

REFORM: GREEK GIFT OR TROJAN HORSE?

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State reforms to apartheid over the past decade have dominated political debate. While reform has been repeatedly lauded or denounced, attempts to understand its dynamics and its implications for change are comparatively rare. Both liberal and radical commentators have been at pains to show that reform seeks to bolster the essentials of white supremacy. This critique has played a valuable role in attacking claims that the state has embarked on a voluntary programme to dismantle racism but the polemic has tended to obscure an analysis of the workings of the reform process by focusing on its intentions. In particular a crucial question has been obscured: does reform strengthen apartheid in practice or does it, regardless of its intentions, weaken it by creating space for a process of change outside the control of the reformers?

The view that reform bolsters white supremacy, either by replacing overt controls with more effective ones, or by co-opting previously hostile groups and transforming them into state allies, was almost a 'conventional wisdom' among anti-apartheid analysts in the mid-1970s and is still argued by some commentators. This paper rejects that view. It suggests that all the key reforms of the past decade have weakened state control and contributed to a limited, but significant, momentum for change. More specifically, it suggests that reform creates space for popular organisation against apartheid and that the degree to which reform weakens the system will be determined by the extent to which these opportunities are used by organised groups who seek change. Reform has strengthened the process of change when these groups have used the opportunity to wrest control of the process from the reformers and to transform attempts to recast apartheid into structural changes.

THE DYNAMICS OF REFORM

An analysis of the reform process confirms that it has indeed been a reaction to pressure rather than a proactive attempt to reshape society, and has invariably begun with an attempt to find new ways of maintaining the control which pressure has eroded. Objective pressures, in particular the stress which demographic and economic changes have placed on apartheid, have been an important pressure for reform but have rarely, of themselves, impelled changes which might weaken exclusive white power. These have occurred only when the authorities have faced substantial subjective pres-

tures, of which the most important has clearly been popular resistance to apartheid: the 1973 Durban strikes, the 1976 and 1984 township unrest and the resistance to influx control of squatters in the Western Cape are the most obvious and important examples.

Whether resistance would, of itself, have been sufficient to force reform which opened up space for popular organisation is unclear: in the short term at least, simple repression is often a far more viable option than its critics would have us believe and the state could almost certainly have crushed the resistance had it chosen to do so. But repression also implies certain costs and, in each of the key reforms, popular organisation was complemented by other subjective pressures which raised the cost of repression and helped create the conditions for reform.

Foreign pressure has been one such constraint and its importance is repeatedly stressed by some prominent anti-apartheid leaders and groups. It clearly has played a role, for example, in labour reform - The Wiehahn Commission report contains copious references to foreign union and employer opinion - or in the retreat from influx control in the Western Cape which created the conditions for the 1986 formal abolition of that policy throughout the country. While an exhaustive analysis of foreign pressure is outside the scope of this paper, it is as well to point out that it has distinct limits: it has at times supplemented internal pressure for change but has rarely been the chief force impelling it.

Business pressure has also played a role. Like the state, business has rarely been a proactive agent of change. Even where it has perceived a conflict between apartheid policies and economic growth, it has shown a consistent willingness to accept these policies and to request only minor adjustments to them. Thus, in the late 1970s, employer organisations still saw influx control as desirable and requested only that it be 'streamlined'. Nevertheless, through the 1970s, business repeatedly lobbied for adjustments to apartheid and, in areas which were seen by state decision-makers as part of business' 'province', such as labour reform and, to a lesser extent, influx control, had some influence on reform. More importantly, business imperatives have at times conflicted so sharply with state policy that business has begun defying that policy, whether by promoting black workers in defiance of job reservation, recognising unregistered trade unions or by leasing property in 'white' areas to blacks. These responses have weakened apartheid policies' ability to impose control and have strengthened pressure for their removal.

