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# STRUCTURAL REFORM: A Model for the Revolutionary Transformation of South Africa?

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Words have meanings. Words are weapons. Few have given these homilies more effective weight in their own lives than Ruth First. In her voluminous writings, in her teaching, in her goading of others to more precise, more telling clarity regarding the strategies and tactics of change, she used language like a rapier to advance the cause of liberation in southern Africa. And she paid with her life for her success in doing so.

No wonder Portuguese was such a trial for her. Of course in her Mozambican years she became competent enough in that language, but I remember from our time together in Maputo her visible frustration on various occasions when she was forced to use Portuguese to make sharp points she would much rather have been making in English. Clearly, she felt disarmed, reduced to using baby-talk (as her own Portuguese must have seemed to her) when only tough talk would do. Small wonder, as well, that one of my own last and firmest memories of her are of a debate we had, precisely, over language. At her request I had written a paper for the meeting of southern African scholars she hosted in Maputo mere days before her death. Some passing criticisms of the work of her Centre of African Studies that I made in that text were not well received by Ruth. And neither was my use, at several other points, of a particular phrase - 'frozen Marxism' - to capsulize the brand of inflexible Eastern European 'Marxism-Leninism' too much in evidence in Mozambique (not least in the University's Faculty of Marxism-Leninism where I taught).

No great enthusiast herself for the brand of Marxism under discussion, Ruth nonetheless preferred, for purposes of facilitating interchange at the Workshop, a less provocative phrase and after several prolonged conversations I agreed to alter it. (I must also confess that when the paper went forward for publication several months later - after the conference and after Ruth's death - I altered it back again!).

Since the thrust of the present article (first presented at the Ruth First Memorial Colloquium, University of the Western Cape, August, 1992) is also about words - about the terminology likely to be most useful in conceptualizing the on-going transformation of South Africa's socio-economic structures - I regret particularly keenly that she will not be here to comment on it. As always when dealing with Ruth one would have hoped fervently to earn, if not her complete agreement, at least her respect for the argument made and the intention behind it. I suspect, too, she would have concurred that terminological concerns are not necessarily merely academic ones but can debouch, more or less helpfully, into the terrain of practice. In fact I myself sense that, for those of us who think of ourselves as socialists, such work is at present of especially pressing importance.

After all, many of our hopes and existing preconceptions have been badly battered by the collapse of 'actually-existing socialisms' and the apparently unchecked hegemony of an ever more ambitiously globalizing capitalism. At one level this can prove liberating; for example - whatever may be the final verdict on its various strengths and weaknesses - Joe Slovo's 'Has socialism failed?' suggests something of what can be accomplished as the incubus of 'frozen Marxism' begins to be shed. But in a context in which prior revolutionary experiments (now by and large defunct in any case) offer little positive inspiration and prevailing socialist theory only limited guidance there is a great deal more thinking that needs to be done to develop new ways of conceiving the modalities - at once socialist and realistic - of a radical restructuring of inherited socio-economic institutions.

Indeed the danger exists that the perceived setback for global revolution (taken together with the fact of global capitalism's undoubted strength) will suggest to many who are progressively-minded that only the mildest brand of reformism is 'realistically' possible. As Kagarlitsky has phrased it, 'if, back in 1969, revolution was the major theme of theoretical discussion on the Left, by the mid 1980s the question of reformism had moved to the forefront... [T]he current reformist myth is forcing the question of revolution out of ideological circulation' (1990:3). The current reformist myth? Read: the time-dishonoured social-democratic notion that a mere tinkering with capitalism can humanize its rapacious logic and maximize its ability to service human needs (or - to put the terms of that 'myth' more honestly - unlikely as the realization of such a hope may be, it is nonetheless the very most that can ever be expected!)

But does the simple juxtaposition of *revolution vs 'mere reformism'* really represent the full range of present possibilities, in South Africa or anywhere else? As we will see below, in some South African circles the debate about possible futures for the country is indeed being cast in terms of just such false dichotomies. When this happens a 'dialogue of the deaf' occurs that merely locks 'revolutionaries' and 'reformists' ever more tightly (and more self-righteously) into their own respective corners. But as will also be apparent there are other South African militants whose practice starts from different premises and whose activities give real content to the promise of a long-term socio-economic transformation of South Africa.

Such militants seek, at least implicitly, to avoid the twin dangers of, on the one hand, a romantic (and inevitably all too rhetorical) ultra-revolutionary approach and, on the other, collapse into a mild reformism that will do little to alter the balance of inherited class power and conservative/technocratic decision-making. Much has been accomplished in this respect, as we will see. Indeed, in many ways South Africans - notably those within the trade union movement - are in the vanguard of global efforts to forge a theory and practice relevant to the struggle for socialist renewal in the post-Cold War era. This article seeks itself to make some contribution to these efforts by further elaborating the notion of 'structural reform', a notion I first posited as being useful for understanding the South African situation in an article (Saul, 1991) in *New Left Review* to which I would refer the reader. I continue to feel that such a conceptualization can help make greater analytical sense of many of the

most noteworthy 'socialist' struggles that are actually taking place in contemporary South Africa. And in doing so it may also contribute to developing a vocabulary, a language, in terms of which those waging such struggles can become ever more self-conscious about the logic of their activities and ever more self-assured about pressing them forward. Words have meaning. Words are weapons.

