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THE RISE AND DECLINE OF PARTY ACTIVISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

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This paper is concerned to identify the decline in party activism in South Africa since before the general election of 1994.
The paper falls into three parts: a brief overview of the general literature on the problem, including references to developments in post-colonial Africa; a schematic account of political activism in black politics in South Africa since the end of the second world war; and thirdly a series of cases in local politics in Mpumalanga at the time of the local elections of 1996 which suggest that there are areas where local party and social movement activism is still visible in the form of internal conflicts, or conflicts between the ANC and its allies, notably SANCO. These cases will be used to show the sometimes complex relations in local politics, and specifically the varied consequences of institutionalising democracy at the local level.
The theoretical starting point lies in the debates which followed Oscar Kirchheimer's famous prediction that the "mass integration" class-based party which had politicised the European peasantry and working class in an earlier period, had gone into decline after the second world war, and was being displaced by the "catch-all party".[1] Kirchheimer argued that the catch-all party abandoned all efforts "at the intellectual and moral encadrement of the masses,... turning more fully to the electoral scene, trying to exchange effectiveness in depth for a wider audience and more immediate electoral success. The narrower political task and the immediate electoral goal differ sharply from the former all-embracing concerns..."[2]
Two decades later, Panebianco sharpened the political features of the catch-all party by distinguishing such characteristics as: its "de-ideologisation" of issues and concentration on "valence issues" with which the larger sector of the electorate was in agreement, such as economic development and maintenance of public order; the increased dependence on interest groups and the transformation of allied organisations such as trade unions, into interest groups with weaker party ties; members' loss of political weight, and the

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[1] Otto Kirchheimer, The Transformation of the Western European Party Systems, in Joseph LaPalambara and Myron Weiner, **Political Parties and Political Development**, Princeton University Press, 1966 177-200.

[2] Kirchheimer, op cit, 184-185. A good example of a party which changed from being a mass integration party is the Swedish Social Democratic Party which before the first world war had engaged in electoral politics purely for propaganda purposes; by the 1960s, it had become a highly successful electoral party with a diverse class base which had developed a highly successful social democratic version of corporatism.

decline in rank and file activism; the strengthening of leaders' organisational power and their greater reliance on external groups than on members in financing the organisation and keeping touch with the electorate; weaker and discontinuous party-electoral relations, "no longer linked to strong social settlements and to solid and unified political sub-cultures."[3] He further identified some of the organisational changes which accompanied the displacement or transformation of the mass party into the catch-all party. These may be summarised under five headings:

1 Rise of professionals: the party bureaucracy gives way to party professionals, and their functions changed from political-administrative tasks to specialised tasks;

2 Decline of membership parties with strong vertical organisational ties, appealing to the "electorate of belonging" (eg the working class);

3 Decline of internal leaders and collegial leadership practices in favour of public representatives and of personalised leaders;

4 A shift in from membership and the activities of collateral organisations (eg trade unions); and

5 A shift from a stress on ideology and on the role of believers within the organisation to a "stress on issues and leadership, central role of the careerists and representatives of interest groups within the organisation."[4]

Of course every party formation is distinctly a product of its own historical and social environment. However, ideal types of this kind are useful guides to detecting broad tendencies in political parties; it is hoped to show in the second part of this paper that some of the processes of the shift from the "mass integration" party to the "catch-all" party may be noted in South Africa during the recent past, and that these are likely to have implications for the relationship within the parties, especially between central and local levels of power.

Criticising these writers, Katz and Mair suggested that they assumed that parties were "uniform actors", whereas in reality parties incorporated at least three elements or faces which interacted with one another: the "party in public office" (parliament and government); the "party on the ground" (members and loyal supporters); and the "party in central office", which organised and was representative of the party on the ground.[5]

These distinctions are helpful in assessing shifts in power between different elements within the party and will be used in the second

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[3] Angelo Panebianco, **Political Parties: Organisation and Power**, Cambridge University Press, p 263.

[4] op cit p 264.

[5] Richard Katz and Peter Mair, Party Organisations: From Civil Society to the State, in Richard S Katz and Peter Mair, **How Parties Organise: Change and Adaptation in Party Organisation in Western Democracies**, London: Sage, 1994, p 5.

section of this paper to try and trace changes in the internal relationships within the ANC, and between it and the state on the one hand and its allies on the other.
The final general development noted by writers on contemporary political parties was the displacement of the relationship between party and "civil society" by an increasingly close relationship with the state, a displacement signified by an identification between party and state, and a replacement of sources of revenue in civil society, including its own membership, with revenues provided by the state.

The African variant
In post-colonial Africa, a variant form of the declining mass party was noted during the mid-1960s. This variant suggests some interesting precedents for developments in South Africa, both at the national and the local level. Immanuel Wallerstein [6] argued that the single party was developed as an instrument of national integration intended to contain political opponents to the regime. He noted a shift in the role of the party after independence. Party leaders became increasingly involved in government, and the priorities of government increasingly superseded those of the political party. Mass interest declined and with it the interest of cadres who moved into government office. Financial contributions from ordinary members fell, and the party relied more on the contributions of well-paid politicians and civil servants. Activism among auxiliary movements -- youth, women unions, farmers -- attracted purges and restrictions. Mergers took place between government and party at national and local level in which governmental priorities prevailed over the party's. "It is argued that the party was taking over the government. It often looked like the reverse."[7]
The heightened levels of mobilisation which characterised the period of struggle against colonial rule and the establishment of a new democratic regime were followed by demobilisation: as Fanon somewhat dramatically put it, the party had become the "skeleton of its former self" serving only to "immobilise the people."[8]
This general prognosis was tragically substantiated in the experiences in Kenya, both at national and at local levels after independence.
Kenya illustrates the displacement of political activism in the dominant party (through the alliance between the conservatives in KANU and KADU and the exclusion of the radicals from KANU during the 1960s) and parallel with it the centralisation of control over

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[6] Immanuel Wallerstein, Decline of the Party in Single-Party States, in LaPalambara and Weiner, op cit 201-214.

