

“IN CASE OF EMERGENCY”. SOUTH AFRICAN STATES OF EMERGENCY, CA. 1985-1988: SYNOPSIS AND CHRONOLOGY

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Abstract

Due to a combination of socio- economic and political factors, apartheid-South Africa erupted in violent political conflict during the early 1980s. For most of the decade that preceded the transition to majority rule, the minority government ruled through martial law. This article discusses the States of Emergencies that were declared during the Presidency of PW Botha in the latter half of the decade.

Keywords: National Party; States of Emergency (1985, 1986, 1987, 1988); total onslaught; total strategy; apartheid; black-on-black violence.

Seutelwoorde: Nasionale Party; noodtoestande (1985, 1986, 1987, 1988); totale aanslag; totale strategie; apartheid; swart-op-swart geweld.

1. INTRODUCTION

The mid-1980s was one of the watershed moments in South African history, and heralded the end of apartheid and the subsequent transition to a full democracy. At the time, however, the country was on the edge of anarchy, and it was difficult to foresee that it would make this transition in a relatively peaceful manner. Both the minority regime of PW Botha and the exiled African National Congress (ANC) had built violence into their overriding master strategies for the 1980s in the furtherance of their political goals. In 1984, sprawling violence, due to socio- economic and political factors, erupted across South Africa. The ANC and the regime simultaneously executed its strategies of force and exploited the violent political conflict. From 1984 to the end of the decade and thereafter, the South African milieu revolved and evolved around violence and the implications thereof, as encapsulated by successive and increasingly excessive States of Emergency. Without a basic knowledge of this critical tidal wave in South Africa's history, the seasoned scholar and junior researcher cannot comprehend the complexities of South Africa in the 1980s. This article focuses on this particular aspect of the prelude to South Africa's historic transition.

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2. THE 1985 STATE OF EMERGENCY

“Every responsible South African has, with growing concern, taken note of conditions of violence and lawlessness which, in recent times, have increased and have become more severe and more cruel in certain parts of the country, especially in Black townships [...] This state of affairs can no longer be tolerated.” This was the prologue State President PW Botha used to announce to parliament and the country that earlier that day, on the morning of 20 July 1985, he had signed a proclamation for the implementation of a partial State of Emergency. He said that, as State President, he believed this to be a necessary inevitability, because he could no longer, “ignore the insistence of all responsible South Africans, especially of the majority of the Black communities, who ask that conditions be normalized and that they are granted the full protection of the law to continue their normal way of life”.²

Initially, the 1985 State of Emergency was imposed on only 36 magisterial districts. The Pretoria, Witwatersrand and Vereeniging (PWV, now Gauteng) and Eastern Cape areas were the main focal points of the original decree. When the security forces deployed in an area, the deployment was met with violent opposition, and more violence broke out. In this pattern, violent unrest spread across the whole of South Africa. Although space prohibits the listing of all violent incidents here, the following examples can be noted.

On 21 July 1985, the State of Emergency was proclaimed, and the following day 113 people were detained. Three people died near Parys in the Free State when a policeman’s home was attacked as violence flared up throughout all the country’s provinces. During the next two days, 23 and 24 July 1985, 15 people died. In the East Rand in Daveyton, four people died, and a further 17 people were killed when funeral goers clashed with the South African Police (SAP). Celebrations to honour the birthday of jailed ANC leader, Nelson Mandela, were banned. By the end of the month, when the State of Emergency was only some ten days old, 1 259 people had already been detained.³

By the middle of August 1985, some 1 482 people had been detained, including Rev. Allan Boesak, the leader of the United Democratic Front (UDF). On 15 August 1985, 31 people were killed in another round of national unrest; in Duncan Village in the Eastern Cape, 19 people died and 138 were injured during riots. The security forces imposed a six-hour curfew on Soweto and the Eastern Cape townships. On the same day, two people died and many were injured when Witbank residents clashed with the police. Between 16 and 18 August, the Cape and Transvaal experienced renewed violence. During the next few days, six people

2 PW Botha, “State President announces State of Emergency”, *Paratus* 36, August 1985, p. 2.

3 M Bennett, “Resurgent rebellion”, *Indicator SA* 3(3), Summer 1986, pp.13-15.

died and 26 were wounded as Aliwal North crowds clashed with the police.⁴ By August 1985, an average of four people died every day in violent political unrest.⁵ At this stage, the unrest had cost black, coloured and Indian communities around R90 million.⁶

Five days later, 500 Soweto students were arrested for “loitering”. By the end of the month, rioting flared up in the Cape Peninsula, killing 17 people, and then intensive rioting broke out in altogether five PWV townships. During the early days of September 1985, the unrest spread to seven Cape Peninsula areas. During one week in the Western Cape, 27 people died in the political violence, and by 5 September 1985, the violence had spread to Natal. By the middle of September, the Minister of Law and Order said that in the past 15 months, 660 people were killed because of political unrest, with a further 2 400 injured.⁷

On 11 September 1985, the police arrested 746 Soweto students. By the end of the month, the death toll, since the unrest broke out in 1984, stood at 740 people killed, 4 126 injured and 19 033 political arrests. By the end of the month, the Ministry of Law and Order placed a six month ban on all meetings that promoted stayaways. By the middle of October, the first soldier was killed while doing township duty. In the Cape, Muslims rioted and called for a holy war or “Jihad”. Between 26 and 27 October, 18 people died. During the same period, a massive security contingent was deployed in the Cape Peninsula and 66 people were arrested.⁸

