

Reconstruction or Transformation

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It is an honour to present the Richard Turner memorial lecture. It is at the same time a daunting honour, as we know that his murderers, and the murderers of so many wonderful people, still stalk the streets and will continue to *do* so because of lapses, compromises, sunset clauses and the cruel necessity that we *had* to 'do so'. These compromises against our better sense are justified as 'means' toward a firmer democratic 'end'. And we have to buckle to this fate, as once more an 'end' has come to justify the 'means' to get there, however polluted the 'means' might be.

We are dealing today with the legacy of a moral philosopher whose craft worked itself around the themes of emancipation, an inheritance which demands of us to speak up. We have to argue against the contamination of the 'means', the contamination of our 'methods' of struggle, of transition, in the *interests* of emancipation. And especially in this province of KwaZulu-Natal where life has been cheapened, and its cheapening has been bandied around as a cultural feature, a source of pride for the majority, we have to affirm that there are also moral traditions that need celebration and extension: there is a moral tradition linking the legacy of Gandhi, Luthuli, Turner, Biko, the post-1970s trade union initiatives, cultural and women's organisations and many more, where the 'means' of organisation, mobilisation, struggle had to be moral in form and content. The way you organised, struggled and fought, the way you related to people, the way you dealt with crises and with the 'other' was *prefiguring* in its moral substance a society that was to come.

Whether one traces Gandhi's *ashrams* or the *satyagraha* campaigns, non-violent defiance, rural cooperatives, democratic shop-steward structures, African communalism, ubuntu, or feminist networks, each one defined a space *despite* forms of domination and authority around them, a space against the 'beast'. Each one cultivated a dialectical relationship between the ends and the means, with the one forming the other in thought and action.

That is why among all the Marxist revivals in the late 1970s, it was Gramsci's legacy (Gramsci 1971) that cut the deepest. His argument

for a 'hegemonic movement', a movement organised through a party of organic thinkers which provided society with intellectual and moral leadership, which, in turn, provided society with a vision and led by example from the trenches and the roads to get there, which was creative in shaping a 'historic bloc' which knew what it needed and needed what it knew, was attractive.

I shall argue that more than ever in our history we need a combination of social movements that are rooted in significant moral formations which will nudge our 'reconstruction' period into a meaningful 'transformation'. Such a movement, such a 'historic bloc', needs a voice and a praxis that moves beyond instrumentalism and the condescension of old and new power elites.

I

Ours has been a democratic revolution, a revolution which must rank as one of the most profound on the scales of modern history. The abolition of apartheid and its institutions has been a leap into the annals of civilisation. And yet, to a social analyst interested in 'delivery' and 'governance', it has been a nightmare. It is an accommodation with the power elites of last year's oppression. Joe Slovo's sunset clauses which got us out of the negotiation impasse and the guns of a counter-revolution, however criticised, were a moment of strategic genius. Their result, this limp thing we call the GNU, has been a frustrating experience – social policies are watered down, delivery is slow and Nelson Mandela seems to be reduced to a benign patriarch who quiets down his children's stifled aspirations. Within the broader family of nations, we seem to be the reluctant allies of a neo-liberal economic agenda.

At the same time, we cannot but notice that the constitution that is being put into place and some of the laws that are emerging from parliament are decisively libertarian.

Constitutionally and legislatively our country resonates from the success of a radical democratic impulse that was schooled in the anti-apartheid campaigns of the last twenty years. The rights to private property and to the exploitation of other people have been limited by a variety of other rights and strictures: of shelter, of children, of workers, of women, of the social good. Some of the best thinking of a left tradition in gender, law, labour, health and so on is creating a society of *civic virtue*, despite the governmental impasse. These are tentative gains, and they are counted because a democratic left exercised a

tremendous influence in the creation of an anti-apartheid intellectual and professional middle class.

Political scientists of the future will be turning to this period to find a word or a concept to denote the role of our state and within that, the role that Mandela has been playing in keeping the factional interests in the ruling power blocs together, disciplined and on 'track'; how the struggles within the ANC between radical democrats and bourgeois nationalists do not translate into an open bruising; and finally, how the international giants and the thousands of experts, money-grabbers and diabolical exploiters are tightening their grip and purpose.

