

be sternly repurposed. Language used for such purposes must, as far as possible, be clear, plain, and precise, and its vocabulary should - as far as is possible - be the vocabulary of the aware citizen, not of the professional 'specialist.' If the revolutionary movement itself cannot make its concepts clear to the aware citizens without the private socio-speak jargon, inflated phrasology and convoluted formulations of academia then no-one can. And in that case, our concepts will remain the private arcane private persuasions of the educated ~~class~~ intelligentsia, and fail to become a force which moves the masses. Which is what it should and ought to be.'

On style: Generally the mid-way of all such statements as "let me first say that" - etc. obstructs the reader of the document, and often cuts the argument into pieces so that the thrust gets lost - without adding anything to comprehension. But more importantly: the ms ~~seems~~ to be ~~of~~ either from several different hands? Or perhaps put together from different pieces made by the same hand but for separate purposes at different times. It has thus all the stylistic defects of a document drafted by a committee - which the old job assures us was the origin of the design of a camel when the programme called for a horse. Perhaps also for the same reasons of origin, it seems to me extremely repetitive in places, some theoretical propositions - my memory tells me without a systematic check - appear ~~and~~ several times, - 3? 4? - in different places.

So, enough for the moment. I repeat: I agree in general with the ideology so far as I understand its formulations. But I really don't like the document as it stands for reasons set out above. You can - and have - done much better. This one, I'm afraid, in its present shape, will not do anything to enhance the reputation or standing of either its author, or the party that issues it. But it is the beginning of a worthwhile project - not a finished or publishable document in my opinion.

Editorially, with regrets,

Rock

57 Lock Crescent,  
Kidlington. OX5 1HF.  
United Kingdom.  
08. 06. 01

Professor J.S. Saul,  
c/o Monthly Review.

PLEASE FORWARD.

Dear Professor Saul,

I have only recently received a copy of your article "Cry For the Beloved Country" in the January Monthly Review. My congratulations. It is the most perceptive and pertinent assessment I have read anywhere about what is happening in my own country. I agree with almost every word of it, but would take issue with the bald description of "a tragedy being enacted". This seems to negate the many small, often localised but still inspirational and imaginative self-help movements which are still alive and kicking in the country, and carry forward some of the democratic enthusiasms and hopes which the ANC, in its best days, generated in people both inside and outside South Africa.

Those 'best days' of the South African liberation struggle seemed to hold out a promise of new ways of democratic social change, and possibly even an opening towards a democratic socialism. They were widely believed to offer an example from which other movements and peoples might draw inspiration and lessons. But as your critique shows correctly, South African political reality appears to be departing further and further from the promise, and the new South Africa is proving to be very different from the hopes and visions we once had.

As one who played a small part, over some fifty years, in both the Congress movement and Communist Party in my country's "best days", I cannot rest with just a description of what is now happening to confound our hopes. I am driven to ask also what went wrong? And why? Is it that our hopes were romantically unrealistic or our appraisal of the resistance movement fatally flawed? Did we misinterpret the real balance of forces at play, or the dead hand of tradition in shaping the future? Or was it simply as so many commentators suggest, that objective conditions for democratic transformation were never present, or the political leaders too inadequate or self-seeking for the task?

This is not an academic question. An understanding of what is going wrong, and why, is the essential precondition for any rectification, and thus for any return to former optimism about South Africa's democratic future. May I suggest that the answer does not lie totally in present realities but goes back to events well before the emergence of the "new South Africa" and the Mandela regime. With hindsight, it now appears to me that a substantial part of the responsibility lies in policy decisions taken in the 1960s. And the turning point, though we did not know it then, was in the liberation movement's decision to abandon its exclusive reliance on non-violent campaigning, and to found the 'armed wing', Umkhonto we Sizwe.

I participated in the discussions that led to decision, and fully supported it at the time. I believed that it was a proper decision in the circumstances which then confronted us, and still fully defend it. But in the light of present-day political developments in South Africa, the long term consequences of that decision are becoming clear in a way they were not - and probably could not possibly have been - foreseen at the time.

To explain. The ANC in its heyday before 1960 had neither a definite socialist or a definite non-socialist ideology, despite indications of one or the other in sundry platform declarations and resolutions. Its simple unifying 'ideology' was one of liberation of the black majority through the ending of all social, economic and political inferiority. 'Liberation' was not understood to be a programme of action but rather a broad agenda of change to be brought about through the mobilisation of non-violent mass pressure of the people themselves.

The concept of 'power' was never on the agenda. The concept that a political group could lever itself into power and then use that power to liberate the masses was quite foreign to the general ideology or thinking of the movement's activists [though it might have been in the minds of some minority groups]. It is not accidental that, prior to 1960, almost every one of the movement's significant campaigns was an essay in the mass mobilisation of ordinary people to free themselves: see, for example, the Campaign of Defiance of Unjust Laws; the Potato Boycott to end farm-slave labour; the Education campaign to boycott state schools and establish independent people's schools; and most significantly, the Congress of the People to draw the outlines of a 'liberated South Africa' and a popularly elected government.