Wherever dissident groups emerged, the authorities attempted to silence them. By the end of 1985, Louis le Grange prohibited the hosting of indoor gatherings in 30 different districts if that gathering was organized by any one of more than 70 “subversive” organizations.⁹ These included: the Adelaide Youth Congress, Alexandria School Committee, Alexandria Students Council, Azanian Peoples Organization, Azanian Students Movement, Black Students Movement, Black Students Movement’s Women’s Group Crisis Committee, Cookhouse Youth Organization, Cradock Residents Association, Cradock Students Council, Detainee’s Parents Support Committee, Fort Beaufort Organ of Peace, Graaff-Reinet Community Organization, Grahamstown Burial Action Committee, Jansenville Students Committee, Karoo Youth Congress, Port Alfred Black Civic Association, Pro-Humanism Organization, Tembisa Civic Association, Thabong

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Die Volksblad*, 22 September 1985.

6 *Ibid.*, 19 September 1985.

7 Bennett, pp.13-15.

8 *Ibid.*

9 E Cameron and G Marcus, “The administration of justice, law reform and jurisprudence”, *Annual Survey of South African Law 1985, 1986*, pp.14-15.

Civic Association, Uitenhage Health, Safety and Cultural Association, Zanolkhanyo Civic Committee, and the United Democratic Front.¹⁰

Reactions to the State of Emergency were as expected. The Progressive Federal Party (PFP) said the fact that the need for a State of Emergency existed, again only underlined the disaster that was the Tricameral Parliament. Instead of heralding a new period of openness and negotiation, it turned into the beginning of “a state of siege”. Dr Andries Treurnicht of the Conservative Party (CP) applauded the State of Emergency, saying that, “Blackmail by violence to impose political change should not be allowed at all”. The UDF said that the State of Emergency again proved that apartheid was inherently violent and could only be “maintained by sheer brute force”. The black hardliners of the Azanian People’s Organization (AZAPO) said that the violence was a result of the fact that the “cosmetic changes that were brought about in a bid to buy a certain section of the black community have failed dismally”.¹¹

The leader of the South African Council of Churches, Bishop Manas Buthelezi, said that the President “should know better” than to think that a State of Emergency was a permanent solution. The American White House called it “counter-productive”, and the Dutch government said that it was “seriously worried” about the government’s handling of the situation.¹² In 2000, Prof. JP de Lange said that the successive States of Emergency created a very violent counter reaction.¹³ “The State of Emergency”, said De Lange, “had provoked a backlash that probably would not have been there – if it had not been for the State of Emergency.”¹⁴

On the other hand, at grassroots level, there were groups in the black communities that welcomed the State of Emergency, irrespective of political orientation. They were tired of the youth gangs and said that it was the only way that they could survive amidst the carnage that was going on in the townships.¹⁵

After being declared on 21 July 1985, the State of Emergency was lifted in eight districts on 24 October 1985, but then on 26 October 1985, another eight districts were again added. By 3 December 1985, seven districts were removed from the State of Emergency’s range. After a total of 156 days, the State of Emergency was finally lifted on 7 March 1986.¹⁶

10 *Ibid.*

11 C Cooper, *South African Institute for Race relations 1985* (Johannesburg: SAIRR, 1985), pp. 462-463; *Die Volksblad*, 22 July 1985.

12 *Ibid.*

13 J-A Stemmet. Private Collection. Interview: Prof. JP De Lange, 28 June 2000.

14 *Ibid.* Translated from the Afrikaans, “Die noodtoestand het ’n teenreaksie ontlok wat waarskynlik nie daar sou gewees het nie – as dit nie was vir die noodtoestand nie.”

15 *Die Volksblad*, 6 September 1985.

16 Cameron and Marcus, p. 543.

3. THE 1986 STATE OF EMERGENCY

The new year, 1986, which included the tenth anniversary of the Soweto riots, proved to be no less violent than 1985. During March 1986 alone, 179 people were killed; the most since the violence originally broke out in 1984. But May 1986 exceeded that total when 213 people died in renewed political upheavals.¹⁷

Already during May 1986, in what seemed like throwing down the gauntlet and paving the way to another State of Emergency, PW Botha delivered a speech to the President’s Council. He highlighted the necessity of a strong security force to combat “internationally organized terrorism” launched against South Africa. Calling for a strongman security stance, he said that “nobody should underestimate our determination” to maintain order.¹⁸ As South Africa was the region’s main powerhouse, this was the government’s “indisputable duty”. He continued to say that it was his undertaking to protect South Africans’ liberty through “civilized” means of security. Switching to Afrikaans he said, “Radikalisme van geen kant af kan ’n bydrae lewer nie” [Radicalism from any side cannot make a contribution]. In a foreboding warning of things to come, the State President informed “geweldenaars” [those who instigate violence] not to try his patience as they will face the full power of the state “wat nog nie naastenby gebruik is nie” [which has not nearly been used in full].¹⁹

During 1986, the State President took a decision which had been a long time in the making: He would not try to appease the outside world anymore. As described in the previous section of this study, the States of Emergency solicited intense and negative reaction from across the globe. The Botha government now decided that they were first going to quell the unrest and then tend to the international situation. He was finished trying to persuade a judgmental world that his changes were indeed fundamentally enlightened and epic.²⁰

