South Africa: Out of the Laager?

by Martin Plaut
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Apartheid’s rise and fall

‘Apartheid was a terrible mistake that blighted our land. With the benefit of hindsight we now know that we have hurt our fellow countrymen.’


Apartheid is about to be buried. After over four decades, the party that invented one of the most notorious political programmes, has finally admitted that the policy was a ghastly error. South Africa today is a land of extraordinary contrasts. Many white South Africans speak as if the ‘new South Africa’, presaged by President de Klerk in his speech opening Parliament in 1990, and then confirmed a year later, has already arrived. They see Nelson Mandela interviewed - respectfully - on their television screens. They witness the banners of the South African Communist Party carried down the streets of their cities. They hear the slogans of the Pan Africanist Congress. They know black families can buy the house next door to them, can go on holiday to their favourite beaches, can invite friends to their local restaurants. For them, the new era has already dawned.

Black South Africans see things very differently. Africans still have no vote of any description. Coloureds and Indians still have a devalued vote for discredited bodies, boycotted by most of their segregated electorate. Some political prisoners have been freed, but others are being arrested. Some exiles have returned, but thousands still have to follow. For most, the daily slog to work goes on as before; for unequal wages, in unequal conditions and with unequal chances of promotion.

To understand what is happening, and why it is such a confused and contradictory process, one has to consider the origins of the apartheid system itself. Neither segregation nor racial discrimination were invented by the National Party when it came to power in 1948. But while white rule had been imposed at gunpoint, it had not been as systematically or ruthlessly enforced as it came to be after the election of Prime Minister Daniel Malan. ‘Today’ he told his supporters, ‘South Africa belongs to us once more. For the first time since Union, South Africa is our own. May God grant that it will always remain so’.

Afrikaners had been humiliated by the defeat inflicted upon them by Britain during the Boer war of 1899 - 1902. Many had returned from the war to find their farms in ruins. Their wives and children had died in concentration
camps, and their cattle had been decimated by disease. Thousands were destitute, and in the bitter inter-war years, the depression only added to their numbers.

It was these memories that drove the politicians who wrote the manifesto of the National Party. They were determined that Afrikaners would be unchallenged in their own land. Political power already lay in their hands. Exclusive economic control was to be prised from the grasp of the dominant English speaking elite, while jobs were to be guaranteed for whites against black competition.

The army and civil service were purged of political opponents, and in their place came members of the secret Afrikaner organisation - the Broederbond, or Brotherhood. With their own men in place, the government set about enacting the apartheid policies upon which they had been elected.

Marriage between whites and ‘non-whites’ was banned. The entire population was registered on racial lines. The social segregation of residential areas was enforced by law. The Pass laws were tightened to control the movement of all Africans. Hundreds of thousands of people were evicted from their homes and resettled because they lived in what had been designated white land. Coloured people were removed from the common voters role. The universities were segregated. The ‘homelands’ were designated as the sole areas in which Africans were to exercise their political rights. The Communist Party was declared illegal, and its MPs deprived of their seats in parliament. In short, there began one of the most extensive pieces of social engineering ever undertaken.

**Resistance and repression**

The rise of Afrikaner nationalism coincided with the rise in African nationalism. The African National Congress, which had been founded in 1912, had undergone a transformation. After decades of peaceful, polite protest, it had been taken over by its radical youth wing. For more than three decades the ANC ‘old guard’ had engaged in fruitless attempts to win acceptance from their white countrymen. The formation of the Congress Youth League in 1943, led by men like Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela, marked the end of this subservience. By 1949 they were in control of the organisation - just as the National Party was setting out to implement its own programme. A confrontation was inevitable.

In 1952 the ANC initiated the Defiance Campaign, in which protesters deliberately broke unjust laws. Their members refused to carry passes, broke curfews, ignored ‘whites only’ signs. Thousands were arrested, and the campaign was broken, but its impact was not. ANC membership rose from 7,000 to over 100,000. Further initiatives followed, with the calling of the Congress
of the People in 1955, at which the Freedom Charter was adopted - the
document which is still the primary programme of the ANC.

The authorities responded with mass arrests, and in 1956 the leaders were
charged with subversion, in what became known as the Treason Trial. They
were eventually acquitted, but further protests and further arrests followed.

At the same time tensions were growing within ANC ranks. After the
banning of the Communist Party, many former communists had joined the
Congress of Democrats, and gone into alliance with the ANC. Most were whites,
and Africanist members of the ANC were deeply suspicious of what they saw
as the increasing influence of communists and whites in the ranks of their
movement. In 1958 they broke with the ANC leadership, and under Robert
Sobukwe founded the Pan Africanist Congress, with the slogan 'Africa for the
Africans'.

It was they who were to lead the next major act of defiance. On the 21st
March 1960, PAC members and supporters around the country were in-
structed to leave their passes at home and go to police stations to offer
themselves for arrest. Some 4,000 arrived at the Sharpeville police station, on
the outskirts of the mining town of Vereeniging. The police, panicking, opened
fire. Sixty nine were killed, and one hundred and eighty wounded. The era of
peaceful, non-violent protest had come to an end.

A state of emergency was enforced, and the ANC and PAC were outlawed.
In 1961 the ANC decided to begin a campaign of violent protest, and its
military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe was formed. Its activities met with some
success, as power lines were blown up and police stations attacked. But after
the police succeeded in infiltrating the organisation in 1963, it was effectively
smashed by a raid on its main base outside Johannesburg. The ANC's leader-
ship, including Nelson Mandela, were in jail. Others, like Oliver Tambo were
in exile, or keeping their heads down, hoping for better days. The movement
that had showed such promise in the 1950's was decimated.

The first cracks

On the surface, Afrikaner nationalism was triumphant. Its enemies were
routed. Its policies were implemented unfettered by opposition, and the
economy boomed. However, even as the National Party reached the zenith of
its powers, in the late 1960's the first cracks began to appear. The pace of
economic growth had sucked thousands of Africans into the towns and cities,
and it was patently clear that no amount of enforced removals would produce
the white South Africa that the first architects of apartheid had planned. In
1963 a small group of MP's, led by Albert Hertzog, broke with the National
Party over the decision to accept Africans as permanent inhabitants of 'white'
South Africa. At the time they were to be dismissed as cranks, but other, more
serious splits were to follow.

