

MARION LACEY

For Black Sash Monitoring Committee

March 1986

"The Government is declaring its State of Emergency. We, the people, declare our own."

In his response to the news that a State of Emergency had been proclaimed, Stone Sizani, speaking at the Cradock funeral of four top UDF leaders, encapsulated the mood of the thousands present and that of the people engaged in mass resistance throughout the Eastern Cape.

The declaration of the State of Emergency signalled very little demonstrative change. For months townships had been occupied by the army and police. Organisations had been banned, as had meetings. Political activists and popular leaders were in hiding, had disappeared, were missing, jailed, detained and in the case of Matthew Goniwe, Fort Calata, Sicelo Mhlauli and Sparrow Mkhonto - brutally murdered.

Police provocation, gassings, shootings and batton charging, and mass retaliation in firebombing, stone throwing, burnings and boycotts had become daily affairs, duly catalogued and dated in the press bulletins issued by the Police public relations divisions.

The discussion which follows is based on a day to day analysis of such newspaper reports. It attempts to cut through the catalogue of violence and repression in order to determine whether there is any pattern in the forms of resistance used. On this basis I will seek to demonstrate first that over the past eighteen months mass resistance strategies have struggled through various phases and adaptations in response to increasingly repressive actions by the state.

Second, and linked to the first, a detailed investigation and analysis¹ of local and national demands and issues has been undertaken in order

to show how these demands were the springboard at local and national levels to focus and force an active response and commitment to change from various targetted white groups. In this paper the targetted groups' response will be discussed, however further research is necessary before a proper assessment of each strategy as an effective instrument for change can be made.

Lastly, in describing the peoples' changing reaction and response to the occupying forces of the SADF and police, the extent to which their provactive presence politicised, radicalised and helped mobilise people or subjugated and further divided them into opposing, conflicting forces is only obliquely referred to here. This, is an aspect, however, which requires far more fundamental research and analysis in conjunction with the organisations themselves.

1. PHASES AND ADAPTATIONS IN STRATEGIES OF MASS RESISTANCE IN RESPONSE TO INCREASING STATE REPRESSION.

Rent boycotts were the first form of struggle used which mobilised people in the wake of the Vaal uprisings in November 1984.

It has been the least dominant form used at the national level, but has been an issue reflected and taken up by almost all civic organisations at different stages and phases over the past eighteen months.² The refusal to pay rent, or the demand for lowering of rents and service charges to a point commensurate with people's earning power, was taken up by the student movement. They linked their parents' increased financial burden to their rejection of school fees and payments for books as a prerequisite for registration. In so doing, youth movements were mobilised to join their parents to resist this additional economic burden. The campaign around the rents issue and high cost of black education meant that unlike the student strategies in the 1976 campaigns, students and parents as oppressed workers could join in common cause in being able to identify with the demands of their separate campaigns.

Rent as a site of struggle soon widened to embrace other issues locally and nationally. At the national level the close relationship between the degraded living conditions of township dwellers and the failure of Community Councillors to effect any visible improvement, directed people's attention towards the often corrupt and impotent nature of these imposed local authorities. Withholding

rent and support for these institutions were brought together and strategised into a demand for the community and town councillors in each area to resign en masse.

Community councillors, many of whom enjoyed the material fruits of their position in the form of fat salaries, choice trading sites or houses, were identified as the most immediate symbol of the people's oppression.

The refusal by many councillors to resign³ and the students' failure to elicit any response from the authorities in their campaign to have the age-limit restriction suspended, as well as the authorities' prevarication over the question of SRCs, were the issues which brought the schools out on boycott in September 1984. This and the harsh and brutal actions by the police in their attempt to force children back into the classrooms affected and strengthened the parents in their resolve to support the students in the school boycott strategy.