The idea of administrative power in order to create liberation by administration grew out of the 1960 decision to introduce forms of violent political action. It was an unintended and unexpected consequence of a seemingly simple decision to inject a relatively small armed force into the programme of mass political pressure by the political movement. The armed sector would, at all times, be controlled by and subject to the leadership of its founding organisations - the ANC and the SACP. That it was never designed for a 'seizure of power' but only for aiding and abetting the non-violent movement was made clear and public in Umkhonto's founding manifesto, which explains that its resort to violence was

intended to give a sharp 'wake-up' call to the white minority and the government, and lead to a peaceful political settlement ahead of the looming prospect of descent into civil war.

'Power' - the acquisition of state power, by force was never the aim. But the very existence of an armed force brought such a prospect closer to the actual agenda for the first time, although that prospect was never articulated and seems not to have been recognised at the time. But the movement's real purpose with Umkhonto was turned on its head by circumstances wholly outside its control.

Shortly after Umkhonto's first acts of sabotage, the state unleashed an unprecedented savage wave of persecution, arrest without warrant, imprisonment without trial, and systematic torture, which made it impossible for the movement to initiate further campaigns of mass resistance. Its organisations were driven into deep decline; their leading personnel, imprisoned or driven into exile, could no longer exercise effective influence either amongst the population generally or over its quasi-autonomous armed contingent.

But Umkhonto was better placed to carry on under the conditions of repression. It had no direct links with the people generally, and sought none. It could smuggle its leading core and its rank-and-file to places of safety abroad, where they could acquire the necessary arms, build and train their organisation, and receive a steady train of new recruits smuggled out of South Africa. Thus outside the country, Umkhonto was able to develop and grow at the same time as, inside South Africa, the old mass liberation movement was driven into retreat.

The balance of forces inside the movement shifted towards the Umkhonto sector. The notion that the movement's political leadership were in control of the armed forces remained, but became ever less of a reality as the balance of forces within the movement shifted steadily towards the military sector. Even though the leading personnel were not entirely different, the prospects of change through mass popular struggle became ever more remote, and the prospect of change through military or quasi-military action to reach state power moved to the forefront of the movement's thinking.

Somewhere in the transition of the movement from 'home' to 'abroad', its leading cadre began to view liberation as meaning the acquisition of state power. Ideology became heavily loaded with the concept of 'seizure of power' - a process which was never precisely defined. The ANC adopted as its leading call to the people at home the slogan: 'Make the country ungovernable!'; or, by implication, immobilise the present state so that others can take over. The SACP also, in a revised programme produced some time late in the 1970's [no copy available to me] replaces an earlier programme commitment to a 'mass insurrection' with a repeated iteration of 'seizure of power.'

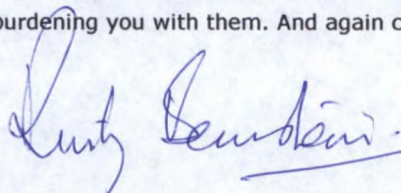
The shift away from concepts of mass popular resistance towards the concept of some form of 'seizure of power' by an armed force gradually became the main political current of thinking in the ANC and the SACP. Their political leaderships in exile, though deeply engaged in developing international solidarity with the South African people, had its 'home' attentions concentrated on the guerrilla camps, on the infiltration of armed groups into the country, and on military actions and acts of quasi-military sabotage by its own units. In short, to the acquisition of power.

The drive towards 'power' has corrupted the political equation in various ways. In the late 80s, when mass popular resistance revived again inside the country led by the UDF, it led the ANC to see the UDF as an undesirable factor in the struggle for power, and to fatally undermine it as a rival focus for mass mobilisation. It has undermined the ANC's adherence to the path mass resistance as the way to liberation, and substituted instead a reliance on manipulation of the levers of administrative power. It has paved the way to a steady decline of a mass-membership ANC as an organiser of the people, and turned it into a career opening to public-sector employment and the administrative 'grave train'. It has reduced the tripartite ANC-COSATU-CP alliance from the centrifugal centre of national political mobilisation to an electoral pact between parties who are constantly constrained to subordinate their constituents fundamental interests to the overriding purpose of holding on to administrative power. It has impoverished the soil in which ideas leaning towards socialist solutions once flourished, and allowed the weed of 'free market' ideology to take hold.

If this is not the whole explanation, in my view it is in great part an explanation of why the reality of the ANC in power seems so far short of what we once hoped it would be. I am sorry it has got to be so long winded. I had intended simply to write to tell you how much I appreciated your article, but got carried away with setting down some ideas which have been rolling around in my head for some time. Your article sparked me off; I hope you find them of some interest.

My apologies for burdening you with them. And again congratulations and best wishes. .

Sincerely,



(L.) Rusty Bernstein.

**Collection Number: A3299**

**Collection Name: Hilda and Rusty BERNSTEIN Papers, 1931-2006**

***PUBLISHER:***

*Publisher:* **Historical Papers Research Archive**

*Collection Funder:* **Bernstein family**

*Location:* **Johannesburg**

**©2015**

***LEGAL NOTICES:***

**Copyright Notice:** All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

**Disclaimer and Terms of Use:** Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is part of the *Hilda and Rusty Bernstein Papers*, held at the Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.