the underlying conceptual framework that structured the NCL's choices. If we are to understand why sabotage seemed the only politically valid course of action left to NCL members, we shall have to understand, first, what sabotage - and politics itself - meant for them. To answer these questions, I shall use three distinct but related sources. The first source is the collection of documents used by the State as evidence against the organisation in the court cases.¹ The second source is statements by NCL members themselves in the trial records of these court cases. The third is material obtained in interviews with NCL members during my research for this dissertation.

Before I continue with the analysis a number of preliminary comments about its nature and aims seem in order. The first set of questions arises out of the limited and sparse nature of this source material. Only ten of the exhibits² in the court cases contain useful political discussion of any length relating to the broader purposes of the NCL. These documents were written by a small group of activists in the NCL. Only three - a political manifesto by Hirson,³ the

1

See Appendix.

2

S v Daniels, Exh C5, C6, C7 and C9; *S v Hirson*, Exh M4(1), M4(3), M4(4), M4(5), M5(1), M5(2)

3

See Appendix 1, Document 2. *S v Hirson*, Exh M5(2) seems to be a more elaborate version of this manifesto, also authored by Hirson.

constitution adopted in 1962,⁴ and a discussion of the London Committee's perspective on the future of the NCL⁵ - were not authored or co-written by Leftwich. All the others seem either to have been written exclusively by him or to have had him as a major contributor. Thus there are two different versions⁶ of an extensive treatment by Leftwich on the NCL's internal strategic options. This treatment argues strongly for the diversification of the NCL into four different subgroups and seems to have been produced at the time of the Cape Town branch's discussions.⁷ Another document⁸ sets out the parameters of one of the four subgroups, a projected political intelligence unit. This document, too, seems to have been produced by Leftwich. Then there are two drafts of a discussion of the role of the NCL in the context of the broader liberation struggle⁹ which were, according to trial evidence, produced Vigne, but which contained ideas by Leftwich and Watson. Still another¹⁰ is a declaration of the aims of the NCL based on an extract from the second of these drafts and on the balance of probabilities seems to have been written by either Vigne or Leftwich. The last¹¹ is a pamphlet which according to witnesses in the trial was again almost exclusively authored by Leftwich.

Care should therefore be taken in the interpretation of these documents, and the opinions expressed in them should not be taken to be representative of the organisation as a whole. They are, however, very useful in spite of this. Firstly, as we have seen, Leftwich's intervention was of crucial importance in the NCL's decision to continue with sabotage. The documents offer us a glimpse of a key player's understanding of the issues at stake in the continuation of sabotage. Secondly, - and more importantly - such doubts rest on a misunderstanding of the aim of discourse analysis. It should be remembered that my analysis focuses not so much on the **substantive points** made in these documents but on what they reveal of the **underlying assumptions** that structured the NCL's thought. In Chapter 2 I emphasised that ideology functions most crucially on the level of the "obvious", and gives the subject the seemingly spontaneous and incontrovertible substratum of tacit assumptions that shape its experience of the world.

My analysis will be aimed at this level. The understanding of these tacit assumptions are crucial if we are to make sense of Leftwich's position at all: without it, we are in danger of misunderstanding the nature of his position, and his views seem to lack coherence. Much of the

4 S v **Hirson**, Exh M5(1).

5 S v **Hirson**, Exh M4(1).

6 S v **Daniels**, Exh C7 (which appears to be the earlier draft) and Exh C6.

7 See pp. 127 - 128 above.

8 S v **Daniels**, Exh C9.

9 S v **Hirson**, Exh M4(4) and M4(5).

10 S v **Hirson**, Exh M4(3).

11 S v **Daniels**, Exh C5.

initial part of my argument will be geared towards understanding Leftwich's own reasons for arguing for the continuation of sabotage. But the purpose of this analysis extends beyond the limits of a consideration of Leftwich's position to that of his fellow-NCL members. For, as my consideration of court material and interviews will show, the underlying assumptions of these documents were shared by Leftwich's fellow-members in the NCL - even by those who, like Lewin and Daniels, were in 1964 becoming increasingly doubtful about sabotage. These documents thus offer a springboard to an understanding of the particular ways in which liberal NCL members **in general** conceived of themselves and their political project, the shared framework of assumptions within which the sabotage issue was debated in the NCL. This will make it possible for us to consider, in the next chapter, the implications of this framework for the possible choices that eventually seemed to offer themselves.

Finally, some general points should be made about the fashion in which this analysis proceeds. I have chosen to pitch my analysis at some distance from its own technical operations. Here I follow a course slightly different from that of other analyses of South African political discourse where Pêcheuxian terminology was explicitly used.¹² The problem with a too explicit and step-by-step use of Pêcheux's methodology has definite drawbacks: Through its repetitive focus on preconstructions, articulations and yet more preconstructed and articulations, it can make an analysis inaccessible and difficult to read. On the other hand, one cannot simply present the results of discourse analysis without showing how that result was arrived at. The interpretative nature of discourse analysis as a strategy means that its results - unlike, say, the conclusions of a statistical analysis - cannot, if they are to be fully understood, simply be presented in self-contained form. Though analysis does make possible the formulation of general hypotheses and remarks about the overall logic of a discourse, its point lies in the way in which these hypotheses enable us to re-read the texts in question. Thus there is no short cut, no option other than to trace the analysis as it unfolds.

I have thus pursued the road of compromise: in the initial stages of my analysis, I shall make use of Pêcheux's terminology, and show the process by which my conclusions were arrived at. As my analysis proceeds, I shall leave its mechanics increasingly at an implicit level, concentrating more and more on its implications. In addition, the reader might find it useful to read the texts presented in Appendix 1 before working through the analysis. This should make the analysis easier to follow and will also make much clearer precisely what a discourse analysis can contribute to an unreflective, "natural" reading of a text.

¹² See Andrew Merrifield, "Beyond Class Politics: The Political Practice of the Natives Representative Council"

6.2 Justifying sabotage: an apparent contradiction

Even a cursory reading of the documents should show that most of them deal, explicitly or implicitly, with the central problem the NCL faced towards the end of 1963 and early 1964, namely the value of the strategy of sabotage and the organisation's place in the wider struggle against apartheid. By that time it was plain to see that sabotage had had no immediate effect and had only solidified white support for the state. After Rivonia and the waves of arrests and trials that followed it the liberation movements seemed pitifully weak and the strength of the state was increasingly evident. As Leftwich points out,

"The might of the regime, its preparedness and effectiveness and willingness and ability to crush internal resistance cannot be under-estimated."¹³

Neither did the NCL have illusions as to their lack of mass support. The London Committee states in its analysis of the organisation's tasks that

"[the] NCL still remains a small elite group, distinguished by its technical competence and secure organisation, rather than by its size or effectiveness. In the existing situation, having failed to establish itself as the means of co-ordinating and federating all revolutionary activity, it is unlikely to grow to the extent where it can displace The Spear or Poqo from their positions as being the revolutionary arms of the ANC and PAC."¹⁴

As can be seen in this passage, a clear distinction is made between the arena of mass organisation and the NCL's nature as a small technically competent elite, and it is recognised that the NCL's smallness is a serious drawback. Almost all the documents reflect this acute consciousness of the organisation's difficult position. The weakness of the NCL, the might of the state and the difficulty of the task that lay ahead are omnipresent and central themes. Quite clearly it cannot be said that the authors of these documents miscalculated the might of the state or overestimated its own strength. As one would expect, this means that there are very strong and obvious arguments against sabotage. Leftwich himself explicitly states that

"it is generally agreed that sabotage work can, at this stage, be valuable only in that it keeps the political climate warm, indicates that there are groups still around, and provides training for the members of the company. It should not be seen as a challenge to the centre of power. Furthermore, it can involve incalculable risks for the members if the jobs planned are too ambitious or dangerous, and risks which, at that, are not offset by the gains accruing from the jobs, be they political, financial or purely of propagandist value."¹⁵

13 S v Daniels. Exh. C7, p. 4.
 14 S v Hirson. Exh M4(1), p. 1.
 15 S v Daniels. Exh C6, pp. 7 - 8.

Yet in spite of these objections, NCL members sometimes seem unexpectedly sanguine about the NCL's relative chances. In the very same breath in which the London Committee points out the NCL's vast disability in terms of size and mass support, it announces that the NCL

"... has, however, an undoubted initiative over the other organisations (in the degree of its technical competence)."¹⁶

The precise advantages of technical competence are, however, not made clear. Neither is it explained how these compensate for the disadvantages flowing from a lack of mass support. Similarly Leftwich, immediately after stating in great detail the case against sabotage, argues for another position which, he says,

"accepts the basic security objection contained in the first argument, but does not accept that this need necessarily mean that current urban action must be ruled out."¹⁷

Surprisingly enough, this conclusion is not based on any more positive evaluation of the effects of sabotage. There is in fact no indication that Leftwich can offer grounds for dissenting from the "general agreement" that the risks attendant upon sabotage outweigh the effects. Nowhere does he question the assertion that it does not succeed in challenging central power; neither does he offer an argument in terms of which the effects of sabotage can be seen as worthwhile even if they do not challenge central power. It looks as if the argument for sabotage does not, in fact, accept (as Leftwich says it does) the security objection". Instead, it appears to be based on a simple **disregard** for its warnings.

This impression is reinforced by the hopes Vigne and Leftwich seem to have entertained for the future of the organisation. In the passage below, which I have already referred to in Chapter 1,¹⁸ they describe the NCL's role in any projected resurgence of popular struggle in the following terms:

"...[it must be] an immediate aim of the NCL... to strengthen its organisation in such a way that the revived military bodies of the ANC and PAC may in the course of time come together in the National Freedom Army which it is the NCL's chief business to recruit, train and jointly lead."¹⁹

On the face of it, then, these documents seem to suggest that Leftwich and other NCL members' arguments for the continuation of sabotage can indeed be explained only in terms of blind recklessness. It seems as if the decision to go on with sabotage was based, not on any analysis of

16 **S v Hirson**, Exh M4(1), p. 1.

17 **S v Daniels**, Exh. C6, p. 13.

18 See p. 11 above..

19 **S v Hirson**, Exh M4(4), p. 3.

South African conditions but rather on the frustrated need to go over to action, no matter what kind.

It will be my purpose in this chapter and the next to show that this view is based on a misunderstanding. My analysis will show that the decision to continue with sabotage did indeed make sense in its own terms. Blindness did play a role, but it was a blindness of a very subtle sort, rooted not in frustration or in a refusal to see what was in front of their faces, but rather in NCL members' most basic assumptions, their very way of seeing.

6.3 Armed struggle and ideological division in NCL discourse

Perhaps the best place to start is with a paragraph in which the basic shift to armed struggle is described. In "The NCL - background and aims", the text written some time between September 1963 and early 1964 by Randolph Vigne we find the following description of the South African situation:

"The banning of Congress and crippling of other liberatory organisations by proscription of members and by laws removing freedom of assembly and speech, effectively forced the leaders of the rightless four-fifths of the South African people to seek **military means of liberation** now that **the means of civil struggle** had been struck from their hands."²⁰

Remember that, in analysing this paragraph, our focus is not so much on the substantive content of the passage, on the truth-value of the propositions regarding the turn to sabotage. Rather, we should try to uncover the basic assumptions that underpin them, the presupposed distinctions that are underlying these propositions.

In the above passage, for example, the two emphasised phrases should be recognised as examples of Pêcheux's "preconstructed". As I pointed out in Chapter 2, the crucial feature of the operation of preconstruction is that we see discourse talking about an object **as if** it already exists in the outside world. By recognising these phrases as preconstructed, we focus attention upon an aspect of the passage we usually ignore: normally, the questions one might ask oneself upon reading such a passage would pertain to the truth-value of such a statement. In other words, one might dispute whether it was in fact the banning of Congress which led to the turn to armed struggle or whether the armed struggle was in fact the only means of liberation now open. In other words, one usually tends to look at a text in the light of the question whether it reflects

²⁰

S v Hirson and Others, Exh M4(4), p.1. My emphasis. Unless otherwise stated, all emphases in this and the subsequent chapter have been made by me. Where this was relevant, I have highlighted preconstructed by printing them in bold and articulations by printing them in italics.

reality accurately or not. Discourse analysis, instead, focuses on the text as a political act in itself. It points out the interesting and complex logic of the fact that the armed struggle and civil struggle are "recognised" as entities at all. Here there is already an important difference between NCL discourse and other liberal discourses - for example, that of Alfred Hoernle. The chief difference between their attitude to forms of political struggle is not so much that the NCL was "for" sabotage and Hoernle "against" it, but that Hoernle's discourse does not even recognise it at all: "military means" as a way of implementing liberal aims is not even an **object** in Hoernle's universe. By focusing on this fact, the notion of preconstruction opens our eyes to the different way NCL/ARM members were "installed" in society, the different political universe that was open to their eyes.

But discourse analysis would be a feeble tool if it stopped at this insight. Its crucial role lies in the way in which it refuses us the right to stop here, confident that we know what is meant by the notion of "military struggle". This is why Pêcheux's emphasises, after "preconstruction", the concept of "articulation". Besides cataloguing the objects that were "real for the NCL", we have to uncover the relationships the NCL saw between them. Here, for example, a clear **opposition** is presupposed between two preconstuctions: "civil struggle" on one hand, and "military means" on the other. In effect, therefore, two separate and different political spaces or fields are constructed in a relation of opposition to each other. On the one hand there is the field of parliamentary, non-violent struggle; on the other there is the field of military action. Much of my analysis will turn on the precise value this opposition had in NCL/ARM discourse.

A closer investigation shows that these two terrains of struggle are seen in very different - indeed, **irreconcilable** - terms. This should be clear from the following passage from "The NCL - background and aims":

"There had seemed to be **ideological reasons** for the fragmentation of the liberatory movement in South Africa into mutually antagonistic groups. The end of **political struggle** *rendered such division meaningless*, and the first move to organise **military action** against the South African Government was made by a group of South Africans of various political allegiances, from various communities and language groups, who in the second half of 1961 formed a national committee to plan the military action ahead..."²¹

This is a crucial passage, and in a sense most of what I will say about the NCL's understanding of revolutionary politics flows out of the distinction made here. Notice, again, the way in which the text "cuts up" reality in a specific way. As before, it differentiates between political and military struggle. But here the difference between civil and military means of liberation noted

21 **S v Hirson and Others**, Exh M4(4), p. 1.

above does not merely differentiate violent and non-violent struggle: it creates a division between "military action" on the one hand and "political struggle" itself.

This is not merely an analytic move. Obviously it is possible to distinguish, at a theoretical level, between two different but complementary levels of the same struggle. This is however not the case here. This should become clear from the scrutiny of a new preconstructed, "ideological reasons". This signifier labels (and thus carves out from the general domain of "reasons") a specific and delimited category of motivation, a category which is thus singled out as having its own logic, its own characteristics. In addition, this signifier is articulated in a very specific relation to the preconstructed, "political struggle": the text states that the end of the political struggle **made ideological division meaningless**. Military and political struggle are thus seen as being finally irreconcilable or at least separate: ideological considerations and commitments are seen as belonging to the field of political struggle, and as the argument "the end of political struggle rendered such division meaningless" indicates, they are alien to the field of military struggle. The latter is seen as a field unto itself, one which does not involve politics or ideology at all.

This is a deep and prevalent theme in NCL discourse: although it finds its most systematic and elaborate expression in the documents it recurs throughout liberal and libertarian NCL members' discourse. It is, for example, at the bottom of Eddie Daniels' anti-apartheid non-sectarianism:

"I lean towards socialism.... but [it] wasn't the ideology that unified us. We were fighting, as far as I was concerned and as far as those involved with were concerned, we were fighting to get rid of apartheid."²²

The central elements of this statement - the general unconcern with ideological orientation, the pragmatic insistence on the simple, material exigencies of the struggle against apartheid - crop up time and again in the words of ex-members of the NCL. Even in the discourse of members of the NCL who were not Liberal Party members, similar themes crop up, as in Raymond Eisenstein's insistence that he is no "organisation man":²³ this formulation is linked in his discourse precisely to his libertarianism and his refusal to be bound to any specific ideological commitment.

In the documents it seems that there was, at the root of this understanding of the nature of military struggle, a deep suspicion of ideology and ideological commitment. Not only was

²² Interview with Eddie Daniels. Hout Bay. 18 October 1987.

²³ Interview with Raymond Eisenstein. London. 16 April 1989.

ideology irrelevant; it was actually counterproductive. To the London Committee, for example, the Communist Party's analysis

"... demonstrates **the basic rigidity of the CP and its inflexibility in a new situation** which Marx did not conceive of, and which none of the early Rev. theorists did not find themselves in.(sic)"²⁴

The alternative to a pragmatic rejection of ideology was a rigidity that did not allow revolutionaries to adapt flexibly to new situations and respond to objective conditions. Furthermore, Vigne and Leftwich argue that

"[the] crushing of both the Umkhonto we Sizwe and the Pan Africanist Congress, as well as of these minor bodies, has both taught a tragic lesson to **all who continue to fight each other and thus play into the hands of the common enemy**, and has left in existence only the original military organisation in the field, the National Committee for Liberation, **itself formed on the basis of national, non-racial unity and ideological reconciliation and compromise - a degree of flexibility based on a wish for fighting unity.**"²⁵

It is clear, even before analysis, that this passage implies an almost causal relationship between ideological division and the fact that the P.A.C. and MK were "crushed". What discourse analysis can contribute is an account of how this argument depends upon the way the key terms of NCL/ARM discourse are articulated here. Notice, in particular, how the notion of "ideological division" is articulated in terms of the preconstructed "all who continue to fight each other", which is in its turn (through the words *and thus*) articulated as equivalent to "play[ing] into the hands of the common enemy". Here one can see in practice what is meant by the Saussurian dictum that meaning resides in relations of substitutability between terms. The logical force of the argument depends on the **presupposed equivalence** of these terms, on the way the discourse creates a whole chain of equivalences ("division"... "fight each other"... "play into the hands..." etc.); its flow is dependent on the way in which this chain makes it possible to slide from one substitutable term to another.

The general result of this chain of equivalences is the contrasting ways in which the NCL and other organisations can be seen to inhabit the political space delimited by the phrase "military means". Whereas the other organisations in the field were, as it were, "visitors" from the terrain of political struggle, importing its imperatives into the field of "military means", the NCL was "true" to the inherent logic of the field, eschewed extraneous ideological division, and survived.

²⁴ S v Daniels. Exh C7. p. 9.
²⁵ Ibid., pp. 2 - 3.

The separation between ideological/political struggle and "military means" has an important consequence. The discursive demarcation of the field of "military struggle" means that armed guerilla action is given a privileged and central place in their discourse. Furthermore, this warfare is understood in a very narrow way. NCL documents are marked, in fact, by a very limited and narrow strategic focus. In the opening paragraphs of his strategic paper, Leftwich states his intention to provide

"...a broad analysis of the SA situation, compared with other situations at other times in which the overthrow of regimes has taken place. The first sections will deal... with a broad enunciation of **the factors which appear to be necessary for the effective overthrow of a regime**, measured against the existence - or non-existence - of these in the SA context."²⁶

The emphasised preconstructed - "factors which appear to be necessary..." - is a very important one in Leftwich's discourse and crops up repeatedly in his formulation as well as in the writings of the London Committee. Leftwich's entire strategic argument is concerned with such "factors", with what Leftwich takes to be the "conditions for rev. activity (sic)"²⁷. But these formulations are articulated in terms of phrases such as "the conditions for effective warfare,"²⁸ "factors that make the fight possible" or "conditions for effective strike potential,"²⁹ and are opposed to the notion of "factors that militate against such warfare on an effective basis."³⁰ The problems of **revolutionary organisation** are thus reduced to questions of **military strategy**. The following extract from the statement of the London Committee shows the consequences of this limited concept of revolutionary strategy. According to them,

"[looking] at **the strategic situation beyond South Africa** for the moment it seems that the free world has provided for South Africa very few of **the services it requires if the revolution is to proceed**. Amongst these are **proper training facilities, transport and supplies**"³¹

The implications of understanding the "strategic situation" in terms of "services it requires if the revolution is to proceed" should be emphasised. Not only are questions of revolutionary strategy reduced to military problems, but military problems are in turn reduced to purely **technical** questions. Revolution is therefore simply a matter of "proper training facilities, transport and supplies!"

26 **S v Daniels**, Exh C6, p. 1.

27 **Ibid.**, p. 4.

28 **S v Daniels**, Exh C7, p.5.

29 **Ibid.**, Exh C7, p.6.

30 **Ibid.**, p.2.

31 **Ibid.**

6.4 Technical competence and fighting unity in Leftwich's conception of the role of the NCL

The NCL's distrust of ideology had serious implications for the manner in which they conceptualised their position. The organisation had been founded on the basis of the assumption that the political fight was over - that the state had crushed all the possibilities for mass organisation - and that now, force had to be used. But when it came to using force, the odds against the NCL seemed insurmountable. The implications of this fact can be traced clearly in the thought of Adrian Leftwich. Numerous extracts can be analysed, but here a few examples should suffice. Note, for instance, the way in which the problems facing the NCL are described in the following passage:

"When a country has reached the stage of industrial development which SA has, **the problems of revolutionary overthrow** are far more complicated than where the economy is either under-developed or just developing. The **state of organisation, the extent of the infrastructure, the ability to mobilise forces** are all dependent on the state of the economy..."³²

Notice the limited way in which the preconstructed "the problems of revolutionary overthrow" are understood. The problems facing the NCL are articulated exclusively in terms that relate to the strength of the state. In another passage, this strength is in turn discussed in revealing terms:

"The recent reports on [the establishment of] factories at secret places in the country is evidence of the degree to which **preparation is being taken seriously**. The country is covered by a **vast network of roads, railways and communications**; police stations are **connected by radio** and the air force, plus helicopters, is in a position to **reach any corner of the country within hours, if not less**..."³³

Note, again, the purely physical, **logistical** terms of the articulation of the concept of the might of the state. This was the logical consequence of the separation of the political and the military field: the enemy had to be defeated through strength, and consequently the main obstacle in the road to victory was the enemy's own strength.

It is important to understand the level at which this point is being made. Even a superficial reading of the documents shows clearly that Leftwich and other central NCL members believed that NCL would not be able, on its own, to challenge such a powerful foe as the state at all. My analysis in this chapter should enable us to go further. It shows that this impossibility was not merely an empirical conclusion. It was an **a priori** judgement: it flowed out of the very terms in which the field of revolutionary struggle was conceptualised. Their separation of armed and

³² **S v Daniels**. Exh C6, p. 7.

³³ **Ibid.**, p. 6 .

political struggle meant that Leftwich saw the NCL as operating in the very battleground in which the enemy was strongest. The notion that the NCL could not succeed on its own was rooted in their most basic and unconscious assumptions regarding the nature of revolutionary struggle: they could not do otherwise than to see themselves - and any other small organisation for that matter - as a small, weak protagonist heavily outnumbered by a well armed, well organised foe. How, then, could they hope to play a role in such a fight? How could they possibly entertain hopes of victory?

Leftwich did not think the NCL's weakness doomed it to irrelevance, as implying that they should give up violent struggle altogether. Instead, he argued for a reconceptualisation of the NCL's role. According to him, guerilla forces should not be seen as the only ones acting in the revolutionary field:

"the chances for a successful armed effort against the SA Govt. forces are small. More specifically, the possibilities of a **freedom army** achieving power by military means, that is by military conquest of the SA regime, are limited, if not out of the question. This does not mean that we dismiss the role of **armed fighters in the overall struggle**. The struggle will not be a simple one. It will not simply be a question of warfare."³⁴

Instead, he reconceptualised their role in apparently more limited terms:

"While we have been pessimistic about the possibilities of a **freedom army** actually overthrowing the regime, we do not suggest that **guerilla forces** are therefore not to be trained, and prepared for action. Far from it. There would seem to be a most significant role which they can play in the future - not as a vast army, but as **small isolated pockets of men**, harassing and sabotaging the rural areas, railway lines and most important of all, operating in the reserves or Bantustans where ... armed and trained local peasantry could be of great significance in the context of **the complex arrangement of forces** which we suggest will finally cause the demise of the apartheid system in SA."

A new preconstructed is thus introduced into the argument at this point: besides signifiers like "guerilla forces" and "isolated pockets of men" there is now also a new entity: a "complex arrangement of forces" which is larger than, and includes, these subsidiary objects. This was how Leftwich reacted to the new scenario that faced them after Rivonia. The overriding strategic problem now became the question of the possibility of an alliance with other, mass-based organisations and the issue of their place in such an alliance.

On the face of it, then, the NCL is seen here as occupying a marginal role: it would only be part of a wider scenario, a group of fighters playing a real but small role in a larger struggle. But this appearance is deceptive. To understand why, we have to follow through in more detail the

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

implications of the NCL's separation of political and armed struggle. Firstly, Leftwich argued that despite its small size, the NCL would have a clear role to play as a source of technical skills and information. The NCL is thus conceived as a wing of experts, presenting a Freedom Army

"... with technique/ information and intelligence information, which will be basic to their effectiveness."³⁵

Note the crucial phrase "basic to their effectiveness". In the light of our analysis until now, its significance should be clear. If the terrain of revolutionary struggle is understood as posing **primarily** logistical and organisational problems, then the role of technical advisors would not be incidental but crucial to success in this field, vital to the success of the struggle. The London Committee's phraseology is even more emphatic:

"We suggest... that the NCL look upon itself as a sort of specialist cadre which will set up **the sinews of the struggle**. That is **the procurement of materials, their transport and training**. We must continue with direct operations. We must try to participate in the field to an increasing extent. Should we liaise with other groups with manpower, we should concentrate on maximum exploitation of our specific abilities."³⁶

The central preconstructed, "the sinews of the struggle" is articulated in terms of included terms that relate only to logistical problems. It gives the notion of a merely ancillary and secondary structure (what are sinews without a brain to guide them?) It suggests that the NCL's role would be **neutral** vis a vis any one of a number of different political aims, as if it should not hope to influence the overall political or ideological character of the struggle.

But this is precisely where the "sinews" metaphor is misleading: the very opposite is true. This should be clear from the earlier analysis of the articulation of the concept of the **international strategic** context. As I have shown it is understood precisely in terms of the concept of "services required if the revolution is to proceed" - which was in turn discussed in terms of materials, transport, and training.³⁷ The field of application of the notion of "sinews" (which might at first glance look relatively marginal) is thus precisely coterminous with the whole field of "strategic problems"! There is simply no recognition of any other question which might fall under the rubric of strategy: the only valid imperatives of the struggle are logistical. To extend the London committee's metaphor, the NCL/ARM would be the sinews of a revolutionary body that was composed of sinew, bone and muscle, but in which a brain would be useless!

35 **S v Daniels**, Exh C7, p. 7.

36 **S v Hirson**, Exh M4(1), p. 2.

37 See p. 141

This might seem fanciful. The same point can however be illustrated via another route. Note, therefore, the terms in which the London committee suggests the idea of co-operation with other organisations:

"The proposal that is made to each of these organisations should clearly be a **joint command**. Each of these organisations should be asked to do what it can do best. It is to be hoped in due course a **complete blend** will be achieved and a full unity of effort and purpose...

Initially, we suggest a liaison based on a practical project to be decided by you... **Ultimate joint command** to flow from practical liaisons."³⁸

It is important to consider very carefully indeed the meaning of the preconstructed "unity of effort and purpose". As I have pointed out, the NCL saw ideological difference as irrelevant and counterproductive in the field of revolutionary struggle. This position has a corollary: an omnipresent concern with the possibility of non-sectarian unity. The rejection of ideological commitment as the root of sectarian struggle depends, in other words, on the assumption that in spite of these divisions there is, in fact, a large degree of **actual** concurrence on pragmatic revolutionary aims. The ARM pamphlet released after Rivonia thus states:

"We salute other Revolutionary Freedom Movements in South Africa... While ARM may differ from [the men of Rivonia] and other groups in the freedom struggle, we believe in the unification of all forces fighting for the new order in our country. We have enough in common."³⁹

It is because they had so much in common that ideological division was to be rejected. In his paper, Vigne contrasts the ideological division that characterised the struggle sharply with the overall similarity of revolutionary aims:

"Smaller groups also launched military activity, retaining **their outdated mutual hostility** to other organisations with **the liberation of the rightless people of South Africa as a common aim**."⁴⁰

This "common aim" in other words, is articulated as qualitatively different from the sectarian aims that belong to the terrain of political struggle and ideological difference. It is a non-ideological aim, one that commands an over-arching loyalty, and that transcends sectarian division. And it is in terms of such a transcendent aim that the goals of the NCL are characterised. When Leftwich proposes the formation of an intelligence-gathering wing, he states that

38 **Ibid.**, pp. 1 - 2.
 39 **S v Daniels**, Exh C5.
 40 **S v Hirson**, Exh M4(4), p. 2.

The Unit will act for the furthering of **the broad aims of nonracial democracy in South Africa...** As its members will be drawn, possibly, from all these groups, and will include individuals associated with none of them, it will be in the best position to influence events without **the encumbrance of sectional party loyalty.**⁴¹

Note how the notion of a commitment to "the broad aims of nonracial democracy" is contrasted to that of "sectional party loyalties". For Leftwich, the NCL's own principles exist on a completely different level as do those of other organisations. They do not derive from the terrain of political struggle and ideological division at all. When Leftwich proposes that members of the intelligence unit

"... will be required to **give loyalty to the Unit**, to accept its **discipline** completely..."⁴²

- this loyalty should therefore be seen as fundamentally different from the sectarian loyalty commanded by ideological principles. This interpretation seems to be confirmed by many remarks by other NCL/ARM members. When Eddie Daniels, for example, states that "If you're a socialist and you're prepared to fight for this and I'm a capitalist and I'm prepared to fight for the same cause, let's join forces",⁴³ it is precisely this view of a trans-ideological goal that underlies his point. Members like Leftwich and Daniels hoped that other organisations would discard ideology so that all could come together in a fight against apartheid.

It should now be clear what the London committee meant when it wrote of the "full unity of effort and purpose" that would hopefully follow practical liaison. It seems as if this unity could only be marked by a replacement of specific ideological viewpoints and limited sectarian loyalties by the commitment to those overarching, transcendent goals that just happened to characterise the NCL's politics! Though the NCL was in one sense a **peripheral** organisation, lacking the muscle and following of other organisations, it was in another sense quite central, much more than a group of technical revolutionary experts. If the struggle was to succeed at all, the NCL would have to be instrumental in bringing about the unification of the fragmented and split revolutionary movement under the values that everybody (deep down) would recognise as valid anyway if they had not been led astray by spurious doctrinal issues. Basic to the very concept of the NCL co-operating with other organisations was the idea that the NCL would eventually displace competing ideological commitments.