Less obvious pressures have played an important, if usually peripheral, role. In contrast to other white supremacist societies, such as Rhodesia and Kenya, South African white opinion has not been monolithic. Opposition

to apartheid is a tradition among a section of white society and this has ensured that alternatives to it have repeatedly been voiced by at least a small white minority. They have had no impact at all when the authorities are sufficiently confident about their policies working as in the 1960s, but have had some indirect influence when state planners have been forced to acknowledge the failure of key policies.

More particularly, in some of the major conflicts of the decade, state attempts to counter or eliminate black resistance movements have been obstructed by white interest groups who have mediated between the resisters and the authorities - business in the labour arena; the churches and the business-funded Urban Foundation in the Western Cape squatter battles. Their role has not been primary, nor has it been irrelevant. Objective pressures and black resistance are thus necessary conditions for reform, but they may well not be sufficient. They have invariably been supplemented by pressures from key white interest groups and from abroad; it is this combination which created a reform climate.

The reforms which these pressures prompted have not produced a rapid state retreat from apartheid. As we implied earlier, the change has been slow, partial - and an attempt to shore up the fundamentals of control. A senior civil servant makes a perhaps trite, but often overlooked, point when he notes that the authorities are only willing to retreat from policies when doing so affects their 'marginal' rather than their 'core' interests. The ultimate core interest is, of course, the maintenance of white supremacy and so reform is likely only when the state faces substantial pressure for change and when it can concede it without directly jeopardising political supremacy. Thus labour policy-makers contemplated African trade union rights only when they devised a formula for shutting the unions off from political activity and even an eminently containable change such as the extension of African freehold property rights was only adopted after academics sympathetic to the National Party convinced its leaders that property rights did not automatically entail political rights.

A similar debate over the Group Areas Act is taking place at present; the argument between policy makers who argue that residential integration is compatible with political segregation and those who insist that it isn't might well have a greater bearing on the outcome than the Cabinet's presumed desire to protect lower-income whites from racial 'swamping'.

Even where reform is seen to be politically containable, traditional policies are not abandoned automatically. To abandon a form of control which has worked in the past in favour of one which may work in the future is a leap into the dark and official decision-makers confirm that the leap is not undertaken lightly. 'Policies which are not working are only aban-

done', says one, 'when repeated attempts to apply them in new ways have failed'. All this ensures that reform is inevitably an attempt to reassert control and that the major reform packages have been attempts to change in ways which leave things much the same as they were before the change - the controls on unions built into the Wiehahn proposals and the curbs on housing and land allocation in the 'positive urbanisation' package are only two of the most obvious examples. If the preceding analysis confirms that reform is a grudging attempt to reassert control, it also implicitly undermines the view that reform plans are coherent, workable strategies for reimposing state control. 'Grand' plans exist but they are nowhere near as coherent, sinister or workable as these analyses suggest.

Reform is a reactive leap into the unknown. The 'grand plans' are often ad hoc attempts to shore up control rather than master strategies. Precisely because reformers are entering uncharted territory, there are often several competing reform plans whose details contradict one another. Officials confirm that there has been substantial conflict among state decision makers on both the details and the extent of reform.

Reform plans devised by government advisers are also rarely implemented in their original form because they must be filtered through contending groups in the political decision-making system; the politicians who must approve the plans face constraints which do not face the planners and these often compel them to modify the plans in crucial ways. It is doubtful whether the Wiehahn plan or that devised by the Riekert Commission would have succeeded if they were implemented in their pristine form but political realities ensured that they were not.

Because the reform plans are reactions to a loss of control rather than articles of ideological faith, reformers have been relatively quick to adapt their details when this happens. Elements of the Wiehahn plan were jettisoned at the first whiff of grapeshot from the emerging union movement; early indications suggest that continuing conflicts over land and housing in black townships are rendering 'positive urbanisation' nowhere near as 'positive' as its planners hoped and that, in some cases, the authorities are making ad hoc deals with squatters rather than enforcing consistent control.