PW Botha was growing impatient at foreign critics who were dictating how he should manage his own country. The government would eliminate violent opposition and restore stability regardless of the cost, and without regard of foreign opinion. As already discussed, Botha lifted the first State of Emergency early in 1986, and diplomatic and economic considerations played a major part in that decision. The local corporate sector was increasingly concerned over the intensifying international calls for sanctions. However, when Botha again had to

17 D Quin, “From one emergency to another”, *Indicator SA* 4(1), Winter 1986, pp. 24-27.

18 PW Botha. Private Collection. Institute for Contemporary History (INCH; now AREA). PV 203: 4/2/141.

19 *Ibid.*

20 H Kenney, *Power, pride and prejudice* (Goodwood: Jonathan Ball, 1991), pp. 364-365.

decide on a new State of Emergency for 1986, he wholeheartedly subscribed to the securocrats' reasoning.²¹

Unlike the 1985 State of Emergency, which was only partially instated throughout South Africa, the 1986 State of Emergency was implemented on a national level. With it the government introduced a new, far more comprehensive package of regulations to effectively suppress internal upheavals. Lt-Gen. Pieter van der Westhuizen, who at the time was the Secretary of the State Security Council, called the 1985 State of Emergency "half measures".²² With the 1986 regulations, the authorities placed extensive restrictions on the media and its freedom to report unrest. Also, because the strengthened 1986 State of Emergency was implemented on a national level, anti-apartheid activists could not flee from the comprehensive security force presence in an emergency area to a non-emergency area, as was the case with the 1985 State of Emergency.²³

The government cited a variety of reasons for instating a new, much more draconian, State of Emergency so soon after having lifted the previous one. One of the reasons was the ANC's calls for black South Africans to escalate the existing conflict into a full-fledged "People's War".²⁴ Botha also pointed to the so-called black-on-black violence and argued that radicals in the resistance movement were necklacing moderate "collaborators", because they wanted to maintain the *status quo*. This was disputed by many critics, as by 1986 it was argued that many of the dead were radicals who were killed by conservative black groups that wished to maintain the *status quo*. Botha's securocrats also informed him that the liberation organizations were planning intensified activities on 16 June to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the Soweto riots. Irrespective of these reasons, a question that the government was continually confronted with was whether it was really of critical importance to not only reinstate a State of Emergency, but a significantly more extensive one at that.²⁵

Many analysts argued that the government's security forces had enough extraordinary judicial powers already, not to mention willpower, to tackle the situation without the declaration of another State of Emergency. Botha realized that diplomatically his country was in a difficult position, with various governments becoming hostile or severing ties with the government. Resistance and repression was eroding the momentum of reform. Black South Africa was becoming increasingly polarized, the whites were becoming more and more disillusioned

21 *Ibid.*

22 C Alden, *Apartheid's last stand* (Johannesburg: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), p. 222.

23 *Ibid.*

24 B Pottinger, *The imperial presidency. PW Botha: the first 10 years* (Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers, 1988), pp. 327-329.

25 *Ibid.*

and shifting allegiances to the left or right, and the international community was becoming more anti-apartheid-orientated.²⁶

Botha’s security leaders explained that the President’s reform successes were being belittled. Their reasoning was quite simple: the Russians were behind the South African Communist Party (SACP), the SACP controlled the ANC, and the ANC controlled the UDF. In addition, the securocrats warned the government that they should not consider negotiating with the ANC: negotiations, they warned, would only be part of a classic Leninist ploy to gain final control of South Africa.

Another main point of the securocrats’ national security assessment was the importance of maintaining the government’s strongman image in Africa. It was important that the country’s neighbours did not make the mistake of seeing the minority government as having gone soft; it was important to show by force that the government still had a firm grip on the country.²⁷ Shortly before he decreed the 1986 State of Emergency, Botha had the armed forces flex its military muscle in a very controversial succession of cross-border *blitzkriegs*. The government was adamant not to seem intimidated by its enemies and also to restore total control over the turmoil. *Destabilization*, as these raids became known, is not the focal point of this article, but is important to take note of.²⁸

PW Botha said, “Because I therefore consider that the ordinary laws are inadequate to allow the Government to ensure the safety of the public or to maintain public order, I decided to implement a State of Emergency across the entire country”.²⁹ On 12 June 1986, Botha announced this to all three houses of parliament. He began by saying that in order to spare South Africans the discomfort of a State of Emergency, his government had decided to introduce yet more intensive security legislation. He said that sporadic incidents of violence had increased since the lifting of the State of Emergency. Therefore, according to the State President, the ordinary laws of the country were insufficient to combat the violence. He continued by pointing out that Pretoria had information that the government’s opponents were planning to violently disrupt the country in the future.³⁰

Next, Botha focussed on so-called “black-on-black” faction fighting and violence and thus actually distanced apartheid politics from the renewed round of violence. He rather tried to convey the idea that his security forces were in fact protecting ordinary black citizens from themselves. He singled out the many

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*

28 For further reading, see for example, C Crocker, *High noon in Southern Africa: Making peace in a rough neighborhood* (London: WW Norton, 1994).

29 Translated from the Afrikaans, “Omdat ek dus van mening is dat die gewone landswette onvoldoende is om die Regering in staat te stel om die veiligheid van die publiek te verseker of die openbare orde te handhaaf, het ek besluit om ’n noodtoestand oor die hele land in te stel”.