The second fracture was also the by product of economic growth. Although
black trade unionism had a long history, these unions had been all but extinguished during the repression of the early 1960's. In 1973, workers around Durban, sensing their new economic power, struck for better wages. In the wake of the strikes, the union movement was re-born. By the early 1980's a steady growth in black unionisation had forced a reluctant government to grant it official recognition. Union membership topped the one million mark, and in 1985 most of the non-racial unions came together to found the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu).

The 1970s also saw a gradual re-emergence of black political organisation and confidence, as the black consciousness movement, led by the charismatic Steve Biko, preached black pride and self reliance. In 1976 it was the turn of the schoolchildren. Angered by an attempt to impose Afrikaans as the only medium of instruction in the schools, they took to the streets. The police opened fire on a demonstration in Soweto, and within days the protests had spread across the country. Resistance continued throughout 1976, and into the following year, but eventually it too was broken. Thousands of young students left the country, determined to fight the regime on more equal terms. They joined the ANC in exile - and the movement was revitalised by the influx.

Under pressure, the government began to realise that some changes had to be made to accommodate the political aspirations of the majority of the population. Prime Minister PW Botha decided that the franchise had to be extended to the Coloured and Indian populations, and preparations were made to establish a Tricameral Parliament, with separate chambers for each of these groups, and the whites. Africans were not to be granted their own chamber, since, it was argued, they could already vote for their own leaders in the ‘independent’ homelands.

The decision split the National Party, with the staunchly conservative leader of the party in the Transvaal, Andries Treurnicht, leading the revolt. In 1983 sixteen MPs, including Treurnicht, were expelled from the party, and launched the Conservative Party.

The new constitution had a second, and equally important effect. It galvanised the majority of black opinion in opposition to the proposals. Not only did the constitution fail to extend the franchise to Africans, it was also written so that the white chamber of parliament could always outvote the Coloured and Indian chambers. Its critics saw it as no more than a continuation of white domination in a new guise. To fight the proposals the United Democratic Front was launched in Cape Town in August 1983, bringing together hundreds of local groups from around the country. Although it was initially broad based, the UDF became seen as the internal wing of the still banned ANC.

Opposition to the new constitution grew in scope and intensity, gradually spreading to townships across the country. The ANC called for action to ‘render South Africa ungovernable’ and by May 1985 unrest had reached such a pitch that the authorities imposed a state of emergency. Hundreds were
killed in confrontations with the police, and although the emergency was lifted in March 1986, it had to be re-introduced only three months later. It was clear that the government had lost effective control of a number of townships, despite the deployment of the army.

The road towards negotiations

Clearly something had to be done if South Africa was not to be torn apart. Yet resistance in the townships and on the factory floor was only one factor in the developing crisis, even if it was the most important. Other factors were also pointing towards negotiation.

First, international pressure, spurred on by the nightly scenes of repression on television, was mounting. Some sanctions had been in place for years - including the arms embargo - but to little effect. The crucial turning point came in 1985 when the international banking community refused to roll over the country's international loans, forcing a harsh schedule of repayments, and plunging the economy into a severe recession. This was reinforced the following year, when the United States decided to ban investments and limit trade with South Africa. Now economic sanctions really began to bite. It had become evident that unless apartheid went, there would be no return to stable growth, and business leaders begun doing the unthinkable - they made contact with the ANC, in order to map out an alternative.

Secondly, the militarists in both the ANC and the South African government suffered reverses. For the government, attacks across South Africa's borders against ANC bases in neighbouring countries had become a way of life. Pretoria appeared able to destroy its opponents across the sub-continent at will. It was also capable of manipulating its weak neighbours, threatening them with retaliation or arming opposition movements. One Frontline state after another was forced to ban the ANC from undertaking military operations from their territories. The result was that the ANC found itself with thousands of young cadres, with little role to fulfill, and little ability to mount a sustained campaign against the South African state. The armed struggle - although symbolically important for the ANC - showed no prospect of removing apartheid by force.

At the same time Pretoria became overconfident. Its activities in Angola, in support of Unita, had drawn in the active opposition of the Soviet Union and Cuba. In 1988 South Africa attempted to take the Angolan town of Cuito Cuanavale, only to be driven back by Cuban reinforcements. It was becoming apparent that white South Africans were not prepared to pay the price of military adventures thousands of miles from their own homes.

Thirdly, the Soviet alternative crumbled. After it was banned in 1950, the South African Communist Party went into alliance with the ANC. When the ANC was in turn declared illegal in 1960, the communists came to play a leading role in shaping the international relations and the ideology of the
movement. Their links with Moscow were crucial in providing the ANC with arms and international support. The arrival of President Gorbachev, and the dissolution of the Soviet bloc has had a profound impact on Southern Africa. The ANC not only lost its chief international ally, it also lost one of its mentors. The collapse of communism across Eastern Europe, and the mounting difficulties in the Soviet Union itself, left the ANC looking for new friends. Perhaps as importantly, South African communists had to re-assess their own politics, and under the leadership of Joe Slovo emerged with a new found dedication to democracy and openness.

For its part, the South African government saw that it was no longer facing what it had termed ‘the total onslaught’ of international communism. Without the support of the Soviet Union, the ANC became a more acceptable negotiating partner.

With the removal from office of PW Botha in 1989, President de Klerk came to power. Initially, little was expected; most commentators wrote him off as no more than a conservative party apartchink. But the new president was clearly determined to break with the past. After extensive discussions within the National Party, it was decided to legalise the ANC, PAC and Communist Party, in order to open negotiations over the future of South Africa.
The politics of negotiation

‘Looking back on the negotiation process which began...last year, it can only be described as the political miracle of modern times’.

Hennie Serfontein, political journalist.

President de Klerk can take credit for ending the political stalemate that had beset the country since the 1960’s, but there is still a long way to go before the much heralded ‘New South Africa’ has been brought into being. Setting the stage for negotiations is one thing; getting all parties round the table is quite another.

The ANC and PAC have made it clear that there are a number of hurdles to be cleared before any talks can take place. Legislation known as the ‘pillars of apartheid’ has to be repealed. This includes the Group Areas Act, which keeps different races residentially segregated, the Population Registration Act, which registers all citizens by race at birth, and the Land Acts, which only allow Africans to own land in thirteen per cent of the country. President de Klerk has promised to repeal all these Acts during the current session of parliament.

