

**COMMITTEES, TYRES AND TEENAGERS:
"PEOPLE'S POWER" AND "ALTERNATIVE
STRUCTURES" AS PART OF THE STRATEGY OF
THE ANC TO RENDER THE COUNTRY
UNGOVERNABLE DURING THE 1980s***

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1. INTRODUCTION

"(T)hey brought with them another man...We all took the man across the veld...The four men started stabbing the...man in the back with large jungle knives. Jabo and Pogiso also stabbed the man with jungle knives...Impi poured petrol over the man from a one-litre Coke bottle. Impi then set the man alight with a match. The man then went mad and fell to the ground. He tried to roll on the ground to put the fire out but then Impi stopped him from rolling on the ground by putting a pitchfork in the man's side and the man screamed and died. Impi took the pitchfork out and we all went home..." one 17-year old teenager recollected.¹

"We call on our communities in the black ghettos to replace the collapsing government stooge councils with people's committees in every block which could become the embryos of people's power. We call on our people and, more specifically, our fighting youth in every black community...to find ways of organizing themselves into small mobile units which will protect the people against anti-social elements and act in an organised way in both white and black areas against the enemy and its agents. Every black area must become a 'no-go area' for any isolated individuals or pockets of the enemy's police or armed personnel",

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¹ **The young revolutionaries** (Bureau for Information, June 1988).

stated a general directive of the National Executive Committee of the ANC, in April 1985.²

Pursuing their ideal, in the 1980s, of toppling minority rule in South Africa, the ANC knew that any type of conventional military stratagem was futile. The Government of PW Botha had at its command an immense military-security complex. Nonetheless, if the ANC could not wage conventional war on the defence forces, it would aim at the destruction of the very ground beneath the Government's feet; it would paralyse the country through chaos. By calling on its supporters to claim people's power and to *render the country ungovernable*, the ANC confronted the authorities with an ongoing security hazard. If a conventional military invasion of Pretoria was virtually impossible, they would try and make the Government overexert itself. The minority Government of PW Botha had the military infrastructure and resources to withstand any conventional military offensive the ANC could direct at it, but the ANC had the numbers; access to the broad masses, something the Government desperately lacked. The Government managed the system, but the ANC controlled the grassroots - and they were going to set it on fire. The ANC knew that power, ultimately, lay in numbers. If they could set the political passive masses alight with militant enthusiasm there would not be enough of the minority to extinguish it. The authorities, irrespective of their sophisticated securocratic infrastructure, could not be everywhere at once; their security forces could not be engaged in the urban and rural areas in Namibia and the Transvaal, Free State, Natal, Cape and the homelands - all at once. Or rather, they could not be applied with maximum efficiency everywhere at the same time. This article will explain, in broad terms, how the ANC utilised and/or exploited the masses as strategic commodities in confronting Africa's only nuclear power in order to dislodge its securocratic stronghold on the status quo. Furthermore, the article will illustrate how, by enlisting the masses to spread violent disorder, the ANC had opened a Pandora's box which has yet to be closed.

2. AN ALTERNATIVE BRUTALITY: THE CONCEPTUALISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF "PEOPLE'S POWER"

The ANC document dealing exclusively with the so-called organs of people's power, stated: "The people shall govern. But in this regard we are talking about a qualitatively different level of struggle. To implement this demand we have to do more than apply pressure and force a concession from the powers-that-be. We have to use all our power to weaken the control of the regime over us, destroy its organs of government and overthrow its administration in the localities. Briefly, this means

² **Oliver Tambo Private Collection:** Office of the President. ANC Archives at the Howard Pim Library, Fort Hare University: ANC call to the nation: Box 34.

that we have to bring about a revolutionary transfer of power in these areas. This is what the emergence of people's committees in the streets, areas, blocks, townships and villages amounts to. To reach this level we had to use all forms of struggle...we marched and waged street battles. In time we made it more and more difficult for the racist government to rule us. We rendered its local structures unworkable and used our accumulated strength to destroy them. Thus, our people's committees emerged in the process of struggle, in a united all-round offensive against the racist government."³

The ANC document, **Organs for people's power**, detailed the whole concept of alternative structures as part of the ANC's strategy to cement itself as the alternative power inside the apartheid state, within its total strategy of rendering the country ungovernable. This was a conceptual document outlining the ANC's whole total onslaught against the minority establishment's authority. The document stated: "We are able to use the combined strength of all forms of the struggle to crush the regime's institutions and set up our own." It set out four basic conditions which the revolution required:

- "The people should reject the government of the day and all it stands for, and clamour for a government of their own. They should not want to be ruled in the old way."
- "The existing government should be unable to rule in the old way: thrown into crisis by the active revolt of the people and differences among sections of those who wield political and economic power."
- "The system in its totality should have become ungovernable for the masses: political, social and economic hardships should be at their worst."
- "This presupposes also that the actions of the people against the system should be at their most intense."⁴

The document also stated that the ANC leaders had to remember that not all the groups in the country moved as one or at once; instead, in different parts of South Africa different types of progress would be made. The document also stated that although the forces of the ANC were strong enough to "smash the organs of government in 'black South Africa,'" they were still not strong enough to "destroy the organs of racist power in the 'white areas' where the seat of apartheid power is to be found".⁵ The latter comment, and the realisation inherent therein, were

³ **ANC Lusaka Mission.** ANC Archives at the Howard Pim Library, Fort Hare University. Broad guidelines on organs of people's power: Box 6.

⁴ **ANC Lusaka Mission.** ANC Archives at the Howard Pim Library, Fort Hare University. Broad guidelines on organs of people's power: Box 6.

⁵ **Ibid.**

relevant throughout the 1980s and it was eventually a major factor in bringing the ANC to the negotiating table.

The ANC stated, with this in mind, that in order to render the country immobile, a cohesive total strategy was demanded: "mass democratic organisation, a relatively strong underground network and an active and developed military force of the people". The ANC argued that defying and/or opposing the establishment and the system through boycotts, strikes and defiance campaigns, was not enough. Rendering the country ungovernable was but one part of the strategy - and useless if the people did not seize power in the vacuums created by the destruction of the Government's structures. They wanted the people to not only nullify these structures but also to seize authority through political self-empowerment, because "the central demand is that the people must govern".⁶

The creation of alternative structures was not simply a method of defying the minority power, but directly related to the crux of the ANC's struggle: the destruction of the system and the political empowerment of the people. "Where organs of the regime have been destroyed we have to create new ones which represent the people and serve their interests." It stated that these organs had to be of an elective nature, the people themselves had to elect representatives onto these bodies and these bodies had to consult with and report back to the people.⁷

This included:

- "Parliament in the form of street committees;"
- "army and police in the form of self-defence units and combat groups;"
- "its courts: the people's courts."⁸

According to the ANC these were "organs of people's power: a new, democratic government".⁹ The ANC referred to the possibility of a stalemate between the Government and the masses, where a situation of so-called dual power would emerge: The Government is unable to crush the revolutionary masses and the masses are unable to overthrow the Government, so the two parties are locked in an impasse. To dislodge such a situation, according to the ANC theoreticians, people's power needed to be developed. The ANC stated that their struggle was a "protracted people's war", combining the various means available to them (i.e. mass

⁶ **Ibid.**
⁷ **Ibid.**
⁸ **Ibid.**
⁹ **Ibid.**

action and armed struggle) and not a unifacted assault on minority power.¹⁰ "We have to do this because we do not have the capacity - in particular the military capacity - to topple the racist regime." Instead of being able to count on mutineers in the Government's security forces to turn their weapons on their masters, the ANC had to make use of a much more holistic onslaught.¹¹

The ANC decreed that "the day-to-day manifestations of oppression and exploitation have to result in mass protest action". The ANC bargained on some of these mass protests to "build up into revolts of varying scales". These crises, according to the ANC, would directly affect and frustrate the minority power, because unlike colonial struggles for liberation, the Government and ruling class were not in Europe - they were in the same country. This could stimulate "a high point in the struggle" where revolution really starts. The creation of alternative structures, organs of people's power, were essential in bringing this about. In the realisation of these alternative structures, all forms of struggle were needed, including the components of the armed struggle.¹²

The importance of alternative structures, within the context of the overall strategy for the seizure of political power, ought to be clear. For the ANC, these alternative structures were not merely tools for rendering the apartheid system unmanageable – the strategists had far more grandiose ideas than that. The ANC wanted these organs of people's power to oversee the "running of people's lives in a revolutionary way". These committees and makeshift courts had to begin implementing the principles of the Freedom Charter and, collectively, act as an alternative "government for the whole of SA", but in order to be able to do that, the document explained, it "means to fight to get rid of the regime everywhere".