30 PW Botha. Private Collection. INCH/AREA. PV 203: 4/2/143.

particularly gruesome necklace murders. “It is clear that Black revolutionaries do not enjoy the spontaneous support of the majority of Blacks”, the State President reasoned, “and that they consequently resort to these methods of intimidation in order to gain control.” These revolutionaries, as Botha repeated, were controlled by a Marxist “power clique”. After giving serious thought to all economic, political and security matters, Botha said that the time had come to take “certain security measures”.³¹

The President said that he was well aware that a renewed State of Emergency would elicit “strong criticism and even punitive measures”, but that that was not going to deter the government from doing what it thought was in the best interest of the country. Going further, Botha confronted the international community by saying that everyone was aware of what had happened in Angola, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Iran, Afghanistan and Kampuchea, and so why could they not understand that that was what he was trying to prevent from happening in South Africa. “We will ensure”, bellowed President Botha, “that our civilised heritage [...] will not be placed on the altars of disorder and decay.”³² He reiterated that no responsible government could tolerate extra-parliamentary actions to disrupt the normal political and economic functions of a country. After that, he called upon international tolerance for his government’s decision, and in the same sentence added that he was bound to the broadening of democracy.³³

Elaborating on the seriousness of the internal situation, the President said that his safety and security experts had convinced him that the whole country was a target. He said that ordinary South Africans had nothing to fear as the State of Emergency was a device to protect law abiding citizens and to neutralize anarchists. Botha spoke too about economic and corporate implications and tried to water down possible repercussions. He ended by saying, “Let’s make our country free of violence.”³⁴

On Soweto Day, as 16 June is popularly known, the tenth anniversary of which had made the securocrats anxious, security forces in effect annexed the Soweto township and enforced a media blackout over it. Soweto might have seemed quiet, but altogether 11 people died on 16 June 1986, and 43 more during the following seven days. Some died in clashes with the police; others in so-called black-on-black violence. About 3 000 people were detained and black workers brought Johannesburg to a 90% standstill through a work stoppage. Boycotts and stayaways followed in several cities.³⁵

31 *Ibid.*

32 Translated from the Afrikaans, “Ons sal voorkom dat ons beskawingserfenis [...] op die altare van wanorde en verval geplaas word”.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.* Translated from the Afrikaans, “Kom ons maak ons land vry van geweld”.

35 W Smith *et al.*, “See no evil hear no evil”, *Time* 127(26), 30 June 1986, pp. 6-7.

As meetings scheduled around Soweto Day were banned, black religious leaders urged their followers to go to church. The government said that it would allow church gatherings as long as it did not have a political undercurrent. The authorities acted sternly wherever they thought religion was only being used as a pretext for politics.³⁶ Near Cape Town, a whole church congregation was arrested, consisting of around 200 men, women and children. The same night in Athlone, the police launched teargas into a Muslim mosque with some 1 000 worshippers inside. Most people went back to work on 17 June, but others had learned of what had happened the previous day (to amongst others their union leaders) and organized actions to protest.³⁷

Later, Botha decided to state his case directly to the people, particularly the black people of the country. On 1 July 1986, he spoke on radio. The President started by telling the black population of South Africa that, “the Government is aware of your problems and your aspirations”. He reminded them firstly of how he kept his promises about reform, or was going to in the near future. Taking a more grave tone, he said, “we would never hand this country over to those who want it destroyed or to [...] those who mistakenly believe that freedom lies in violence”.³⁸

He then expressed his sadness that black South Africans were being “murdered by radicals” or had “died in inhuman terrorist attacks by murderers”. Not surprisingly, there was no reference to those who had died in clashes with the security forces. To stop these deaths from escalating, he said he had declared another State of Emergency.³⁹ He then asked his nationwide black audience, “Are not the voices who cry the loudest for the State of Emergency to be lifted the voices of those who seek the destruction of our common future?” He again warned his listeners against “outside forces” who wanted to “dictate our future”.⁴⁰

During the first eight months of the new State of Emergency, some 13 194 people were detained for 30 days or more. The Detainees’ Parents Support Committee estimated the number of detainees from June 1986 to the end of the year to be around 25 000. The PFP had also put the number at between 20 000 and 25 000. The authorities did not provide the total number of detainees, because they felt that radical groups like the ANC and UDF misused information on detainees, “in the most dreadful way, to the detriment of South Africa”.⁴¹

In the 1986 court case of *Bloem v State President of South Africa*, the judicial validity of Botha’s proclamation of a State of Emergency was tested. The case was presided over by a full bench lead by Judge MT Steyn, whom some commentators

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*

38 PW Botha. Private Collection. INCH/AREA. PV 203: 4/2/144.

39 *Ibid.*

40 *Ibid.*

41 C Cooper *et al.*, *South African Institute for Race Relations 1986* (Johannesburg: SAIRR, 1986), p. 537.

would later criticize for being partial to the Botha administration. According to Judge Steyn, the country's internal calamity was the result of liberal radicals who were not satisfied with the government's tempo of change. The resistance was not only aimed at the government, but also, "at certain sections of the private sector, at members of the security forces and other individuals, and also indiscriminately at the general public".⁴²