In a more popular vein, the African National Congress in Government is being described in three ways: as a 'prisoner' of the settlement, as a 'sell-out' to dominant interests, or simply as incompetent and inexperienced. At best, it can be argued that it involves various gradations of the three. Nevertheless, whether it is seen as a prisoner or a 'sell-out', there is nothing that a robust movement in civil society will not reveal with swift precision. Indeed, I do believe that elements of the three states of the African National Congress's existence *are* active and that the radical democratic core of the movement is caught, cornered and neutralised. Without a movement rooted in everyday life, the future will be defined by internal jacqueries, intrigues, cheque-books and expense accounts, within the state apparatus.

If the need of a social movement is necessitated by the 'stuckness' in governance, it is also necessitated by the anarchic explosions on the ground, the babblings of marginalised groups, the gung-ho machismo and chauvinism of imaginary combatants. The frustrated outpourings of ordinary people need a vision and a reconfiguration of their grievances into a sustained structure of demands and challenges.

It is precisely at the level of vision and the ability to consolidate itself in a serious way that a 'left' in South Africa is becoming rather inconsequential; even before the elections, Moses Mayekiso emphasised that there was a 'lack of will on the left', and added that it was 'in disarray ... in tatters' (Mayekiso 1993). Such a state of affairs would have the most devastating implications for the labour movement, he continued, and its capacity to shift South African society away from exploitation, domination and fear.

His voice has joined the chorus of many grassroots intellectuals of the labour movement who have been lamenting the collapse of a left vision at this decisive moment in the country. The voices are heard everywhere these days: the South African Communist Party's Jeremy Cronin urged that our 'fast-fracturing working class' needed

to rediscover its direction. Furthermore, Eddie Webster, in a previous Turner memorial lecture (Webster 1993), pointed to the lack of moral vision in labour's project alongside its undoubted negotiating and incremental powers. 'We did pour out in the streets over the Labour Bill', added Elias Banda of SACTWU recently, 'in our thousands, in fact thirty thousand and we marched. But where are we marching to?' (*South African Labour Bulletin*, Workshop, 1995). Indeed, where?

Gramsci argued eloquently that the struggle for real democracy and socialism had to be conducted on many fronts - from the classroom to the mine, from the street to the church. It therefore necessitated a 'modern prince', a 'movement', a political organisation of the working class as mentioned above, that was to exercise moral and intellectual leadership in all these struggles. His 'modern prince' had both power and vision, it was a lion and a fox.

Here, the process will have to happen 'the other way around': our unique conditions and our context, our history and our lack of vision necessitate a process that must bring together a 'historic power bloc', animated by a variety of confused and competing visions. There is no beacon leading from the democratisation of the political process to economic democracy, rather many torches waving wildly in the air. There is no mechanism of grouping the torches into a beam.

Let me explain: we can distinguish usually between a 'practical consciousness' and 'discursive vision'. The first, born in struggle and shaped by grassroots intellectuals, creates survival strategies and a sense of public class knowledge among ordinary people, organised workers and communities. This consciousness is vibrant in South Africa among shop-stewards and within social movement leaderships in black communities. It presents serious practical and moral alternatives to the existing mess of life's conditions.

The second, the 'discursive vision', is a product of more than the experience and traditions of everyday struggle - it comes from an attempt to understand the sources of exploitation and oppression; it involves the contributions of science and philosophy; it involves the experiences of other societies; it translates the experiences of 'practical consciousness' into broad socio-economic directions. It directs the availability of social power into paths, strategies and policies for greater freedom.

At the moment, our capacity to articulate such a 'discursive vision' has been numbed. The mechanism through which we arrive at it has not been produced.