[7] op cit 210.

[8] cited op cit 208.

local authorities.[9]
This issue may hold significance for South Africa in the future.

PART II: SOUTH AFRICA 1945-1994
South Africa went through a period of unprecedented mobilisation from the mid-1980s, a period which culminated in the election of 1994. This mobilisation was channelled through a range of "alternative associations" acting under the umbrella of the Mass Democratic Movement, aligned with but structurally and organisationally distinct from the ANC, which was banned until 1990. The ANC took part in this mobilisation as a symbol rather than an organisation and may have had a demobilising effect on its allies.
Since 1994, the ANC and its allies have shown signs of a decline in levels of activism, Control has been consolidated by the "party in public office" over the "party on the ground" and the "party in administration." Leaders of the Mass Democratic Movement were assimilated into government and in some cases subsequently marginalised.
These processes of mobilisation and demobilisation have recurred through the long history of the ANC, and the latest developments need to be situated within the history of the movement.
The South African experience of democratic government has been very short, but there has been a long history of popular party and movement politics which will be summarised presently in the relationships between the different aspects of party politics. Concentrating mainly on the experience of the ANC, which resonates in the history of the PAC, popular movement and party politics have gone through a number of stages during the past 50 years.

i MASS MOBILISATION: 1945-1960
From the second world war, South Africa experienced a period of intensive mobilisation, involving mass protests against the pass laws and campaigns such as the demand for a "pound a day"; the ratification of the Freedom Charter in 1955; the women's march on Pretoria. The Treason Trial failed to destroy the movement. This stage culminated in the PAC's agitation against the pass laws in 1960 and the loss of life at Sharpeville, with the banning of these movements, and their departure into exile.

ii THE POLITICS OF EXILE 1960-1990
The ANC and PAC developed as clandestine organisations cut off from direct links with their domestic base. Although the armed struggle which the liberation movement embarked on was intended to mobilise domestic political support, it necessarily involved developing capacities different from those of a mobilisation party. Emphasis was increasingly placed on diplomatic and military located in the

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[9] Cf Colin Leys, **Underdevelopment in Kenya: the political economy of neo-colonialism, 1964-1971**, London, 219-224 for details of the process by which the radicals were extruded.

international rather than domestic mobilisation. The exile political leadership, among them Thabo Mbeki and Joe Modise, were diplomats, organisational men and military commanders, different from the demagogic leaders who had dominated the ANC between 1945 and 1960. During this period the two movements, and particularly the ANC, built up the organisational structures which were to form the core of the party administration and the government after 1994.

iii MOBILISATION AND REBELLION: "INTERNAL" MASS MOBILISATION, 1970 -1990

From the early 1970s onwards a real transformation of South African politics got under way, with major strikes leading to the formation of highly politicised trade unions, the development of a militant black consciousness movement, and the school-children's revolt of 1976. By the mid-1980s the unions and domestic grass roots movements such as the civic associations had formed alliances under the umbrella of the Mass Democratic Movement which assumed the role of a surrogate ANC. A new generation of domestic leaders emerged. They played a significant role in the ANC after 1990. Even at this stage, an authoritative analysis has suggested that the association between local grass roots movements and the ANC (symbolic rather than organisational) may have had a demobilising effect on the levels of political activism in the country.[10]

iv THE POLITICAL TRANSITION, 1989-1994

From the late 1980s the country entered a period of heightened political activity and expectation, with marches and rallies and intense conflicts accompanied by waves of violence. The ANC was unbanned, its leaders were released, and it entered negotiations with the government. Simultaneously, and contrasting markedly with the process of heightened political mobilisation, an alternative form of politics began to emerge, not on the streets, townships or in the workplace, but in committee rooms and conference centres as the political parties entered the negotiations leading to the new constitution, and to reorganise themselves for the coming

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[10] In 1987 Friedman wrote: "While the banned movement's symbolic appeal is clearly immense, it is not matched by a corresponding degree of internal organisation - ANC leaders themselves acknowledge that they are not in control of many of the activists who invoke its name. Purely symbolic support for an organisation which does not operate effectively within the country can, and has been, a recipe for passivity as well as militancy by prompting powerless communities to rely on the banned movement rather than their own efforts to achieve change. Indeed in some areas resistance politicians have invoked these symbols against groups who have sought to organise independently for change. In this sense the symbolic strength of the exile movement has often weakened attempts to build grassroots power within the country." (Steven Friedman, The struggle within the struggle: South African resistance strategies, **Transformation**, 3 (1987), p 61.