The second condition is that all political prisoners must be freed. This has begun, but there are still differences between the authorities and the parties over who can legitimately be counted as a political prisoner. In the meantime the police have continued to arrest certain ANC and PAC activists, placing further obstacles in the way of talks.

Thirdly, there must be a return of the exiles. Some 40,000 South Africans fled into exile, mostly during the 1970’s and 1980’s. A few have gone home, but many more must return. The repatriation process has been given a considerable boost by the government’s decision to ask the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to assist their return.

President de Klerk has promised that these obstacles will be removed. If this can be achieved, then talks could get under way. The question then arises as to which parties might attend any such meeting.

Parties to talks

The African National Congress (founded 1912). The party commanding most support in the country, and the movement credited by most blacks with leading the fight against apartheid. The ANC is today a multiracial party, with
members of the white, Indian and Coloured communities on its executive, dedicated to a non-racial constitution. Despite its strong position, the ANC has had considerable difficulties re-establishing itself as a legal party since it was unbanned in February 1990. Its campaign to recruit a million members by the end of that year was not as successful as it had hoped - it had only achieved a quarter of that goal by the end of 1990. It has been plagued by inefficiency, and has found it hard to respond to the initiatives taken by the authorities. The party has been engaged in bitter clashes with the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party, as well as sporadic but bloody conflicts with other black movements, including the PAC and Azanian Peoples' Organisation (AZAPO). It has also been tarnished in the eyes of some by the prominent position given to Winnie Mandela, wife of the ANC's Deputy President, Nelson Mandela, who is on trial for kidnapping and assaulting black youths.

The South African Communist Party (founded 1921, dissolved 1950 and refounded 1953). In alliance with the ANC since it was banned in 1950, the SACP played a crucial role in ensuring arms supplies for the ANC through its links with the Soviet Union. It also was an important source of intellectual input for the ANC. A considerable (but undisclosed) number of ANC executive committee members hold joint Communist Party membership. The SACP also has important links with the million strong Congress of South African Trade Unions. Despite its alliance with the ANC, it has said it will fight any election under its own colours, although it would then provide the ANC with support.

The Pan Africanist Congress (founded 1959). The smaller of the two liberation movements recognised by the Organisation of African Unity and the UN, the PAC was riven by splits during its years in exile. Under the leadership of Clarence Makwetu, the PAC has undergone something of a renaissance, and has begun to establish itself internationally, with Makwetu visiting Britain recently, at the invitation of the Foreign Office. The movement is more radical in its rhetoric than the ANC, demanding a return of all land seized by whites down the centuries, without compensation. This is particularly appealing to rural people, and the youth, who question the ANC's concessions to the government. It recently held the first joint protests with the ANC for thirty years, and has tried to mend its fences with the larger movement. The PAC is well placed to pick up support if the rapprochement between the ANC and the government fails to produce results.

The militant left. A number of smaller groups, including the Azania Peoples Organisation, the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action, the Cape Action League and the New Unity Movement, exist to the left of the mainstream parties. These groups are important regionally - for example, the New Unity Movement and the Cape Action League have support around Cape Town - but are presently of marginal importance, although their socialist perspective and rejection of government initiatives is attractive to young people in the townships.
The **homelands leaders.** The black homelands, established under the apartheid system, produced unstable leadership, beset by corruption and coups (successful and unsuccessful). In recent years a number of important leaders have seen the writing on the wall, and have moved towards the ANC. The Transkei leader, General Bantu Holomisa, is now openly supportive of the ANC.

The **Labour Party** and **Solidarity Party.** Based on the Coloured and Indian communities respectively, these parties disgraced themselves in the eyes of many of their supporters when they agreed to participate in the Tricameral Parliament that excluded African representation. In each election they have been voted in by less than one third of their segregated electorates. Nonetheless, they retain some support from conservative sections of the population, who are worried about the socialist statements of the larger black movements.

The **Inkatha Freedom Party** (founded as a cultural movement, 1975, became a party 1990). Largely Zulu based, but with some white support in Natal, the party claims a membership of 1.5 million. Led by Chief Mangosotho Buthelezi, Inkatha is strongly traditionalist, and conservative, backing capitalism, where other mainly black political parties support socialism. It has fought the ANC for control of Natal, and in recent years has taken the battle to the Transvaal. In January the ANC met Inkatha to try to resolve their differences, but the fighting continues.

The **National Party** (founded 1912). Once exclusively the party of the Afrikaner, it is today supported by many English speaking whites. In power since 1948, it has now formally rejected apartheid. This has won it some support, even in the black communities. But it is tarred with the legacy of apartheid, and will find it difficult to broaden its support, despite the astute leadership of President de Klerk.

The **Conservative Party** (founded 1982). The bastion of Afrikaner reaction, it became the official opposition in parliament in 1989, when it won 39 of the 166 elected seats. It opposes all moves away from apartheid, and has considerable Afrikaans support, although this may have peaked. It is distinguished from extra-parliamentary far-right groups, such as the Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB), the Boerestaat Party, the Wit Wolwe and a number of others by its refusal to advocate the use of armed force to resist the changes brought in by President de Klerk.

The **Democratic Party** (founded 1989). The inheritors of a long tradition of white liberalism. The party strongly supports human rights, and the extension of the franchise to all South Africans. Although it won almost as many seats as the Conservative Party in 1989 (33) it is probably doomed to play a minor role in the future. Many of its largely English speaking supporters now back the National Party, while others have gone over to the ANC. Some of its members favour entering a formal alliance with the ANC in the future,
Table 1

If there was an election today, which party would you support?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTIES</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL ELECTORATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANC and its allies, including the Communist Party</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The PAC and the far left (Azapo, Unity movement etc)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Party and its possible allies, Labour, Inkatha and the Solidarity Party</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The far right</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

although its backing for free enterprise could prove a stumbling block. But there will probably be a third faction within the party that supports the continued existence of a political party dedicated to liberal values.

It is difficult to assess the relative strengths of these parties. There has never been an election in which all the people of South Africa have been able to vote. This means turning to opinion polls, but these too have their shortcomings, since accurate polling has been difficult to conduct. Despite these obstacles, Table 1 provides an estimate of the possible outcome of a non-racial election, should one be conducted at the present time. These predictions are broadly supported by surveys reported in the Weekly Mail of 22nd March 1991.

