

## HISTORY, REVOLUTION, AND SOUTH AFRICA

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During the French Revolution - so the story has it - a monkey was washed ashore on an English beach after a shipwreck. The local rustics immediately identified the unfortunate ape as a Frenchman, and to stem the contagion of revolution they hanged it on the village green. Scarcely less credulous were the journalists of the *New York Times* and *London Times* seventy years ago. Between November 1917 and January 1919, they published news stories on the Russian Revolution which were completely preposterous, a farrago of fantasy and fiction. The Bolsheviks - they reported - were German Jews seeking to implement the Protocols of the Elders of Zion; women were nationalised and children corrupted; statues were erected in public squares to Judas Iscariot, while inside communal kitchens human fingers bobbed in the broth. The Chinese hangmen who carried out executions for Lenin sold off the flesh of their victims as veal. Not surprisingly, the regime erected on these foundations tottered and Lenin fled Russia: he hid in Kronstadt; he sought refuge in Berlin, in Sweden, in Barcelona; finally (perhaps exhausted by his travels) he was locked up and Trotsky was proclaimed dictator (press reports quoted Laqueur, 1967:8-10).

Comic though they are, these reactions have some pertinence for the topic of revolution and its study by historians. They remind us of the convulsive nature of such events and of the varying and confusing evidence they bequeath; they alert us to the strength of feelings roused by them; and they suggest how ideologically loaded are some of the diverse interpretations that exist of individual revolutions and of revolutionary processes generally. In particular, the stridently counter-revolutionary absurdities of the newspapers I quoted have a bearing on my choice of topic for this lecture.

South Africa's past, like its present, is deeply seamed with counter-revolutionary impulses, practices, and beliefs. This is not simply a reference to the Suppression of Communism Act, the top-heavy security apparatus, or the official ideology of Total Onslaught. Nor is it merely a reminder of the massive violence used to crush peasant rebellion in 1906 and 1960, the Rand Revolt of 1922, civil disobedience in 1952 and 1960, and the whole range of popular protests since 1976.

More fundamentally, the political economy of modern South Africa - misbegotten child of colonial conquest and capitalists industrialisation - has concentrated wealth and power in the hands of a minority while it has

subjugated and exploited a majority of its population. Deeply imbedded labour repressive and racially exclusive mechanisms have engendered relations between classes and ethnic groups that are so lop-sided and antagonistic that historically they have had to be regulated by high levels of intimidation and violence.

Rooted in this sour soil is a dominant ideology which, in addition to its authoritarian, nationalist and racist aspects, fails to comprehend, let alone countenance, political change from below. If one accepts Draper's proposition that in capitalist societies the ruling class has 'a built-in dread of revolutionary violence' and manifests 'an unwillingness and inability to conceive of revolution as a social upheaval from below' (1978:21), then I think it follows in the South African case that this dread and this inability are accentuated. This is certainly one of my assumptions and a major reason for choosing in this peculiarly public and uncomfortably formal setting to speak on 'history, revolution and South Africa'. This lecture attempts to chip away, however ineffectually, at encrusted prevailing beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. A second reason was my sense that it would be difficult, not to say derelict, to present an inaugural lecture which failed in some manner to address contemporary issues from the historian's vantage point. These are not normal times, and to pretend that they are would be a shabby and evasive intellectual side-step.

But what is a revolution? In a definition that draws heavily on the ingenuity of others, let me propose that revolutions are historical phenomena exhibiting the following four features (attempting to combine Skocpol, 1979:3-4, and K Griewank quoted by Hobsbawm, 1986:9):

- (1) rapid institutional change of a society's state structures; a breaking-through or over-turning of an existing political order;
- (2) a simultaneous transformation of social relations: a decisive shift in the balance of power between social classes;
- (3) such a transfer of political and social power involves 'class-based revolts from below', the entry by normally dominated social groupings into actions of resistance or violent revolt;
- (4) the transfer of power thus effected through 'socio-political conflicts in which class struggles play a key role' is then consolidated in terms of an ideology or programme: revolutions involve conscious objectives, they seek to promote changes justified as positive improvements.