It is far more difficult to enforce control through reform than to impose it through unalloyed repression. Because reform implies a retreat from more overt control, it usually creates new space for resistance and unchains social forces which place new stresses on control. Invariably, the reform plans, no matter how elegant they appear on paper, have proved unable to rein in these forces. Labour reform could thus only be attempted if black trade unions were allowed to organise more freely. The space

which this provided them frustrated the Wiehahn plan's original intention of neutralising union bargaining power. Attempts to reimpose control over the Western Cape squatter camps through reform implied that the permanence of some of their residents had to be recognised. Once the authorities no longer sought to eliminate the camps they became havens for new entrants to the area to which they could return each time they were evicted. In other cases, too, the sharp instruments of reform proved as unable to reassert control as the blunt instruments of repression. By limiting state options - by ruling out some forms of repression - they created openings which further eroded the control they were designed to protect.

This process stems partly from the nature of apartheid itself. Opposition figures repeatedly assert that 'apartheid cannot be reformed'. While the slogan is intended as a moral comment on the system, it accurately describes its structural features too. A workable reform plan - one which would reassert state control - can only succeed if it can co-opt the social groups at which it is aimed; workers in the case of the labour reforms, squatters in the Western Cape influx control case, established township residents in the case of 'positive urbanisation'. Successful exercises in co-option have been launched in other hierarchical societies, notably in Latin America. But co-option implies that the co-optees must be given real benefits at the expense of those who are excluded from the deal. For apartheid to offer selected black groups enough to recruit them as allies, it would have to so change its nature as to become an entirely different system. Such a system of non-racial elitism may be on the agenda of some of the more far-sighted business planners - but it has not been on the state's agenda throughout the reform period nor is it now. Government planners believe, probably correctly, that even a system which extended political influence to a minority of blacks would fatally erode the white supremacy they seek to maintain.

This continued commitment to apartheid - presently encapsulated in an insistence on 'group rights' - neutralises the reformers' ability to reassert control because it ensures that they cannot 'buy off' dissent; they simply give it more space. This is illustrated by the dynamics of a reform which has appeared to open up the least space for resistance - the tricameral parliament. When the system was introduced, government planners confidently (albeit privately) predicted that it would 'buy off' the 'coloured' and 'Indian' communities by providing them with tangible material benefits in exchange for support for National Party political goals. It did not. Two years after it was launched, MPs in both black houses, but particularly in the (coloured) House of Representatives, were complaining bitterly that conditions in their areas had actually deteriorated. The

reason is provided by a government constitutional planner who, in a moment of candour, observed that these communities' needs could only be met if the economy recovered - the government, he added, could not meet them when resources were limited because 'they can only do so by eating into white privilege'. In other words, black needs could only be met within the tricameral system at the expense of white ones and it was politically impracticable for the National party to sacrifice white priorities.

The limits of co-option are also demonstrated at the political level. The tricameral parliament has not given its black participants sufficient formal power to enable them to initiate change - they have thus been unable to achieve even their limited objectives and this has ensured that their constituents have not been co-opted. The reforms have, however, given them some limited power to veto legislation and they have used this on occasion to block bills and extract concessions. These have not touched the core issues of power and privilege - but the evidence does suggest that they have limited state options and forced concessions which the government would have preferred to avoid.

The constraints of the tricameral system, together with the narrow social base and limited political objectives of its black participants, have ensured that the costs to the authorities have been eminently containable. However, the evidence suggests that this particular reform has failed as an exercise in co-option - and that it has at the same time placed some constraints on white legislators. It has failed to give its black participants and their constituents enough to recruit them as allies but has given them enough to limit government options. The example is instructive precisely because of the limited nature of the tricameral reform. It is thus no surprise that reforms such as the Wiehahn package or the attempts to curb squatter influx, which have, of necessity, placed more effective bargaining weapons in the hands of more substantial social groups, have posed more effective challenges to state control.