Negotiating positions

Before any voting takes place, broad agreement will have to be reached on the best way forward, and this will not be easy to achieve. There are essentially three alternative views of the most appropriate way to proceed.

- The National Party believes that all interested parties should get around a table to thrash out their differences. From this process it hopes that a broad consensus will emerge of the kind of new constitution required by the country. The Party does not want race to be written into the constitution. Instead it would like it to allow ‘interest groups’, which might be defined by language, profession, or occupation to be recognised, and to play a role in running the country. Exactly how this would take place is left deliberately vague, but the party is determined that the role of these groups, and the positions of what are termed ‘minorities’ should be guaranteed in the constitution by an entrenched Bill of Rights. At this stage the National Party is only prepared to talk in broad generalisation, arguing that the specifics will be unveiled once talks get under way. If a consensus can be achieved in the all party talks, the draft constitution will then be put to the electorate in a referendum, or even in a series of referenda. These proposals would allow the National Party to continue to govern while the constitution
is being drawn up, something the other parties find quite unacceptable.

- The ANC is extremely sceptical about the National Party's approach to negotiations, believing it to be a ruse to entrench white rule by other means. The ANC would prefer to see the election of a constituent assembly, so that the relative strengths of the various parties could be properly established (something the National Party proposal does not properly address). The assembly would draw up a constitution which would then be endorsed in a referendum. This proposal is unacceptable to the National Party, which argues that if an election is held, the winning party will effectively be able to draw up almost any constitution it desires. The ANC has compromised with the government, and has agreed to accept all party talks, but only as a step towards a constituent assembly.

- The PAC, and other parties to its left, demand a constituent assembly, and are not prepared to compromise. This may be partly a tactic, since their participation in all party talks would probably leave them as junior partners in any deal brokered between the ANC and the National Party. They would be forced into compromises which would be difficult to sell to their supporters, with little to gain in return. They may prefer to stick to their principles, and remain outside the talks, to pick up support if they fail.

Exactly how the process of talks will proceed is difficult to predict. If the ANC has its way the table around which the talks are held will be oblong - metaphorically speaking. The National Party and its allies will be on one side, and the ANC, and its supporters on the other - reflecting the ANC's belief that their struggle has been one of the masses versus the regime.

The ANC went some way toward realising this objective in April 1991, when its executive committee met the executive of the PAC for the first time in over three decades. The two movements agreed to hold a joint conference in August this year, at which they hope to launch a Patriotic Front of all anti-apartheid groups, although the details of the proposal have still to be revealed.

If the government has its way the table will be round - since the National Party believes that South Africa is a country of diverse minorities. Whites are a minority group, but so are Coloureds, Indians, Sotho, Pondo, Xhosas, Zulus etc. For the government the talks should produce a consensus between these groups over the sharing of power, and not end in what they describe as a 'winner take all, majoritarian situation'. The two visions are very different, and will be hard to reconcile.

At the same time, it is important not to underestimate the momentum towards negotiations. Both major actors have staked a great deal in initiating this process. The government is clearly determined not to have to go back to its white electorate having failed to reach a settlement. If talks broke down it would also be under enormous pressure from the international community to
resurrect the dialogue.

The ANC is under comparable, if rather different pressure. If it pulled out of the talks it, too, could find world opinion turning against it. More importantly, the movement would find it extremely difficult to find alternative means of exerting pressure on Pretoria. It might take years to have sanctions re-imposed. In the meantime it would have to attempt to recommence the armed struggle, and to go back to the kind of mass action that was seen in the 1980's. Neither would be easy, particularly in a climate of repression that would be likely to follow a permanent collapse of negotiations.

This is not to suggest that any dialogue will be without hitches. The almost endemic violence in the townships, with repeated accusations by the ANC that the government is behind the clashes, could destabilise the talks. The ANC has issued an ultimatum to the government to end the violence, or the dialogue will not take place. Exactly how serious they are about this is hard to assess, with some of its spokesmen appearing emphatic, and others taking a less determined stance. But in the end neither side has a real interest in seeing the discussions fail, and that is perhaps the best hope of the process producing a new constitution that will be acceptable to the majority of South Africa's people.
The empty till

‘Unless we can get growth going now, by the mid-1990’s it will be virtually impossible for any government to govern this country because of the number of unemployed.’

Barend du Plessis, Minister of Finance.

‘It is absolutely imperative to reverse the present trend towards stagnation and to promote economic growth. Without significant growth in our economy we will not be able to address the pressing problems of poverty and inequality confronting our people.’

ANC discussion document, October 1990.

South Africa’s economic troubles come as something of a surprise to outsiders. On the surface the country has little to worry about. It is the most developed country South of the Sahara, although that is perhaps hardly the proudest boast given the economic calamities of the rest of the continent. Foreign visitors are swept to well appointed hotels along immaculately maintained highways; are wined and dined in homes that have few equals outside Hollywood and are taken on tours of modern, integrated plants producing everything from steel to aircraft. How can a country blessed with almost every mineral in the world (barring oil), with an agricultural sector capable of holding its own in export markets and a cheap, relatively skilled workforce fail to prosper?

Yet poverty lurks just around every corner. In the slums of Alexandra cattle browse on rubbish heaps, while women wash in plastic buckets. Just four kilometers away in the boutiques of Santon City, Dior rubs shoulders with Chanel. According to official statistics, more than 16 million people - almost one half of the whole population - are living in poverty, and more than 2 million are in need of assistance to combat malnutrition.
The story of the South African economy in recent years has been one of slow but steady decline. In the sixties the growth rate averaged 5.8 per cent a year; in the seventies it was 3.1 per cent and over the past 10 years, the economy has grown on average by 1.6 per cent a year. According to government figures the economy contracted by 1 per cent in real terms last year, and zero real growth is expected for 1991. Living standards have fallen consistently throughout the 1980's, as growth failed to keep pace with population. Today 47% of South Africans live below the poverty line.

