

THE STORMS OF REFORMS: SOUTH AFRICA'S REFORM-STRATEGY, c. 1980-1989

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Abstract

*2013 marks the thirtieth anniversary of South Africa's 1983 referendum in which the majority of whites voted in favour of Pretoria's proposed reformist constitution. The reform strategy, set out as a 12 Point Plan, was part of the grandiose Total National Strategy. The latter was conceptualized in an attempt to simultaneously enlighten the political **status quo** while safeguarding minority power. It implied the scrapping of a myriad of laws and regulations and a mesh of new ones – including the 1983 Constitution. In order to reform apartheid the National Party regime of PW Botha had to reform the country almost in its entirety. Pretoria nonetheless refused a statement of intent or time frame. If the reform strategy failed the minority would be left out of options and would in whatever way surrender its position of unquestionable power. Without grasping the processes inherent to this topic the processes of 1990 and thereafter cannot be understood. This article will examine the reform strategy and implementation thereof. Furthermore the article will enlighten the reaction to it and so too its effect.*

Keywords: Apartheid; total strategy; reforms (1980s); 12 Point Plan; Tricameral Parliament; PW Botha; referendum (1983); Samuel Huntington.

Slutelwoorde: Apartheid; totale strategie; hervorming (1980's); 12 Punt Plan; Driekamerparlement; PW Botha; referendum (1983); Samuel Huntington.

1. INTRODUCTION

The country's uniquely difficult position during the 1960s and 1970s made the need for an all-enveloping security strategy, seen from the perspective of the minority government, obvious. In an interview with the writer, General Magnus Malan, onetime Head of the South African Defense Forces and later Minister of Defense in PW Botha's cabinet, said that he viewed such a Total National Strategy as crucial and said it was "a life-or-death matter" because plainly "if you do not have a strategy you are bugged".²

In this regard the South African military studied insurgency and counter-insurgency doctrines, Mao Zedong, Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh and paid attention to the upheavals in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Vietnam, Algeria and

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2 J-A Stemmet Private Collection, Interview J-A Stemmet Gen. Magnus Malan, 12 August 2000.

Malaya.³ Furthermore, since 1945, more than one writer and strategist across the world had pondered upon the strategic theory of Total War and a corresponding Total Strategy. More than one attracted the attention and imagination of Pretoria's security establishment. One such writer had a tremendous influence on how the Nationalists reasoned. He was retired French General Andre Beaufre, who based his writings on the violent French colonial experiences in Algeria and Indochina.⁴

In essence Beaufre attempted to formulate a strategy that could successfully counter Leninist strategies. To do so he argued that the political leaders of a state must become strategic in their governance and specifically enclose and coordinate politics, economics, diplomacy and the military sectors. He referred to it as a "total strategy".⁵

Another aspect of Beaufre's Total National Strategy (TNS) philosophy is that of political reform acting in unison with the security dimension. Accordingly he stated that by means of "thorough-going reforms we must cut the ground from under the feet of the malcontents". The Nationalists were attentive.⁶

2. THE "12 POINT PLAN"

In a speech at a NP meeting in Uppington on 28 July 1979, Prime Minister (later State President) Botha said: "Good neighbourliness in this country can be developed to the full only if we do justice to every population group. And we can keep the peace in this country and ensure the safety of our children only if the right relations are built up between Black and White in this country, and I am going to dedicate my life to this...", and "The National Party has a programme or policy to adapt to changing circumstances. One cannot keep one's policy the same year in and year out, because the world does not remain the same year in and year out."⁷ And then some years later, in 1982 (the reader keeping Beaufre in mind) Botha said: "Now that we are in power, we have to be prepared to follow the road of justice in our relations with other population groups. If we do not succeed in this way the powers of radicalism and even revolution will disfigure the national life of our country."⁸

3 B Pottinger, *The imperial presidency: PW Botha, the first 10 years* (Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers), p. 339.

4 C Alden, *Apartheid's last stand: the rise and fall of the South African security state* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 42.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

7 JJJ Scholtz, *Fighter and reformer: extracts from the speeches of PW Botha* (Pretoria: Bureau for Information, 1989), pp. 17-18.

8 *Ibid.*

As part of the Total National Strategy (managed by a National Management Strategy) PW Botha started his campaign of reform. In a speech he gave at the NP Congress in Durban, on 15 September 1979, that would become known as the 12 Point Plan speech, Botha set out what was in fact the culmination of his search for a reform process. According to Botha: "It is to strive for the recognition of the following policy within the framework of a multinational Southern Africa that this is the only solution to our problems."⁹

The 12 Point Plan was:

1. The recognition and acceptance of the existence of multinationalism and of minorities in the Republic of South Africa. (Said Botha: "You cannot wish them away.")
2. The acceptance of vertical differentiation with a built-in principle of self-determination at as many levels as possible.
3. The establishment of constitutional structures by the black peoples to make the highest degree of self-government possible for them in states that are consolidated as far as practicable. ("We believe that part of the right to self-determination of these Black states is to allow them to grow towards independence according to their own judgement", said Botha.)
4. The division of powers between South African whites, South African coloureds and South African Indians with a system of consultation and co-responsibility so far as common interests are concerned.¹⁰
5. The acceptance of the principle that, where at all possible, each population group should have its schools and live in its own community as being fundamental to social contentment. ("In my view", explained the NP leader, "this is not discrimination, it is the recognition of each other's rights.")
6. The preparedness to consult as equals on matters of common interest with a sound balance between the rights of the individual and those of the community. (Botha then said that he was in favour of removing petty apartheid, "hurtful and unnecessary discriminatory measures". And then curbing the possibility of being branded a liberal, made the following adamantly clear: "But I am not in favour of a system of compulsory integration in South Africa, and I am not in favour of endangering my own people's right to self-determination.")