This combination of political and social transformation, brought about by class upheavals, and with an ideological element, distinguishes revolutions analytically from rebellions, coups d'etat, and other forms of violent political change. But let us note at this point the provoking

ambiguous category of national liberation struggles. These are typically waged against a colonial power or dominating alien presence. In some instances, wars of national liberation carry over into full blown revolutions, meeting all four definitional requirements: the Vietnamese revolution, successively anti-French, anti-Japanese, anti-American and anti-capitalist, is an obvious exemplar. In other cases, national liberatory movements may achieve political transformation, involve mass activism, and proceed according to a nationalist ideology and programme - but stop short of fundamentally reordering social relations or class structure. Examples would include the American War of Independence, the process through which the Gold Coast became Ghana, or the war by which Rhodesia became Zimbabwe (Chaliand, 1979:esp 178ff; Walton, 1984:1-36; case studies in Lewis, 1974).

Hinted at but not contained in the definition are two other attributes of revolution. These are, first, the transformative or propulsive capacity of revolutions - in a famous phrase, the notion that 'Revolutions are the locomotives of history'; and secondly, the innovative or creative dimension of revolutions.

The first of these is fairly easily demonstrated. Modern revolutions have set in train prodigies of state construction and development; revolutionary societies have remarkably rapidly surpassed not only their own pre-revolutionary capabilities but also those of other non-revolutionary countries in comparable circumstances. The Russian Revolution saw a backward agrarian power rise in two generations to the second-ranking military and industrial power in the world: between the wooden ploughs of October 1917 and the Sputnik of October 1957 the parameters of economic development were drastically revised. Revolutions endowed contemporary China with a unity, purpose and capacity that seemed barely credible for the corrupt ravaged shell of a state in 1949. Two decades after the Cuban Revolution, a tiny Caribbean country, a byword for neo-colonial dependency, muscled its way into the leading ranks of third world nations: Castro's island is startlingly different from the sleazy satrapy of Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana*. One aspect of rapid internal change should also be noted: all these cases transformed relations between women and men, assailing age-old forms of male dominance.

Please note: in none of these instances am I entering the endless debates posed by the question: Yes, but at what cost? The question is important; but it is a separate issue from the one I am outlining. In any case, perhaps the wisest answer is that attributed to Chairman Mao: asked to assess the outcome of the French Revolution he replied 'Oh, it is too soon to tell'.

Let me turn from the state-building and developmental achievements of

post-revolutionary societies to a feature belonging more strictly to the revolutionary upheaval itself: what I called the creativity of revolutions - a view of revolution (in Trotsky's phrase) as 'the inspired frenzy of history' (Trotsky, 1968:349). Quite simply, periods of revolutionary struggle have the effect of drawing large numbers of ordinary people into active, fiercely engaged public life. Urban workers and peasants, normally excluded from decision-making and implementation, find themselves thrust into these spheres. Their political participation, writes Wolf, 'releases that burst of creativity which has everywhere marked the revolutionary upsurge, and which forms the ultimate human justification for a radical politics - not merely to end injustice ... but to create a new world' (1971:5).

A *new world*: for it is the novelty of their participation which demands innovation and permits the extempore creation of new institutions and agencies. This spontaneous and inventive energy of the masses produced the *societes sectionnaires* in revolutionary Paris as 'a new instrument of popular power' (Souboul, 1964:164); it fostered the soviets or workers' councils in Russia in 1905; it gave vitality to the Civil Defence Committees in Nicaragua in the late 1970s. To move from city to countryside is to discover precisely similar releases of collective creative forces: in which 'the people themselves ... fashioned new levers of power and new means of livelihood from the bottom up ... fusing the traditional agencies of local society and the momentum of the Revolution' (Carlos Fuentes, quoted Selden, 1971:233). Wherever village studies have been conducted in revolutionary areas, they have documented the 'engagement in creative tasks of men and women who might never have had an opportunity to express their talents in the old regime' (Wolf, 1971:6).

#### HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO REVOLUTION

Given that revolutions accelerate and redirect historical developments, it is not surprising that their study has become 'one of the supreme and central preoccupations of historiography' (Zagorin 1973:29). For historians, revolutions possess especial value in that they illuminate social structures so vividly, laying bare much that is normally latent, clarifying or magnifying phenomena, and 'not the least of their advantages - normally multiplying our documentation' (Hobsbawm, 1971:29). One need only think of the mountainous studies of the French Revolution - and even quite specialised sub-topics have now thrown up respectable foothills of research - or of the English, American and Russian Revolutions to recognise their magnetism.