elections.
During its long existence, the ANC has only since 1994 acted as an electoral party. Its success in the 1994 elections rested on its reputation as the party of liberation rather than an electoral party with a competency to organise electoral support. The choice of a single constituency party list system for the 1994 general elections was undoubtedly a response to a number of exigencies, including the impossibility of assembling a voters' roll and the state of anarchy in the country, but it was also apposite to the character of a movement inexperienced in the routines of electoral organisation and management. The list system boded ill for the development of a vibrant party organisation at the constituency level, for it made it possible for the party to insulate the selection of public representatives from ordinary party members. The fact that this system was partly used in the 1996 local government elections and will be used again in 1999 is significant of a concentration of power in the "party in public office." The ANC established "constituencies" where it holds surgeries, but these provide no institutional mechanism for making elected members answerable to party members at this level.

v THE ASCENT OF THE PARTY IN PUBLIC OFFICE, 1994-
The election of 1994 signified a momentous change in the ANC as it assumed the identity of party in public office. The accession of the venerable leaders of the ANC from half a century before to positions of power in the state was the most potent symbol of the political transfer of power which took place during the early 1990s. It symbolised the transformation of the movement into the party of government, and the erstwhile heroes of an era of protest, mobilisation and suffering, into symbols of the new state power. The personalisation of Mandela's leadership strikingly illustrates the displacement of collegial by personal leadership.
New relations also emerged within the ANC between its different "faces" and in the relations between the ANC and its allies. Broadly, the party in public office (in government, parliament, the public service) became the ascendant force in the movement. These changes had considerable implications for former leaders of the MDM. Talented members of the "alternative movements" were recruited directly into government (cabinet ministers such as Jay Naidoo, Trevor Manuel, Alec Erwin, Mohammed Valli Moosa) or into party administration (Cyril Ramaphosa and Cheryl Carolus.) Changes at the national level of government had parallels in the assimilation of many of the leaders of the MDM at lower levels of government. For instance, four provincial prime ministers (in the seven provinces controlled by the ANC) had been UDF activists.
These five phases in the evolution of the ANC correspond to a distinctive style of leadership and set of relationships within the party and between it and other elements in the society and to distinctive styles of leadership. These phases could be represented as geological strata, the oldest lying deepest and the most recent nearest the surface, but all having consequences for the shape of the political terrain. One might extend the metaphor by suggesting

that the formation began to "cool" after 1994, thus giving some permanence to the party formation and political leadership.

THE DECLINE OF ACTIVISM IN THE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS.

The assimilation of the leaders of the MDM into government inevitably weakened the associations which they had previously led, and therefore reduced their potential for activism. But having been removed from the arena of activist politics, a number of them were marginalised politically. Jay Naidoo, former secretary general of COSATU, one of the most important figures in the union movement and pivotal in the MDM, was appointed Minister without Portfolio in the first cabinet. He was put in charge of the Reconstruction and Development Programme, presented during the 1994 election campaign as a strategy for mobilising the resources of the society to tackle problems of poverty and powerlessness. But he did not control a line department. Within a year or so he was moved to the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, and the RDP was moved to the deputy president's office, and has thereafter declined in visibility.

The decline in the power and influence of Cyril Ramaphosa, former leader of the highly successful Mine Workers' Union, after 1996 is highly significant. Ramaphosa was at one stage tipped as a possible successor to Mandela. He chaired the Constitutional Assembly, but then departed from political life for a business career after the adoption of the Constitution.

Cheryl Carolus has also had a fitful career in the ANC since 1994. She had been a key member of the UDF during the 1980s, was one of only two women in the ANC team that negotiated with the De Klerk government, and was elected deputy secretary general to Ramaphosa in 1994. She might reasonably have expected to achieve high office either in the ANC or in government. Instead after Ramaphosa left politics (according to her he was forced out) she was appointed acting secretary-general of the ANC only after two other leaders had turned the job down. It has been suggested that she has reached the zenith of her powers: "...she has stepped on too many toes. She attacked party positions, embarrassed ANC ministers and disagreed with influential members of the organisation." It was later reported that she was to be offered the position of High Commissioner in London. In June she announced that she was leaving political life to go into business.[11]

These examples suggest both the declining importance of civic associations in relation to the ANC, as well as of the relatively lesser importance of the party in central administration compared with the party in office.

The declining role of former UDF activists during the run-up to the draft constitution and the election was confirmed in an article by former UDF secretary, Popo Molefe, currently premier of the north-west province, who noted that after 1991, the UDF "scaled down its

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[11] Ramotena Mabote, Carolus star is on the wane, **Star**, 15 April 1997; **Financial Mail** 13 June 1997, p 36.

profile as more of its functions passed to the ANC and key UDF activists became involved in the reorganisation of the ANC".[12] The other symptom of a decline in social movement activism was the corrosion of the ANC-CP-COSATU alliance, specially after the adoption by the government of the macro-economic policy GEAR. The Labour Relations Act has put a strain on the relations between the Government and the unions, especially after the Labour Court ruled in May 1997 that a protest planned by COSATU against parts of the Act was illegal because it had not complied with the provisions of the Act. The opinion has been expressed that COSATU's planned action was directed "not at business but at its ostensible ally -- the ANC government."[13] Stanley Uys has suggested that this heralded the disintegration of the "broad church" after President Mandela's retirement in 1999.[14] These developments suggest a further evisceration of an activist role within the tripartite alliance and the increasing importance within the ANC of governmental priorities. The fact that in economic policy these priorities seem to emphasise economic growth and stability has implications for grass-roots activism. There are several indications that the advent of the new regime threatened to eviscerate activism in the civic associations, partly by drawing off talented individuals, and partly by a convergence in purpose of the civics and the state. Steven Friedman recently argued that
"many of the most articulate and talented leaders of these social movements have been absorbed into the post-apartheid state....SANCO ... sees itself as a watchdog on local government at the same time as it argues with the ANC about how many of its activists are to become members of the government over which it wants to watch... There is a danger that argument over the respective roles of elected representatives and civil society is really about how the spoils of the acquisition of state power are to be divided."[15]

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[12] **Sunday Times** 20 April 1997.