### Structural reform: some theoretical considerations

Obviously, the fact that the grim and immediate struggle against the apartheid state and the apartheid system remains front and centre in South Africa renders the discussion of 'post-apartheid' socio-economic futures somewhat more abstract than it might otherwise be. At the same time, important battles are also underway on a number of policy fronts that already have begun to have profound implications for the balance of power and policy in a post-apartheid South Africa. As I have written elsewhere, there is currently a complex

simultaneity of two distinct moments - the negotiations moment, the post-apartheid moment - in the South African historical process, a simultaneity that both clouds analysis and compromises action. Thus, even as South Africans press forward to shape the post-apartheid dispensation, they are dragged back, brutally, into the present, where continuing stalemate over the modalities of 'democratization' has created space for the grimmest of barbarisms (1991:4).

Nonetheless, for purposes of this paper we must bracket off the current, vitally important struggle to force the pace of negotiations and counter the pull towards chaos in South Africa, focussing instead on the simultaneous efforts of many South African militants to shape a future beyond the interregnum that begins to redress South Africa's severe socio-economic inequalities. As hinted above, most of those who have this goal are conscious of the severe constraints that will hamper, in South Africa, any attempt to develop and to implement radical social and economic change: the increased power of capital, international and domestic, in an era of accelerated globalization and the absence of any strong counterweight to capital's global writ in the post-Cold War era, the technical, administrative and other constraints on the popular movement's capacities as it seeks to deepen its challenge to established power centres. Indeed, it is precisely because commitment to meaningful change is balanced by an acute awareness of such contextual factors that the South African Left, at its most relevant, has moved towards a project of 'structural reform'.

As I suggested in my earlier article, use of this concept means applying to South Africa a distinction delineated by Andre Gorz between a 'genuinely socialist policy of reforms [and] reformism of the neo-capitalist or "social-democratic" type' (1973:141).<sup>1</sup> I then identified two essential criteria for distinguishing 'structural reform' from mere 'reformism', the first being 'the insistence that any reform, to be structural, must not be comfortably self-contained (a mere "improvement"), but must, instead, be allowed self-consciously to implicate other "necessary" reforms that flow from it as part of an emerging project of structural transformation' (1991:5). In other words (and in contrast to Bernstein's 'the process is everything for me, and the "final aim of socialism" is nothing'), the popular movement-cum-party attempt-

ing a programme of structural reform must constantly articulate both to itself and to its broadest potential constituency the goal of structural transformation/socialism. It is this alone that can situate and make revolutionary sense of short-term struggles and achievements and forestall a situation in which these latter take on no more than the vulnerable half-life of free-standing, one-off ameliorations of some particularly raw attribute of otherwise ascendant capitalism.

Moreover, it is precisely such emerging self-consciousness about the long-term imperatives of transformation (and about the logic that must be seen to link the realization of any one advance to the need/possibility for a set of subsequent advances towards a transformative goal) that is also the necessary touchstone for realizing the second attribute of any 'structural reform'. For 'a structural reform cannot come from on high; instead it must root itself in popular initiatives in such a way as to leave a residue of further empowerment - in terms of growing enlightenment/class consciousness, in terms of organizational capacity - for the vast mass of the population, who thus strengthen themselves for further struggles, further victories' (Saul, 1991:5-6).

My initial proposal of this approach to transformative/socialist endeavour elicited some favourable response (Singh, 1992) but also sharp criticism - in a subsequent issue of *New Left Review* - from a militantly Left perspective - from Alex Callinicos (1992:105ff). The latter chose to see me advocating - this he saw as a mistake on my part, of course - 'structural reform' as 'a detour on, rather than an abandonment of, the road to revolution'. In fact, as I argued in reply, my claim was actually even bolder than that:

All the more reason, then, to insist that a strategy of structural reforms not be seen as being, at best, some mere 'detour'... Under many (if not most) contemporary circumstances, including South African circumstances, it may well be the road [to revolution] itself. For it suggests a model of socialist activity that can force the most unromantic reading of the odds against any very immediate transformation of existing capitalist circumstances and yet permit a definition of sites and modes of real struggle and a concretization of tactics and strategies that opens up the possibility of moving towards just such a transformation. Moreover, it promises to underscore the saliency of substantive issues (rather than vague revolutionary nostrums) in terms of which leaderships can most effectively be held to democratic account by their constituencies and in terms of which these very constituencies can become ever more conscious of their class interests - indeed, of their very 'classness' - not as some theoretical given but as the practical content of their own lives and public activities (1992:109ff).

Readers may wish to refer to this exchange which, in my judgement, finds Callinicos too often invoking the magic talisman of (a largely unspecified) 'mass struggle' to outrank all those with whom he disagrees. He thus evades, in the name of a militant 'revolutionism',<sup>2</sup> real questions about the complex and subtle politics necessary to wring progressive change from the difficult set of circumstances found in contemporary South Africa.<sup>3</sup> In developing further my thoughts as to what a

militant but realistic socialist politics might begin to look like I have, in fact, found much more enlightenment from a recent reading of Boris Kagarlitsky's intelligent volume, *The Dialectics of Change*.<sup>4</sup>

For Kagarlitsky does find the concept of 'structural reform' to be a suggestive one. He also manages to give this notion a firm and convincing pedigree within the Marxist tradition, rooting it in the first instance in Marx's own writings. He emphasizes, for example, 'the patently reformist themes of *Capital*' (that volume's emphasis on the importance of English factory legislation, for example), noting that 'Marx was convinced that they [reforms] prepare not only the revolution, but also socialism. In other words, for Marx, the value of reforms was not in that they undermined the old system - sometimes they even strengthen it - but in their creation of elements of the new system within the framework of the old society. This theme in Marx's theory has been completely ignored by revolutionaries and reformist social democracy alike'.<sup>5</sup>