It is in terms of this understanding of the importance of the idea of a non-sectarian and pragmatic commitment to effectiveness that the earlier-quoted statement about the need to

41 S v Daniels, Exh C9, p. 2.

42 S v Daniels, Exh C9, p. 1.

43 Interview with Eddie Daniels, Hout Bay, 18 October 1987.

recruit, train and jointly lead a National Freedom Army should be understood. Immediately following that statement, Vigne and Leftwich argue that such a role is indeed necessary; the crucial and concluding passage in that argument runs as follows:

"The *raison d'être* of the National Committee for Liberation is the proper organisation and strategic use of such force, in the light of a major prerequisite to its use, that the more firmly, resolutely and speedily such force is used, the more quickly can be ended the current stagnation of South Africa's growth to nationhood as a free African state, and the more rapidly can be achieved the liberation of all its people from slavery in its 20th-century capitalist form, from ignorance, poverty and fear."⁴⁴

The justification for the continuation of sabotage should be understood in terms of this *raison d'être*. This should be clear from Leftwich's strategic paper, in which he listed the following advantages that according to him flowed from sabotage:

- "a) Training and experience for company members
- b) coupled, at the present stage, with propaganda and publicity, it would help create the feeling of uncertainty and fear which would be necessary as a start to limit immigration... and foreign capital.
- c) it would give the company a stock of credits which would be to its great advantage when the struggle moves into a later stage
- d) it would be a morale boosting function - not so much for company - but for the masses generally, since it would show that there are still groups around which are active.
- e) it would unnerve the govt and police by its accuracy and choice of objectives, and again, coupled with effective propaganda, it would create a climate of uncertainty and angst among white South Africa"⁴⁵

It should be obvious that the underlying notion of the nature of sabotage as a political act is of a piece with the liberal notion of sabotage articulated by Daniels and others.⁴⁶ Sabotage - for Leftwich, as for the other liberal NCL members - was in the final analysis a signifying, performative act. The notion that the NCL could build up its stock of credits through sabotage makes sense primarily in terms of this conception. For Leftwich, the NCL would through its acts of sabotage signify to the masses its revolutionary seriousness. It would indicate their uncompromising commitment and their technical competence - and therefore their essentiality for any successful revolution. Through this the masses would recognise them as the group most suited to help them in their struggle and play a unifying role.

The crucial point here is that sabotage is not meant to be a central weapon in the insurrection itself. As we have seen, the NCL's centrality is conceived to lie, not in the damage it could do to the state but rather in the values which it embodies, the commitment to pragmatic effectiveness

⁴⁴ S v *Hirson*. Exh M4(4). p. 5.

⁴⁵ S v *Daniels*. Exh C6. p. 13.

⁴⁶ See p. 126 ff. above

and the eschewing of divisive ideological commitment it insists on. And sabotage is thus meant, not to bring the state toppling down but to ensure that when the masses rise, the NCL is in a favourable position to ensure that its un-ideological and pragmatic vision helps shape that struggle.

Here we have the answer to the apparent contradiction pointed out on p. 136. There it seemed as if the argument for the continuation of sabotage was based on a simple disregard for the arguments against it. Now it is clear that this impression missed the point. The interesting thing about Leftwich's justification of the continuation of sabotage is that he does not disagree with the observation that insurrectionary conditions do not exist. He simply side-steps it. His arguments do not depend upon an appeal to the direct results of sabotage. In terms of Leftwich's argument these are irrelevant. Whereas the argument against sabotage depends upon the assumption that conditions do not favour effective guerilla war, Leftwich simply states that the NCL should be ready when they do. His arguments for sabotage and intelligence training refer to the need to build up the skills and revolutionary credibility "against the day when this will be possible and effective."⁴⁷ The point of its activities are simply **preparation**, so that when guerilla war is possible, the NCL would be in a favourable position to intervene.

This notion is closely related to another recurring theme in NCL discourse: the central importance of building up technical expertise. In the documents, time and time again, reference is made to the need to build up "a highly competent wing of experts"⁴⁸ and to accumulate a "pool of knowledge and know-how concerning field techniques",⁴⁹ to build up a database of "facts... and up-to-date information" that can be made available to selected political groupings.⁵⁰

It is in terms of this category above all others that the NCL's relationship with the masses it hoped to liberate was conceived. Since most of its members did not themselves number among the oppressed its claim for a place in the struggle was crucially problematic, and since it was not in touch with any trade union or popular organisation which itself represented the oppressed it could not even justify its existence with reference to its organisational work with the oppressed. Instead, that relationship would have to be mediated through the category of technical skill; the NCL would have a place in the struggle because it had access to a pool of know-how and resources that would be necessary in the years of struggle ahead.

47 S v Daniels, Exh C7, p. 6.

48 Ibid., p.7.

49 S v Daniels, Exh C6, p.12.

50 See S v Daniels, Exh C9

The above analysis has shown that Leftwich's sanguine expectations of the future of the NCL must be understood in terms of the political logic of their underlying assumptions. Though at first glance they appear simply arrogant and irrational, they proceed in fact from the underlying assumptions about the relation between the field of revolutionary struggle and that of politics. Though the position expressed in them did not proceed **inevitably** from those assumptions, they are made possible by them: the notion of "military struggle" and ideological difference as fields extraneous to one another enabled Leftwich and the London committee to see the NCL in terms that made it, in their view, central to the fight against apartheid.

6.5. The ethics of being an amateur: the concept of the "ordinary person"

The analysis so far has shown the extent to which the NCL's discourse was characterised by a deep suspicion of ideology. The centrality of this concern should not be underestimated. In part it reflected a judgement about the relevance or counter-productiveness of ideology. But it was also more than that. Its relevance should be understood mainly in terms of a certain **moral** vision - a moral vision of some power and simplicity. This moral view can be explored in terms of two closely interlinked themes.

The first such theme in NCL discourse is linked to the notion of an "amateur". It is indeed striking that this notion should occur so often in contemporary interviews with ex-members of the NCL. Sometimes, of course, the use of this term is not surprising, and NCL members seem to use it to indicate, simply, that they were not professionals:

"Nobody had any idea what it [sabotage] actually meant, nobody had any training, nobody had any idea of how it would [be] organise[d]... So it was very much a sort of hand-to-mouth and amateurist (sic) thing."⁵¹

All the same, the use of this term by an organisation that placed so much emphasis on **technical** efficacy - an organisation that was, in fact, in its use of shaped charges and electrical timers, quite sophisticated for its time - should not be taken quite for granted. More is bound up with the term "amateur" than just amateurishness. Indeed, it seems to carry a range of meanings beyond that, and situates NCL members in political space in a very specific way. Eddie Daniels, for example, uses the notion of being an amateur in much the same way as does Lewin in the passage above:

"When we formed this organisation, we were **amateurs**. We learned as we went along. We were not **highly trained professional soldiers**. All we were trying to do, what we felt was our contribution to the struggle.

⁵¹ Interview with Hugh Lewin. Harare. 3 February 1990.

... We had a chap by the name of Watson who was a parachutist in the British Army, and he gave us some training. But besides that we had no training at all. We were just **ordinary people**.⁵²

To define oneself as an amateur was therefore also to define oneself as an ordinary, common citizen, a member of the civil society that Verwoerdian apartheid was attacking and in terms of whose values liberalism's central appeal was couched. And opposed to the notion of being an amateur, therefore, was not only that of the professional, but also that of the politician:

"... the people in the ARM... were **just ordinary modest people** who had no great ideas of running the government or running the country or seeing themselves as Prime Minister or generals....[W]e just had the general understanding that we wanted a non-racial country, democracy and justice... Who was going to run it did not interest us.... [N]one of us had any ideas about **holding high office**. All we wanted was to make a contribution to the struggle."⁵³

A similar sentiment is uttered by Hugh Lewin who points out that

"I did not see myself as a **politician** in any way. I was, if you like, an **ordinary citizen** who happened to be doing things."⁵⁴

In this form, the cluster of notions surrounding the concept of the "amateur" is not incidental but central to the NCL's discourse. It is a set of notions that comes up time and again in the self-identification of NCL members. The recurrent notion of the NCL as a group of like-minded people referred to earlier and Eisenstein's characterisation of himself as not being an "organisation man" falls precisely on this terrain.⁵⁵ NCL discourse installs its subjects crucially as **citizens** - citizens who ordinarily would not become involved with politics but who are forced into action by the assault on the fabric of ordinary life, so that acts which do not ordinarily partake of the political **become** political acts.

"I was not a **politician**, I was **against the injustice** that was taking place. ... You know, you take the making of bread. That is politics in South Africa! It involves job reservation! They say to the black man you can't take that job because you are black. That's politics! So even the making of bread. So every thing in South Africa: who you associated with. That's politics. Where you stay. Almost the air you breathe, that's politics."⁵⁶

Note the highly significant way in which Daniels **opposes** the idea of being an politician and being against injustice. Being a politician is, in a sense, a career choice where seeking "high

52

Ibid.

53

Interview with Eddie Daniels. Hout Bay. 5 June 1988.

54

Interview with Hugh Lewin. Harare. 4 February 1990.

55

See p. (?) above.

56

Interview with Eddie Daniels. **loc. cit.**

office" forms the guiding imperatives of action. The terrain where the love of justice motivates people is precisely that of ordinary life. Just as in the documents of Leftwich and the London committee the field of ideological commitment was external to that of revolutionary struggle, it is here seen as alien to the values in terms of which apartheid are opposed. Paradoxically, these values are also in essence non-political. Note Daniels' emphasis on the fact that it is in **South Africa** that everything is political. The implication is that the politicisation of ordinary life in the South African situation is abnormal. The fact that the acts of ordinary citizens have become treated as political acts is therefore an index of the abnormality of the South African situation.

This is linked to the second central theme in the thought of the NCL. The NCL's exclusion of ideology should be seen, not merely as a judgement about the appropriateness or not of a rigid theoretical scheme but also as part of a powerful ethical and moral vision, a belief that there were tasks that had to be accomplished, and that these tasks were self-evident to all who cared to see them, that they lay obviously to hand. In such a moral universe, ideology and theorising served little purpose. It is significant, for example, that even in the most systematic statements of their political programme, such as in the trial documents, the NCL's revolutionary character was not seen as lying in the fact that it had formulated the "correct line", that its revolutionary doctrine was the correct one. Rather, members spoke about its revolutionary character in ethical terms. This tendency is revealed when Leftwich closes his strategy paper with the following warning:

"... it is suggested that regions do not even begin to operate until they have reached a stage of **effective internal organisation**, till their members have been tried and tested and their **long-term commitment to the cause** and their **willingness to stick it through to the end** have been proved."⁵⁷

What matters is not so much deciding what the tasks were that lay ahead. Those tasks, for the NCL members, were obvious, and plain to see. What mattered was whether one had the toughness, the gumption to carry a difficult task through to the end. As Hugh Lewin comments:

"I know I accept that this is a very simplistic view, but I still think that when you know that one should not get cluttered by all the nonsensical arguments that are put forward which are basically just time-wasting."⁵⁸

This theme seems to provide an important indication as to the terms in which members were interpellated as saboteurs. We have seen, in Chapter 5, that it was precisely in the dangers of action, in the risk of doing something that they believed to be right, that some members found

57

S v Daniels. Exh C6. p. 14.

58

Interview with Hugh Lewin. *loc. cit.*

NCL membership meaningful.⁵⁹ It seems, in other words, that the moral appeal of sabotage against apartheid was closely bound up with this impatience with mere talk. This is certainly reflected in the pamphlet with which the NCL/ARM announced its existence under a new name:

"ARM states its **dedication** and **commitment** to achieving the overthrow of the whole system of apartheid and exploitation in South Africa...

ARM does not only **talk**. ARM **acts**. ARM has declared and will declare itself through action."⁶⁰

The note of moral defiance is significant. It should not be seen as mere revolutionary bravado; the **ethical** terms in which it declares itself reflect precisely the space in which NCL/ARM discourse situated its subjects. It was not a space in which ideological debate and difference had any place; it was a space in which the choice offered to its subjects was simple: they could act and do what was right - or they could participate in mere talk, the ideological debate that was obfuscating the issues.

To summarise: the NCL's ideology is deeply marked by its exclusion of ideological commitment from the terrain of struggle. That exclusion made it possible for them to see the arena of guerilla warfare as the supreme and privileged terrain of struggle. In the case of the more prominent members such as Leftwich and the London committee, it lay at the bottom of the conception of the NCL as the "sinews of the struggle" and it shaped their conception of an overarching commitment to anti-apartheid struggle that would overcome sectarian division and make possible a focus on the pragmatic questions of struggle. In the case of the ordinary members it formed a central part of their commitment to action and their impatience with doubt and ideological hair-splitting. The rejection of ideological struggle was, in other words, a very important and central part of their discourse. It was part of a moral clarity and an insistence on practical action which was one of the organisation's greatest strengths. The linkage between this moral clarity and the concept of being an "ordinary person", standing up against the government's attack on the moral fabric of civil society was a crucial factor in the mobilisation of members to sabotage. It was central to the moral economy of the NCL, to the ethical commitment of members to each other and their organisation in spite of the danger to which they exposed themselves, to their sense of purpose and fulfillment in active struggle against the repression of the South African government after Sharpeville.

⁵⁹ See pp. 110 - 111 above.
⁶⁰ S v Daniels, Exh C5.

6.6 The concept of the "ordinary citizen" in history

To understand the NCL, it is not enough to understand the centrality of the discursive elements I have analysed so far. It is also important to understand their historically situated nature. The symbolic order, we should remember, has its own independent materiality, and when men and women, acting in history, conceptualise their political identity and the nature of their struggle, the conditions imposed on them by history include the discourses which enable and structure their self-identification. That identification is dominated by the signifier in all its historical specificity.

In identifying themselves with the notion of independent, morally committed ordinary citizens taking part in an essentially non-ideological struggle, NCL members were drawing on a set of notions that formed a central and important part of British cultural life. I therefore close off this chapter by tracing a part of the genealogy of this cluster of concepts.⁶¹ I will show the occurrence of these notions in other, earlier contexts, and conclude by asking some questions about the implications for this particular intellectual heritage of its articulation in a South African context.

Broadly speaking the self-confident and experimental amateurishness we trace in the discourse of the NCL seems related to a set of notions expressed in a whole range of ways in British middle-class society. These themes crop up, for example, in the "British empirical tradition" in colonial administration;⁶² it marked off British philosophers from their continental colleagues;⁶³ it was a crucial component, for example, of British war-time ideology;⁶⁴ it crops up repeatedly in British popular fiction.⁶⁵ In each of these contexts a similar thread crops up: a view of praxis

⁶¹ I use the term "genealogy" in its Foucaultian sense: ideological elements that seem similar are upon closer investigation very divergently articulated in different contexts. The study of such elements cannot take the form of the tracing back an unbroken, continuous strand - or even a tangled web - to its historical source. Instead of trying to find, beneath these discontinuities, a hidden unity, genealogy focuses precisely on such breaks and ruptures. For a detailed discussion see H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 104 ff.

⁶² Dr W. Nasson, pers. comm.

⁶³ For a slightly exaggerated thumbnail sketch of this aspect of the "Oxford School", see Jasper Griffin, "Introduction", in Ved Mehta, *Fly and the Fly-bottle: encounters with British Intellectuals* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. xii - xiii.

⁶⁴ The crucial difference between Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* and, for example, Humphrey Jennings's *Listen to Britain* is the emphasis in the latter film on the sounds of domestic Britain. The theme reflected in the opening of the latter film (the lark singing in the wheatfield, the Spitfires roaring over) and the way in which it emphasises the continuity of rural with industrial life is significant, not only because it constructs Britain as a class-unified entity but also because it insists on the umbilical chord connecting the mechanical, steely world of the war industry with the organic values of Britain's rural past (see Jim Hillier, "Humphrey Jennings", in Alan Lovell and Jim Hillier, *Studies in Documentary* (London, Secker and Warburg in association with the British Film Institute, 1972), pp. 886 - 87).

⁶⁵ To take, for example, the terrain of detective fiction: the status of being a comfortably middle-class amateur is what links together Sherlock Holmes and Miss Marple. Contrast this to the hard-boiled detective of

grounded not in systematic theory or a going back to first principles, but in simple common-sense, which is conceived to be deeply different from and systematically opposed to the terrain of self-conscious, systematic theory.

This tradition was articulated in many ways, and obviously could often form the backbone of extremely reactionary political positions. But it also formed a crucial element in popular British radicalism. In the 19th century these notions formed an important part of the anarchistic ideology of the British craft unions of the time, and was forcefully articulated by William Morris.⁶⁶ The most forceful twentieth-century articulators of these traditions have been, of course, George Orwell⁶⁷ and E.P. Thompson;⁶⁸ the popular music of Billy Bragg can also be seen as carrying forward this tradition.⁶⁹ Whatever their differences, the remarkable similarity between these writers was the way in which they situated themselves as "ordinary, decent men", strangers to the terrain of politics, and yet forced by the values of civil life to make a stand in the public world.

In Britain this self-conceptualisation enabled a broad range of radical political practices, and we have seen their centrality to the NCL/ARM's moral appeal. But what were the implications for this tradition of its enunciation in the specific conditions of South African society? In the next chapter I shall return to this question. I shall explain how, while they did play an "enabling" role, these elements also curtailed the NCL/ARM's conceptions of the politically possible. They formed the basis of deep limits to its conception of the role and place of sabotage - and at the same time they prevented NCL/ARM members from seeing these limits, made it impossible for them to address the questions that were most crucially posed by their own project. I shall argue, in other words, that in the very themes that sustained NCL members in their commitment, there lay also the seeds of their blindness.

American fiction. (Chandler, Ross MacDonald) whose relationship to bourgeois society is precisely one of alienation, lack of contact. Think also of the way in which, in novels like *Watership Down* and the fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien a kind of domestic cabbage-patch wiliness, a plain-spoken down-to-earth toughness and pluck is the characteristic that finally brings victory.

66 See E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, especially the letter quoted on p. 192. See also Ruskin's critique of alienating labour quoted on pp. 34 - 39 of the same book and which was to influence Morris deeply. The opposition between the creative freedom of the craftsman and the rigidity and soulless precision of Victorian engineering echoes the way in which the NCL was later to oppose pragmatic non-sectarianism with ideological commitment.

67 Examples abound: see, however, the essay "England, your England" (*Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1983), especially pp. 62 - 72, for a detailed treatment of these themes. The same author's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1962) states these values in the broader context of a commitment to socialism (see, for example, pp. 216 - 230).

68 For a powerful articulation of these concepts in relation to British left-wing politics see his essay "The Defence of Britain" (in E. P. Thompson, *The Heavy Dancers*), especially p. 75 and his description of the women of Greenham Common on p. 85.

69 Note, for example, how he situates "the patient millions" precisely outside Parliamentary politics and over and against "the sound of ideologies clashing" (Billy Bragg, *Back to Basics* (Chrysalis, AGO DP 8)).

7

The Inconceivability of Politics: The NCL/ARM and the concept of the "Ideological Fantasy"

"What then in the last resort are the truths of mankind? - They are the **irrefutable errors** of mankind."

Friedrich Nietzsche: **The Gay Science**

7.1 The mustard-seed and the prison-house: optimism and pessimism in liberal protest.

In this chapter I shall investigate the limits imposed on the political vision of the NCL by its basic discursive terms of reference. I will show how its discourse, though it does have a certain level of coherence, is ultimately plunged into a series of vitiating paradoxes and contradictions. I will start by exploring the implications for the liberal underpinnings of that project of some aspects of the South African context in which the NCL found itself. We have already seen how the NCL's commitment to sabotage was essentially a continuation of liberal concerns and that it should be understood as a performative act. We have also seen how underlying this "performative politics" liberals - whether NCL-members or non-violent campaigners - constituted themselves crucially as representatives of the "ordinary", non-political life of civil society, and how in doing this they drew on ideological resources similar to those of certain strands of radical English politics. It would probably be an oversimplification to suggest that the NCL's radical liberalism and the libertarian leftism of Morris, Orwell and Thompson are directly related. There are however enough similarities between the different discursive positions to make possible a useful comparison. Such a comparison will show how the meaning of this particular set of notions had been shaped by the history of the articulation of liberalism in South Africa.

Liberalism in South Africa was crucially shaped by its concern, among other things, with the question of South African unity. It was deeply influenced by the way in which that question had first been addressed in the context of the time leading up to the unification of South Africa in the first decade of the century. Belinda Bozzoli has pointed out the emergence of a discourse - enunciated, according to her, by the organic intellectuals of manufacturing capital - significantly different from the ideology of **British** South Africanism. In its concern with the unification of

South Africa as a single nation and the community of interests of its citizens, this discourse, which she names the ideology of "South Africanism" was markedly different from the conceptualisation, in imperialist discourse, of South Africa's interests as an outpost of the British empire. Bozzoli points out how this concern with South Africa's unity as a single nation led to a certain ambiguity about the place of politics in that nation. Its emphasis on social unity in spite of the differences that threatened it and the extension and protection of trade and manufacture through all four Provinces meant that they had to deplore "divisive" issues: questions which could threaten such a union were defined out of the proper arena of politics:

"The nation was one, and should not be divided; hence its political activities should reflect this. Politics, as an activity, should not be rejected but should be harnessed to the common goals of society - industrialisation and capitalist development. Thus the ideology, while it accepted the legitimacy of party politics, attempted to divest it of its overtly political content... This was the foundation of the idea of politics somehow being 'non-political'..."¹

As in the case of the examples mentioned above, much of the effectiveness and appeal of this discourse rested in its ability to centre itself politically. To the moral weight of plain-spoken pragmatism it contrasted an ideological commitment that it suggested was the prerogative of factionalists in Parliament. Thus Hiram Strong significantly argues in a passage quoted by Bozzoli that "[t]he **electorate** is tired of this cry 'Progressive versus Bond'..."²

Though the liberals of the 1950s and 1960s were by no means the organic intellectuals of manufacturing capital, as Bozzoli makes out Strong to be, they were deeply influenced by this concern with the unity and interests of the whole country. The notion of political struggle not being essentially ideological in nature, of its being about the simple interests and values of "ordinary life", was linked indissolubly with the notion that those values transcended all the divisions that threatened the unity of the South African nation. In this they differed greatly from the discourse of radical British libertarianism. One element that can be found in the political discourse of Morris, Orwell, and today, Bragg, is precisely its unashamed and committed partisanship. The social tensions that occasioned the development of capitalism in Britain could be given interested and partisan expression: the "ordinary persons" implied by these writers were on the whole ordinary **working class** persons, or at least middle - class persons committed to socialism or democracy. These very elements can also be found in the left-libertarian Congress tradition I have spoken about.³ Its discourse is marked precisely by the articulation of a subject-

¹ Belinda Bozzoli, *The Political Nature of a Ruling Class*. (London. Routledge Kegan Paul. 1981) pp.135-136.

² Hiram Strong, *South African Commerce and Manufacturer's Record*. 1 5 (September 1907). quoted in Bozzoli. *op.cit.*, p.135 (my emphasis).

³ See p. 40 above. Helen Joseph's autobiographical *Tomorrow's Sun: a Smuggled Journal from South Africa* (New York. John Day. 1967) is a good example. Joseph's subject position never departs for a moment from

position which permits an identification with **oppressed** South Africans. In contrast, liberals tried to address **all** South Africans, and speak for the unity of interests of the whole country.

In the discourse of radical liberalism these two tendencies came more and more into conflict. On the one hand left-wing liberals tended to conceptualise themselves as "ordinary people" involved in a politics that was not really politics because it transcended the divisions of South African society and was concerned with the weal and woe of the entire nation. On the other hand their commitment to the values of democracy, human rights and human dignity were increasingly forcing them to face up to and deal with issues that were deeply divisive. While a neutral position could be taken up relatively unproblematically by the practical manufacturers whose main interest, **pace** Bozzoli, was "business", it was the source of serious paradoxes in the discourse of liberals attempting to come to terms with and act upon the existence of systematic division and injustice in South Africa. For if they spoke for the really "ordinary" and simple truths that represented the interests of all South Africans, how could they deal with the - after all, fairly obvious - fact that they were a small and shrinking minority in a deeply divided country? What happened to the liberal notion that they were speaking for all South Africans if those South Africans rejected their argument? There was something contradictory about a politics of demonstration in which liberals tried to show that they were not pursuing some outlandish ideology but were in touch with the standards of decency and sanity, that they were the **really**"ordinary people", while it was everyone else who was out of touch.

Liberals resolved this problem by differentiating increasingly between two levels of political reality. This was the only way in which they could maintain their position with any semblance of consistency. On one level, they had to admit that their politics was being rejected by the overwhelming majority of South Africans; had to acknowledge the existence of this gap between them and the people they were trying to speak to. Indeed, the "blindness" of the public to the Government's authoritarianism, their failure to protest the curbing of the liberty of others and themselves, was a perennial feature of liberal discourse in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Examples are rife; here is a passage in an article appearing in **Contact** in 1956 under the headline "What will we swallow next?":

"So much restrictive legislation has been turned out... particularly during the last eight years... that to-day South Africans seem to have become dangerously close to being inured to it. A few years ago many people could not only see what was happening in this country, they also felt a need to do something about it... As time has passed... many of them seem to have lost the will to do anything about it. Slowly, a paralysis has

her conception of herself as an ordinary woman. The book still manages to represent antagonism, but this is because her identification is also one **with** the ordinary black women of South Africa and **against** the brutal, fascist government. Nowhere does she imply that her politics is non-political.

overtaken them. The lack of a rousing Union-wide protest and campaign against these Acts... makes one wonder if the will to oppose is not evaporating under the regular hammer-blows directed at civil liberties in South Africa."⁴

This failure to rise up in protest against the Nationalists was not incomprehensible to the liberals. This is where the somewhat glib dismissal of liberalism, according to which it could not understand the material basis of apartheid, misses the point. They understood it all too well. Nationalist policy was, for them, not **totally** irrational, doomed to failure. It had a degree of success. As Lewin points out, apartheid obviously brought material benefits for the white population:

"... it is a very insidious society, basically. It has become highly sophisticated... basically it is the sort of place that very quickly drags you in. It has got so much going for it in terms of comfort, in terms of leisure, in terms of making the good life. It is a highly attractive and therefore very seductive type of society. And when you look at the way in which your white protestant European can get dragged into it very quickly... as long as you are white and as long as you are protestant and as long as you have got a skill it is a marvellous place to be. And because of the structures of apartheid it is - you know you can live in it without actually seeing the dangers."⁵

But if it was true that liberals had to admit that they were a small minority, they could still in a sense see themselves as speaking for the interests of all South Africans. It was true that on one level the politics of self-interest and apathy made sense. But that rationality was a myopic rationality; remember Duncan's insistence on the short-term nature of apartheid's "dazzling success".⁶ On another level, in the long term (and it is no coincidence that Paton and Brown's political column in the pages of **Contact** was entitled "The Long View") it was disastrous to the South African nation and the shared future of all its peoples. It was at this level that liberals situated themselves. If they thought of themselves as motivated, not by ideology, but by common sense, as the spokespersons of ordinary South Africans on all walks of life, it was precisely because they spoke for the South Africa-that-could-be, the South Africa that was potentially there.

The distance between the political reality of the divided South Africa on the one hand and its underlying community of interest was a major theme in liberal thought throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Many of the apparently divergent features of liberal thought at the time seem to have been consequences of the inability of liberals to think their way through this impasse. Two different courses of action were open, each of them a response to one of the horns of the same

⁴ "What will we swallow next?", **Contact**, July 1956. See also "The Police State", **Contact**, November 1954, especially "One might expect...forged for it" and "A Fearful Silence", **Contact**, February 1955, especially "It is incredible... these people unduly".

⁵ Interview with Hugh Lewin. Harare. 4 February 1990.

⁶ See p. 60 above.

dilemma. Despite their superficial dissimilarity, these courses of action were mirror-images of each other; the opposed moments of a double movement dominated by the same root assumptions.

On the one hand there was the possibility of always insisting on the validity and the obviousness of the unity of interests of South Africans. Liberal discourse was concerned centrally with insisting on the reality, beyond the sectional interests of different racial groups in the country, of that community of interest that unified all of its citizens. The interracial contact and the social mixing - the "tea-parties" for which liberals have so often been lampooned was important precisely in this regard. They showed what South Africa **could be like** if good sense prevailed.⁷ For many liberals, the Liberal Party was, in effect, nothing less than a microcosm of this South-Africa-as-it-could-be, a seed-crystal round which a rational society could take shape, or as Paton was to put it, "the seed from which the mustard-tree of the future will grow, the tree which sheltered all the fowls of the air."⁸

On the other hand liberalism could fixate itself on the irrationality, the selfishness, the short-sightedness of white South Africa. If the **creation** of a vigilant public, the building of a common society was a powerful ideal in liberal thought at the time, if the social mixing and the exemplary attempts at interracial co-operation were demonstrations of civil-society-as-it-should-be, then apartheid's destructive effects, the way in which that organic unity could fall apart, became a central thread in the criticism of government policy.

By the early 1960s, this theme was not used only as a warning, but became a category in the critique of South African social life itself. It is a development which can be traced in the literature of the period, where South African society becomes conceptualised more and more in terms of the category of the absurd, the unreal, the irrational. It was a feature of the political satire of the period, ranging from the rather pointed and heavy-handed irony characteristic of the political fairy-tales of E.V. Stone's "Grim Fairy Tales"⁹ to the full-blown lunacy and violence of Tom Sharpe's Piemburg.¹⁰

⁷ This again is an instance of the way in which discourse should be seen as existing, not only on the linguistic level, but as involving political **practice** as well. This aspect of liberal politics shows us precisely how political acts themselves imply a certain political space, construct it in a specific way. Here we see, in other words, the **performative** dimension of liberal political activity (Andrew Merrifield, pers. comm.)

⁸ Patrick Duncan, quoting the words of Alan Paton in "Thoughts on the Provincial Congress of the Liberal Party in Natal 1955", *Contact*, September 1955. See also, for example, Patrick van Rensburg, *Gully Land*, p.174.

⁹ *Africa South* Vol.2 no. 1 (January - March 1958) pp. 40 - 46.

¹⁰ See, for example, *Riotous Assembly* (London, Pan, 1971) and *Indecent Exposure* (London, Pan, 1973).

In a slightly different guise this concern played an important part in the articulation of South African liberal alienation: it was expressed in a vision of a South Africa that lacks organic coherence, an exploded, artificial society, motivated only by selfishness and devoid of living organic relationships. This theme is powerfully reflected, for example, in Robin Farquharson's story "The Drifters", a satirical look at the liberal and left intelligentsia in Johannesburg in the early 1960s. Farquharson (a close friend of John Harris)¹¹ focuses on their shallow experimentation with non-racial parties, the narrow social confines of their segregated lives, their rootlessness and the shallowness of their political and emotional involvement with each other. "The drifters," Farquharson intones,

"... waver on many boundaries. The lines between races and sexes and economic classes, sharp as they are, fade and shift disconcertingly and unpredictably... Nowhere in the world is it more difficult for a relationship simply to exist between people rather than between members of groups, classified and identified even if they refuse to be stereotyped or segregated. South African society is not a single organism, not a smooth surface: it is a body sliced in segments, a field strewn with trenches and landmines. No wonder the drifters drift."¹²

It is interesting to note the same view of South African society reflected in the discourse of two NCL/ARM ex-members. Ronnie Mutch's semi-autobiographical novel **Remembered Violence** is notable for the vision of a desolate, absurd society through which his alcoholic and cynical central character moves. Similar themes crop up in Hugh Lewin's reminiscences of prison life. In the massive, bleak meaninglessness of its rituals, the naked relations of exploitation that grow up between its inmates, in its elaborate and lifeless artificiality, prison became, for Lewin, a metaphor for South African society itself:

"...the outside society was based on something totally arbitrary, based on amorality. It had no central driving force other than total selfishness. And it maintained itself... through coercion... Now that is [precisely] how the prison system works. ...[Y]ou are keeping people in a situation of total boredom and trying to maintain law and order. You have all sorts of... mechanisms for keeping that society working. But essentially because you have no driving force, you have no ethic which actually drives, motivates, stimulates the lives of the people inside. Without that ethic, the only way to maintain some sort of semblance of order in that society is through coercion. And particularly in Pretoria the prison society is a total paradigm then of the outside society.... Central was

¹¹ AD 1931 Aa p. 130.