At the same time, the trend has been far from uniform. As apartheid has begun to be relaxed, a new black middle class has begun to emerge. Companies that only a decade ago would never have dreamed of employing anyone with a black face in any kind of managerial capacity are now eagerly recruiting black university graduates. Black minibus taxis now transport more than a million passengers a day, with some 100,000 taxis strongly organised into the Southern Africa Black Taxi Association. Nor is it just the black middle class that has prospered. The rebirth of radical trade unionism has ensured that black wages have kept pace with inflation, where white wages have not.

The cumulative effect of these changes has been to see black consumption surpass white consumption in a number of fields. In 1988 Avis opened its 101st branch in the region - in Soweto, and reports an upsurge in black demand. The five star Carlton Hotel in Johannesburg in the same year declared that half of its weekend package holidays were booked by blacks.

**Soaring unemployment**

If the standard of living of black people in work, or able to break into business, improved in the 1980's, the same cannot be said for the rising number of people who are unemployed. According to the South African Reserve Bank only eight million out of a twelve million strong workforce are today in formal employment. The rest have to eke out a living as best they can.

The townships teem with people in what is euphemistically called the informal sector. Many fill a gap in the market - selling food or trinkets to passers by, or making and mending clothes. Nearly three million people earn a living in this way. In the rural areas unemployment and poverty are more hidden, but no less real. One person in paid employment may have to support a widely extended network of relations who are either unable to find work, or are too old or too young to succeed on the labour market.

Blacks are bearing the brunt of the burden, but they are by no means the only people without work. Despite their privileges, an increasing number of whites are out of work. Apartheid was supposed to make this a 'land fit for the white man', but it has left 20,000 whites dependent on soup kitchens and food handouts.
The role of foreign capital

If the economy is to grow, it has to have foreign capital and expertise. The international campaign to isolate South Africa was largely ineffective in the 1960's and 1970's. The Soweto uprising of 1976, and the events of the mid 1980's brought the issue alive internationally. By the 1980's international companies were under extraordinary pressure, particularly in the United States, to stop investing in apartheid. Foreign firms decided to cut their losses and many sold their holdings to South African companies.

Attracting foreign capital was increasingly difficult for the country. American legislation deprived the country of IMF loans, and in 1985, when South Africa had to refinance its debts, it found international bankers distinctly unsympathetic. As a result, the government had little option but to repay the loans, and that meant running a surplus on the current account. Economic growth had to be sacrificed to repay the debt.

Political reforms have finally begun to reverse this trend. In recent months there has been a net inflow of foreign funds - a fact that was greeted with almost ecstatic relief by the hard pressed business community. Without foreign capital and foreign expertise it is highly unlikely that the country can generate the five per cent growth rate that it requires to prevent unemployment from rising still further.

Remedial action

To make the 'New South Africa' more than just a political slogan will require investment on a vast scale. The backlog created under apartheid is truly daunting. Consider the question of housing. The lifting of the Pass Laws, restricting movement around the country, has produced a mass migration to the cities. For example, ten thousand people are moving into Cape Town from the rural areas each and every month. Homes are desperately needed, and the funds required are enormous.

One study estimated that it will require R5 billion (approximately £1 billion) to be spent every year to the end of the century, to provide the homes that are needed. To meet all the other costs of ending apartheid could cost a staggering R20 to R30 billion (£4 to £6 billion) a year over the next ten years. To pay for this personal taxes would have to double - hardly a way of winning support for a post-apartheid society.

The government is beginning to address these problems. In his March budget, Finance Minister, Barend du Plessis admitted 'South Africa now has one of the most unequal distributions of income in the world. But still more disturbing are the millions of South Africans who have to make do with pitifully low incomes. The theme of this budget is, then, equity through growth and stability'. The minister went on to announce increases in spending on education, paid for by cuts in the defence budget. Over two hundred million
Rand was put aside to reduce the hardship of the poor, principally through food aid. The gap between black and white pensions has also been narrowed - something that will have a real impact on many living in the rural areas.

The ANC has traditionally supported a policy of nationalisation as a means of achieving a more equitable distribution of resources. Now it is having second thoughts. This is hardly surprising, since it is only too clear that any mention of socialism and nationalisation will drive away any prospective foreign investor. The movement's current discussion paper declares: 'we cannot have the view that nationalisation will give a new democratic government the means to provide us all with jobs, houses and education.....If we are going to nationalise, we need to borrow the money to pay for the companies we buy. We will have to pay back this money with interest. This money will be spent without creating a single new job.'

Instead, the organisation is considering large scale keynesian government spending to regenerate the economy. Housing is to be a key sector, together with improved education and training. If the government now recognises the scale of the problem, and has begun to do something to alleviate it, the problem for the ANC and the rest of the opposition is how to come up with alternatives. In some senses President de Klerk is rapidly stealing their political clothes.

To suggest that the South African economy is in difficulties, and that there is no pot of gold waiting to be re-distributed to the masses is not to argue that it is in terminal decline. The country has developed a very impressive economic infrastructure since the discovery of gold and diamonds a century ago. Its capital stock is of a good quality, and it has efficient and relatively uncorrupt legal and governmental services. It has a high quality professional and technical workforce, and its semi-skilled labour is relatively well trained. It could perhaps best be described as a going concern that has neglected to invest in new plant and technique. But with imaginative management, the economy could be turned around, and with outside assistance could provide a reasonable standard of living for all its people.
Big fish in a small pond

It would be a mistake consider the situation in South Africa in isolation from the rest of the sub-continent.

South Africa has always been the dominant power in the region, but ever since the signing of the Lusaka declaration in 1969, it has found itself at loggerheads with its neighbours. In that year a group of independent states came together to pledge their support for movements fighting racism in Southern Africa. It was a direct challenge not only to South Africa, but also to the other white ruled countries of the region - Rhodesia, Angola and Mozambique. It was a stand that was to cost the signatories to the Lusaka Declaration very dear indeed, for South Africa has long been aware of its regional strength.

Once the country had made its peace with Britain, following the granting of independence in 1910, Pretoria sought to co-operate with London over policy towards sub-Saharan Africa. In the 1930’s the then Minister of Defence, Oswald Pirow proposed a series of federations stretching from South Africa to Sudan, linked by a common ‘native policy’ and flowing from that a ‘common defence policy’. Britain rejected these overtures. Even in those days, South Africa’s ‘native policy’ was seen as a stumbling block to closer involvement in Britain’s colonies in the region.