According to the Judge, the violent resistance to Botha's reform process had taken on the form of "mob action" and included, "widespread damage to property and acts of gruesome cruelty". Judge Steyn elaborated, "The mob violence is usually instigated by agitators and accompanied by widespread intimidation [...] the violent resistance also consists of acts of organized terror such as assassinations and the planting of landmines or placing of bombs whereby many private individuals, and members of the security forces are killed and maimed and otherwise injured and private property or public installations destroyed or damaged."⁴³

Steyn then widened the scope of resistance to the State President's reform policies by including "a socioeconomic dimension" to the spectrum encompassed by the internal crisis. This, he said, included "boycotts of classes" and "trade boycotts". Turning towards the global context, the Judge broadened the effect of the internal unrest by saying that, "for many a month this domestic turbulence has been accompanied and intensified by a mounting political, psychological, socio-economic and terror onslaught upon the Republic of South Africa from beyond its borders".⁴⁴

Steyn then noted that the country's state of internal unrest boiled down to "a power struggle" which had as its goal, "making the Republic ungovernable, subverting by violence the existing dispensation and substituting an entirely different one therefore". Furthermore, the South African community as a whole "has been gravely hurt". The Judge noted, for example, that the unrest had led, "to the weakening of its unit of currency and the economic distress it is enduring". It was, the Judge reasoned, because of all these and still other factors that the State President was not unjust in having proclaimed a State of Emergency.⁴⁵

Seen from the President's perspective, the State of Emergency was primarily a success. Sweeping mass arrests and specifically the arrest of prominent activists, left protest organizations without collective management or direction. Black vigilante groups and death squads had brutally dispersed the so-called "comrade" gangs. Many members of stone throwing mobs were incarcerated and ANC operatives

42 E Cameron *et al.*, "The administration of justice, law reform and jurisprudence". In: *Annual Survey of South African Law 1986* (Cape Town, 1987), pp. 577-578.

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*

were hunted down.⁴⁶ Whereas in May of 1986 more than 150 had died, a year later that number had dropped to eight. From 1 January 1986 to 11 June 1986, some 339 people were killed, but in the ten month period from June 1986 to April 1987, the numbers were down to 147. By 1987, incidents of violence had dropped by 76%.⁴⁷

Henry Kenney wrote about the 1986 State of Emergency, “Radical anticipations of the impending collapse of the racist regime subsided quickly. PW Botha achieved his overriding purpose, but at the cost of a State of Emergency which it seemed would be renewed every year.”⁴⁸ Although Botha succeeded in crushing internal political resistance and forcefully bringing about stability, it was a loose-jointed stability with a very sensitive veneer of calm.

On 3 September 1986, Minister Louis Nel held a media briefing to discuss the country’s violent situation. In his opening remarks, he *inter alia* said, “Let there be no misunderstanding regarding the real issue at stake. It is not the rent issue, it is not the presence of the Security Forces in Black residential areas, it is not certain remembrance days, it is not school programmes – the violent overthrow of the South African state is the issue.”⁴⁹ In that case then, nobody could have expected a short lived State of Emergency, irrespective of how harsh, to have permanently solved the national political unrest.

In December 1986, President Botha exposed the ANC’s general plan for 1987. He said the ANC was planning to expand its campaigns of murder, arson and sabotage to the white urban areas. He said the ANC was also planning to attack white farmers and to further strengthen the united mass movement.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the ANC was planning to wage an intensive campaign of unrest in the homelands, to create discord amongst whites, and to further intensify its armed struggle from the frontline states. President Botha stated that the ANC wanted to bring about a full-scale revolution in South Africa by December 1987. Botha also stated that the government would act strongly against terrorism and unrest.⁵¹

4. THE 1987 STATE OF EMERGENCY

“Because I believe this to show that conditions originated in the Republic that places the safety of the public and the maintenance of public order under serious threat, and that the ordinary laws are inadequate to ensure the safety of the public and to maintain public order”, said PW Botha on 11 June 1987, “I therefore declare

46 Pottinger, p. 348.

47 *Ibid.*

48 Kenney, p. 366.

49 Louis le Grange. Private Collection. INCH/AREA. PV 778: pleg 6/326.

50 *Die Volksblad*, 13 December 1986.

51 *Ibid.*

[...] that an emergency exists in the Republic [...].”⁵² Legally, a State of Emergency could only be instituted for a period of one year and therefore could not continue indefinitely. The government explained that it could not risk lifting the State of Emergency, as it could too easily lead to renewed political violence, general unrest and the total collapse of community services.⁵³

In general, the 1987 State of Emergency was a repeat of the 1986 regulations, although some extra powers were introduced with regard to the security control of black schools, as well as to certain aspects of detention. With the new 1987 State of Emergency, the Botha government also tried to circumvent certain problems with technical aspects in the regulations of the previous States of Emergency, which had culminated in the authorities’ set of State of Emergency regulations being frustrated by court findings.⁵⁴

The 1987 State of Emergency was, from Botha’s side of the political spectrum, a significant success. The violence had been subdued, and most townships were again under the firm control of the authorities. In most areas the so-called alternative structures which were created by the radicals as an attempt to challenge the government’s new local black bodies had been destroyed.⁵⁵ The belief of activists and anti-apartheid fighters that revolution was in the air had been replaced by a chaste realization that Botha’s government was far more powerful, and ruthless, than they had anticipated.⁵⁶

