THE DEMOCRATISATION OF SOUTH AFRICA: TRANSITION THEORY TESTED[1]

David Ginsburg

Introduction

Some two years have elapsed since the first-ever elections based on universal adult suffrage were held in South Africa. During this period, the institutional forms, content and trajectory of the democratisation process have been sufficiently defined to again permit comparison with transitions from authoritarian rule to democracy that occurred in Latin America and Central Europe in the late-1980s. In particular, the political contours of South Africa's 'new' society are now sharply enough in focus for us to assess whether 'transition theory', as it is loosely referred to, can shed light on experiences here and so provide a broader context in which to situate and explain past, present and future outcomes in the struggle to forge a new political order.

In essence, much of transition theory is the product of reflection upon, and abstraction from, the historically disparate paths to democracy followed in Central Europe and Latin America. It is constituted by a broad consensus amongst a number of theorists, including the likes of Przeworski, Schmitter, Diamond, Di Palma, Adler and Webster, among others, about the reasons for the demise of undemocratic regimes, the forces that propel and shape transitions, and the nature of the new political systems that supplant authoritarian rule. Moreover, many of these theorists are united by a common ideology usually reflected in their notions of what kind of democracy should be aspired to by those seeking a more equitable and just society. Indeed, we *will* argue that it is precisely its marked tendency to endorse a particular, bourgeois, version of democracy, that renders transition theory most susceptible to criticism.

For present purposes, however, we will attempt to identify those central tenets of the theory that do appear to illuminate events unfolding in this country; with special emphasis on the role of the labour movement in social reconstruction.

Transition Theory

At the heart of transition theory is the old truism that those who rule authoritarian societies do not voluntarily surrender their power and, hence, do

not willingly renounce control over the political systems in which that power is located. Nor do they modify or reform these systems in ways that are likely to jeopardise existing power relations. Rather, the rulers typically resist demands for profound systemic and structural change and no appeal by those excluded from the political decision-making processes will prevail, even if morality or justice would thereby be served.

Consequently, in instances where authoritarianism does yield to pressures for democratisation, this emanates not from any new-found benevolence on the part of existing rulers, but from a shift in the balance of power between those seeking to maintain the status quo and those pro-democracy forces trying to change it. Increasingly, existing power-holders are drawn into sustained and intensifying confrontations with a democratic opposition that typically gains in coherence, organisational capacity and popular support. Yet, while these 'progressive' forces are indeed able to mount effective challenges to the exercise of arbitrary power, they lack the strength to eradicate it entirely; just as existing powerholders are incapable of suppressing, or eliminating, their democratic opponents. In this sense, therefore, the contending parties reach a stalemate that can either escalate into levels of chaos that neither side wants, or be resolved through negotiations between the parties for a new, democratic order acceptable to each. More to the point, transitions are seldom viewed as the result of a revolutionary rupture where the *ancien regime* is overthrown by a popular insurrection, but are typically held to be the outcome of a series of pacts negotiated by elites representing the various protagonists (Ginsburg, Webster et al, 1995:3).

This notion of elite pacting is integral to transition theory and is premised on two theoretical assumptions. Firstly, that negotiations cannot be conducted by the masses themselves, at venues other than the bargaining table, but must be entered into on their behalf by a leadership (elite) that ostensibly speaks for them. Thus, the historical propensity for oligarchal tendencies to emerge within the ranks of the rival factions, but particularly among the pro-democratic forces, generally meets with the approval of transition theorists. Secondly, it is assumed that not all members of the contending factions are enamoured with the idea of negotiations, or 'pacting'. Hardliners within the authoritarian bloc and radicals among the pro-democracy forces might well wish to pursue maximalist solutions in the sense of provoking, or intensifying, a civil war that each believes can be won in a final, decisive battle. However, for reformers within the authoritarian ranks who recognise that the retention of power requires the apparent sharing of power, and for moderates within the pro-democracy movement who recognise the futility of inheriting the ashes of a once viable society, or who prize governance above all else, the prospects of chaos so defined are unacceptable.

The resolution of this stalemate then lies in an alliance between reformers in the authoritarian bloc and moderates in the pro-democracy opposition. Both distance themselves from extremists in their own camps. Both seek a sub-optimal solution that will nonetheless allow themselves and their society to survive (Ginsburg, Webster et al, 1995:3):

> Reformers face a strategic choice of remaining in an authoritarian alliance with hardliners, or seeking a democratic alliance with moderates. Moderates, in turn, can seek all out destruction of the political forces organised under the authoritarian regime by allying with radicals or they can seek an accommodation by negotiating with reformers (Przeworski, 1991:69).

The bottom line is that in the face of imminent chaos:

> Political actors calculate that whatever difference in their welfare could result from a more favourable institutional framework (this) is not worth the risk inherent in continued conflict (Przeworski, 1991:85).

Thus, also at the heart of transition theory is the argument that reformers and moderates eventually find common cause in a limited, or attenuated, notion of democracy in which governments 'must be strong enough to govern effectively, but weak enough not to be able to govern against important interests' (Ginsburg, Webster et al, 1995:4). That is to say, they reach a conservative compromise, a pact, expressed in and through 'liberal' democratic institutions of a kind that insulates the government from the broad mass of people, thereby allowing existing power-holders to retain much of their control over the levers of power in society, such as property, the military and, not least, the state bureaucracy. In effect, reformers and moderates make a political trade-off that ultimately allows a small number of specialised political personnel to govern on behalf of the few rather than the majority.

Building on this premise, transition theorists explicitly recognise that reformers in the state and moderates in the opposition are willing to settle for a form of politics that preserves the central pillars of a specifically capitalist society, ensuring that entrenched power-holders - especially the bourgeoisie - maintain a veto over the pace, content and institutional form of the new democracy. Indeed, many transition theorists go further than this. They argue that capitalism and democracy are natural bedfellows. Market economics, private property, profit and capital accumulation are either seen as essential to democracy, in its limited form (Barrington-Moore, 1966), or as a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy (see Allison, 1994:9-10).

We should note, though, that this attenuated version of democracy is endorsed by some transition theorists not merely because it accords with their ideological inclinations, but, perhaps primarily, because it is seen as the only variant of democracy feasible in the face of likely resistance by existing power-holders to any meaningful, democratic transfer of power to the people. More specifically, were power to be made generally accessible to the majority through other than 'liberal' democratic institutions, it might well be used to effect social and economic policies that are either intrinsically unaffordable, or are affordable only through a redistribution of resources at the expense of existing powerful and privileged groups. Since they argue that this latter alternative would likely jeopardise the prospects of a relatively smooth and successful transition, any variant of democracy that entails the ongoing participation by the broad mass of people in decision-making processes that bear upon their lives - ie democracy that entails mass participation in the daily governance of society - is eschewed in favour of one ' ... where the citizens care about politics, but not too much' (Diamond and Plattner, 1993:103).

Thus, transition theorists tend to operate with a clear distinction between economic and political democracy. Or, put differently, to the extent that they operate with a limited version of democracy, one reason is precisely because they exclude from the definition of democracy the possibility that workers might be endowed with rights that enable them, say, to direct economic activity away from production for profits - realised through the sale of commodities in the market place - towards production geared to the satisfaction of needs.