In the strategic opinion of the ANC these alternative structures were microcosmic representations of the overall ANC strategy: "They have to lead in the all-round offensive against the regime employing all forms of struggle". Operating as individual cells, but with a collective target - the destruction of minority rule - these alternative structures were to sow the seeds for revolution.¹³

In practice, the committees were formed on a street basis. Members had to be elected from amongst the local people. Preliminary meetings were to be held to establish what the people's needs were and to identify the issues around which programs of action could be instituted. These were to be generalised and merged

¹⁰ **Ibid.**
¹¹ **Ibid.**
¹² **Ibid.**
¹³ **Ibid.**

into a so-called "Program of Action" for the whole locality. These issues had to be of a broad nature and be connected with corresponding issues in the other townships and villages. Therefore, although operating at a very local level, these structures had to be aware of what was going on in the other townships.¹⁴

According to the document, the most prominent issues in these programs of action, had to, or ought to have, included:

- The rent boycott.
- The education endeavours.
- The workers' struggles.
- Campaigns for a higher standard of living, i.e. struggles for cheaper transport fares.
- Ensuring that all the people in the area, children, males, females, the elderly, the workers and unemployed, were all members of some kind of democratic organisation. Furthermore, there should be "permanent and viable mechanisms of liaison" between these organisations and the street committees.¹⁵
- The street, block and area committees had to be involved with the civic organisations: "Revive and strengthen the civics in all areas and link them up at national level; ensure that they are representative of all the people and operate on the basis of democracy; involve them intimately in the people's power movement with the aim of turning them into all-township organs of people's power."
- Organising a program for political education and propaganda.
- Administrative tasks had to be delegated, including the cleaning of the streets and refuse disposal.
- "[K]now the individuals in its areas, their profile and activity and *identify the network of informers and deal with it effectively*."¹⁶
- "[F]orm and supervise the work of self-defence units and combat groups."
- "People's courts" had to be organised to dispense "popular legality".¹⁷

It is important to note how the document outlined the last three points, which surely were the most controversial of the tasks performed by these alternative structures. Regarding self-defence units and combat groups, the document stated: "The forms of armed actions and self-defence activity vary: the mass revolutionary violence of the people; units to protect leaders of people's committees and democratic organisations; a system of patrolling the streets and warning signals; units to harass

¹⁴

Ibid.

¹⁵

Ibid.

¹⁶

Emphasis by the author.

¹⁷

Ibid.

enemy patrols; attacks on enemy encampments; elimination of agents; procurement of weapons and so on."¹⁸ The document warned those involved to be intensely confidential when creating these groups and that the members had to be selected carefully. It warned that the security agents of the Government were everywhere and would not hesitate to eliminate people exposed as members of these self-defence units.¹⁹

As for "combat actions", the document suggested that smaller units had to be formed. Those involved had to be the best members of the self-defence units. These groups were to be divided into commanders and officials taking care of reconnaissance, logistics, combat squads, hiding places and communications. They were again warned to operate in a tightly controlled clandestine way and were to link up with the local representative of Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK). The idea was that the MK representatives could develop these local combat units into "combat formations of MK".²⁰

"People's courts" were there to "ensure healthy, revolutionary and democratic interrelations within society...groups, family units and individuals". It emphasised that the sole reason for the existence of these structures was political and the basic guiding purpose of these courts was to "thwart the enemy's plans and actions. To ensure this, they dealt with cases such as anti-social behaviour, conflicts and political crimes against the people. All this is important: *the primary cause of these problems is apartheid.*"²¹

The document stated that the composition of these courts could differ from community to community, but all should operate on the same basic principles:

- These had to be "popular and community-based".
- Their "approach should be political and educational". The authority of these courts had to stem from the respect the people had for these structures and not from fear.
- "Punishment should serve educational purposes, e.g., useful work for the community. For serious crimes against the people, even more seriousness and dignity is required. *And where the death sentence is decided upon, ways should be found not endangering the court. To carry it out, appropriate structures should be used, and the forms should serve as a deterrent while not exceeding the limits of revolutionary decency.*"

¹⁸ **Ibid.**

¹⁹ **Ibid.**

²⁰ **Ibid.**

²¹ **Ibid.** Emphasis by the author.

- Because these courts were vested with the power to execute people, the document stated that the parties involved should "conduct proper investigations and ensure that we are not merely skimming at the surface of the enemy's network".
- Where possible the people should involve legal professionals to make the processes more sophisticated: "However, we should consciously avoid turning the whole popular experience into an elitist exercise negating the very concept of people's democracy."²²

The document made it clear that, according to their strategy, this interwoven web of structures and links between the underground and those on grassroots level - the street committees - and with the area and regional and national groups - the civic and mass organisations - was the ANC's guarantee for victory.²³

Although bombastic at times, the document was not written with delusions of grandeur and paid attention to the "enemy's counter offensive". In ominous wording, the ANC warned that PW Botha had become "ruthless" and had opted for "open terror" in dealing with the revolt. According to the document, these alternative structures were the number one target of the security forces. It warned that the Government, through a state of emergency, was trying to isolate one region from the other and making it easier to crush the upheavals in these contained areas. It stated that the Government was recruiting "all types" to "butcher activists and paralyse the democratic movement". It explained that the Government was recruiting from the ranks of the "unemployed, the rural population, common criminals and the bandits from the neighbouring countries".

