

AMERICAN PRESS REPORTAGE ON PW BOTHA'S ATTEMPTS AT REFORMING APARTHEID, 1978-1989, WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE NEW YORK TIMES, NEWSWEEK AND AFRICA REPORT

TA Machaba¹

Abstract

Prime Minister PW Botha took over power from BJ Vorster in the midst of a strenuous period in the history of South Africa. The country was criticized internally and externally for its apartheid policy. In response to the criticism, Botha decided to introduce some reforms. This article looks at how Botha's reform initiative was perceived by the American press with specific reference to the *New York Times*, *Africa Report* and *Newsweek*. Three publications were selected for the survey because the *New York Times* is critical of the Republicans and supports the Democrats. *Africa Report* is selected because it holds a liberal pro-black view and *Newsweek* holds a slightly conservative pro-white view. Thus, all combined, they are generally representative of the American view. The article will analyse how the US media reported and reacted to Botha's reform policy in general and to its specific aspects. Consideration will also be given to language usage so as to be able to find out any hidden meanings and insinuations in specific words or headlines. Focus will also be put on how Botha reacted to the criticism levelled against him and his reform initiative by the US media. Finally attention will also be placed on how the American press interpreted Botha's role as a prelude to future negotiations and the part played by his successor, FW de Klerk, in putting apartheid to rest.

1. INTRODUCTION

South Africans have written much in praise and condemnation of the reforms to the apartheid policy initiated by political leader PW Botha from 1978 to 1989. The purpose of this article, however, is to throw new light on how people in the United States (US) viewed Botha's changes, by analyzing reports in the United States' selected publications. The aim is also to indicate how the almost non-existent view ended being anti-South Africa (SA) as well as how the media contributed towards the change of opinion. In this endeavour, the study will specifically focus on commentary by the *New York Times*, *Newsweek* and *Africa Report*.

This article will investigate how the US media reported and reacted to Botha's reform policy in general and to its specific aspects. Consideration will also be given to the language usage so as to be able to find any hidden meanings and insinuations in specific words or headlines. Finally focus will also be placed on how Botha

¹ Department of Historical and Heritage Studies, University of Pretoria. E-mail: thatisi.machaba@up.ac.za

reacted to criticism by these media and how the American press interpreted Botha's role as a prelude to future negotiations and the part played by his successor, FW de Klerk, in finally putting apartheid to rest.

The three publications for this survey were selected because they are widely read in America. The *New York Times* is an important US daily publication and, therefore, is able to comment on world events promptly. This paper is critical of the Republican government and supports the Democrats. *Newsweek*, on the one hand, is selected because it holds a slightly conservative pro-white Republican view and would consequently judge Botha's reform in line with its own principles. *Africa Report* on the other hand, is chosen because it holds a liberal Democratic pro-black viewpoint. Therefore, the use of the three newspapers would provide a view that would be "representative" of American thought about Botha's reform initiatives.

2. BOTHA'S PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS LED TO THUNDER ON THE RIGHT

The South African Prime Minister, BJ Vorster, retired because of ill-health and on 28 September 1978 the ruling National Party (NP) elected PW Botha to succeed him.² Botha was regarded as a political mixture of pragmatism, arrogance and conservatism.³ He, however, stunned many and stirred optimism, when he stated that he considered human rights a top priority.⁴ *Newsweek*'s reaction in this regard suggests that it at first considered Botha as a defiant politician who would not deviate from the path of apartheid but now portrayed himself as a potential reformer. *Africa Report* commented that Botha was a political hawk who would not introduce policy changes.⁵ The *New York Times*'s staff was on strike at this time and could unfortunately not comment on Botha's speech.

On accession to power, Botha appointed a select parliamentary committee headed by Justice Minister, Alwyn Schlebusch, to revisit the 1977 constitutional proposals in order to avoid dissent on this issue.⁶ The *New York Times* reported that Botha surprised many people by questioning the basic tenets of apartheid. He continuously told white audiences that "we must adapt or die" and not be blind to reality.⁷ This report mirrors the paper's readiness to give publicity to Botha's initiative and indicates his determination to proceed with reform.

2 TRH Davenport, *South Africa A modern history* (London, 1991), p. 394.

3 H Kitchen and J Coleman-Kitchen, *South Africa Twelve perspectives on the transition* (Westport, 1994), p. 14.

4 R de Villiers, "The turning point", *Newsweek*, 9 October 1978, p. 24.

5 "Post-Vorster policy change unlikely", *Africa Report* 23(6), November-December 1978, p. 19.

6 Kitchen and Coleman-Kitchen, p. 17.

7 JF Burns, "Premier stuns South Africa by moves to relax apartheid", *New York Times*, 22 November 1979, p. A2.

The *New York Times* subsequently gave extensive coverage to Botha's new direction.⁸ In 1979 it reported that Prime Minister Botha raised the possibility of including urban blacks into the constitutional framework. In the opinion of the reporter, these actions showed that Botha indeed seemed prepared to include urban blacks in decision making and was, therefore, a reformist. However, Botha was against the notion of one-man-one-vote because it could lead to power struggles, confrontation and finally dictatorship.⁹ The *New York Times* suggested that Botha seemingly accepted that eventually blacks would lead the country and that he needed a solution to the question of minorities.

Botha delivered what sounded to *Newsweek* like a death knell to white privilege when he told the NP Natal provincial congress in September 1979 that the more blatant aspects of apartheid had to be removed to avoid racial conflict. He was, however, careful and stated his intended reforms in general and vague terms. By stating that Botha used "general and vague terms", *Newsweek* suggested that Botha was not revealing all his intentions.¹⁰

The Schlebusch Commission's report on constitutional reforms was published in 1980. It recommended the establishment of three houses of Parliament for whites, Indians and coloureds respectively. The Senate would be abolished and replaced with a body called the President's Council whose main function would be to advise the State President on the draft constitution. The office of Prime Minister would be scrapped and the powers that go with it transferred to the State President. The Indian and coloured chambers of Parliament were limited to their own community and general matters such as foreign affairs. Their decisions could be vetoed by the white Parliament. A Black Advisory Council, whose role would be consultative, was also proposed.¹¹ The constitutional proposals, however, brought about a rift within the NP. This was commented on in *Newsweek* in a report that implied that rather than bring about peace in the country, the constitution would usher in divisions.¹¹

The final draft of the proposed charter was tabled in Parliament on 5 May 1983 and finally approved on 9 September 1983. The *New York Times* informed its readers that the acceptance of the constitution would mark a major milestone in the history of South Africa because, for the first time, Afrikaner leaders were prepared to move away from apartheid.¹² The paper regarded the proposed charter as a step away from apartheid.

Newsweek informed its readers that the proposed reforms did not go unchallenged, even within the ruling party. The conservatives, led by Dr AP (Andries)

8 A Lewis, "South Africa: In an uncertain state", *New York Times*, 19 February 1979, p. A15.

9 "South African premier asks non-white races to a national meeting", *New York Times*, 3 September 1980, p. 10.