In general, then, all genuinely participatory strains of democracy are eschewed in favour of a politics that deems periodic elections to be the only legitimate mechanism for mobilising and expressing the will of the people, and renders the representatives so chosen effectively unaccountable to their constituents because they cannot immediately be recalled in the event of their deviating from their mandates. In other words, it is the absence of any mechanism to effectively enable the electorate to control its representatives, that frees the latter 'to govern on behalf of important interests'.

However, while an attenuated version of democracy may, historically, be the most realistic compromise reachable through elite pacting, it is fraught with so many contradictions as to run the risk of eventually becoming its own grave digger. For while the prospect of a weakened form of democracy may indeed appease entrenched interests, and thus facilitate transition, the inability of the broad masses to alter their social and material circumstances through pacted democratic institutions might well lead them to eventually reject all of the so-called democratic gains achieved through this process.

Indeed, it is precisely this prospect that leads transition theorists to a recognition that new democratic governments, immediately upon coming to office, must set about demobilising those forces in civil society that were instrumental in driving the transition process from the outset. Not to do so would be to leave intact precisely those social movements whose interest in democracy lies in the implementation, at any reasonable cost, of social and economic policies that materially uplift the hitherto under-privileged and deprived masses.

Before leaving this point, we should note that while many of these theorists are sympathetic to a 'limited' notion of democracy as the ultimate goal of transitions, they are mindful of the strategic value of movements pursuing a more radical-democratic vision both in initiating transitions and during the struggles thereafter to bring the contending parties to the negotiating table. Their point is that once the parties are thus seated, the only 'realistic' items on the agenda are the institutional forms and parameters of this shrunken democracy. In this context, demobilisation is simply a political strategy for attempting to ensure that this attenuated democracy actually works.

Transition in South Africa

By the mid-1980s, the crisis of apartheid had produced a deadlock between the white-controlled state and the popular organisations of the oppressed mass of the population. Whereas the apartheid state had for some 35 years proven successful in reproducing the material and social conditions for profitability, now that very same policy of apartheid had come to engender a level of conflict in society that seriously jeopardised the future of capitalism in South Africa. The regime, convinced that any alternative to the status quo necessarily required submission to the forces of communism, or, at least, energetically professing to fear this possibility, was unable to conceive of any resolution to this impasse other than by making the kinds of reforms that were, or would be, rejected out-of-hand by the pro-democracy forces; while the latter, in turn, were irrevocably committed to the ending of apartheid no matter where that struggle took them. Something had to give, and the events of the subsequent decade demonstrate just how useful transition theory is for understanding the great wave of change that has swept across this country in recent times.

Notwithstanding the De Klerk government's mounting protestations to the effect that the National Party was a reformed animal, that it had seen the error of its racist ways, transition in South Africa was manifestly not the outcome of the ruling group's change of heart. Instead, and in keeping with a core tenet of transition theory, it was triggered by the growing untenability of the apartheid status quo. By the mid-1980s,

> a low intensity civil war had been joined in the townships, with
> large parts thereof rendered ungovernable, operating as 'no go
> areas' for the security forces and virtually under the control of
> what were, effectively, embryonic institutions of people's power
> (Ginsburg, Webster et al, 1995:5).

Indeed, not only was there a civil war being waged on multiple fronts, but this
had been injected with a radical-democratic content that had the potential to
propel the transition in directions that existing power-holders neither could, nor
ever would, accede to. Note the words of the United Democratic Front (UDF), a
co-ordinating body of numerous anti-government organisations and movements
that effectively fronted for the ANC during the latter's enforced absence from
above-ground politics in the country:

> Not only are we opposed to the present parliament because we are
> excluded, but because parliamentary type of representation in
> itself represents a limited and narrow idea of democracy . The
> rudimentary organs of people's power that have begun to emerge
> in South Africa ... represent in many ways the beginnings of the
> kind of democracy we are striving for (quoted in Lodge, 1994:24).

All the ingredients for stalemate were thus finding their way into the bitter
brew that was South African society. Democratic pressures emanating from the
broad mass could no longer be suppressed through the tried and tested states of
emergency that once seemed to work so well. The regime had run out of
repressive options and increasingly lacked the will to suppress conflicts
occasioned by armed struggle and mass action by unions and civics (Ginsburg,
Webster et al, 1995:5):

> More importantly, the campaign to make South Africa
> ungovernable had stretched the resources of the state to a point
> where further repressive measures would have entailed costs that
> capital was increasingly unwilling to bear. Crucially, too, the
> global financial community had refused to 'roll over' the
> government's debt repayments and harsher sanctions had begun
> to take a toll (Ginsburg, Webster et al, 1995:5).

However, as the government's growing inability to pursue apartheid grew
daily more obvious, so too did it become apparent that even the best efforts of
the ANC were incapable of unilaterally seizing power. While the principal
liberation movement unquestionably enjoyed overwhelming popular support,
and while it could undoubtedly disrupt the normal affairs of state, neither the
armed struggle nor the campaign to make the country ungovernable came close
to forcing the regime into unconditional surrender.

Nor, for that matter, were labour struggles likely to lead to a different outcome. Notwithstanding the fact that South Africa had one of the largest labour movements in the developing world, led with strategic acuity by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), organised workers learned the lesson that unions everywhere have so often learned: that the withdrawal of labour alone, albeit over non-workplace issues, is very rarely sufficient to overthrow governments (Ginsburg, Webster et al, 1995:6).

This stalemate could only be broken when:

> the major protagonists realised that their individual solutions to South Africa's crisis could not be imposed unilaterally on others and that a negotiated solution, with all sides involved, would be the only way to achieve some of their aims. (Ginsburg, Webster et al, 1995:6).

This required, on the one hand, that the government recognise the futility of further efforts to reform apartheid, and accept that not only was the latter defunct, but its successor could be nothing less than a non-racial democracy in which minority interests were guaranteed by a Bill of Rights rather than the race-specific legislation of yore. On the other hand, the pro-democracy forces had to accept that an end to the impasse would not be achieved through armed struggle and that they, too, would have to enter into negotiations for a new order that would leave key institutions of the old South Africa intact.

In practice, this meant that reformers within the state had to 'nullify', or abandon, those right wingers bent on a 'scorched earth' fight to the death against the 'forces of communism', while moderates within the opposition were required to distance themselves from radicals who pinned all of their hopes on militaristic solutions and/or were committed to a vision of the future that included a commandist-type state engaged in the upliftment of the masses through a redistribution of resources primarily in the form of nationalising the banks and the mines. In short, who were committed to a fairly literal interpretation of the Freedom Charter that had steered ANC and SACP politics for nigh on 40 years.

It was only when the stalemate was finally and mutually acknowledged, and when the armed formations on both sides came to accept that they could not eliminate each other, that the main opposing parties to the conflict began to talk to each other (Ginsburg, Webster et al, 1995:6).