The great strength of Kagarlitsky's approach, then, is to bind revolution and reform together as being, potentially, two mutually reinforcing preoccupations and processes; 'In and of itself, Marxism is neither a "revolutionary" nor an "evolutionary" theory. As a *theory of practice* Marxism derives from the alternation of evolutionary and revolutionary stages in history and crucially from their organic interconnection. This latter feature has been completely overlooked by both Right social-democrats and their left-wing critics' (1990:113).<sup>6</sup> Right and left? We noted earlier Kagarlitsky's suspicions, echoing Lenin's own, of ultra-leftist 'revolutionism' (see footnote 2, above). But he is also well aware that 'the right wing of the workers' movement' offers no very helpful alternative; 'the politics of inconsistent and indecisive reforms has led many parties to lose their socialist perspective', pushing, as he puts it, 'social democrats towards technocratic ideology, which has nothing in common with socialism' (1990: 113).<sup>7</sup> It is by denying the intellectual prison framed by such a polarization of positions that Kagarlitsky moves instead towards advocacy of 'revolutionary/radical reformism'. In doing so he also underscores the imaginative contribution of such thinkers as the (much underrated) French socialist Jaurès<sup>8</sup> to the identification of some fresh and promising possibilities within the Marxist tradition:

Alone among activists in the Second International, Jaurès and his supporters genuinely understood the depth and complexity of this problem. Alone among revolutionaries, Jaurès grasped the value of reformist work, proclaiming it necessary 'to take up the business of reform from the beginning and, through reform, to begin the business of revolution'. Alone among reformists in the International, Jaurès attempted to elaborate an entire offensive, socialist strategy for state power in the conditions of democracy. As the supporters of Jaurès put it; 'our weapon has two edges, one is the spirit of gradual reform, the other is revolution' (1990:35).<sup>9</sup>

Beyond Jaurès, Kagarlitsky sketches the importance to the development of a 'structural reform' tradition of such diverse voices as Italy's Palmiro Togliatti (with his project of 'reformism from below'), intellectuals linked to the Centre for Socialist

Research (CERES) in France, certain elements within Poland's Solidarity and, most significantly, militants (including Andre Gorz) grouped around France's Unified Socialist Party (PSU) in the 1960s and 1970s (1990:176).<sup>10</sup> The cumulative import of such thinking? On the one hand, 'in contemporary society the road to revolution lies only through reforms'. On the other, 'structural reforms must lead to a gradual rupture with the existing order and not rectify the "individual consequences of capitalism"'. In sum, 'the strategy of change adopted by the French socialists was designed to replace the very logic of society and not only in individual institutions'.

Not that such 'revolutionary reformists' are likely to be naive about the obstacles that confront their project. Certainly, even in the short run, capital has demonstrated that it has the means ('direct sabotage, an "investment strike", the export of capital and so on') to make things extremely difficult for a structurally reforming movement. Moreover, 'the closer the advocates of change get to the point which distinguishes revolution from reform, the more intense the social conflict becomes': 'Having upset the system's equilibrium, the changes destabilize the economy and jeopardize the government implementing them. The inadequacy of the reforms can be an argument in favour of new transformations, but they can also be used by supporters of the old order'. The movement must remain ready to force the pace of revolutionary change if circumstances permit, but halts and even retreats under pressure may also prove necessary from time to time. In the latter case, much will depend on how 'irreversible' the movement has managed to make the various reforms it has achieved up to that point - the key to an effective 'defensive strategy' in this respect being, not surprisingly, the extent to which consolidation of self-management and/or popular empowerment have been central to what has been accomplished.<sup>11</sup>

More generally this suggests the crucial requirement that a *mass movement* has succeeded in building the capacity to sustain itself and its sense of long-term, overall direction.<sup>12</sup> For Kagarlitsky, such a movement should extend 'beyond the bounds of political parties, (be) autonomous from their day-to-day leadership and not (be) subject to their tactical failures and party mistakes'; it should have become, in effect, a movement with sufficiently deep roots in society to be able to live to fight another day! The politics of 'structural reform' will be complex, then. And to sustain them 'neither moderation nor revolutionary slogans can be a substitute for strategy. A serious and profound search is required which is only now beginning'. The next section seeks to determine just how far this necessary search actually has progressed in South Africa itself.

### South Africa: conceptualizing change

In South Africa, as we know all too well, the road to a political democratization, narrowly defined, is proving to be a distinctly rocky one. Increasingly, a wide range of commentators (including many located somewhere to the left of the political spectrum) also cast severe doubts as to how far socioeconomic policy could move in a socialist direction even were constitutional issues to be resolved in a positive manner. For example, Bill Freund apparently embraces the perspective of a number of books on the economy which he is reviewing when, in a recent article, he states

that 'South Africa does not actually contain revolutionary possibilities at present'. He sees that as in part reflecting international realities, in part the fact that 'the old power in South Africa [is not] genuinely on the point of collapse or disappearance'.

A South African revolution could, therefore, only be accompanied by local devastation, with massive emigration of skilled people and capital flight, as well as in the teeth of international hostility. It would at best be a harsh, militantly policed 'barracks socialism'. Such a militarized socialism could organize a society with a high degree of equality but a low level of consumption and with few prospects for accumulation and development.

Freund's conclusion; 'The alternative, however unwelcome to advocates of class struggle, involves conciliating much of the bourgeoisie and giving the South African middle-class of all colours a way forward' (1992:85).