It was at this time that many areas began reporting a massive police and riot squad presence. In turn this provoked further resistance and militancy on the part of school children, so that within weeks the first reports of children being fatally wounded by police began to filter through. Funeral attendances grew with each fatal shooting. Barred by community councillors, as most organisations were, from using community halls, funerals soon became the only venues for mass mobilisation, recruitment and assessing the mood of the people on issues and campaigns.

The state increased its military presence. A chain reaction of killings, funerals, more shootings and deaths accompanied the reports of each successive funeral.

Calls for the police to withdraw were answered by sending in the army. At first they functioned as a back-up group for the police, their ostensible purpose being to win the "hearts and minds" of the people. So photographs of police handing out sweets, playing soccer with a group of kids, or break-dancing with adolescents were given a high profile by the state media and ruling class press.

Violence escalated as the police and the people confronted each other and the army was drawn into actively supporting the police in their work.

At this point all indoor meetings of organisations in the unrest areas were banned. Leaders were detained or went into hiding and into this vacuum the army stepped as an occupying force.

The earlier calls for the mass resignation of community councillors, corrupt and ineffective teachers and principals, and for the withdrawal of police and agents of the state from the townships, took a turn at this point. With the banning of the popular leaders and organisations the more militant students moved to fill the gap and they began actively harassing figures of authority who had failed to heed earlier calls. Firebombing of properties and vehicles, schools and community and recreation halls, began to enter the police daily reports.⁴

Instead of running and seeking refuge in the nearest house when police tear-gassed and baton-charged groups of people in the streets the students stood their ground. Faces covered by wet cloths, they retaliated by stoning and petrol bombing police and army vehicles. The daily death toll and reports of injuries by bullets and birdshot mounted - culminating in the Langa massacre of 43 on March 21st.

The Langa massacre hit the headlines and reverberated around the world, causing a national and international outcry. Yet eight months later the massacre of 12 in Queenstown hardly stirred the local press, while overseas journalists, banned by this time from filming in Emergency areas, had their stories relegated to minor news items in the international press. The 12 deaths were duly noted and catalogued in the daily reports issued by the SAP Public Relations division in Pretoria. Violence had become commonplace in the Eastern Cape and repression a way of life for most people, especially those imprisoned in the township ghettos.

After eighteen months of skilful deconditioning, through press and media manipulation, whites generally had become inured not only to the violence but desensitised and almost indifferent to events and incidents taking place in what had become known as "ungovernable" emergency operational areas.

Loss of life warranted no more than a mechanical entry by reporters alongside a long list of arrests from firebombing, stone throwing and illegal gatherings. As catalogued by Police bureaucrats on

request and duly and faithfully reported in the daily press, popular resistance was being deliberately criminalised into public violence acts perpetrated by "mobs", "gangs" and "thugs".

As early as August last year the public and news media gullibly, and let it be said eagerly, accepted the following dictate from the police publicity division: "Detainee bulletins are to be reduced on the grounds that:

Things are calming down. There is now more criminal activity, such as arson attacks, than unrest. But everything is still being seen as unrest.⁵

Regardless of what Police public relations said, in area after area horrific stories were being reported of how councillors, traders and school principals were organising vigilante groups to control "unruly mobs" and that this was being done with the passive, if not active, backing of the police. As a result a reign of terror was unleashed in township after township.⁶ Open war was declared by the two opposing forces while existing divisions between opposing political movements were deliberately and systematically exploited by the police and their agents. For a short period the pent-up anger of the youth was deflected. Alleged Azapo⁷ members fought sometimes violent battles with opposing UDF members.

The violence which erupted in some of the townships as a result, was eagerly taken up by the media, who began to depict and project the "unrest" as a black-on-black affair. The state asserted it was using its repressive powers to restore law and order in the townships. The

lives of innocent, law-abiding citizens needed to be protected while they aimed merely to restore "victimized" councillors to their former position of power with all the necessary guarantees that their lives and property would be protected. Armed, guarded and with full state military power to protect them, councillors, who had refused to resign, then took it upon themselves to brutally discipline the youth.