The contradictions of reform are not only structural. A subsidiary, but important, ideological dimension is at work which has also limited reform's ability to reimpose control. Reform plans are inevitably accompanied by an ideological package. They are presented as formulae for conferring substantive freedoms on their beneficiaries. The details of the plan usually contradict these claims, but these contradictions create problems for the authorities by contrast with a policy of unambiguous repression. Thus a senior labour official confirms that the authorities' stated endorsement of International Labour Organisation conventions played a role in limiting their willingness to reimpose repression when Wiehahn failed to control trade unionism. Reform plans are not simply cynical attempts to impose

control. In the minds of their planners, there very often are attempts to confer substantive freedoms; the planners simply define those freedoms in different ways to their supposed beneficiaries. When the contradictions have been exposed, the reformers have shown a marked reluctance to be seen to be abandoning the new ideology and to return to the old one.

A further dimension of this phenomenon is significant. The National Party has discarded the Verwoerdian ideology of apartheid but has put nothing in its place beyond a vague pragmatism. Reform plans are thus not articles of faith as Verwoerdian apartheid was and this ensures that state decision-makers are far less committed to their details than they were to the plans of the 1960s. Verwoerdian apartheid may have failed. But, in its heyday, it instilled a certainty and a confidence in state decision-makers which is notably absent in the pragmatic era of 'reform'. In the 1960s, officials knew where they were going and how they were supposed to get there - they thus showed a far greater reluctance to deviate from their chosen path. The controls which have been introduced in the reform era have no similar ideological underpinning, hence the ideological conflict and confusion among state decision makers because, as one official puts it: 'before everything was black and white and everybody knew what we should be doing; now nobody is sure'.

This explains why the details of reform plans have been abandoned far more quickly when they have been seen not to be working. Ideological uncertainty and dissent within the establishment is growing and there seems less prospect than ever that a coherent ideology of control will replace the Verwoerdian world view. In short, then, the structural and ideological constraints which confront reform have ensured that its attempts to reimpose control have limited state options and opened up space for resistance - but have not achieved the co-option which would have allowed the state to strengthen its control. But reform does not inevitably erode state controls: it only creates the conditions, the space, in which the erosion of control becomes possible. The fate of reform depends largely on the response to it of social groups who seek more fundamental change - and in particular of organised opposition movements.

REFORM AND RESISTANCE

We observed earlier that black resistance is the chief motor to reform. But the nature of that resistance - its degree of organisation and the strategies it employs - also plays a crucial role in determining the direction and fate of reform. The point is illustrated by a comparison between the 1973 strikes and the 1976 township unrest, both of which impelled the state and business to introduce reforms. The strikes were, of

course, less dramatic than the unrest three years later and far less damaging. But they did prompt the birth of an organised movement which, albeit in a very limited way at first, was able to influence the reform process and ensure that it did not proceed entirely on the establishment's terms. Thus, despite the union movement's weakness in the 1970s it did play a significant role in thwarting successive attempts to introduce workplace committees as a substitute for unionism. In the post-Wiehahn period, the unions played the major role in nullifying most of the controls in the labour reform package.

The 1976 unrest did not produce a similar level of organisation. The reform process thus proceeded initially almost entirely on the establishment's terms: it led, for example, to the strengthening of the segregated black local authorities system and to business attempts to create a 'black middle class' as a buffer to change. The degree to which resistance is able to influence change thus depends more on the degree to which it is organised than on its scale and intensity.

The strategies employed by the resisters are also of some importance. Uncompromising resistance to reform clearly renders control more difficult to implement - but it does not necessarily enable the resisters to influence change. Strategies which seek to exploit the contradictions in reform and to enhance the organisation of the resisters are far more likely to do so.

Again the two examples cited here are instructive. The union response to Wiehahn was an attempt not only to resist the reform's controls but to use the opportunities it created to enhance organisation. Openings, such as a widely-held employer perception that the reforms were designed to confer effective bargaining powers on the unions or official institutions such as the industrial court, were used repeatedly to strengthen workplace organisation. This implied both highlighting the stated aims of reformers - their rhetorical support for free bargaining - and using institutions created by the reform package where these were seen to create possibilities for bolstering organisation. The unions did not only reject the repressive elements of reform, they also engaged with the reform process and, to a significant degree, wrested control of it from the authorities.