Study of revolution by historians has taken three main forms. The most

common, and most important, is the investigation of specific individual revolutions. Secondly, there have been comparative studies, which examine the phenomenon through two or more instances. Thirdly, there have been theoretical approaches, seeking for general explanations of the causes, processes and outcomes of revolution. To give a sense of how the study of revolution has changed over time, and also of the theoretical bearings I am steering by, let me sketch some of the more influential theories and indicate what appear to be some of the most popular and fruitful recent approaches available at the moment.

It makes sense to begin with the explanation of revolution worked at for forty years by Karl Marx. It has sustained a barrage of criticism over the years, and it is quite clearly weakest in its predictive powers: revolutions have not occurred where Marx expected them to occur. Nonetheless, much that Marx proposed has subsequently entered mainstream, non-Marxist social science; several of the most highly acclaimed recent studies of revolution work within a framework derived or adapted from Marx (see, for example, the most important comparative works on revolution in English in recent years, Moore, 1966; Wolf, 1969; Tilly, 1978; Skocpol, 1979); I would agree with Meyer that Marx's 'theory of revolution remains one of the most stimulating models for the analysis of revolutionary processes of transformation' (Meyer, 1986).

Marx's writings contain two major analytical points of entry into the study of revolutions: one of which stresses long-term systemic or structural change, and another which focuses upon conscious class conflict as the agency of revolutionary change. In the first of these, Marx is concerned to identify and explain transitions from one socio-economic order to another; the epochal changes central to his analysis were those from pre-capitalist to capitalist society, and those from capitalist to socialist society. These macro changes occur when the economic capacities of a society come into conflict with the existing class structure. Essentially the argument is that in certain periods of economic development one should expect specific kinds of drastic historic change in older regimes and structures. This transition may occur in a number of ways, including relatively peaceful evolution; but under certain circumstances it acquires an accelerated, concentrated, revolutionary form.

It is in this latter instance - 'the microphenomenon of actual revolution' (Hobsbawm, 1986:10) - that the concept of class conflict is crucial. Marx held that in any historically given society it is possible to identify complementary but antagonistic classes: masters and slaves, or feudal lords and peasants, or capitalists and wage-earners. And as that society persists over time, the tensions or contradictions between them are

heightened. It is when members of a class can be successively mobilised so as to seize state power from members of another class that revolutions occur.

But how would Marx's concepts translate into actual scholarly practice? Charles Tilly of Chicago, perhaps the leading American scholar of revolutions, offers this succinct summary:

If you want to analyse major conflicts, we hear him telling us, identify the major classes and interests which emerge from the organisation of production. Catalogue the resulting conflicts of interests. Examine each class you have enumerated in terms of its preparedness to act on its interests. Work out the class bases of the chief institutions and leaders involved in the conflict. Watch out for the crises which make the dominant classes vulnerable, and expect the organised underclasses to strike. There is much more to it, but those are Marx's essential instructions (Tilly, 1978:13).

Two aspects of Marx's approach account for its durability and utility. First, it draws together, analytically, the economy, social structure, state and ideology of the case being studied; its lens setting is one that attempts to include the totality of social change in its field of vision. Secondly, for revolutions in the modern era, it contextualises each particular instance within a more general phenomenon: it links 'the causes and consequences of revolution directly to the historical emergence and transcendence of capitalism' (Skocpol and Trimberger, 1978:122).

What of non-Marxist theorists of revolution? I am going to borrow Goldstone's useful framework of 'three generations' of western, mainly American, writings on revolution. The first generation were writing between the 1820s and 1940s. Goldstone dubs their approach the 'natural history' of revolutions: like the 'natural historians of biology, who sought to identify common stages and patterns in the development of life', they sought to establish a syndrome or pattern of revolution (Goldstone, 1982:187-207; also 1980:425-53). They drew upon the natural sciences for analogies. Crane Brinton's *Anatomy of Revolution*, published in 1938, remains perhaps the best known single work on the comparative study of revolution; and it resorted to the metaphor of revolution as a fever, with prodromal symptoms, crisis and delirium, convalescence and relapses, to recovery and a kind of immunity from further attacks.