¹² It is reprinted in *New African*, Vol.1, No.2, (March 1962) on pp.8-9 as "extracts from a work in progress". It does not seem that this progress ever resulted in the completion or publication of a novel. This vision is of course most elaborately expressed in the early novels of JM Coetzee, especially in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1982), which is notable for the way in which it deconstructs the opposition between the inorganic Empire and the organic cycles of Nature. The relevance of the experience of torture in this novel lies partly in its revelation (e.g. p.115) that the "organic" world can itself be a tool of empire (Andries du Toit, *The Doubting Self in J. M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians* (research paper, University of Stellenbosch, 1985), p. 13..

the best example of that because it has the final symbol of state coercion, the gallows.
-13

Lewin's metaphor is interesting because an exploration of its ramifications allow us an insight into the paradox at the heart of the liberal politics of protest. Prison was apposite as a metaphor for South African society, not only because of its rigid regimentation, but also because that authoritarian rule **deprived** people of the ethical centre, the "driving force" of their beings. Prison, for Lewin, was obscene because it turned people into crooks.¹⁴ It was in this that prison and South African society, "... a rotten regime, devoid of moral justification, maintaining control through double-dealing, and, in the process, befouling everyone"¹⁵ reflected each other most accurately: they destroyed the very foundations of the ethical principles on which a future South Africa must be built.

This point should make it clear that the alienation from political life which Leftwich conveyed in his letters was not merely a private psychological quirk. On the contrary, it was the expression of a deep and prevalent theme in radical liberal discourse. His comment about the corrupting influence of apartheid pervading "like a fine, poisonous dust, every aspect of our living in the country"¹⁶ is just another example of this general concern; and the resultant growing chasm between his external self and his true, "human", private self that this perception implied was nothing but the extension into the **personal** sphere, of the increasing dichotomisation of **all** South African life, the growing space between the two levels of political reality, that characterised liberal discourse at this time.

It also touches on a serious dilemma in liberal thought. To resist authoritarianism, there needed to be a healthy, organic, civil society. But South Africa seemed to be characterised precisely by the absence of that civil society - and indeed, every repressive law passed by Parliament made the chances that such a society might take root yet more remote:

"The plain truth is that moral values have changed radically in the last few years. Each and every one of them has lost its old validity... In such times of erosion people lose their heads. Whether they know it or not, their standards of value change.... He who will not strike a blow for the rights of others... will soon lose his own. And what is more, he will lose the very taste of being free."¹⁷

Here we have come to a crucial point in the analysis of liberal discourse. This is the point of its deconstruction, the place where the political paradox faced by liberals is revealed. This paradox

13 Interview, Hugh Lewin. *loc. cit.*

14 Hugh Lewin. *Bandiet*, p. 50.

15 *Op. cit.*, pp. 176 - 177.

16 See p. 120 above

17 "Standards of Value". *Contact*, December 1956.

flows out of the root assumptions of the liberal project, out of the very conceptual framework that underpinned liberal identity.

For liberals, their assumption that their politics was not really politics, that it was plain common sense, was linked to the notion that the truths they stood for were so transcendently reasonable that only someone deeply unreasonable could reject them. For the NCL/ARM, for example, sabotage was a call to resistance and a plea to awaken to truths that seemed in the final instance obvious. As Lewin puts it:

"I just felt that... if you looked at the base issues... in South Africa you are dealing with something which is totally arbitrary which is totally stupid, and which could be changed overnight....It is ridiculous. It is based on no sense whatsoever."¹⁸

But what if, as seemed to be the case, that body of reasonable political opinion that liberalism appealed to did not exist, if "... factors which are calculated to cause an anti-government swing in a normal democracy simply don't operate in South Africa"?¹⁹

That was the question asked after the 1958 election, and pointed at the fact that liberalism had set itself a task that in terms of its very definition, was doomed to failure. On the one hand, hope for the future depended on the creation of a body of reasonable people who would not allow the government to trample roughshod over political freedoms, on the creation of a "vigilant public".²⁰ But the most alarming obstacle to this project was exactly the **absence** of that vigilant public and apartheid's tendency to destroy whatever hope there was of such a public spirit taking root and flowering.

Although liberals could recognise this impasse, they could not formulate an alternative political practice in response to this realisation - not without a substantial reformulation of the entire political project. Since apartheid was so obviously invalid, since what was required was that white South Africans "come to their senses", no alternative to the politics of protest was conceivable. Within the terms of liberal discourse as it then existed, only two options were available: liberals could either doggedly continue, trying to signify to the blind eyes of South Africa the destructiveness of its course, or they could abandon politics altogether. Losing faith in the validity of protest meant losing faith in politics as such - often to such an extent that bound up with the question of whether or not protest was worthwhile was the question of whether life in South Africa was worth continuing.

¹⁸ Interview, Hugh Lewin, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ "Post Mortem", *Sokhe! Umlilo*, April/May 1958.

²⁰ "The Government and the Courts", *Contact*, February 1955.

Liberalism thus seems to have been caught in a series of extreme reactions. From self-confident, blithe predictions of success liberals moved to revulsion from a society they considered to be soulless; from the assumption that the Nationalists were doomed by definition, to Paton's existentialist quietism. They seem to have been for the time being unable to make sense of, and to think politically about, the fact that other whites did not feel addressed by the the values they themselves saw as obviously and transcendently true. They were aware of that fact, but they could not relate it to the general nature of their own project. Liberalism inside and outside the NCL was thus marked by what can best be described as a **fatal inability to "place" difference**. In a sense, **politics** was inconceivable within its terms of reference.²¹ People either saw the truth, or they did not; if they did not, all you could do was point it out, doggedly, patiently, till they did. This made the conceptualisation of a different political practice impossible; political choice was limited to a choice between the practice of protest - and no practice at all.

7.2 On the bus and off the bus: the question of the "desire of the masses"

Having analysed the structure of the dilemma in which members like Lewin and Daniels found themselves, we are in a better position to evaluate Leftwich's intervention. For Leftwich's paper was an attempt to transcend this dilemma. He did not merely insist on the strategy in spite of the objections; he offered an alternative, a new vision of the place of sabotage in the struggle for liberation, one that attempted to cope with the obstacles the organisation had encountered.

Leftwich's intervention is interesting for another reason. His justification of sabotage differs from other examples of liberal discourse in one fundamental aspect: it is centrally concerned with the relationship of the NCL to the oppressed South Africans they were trying to liberate. The crucial stumbling block of sabotage conceived as protest action was the deafness, the short-sightedness of the white electorate and the government whom they were trying to awaken. Leftwich was able to believe in the continuation of sabotage only because he introduced a new

²¹ Obviously I am using politics in a special sense. Politics in this sense is an activity centrally related to the notion of the essential **contestability** of even fundamental issues. Where differences exist within a shared and **agreed** procedural matrix, the resolution of these differences does not turn on a **political** struggle for hegemony but on **technical** questions. A good example of such a non-political conceptualisation of "conflict resolution" is, ironically, the Marxist tenet that the government of men shall be replaced, in the classless society, by the administration of things. (A.J. Polan's *Lenin and the end of Politics* (London, Methuen, 1984), pp. 57 - 85. Liberalism, in its insistence on an obvious and common-sense set of non-partisan values, shares many of the characteristics of this view. It sees political struggle as taking place within a given framework that cannot itself be called into question in the political protest. Within the terms of the discourse of this thesis, "politics" is a limit-concept. I discuss the problem of the meaning of the word "politics" in my conclusion: see p. 209.

actor into the world-view implied by liberal discourse: the oppressed people of South Africa themselves. Traces of this can be found in the conceptualisations of other NCL members. Daniels, for example, as we have seen, hoped to "inspire" the masses to take action. In Leftwich's discourse, however, we find the clearest - and perhaps the only - example of a liberal attempt to think through the ramifications of such a conception. It is a radically different conception of liberatory politics from the one I have explored in the first section of this chapter, and transcends most of its pitfalls. But as an attempt to transcend the limits of liberal politics it eventually fails.

At first glance, the concept of "the masses" does play an important role in the discourse of the NCL. In Leftwich's strategic paper, we find him discounting the possibility that foreign pressure alone could topple apartheid in the following terms:

"... the onus of carrying through the revolutionary changes during and after the collapse of the regime will inevitably fall on the shoulders of **the SA people themselves**. Their role in this process is crucial."²²

In this passage "the South African people themselves" is seen as the central actor in the revolutionary struggle: it bears the main responsibility for liberating South Africa and is the most important agent of liberation. It is therefore in effect constituted as a "revolutionary subject". It would seem therefore that the struggle the NCL saw itself as being part of was the struggle of this revolutionary subject and that it would therefore want to align itself with it.

A closer look at this centrality reveals however that it is deceptive. In the following passage, Vigne argues in favour of the NCL's recruiting, training and leading role in the struggle. His argument rests apparently precisely on the centrality of the masses as revolutionary actors:

"... such recruitment is not only possible but intensely desired by **the oppressed people of South Africa**"²³

Note, first, the importance of the notion of the "desire" of the "oppressed people of South Africa". The argument here seems to give "the people" a very central role in the struggle indeed. In terms of its logic, the mere fact that the people of South Africa "desire" that recruitment counts as justification of the NCL's project. In the NCL's discourse, they therefore occupy precisely the same place that Althusser's policeman occupies in his "little theoretical theatre" described in Chapter 2. In the place of the policeman's "Hey, you!" in relation to which the subject identifies itself as an offender we can put the notion of the desire of the masses. Here

²² S v Daniels, Exh C6, p. 9. My emphasis.

²³ S v Hirson, Exh M4(4), p.3.

we can see that the oppressed people of South Africa were what Lacan would call the NCL's "Other", the Subject whose mandate they accepted.

What is more, this formulation seems to indicate one possible reason for the NCL's neglect of political work. The belief that the NCL's leading and recruiting role was already "intensely desired" by the oppressed would imply that it was not necessary to build political support for that role, because that political support already existed. This is not merely a particular quirk of Vigne's. Here, for example, we see a similar move in the discourse of Eddie Daniels, speaking 25 years later. When asked about the NCL's relation to the masses, he responds:

"... our aim of course was to bring about changes for the masses. The only reason why we did not go out to the masses to recruit was because... it is difficult because that's what happened to the ANC and the PAC in the early years. They had so many informers that they were smashed. So we did not go public and advertise our presence but **our ideals were the same as the ideals of the masses**. We wanted change."²⁴

The logic of this passage is similar to the previous one and the preconstructed "the ideals of the masses" is very similar to that of "the desire...". Notice how Daniels's argument relates essentially to recruitment: although a concrete link with mass struggle was too risky, that lack did not really cut off the NCL from the masses. They were still linked with the masses because they, as it were, **occupied the same place** as the masses, desired the same thing.

But how is the question of the "desire of the masses" decided? An exploration of this question shows that Vigne and Daniels' conceptions conceals a complex paradox. After invoking the desire of the masses in the passage quoted above, Vigne justifies his assertion in terms that are surprising. According to them, this desire is evidenced

"...by the contemporary social, political and economic condition of our country."²⁵

It is upon the basis of a discussion of this "social, political and economic condition" that the need for the NCL's leading role is finally asserted. The crucial point here is that nowhere in the discussion that follows is the consciousness of "the masses", their actions and their understanding, problematised for even a moment. The "desire" of the oppressed, it seems, is simply "read off" from the social context. Precisely at the moment when the masses and their desire are invoked, they disappear from view.

The only way in which this move could make sense is if Vigne is understood not to be making an empirical point. He is not talking about what any specific oppressed South African might

²⁴ Interview with Eddie Daniels. Hout Bay 18 October 1987.
²⁵ *S v Hirson*, Exh M4(4), *loc. cit.*

articulate as his or her wish. Rather, this is a point about what would **count** as the desire of the masses. It refers to what the masses would want **if they knew what to want!** In a sense the "masses" with reference to whose desire the NCL justifies its leading role is a metaphysical construct, existing outside and beyond any specific manifestation. In NCL discourse, behind and beyond the quiescent proletariat and the backward peasantry, there existed "the African masses" **in abstracto**, who **must** eventually support the NCL, reject apartheid, and rise up in revolution. This, then, is how the "disappearance" of the masses from centre-stage in the above passage, and their replacement by a "social... context" is possible: NCL discourse **places** the masses in a specific and final way, and **closes** the question of what it is that they desire.

Perhaps the best way of explaining this problem is to refer to the critique mounted by the Yugoslavian theorist Slavoj Žižek of the justification, in Eastern-Bloc countries, of the rule of the Party by referring to the will of "the People". This justification, Žižek observes, contrasts interestingly with that of kingly rule. Whereas a royal monarch legitimises her rule with reference to a divine right, and can never admit that she rules only because the people allow her to, the party makes this fact the centrepiece of its legitimacy:

"... the Party thinks [it] is the party because [it] represents the People's real interests, because it is rooted in the People expressing its will..."²⁶

Žižek points out that the conventional critique, namely "the obvious fact that the majority of the people really doesn't support party rule", though it might be true, misses the point. Such a criticism is premised on the presupposition that this justification functions on an empirical level, and is hence open to empirical falsification. Žižek argues, however, that what has to be grasped is that phrases like "the whole people supports the Party" **cannot be falsified**:

"... behind the constation of a fact we have a circular definition of the People:... the real member of the People is only he who supports the Party: those who are working against the rule of the Party are automatically excluded from the people..."²⁷

This circular definition is not a piece of "bad faith", a cynical totalitarian lie. It proceeds, Žižek observes, precisely from the fact that in such discourses the People is constructed "as a **unity**" and that the party tries to represent that unity.²⁸ The notion of "the will of the people" is a construct: it is the result of an operation of abstraction from the disparate, fragmented, empirical wills that even Party members encounter in everyday life. It is this operation of

26 S. Žižek, "Approaches to the Lacanian Real" (unpublished typescript). p.8.

27 *Op. cit.*, pp. 8 - 9.

28 *Op. cit.*, p. 9. My emphasis.

abstraction that one can detect both in Vigne's document and Daniels's statement. A close reading of the NCL documents shows the full implications of such a move.

An interesting consequence, for example, is the disappearance of the "masses" as historical actors in crucial passages of the documents and the curious way in which the role of the oppressed people as an historical agent is downplayed. Vigne, for example, closes his paper with the announcement that

"we see the mortal struggle to come as our own responsibility which, **on behalf of the oppressed people of South Africa**, we accept to the full."²⁹

The contrast with the previously quoted passage in which the oppressed people are constructed as a revolutionary subject should be clear. Though the onus for making the changes falls on the shoulders of the people, they are, it seems, absent from the political field when it comes to acting on that onus. They act only by proxy, through the NCL.

A similar tendency is noticeable in Vigne's description of the transition to armed struggle:

"The banning of Congress and crippling of other liberatory organisations by proscription of members and by laws removing freedom of assembly and speech, effectively forced **the leaders** of the rightless four-fifths of the South African people to seek military means of liberation now that the means of civil struggle had been struck from **their** hands."³⁰

It should be quite obvious that it is the leaders who are the acting subjects in this passage; it is they who seek military means of liberation, and from their hands that the means of civil struggle have been struck. Again, the "rightless four-fifths" seem to act only at second hand: they are present only in their leaders. Note, too, the revealing language in which the NCL's London Committee assesses the organisational strength of the ANC and PAC. According to them, inside the country

"It is difficult to assess to what degree [the ANC has] **been destroyed by the Rivonia arrests...** they would still seem to **have personnel** but seem to **lack materials and training ...** We cannot comment on the PAC at home. They seem to have received their quietus."³¹

while outside South Africa,

"The ANC... seems to **be in very good shape** not only in Dar but also in Algiers and London. It seems to **have a certain amount of money...**

29 S v Hirson, Exh M4(4), p. 8.

30 Ibid., Exh M4(4), p. 1.

31 S v Hirson, Exh M4(1)

The PAC by contrast is **broke and badly split** abroad...³²

Here, the preconstructed "being in good shape" is articulated in relation to its "having money". Again, the focus of the discussion relates in the first place to their **efficacy**, to the **technical** aspects of their functioning, and not to their political strength. Note, also, the reference above to the ANC's mass support constructed in terms of **personnel**. In a parallel formulation, Leftwich refers to the closer contact other organisations have with the mass of oppressed South Africans in revealing terms:

"[At that] time we shall be able to present to an army, recruited either by us or by others more closely in touch with a **pool of potential recruits**, a highly competent wing of experts..."³³

This operation of abstraction explains why the NCL could continue with sabotage, even when all the indications seemed to be against it, why, though individual members might leave, it was at least possible to go on. By extension, it also explains the NCL's lack of attention to the need for mass political work. The fact that the masses did not rise up in response to the NCL's acts or to anything else would not invalidate the assumption regarding the desire of the masses, and the faith that they would eventually act in accordance with this desire. It would only mean that the time was not yet ripe, that the masses did not yet know their desires, or that the NCL was not being effective enough in its "inspiring" role. Any specific fact about the urban proletariat, then, is seen as external to the question of what they really desire. No merely empirical contradiction would necessarily force the NCL to question its basic assumptions.

Note, for example, the terms of Leftwich's discussion of the difficulty of establishing secure guerilla bases in South Africa. He compares the South African situation with Algeria, where there were

"... vast areas of land which were uninhabited and when sparsely inhabited there was no French presence. These areas served as internal bases and had the support of the population, UNITED in its aim of **throwing off French rule**."³⁴

Note the meaning which is given to the notion of having "the support of the local population". A little earlier in the same argument, the FLN's own aims have been described exactly similar terms:

"In the Algerian case **the purpose of the FLN was to throw off external rule and expel the foreign presence** in order to attain independence."³⁵

32 **Op. cit.**, p.1.

33 **S v Daniels**, Exh C7, pp. 6 - 7.

34 **Op. cit.**, p. 2.

35 **Op. cit.**, p. 1.

The comparison shows us the meaning, in NCL discourse, of the preconstructed "the support of the population": the argument implies that because the masses support the FLN, it must mean that the **FLN's aim is theirs**. There is an implicit slippage from the notion that the population desired to throw out the settlers to the notion that they supported the FLN: the two are taken, in this discourse, to mean the same.

There is, at first glance, not much that is surprising. But the interesting point is that the converse is not true: if the masses **do not** support an initiative, it does not invalidate the NCL's interpretation of the nature of that "desire", the idea, as Daniels put it, that their ideals "were the same as the ideals of the masses". Thus Leftwich argues:

"while there are obvious concentrations of whites in key areas, there are, generally speaking white farmers or traders in almost every area of the country. The white population must be seen as part and parcel, for military purposes, of the regime and its forces. In addition to this there are the plain and regrettable fact of **informers, turncoats and Govt. supporters amongst the mass of the people, the Africans**.

... If it were not discovered by the vast net of police and army, and if it were not discovered by the smattering of whites, then it would still have to hope to avoid discovery and reporting by **the people in the rural areas where the level of political consciousness is not yet at a point where it could and would support the guerillas.**"³⁶

Though the possibility is admitted that (sections of) the masses might substantially diverge from the NCL, this does not invalidate the project of the guerilla organisation or the notion that it is acting out the desire of the people. It is seen as being either due to the fact that people have turned traitor ("informers, turncoats and Government supporters"), or, revealingly, to the idea that consciousness is not developed enough: consciousness would be seen as "developed", presumably, when the rural population **do** support the NCL. This shows how the concept of the "desire of the people" can survive empirical difference untouched. This is the meaning of Zizek's point regarding the concept of the People in Party ideology: the Other is not an **empirical** other, but a construction, a presupposition about who the People must be.

But something even more important is shown by this passage than the mere disjuncture between the (abstract) notion of the desire of the people and particular cases of articulated desire about what they will or will not support. This is revealed by the treatment of the realisation that the rural population might be politically undeveloped. Whereas it might ordinarily seem to imply automatically that their consciousness needs to be developed, and thus opens the project of political work in the rural areas, this possibility is simply ignored. Leftwich, having pointed out

³⁶ S v Daniels, Exh C7, p.3.

that secure bases are difficult to establish, simply continues developing other areas of his argument.

It seems that the task of developing that consciousness is not the task of any party or organisation. Instead, the notion that a "developed" consciousness would supersede the "undeveloped" consciousness of the peasantry, and that the "turncoats" would continue constituting just a small part of the population seems to be based on simple assertion. Here, it should be possible to detect echoes of the confident liberal assertions of the triumph of democracy that we saw in Chapter 3. Just as radical liberal discourse was based on the presupposition that the injustices of apartheid were so enormous, the rationality of non-racial co-operation so evident, that all sensible people must in the end be won over to the liberal cause, so Leftwich's faith in the inevitability of revolution seems to be based on the simple assumption that the spirit of resistance is so undying that it must inevitably prevail. In Vigne's document, a similar faith is expressed when he states that

"The former political strength of the ANC and PAC make it certain that their presently smashed military formations will revive in due course. Very heavy losses have been suffered, but their spirit of resistance has in no wise been broken."³⁷

At other times the NCL seems to have had a strongly **teleological** conception of the nature of the development of political consciousness. It would develop automatically in a direction the end-point of which the NCL had already determined. This teleology can be discerned in the NCL's conception of the process of political unification and co-operation with other organisations. It is interesting to note that it is not seen as necessary for the NCL to go actively about convincing the other organisations to accept its position. It seems as if this acceptance would not primarily flow from such persuasive work. Instead, practical co-operation is seen "in due course" as leading **of itself** to political resolution; unity of purpose is expected to flow **naturally** from practical work. It looks as if for them there was something about the very nature of pragmatic co-operation in itself which would lead to political agreement, so that the experience of practical work itself would be the persuasive force. Look, for example, at the way in which the London Committee conceptualises the process by which the NCL would replace the SACP in its alliance with the ANC:

"while those fellows are still certainly part of the partnership abroad,... they will soon [be] seen to have outlived **their usefulness to the ANC** here. In fact we are continually asked to **do certain jobs** for them here... It should be the motto of the NCL "by our **works** ye shall know us" and **deeds** make friends quicker than words."³⁸

³⁷ S v Hirson, M4(4), p. 3.

³⁸ S v Hirson, M4(1), p. 2.

The conceptual opposition between words and deeds is significant here. "Words" are mere talk, are irrelevant to the struggle, have no real consequences in struggle, win no victories. They belong, obviously enough, to the realm of ideological struggle and commitment. Deeds, on the other hands, have consequences, are "useful". Organisations that did have ideological axes to grind would, after the experience of successful pragmatic co-operation, hopefully see the counterproductiveness of this attitude, and would start to be guided, like the NCL, simply by "objective" imperatives of how best to fight the revolutionary war effectively. These two processes - the winning over of the ANC to an alliance with the NCL, and the development of the consciousness of the peasantry follow, I would suggest, the same general logic. For the NCL, they would both flow from the "nature of things".

One aspect of Leftwich's downplaying of the need for practical political work is thus easy to explain. The NCL did not emphasise conscientisation of "the masses" because they saw **no need** for it. The masses would rise up, as it were, on their own steam; and the ANC would simply recognise the superior virtue of the NCL. This, however, is only half the story. There was another reason for the NCL's blindness to the need for mass politics.

This reason flows out of the basic logical assumptions upon which the abovementioned teleology is based. It is premised, as we have seen, on the differentiation between a flexible pragmatism on the one hand, which took cognisance of objective facts and was adaptable in the face of altering circumstances, and ideological inflexibility, which was rigid and did not adapt itself to changing circumstances. That was precisely why the former was preferable to the latter: only revolutionaries who thought on their feet, as it were, would survive and succeed, whereas the wages of blinkered ideological commitment were failure.

But how, then, to fight those ideological blinkers? Leftwich supposed that the experience of the objective advantages of pragmatism would open organisations' eyes to the disadvantages of ideological rigidity. The NCL's technical efficiency would win over allies. But logically speaking those very objective advantages were precisely what ideology hid from you! Differently put, ideological narrowness and sectarian commitment was a disease which rendered the patient immune to the cure. This means that in a very important sense, the NCL would not be able to handle cases where the oppressed population's consciousness diverged from the organisation's notions. The "correct" understanding of the South African situation was (for the NCL) so obvious, flowed so naturally from objectively available, self-evident facts, that a different understanding was incomprehensible. They could only see such difference as belonging to the realm of illusion, caused either by the blinkers of ideology or by the misleading efforts of the state.

This was to have very problematic consequences for Leftwich's notion of the function of political work. This is evidenced in Leftwich's argument against the Communist Party line:

"The CP/Spear people argue that one merely needs to get the [working class] organized and the problems are over. To us, this is facile. Firstly the problems of organization are immense. The network of informers is so wide and so efficient that the moment one becomes efficient as an organizer or the moment a group is formed it will either be crushed, arrested, or its leadership shorn from it. Furthermore, it is our contention that in the context of the booming economy, and the rising wages for African workers - which is a rather clever move by the industrial supporters of the regime - the African urban proletariat is **UNLIKELY** to respond to a call to rise - unless there is some real certainty of winning. There have been too many failures in the history of SA politics, the might and fury of the police has been demonstrated only too often, and the mood of the urban population is one which suggests to them that quiet apoliticism, enjoying what vicarious benefits come their way as a result of the economic expansion, is by far the safer course to follow."³⁹

The above passage shows that Leftwich does not seem to have had any illusions regarding the mood of the urban proletariat. The lack of emphasis on mass politics in his discourse is not the result of a "tinderbox" hypothesis regarding the political understanding of the masses, a notion that the masses were ready for revolution.

In this connection, it is particularly revealing that Leftwich, with perhaps a tinge of irony, uses the phrase "**merely** needs to get the [working class] organised".⁴⁰ Although Leftwich criticises the Communist Party for underestimating the difficulties of working-class organisation, it is he who is guilty of this. An investigation of his argument shows that in his conception working-class organisation contains no **inherent** difficulties of its own, that it presupposes already-existing political support that merely has to be "cashed" - that it is, in other words, merely a technical and organisational task. From this flows the passage's strangest feature: it seems to operate in terms of a completely inverted notion of the importance and place of political work. Whereas usually a knowledge of the un-revolutionary state of mass consciousness is the **main argument in favour** of mass political work, here it is the **main argument against** it!

This inversion, it seems, is a consequence of the abovementioned incomprehensibility of different attitudes to struggle, the closure of the question of the "desire" of the masses. As in the case of liberal discourse more generally, Leftwich's position is characterised by an inability to handle **difference**. It seems as if the NCL's teleology made it logically impossible for them to "place" instances of consciousness that diverged from what they understood to be the "desire" of the people of South Africa. As in the discussion of Algeria and South Africa quoted above,

³⁹ S v Daniels. Exh C6, p. 8.

⁴⁰ My emphasis.

consciousness is either seen as simple **concurrence** with the guerilla fighters' aims, or considered as **antagonistic** to the NCL, or at least not supportive. In neither case is there a conception of a coherent and independent project of altering that consciousness. Leftwich's conception of the nature of revolutionary consciousness, in other words, can be summed up in the slogan used by Ken Kesey in **The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test**, namely that "you're either on the bus or off the bus".⁴¹ Popular consciousness was either developed, in accordance with their aims - in which case political work was not necessary - or that consciousness was undeveloped or misguided, in which case it was a given outside the NCL's control, and political work was useless.

The consequences of this impossibility can be detected throughout Leftwich's texts. Though sabotage was primarily a signifying act, a "propaganda tool", that "propaganda" function was conceived of in a very limited way.⁴² The idea that the NCL would, through acts of sabotage of sufficient competence, be able to build up legitimacy in the eyes of mass organisation, a "stock of credits" that would "earn them a place" in the revolutionary alliance is based on a similar assumption. Once again, it is assumed that such revolutionary legitimacy is not invested with ideological value; that its appreciation is ideologically neutral and that political work is therefore not necessary in the process of earning it. The very metaphor of a "stock of credits" betrays much here: it reveals the presupposition that there is a common currency, valid throughout the terrain of revolutionary struggle, and immediately recognisable as such by all.

This has serious consequences, for it eventually means that the NCL's role in the broader struggle is conceptualised in a deeply contradictory way. This contradiction comes out very clearly in Leftwich's papers: on the one hand, it is seen in **vanguardist** terms, as occupying quite a central position in an insurrection, "leading and recruiting" the National Freedom Army. Its skills and services form the logistical backbone of the struggle, and its non-sectarian values and ideological flexibility are what should be adopted if the revolution is to succeed at all.

But at the same time the grouping is also described in terms that put it in a position oddly distant from that mass struggle. Throughout my discussion of Leftwich's papers one obvious question is not considered: namely, the question of **how** such an uprising is to occur. Even if

⁴¹ The full text of Kesey's quote is: "There are going to be times... when we can't wait for somebody. Now, you're either on the bus or off the bus. If you're on the bus and you get left behind, then you'll find it again. If you're off the bus in the first place - then it won't make a damn." (Tom Wolfe, **The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test**, p.74.) See my comments on the structure of Kesey's logic on p. 178.

⁴² This is true not only of Leftwich's discourse, but also of other NCL members' thought on the masses' response to sabotage. To see sabotage as possibly inspiring the masses to rise up in insurrection would make sense only if the masses **already** desired freedom and recognised the need for forceful revolution against the state. The same goes for the related idea of sabotage boosting the morale of the masses, or of it indicating to them that the government was not all-powerful and that resistance was still possible. Sabotage made sense only on the assumption that the political battle was already settled.

such a spontaneous insurrection did take place, another problem arises vis a vis the notion that the NCL would play a leading part in it. Both these eventualities seem to be taken for granted as inevitable. The NCL is therefore in the paradoxical position of a vanguard party which has to wait for the masses to arise spontaneously - and has to hope that they will equally spontaneously recognise it as their leader!

This contradiction can be described from a different angle, for it has curious consequences for the way in which Leftwich conceptualises time. We have here an essentially **eschatological** conception of political time. In its terms, acts gain meaning in terms of some future event, while their present meaning is relatively unimportant. In this, the NCL's discourse bears a remarkable similarity, for example, to peasant millenarianism or Christian traditions that focus on the question of the "readiness" of the subject at some future moment of judgement and which therefore are concerned not with the present effect of an act, but with its eventual meaning.⁴³ This is in marked contrast to the prevailing organisation of political time in literate societies, where time is conceived as a linear progression and the value of political acts are conceived precisely in relation to the accumulation of their consequences.⁴⁴

These points seem to me to indicate the central enigma of the NCL. One question above all others is raised by the documents of Leftwich and the other central members: if their hopes for the future depended upon the possibility of a mass uprising, why did they never recognise the task of organising such an uprising? Their entire political project seems to have hinged on two basic assumptions - firstly that a mass insurrection would take place, and secondly that, come such a mass insurrection, the NCL would, even though it has played no role in the creation of such an insurrection, be in a position to lead it. But both these assumptions seem to be based on simple assertion, a simple act of faith.