5. THE 1988 STATE OF EMERGENCY

Early in 1988, the government neutralized more of its opponents. The government barred the UDF, the Detainees’ Parents Support Committee, the Free Mandela Campaign and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) from effectively doing anything except to perform mundane and insignificant organizational tasks.⁵⁷ As for the State of Emergency, the NP government was firm that it could not risk lifting it as the situation could too easily degenerate again. Therefore, on 10 June 1988, State President PW Botha announced the third consecutive State of Emergency.⁵⁸

52 W du Plessis and N Olivier, “11 Junie 1987 – tweede algemene noodtoestand”, *SA Publikereg* 2(2), November 1987, p. 197. Translated from the Afrikaans, “Nademaal dit na my mening blyk dat omstandighede in die Republiek ontstaan het wat die veiligheid van die publiek en die handhawing van die openbare orde ernstig bedreig, en dat die gewone landswette onvoldoende is om die veiligheid van die publiek te verseker en die openbare orde te handhaaf, verklaar ek derhalwe [...] dat daar ’n noodtoestand binne die Republiek bestaan.”

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Ibid.*, p. 207.

55 P van Niekerk, “Middle ground laid to waste”, *New Statesman* 114(2941), 7 August 1987, p. 10.

56 *Ibid.*

57 Oakes (ed.), p. 488.

58 W du Plessis and N Olivier, “10 Junie 1988 – derde algemene noodtoestand”, *SA Publikereg* 3(2).

The revamped 1988 State of Emergency focused on putting more restrictions on certain specific organizations and impeded media rights even further. Commentators also noted that the stature of the high court was seriously negated by these regulations. Botha’s government now had almost complete and total control over freedom of speech and the freedom of association.⁵⁹

During 1988, the government – having reinstated the State of Emergency – had to explain why the intensive security measures of the past three years had not yielded the desired results. And why then was it again necessary to prolong the State of Emergency, which at that time was steadily becoming a permanent part of the South African landscape under Botha. The government had to explain or reconfirm why this was the soundest option in handling the political unrest. During the year, the state’s Bureau of Information released a booklet to justify the matter and put it in the official perspective. Entitled *Die Nasionale Noodtoestand* [The National State of Emergency], it referred to the five basic goals Botha had with the State of Emergency.⁶⁰

It stated that the State of Emergency wanted to ensure that a “vreedsame, stabiele en ordelike klimaat” [peaceful, stable and orderly climate] was maintained, to restore law and order, to ensure “vreedsame naasbestaan” [peaceful coexistence], to effectively diffuse foreign pressure “om [...] buitelandse inmenging in die RSA se binnelandse aangeleenthede aan bande te lê” [to curb foreign interference in the domestic affairs of the RSA] and also to ensure and protect the individual’s safety.⁶¹

On the last objective, the booklet clearly stated that human rights should not be seen in absolute terms. When national safety is jeopardised, it is justified to limit certain rights of the individual, “It is an internationally accepted fact that human rights are not to be considered in absolute terms. The rights of the individual are constantly weighed against the national interest. When the national interest outweighs individual interests, certain rights of the individual should be restricted.”⁶²

Of course, a great debating point at the time was that if these consecutive States of Emergency actually worked, why then did the violence repeatedly flare up again? It should have been clear to PW Botha by then that simply declaring a State of Emergency was not a substitute for a long term political solution. The compilers of the booklet addressed this issue and argue, “The Government has, especially since 1983, been working on real reform initiatives [...] With the start

59 *Ibid.*

60 *Die nasionale noodtoestand*. Booklet compiled by the Bureau for Information, June 1988.

61 *Ibid.*

62 *Ibid.* Translated from the Afrikaans, “Dit is ’n internasionaal aanvaarde feit dat menseregte nie verabsoluteer moet word nie. Die regte van die individu word deurentyd teen die nasionale belang opgeweeg. Wanneer die nasionale belang swaarder weeg as individuele belange moet sekere regte van die individu beperk word.”

of unrest in 1984, it became clear that the reform process would be hampered in South Africa and that the necessary services and reform actions could not continue unhindered. Against this background, the National Emergency was declared and brought about amazing results in the field of continuing socio-economic and political reforms [...].⁶³

The single most important section of the booklet with regard to the government's overall justification of their increasingly drawn out security manoeuvres is on the last page, where it is explained why reinstating the State of Emergency was necessary. The government stated that, should the existing emergency regulations be abolished, the expectations were that, "in die lig van veral die onlangse reeks terreurdade, onrus weer skerp sal toeneem" [in light of the recent series of particular acts of terrorism, unrest will again increase sharply].⁶⁴ According to the booklet, the underlying reasons for the unrest still existed. To some extent, the latter is then an admission that the last three States of Emergency did not remove the primary reasons for the violence. In other words, the emergency security measures could contain the unrest, but did not address the fundamental political reasons for its existence.