By contrast, sustained resistance to the black local government system clearly did impair the credibility and effectiveness of township local authorities - during the 1984/6 unrest it prompted the collapse of many councils. But, while it could hamper or even torpedo the old system, it did not produce a new one which transferred effective power to communities. (The local authorities system, of course, did not offer the same space to organisation as the labour reform, although community leaders in, for

example, Lamontville, did use council elections as a platform to organise. While their attempts to use the system to win community gains failed, they did make organisational gains.)

The first signs of an attempt to wield community power emerged with a shift towards more solid organisation, which was strengthened by 'gradualist' tactics such as negotiating limited improvements with local business or township administrators - as in Cradock and Port Alfred. This was not an example of engaging reform in the same way the unions had done but does illustrate the way in which uncertainty within the ruling establishment is likely to produce gains for disenfranchised groups when it is confronted by organisation supplemented by appropriate strategies.

An example of the way in which reforms far more restrictive than the Wiehahn deal can open space for organised resistance is the battle between Western Cape squatters and the authorities. From 1979 onwards, the state attempted to curb the threat which the squatter settlements posed to influx control by making deals with squatter communities which were designed to allow some squatters to remain in the area in exchange for keeping others out. We have noted that this had precisely the opposite effect. In retrospect, it is now clear that the battle to retain influx control in the area was lost when parts of Crossroads were legalised, a move which was widely seen at the time as an attempt to enforce control more effectively.

Later, squatter communities effectively resisted attempts, imposed through the classic mix of reform and repression, to move a select few to an area (Khayelitsha) where control could be more rigorously enforced and to expel all others. They achieved this again through organised resistance and again by demanding that the authorities implement the elements in the reform package which ensured greater squatter permanence. The wedges this strategy drove into officialdom were sufficient to produce a situation in which, in the latter stages of the battle, key officials were working to undermine the objectives of their superiors.

At first glance, the squatter example is a singularly bad one, for in some respects the state's objectives have now been achieved. The vigilante violence of 1986 appears largely to have achieved what the state could not by thinning out the squatter camps and driving many of their residents to Khayelitsha. However, this state success was achieved not by a more effective reform strategy, but a failure of organisation within the squatter camps. The 'witdoeke' were not created by the state, they were merely used by it. Their roots lie in long-standing tensions and organisational weaknesses within the squatter communities which were not inevitable. They could have been prevented had resistance groups either not ignored them or sought to capitalise on them. (The leader of the 'witdoeke' had been,

until some months before the violence, chairman of a United Democratic Front-affiliated civic association). The Western Cape reforms indeed created opportunities for organisation. They imposed control partly because those opportunities were not used.

In some instances, effective pressure on state control has been strengthened by individuals and groups without an organised base but with intellectual resources which they have used to initiate and strengthen pressure on state policies. A significant example is the role of 'public interest' lawyers who have initiated 'test cases' which, state planners acknowledge, have played a role in impelling reform. They identify the Komani and Rikhoto cases, which undermined key influx controls, and the Govender case, which hampered the enforcement of the Group Areas Act, as key influences on change. This influence can, however, only be exercised in a climate in which official decision-makers are losing confidence in the workability of control. The authorities have the formal power to override court rulings, have used them repeatedly and continue to overturn rulings which undermine controls to which the state is fully committed. Where uncertainty prevails and the controls are already being challenged by objective social forces and organised resistance, however, they have often been unwilling to bear the political costs of overriding court judgements.

Reform also opens unprecedented avenues for influence to a range of pressure and lobby groups who have traditionally had no access to state decision-making. This influence is limited; they have had far more impact on the details of reform packages than on the broad policies which underpin them. However, because the details of reform proposals are often as, if not more, important than the general policy changes, this influence is significant. Thus the battle over the details of the Wiehahn package had almost as great an influence in shaping the labour changes as the 1970s battle over the principle of union rights. At present, the state's formal abandonment of influx control has opened up crucial conflicts over the detailed implementation of that decision. The way in which issues such as squatter control or urban land allocation are resolved will play a crucial role in determining state urbanisation policy.