The Government was "exploiting" these groups and "falsified 'traditional' sentiments" to activate these groups "against their own interests". It accused the Government of unleashing "campaigns of bloody terror" through contracting its dirty work to vigilante gangs.²⁴ These were ordered to destroy the alternative structures, while the Government pretended that it had nothing to do with the so-called black-on-black violence.²⁵

The document stated that the Government's "so-called counter revolutionary scheme, total strategy" was bound to fail eventually, but that the Botha government's securocratic network had made it exceptionally difficult to fully

²² **Ibid.**

²³ **ANC Lusaka Mission** D/A. ANC Archives at the Howard Pim Library, Fort Hare University. Broad guidelines on organs of people's power: Box 6.

²⁴ **Ibid.**

²⁵ **Ibid.**

execute the ANC's strategy. As such, the document made an appeal on people to pay attention to some specific "urgent tasks".

These included:

- Everybody involved in the anti-apartheid struggle had to ensure that where alternative structures had collapsed, they were revived and strengthened.
- "Mass action, ungovernability and people's power should spread to other areas of the country." In this regard, special attention had to be paid to the situation in coloured and Indian communities. These communities also had to form their own alternative structures and had to link them with those of the black people.
- Mobilisation of the rural population had to be intensified and "action must be directed against the bantustan and other apartheid structures".
- More attention had to be paid to the cohesive defence of areas that had been hit particularly hard by the security forces. The document singled out the role of the "democratic media" in highlighting the plight of these communities.
- Civic organisations had to be cemented and national cohesion had to be administered between these bodies.
- Everybody should engage in defending the united mass front.
- "We need to put into effect a systematic strategy to deal with the vigilante gangs".* The document stated that the people had to nullify the Government's "social base from which to recruit" and as such political programs had to be intensified in the rural areas. "On the other hand, *we must physically deal with*

* Vigilante gangs were black groups that were covertly organised and/or sponsored by the Government to oppose and disrupt alternative structures and so-called self-defence units. While the youth were getting out of hand and rejected any type of discipline and respect for older people, some groupings in the townships could stand no more. Some groups of conservative, older males refused to accept that they were now subordinate to teenagers, irrespective of the possible greater political strategy. These men forged their own rough gangs to reassert their seniority and patriarchal rank over the volatile youth. Generally referred to as the *Fathers*, these groups of older men took the youth head on, and often proved to be just as brutal as the young ones. The *Fathers* were also nothing new to the social order of townships. Since the 1940s, for the lack of better government-controlled policing services, vigilante groups of men were spontaneously formed in townships to dispense their own kind of community-based, rough justice. These "tribal" gangs of vigilantes were known as *maghotla* and were accepted by their local communities as rendering a kind of social discipline in the locations and villages. In the latter part of the 1980s, allegations arose that these conservative groups were being manipulated by the Government to do its dirty work for it, namely to eliminate activists and to violently exploit divisions in the black anti-apartheid mass movement. By November 1988, according to the *Star*, about 90% of South Africa's political violence came from clashes between vigilante and counter-vigilante activity. Due to its sheer brutality, the country's political gangsterism was making headlines throughout the world. See: N Manganyi and A Du Toit (eds), **Political violence and the struggle in South Africa** (Cape Town, 1990) and J Seekings, **The UDF** (Claremont, 2000) and the 1986 report of the Commonwealth's Eminent Persons Group.

*those who cannot be reformed, especially the leadership of the vigilante gangs".*²⁷

- "We have to frustrate efforts of the regime to re-establish its informer network." And regarding so-called collaborators: "*Those who have committed serious crimes against the people should be dealt with accordingly.*"²⁸

The strategic motivations behind the call to make the country ungovernable must, firstly, be understood in terms of the ANC's holistic onslaught against the minority power and its sophisticated military-security complex specifically. Apart from rendering the apartheid system unworkable and getting the masses to politically empower themselves through organs of people's power, the ANC's call on the masses was also part of a military strategy. It must be understood in terms of numbers. Whereas the ANC's support base was found amongst the majority of South Africans, the support base of the Government's military-security establishment was the minority. If the ANC could have managed to make all of South Africa ungovernable, the Government's security forces would have needed to patrol the whole country.