The second generation of theorists were writing in the 1950s and 1960s. They employed far more elaborate and self-consciously social scientific

methodologies. They drew upon social psychology for notions of deviancy and frustration/aggression models of collective behaviour; they cross-bred with economists for theories of relative deprivation, the J-curve of rising but interrupted expectations, and so on; from structural functionalist sociology they typecast revolution as a systemic disequilibrium of normally stable social systems - and so on. In relation to the ingenuity and industry that went into the construction of these models, they shed little light on their subject. Their shortcomings have been reviewed by a number of scholars. One abrasive but accurate comment must suffice: these theories 'are deeply defective. Their elementary concepts and empirical descriptions are built upon misleading metaphors, riddled with erroneous theoretical assumptions ... And their general conclusions ... typically rests on arguments that, under scrutiny, turn out to be trivially true ... unsupported by evidence, or patently false' (Aya, 1979:39-99; also Zagorin, 1973; Goldstone, 1982; Goldfrank, 1979:135-65; Skocpol, 1979:3-39).

If such robust criticism is justified, the question arises: what went wrong? Why did this generation of western intellectuals bark so insistently up such inappropriate trees and dash so energetically down so many blind alleys?

The main reason lies in the context. These scholars were writing against a backdrop of international events that alarmed the west and particularly the United States. In the late 1940s and early 1950s there were successful revolutions in China, North Korea and North Vietnam, in Yugoslavia and Albania; in Eastern Europe socialist regimes were installed under Russian patronage; and insurgent movements were suppressed in the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaya. By the end of the 1950s, the Algerian and Cuban revolutions were under way. The intellectual climate of the Cold War meant that most of the second generation theorists were explicitly or implicitly hostile to revolutions; they viewed them as unnatural, illegitimate and preventable; and the prophylactic character of their approach warped and vitiated their explanatory power.

In the later 1960s and 1970s, important advances were made in the theorisation and historical study of revolutions. They derived firstly from a deepening dissatisfaction with the model-builders of the second generation; secondly, from a more heterodox, less mechanical post-Stalinist Marxism; and thirdly from the distinctive historiographical shift of recent decades in the writing of history towards exploring and reconstructing the experiences of the masses, the underclasses, ordinary men and women. Often called 'history from below', this approach has yielded rich harvests in a number of fields, but it is peculiarly important for the history of revolutions. If one agrees that the 'most indubitable feature of a revolution is

the direct interference of the masses in historic events' (Trotsky, 1980:xvii), then the benefits of the new social history are self-evident. These intellectual shifts, of course, also reflected global developments: the challenge of 1968, the Vietnam War, the international recession, the collapse of rightwing regimes in Portugal, Spain and Greece, the thaw in the Cold War which led to detente - and so on.

I shall simply list, in bald summary, what seems to me to be some of the most valuable emphases or perspectives developed by the third generation:

- (1) They stress the need for a 'world-historical' perspective, insisting that the study of revolution is concerned not only with internal polarisation but also with international considerations; they focus on the extent to which the society in question is subject to economic, military or political pressures from other states and from changes in the world-system;
- (2) Advocated especially by Theda Skocpol is an approach which concentrates on the socio-structural causes of revolution, downplaying consciousness and active 'making' of revolutions, and stressing instead deep-seated, historically generated fault lines within a given society;
- (3) They emphasise that the state is an autonomous actor in revolutionary times, and that states vary in their capacities for responding to challenges; in particular, they have directed attention to the question of the state's control over its armed forces as a crucial variable in revolutionary outcomes;
- (4) Some fine scholarship has alerted us to the major role played in modern revolutions by agrarian classes. A much greater analytical weight is given to the actual role in insurgent movements by peasants and rural workers; but also to the formation of class coalitions and the importance for the peasantry of political leadership from other groupings - especially the disaffected intelligentsia and the urban working class (including Wolf, 1969; Hobsbawm, 1959; Paige, 1975; Scott, 1976);
- (5) Tilly and others have argued for the importance in the political domain of 'multiple sovereignty'. This is an elaboration of an older notion of dual power, which arose when a revolutionary element 'although not yet master of the country, has actually concentrated in its hands a significant share of state power, while the official apparatus of the government is still in the hands of the old lords' (quotation on 'dual power' from Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, cited Tilly, 1978:190; for Tilly's elaboration of 'multiple sovereignty', see Tilly 1978:191-220). Tilly suggests that

not merely two, but several competing contenders may advance claims to control over aspects of government, and that significant sections of the population may come to recognise these claims.