43 Even more significantly it resembles, in this aspect, certain strands of Marxism. A close reading of the texts Hirson produced under the aegis of the Socialist League of Africa, for instance, reveals a similar dichotomisation of time. On the one hand there is the world of present day struggles in which (1) workers have no clarity about their interests and are led astray by the opportunist machinations of Congress and (2) theoreticians (not being working class) can never fully penetrate the veil masking the way forward to socialism. On the other there is a crucial break marked by the seizure of power by the working class. The interesting thing is that the relationship between these two times is deeply problematic. In talking about the way in which the working class will "in the end" accept its revolutionary class role, Hirson falls back on a conception of struggle being "elemental" and in a certain dimension untheorisable (interview, London, 5.5.1989). His Marxism becomes therefore a species of political millenarianism at which the moment of the working class's acceptance of its "true" role is removed from any direct relation to the here-and-now politics of South Africa, and recedes to the horizon of faith in "historical inevitability".

44 This conception of political time should not be confused with the essentially cyclical conceptions of time that characterise pre-literate, oral societies (see Benedict Anderson, **Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism** (London, Verso, 1983) pp. 28 - 40). The eschatological conception of political time found in the NCL belongs, for all its unusual features, solidly to modern, literate temporality.

A "blind spot" characterised their thinking - a blind spot in the full physiological sense, the point of which is not so much that the viewer does not see a given object, but that the gap caused by the blind spot is itself also invisible: for Leftwich seems to have found it impossible to think his way through this contradiction or even to see it as problematic. In the following passage, for example, he points out that the NCL's proposed strategy

"... is predicated on the assumption that a time will come when guerilla warfare will be possible."⁴⁵

He seems to be on the very verge of making the assumption itself the subject of his argument - and then simply continues blithely as if it does not even merit discussion. He simply says that at that time the NCL shall step in, proceeding to write about the insurrectionary "army" as if its existence is an accomplished fact.

This move is a perennial feature of these documents. In fact, the reader is often struck by the way in which the possibility of such an insurrection, while forming the very basis and hinge of NCL strategy, is presented **subjunctively**. Leftwich's text abounds, for example, with disclaimers to the effect that "We do not attempt here to prophecy the patterns of change nor attempt to indicate just how or when it will occur,"⁴⁶ and in a later passage his argument about the possibility of an insurrection hinges on the eventuality of "if a state of emergency were to result...".⁴⁷ But at the same time, the strategy of continuing with sabotage and intelligence gathering depends crucially on just such an eventuality. In each of these formulations the idea of a general insurrection is projected forward to some unspecified - and, the texts suggest, unspecifiable - point in time, while their inevitability is never questioned.

As an attempt to come to grips with the problem of continuing effective resistance against the apartheid regime Leftwich's position is thus deeply problematic. It was characterised by an inability to answer or even pose the questions that arose from the very terms of the project he conceived. In addition - and this is the crucial point - it did not allow Leftwich to state an alternative practice beyond the continuation (albeit lower-profiled) of sabotage.

7.3 Liberal discourse and political choice

We are now in a position to return to the NCL's decision to go over to a renewed attack after the Rivonia trial. Although the evidence about that meeting is contradictory and vague, my

⁴⁵ S v Daniels. Exh C7, p. 6.

⁴⁶ S v Daniels. Exh C6, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

analysis places us in a position to understand the dilemma in which the NCL was placed, and the framework within which it addressed the problems it faced. In particular, we can now understand the limitations of this framework, and the consequences of this framework for the NCL's decision.

The central categories of the NCL's conceptualisation of politics, while they played such a central enabling role, at the same time placed fatal limits on their strategic thought. In the first place it vitiated NCL members' thought on the organisation's relationship to the masses. Leftwich's intervention, together with the opinions expressed in the documents of the London committee, was an attempt to think through these problems and did succeed in raising the question of the NCL's relation to the potentially revolutionary mass of oppressed South Africans. But their exclusion of ideology from revolutionary struggle meant that mass support could never be seen as one of the stakes of that struggle. It was impossible for Leftwich to conceive of the masses having a political understanding different from the NCL's, a consciousness eluding or exceeding the NCL's attempts at formulating it, but which could still be described as (potentially) revolutionary. It was therefore also impossible to conceive of the raising of the level of consciousness of the masses as a discrete and political task. And in the end, it was impossible for him to conceive of the masses as having any role beyond that of mere muscle-power.

When the strategy of sabotage became increasingly problematic towards the end of 1963, it did not offer them a framework within which they could "place" those difficulties and think them through politically. They were unable to politically assess their lack of success. In terms of the position enunciated in the documents by Leftwich, Vigne and the London committee, the NCL could do nothing except mark time and accumulate know-how while the masses were quiescent. The very project of organising the insurrection itself was inconceivable. They could only wait.

Secondly, a similar problem cropped up in the discourse of the liberals in the NCL whose involvement proceeded from a perception of themselves as ordinary people trying to bring the government to its senses. In the end, liberal discourse offered to members of the NCL and of the liberal Party alike only two choices: either to give up - which meant giving up politics altogether - or to "try harder", to continue doggedly in the face of defeat. Thus, even though he acknowledges that "there is a contradiction"⁴⁸ in his saying so, Hugh Lewin still articulates a belief that it seemed at the time necessary to continue trying, that even if one despaired of the white electorate ever coming to its senses there was still the hope that

⁴⁸ Interview with Hugh Lewin. *loc. cit.*

" if you create enough, you know, create enough disruption, if you create enough awareness then people might actually come to their senses."⁴⁹

To give up was a choice that individual members could make, but in terms of their own commitment to the NCL it was a difficult one. It would, in effect, be a choice for abandoning politics altogether - and that, in view of the strong ethos of commitment bound up with being a member of the NCL, was not an easy step to take. Giving up would betray everything the NCL had stood for. It is small wonder then that they decided to continue trying.

Here lies the irony of so many liberal critiques of the NCL: in their discourse, the commitment to peaceful protest of a Paton and the headlong rush into violence and sabotage are opposite poles.⁵⁰ Paton's statement that "Although we do not live in a democratic society, we intend to behave as though we do"⁵¹ is therefore seen as a keeping-faith with liberal ideals - ideals the NCL betrayed through its choice for sabotage. It now seems that on another level, the NCL/ARM and Paton had come up with precisely the same answer to the question posed to them by the apparent failure of protest. Though the NCL differed deeply from Alan Paton in its choice of as dramatic a strategy as sabotage, Paton's insistence on perseverance in a symbolic protest even if it fell on deaf ears is mirrored precisely in the NCL's eventual choice to continue.

7.4 Theoretical interlude: the concept of the "ideological fantasy"

In the last two chapters I have analysed the subterranean logic of two related but discrete discourses: the presuppositions of the politics of sabotage-as-protest on the one hand, and Leftwich's effort to place the NCL in the broader context of the armed struggle on the other. Though their concerns were quite different, my analysis has shown a number of points of similarity between them. These are partly due to their shared roots in liberal ideology. But the analysis has also shown a similarity at another level: the level of the **structure** of these discourses.

A central moment in the analysis of both bodies of discourse was the uncovering of the point at which the rich play of substitutions - the way in which one preconstructed is articulated as equivalent (or opposing) to another, and that is again related to still another - suddenly ceases. Concepts such as the notion of the desire of the masses (what the masses would desire if they knew what to desire), the transcendent obviousness and universality of liberal values (the values that would be obvious if whites were not so blind) were not themselves explained in terms of

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Ibid.

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Ken Owen. "SA Lucky to be living in Alan Paton's shadow" *The Cape Times*. 25 May 1985

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Reported in *Umkhlanganis*. July-August 1960.

further equivalences. They were not themselves further explicable in terms of yet more signifiers. In other words, they were not subsidiary terms, the crucial organising notions in terms of which the totality of elements of NCL and liberal discourse make sense. These terms seem to occupy the precise place of the policeman's cry of "Hey, You!" in Althusser's metaphor for interpellation.

At the same time we saw the essentially paradoxical, self-deconstructive nature of these central terms. For though they enabled a political practice, they did not allow the answering of the questions that political practice raised. They confronted liberals with difference, but did not allow them to place that difference. Though liberals were conscious of the distance between them and their fellow-countrymen, they could not relate that distance to the overall terms of their project; though Leftwich was aware of the empirical facts of the state of consciousness of oppressed South Africans, he could not conceive of the implications of these facts for his notion that the NCL was acting out the "desire" of the masses. In both cases I have shown how this led to a proliferation of paradoxes. In the liberal discourse of the "ordinary person" as well as in Leftwich's papers on the NCL's place in a mass insurrection one can detect a series of extreme and opposite choices: in the former, complete disillusionment versus the dogged faith in protest-for-its-own-sake; in the latter, a commitment to being the vanguard of the masses versus an inability to do anything to mark time until they arose. These contradictory movements were united, for all their contradictoriness, under the centrality and the unquestionability of these organising terms.

These paradoxes were not an incidental aspect of NCL and liberal discourse. They were part and parcel of its very being. They flowed, from the central move by which these discourses abstracted from empirical reality. This is why Ken Kesey's quote about being "on" or "off" the bus⁵² is such an appropriate way of understanding the problems of NCL discourse. The wonderfully circular logic of that epigram (if you're on the bus, you'll find it again, and if you're not, it doesn't matter) is structured by the fact that the central category (being "on the bus") is not an **empirical** given but is **abstracted** from the empirical. The same goes for the discourses here analysed: the central concepts of liberal and NCL discourse were based on a similar abstracting move. In liberal discourse generally this abstracting move was that by which liberals distinguished between the short-term rationality of apartheid on the one hand and the wisdom of the "long view" on the other; in the discussion of the "desire of the masses" it was the distinction between the empirical desires of individual South Africans and what they would want if they knew what to want. In each case the discourse in question, whether it was the world of Kesey's

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See footnote 41 above.

followers or that of liberal NCL members was protected against the pressure of empirical counterfactuals: the central and organising concepts of their discourse transcended these counterfactuals, they **organised** the empirical, and existed on an entirely different plane from it.

The NCL/ARM's apparent blindness, in other words, was the product, not of frustration or irrationality but of something much more elusive. It was not a mere absence in their thought, not an oversight or lacuna that could simply be filled in or supplemented. It ran much deeper than that. Their inability to face up to the question of the organisation of an insurrection was not an incidental but an **essential** element of their discourse; it was structurally part of it. In fact, the positive consistency of the NCL's discourse, the entire edifice of their ideology depended precisely on an oversight, on the precondition that they could not ask certain questions. In the NCL we come up against the crucial question, not only of the way in which ideology interpellates individuals as subjects, but of how the successful interpellation depends also in a manner of speaking upon blindness, a gap in the ideological facade. I am stating, in other words, that "blind spots" have their own logic - that they are not a mere absence, but have their own structure and solidity.

Zizek focuses on this moment of "blindness" and suggests that it is an essential feature of **every** discourse and not just of the ideology of the NCL - or, for that matter, the Merry Pranksters. This point is based on Zizek's Lacanian interpretation of Althusser, which focuses on the implications of the linguistic nature of the ideological interpellation.

A close look at the logic of the symbolic realm as conceived by Saussure shows that his concept of meaning as relational, and of language as a system of differences, has apparently problematic consequences. Since there is no element outside and undetermined by the system the value of any given element depends on the play of difference in a field **without positive terms**.⁵³ The importance of this point cannot be overemphasised. Its general tendency is to undermine the notion of the signified as self-contained, as united with the signifier in a reciprocal unity. As Jacques Derrida points out, undermining the concept of a "transcendental signified", of a meaning which would itself be independent of the play of difference, extends the domain and play of signification indefinitely.⁵⁴ Meaning's **relationality** therefore implies its **unfixity**. It is never stabilised: each term's meaning lies in its substitutability with a term further down a chain which in essence can be seen to be infinite. The implications of this point of view can perhaps be well explained by thinking of the way in which, if we ask for the meaning of a signifier, the

⁵³ K. Silverman. *The Subject of Semiotics*. p.7.

⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*. trans. Alan Bass (Chicago. University of Chicago Press. 1978). p. 280.

answer is usually supplied in terms of another signifier. The meaning of that signifier must be explained in terms of yet another... The moment when the play of signification comes to rest is indefinitely deferred. Lacan recognises and places great importance on this unfixity of meaning: For him, every signified is commutable, can function in turn as a signifier. Meaning is always provisional, never resolved back into a pure indication of the real.⁵⁵

But the subversion of the idea of a self-contained signified does not mean that meaning disappears altogether. The incessant sliding of signification, the play of difference between floating elements, can be temporarily and partially checked by what Lacan terms **points de capiton**. These are nodal points at which a central signifier fixes the relationships between itself and the other signifiers, thus ending the ceaseless play of substitutions and thus creating what Pêcheux has called a "logically stabilised universe".⁵⁶ In such a universe, there is no need to continue the potentially infinite play of substitution: at a certain point, we have simply reached what is 'too simple to explain'. The central concepts I have isolated in the previous pages have precisely this status. Though in principle there is no need to "stop" anywhere with the substitution of one signifier for another, in any stable discourse it **does** stop at some level. These basic moments at which the play of signification (provisionally) stops correspond precisely to the central concepts of NCL discourse I have isolated; the unifying signifiers that I have compared to the policeman's cry.

Zizek emphasises one important fact about the **point de capiton**: they get their value precisely from their mere organising and totalising function within the discourse. The implications of this point might be explained in relation to a familiar phenomenon: the way in which inter-ideological debates often end up in people talking past each other in a very fundamental way: the very concepts that seem luminously self-evident, that seem to overflow with rich but inarticulable meanings (think of the American Declaration of independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident") are vacant, and meaningless, mere tinkling cymbals, to those on the other side of the ideological divide. This reveals a central aspect of the way in which ideology operates: our subjection as subjects always occurs in relation to a signifier which seems to us to contain this inexhaustible plenitude. But what this experience of "not understanding what seems so obvious" symbolises is that this experience of luminous self-evidence is a subject-effect of ideology: the truths are only "self-evident" if you are **already** interpellated by it. Zizek's argument reasserts, then, some of the paradoxicality implied by Derrida's argument about

⁵⁵ K. Silverman, *op. cit.* p. 165.

⁵⁶ Michel Pêcheux, "Discourse: Structure or Event?", trans. by Warren Montag, with M. G. Pêcheux et al in G. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London, MacMillan, 1988), p. 638.

unfixity of meaning: the **points de capiton** have a central, organising status, but this is not because they are more in contact with the "real"; rather, they **seem** more in contact with the real because they are the last concepts in the discourse, the "bottom lines", the place where the explanations end and assertions begin. The fixing operation of the **point de capiton** has thus a deeply **circular** aspect: the organising concepts of a discourse are in a very important sense **empty** signifiers.

The concrete implications of this aspect of the **point de capiton** is focused on in Zizek's concept of the moment of **ideological fantasy**. The notion of "fantasy" is perhaps a misleading term. It should not be regarded in the way that the word is usually understood, i.e. as referring to pure illusion. The term derives from Zizek's Lacanian elaboration of Althusser's concept of ideology and should be understood as having a specific technical meaning. The fantasy, in Lacanian terms, is a response to the essential, radical openness of the question of the "desire of the Other". The desire of the Other - the policeman in Althusser's example, the masses in Leftwich's discourse, world opinion and civil society in liberal discourse - is, he points out, always marked by a radical, traumatic ambiguity. What is it the policeman **really** wants? What does the ANC/COSATU etc. **really** mean with its demands?⁵⁷ Just what is it that is demanded of liberals when they are faced with what Peter Dreyer called the human disaster of racism? In a sense, the ideological interpellation, to be successful at all, depends crucially on the subject **closing** the question of the desire of the Other, finding a provisional answer to it that lessens its ambiguity. This is precisely the significance of the way in which Leftwich treats the desire of the masses. It is a certain construction of what the desire of the Other must be. Without this closure, without such a moment where this radical ambiguity and the (in principle) endless proliferation of questions and "yes-buts" that it engenders is temporarily put aside, the interpellation would simply not occur. That is precisely the function of the **point de capiton**: to check the sliding of the signifier, the radical unfixity of meaning that is the very condition of language. But, by the same token, that moment of closure always depends on the closing off of questions that could still be asked.

This last assertion seems to me the point where many South African Marxist scholars part ways with Lacan and the deconstructive strategies of Derrida that lie alongside Lacan's discourse. Although it might be true that there is a level at which every certainty is open to question, there is also a level at which decisions must be taken. What is the point, then, of insisting on this

⁵⁷ This radical ambiguity is precisely what is at stake in the well-known racist statement that the demands of the mass organisations should not be taken seriously because "if you give them a hand they'll take the arm." The notion that there is always something more at stake (after the arm, what then?) indicates precisely the way in which desire, as Lacan puts it, resides always in the "beyond" of demand.

supposed "radical ambiguity"? Zizek's application of this question to the theory of ideology, and my analysis of NCL discourse in the previous two chapters suggests an answer. As Zizek shows, this notion implies that every ideological interpellation, by virtue of closing off the question of the radical unfixedness of meaning, has a moment where it falls back on blank assertion. At this point the possibility of further explanation, of further equivalences and substitutions, vanishes. This is what Zizek irrelevantly calls ideology's moment of "dogmatic stupidity" These points are at the same time the moments of ideology's failure (because the circular, empty character of the nodal point is exposed here) and its greater success, because it is here that we see the subject most clearly "in the grip", as it were, of ideology (as is evidenced precisely in its insistence that these truths are self-evident, its inability to understand why we can't see the obviousness). Ultimately, ideology depends on this moment of dogmatism, on this ability to maintain "closure", to insist, for example, on the validity of one's concept of the desire of the masses, or on the unity of the interests of all South Africans beyond their apparent division. In other words, Zizek's argument - and this is borne out by the way in which we see this question being handled in NCL discourse - is that it is precisely through the abstracting and closing operation of the ideological fantasy that ideological interpellation can handle the existence of counterfactuals. As he puts it, "... insofar as every interpellation fails at a certain point, fantasy is a means for an ideology to take into account in advance its own failure."⁵⁸

Zizek's argument is thus in the end that we should go **beyond** discourse analysis. For the crucial fact of the fantasy is that it is not something which can be further analysed. It is rather something that has to be "gone through", which simply has to be recognised as a fantasy. Beyond the task of showing the myriad relationships between signifiers there is thus also another task: the recognition that behind the signifiers that dominate and fix political identity there is no inexhaustible and inarticulate fullness of meaning but a gap, a blank. As Zizek puts it,

"... the crucial step in the analysis of the ideological edifice is ... to detect... behind the dazzling ideological facade, this self-referential, tautological, performative operation"⁵⁹

My analysis certainly bears out the notion that this "circular" moment is of crucial importance in NCL discourse. Paradoxically it is in the success of that discourse, (in its failure to fail!), that the failure of the NCL as an organisation lay: it was because the NCL's project did **not** give way under the weight of evidence that sabotage was not going to awaken the white voting population and bring them to their senses, that the urban proletariat was not simply going to rise up in insurrection, that the organisation could not formulate alternative strategies.

⁵⁸ S. Zizek. "Identity, identification and its Beyond". p. 36.

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

Zizek thus helps us understand how the ideological subject can disregard facts that seem to stare it in the face. Ideology, in order to set the subject in motion at all, depends on a movement of abstraction, of closure. For the subject to act in the world, it has to act in relation to some issues and not to others; if it is to see **certain** things, it cannot see **everything**. But this closure means that the subject can continue to act even when the symbolic order is thrown into crisis. The ability to interpret certain facts inescapably involves the inability to read others. Blindness and insight are inextricably part of each other.

To this explanation we can add a corollary. Zizek's is essentially a transhistorical point; it refers to what Althusser calls Ideology as such and not to the concrete particularity of the practices and institutions that make up, for example, the Ideological State Apparatuses. Zizek is saying, in effect, that there is a worm in the heart of ideology, a virus in language, that all interpellations, all discourses contain in themselves this moment of potential failure. The example of the NCL confirms this, but allows us to add that although the ideological fantasy may have a transhistorical logic, its occurrence must be understood in its historical specificity. Its central elements are drawn from the ideological context of their time, and attain their importance in the concreteness of a particular historical context. Their consequences exist, not only in their ability to sustain the subject in the face of challenge, but in the way concrete historical subjects thus ideologically sustained, make their choices.

8

Conclusion: Amateurs, Activists and the End of the NCL/ARM

"...there are an increasing number of kinks in things:
there is always a fresh infestation of failure"

William Gass

"...as the years pass, the positive achievements of all of you in ARM will not fade whereas the mistakes will..."

Patrick Duncan, in a letter to Randolph Vigne
8 February 1967¹

8.1 Defiance and disaster

The idea of the post-Rivonia pylon attack proposed at the April 1964 meeting had been floated some time before. During the Rivonia trial the NCL/ARM had decided, in deference to the safety of Congress leaders on trial, to place a moratorium on sabotage. While the Rivonia leadership were in the dock, no acts of sabotage would be committed. But after the sentencing, the NCL would strike again in a display of renewed defiance.

In terms of the Easter discussion, this proposition was seen at least partly as a compromise.² The course of action proposed in Leftwich's strategic analysis documents did downplay sabotage, denying that it was a central revolutionary strategy, and thus constituted (without abandoning the strategy altogether) a concession to other members' reservations about sabotage. Leftwich's argument in fact side-stepped many of Daniels's objections. No longer would it be seen primarily as aimed at conscientising white South Africa; it was now conceptualised more in terms of the need for training and the importance of accumulating revolutionary credibility.

In terms of these imperatives, the notion of a spectacular sabotage attack after Rivonia made all the more sense. The post-Rivonia situation, in terms of Leftwich's argument, was seen as

¹ Quoted in C. J. Driver. *Patrick Duncan, South African and Pan African*, p. 255.
² Interview with Hugh Lewin. Harare, 3 February 1990.

granting the NCL a crucial opportunity to establish its legitimacy. A spectacular sabotage attack so soon after the sentencing of the Rivonia trialists would be a dramatic assertion of continued resistance in the face of a repressive state. In addition it would, in the temporary absence of Umkhonto we Sizwe, be an effective way of asserting the centrality of the NCL in the sabotage field. It seems as if this attack might have been seen as a new beginning for the organisation. Significantly this occasion was chosen for launching the group's new name. The recommendation of the London discussion had been taken seriously, and the group was now to function under the altogether more dramatic name of the African Resistance Movement, (ARM). A pamphlet was drawn up announcing the "formation" of the "new" organisation.³

The ARM now embarked on one of its most elaborate and large-scale operations yet. Detailed maps and photographs were used.⁴ Every move was carefully worked out, inventories were compiled. The action was carefully synchronised on a national level, and Leftwich travelled specially up to Johannesburg to ensure that the attacks happened just after sentencing. On Thursday 18 June, they attacked, using shaped charges: the Cape town ARM struck pylons at Lynedoch, Fisantekraal near Durbanville and Stellenbosch.⁵ The attack on the Lynedoch pylon was unsuccessful that night, but it was brought down on Sunday 21 June.⁶ The Johannesburg group struck at two pylons at the farms Welgedacht and Vlakfontein in the district of Nigel, bringing down one.⁷

As an attempt to launch the name "ARM", the attack was but a moderate success: newspaper coverage of the pamphlet announcing their "launch" was not very prominent.⁸ Nonetheless, the sabotage attacks themselves had a dramatic impact. In the words of Albie Sachs:

"...One day in the press there appeared reports that electricity pylons had been toppled in various parts of the country. Six had fallen in one night; another one was to hit the ground two nights later. The police announced that explosives had been used. Many people were angry at what they regarded as new outrages, others were delighted by the evidence of continuing resistance, but everyone, including myself, wondered what organisations had been responsible and what sort of people had had the daring to organise such activity at a time of such danger."⁹

³ Originally Hirson and Eisenstein (members of the SLA) drew up a pamphlet. Leftwich however discarded their version and wrote one himself, which was then approved by other ARM members (Hirson, "The State of Emergency", p. 11

⁴ **S v Daniels**, p. 52.

⁵ **Ibid.**, p. 52-3, 147, 151.

⁶ **Ibid.**, p. 150.

⁷ **Hirson/Khumalo**, p.1; **Hirson/Viktor**, p.1; **Hirson/Wentzel** p. 11; AD 1912 "Judge says no to squash plea from Prager", **Rand Daily Mail**, 10 November 1964.

⁸ Hugh Lewin, pers. comm.; see, for example, the coverage of the story in the AD 1912 "A.R.M. - 'New Resistance Movement'", **Star** 22 November 1964, where the existence of the NCL is reported in a story barely three sentences long.

⁹ Albie Sachs, **Stephanie on Trial**, p. 22.

In the terms of its conceptualisation, the action had been a relative success. The newly-renamed ARM was now in a comparatively favourable position. Firstly, processes were under way to transform it from a loose and fragmented collection of saboteurs into a diversified and more or less cohesive organisation. It was starting to function in a more organised fashion, and that degree of organisation had paid off: the co-ordinated attack on pylons in the Western Cape and the Transvaal had made a definite public impact. Secondly, disastrous as the Rivonia raids had been, it meant that the field was now clear for ARM, and that it was a much more important organisation in the sabotage field than it had been before. Perhaps most encouragingly, despite the doubts of its members, their ideological differences and the heavy state repression of the past three years, the organisation still survived intact - which seemed in some measure a vindication of the group's strategy. Although the immediate prospects looked bleak, ARM thus faced a more positive long-term scenario.

These hopes were however to be dashed. On Saturday 4 July 1964, security police visited the flat of Adrian Leftwich, and started the process that led to the utter ruin of the organisation.

Usually, the breakdown of an organisation does not form a central part of its story. In comparison with the history of its achievements, its collapse has a relatively peripheral status. This is not so for the NCL/ARM. Here, a concatenation of chance events - together with factors resulting from the peculiarities of the organisation's development - conspired to ensure that the organisation fell apart in a particularly catastrophic way. The memory of that collapse and the way it was reported in the media plays an important part in popular perceptions of the organisation today. While political trials are often occasions at which the state actively signifies its power and reasserts its hegemony and legitimacy, they have, on occasion, been turned into sites of struggle. As Davis has pointed out, the Rivonia trial was in itself a contested arena, a struggle within the legal framework of the trial to articulate and impose alternative meanings on the ANC's use of violence.¹⁰ This was not at all the case with the NCL/ARM: its trial simply became an occasion for the organisation's humiliation by the state. It is therefore important to understand precisely the process of the organisation's death.

It is unlikely that the visit which led to Leftwich's arrest was specifically aimed at the NCL/ARM. The raid on Leftwich was only part of a nationwide crackdown on members of the white left that, according to R. W. Johnson, was "to eliminate white radicals almost as a

¹⁰ Dennis M. Davis, "Violence and the Law: the use of the censure in political trials in South Africa". in N. Chabani Manganyi, and André Du Toit (eds.) *Political Violence and the Struggle in South Africa* (galley proof of unpublished book. New York. St Martin. projected publishing date: 1990) p. 311.

species".¹¹ According to a statement by General H. J. van den Bergh, this crackdown had been some time in the planning and had started on 22 June.¹² By 14 July, 40 people had been picked up. Only 10 of these arrests were clearly NCL/ARM related.¹³ In the same crackdown, numerous members of COD and others suspected of involvement in the SACP were also picked up; in 1965 some of these would, along with Bram Fischer, be charged under the Suppression of Communism Act.¹⁴

Light can be shed on this question too, by the events surrounding the career in the security forces of a young man named David Plotz. After the crackdown on ARM and the conviction of its members, he came forward and claimed in an interview with the **Sunday Times** that he had been an agent for the SADF's Military Intelligence. He claimed that in December 1962 he had stumbled across evidence of the existence of the NCL through his contact with an American girl-friend of Watson. Plotz, then in Germany, contacted the South African embassy, and in February 1963, he was recruited by Military Intelligence. He was sent to South Africa, assigned the task of infiltrating Robert Watson's cell in Cape Town.¹⁵ In May, he abandoned his investigations, having failed to infiltrate the NCL. After the publication of the interview on 6 December 1964, it transpired that the Security police had been unaware of his investigations or his suspicions regarding Robert Watson. He was later questioned by the South African Police, who appear to have believed his story.¹⁶

It seems, therefore, that it was through complete coincidence that the police, during the raid, came across four typed sheets hidden inside a book at his bedside table.¹⁷ These sheets contained damning evidence of the NCL/ARM's activities. One pair dealt in detail with their project procedure for sabotage attacks. The second set out the "current responsibilities" of different sub-groupings of the NCL, covering subjects like "Propaganda", "Intelligence", "Action",

¹¹ R. W. Johnson **How Long will South Africa survive?**, p.20.

¹² AD 1912 "Van den Bergh gives Total in detention". **The Star**, 14 July 1964. In other words, the detentions had started only 4 days after the NCL/ARM attack. The General denied, however, that the detentions had anything at all to do with the post-Rivonia sabotage attempts ("Police raid hundreds of homes". **The Star**, 3 July 1964).

¹³ The figure of 40 detentions was given by General van der Bergh (AD 1912 *op. cit.*, **The Star**, 14 July 1964). This is confirmed by an examination of reports in AD 1912: "At least 31 held in recent raids". **The Star** 7 July 1964; "Total silence on detainees". **The Star**, 8 July 1964; "Vorster and Van der Bergh explain" and "Another detained on Rand". **The Star**, 10 July 1964; "Fiance of Fischer held". **The Rand Daily Mail**, 11 July 1964; "Author's Son Held". **The Rand Daily Mail**, 14 July 1964; "Graaff questions police raids". **The Cape Times**, 6 July 1964; "Girl research worker held". **The Cape Times**, 7 July 1964; "Security Police want 'pimpernel'". **The Sunday Times**, 12 July 1964.

¹⁴ See newspaper sources quoted *ibid.*: interview with Esther Barsel, Johannesburg, 9 September 1989; Gerard Ludi and Blaar Grobbelaar. **The Amazing Mr Fischer** (Johannesburg, Nasionale Boekhandel, 1966), p. 47.

¹⁵ AD 1912, "Army knew of A.R.M." **The Rand Daily Mail**, 12 December 1964.

¹⁶ AD 1912, "Vorster and Plotz". **Sunday Times** 13 December 1964.

¹⁷ **S v Daniels**, p. 16.

and contained explicit references to guerilla warfare.¹⁸ The policeman, Lt. A. J. van Dyk, did not arrest him immediately, but returned later to do so.¹⁹

This sort of crisis was not completely unforeseen. On the contrary, Leftwich had given some thought to the implications of just such an eventuality. Indeed, it is ironic that the idealism and moral integrity Leftwich projected, and the values he had enunciated as a NCL/ARM member, all concerned precisely the questions that were now at stake in his behaviour subsequent to his arrest. Thus Leftwich had apparently taken part in an experiment conducted by the University of Cape Town's Department of Psychology on the effects of solitary confinement.²⁰ And the papers later seized by the state contained a memorandum to his fellow-NCL/ARM members, detailing the effects of solitary confinement and setting out strategies for resisting arrest.²¹ And although the paper speaks eloquently of the negative effects of solitary confinement and the power and resourcefulness of police interrogators, it left no doubt that Leftwich believed that NCL/ARM members had to resist, had to - and could - avoid becoming tools of the police.

Here, we once again confront the problem of understanding Leftwich's role. There is a danger that the ironies and contradictions surrounding his behaviour after the arrest are understood crudely, so that, instead of contributing to a comprehension of the issues involved in his breakdown, they serve merely to damn him, to amount to a moral condemnation of his eventual role. Beyond such condemnation there is the need to understand how Leftwich could have played the role he did.