The closest to such a 'mechanism' would have been the South African Communist Party, whose energy and growth has been remarkable since its unbanning. Indeed, Hani's charismatic leadership had managed to weave together a growing and diverse party: old-time Stalinists co-existed with post-Fordist intellectuals, grassroots democrats with Cabal-like vanguardists, radicalised youth with feminists. However exciting its diversity, it has at the moment no independent programme to steer and create a social movement beyond formal democracy or to provide it with its new progressive social 'charter'. Its recognition of the necessity of political pluralism (Slovo 1990) makes it one of the major forces, but not the one and only. Unlike other political organisations of the left, like WOSA, the Independent Socialists, and the centre-left AZAPO and PAC, it has, together with non-party socialists within the ANC, a major political presence at the grassroots.

Another source of 'discursive visions' was the broader intellectual left. The 'left' was always an amorphous and competing body of individuals, groups and associations. In the early 1970s it was made up of an endangered species of intellectuals – black consciousness thinkers, white quasi-socialists, radicalised clergy, incarcerated politicians and trade unionists. The rise of social movements in the next decade and the rise of academic Marxism helped create the climate for progressive ideas. The collapse of certainty after the Eastern bloc melted its boundaries to the West and the growth of postmodern passions has diminished its size. The unbanning of political organisations, the ugliness of violence and the commitments struggles started demanding have sent most of the others onto professional paths. Last year's radical is this year's professional consultant or human resource manager.

If the 'left' constituted all those who in thought or deed fought for and alongside the 'powerless' – the exploited, the oppressed, the damaged – so that exploitation, oppression and brutality disappeared, then the left in South Africa has more or less vanished.

Of course the SACP, in its argument for a two-stage revolution, expected that the democratic forms of the self-organised masses, the 'organs of people's power', would be the ushers of the new phase of transformations leading to socialism. These exemplars of the democracy of councils, of soviets, were to prefigure the socialism desired by the masses. But the counter-revolution has turned all these 'organs' into militarised enclaves and disciplinary institutions. Especially in KwaZulu-Natal, with the violence unleashed on democratic institutions, these have turned too into armed arsenals. They have ceased

being centres for democracy and hegemony, but have become insurrectionary points, unsuited for a democratic dispensation.

For its part, the African National Congress has delivered its historic promise: to create a democratic country which, however distant from the principles of the Freedom Charter it finds itself at the moment, will be delivering a far-reaching constitutional framework. The RDP was a programme that *added* onto the democratic promise *another* one: the socio-economic transformation of society. The impetus for the RDP came from *within* the alliance, pioneered by the Congress of South African Trade Unions and later the civics.

For COSATU, what was termed a reconstruction accord in 1993 was a dual programme: it was an attempt to respond to the crises that were forcing its members and its affiliates to grope about defensively and to make sure that the transition did not get stuck in a formal democracy without substance. This was seen to be also its lever for entering into a reconstruction accord with the first democratic government of the country.

After a careful analysis of its capacity at that juncture, it pledged itself to fight for:

- (1) a strong democratic government to rebuild the country for all the people;
- (2) a programme to provide jobs;
- (3) a new education system and a restructuring of its vocational and skills training;
- (4) a war against poverty to meet everyone's basic needs;
- (5) an incessant campaign for 'rights for all': equal rights for women, trade union rights for the excluded, and basic socio-economic rights for all.

This 'programme' (and the campaigns around it) was expected to consolidate COSATU's political alliance for democracy with the ANC and the SACP and to deepen the alliance's democratic demands for redistribution and economic democracy. Second, it was to begin forging a poor people's movement around its concrete demands, reaching out to sectors that were far beyond its own boundaries. Such a social movement held together by a new 'social charter' never materialised. Everyone got caught by the election fever, by creating a new government and thereafter by lobbying for empowerment.

What emerged rather was the RDP (ANC, et al. 1994), a more encompassing document than the original COSATU one which

became the Alliance's socio-economic manifesto and banner. After the election, the RDP became a Government of National Unity developmental framework. By 1994 it had become a Ministerial Budgeting Programme.

II

The RDP as it has been injected into the state's veins has become a tremendous platform of opportunity and opportunism, of courage and confusion.