#### HISTORICAL CRISES AND REVOLUTIONARY SITUATIONS

Let me now try to apply these perspectives by posing a leading question: what constitutes a revolutionary situation? Can one identify certain kinds of historical moments that offer realistic chances of a revolutionary outcome? And, if so, does contemporary South Africa appear, in terms historians might agree on, to have entered a revolutionary situation?

We should distinguish between an historical crisis and a revolutionary situation. Historical crisis is a longer term, contextual and structural concept: it asks whether the international system is in a phase of restructuring; what major developments have taken place in a given country's economy, social structure and political order; if the tensions generated by these changes have been absorbed or accommodated - or, alternatively, whether they have become acute due to the failure or absence of institutional adaptation. Gramsci termed this kind of structural crisis an 'organic' crisis, 'sometimes lasting for decades ... [when] incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves' (Gramsci, 1971:178).

Several scholars including myself, have argued that South Africa entered an organic crisis in the mid-1970s, and that it persists today. Among the long-term, contextual and structural features may be briefly noted the following:

- \*the international context since about 1973 is one of recession and insurgency; southern Africa, along with Central America and the Middle East has been an epicentre of political change, with an overall realignment of forces in central/southern Africa that does not favor South Africa's ruling minority;
- \*the South African economy, after a period of rapid expansion has for over a decade been plagued by inflation, unemployment, balance of payments pressures and foreign debts - the symptoms of the structural impasse of dependent industrialisation;
- \*radical social and political opposition has intensified: overt struggles between capital and labour have become endemic, while ever since June 1976 mass-based political movements have increased in numbers and militancy.

A revolutionary situation, on the other hand, is a short-term, more concentrated phenomenon, occurring within a structural or organic crisis. It is also a more fluid and open-ended phenomenon, more liable to be affected by political factors, by how purposive and how concerted is mass

mobilisation.

Lenin defined a revolutionary situation as a nation-wide crisis that affected both the dominant and subordinate elements in society: 'it is only when the "lower classes" do not want to live in the old way, and the "upper classes" cannot carry on in the old way that the revolution can triumph' (1974:84-85). A situation becomes revolutionary because of the simultaneity and interaction of a crisis of the regime and independent political action by the masses. This essential definitional core is repeated and elaborated in many academic theories. Let me look at the two elements a little more closely, and integrate them with various other conditions to arrive at an eclectic definition of a revolutionary situation. For clarity's sake, I shall simply enumerate the constituent parts of the definition.

(1) The presence of dilemmas for the ruling class and its regime, and splits or conflicts over how to resolve them: this might include the defection of erstwhile supportive elites; the collapse of consensus around the ideologies of the regime; and difficulties in carrying out administrative functions.

(2) Especially, the loss by the regime of its undisputed and unified control over the instruments of violence in the state: in a modern industrial society this means essentially the police and the armed forces.

(3) With the loss of administrative and coercive capacities by the regime, there arise alternative claimants to authority -the phenomenon of dual power or multiple sovereignty mentioned earlier, with competing alternative structures of administrative, judicial, revenue raising, and ideological nature.

If those three developed Lenin's first major requirement, then similarly we can sub-divide his second:

(4) A segment of the population breaks decisively with the ruling ideology of the society, and articulates objectives that are incompatible with the continuation of the existing polity.

(5) An explosion of new forms of political activism among members of the subordinate classes: the sudden passage of the masses 'from a state of political passivity to a certain activity' (Gramsci, 1971:210).

Then in addition to the two essential conditions one might add:

(6) The presence of a political movement or party acting 'as an instrument of political centralisation', combining fragmentary or sectional forms of struggle and directing them to a confrontation with the state (Geras, 1986:183).

(7) A coincidence of widespread rural instability or even rebellion

with urban unrest: although we might note that the revolution in Iran, in a fairly highly developed economy, was an almost entirely urban affair.

(8) An international context in which one or more factors disadvantage the nation-state in question.

Well: how far does contemporary South Africa correspond to the notion of revolutionary situation just outlined?