These details are more open to influence by groups outside the state decision-making structures because, as we have suggested, the abandonment of traditional controls and the adoption of new policies places the state and its planners on unfamiliar terrain. State planners have thus been willing to entertain, and have at times sought, assistance from groups and individuals outside the state decision-making structures who are seen to have intellectual and technical resources which could render reform plans workable.

This 'technocratic' influence has been exercised most notably by groups such as the business-funded Urban Foundation which has not only influenced legislation on issues such as influx control, local government and black property rights but has at times drafted it. While other lobby groups have not sought so direct a role, an influence over some labour legislation was exercised by business, opposition academics and even, indirectly, by academics and lawyers sympathetic to the union movement. The importance of this influence should not be over-estimated. It does, however, illustrate that reform opens avenues for influence by critics of state policy which would have been inconceivable in the Verwoerd era.

The opportunities which reform opens to both organised resistance and lobby groups is illustrated further by a brief look at a reform which has opened up these possibilities at present - the replacement of influx control by 'positive urbanisation'. The abolition of influx control would clearly strengthen organised resistance to apartheid. Permanence in the cities would reduce the risks of engaging in both labour and community organisation for a large section of the workforce, would reduce divisions between migrants and 'Section Tanners' which have hampered united action in some communities, and would also increase pressure on a host of state policies by ensuring that the poor and powerless could not be expelled to the rural areas where they pose no immediate threat to stability.

Apartheid critics have pointed out, however, that influx control has not been abolished. Anti-squatter legislation, curbs on the residents of 'independent homelands' continue to deny urban permanence to many residents. Some analysts have seen township 'upgrading' schemes as a means of enforcing control by restricting the townships to the relatively affluent while driving the poor out to distant townships such as Botshabelo outside Bloemfontein.

They are, of course, correct. But the strategy has also opened opportunities for resistance which may render it no more effective than traditional influx control. The potential for organised community resistance to 'positive urbanisation' has been enhanced for the policy can be enforced only by moving entire communities - or large portions of them - rather than by the more effective individualised methods which the pass book system allowed. In some cases, such as Langa outside Uitenhage, the state has achieved this. In others such as Oukasie outside Brits or Weilers Farm outside Johannesburg, the outcome is uncertain. Attempts to move squatter settlements within existing townships on the Reef have thus far been marked by official confusion and the evidence thus far suggests that control will not be effectively enforced. Where the affected communities have been organised, however, control has been imposed only by repression and events

in the Transvaal suggest that there are limits to the state's willingness to use it.

The openings for legal action to challenge removals is clearly greater now than it was when control was built into a coherent body of legislation and the openings for pressure groups are enhanced because removals are now negotiable in a way in which influx control never was. In some communities, such as Munsieville on the West Rand or Walmer in Port Elizabeth, pressure has thwarted removals. The transferral of formal responsibility for controlling urbanisation to black local authorities, seen by some critics as a formula for more effective control, has also opened avenues for resistance. Because township councillors are less insulated from squatters than the white authorities, they have been less willing to sanction removals even in Soweto, where most councillors are now protected from hostile residents because they have decamped to a fortified suburb. They have reacted to the growth of squatter settlements in their domain with limited attempts to enforce removals, mixed with attempts to accommodate selected groups of squatters. This response has done little to thin out the squatter camps.

In sum, 'positive urbanisation' does not appear to be a coherent control strategy, despite the fact that it has been accompanied by effective removals, particularly in the Eastern Cape. Even during the present emergency, when effective organisation against the strategy has been severely hampered, the response has been ad hoc and often contradictory, often dependant more on the need to satisfy local white constituencies than on the logic of a master plan. Its successes have relied on the blunt weapons of the emergency, not on the logic of the urbanisation plan itself. Were these weapons to be discarded, there is little doubt that the plan would quickly collapse. Even with the emergency in force, the strategy is vulnerable to erosion by organised resistance.