It is the generalization of such a mood that emboldens various local apostles of market liberalism (Don Caldwell, Louw and Kendall) to bombard the book-store shelves with their volumes in praise of unqualified, 'deracialized' free enterprise. Others speaking from within the leading circles of economic power in South Africa will acknowledge a little more readily the need to take positive action to redress the deep-seated socio-economic inequalities existing in South Africa. Even here, however, the goal of capital is to define these inequalities as a welfare problem (redistribution), rather than a production problem. And then there are those (Peter Moll and others associated with him, for example) who present themselves as speaking a more firmly 'radical' language, yet in calling for an only slightly more aggressive creaming off of surpluses from the private sector embrace a rather similar model of 'growth with redistribution' (Moll, 1990; also Moll, et al, 1991). Some useful insights can be found in the work of such writers, yet ultimately their writings, characterized by their pugnacious 'unwillingness to consider structural change', advance too narrow a view of 'the art of the possible' even for Bill Freund: 'the real limitation of Moll and his colleagues - through their modest and uncertain views on state intervention - is to take production and growth too much on business' terms. They are too ready... to confine themselves to fiddling about with what slack space may remain from improving tax policies or saving on military expenditure after making business happy' (1992:85).

However far Freund might himself want to push this point it is an important one, potentially a crucial wedge in the reinsertion back into the South African equation - via the route of 'structural reform' - of the very 'revolutionary possibilities' Freund tends to downgrade. Take note, once again, of a suggestive presentation of the relevant point by Kagarlitsky: 'While traditional social democratic reformism confined itself to changes in the sphere of distribution and indirect regulation of the economy, strategic revolutionary reform has to *affect the spheres of property and organization of production*' (Kagarlitsky: 1990). And bear in mind that this is not merely a debate amongst social analysts. Where, we might ask, would the ANC want to situate itself on the spectrum between, say, Moll and company on the one hand and Kagarlitsky on the other?

Unfortunately, it is not so very difficult to imagine what Kagarlitsky here describes

as 'traditional social democratic reformism' becoming the height of aspiration of the ANC itself. For the threat of a significant narrowing of the range of socio-economic options that some ANC leaders think to be open to a post-apartheid South Africa is very real. Pressures on the popular movement to indicate acceptance of a set of imperatives favoured by such worthies as Anglo-American and the IMF/World Bank (among many others) continue to intensify, for example. Is it a sign of the times that a crucial meeting with international businessmen in Davos, Switzerland, in early 1992 the ANC delegation (led by Mandela himself) was apparently found backpedalling rapidly on various progressive economic positions and emphasizing the importance of 'attracting foreign investment' - to the virtual exclusion of all other questions?<sup>13</sup> True, such emphases have been challenged within the ANC. Nonetheless, even leading ANC/SACP theorist Joe Slovo sometimes seems content - according to a recent news report - also to cede the responsibility for 'growth' to the private sector, with 'redistribution' then being the task of the government. 'We don't follow the dead cow theory', he is quoted as having said recently, 'describing it [the dead cow theory] as an economic policy to "kill, feast, gorge and then there's nothing left to milk"'.<sup>14</sup> Catchy enough, perhaps, but is this formulation ('growth with redistribution') really likely to assist the popular movement in conceiving effective ways to constrain the otherwise unencumbered dictate of capital?

In fact, Slovo's own position more often pushes past such limitations, especially when he is wearing his SACP rather than his ANC hat. While rejecting nationalization he vigorously defends the case for state intervention and certainly assigns his Party the role of ensuring that, in the 'inter-class line-up of forces, working class interests are not swamped, that the working class is organized as a powerful constituency and that the choices which are being debated for future development will be made in a way that will not prejudice the working class whom we claim to represent' (1991:12).<sup>15</sup> To be sure, the modalities of such state intervention as will ultimately prove to be necessary are not spelled out, and no more are the modalities of direct intervention by the popular classes that might actually serve to keep their interests front and centre. Those suspicious of the SACP's historical record of pseudo-vanguardist arrogance will want to hear more on these issues from the Party as the post-apartheid policy struggle unfolds.

Creativity from the Party in this respect is not impossible, of course. While some members criticize Slovo's emerging position from the quasi-Stalinist periphery, others - notably Rob Davies, writing in the *African Communist* (Davies: 1991) - have attempted to divine a 'realistic' economic strategy that also sustains momentum in the direction of structural transformation.<sup>16</sup> He acknowledges both the 'strengthened... hand of the free market lobby in our own national economic debate' and (more controversially) that 'the immediate post-apartheid period will be characterized by national-democratic rather than socialist construction'. Nonetheless, he underscores the fact that

We (socialists and communists) need urgently to develop a specifically socialist perspective in particular policy options and measures. Our party has long recognized that there is no Chinese wall between the stages through which any transformation must inevitably pass. The

kind of policy which emerges in the stage of national democratic construction will significantly affect the prospects of a socialist project in the future. We need therefore to become more active in identifying and struggling for policies that will be feasible under the concrete conditions likely to prevail immediately after liberation and which will both lead to immediate improvements in the lot of working people and lay a favourable base for the eventual transition to socialism. This requires a degree of clarity about the kind of socialist project we envisage (1991:39).

An argument is then presented that seeks to move away from the tendency to define socialization of the production process in terms that stretch beyond mere 'state ownership of the means of production'. Instead Davies discusses both the need for planning that will 'introduce a social direction into an economy which will continue to be characterized by commodity production' and for the introduction of a variety of collective production practices that might be encouraged in such a way as to alter, slowly but surely, 'the balance of power in favour of working people in an economy characterized by a variety of ownership forms' (1991:42).