South Africa traditionally saw its closest neighbours as areas that might in future be incorporated into its territory - and this included Botswana, Lesotho and Namibia. The rest of the region was seen as a useful provider of labour for its mines, and as a market for its goods. As long as London or Lisbon controlled the fates of most of the states in the area, Pretoria had little to worry about. This pattern was first disrupted in 1965, when Ian Smith declared unilateral independence from Britain. South Africa had little option but to support the Rhodesians, but the whole incident brought unwelcome international attention to the area. Namibia too began to move up the international agenda, with the United Nations attempting to revoke South Africa’s mandate to control the territory, which had been granted to it in the wake for the First World War by the League of Nations.

Neither of these developments would have done a great deal to effect regional relations had it not been for the collapse of the Portuguese dictatorship in 1974, and with it the demise of the Portuguese empire. At a stroke,
South Africa found itself faced with independent states on its borders, ruled by radical movements that had come to power by overthrowing their colonial masters. It was a frightening prospect for the South African government, especially as the ANC had good relations with the MPLA in Angola and Frelimo in Mozambique.

South Africa did what it could to intervene directly in Angola in 1975, with American covert support, but to no avail. Worse still, from Pretoria’s point of view, its intervention provoked Soviet support for the MPLA, and with it Cuban involvement in Angola. The South African government now believed it faced a Soviet backed threat from the North, not only from the ANC, but also from hostile neighbours. Its fears were heightened with the achievement of independence in Zimbabwe in 1980.

A two-pronged response was adopted. Pretoria was determined to find a means of hitting back at neighbouring states that were providing assistance and transit routes for ANC fighters. Opposition movements were fostered - including Unita in Angola, Renamo in Mozambique, Super-Zapu in Zimbabwe and the Lesotho Liberation Army. Secondly, cross-border raids were launched against targets across the sub-continent. In 1982, ANC homes in the Lesotho capital, Maseru were attacked. The following year there was a large scale invasion of Angola. In December 1986 six ANC members were abducted in Swaziland, and the following April there was a raid on the Zambian town of Livingstone. A pattern had been established that would escalate in the coming years. Just as the ANC began to increase its armed attacks inside South Africa, Pretoria was determined to show that no target in the region would escape its attention.

At the same time, a more conciliatory approach was adopted. In 1982 a non-aggression pact was signed with Swaziland. Two years later the Nkomati Accord was signed with Mozambique, in which South Africa promised to end its support for Renamo, and in return Mozambique agreed to expell the ANC from its territory. This the Frelimo government did, but Pretoria continued to honour the Nkomati Accord more in the breach than the observance, with persistent reports of continued South African support for the rebels.

The turning point in South Africa’s regional relations probably stems from the Angolan civil war. Had it not been for the intensification of that conflict, which culminated in 1988 in an unsuccessful attempt to take the strategic town of Cuito Cuanavale in the South of the country, Pretoria would probably not have had to re-assess its regional strategy. Its forces were not beaten, but it was clear from the fighting that it would take a greater commitment in terms of men and materials than South Africa could afford, and it was decided that a halt had to be called to the escalating conflict. The American Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, mediated between Luanda and Pretoria. In 1988 an agreement was drawn up that allowed for the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola, and for the independence of
Namibia. It proved to be a watershed, and as Chester Crocker predicted in December 1989 'the conditions now exist that could drive the states of Southern Africa - and the leaders of South Africa - towards one another'. On the 21st March, 1990 President de Klerk could stand side by side with other regional leaders to witness the independence of Namibia. It was an extraordinary moment after so many false starts.

This is not to suggest that the problems of the region are over. According to the Economist, some 1.5 million people have died in the wars and related famines that South Africa fuelled in Angola and Mozambique. The governments of both countries are now engaged in negotiations with their respective rebel movements. They have also committed themselves to abandoning Marxist one party states in favour of multi-party democracy. Despite this, the fighting continues and millions of their citizens are still in desolate refugee camps. It would seem that long after South Africa is formally at peace with its neighbours, its previous destabilisation will continue to affect the region.

The might of the market

'The aim of (South Africa's foreign policy) is largely through economic incentives to induce African countries to enter into some degree of cooperation with South Africa, thus breaking South Africa's isolation and eventually reducing liberation pressures.' Henry Kissinger 1969.

Across the region, there is no escaping South Africa's economic reach. For generations, families from as far afield as Tanzania and Zaire have been sending their men to work on South African mines. While politicians have been pledging themselves to isolate apartheid, their citizens have been fed and clothed by South Africa's factories and farms. South African businessmen are to be found as far north as Abidjan or Kinshasa, selling everything from machine tools to beer. South Africa's trade with the continent is at record levels, and Pretoria maintains trade missions in six out of ten states of the region.

Successive South African governments have sought to formalise these links. Some ties already exist. The country has long shared a common Customs Union with Swaziland, Botswana and Lesotho, which functions to the mutut advantage of all states. In the 1960's the then Prime Minister, Dr Verwoed, proposed a Southern African Common Market, but nothing came of it. Then, in March 1979 Prime Minister Botha launched plans for a 'Constellation of States in Southern Africa'. Little came directly out of this initiative, but indirectly it spurred the states of the region to seek their own alternative plan. In June 1979, at a meeting in Arusha, Tanzania, the states of Southern Africa held the first meeting of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC). With the support and encouragement of the European Community, SADCC aimed to increase economic co-operation, and to reduce their dependence upon South Africa.
Since then SADCC’s nine states (now joined by Namibia) have met regularly, to put forward plans for everything from satellite communications to fertilizer production, to be funded by the international community. The sector that has been most successful in attracting funds so far has been transport and communications. By the end of 1989 over $2,000 million, of a total of $2,500 million that had been secured for SADCC projects, had gone to this sector. As a result a number of lines of communication have been improved, in particular the vital Beira corridor, linking Zimbabwe to the sea. The results have been somewhat disappointing, since the routes have been repeatedly attacked by rebels, reducing their effectiveness. In other fields, such as industry, SADCC’s efforts have met with almost no success. The interests of individual states have simply been too strong for real co-operation to take place.