An interesting light is thrown on Leftwich's concern with detention and imprisonment by notes taken by Gwendolen Carter concerning a conversation between her and Leftwich on 29 July, 1963. Their interview was out-of-doors, and during their conversation they were passed by a police car. Much to Carter's surprise, Leftwich "pulled out a pen and wrote down the licence

¹⁸ According to some informants, what the police found was a list of NCL/ARM members' code names, correlated with their real names (interview with Dot Clemshaw, Cape Town, 20 November 1988). According to Alan Paton Leftwich denies this (Alan Paton, *Journey Continued*, p. 227); furthermore, no such material appears anywhere among the trial exhibits.

To make matters yet more complicated, the item discovered during the raid is referred to by the policeman concerned as "Exhibit B1" (*S v Daniels*, p. 18) - and this exhibit is not included in the Cape Town Supreme Court Archive's trial record! A study of Council's working papers (University of South Africa, United Party Archives, Private Collections, Pilkington Jordan Papers, File 13 (2.7.1)), shows that this exhibit is identical to Exh C25 (1) - (4) in the Daniels trial. The above summary of the document is based on the latter item.

¹⁹ *S v Daniels*, p. 60.

²⁰ Interview with Sheila Lapinsky, Cape Town, 6 November 1988.

²¹ Leftwich said in court that he had written the report (*S v Daniels*, p. 165). According to Paton, "Leftwich writes that he had admitted writing such a document but in fact he had not, and had admitted only to shield the actual writer." (Alan Paton, *loc. cit.*) According to Albie Sachs, however, the evidence was strongly in favour of Leftwich's having been the author, since his handwriting appeared on the original. (Albie Sachs, *op. cit.*, p. 110).

number on a piece of paper", explaining that it was useful in case one could recognise them later.²² During the course of their conversation, Leftwich emphasised that his motivation as a NUSAS leader was different from "normal political motivation":

"Youngsters such as himself were not interested in power. In fact, they did not themselves expect to come to power. They were not interested in glory or wealth. They were fighting for a cause, a principle. It sounded very much as if the Liberal cause was a religious crusade. He recognised that his present activities would not lead to security, to wealth, or to influence, but most likely - in the short term, at least, to jail."²³

Another interesting incident is recalled by Dot Cleminshaw, a fellow-Liberal Party member. After a meeting, Leftwich gave her a lift home and asked her whether she would ever get involved in sabotage:

"...I said no, because I have two young children and my first duty is to them.... And I said something about if I got involved I would have to be able to get away with it. And he said - I have never forgotten it - you can't get away with it."²⁴

These passages show Leftwich articulating a moral attitude of almost complete idealism. In the first incident, this idealism is overt; in the second, it appears more implicit. In either case, the self-image expressed in these two interviews is of someone who sticks to his principles even though they lead him to imprisonment and personal danger. Moreover, Leftwich appears to have been sincere in articulating these ideas. To be sure, one must suspect him of a desire to impress the American author, but no such intention could have been present during his conversation with Cleminshaw: he seems to have believed sincerely in the values he was enunciating. In fact, his participation in the NCL/ARM does not seem to have been based on the hope that he would escape the consequences of his actions. Indeed, he seemed to accept the risk of prison and to believe that he would be equal to the experience of interrogation. It was part of his commitment to the NCL.

What is particularly interesting about the ideals Leftwich expresses here is their relation with the passages from Leftwich's letters to Lewin quoted earlier. There, Leftwich articulated a self-disgust, an alienation from his own political identity as a white South African that contrasts strongly with the idealism of the values projected in these conversations. Though at one level there is a sharp contrast between the different ways in which Leftwich articulates his image of himself as a South African, they are, at another level, intimately connected. It is striking that the position Leftwich was interpellated by was precisely one conceptualised as **unstained** by the

22 BCZA 79/26 2:XL6:96, p. 1.

23 *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

24 Interview with Dot Cleminshaw. *loc. cit.*

moral compromises that were forced on South African liberals, an identity unaffected by the ambiguities of their position. But this subject-position was also just the one in which those moral compromises would stand out in their most glaring, alienating harshness, and which was therefore guaranteed to be thrown into crisis continually by the intractable facts of everyday existence as a white South African.

After Leftwich's arrest, Lynette van der Riet, an NCL/ARM member who was with him at the time, went to her flat and removed the suitcases full of explosives and other material. These she took to Schneider's flat in Sea Point. Unknown to her, she was followed there by the Security Police. Later that day, she was arrested. With this, the crisis, already serious, rapidly deepened. On 6 July, acting on information given to Warrant-Officer Spyker van Wyk by Lynette van der Riet, police went to Mike Schneider's flat in Sea Point. Schneider, though caught by surprise, was able to make a dramatic escape,²⁵ but in his garage police found a wooden crate and a number of suitcases containing explosives, detonators, electrical equipment and manuals on demolitions and mine warfare. They also found sketch plans of pylon demolition jobs,²⁶ maps used in the June 18 attack, notes on the construction and repair of timing mechanisms²⁷ lists of members' "subscriptions" with payments marked off against code names, documents relating to the various pylon "jobs", inventories, correspondence relating to the arrival of the case of plastic explosives, and copious notes on attack procedures and responsibilities. Leftwich had been an able administrator, but under his guidance, sabotage attacks seem to have been planned with the systematic profusion of detailed memoranda and inventories usually reserved for NUSAS congresses. And the police now had first incontrovertible and concrete evidence of the NCL/ARM's existence and activities.

The nature and import of this evidence has to be appreciated if Leftwich's subsequent role is to be understood. For though the police were now in possession of a vast quantity of material evidence, it was evidence that did not clearly implicate anyone beyond Leftwich, van der Riet and Schneider. This fact should make clear the importance of Adrian Leftwich's detention and his detailed knowledge of the organisation. The police were now in possession, not only of concrete and detailed evidence, but they had custody of someone with enough working knowledge to interpret all the evidence for them - and who in many cases knew the real names of the people referred to by their aliases in the papers they had found. And about four days

²⁵ *S v Daniels*, p. 17.

²⁶ See, for example, *S v Daniels*, Exh C44.

²⁷ See *S v Daniels*, Exh C12 - C16.

after his detention Leftwich, though he had himself taken part in an experimental simulation of the conditions of solitary confinement,²⁸ started telling the police what they wanted to know.

It was almost immediately clear to NCL/ARM members that Leftwich was talking, and that their detailed security arrangements had come crashing down in ruins. As members hitherto carefully segregated from each other in different cells and protected by false names were picked up one by one, it became obvious that the police were acting on information that was of high quality indeed. The alarm was spread to branches throughout the country.²⁹ But the safety procedures and emergency measures so carefully worked out before had assumed that any state action would affect only a limited part of the organisation; in this context they were useless. It was now up to individual members to save themselves.

Some tried to escape. In Cape Town these included Vigne who disappeared on 2 July and arrived in England on 14 August.³⁰ Watson was questioned "for a couple of hours" by Lt. A. J. Van Dyk, the man who had detained Leftwich, on the evening of 4 July, and decided to leave for England via Salisbury as it then was.³¹ On 8 July, on his way to Swaziland, Schneider stopped in Johannesburg to alert members that, as Wentzel was to put it later, the police had caught "some of the boys down there"³². This warning gave the Johannesburg members a valuable head start: Ronald and Hilary Mutch fled to Bechuanaland and Rosemary Wentzel to Swaziland, where she was granted political asylum. Green also went to Swaziland.³³

In the next few days, about eight more NCL/ARM members were picked up.³⁴ De Keller was arrested and dragged away across the lawn of the residence he was staying at during a NUSAS conference in Pietermaritzburg in the early hours of 7 July.³⁵ Eddie Daniels tried to save what he could: his plan was to get hold of the explosives and to commit as many acts of sabotage as

28 Interview with Dot Cleminshaw. *loc. cit.* It is sometimes claimed that Leftwich had broken down during this experiment (interview with Sheila Lapinsky. *loc. cit.*) According to Randolph Vigne, however, this is not true (*pers. comm.*)

29 *Hirson/Lewin* p.5: Interview with John Laredo, Leeds, 22 April 1989. For a first hand account of the breakdown of the organisation, see also Hugh Lewin, *Bandiet: seven years in a South African prison* pp. 17 - 39.

30 AD 1912 *Star*, 2 October 1964. According to C. J. Driver, Vigne (by that stage already wanted by the police) left South Africa for Canada aboard a Norwegian cargo-ship, his passage booked in the name of his friend, the publisher James Currey (*op. cit.*, p. 254).

31 AD 1912 "Sabotage secrets revealed by Watson". *Cape Times*, 1 January 1965.

32 *Hirson/Wentzel*, p. 16.

33 *Ibid.* See also Ernie Wentzel's account of her flight to Robin Scott-Smith's farm in Swaziland, A1931 Aa p. 103.

34 Newspaper reports do not seem to cover all the detentions. Livingstone Mrwetyana, a peripheral NCL/ARM member, was thus picked up at some point after Leftwich's capitulation, but I have not been able to find report detailing the precise date.

35 Interview with Sheila Lapinsky. *op. cit.*

possible "so as to detract suspicion away from those who were already detained".³⁶ But the quality of the information at the disposal of the security police was simply too high, and Daniels was picked up on 7 July, before he could do anything.³⁷ Lewin, given the chance to get away, after Schneider's warning, initially remained to warn John Harris; he eventually decided to stay behind to face the consequences.³⁸ He was arrested at his work on 9 July.³⁹ On the next day, Baruch Hirson was arrested at a road-block on his way back from a conference in Durban,⁴⁰ while Eisenstein was arrested in Johannesburg.⁴¹ Stephanie Kemp and Tony Trew were picked up during the weekend.⁴² In many cases, though they were conscious that their comrades were being arrested one by one, they could only wait and see whether their names, too, had been given to the police. The position was not without its ironies:

"The day before I was arrested I saw Nat Nakasa in the newsroom of the Rand Daily Mail. Nat told me of the arrest of Hugh Lewin, and he said it was very sad because it was like cattle. These were his words, you know, that you take one of the cattle, and the rest of them carry on eating and munching the grass"⁴³

Within two weeks after 4 July, the NCL/ARM was to all intents and purposes crushed. At least ten of its members had been detained, many more were on the run.⁴⁴ The members in detention tried to limit the damage by confessing only what they surmised the police already knew, but it gradually became clear to them that the police knew just about everything.⁴⁵

Now events took a truly disastrous turn. Higgs had left without removing the small suitcase he had left at Helmstedt's office. He wrote to Denis Capatos, a student at the University who was friendly with Higgs⁴⁶ and peripherally involved in the NCL/ARM, to pick up articles that were being stored there; from the context it was clear to Capatos that the suitcase contained dynamite. Higgs also wrote to Helmstedt, saying that "friends of his" would collect the suitcase.⁴⁷ But it was too late. Before he was picked up, Lewin, it seems, had alerted Harris and had also told him

³⁶ Eddie Daniels, *Spent Fifteen Years on Robben Island*, p.2.

³⁷ AD 1912 "Cape Liberal detained", *The Star*, 7 July 1964.

³⁸ *Hirson/Lewin*, p.5.

³⁹ Hugh Lewin, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁴⁰ AD 1912 "Lecturer detained", *The Sunday Times*, 12 July 1964

⁴¹ Ad 1912, "Fiance of Fischer Girl Held", *The Rand Daily Mail*, 11. July 1964. The "fiancé" in question was of course not Eisenstein, by Sholto Cross, who was also suspected of being involved with the NCL/ARM.

⁴² AD 1912 "Two former students detained", *The Star*, 14 July 1964.

⁴³ Interview with Raymond Eisenstein, London 16 April 1989

⁴⁴ Reports on detentions included the information that "two Africans" had been detained in Johannesburg. As their names were not given, it is not possible to say whether they were members of the AFM section of the NCL/ARM or not. If they were, then the number of NCL detainees would be at least 12.

⁴⁵ Interview with John Laredo *loc. cit.*; E. Daniels, *op.cit.*, p.5.; see also the account of Kemp's detention in Sachs, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁴⁶ A1931 Aa p.109.

⁴⁷ *Hirson/Helmstedt*, p.3.

where the explosives were kept.⁴⁸ The next day, on 9 July, Harris met Helmstedt at a cinema and told her that he wanted to collect the contents of her cupboard, and on that Saturday, 11 July, he did so.⁴⁹ When Capatos arrived at her office the cupboard was empty.⁵⁰

Harris had by all accounts been a peripheral member of the NCL/ARM. He had served on the Executive committee of the Transvaal Liberal Party and on the Party's national executive in 1962. At the end of that year he had joined the South African Non-Racial Olympics Committee (SANROC).⁵¹ He rose quickly to become chair and vice-chair of the organisation, and in 1963, had represented it at the International Olympic Committee in Geneva.⁵² In late 1963, authorities seized his passport when he was on the point of leaving on another journey; on 12 February 1964 he was banned in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act.⁵³ Harris had joined the NCL/ARM only in December 1963, quite late in its career. He had not been a very active member, and had been involved in only one project: on 24 January 1964 he had been involved in an attack on a power traction mast between Irene and Lyttleton, and, on the same night, an attempt to sabotage railway signal cables at a point between Angus and Natalspruit. On this project he had been used only as a driver and to stand guard.⁵⁴ Harris does not seem to have been part of the post-Rivonia attack at all, and was later to testify that other members of the NCL/ARM had viewed him with "contempt".⁵⁵

Now, however, he was in a central and crucial position. By this time all the Johannesburg members of the organisation had either fled or were in the hands of the police - all, that is, except Harris and John Lloyd, Lewin's flatmate. On 14 July, they met to discuss possible courses of action.⁵⁶ Harris felt that it was a situation "which was so delicately poised that by giving a push in the right way, the right push at the right time, you will get a redistribution of forces."⁵⁷ In the next five days, Harris and Lloyd met four times.⁵⁸ They initially considered the possibility of Lloyd planting an incendiary bomb in the Pretoria post office or in an underground parking garage.⁵⁹ Harris thought of simultaneously planting one in the left luggage department

48 **S v Harris**, p. 391.

49 **Hirson/Helmstedt**: AD 1912 **The Argus**, 16 October 1964.

50 **Hirson/Capatos**, pp. 2 - 3.

51 AD 1912 "How Harris worked for Liberalism and Sport". **The Sunday Times**, 18 October 1964.

52 **Ibid.**

53 AD 1912 "Harris Subdued". **The Star** 14 September 1964.

54 **Hirson/Wentzel**, pp. 7, 9.

55 AD 1912 "My first Bomb Failed". **The Rand Daily Mail**, 20 October 1964.

56 **S v Harris**, p. 378.

57 **Op. cit.**, p. 377.

58 **S v Harris**, p. 377 - 380.

59 **S v Harris**, p. 378 - 379, 380 - 381.

at the Johannesburg station.⁶⁰ But towards the end of the week, Harris had an idea which seemed to him "to have a sort of magnificence about it that the original idea did not have."⁶¹ He would plant a bomb in the station itself, warning the authorities to clear the concourse. Lloyd agreed, and they decided that Lloyd would do a reconnaissance of the post-office while Harris would plant the station bomb. But Lloyd could never play his part in the events to come: he was detained on 23 July.

Whether Harris had considered the possibility that people might be endangered is not at all clear. His telephone call to the authorities indicates that he did at least make an effort to clear the concourse. In his trial he alleged that the possibility that anyone might be close enough to the bomb to get hurt simply did not occur to him.

"I had a very clear picture in my mind of a loud bang, and a flare about ... 18 inches wide, and standing all around... there would be people. Mostly very struck by the explosion and this flare... I thought of it... like in geometry. You have got a point, and a circle around it, you know, where you put your protractor's sharp point in. It would be like that, and it would just be empty space around the point"⁶²

Such testimony should of course be handled with care. Testifying for the State, Lloyd would state that Harris had foreseen that people could be killed, but had argued that the loss of life would, in the long run, save more lives.⁶³ During the preparation for the attack on the station, Harris had written a letter to Verwoerd, in which he demanded that the Prime Minister "meet our requirements". If these requirements were not met, the letter stated, "we have plans for ... killing, and with great reluctance we will put these plans into operation if you reject or ignore our initiative".⁶⁴ He never mailed the letter - not because of having second thoughts about the threat, but because Lloyd convinced him that the police, convinced they had smashed the whole NCL/ARM, would not take it seriously.⁶⁵ In court, he would say that the threat had been mere empty bravado, but it should indicate that he might have been conscious of the bomb posing some risk to human life. Ernie Wentzel, characteristically cynical in his unpublished memoirs, doubts whether the possibility of taking life was excluded from Harris's mind.

"During the trial, other ARM members isolated Harris and the station bomb as the independent conduct of one individual. Of course, this is in part true. When Harris exploded the bomb the others had all been arrested or fled ... But that is not the whole truth. The ARM was gradually convinced of the low-key impact of the programme of

⁶⁰ *S v Harris*, p. 380. The idea of a bomb in the left-luggage section had apparently been a long-standing project of his (interview with Hugh Lewin. Harare . 3 February 1990).

⁶¹ *S v Harris*, p.382.

⁶² *S v Harris*, pp 401-402. 412-413.

⁶³ AD 1912 "I plotted with Harris". *The Rand Daily Mail*. 13 October 1964.

⁶⁴ *S v Harris*, p.395.

⁶⁵ *S v Harris*, p.394.

explosives. They discussed more dramatic action. A bomb on a Boeing en route to Durban; a bomb on a station, a bomb in a parking garage. Perhaps this would have remained talk. Perhaps, but for the arrests, others would have been involved with Harris."⁶⁶

Wentzel however does not cite any sources for these allegations, and does not make it clear how he came by this information at all; NCL/ARM members also strenuously deny that the possibility of taking human life had ever been considered.⁶⁷

A last consideration when treating the matter of Harris's intentions is the circumstantial evidence that is available. The most striking feature of the way Harris went about planning for the station bomb is his great amateurishness. He was almost suicidally careless about security - for example, he travelled around for two days with the incriminating threat letter to Verwoerd casually folded in the plastic leatherette pocket of his car door for the simple reason that he did not think of throwing it away ("I am a hoarder. I just keep things", he told the court later).⁶⁸ He had no knowledge of explosives: the detailed manuals contained in the suitcase made no sense to him,⁶⁹ and he did not even know how many detonators to use to set off the dynamite.⁷⁰ Not certain whether the explosion would be effective enough, he simply took some cordtex, "that yellow cord stuff" and "wound it round into a sort of loop" and added that to the contents of the suitcase. In this context, his apparent naivete in describing his conception of the explosion seems more believable.

Friday, 24 July, Harris put his plan in action and planted the bomb. Less than seven hours after the bombing, Harris was arrested.⁷¹ He was interrogated and so violently assaulted that his jaw was broken.⁷² On 11 September he made a statement to a magistrate admitting to planting the bomb.⁷³ On the same day he was charged with murder and sabotage.

After the station bomb the situation of those members who had been detained changed radically. In the short term the station bomb meant that many detainees, whether connected

66 AD 1931 Aa p. 125.

67 Interview with Hugh Lewin, 3 February 1989.

68 *S v Harris*, p. 395.

69 *S v Harris*, p. 400. See also p. 463, where he seems to be ignorant about the most elementary safety precautions in working with detonators.

70 *S v Harris*, p.401.

71 The swiftness of this arrest deserves some comment. Gordon Winter (*Inside Boss*, p. 94) has it that a police informer contacted the police and told him that a white liberal had asked him to find an old broken alarm clock. This information led to Harris's arrest. This conflicts with the fact that Harris already had access to the by now sophisticated timing devices the NCL had at its disposal, and that he used one in the blast. Another explanation is offered by Alan Paton, according to whom John Lloyd was taken to the Station after the blast, and on seeing the carnage, burst out "My god, what has Harris done now?" (Alan Paton, *op. cit.*, p. 236).

72 AD 1912 "Jaw broken in custody, says his attorney", *The Star*, 21 September 1964.

73 *Ibid.*

with the NCL/ARM or not, were badly assaulted in detention.⁷⁴ This was the first time violence had been used against white political prisoners.⁷⁵ In addition, there was a second rash of detentions, possibly linked to the bomb and the accompanying assaults. After 14 July, the NCL/ARM arrests had practically ceased.⁷⁶ Now twelve more people were arrested on suspicion of being involved in the NCL/ARM.⁷⁷

Even members who had safely crossed the country's borders were not safe. Higgs, who had emigrated from South Africa in June⁷⁸ was abducted from his new home in Lusaka by kidnapers who spoke in heavy South African accents. He was drugged and driven back to South Africa through the night; he woke to find himself next to Zoo Lake, in Johannesburg, where he was arrested later that day.⁷⁹ It was never finally established who did the kidnapping. Later the cars they drove were found to have been government property,⁸⁰ but the Commissioner of Police, General J. M. Keevy, squashed speculation that the government was involved as "irresponsible".⁸¹ Higgs, in any event, eventually eluded the grasp of the South African authorities. He was a British citizen, because it could be established that he had been a kidnapped person when arrested,⁸² he could not stand trial and had to be allowed to leave the country.

Rosemary Wentzel was less lucky. She was detained near Ermelo On August 11.⁸³ She alleged that three men had forced her out of her house, bound and gagged her and brought her back into South Africa. There she was tricked into getting into her own car, which had also been brought back to South Africa, and driving back to Swaziland. She almost immediately drove into an improvised roadblock. ("I am Rosemary Wentzel, and I have been kidnapped from South

74 Esther Barsel. Johannesburg. 9 September 1989. Kemp and Brookes were allegedly assaulted in Cape Town by "Spyker" van Wyk ("Assault claim by sabotage trial girl". *The Cape Times*. 10 October 1964); Albie Sachs. *Stephanie on Trial*. p. 56 - 58. In Johannesburg. Lewin was reportedly attacked by a Lt W. J. van der Merwe (AD 1912 "Lewin says he was hit at Grays". *The Star*. 18 December 1964).

75 Albie Sachs. *op. cit.* p.34. Amy Thornton. Cape Town. 14 November 1988.

76 Although Alan Brooks was detained on 22 July (AD 1912 *The Rand Daily Mail*. 23 July 1964). and John Lloyd and Samuel Olifant on 23 July (AD 1912. "Seven journalists in detention". *The Star*. 24 July 1964).

77 They were: Helmstedt on 24 July. (AD 1912 "Police Hold John Harris". *The Sunday Times*. 26 July 1964). Frampton Kerr and Fred Prager on 27 July (AD 1912 "Advocate. Liberal Executive. detained". *The Rand Daily Mail*. 28 July 1964). Terence Beard. Peter Rodda and Norman Bromberger on the 28th (AD 1912 "Cape Lecturers held by police" *The Star*. 28 July 1964). Harry Cohen on 29 July (AD 1912 "4 lecturers and 10 Liberals now in detention". *The Star*. 30 July. 1964). On 29 July. police also detained Ernie Wentzel. Cape Town ballet student Selena Molteno. and Millie McConkey (AD 1912 "Ernest Wentzel held for 90 days". *The Rand Daily Mail*. 30 July 1964). John Laredo and David Evans were detained on Friday 6 August (AD 1912 "Another Rhodes lecturer held". "More liberals held". *The Sunday Times*. 9 August 1964).

78 *Hirson/Helmstedt*. p. 2.

79 AD 1912 "All the way by Car...". *The Star*. 4 September 1964.

80 AD 1912 "Kidnappers used Cars bought by Government" *The Rand Daily Mail*. 18 September 1964.

81 AD 1912. "Car Report is irresponsible. says Keevy". *The Star*. 18 September 1964.

82 AD 1912 "Kidnappers used Cars bought by Governmnet". *The Rand Daily Mail*. 18 September 1964.

83 AD 1912 "Was this another snatch?". *The Rand Daily Mail*. 8 September 1964.

Africa", she told the security policeman who stopped her car. "Who do you think you are, James Bond?" he replied and arrested her.⁸⁴ The Colonial Office however stated, in response to Wentzel's allegations, that its position was based on the report of the Swaziland police, which stated that there was no evidence of kidnapping.⁸⁵ She was later to be a key State witness in the trial.

In the long term the consequences for NCL were much more serious. Though the death penalty had been hanging over their heads in any case, its shadow now loomed all the darker, especially when Ethel Rhys died on 19 August. In practice this meant that the pressures on NCL/ARM members to turn state witness increased.⁸⁶ Considerable pressure was applied on ARM members to become State witnesses: John Laredo and Eddie Daniels, for example, were offered freedom in exchange for their testimony.⁸⁷ At least nine NCL/ARM members in the end accepted this offer.⁸⁸ Other ARM members, like Livingstone Mrwetyana⁸⁹ and Eddie Daniels' cousin Neville Hillman⁹⁰ agreed to become state witnesses but were never called. But it was Adrian Leftwich whose decision to testify had the greatest impact.

It has to be remembered that in spite of the plentiful evidence the State had accumulated, it needed witnesses to make its case watertight. The confessions obtained from detainees were not admissible court evidence, and much of its other evidence was circumstantial, referring to anonymous code names rather than to the accused. Albie Sachs's comments on his impressions as a young lawyer being briefed on the case, make this point quite clearly:

"These documents recorded in remarkable detail the activities of the organisation over a period of nearly a year, but fortunately for the members, did not mention anyone by name. It was clear to us that the prosecution would have no difficulty in proving that the organisation had existed... but we all felt equally convinced that the only way in which the accused could be personally implicated would be if an important member of the organisation took the stand and denounced them."⁹¹

⁸⁴ AD 1912 "Rosemary Wentzel tells story...". *The Rand Daily Mail* 12 September 1964.

⁸⁵ AD 1912 "Wentzel case for Colonial Office". *The Rand Daily Mail*. 10 October 1964.

⁸⁶ At the time of the NCL/ARM trial, the decision to become a state witness carried a new seriousness. Not long before, during the trial of Dr Neville Alexander and others accused of involvement in the Yu Chi Chang Club several of those who had been offered immunity in return for testifying for the State had been able to obstruct the prosecution's case by giving evidence that was very vague, or simply maintaining that they could not remember. In 1964 the Criminal Procedure Act of 1955 Act had been amended, so that a "recalcitrant witness" could be punished with up to one year's imprisonment if he or she could not give evidence to the court's satisfaction. In addition, the immunity could be withdrawn ("Detainees facing crisis of choice". *Cape Times*, 7 October 1964).

⁸⁷ Eddie Daniels *op.cit.* p.12; John Laredo, *loc. cit.*

⁸⁸ They were Adrian Leftwich, Lynette van der Riet, John Lloyd, Rosemary Wentzel, Denis Capatos, Jane Helmstedt, Willie Tibane, Samuel Olifant and Johannes Dhladhla.

⁸⁹ Interview with Dot Cleminshaw *loc. cit.*

⁹⁰ Eddie Daniels, *op.cit.*, p.13.

⁹¹ Albie Sachs, *Stephanie on Trial*, p. 72.

Still, few people suspected that it would be Leftwich himself who would be the star witness. Since his detention, it had been assumed as a matter of course that Leftwich would be in the dock⁹² - so much so that before the trial started, it was swiftly coming to be known as the "Leftwich case".⁹³ When he was not charged along with his fellow-detainees,⁹⁴ it came as a shock to many.⁹⁵ Sachs reasoned:

"The only reasonable explanation for Adrian's absence from the court seemed to be that he was going to be a witness against the others. This was incredible. He should have been the chief accused, not the principal witness for the prosecution. The earnest speaker, the buoyant, youthful, sincere organiser... no, it seemed impossible."⁹⁶

That Leftwich had now become a State witness seemed the supreme irony of the NCL/ARM's collapse. Firstly, there was Leftwich's centrality in the NCL/ARM, the fact that he was a leading figure testifying against those that had followed him. As Daniels was to write fifteen years later,

"At the time of the trial I was certainly disappointed in him. Partly because he had let the side down but more because he had saved himself at the expense of those whom he was responsible for. He was not responsible for me, in the sense that he had not recruited me. To my knowledge, I was a member of the NCL before he was, but he had recruited... the other four who were in the dock with me. In this I feel he slipped badly."⁹⁷

Leftwich appears to have crumbled totally under the hands of the police. In his behaviour during the trial, there was no vestige of resistance. He seemed to have become entirely a tool of the State. Not only was he sending his friends to prison, but he spoke freely of the futility and uselessness of the whole exercise, seeming to deny not only his comrades but the principles he had stood for. And, in another alarming indication of the extent of his own breakdown, he wrote on the wall of one of the cells he had occupied, that he had learnt for the first time how weak he was, and how great was the power of love.⁹⁸

92 "Detainees facing crisis of choice", *The Cape Times* 7 October 1964

93 *Op. cit.*, p. 40. See also Miles Brokensha and Robert Knowles, *The Fourth of July Raids*, p. 95.

94 AD 1912 "Eight in Cape Preview of Sabotage Trial", *The Rand Daily Mail*, 29 October 1964. All in all, thirteen NCL members appeared in four separate NCL/ARM trials. (According to Muriel Horrel (*Action, Reaction and Counter-Action*, p. 82), there were six trials; how she arrives at this figure is not clear. In addition, she wrongly states that the trials took place in early 1964). In Cape Town, Daniels, Kemp, De Klerk, Trew and Brookes appeared on a main charge of sabotage (Charge sheet, S v Daniels, Counsel's Papers (United Party Archives, Private Collection, Pilkington Jordan Papers, File 13 (1) (2.7.1)). Though a separation of trials occurred for the purpose of sentencing, it was still for all other purposes regarded as one trial. In Durban, Evans and Laredo were charged with sabotage ("Two men face sabotage charges", *The Daily News*, 13 October 1964). In Pretoria, there were two trials: Harris was charged with murder (AD 1912 "Station bomb death: Teacher charged with Murder", *The Star*, 14 September 1964); Hirson, Lewin, Prager, Eisenstein and Cox were charged with sabotage (AD 1912, "State names 25 as conspirators", *Rand Daily Mail*, 2 October 1964.

95 "Detainees facing crisis of choice", *The Cape Times* 7 October 1964

96 Albie Sachs, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

97 Eddie Daniels, "Spent 15 years on Robben Island", p. 12

98 Albie Sachs, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

This last painful detail poses the problem of Leftwich's breakdown in particularly striking form. Again, it is crucial not to stay merely at the level of the irony involved in such a sentence being written by someone who was sending his friends and comrades to prison. Instead, it provides an important clue to the nature of the collapse of his personality, and the way in which that collapse linked up to the concerns that characterised his political life until now. As I have pointed out, the available clues seem to indicate that Leftwich's intense revulsion from the corrupting moral influence of apartheid was closely related to his idealism. His own political identity seemed to him infected by the violence and abnormality around him. I have also shown that, accompanying Leftwich's anguished sense of his personal involvement in South Africa's violence, there was the tendency to idealise the terrain of his personal, private self, and to idealise his friendship with Lewin as one in which he was recognised and accepted in spite of any of the external features of his character. It is this theme that Leftwich's reputed cell-wall inscription seems to pick up. It is more than just an idealising cliché about the nature of love. Rather it seems to show how, as his commitment to the values he had earlier articulated started to shatter, this withdrawal to the realm of private recognition became more and more prominent. While his public actions did not live up to his moral commitment, he could, in this private sphere, believe that his intentions were still pure, his commitment to those values still real.