Furthermore, it was the absolute duty of the government to protect the "individu wie se veiligheid bedreig word" [individual whose security is threatened]. Also, the government viewed the right to life as the most important and basic of human rights and as such the Botha government was not going to allow that, "innocent people be maimed by radicals in the reckless pursuit of their political objectives and be killed".⁶⁵

After their harshness during the previous two States of Emergency, the security forces had gained a firmer grip on the townships. Although the mass-movements still functioned, it was in an underground capacity. Importantly for the securocrats, the so-called alternative structures, including street courts, were effectively eliminated. The police adopted a more pro-active stance. They decided to ban or restrict people and organizations, ban gatherings outright, and/or seal off venues and areas instead of trying to disrupt gatherings while they were in progress. Nevertheless, the police still maintained a strong presence in the

63 *Ibid.* Translated from the Afrikaans, "Die Regering is, veral sedert 1983, besig met daadwerklike hervormingsinisiatiewe [...] Met die aanvang van onrus in 1984 het dit duidelik geblyk dat die hervormingsproses in Suid-Afrika gestrem sou word en dat die nodige dienste en hervormingsaksies nie onverhinderd sou kon voortgaan nie. Teen hierdie agtergrond is die Nasionale Noodtoestand afgekondig en is verstommende resultate op die terrein van voorgesette sosiaal-ekonomiese en politieke hervorming teweeggebring."

64 *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.* Translated from the Afrikaans, "(dat) onskuldige mense (nie) deur radikale in die onverskillige najaag van hulle politieke oogmerke vermink en gedood word nie".

townships with daily patrols, patrolling in armoured vehicles and conducting seal-and-search raids.⁶⁶

For PW Botha, it seemed as if the whole South African situation simply boiled down to one word, *self-discipline*.⁶⁷ “There is too little self-discipline in South Africa”, PW Botha explained in 1988, “We cannot live in this country as though we were the only people living here. We cannot live in this country as though the White First World group can possess everything, do everything, demand everything; that is not self-discipline; that is selfishness. On the other hand self-discipline is also needed in our other population groups, in our Black population groups and in our Coloured population groups, for the more agitation arises in South Africa, the greater the reaction will be in South Africa.”⁶⁸

6. CONCLUSION

By and during the second half of Botha’s roughly decade-long term as head of state, he received increasing criticism for his lack of bold direction and political vision. Many critics and commentators of the Botha administration argued that it had become clear that the President was a tactician and not a visionary strategist. He was attacked for not actually having a long-term plan for the future and that all his reformist tinkering and securocratic strategizing were attempts to buy time. His reform strategy, with which he entered the presidency, dwindled by the latter half of the decade as the violence spread and intensified. It would seem that during this period, the second half of the 1980s, his reform program was side-lined and that he actually used bursts of reform to subdue internal and external outcries.⁶⁹

It was a case of one step forward – one step back. “Each step down the path of reform [...] is not part of a coherent ideological programme,” wrote Simon Jenkins, “It is conceded only under force of circumstances to meet what appears the line of least resistance. Each year a new ‘bottom line’ is drawn, only to be abandoned by the next.”⁷⁰

During the 1987 election campaign, PW Botha asked the voters to unite against the spirit of revolution that had gripped the country. He pleaded for a mandate to continue his reforms, but reiterated that he would not allow foreigners to dictate what he should and should not do and at what pace. Botha said that he could only thwart the negative campaign currently waged against the country if the

66 G Cawthra, *Policing South Africa: The SAP and the transition from apartheid* (London: Zed, 1993), p. 113.

67 JJJ Scholtz, *Fighter and reformer: Extracts from the speeches by PW Botha* (Johannesburg: Bureau for Information, 1989), p. 90.

68 *Ibid.*

69 S Jenkins, “Looking back on 1986”, *Optima* 34(4), December 1986, p. 176.

70 *Ibid.*

voters empowered him to do so. The Nationalists again made it clear to the white electorate that its reforms would not lead to a multiracial one man one vote – more black faces in higher places would not mean fewer white ones. That was effectively the crux of the government's message. Again Botha would not only retain his middle-of-the-road policy, but stay politically in one place while conducting it.⁷¹

The implication was also that the States of Emergency were a political attempt to retain the *status quo* of white minority rule and not to force PW Botha to actually introduce some fundamental changes. This of course further motivated commentators to say that Botha was not visionary enough to move progressively forward, but ultimately was simply standing unmovable in the middle of the political road, buying time.⁷²

One of most poignant formulations of this type of criticism came from the leader of the Zulu orientated Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi, "I do not believe that President Botha has any intention of going to the electorate with a bold plan to establish a true democracy here. He is going into the election to buy additional time, hoping somehow that the extra time will make it possible for him to secure political dreams. His policies, his Government, and his approach to reform are designed first and primarily to secure Afrikaner dreams, which are not South African dreams, because this is a multiracial country."⁷³

The main difference between previous NP governments and that of PW Botha was that by the mid-1980s, his administration had finally reached the conclusion that it did not need simple black subservience but rather black co-operation. Therefore, throughout and especially during the State of Emergency periods, Botha searched for black moderates he could entice to join him in his reformist manoeuvrings in an attempt to undercut the influence of the more radical groupings. But to achieve collaboration of "acceptable" black groups, the government had to make political concessions that in effect would have greatly disheartened Botha's take on apartheid policy and indeed the government's security strategies.⁷⁴ Steven Friedman wrote, "But the search for black co-operation is not simply a policy option – it is a strategic necessity, for stability cannot be imposed indefinitely by coercion alone."⁷⁵

By the end of the 1980s, a few broad security and political trends can be distinguished. It was clear that although the NP did lose some supporters to both the left and right, they could still retain the majority of the white electorate. The NP was still in power in Pretoria and would remain so for the foreseeable future. But despite attempts, they could not succeed in getting the moderate black

71 AJG Muller, *Die hervormingsinisiatiewe van die Nasionale Party, 1978-1989, en die redes daarvoor* (MA, University of the Orange Free State, 1993), p. 219.