REFORM AND CHANGE

This account has attempted to counter the argument that reform frustrates change. It has argued that, in areas such as trade union rights, influx control and residential segregation, reform plans have eroded state control. But this does not answer a more fundamental question - whether the strategic use of the reform process by opposition groups can pose enough of a challenge to white supremacy to threaten the system.

To suggest categorically that engaging reform will ensure the demise of the present system would be foolhardy. As the battle moves nearer to the central issue - access to political power - the stakes grow. The state will resist pressure for the democratisation of the political process far

more fiercely than it did the changes we have analysed. A crucial element in the equation is the military who, some analysts argue, would intervene if they believed the politicians were losing control and seek to shore it up through severe repression. The outcome of the final battle is therefore unclear. But the battle has hardly commenced; nor is it likely to unless opposition groups seek to use the reform process to build organisation and to erode sole white control.

Recent events have confirmed that neither the collapse of the state nor its violent overthrow are in prospect. Control over the townships has been reasserted, at least temporarily. Equally significantly, the limits of popular organisation have been exposed by the authorities - ability to reimpose control in some areas by proxy - rightwing vigilantes who have proved a useful ally in curbing resistance. These vigilantes are rarely simply creations of the state. They usually reflect real cleavages within communities which organisation has not yet overcome.

It has also been argued persuasively that the violent overthrow of the South African state is impossible in principle. To cite but one argument: a vital ingredient of other revolutions, the defection of the military or a large part of it, is clearly not possible here, where the security forces are manned largely by the enfranchised.

If the present order cannot be overthrown, it can be eroded by organised resistance. While white supremacy is in no immediate physical danger, it is subject to unprecedented stresses - economic, political and ideological - which have sharply raised the costs of enforcing the system. We have argued that popular resistance has been the chief motor of this process and it is at least conceivable that increased and better organised resistance could render the system so unworkable that its replacement would become possible. This outcome is not certain but the erosion of the system through a mixture of objective pressures and organised resistance which sap the ruling group's ability to impose control is a far more plausible theory of change than one in which the state succumbs to superior military strength.

Organised resistance is likely to grow only if reform provides it with space. Because reform limits state options, ruling out more overt forms of repression, it invariably allows openings for popular organisation. The uncertainties which it creates within the state open opportunities for opposition groups to use this organisation to extract concessions which, albeit in limited ways, force the authorities to concede some power to hitherto powerless communities. This is illustrated not only by previous reforms but, in a converse way, by the present emergency which has demonstrated the extent to which popular organisation can be snuffed out by

repression.

It is also important to note here that while reform invariably attempts to contain change it equally invariably fails to do so. The labour reforms did not create a contented black workforce, willing to forego political power in exchange for workplace gains. They succeeded only in providing workers with an organisational channel to demand rights in society as well as the workplace. State urbanisation policy since 1976 has not created a secure urban black middle class willing to act as a 'buffer' against popular dissent. It has succeeded only in giving the black poor greater access to the cities where their demands are more visible and more threatening.

An analysis of the reform process also reveals that concessions to change on 'marginal' issues have not defused pressure on the 'core': they have done the opposite. Each reform has placed new, wider reforms on the agenda because each has created new pressures and contradictions which were latent before the reform. Pressure for black union rights only mounted after restrictions on African job mobility were eroded, reducing the replaceability of African workers. Influx control in the Western Cape became marginal only after the 'coloured labour preference policy' was repealed, and pressure on influx control increased nationally after the authorities extended limited concessions to permanent urban residents. The repeal of influx control has strengthened direct pressure on the Group Areas Act as township housing provision is obstructed by racial land zoning and on segregated black local government as local authorities face demands for services and facilities which they are unable to meet.

This process is neither ineluctable nor automatic: we have stressed that reform strengthens pressure for change only when its opportunities are used by social actors. But the process does create the potential for a progressive erosion of the fundamentals of white supremacy which, under the pressure of organised resistance, could render the system increasingly unworkable. It is equally clear that popular organisation has not yet reached a stage where it could pose a fundamental challenge to white authority and is unlikely to do so unless it uses the opportunities created by the protective umbrella of reform.