9 Institute for Contemporary History (INCH, Bloemfontein), PW Botha Private Collection, PV 203, 4/2/181.

10 *Ibid.*

7. The recognition of economic interdependence and the properly planned utilisation of manpower.

Striving for a peaceful constellation of Southern African states with respect for each other's cultures, traditions and ideals.

1. South Africa's firm determination to defend itself against interference from outside in every possible way. (Again the reader should keep in mind Beaufre's thought on developing a TNS and a process of reform. Saying that the Republic was militarily stronger than ever before, Botha said that his will to reform should not be misunderstood as having been born out of a sense of desperation or fragility: "I want to warn those who think that we practice our politics from a position of weakness: We are not speaking from a position of weakness, we are speaking from a position of decency. If they want to test us, our strength, we will hit back for the sake of South Africa's self-respect.")
2. "As far as possible" a policy of neutrality in the conflict between super powers, "with priority given to Southern African interests".
3. Maintenance of effective decision making by the state, which rests on a strong Defence Force and Police Force to guarantee orderly government as well as sufficient clean administration. And strong security forces, with contented members, are of the "utmost importance in today's dangerous world".
4. Maintenance of free enterprise as the basis of our economic and financial policy.¹¹

Drafted in conjunction with Chris Heunis, later to become Minister of Constitutional Development, the 12 Point Plan, according to Chris Alden, was Botha's "effort to transform the administrative, security and reform imperatives that characterized the... Total National Strategy into a national reform strategy".¹²

One of the major influences on the Botha government's assessment of how reform should be administered was that of the Harvard professor, Samuel Huntington. As early as 1981, Huntington visited South Africa and gave a lecture on the subject at the Political Science Association. It was there that the academic explained his reform theory, which in essence was a formula for a top-to-bottom styled reform strategy. Also, during this talk, Huntington made a famous statement, saying that a reformer should be a master of deception. "The politics of reform is basically a tripartite process with the reform leader fighting a two front war", said

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Alden, p. 80.

Huntington, “against both stand patters and revolutionaries while at the same time attempting to divide and confuse his enemies.”¹³

He reasoned that with the black liberation movement to the left of Botha and the Afrikaner conservatives to the right, the Botha government was in a “classic reform position”, but that this did not imply that the government was necessarily a reform government. According to Huntington, this only implied that the opportunity for reform existed: “Whether efforts are made to utilize that opportunity only history can tell for sure because it is of the essence of the reformer that he must employ ambiguity, concealment, and deception concerning his goals.”¹⁴

It ought to be mentioned that although a large number of leading scholars and commentators debated Huntington's influence on the regime as a reform pedagogue of sorts, Botha himself denied this. Botha's biographer, Daan Prinsloo, wrote in the former state president's authorised biography *Stem uit die wilderness*, that according to PW Botha Huntington's perceived influence is exaggerated if not imaginary.¹⁵

During 1986 President Botha released a memorandum to a visiting mission of US Congressmen, under the leadership of Chairman William H Gray, in which he reviewed his government's reform process up until that point.¹⁶ One of Botha's first reform steps was the abolition of the so-called “petty apartheid”, for example the “whites only” signs internationally recognised as symbols of apartheid South Africa. The noted reform initiatives mentioned in the memo included the opening of sport to all races, the opening of a “modern, sophisticated trade union system”, the repealing of job reservation, the revocation of the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, the repealing of “racial provisions” in the Immorality Act and the opening of public amenities to all races, for example hotels, restaurants, park benches, trains and buses.¹⁷

The list of reforms is concluded with this positive, if rather vague, thought: “The door is thus wide-open, for the first time in South Africa's history, to the achievement through negotiation of a political dispensation in South Africa which could satisfy the political aspirations of all the country's communities. Negotiation is the key to the solution of South Africa's problems.”¹⁸

13 H Kenney, *Power, pride and prejudice: the years of Afrikaner Nationalist rule in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1991), p. 304.

14 *Ibid.*

15 D Prinsloo, *Stem uit die wildernis: 'n biografie oor oud-president P.W. Botha* (Mossel Bay: Vaandel-uitgewers, 1997), p. 102.