There is promise here, and also in the work of Economic Trends (ET), a group of researchers (some of whom have themselves a great deal of direct trade union experience) closely linked to COSATU. The main concern of ET theorists focusses on the need for intervention by progressive forces in order to enforce an expansive growth strategy on capital that it could not be expected to adopt 'spontaneously'. As is well known, one key to their project has been to juxtapose the notion of 'growth through redistribution' to 'growth with redistribution' as one key to overcoming the visible crisis of the South African economy. This is an approach that seeks to place popular needs at the centre of the economic equation and looks for growth in the economy by reshaping production to meet those needs ('building materials, consumer durables, clothing and products produced in micro-enterprises' are prominently mentioned in this respect). Such theorists are by no means insensitive to the simultaneous requirement of an effective export strategy and some tough economic questions do arise as to how best to conceive projected sectoral balances and the like in such terms. For present purposes, however, the crucial fact is that (as Freund writes in contrasting the ET approach with that of Moll and his colleagues) ET 'insists on indicative planning that will reshape the orientation of the economy' (1992:85),<sup>17</sup> an approach that reinforces the need to constrain substantially capital's own prerogatives.

Perhaps rather less is said in recent ET writings about the imperative of expanding the democratic prerogatives of the popular classes vis-a-vis the power of capital as an issue in its own right. Indeed, in one of his most recent writings, ET coordinator David Lewis, writing with an ET colleague, Avril Joffe (Joffe and Lewis, 1992:31), down-plays the class contradictions that some would seem to be the chief motor of any attempt to narrow the writ of capital's freedom of choice and to overcome its irrationalities. They write that 'a recognition of the benefits of cooperation must surely take the place of the adversarialism characteristic of the relationship between labour and capital to date... (C)ollaborative relationships - between manufacturers,

companies and unions, the industry via employer federations and industrial policy makers - are an essential ingredient of any successful industrial policy'. But the answer to this is, surely, yes... and no. Lewis himself has written eloquently elsewhere of South African capitalism in ways that evoke class contradictions more centrally than class collaboration. Can one really hope to finesse the fact that such contradictions will also continue to cut across any new politics of industrial strategizing that may prove possible on the terrain of a more democratic South Africa? And isn't there a danger that presenting a project of growing democratic control over production merely in terms of collaboration may disarm more than it strengthens the popular classes, undermining their preparedness for the more pugnacious confrontations with capital that may well be required further down the road?

There is a paradox here, of course. Capital must feel its overall stake in the established system to be sufficiently secure to yield relatively gracefully to concessions extracted from it by the popular forces - until such times as such forces have marshalled their power to push the envelope of structural reform a little further. Can the popular movement conciliate capital adequately without at the same time demobilizing its own forces? Certainly, there are those within the trade union movement who want to test the limits of this paradox rather more assertively than the language of 'collaboration' would easily allow. Thus, for such militants the democratization of the labour-capital relationship is indeed necessary in order to overcome the irrationalities of capital-logic in South Africa and to reactivate growth and development by impacting upon economic 'restructuring'.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, such necessary democratization is also to be valued in its own right, as part of a process to 'genuinely empower the producers so that they have control over what they have produced'. In this way '[socialism] must deliver what social democracy cannot do' (Godongwana, 1992:23). It is this kind of thinking that comes closest of any in South Africa to representing an agenda of 'structural reform' and/or 'revolutionary reformism'.

For Enoch Godongwana, quoted here, makes no apologies for an approach to 'restructuring which is informed by a socialist perspective and which is characterized by working class politics and democratic practice and accountability of leadership'. Nor does he apologize to Alex Callinicos (whose views he specifically cites) for a struggle for socialism that is carried out across the terrain of 'negotiations', 'social contracts' and even 'trade-offs between contending forces' and 'is the product of methods of struggle that combine advances and - under certain circumstances - tactical retreats to make way for further advances' (1992:21). The prospect of engaging the class enemy in a measured and sustained manner does not unnerve Godongwana. For him what is critical 'is how that engagement takes place' (1992:23).<sup>19</sup>

It is in much the same spirit that Geoff Schreiner discusses the way in which unions have advanced into various national forums to begin to make demands that stretch beyond the wage bargain: 'there are good social contracts and bad ones, ones that work and ones that don't, ones that advance the interests of the ruling class and ones that assist in building workers' power and organization. We would be politically

irresponsible to miss out on the latter' (1991:35). And this, in turn, parallels considerations raised by one of the most astute of observers of South Africa's labour scene, Karl Von Holdt, in discussing various workers' participation schemes on the drawing boards in South Africa: 'Do such projects mean abandoning socialism for a reformist social democratic vision? Or are they steps on the long road of a democratic struggle for participatory socialism?'<sup>20</sup> Tough questions. Yet as long as such questions are on the agenda of the Left in South Africa the possibility of socialist transformation, rather than a merely corporatist cooptation of the trade union movement, will remain alive.

The assertive role of the trade union movement links to another dimension of the South Africa situation that is distinctly positive from the point of view of sustaining a revolutionary struggle there by reformist means. For the unions are merely the most prominent amongst a number of forces in 'civil society' whose projects can expand the array of pressures at play upon capital and the state to extract radical outcomes. This reality is, of course, the product of the particular process by which a broad mass democratic movement re-emerged in South Africa from the 1970s on, a movement very far from being reducible in its institutional expression to a single party/liberation movement. This process has also deposited an ideological legacy of considerable significance: the very prominence of the South African Left's firm emphasis on the crucial legitimacy of the claims of 'civil society' is itself testimony to this. Indeed, if an ever-emboldened sense of popular empowerment is a *sine qua non* of sustaining a project of structural reform, South Africa's recent history has given the country some real advantages in this regard.