This essential tenet of transition theory was succinctly captured, albeit not with that purpose in mind, by Joe Slovo, a senior leader of both the ANC and the South African Communist Party, and an active participant in the negotiating process:

> ... why are we negotiating? We are negotiating because towards the end of the 80s we concluded that, as a result of its escalating

crisis, the apartheid power bloc was no longer able to continue
ruling in the old way and was genuinely seeking some break with
the past. At the same time, we were clearly not dealing with a
defeated enemy and an early revolutionary seizure of power by the
liberation movement could not be realistically posed. This
conjuncture of the balance of forces (which continues to reflect
current reality) provided a classic scenario which placed the
possibility of negotiations on the agenda. And we correctly
initiated the whole process in which the ANC was accepted as the
major negotiating adversary (quoted in Saul, 1994:178).

At this point we need not dwell on the vagaries of the bargaining process that
eventually resulted in a non-racial democracy for South Africa. Suffice to say,
within the ranks of the pro-democracy opposition, the ANC did indeed become
the major negotiating adversary, strengthening its hand considerably for this
purpose by formally allying itself with the SACP and COSATU. As the dominant
partner in this tripartite alliance, the ANC led the way in protracted negotiations
with reformers inside the state to decide upon the broad principles of a new
political arrangement and a date for a general election that would finally close
the door on apartheid.

Although many a detail had still to be resolved - indeed, that to this day await
resolution - the negotiating parties eventually agreed upon a set of democratic
principles that provided for, inter alia, regular elections based on universal adult
suffrage in which many parties could compete for 'the commanding heights of
the state' through a system of proportional representation. All of these principles
were to be entrenched in an interim constitution which included a Bill of Rights
that effectively left property, and many other levers of power, firmly in the hands
of those who had long since enjoyed these privileges - with an understanding
that the final constitution would not depart too drastically from the principles
agreed to in the run up to the election.

Assessing Transition in the Post-Election Period

There are many who would claim that too little time has elapsed for us
accurately, or fairly, to evaluate the post-elections phase of transition in South
Africa. Too few of the programmes and policies intended to give substance to
the 'new society' have been put in place, they argue, or, if they have, are so
complex in nature, so bound up with other profound attitudinal, organisational
and structural changes, that they have yet to work themselves through in any
definable form, or, at least, any form that lends itself to reasonable assessment.

For others, however, a number of fundamental choices have already been made that set in place, and in motion, a web of social, economic and political institutions and practices that not only lend themselves to preliminary stock-taking, but already have enough continuity about them for us to make prognoses with some measure of confidence. In short, it seems clear that the die has been too firmly cast for there to be major changes in, let alone reversals of, these newly-established practices.

In our view, the period subsequent to the April 1994 elections has revealed a continuation of trends that specifically emanate from, or were implicit in, the settlement reached between the negotiating parties during the earlier phase of transition. Two such trends in particular come to mind; not merely for their undoubted significance when weighing the prospects for social stability in this country, but because they seem to have been so accurately anticipated by the transition theory under review in this paper.

In the first instance, the transition has unfolded in a sufficiently defined and established form for us to recognise that the South African version of democracy manifestly stops at the factory gates, notwithstanding occasional protestations to the contrary. In other words, it already seems clear that the political system established by the new constitution offers only a limited form of democracy in which the government 'is rendered strong enough to govern effectively, but weak enough not to be able to govern against important interests'. Secondly, it is precisely in consequence of this shrunken democracy, that the new government has had to pursue, quite vigorously, a policy of demobilising those forces and social movements in civil society that might effectively contest its inability to make meaningful social and material improvements to the well-being of the underprivileged majority.

Strong Enough to Govern Effectively
The notion of effective government is obviously open to both value judgement and ideological interpretation. Nevertheless, in abstract sociological terms, it plausibly refers to the ability of those who hold the reins of political power, whether locally, regionally or nationally, to create and/or maintain a level of social order sufficient to allow the vast majority of citizens to go about their daily lives in routine and predictable ways, be these for better or worse, or in new or familiar circumstances. It thus entails a degree of stability in all the social relations that constitute society, economic, political, cultural or otherwise, and is attained through coercion, persuasion or both. By definition, therefore, a primary index of ineffective government would be a sustained breakdown of social order.

In addition, effective governance consists in the ability of these same 'powers-that-be' to provide such infrastructural services as are necessary to the reproduction of society in this or that particular form. In capitalist societies, this entails the reproduction of labour-power and a compliant citizenry through the educational system and other state-sponsored socialising agencies; the provision of health care facilities sufficient to keep the labour force in working order; geriatric facilities, including pensions; and the provision of electricity or other sources of energy, clean water, telecommunication services, various forms of public transport including railways and harbours where appropriate, and roads on which drivers pose more of a risk to life and limb than crumbling cement or potholes.

Measured in these terms, the newly established Government of National Unity (GNU), led by the ANC, and founded in terms of the interim constitution, has performed remarkably well over the past two years. Not only has it maintained the level of social services and infrastructure inherited from the past, but it has even managed to expand some of them on a 'de-racialised' basis, albeit at a rate, and on a scale, that still lags behind popular need and demand. So, for example, many children receive school meals where previously they went hungry, while pregnant women and mothers of children aged six and under can obtain free medical attention where previously the latter was either effectively inaccessible, or had to be paid for. Moreover, a growing number of South Africans now have access to electricity, clean, running water and telephones.

Likewise, having assumed office in a society where many of its citizens were not only battle trained but battle hardened, the government has managed to secure at least a minimum level of commitment to the new civilian order from people who were only recently joined in a deadly fight to conserve or change the apartheid regime. Thus, despite vast inequalities in the distribution of wealth, income and other desired resources, those who are potential adversaries on the basis of class, race, ethnicity, gender and/or political persuasion, are now able to go about their daily lives in more or less routine and predictable ways. This feat is rendered even more astonishing when one considers that the new government 'inherited' many millions of young people, the so-called lost generation, who had, in a real sense, escaped 'normal' socialisation processes due to frequent and chronic family breakdown and the politically induced 'collapse' of the schooling system for African children. This was a generation who, by sociological rights, should almost not have been capable of living in society, especially as they had frequently been traumatised by repeated exposure to violence, either as victims or active participants.

While it is true that an alarming number of South Africans are not able to 'routinely complete their daily activities' due to some or other crime against their persons - often committed with the callous indifference of the perpetrators - the fact is that far more people return home safely each day than those who do not. Notwithstanding media frenzy about rising banditry and lawlessness, or the palpable nervousness of many ordinary citizens in both rural and urban areas, or even the acknowledged existence of criminality within the security forces themselves, order generally prevails over chaos in the country, much to the surprise of those numerous pundits who expected anarchy in the 'new' South Africa.

Moreover, all of this has so far been attained through a preponderance of persuasion over coercion. Indeed, not only have the repressive apparatuses of the state taken a back seat in the GNU's efforts to secure stability over the past two years, but when they have become involved they have usually been accused of exacerbating chaos by being 'soft on crime'. The courts, for example, have been severely chastised by some influential sectors of the press for granting bail in certain deserving circumstances, as have the prison services been rebuked either for granting parole, or releasing children from custody, and the law, generally, admonished for abolishing the death penalty. In a society that continues to be wracked by bitterness and accumulated resentments from the past, the ability of the GNU to secure order primarily through a concerted campaign to promote 'healing and reconciliation' is truly a testament to effective governance and a measure of how deeply illegitimate the apartheid regime was.