Affidavits began piling up in the Black Sash's monitoring offices detailing police and SADF brutality and torture as well as unexplained deaths and assaults by community councillors and their vigilante cohorts. Complaints of people being arrested at charge offices when they went to report incidents of assault and torture began to mount. Frantic families, friends and eventually the people themselves on release would seek help from the Black Sash advice officer and monitoring workers or from crisis centres set up in the larger towns to provide this resource.

In responding to such calls it soon became evident that increasingly the people's perception of justice and the rule of law was either one of defeat or cynicism. First Kannemeyer had pointed to police culpability in the Langa massacre and yet the only people punished were the 31 wounded, then arrested and charged with public violence.⁸ From this to the deaths and mysterious disappearance and murder of popular leaders. Then to a consistent pattern which was beginning to emerge of everyone or anyone who was wounded or who had witnessed a police shooting, being arrested and charged with public violence. It was inevitable that a growing distrust and anger at the police and their associated courts of law began to mount.

For the "amabhuto", the militant youth wing, the way to retaliate was by taking the law into their own hands. With the absence of strong leadership, they soon became a law unto themselves in some areas,⁹ routing out those who collaborated with the system. The number killed or injured or maimed by the amabhuto pales, however, into insignificance when compared to the hundreds shot dead or murdered by the state and its agents.¹⁰

Legal commentators have described the State of Emergency as a "state of official lawlessness". This is certainly true of this phase of mass repression given the fact that the official law and order agents were indemnified in advance of their actions.

As the daily death-toll mounted, rumours and the reality of police and SADF brutal actions spread. So communities in turn moved collectively to defend themselves. Actions against state agents, collaborators and informers who were seen to be in league with the enemy were condoned. The different responses by communities and outsiders to the brutal murder of Mayor Kinikini and his family illustrates this well. Clearly an undeclared civil war situation existed in many townships throughout the Eastern Cape.¹¹ Direct confrontation with the state assumed dimensions not characteristic of the earlier phase.

Political activists and organisations came out strongly in their condemnation of the undisciplined, wanton violence. Henricks, the Border Secretary of the UDF in condemning the violence in Duncan Village had this to say:

We cannot find the words to adequately describe our absolute horror at the killing and maiming that is taking place in Duncan Village. The sounds of gunshot throughout the night and also during the day has added another area in South Africa to the operational zone.

The presence of the SADF, we repeat, is a declaration of war on the citizens of South Africa living in Duncan Village.

Stone Sizani, UDF publicity secretary, warned:

Many townships are seen as war zones. The SADF is not only a presence in the townships. It is in full action. And their actions are horrific. Every day the anger is growing and growing.

Derek Swarts Eastern Cape UDF Secretary, argued:

Wherever there is oppression, there will be resistance. And we find in the Eastern Cape, that the more acute our struggle against the authorities becomes, the more repressive they become; but repression just infuses more determination in the people.

A detailed report of day-to-day resistance and repression is being undertaken in a separate paper substantiating some of these findings.¹³ From this an analysis of an area by area, day by day, monthly pattern is emerging which bears out the above remarks. The statements, affidavits and investigations by Black Sash monitoring committee, Grahamstown Anti-Repression Committee, advice and crisis centres set up in Port Elizabeth, East London and Queenstown, are also ample testimony of the horrific and brutal acts of repression perpetrated at this time. Ironically, as the Wendy Orr interdicts and many others served on the police have shown, whilst it was possible for the courts to restrain the "lawlessness" of the police whilst a detainee was imprisoned under the State of Emergency laws, on the streets it was a different matter entirely. The indemnity in advance protected the police and this held fast, as did the people's growing belief that

the long arm of the law was an instrument of brutality and repression rather than one which could protect them from the reign of terror unleashed on their lives.