10 P Webb and P Younghusband, "Botha's switch jolts the whites", *Newsweek*, 3 September 1979, p. 28.

11 R de Villiers, p. 24.

12 J Lelyveld, "South Africa acts on a constitution", *New York Times*, 10 September 1983, p. 3.

Treurnicht, Deputy Minister of Education and Training, were seen to be standing between Botha and reform. *Newsweek* also insinuated that party unity was at stake and that disciplinary problems would start for Botha. Botha at first threatened to expel any cabinet minister who would dare to cross him.¹³ *Newsweek* implied that Botha used threats to hold the party together and impose his will. This threat did not hold for long because Treurnicht was later elected leader of the NP in the Transvaal. His powerbase controlled as many white voters as the three other provinces combined. He thus became the most powerful politician in South Africa after Botha. In a report on these developments, the *New York Times* suggested that Treurnicht used his new position to oppose his leader. Botha was either to forgo reform or get rid of him.¹⁴ After a long and bitter struggle between Botha and Treurnicht, the Transvaal Head Committee of the NP headed by the Minister of Mineral and Energy Affairs, FW de Klerk, expelled Treurnicht from the party on 8 March 1982. On 20 March 1982, Treurnicht launched his Conservative Party (CP) and became leader of that party. *Africa Report* suggested that his expulsion from the NP was unexpected and that Transvaal was behind Botha.¹⁵

When the Constitution Bill was brought before Parliament for approval in 1983, the CP voted even against discussing the new bill. The official opposition party, the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), abstained from voting when the bill was read at first. The *New York Times* regarded the PFP action as a surprise since this party was anti-apartheid. The bill was nonetheless passed. Botha's promise to the white electorate that they would have a chance to vote on the constitution in a referendum on 2 November 1983 had already been made.¹⁶ The *New York Times* informed its readers that the electorate now had to decide whether to grant Botha a mandate for reform or not. Victory by Botha or the opposition would either way change the country. Almost 66 per cent of the electorate approved the constitution and thus gave Botha the mandate to continue with reform. This victory represented defeat to all those against reform and severely weakened the rightwing.¹⁷

The rightwing were generally seen as spoilers by the US media. The reports also indicate that the Americans were impressed by Botha's decisions and the direction he was taking. They believed that he had undergone a metamorphosis but still doubted his sincerity. The media felt that the reforms did not go far enough since they excluded blacks.

13 "A land slide victory for a new constitution", *Newsweek*, 14 November 1983, p. 41.

14 JF Burns, "Afrikaner tale of 2 provinces: Transvaal and Cape", *New York Times*, 19 December 1978, p. A2.

15 "South Africa", *Africa Report* 24(4), July-August 1983, p. 37.

16 "Power-sharing in South Africa", *New York Times*, 6 May 1983, p. 3.

17 A Cowell, "South African whites approve a limited sharing power", *New York Times*, 4 November 1983, p. A6 and "A landslide victory for a new constitution", *Newsweek*, 14 November 1983, p. 41.

3. COLOURED AND INDIAN RESPONSES TO BOTHA'S INVITATION

Having gained white support for his reform policy, Botha now had to get that of the Indians and coloureds as they were to participate in the new dispensation. The “approval” of the black majority was also essential. After Botha had made his reform plans known, the coloured Labour Party (LP) in January 1983 overwhelmingly accepted the charter.¹⁸ *Newsweek* and the *New York Times* subsequently informed their readers that this acceptance was a major triumph for Botha. The Reverend Allan Hendrikse, leader of the party, pledged that the LP would enter Parliament to fight for real change and more rights for blacks.¹⁹ The above reports portrayed Hendrikse as a confident leader and suggested that the LP’s decision would bolster Botha’s plan. The acceptance, according to the *New York Times*, lent some credibility to Botha’s reform plan.²⁰

Botha decided that there would be no referenda for the coloureds and Indians on the question of the constitution and, instead, they would hold elections. The coloured election took place on 22 April 1984 and the turnout was low.²¹ The *New York Times* reported that the low turnout seemed to indicate that the bulk of the non-white community was “opposed or indifferent to the changes”. The LP won the election. The government accepted the election results despite the low turnout. To the *New York Times*, this indicated the government’s determination to forge ahead with its plans.²²

After the coloured elections, the Indian community also had a turn to express themselves. The *New York Times* reported that the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), the oldest Indian political organisation in the country, and the South African Indian Council (SAIC), rejected Botha’s offer because blacks were being excluded. However, the National People’s Party (NPP) and its leader, Amichand Rajbansi, later decided to accept participation. Rajbansi declared that if elected to Parliament, he would not be prepared to serve in the Cabinet because he would find himself standing in self-condemnation.²³ The *New York Times* insinuated that Rajbansi accepted that the new dispensation was not complete without black representation. The turnout for the Indian election on 28 August 1984 was also lamentable and undoubtedly reflected a rejection of the new order. The NNP (New National Party)

18 H Kenny, *Power, pride and prejudice: The years of Afrikaner Nationalist rule in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1991), p. 334.

19 A Lewis, “Confident South Africa”, *New York Times*, 31 January 1983, p. A25 and B Levin and H Jensen, “Botha’s plan gets a boost”, *Newsweek*, 17 January 1983, p. 14.

20 J Lelyveld, “South African offers himself in deal”, *New York Times*, 23 April 1982, p. A2.

21 Davenport, pp. 434 - 435.

22 A Cowell, “Turnout low as mixed-race South Africans vote”, *New York Times*, 23 August 1984, p. A4.

23 “Botha’s power-sharing plan faulted”, *New York Times*, 1 August 1982, p.10 and J Leylved, “South Africa Indians put Ghandi’s legacy to test”, *New York Times*, 27 January 1983, p. A2.

won the election. The government blamed intimidation for the low voter turn-out, and accepted the results as a mandate.²⁴ The *New York Times*' reporter gave the impression that Pretoria was determined to carry out its reform mission despite the wishes of the majority of the Indian population who had tacitly demonstrated their abhorrence of the new system by boycotting the polls. Another impression this report gave, was that the government regarded the low voter turn-out as a result of intimidation and not of voter apathy.

The *New York Times* reported that the South African Parliament adjourned for the last time as an all-white institution on 13 July 1984 because the new constitution had to take effect on 3 September 1984. The reporter condemned the fact that the "nation's black majority" was excluded and that Indians and coloureds were given a "limited" role. Nonetheless, on 5 September 1984 Prime Minister PW Botha was elected the first Executive President of SA and he subsequently appointed Rajbansi and Hendrikse to his cabinet as ministers without portfolios.²⁵ The *New York Times* reporter bemoaned the fact that the majority of the population was excluded. He was also careful to state that the "critics asserted that the Government's apparent unwillingness to confer specific responsibility on the [non-white cabinet ministers] suggested that their presence was little more than token". His choice of words may suggest that he merely avoided saying so himself.