The promise of the end of apartheid has begun to open new vistas. In March 1991 some 140 businessmen from South Africa and 15 African states met in Swaziland, to discuss prospects for a Southern African Common Market. Ron Hayward, of the South African Chamber of Business observed: ‘Businessmen in Southern Africa can no longer wait for politicians to shake hands. We have to get the business and economics of the region running and politics will follow’.

With everything from South African pilchards to wines already widely available in the rest of Africa, one could remark that this co-operation is already in practice. But clearly it will require the official lifting of sanctions before South Africa will be able to participate fully in the economic life of the continent.

Once this is possible, there will be clear benefits for all concerned. Many South African products are particularly suited to African conditions, and are available at a lower cost and more rapidly than goods from the rest of the world. There are also a number of schemes that could be of mutual benefit to the states of the region - including ambitious projects to provide a single electricity grid as far North as the Equator. SADCC itself might be transformed once South Africa becomes a member. There is clearly some truth in the assertion by Neil Van Heerden, director of South Africa’s Department of Foreign Affairs, that ‘SADCC without South Africa is like a car without an engine.’ Putting that engine into the car will, however, require political rather than economic developments.

There will, of course, be the possibility that the South African ‘engine’ will drag the rest of SADCC in a direction not of its own choosing. South Africa’s economic might could easily undermine the fragile economic developments in the rest of the region. How would Tanzanian industries, for example, fare against South African competition once sanctions are removed? A ‘New South Africa’ will have to enter into negotiations with its neighbours with some care if it does not wish to gain a reputation as the regional economic bully.
Towards a new South Africa

'I go from elation to depression in a day - sometimes in an hour.'

The remarkable political progress that has been made since President de Klerk addressed parliament in Cape Town in February 1990 should not obscure the distance that still has to be travelled before a post-apartheid South Africa comes into being. The conditions that must be fulfilled before negotiations get under way were dealt with in Chapter One. But another obstacle to real reconciliation now blocks the way forward. The constant attacks and counter-attacks between Inkatha and the ANC are a tragic waste of human life, having claimed five thousand victims in the past four years. The clashes are also consuming an increasing proportion of the time and resources of all concerned, pushing other issues off the agenda.

Most explanations of the conflict centre on the tribal divisions between the two parties, and certainly these differences have a part to play in understanding the conflict. The ANC continues to regard Inkatha as an expression of Zulu reaction, while Inkatha points to the predominance of Xhosas in the leadership of the ANC. But most of the deaths have resulted from clashes in Natal - a province that is predominantly Zulu, and where ANC membership, as well as Inkatha's, is predominantly Zulu. Any explanation that relies exclusively on tribalism must, therefore, be faulty, although as a long term factor, ethnicity should not be underestimated.

The conflict is essentially political. ANC members believe that Chief Buthelezi is nothing more than a government stooge, who revealed his true colours back in 1976, when he backed the authorities against the students during the Soweto uprising of that year. To them he is no more than a homeland leader who has refused to join the oppressed in their struggle against the injustices of apartheid. They regard his supporters as little better than government backed vigilantes, who engage in activities comparable with the death squads of Latin America.

Inkatha members - many of whom are drawn from the more traditional rural areas of Natal - see the young men and women who led the rebellions of the 1970's and 80's as undisciplined children, who lack respect for their elders. Zulu migrants, living in the hostels around Johannesburg, already find themselves at odds with the rest of the community, many of whom they regard as
city slickers, out to con rural people like themselves. They find their way to work blocked by township youths, who demand that they go on strike, risking their jobs and their livelihood for abstract concepts like a constituent assembly. Faced with these kind of situations, many Inkatha supporters believe they have no option but to defend themselves by any means at their disposal.

The ANC believes that the South Africa security forces have played a part in stoking the fires of conflict - something the authorities deny. But even if there is some truth in the accusation, it probably plays a secondary role in the continuing clashes. As Archbishop Tutu put it recently, 'Something has gone desperately wrong in the black community. What has gone wrong is we seem to have lost our reverence for life'. He went on to urge black South Africans to turn the spotlight on themselves. Both movements feel terribly wronged, and it will require the best efforts of Mandela and Buthelezi, as well as the intervention of President de Klerk, to bring the fighting to an end.

**Areas of agreement**

If the obstacles to talks can be overcome, the prospects of reaching an agreement between the National Party and the ANC that could be sold to the country as a whole remain remarkably good. There are a number of reasons for this. Perhaps the most important is that there remains an extraordinary degree of goodwill in South Africa. Despite the suffering endured by black South Africans under apartheid, they are remarkably forgiving towards their white compatriots. Whites are, after all, still welcome to join the ANC, to participate in opposition demonstrations, to go and visit homes in the townships. The bitterness that pervades other conflicts - Northern Ireland, for example - is largely absent from relations between South Africa's blacks and whites.

There is also a greater tradition of, and commitment to, democracy in South Africa than in almost any other African country. One of the legacies of the bitter struggle to build the trade union movement has been an attachment to rank and file involvement in decision making that is not dissimilar to the experience of the working people in their unions in Britain.

Agreement now exists between the ANC and the National Party on some of the broad outlines of what a new constitution might look like. Both major parties agree that it should contain a Bill of Rights, even though they disagree on what such a Bill might enshrine. There is also agreement that South Africa should continue to exist as a unitary state, and that the homelands should be formally re-incorporated into the country. Both accept that there should be a degree of devolution of power to local authorities, although this is an area that still has to be explored. Both also accept that there should be a mixed economy, even though the National Party now favours a greater emphasis on privatisation of state owned assets, and the ANC would like to see the state take a greater stake in the economy.
What appears to be taking place is that the country's racially defined political system is being transformed into something not unfamiliar to a European spectator. The National Party has now opened its membership to people of all races, even if it has not begun actively recruiting in the townships. It hopes to go into any free election in alliance with black parties, possibly Inkatha, the Labour Party and Solidarity. It would then represent the centre right of politics - a sort of Christian Democratic Party of South Africa.

For its part, the ANC is transforming itself from a party that espoused marxist rhetoric, (even if its basic programme - the Freedom Charter - was essentially social-democratic) to one that is broadly on the centre-left of politics. If it is successful it will go into an election in alliance not only with the Communist Party, but also with a number of other groupings, not least of which would be a number of leaders of the former homelands. The ANC would then be not dissimilar to a Social Democratic or Labour Party.