There is first the need, as I have argued before (Sitas 1994), to create the Delivery Systems. This involves a kind of statecraft that has never been tried out here before. We have been used to a kind of government that centralised everything so that it could exclude and block; it was never a government that serviced or cared.

The first precondition for delivery was the transformation of the kind of state that emerged through apartheid's last decade: that centralised, opaque Moloch, with its satellite wings in the homelands. The new paradigm shift from a bureaucracy designed to exclude and control to a 'facilitating' state working in tandem with civil society presupposed an organisational revolution. This is not a process understood by the Harvards, Oxfords or centres of political governance in the late bourgeois world.

At the dress rehearsal of the RDP orchestra, the honourable comrade Naidoo would be told that its performance was quite unproductive and costly: the musicians took too many breaks, some sections played too slowly, there were too many solos and anyway, he could play the same tune by himself on a squashbox, so why the fuss? (See Sitas 1994.)

The talk of 'lean, effective, governance', the postmodern version of Thatcherism, means little else and whatever it might mean, it *cuts*.

Nevertheless, the delivery of the RDP is faced with at least four internal dangers:

- (1) The sabotage of its coherence by people who have a vested interest in its failure. Such people will use the enormous difficulties in its coordination as fertile ground to cultivate its collapse.
- (2) The clipping of its wings by bogus fiscal constraints.
- (3) The distortion of its goals by a world filled with useless experts of 'reconstruction' and 'development'. Usually offered to us at

great expense by experts who have never been challenged by the fact that there is no single example of success that they could quote. Of course there is our own local breed of experts whose track record involves Dimbaza, Limehill, Inanda, Winterveld and so on. What they all have in common is expensive habits. Distortion can also follow by regional governments, local authorities, chiefs and capitalists doing exactly their own version of the RDP, each with its own consequences.

- (4) The wastage of most of its funds by, among others, provincial bureaucratic gravy trains, consultants, NGOs with the 'right' connections but their own agendas, shacklords and traditional authorities, lawyers and accountants. But the statecraft needed internally demands an organisational revolution, ending our isolation and becoming a state amongst states, an exemplar and supporter of democratic initiatives, and taking seriously the responsibility that our transition has had profound international effects. We are signposted as a way out of Afropessimism, as a hope for democratic movements everywhere, as the magnet which will make Ethiopia, Nigeria, Zaire, Africa's most populous giants, transform; which will breathe development in the SADCC, which will become the anchor for a progressive Indian Ocean economic zone; which, through its embassies, will entertain fewer tinpot generals, but will use the funds to help development, fight rural poverty, help democratic trade unions and preach peace.

Indeed, the transformation of governance is the most crucial of the RDP's integrated and coordinated approaches, alongside restructuring the economy, developing our human resources and, most importantly, meeting basic needs.

No one can underestimate the difficulties of the task at hand. Redistribution is unthinkable without economic growth, and economic growth *presupposes* the development of our human resources; and all three depend on a new kind of state which can facilitate developments. In this light, there is a need for coordination, cooperation and decisiveness never experienced before.

To deliver a qualitatively new way of doing things is a major undertaking. And as everyone knows, it is no secret: the RDP delivery is faltering.

But the RDP is not only a problem of DELIVERY! It is also a problem of 'reception'. The RDP is neither a 'thing' nor a truckload

of 'things'. The RDP cannot just deliver 'goods': a house here, an electrical pole there, a plough here, a sprinkler there. It has to work within a bolder framework. It has to deliver those 'goods' and those 'opportunities' to people who relate to each other in their own ways and within their own aspirations. As every migrant worker (man or woman) knows, each household is also a way of life, a meaning, an element of culture.

The independent voice of these reception points has to be heard. Their full participation must be encouraged and sought; their right to differ and demand different things must be respected. Systems of patronage and favouritism must be avoided. And, in a region where such community relationships have been torn up through violence, they have to be emotionally re-mended.

We have come full circle. Either one accepts that the 'ground', the 'grassroots', are going to organise themselves into reception points, which will happen spontaneously (and they will; as soon as any resource is about to be distributed, it will gather around it layers and layers of reception points), but at the same time it will have no answers to a series of power blocs and patronage systems that will predominate in each area. Those with prior resources will be able to be represented or represent themselves, those without will be marginalised.