#### THE SOUTH AFRICAN SITUATION

That the South African ruling class is experiencing fission and defections is incontrovertible. Goldstone's assertion of 1982 - that in South Africa the state was 'effectively a committee of the united ruling elite' (1982:197) - no longer holds. Since then, a major parliamentary politician has opted to work in extra-parliamentary fora; top business elites have met the ANC; previously pro-regime intellectuals have defected from the ruling party; and emigration continues to drain managerial and professional skills. At the same time, the administrative capacity of the state has not yet been significantly breached - although the rent boycotts have led to the effective collapse of one revenue-raising apparatus.

Equally, the eroding moral authority of the state has seen an unprecedented emergence in South Africa of alternative structures, alongside and in competition with those of the state. This was the historical significance of the creation of street committees, people's courts, and of popular organs which took over the role of local government in Cradock, Mamelodi, and elsewhere; it is also the reason that these structures have been among the main targets of state violence since 1985.

Most obviously, there has been a massive withdrawal of support from the official ideology, and the articulation of a quite different moral and political order; together with the ideological shift has been that translation of political passivity to activism among hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of South Africans. By any comparative yardstick, the level of participation in rallies and boycotts and stayaways and strikes has been high. When one measures their statistics against the repressive parameters of South African politics - when one considers the penalties imposed by a system that has criminalised huge areas of political belief and behaviour - then one gets some inkling of how deep-seated and momentous is the mass character of recent mobilisation in South Africa.

As far as the sixth requirement is concerned (the presence of a party or movement able to direct and coordinate political actions), clearly the ANC, supported by the SACP, fulfils this role in some degree. It commands a significant level of support nation-wide; its basic programme, couched in

terms of fundamental human rights, has broad appeal; it operates more and more as an actor on the stage of domestic politics, rather than standing in the wings of exile. The capacity of the movement to provide leadership, and the direction in which it attempts to lead, are not predetermined or unchanging; they will be defined and shaped in the actual course of struggle.

At this moment, people are debating these issues: not only in the ANC but also in the trade unions, the youth and community-based organisations. They assess the theory of internal colonialism and the strategy that flows from it - a cross-class alliance of all oppressed (black) groups; they ask what the implications are of the working class as the 'leading element' in that alliance; they encounter the main criticisms developed of the internal colonialism thesis and its nationalism - that it does not take sufficiently into account the levels of industrialisation and proletarianisation that have ensued since the 1950s. They respond to an alternative theoretical starting-point, which sees apartheid as the peculiar form assumed by capitalism in South Africa, and to its corresponding strategy - a programme based on working class organisation and interests. The resolution of these debates, not only in theory but in practice, will affect whether the national liberation movement in South Africa will resemble a 'Zimbabwean' or a 'Vietnamese' outcome; whether it will be essentially anti-regime or anti-capitalist.

On preconditions (7) and (8), it might be sensible to enter provisional judgements. Neither factor is unambiguously present nor entirely absent. In 1985, the small towns of the Karroo and Eastern Cape saw some of the most concerted expressions of resistance; events in KwaNdebele and Lebowa suggest how precarious local elites are and how tinder-dry the grass roots of politics in these rural ghettos; yet overall, the forces of stability are stronger in the countryside than those of change. The international context has not yet swung decisively to South Africa's disadvantage. The continued weakness of the front line states and the support on crucial issues by the major western powers outweigh the altered geopolitics of the region and the campaigns for sanctions and isolation. Yet given the South African regime's strong-arm tactics domestically and regionally, only a very confident soothsayer could project current levels of protection by the west too far into the future.

Which leaves us with the second precondition: the state's ability to maintain control over the police and the defence forces. Theoretical and empirical findings converge on this score. Radical, liberal and conservative analysts all agree that unless the armed forces of a regime exhibit substantial erosion or defection then no modern revolution can take place.

This postulate is borne out by the evidence of all revolutionary epochs since 1789.