16 INCH, PW Botha Private Collection, PV 203, PS 12/74/1.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

3. THE TRICAMERAL PARLIAMENT

One of the most robust moves of Botha's reform campaign was the inception of a so-called Tricameral Parliament. One of the first acts Botha focused on after taking over from BJ Vorster, was to appoint a parliamentary select committee to investigate the possibility of opening Parliament to coloureds and Indians.¹⁹ By 1979, the committee's recommendations resulted in the dissolution of the Senate, empowerment of the State President by party leaders to appoint 20 members to the House of Assembly and the creation of a President's Council with no legislative powers, but advisory capabilities. In this President's Council whites as well as coloureds and Indians were to serve but very explicitly, no blacks. Botha said: "Black people will not have representation in the President's Council; my successor can do that one day if he wants to." According to Botha such a move would spell disaster, because it would imply an acceptance of "the germ" of black majority rule.²⁰

This President's Council had the responsibility to write a new constitution. On 2 November 1983 a white referendum was held during which whites' overwhelming support for Botha's new Tricameral Parliament was made abundantly clear. The State President walked away from the polls with a two-thirds majority stamp of approval for his new constitution and multi-cultural parliament.²¹

Botha spoke about the referendum and why most whites supported it: "The whites wanted a good relationship with other population groups. Afrikaans and English speakers, they all had goodwill in their hearts towards other population groups. That's why they voted YES in the referendum that I had arranged. They saw the suggestions and recommendations of the then President's Council, to be a positive way to assure some form of stability and safety for South Africa."²²

The country's government would thus be representative of whites, coloureds and Indians, yet not of the majority of South Africans, the black population. Samuel Huntington had said in 1981, that "narrowing the scope of political participation may be indispensable to eventually broadening that participation."²³

Blacks would get special structures, separate from the Tricameral Parliament. Explaining his aims towards the black people, Botha said in 1983 that he accepted that urban blacks are a feature of his country citing the "economic necessities" that forced him to accept it. "That is why we are developing third tier government

19 D de Villiers and J de Villiers, *PW* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1984), p. 213.

20 *Ibid.*

21 B Maree, "'n Maand van geskiedenis", *Suid-Afrikaanse Panorama* 29(12), December 1984, pp. 1-2; T Cameron (ed.), *Nuwe geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika in woord en beeld* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1986), p. 318; De Villiers and De Villiers, p. 213.

22 J-A Stemmet Private Collection, Interview J-A Stemmet – PW Botha, 13 October 2000.

23 Kenney, p. 304.

systems and structures for blacks” and that these low leveled structures “would be allowed to develop to a higher level than ordinary municipalities”. These local black councils, as they would later be known, would to a certain extent be in control of matters such as law and order and health services.²⁴

During August of 1984, the coloureds and Indians held elections to vote for their tricameral parliamentary representatives. The coloured and Indian turnouts were very low and it is estimated that not even 20% of the registered voters bothered to vote.²⁵

Nonetheless, the government continued to usher in the new dispensation. The new parliamentary system would function with the House of Assembly staying exclusively white, with 178 seats. A House of Representatives would accommodate 85 coloured seats and a House of Delegates would house the Indian representatives with 45 seats.²⁶ The objective of the new Constitution was, described by the then Minister of Constitutional Affairs, Chris Heunis, as being to “accommodate the coloured people and Indians without detracting from the self-determination of the whites”.²⁷

Keeping with Heunis' train of thought, legislation was divided into “general affairs” and “own affairs”. The former included matters such as defence, foreign affairs and justice, with the latter dealing with matters relating to specific race groups, such as culture, education, local government and health. “Own affairs” legislation could be enacted by whichever House was involved, whereas “general affairs” had to have the support of all three the Houses. If the Houses could not achieve consensus, then it was submitted to the President's Council, which in these cases had the final say. This Council consisted of 60 members: 35 members came from all three Houses; a further 25 members were appointed by the State President, of which ten had to come from the ranks of the opposition.²⁸

As can be ascertained from the above figures Indians and so-called coloureds had indeed been made part of the central governmental process and it was done in a way that ensured they could never force the white executive hand. There was no way in which coloured and Indian parliamentary power could be translated into any real final political authority or influence; the predominately white House of Assembly was ultimately responsible for electing and removing the State President.

24 H Murray, “Interview: PW Botha”, *Leadership SA* 2(3), Spring 1983, p. 17.

25 AEAM Thomashausen, *The dismantling of apartheid: the balance of reforms, 1978-1988* (Pretoria: Andre E.A.M. Thomashausen, 1987), p. 10.

26 Maree, pp. 1- 2; Cameron (ed.), p. 318.

27 D Oakes (ed.), *Reader's Digest illustrated history of South Africa: the real story* (Pleasantville: Reader's Digest Association, 1988), p. 473.

28 *Ibid.*

Also, no institutionalised basis existed for the coloured and Indian houses to prevent, or even delay, legislation.²⁹

State President PW Botha had, according to many commentators, acquired some exorbitant new powers through his 1983 Constitution. In 1985 Deon Geldenhuys and Hennie Kotzé wrote on the subject of the powerful office of State President, as found in the 1983 Constitution, noting that the new constitutional dispensation “revolves” around the person of the State President: “Some politicians wonder, indeed, whether the new constitutional system could continue functioning without Botha.”³⁰

Afrikaner journalist and historian, At van Wyk, observed that Botha steadily took on the persona of a high handed “anointed emperor” and became an increasingly domineering, elusive enigma, shielded by “a military-like line of officials”.³¹ In contrast to the enthusiasm that Botha had inspired during his first years as Head of State, Van Wyk felt he had deteriorated into a power hungry egomaniac “playing the imperialist role himself, aiming to remain at the top for a long time”.³²

The new Constitution effectively made PW Botha the formal and executive head of state, as well as the commander-in-chief of the South African Defence Force. The new State President enjoyed far greater security of tenure than his Prime Minister predecessors who had served under the 1961 Constitution. *The Republic of South Africa Act* of 1983, invested the Executive with vast new command, that apart from getting authorisation from parliament with regards to spending money, the executive could, technically, govern without parliamentary checks and balances. Some analysts have also commented that it seem whenever the opposition got too strenuous, the executive would revert back to special extra-parliamentary regulations, for example emergency laws, to push through the parliamentary legislation it wanted.³³