Of course, one must be careful not to romanticize this outcome. Violence has permeated very deeply into South African society, not least amidst the decay of the social fabric - the pull towards 'barbarism' - spawned by the stalemate of the past few years, and this has probably negated some of the advantages referred to above and slowed the further consolidation of democratic attitudes and practices.<sup>21</sup> This is just one more way in which the post-apartheid future is in hock to the uncertainties of the transitional present. Beyond this, Adrienne Bird and Geoff Schreiner have recently pointed to a quite different kind of danger inherent in the way 'civil society' is currently articulating itself within South Africa. Is it possible that some elements within the camp of the popular classes are 'more equal' than others and that, in particular, the best-off, best-organized workers might themselves be tempted to buy into a position of relative privilege within the post-apartheid dispensation? 'In our view, corporatist arrangements (70/30 solutions) driven by union members together with organized (big) business and endorsed by a weak state hungry for political support, are a real danger for the future. Tripartite models will encourage these possibilities' (1992:28).<sup>22</sup> And in urging a 'multi-partite model' (both now and in the future) of on-going 'negotiations' over socio-economic matters they seek the emergence of more broadly-based approach to the representation of civil society: 'In this conception, civics, women's groups, associations of the unemployed and the aged, consumer and rural organizations, and so on would be guaranteed the right to participate in appropriate bodies on key aspects of state policy, together with the Big

Three' (1992:29).<sup>23</sup>

A useful warning. But the organized working-class must remain central to structural reform efforts, nonetheless. And, as we have already seen, there is a refreshing degree of self-consciousness about the role it has to play. Witness, for example, COSATU secretary-general Jay Naidoo's suggestion at the time of the dramatic anti-VAT stayaway of late-1991 that the stayaway had implications not merely for the existing white government; in his view, it should also be seen to imply a friendly reminder to any future ANC government of the workers' willingness to act dramatically to affect the substance of economic decision-making.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps this is as good a measure as any of just how far many South African revolutionaries have come from more statist definitions of socialism and development - no small achievement in light of what has happened elsewhere on the continent.

But it is scarcely the last word on the prospective role of party and state if 'revolutionary reform' is to be realized. Naidoo's sense of the need to keep a wary eye on the ANC does not contradict his equally bold assertion that 'the [ANC-COSATU] alliance is a very important vehicle for us to achieve our ends. The forces ranged against us are very powerful - big business, imperialism, a powerful state. We ourselves will need a powerful state orientated towards the working class - the ANC has to be strong'.<sup>25</sup> For if technocratically-inclined social democrats as well as recidivist Stalinists can easily overplay the extent to which state action is to be deemed the almost exclusive centre of 'progressive' activity, protagonists of 'civil society' must beware any underplaying of the importance of the state (and of the political forces that control the state).<sup>26</sup> Established centres of social power are most likely to yield to demands for significant change and to compromise their own most narrowly construed vested interests only if they feel pressure both from above and from below.

Thus for trade unionist Siphso Kubheka there is a need for a 'strong and democratic' ANC: 'This will allow the ANC to balance the demands of capital and the demands of labour, but at the same time take a firm position on restructuring the economy with a bias towards labour'. Not that the unions themselves can then avoid the necessity for hard battles against the employers in support of government programmes: 'The government alone would not be able to force employers to do what it wants.' Still, if his hopes materialize, Kubheka expects a 'march to a socialist order in the long term'.<sup>27</sup>

But how likely is the ANC, if, as and when it shoulders state power, to play this role in helping to squeeze capital and to realize - in creative interface with the forces of civil society - what could become, in effect, a structural reform agenda? This is too big a question to be tackled adequately here although we have already noted some reasons for concern in this respect. Certainly the pull of big capital on the ANC will continue to be considerable and many of the seductions of comfort and prestige that have sapped the energy of progressive political leaders elsewhere are already playing strongly upon the movement. There are also some good reasons - both economic and political (in terms of off-setting the predominance of big 'white' capital on the one hand and building a successful political alliance on the other) -

for the ANC to help advance the interests, within a 'mixed economy' strategy, of the black bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie (a point elaborated upon in Gelb: 1992).

Yet the difficulties of so doing while also advancing the socio-economic interests of the more impoverished popular classes will not be so easily papered over in the post-apartheid phase by invocation of 'national-democratic' imperatives as they once were. Certainly there are already some signs of meaningful struggle within the ANC over possible post-apartheid outcomes - these cast not only in class terms but also, importantly, in gender terms.<sup>28</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, the efforts of some ANC economists to give a radical twist to, precisely, such concepts as 'the mixed economy' do have promise of their own (1991:32ff). But can a leading political force which fails (at least to this point) to have anything like a 'structural reform' perspective clearly and overtly articulated to itself or to its mass following actually be expected to become the cutting-edge of 'revolutionary reformism'? Alternatively, can the pressures of the trade unions, the SACP and other elements within the mass democratic movement more broadly defined keep such a possibility alive, within and without the ANC, if the ANC (at its most narrowly defined) fails to move forward - and to the left? In short, even if the South African ambience seems one conducive, in many respects, to struggling for socialism in novel and potentially effective ways, the issue of the best political modalities for doing so is still very far from being resolved.

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In this paper we have begun to see that there are many voices in South Africa, from both Right and Left, who seek, for their own purposes, to suggest the choice of options open to the country to be absolute and starkly polarized: reformism vs revolution. It has also been argued that neither in Marxist theory nor in practice is there any reason for adopting such a Manichean view of socio-economic possibilities. It is true, as Stephen Gelb has recently suggested to me, that my own presentation of the logic of 'structural reform' could itself do more to analyze, for different sectors, how various concrete policy initiatives might have their full potential as structural, rather than 'merely reformist', reforms drawn out. This is a challenge I hope to take up in future research and writing.