The false alternative is to juxtapose to the state and its delivery systems the NGOs as the 'voice' of civil society. Despite their experience, quality and commitment, NGOs can only be an extension of 'delivery', partners with the state, quality controllers, trainers, but no more. Although they are a vibrant aspect of civil society, they cannot stand for civil society itself.

Civil society has always been an imprecise concept: its 'civility' masks the facts of power, of private property, of control, of the vicious exclusion and inclusion mechanisms of status groups, of shacklords, of warlords. We need to distinguish between civil-society-based movements and *movements of civic virtue*. Whereas all social movements challenge the institutional and/or class order of a society, movements of civic virtue are based on the cooperative interaction of people within free associations, governed by norms of reciprocity and forms of 'undistorted communication'. Of the former we had and have plenty; of the latter, we do not have much at all.

Rick Turner insisted in the 1970s that the labour movement was the epicentre for a movement of emancipation. Those exploited and colonised were to create the organised power and the vision for a participatory democracy. In *The Eye of the Needle* and in essays attrib-

uted to others during his banning period (like Foszia Fisher, Bhekisisa Nxasana and so on), he argued that the black working class was beginning to develop the class consciousness that desired an alternative to capitalism.

Since the 1970s, we have learnt to be more circumspect about the theoretical claim. We learnt that labour was not the only humanising, anthropogenetic activity, and that its expenditure and power, however central, was not definitive in and by itself of our identities. Furthermore, we have learnt that however important industrial production was as a locus of power and self-activity, a project of emancipation and liberation involved spheres of economic and social life broader than Marx (and, for that matter, Turner) ever conceived. We also have learnt that cultural formations, identities and (to steal from Raymond Williams) 'structures of feeling' (Williams 1958) were not reducible to class and its structurings.

We also learnt:

- (1) That domination and power were not only embedded in the institutions of state and industry, but they were dispersed throughout the institutions of society, each with its own administrative, discursive, gendered and interpersonal regimes.
- (2) That households, kinship networks and communal spaces were central areas of domination, redefinition and struggle.
- (3) That 'individuation', the 'personal', the 'particular' were not the preserve of capitalist modernity; the rich troves of tradition, ethnicity and belief marking the landscapes of Southern Africa were as constitutive of individuality.
- (4) That a politics of liberation and the unity it demanded were not only about class, class alliances, race or non-racialism, but a more polyvalent and multi-centred unity. It would be about neither the concentrated will of a dictatorship of the proletariat, nor a redrafting of civil society from the centres of the capitalist world to the peripheries. Despite the above, labour's emancipation was and remains *central* to all other freedoms in this 'multi-centred' new world. And in South Africa, where labour unions have been the most democratic organisations in the country, there is no escape. It is important to consolidate a social movement around the most organised sectors of the population. It is imperative that this become the foundation of a broader social charter which binds all formations that can see themselves forming part of a poor people's movement. Here

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the experience and prowess of shop-steward leaderships and their 'practical consciousness' will be fundamental.

Two years ago I attempted in *Etopia: a Week in the Life of a Worker in the Year 2020*, to paint the picture for a democratic economy, co-orchestrated by ordinary workers in a futuristic novella which could have raised some of the debates around the form and content of the 'new' we could demand in our lifetime. It generated some discussion in KwaZulu-Natal, but it could not stand as a substitute for trade unionists' priorities in trying to get onto the local government electoral lists.

It is imperative for COSATU, NACTU, community organisations and other progressive organisations to bring together forums where a broader social vision can be negotiated through their respective programmes of action. It is important, too, to bring together grassroots, organic and bookish intellectuals to start the fusing and extrusion of ideas for our future. We need to know what freedoms are there to be shared by all, what cultural diversity for some and which rights for whom. We need the principles and practices that are going to guide policy and development, and we need a substantive intervention to begin addressing the RDP promises.