Of course, it may be the case that sentiments of this nature are unduly premature. Of late, there have been increasing signs of the government's willingness to get tough on crime, of which President Mandela's 1996 'state of the nation' speech to parliament is but the latest instance. In that event, one might reasonably assume that getting tough will entail the use of greater force and severity both in bringing criminals to book and in punishing them, and might even, in the worst case scenario, imply an attenuation of prevailing civil rights and, hence, democracy. For the moment, however, it remains true that order, albeit precarious, is maintained in South Africa with remarkably little recourse to the means of coercion.

The Inability To Rule Against Important Interests
If the political system established by the new constitution only provides for a 'limited' form of democracy, in the sense that the popularly elected government is 'too weak to rule against important interests', then not only must we be able to identify these interests, but also point to the institutional, or systemic, sources

from whence they are derived. Moreover, we are obliged to show how the policies of government actually defer to entrenched power-holders in those situations where the interests of the masses should take precedence over those of the few. In the South African case, as in societies elsewhere that have undergone transitions from authoritarian rule to democracy, the important interests given relatively free rein by the GNU are primarily those of property-owners, whether transnational or domestic in origin, who derive their incomes through the extraction of surplus labour from the working population, as well as those other beneficiaries of the free-enterprise system who in some way receive their 'share' of that surplus. For instance, landlords, shopkeepers and those engaged in financing the system. In addition, we might tentatively include individuals whose access to fairly lucrative positions in the occupational division of labour warrant their description as middle class, together with professionals and petite bourgeois owners of productive resources who benefit from either juridical or 'real' economic ownership. In general, these latter groupings are privileged by the existing distribution of resources and are thus typically united by their inclination to preserve the status quo within market economies, rather than assume the risk of systemic change.

In short, the important interests are those integrally bound up with, and dependent upon, the maintenance of a capitalist economy in which the imperative of private accumulation is deemed the first priority of government, since it (growth) is allegedly the panacea for all other social ills. Thus, despite the fact that South African capitalism has generated pronounced polarities of wealth, income and life chances; that it has continuously created unemployment and poverty even in its growth phases; and, more insidiously, has spread the rewards and punishments of the system unevenly across racial and ethnic lines, the interests of capital are, nevertheless, not only paramount, but, in effect, constitutionally beyond challenge.

In some maximalist sense, of course, a government's ability to rule against important interests would refer to its capacity to effect such a profound transformation of the status quo that the very nature of the social system under consideration would change. Thus, for instance, the capacity to abolish, or radically re-define the institution of private property, would not only lead to the demise of the labour market as we know it, but, in so doing, would undercut the prevailing capitalist class structure and possibly initiate a transition to a socialist mode of production. That really would be to rule against important interests.

However, on a somewhat less ambitious scale, a meaningful sense of ruling against important interests might well refer to situations where governments leave the institutional pillars of capitalism intact - namely, private appropriation

of profit and the buying and selling of labour-power but still effect structural transformations that demonstrably improve the quality of life for the majority of their citizens through such policy-driven interventions as:

- the redistribution of wealth, either through nationalisation or measures designed to force certain categories of property-owners (absentee landlords being a group in point) to transfer assets to those who are able to make productive use of them;
- the dissolution of oligopolistic and monopolistic corporate practices particularly in relation to pricing and the capacity to either exclude new entrants into particular industries, or eliminate fledgling enterprises or individuals trying to establish themselves in particular industries;
- redressing existing inequalities in the distribution of income, and, hence, alleviating poverty, either by embarking on extensive public works projects that create jobs where previously there were none, or by intervening in private sector decision-making processes that bear upon investment levels and the labour technology mix and, hence, employment levels;
- implementing revised taxation policies that move away from regressive flat rate taxes such as VAT, towards those that are genuinely progressive in that they actually do take proportionately more from the rich than from the poor;
- breaking the stranglehold that existing elites in capitalist society have traditionally held over the levers of political power, through the establishment of mechanisms for incorporating all sectors of the populace in decision-making processes that bear upon the diversity of their lives.

Indeed, a government's capacity to rule against important interests might well be measured precisely by the degree to which that populace is drawn into the policy-making process in the first place. Or, put differently, the provision of mechanisms that genuinely allow for popular participation in key areas of decision-making would, in itself, be a crucial dimension of transformation.

In the South African case, maximalist notions of governing against important interests do not seem particularly feasible. We need not dwell on the reasons for this, other than to note that this country's inextricable insertion into a 'triumphant' global capitalist order makes the prospects for any government-driven attempt to dismantle a market economy unlikely in the extreme; to say nothing of the preparedness, or unpreparedness, of South Africa's working class to move beyond its apparent enthusiasm for nationalism and push for a more revolutionary form of change.

Thus, the question remains whether a less radical transformation of South African society, along lines spelled out above, would be possible in the circumstances that currently prevail. Could not the GNU's capacity to rule against important interests be measured by its ability to redress imbalances from the past through policies that admittedly leave the institutional pillars of capitalism intact and, hence, leave the most important of all existing interests relatively unchallenged - but nevertheless require the latter to make concessions, or change their normal practices, in ways they otherwise would not have done? Is restructuring of this kind not a measure of a government's ability to rule against important interests in those instances where the interests of the majority require it?

According to COSATU, this kind of transformation most certainly is realisable within the constraints imposed by both domestic and foreign configurations of power, privilege and vested interest. Indeed, COSATU has not only formulated a programme designed to effect such a transformation - the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) - but, as a sop to its long-standing commitment to socialism, made its entry into the Tripartite Alliance contingent upon the ANC and SACP adopting this programme as the basis of all subsequent development policy, a condition which, sooner rather than later, was enthusiastically accepted by the ANC and SACP and turned into an integral part of the GNU's larger vision for a new South Africa. From that day to this, the transition process has been driven in the name of the RDP.

The ANC's base document setting out both the letter and spirit of the RDP bears selective repeating, if only because it succinctly captures the essence of the programme. Thus, the first of the six principles that constitute the project speaks of integrated and sustainable development policies; while the fifth states that 'the RDP integrates growth, development, reconstruction and redistribution into a unified programme' (quoted in Adelzadeh and Padayachee, 1994:3). Later in the document, the RDP is summarised as an 'integrated programme, based on the people, that provides peace and security for all and builds the nation, links reconstruction and development and deepens democracy ... ' (quoted in Adelzadeh and Padayachee, 1994:3).

To assess the performance of the RDP in so far as this permits an answer to the question of whether the state is capable of ruling against important interests, it is worth examining the general tenor of this programme. Before doing so, however, it must be stressed that of interest here is not one or other of the RDP's various proposals for restructuring South Africa, but the intrinsic nature of the latter, and how, in principle, they impact on the GNU's capacity to operate on behalf of the diverse constituencies it ostensibly represents. Put differently, we

are as much interested in what the RDP does not achieve, or cannot in principle achieve, as we are in what it intends to do.