Subsequently the Government's security forces would have been forced to spread their already strained, albeit sophisticated, resources very thinly, dividing the Government's security resources and its stronghold on the upheavals. This would have made it easier for ANC cadres to enter and operate undetected throughout the country. For this strategy to have succeeded the ANC needed the upheavals to spread from the radicalised urban townships to the quieter rural areas.²⁹

That was why in the document outlining the strategy for creating an alternative power through alternative structures, the ANC correctly explained that the Government "relies on isolating areas of revolt from the rest of the country". To prevent that, the ANC needed the whole country to be in constant turmoil, at the same time, and specifically for the more passive rural areas to become politically active. Apart from its general call on the masses to render the country ungovernable, the ANC explicitly called for more intensive "(r)ural mobilisation and organisation".³⁰ The ANC never fully succeeded, during the 1980s, to draw the general rural population of South Africa into active support of its political strategy. The main focal point of its strategies to render the country ungovernable remained concentrated in the urban areas.

²⁷ **Ibid.** Emphasis by the writer.

²⁸ **Ibid.** Emphasis by the writer.

²⁹ **Ibid.**

³⁰ **Ibid.**

3. PULVERIZING PEOPLE: THE EFFECT OF "PEOPLE'S POWER"

By drawing the general populace into its violent opposition to the status quo, the ANC at once boosted its own power base, but also opened up a Pandora's box of brutality and chaos. A very thin line separates people's power and out-and-out mob violence. In South Africa that thin line was ignored and at times non-existent.

Between 1984 and April 1986, 508 people died in so-called black-on-black violence (while a further 731 people were killed by security forces in the States of Emergency).³¹ By 1987, the violence aimed at so-called "collaborators", reached such heights that the Government stated that it was clear that the black security officers had become the main target of the radical groups. During the year a number of non-white security officers were murdered by their communities - many were stoned to death.³² For councillors the situation was not any better. Many were murdered and/or had their homes destroyed. The house belonging to a certain councillor (and the 5 people in it), was attacked by machinegun fire and grenades for the seventh time in two years. During this time the councillors in Soweto were in such constant danger of losing their lives that they had to flee their homes and settle in a formerly "whites-only" suburb on the outskirts of the township.³³

During 1988 some 1149 people died as a result of political violence. Between September 1984 and 1988, the violence cost the country more than R285 000 000, injured 880 security officers and killed 71 policemen.³⁴ By 1988, being a black security officer, councillor or a non-white member of the Tricameral Parliament, or even just being related to one, was a very dangerous position to hold.³⁵

4. KID'S PLAY: THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH

Following the calls from the ANC leadership in Lusaka to form alternative structures and self-defence units, and further promoted by the groupings inside the united mass front throughout the country, during the mid-to-latter part of the 1980s, political youth gangs sprouted.

There are various theories why the black and coloured youth were so eager to form these gangs. Commentators seem to agree that socio-economic factors played just as important a role as political considerations. In fact, at their core these groups

³¹ D Quin, "From one emergency to another," *Indicator SA*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Winter, 1986, p. 24.

³² C Cooper, (et al.), *South African Institute for Race Relations 1987/88*, p. 37.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 597.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 602.

were nothing new to the South African landscape and, in one form or another, had existed from the start of the 20th century.³⁷

During the 1980s and especially from 1985 onwards, when examining the emergence of alternative structures like street committees and people's courts, it is very important, albeit sometimes difficult, to distinguish between criminal, political and community-based alternative structures.³⁸ By the end of the decade this distinction all but disappeared.

The role of the youth was a predominant feature in the creation of alternative structures and all the positive and negative consequences thereof. As the Government strengthened its attempts to squash the upheavals and the youth increasingly moved to the forefront of the struggle against apartheid, and were caught in the crossfire, the ANC was unperturbed about this section of society. The youth were not mobilised as an implied result of the ANC's drive to render the country ungovernable. They continuously and explicitly focussed on spurring them onto action. In 1987 the President of the ANC, Oliver Tambo, called on the people "in particular the youth, to form and engage in self-defence units and combat groups in action against the fascist army, police and death squads - the vigilantes".³⁹

Why the ANC utilised, if not exploited, the youth is easy enough to understand. They represented a large section of the population and, more importantly, were easily motivated to political action - it was a case of simply directing their energies towards chaos. The ANC knew that these young people were more easily incited than their cautious parents. Over the years, after many failed campaigns against the system, many adult blacks had lost the will and the zealous passion to fight apartheid. They had grown politically weary, relatively speaking, and had come to accept their frustrating social and political position - in any case this was the perception held by the youth.⁴⁰ "You look at your parent and see a worn-out,

* Some of these were criminally inclined, but not all. Those in rural areas were set up for purposes of control and control over courting. In towns, these groups gave its members a sense of belonging and of coming into their own right. As jobs became scarce and the number of unemployed young blacks rose, the culture of youth gangsterism increased. Many of these gangs originated in prisons and when the members were released they took what they had learned about such groups with them to the outside world. By the 1940s a distinct feature of townships were the existence of shady *tsotsi* gangs. (See: Manganyi and Du Toit, (eds)).