With the growing belief that ordinary people no longer had recourse to the law another strategy emerged - the so-called "Kangaroo courts of justice". Initially undisciplined, disorganised and with no strict code of ethics these courts for a short while just added to the confusion and terror. Significantly this was one strategy that received the most consistent coverage and comment during their short duration. The state media used the existence of the "courts" to denigrate and undermine the already battered and banned peoples' organisations in whose name the courts were operating. The UDF from the outset disassociated itself from and condemned the action of such courts. On their release from detention leaders immediately set about addressing this problem by disbanding the courts.

Popular pressure in the present strategic phase has made the notion of and need for such courts an acceptable strategy. As communities and organisations have begun to assume a greater responsibility for the running of their own affairs, a re-assessment of the role of peoples' courts and peoples' justice is being made. In conjunction with street and area committees peoples' courts are being re-established and are being run by respected personnel in accordance with a strict code of ethics.

Yet another instance of how new forms of struggle have been adapted and restructured as they become rooted in increasingly more disciplined peoples' power in the no-go areas.

2. THE CONSUMER BOYCOTT STRATEGY AND TARGETTED WHITE GROUP RESPONSES

Consumer boycotts as a strategy must also be seen as a response by community organisations to adopt new forms of struggle in the fact of massive repression. In this section the consumer boycott strategy is briefly analysed in an attempt to gauge how the boycott committees in the different areas used this strategy in the form of articulated national and local demands to focus and force an active response and commitment to change from different targetted white groups.

Despite state and local authority attempts to break the mushrooming consumer boycott movements by force,¹⁴ the decision of the individual to withdraw his or her buying power remained impervious to state repressive action.

The initial response by local authorities and Chambers of Commerce to consumer boycott strategies was to attempt to persuade people that "agitators", "intimidators" and a "radical minority" using violence to achieve their goals were manipulating the oppressed. They asserted that the boycott weapon was very counter-productive and merely intensified the peoples' suffering. The negative effects such as higher township prices, loss of jobs, retrenchments, lay-offs, and short time were followed in some instances by accepting the Queenstown strategy of waiving the shop wage determination minimum and threatening to impose a reduction in wages of 20% each month.

The township dwellers closed ranks. In collectively agreeing to withdraw their buying power as one of the only peaceful strategies available in the face of massive state repression, individuals who broke the boycott were treated like scabs who who crossed a union picket line. The community in defense of their strategy condoned the punishment meted out to those who weakened or undermined the collective will of the people.

With the refusal or failure of commerce and industry to address the peoples' demands, boycotts called originally for a defined period were re-instated or prolonged "indefinitely".

In August as the boycotts became effective in area after area, Chambers of Commerce and Industry began to respond vaguely with statements such as "the difficulty was that the Chamber did not know exactly who was behind the boycott ..." (East London, 3.8.85). The Port Elizabeth Chamber of Commerce was reported as saying that they had "difficulty in finding leaders with whom to negotiate" and they appealed to boycott leaders to come forward and negotiate. The Chamber in Grahamstown captured the difficulty of all business associations in arguing that they were "in a Catch-22 situation" for regardless of the stage of negotiations, the Grahamstown Burial Action Committee was powerless to act on the Chamber's proposals and suggestions without a mandate from the people. They could not call off the boycott until either their demands had been met or alternatively, they would have to be mandated by the people, this mandate to be given at a mass meeting.

The authorities insisted that as the situation in Grahamstown had not been "normalised", permission for such a meeting was out of the question.

In area after area¹⁵ the situation remained deadlocked at this point. By mid-August, many local Chambers were lobbying their MPs, meeting regionally and demanding a coherent initiative blueprint from their Chambers nationally. Queenstown's¹⁶ example was not isolated. On the 19th August 500 people attended a meeting in the town hall and mandated a fifteen member committee to draw up a memorandum for submission to the Ministers of Co-operation and Development Aid and Constitutional Planning. In it they insisted that unless the plight of the businessmen was accorded the "highest priority", they faced "financial ruin". The conditions in Mlungisi township were described as "appalling and inhumane". Within ten days they heard that they had been awarded R15m by the government for upgrading.