Fiscal Discipline and Social Needs

Such was the damage inflicted on South Africans by almost fifty years of apartheid, that the vast majority of citizens, mainly Africans, still live in squalid poverty, malnourished, uneducated or under-educated, often unemployed and usually confined to urban and rural slums where clean water, proper sewerage, electricity, telephones and clinics are at a premium. Their children frequently die of diseases endemic to poor communities, while the aged typically lack the kinds of facilities that might at least have eased their passage from this mortal coil.

In short, the vast majority of South Africans live in conditions of such manifold despair that only vast injections of capital would have any chance of alleviating their plight. However, when we look to whether such funds are forthcoming from the RDP - after all, it is specifically committed to sustainable programmes that meet social needs - we find that as yet they have not been, although problems of establishing the organisational forms capable of delivering the various services does, in part, account for this. For the rest, even once these delivery mechanisms are in place, the question remains whether a programme costing the equivalent of approximately two percent of total government spending has a chance of satisfying needs on the scale required, to say nothing of the 'fiscal' reasons for this relatively paltry sum in the first place.

Clearly it is unrealistic to expect a developing South African economy to afford social services on a scale that would remedy all of these afflictions. However, the problem arises when fiscal policy that could, if properly implemented, facilitate the satisfaction of many basic needs, instead becomes a constraint on government spending, dictated not by humanitarian considerations, but by a capitalist rationality that places fiscal discipline above people (Adelzadeh and Padayachee, 1994).

This, in fact, is what is happening. At the very time when people are literally crying out for services, the GNU is curbing spending in the name of a fiscal discipline that will allegedly draw foreign investors to our shores. While it may well be the case that foreign capital is ultimately drawn to 'investor-friendly' countries, defined in part by fiscal responsibility, and that some trickle-down effect thereof will eventually enrich government coffers, the fact is that social needs are currently being subordinated to essentially capitalist interests.

Taxation Policy

Inequalities in the distribution of income in South Africa are more pronounced than those in many countries for which national household income figures are available. In 1991, for example, the poorest 40 percent of South African households, overwhelmingly black, earned only four percent of the total income earned by South Africans, while the richest ten percent, predominantly white, earned more than 50 percent of the total income (TURP, 1994:50). In absolute terms, some 17 million African people, or approximately 40 percent of the total population, live below the poverty datum line (TURP, 1994:17).

Hence, one would expect that the GNU, committed as it is to redressing the imbalances of the past and, arguably, elected as much for that purpose as for liberating the people, would revise the South African tax structure, and the principles of taxation, in such a way as to get those whose privileges so often derive(d) from racial capitalism to at least bear some of the costs of upgrading the life chances of the majority. Although taxation alone is clearly not capable of redistributing income, one might think it would be one mechanism available to the GNU for at least moving in this direction. Yet when we examine the course of action actually pursued by the GNU - which at this stage consists primarily in the establishment of a Tax Commission to review policy it would seem that corporate tax rates, and, hence, in many instances, the income of the very rich in South Africa, have not only been left untouched, but actually reduced in the 1996/97 budget; either on the grounds that 'excessive taxation' discourages foreign investment, or as an incentive for companies to invest their profit in production rather than the stock-market or other financial institutions. Since 1980, company taxes have fallen from 22 percent of total revenue to 12 percent, (RSA 1994) and the GNU has done nothing to reverse this trend.

Instead, what seems to be happening is that the burden of funding the GNU's effort at redistribution is being placed on the shoulders of the middle classes, whose individual tax contributions to total revenue have risen from 20 percent in 1980 to 39 percent in 1994/95 (RSA 1994). When one considers that the incomes subject to high rates of personal taxation have effectively fallen due to inflation, it becomes even more apparent that comparatively less well-off South Africans are paying to remedy the sins of apartheid, while those who were enriched largely by that same system are, in a relative sense, getting away scot free.

Unfortunately, matters do not stop there. When we also consider that the income generated by regressive taxes such as VAT/GST has risen to the point where it now constitutes almost 30 percent of total revenue as compared to 13 percent in 1980, then it is clear that not only are middle income-earners funding

what little restructuring there is, but the poor are as well. Put differently, not only does taxation policy not seem to be a lever for redistributing income, but it is actually getting the poor to pay for themselves. Moreover, current indications are that this trend will continue as VAT seems likely to be raised in the coming years despite government's original assurances to the contrary.

In light of the above, it is hard to imagine that what we have here is a democratic government capable of ruling against important interests, although the position of the middle classes does appear to be eroding. In this sense, we are left to conclude that the GNU is not only good for business, but, in many respects, is even better than the apartheid regime was at the height of its power.

The Redistribution of Wealth

In all societies, the connection between the distribution of wealth and the distribution of income is complex, but real. Suffice to say, and as a rather crude rule of thumb, those who own productive property, tend to earn more than those who own no property whatsoever, and even where skills and expertise are income earning assets in the labour market, or human capital, these too are ultimately, and intimately, bound up with a prior, historical division of wealth and income.

This being the case, given that ownership of productive property is so heavily concentrated in South Africa - a rough indication being that the four biggest conglomerates control 76.5 percent of the value of shares on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (McGregors Information) we would expect the GNU to also be concerned with those measures to redress inequalities of income that look to wealth redistribution to provide the means.

This, of course, is precisely the solution to the plight of South Africa's poor mooted by the ANC and SACP during those many years of struggle before negotiations were deemed the best means of achieving final liberation. The Freedom Charter, for so long the blueprint for a democratic, post-apartheid South Africa, specifically refers to nationalisation of the banks and mines as the chief means of restructuring society in the direction of greater equality and justice. Notwithstanding the many conceptual and practical problems attendant upon the idea of nationalisation, the spirit of the Charter is unambiguous, as were the intentions of those who drafted it in 1955. Equalisation of income and other life chances rested upon the equalisation of wealth.

It was only when the prospects for negotiating a new democratic arrangement loomed ever larger on the political horizon that the ANC and SACP even considered abandoning this fundamental tenet of the Charter. In the event, they only dropped this provision as a part of the process of mollifying their negotiating adversaries by side-lining radicals within their own camps.

In place of the Charter, the tripartite alliance eventually proffered the RDP as the basis for reconstructing South Africa, and included therein a place for land reforms and corporate unbundling, rather than any notion of nationalisation. The former essentially referred to a redistribution of productive and residential land to private owner, although other forms of tenure are entertained, either through expropriation coupled with compensation, or the restoration of land to those who had been dispossessed subsequent to 1913. Unbundling represented an attempt to reduce conglomerate control of industry essentially by obliging holding companies to distribute their shares in subsidiaries among their own shareholders. Not only is it questionable whether this effectively reduces the power of monopolies, but in neither case did the measures proposed have the same radical potential to place significant and large-scale productive assets under social rather than private control. Hence, in neither case was there the potential to redistribute either wealth or income. In the final analysis, the effect of these measures is not to narrow the gap between rich and poor, but to 'de-racialise' the existing distributions of wealth and income. Again, this is hardly consistent with a government effectively able to rule against important interests, even if the latter are occasionally systemic in scope rather than immediately private. This last point is worth stressing. Important interests in capitalist societies may as easily relate to private concerns with the well-being of the system as a whole, as to private interests within that system.