[13] Labour on the Outside, **Finance Week** May 15-21, 1997, pp 20-22.

[14] **Sunday Times** 11 May 1997. It would be of more than semantic interest to trace the replacement of the term "liberation movement" with "broad church" to describe the ANC.

[15] Steven Friedman, Democratic Selections? Civil Society in South Africa's New Democracy, in Ernest Magagna and Rachel Houghton (eds), **Transformation in South Africa? Policy Debates in the 1990s**, IFAA, 1997, 235. This problem long preceded the establishment of the new regime. Friedman noted the tendency for these movements to proclaim their identification with the African National Congress. His comments on this are interesting in the light of retrospective claims, such as that made by Popo Molefe that there was no difference between the UDF and the ANC.

Sheila Meintjes has made a similar point in a paper on attempts to revive an activist role in the women's movements, and the problems they faced in trying to sustain this role after the unbanning of the ANC. The Women's National Coalition failed to maintain the momentum it generated during the early 1990s, and the ANC Women's League failed to persuade the ANC National Executive Committee to accept a proposal for a quota on the body.[16]

Symptomatic of the decline of local activism since the 1994 elections was a report that SANCO was on the verge of collapse, in part because the commercial ventures which it had entered (eg selling insurance to its members) had failed because of the difficulty in sustaining membership drives![17] It has been suggested that SANCO risked its autonomy by announcing its support for the ANC in 1999, and for Mbeki as the next ANC leader. SANCO had lost its "sharpest brains" to government. It was close to bankruptcy, having only 5,000 fee-paying members since December. It had been ignored in the Masakhane campaign (to which it was opposed.) It had backed the ANC in the local elections in 1996. But the leading authority on civic associations, Kehla Shubane was quoted as saying that at the grass-roots level, the civic movement had not declined.[18] However, its relationship with the ANC is problematic, the national leadership having lost any identity separate from the ANC, and the grass roots organisations pursuing diverse objectives. In the next section it will be shown that SANCO is by no means dead, and that it pursues various strategies in different localities during the local elections of 1996.

It is neither surprising nor unexpected that the great waves of mass mobilisation which accompanied the transition of the 1980s and 1990s should have subsided from 1994.[19] Nor should the emphasis

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[16] Sheila Meintjes, The Women's Struggle for Equality during South Africa's Transition to Democracy, **Transformation**, 30, 1996, pp 47-64

[17] **Weekly Mail and Guardian**, April 25 to May 1, 1997.

[18] William Gumede, "Perspective", Star, 10 May 1997.

[19] An analysis by James Myburg of the battle for the succession to the Gauteng premiership (Democracy by Consensus, **Finance Week**, August 21-27, 1997) draws a conclusion superficially similar to this one. However, it represents the development as a reversion by the ANC to the more "Leninist structure of the centrally controlled exile organisation" and away from the "more democratic style" of the old UDF activists. The argument here does not rest on an analysis of the relative strength (or indeed the existence) of competing factions in the ANC, but on the changes accompanying the accession of the ANC to power. The new roles which these politicians have assumed were prescribed by the transformation of the ANC into the party of government, not by the ascent of any

placed here on the subsidence be construed as a lament for the passing of the moment.

PART III (i) LOCAL POLITICS IN MPUMALANGA: A SURVEY OF 12 AUTHORITIES.[20]

In this section an attempt will be made to judge whether the ANC had established itself as a party of government in the local authorities surveyed here. The value of using local politics to test the problem is that local authorities exhibit interesting variations in political relations, structures and capacities between areas which are sometimes separated by only a few kilometers. Undoubtedly similar variations exist within parties organised at regional and national levels (indeed the assumptions here are that they should), but focusing on larger groupings tends to produce a grossing up or aggregation of these variations.

The problem can be seen in several different ways. Had the ANC established control over the local political arena, including control over movement organisations such as SANCO? Was it able to assert its authority in the local authority? Was it able to enunciate and execute its policies?

There is a view that local government in Mpumalanga Province is generally weak, but there are nevertheless considerable variations between different authorities which enable us to compare relatively weak with relatively strong councils.

The African National Congress (ANC) was by far the strongest party in the province, holding 365 (64%) out of 568 seats. The National Party (NP) came a poor second with 80 seats (14%).

The other parties are listed in descending order:

Independents 48 (8%)
Residents' Associations 30 (5%)
Freedom Front 24 (4%)
Other 12 (2%)

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faction within the party. (Incidentally if centralisation of party decision-making were marks of Leninism, then Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair would both qualify as Leninists.