According to C Heymans, the apparent broadening of democracy cannot be seen separately from the concentration and centralisation of power: “It reinforces such trends as the shift towards executive rule at the expense of parliament and the enhanced role of security in the decision-making process.”³⁴

Veteran liberal politician, Helen Suzman, of the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), regarded the expansion of the State President’s powers one of the main motivations for not supporting his new Tricameral Parliament. In *In no uncertain terms*, her autobiography, she wrote: “We objected to the absence of checks and

29 B Dean, “Control by cabal”, *Leadership SA* 5(4), 1986, pp. 58-60.

30 D Geldenhuys and H Kotzé, “Man of action”, *Leadership SA* 4(2), 1985, p. 12.

31 A van Wyk, *The birth of a new Afrikaner* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1991), p. 34.

32 *Ibid.*

33 Dean, pp. 58-59.

34 I Liebenberg, *Ideologie in konflik* (Bramley: Taurus, 1990), p. 109.

balances to curb the very wide powers the President would exercise: no court could override any decision he made.”³⁵

Probably the most clear-cut example of the wielding of this kind of power came about in 1986. The NP wanted to pass two controversial security bills, the *Internal Security Amendment Bill* and the *Public Safety Amendment Bill*, but both the House of Delegates and the House of Representatives rejected it. According to the new Constitution when this type of divide arose the matter were to be referred to the President's Council, which would have the final say. The Council, not surprisingly, approved both the bills without a hitch. Both the contested bills were then officially regarded as having been approved by Parliament. This type of brusque circumvention led to much outspoken criticism from the coloured and Indian parliamentary groups, the PFP and a wide spectrum of commentators.³⁶

As can possibly be ascertained from the above, the new Constitution was severely criticised for its centralization of authority. Although considerable powers were indeed delegated, no real devolution of power took place.³⁷

4. THE QUESTION OF INTENT

The reform initiatives were initially met with excitement, but after the initial hubbub had died down, one very logical question soon cracked the cautious esteem the reform campaign was held in by Botha's liberal opponents: What was the NP's final intent with reform? Where was it going: was it the first step in a process to finally dismantle apartheid, or an inconsequential constitutional window dressing? – the key word here being “intent”. Botha came under a lot of pressure to issue a statement of intent or a time limit of sorts with regards to the future and ultimate goals of the reform process and the possibility of negotiations.

During his so-called *Rubicon Speech*, of 15 August 1985, Botha said that the view of South Africa as being made up of a black majority and white minority was “simplistic” and a “racist approach” to the country's situation. Then, taking on the question of issuing a statement of intent he said: “I am not prepared to make it, not now and not tomorrow.” And if his global audience still had any misconceptions about where he stood on this issue, in no uncertain terms he said: “It would also be wrong to place a time limit on negotiations. I am not going to walk into this trap – I am responsible for South Africa's future.”³⁸ Botha then continued, saying that he knew for a fact that most of the country's leaders and “reasonable” South Africans

35 H Suzman, *In no uncertain terms: a South African memoir* (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. 232.

36 C Cooper et al., “Security”, *South African Survey of Race Relations 1986* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1987), p. 816.

37 L Shlemmer, “South Africa in mid-1986”, *Indicator SA* 4(1), Winter 1986, p. 6.

38 INCH, PW Botha Private Collection, PV 203, 4/2/133, Address, 15 August 1985.

rejected the concept of one-man-one-vote, because they agreed that it could only “lead to domination of one over the other and it would lead to chaos. Consequently I reject it as a solution.” He then also stopped the conjecture and speculation that had started around the introduction of a fourth black house of parliament. Botha said he did not regard it as a “practical” solution.³⁹

It would thus seem that Botha’s short-term aims were to sustain white minority power by desegregating so-called “unnecessary apartheid” and implementing economic upliftment and development programs specifically aimed at the black communities, but after all was said and done, racial segregation would remain.⁴⁰

The reason why most white South Africans supported Botha’s reforms, was exactly why most blacks rejected it. Although the reforms might have trimmed some of apartheid’s thorns, it left the bark and roots of the system untouched. In his popular book, *Moderne Afrika*, APJ van Rensburg explained Botha’s reforms in somewhat lofty terms, making it clear that reform was an attempt to ensure white survival on a black continent, while protecting group interests in the process.⁴¹ Botha also made this point clear throughout his reform campaigns, saying in August 1985 that a “simplistic ‘winner-takes-all’ political system” will “diminish and not increase the freedom of our people”.⁴²

While addressing a NP youth gathering in the Transvaal during the same period, Botha assured the teenagers that, “We shall not be stamped into a situation of panic by irresponsible elements for opportunistic reasons. We shall not be forced to sell out our proud heritage we built up over the decades.” The State President then said that the NP government would continue with “the process of peaceful deliberations and consultations”.⁴³

Reverend Beyers Naudé said that he initially attached merit to Botha’s reform policy, saying, “I – in the beginning – really thought that it would be reformed,” but he went on to say that the more he came into contact with black South Africa “I realised more and more that apartheid couldn’t be reformed. Apartheid was, in its nature, a rape of human values and it was simply not going to work.”⁴⁴ He said that especially after hearing the views of young blacks “I realised, sorry, but there is no way that apartheid can be truly reformed”.⁴⁵