Public works and employment

It is a matter of historical fact, and a theoretical commonplace, that capitalism as a system, and the conditions for capital accumulation, can be secured in and through a number of different state forms, ranging from the liberal, representative democracies of, say, the United States, through varieties of social-democratic, or welfare states, to the fascism of pre-war Germany or Italy, It is also theoretically unremarkable to note that the origins of different state forms have more to do with historically specific forms of struggle in different societies, and the complex balance of forces that obtain in any given instance, than they have (to do) with some putative abstract requirements of capital-in-general or accumulation per se.

What does not typically get explored, however, is the complex relationship between different notions of private property and particular forms of state, or between the specific struggles just alluded to and the forms of private property that historically have served to define capitalist economies. For it is clear, that the rights and duties that legally, and in practice, have hitherto been attached to notions of private ownership vary quite considerably from one society to another,

and are ultimately a function of the balance of power between forces competing to dispose over resources available within particular societies. To make the point rather crudely, in those free-enterprise economies where labour has traditionally been weak in relation to capital, private property rights have often been extensive, almost to the point of conferring despotic powers on those defined as owners; while in those instances where organised labour has managed to resist the arbitrary exercise of power, especially at the point of production, many 'managerial prerogatives' have been curtailed.

Of particular relevance for our purposes, is the fact that capital's right to determine employment levels, as well as its related rights with regard to the deployment of technology, have not effectively been challenged in South Africa, despite the successes of the labour movement on so many other fronts. Indeed, COSATU has been conspicuously ineffective in preventing technologically-induced retrenchments or lay-offs. Thus, one might have thought that a programme like the RDP, designed in large measure to tackle the problem of structural unemployment, offers no prospects for job creation via the medium of government intervention in corporate hiring practices, even though there are precedents to be found elsewhere in the capitalist world. There is no small irony here considering Mandela's own recognition, articulated in February 1994, of the need for state interventions of this or similar kinds:

> We are convinced that left to their own devices, the South African
> business community will not rise to the challenges facing us ...
> While the democratic state will maintain and develop the market,
> we envisage occasions when it will be necessary for it to intervene
> where growth and development require such intervention (quoted
> in *Financial Times*, February 15, 1994).

What we have, instead, is a commitment in the RDP to public works projects that will simultaneously provide infrastructural facilities to the economy and create employment opportunities for many of those currently out of work. In itself, of course, this is no bad thing. After all, some jobs are better than none. However, in the context of a government obliged anyway to curtail its spending, the prospect of finding reasonably well-paid jobs in public works projects are remote. One suspects that this accounts for the veiled warnings emanating from government about the unions not 'pricing' public works projects out of existence, even though the RDP refers to not abusing labour standards.

Democratising the State and Society

The theme of this paper has been that transitions typically require the adoption of 'limited' democratic forms that effectively insulate governments from the

broad mass of the people and thereby enable them to rule on behalf of important interests rather than the majority. The argument, in keeping with other transition theorists, is that in the negotiations phase these attenuated democratic forms are the only ones acceptable to power-holders in the old authoritarian order precisely because they allow for the distinct possibility that many existing privileges will prevail in the new social and political circumstances.

It has also been argued that an immediate consequence of this limited democracy has been the inability of newly elected governments to effect major socio-economic transformations, thus requiring them to demobilise those forces in civil society, particularly the union movement, that had fought for democracy precisely as a means of furthering such structural objectives. In the final part of this paper, we will explore these issues more fully.

For the moment, it must suffice to note that whereas the RDP makes repeated reference to the need to draw 'organs of civil society' into as many 'People's Forums' as possible, this is not with the intention of giving institutional expression to 'a deepening' of democracy. To the contrary, it is meant to draw into corporatist-type arrangements those elements in civil society with the potential to push beyond the prevailing 'limited' version of democracy, and in so doing, to make them 'play politics' in accordance with rules laid down by the state. In short, it is incorporation with a view to taming those forces with a more democratic, or just, or egalitarian vision of society.

Taken as a whole, it is hardly surprising that South African business tends to be well pleased with the general trends evident in the RDP (Adelzadeh and Padayachee, 1994:12). Writing in the *Sunday Times* on October 9, 1994, Kevin Davie remarks that:

> all signs now are that our policy makers see that the objectives of the RDP are wholly compatible with the three words [privatisation, liberalisation and convertability] which so interest the money men (quoted in Adelzadeh and Padayachee, 1994:12).

Or, as the RDP Monitor puts it:

> the private sector, after its somewhat tentative initial endorsement, has come out in full support (quoted in Adelzadeh and Padayachee, 1994:12).

Unused, as they are, to the genuine co-determination of anything, let alone having to do so with trade unions or workers enjoying entrenched rights, entrepreneurs, the 'most important interests of all' in free-enterprise economies, have rapidly come to understand that far from holding any terrors for them, especially any of a socialist variety, the corporatist-type arrangements between capital, labour, the state and civil society provide the best possible framework

within which to pursue their private interests; at least for as long as such 'embryonic organs of people's power' as the labour movement and civics remain amenable to being tamed.

Before leaving this point, we should note that to the extent that prospects for the success of the RDP are bleak, this does not demean the intentions of those who promote it. Rather the problem is to be found in the nature of the capitalist state and the constraints placed upon it by the historically specific mode of South Africa's incorporation into the new world order. With the best will in the world, this government cannot defy the needs, interests or logic of the global capitalist system; all of which, in the current conjuncture, set particularly harsh limits on the scope and nature of restructuring in this country.

This is not say that little has been won through transition and that the vast majority of South Africans are not qualitatively better off than they were under apartheid. For all its limitations, the current democratic arrangements are an infinite advance on the old order. The argument made here, but crudely and simplistically presented, is that the new democracy does open up spaces that can be used to press for a range of possible outcomes to particular problem-solving. exercises. Thus, although different solutions can be reached through these corporatist-type forms of negotiation, the fact remains that what ultimately cannot be done in this way is typically much more significant than what can be accomplished.

This point can be expressed differently. To the extent that all bourgeois state forms are in some way limited in terms of the transformations that can occur within their boundaries, there will always be severe constraints on the nature and extent of social and economic restructuring. But to the extent that different gains can be made in the context of different state forms, it is always imperative for those 'sectional' interests seeking to advance their respective causes to push available democratic structures to the limit. For only by doing so will they push the boundaries of democracy further and further in the direction of genuine mass governance by the people.

Why Settle for so Little?

For those with even a perfunctory knowledge of South African politics during the past two decades, it might seem odd that a pro-democracy opposition movement that had mobilised so effectively and militantly to force an end to apartheid, eventually settled for a political arrangement that in principle and precedent was destined to offer so little. After all, it was not as if those forces in civil society responsible for driving the transition process were unfamiliar with alternative versions of democracy. COSATU, for instance, had not only assumed

a leading role at critical moments in the struggle, but had long been committed to a socialist future for the country, with many of its rank-and-file members having actually practised a form of grass-root democracy in their various affiliate unions (Ginsburg, Webster et al, 1995). Moreover, COSATU had forged alliances with other embryonic organs of people's power, such as civics, that were also familiar with the principles and conduct of a more radical version of democracy. Together, they had taken up the cudgels on behalf of communities broader than those found in the work-place, using strikes, stay-aways, boycotts and marches, either singly or in waves, to force employers and/or local authorities and/or the central government, or all three, to accede to some or other demand, eventually forcing the state into that retreat we now call negotiations. In short, they had used their organised strength to reduce much of civil society to a war zone in which the odds were increasingly stacked against the apartheid regime.