[20] This section of the paper is based on the unpublished research report **Governmental Performance and Capacity: Transitional Local Authorities in Mpumalanga** (hereafter **Report**). The Project was coordinated by Philip Frankel, Stephen Louw and Simon Stacey, all of the Department of Political Studies, University of the Witwatersrand under the auspices of the Human Science Research Council External Projects Programme, April 1997. I am extremely grateful to my colleagues for giving me access to this report.

The project covered the following local authorities: Dullstroom, Machadodorp, Lydenburg, Sabie, Carolina, Hendrina, Delmas, Ogies, Witbank, Middelburg, Leandra and Barberton.

Conservative Party 4

However despite its numerical predominance in the province as a whole, the ANC commanded a two-thirds majority in only three local authorities (Machadodorp, Carolina and Ogies/Phola.) Far from its numerical strength reinforcing its authority the ANC was weak and divided in these areas. In general, its control was far from complete. It was often divided internally, its authority challenged by populist groups. SANCO frequently mobilised community opinion against ANC policy, especially on issues relating to service payments. The ANC was confronted by blocs of white councillors linked together through cultural affiliation, and often enjoying long experience of the technicalities of local government.
Party divisions followed racial lines in the 12 authorities examined here: with the exception of one Indian (the ANC chairman of EXCO in Carolina) all ANC councillors were black; all independents and all representatives of the NP independents, the CP, the FF were white, as were all but one representative of Residents' or Ratepayers' Associations. A large proportion of independents and Ratepayers' Association representatives were in fact right-wing whites, often with a history of association with the Conservative Party.
A secondary instance of demobilisation was the collapse of the white "right". In step with the intensification of the liberation struggle from the mid-1980s, white right-wing activism escalated in the Eastern Transvaal. The local government elections witnessed the almost complete demise of the white right, which regularly disguised itself as rate-payers and independents.

CASE STUDIES:

1 MIDDELBURG: SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION FROM LIBERATION MOVEMENT TO PARTY IN OFFICE.
The ANC held 12 seats on the Council, the Greater Middelburg Residents' Organisation (GMRO) three; the MRO one and the NP eight. Surprisingly, given its political background, Middelburg had emerged as the exemplary instance of inter-party, cross-racial cooperation and of effective local government.
Under the old regime, the CP had dominated its political life, the AWB had a strong presence there, and "Boerekommandoes" had been familiar spectacles. The CP declined during the 1990s, and the GMRO, the umbrella for local independents, was not a CP front, though one of the independents was a member or ex-member of the CP. One of the reasons for this change may have had to do with the lengthy period of familiarisation and cooperation between the different political groups in the town which took place under the aegis of the Middelburg Informal Development Forum. Another undoubtedly lay in the political astuteness and competency of the ANC in the town, and their deliberate pursuit of an accomodationist policy during the period prior to the establishment of the interim government. The Mayor had made it his business to be accessible to the townsfolk. Complaints (for instance the mistaken claim that

service charges were high) tended to be non-political in character. Populist sentiments appeared here as elsewhere. During the election, some candidates had promised the people of Mhluzi (the local township) houses and land in return for their support. This introduced some strains in the relations between the Council and Mhluzi when it became obvious that these candidates could not deliver on their election promises. But it was not seen as a serious problem.

Unlike some other local authorities in the Province, the Council and officials cooperated effectively, refraining from interfering in each other's sphere of competency. The ANC councillors took official advice on technical issues. They enjoyed congenial relations with the Town Clerk. Relations between the ANC and the NP councillors were good, and they had distributed Council office in a cooperative way. (The positions of Mayor and of EXCO chairman were held by the ANC; the Deputy Mayor was a Nationalist). The **Middelburg Observer** described the parties as being in bed together. The Mayor of Middelburg Mr Ben Mokoena was credited with the responsibility for its good government. Mr Mokoena had been in exile for several years. Described as charismatic, articulate, intelligent and adept at politics, he was strongly supported by the ANC and the community at large. He tended to be the focus of attention in local government, leaving little space for anyone else. He was able to take unpopular lines when needed. The Chairman of EXCO (Sidney Choma) was also highly experienced. The GMRO was conservative and orthodox; its members argued that politics should not contaminate local government and that party was bad (they were in fact CP supporters in disguise.) Their strength lay in the grasp of one of the councillors of finance and procedures.

The Mhluzi Residents' Organisation (MRO), which held one seat, was the vehicle of Mr G K Maseko, who was mistrusted in the community and his organisation was described as a lot of criminals. He was said to have had a record of arson and public violence. He was an ex-member of the ANC who had fallen out with the party, but continued to vote with the ANC on most issues, thus ensuring that the ANC could usually be sure of a simple majority. On the other hand he gained considerable influence over the ANC. The ANC and the NP often voted together against the GMRO. The NP was relatively quiet despite its large representation; it was difficult to discern a Middelburg NP position, as the NP was not bound by its caucus, either in the locality or by the national party. In reality the Nationalists were independents, a situation with a long history in Middelburg local politics. Businessmen stayed out of politics.