Naudé, in his capacity as Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, in a 1985 article, explained why reforms were not far reaching enough: “Increasingly, the democratic people of South Africa are using the Freedom

39 *Ibid.*

40 L Shlemmer, “Change – South Africa’s split personality”, *Indicator SA* 2(1), March 1984, p. 7.

41 APJ van Rensburg, *Moderne Afrika* (Pretoria: De Jager-HAUM, 1983), p. 144.

42 INCH, PW Botha Private Collection, PV 203, 4/2/133, Address, 15 August 1985.

43 *Ibid.*

44 J-A Stemmet Private Collection, Interview J-A Stemmet – Beyers Naudé, 27 June 2000.

45 *Ibid.*

Charter as a yardstick against which to measure the 'reforms' in South Africa. The reality is that now, 25 years since the drawing up of the Freedom Charter by 3 000 representatives of the people from all walks of life, none of the demands have been met." He then conceded that some might have been addressed by Pretoria under Botha, but "none of the fundamental demands have been met and there is no prospect of them being met".⁴⁶

Although, for exactly opposite reasons, both the rightwing Conservative Party,⁴⁷ as well as the liberal Progressive Federal Party opposed Botha's Tricameral Parliament. Helen Suzman, in explaining why her PFP was against the new system, said that she believed, in effect, that Botha's new deal "lacked legitimacy" because "it was created without proper consultation with all sections of the population", specifically South Africa's black majority. She also criticised the new Constitution for its lack of a Bill of Rights.⁴⁸

Focusing on the question of legitimacy and the Botha government, political scientist Prof. JC Garnett, commented, during 1989, on the Nationalists' reform policies, which, in his view, could easily be understood as "merely tinkering cosmetically with the Constitution".⁴⁹ He sounded a warning that the Botha government stood a chance of losing all legitimacy if it did not reassess its security orientation. He argued that South Africa's executive should not make the mistake of looking at their biggest security threat as a Reds-under-the-beds conspiracy, but rather the legitimacy tightrope it was walking – trying to pacify the blacks with constitutional tinkering and reform: "The most dangerous threat to the security of South Africa is the distinct possibility that the government will fall off its tightrope, and will not be able to resolve the crisis of legitimacy" which is what "undermines its moral authority".⁵⁰

The legitimacy issue was not only a point of contention during the 1980s. During the late 1970s the noted Afrikaner philosopher, Willie Esterhuyse, in his *Afskeid van apartheid*, wrote that if the government introduced and executed a campaign, which the target group did not accept, but regarded with suspicion, then such a program will never succeed.⁵¹ Esterhuyse argued that the moral quality and safety of the Afrikaner's "national existence" depended on how successful

46 B Naudé, "Where is South Africa going?", *Africa Report* 30(3), May-June 1985, p. 5.

47 The Conservatives reasoned that the reforms were jeopardizing separate development and would ultimately culminate in black majority rule.

48 Suzman, p. 231.

49 JC Garnett, "National security and threat perception", *The strategic review for Southern Africa* 10, 1989.

50 *Ibid.*

51 WP Esterhuyse, *Afskeid van apartheid: opstelle oor rassediskriminasie* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1979), p. 63.

they were in cutting away the “tumour of racism” and the “moral cancer” of racial discrimination.⁵²

Seen from the perspective of a white minority and in the context of apartheid party politics, Botha’s reforms were monumental and ground breaking. Seen from the perspective of the black majority, in the context of liberation politics, these reforms were an overrated storm in a small teacup. White and black South Africans had a completely different view of what “change” meant. Blacks did not want political fringe *benefits*, they wanted the same political *rights* as the whites.⁵³

Ismail Omar, who served in Botha’s Indian House of Delegates and President’s Council, wrote: “The lack of a natural exchange of ideas and thinking has resulted in a perception gap of frightening magnitude in a society with a common destiny. A giant leap in political terms from the White point of view is not a giant leap from the Black point of view,” then specifically focusing on the Tricameral System, he wrote that by 1987 coloureds and Indians regarded it as “irrelevant”.⁵⁴ This was the case, according to Omar, because: “Its actions are so totally incompatible with its declared policy of ‘power-sharing between groups’ and ‘non-domination’, that it has created a credibility void for itself as well as for participation politics.”⁵⁵

Prof. Lawrence Shlemmer concurred, writing that although Botha’s unprecedented reforms “seen in the light of nearly 40 years of highly institutionalised apartheid and over three centuries of racial segregation” should not be summarily belittled as meaningless. But, there should be no mistake that in effect, very little changed for the black people of South Africa, irrespective of how profound the acceptance of these reforms might have been for the whites.⁵⁶

The criticism of the Tricameral Parliament revolved chiefly around:

- The exclusion of blacks at central government level.
- Differentiation between groups, on the basis of their race, was proof that discrimination was not fundamentally changed or addressed.
- The failure of the co-option of coloureds and Indians, as illustrated by their low voter turnout in 1984.⁵⁷

52 *Ibid.*

53 D Lamb, *The Africans* (London: Mandarin, 1991), p. 320.

54 I Omar, *Reform in crisis: why the Tricameral Parliamentary System has failed* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1988), pp. 33, 89.