This separation seems indeed to be a general feature of his behaviour of the time. His behaviour seems marked by the belief that he was the same person, and that his changed role was an external matter, one that did not reflect his own self. This might explain the way in which Leftwich seemed curiously unbowed by his own volte-face - a point which seemed to many observers almost unbelievable. Here, for example, are the words of Albie Sachs, who during the preparation for the trial had refused to condemn him outright, and had tried instead to understand his breakdown:

"From the moment he had walked into court, chatting in a friendly way to members of the security police, I had realised that my spontaneous feeling towards him now was one of uncomplicated hatred. If he had grown a beard or worn dark glasses or become so haggard as to be unrecognisable, my anger might have been less strong, but he was exactly as I had always known him, buoyant, serious and absorbed. The very familiarity of his stance, of his facial expressions and even of the timbre of his voice seemed to intensify my emotion. This was the same Adrian; all that had changed was his role."⁹⁹

Sachs was not allowed the luxury of uncomplicated hatred for too long. Leftwich's astonishing composure was not impenetrable, and on the third day of the trial, when counsel for Daniels

⁹⁹

Op. cit. p. 116.

asked him whether he was happy with his decision to be State witness, he broke down. He refused counsel's offer of adjournment and continued:

"I loathe, God, I loathe apartheid and all that it means. This treachery here I place at the door of the system..... I am twenty-four years old. I have been stupid; I think we've all been stupid, and I think we realise we've been stupid... I am giving evidence, very simply, because... I realised the case against Eddie, the case against Spike, was hopeless anyway... As far as Stephanie Kemp and Alan Brooks was concerned, I believed they stood to get a very light sentence. If I stood a chance of getting five, six, seven, eight, ten years, I would not give evidence, not against people I am close to. But I believe, I don't know, that if they were in my position... and the evidence that stood against me, and they stood to come out possibly when they were forty-nine, fifty years old, they would have and I would have welcomed them to do the same... I certainly hope that there will be a time when, if those people I am giving evidence against, can forgive me and understand that I do not move one jot from my ideas and if they can forgive me that there will be a time... when this country sees a... better situation... well, I just hope that when that day comes, that we will all be together again. And that is why I have given evidence."¹⁰⁰

But though Leftwich could distinguish between his private self and his public acts, and though he could hope for such an eventual reconciliation, when he would not be judged by externalities but be accepted in spite of them, the world judged him by his public actions. His about-turn was widely publicised¹⁰¹ and the moral condemnation was almost universal. When counsel at one stage called Leftwich a rat, Judge President Beyers did not intervene; while giving judgement, however, he remarked that this was "a trifle hard on the genus *rattus*."¹⁰² Others were less inclined to gloat, and found in Leftwich's breakdown only cause for distress. In a letter to Alan Paton some days later, Leo Marquard wrote:

"The trials are dragging their dreary way through the courts. It is not pleasant to watch the breakdown of the human personality. I find great difficulty in expressing what I feel. Clearly the law must be obeyed; and equally clearly acts of violence cannot be

¹⁰⁰ S v *Daniels*, pp. 197 - 198.

¹⁰¹ The extent of the newspaper coverage of the NCL/ARM trial deserves some mention. The trial received an unusual amount of publicity, especially in view of the fact that by the time the NCL/ARM members were formally charged, sabotage trials had become, if not a routine, at least a regular and well-known event in South African courts. (Between February 1963 and December 1964, 2436 people had been charged with sabotage in South African courts, and of these 1308 had been found guilty.)

Nevertheless, the newspaper coverage accorded NCL/ARM trials was widespread, intense, and prominent. Speculation had been rife since shortly after the arrest of Leftwich, with some newspapers venturing to say that there might be an upcoming trial that would be "one of the biggest legal operations the Supreme Court has known"(AD 1912, "Legal Men Studying Thousands of papers", *The Star* 31 August 1964, "Advocate on special duty in Pretoria", *The Star*, 9 September 1964). These speculations were partly grounded on the supposition that there would be one trial in which all the NCL members would be tried at once (*ibid.*). In addition, the story had all the details that made sensational copy: the youth of many of the members, the fact that so many were white and middle class, the link to the station bomb, the drama of the kidnappings. Even when it was decided that each centre's members would be tried separately, newspaper coverage was still intense.

¹⁰² S v *Daniels*, judgement, p. 4

tolerated. But what does one say of legislation that permits individual beings to be bullied and cajoled into betraying their friends?"¹⁰³

It is interesting that this was Leo Marquard's overriding impression of the trial. For him and many other liberals it was Leftwich's betrayal that ultimately dominated it. In the end, most of the NCL/ARM accused were duly convicted and served their sentences in jail.¹⁰⁴ But the defeat of the NCL did not lie in their imprisonment. For many, their imprisonment was but the consequence of the very moral idealism and refusal to compromise that characterised their commitment to the NCL. Ultimately it was the spectacle of Leftwich, betraying his friends, himself and the ideals he stood for that most thoroughly symbolised the defeat of the organisation.

8.2 Amateurs, activists and the politics of citizenship

In the previous pages I have tried to tell the story of the NCL/ARM and how the very intellectual and moral traditions that inspired them to take up sides with the oppressed people of South Africa prevented them from acting out this commitment effectively. Three concerns have been braided together in this tale. Firstly, I have tried to recount their course of action and explain the reasons for the choices they made. My second concern was methodological: I have tried to show how an understanding of discourse and the political subject can help us understand historical events. And thirdly, I have tried to narrate a chapter in the history of a specific strand of the intellectual history of the white left in this country. These three strands, as I have woven them, end in the painful and terrible scene described in the end of my story: Leftwich's betrayal of everything he once believed in and stood for, and his utter collapse and defeat in the dock.

Why end the story there? The NCL/ARM story could just as well be said to have ended, for example, on 4 July, or on the day of the release of Eddie Daniels, longest-imprisoned of the NCL/ARM members. Though Leftwich's collapse is a dramatic moment it is also, I should

¹⁰³ Leo Marquard, letter to Alan Paton, 8 November 1964 (BCZA 77/25 A 382).

¹⁰⁴ In the Johannesburg trial, Hirson was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment; while Eisenstein and Lewin each received seven years (AD 1912 "She saved son's life only to see him jailed for sabotage", *The Rand Daily Mail*, 2 December 1964). Charges against Cox were withdrawn (AD 1912, "Cox Now in Lusaka" *The Rand Daily Mail*, 31 October 1964), and Prager was acquitted due to lack of evidence (AD 1912 "Prager free: Sabotage is ended - Counsel", *The Rand Daily Mail*, 1 December 1964). Harris was sentenced to death. (AD 1912 "Harris is Sentenced to Death", *The Star* 6 November 1964) In Cape Town, Trew and Brooks were each sentenced to four years, with two suspended, while Kemp was sentenced to five years with three suspended. De Keller was sentenced to 10 years, while Daniels was sentenced to 15. In Pietermaritzburg, the State withdrew its allegations of conspiracy in to sabotage; Evans and Laredo were sentenced to five years each for possession of explosives ("Five years for men who had dynamite" *Daily News*, 24 November 1964). The NCL/ARM was declared an unlawful organisation in Proclamation R. 242 on 25 September 1964 (S v Daniels Charge Sheet, Pilkington Jordan papers File 13 (1)).

point out, one that presents the historian with some difficulties unusual to her or his craft. Though history does deal with pain or moral defeat, it is usually separated from its subject-matter by the passage of years. The moment of human weakness and pain we confront here is much closer, and involves many persons still living. It is a moment, moreover, that cannot be confronted dispassionately and without a measure of moral judgement. Why, then, tell the story in a way which puts the spotlight on this scene?

To ask this question is to turn the textual tables somewhat; while I have been analysing the discourse of the NCL, this issue raises the question of my own discourse. This could be understood in a weak sense: thus the question could be taken to problematise simply my own decisions about emphasis. But it could also be understood in a strong sense: the narrative here presented is itself a discourse, is also structured ideological interpellation. What I have "recognised" in the NCL, what I have seen in its history - the critical moments, the slow processes, the crucial signifiers and blind spots - is therefore also open to a discourse-analysis.

But the subject must needs be blind to the ideological mechanism that sustains it in the world, and the question as to my own discourse is the one I am least qualified to answer. What I can do, however, is to consider the strange place of Leftwich in the story of the NCL/ARM, and the meaning of that place for our own time. Bound up with the question of Leftwich's defeat and the significance accorded it is the question of the significance, for us, of the whole story of the NCL/ARM, the point of studying its career.

It has been a strange fact that Leftwich's betrayal of the organisation has occupied such a prominent place in the "popular history" of the NCL, and is such a central concern for so many of the people that have been involved. It is a prominent event, for example, in many of the existing accounts of the NCL/ARM, and is the crucial moment of C.J. Driver's novel. Leftwich loomed central in the minds of almost every participant; the first question from practically every member I interviewed was "Have you seen/will you see Leftwich?" This is an interesting and unique situation. In our own minds the story of Rivonia, for example, is the story of Mandela and Sisulu - not of Bruno Mtolo. Piet Beylveveldt also turned State witness; but his name does not still excite the passionate condemnation Leftwich has received, even years afterward, from many people not even affected by his acts.¹⁰⁵

My own decision to focus on the NCL/ARM in my study of radical liberalism flowed partly from a fascination with the human drama and starkness of the organisation's betrayal. In my own

¹⁰⁵ An interesting example is Ken Owen's description of Leftwich as "a little weasel of a man" (See "SA lucky to be living in Alan Paton's Shadow", *The Cape Times*, 5 May 1987)

research, however, I became suspicious of this fascination and tended more and more to consider this concern with Leftwich as extraneous. I decided that my focus should be not on these questions of commitment and betrayal, but on the NCL/ARM's underlying and implicit political understanding.

This view, it has become increasingly clear, is mistaken. The question of the political discourse of the NCL/ARM and the moral questions raised by Leftwich's betrayal are inseparably intertwined. Leftwich's collapse is important because it signifies, not only the NCL/ARM's defeat, but the crisis of a moral tradition. His collapse cannot be treated as external to the rest of the story. The words above all others that haunt Leftwich's witness-box are the words he wrote a few months before when he stated that members' "long term commitment to the cause" and their "willingness to stick it through to the end" should be proved.¹⁰⁶ As I have tried to show in the above pages, the irony of Leftwich's defeat is that he failed to live up to his own moral position.

This is partly why I accorded so much space to a consideration of Leftwich's own motivations, and why I was concerned to show that Leftwich had few illusions about his chances of escaping, that he had considered the possibility of imprisonment and had decided to take that risk. The significance of his failure would be misunderstood if Leftwich were taken to be a hypocrite, or for somebody who did not think through the consequences of his actions. His collapse is the fruit, not of simple cowardice, but of a moral commitment that did not know its own perilous frailty.

There is, to be sure, room for speculation about the private or psychological motives for what turned out in the end to be such a massively self-destructive course of action. Why, for example, did Leftwich, always so security conscious, keep such detailed records in the suitcase at Van der Riet's flat? How did he allow himself to know so many names? But the answers to these questions do not lie in a simplistic assertion that Leftwich was "arrogant", or in a complacent rejection of his moral stance. Rather, these must be reconciled with the fact that as far as is ascertainable, Leftwich's invocation of these ethical values - "long-term commitment to the cause", "willingness to stick it through," were made in earnestness and good faith, that the ideals he announced were ideals that he tried to live up to - even to the extent of joining an organisation committed to sabotage.

This is indeed one of the central thrusts of the methodological turn to discourse analysis. We should be aware, not only of how the NCL/ARM addressed others, but also of how they were

¹⁰⁶ See p. 151 above.

addressed, how ideology gave the world a voice so that it could speak to them. The acts of sabotage committed by its members were not only assertions of defiance but responses to a moral question posed to them by the injustices they confronted in South Africa, and Leftwich's words should be seen, not only as a judgement on him, as an enunciation of virtues which he himself did not have, but also as the question which he asked himself, a challenge to which his own actions was a response. This is the significance of his collapse. Its irony lies in the fact that it was unthinkable in terms of his own discourse, that it did not have a place in the moral universe of the NCL/ARM. Its bitterness lies in the fact that he failed on precisely the terrain where he tried to respond to the challenge, where he tried to live and act his commitment.

In this dissertation, Leftwich's betrayal of his colleagues therefore forms the complementary moment to that of the ideological fantasy. Whereas my treatment of the latter focused on ideology in its surprising resilience and elasticity, whereas there I emphasised the way in which ideology can maintain itself even in the face of what to the outsider seems incontrovertible evidence, we now confront ideology in its brittle fragility. And, as in the case of the ideological fantasy, this fragility is an aspect of ideology "as such": in Leftwich's collapse we see the instability of every interpellation. Interpellation and ideology cannot be understood with reference only to the interplay between the Imaginary order (within which identification takes place) and the Symbolic (which structures and dominates that identification). Besides these there is another order - that of the Real. Without a concept of the Real, any theory of ideology tends towards an ideological determinism in which the subject appears to be fixed forever in a position of subjection to an ideological Other from which there can be no escape; we would be unable to explain ideological change and crisis.

The Real is perhaps the most difficult and paradoxical of Lacan's concepts. On one level, its meaning seems obvious enough: Lacan uses it to refer to the order of the outside world in its dimension as a "brute, external force". But Lacan conceives of its relation to the Symbolic order in terms almost directly opposite to those of Western positivist and idealist thought. Our common-sense model of the effect of the real world on our interpretations of it can be symbolised by the traditional conception of the progress of science: science is the long labour of many men and women, ever refining their insights, sharpening their concepts, drawing asymptotically closer and closer to the true answers. Lacan's view of the relation of the real to the symbolic questions this view; it suggests, instead, Kuhn's view of scientific progress as characterised by deep breaks, radical revolutions which change not only the answers scientists search for but the questions they ask. The relation of the Real and the Symbolic is one of crisis. In the place of the image of the scientist at her microscope, we should put the sudden and

unforeseen collapse of Eastern European communism. For although, as I have emphasised all the while, the Symbolic order dominates the Real and structures our experience: the real is always only present to us through being represented in discourse. But that domination is radically unstable. The fact that it is self-contained does not preclude its being fragile, crisis-ridden; always, without exception, susceptible to the traumatic irruption of the unforeseen, of that which was not symbolised. The real and symbolic orders are therefore fundamentally **at odds**, in a relation of interruption. The Real impinges on our interpretations only insofar as it disrupts them. It is not something that is discovered; it is the unexpected, it is what one "bumps into", it is the moment at which an interpretation founders, when the smooth gears of the discursive process crunch on an unexpected spanner, when the statue of Lenin comes crashing to the ground to the cheers of the workers.

The real is therefore a limit-concept. The real, in a manner of speaking, is **nothing but** the moment at which the interpretation founders - in Lacan's formulation, the real is the impossibility that things could be otherwise.¹⁰⁷ As Žižek puts it, the real is, in Hegelian terms, at the same time **presupposed** and **posed** by the symbolic.¹⁰⁸ It can only be detected or inferred at the moment of the failure of interpellation, detected as an interruption in the smooth circulation of signifiers: a gap, a hole, a failure in the interpellation.

Why is it important to emphasise that the real is **nothing but** the way in which ideology stumbles, is thrown into crisis? It is because he is concerned to deny that this moment of crisis is something the ideological can become progressively inured to, something ideology can "learn from", as if, if our interpretations have been disrupted often enough, we shall slowly be able to piece together what is "really" "out there". Lacan refuses to say anything more about the "actual nature" of the real. To do that would be to advance the idea that a final interpretation is possible which is safe from shipwreck. Lacan insists that any such interpretation must always in its turn be open to disruption. The unexpected shock that occurs when the interpellation can no longer be maintained, when we feel that we are awaking from the ideological dream - this impact can be dealt with only by an attempt at **re-symbolisation**, **re-hegemonisation**. This re-symbolisation does not take us any closer to the real; it can only suture us, once more, into the self-contained, world of the signifier; an interpellation that is in its turn again open to the disruptive effects of an encounter with the Real.

107 Michel Pécheux. "Discourse: Structure or event?". p. 637.
 108 Slavoj Žižek. "Approaches to the Lacanian Real". p.19.

Thus we can see, in the trial of the NCL/ARM, how each of its members rearticulated his or her discourse so as to deal with the at first incomprehensible fact of failure. There was nothing inevitable about the course of this rearticulation. Leftwich articulated a discourse of self-exoneration in which he separated his private and political selves; Daniels and Lewin extended their ideology of integrity and commitment to include the choices they faced in detention, and made their very imprisonment a continuation and vindication of their political beliefs. Brooks and Kemp, on the other hand, moved away from the ideology of liberalism towards that of Marxism - Kemp, like Berman, is today inclined to talk about her membership of the NCL/ARM as an aberration, and emphasises her journey towards the ANC as the important story.

But if there was nothing inevitable about such a process, neither was it completely free, completely arbitrary. In realigning themselves, each NCL/ARM member made use of the discursive resources that was available to them. Leftwich's discourse is marked by an exaggerated continuation of the oppositions we detected in his discourse; Daniels, Lewin, Hirson, Brooks and Kemp all made sense of the crisis of their project by using the discursive resources that were available to them. As Peter Hudson has pointed out, the way we move from; subject-position to subject-position is not totally random or indeterminate. True: its logic does not belong to the iron laws of material necessity; it is the logic of the articulatory practices that constitute the discourse in question.¹⁰⁹ And that logic means that the ideologically dislocated subject cannot pick and choose the elements that constitute its own subjectivity: rather, it takes up place in a discursive system which has its *own* regularity and structure. Thus what is interesting about the present crisis of Congress discourse after February 2 1990 - a crisis resulting from its efforts to incorporate the new politics of negotiation into its framework - is precisely the way in which it is marked, not by a proliferation of idiosyncratic positions but the homogeneity and systematicity of positions that are in fact taken up.

Leftwich's breakdown is important, then, for two reasons. In the first place, it faces us with an interesting challenge. In these pages I have presented the process of interpellation in its synchronous dimension: I have looked at the subject's constitution towards a particular set of crucial signifiers. I have shown how this focus on the signifier in its moment of "success" can help us understand a historical event. But the field of history is the field of diachrony; it is no coincidence that my discussion has ended with the problem, not of the success, but of the *crisis* of the signifier. For it is in the field of history that we can investigate most fruitfully the way in

¹⁰⁹ Peter Hudson, "Causality and the Subject in a 'discourse-theoretical' approach to Marxism". pp 10 - 14.

which the subject is not only constituted, but reconstituted. Individuals move through a host of subject-positions in their lives. Sometimes they interpellate us simultaneously (Christian, worker, consumer, mother). Often such a harmonious intersection of subject-positions (soldier, South African) can be thrown into sudden crisis; a crisis which can in its turn read to a fundamental rearticulation of identity. And beyond these personal histories there are larger discursive shifts; the breaks by which the discourses that constitute our public identities are rearticulated. In the field of history, then, we face the challenge of describing these rearticulations.

Such a history shall have to go beyond a reductionist explanation of changes in terms of economics. It shall have to deal with the complexity that these shifts have on their own discursive level. How such a description will look, I cannot yet say, except that it shall have to spotlight three questions. Firstly, it shall have to follow Foucault and emphasise the discontinuity of this process. As we move from one position to another (liberal, socialist, democrat) we do not move incrementally over an homogenous (left to right?) continuum. Rather, our movements (though never arbitrary) are both discontinuous and erratic. Secondly, it must deal with the way in which in the narratives we produce about our identities as socialists, workers, South Africans, we efface that radical heterogeneity; our stories (about ourselves, our communities) explain how we are always becoming what we were going to be all along. Thirdly, it must look at the way, in these these accounts, a crucial role is played by what one could call epochal events, founding acts - breaks (Sharpeville, February 2, being shot at, sexual assault, a strike) that serve as focal points for the ideological rearticulation..

Leftwich's collapse has a second, more concrete significance. His departure from his own code of commitment does not only symbolise in an extreme way the **general** openness to crisis of the discursive, the need to understand ideological change. It also leads to the question of what became of the ideological traditions he and the NCL/ARM represented. Leftwich's failure did not only touch himself: his self-conceptualisation as an ethical subject drew on ideological resources that shaped the NCL/ARM as a whole: whereas the fourth of July raids mark the moment of the organisation's strategic defeat, Leftwich's collapse symbolically marks the crisis of its moral project. How, then, was this tradition rearticulated? How, after the NCL/ARM, did the ways in which white radicals conceptualised their radicalness change?

This seems at first a mistaken question. The ethical subject position implied by so much of NCL discourse - the self-conceptualisation of oneself as an "ordinary person", an amateur, taking up a stand against injustice - is, after all, one matter: Leftwich's failure to live up to it is another.

Other NCL/ARM members - Lewin and Daniels, for example, did not turn State witness; as my references to interviews show, their discourse is today still marked by its characteristic oppositions and equivalences. But this is to miss the significance of the NCL/ARM's project. Its turn to sabotage was an attempt by whites to identify themselves with the movement of the mass of oppressed South Africans. In that they are unique. What was unique about the NCL/ARM was that it was probably one of the most radical of attempts to make the basis of that identification the subject position of the "ordinary citizen", the person-in-the-street, taking a position regardless of the teachings of ideology or doctrine. And though this tradition continued and the discursive subject positions associated with it are still a feature of modern-day South Africa, no sustained attempt has been made to identify within the terms of this tradition with the aspirations of the oppressed majority. It has vanished, in other words, from the discourse of the organised white left.

Instead, another subject-position came almost exclusively to characterise whites' attempts to identify with popular struggle. It was based, not on an identification with the subject-position of the ordinary member of civil society but on its rejection. In the 1970s, with the rise of popular resistance among industrial workers after 1973 and the hegemony of black consciousness, this rejection took the form of a critique of that civil society and the presuppositions of liberalism. Identification with the struggle of the oppressed took place, in other words, through the nexus of theory. This subject-position marks the discourse of the left from the theoretical writings of Richard Turner, through the theoretical intervention of revisionist historians like Legassick and O'Meara, to the activities of white intellectuals involved in the labour struggles of the early 1970s.

With the resurgence of Charterism in the early 1980s and the discursive construction of a non-racial South African subjectivity this changed again. The dichotomisation in Congress discourse of political space into a "people's camp" and an "enemies' camp" with membership decided not by skin colour or class but by commitment to the ideals of democracy and non-racialism, rendered the mediation of identification through an elaborate theoretical critique unnecessary. Taking up the flag of Charterism was in itself a sufficient act of alliance. But in spite of this the relation of opposition and contrast in the self-conceptualisation of the white left between itself and the notion of the general, "ordinary" white public remained. Here identification occurred, not through a notion of plain-spoken commitment and technical expertise, nor yet through a concept of commitment to the interests of international socialism and proletarian power, but through a notion of the correctness of a line: the characteristic self-conceptualisation in the organised white left for the last decade has been that of an **activist**.

This subject position almost completely permeates the political culture of the left today. Even the efforts by organisations like NUSAS and the ECC since the early 1980s to regain the white left's moral appeal in "the white community", efforts, in other words, to formulate a political discourse with which whites can identify, those efforts remain structured by this implicit self-conceptualisation, the implicit division between a body of activists and the public they are trying to appeal to.

This political heritage constitutes the ideological resources available to us for the tasks that face us in South Africa after 2 February 1990. This South Africa is one in which Congress politics takes on less and less the character of a vanguard movement, leading the struggle forward underground. The political terrain that faces it in the period before negotiations and after it is now radically different. The topography of this terrain is as yet difficult to sketch. But surely one of its central characteristics is the possibility that the concept of citizenship will form, not the "other" of the democratic politics of the future, but its very basis and matrix.

It is with the very difficulty of sketching precisely what this entails for the politics of the left that I wish to end. It seems that that difficulty is the result at least partly of the discursive resources at our disposal in facing up to these tasks. In fact, here is where the discourse of "activism" itself faces a central and serious crisis. For there is one crucial aspect shared both by the discourse of the NCL/ARM and the position characterised by the assumption of a subject-position as "activist". This aspect I have indicated in my analysis of the moment of fantasy in NCL discourse as an inability to conceptualise with and deal with **difference**. Have the discourses that constitute the Congress tradition done very much better? To be sure, the importance of the task of building political consciousness has been emphasised; but the challenge of dealing with different conceptualisations of the liberatory process has on the whole not been met. In the above pages I have shown the way in which Leftwich's discourse has "closed" the question of the desire of the masses. Does the Congress tradition not face very analogous difficulties in dealing with the gap between its representation of the desire of the "people" and the divergent ways in which specific desires will be articulated in the political struggles that lie ahead? This question seems to be part of the challenge recently uttered from within the ANC by Albie Sachs. As the task of winning over support as a legal movement in the face of counter-hegemonic challenges becomes a reality, this is a challenge that looms all the larger in our future.

I cannot, therefore, conclude with any self-contained, closed-off answer about the significance for us of a study of the NCL/ARM. Instead, I must end with a question, a question the NCL/ARM poses us. In my analysis, terms like "an inability to deal with difference" have played a central role. But what does a political project look like that **can** place difference? How does

an identification look that can think its own provisional nature? Is it possible to act in terms of a concept of political unity in which the basis of that unity is seen not as a point of departure but as a process? And could such a discourse still enable a radical political project, capable of continuing the concern with democracy, equality and justice that has characterised left discourses until now?

Although my analysis has been ideologically structured by a concern with these issues, it has flowed, not from any certainty about the shape of such a politics, but from a knowledge of uncertainty. It has been motivated by the hope that even if it is not yet possible to say what such a politics looks like, it is possible to learn much from a realisation of what it does not look like. My thesis has been concerned, in other words, not only with filling in gaps in our knowledge about the past, but also in beginning to trace the outlines of an absence.

Appendix 1.

Documents

Note

To ensure ease of reference I have retained the pagination of the original documents. Minor errors of spelling, etc. have been rectified.

Document 1 National Committee for Liberation: Announcement. This is a pamphlet distributed by the NCL after their 20 December 1961 pylon attack.¹ It has been reproduced from a copy in AAS 254 Reel 7 (FI 691)

Document 2 Socialist League Political Manifesto: This manifesto was drafted by Baruch Hirson and read and accepted at the NCL's national formation in May 1962.² It has been reproduced from a copy in Baruch Hirson's personal possession.

Document 3 S v Daniels Exh C5 ("ARM" pamphlet) This pamphlet was drafted mainly by Adrian Leftwich in preparation for the 18 June pylon attack.³

Document 4 S v Daniels Exh C6 This is a discussion of the strategical problems facing the NCL and was apparently written by Leftwich.⁴

Document 5 S v Daniels Exh C7 This seems to be an earlier draft of Document 4, and was also written by Leftwich.⁵

Document 6 S v Daniels Exh C9 This comprises two different drafts of plans for a "political intelligence unit". Leftwich alleged in court that these were written by Vigne,⁶ but they also show a great similarity to the plans outlined by himself in Documents 4 and 5.

Document 7 S v Hirson Exh M4(1) This discussion of the NCL's position in the broader liberation struggle was sent from the NCL's London committee, apparently as part of the effort to formulate a national position for the NCL.⁷

Document 8 S v Hirson Exh M4(3) This document is a summary of the goals and principles of the NCL and appears to be condensed from the points enumerated in Documents 9 and 10 below.

Document 9 S v Hirson Exh M4(4) ("The National Committee for Liberation - Background and aims") This document, like Document 7, was produced as part of the attempt to formulate a policy for the NCL after Leftwich's return from London some time after September 1963. It contains ideas contributed by Leftwich and Watson, but was mainly written by Vigne.⁸ Where significant, handwritten additions to the manuscript have been enclosed in curled brackets ({}). In some cases the original wording has been deleted; where this seemed material to the meaning of the text I have indicated this by by ~~striking through~~ the relevant words.

1 AD 1912 "We Bombed Two Pylons. Group Claims". *The Rand Daily Mail*. 22 December 1961
 2 Hirson/Olifant. p. 42: Interview with Baruch Hirson. London. 15 May 1989
 3 S v Daniels. p. 161.
 4 *Ibid.*
 5 *Ibid.*
 6 S v Daniels. p 162.
 7 Hirson/Leftwich (recalled). p. 2
 8 Hirson/Leftwich (recalled). pp. 3-4

- Document 10** *S v Hirson Exh M4(5)* This appears to be an earlier draft of Document 9, and was drawn up by Vigne.⁹ As in the previous text, handwritten insertions have been indicated with the use of curled brackets and strikethrough.
- Document 11** *S v Hirson Exh M5(1)* This is the formal constitution of the NCL, adopted at its merger meeting in May 1964.
- Document 12** *S v Hirson Exh M5(2)* "Draft for Discussion" This is a more elaborate version of the manifesto reproduced as Document 2, and was probably authored by Hirson.¹⁰

9

Ibid.

10

Baruch Hirson, pers. comm.

Document 1: National Committee for Liberation: Announcement

The National Committee announces that on 20 December 1961 it destroyed power lines in Johannesburg.

The National Committee for Liberation has been responsible for:

1. The removal of banished people to places of safety
2. The transportation of people overseas.
3. The taking of 20 nurses to a point of embarkation to Tanganyika.
4. The burning of the records at the Bantu Administration Tax Office in Delfers St, on 24/9/61
5. The destruction of a power line on the 9/10/61.

The NCL has taken this action as there is no longer any legal democratic way to oppose the Nationalist Government.

The NCL welcomes the appearance of the "Assegai of the Nation". Both the "Assegai of the Nation" and the NCL support the Liberatory Movement. However, no one group has the responsibility for fighting for the freedom of its country.

The NCL is a non-racial organisation whose members hold varying political opinions, our attack is against the Nationalist Government and not individuals, and our members are trained to protect the lives of people in all circumstances.

We warn the Government that we will fight until the last vestige of white domination has been eradicated. We stand for a non-racial state based on equality for all and we will carry on the fight until this has been achieved

"The Socialist League of Africa is the independent movement of the workers of Africa. Its aim is to organise the working class in order to struggle for a socialist Africa. To establish this end, the league will

- (1) Establish contact with working-class bodies throughout Africa because our struggle is part of the larger struggle of establishing the United Socialist States of Africa;
- (2) Support every positive step taken by the National Liberatory Movements in Africa, that help to establish any or all of the democratic rights that are inseparable from the struggle for democratic socialism:
 - (a) the defeat of imperialism throughout Africa;
 - (b) the establishment of full citizen's rights and granting the vote to every man and woman without qualification;
 - (c) the taking over of the mines, large industries and banks for the people;
 - (d) the taking over of the land by those who work it;
 - (e) the removal of all discriminatory laws with outlawing of any colour or racial discrimination.
- 3 The League will urge all workers to join their trade Unions. Its industrial program will be:
 - (a) to break down any colour bar in industry;
 - (b) to achieve full jobs for all with equal pay;
 - (c) to fight for the legalisation of the Trade Unions to achieve their right to collective bargaining;
 - (d) to raise wages until a full living wage is obtained;
 - (e) achieve trade union unity throughout Africa.
4. The League declares its working-class independence and will ally itself with any organisation working to achieve part or all of these democratic aims.
5. The League's international policy will be determined by the principle that its first concern is the interests of the working class. It will stand together with those states who fight imperialism, oppose capitalism and work in the interests of world peace.

Forward to the liberation of the world working class!

The African Resistance movement (ARM) announces its formation in the cause of South African Freedom. ARM states its dedication and commitment to achieving the overthrow of the whole system of apartheid and exploitation in South Africa. ARM aims to assist in establishing a democratic society in terms of the basic principles of socialism.

We salute other Revolutionary Freedom Movements in South Africa. In our activities this week we particularly salute the men of Rivonia and state our deepest respect for their courage and efforts. While ARM may differ from them and other groups in the freedom struggle, we believe in the unification of all forces fighting for the new order in our country. We have enough in common.