What is important to affirm here, however, is the fact that important actors in South Africa have themselves refused to be intimidated by the apparent elegance of over-simplified dichotomies and are instead following the logic of their own practice towards promising theorizations of the 'structural reform' type. In doing so they enter into a more open and contested field of Left debate than is sometimes acknowledged and one from which they can hope to draw additional sustenance for their own activities. But the extent to which a commitment to the politics of 'revolutionary reformism' ('Marxism-Jaurèsism?') already defines the more or less explicit agenda of many of those engaged in South Africa's own 'great economic debate' suggests that South Africans can also expect to make their own important contribution to the renewal of socialist thinking that is necessary on a global scale.

## NOTES

1. As Gorz (1973:141) put the central point of his argument, 'If immediate socialism is not possible, neither is the achievement of reforms directly destructive of capitalism. [Yet] those who reject all lesser reforms on the grounds that they are merely reformist are in fact rejecting the whole possibility of a transitional strategy and of a process of transition to socialism'.
2. As Kagaritsky writes (1990:14), 'For Marxists, the word "reformism" is no longer the term of abuse it was at the turn of the century. History has all too sternly demonstrated that one should be more wary of the empty chatter of revolutionary phrases and demagogic promises. In the last analysis, "opportunists" have caused less damage than extremists. Lenin himself wrote in 1921 that "the greatest, perhaps the only danger to the genuine revolutionary is that of exaggerated revolutionism, ignoring the limits and conditions in which revolutionary methods are appropriate and can successfully be employed. True revolutionaries are most likely to come a cropper when they begin to write revolution with a capital R, to elevate "revolution" to something almost divine, to lose their heads, to lose the ability to reflect, weigh and ascertain in the coolest and most dispassionate manner." Untimely revolutionism, to use Lenin's term, is capable of inflicting (and has inflicted) major harm on the Left, particularly in periods of society's calm and peaceful development'.
3. Callimicos' strongest point is his fear that more subtle processes (eg various brands of negotiations) will contribute to the unhealthy bureaucratization of ostensibly progressive organizations. And some recent writing closer to the ground in South Africa does indeed suggest that even so internally democratic a trade union as COSATU is facing just such a challenge as, at the present moment, it becomes more active in various kinds of 'negotiations' on the national stage (see Bobby Marie, 'COSATU faces crisis: "Quick fix" methods and organizational contradictions' and related articles in a special issue of *South Africa Labour Bulletin*, 16(5) [May-June, 1992], entitled 'COSATU: gaining influence, losing power?'). Still, I see no reason why this should be deemed inevitable. In fact, the struggle within the popular movement to force its leadership to sustain the kind of tough bargaining stance that a transformative process implies is one of the most crucial things the politics of the transition must be about (see Saul, 1992).
4. I am grateful to Stephen Gelb for pointing out to me the potential importance of Kagaritsky's book (1990) to the development of my own analysis of the process of change in South Africa.
5. Kagaritsky does note that 'this theme' is 'also absent from Marx's and Engels' later works. It is indeed possible that after the first volume of *Capital* was published, Marx himself to some degree changed his point of view. The Paris commune and the revolutionary struggle on the Continent compelled him to take a more decisive stance; the seemingly imminent revolution rendered reform a less immediate problem' (1990:8). But this fact merely reinforces Kagaritsky's underlying premise; that, properly understood, revolution and reform are not necessarily mutually exclusive preoccupations, the shifting balance socialists must strike between them being strongly determined by context. His conclusion: 'We do not have the right to pass over Marx's reformist ideas'.
6. As Kagaritsky continues (1990:113), 'Not only Marxist theory but the most elementary logic demands different responses in different situations'.
7. As for Kagaritsky's own view of the costs of such a polarization: 'The trouble is not that Marxists have adopted the idea of a revolutionary transformation of the world, but that they have made it an absolute by drawing the conclusion that "genuine" changes are possible only on a revolutionary basis. There has arisen a particular moral doctrine according to which reformist politics merit disdain at best. This "revolutionary ethic" came into being, of course, long before the appearance of Marxism. As we have seen, Marx himself never adopted such positions. But, by an irony of fate, it is precisely people who consider themselves his followers who, in the twentieth century, have become the heralds of such principles. The practice of "opportunist reformists", which has indeed often been inclined towards compromise, has tended to confirm these ideas by reinforcing sterile "revolutionism" on the Left, which has degenerated into insurrectionary phrase-mongering' (1990:113).
8. Kagaritsky adds that 'the supremacy of the German social bureaucrats within the workers' movement at the turn of the century helped ensure that the Jauresists' practical and theoretical experiences remained substantially inaccessible to other parties' (1990:42).
9. Of course, as Kagaritsky then proceeds to emphasize, 'the starting point of Jaures' strategic concept, termed the "new method", was Engels' idea that, in conditions of freedom, the proletariat can struggle initially for share of power, and then the whole of that power, in order to become enabled to change existing laws in conformity with their own interests and requirements'. The democratic state, unlike other forms of power, does not permit the bourgeoisie's complete and undivided rule. This rule is limited by certain conditions, and the class essence of democracy therefore consists in a compromise between the contending forces. In a polemic with Right social democracy, Jaures said that, in French conditions, "class antagonism exists and develops within democracy and is subordinate to the conditions of the democratic regime. The struggle between the two opposing classes, between the two groups of interests, cannot assume an identical form, character and means in both a democratic republic and a despotic state. This is true and indispensable" (1990:35). In terms of the South African situation, this gloss on Jaures' point does help underscore the importance of current efforts to consolidate an achieved democratic dispensation - a crucial accomplishment both for helping, potentially, to preempt a further decline into social chaos and for opening up space for socialist agitation.
10. Of course, as Kagaritsky admits, 'The PSU's attempts to build a mass revolutionary-reformist

party fell through'. And we all know what has happened to Mitterand, who was apparently much influenced by the 'structural reform' ideas of CERES at a certain stage of his career. However, the PSU's failure (or indeed Mitterand's) 'does not mean that it is impossible in general to create such an organization'.