The *New York Times*, *Newsweek* and *Africa Report* rightly bemoaned the fact that the black majority was excluded from the new political dispensation in South Africa. However, the journalists were cautious not to criticise the government directly. Thus, they sometimes hid their meaning in headlines that were forthright in their attack of apartheid. They also reported coloured and Indian acceptance of the proposed order as a victory for Botha but simultaneously showed reservations with the new system. The reports also acknowledged that there was formidable opposition to the new charter and indicated that the low voter turnout was a sign of indifference. They also showed the determination of Botha to forge ahead despite opposition.

4. BLACK REACTION TO THE NEW CONSTITUTION

The proposed new charter excluded blacks and only offered them self-government at local level.²⁶ President Botha informed the House that the government was investigating ways to satisfy black political aspirations in the homelands.²⁷ This

24 A Cowell, "Turnout in voting by Indians in South Africa", *New York Times*, 3 August 1984, p. A6 and A Cowell, "Reporter's note book: Apartheid's new wrinkle gets a tepid reception", *New York Times*, 1 September 1984, p. 2.

25 A Cowell, "Non-whites in South African cabinet", *New York Times*, 16 September 1984, p. 3.

26 T Cameron and SB Spies (eds), *A new illustrated history of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1986), p. 318.

27 JJJ Scholtz, *Fighter and reformer Extracts from the speeches of PW Botha* (Bureau for Information, Pretoria, 1989), p. 27.

meant that the blacks would still not be regarded as permanent citizens in “white South Africa”. Many blacks rejected this state of affairs.

The *New York Times* spread the message that Botha’s reform plan was rejected by black leaders such as Bishop Tutu, who as Secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) represented millions of blacks. Tutu argued that Botha was only “applying an inhuman system humanely”.²⁸ *Newsweek* also alleged that few blacks were satisfied with the *status quo*. Nthato Motlana, a prominent Soweto civic leader, was more forthright by putting forward the demands of blacks. (Soweto is a sprawling township of more than one million inhabitants.) He charged that blacks needed a total structural change, equality before the law, a constitution that guaranteed everybody fundamental human rights, and a vote.²⁹ To justify the allegation that blacks were dissatisfied with the new dispensation, *Newsweek* quoted leaders such as Motlana verbatim. This was presumably also to veil its own scepticism of Botha’s intentions.

On 8 May 1980, the *New York Times* reported that Botha had announced that the government would amend the constitution to give blacks an advisory role in the making of the country’s charter. The reporter stated that this announcement represented a deviation from the policy of separate development propounded by the NP for decades. This proposal did not grant blacks direct representation in Parliament, as they demanded. The paper charged that Botha rejected the popular black demand of a one-man-one-vote because he felt that such a system would lead to a domination of the minorities by the blacks.³⁰ The editor commented that Botha seemed to be back-tracking on his earlier pledge to bring blacks to a position of more political and economic influence.³¹ The above editorial demonstrates that its reporting on apartheid was now forthright. It also reveals that the criticism of Botha’s initiative was becoming the paper’s policy towards his proposed reforms to the apartheid system.

In 1981 Tutu wrote in *Africa Report* that black hopes ran high when Botha came into power and warned whites to adapt or die. Two years later, he lamented, Botha’s reformist rhetoric had not been transformed into reality. Tutu urged Botha to be bold and decisive in his endeavours. Furthermore, Tutu made it known to Botha that blacks wanted a total overhaul of the political situation.³² The US media gave opportunity to those opposed to apartheid to air their views and supposedly also to give their US readership the other side of the story, so to speak. The fact that

28 JF Burns, “Premier stuns South Africa by moves to relax apartheid”, *New York Times*, 22 November 1979, p. A2.

29 S Strasser et al., “Cracks in apartheid”, *Newsweek*, 29 October 1979, pp. 13-14.

30 JF Burns, “South Africa giving blacks a state role”, *New York Times*, 9 May 1980, p. A6.

31 “Reform South African style”, *New York Times*, 21 May 1980, p. A34.

32 D Tutu, “The future of South Africa”, *Africa Report* 26(5), September-October 1981, pp. 4-5.

Africa Report gave Tutu the latitude to write this article for its readers suggests that the magazine supported his ideas.

In late 1983, *Newsweek* asked the President of the ANC, OR (Oliver) Tambo, his views on Botha's promises. Tambo responded that they were "too little and too late".³³ *Newsweek* did not directly comment on Tambo's remarks. However, the title to this report, namely "The whites are in for a rude shock", implied that the magazine regarded Tambo's rejection of Botha's intended reforms as something that would surprise white South Africans only. Since blacks would not be "shocked", this would furthermore imply, in the opinion of *Newsweek*, that the changes did not go far enough.

When the Constitution was inaugurated in August 1984, large numbers of blacks in the townships of Sebokeng and Sharpeville took to the streets in protest. They fire-bombed beer halls and garages that they perceived as symbols of white domination. The police responded with teargas and rubber bullets resulting in bloody battles in the streets. According to *Newsweek*, this deepened the credibility problems confronting Botha.³⁴ The government did not take kindly to the United Democratic Front (UDF) fanning protests and demonstrations in the black townships. The Front was an all-race organisation formed in 1983 to oppose the new dispensation. Many UDF activists and leaders were arrested for trespassing various apartheid laws. *Africa Report* viewed this as a "major political crack down" by South African police. These arrests were reported to having further destroyed the conciliatory tone that Botha had set when he first announced his reform plan.³⁵

Meanwhile, the riots in the black townships spread like wild fire. To bring about law and order, President Botha declared a state of emergency in 36 districts by invoking the Public Security Act of 1953. This Act, regarded as draconian by *Newsweek*, gave greater powers to the security agencies. *Newsweek* compared the announcement of the emergency to a declaration of war.³⁶ By implication the new charter in excluding blacks led to violence rather than peace.

The above US media spread a message that reform was looked at with scepticism by many black leaders. Interviews were especially conducted with black South African leaders in the American media. This was apparently in order to give blacks a chance to air their views with regard to the proposed order. Guest writers also did the same. US media were also gradually becoming vociferous and direct in their condemnation of apartheid.

33 "The whites are in for a rude shock", *Newsweek*, 11 August 1983, p. 52.

34 M Whitaker et al., "Bloody return to Sharpeville", *Newsweek*, 17 September 1984, p. 17.

35 "UDF leaders charged with treason", *Africa Report* 30(2), March-April 1985, pp. 47-48.

36 M Whitaker and P Younghusband, "Pretoria's mailed fist", *Newsweek*, 29 July 1985, pp. 12-13.

5. BLACK TRADE UNION MOVEMENT CHALLENGED BOTHA

Prior to Botha's assumption to power, strikes by blacks were prohibited by the Native Labour Act of 1953.³⁷ The Act did not legally recognize black trade unions nor prohibited them. By 1979, there were 27 black trade unions operating illegally.³⁸ The *New York Times* reported that on assuming power, Botha appointed the Wiehahn Commission to investigate labour and industrial relations. Botha's advisor, Nicholas Wiehahn, headed the panel. Blacks were not represented on this commission. On 1 May 1979, the panel recommended changes in South Africa's labour laws including the granting of union rights to blacks. White trade unions would not be compelled to accept black members. The recommendations also included the abolition of job reservation that set aside certain skilled jobs for whites and denied blacks apprenticeship rights. Furthermore, the *New York Times* warned that the South African government's moves would be closely monitored by foreign conglomerates including those from the US.³⁹ This implied that the newspaper was suspicious that the recommendations may not be put into effect.