The time for talking is past. The present regime and its supporters, internal and foreign, have shown that they are not prepared to respond in any way to the peaceful demands of the people of South Africa for full participation in all aspects of the political, economic and social life of the country. Instead, oppression has increased.

ARM does not only talk. ARM acts. ARM has acted. ARM has declared and will declare itself through action. This is the only language our rulers understand. And ARM, with other freedom forces will harry and resist the oppressors until they are brought to their knees.

White South Africa has often been given the opportunity to align itself with progress. It has constantly refused to do so. It has sought only to build for itself on the backs of the people a comfortable bastion of profit power and privilege.

ARM declares its fight not against the whites as such, but against the system they so jealously defend. ARM will avoid taking life for as long as possible. ARM would prefer to avoid bloodshed and terrorism. But let it be known that if we are forced to respond to personal violence -- and we cannot forget decades of violence, torture, starvation and brutality against us -- we shall do so.

For the present ARM will inconvenience and confuse. ARM will disrupt and destroy. ARM will strike where it hurts most. We will not cease until the present vicious system and rule by force is crushed. ARM does not wish to see one form of domination replaced by another. It works for a full political and social revolution.

To Verwoerd, Vorster and their men we say; you will NEVER stop the pulse of the new society which even now, beats in our factories and cities, our mines and farms -- and YOU KNOW IT.

To the people of South Africa, we say;
ARM NOW FOR FREEDOM

Document 4: S v Daniels and others Exh. C6Introduction

This paper serves to outline the present strategy and thinking of the company in relation to its role and activities in the context of the SA situation, as we see it. Naturally, individual points and examples can be questioned and need greater explanation and expansion, and hence we ask that the general thesis be the focal point of a critical examination of this paper. It is this which, if accepted, must form the basis of immediate future policy and activity of the company.

This paper is divided into a number of sections. The first sections deal with a broad analysis of the SA situation, compared with other situations at other times in which the overthrow of regimes has taken place. The first sections will deal too with a broad enunciation of the factors which appear to be necessary for the effective overthrow of a regime, measured against the existence -- or non-existence -- of these in the SA context. The concluding sections will outline our views and plans in terms of the general outline, and an explanation of why we believe these plans and views to be realistic.

1. In our view, the SA society can hardly be compared with any past or present situation where rev. activity has overthrown or is overthrowing an oppressive regime. The SA economy is a booming expanding capitalist economy which has been developed by able and tough men, through a process of exploitation of the mass of the population which it has harnessed to achieve this end.

In the process of this development an advanced industrial economy has been built, and is being built, which is providing well-being and affluence for the white oppressing minority, and in minimal proportion to the [wealth?] of the country, some benefit to the African working population. The white minority in SA is not an effete feudal group. It is a tough business minded sector made up of high powered financiers, skilled industrialists and carefully protected workers.

Thus, it would be wrong to consider the white minority in South Africa to be in any way comparable to the effete Chinese middle classes as represented by the Kuomintang, to the feudal and aristocratic Czarist regime in Russia or to the Cuban ruling class prior to the advent of Castro. The S.A. minority is also not typical of a colonial settler group such as the French in Algeria. The French in Algeria could still have been regarded as "settlers" -- a term which suggests their comparatively recent arrival and the possibility of their departure to a metropolitan country. The French in Algeria did not form an integral part of the economy & social structure in the same way as the SA whites do. Firstly, Algeria not being an industrially advanced country, their presence was either in the field of farming, administration, military or some business and commercial undertakings. Their allegiance-- in the main -- was owed to France, and there was always the possibility of a return to France if conditions so determined, and as events subsequently showed. In SA, however, the white population has passed the "settler" stage; it has become identified with the country and has become totally enmeshed and entwined in the very bases

of the economy which it has guided and directed [for its?] own **domestic benefit** -- though not, of course, without the support and assistance which foreign US and Brit capital investment has provided. SA is an independent state and the purpose of the state -- in one respect -- is geared towards the improving of material conditions (for whites) and not towards supplying a metropolitan power with certain raw materials, nor being the market for goods from that metropolis. In other words, the white minority in South Africa is not a settler group -- it is a dominating minority. It cannot be compared to the French in Algeria -- or the English in Kenya; the society itself is representative of an advancing industrial capitalism. The colour composition of the population and the diametrically opposed political and economic interests of non-white and white, offers no hope of army defection which took place in Russia, China and Cuba, and which was of some importance in achieving the revolutionary changes in those countries.

Our first point then is that in SA, an advancing industrial capitalist society, with a culturally heterogenous population make-up, offering almost no chance of defection from ruling group to oppressed, and an independent state drawing locally on the loyalty and support of the white group, and not owing effective political allegiance to a metropolitan power for the benefit of that power, a classical revolutionary situation does **not** exist, and hence an orthodox strategy for freedom can not be applied.

2. Where rev. activity has occurred before, there have inevitably been a certain set of conditions, individually or in differing combinations. These are:

- a) Suitable geographic conditions such as the Malayan jungle or the vast Chinese hinterland;
- b) an effete regime from whose ranks army defection has been possible;
- c) areas where bases for fighters have been possible, either in independent bordering states such as Tunisia and Morocco in the Algerian case, or the Sierra mountains in Cuba's case;
- d) usually the state of the economy has either been an agricultural one or one which is on the verge of industrial development.

In South Africa few, if any of these conditions are effectively present. Firstly, the SA terrain is unsuitable apart possibly from isolated areas in the NE cape near the Basutoland mountains, the far North of Natal, and one or two other spots. Generally the terrain is poor for a guerilla army and coupled with the effective state of readiness of the armed forces, its training in this field and its experience in learning from other situations, the possibility -- from a geographic point of view -- of successful military overthrow of the regime seems small. Even [if] a group of fighters were to establish themselves in one of these areas, their effectiveness would be minimal unless they were able to penetrate to key centres of the country where they could be effective.

Secondly, as we have seen, the possibility of army defection is nil: the regime will not crumble overnight and will enjoy almost total white support.

Bases for the freedom army will be hard to find in the country, for the effective supply lines will

rule out certain central areas. As to bases being provided by independent states, we are, for the foreseeable future, equally pessimistic. Even if the states bordering SA -- Basutoland, Swaziland, Bechuanaland, Mozambique and SR -- were to become independent within the next two or three years, to assume that they will be prepared to assist the SA freedom fighters either practically or tacitly, in the face of the might of the SA regime and armed forces would be foolish. These countries will have fragile economies and delicate political situations. They will not be prepared to give much actual assistance to the SA fighters. They will have their own problems -- as East Africa has shown in the last few months and indeed their most valuable contribution to the SA struggle will be to build themselves up as quickly and effectively as possible with viable [?], in order to assist, from strength, at a later stage.

This is not to suggest that they will not be able to help at all. Clearly, as they have done in the past two or three years, there will be much which they can do. Our point however is this; if say Bechuanaland were to house a freedom army and allow it to train, build up supplies and cross the SA border, this would approximate, very closely, to an act of war against SA. The SA army would have little trouble in dealing with Bechuanaland in quick time. Likewise for other adjacent territories. Our point thus is that the bordering states are going to refuse to provide this sort of help for some time to come. The fact that TANU refused to allow the PAC to unload arms -- so we are told -- at Dar, is the beginning of indications of this kind. When the form of the fighting opposition to apartheid reaches a point where troops, arms, supply lines and fighting forces are involved to a considerable and realistic

extent, then at that point the African countries, unless they have reached a level of greater stability and internal strength and unless the International position has changed radically, not see their way clear to helping in way which will be necessary at that stage.

Little help can be expected from the USA. Their interest is in stability and their assessment is no doubt that the SA government can hold the fort for some time. The US will make odd noises in protest and may even exercise "pressure" -- they will not act to assist practically in the overthrow of the system. The Russians are hardly likely to do so, given the international reaction which will result.

Finally the SA economy is strong enough at this stage to support, industrially, an army fighting against guerillas. The recent reports on [the establishment of] factories at secret places in the country is evidence of the degree to which preparation is being taken seriously. The country is covered by a vast network of roads, railways and communications; police stations are connected by radio and the air force, plus helicopters, is in a position to reach any corner of the country within hours, if not less. Throughout the country there is white settlement, in some cases sparse and in the urban areas substantial. The whole white population must be regarded as potential active fighters in support of the regime, and hence any suspicious activity or movement of men in even remote areas could well be reported in a matter of hours to police

army HQ's.

Even if, as has been pointed out before, a guerilla army WAS able to establish itself in a remote area of the country, and make small and regular forays, it would have to penetrate some distance from its base in order to strike effectively. When Mao Tse Tung established his "liberated areas" in North China he was in a position to hold them and develop them into small Soviets, because; a) the Kuomintang army could not or would not reach them there, being extended on all other fronts b)the technique of air/land routing of forces was at its most elementary stages which it has progressed far beyond today and c) the size of the country militated against locating and then planning an attack on the "liberated areas". In terms of military overthrow, an army is necessary, and occupied areas have to be administered and governed.

When a country has reached the stage of industrial development which SA has, the problems of revolutionary overthrow are far more complicated than where the economy is either under-developed or just developing. The state of organisation, the extent of the infrastructure, the ability to mobilise forces are all dependent on the state of the economy. An advanced economy will naturally have all these facilities built-in as a part of the system and their application to other fields is simple.

It is generally agreed moreover that urban sabotage work can, at this stage, be valuable only in that it keeps the political climate warm, indicated that there are groups still around, and provides training for the members of the company. It should not be seen as a challenge to the centre of power.

Furthermore, it can involve incalculable risks for the members if the jobs planned are too ambitious or dangerous, and risks which, at that, are not offset by the gains accruing from the jobs, be they political, financial or purely of propagandist value.

Thus far the picture looks pessimistic. We feel that any other picture of false optimism would be unrealistic. The CP/Spear people argue that one merely needs to get the [working class] organized and the problems are over. To us, this is facile. Firstly the problems of organization are immense. The network of informers is so wide and so efficient that the moment one becomes efficient as an organizer or the moment a group is formed it will either be crushed, arrested, or its leadership shorn from it. Furthermore, it is our contention that in the context of the booming economy, and the rising wages for African workers -- which is a rather clever move by the industrial supporters of the regime -- the African urban proletariat is **UNLIKELY** to respond to a call to rise -- unless there is some **real certainty** of winning. There have been too many failures in the history of SA politics, the might and fury of the police has been demonstrated only too often, and the mood of the urban population is one which suggests to them that quiet apoliticism, enjoying what vicarious benefits come their way as a result of the economic expansion, is by far the safer course to follow.

It seems then that it is to the Rural areas that we must turn. Urban sabotage can be vital and important and will take on greater significance when rural activities get under

way. We shall return to the arguments for and against its continuation shortly.

It has been suggested that the chances for a successful armed effort against the SA Govt. forces are small. More specifically, the possibilities of a freedom army achieving power by military means, that is by military conquest of the SA regime, are limited, if not out of the question. This does not mean that we dismiss the role of armed fighters in the overall struggle. The struggle will not be a simple one. It will not simply be a question of warfare. Given the complexity of the SA situation internally and the complexity of international relations and their pressures, so the method of change in SA will be equally complex. We do not attempt here to prophecy the patterns of change nor attempt to indicate just how or when it will occur. Insofar as the international pressures are concerned there is less scope for analysing the possible line-up of forces or their manifestation against the SA Govt. This side of things will therefore be ignored for the purposes of the further sections of this paper, but it must be assumed that we acknowledge that international pressure, which may take some time to build up to an effective peak, will be a further [facet] of the overall assault on the system of Apartheid and exploitation. In any event the onus of carrying through the revolutionary changes during and after the collapse of the regime will inevitably fall on the shoulders of the SA people themselves. Their role in this process is crucial.

While we have been pessimistic about the possibilities of a freedom army actually overthrowing the regime, we do not suggest that **guerilla forces** are therefore not to be trained, and prepared for action. Far from it. There would seem to be a most significant role which they can play in the future -- not as a vast army, but as small isolated pockets of men, harrassing and sabotaging, the rural areas, railway lines and most important of all, operating in the reserves or Bantustans where -- as a long term project -- an overthrow, in the Transkei, for example -- of the Matanzima regime by armed and trained local peasantry could be of great significance in the context of the complex arrangement of forces which we suggest will finally cause the demise of the Apartheid system in SA.

The role thus of such forces would be to adopt the tactics used by Wingate in Burma and Ethiopia, namely to avoid all possible contact with the enemy, but strike at his supply lines, his roads, his railways, his police posts and communications, leaving his area immediately and hiding out where they can. The results of such activity would mean that the SA forces are going to have to deploy vast numbers of men to search out these pockets (which must be small and effective) to guard installations and to protect key targets. If the extent of guerilla activity was wide enough this could mean that men will be drawn from industry, commerce and the administration, leaving the country on a quasi-war time basis of manpower in these fields. This would mean a cessation, if not a retardation of the economy. For the sort of progress to be achieved which the

economy is achieving at present, it is necessary for there to be continual growth and expansion -- a pause in this process can upset the whole process in many ways. Now, if a state of emergency were to result through rural activities and urban disruption, coupled with increasing pressures of one sort or another from abroad, plus the drying up of the all-vital investment capital which the economy as presently constituted depends on, the effect on the country could be crippling. If this, followed by strikes, rural unrest of a non-military nature, could be effected, the regime could be near its end.

There are a number of levels at which preparation must be undertaken if a state of affairs such as the above is to be achieved. Whether this situation is reached or not, and whether the general thesis is tenable or not, it is our contention that in any event the 4 pronged plan suggested below will be of value in the fight - in whatever form it takes - which lies ahead.

1) It is basic that we know, politically, what is happening in the country. By this we mean what forces, personalities and groups are emerging in the urban and rural areas, in the Bantustans and in SWA. We must know what local initiative is being taken, we must be able to know who to speak to and who to give help to, who to train and who is to be trusted. At the same time the rural peasant groups such as those which formed in Pondoland in 1960 must know who to trust and who to approach for help. This is broadly

speaking, the role of political intelligence. A group of this kind will be responsible for getting to the roots of the genuine opposition movements, knowing the personalities, the problems and the aims and ambitions of the people concerned. It is a key function in any revolutionary organisation for it not only enables the company to have at its finger tips the feel of the country politically, but it also opens the way to recruiting, training and the establishment of -- at the active level -- the very guerilla groups which were referred to above.

2.&3. Long term intelligence. This must be closely coupled with long term military planning. It is quite clear that if groups such as those we suggest could operate, are to get into the field, they must be equipped, trained, and have a good working knowledge of field techniques and must also know where key targets are, where possible sources of arms, ammunition and equipment are. This is the role of the two long range planning groups. The one group - intelligence - must start plotting such things as police camps, key installations, arms dumps, coast lines, harbours, army movements, key roads and railways in and out of given areas, local terrain and hide-outs etc. This is a long and tedious job, but one which must be done.

The long-term military team must set about building up a pool of knowledge and know-how concerning field techniques, arms, ammunition, plane flying, advanced sabotage, unarmed combat, military science and a host of other practical details which teams in the field must know and be able to apply.

4. Finally there is current action. The point is debatable. There is the argument that all such current action

should cease immediately in favour of the long term objectives listed under 2,3&4. It is argued that urban and petty sabotage is suicidal and apart from some pot-boiling effects, has not sufficient political or disruptive value to offset the dangers involved.

The other argument accepts the basic security objection contained in the first argument, but does not accept that this need necessarily mean that current urban action must be ruled out. Those who support current action could argue as follows: 1) There are jobs, simple and comparatively straightforward, whose risks CAN be minimized, though never eliminated. 2) It is these jobs that must be tackled regularly and immediately 3) the value of such activity lies in

- a) Training and experience for company members
- b) coupled, at the present stage, with propaganda and publicity, it would help create the feeling of uncertainty and fear which would be necessary as a start to limit immigration which is really a strategic function and foreign capital.
- c) it would give the company a stock of credits which would be to its great advantage when the struggle moves into a later stage
- d) it would be a morale boosting function - not so much for company - but for the masses generally, since it would show that there are still groups around which are active.
- e) it would unnerve the govt and police by its accuracy and choice of objectives, and again, coupled with effective propaganda, it would create a climate of uncertainty and angst among white South Africa

Thus for the fourth section, it is argued bearing in mind the current debate on this question that apart from the important aspect of training, building up electrical and technical experts, the section should be instructed to proceed on small, well planned and regular jobs.

At no stage, may we add, do we underestimate the security problems involved in the whole plan of operations as laid out. Further, it is suggested that regions do not even begin to operate on the above lines, or similar ones, until they have reached a stage of effective internal organisation, till their members have been tried and tested and their long-term commitment to the cause and their willingness to stick it through to the end have been proved.

Document 5: S v Daniels and others Exh. C7

In reviewing the past military overthrow of tyrannical regimes in other parts of the world a number of broad factors and trends emerge. Firstly it must be clear that the old classical theory of revolution in relation to Russia and China, despite their different forms (the one based on an urban proletariat, the other agrarian based) cannot be applied holus bolus to the colonial situation. Wars of national liberation such as the Algerian war was a different proposition to the Chinese Revolution of Mao Tse Tung. In the Algerian case the purpose of the FLN was to throw off external rule and expel the foreign presence in order to attain independence. In this situation the Algerian fighters had a number of factors on their side which made this task possible. Firstly there were the two independent and sympathetic countries of Tunisia and Morocco on either side of Algeria. These served as useful and effective basis from which penetration could be made, training facilities provided and to which retreat could be made. As Mao Tse Tung has shown "Guerilla warfare cannot survive for long and develop itself without a base." There are two types of base. There are the bases internally in a country and there are the bases in neighbouring countries which are sympathetic or at best neutral.

Secondly, the geography and demography of the country.

There were vast areas of land which were uninhabited and when sparsely inhabited there was no French presence. These areas served as internal bases and had the support of the population, UNITED in its aim of throwing off French rule.

These two factors are cardinal in any military struggle. We must consider their relevance in the SA case.

Firstly there are no independent, sympathetic or neutral states on our borders. This would mean that apart from air support or secret routes along which fighters could pass back and forth -- which would necessitate the most complex and limiting framework on the war -- the essential core of resistance and its base would have to be located internally in SA. If the geography of SA and the population distribution were such as in Malaya, or Cuba where vast areas of dense Jungle or inaccessible plains with a sympathetic population made the fight possible, then the prospect of effective guerilla war would be worth, at this stage, considering. But let us look at the factors which militate against such warfare on an effective basis in SA today.

1) South Africa does not have vast Jungle areas where a Guerilla base could establish itself. Apart from the Eastern Cape forests and a few areas elsewhere, the basic lay of the land cannot

be compared to the endless stretches of China or the impenetrable jungles of Malaya. A guerilla base would be very difficult to hide.

2) Then one must consider the population distribution. While there are obvious concentrations of whites in key areas, there are, generally speaking white farmers or traders in almost every area of the country. The white population must be seen as part and parcel, for military purposes, of the regime and its forces. In addition to this there are the plain and regrettable fact of informers, turncoats and Govt. supporters amongst the mass of the people, the Africans.

Even if a guerilla band were able to find an area in which it could base itself it would be limited to that area and its striking range would not be far. If it were not discovered by the vast net of police and army, and if it were not discovered by the smattering of whites, then it would still have to hope to avoid discovery and reporting by the people in the rural areas where the level of political consciousness is not yet at a point where it could and would support the guerillas.

3) Finally there is the simple but enormous strategic and logistic might of the armed forces and police. Never before in a colonial situation of the type which SA represents as such an effective build-up of force, geared essentially to internal security, been paralleled. The French in Indo China or even Algeria did not have the time nor the experience of other colonial powers

in which to build up and prepare in advance. The SA govt. has just this opportunity. It has had men in Algeria to observe the war and police methods there; it has established a vast network of home guards, commando units, helicopter [?] squadrons, and has geared the army and police force to an almost total concern with internal security and the smashing of guerilla forces. The might of the regime, its preparedness and effectiveness and willingness and ability to crush internal resistance can not be under-estimated.

Bearing the above in mind, our position in this situation must be very carefully and thoroughly considered.

Thus far our work has been confined to internal sabotage, disruption of communications and power and odd peripheral escape and transporting work. No-one would claim that, apart from pot-boiling and slight inconvenience, this has had no effect whatsoever in weakening the power base of the regime. If it has done anything it has strengthened their propaganda hand, made them more alert and geared the state machinery to an all-out drive against genuine opposition.

We can also accept that the continuation of our work along present lines at any pitch cannot effect the downfall of the regime. Even if it were able to create an atmosphere of panic and economic disruption and opposition, we would not, if the Govt. still have the basic force and power to establish a government and rule. At this stage there is no group which could do this.

Further than this, we must accept that on our present strength and in terms of our present supplies and ability, our chances of long term survival -- with or without effective action -- are very slim.

The thesis thus far then is this; as yet in SA there are not even the most essential and limited conditions for effective guerilla warfare and the present sabotage phase has not real effect militarily, and stands a very good chance of being smashed. All it can hope to do is affect the climate.

If we consider that the overthrow of the regime and the replacement by a govt. based on mass support (and willing and capable of introducing the radical social change which is necessary in order for effective political and economic democracy to be established can only be achieved by military means -- or must essentially be achieved by this -- then we have to think out our strategy in long terms. It is never feasible to predict changes which may affect the situation, such as international repercussions, depression or any number of a host of forces which may influence events in any given direction. Be that as it may, it is necessary for us to have any idea of where we are going and how we are going to get there.

If we accept that final overthrow is to be a military one, then we must accept that this is going to be one based on an

internal military uprising consisting essentially of guerilla groups with an effective strike potential. For this the conditions mentioned above; is a base of retreating to and working from; a broadly sympathetic population (African) and certain areas free of white presence must be satisfied. Even then, if these were all possible what chances are there for success? The most realistic possibility is an independent state on our borders. Even with this can a guerilla army making quick forays, hope to penetrate to the centre of things with any effectiveness? Would not the border areas be so well patrolled and policed that any movement of men would become noticeable[?] Any group of black men would be spotted and resisted.

These are pessimistic thoughts, but realistic ones.

We have reached this point then. Internal sabotage, of the present form is not effective, and involves the most appalling risks. For the foreseeable future the hope of a guerilla army is very small. What then is to be done[?]

There seem 3 alternatives and possibly a 4th:

1) The Company changes its direction immediately. It drops its present action and concentrates solely on building up a vast but concentrated pool of skill, knowledge and technique in the arts of warfare, and especially guerilla warfare, against the day when this will be possible and effective. This view is predicated on the assumption that a time

will come when guerilla warfare will be possible. [At that] time we shall be able to present to an army, recruited either by us or by others more closely in touch with a pool of potential recruits, a highly competent wing of experts with technique/ information and intelligence information, hich will be basic to their effectiveness.

2) That we abandon all activities in toto, confine ourselves perhaps to the production and distribution of underground newspapers, pamphlets and journals, possibly attempt to create an effective escape group, pulling off daring escapes and rescues and transporting individuals abroad.

3) That we concentrate our energies on widescale and effective urban, and some rural sabotage work, with the aim not of overthrowing the regime, wwhich we would accept to be impossible, but aimed rather at loosening rather at loosening the deadlock and allowing a more fluid situation to develop where perhaps panic, capital flight, drying up of investment and immigration will cause a new situation into which others will move, or we ourselves shall move at a later stage if we are around to do so. In other words, this suggests that we accept the very limited objective of trying to create some fluidity in the situation, the internal continental implications of which we could not, apart from generalising, prophesy.

4) That we effect a compromise between 1 & 3. That is, we establish an independent wing, newly recruited and maintained quite separately from the present organisation, with the

purpose of building up the intelligence and military skills wing of the organisation against a day when they will be needed. At the same time, the present "action" wing remains in the field, pulling of regular but highly effective and planned jobs, with the object of keeping the political climate suitable for tension and hence conflict.

A few other points must be made at this point.

1) It should be our aim, stated and accepted, that as soon as security effectiveness and political aim are known, for us to team up either on a unity basis or on a federal basis with one or another of the PAC or ANC. Ultimately there is going to be the need for one major freedom organization if, again, it is accepted that internal military action will be the answer. And, even if not, there will have to be a group which, come the change -- however that may be -- is capable of taking over.

2) If point 4 is accepted then a broad plan for this new line is at hand.

3) If point 3 is accepted then our present structure effectively and finally tightened up can be used.

Overall we must finally clear up and establish our ultimate political goals in a policy statement.

The broad CP and apparent Congress Line at the moment is this. The working class is the ultimate force of change. Until it has been organized - which they naturally insist it is - and until it has attained the level of political consciousness which will propel it into effective action, nothing can be done. In an industrialised country it is the working class which holds power, potentially or actually. To attempt abotage is "bourgeois impatience" (although they themselves -- or was it they? -- started this with Ukonto) and can only do no good. They argue that the PAC poqo campaign was wrong and harmful, for the effect of it was to stimulate the 90 day laws and oppressive legislation which, while it also meant the cleaning up of the PAC, also resulted in the emasculation of Congress. There is much spurious thought in this whole argument and it demonstrates the basic rigidity of the CP and its inflexibility in a new situation which Marx did not conceive of, and which none of the early Rev. theorists did not find themselves in.

Be that as it may, our aims should be to establish links with Congress and their military wing if for no other purpose than to exchange views and analyses of the situation.

These are brief and vague thoughts on our directions for the coming year. Detailed expansion of point is necessary.

But we have to think about it.

Document 6: S v Daniels and others Exh C9

Confidential

POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE UNIT

Aims The Unit will aim to collect facts and seek out trends relating to groupings and personalities in the developing political situation in South Africa, the High Commission areas, South West Africa, and contiguous territories. The material and up-to-date information so collected will be available to certain groups and parties whose interest in the SA freedom struggle is genuine and who, in the view of the leadership of the unit, are committed to the basic and broad common denominator of the democratic ideal and form.

The Unit itself will retain full records, stored outside the Republic, and will aim to position itself in such a way that by being fully informed on groups and trends and political situations it will in turn be able to influence events.

Thus the Unit will both collect and present facts and analysis as well as play a part in the developing political situation which its members will be studying.

Principles:

The Unit will act for the furthering of the broad aims of non-racial social democracy in South Africa, the concept as understood by the non-communist section of the ANC, the official leadership of the PAC, the left wing of the Liberal Party and possibly certain more progressive Progressives. The members of the group will have no particular party loyalty, but will enjoy unity of action by virtue of common adherence to the broad belief in basic social and democratic principles, and a concern for the future of S.A.

Activities

The Unit will consist initially of as few members as successfully accomplish the tasks, possibly not more than 20 throughout the country as a whole. They will be required to give loyalty to the Unit, to accept its discipline completely. They will operate regionally and all information with the necessary security precautions taken will be channeled through to a central point for assessment and analysis and then stored abroad.

At the outset seven key areas will be visited by the unit, and members will cover them individually or in pairs.

Their job will be to map out the entire political activity of the area in terms of a questionnaire which the executive will prepare as well as collect background data and information on the area and the personalities. In some cases at the same time, in others as a later operation, they will be given specific objectives to accomplish, persons to visit, points of view to put across, actions designed to combat immediately initiatives taken at the political level by the Republican Government or its agents.

POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE UNIT

Aims The Unit will aim to collect facts about the developing political situation in South Africa, the High Commission territories, South West Africa, and contiguous territories. The facts so collected will be analysed and recorded for supply to organisations needing a up-to-date, absolutely reliable inside information, such organisations being required to pay towards the costs of operation. The facts so presented will be prepared for the use of bodies requiring them, and will be angled for their use. The Unit itself will retain full records, stored outside the Republic, and will aim to attain position from which itself to influence events through being in possession of the essential information in any given situation.

Thus the Unit will aim not only to collect and present facts, but also itself to play a part in the developing political situation which its members will be studying.

Principles The Unit will act for the furthering of the broad aims of nonracial democracy in South Africa, that concept as understood by the non-communist body of the ANC, the official leadership of the PAC, the Liberal Party and the more advanced section of the Progressive Party. As its members will be drawn, possibly, from all these groups, and will include individuals associated with none of them, it will be in the best position to influence events without the encumbrance of sectional party loyalty.

Activities The Unit will consist of as few members as successfully accomplish its tasks, perhaps twenty in the country as a whole. They will be required to give their primary loyalty to the Unit, to accept its discipline completely. Their functions will be carried out regionally. At the outset seven key areas will be visited by members of the Unit, travelling sometimes alone and sometimes two together. Their task will be to map out the entire political activity of the area concerned, in the first instance, in terms of a questionnaire prepared by the executive of the Unit. In some cases at the same time, in others as a later operation, they will be given definite objectives to accomplish, persons to visit, points of view to put across, actions designed to combat immediately initiatives taken by the Republican Government or its agents. Thus, in the immediate period, a tour of South West Africa, following on the heels of Dr Verwoerd, BAD Minister Nel and deputy-minister Botha, is to be undertaken by a member whose task will be not only to gauge the effect of the Government's new SWA measures, but to kill any attempt the Government may be making to win local nonwhite approval for these measures, especially through the emergence of "stooge" spokesmen for the people concerned. Also in the immediate period two members are to go to the Transkei, one for an indefinite period, completely under cover, to place himself in the centre of political affairs there, as a press agent, the other to do an exhaustive tour of the East Pondoland area, where reports have been received of imminent resumption of the 1960 rebellion.

Document 7: State v Hirson and others Exhibit M4(1)

1. The NCL still remains a small elite group, distinguished by its technical competence and secure organisation, rather than by its size or effectiveness. In the existing situation, having failed to establish itself as the means of coordinating and federating all revolutionary activity, it is unlikely to grow to the extent where it can displace The Spear or Poqo from their positions as being the revolutionary arms of the ANC and PAC. It has however an undoubted initiative over the other organisations in the degree of its technical competence. At the moment it seems better organised in the Cape than in the Transvaal where its level of activity is very low.

2. The need for unity. There is an overwhelming need for unity.

Outside South Africa. The parties here consist of the NCL's own committee. The ANC which seems to be in very good shape not only in Dar es Salaam but also in Algiers and London. It seems to have a certain amount of money. There seems to be a distinct difference in attitude to members of the NCL on the part of ANC members in Dar where several distinct suggestions of cooperation were made recently to your representative. In London there seems to be no such feeling. This may arise from the fact that all the White comrades seem to have congregated in London.

The PAC by contrast is broke and badly split abroad. Molotsi and [R]adebe seem to be following Leballo while Mahomo is trying to build himself a new empire in the Congo. The latest information from Mahomo suggests that the PAC in Maseru has fragmented and that Molefe and Leballo have fallen out. Our impression is that the PAC has become frankly opportunist and has little organisation worth having.

Inside South Africa. Here by common consent is where unity of command must first be established. There seems to be three other possible parties apart from NCL. These are the Spear, Poqo, and Apdusa. From events known here and at home it seems that we might well be nearest to Apdusa in that [they] seem to have been crippled by recent arrests and Tabata seemed keen to cooperate -- indeed this is the line that he has been selling Kambona. However, if we cooperated first with Apdusa, this might alienate the ANC and this is an important consideration. Also Apdusa is very sectarian. ANC abroad seems keen to cooperate. It is difficult to assess to what degree they have been destroyed by the Rivonia arrests. If accounts of sticker campaigns in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town are correct they would still seem to have personnel but they seem to lack materials and training. In this regard it is worth noting that they have in excess of 150 persons waiting the end of Federation with a view to returning to South Africa. All these have been trained but not to the satisfaction of Makiwane in that they have had a standard military course. We cannot comment on the PAC at home. They seem to have received their quietus. If we are not in touch with ANC at home then contact can be proceeded with in Dar. The pulling power of the ANC outside South Africa must be appreciated -- especially in relation to the committee of 9. This is far less true of PAC.