11. Important not least, in Kagarlitsky's estimation, because 'the efficacy of strategic defense determines the possibility of a new offensive and tasks' in some subsequent round (1990:150).
12. The failure by Mitterand to take seriously this requirement is seen by Kagarlitsky to be one of the two chief reasons for the evaporation of any Left content from his political project once in power (1990:150): 'The French Socialists' second serious error lay precisely in their underestimation of the masses' spontaneous support and their desire to carry out everything "from above" through the channels of Party and State. Government figures themselves recognized that "having seized the fortress of power, the Left raised the drawbridge and locked themselves in". (Their first/chief mistake? Not successfully neutralizing the pressure of international capital: 'They made no efforts to build a united front with other left-wing governments in the West and elaborate an international policy which would have reinforced reformist tendencies in neighbouring countries'. No small task, of course). Daniel Singer's magisterial volume on the Mitterand experience, *Is Socialism Doomed?*, is extremely suggestive in dealing with similar themes.
13. See the articles 'Mandela returns to continuing dispute on ANC economic policy' and 'ANC team at Davos summit finds international business critical of policy' in *Southscan*, 7(6) (February 14, 1992).
14. See the article 'No to "dead cow theory"' in *Southscan*, 7(13) (April 3, 1992).
15. See also Stovo's interview in Coleman (1991).
16. Of course, there is also a strand of Left discourse inside the country that does tend to collapse - much like the position of Callinicos (1992) - into a kind of well-intentioned but not very immediately relevant 'revolutionism', with an all too easy urging of some kind of maximalist confrontation with capital at its core. See, as examples, Kitson (1991) and Habib (1991). Habib, a member of South Africa's Workers' Organization for Socialist Action (WOSA), concludes that, contrary to present SACP practice, 'the vision of the classless society can only truly be brought into realization if our theories, strategies and tactics are derived from the rich tradition of authentic Marxism-Leninism' (1991:79). The case for 'Marxism-Jaurèsism' is least likely to make advances in such circles.
17. Freund (1992:85) emphasizes, in this connection, the possible need to '(break) up the stranglehold of conglomerates on investment funds'.
18. Enoch Godongwana (1992:23) defines 'restructuring' (quoting Alec Erwin) as 'significant and discernible changes in the pattern of output, input, cost structures, employment, employment practices and industrial relations, markets and production methods'.
19. As Godongwana, a NUMSA Regional Secretary, concludes his article (1992:23), 'Callinicos and others who hold similar views, may argue that this approach does not have any historical precedent but the same could be said for their approach'.
20. Von Holdt (1992a:65). See also the interview of related importance with NUM's Marcel Golding and entitled, significantly, 'Productivity: "participating to achieve control"', *SALB*, 16(2) (October/November, 1991); and, for a particularly helpful overview of debates within the trade union movement regarding alternative strategic perspectives, Von Holdt (1992b).
21. On some of the costs of this stalemate - itself a product of such diverse factors as De Klerk's footdragging, Buthelezi's ruthlessness and the ANC's own inability to deliver the coup de grace - see, *inter alia*, Saul (1991) and also the chilling description of the present volatile state of South African youth in Bundy (1992).
22. As Bird and Schreiner go on to note, 'In arguing this, we accept that COSATU has historically, in the absence of the major political parties, represented the interests of working people. But this tradition does not guarantee that this line of march will continue into the future' (1992:28).
23. Bird and Schreiner also discuss usefully some of the things that might be done to strengthen the hand of such sectors, 'precisely the weakest, the poorest and most marginalized in society [who] experience the most difficulty in developing stable national organizations' (1992:29).
24. As Naidoo said in one interview (1992), 'COSATU has always been a political player and intends to remain a political player even if we have an ANC government in power'.
25. As Naidoo adds (quoted in Von Holdt, 1991:26), 'The working class in Europe and in the Soviet Union had a history of militancy and revolutionary struggle, and that has been lost. Our 30,000 shop stewards could become trapped in bureaucracy and inaction. Our tradition of organization and struggle could be immobilized. We are placing our hopes in the organizations of civil society - but a strong state would be an enormous help. The state defines the ways in which civil society is empowered.'
26. A critique along these lines of Left preoccupations with the claims of 'civil society' forms the core of a recent article by Blade Nzimande and Mpume Sikhosana (1992), but the article makes its own case much too easy for itself by caricaturing 'pluralism' and invoking the alternative model of a possible revolutionary society in the making as an unlikely form of 'fused group'. More useful in identifying some of the strengths and weaknesses of recent invocations of civil society in South Africa - but also the limits, utility, even grave dangers, of the alternative brand of vanguardist formulations a la Nzimande and Sikhosana - is Fine (nd).
27. Both Naidoo and Kubheka as quoted in this paragraph are cited from an extremely helpful article - one of many such that he has penned in recent years - by *SALB* editor, Karl von Holdt (1991). Indeed, more generally, *SALB* has become a particularly important forum for reflecting the

innovative socialist thinking that is at play in present-day South Africa.

28. See, for example, a sharp and very concrete critique, written from a gender-sensitive perspective, of even the most progressive ANC economic advance planning exercise to be found in the paper 'Gender and Economic Policy in a Democratic South Africa' (Development and Practice Research Group, Working Paper 21, Faculty of Technology, Open University), written, with Maureen MacIntosh and Doreen Massey, by leading ANC cadre Frene Ginwala (1991). More generally, see, *inter alia*, the various articles (by Pat Horn, Shireen Hassim and others) in recent issues of *Transformation and Agenda*.

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