The government adopted the commission's proposals and consequently passed the Industrial and Conciliation Act of 1979. Many blacks according to *Newsweek* could not believe the new direction taken by Botha. *Newsweek* further commented that many blacks were suspicious but felt that barriers were being broken. *Newsweek* informed its readers that on the one hand, the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), the largest black trade union, and the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA), regarded the new Act as a recipe for confrontation. On the other hand, white trade union leaders were bitterly opposed to this legislation and feared that its application could lead to employers replacing whites with cheaper black labour. Pretoria hoped that the legislation would demonstrate to the world that it was serious about reforming apartheid. Furthermore, *Newsweek* claimed that this move would also gain South Africa investor confidence. Finally, *Newsweek* stated that the relaxation of labour laws would buy the white minority government a little more time.⁴⁰ This implied that apartheid would eventually come to an end.

The *New York Times* on 27 September 1979 warned that black trade unions would be under strict government scrutiny and risk losing their new status if, in the eyes of the authorities, they become too militant. The paper, nevertheless, regarded the move as a real change from apartheid. The question, according to the editor, was whether the black majority and outside world would be convinced that political

37 BJ Liebenberg and SB Spies (eds), *South Africa in the 20th century* (Pretoria, 1993), p. 324.

38 L Thompson, *A history of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 2001), p. 224.

39 JF Burns, "Altered South Africa union laws could aid blacks", *New York Times*, 2 May 1979, p. A6.

40 P Webb and H Gibson, "South Africa's break for blacks", *Newsweek*, 14 May 1979, pp. 32-33 and "Critics condemn South Africa's toned down labour reforms", *Africa Report* 24(4), July-August 1979, p. 24.

and economic changes could take place peacefully. The paper abhorred the fact that racially separate unions were still the norm. The editor charged that South Africa deserved encouragement along the road to reform.⁴¹ This implies that the editor saw the changes as part of other reforms that still had to be implemented.

The *New York Times* reported that black labour unions combined to form the largest trade union federation in South Africa. This federation, launched in December 1985, was called the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). In the reporter's view, this union immediately became the most imposing black organization ever founded in the country.⁴² According to both *Africa Report* and the *New York Times*, COSATU adopted an overtly radical political stance. At its inauguration rally, its President, Elijah Barayi, stated that the unions' major function would be to "organize and educate the black masses not just on wage and bread-and-butter issues but on broader political issues too". Barayi called on Botha to resign and make way for the life imprisoned ANC popular leader, Nelson Mandela, and vowed that COSATU would one day rule the country. *Africa Report* and the *New York Times* viewed Barayi's challenge to Botha as a sign of black impatience with the pace of reform.⁴³ COSATU seemed to regard itself as a government-in-waiting, albeit, in alliance with the leadership of the ANC.

Demands for change also came from businessmen. *Africa Report* claimed that in 1979 Botha scored a major victory when he convinced business leaders to accept his reform programme. The plan was also to increase the free hand companies enjoyed in the free market system.⁴⁴ Later business indicated that it was not satisfied with the pace of reform and thus Botha convened another meeting. *Africa Report* commented that Botha informed this gathering that change in labour relations was the only alternative to revolution. After the convention, *Africa Report* disclosed that Mike Rosholt, head of Barlow Rand, a giant business group, summed up the frustrations of the businessmen about the slow pace of reform. He charged that business did not believe, as the state appeared to, that the time for change was unlimited.⁴⁵ Although *Africa Report* did not comment on this, the publication of this report in itself suggested that it agreed with Rosholt.

In 1986, according to *Africa Report*, the South African Consolidated Chamber of Commerce (FCI) published a business charter binding its members to universal

41 "A step forward in South Africa", *New York Times*, 27 September 1979, p. A18.

42 S Mufson, *Fighting years: A black resistance and struggle for a new South Africa* (Boston, 1990), p. 139.

43 "Black workers draw battle plans to challenge Botha", *Africa Report* 31(1), January-February 1986, pp. 31-32 and A Cowel, "Pretoria unions back divestment", *New York Times*, 5 December 1985, p. 1.

44 B Naude, "Where is South Africa going?" *Africa Report* 30(3), May-June 1985, p.6.

45 "South African businessmen impatient at slow pace of reform", *Africa Report* 27(1), January-February 1982, p. 23.

human rights and outlining the role of business in pressing the government for change. In this report, JC van Zyl, the Chairman of FCI, alleged that the change that was taking place in South Africa was a result of pressure from the black townships. He argued that if black political aspirations were not addressed, blacks would be compelled to use industrial relations to vent their anger. The FCI urged Botha to among others negotiate a dispensation of genuine political power sharing with all accepted leaders.⁴⁶ *Africa Report* commented that the steps taken by business indicated its true concern about the state of affairs. Business' demands to government indicated that businessmen had become more militant.

The *New York Times* welcomed the changes introduced into the labour market. It further regarded the changes as more than it had anticipated and hoped for. However, the paper warned the South African government that foreign and domestic conglomerates would monitor the situation closely. *Newsweek* on the other side, regarded the changes as a time buying tactic and blamed the labour unrest for them. *Africa Report*, contrary to the other two media, seemed to view the reforms as significant and a commitment to non-racialism.

6. REFORM OF BLACK MOVEMENT

The Botha-led government also introduced reform with regard to the regulation of the movement of blacks in the country. Black movement was traditionally controlled by means of pass laws. The pass book was an identification document that every black person above the age of 16 had to carry with him or her and which had to be produced on demand by a police officer. On 23 July 1979, the *New York Times* communicated that despite rigorous application of the pass regulations, many blacks were "illegally" moving into the white areas from the reserves in search of jobs. In 1979 the Minister of Cooperation and Development, Piet Koornhof, allowed those blacks who had been employed in a white area for more than three years or one year by a single employer to remain in the urban areas. Koornhof also promised urban blacks political rights. The *New York Times* welcomed these changes and promises as a sign of goodwill.⁴⁷

The Riekert Commission that Botha had appointed upon taking power in 1978 to investigate, among others, conditions for the employment of black workers, submitted its report in 1979.⁴⁸ This Commission, in the opinion of *Africa Report*, called for greater freedom of movement for black workers. Among others, it recommended that urban blacks had to be accepted as permanent residents of the

46 JC van Zyl, "Business bears down", *Africa Report* 31(2), March-April, p. 5.

47 *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

48 JF Burns, " Partial relaxation of South Africa's pass laws generates some goodwill but further divides blacks", *New York Times*, 23 July 1979, p. A9.