The ANC was strongly bound by its caucus, and voted as a bloc in the Council, but it was neither inflexible or intransigent. It consulted widely in the community, its ward councillors held regular report back meetings in Mhluzi, and it took community problems to the party. The ANC in Middelburg had strong links to the central and provincial governments, which enabled it to anticipate national and provincial legislation. All Middelburg councillors, including the ANC representatives, were highly critical of the provincial government which they perceived to be

inefficient and arrogant.
The strength of the ANC had its roots in the history of the struggle in Middelburg, which had been so well-organised that it had earned the sobriquet of "Little Kremlin". Middelburg activists had brought Black Consciousness to the eastern Transvaal, and local struggles echoed the Soweto riots of 1976. There were more exiles and political prisoners there than in the rest of Mpumalanga put together.
ANC activists were well educated, skilled and politically aware. They had organised a highly disciplined, goal-oriented resistance to apartheid, avoiding needless destruction. They had used boycotts and non-payment campaigns to achieve specific objectives, and had refrained from these strategies once they had served their ends. This unusual stance enabled them to resist the common populist attitude of entitlement to free services. Because of this history, the ANC had adapted well to the changing style of politics from protest to cooperation. Its main weakness was that it had not mastered procedures. Middelburg reflects almost exactly the trajectory of change outlined in the earlier parts of this paper. The really interesting feature, locally, as nationally, is that the experience of resistance contributed to political competency as well as legitimacy.

2 TWO DISASTER AREAS: LEANDRA[21] AND OGIES/PHOLA
These authorities failed to produce a coherent political formation capable of giving direction to local government.
Political problems in the Council reflected the socio-economic problems faced in Lebahong. The original population of Lebohang had been overwhelmed by the recent influx of "foreigners" which produced conflict over resources. Half the population of Lebahong was under 25 years of age. Political conflict had a generational component. SANCO's base lay in the older, more established communities. The ANC was fairly new and got support from shack-dwellers.
There was political conflict over the mayorship and the leadership of EXCO,the Mayor and the EXCO chairman quarrelling over who should be Mayor. The Mayor Mr Nhlapo had connexions to SANCO, while Mr Nkabinde, the chairman of EXCO, represented the local ANC.
This quarrel contaminated municipal government and demoralised local officials. The people of Lebohang questioned the legitimacy and efficacy of the TLC. Councillors complained that the community mistrusted them. A record of abuses of the Mayor's Fund by the previous TLC continued to hang over the Council.
There were generational conflicts in the Council. The older councillors were white and non-ANC; the black councillors (eight out of 20 of whom were under the age of 30) saw procedures as the heritage of the apartheid era. Most young councillors had entered community affairs during the mobilisation years of the 1980s and

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[21] Leandra comprised Leandra (formerly Leslie) with the adjacent township Lebohang.

saw themselves to be motivated by "struggle" values. Their behaviour was incomprehensible to officials who were mostly much older and antagonistic towards populist political style. The township mass meeting continued to be main site of activity. But decisions taken in one forum were often inconsistent with decisions taken in another.
Some saw election to the Council as the route to personal advancement. Some councillors were employees of council, leading to the perception of a gravy train activity.
Various constituencies in Lebohang were actively engaged in delegitimising the Council. There was a bizarre alliance between the white right in Leslie and a shadowy Lebahong Residents' Association allegedly with links to the and PAC and IFP. The white partners in the alliance were closet AWB and Volksfronters associated in a ratepayers association (the Leandra Inwoners Belastings Assosiasie). They were trying to get a flat rate for Leslie and Eendracht (as in Lebohang). The Masakhane campaign had been unsuccessful in Leandra.

ii OGIES/PHOLA
Government in Ogies was without cohesion or direction. Its political leadership was "either absent, incompetent or unrespected."[22] Official positions were held by people who were politically contentious or who were incompetent and lacked diligence. For instance the previous town clerk had been suspended after 33 years service to make way for Mr Sibaya who had previously been his personal assistant and had less experience and knowledge. Mr Petrus Molapo, the ANC chairman of EXCO, was widely regarded as a "trouble-maker", who, according to non-ANC councillors, was probably involved in anti-payment campaigns in Phola. ANC councillors were divided, some supporting and some opposing him, and the independents aligned themselves with the group who opposed Molapo.
The Mayor, Mr "Bigboy" Radebe, was competent and respected, but only three of the ANC councillors supported him. Two others supported the chairman of EXCO, Mr Molapo.
The Council had few dealings with the provincial government and none with the national government. Relations between the Council and SANCO were antagonistic. SANCO ran an anti-payment campaign in Phola which subverted the Masakhane campaign. Mass meetings achieved little. Ogies encapsulated all the worst problems of local government in the new South Africa.

PARTY COHESION AND THE CAPACITY TO MANAGE
The internal cohesion of the ANC and the state of its relations with SANCO were important in a number of councils. Support from the provincial party was also sometimes a factor. Very often these determined the capacity of councils to manage the problem of service payments. Successful management of this problem seems to

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[22] **Report**, op cit p 183.

have depended on several of the following conditions being present: a united and resolute ANC Council; a supportive SANCO (or other similar associations); an active community political life dominated by the ANC. Here the experiences of Dullstroom, Delmas/Botleng, Machadodorp, Lydenburg, Sabie and Hendrina, will be considered.

DULLSTROOM AND BOTLENG/DELMAS: SANCO RESCUES THE ANC

Dullstroom provides a good example of the way in which poor relations between the Council and the community contributed to precipitating a strike among municipal workers, but in which the ANC Council maintained its authority because of the support it received from the provincial party and from SANCO.