72 *Ibid.*

73 *Ibid.*, p. 233.

74 S Friedman, "Shifting strategies in black politics", *Optima* 36(3), September 1986, p. 155.

75 *Ibid.*

majority to support Botha’s socio-political reformist schemes.⁷⁶ Also importantly, it was becoming apparent that although the harsh measures of the security forces did indeed crush resistance, it only suppressed it in the short term, and could not succeed in permanently overpowering violent black political discontent – instead it only exacerbated resistance. Thus political/socio-economic reform did not seem to be getting off the ground and neither did the security option promise any long term solutions for the political crisis.⁷⁷

In an interview with Beyers Naude during 2000, the prominent anti-apartheid activist was asked whether he reckoned that all the reinstatements of all the State of Emergencies were justified, “No. From their point of view, I can understand that they did it, but I told myself that they could try, but in the long run it will not work.”⁷⁸

In a section of the NP’s 1988 publication entitled, *NP altyd nuut*, State President PW Botha wrote that from the start the government had to do with communist-inspired agitators; that in this intensive struggle the state had never hesitated to act firmly, and that it was still opposed to negotiating with terrorists. “On the domestic terrain, since shortly after it took office, the National government had to deal with a refined communist-inspired onslaught. It is a fierce battle, and never did the government hesitate [...] to act firmly, even if it was accompanied by international hostility [...] In addition, the Government consistently refuses to negotiate with terrorist tyrants.”⁷⁹

When reading this, it does indeed seem as if the crux of the NP’s official politics and policy, although somewhat restyled in some ways, remained as a whole unmoved. Yet as the successive States of Emergency made apparent, the violent political conflict would not simply dissipate, nor could the government succeed in permanently and unilaterally ending it.

Asked why he thought the government’s State of Emergencies did not succeed in permanently stamping out the anti-government upheavals, Beyers Naudé explained that it revolved around three points: the tremendous upsurge in dissidence amongst blacks, security measures that could not resolve fundamental

76 Muller, p. 279.

77 *Ibid.*

78 J-A Stemmet. Private Collection. Interview: Beyers Naude, 27 June 2000. Translated from the Afrikaans, “Nee. Uit hulle standpunt kon ek verstaan dat hulle dit gedoen het, maar ek het vir myself gesê hulle kan probeer, maar op die lange duur gaan dit nie werk nie.”

79 JJ van Rooyen (ed.), *NP altyd nuut: Nasionale Party regeer al 40 jaar* (Cape Town: Nasionale Party, 1988), p. 6. Translated from the Afrikaans, “Op binnelandse terrein het die Nasionale regering van kort na sy bewindsaanvaarding met ’n verfynde kommunisties-geïnspireerde aanslag te kampe. Dit is ’n felle stryd, en nooit het die regering gehuiwer [...] om ferm op te tree nie, selfs al het dit met internasionale kwaavriendskap gepaard gegaan [...] Hierbenewens weier die Regering konsekwent om met terroristiese geweldenaars te onderhandel.”

political issues, and the international anti-apartheid pressure.⁸⁰ He said, “I thi`nk there were three reasons why they could not do that. The first reason was [...] the surge of resistance, on the part of the black community, had become much stronger than before, that they realized we could not suppress it in the long run. The second reason was that they realized from their side that even if we could suppress opposition with some act of force, in the long run it simply does not work. And also because they realized that the resistance from outside, against apartheid, was becoming stronger and stronger. For instance through sanctions [...] They realized in their hearts [...] we could temporarily suppress it, but in the long run there will in all likelihood be an explosion. When the explosion came, then the danger was that for all of us, there would be no future [...]”⁸¹

Violent political conflict served as a catalyst for relatively peaceful democratisation where both sides used the carrot and stick of negotiations and violence to negotiate South Africa’s future. A show of force is not necessarily indicative of strength, for although the minority regime in this period continued to thwart dissent and defiance, it could not succeed in circumventing the future. Counterinsurgency, as manifested in South Africa’s States of Emergency, requires succeeding in the political dimension of the conflict, something the minority regime failed to do.

80 J-A Stemmet. Private Collection. Interview: Beyers Naude, 27 June 2000.

81 *Ibid.* Translated from the Afrikaans, “Ek dink daar was drie redes, hoekom hul dit nie kon regkry nie. Die eerste rede was [...] die opwelling van verset, aan die kant van die swart gemeenskap het soveel sterker en sterker geword as vantevore, dat hulle besef het ons sal nie op die lang duur dit kan bly onderdruk nie. Die tweede rede was dat hulle van hulle kant af besef het al kan ons dit ook met een of ander magsoptrede onderdruk, dan gaan dit op die lange duur net eenvoudig nie werk nie. En ook omdat hulle besef het die verset aan die kant van die wêreld buitekant, teen apartheid besig was om sterker en sterker te word. Met byvoorbeeld sanksies [...] Hulle het in hul harte besef [...] tydelik kan ons dit onderdruk, maar op die lange duur gaan in alle waarskynlikheid hier ’n ontploffing kom. As die ontploffing kom dan is die gevaar daar dat dit vir almal van ons hier, daar geen toekoms is nie [...]”