55 *Ibid.*

56 Shlemmer, “Change – South Africa’s split personality”, *Indicator SA* 2(1), March 1984, p. 6.

57 Thomashausen, p. 10.

5. TWO-PRONGED APPROACH AND A SPLIT DOWN THE MIDDLE

To try and put the relationship that existed between the Total National Strategy and the reform process into perspective it is important to note that by the time Botha took control of the NP, South Africa was experiencing, as shown in broad terms above, a legitimacy crisis, both in the eyes of the world as well as internally.⁵⁸ Instead of trying to diplomatically explain the apartheid situation to the world, Botha sternly attempted to keep South Africa and the politics of apartheid under control by means of the Total National Strategy and National Management Strategy.⁵⁹

Reform was the link between how Botha tried to appease the black population and the world community, while at the same time keeping control of the system. These two considerations then form the carrot and stick of Botha's political approach.

Botha never considered the concept of one-man-one-vote power sharing, saying in a speech in 1986: "There is no way that it can lead to fair power sharing. If complied to, it would purely boil down to a seizure of power and majority rule."⁶⁰

On various occasions the State President explained his view on the majority rule principle. Following an ethnic train of thought, he said that the country was made up of minorities, white and black minorities. Botha said that the future of the constitutional position of black South Africans would be determined through lengthy "consultation" with various black communities.⁶¹ PW Botha reaffirmed, in 2000, that he had never supported the creation of a fourth black House as part of the Tricameral System. He envisaged some type of National Council outside parliament, where talks and consultation could take place.⁶²

According to JP Landman, the Botha government's point of view on consultation implied the façade of negotiations without the government actually having to negotiate. Via the so-called process of consultation the Botha-led NP could gain as many insights from as many different black groupings as it wanted, while all along propagating its own views and programs.⁶³ These parties could then debate these convictions as vigorously as they wanted, without the government being bound or under any obligation to accept or act upon any of the insights or recommendations. Therefore, just because consultation and talks were taking place,

58 D Geldenhuys, *The diplomacy of isolation: South African foreign policy making* (Braamfontein: Macmillan South Africa, 1984), p. 235.

59 FvZ Slabbert, *The system and the struggle: reform, revolt and reaction in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1989), p. 125.

60 INCH, PW Botha Private Collection, PV 203, PS 12/75, Staatkundige hervorming, 1986.

61 *Ibid.*, 4/2/133, Adress, 1985.

62 J-A Stemmet Private Collection, Interview J-A Stemmet – PW Botha, 13 October 2000.

63 JP Landman *et al.*, *Wat kom na apartheid?: Jong Afrikaners aan die woord* (Johannesburg: Southern Books, 1988), p. 24.

it did not mean negotiations were taking place. Consultations could not be regarded as a substitute for negotiations.⁶⁴ Logically, the much-debated concept of co-option again came into play here.

According to F Van Zyl Slabbert by the mid-1980s, the country was engrossed in siege politics. Siege was made up of two strategies he said – repression and co-option. The former must control dissent and the latter “must manage political domination”. Both strategies were irreconcilable with “popular democratic politics” and “the ideological justification for opposing it, is the overriding need for stability”. According to Slabbert, in these circumstances “the politics of stability becomes an end in itself, even though the stability that is achieved through repression and co-option will be presented as a means to an end”. Cutting through to the crux, he wrote: “At the heart of such justifications, however, lies the determination and the will of the white minority Government not to lose control over the machinery of state.”⁶⁵

Slabbert then explained that it was because of Botha’s reform policies – which refused the relinquishing of white minority power – that the people who were “subjected to repression and co-option” were demanding “freedom”, the freedom to organise, choose and participate as they saw fit. According to Slabbert, Botha could not allow this because this would eventually have led to the majority deciding who should govern them. “And so the ‘politics of freedom’ and the ‘politics of stability’ will feed off and oppose one another. The demand for ‘stability’ will be seen as a threat to ‘freedom’, and the demand for ‘freedom’ a ‘threat’ to ‘stability’.” He then again stressed, that “co-option” was an attempt from Pretoria to sustain white minority power.⁶⁶

According to Webster and Erwin co-option was a procedure whereby the leaders of an opposing group are being absorbed by the governing group – “in such a way that no shift in the balance of power takes place”.⁶⁷ During 2000, Clem Sunter explained the view which he held during the 1980s, that co-option could only lead “downhill, because the majority of the black people in the country won’t buy the co-option scenario.⁶⁸ And therefore you have to negotiate with the real guys.” According to Sunter, Botha did not really go as far down the co-option route as he could have, “they understood that the co-option scenario wouldn’t work”. He did add, though, that he thought Botha “would have liked to have made that mistake”.⁶⁹

By neglecting to incorporate black South Africa in the Tricameral System, the government reinforced a sense of unity among blacks, a sense of common

64 *Ibid.*

65 FvZ Slabbert, *The last white parliament* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1986), p. 197.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 198.