The constituencies that are most likely to respond would also include women's organisations, rural forums and peasant assemblies, cultural organisations, civics, cooperatives, church groups, burial societies, informal traders and hawkers, teachers' and nurses' unions, and so on.

Alongside the above, though, we also need a Peace Movement. We have had enough of peace committees, peace structures and the fact that 'peace' is a strategic objective rather than a principle covering individual and social rights. Our region, militarised, torn by violence, intolerance and authoritarianism, needs a challenge; our country, caught in its new statehood with its guns and combat boats and a thriving trade in means of destruction, 'means of exterminism' in the words of Edward Thompson (Thompson 1982), needs re-direction; our region, trashed by wars conducted in our white self-interest, needs demilitarisation; the growing tribalism and violence throughout the continent needs contestation. Whether its sensibility flows from materialist concerns, like mine: that our sensuous passage on earth is the only worth we have, so anything that limits, constrains, destroys or thwarts life is inhuman; whether it comes from a Zulu humanist like Mazisi Kunene, that nobody has the right to destroy the 'potential' in our human life force and that our task is to enhance it; whether it

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comes from Turner's Moslem humanism or Christianity, the point is that without a praxis that challenges the abomination around us, we shall be left with the ruins and their architects.

Of equal value would be a vigorous cultural movement -the self-expression and creative energy in ordinary people cannot be commandeered through a state or through a few Arts Foundations in civil society. At the moment we are caught between the non-delivery of resources *and* the monopolisation of their access by either a bourgeois project in civil society or by strands of ethnic nationalism. For any genuine democrat, the areas of self-expression and cultural significance cannot be abandoned, nor can a communal vision which animated all progressive thinking.

Lastly, there is an urgent need for a movement for gender equality led by women, which straddles the countryside, the margins of the cities and urban homesteads. Made up of the hundreds of fragmentary associations, committees, cooperatives, self-help projects and sectors within formal organisations, this would bring cooperation, reorganisation and development, and would create the institutions necessary for the realisation of some of the constitutional gains.

Ours is a point of no return, before the future will be shaped by others who know how to frame it - the international community, the ruling classes, new modernising elites and corporate capital. Either what (in the words of Mayekiso) is in 'tatters' gets swept into the rubbish bin of history, or this conflicting and myopic cluster called a democratic left finds the lens and its horizon. We need a lot of optimism of the will in this era of the absence of our mind.

It is to the criss-crossing of such movements' activities that 'reception points' of the Reconstruction and Development Programme will have to turn for support, coordination and participation. The instinct of many of us is to 'lobby', to hang around the cold corridors of power and gesticulate - 'remember me? - dear Minister, dear DG?' - in the hope that the grassroots will be served. Our instinct is reinforced by the international funding agencies that tell us to do so, because now their priority is the support of the 'state'. At the same time I am not arguing for the simplistic view that civil society has to be in opposition to the state and that movements in civil society will perforce be conflictual: rather, what is being said here is that social movements will be sometimes *against* the state, sometimes *with* the state but *always* with their constituency.

The definition of this historic 'constituency', this historic bloc based on a new-found democratic core, based on normative founda-

CULTURE

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tions of interaction and equality, based on the need of ordinary people not only to eat and survive, but to live rewarding lives, is a major intellectual and practical task.

The reconstruction and development programme has been criticised by Sam Nolutshungu (1995) in his keynote address at the S.A. Sociological Association's conference this year. He argued that the vocabulary imported from post-Civil War America and post-World War II Europe distorted our understanding of how different our conditions were. He furthermore inveighed against its gross downplaying of racial and class inequalities. What he did not articulate was that ours was a self-conscious borrowing from the World Bank – a language borrowed in order to create a breathing space for our own initiatives, another 'means' to an end.

In juxtaposing 'transformation' to 'reconstruction', one is not demanding a different, purer, more authentic language. The juxtaposition is intended to open up a critical space for new practices to think themselves out, new initiatives to develop, new dialectical contradictions to emerge – we owe it to the legacy of Richard Turner never to stop thinking and doing, against the grain, indeed sometimes, *despite* the grain.

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