It may be that what is emerging in South Africa is a local form of the centre-left, centre-right division that exists in so many countries around the world. If that is the case then the future may hold more hope many have predicted.

This transition will not be easy for the ANC. There are a number of fractures that now divide the movement. Its older members - particularly those in work - long for peace and stability after more than a decade of turmoil and confrontation. But the young men and women who were the backbone of the resistance, are confused and angry about the movement's negotiations with 'the enemy'. Many of these young people have not only given up years of their lives, they have also abandoned their education, and now have no hope of employment. It will be hard for the ANC to satisfy both of these constituencies. There are also tensions between the former exiles, who are now coming home in droves, and those who remained in South Africa, building the unions and the United Democratic Front. It is the exiles who now have the top jobs in the movement, and this has caused considerable resentment. Despite this, the ANC has a record of unity that many other movements - in South Africa and beyond - can only envy. It would be surprising if this was thrown away now that the ANC is a legal party once more.

The National Party too is likely to encounter difficulties as it attempts to recast itself in a non-racial mold. It can now only count on the backing of around half of the white electorate. The rest find it difficult to understand why their party is negotiating with an enemy that until only eighteen months ago was to be shot on sight. They ask why they should be talking to the ANC - a movement that never came close to defeating the South African security forces. It must be some comfort to President de Klerk that he now has the support of around 11 per cent of the black population. It is this base that he intends to build upon.
Britain and South Africa

For the best part of a generation the key question in relation to South Africa has been the question of sanctions.

There continues to be a fierce debate on the subject - in particular what conditions the South African government must meet before which aspect of sanctions is lifted. However, as the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons noted recently ‘the dilemma now posed by sanctions is one of timing. It is no longer whether to lift them; it is when to lift them’.

The time is now ripe to consider what can be done to encourage the building of a post-apartheid South Africa. In so doing it is important to remember Britain’s special responsibility in the region. The ties are strong indeed. Historically it was Britain that devised the constitution of the newly united Union of South Africa in 1910, ignoring the pleas of black South Africans to give them the vote. Nor have the years removed these links. Half of all foreign investment in South Africa comes from this country, and over a million South Africans may have a right of abode in the UK. Exactly how Britain might best help South Africa will have to be the subject of extensive study, but these are some areas that will require attention.

- Whichever party takes over the reins of power in a post-apartheid South Africa will be faced with extraordinary demands for very limited resources. Moreover, it will have to deal with a highly politicised electorate, that is willing to take to the streets to attain its demands. It will not be at all easy to adhere to the principles of democracy and tolerance, and the country will require every encouragement if it is not to slide back into authoritarian ways. This may seem a platitude, but there is no doubt that many in South Africa have a high regard for international opinion. Years of sanctions and international opprobrium have left a mark on men and women of all races. Even after a settlement has been reached, and elections have taken place under a new constitution, it will be important to use judicious pressure to ensure that the country does not stray from the path upon which it is now embarking. The kind of benign neglect that followed the granting of independence to so many African states would only undermine what may be achieved.

- To encourage this process the country will require economic assistance that it would not be entitled to if normal aid criteria were applied. South Africa is
one of the richest countries on the continent, yet it will need help if the last forty years are to be put behind it - particularly in the areas of housing, education and social services.

- Assistance should be judiciously given and carefully monitored. There is already bitterness in the country that some organisations opposed to apartheid are favoured by external donors. It is important that aid should be non-partisan. It is equally important that it should not go astray. There are already too many stories of assistance being used for personal gain.

- Particular attention will have to be paid to the return of exiles to the country. Resources - such as housing - are in short supply, and it is important that the returnees should not be seen to take the little there is from the existing community. External funding could play a major role in assisting this process. Britain could also help solve the problem of what to do with returning members of the armed wings of the liberation movements. Many thousands will come home, with few skills other than knowing how to pull a trigger. The country already has an extremely high crime rate. If these young men and women are not to end up adding to these statistics, some alternative employment will have to be found for them. Joining the existing security forces is clearly one option. Britain has a good track record of integrating guerrilla forces into existing security forces in Zimbabwe and Namibia, and could play a useful role in this regard in South Africa as well, if it is invited to do so.

- South Africa was, until 1960, a member of the Commonwealth. The organisation has a great deal that it could offer the country, if it choses to request membership. Even before it became a formal member there is much that the Commonwealth could offer South Africa. The organisation already has an active Southern African programme, training young South Africans, and this could easily be expanded and strengthened.

- Its years in the international wilderness have left South Africans extraordinarily isolated and insular in their outlook. Once sanctions are lifted there is much that Britain could do to overcome these problems, and ease its return to the world community. Already the British Council plays a valuable role in introducing South Africans of all opinions and from all walks of life to a wider horizon. The British media could play a valuable role in assisting this process when the time is right.

- It is important that the needs of a post-apartheid South Africa does not obscure the plight of the rest of the sub-continental. SADCC has had its difficulties, but once apartheid has ended, and the wars that plague the region are no more, there will be a strong case for increasing aid to Southern African states, both bilaterally and through SADCC. The scars inflicted by the conflicts associated with apartheid will take a long time to heal, and funds will be needed to speed up the process.
South Africa: out of the laager?

This pamphlet is the first Fabian contribution to the debate on how Britain should respond to the dramatic recent changes in South Africa.

South Africa today is a land of extraordinary contrasts. Many white South Africans speak as if the new South Africa promised by FW de Klerk had already arrived. Black South Africans, still without a vote and facing unequal opportunities, see things very differently.

Many obstacles need to be overcome if the legacy of apartheid is to be buried. Martin Plaut looks at the parties to the negotiation and the chances of success. He argues that both the government and the ANC have strong political and economic reasons for seeking a settlement and so the prospects are brighter than they appear. The time is ripe to consider how Britain and the international community can help build a post-apartheid South Africa. The political fragility of any settlement means that South Africa will require economic assistance, to which it would not be entitled if normal aid criteria were applied.

The Fabian Society brings together those who wish to relate democratic socialism to practical plans for building a better society in a changing world. It is affiliated to the Labour Party, and anyone who is eligible for membership of the Labour Party can join; others may become associate members. For details of Fabian membership, publications and activities, write to: Simon Crine, General Secretary, Fabian Society, 11 Dartmouth St, London SW1H 9BN.

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