Relations between the ANC councillors and the black community were tense because of the widespread belief that the councillors had failed to deliver on the promises they had made during the election. Relations deteriorated even further after the Council refused to grant municipal workers a wage increase and there was a service payment boycott in Sakhele, the adjacent township. The boycott was accompanied by references to "fat cats" and "gravy trains".

The municipal workers formed the Dullstroom Forum to express their grievances. The provincial ANC was brought in to mediate between the Forum and the Council. The ANC enjoyed close relations with the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO). Indeed the ANC was only able to deal effectively with the service boycott because of the support it received from SANCO.

In Delmas/Botleng, too, SANCO played a supportive role. There the President of the local SANCO branch (and a member of both the ANC and the SACP) adopted a somewhat unusual stance towards the problem of payment defaulters, suggesting that the Council should cut the bulk supply of services to Botleng in order to collectivise the effects of non-payment. This Council was unusual in that although white independents were more familiar with procedure than the ANC, the ANC had superior political skills because of their experience in the civics. Generally they had a strong sense of their political competency.

MACHADODORP: "INDIVIDUALISTIC" ANC; HOSTILE SANCO

A similar, but more complex, situation developed at Machadodorp, precipitated by a weak and divided ANC, poor relations with officials, and a hostile stance by SANCO. The ANC enjoyed an overall majority on the Council with seven seats, but three of them had stood as independents.

The ANC operated as a political party but allegiances were described as "individualistic", with many personal clashes. For instance a clash ensued over the election of Aletta Nhlapo as mayor. A veteran of the struggle, but semi-literate, she was unsuited to institutional politics. She was attacked by the Nationalists, but also lost support from within the ANC. She accused her ANC colleagues of bowing to racism.

Machadodorp experienced a crisis soon after the election over non-payment of service charges. In November 1996 the Council cut the

water supply. The black community then put pressure on councillors to reverse the decision. As in other local authorities in the province, councillors did not feel free or willing to accept responsibility for tough decisions, tending to buckle in the face of community pressures, lacking the independence and political resources needed for effective government.
There were tensions between officials which tended to run along on party lines between the NP and the CP and the FF. The NP was very weak. The independents were prominent locals who voiced the discontents of the white population. Neither the CP nor the FF had much influence.
Strains in the Council reflected political relations in the community. Political relations in eMthonjene, Machadodorp's township, were complex and conflictual, with conflicts within the ANC, between the ANC and the civics, and between new and old residents. In common with other local authorities, tensions arose over the struggle for limited resources. These tensions were overlaid by racial cleavages.
SANCO organised fortnightly meetings in the township, mobilising sentiment against the Council. SANCO functioned increasingly as an opposition, expressing dissatisfaction with "system" politics, and putting populist pressures on the Council. SANCO used the RDP to justify its anti-system stance.

LYDENBURG: ANC VERSUS "ANC"
Lydenburg presented yet a different face of the same problem, with internal weaknesses reinforcing attempts to impose caucus decisions without debate, and with SANCO performing an oppositional role. Surprisingly, the consequences were less unsettling than one might have imagined.
The ANC caucused all decisions and took them to Council as **faits accompli**, thus concealing internal divisions. Other parties and the officials resented this tough party line. One of the deleterious consequences was to undermine the ability of individual councillors to take any initiative.
The ANC held regular mass meetings in Mashishing, including meetings with the Indian community. Opposition to the ANC came from a group calling itself the "ANC" led by an ANC list candidate who had failed to get elected. This rival "ANC" undermined the Council's efforts to promote Masakhane. The group stated that they would stand in the next election but stood little chance of success.
These problems were exacerbated by SANCO, which was believed to be holding its own meetings in Mashishing where they contradicted the views of ANC councillors. In the area generally, SANCO was beginning to assert itself as an independent force, expressing unhappiness with the compromises entered into by the ANC and the fear that these compromises would take place in Lydenburg. However there was strong community support for ANC councillors. The ANC had so far managed to contain the influence of populist politics. However Lydenburg had not faced the sort of issue that arose in Machadodorp. It was not clear how the Council would cope if they

did.

SABIE: THE ANC VERSUS THE "CENTRAL COMMITTEE"

The ANC held five seats, the NP one and independents four. One independent stood as a ratepayer; another was a member of the CP. Party caucuses did not decide issues before meetings, and debates tended to be a-political except on very controversial proposals. ANC councillors often disagreed among themselves.

An ANC splinter emerged, calling itself the "Central Committee". It consisted of aspirant councillors who had failed to get elected on to the ANC list and drew its support from new squatter settlements in the area. The Central Committee worked to undermine the Council and discouraged people from paying services. The Council and provincial ANC leaders tried to meet them but they continued to operate as a rival ANC faction. However the Central Committee failed to disrupt party unity, possibly because the other parties in Sabie and Simele were also opposed to it, fearing that it had the potential to stir up populist "trouble" in the next election.

The Central Committee obtained membership cards from the provincial ANC. The dominant faction asked the provincial party to stop supplying them with cards and to intervene to assert their hegemony. These efforts were unsuccessful. Despite these problems, politics in Sabie were healthier than in Lydenburg. Councillors in both areas were under pressure from populists. Links between Sabie and the Province were weak.