cities.⁴⁹ On 1 November 1980, the *New York Times* published a documentary report in which it stated that Pretoria had issued a package of legislation to ease restrictions on blacks living in the urban areas. The paper claimed that the proposed legislation would promote freedom of movement for many blacks but simultaneously hinder the migration of homeland blacks to the cities. The introduction of this law, according to the *New York Times*, marked the beginning of an irreversible process of the easing of restrictions on blacks.⁵⁰

On 2 February 1980, the *New York Times* reported that in another effort to ease the lives of urban blacks, Koornhof announced to Parliament that the cities of Pretoria and Bloemfontein would experiment with dropping the 72-hour limit imposed on blacks visiting an urban area where they did not live. If successful, the plan would be extended to other cities. The *New York Times* alleged that the 72-hour limit was one of apartheid's most dreaded laws.⁵¹ This report suggests that the correspondent hated the restrictions placed on blacks in the white cities. On 12 September 1985, the *New York Times* informed its readers that Botha had declared his intention to restore South African citizenship to homeland blacks who would as such have dual citizenship. The paper hoped that ultimately there would be a single citizenship for all South Africans.⁵² Botha's plan was not detailed and left many people guessing. The granting of citizenship to homeland blacks, would also entitle them to South Africa's identity documentation.

According to the *New York Times*, Botha ended the enforcement of the pass laws on 18 March 1986. Blacks that had been incarcerated for pass law offences and those awaiting trial for such, were to be immediately set free. Botha also decreed that the reference books carried by blacks would be abolished and that a new standard identity document would be issued in July 1986. Bishop Tutu, who had recently been elected Archbishop of Cape Town, gave Botha a conditional praise for the step he had taken. He cautioned, however, that "there [was] no sting at the tail". Many blacks, in the paper's opinion, were sceptical about Botha's move. The paper also charged that the rescinding of pass law control was again a sign to Western banks to reschedule part of South Africa's foreign debt. The *New York Times* thus implied that Botha was taking this step in order to appease the West as well as blacks in South Africa.⁵³

The *New York Times* hailed the abolition of the pass laws in its editorial on 26 April 1986. It regarded this as "a tangible step away from state sponsored racism" that divided the nation. The editor criticized the former pass legislation

49 J Seller, "A government against the world", *Africa Report* 24(5), September-October 1979, p.13.

50 J Lelyveld, "South Africa easing curbs", *New York Times*, 8 February 1980, p. A5.

51 "Two South African cities to end a race restriction", *New York Times*, 8 February 1980, p. A5.

52 S Rule, "Citizenship plan offered by Botha", *New York Times*, 9 December 1985, p. A1.

53 EA Gargan, "Pretoria rescinds pass-law control on blacks", *New York Times*, 19 March 1986, p.10.

as having been the “most obnoxious expression of black serfdom” in South Africa and regarded the abolition of the restrictions as something that could ease racial tensions. The editor also warned that as long as blacks did not have political say, they would not be grateful for piecemeal changes. Finally, the editorial articulated that the repeal of the pass laws were evidence that apartheid, albeit in a small way, was being dismantled.⁵⁴ From this editorial, it is clear that although the *New York Times* expressed jubilation at the rescinding of the pass legislation, and regarded it as a forward movement in racial relations in South Africa, the newspaper believed that more tangible steps needed to be taken to rid the country of apartheid.

The American media under review lauded the repeal of the pass laws and regarded this as a tangible change by Botha. The *New York Times* further regarded this transformation as irreversible and encouraged Pretoria to get rid of apartheid in its entirety. *Africa Report* welcomed the rescinding of pass legislation and called for a greater freedom of movement and better living conditions for blacks. The American media accepted the abolition of the pass laws.

7. US REACTION TO THE NEW CHARTER IN SOUTH AFRICA

Despite much talk about including blacks in decision taking, the Botha government was still adamant that the former should not participate equally with whites.⁵⁵ This condition was not accepted by the US public and business. The *New York Times* reported that notwithstanding, the Carter administration suddenly adopted a softer attitude towards South Africa from October 1978. This was after the US Secretary of States, Cyrus R Vance, had delivered a handwritten letter to Botha from US President Carter. The letter, according to the report, was cautiously friendly and supported the new approach taken by Botha to reform apartheid. In the opinion of the reporter, the White House viewed its decision as tactical because it still demanded full political participation by blacks in South Africa and wanted to avoid hardening South Africa’s resolve.⁵⁶ The report purported that Carter was determined to use the carrot rather than the stick in an effort to encourage Pretoria to continue with reform.

Republican Ronald Reagan won the US presidential elections in 1980. *Africa Report* charged that he did not have a foreign policy towards South Africa. Reagan responded by promptly coming out with a foreign policy termed “constructive engagement”. This policy advocated dialogue in order to encourage change in South Africa. Reagan also argued that the US could not abandon a country that stood by her in every war she had fought. The President’s remarks about South Africa, in the opinion of the reporter, led many to believe that he favoured this country.

54 “One step forward in South Africa”, *New York Times*, 26 April 1986, p. 26.

55 L Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven, 1995), p. 228.

56 JF Burns, “US testing policy on South Africa”, *New York Times*, 3 December 1978, p. 16.

Democratic congressman and Black Caucus member, Julian Dixon, immediately introduced a motion in the House barring Reagan from inviting Botha to the US until the latter's government renounced apartheid.⁵⁷ According to *Africa Report*, the new US foreign policy towards South Africa was not unanimously accepted by Americans. The President's positive remarks about the country led to accusations of collusion with Botha. Pretoria's continuous crack down on dissenters against the new order, according to the *New York Times*, prompted a wave of protest in several US cities. The demonstrations were also claimed to be against the constructive engagement policy.⁵⁸ The editor insinuated that conditions in South Africa had reached such alarming proportions that even conservative Republicans registered their objection to the situation.

On 6 September 1985, the *New York Times* announced that Reagan and his advisors had met to discuss how the US could use her influence to bring about talks between Pretoria and prominent black leaders in South Africa.⁵⁹ The reporter insinuated that Reagan now realized the graveness of the situation in South Africa and the failure of constructive engagement. The administration thus noted that it was essential to go back to the drawing board and come up with a solution acceptable to all Americans.

The above reports indicate that the American government did not see eye-to-eye with its public on the racial problems in South Africa. The media backed those against apartheid while Washington wanted to give Pretoria a chance. Finally, according to the *New York Times*, even Reagan lost his patience with South Africa and called for a policy review.

8. US BUSINESS AND REFORM IN SOUTH AFRICA

The presence of US corporations in South Africa was vital to the economies of both countries. The American anti-apartheid movement, however, started to question the presence of US conglomerates in South Africa even before Botha became Prime Minister. They believed that failure to oppose apartheid implied endorsement of the system. The Carter administration favoured the presence of US companies in South Africa. Nevertheless, the companies had to subscribe to the Sullivan Principles. The code was drafted by Reverend Leon H Sullivan, who was also a director of the Ford Motor Company. The principles were published in, among others, the *New York*

57 AJ Hughes, "Reagan's unruly review", *Africa Report* 26(3), May-June 1981, pp. 23-26.

58 "Racing voices against apartheid", *New York Times*, 11 December 1984, p. 30.