³⁷ Du Toit and Manganyi, p. 52.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

³⁹ **Oliver Tambo Papers**: ANC Archives at the Howard Pim Library, Fort Hare University. Speeches and statements, 1987: Box 17.

⁴⁰ S Motau, "South Africa's troubled townships", *Optima*, Vol. 33, No. 4, December, 1985, p. 201.

hopeless, person", said one 26-year old. "And those memories lay the groundwork for revolution."⁴¹

Therefore the ANC moved through their militant children to spur communities to action. These children led drawn out school boycotts; they played a central part in the enforcement of consumer boycotts and they were united in their hatred of the South African Police.⁴² "Whenever I see a white policeman, my immediate thought is, 'This man is my oppressor' ", said one youth. Together with this, a sizeable section of the youth were also staunchly loathsome of whites, who they perceived as their violent oppressors. "Reconciliation with the whites is too late now", said one black youth in 1985. "We are the majority and they will be taught that."⁴³

Older black people, as already noted, not only lost control of sections of the youth but, in many cases, were terrified of the roaming politicised teenagers and children.⁴⁴ One parent said:"Before, it was the security police we were afraid of. Now it is our children."⁴⁵ The young people increasingly refused to obey their seniors, as best seen in the school boycotts. When older people tried to resolve the situation, the teenagers would listen to the adults, but as soon as the adults said something they did not like, they would ignore them. Furthermore, by the mid and late 1980s, youths were not only unafraid of being arrested, on the contrary, it became a status symbol.⁴⁶ With time, as the security forces and conservative black gangs moved in against youth gangsterism, some sections of the black youth increasingly lost patience with the situation and their political elders. Some even started to become increasingly disillusioned with the ANC. The young people wanted fast action and quick results, and when this did not happen, or at least not on the grand political scene, some young blacks grew not only more militant but also impatient and blamed the ANC for not doing enough.⁴⁷

One such black youth said that people like Bishop Tutu were too moderate and that his "moderation serves Botha's ends. We will not stand for it any longer." Another young militant black teenager said: "We blacks are dying in the streets of Cape Town and the ANC is doing nothing except sitting back in Lusaka twiddling their thumbs."⁴⁸

⁴¹ R Cullen and R Wilkinson, "The young lions", *Newsweek*, Vol. 106, No. 12, 16 September 1985, p. 13.

⁴² Motau, p. 201.

⁴³ Cullen and Wilkinson, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Motau, p. 203.

⁴⁵ Cullen and Wilkinson, p. 13.

⁴⁶ Motau, p. 203.

⁴⁷ Cullen and Wilkinson, p. 14.

⁴⁸ **Ibid.**

It is important to remember that the ANC's call to render the country ungovernable implied a definite level of uncoordinated violence. Tambo admitted that the ANC was not controlling the upheavals of the country on an "hour-to-hour or day-to-day" basis. He said that the children, and the other militant black people, were doing what he had asked and as such, "(w)e can't tell our children that what they are doing is very dangerous. They are sustained by a hatred of the system."⁴⁹

The ANC's simplistic appraisals of the, apparently, uncontrolled barbarity that was sweeping across the country – in no small way a direct result of the organisation's call on the people to make the country ungovernable – were fast becoming insufficient to satisfy the many analysts and journalists wanting to know where the ANC stood on the topic of violence.

People, inside South Africa and across the world, increasingly wanted to know from the ANC how much of the violence they condoned. To a growing extent, the ANC seemed to have a split personality. On the one hand the ANC tried to hold higher moral ground than the prime anti-apartheid body and on the other, it was waging a violent strategy against South Africa's political establishment. The necklace issue soon emphasised the tightrope the ANC was walking.

5. COFFINS FOR "COLLABORATORS": THE NECKLACE ISSUE

On 13 April 1986, Winnie Mandela, wife of jailed Nelson Mandela, made one of the most controversial statements in the history of the ANC. Speaking at a rally at Munsieville, near Krugersdorp,⁵⁰ Winnie, as always, covered by local and foreign journalists, told the large crowd: "With our boxes of matches and our necklaces we shall liberate this country."⁵¹

Her pronouncement sent shock waves throughout South Africa and the world. Nelson Mandela's wife was not only openly condoning these brutal killings, she was in fact telling the people that it would give them their political freedom. The Government gained a lot of propaganda mileage from her statement. As far as they were concerned this proved that the radical blacks were in fact barbaric killers. Some in the Government believed that the statement confirmed their reasons for oppressing the ANC.⁵²

⁴⁹ T Clifton, " 'We will expect a blood bath' - a warning from exile", *Newsweek*, Vol. 106, No. 12, 16 September 1985, p. 16.