REFORM AND REPRESSION:PRESENT PROSPECTS

The bulk of this paper has discussed the pressures on state control created by a reform climate. At present, the argument would seem largely academic as the emergency would appear to have reasserted state control and eliminated many of the opportunities for organisation and influence we have outlined. This assessment is largely accurate. Organisation in the townships has been crippled by detentions and the gains won by communities in

local negotiations have been rolled back. A comprehensive strategy to defuse urban black grievances through a combination of material improvements and repression against independent community groups is being implemented through the National Security Management System. This strategy is designed to neutralise independent community initiatives and to impose stability from the top down; the climate for effective organisation is likely to remain limited as long as it remains in force. Regional Services Councils are to be imposed in the face of popular resistance in an attempt to bolster black local authorities. There are other examples, all confirming that the authorities are engaged in a concerted attempt to reimpose control over the process of change. But the present impasse is unlikely to be permanent. The emergency, and the strategies which accompany it, have not removed the structural pressures which apartheid faces and it seems likely that these will generate further pressure for reform.

Thus, despite talk of an economic upturn, economists agree that the economy is beset by structural constraints which prevent long term recovery. Government planners see apartheid policies as a significant obstacle to growth, hence their new-found support for 'inward industrialisation' which requires significant increases in black urbanisation. Accelerated urbanisation is itself a significant pressure on state policies. The need for land places new pressure on the Group Areas Act and effective township development requires credible and legitimate local government. Pressure on segregated systems for delivering services such as education, health and transport are also growing, hence the current state enthusiasm for privatisation which is seen partly as a means of 'depoliticising' these functions. Subsidiary, but significant, ideological pressures on apartheid are also growing, as evidenced by the defections of intellectuals from the National Party and continued evidence of impatience among senior bureaucrats with the pace and direction of reform.

These pressures explain why, despite the apparent jettisoning of reform, state policy now is nowhere near as coherent as most analysts would have us believe. National Party spokesmen continue to support the Group Areas Act while stressing that 'illegal' black residents in white suburbs will not be removed thus ensuring the continued erosion of residential segregation. They continue to extol the virtues of segregated education, at the same time subsidising non-racial private schools. They continue to forcibly remove some communities while recognising the permanence of others. And they continue to stress that stability can be achieved only by meeting black political aspirations. These signs should not be over-emphasised: all these statements are consistent with the strategy which we outlined earlier in which reform is to be imposed on the state's terms in an attempt

to neutralise popular organisation. But the evidence suggests that the strategy is likely to fail.

On a purely material level, it is highly unlikely that the state has the capacity to effect the required improvements in black urban areas without making politically unacceptable inroads into white spending priorities; certainly the Regional Services Councils will be unable to fund effective development unless they raise their tax base and so erode economic development in the cities. State planners hope to resolve the problem through privatisation and deregulation which could well price services out of the reach of township residents, fuelling discontent.

On the political level, there are already signs that repression cannot guarantee the stability which state planners seek. Repeated attempts to break township rent boycotts have had only limited success, even in the absence of formal organisation. While the emergency has indeed largely immobilised organisation, it seems unable to prevent continued outbursts of random militancy - recent arson attacks on trains in apparent support of striking rail workers is a case in point. Nor has it prevented a situation in which a small group, using only a few thousand pamphlets and groups of youths to impose their will at transport points, can enforce a three-day stay-away in Soweto. Indeed, repression may well have assisted this by eliminating any possibility of seeking an open mandate for protest actions.

These are perhaps isolated examples: the emergency has clearly curbed both organisation and resistance. But they do emphasise that the constraints to urban stability are not purely material and that attempts to impose it through institutions which lack legitimacy are likely to fail.

In sum, then, the present attempt to impose stability in ways which close off avenues for popular organisation and for free political activity is likely to fail. As it does objective and subjective pressures should create fresh pressure for reform which will again open up opportunities for popular organisation to wrest control of the reform process from the authorities.