59 B Gwertzman, "Reagan and aides review policy on South African", *New York Times*, 6 September 1985, p. A9.

Times, and laid down standards for American corporate activity such as recognition of black trade unions.⁶⁰ The principles were, nonetheless, condemned in South Africa.

Bishop Tutu, the Secretary of the SACC, was quoted by *Africa Report* to have argued that the principles were largely ameliorative because they dealt with the improvement of an unjust and immoral system.⁶¹ Tutu implied that the Sullivan Code merely made apartheid better and did not attempt to get rid of it. According to *Africa Report*, the Sullivan Principles were also criticized in America, as a “public relations effort” by prominent African-American leaders. They argued that the Code could not change black working conditions in South Africa while simultaneously providing cash and technology to strengthen apartheid. American anti-apartheid campaigners encouraged US companies operating in South Africa to divest. *Africa Report* published this to indicate that Americans were dissatisfied with the low level of reform in the country.

The *New York Times* charged that the Sullivan Code did not offend South African laws but its customs. It refused to endorse the principles because they blunted demands for stiffer sanctions and benefited whites in South Africa and US companies⁶² This paper implied that the Sullivan Code was a delaying tactic that did not address apartheid directly. Sullivan corroborated this, when in an *Africa Report* article, he accepted that the principles were not meant to be the total solution to South Africa’s problems. He challenged US companies to help change apartheid or leave South Africa and suggested that the principles be made compulsory for all US corporations involved in South Africa and be backed with, among others, tax penalties.⁶³ Sullivan now realised that the Code, in its original mode, was ineffective.

The Reagan administration believed that the Sullivan Code and the US companies in South Africa had taken the lead in improving the working conditions for blacks. This allegation was articulated in *Africa Report*. The State Department was said to have endorsed the Sullivan Code and encouraged US firms to implement it. The White House claimed that American companies in South Africa directly supported change in the country.⁶⁴ *Africa Report* suggested that the administration supported the principles because they were in line with constructive engagement. Furthermore, the magazine claimed that Reagan did not want to “hurt” South Africa and believed that the country would reform its policies. In October 1986, the US Corporate Council on South Africa, consisting of 52 major firms, called for the abolition of statutory racial segregation. The *New York Times* insinuated that

60 A Lewis, “Message to Pretoria: 11”, *New York Times*, 29 March 1979, p. A23.

61 “Update: South African”, *Africa Report* 24(5), September-October 1979, p. 38.

62 “Doing business with racists”, *New York Times*, 15 June 1983, p. A26.

63 LH Sullivan, “The Sullivan principles and change in South Africa”, *Africa Report* 29(3), May-June 1984, pp. 48-50.

64 “The Reagan administration”, *Africa Report* 29(5), September-October 1985, pp. 7-8.

the American businessmen's direct involvement in South Africa's racial problems indicated their concern at the slow pace of reform.⁶⁵

Africa Report, *Newsweek* and the *New York Times*, were in agreement in their criticism of US economic ties with South Africa. They all rejected the Sullivan Code as half measures. The *New York Times* refused to endorse the principles because in its opinion, the Code watered down demands for more drastic action against South Africa. The American media were in favour of disinvestment, divestment and sanctions against South Africa to force the country to change its racial policies.

9. CROSSING THE RUBICON

After the new Constitution had come into effect in 1984, blacks in the townships of South Africa reacted violently as a sign of displeasure. In order to deal with the situation, President Botha announced a partial state of emergency on 20 July 1985.⁶⁶ The *New York Times* reported that the security forces were given draconian powers to deal with dissent and that they could not be held accountable nor be sued for damages arising out of their actions.⁶⁷ The report painted a bleak picture about the South African situation and implied that Botha had reached a point where he believed that only brute force could quell the situation in the black townships.

Meanwhile, in the US pressure was being exerted on President Reagan to react to the violence in South Africa. The American government also needed tangible evidence that the country was moving away from apartheid.⁶⁸ The *New York Times* reported that the US government had conveyed a message to Pretoria at a bilateral meeting held in Vienna in August 1985 that the political climate in South Africa would impact badly on relations between the two countries. The *New York Times* claimed that after the meeting, US officials revealed that their counterparts had briefed them about South Africa's commitment to the overall reform of apartheid. The South African team also indicated that a policy review would be completed within a short time. The paper was optimistic about the policy review and believed that it was in its final form and would make provision for political participation by blacks. It also believed that apartheid would end.⁶⁹ The newspaper thus raised the hopes and expectations of its readers about the impending changes in the country.

65 A Cowell, "186 US companies ask Botha to 'lower tensions' in schools", *New York Times*, 19 November 1985, p. A1.

66 Davenport, p. 439.

67 "South Africa in emergency", *New York Times*, 23 July 1985, p. A26.

68 B Pottinger, *The imperial presidency P.W. Botha the first ten years* (Johannesburg, 1988), p. 405.

69 "South Africa told unrest will affect ties to US", *New York Times*, 10 August 1985, p. 1 and GM Boyd, "US said to tell South Africa that policies could harden", *New York Times*, 11 August 1985, p. L12.

The world was all ears in anticipation of the new policy changes to be announced by Pretoria. On 15 August 1985, during an address to the Natal National Party's provincial congress, with international media in attention, President Botha rejected the call by the US and others to give blacks a political say. He informed his audience that South Africa was crossing the Rubicon and thus his speech was dubbed the "Rubicon Speech". This speech had been expected to include major changes promised to the US delegation in Vienna.⁷⁰ Instead, Botha decided to play it his own way and ignored the speech that had been prepared for him by Chris Heunis, Minister of Constitutional Development, and ratified by the Cabinet.⁷¹ The *New York Times* claimed that in his speech, Botha stressed that he was unwilling to give in to external pressure and warned the world not to push South Africa too far. He accepted the permanence of urban blacks but was unwilling to create a fourth chamber of Parliament for them. The *New York Times* seemed to believe that Botha was willing to discuss policy with recognized "elected" leaders. The paper implied that he was prepared to co-opt moderate leaders and reject militant ones.⁷² On the other hand the paper created the impression that Botha was a dictator because he had rejected a speech prepared for him by his colleagues. The *New York Times* also insinuated that Botha's failure to announce major reforms, as promised to the American delegation at Vienna, showed that Pretoria was prepared to flout the world and go it alone.