⁵⁰ F Bridgland, *Katiza's journey - beneath the surface of South Africa's shame* (London, 1997), p. 19.

⁵¹ "Suffer the children - child abuse for revolutionary end in South Africa." A report by the International Freedom Foundation (Washington, 1987).

⁵² E Gilbey, *The lady - the life and times of Winnie Mandela* (London, 1993), p. 146.

Meanwhile the ANC was totally caught off guard and stunned by Winnie's statement. In fact, her pronouncement served to throw the ANC leadership into a diplomatic calamity. They immediately sent word to her that she should remain quiet and refrain from making public statements. But the damage to the international image of the ANC had already been done. Winnie's pronouncement was widely reported in Europe and the United States where, as Nelson Mandela's wife, she was quite famous and, as was the case in South Africa, the Americans and Europeans, knowing what a necklace was thanks to the media, reeled back in shock.⁵³

The ANC leadership in Lusaka was caught in a Catch 22. After having called on the masses to render the country ungovernable, the ANC could not now start criticising the means the people used to attain that end. If they criticised the necklacing, their supporters in South Africa might understand it as being a condemnation of them and of what they were doing to help the ANC destroy apartheid and consequently might even turn their backs on the organisation. On the other hand, if they condoned it or simply said nothing, the ANC could lose much of its international status, and of course the South African Government would have a field day. As already pointed out, a section of the militant youth was becoming increasingly disgruntled with the ANC in exile, which they felt were not doing enough to end apartheid. So if the ANC condemned what the young radicals did, the youth might become even more disillusioned with their faraway political leaders. As such Oliver Tambo did not condemn the necklacing murders too wholeheartedly. He argued that it was difficult to criticise the brutality of his own supporters while that of the minority regime was so much worse.⁵⁴

Not everybody in the ANC was against the necklace method. One editor of **Sechaba**, the ANC's official publication, said that "necklacing is part and parcel of that process that is cleansing the black residential areas of black informers..."⁵⁵ Years later, Chris Hani, who had been a senior executive in the ANC leadership, spoke about the necklace killings: "People are saying that the ANC didn't make its voice heard at the time to condemn the necklace murders, I can't recall, but it was never our method...And later on we joined in condemning the method of necklacing - I mean as an organisation."⁵⁶ Because the ANC could neither fully

⁵³ **Ibid.**

⁵⁴ Bridgland, p. 19.

⁵⁵ Video documentary: **South Africa: a face seldom seen / a voice seldom heard - in search of moderation**. Produced by UCOM. (No further information available.)

⁵⁶ Video documentary: **Ulibambe Lingashoni - hold up the sun - the ANC and popular power in the making**, episode 5: "Not the kings and generals - 1983-1990". Director: M Molete. Distributor: Ster-Kinekor, 1993.

condemn nor condone necklacing, their explanations on the subject were usually long. In 1986 Chris Hani explained the organisation's rationale. He said that because pro-establishment blacks, like policemen, lived in the same township as the radical blacks, these *collaborators* acted as "conduit through which information about our activities, about our plans [have] been passed to the enemy".

Hani said that this greatly frustrated the programs and goals of the liberation movement, hence: "The necklace was a weapon devised by the oppressed themselves to remove this cancer from our society, the cancer of collaboration of the puppets. It is not a weapon of the ANC. It is a weapon of the masses themselves to cleanse the townships from the very disruptive and even lethal activities of the puppets and collaborators. We do understand our people when they use the necklace because it is an attempt to render our areas and country ungovernable, to make the enemy's access to information very difficult."⁵⁷

The necklace-murders, and the organisation's reluctant condemnation of it, threw a shadow over the ANC's standing. It haunted the ANC into the late 1990s. In its second submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission the ANC argued that it did not approve of all the methods employed by its supporters during the 1980s and that already during that decade it had made its disapproval clear. "But the ANC leadership refused, and will always, refuse to condemn those who believed that they were part of the struggle for liberation led by the ANC and the UDF, and were making their contribution by ridding communities of informers and those amongst them who directly collaborated in apartheid violence."⁵⁸

6. CONCLUSION

When keeping in mind that the general populace was responsible for the management of alternative structures and that these were settled in unstable township communities, coupled with an atmosphere of uncertainty and social insecurity, the alternative structures lent themselves to exploitation by opportunistic individuals for personal gain. As already noted, this scenario, where organs of people's power degenerated into common criminality and gangsterism, occurred throughout the existence of the strategy.