67 Liebenberg, p. 110.

68 J-A Stemmet Private Collection, Interview J-A Stemmet – Clem Sunter, 13 November 2000.

69 *Ibid.*

grievance.⁷⁰ Through the Tricameral System the government tried to co-opt blacks, coloureds and Indians into their whites only system. By doing so, in the eyes of the non-collaborators, Pretoria discredited those groups who bought into the new system and simultaneously heightened the status of those who boycotted it.⁷¹ As Denis Beckett put it: “Thus, the government’s attempt to gradually ‘broaden democracy’ is hopeless. All that its broadening is rejection.”⁷²

Following this line of reasoning, that which various commentators felt the Tricameral System did achieve was the polarisation of co-opted and the non-participants. Omar writes that this is because the “non-participation forces have succeeded in creating a credibility crisis for participation politics by the successful propagation of the political cliché that those participating in the system support apartheid, and those outside oppose it”. In other words, those associated with the system, irrespective of colour, were immediately seen as proponents of its wrongs.⁷³

A condition of being either for us or against us, had set in. The result was, according to Slabbert, that the Botha government regarded anyone opposed to its system as its enemy and a proponent of its violent overthrow; similarly those that had been co-opted, irrespective of their “sincerity”, would be typecast as working to further the aims of the system: “There is nothing new in this and it is typical of the mutual stereotyping that takes place in a polarisation situation.”⁷⁴

The polarisation and typecasting that Slabbert refers to were not entirely new to the South African landscape. During the 1970s Willie Esterhuysen had warned, in his 1979 book, *Afskeid van apartheid*, of a growing sense of paranoia and distrust among coloureds towards Afrikaners. As one coloured community leader told him: “In a certain sense you are a security risk to me. I cannot risk being open about our association. My people will accuse me of conspiring with the Boers.”⁷⁵ Typecasting also came into play when Botha said, without specifying who he was referring to, that those who are demanding greater and vaster change are “radical elements” and that these radicals “want revolutionary and not evolutionary change. We will not surrender to that.”⁷⁶

Leon Wessels, high ranking Nationalist, said in an interview in 1988, that those who said the Total National Strategy was a government ploy to try and stay in power indefinitely are those to whom the “system was a threat” and by this he meant “those who seek to make South Africa ungovernable”. He then juxtaposed these non-collaborators with the “responsible black citizens” who “appreciate the

70 T Matthews, “Political violence in South Africa”, *Leadership SA* 3(3), Third quarter 1984, p. 22.

71 D Beckett, “Still the fears to raise the hopes”, *Frontline* 6(6), November 1986, p. 45.

72 *Ibid.*

73 Omar, p. 24.

74 Slabbert, *The last white...*, p. 201.

75 Esterhuysen, p. 84.

76 De Villiers and De Villiers, p. 217.

important role of the Joint Management System in providing stability, normality and development”.⁷⁷ According to Rev. Allan Boesak, the prominent anti-apartheid activist and head of the powerful mass organisation, the United Democratic Front, there was a certain cathartic value to radicalization and the accompanying polarisation. He argued that the Afrikaners had turned politics into “mud” and thus: “The people can’t see the politics clearly. There is only one way to purify politics, and that is through radicalisation.”⁷⁸

6. HUNTINGTON’S CRITIQUE

After delivering his much publicised address in 1981 about the route and virtues of reformist politics, Samuel Huntington returned to South Africa during 1986 to evaluate Pretoria’s five year reform track-record. Not hiding his disappointment the Harvard professor’s assessment was in effect a scathing critique of the Botha government’s entire reform program and the implementation thereof. Huntington’s criticism received almost as much publicity as his original 1981 talk and boiled down to expressing doubts about how serious Botha was about reform and therefore questioning his legitimacy as a reformer.⁷⁹

Huntington felt Botha enjoyed talking the reformist talk without walking the reformist walk. It is important to look at his main points of criticism, as many of these also directly or indirectly relate to the main causes of the violent political upheavals that were to follow.

- Expectations

The American reform expert blamed Botha for raising expectations to inproportionate levels. He reminded Pretoria “not to make big promises”. He felt Botha had promised much, but ended up “delivering much less than [he] seemed to promise”. On many occasions Botha complained that his government did not receive the credit for its reformist initiatives, which according to Huntington was because they had delivered too little after promising too much. “As a result,” he explained, “when it does do something worthwhile as in the case of the pass laws, it does not perhaps get the credit it deserves.”⁸⁰

77 W Ebersohn, “The headmen”, *Leadership SA* 7(5), 1988, pp. 16-25.

78 L Wessels, *Die einde van ‘n era: bevryding van ‘n Afrikaner* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1994), p. 9.

79 S Huntington, “Whatever has gone wrong with reform?”, *Die Suid-Afrikaan* 8, Winter 1986, pp. 19-22.

80 *Ibid.*

- “Fabian strategy”

In 1981 Huntington argued in favour of his so-called Fabian strategy, whereby it was best to move as fast as possible with reforms after having announced them. In this way the government's opposition would be taken by surprise and not have enough time to mobilize resistance. Huntington said that the Botha government clearly did not follow that advice. “Almost every major issue in South Africa is studied first by one commission and then by another...There is an elaborate process of analysis and consideration, and it takes a year and often longer for the changes to go through Parliament. It thus seems to take several years after something is announced as a goal of the government before it can be put into operation.”⁸¹

- Position of strength

This is related to the above strategy of surprising the opposition by introducing reforms before the opposition demands them. This was very important because “no government is happy about introducing reforms under pressure, and seeming to give in”. “Once again,” Huntington wrote, “the South African government has generally failed to follow this prescription.”