Many American Congressmen, according to the *New York Times*, regarded Botha's speech as a disappointment. Congress argued that the only option left for it, was to impose economic sanctions on South Africa. Senator EM (Edward) Kennedy called upon the Reagan administration to end constructive engagement.⁷³ This report implied that the *New York Times* maintained that Americans were disheartened by Botha's failure to grab the opportunity to dismantle apartheid. Above all, the *New York Times* exposed the divergent views held by the White House and Congress on South Africa. The *New York Times* alleged that Botha's failure to grant blacks political power exacerbated the black township riots which were beamed over the radio and television in the US. Senate was also due to vote on a sanctions bill which had been passed by Congress. On 9 September 1985, Reagan decided to steal a march on Senate and issued an executive order imposing limited sanctions on Pretoria. He allegedly included some of the recommendations in the bill before Senate, such as a ban on the sale of computers to South Africa's security services. Reagan claimed that his moderate sanctions were aimed at the "machinery

70 Cameron and Spies, p. 319.

71 Pottinger, p. 406.

72 "Experts from Botha's speech on the outlook for South Africa", *New York Times*, 16 August 1985, p. A6.

73 A Lewis, "South African President's speech faulted by members of Congress", *New York Times*, 16 August 1985, p. A7.

of apartheid” and not the victims thereof. The *New York Times* criticized Reagan for failure to indicate how long the sanctions would apply.⁷⁴ This report suggests that the paper was in favour of the decision taken by Congress. That is why it alleged that Reagan wanted to save his face by only accepting some of Congress’s proposals. This further implied that the *New York Times* believed that Reagan did not want to accept his wrongs publicly and indicated that the Democratic Party and Congress continued to advocate for stiffer sanctions against South Africa.

The Rubicon Speech elicited unanimous responses by the US media. They agreed that this speech stunned and disappointed the world, the media included. In addition, they were in favour of Reagan’s limited sanctions although they regarded them as too little. The media, therefore, wanted to see heavy sanctions imposed on South Africa as punishment for intransigence. Botha’s speech seemed to have created more enemies than friends for South Africa.

10. INTRANSIGENCE PUNISHED

After the Rubicon Speech, international opinion was that Pretoria remained intransigent to change. Western governments were also pressured by their subjects to impose sanctions on South Africa.⁷⁵ Even prominent South Africans such as Bishop Tutu were prompted to call for sanctions against Pretoria. In doing so, Tutu, according to *Newsweek*, risked being charged with treason under South Africa’s Internal Security Act. Washington declared itself opposed to Tutu’s plea. *Newsweek* commented that the call for sanctions, by a moderate leader such as Tutu, meant that Reagan’s 1985 executive order was not enough. The magazine added that it was more urgent then for the US Congress to demand tougher sanctions against South Africa.⁷⁶ This proved that *Newsweek* also favoured sanctions against Pretoria. On 11 June 1986, the *New York Times* welcomed a report that the House of Foreign Affairs Committee had approved a measure to impose sanctions against South Africa. The bill proposed, among others, a ban on new investments in South Africa and that if within a year the country did not release all political prisoners, the computer industry would be compelled to stop all operations in South Africa.⁷⁷ This report implied that the paper was glad that Congress was determined to force Pretoria to change. In another report soon afterwards, the *New York Times* claimed that the international community was also determined to punish Pretoria for apartheid.

The Eminent Persons Group, a Commonwealth delegation that tried and failed to facilitate talks between South Africa and black opposition leaders, according to

74 B Weinraub, “An executive act”, *New York Times*, 10 September 1985, p. A1.

75 Kenny, p. 357.

76 N Cooper and R Manning, “Facing a ‘catastrophe’?”, *Newsweek*, 14 April 1986, p. 19.

77 NA Lewis, “House panel backs new South African sanctions”, *New York Times*, 11 June 1986, p. A6.

the *New York Times* and *Newsweek*, realized that Pretoria was unwilling to take advice and saw economic sanctions as the only way to force her to comply.⁷⁸ The two publications gave the impression that they supported the point of view of the Commonwealth. According to the *New York Times*, the House of Representatives on 18 June 1986 approved a bill which made provision for a trade embargo and total disinvestment by US corporations in South Africa within six months. Senate voted against this measure on 31 July 1986, but favoured other forms of harsh sanctions against South Africa. On the same day, the US and Britain vetoed a UN Security Council resolution to impose economic sanctions against Pretoria.⁷⁹ To the *New York Times*, this indicated that the White House was still not prepared to punish South Africa. It also implied that the paper wanted to give publicity to the rift between Reagan and Congress over South Africa.

On 12 June 1986, SA President Botha decreed a nationwide state of emergency to deal with political dissent in the country. *Newsweek* blasted Botha for this and alleged that he only pretended to be a reformer. It criticized the decree as a "license to kill for the police". The President of the ANC, Oliver Tambo, in retaliation, charged that 1986 would be marked by greater escalation of offensive action against apartheid, including mass resistance.⁸⁰ *Newsweek* implied that Botha was not prepared to rescind the emergency and the ANC indicated that it was prepared to increase its struggle. The stage was set for further confrontation. The *New York Times* by this time alleged that the Reagan administration had started to review its constructive engagement policy after Botha's state of emergency. Senate was also trying to formulate a sanctions bill to match that passed by the House on 18 June 1986. The White House requested to defer its decision until the State Department had synchronized its actions with some European powers.⁸¹ The *New York Times* seemed to be suggesting that by putting its foreign policy under review, the Reagan administration accepted that the policy had failed. It also implied that the US would be prepared to act in concert with other powers against South Africa. On 2 August 1986, the *New York Times* reported that Senate's Foreign Relations Committee voted in favour of strong economic sanctions against South Africa. The measures proposed included a ban on new investments by US corporations in South Africa. The Senate Committee also demanded that apartheid be abolished within a year and that sanctions be withdrawn if Pretoria released Nelson Mandela, rescind the emergency, unban black political organizations and start negotiations

78 J Lelyveld, "Commonwealth delegates chart drive for South African sanctions", *New York Times*, 13 June 1986, p. 1 and M Whitaker, "South Africa: shifting tactics", *Newsweek*, 14 July 1986, p. 37.

79 NA Lewis, "House votes bill to cut off investment in South Africa", *New York Times*, 19 June 1986, p. 1.

80 R Manning, "South Africa's civil war", *Newsweek*, 23 June 1986, p. 7.

81 SV Roberts, "Senators say bill to prod Pretoria has wide support", *New York Times*, 16 July 1986, p. A1.

with black leaders. The *New York Times* communicated that the proposals accepted by the Committee served as a clear sign to Reagan and Botha that change was demanded. President Reagan objected to this. The *New York Times* informed its readers that Senate in turn rejected Reagan's objection and voted overwhelmingly in favour of sanctions against South Africa on 15 August 1986. The Senate Bill, among others, prohibited the use of US banks by Pretoria. Congress, in the opinion of the *New York Times*, was ready to override Reagan should he decide to veto the "Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Bill". The *New York Times* commented that Senate ignored the Reagan administration by voting for sanctions.⁸² This report implied that the passage of the Bill would further prove that the White House was at odds with the demands of the American people.