East London came out strongly in favour of opening all amenities and creating additional facilities. In all areas the move was towards re-establishing non-racial local authority structures.¹⁷ Indian traders involved in the boycott also began to seek ways to redress African grievances. In Port Elizabeth their association agreed that "they had to shed their 'exploiter' image" and identify with the African cause. They agreed to close their businesses for a day, revise wage structures, provide a relief fund for unrest victims and set up an educational trust. In Grahamstown, Indian traders publicly disassociated themselves from the tri-cameral system.

In such instances the consumer boycott tactic was successful insofar as it undermined the state's co-optive strategy with regard to Indian and coloured traders.

Even African shopkeepers were forced to re-assess their own position in the popular struggle and their earlier alignment, in many instances, with the rejected community councillors.

The call to the white traders and businessmen was to pressure the government into addressing the four primary demands, namely: the lifting of the State of Emergency, troops out of the townships, the release of popular leaders and the unbanning of organisations and meetings.

The state stood fast despite the growing frustration and clear alienation of the small retailer who was facing financial ruin.

It was at this juncture that the devastating political and economic onslaught descended on South Africa in the wake of Botha's failure to cross the Rubicon. The flight of capital forced the government to stop trading on the JSE. Days later controls were re-imposed on capital movements, after world disappointment had forced the rand to a record low. Despite Du Plessis's reassurance that:

The rand would recover from its dramatic drop against the dollar once the implications of President Botha's Durban speech was understood' ... (Eastern Province Herald, 16.8.85)

and the amusement expressed by the State President thus:

the "confusion of Babel" surrounding his speech ... Reason will triumph ... give them time to study the speech ... the National Party had the right course towards the right goals and that was the key to success.

Daily Dispatch report of State President's speech at Natal Congress the day after the Rubicon I address.

On the 21st July - only a month before South Africa's slump into financial chaos - Johan Cloete of Barclays Bank echoed the feelings of many businessmen when he said:

The State of Emergency could have a beneficial effect on the economy - provided we don't drift back once the unrest has been contained.

For many businessmen failing confidence in the economy was a consequence of the political instability. The hope was that temporary strong-arm state tactics would contain, if not crush, escalating popular resistance, as it had done so successfully 25 years earlier when a state of emergency was declared in 1960.

As the above discussion shows the imposition of the State of Emergency had, if anything, strengthened popular resistance and escalated the violence.

In response to the state's repressive actions furthermore, organisations had been forced to adapt their form of struggle. In opting to use the consumer boycott strategy, gains were made by dividing the power bloc as local white groups moved to commit themselves, in theory, to the creation of non-racial municipalities and this

was then reflected nationally through their associations by calls for "genuine" leaders to be consulted and represented at the highest level of decision making. In theory, then, through consumer boycotts certain gains were made in that commerce and industry were on the one hand pushed over the Rubicon which the ruling party itself had failed to cross. On the other hand, in moving toward the establishment of non-racial local structures they were advocating policy in conflict with the ruling power bloc.

Seen from this perspective it is possible to argue that the reform initiatives articulated by commerce and industry can be seen as a response to popular uprisings and struggles and the need to create a stable political climate for economic recovery.

From another perspective events in August last year suggest that international pressure was equally important in galvanising the business community into first threatening to withdraw their support from Botha in his reform initiative programme, while others openly committed themselves to a blueprint for the dismantling of the apartheid structures. The need to restore and re-create investor confidence was a primary motivation for big business. Even if this confidence was bought at the risk of splitting the white power bloc.

This brief discussion demonstrates the complexity of attempting to determine the extent to which the cracks in the power bloc were a consequence of the growing and increasingly sophisticated forms of mass struggle and resistance or whether, at this particular juncture, they should be seen as capital's response to intense international

pressure. There is little doubt, however, that the period of mass resistance and the state's provocative repressive acts weakened the intransigence of the state's tortoise-like initiatives and pushed the political process into a period of intense debate and conflict.

MARION LACEY

For Black Sash Monitoring Committee