"(I)t was the activities of the later waves of young, unconstrained 'Comrades' that ultimately caused the most problems to both the security forces and the African National Congress", Brian Pottinger pointed out. "The Comrades - no matter the

⁵⁷ Further submission and responses by the ANC to questions raised by the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, 12 May 1997, p.11.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.10.

talk about 'Young Lions' - were becoming increasingly undisciplined, traumatized, non-ideological and racist. They were just too independent and febrile."⁵⁹

Chris Alden wrote: "The utilisation of the expedient of calling for a 'people's war,' which presented the insurrection within the townships as directly attributed to ANC actions, was a double-edged sword for the organisation."⁶⁰ "Only partially in control of events, the status of the revolutionary struggle became tied to the conduct of township rebellion in all its manifestations. Attempts by the ANC and the UDF to reel-in the township youth met with only partial success...the impetus for violence continued to foster militancy within the ranks of the 'comrades'."⁶¹

In his book, **The revolution deferred**, Martin J Murray summarized: "In a tragic sense, the popular movement reaped what it had sowed. The bittersweet legacy of years of political upheaval produced what some called a 'lost generation' stranded in social limbo caused by the social disintegration of black communities. Cut loose from their ideological moorings, some...militants drifted toward a precarious existence on the margins of politics. To the extent that the experienced political leadership lost the capacity to instil discipline into the swelled ranks of the 'comrades', the distinction between political activism and indiscriminate thuggery sometimes became blurred...political analysts...blamed a growing 'culture of intolerance' for internecine bloodletting..."⁶²

By having dragged the general populace into its strategy of destroying the apartheid establishment, the ANC, to a growing extent during the late 1980s, lost control over the violent chaos that had beset the country. There was a possibility that, in the long run, when the ANC finally was to tell its supporters to stop spreading chaos, after having done it for so long, they would not listen. Although the ANC has never admitted as much, many analysts agree with each other in this appraisal. Furthermore, Dr Beyers Naude admitted as much to the author.⁶³ Dr Naude said that although the upheavals were partially orchestrated by the ANC, with time the wave of upheavals developed their own momentum. He said that because the ANC had its own internal front, the UDF, it was understandable that the wave of dissent in South Africa kept on growing and intensifying, but "as time passed the forces and the upwelling were so violent that there was no stopping it".⁶⁴

⁵⁹ B Pottinger, **The Imperial Presidency** (Johannesburg, 1988), p. 320.

⁶⁰ C Alden, **Apartheid's last stand** (Johannesburg, 1996), p. 215.

⁶¹ **Ibid**, p. 216.

⁶² MJ Murray, **The revolution deferred** (London, 1994), p.54.

⁶³ **J-A Stemmet private collection**: Interview with Dr Beyers Naude, 27 June 2000.

⁶⁴ **Ibid**.

He said that that he along with the other leaders of the mass movement started to realise that the situation was becoming uncontrollable and that the chaos was growing increasingly beyond the stabilising influence of any group. "Kyk die momentum was so geweldig gewees", said Dr Naude, "onself was nie daardeur verras nie, maar ons het besef dat ons dit net nie meer kan beheer nie." Asked whether this realisation was a factor in prompting the ANC to talk with the Government, Dr Naude said: "I have no doubt that it was a deciding factor..."⁶⁵

From a purely strategic perspective utilising the general population as a strategic key was not only understandable, but also particularly important. Using the collective power of the masses, the ANC had at its disposal an immense force to further its political ideals. But be that as it may, by dragging the masses into the violent political conflict of the 1980s the ANC had thrown open a Pandora's box of long-term consequences.

The violence that the ANC made the masses accessories to, disrupted social orders and most assuredly left deep emotional and psychological scars on the people who took part in or were witness to these waves of violence. Furthermore, many of those who witnessed or took part in the most gruesome brutality were children and teenagers. Can anyone really grasp the sheer scope of the collective psychological scars that the violent conflict of the 1980s must have had on these people and how they are now, as adults, giving expression to it? Assuredly those effects have not simply disappeared. Consciously or unconsciously, ANC strategy taught many young, ordinary people on grassroots level that violence is an equaliser and a dynamic means of reaching goals. What would the long-term sociological effect of this be? The fact of the matter is, the political settlement reached in 1994 made an end to apartheid but South Africa yet has a long way to go before it has completely purged itself from the traumatic effect of the 1980s.

⁶⁵ **Ibid.**