The *New York Times* alleged that the Republican Senator RG Lugar, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, urged Reagan to sign the Bill or be overridden. To the *New York Times*, this indicated that Senate was unhappy about Reagan's policy towards South Africa, since Lugar was a senior and influential Republican. His remarks, in the opinion of the paper, also suggested a rift on a key foreign policy issue in the Republican Party. The report further strengthened the notion that Reagan no longer represented US public interest.⁸³ Reagan vetoed the Bill on 26 September 1986. That put him on a collision course with Congress and on 29 September 1986, it voted to override him. The *New York Times* welcomed the override and lauded it as a major defeat for Reagan in respect of foreign policy.⁸⁴

American media condemned Reagan for failure to punish South Africa for practicing apartheid and praised the efforts by the US Congress to impose sanctions on South Africa. The media under review here were jubilant that Reagan had been vetoed and sanctions had been imposed against South Africa. They condemned the constructive engagement policy and believed that only sanctions would force Pretoria to change from apartheid.

11. LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Many people, organizations and governments throughout the world urged Pretoria to release political prisoners and to negotiate a settlement. For a long time South Africa failed to heed these requests. The ANC-SACP alliance also professed a

82 SV Roberts, "Senate votes bill to prod Pretoria", *New York Times*, 16 August 1986, p. A1 and SV Roberts, "House passes Pretoria sanctions; President is expected to veto bill", *New York Times*, 12 August 1986, p. A1.

83 GM Boyd, "Lugar say's he's led fight to override sanctions veto", *New York Times*, 17 September 1986, p.A8.

84 GM Boyd, "President vetoes bill for sanctions against Pretoria", *New York Times*, 27 September 1986, p. A1 and SV Roberts, "House, 313 to 83, affirms sanctions on South Africa", *New York Times*, 30 September 1986, p. A1.

willingness to negotiate for a new dispensation only if the banned organizations were unbanned, political prisoners released and apartheid removed. Pretoria refused these overtures alleging that it was not prepared to negotiate with communists.⁸⁵

On 31 January 1985, allegedly for the first time, Botha mooted the possibility of conditionally releasing Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners in a report published by the *New York Times*. The condition of release was, among others, that the prisoners denounce violence. This condition however was allegedly rejected by most of the prisoners. The *New York Times* commented that the renunciation of violence on the part of Mandela would lower his status among his followers as someone who compromised with the apartheid government.⁸⁶ The paper created the impression through this report, that Botha wanted negotiations only on his terms, and in that sense was a dictator. It, therefore, seems that the *New York Times* welcomed Mandela's decision and that of other prisoners not to be released conditionally and also suggested that it held Mandela in high esteem.

Newsweek also criticized Reagan's constructive engagement and further suggested an agenda for change that it recommended the US should follow. It suggested among other things that Reagan abandon the constructive engagement policy, force South Africa to negotiate with all black leaders and create and press tougher sanctions.⁸⁷ These recommendations meant that the suggested agenda was the magazine's policy towards the country. On 5 November, Govan Mbeki, one of the ANC leaders sentenced to life imprisonment with Nelson Mandela in 1964, was released by Pretoria. According to the *New York Times*, Mbeki was freed on humanitarian grounds because of his age (77) and poor health.⁸⁸ The *New York Times* welcomed the fact that Mbeki was freed without any preconditions. Thus this paper insinuated that it favoured the unconditional release of all political prisoners in South Africa.

While, according to the *New York Times*, people were anticipating Mandela's release, on 14 August 1989 President Botha announced his retirement alleging that he was being ignored by his colleagues. The main issue, in the view of the *New York Times*, was party leader, FW de Klerk's determination to travel to Zambia to meet President Kenneth Kaunda without Botha's permission. The *New York Times* suggested that Botha left politics a bitter and lonely man. On 15 August 1989, De Klerk was sworn in as Acting State President of South Africa. The *New York Times* reported that De Klerk reiterated his pledge to phase out white domination and enter

85 Davenport, p. 437.

86 A Council, "South Africa hints at conditional release for jailed black leader", *New York Times*, 1 February 1985, A.A7 and "Pretoria is adamant on Mandela", *New York Times*, 15 February 1985, p. A8.

87 M Whitaker *et al.*, "An agenda for change", *Newsweek*, 16 September 1985, pp. 20-21.

88 JD Battersby, "Pretoria frees a black leader jailed 23 years", *New York Times*, 16 August 1987, p. A1.

into talks with blacks over the reform path.⁸⁹ On 15 September 1989, De Klerk freed eight jailed ANC leaders and also claimed, according to the *New York Times*, that Mandela's release was being finalized.⁹⁰ The *New York Times* commented that De Klerk was magnanimous in comparison to Botha and that he was committed to reform.⁹¹ It implies once more that it preferred De Klerk to Botha, and that it believed that the former would introduce reform quicker than the latter. Indeed De Klerk lived up to his word and Mandela was finally released on 11 February 1990, and negotiations for the future of South Africa started. The reform commenced by Botha ended in a successfully negotiated non-racial democracy.

12. CONCLUSION

The *New York Times*, *Newsweek* and *Africa Report* all viewed Botha with scepticism when he came to power in 1978 because they believed he was conservative and would try to perpetuate apartheid. After his ascendance to power, his speeches about the need for reform made many to quickly change their minds about him. The US media began to portray him as a reformer. These speeches unfortunately resulted in the world turning to Botha in great expectation. When he started to introduce reform measures, however, the US media began to accuse him of doing too little and of being unwilling to change. Their reports suggested that the new Constitution was divisive and was therefore the cause of the violence in black townships. At first the US media used hidden meaning in words to condemn apartheid, but later became forthright. Verbatim quotes by South African anti-apartheid activists in criticism of apartheid were also worked into press reports in such a way as to veil their own condemnation.

The US media severely criticized Botha's constitutional change for excluding blacks. Their condemnation went so far as to take the side of black activists in South Africa. *Africa Report* used guest writers to report on the political situation in the country. The majority of these guest writers were anti-apartheid campaigners such as Bishop Tutu. The *New York Times* went to the extent of justifying the armed struggle in South Africa by stating that blacks did not even have recourse to courts. *Newsweek* also vigorously condemned the new charter and finally proposed its own agenda for change in South Africa. These media also castigated their own government for failing to pressure Pretoria to change.

In conclusion, one can argue that the US media failed to give Botha credit for his initiatives. Although he did not eradicate apartheid, he was through his

89 CS Wren, "Botha, rebuffed by his party, quits South Africa presidency", *New York Times*, 15 August 1989, p. A1.

90 CS Wren, "De Klerk becomes Pretoria President", *New York Times*, 16 August 1989, p. A3.

91 P Laurence, "Opening the gates", *Africa Report* 34(6), November-December 1989, pp. 23 and 25.

Machaba • American Press reportage on PW Botha's attempts at reforming apartheid

dictatorial style of leadership able to push reform measures despite opposition thereto. Even though he left under a cloud, he had laid the foundations for further reform and made it easier for his successor to destroy apartheid in its entirety.