Many studies of South Africa have pointed to the high degree of regime loyalty displayed by police and army, and the unlikelihood of any changes in the foreseeable future. The most detailed study of this question was by Russell in 1974, and she concluded emphatically that the armed forces would remain loyal to the regime no matter how much upheaval and turmoil there was (1974:81-82). In 1987, such a finding is almost totally intact. The South African state continues to be insulated against an indispensable precondition of revolution. Yet even this apparently granitic pillar of the status quo may on closer inspection exhibit a few hairline cracks, which, under certain conditions might ramify. Not many South African soldiers have broken ranks and given assistance or information to the official enemy; but there have been a few. There has not been large-scale infiltration of the police, but there has been some. The South African anti-conscription movement is still tiny; but a few years ago it did not even exist. Each of the Bantustans now sports its own armed forces; but recent events in the Transkei indicate that these carry their own threats of irridentism and fission. The state continues to expand its policing capabilities; but are the kitskonstabels as reliable as conventional forces? And for that matter, how much of a problem might it be for the state if large segments of the police force identify politically with forces well to the right of the government?

Equally, are there credible scenarios whereby South African armed forces find themselves fighting outside the country - not on derringdo cross-border raids, but bogged down in protracted guerrilla war? Perhaps defending Unita or MNR client regimes, or involved in an escalated war in Namibia, or drawn through destabilisation tactics into military encounters elsewhere in the sub-continent? If any of these are possible, then one might recall Bill Johnson's speculative comments made a decade ago. If South Africa became involved in extra-territorial adventures,

The military strength of the state would be worn away in foreign wars; the wars would constitute a large extra strain on the economy ... dislike of war would help trigger insurrection at home; and the state's repressive apparatus would be neither intact nor in place to meet such a threat. Large-scale military intervention by Pretoria [elsewhere in the region] is a recipe for social revolution in South Africa (1977:310).

Finally, it is probably worth noting too that this topic - the loyalty

of the armed forces as a critical factor in shaping revolutionary outcomes - has come to bulk quite large in the strategic thinking of the ANC. Where previously little concrete consideration was given to military issues or the possibilities of splitting the regime's armed forces, in the 1980s there has been considerable debate on these both in theoretical and in agitational publications. An emphasis still dominant in 1983, in favour of classic guerrilla struggle has increasingly been challenged by more 'insurrectionist' arguments, and the notion of a people's war.

To conclude. Historians must grapple with two major qualities of revolutions. First, there is their 'general character as phenomena of historic rupture' (Hobsbawm, 1986:12), as products of impersonal, historically engendered social-structural pressures and imbalances. Secondly, revolutions are also episodes in which large numbers of men and women engage in conscious, active political struggle. Both aspects, structure and struggle, must be explored if we are going to comprehend and explain revolutions.

Exactly the same is true if we seek an historical understanding of where South African society has arrived and how it might proceed. The longer term structural logic of South African history, as I read it, is that the state and the socio-economic system are in a deep or organic crisis. We are living through a period (in Gramsci's vivid phrase) when 'the old is dying and the new cannot be born; and in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear' (1971:276). Bluntly, something has got to give. Restructuring is unavoidable. But what form will it take? As indicated, it seems that some but not all of the preconditions for revolutionary change exist.

What will be born? What strategies will develop from which theories, and how will theory be 'transformed into practice, vitalized by practice, corrected by practice, tested by practice'? (Lenin, 1974a:413) Can those who seek transformation from below construct organisational means to their ends, so as to link mass action and effective leadership? Do the possibilities exist for the release of collective creativity from the wellspring of human activity, the lives of ordinary men and women? Or will the restructuring be that of violent counter-revolution, last resort of the fearful and repressive guardians of a discredited social order?

Academics ought to ask these questions even if no easy answers are available. It is our privilege that we are paid to ask questions; it is our responsibility to try and ask important ones.

#### NOTES:

- \* This contribution was given as an inaugural lecture. The audience was not especially an academic one. It was not intended specifically for

publication. It has not been edited in any way other than to change the system of referencing - the editors.

1. That is: 'At a certain stage of their development the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or - what is but a legal expression for the same thing - with the property relations within which they had been at work before' (Karl Marx, 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*).
2. For the French Revolution, the work of Souboul and Tonnieson on the sans-culottes, Rude on the Parisian crowd, Cobb on the volunteer Revolutionary Armies - to name but a few - means that 'Historians now understand how wide and deep was the political mobilization of ordinary Frenchmen ... how coherent the action of the so-called mob' (Tilly, 1978:47). For similar, more recent advances in the study of the Russian Revolution, see the review article by Suny (1983).

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