Proposal. The proposal that is made to each of these organisations should clearly be a joint command. Each organisation should be asked to do what it can do best. It is to be hoped that in due course a complete blend will be achieved and a full unity of effort and purpose. There has obviously been for a long time an unexpressed reluctance to getting involved with the Communist Party of S.A. It should be recognised that whatever the facts of the situation, the Spear is a partnership between the ANC and the C.P. and it is recognised as such by the ANC. Therefore unless it is suggested that an organisation should be created in opposition to Spear -- which seems frankly impractical -- NCL members should face the fact that the C.P. is to play a part. On analysis it seems that if unity is achieved this part will decrease with time. Our analysis in the early days of the movement included the assumption

that most of the CP members with any ability would be knocked off by the government or exiled within a short while of sabotage commencing. This has proved to be true. Therefore while those fellows are still certainly part of the partnership abroad, they are not so at home -- for obvious reasons -- and they will soon seem to have outlived their usefulness to the ANC here. In fact we are continually asked to do certain jobs for them here. This is curious in the light of the facts that there are folk like Slovo and Hodgson in London. We suggest therefore that now is the time to try and find unity with Spear at home and that the fear of an association with the CP should be diminished by the facts set out above. It should be the motto of the NCL "by our works ye shall know us" and deeds make friends quicker than words. Eric feels about the CP: They will continue their dominant position from overseas in same way as happened in Spain because they will be in position to control flow of money and supplies at later stage of struggle. Don't underestimate Joe and Co -- even though they will be [weakened] in South Africa. Their dominant position abroad will be of maximum importance. This does not affect our possible working with Spear but our perspective must be clear on their future role.

Initially we suggest a liaison based on a practical project to be decided by you. We give as an e.g. 2 points 20 mile distant on a railway line. NCL and Spear to do one each at the same time. ONLY one member from each group to be in contact therefore maximum security. Ultimate joint command will have to flow from practical liaisons.

What can the NCL offer? We can offer a number of things that remain unsolved in spite of the fact that three years have gone by since Sharpeville. Looking at the strategic situation beyond South Africa for the moment it seems that the free world has provided for South Africa very few of the services it requires if the revolution is to proceed. Amongst these are proper training facilities, transport and supplies. The key to some of these problems might be provided by the independence of Zambia but not all will be solved or nearly as many believe.

Transport: This is linked of course to the availability of supply but it is doubtful whether the independence of Zambia will ease the problem. The link between Zambia and Bechuanaland is through the pont at Kazungula. Here at best Zambia has fifty yards of the river bank which will probably be policed. At worst none. What seems abundantly clear is whatever this situation might be, while it may be possible to pass men through this gap back into Bechuanaland for transport to SA (and even this might be difficult if proper controls are placed on the crossing by Bechuanaland), it will be virtually impossible to use this route for materials. The question that is raised by these facts is whether, for the moment materials can be transported into S.A. from the North. If money was available we suggest that the NCL should seriously consider the suggestion originally made that Torquil be used from the Cape to liaise with passing vessels, using Betty's bay or a similar place for unloading. It is interesting to note that Torquil has aroused interest in Dar es Salaam quarters for this very reason.

Training. Northern Rhodesia is about to become the new training ground for SA. We should consider what part we can play in this. We have already translated certain works into Sotho. We have a lot of know-how. Will we want our own training place or can we in concert with others make a very material contribution to training facilities in Zambia.

Materials. In spite of much talk about the availability of materials it seems clear that there is not much likelihood of these being provided by nations in the quantities that will be required.

We suggest therefore that the NCL looks upon itself as a sort of specialist cadre, which will set up the ninews of the struggle. That is the procurement of materials, their transport and training. We must continue with direct operations. We must try to participate in the field to an increasing extent. Should we liaise with groups with manpower, however, we should concentrate on maximum exploitation of our specific abilities.

Document 8: S v Hirson and others, Exhibit M4(3).

The aim of X is to build a new South Africa. The new society will be based on the broad principles of socialism and democracy. It will be established through radical social change and the overthrow of the whole apartheid system

The revolutionary government will: --

1. Abolish segregation in all its forms and protect the individual rights of all.
2. Establish and guarantee the freedom of expression, association and religion.
3. Establish a socialist economic system, based on democratic planning over which the people will have the decisive control and which will ensure equitable redistribution of wealth in all its forms.
4. Embark on an extensive programme of nationalisation to ensure an efficient and expanding national economy with full employment.
5. Redistribute the land for the overall benefit of the society.
6. Establish free and compulsory prim and sec education for all, with free tuition in higher education for those who merit it. In addition, a large-scale and intensive adult education programme will be instigated.
7. Establish free social services for all.
8. Ensure that the judiciary is independent.

The X recognises that, in order to achieve the above objects, there must be unity between all liberatory movements within South Africa. The X is prepared to negotiate to this end with all organisations fighting for the liberation of the country.

The X recognises that Africa has been artificially partitioned by colonial powers and must overcome its heritage of imperialist exploitation. In order to uplift itself and take its proper place in world affairs, Africa needs political and economic unity.

The X regards the Addis Ababa conference as the first step towards such unity and gives the conference and the permanent committees set up by it its wholehearted support.

Furthermore the X supports all those still struggling against imperialist and colonialist oppression throughout the world.

Once a provisional government has been established in South Africa, the X will call for a national convention as the first step towards forming the new society.

Document 9: State v Hirson and others, Exhibit M4(4)

The National Committee for Liberation -- background and aims

REASONS FOR MILITARY ACTION: THE TIME FOR UNITY

Harsh counter-measures to the 1960 campaign of the Pan Africanist Congress and the 1961 strike called by the African National Congress brought to an end the fifty-year old non-violent political struggle for democracy and social justice in South Africa. The banning of Congresses and crippling of other liberatory organisations by proscription of members and by laws removing freedom of assembly and speech, effectively forced the leaders of the {oppressed} rightless four-fifths of the South African people to seek military means of liberation now that the means of civil struggle had been struck from their hands.

There had seemed to be ideological reasons for the fragmentation of the liberatory movement in South Africa into mutually antagonistic groups. The end of political struggle rendered such division meaningless, and the first move to organise military action against the South African Government was made by a group of South Africans of various political allegiances, from various communities and language groups, who in the second half of 1961 formed a national committee to plan the military action ahead.

The committee was named the National Committee for Liberation, its members being drawn from regional committees in the cities and rural areas of South Africa.

Successful acts of sabotage were carried out in 1961, and a number of engagements involving the escape of imprisoned and confined leaders were accomplished.

December 1961 saw the launching of the military wing of the

ANC under the name Umkonto we Sizwe, although approaches had been made by the NCL to Congress Alliance leaders in the cause of forming one united military force. The career of the Umkonto we Sizwe has been halted by the capture of the high command at Rivonia in August 1963, after many heroic act in the first sabotage phase of Umkonto's campaign. Meanwhile the rank and file of Umkonto members, if they happened to escape the South African Police net that Rivonia made possible, are scattered and leaderless.

The Pan Africanist Congress meanwhile remained pledged to its promise to the African people of "freedom in 1963", but March 1963 saw the crushing of the projected rising and the imprisonment for long periods of PAC men, among whom were the bulk of the countrywide leadership.

Smaller groups also launched military activity, retaining their outdated [mutual] hostility ~~to other organisations with the liberation of the rightless people of South Africa as a common aim~~. The passing of savage laws allowing for indefinite solitary confinement and gaol without trial { + use of torture } has been instrumental in enabling the South African Police to root out and smash such smaller groups. The use of torture has become commonplace in the investigation of sabotage, and the effect has been to destroy those smaller groups that have sought to build up from purely local strength, with the dangers inherent in recruitment witin a particular local community

The crushing of both Umkonto we Sizwe and the Pan Africanist

Congress, as well as of these minor bodies, [have] both taught a terrible and tragic lesson to all those who continue to fight each other and thus play into the hands of the common enemy, and has left in existence only the original military organisation in the field, namely the National Committee for Liberation, itself formed on the basis of national, nonracial unity and ideological conciliation and compromises. {a degree of flexibility based on a wish for fighting unity}.

The former political strength of the ANC and PAC make it certain that their presently smashed military formations will revive in due course. Very heavy losses have been suffered, but their spirit of resistance has in no wise been broken. This must make it an immediate aim of the NCL both to fill what would otherwise be a power vacuum in the coming phase of military attack and to strengthen its organisation in such a way that the revived military bodies of the ANC and PAC may in the course of time come together in the National Freedom Army which it is the NCL's chief business to recruit, train and jointly lead.

PRESENT EVILS AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF EVOLUTIONARY POLITICAL CHANGE

That such recruitment is not only possible but intensely desired by the oppressed people of South Africa is evidenced by the contemporary social, political and economic condition of our country.

Suffice it to say here that four-fifths of the people of South Africa are without social, political or economic rights, their denial being sanctioned by a legislature and executive drawn entirely from the remaining fifth, the membership of

both majority and minority being determined solely on grounds of racial origin. thus the ruling group, so-called "whites" of Western European descent, have complete and absolute power over the indigenous African people, who form the great majority, as well as over those of Asian and mixed stock. The apartheid ideology of the Afrikaner Nationalists not only has transferred to the statute book the mass of social disabilities that the nonwhites have suffered since the days of slavery and military conquest, but has also become accepted by the non-Afrikaner-Nationalist minority among the whites as well. Any thought of political evolution within the context of present legislative forms in South Africa has been dismissed by the undeniable phenomenon that the whites of South Africa have, with few exceptions, closed ranks against the advance of their non-white "inferiors."

The vested economic interests of the white population, backed all too strongly by the capitalist system of Western Europe and the United States, together with their total political and social privilege, added to which is their deep and abiding fear of the vengeance aroused by the guilty conscience of their entire community, rule out any real hope of a phased, gradual, controlled transfer of power from the minority to the people as a whole. In order to achieve this transfer of power, nothing short of revolutionary means have to be adopted, and in a South Africa which today denies political expression, collective bargaining in trade unions, and the liberty of almost an entire section of political leadership, to its oppressed majority, such a revolution

can only be brought about through the use of force.

The raison d'être of the National Committee for Liberation is the proper organisation and strategic use of such force, in the light of a major prerequisite to its use, that the more firmly, resolutely and speedily such force is used, the more quickly can be ended the current stagnation of South Africa's growth to nationhood as a free African state, and the more rapidly can be achieved the liberation of all its people from slavery in its 20th-century capitalist form, from ignorance, poverty and fear.

A NEW SOCIAL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC ORDER FOR SOUTH AFRICA.

It is not the view of the NCL that such a military overthrow of apartheid is an end in itself. For the achievement of true liberation a new social, political and economic order must be ~~imposed-on~~ [instituted in] South Africa. The basic reasons for the appalling state of racial oppression and white overlordship in South Africa are, of course, to be found in the present social and economic pattern, an inheritance of hundreds of years of years of exploitation, colonialism, unbridled capitalism, and even quasi-religious racialism, rather than in the physical or mental make-up of individuals in the minority or majority groups. The people of South Africa are the prisoners of a system inherited from the past, dead ages; liberation for South Africa must mean the destruction of this system, and its replacement with a new order capable of releasing the immeasurable human and physical potential of our country.

Consequently the NCL was set up with the clear aim of achieving the {revolutionary} overthrow of the present apartheid Government, of ensuring that it was not replaced by similar tyranny in a different form, and of positioning itself so as to influence future [a] Government constantly towards carrying out the original socialist, democratic and egalitarian aims of the revolution. As the controlling force in a strong, central Government, the members of the National Committee for Liberation aim to ensure that the aims of the revolution are not betrayed, either towards the acceptance of a rigid {doctrinaire textbook} Communist system, with its concomitant Cold War commitment, or towards an expedient, unprincipled relaxing into the capitalist system which is the root of South African evil.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL AIMS

An exact itemisation of economic policy is altogether undesirable at this point. The new South Africa may nationalise its gold mines or not (as in Ghana) it may nationalise its land or not (as in [Y]ugoslavia), but the basis of its economic system will be, as it is in those two countries, socialist. As regards the political system, its aim will be towards true democracy, with the value of the vote becoming equal as the voters themselves become equal in their rights and welfare {+ economics?}. The immediate object will be to give every adult man and woman the vote, to build up their participation in local government {thus combating democratic centralism?}, and to allow the freedom of political parties or independent candidates to compete for the votes of the electorate, subject only to necessary statutes outlawing

the fostering, by any means, of racial or religious hatred or strife.

Social changes will follow from the political and economic developments, but here again social equality will be encouraged by a realistically nonracial educational system, and by state promotion of technical training, higher and state education, purposefully to make up the ground lost to nonwhites by generations of "colour bar" retardation. The concept of individual liberty {-- seen in terms of the new social + economic order} will be cherished, and protected by an independent judiciary charged to uphold the right of all citizens to a fair trial under the rule of law. Within the social context, due awareness will constantly be paid to the peculiar composition of the South African people with their manifold genetic and cultural origins. Cultural freedom will be upheld while a unified patriotism recognising diversity will be built up. In this patriotism of the new South Africa will be no narrow sectional nationalism, but a pride in South African citizenship, in African continental fellowship and an allegiance to the ideal of world brotherhood.

TOWARDS A NATIONAL FREEDOM ARMY

It remains only to say that the road to military overthrow of the present regime in South Africa will be hard and will demand very great sacrifice and heroism. The armed forces at the disposal of the regime are powerful and constantly poised for the crushing of any rising. A peasant revolt was bloodily crushed in 48 hours in mountainous, forested East Pondoland in 1961, and this before the real build-up of South Africa's

internal security forces was really under way. The manufacture of arms and ammunition in South Africa will very largely make good the losses brought about by the United Nations' arms embargo. Furthermore, the NCL does not overestimate the logistic readiness of the free African states to invade South Africa successfully in the coming period. Least of all do we depend on the hope that the other world powers will intervene between the white regime and its victims through military action or naval blockade. In its projected launching of a National Freedom Army the NCL will be constantly guided by the certainty that the liberation of South Africa is the task of the people of South Africa, however severe their disabilities, however overwhelming may seem the forces of oppression ranged against them. To our fellow African states and to all our {progressive} allies throughout the world we shall constantly look for aid -- in finance, training facilities, technical aid, equipment, in their moral support and in the harassment their combined action can cause to the regime. But we see the mortal struggle to come as our own responsibility, which, on behalf of the oppressed people of South Africa we accept to the full.

Document 10: State v Hirson and others: Exhibit M4(5)

Harsh counter measures to the 1960 campaign of the PAC and the 1961 strike called by the African National Congress brought to an end the 50 year old non violent political struggle for democracy and social justice in South Africa. The banning of Congresses and crippling of other liberatory organizations by proscription of members and by laws removing freedom of assembly and speech effectively forced the leaders of the oppressed majority of the people to seek military and violent means of liberation for establishing a new South African society.

There had been differences in class attitude and ideology which had made for the fragmentation of the anti-government forces into mutually hostile groupings. But the end of the political struggle tended to render such division meaningless, either through the self-eliminating of certain groups, or through the objective need for cooperation {amongst groups}. The first move to organise military action against the South African Government was made by a group of South Africans of various political allegiances, who, in the second half of 1961 formed a national committee to plan military action.

The group was named the National Committee for Liberation, its members being drawn from towns and rural areas {throughout} the country and organised regionally, coordinated through a central committee.

Successful, yet isolated acts of sabotage were carried out between ~~the formation of the group and the end of 1963~~ {the end of 1961}, and also escape and transport work for imprisoned and confined leaders {was successfully undertaken}. As 1964 commences, the organization, strengthened by experience and intact thus far from detection by the police and vast network of informers, plans to launch a massive violent assault on the forces of oppression.

December 1961 saw the launching of the military wing of the ANC under the name Umkonto we Sizwe, although approaches had been made by the NCL to Congress Alliance leaders with the aim of forming one united military force. The career of Umkonto was halted by the capture of the high command at Rivonia in August 1963, after many heroic acts in the first sabotage phase of Umkonto's campaign. Meanwhile the rank and file of Umkonto members, if they escaped the police net that Rivonia made possible, are scattered and if not leaderless then {unable, for the moment, to act}.

The PAC meanwhile remained pledged to its promise of "freedom in 1963", but March 1963 saw a fierce and brutal crushing of the projected rising and the imprisonment of many hundreds of PAC men, among whom were the bulk of the countrywide leadership.

Smaller groups also launched military activity, retaining their outdated mutual hostility. But {ruthless} use of {[illegible?]} powers enabled {the police}, through torture and indefinite solitary confinement

to destroy these groups, which {had} ~~sought to build up from~~ local strength, with the dangers inherent in recruitment within a particular local community.

The temporary crushing of the UWS, the PAC and smaller groups has taught tragic and terrible lessons to all who compete and fight each other and thus play into the hands of the common enemy, and has also shown the present might and effectiveness of the regime. It has left, in active terms, only the original NCL in the field, itself formed on the basis of national unity, a degree of ideological flexibility based on a will for actual unity amongst the military groups.

It is clear that the PAC and ANC groups will revive again, for the spirit has not been broken. {In the mean time} the {immediate} aim of the NCL will be to fill the vacuum and to strengthen its own organisation, increase its supplies of arms, ammunition and explosives and equip itself with skills, and to build cadres of highly trained and active fighters, constantly attacking both state and private installations, factories and key targets. {It is hoped that this will lead up to co-operation with the other re-emerging (sic) which will come together in the NFA which it is the NCL's chief business to recruit, train and jointly lead}.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF EVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

The NCL holds it as self-evident that revolutionary social, political and economic change is {fundamental} to the establishment of the new society based on the broad principles of socialism.

The ruling group -- the "whites" of Western European origin, have total power over the indigenous and mixed population. Any thought of gradual phased transfer of power in the social, political and economic context of the society is {out of the question}. Such thoughts would indicate a gross misunderstanding of the nature of the capitalist society in which we live. The vested economic interests of the white group, backed and bolstered by the capitalist patterns Europe and America, together with their total political and social privileges, makes for complete entrenchment of the ruling class. In order not only to dislodge the ruling group, but also to ~~overthrow the system~~ {institute the new socialist system}, revolutionary violence and military means will be used and revolutionary change will be subsequently applied.

The purpose of the NCL: In order to achieve the new society, {the NCL aims at} the proper and strategic use of violence, sabotage, terrorism and guerilla warfare, believing that the more firmly, resolutely and speedily such force is used, the more quickly can be ended the current stagnation of South Africa's growth to nationhood as a free African state, and the more rapidly can be achieved the {subsequent} liberation of all its people from slavery in its 20th-century capitalist form.

A NEW SOCIAL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC ORDER FOR SOUTH AFRICA.

The consistent goal of the NCL is to overthrow the whole apartheid system and the basis of capitalist

exploitation in South Africa and to institute a revolutionary social, political and economic order in South Africa based on the principles of Socialism {as they can be best applied to SA}. The inheritance of hundreds of years of exploitation, colonialism, unbridled capitalism and its offshoots of racialism and prejudice lie at the root of the ~~social-disease-and-horror-of-our-society~~ {evils of our society}.

The liberation of SA from the grip of capitalism and imperialism will mean the end of these reactionary forces, and the release and development of the immeasurable human and physical potential of our country.

The overthrow of the present system must not be followed by a similar system; we want total revolutionary change. The NCL aims to [position] so as to affect these aims. As the controlling force in a strong central provisional government prior to a national convention of the people, the NCL will aim to ensure that the Revolution is carried out to the full and not betrayed

{by forces such as those representing doctrinaire Communism, nor by bourgeois middle class conservatism [and reformism] -- which may allow an expedient relaxing back into the capitalist system. We will not be involved in Cold War disputes and will not align ourselves with either camp.}

{Economic, Political and Social Aims}.

The consequences of the Revolution and the immediate demands resulting from it in terms of administration, resources, human potential and productivity cannot at this stage be predicted. It is thus not possible nor realistic to attempt a detailed blue print of our policy, but our basic principles are;

- * The NCL will abolish discrimination in all its forms.
- * The NCL will establish a socialist economic system based on democratic planning over which the people will have the decisive control and will ensure the equitable redistribution of wealth in all its forms.
- * The NCL will embark on an extensive programme of nationalisation to ensure an efficient and expanding national economy with full employment {and the elimination of monopolies and private capital}
- * The NCL will re-distribute the land for the overall benefit of the society, and provide for agricultural {growth + improvement} through the encouragement and establishment of {such means as} co-ops, communal farms, collectivisation and consolidation of the land, {as well as wide-scale agricultural education at primary and secondary level}.
- * The NCL will establish free and compulsory education for all, with free tuition in higher {+ sec} education for those who qualify for it. As an initial move a nation-wide crash programme of adult education will be embarked upon by the Rev Govt.
- * The NCL will establish a thorough network of social services for all.
- * The NCL will ensure an independent judiciary {+ fair public trial}. {It is our view that the courts can be an important force in moulding values of society}.
- * The NCL believes that in a time of revolutionary change a strong central government is both necessary and desirable. It believes that the people, in whose name the Govt seeks to act, must have an effective check on the Government.

The NCL has as its aim the growth of political institutions which in the period of change will concentrate power in the hands of the central Govt {but which will incorporate machinery which will make possible for the people to exercise effective checks on abuse of power by the gov't. but which do not render the essence of power of the central gov't. so limited as to make it unable to fulfill its revolutionary goal}. ~~In the event of such institutions not being workable or manageable, we believe it necessary to err on the side of central power, bearing in mind the ultimate democratic purpose of the state, defined in relation to the economic and social~~ [illegible]. For we believe that civil liberties and rights ~~are luxuries which only~~ have relevance and meaning in an egalitarian society, where a certain level of material well-being has been achieved {for all. We set as our aim the effective implementation of [illegible]}

The immediate adult suffrage that will be introduced will be coupled with active encouragement of participation in local government. Also industrial democracy through an energetic and effective TU movement will be encouraged. The NCL believes that the stage of full democracy can be more quickly reached in SA than in the rest of Africa, and hence we set as our goal the rapid achievement of this through the speedy and effective institution of the new society, based on the already advanced economy.

Social changes {will} naturally follow and be encouraged. {The effects of} colour bar retardation of the mass of the people in spheres such as education, will be actively

{The effects of the colour bar have created vast inequalities in variety of fields such as education, housing and social services. The state will pursue an active policy to make good the deficit to the mass of the people before the revolution. }

Cultural freedom will be upheld while a unified patriotism recognising diversity will be built up and, recognising diversity, a pride in the country, ~~a feeling of brotherhood~~ {will be encouraged as part of a feeling of solidarity} and fellowship with the peoples of Africa and an allegiance to the brotherhood throughout the world.

The overthrow of the regime will require great and determined effort and sacrifice. The crushing of the Pondo revolt in 1961 is evidence of the organised and ever-ready might of the regime. We do not overestimate the logistic readiness of the free African states to invade SA in the near future, nor do we see any purpose to hope for physical aid from the rest of the world. In its projected launching of National Freedom Army the NCL will be guided by the certainty that the liberation of SA is the task of the people of SA, however severe their disabilities and however overwhelming may be the forces of ranged against us.

In order to achieve these aims the NCL regards unity with other military groups as essential, and is anxious to enter negotiations to this end, and our sole criteria for such unified co-operation will be a) security b) {adherence} [to] our basic socialist principles. The NCL recognises the artificial division of Africa and the vast burden which our continent has to overcome as a result of years of imperialist exploitation. In order to achieve its goals of genuine freedom, Africa must unite.

We shall look to our colleagues in Africa for help, guidance and sacrifice; we offer them the same. Finance, training facilities { + } arms are needed. The NCL regards the AA conference as the first step {towards the goal of effective Pan-African co-op[eration]} and gives the Conf[erence] and the committees set up by it, its full support. The NCL supports all people struggling not only against imperialist rule but also against all forms of capitalist oppression.

{We see the struggle for our freedom from oppression in South Africa as our own responsibility -- a responsibility which we accept to the full}.

Document 11: State v Hirson and others, Exhibit M5(1)

- I The ___ shall consist of all those who adopt the programme and the discipline of the movement

The ___ shall work democratically, safeguarding the interests of every member. At every stage there must be protection against bureaucratic control, while at the same time, once decisions are taken they shall be carried out by every member.

- II The supreme authority of the ___ shall be the National Central Committee (N.C.C.) which will be the active political centre and will direct the action and the organisation of the membership.

The members of the NCC will be drawn from every centre of the country. The membership of the NCC will be changed only by such conference as can be convened, or by a majority decision of the committee who may suspend a member. The suspension will be reviewed by the first full meeting of the NCC thereafter.

The NCC shall meet at least once every three months.

Between full meetings, the work shall be carried out by the members of the NCC residing on the Witwatersrand together with such members from other centres who can attend. This will be the working committee.

The working committee shall meet as frequently as is necessary and shall be convened by a secretary at the request of any member.

The NCC shall appoint all full-time organisers in consultation with the regional committees.

The NCC shall appoint such sub-committees as necessary to ensure that the work is carried out.

These shall include:

- (a) the action committee who will have the right to take any decisions relating to action, and who shall take precedence over all other bodies in the movement in time of crisis.
- (b) a secretary and a treasurer who shall see to the efficient running of the organisation.
- (c) A publication committee which shall publish regular bulletins, journals and books.

All such sub-committees will report regularly on all matters of principle to the NCC or the working committee.

The NCC shall appoint alternate members to ensure replacements if these become necessary.

The NCC shall take no major decisions affecting basic policy without referring the matter through the regional committees to the entire membership.

- III Each region shall have its own Regional Committee (RC) of at least 5 and not more than 7 members.

The RC shall be completely autonomous as far as is compatible with the above.

The RC shall meet at least once a fortnight.

The RC shall be in charge of all recruitment in the area.

They will raise any monies which will pay for all local expenses. Any excess money shall be transferred to the NCC.

The RC shall set up any sub-committees needed and shall take all decisions affecting the region in matters of political activity, leafleting, action etc., where possible in collaboration with the NCC.

The RC shall report to the NCC through the member who represents them on the NCC.

The RC shall see that all members receive full reports of the work of both the RC and the NCC regularly. They shall also see that every document of the ___ is received by every member.

- IV The basic unit of the ___ shall be the cell, consisting of not more than 4 members and one contact.

The contact shall be a member of the RC or of the local committee if such exists in any area.

Such local committees shall be set up at the direction of the RC and will be directly represented on the RC by at least one person.

No member shall meet with members of the ___ other than of his cell, nor shall he disclose membership to any other member of the NCL unless brought into contact with such members for the working of the movement.

The cells shall receive and discuss all documents issued by bodies of the ___ which shall be fully discussed and then destroyed in front of the cell. Every member has the right and the duty to suggest changes in the direction of the movement, to criticise all documents and policies.

Such comments shall be immediately reported through the contact back to the relevant committee verbally or in writing if the member wishes.

Any member of a cell may be suspended by a majority decision of a cell. The member shall have the full right to appeal to the next higher committee where the full charge shall be considered.

The Working of the Cell.

The cell is the smallest unit for action and is centred in residential or industrial areas, in trade unions, or in political groups.

The cell must give its first attention to proposed action where it will function as a group.

The cell shall meet regularly and shall get reports from each of its members of their political and industrial activities.

The cell shall form the base for political discussions in order to build up political consciousness.

Political resolution of NCC

In the last months of 1961 the political situation in South Africa has moved into a new stage.

Following the shootings in Sharpeville and the failure of the stay-at-home organised for the end of May 1961, new thoughts for militant action have emerged amongst the people which eventuated in the recent bombing attempts in Johannesburg, Durban and Port Elizabeth.

The two main National Liberation movements, the ANC and PAC have found themselves disorganised by their bannings. In many areas, however, the ANC has managed to reorganise itself to some extent. The sympathy of the people has remained for either of those two organisations.

The white population is largely united, and as there is little chance of outside intervention in the foreseeable future, the three million whites, with technical knowledge, education and its armed force are a very powerful force, and if this force is not split, it may actively help to keep the present government in power. To this extent the emergence of the Progressive Party, though it can never be considered as an ally, it may help by splitting the white block.

In the light of this situation our tasks in the forthcoming months can be summarised as follows:

1. To work inside the National Liberatory movements where the bulk of recruits will be found.
2. To identify ourselves with militant action while not losing sight of our political objectives.
3. Consolidation and organisational increase of our existing membership, especially in rural areas.
4. Intensification of the political education of our militants.
5. Support for any attempt to bring a section of the white population close to the aims of the liberatory movement.

Document 12: State v Hirson and others, Exhibit M5(2)

Draft for discussion

The ___ is a movement of the workers in the town and country who participate in the struggle to establish a Socialist Society.

The members of the ___ are drawn from the most advanced workers and other progressive elements of society who will devote their lives to the establishment of socialism.

The ___ acts together with the workers in their struggle and formulates their demands in the most conscious form.

The democratic Struggle

The struggle for socialism is inseparable from the struggle to break the colour bar and the establishment of full democracy. To this end we demand:

- a) The vote for every adult man and woman.
- b) Compulsory and free education for every child.
- c) Freedom of movement speech and organisation.
- d) The formation of Free Trade Unions and the opening up of all jobs.

Because political freedom will be meaningless without economic freedom we demand equally:

- a) The ending of the reserve system and the reallocation of land.
- b) The taking over of the wealth of the country so that the banks mines and large industries can serve the interests of the people.

The ___ declares that it will co-operate with all groups who are prepared to conduct a struggle to achieve any of these democratic demands. At the same time it reserves the right to independent action in order to continue the struggle for socialism.

Socialism

Political freedom will be an empty shell if the economic system of South Africa is not altered. The control of the means of production by capitalism must be broken and the working class must take control of the resources of the country. For this reason the ___ will organise the workers and labourers as an independent force and prepare the way for a new socialist society.

The struggle for democratic rights must grow uninterruptedly into a fight for socialism. This implies:

- a) The ending of all oppression of workers.
- b) The organisation and planning of the economy of the country so that the wealth shall belong to those who work.
- c) The control of the government by the workers so that the above shall be brought into effect.
- d) The planning of society so that the workers shall have the full utilisation of all resources of society and so build a new life of human dignity and culture.

The complete victory of the working class shall be our victory and we will work alongside the entire working class in both town and countryside to achieve this end.

Internationally

We recognise that our task cannot be fulfilled in our country alone and that there must be a close economic and political link with other peoples of South Africa.

We will establish this link now in order to allow for the unification of the struggle and the eventual unification of Africa as a Socialist continent.

We will at all times support the struggles of the working class throughout the world in their efforts to achieve and build Socialism. We will support and co-operate with all such groups in their efforts to destroy capitalism, imperialism and colonialism in any form.

We recognise that only world-wide socialism can end the threat of war and allow the peoples of the world to build a free society without exploitation.

WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE - WE HAVE A NEW WORLD TO BUILD

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¹ Unless otherwise stated, unpublished papers are in my own possession.

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4. Trial Records²

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² These trial records, referring to cases that occurred less than 30 years ago, are still being kept at the Supreme Court Divisions where they were heard.

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