- Security

Huntington stated that every reform process would encounter “some violence”, but that it was vitally important for a government to keep it under control. The American stated that it had become clear to him that since his first visit to the country, the government “has been unable to control these types of violence” and not only did the government seem inept in controlling the violence, “it appears that the government has even encouraged backlash violence...” and “the government has also lost control over a certain amount of revolutionary violence...”⁸²

- Changed constituency

According to Huntington, a reformist government should try and change, or rather broaden its constituency. He felt that Botha should have drawn together various groups over a large spectrum to support his reform programs. But returning after five years, Huntington said that one of the most significant developments was the great extent to which Pres. Botha “has actually alienated many of these groups...In general, the government has totally failed to rally new coalition partners to its cause.”⁸³

81 *Ibid.*

82 *Ibid.*

83 *Ibid.*

- Unilateral reform

Under this heading Huntington noted the forceful level of politicisation that had developed amongst all South African people and groups. He noted that when he visited the country in 1981 the people “were obviously concerned with politics” but by 1986 they were “obsessively preoccupied with politics”. And also that not only were “individuals and groups becoming politicised, but issues also”.

- Decreased authority of government

Here Huntington argued that there seemed to have been “an alienation of the government”. “It seems to me that the government is much weaker, by and large, than it was in 1981. It does not command the authority, respect and legitimacy of major groups in South African society.” He explained that by 1986 the government was no longer the only predominant political actor and that this would surely hamper its reformist programs, adding rather sceptically “even if it wanted to, to carry out a programme of substantial reform”.⁸⁴

- Back burner

Here Huntington criticized the government for putting reform on the back burner, giving other issues greater emphasis – notably security. Huntington took Botha’s reasoning that before reform could continue Pretoria first had to quell the violence at face value, but was again sceptic about exactly how serious Botha was about reform. He asked: “If they do re-establish their control, will they then move on with some meaningful reform? ... I don’t know whether they will.” He also cautioned Pretoria on their vast security outfit, noting that, “They may find that having created a massive policing apparatus, they have created something which is policing them.”⁸⁵

- Preconditions

Here the political scientist argued that South Africa lacked certain preconditions for real change to materialize, specifically “pre-conditions for successful negotiation are missing”. If one thought had to be singled out to define Huntington’s 1986 assessment, it might be this one: “In a sense, South Africa today has a government too weak to impose reform from above – assuming it wanted to – and opposition groups which are too weak to compel reform from below through negotiation.”⁸⁶

84 *Ibid.*

85 *Ibid.*

86 *Ibid.*

7. CONCLUSION

Through the Total National Strategy and National Management System, the Botha government conclusively showed that it would not jeopardize white minority power and that the greatest supreme political force in South Africa was still the Nationalist Government. This was an endeavor to compel its opposition, irrespective of racial or political orientation, to accept that the only practical option left to them was to accept Pres. Botha's policies.⁸⁷

According to Van Vuuren, the ideology of apartheid, as remolded during the Botha era, consisted of two para-ideologies: *Total Onslaught* and the *New Dispensation*. Reform was brought about in reaction to the ever-growing legitimacy crisis and the ideology was amended without real submission of political power. The effect of these two para-ideologies was that the Botha government now wore two political masks. The hawkish rhetoric of "Total Onslaught" which belliciously guaranteed hell on earth to all the enemies of the state, when at the same time there was the peace dove of reform, which Botha dangled in front of moderates if they accepted his New Dispensation.⁸⁸

Botha himself explained this during his Rubicon speech, saying that his government was determined to continue with reforms and then, reading the other side of the proverbial coin, issued this dire warning "to those who prefer revolution to reform, I say they will not succeed. If necessary we will use stronger measures but they will not succeed"⁸⁹ – hence the political carrot and stick. The stick being the threat of the vast and severe striking power of the Total National Strategy and National Management System to be used against the enemies of the government and the carrot being co-option into accepting and supporting Botha's reforms and promises of a new dispensation. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, called reform "poor plastic surgery" in an attempt to mollify black South Africa, and said: "Of course apartheid cannot be reformed. It must be dismantled. You don't reform a Frankenstein – you destroy it."⁹⁰

The Total National Strategy and National Management System comprised a broad strategy to protect and serve the *status quo*. Particularly the reform aspects, and then specifically the exclusions of blacks, solicited an unprecedented wave of dissent from the majority of non-white South Africans. In 1984 unprecedented political and socio-economic turbulence struck the country. The endurance and strength of the Total National Strategy was to be tested in the furnace of political

87 CD Shearing, "The shifting alliances of reform and resistance", *Indicator SA* 4(1), Winter 1986, p. 20.

88 Liebenberg, pp. 106-107.

89 INCH, PW Botha Private Collection, PV 203, 4/2/133, Adress 1985.

90 J Allen (ed.), *Desmond Tutu: the rainbow people of God* (Toronto: Bantam, 1995), pp. 97, 101.

frustration. In the end it caused a deadlock.⁹¹ As Pretoria's reformist strategy failed, the only option left was to do what it was suppose to prevent – negotiate a New South Africa.

91 See for example: H Giliomee, *The last Afrikaner leaders: A supreme test of power* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2012), pp. 42-180; J-A Stemmet, "Apartheid and anticipation of apocalypse", *Journal for Contemporary History* 36(1), 2011, pp. 98-113.