The question is, therefore, why did they not exert their combined influence within the ranks of the democratic opposition to press for something more, and other, than the representative form of parliamentary government eventually installed after the April 1994, elections?

In part, the answer lies in the fact that neither the De Klerk regime nor the important interests it represented were willing to simply roll over and die. As Joe Slovo put it, the pro-democracy opposition 'was not dealing with a defeated enemy' (quoted in Saul, 1994:178). The balance of power within the struggle may well have shifted closer to a position of equilibrium, or stalemate, but it had not moved that far as to enable the democratic opposition to demand an unconditional hand-over of state power. With what were then pervasive fears of a right-wing backlash to the very idea of negotiations - given substance by the neo-nazi storming of the hall where the bargaining was taking place - the pressures were on the triple alliance to expedite the process of reaching a 'temperate' settlement acceptable to all. Indeed, in so far as we can refer to the acumen of De Klerk's moderates during negotiations, this might refer precisely to their ability to convey to their adversaries an exaggerated spectre of a right-wing poised to scuttle any settlement deemed too radical in any way.

In part, however, this parliamentary form of democracy also sat well with key factions within the modern ANC, and, indeed, had long been the object of political aspirations for many within the movement. The point has not infrequently been made that the ANC has, for much of its history, been ideologically inclined towards Western political ideals and institutions:

> The leaders of congress were intellectuals and trade unionists, but
> the trade unionists were too weak to set the pace. The clergymen,
> lawyers, writers, teachers, clerks and chiefs who founded

Congress or who decided its policies were constitutionalists who aspired to political equality within the framework of parliamentary government. Until the 1950s Congress was a radical liberal movement which never envisaged anything so far-reaching as the socialisation of the land, mines, factories and banks (Simons and Simons, 1969:621).

The ANC was radicalised by the struggles of the 1950s - the bus boycotts, resistance to the destruction of Sophiatown, the women's struggles and so on - and these battles 'increased the pressure from below from a new generation of activists for a less deferential organisation ... one indication of that was the adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955 which promised, in very general terms, to provide fundamental reform in the interests of workers and the oppressed' (Kimber, 1994:163).

However, as Lodge points out, this shift, although real, was limited:

In 1955, despite its increasing sensitivity to the preoccupations of the least privileged, and despite the increasing strength of its links with worker organisations, the ANC was not a movement strongly oriented towards the working class. The endorsement of the Freedom Charter reflected the changing character of the movement's leadership: in contrast to the previous decade it was younger, less affluent and more likely to be drawn from a legal, trade-union, or non-professional background than the politicians of the 1940s. But despite a more radical leadership the ANC was often slow and ineffective to resist fresh infringements on existing freedoms and rights (Lodge, 1983:174).

Moreover, notwithstanding its alliance with the SACP, and eventually COSATU, and its involvement in various forms of more militant action against the apartheid regime from the 1960s onwards - to wit, the armed struggle, rolling mass action and the campaign to make South Africa ungovernable - there remained a nationalist element within the ANC, arguably dominant, who increasingly found common cause with those proponents of Western-type democracy whose views gathered considerable credibility with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Indeed, we should not underestimate the extent to which the South African transition was shaped precisely by the fact that it gathered momentum just when alternative visions of democracy were becoming discredited by experiences in the Eastern bloc, or by the growing perception that West European social-democracy was bankrupt. Nothing could have played more into the hands of those Western powers anxious to shape the outcome of

transition in this country, than the ability to pass off Stalinist-style 'democracy' as the only alternative to the version they wanted on the agenda.

However, in the final analysis, the most significant factor accounting for the inability of the triple alliance to secure a more radical democratic outcome to negotiations, is arguably to be found in the actual nature of the struggles it waged. While mass action and campaigns to make the country ungovernable might well have demonstrated to millions of people, especially workers, the potential inherent in organised protest to achieve objectives that were so recently thought unattainable, these were measures that were fundamentally reactive to existing state power, rather than pro-active. It was one thing for social movements to test and feel their power - potentially liberating in more ways than one - it was another to use that power only to disrupt the normal affairs of state. The capacity to seize power unilaterally, or to achieve enough of it to dictate terms at the negotiating table, hinged, instead, on the ability of opposition forces to govern society, and particularly the economy, in opposition to the authoritarian regime. In other words, the only circumstances that might have produced a more radical, participatory form of democracy, would have been those in which the parties to the triple alliance had waged a campaign to make South Africa governable - by themselves and prior to the conclusion of negotiations. Perhaps if they had, they might even have found that they did not need to negotiate at all.

Demobilising Civil Society

Thus, one of the contradictions of recent events in this country is that the very struggles that 'liberated' South Africans by giving them a parliamentary democracy, were also the struggles that contained the seeds of something more. Put differently, the radical potential of those struggles was primarily what drove reformers in the state to seek an accommodation with moderates in the democratic opposition while there was still time to pre-empt a more thoroughgoing, participatory democratic alternative: a democracy which really was the 'self-empowerment of the people ' (Cronin, 1992:20). Arguably, it was precisely the possibility of a more radical transformation that ultimately prompted the De Klerk regime to enter into negotiations. In the end, the government bowed to a point of view that key fractions of domestic and global capital, along with all the major powers, had been trying to impress upon it for some years: that non-racial, bourgeois democracy and a de-racialised capitalism, were the most plausible guarantees for a profitable economy and a stable society.

However, having settled on a parliamentary system that promised accountability, but provided no significant mechanisms for securing it, the GNU was then faced with a dilemma that could only be resolved in a limited number

of ways: it could use its popular mandate to effect a thoroughgoing democratic transformation of South Africa, but incur the wrath of important interest groups both domestically and abroad; it could attempt to demobilise those forces in civil society that had helped propel it to power but were too radical thereafter in their demands for transformation; or, the GNU could attempt a piecemeal and limited restructuring of the economy in the hopes that gradualism - the promise of more and better things to come - would either obviate the need for demobilisation, or limit the extent of the latter in the sense of not provoking unmanageable levels of resistance from forces bent on a more profound transformation of South African society.

In this context, demobilisation refers to attempts by the state to instill in the working class, or other independent organs of civil society, an understanding of 'proper behaviour' in the new society; namely compliance with the need for stability and economic growth within the framework of the market. In addition, demobilisation entails persuading the masses to participate in politics in the 'correct' way, which is by voting every few years for the legislature (Ginsburg, Webster et al, 1995:80).

In the event, the GNU opted for a solution which gave it the maximum room for manoeuvre, namely the third of the strategies alluded to above; although portents of how difficult restructuring would be - the sheer scale of the 'backlog' a new government was sure to inherit - led to a pronounced inclination towards demobilisation even before the election when the ANC declared many strikes and protests of the day to be 'destabilising' and unhelpful in coming to a negotiated settlement (Kimber, 1994:161). Indeed, shortly after the election, Mandela turned from praising the unions 'as crucial in the defeat of apartheid to castigating militants precisely for failing to make the shift from resistance to nation building' (Kimber, 1994:162). In the first three months after the election there was an outburst of struggle that not only met with similar admonitions not to frighten off foreign investors, but often encountered the same kinds of repression that had been forthcoming from the previous regime. Car workers, shop workers, traffic policemen, print workers, postal workers, court officials and many other groupings launched strikes which not only drew rubber bullets from the police, but earned them a dressing down from government because they were placing their sectional interests above the well-being of the country.

This theme of national interests taking precedence over those of the working class, or, indeed, any other so-called sectional interests, continues to justify a concerted effort by the GNU to establish as hegemonic those democratic structures where the rules of participation determine both the issues to be placed on the political agenda and the acceptable procedures through which these

concerns may be mediated. In the name of deepening democracy, what the GNU seeks is to draw the parties to particular conflicts, or potential conflicts, into forums where the rules of admission oblige each one of them to forego any other means of pursuing their particular objectives. We are thus asked to believe, inter alia, in the unquestioned primacy of negotiated solutions to disputes over those achieved through mass action, when it was precisely the latter mode of expressing the 'general will' that brought the GNU to power in the first place.

In this sense, we are confronted with an irony of enormous proportions: an attempt is being made to replace one form of democracy, with its proven capacity to articulate and promote the interests of key organisations in civil society, by another form of democracy with an altogether more problematic history of accomplishment. The more radical, though embryonic, participatory democracy practiced both within the ranks of numerous COSATU affiliates and several key civic associations is currently being marginalised by a government purporting to give substance to the ideals of liberation by equating freedom with 'one-person one-vote' in a representative parliamentary form of democracy.

Shaping Contemporary Politics

Not only do attempts to demobilise COSATU strike deeply at the social movement character of trade unionism in this country (Webster, 1988), but they threaten to undermine even the orthodox collective bargaining functions that the independent, non-racial labour movement has developed so effectively over the past 20 years. In other words, these efforts on the part of the GNU are not only aimed at breaking the links built during the struggle between the unions and other embryonic organs of peoples power - thus putting an end to the use of a 'totalising' strategy to achieve social or political objectives - but they even seek to limit the unions' capacity to protect and promote the interests of their membership at the point of production itself. Put differently, if the unions are to engage in politics and collective bargaining in the future, they are to do so in ways specified as acceptable by the GNU and in the pursuit of objectives deemed legitimate by the latter.

Since the notions of acceptability and legitimacy entail 'peaceful' compliance with the rationality of domestic and global markets, and hence exclude mass action as a means of pursuing union objectives, efforts to demobilise the labour movement are clearly far-reaching in their implications and consequences for politics in this country. In attempting to force COSATU to 'play by the rules', and even to discipline its rank-and-file to accept those dictates of the market such as the need for increased productivity in order to promote international competitiveness, or the abolition of tariffs, etc - all with deleterious effects on

the living standards of the working class - the GNU has placed itself on a collision course with the labour movement and thus thrown into question the future of the very alliance that brought South Africans to the point where they are today.

It is precisely because demobilisation aims to draw the union movement into a legal-institutional framework for the formulation of policy and the resolution of disputes, and to 'wean' the unions from mass action, that the very nature of the exercise shapes the forms of response that the labour movement can and will make to demobilisation. More specifically, demobilisation virtually requires the unions to pursue their interests both within and without the arena of parliamentary politics. To the extent that gains are to be had by entering into corporatist-type arrangements with government and the private sector, the labour movement will be obliged to play by rules not altogether to its liking. The unions can, however, use their position from within to push the GNU leftwards. On the other hand, to the extent that this very process of engaging with their adversaries has the potential to disempower them, the unions are also forced to pursue their interests using means adopted during the struggle against apartheid and by continuing to form alliances with other independent organs in civil society. A recent study shows just how unequivocal rank-and-file COSATU members are on this issue. Mass action is as legitimate a tactic against the GNU to enforce the delivery of change as it was against the old apartheid regime (Ginsburg, Webster et al, 1995).

Conclusion

Notwithstanding its ideological predisposition towards parliamentary, or 'liberal' democracy, transition theory clearly has much to offer those seeking to understand the origins and nature of changes occurring in South Africa. The idea that transitions flow from the untenability of the status quo in authoritarian societies; the fact that they are typically the outcome of pacts reached by elites representing reformers and moderates; the historical and systemic pressures disposing the negotiators towards a democratic settlement that leaves entrenched interests more or less intact in the new society - all these seem particularly apposite to transition in South Africa.

Where the theory is less than useful is in providing a framework for understanding the principled and strategic responses those independent organs in civil society must make to government efforts to demobilise them. As noted above, the South African case requires us to examine the future of the tripartite alliance, given that it is precisely one of the parties to this arrangement, the ANC, that has initiated efforts to demobilise another, COSATU. The latter is literally forced to contemplate the viability of remaining within the alliance, or

withdrawing and taking up a different position on the South African political stage. These are issues on which transition theory has relatively little to say.

NOTES

1   This paper was written prior to both the withdrawal of the National Party from the Government of National Unity and, more importantly, the announcement of a New Economic Strategy on Friday June 14, 1996. However, neither of these highly significant events substantially alters the tenor of the argument advanced in this paper, although each clearly warrants incorporation into any analysis that purports to explain either the dynamics of contemporary South African politics in particular, or the process of transition generally. In fact, this author is currently researching precisely the implications of this new economic strategy and will publish preliminary findings in a paper to be presented to the International Sociological Association's conference in July of this year.

REFERENCES

Adelzadeh, A and V Padayachee (1994) 'The RDP White Paper: reconstruction of a development vision?', *Transformation*, 25.

Allison, L (1994) 'On the gap between theories of democracy and theories of democratisation', *Democratisation* l(1).

Cronin, J (1992) 'In search of a relevant strategy,' *Work in Progress*, 84.

Diamond, L and M Plattner (1993) *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.

Ginsburg, D and E Webster et al, (1995) *Taking Democracy Seriously: worker expectations and parliamentary democracy in South Africa*, Durban: Indicator Press.

Kimber, C (1994) 'South Africa - the struggle continues', *International Socialism*, 64.

Lodge, T (1983) *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, Longman.

Lodge, T (1994) 'South Africa: Democracy and development in a post-apartheid society', Unpublished, Department of Political Studies, University of the Witwatersrand.

McGregor, R and A (1994) *Who owns Whom in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (14th edition), Cape Town: Creda Press.

Moore, B (1967) *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, London: Penguin.

Republic of South Africa, Department of Finance, Budget Review, June 22, 1994, Cape Town.

Przeworski, A (1991) *Democracy and the Market: political and economic reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Saul, J (1994) 'Globalism, socialism and democracy in the South African transition', *The Socialist Register*, London: Merlin Press.

Simons, JJ and RE Simons (1969) *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Trade Union Research Project (1994) *A Users guide to the South African Economy*, Durban: Y Press.

Webster, E (1988) 'The rise of social movement unionism: the two faces of the black trade union movement in South Africa', in P Frankel, N Pines and M Swilling (eds), *State, Resistance and Change in South Africa*, London: Croom Helm.