The squatter settlements were occupied by the families of workers on timber plantations and related industries, the bread-winners having previously lived in single-sex hostels. They did not have long-standing ties in Sabie and were regarded as outsiders and competitors for jobs by the older residents of Simele. They were influenced by two leaders of the Central Committee, Mandla Skosana (no known previous experience of politics) and S K Nkosi (a member of both the ANC and SACP) who had failed to get nominated to the ANC list. The level of political interest was low among the town-folk, and there was little likelihood that mass meetings would attract a big attendance there. The ANC hosted regular meetings in Simele, usually once a month.

HENDRINA: INTER-PARTY CONSENSUS; INTRA-PARTY VACILLATION

Political relations in Hendrina were less polarised than Carolina because racial tensions were less pronounced, or perhaps they were less visible. The EXCO was an all-party institution. Councillors in both towns expressed strong commitment to the idea that community interests should transcend party affiliation. The Council was dominated by the spirit of appeasement, particularly on the issue of rates and rentals, and this resulted in inconsistencies in policy.

The ANC had stood for election on the platform that they would reduce rates and rentals; but in office they tried to take a strong line on defaulters. They realised that assessments would have to be increased if the Council were to manage its problems. There was a

small Pan African Congress (PAC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) presence in Hendrina, but it does not appear to have made any impact on local politics.
Officials often took advantage of ANC councillors' lack of grasp of procedural issues, and tried to manipulate Council business by filtering out contentious issues. The ANC councillors became "inanimate objects in the system of power relations." [23]
The level of political mobilisation in Kwazamkuhle was low. Only a minority of potential voters had been registered for the 1995 elections, which suggested a lack of energy on the part of officials and the organisational weakness of the ANC. Hendrina suffered from the combination of a politically inarticulate population and a low level of party capability to project community demands.

CAROLINA: ANC VERSUS POPULISM
The ANC held seven out of the ten seats on the Carolina Council. The FF held two seats and the CP one. Despite having a majority on the Council, the ANC was weak and disunited, and political divisions were based on personality. Councillors had a record of inconsistency, fluctuating between populist and accomodationist positions. The ANC held regular, often tumultuous, monthly meetings in Silobela. The Mayor of Carolina, Mr Shabangu, was very popular, though he often took the flak for problems. He was believed to have connexions with Thabo Mbeki and was regarded as an "external" ANC import. SANCO had played a major role in Silobela during the 1980s, but had subsequently faded away and its supporters came to operate under the ANC umbrella.
A divisive element in Carolina came in the shape of "Mama" Thela, an aging activist (a local version of Winnie Mandela) who dominated politics in Silobela and Kwazomokhuhle, her support base coming from the poorer people. She had an ally in Mr Lusenga, a local version of Peter Mokaba. Some ANC councillors who were antagonistic towards Mrs Thela supported the idea of a white deputy mayor as a way of removing her from the EXCO, but people in Silobela had little confidence in them. There were low levels of political mobilisation in Carolina.

CONCLUSION
The ANC was the predominant party formation in the local authorities of Mpumalanga Province, but as is evident from this account its authority was often precarious and sometimes non-existent. Several common problems which have been identified will be briefly addressed.

THE ANC AS GOVERNING PARTY
There were large variations in the political competency and capacity of the ANC. In some areas it governed on the basis of a consensus; in others it sought to impose decisions made previously

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[23] **Report**, op cit p 136.

in caucus, often causing resentment among other councillors. In some it governed with vigour and competency; in others it was enervated by internal strife, conflicts with SANCO and poor community support or down-right opposition.

STRAINS OF TRANSITION

The strains of transition the ANC was undergoing from a liberation movement to the party of government which were outlined in earlier sections of this paper were evident in these sketches. They include the tensions between councils and communities over non-delivery; the ambiguous stance in some councils towards non-payment; the frequent internal divisions in the ANC, or between it and its ostensible partners in the alliance (particularly SANCO), divisions articulated along a populist-accomodationist cleavage. In some areas, most notably Middelburg, the ANC had successfully undergone the transition to a party of government, and although there were some signs of strain, they did not seem to be severe. By contrast in an area like Leandra the ANC had not established itself sufficiently well, either during the apartheid era or subsequently, to articulate the major interests of the local community.

The process of party formation (with a corresponding shift in the relations between the three faces of party) worked unevenly through local politics in Mpumalanga, with many variations in pace and direction. Overall, the transition has been imperfectly accomplished, clearly manifest few areas. A possible disjuncture will reveal itself between the politics of localities in this province, and the politics of the central and provincial state.

POPULISM [24]

The tensions between populist pressures, often claiming to express the voices (authentically or otherwise) of marginal and subordinate elements in the communities, offer insights into several problems in democratic South Africa. The first is the endemic structural problem of poverty in the society, and the predicament which politicians face in trying to address them. Frequently the predicament emerged because candidates had made electoral promises which they could not fulfil, opening elected officials to attack by groups working outside of the institutionalised political arena. A major source of conflict between Councils and local communities, located along what has been loosely described here as a accomodationist/populist cleavage, reflected the extreme poverty experienced in those communities. The most important issue presenting itself along this cleavage concerned payments for

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[24] The appellation populism is not used here in the derogatory style common in current South African analyses. On the contrary it is viewed as a significant articulation of a crisis in South Africa's democratisation which exposes contradictions between the expectations of radical change on the one hand and the limited capacity and changing purposes of the new regime.

services and rates. A voluntarist gloss has sometimes been placed on this issue (not least in the Masikhane campaign) which implies that communities chose to pay or not to pay. This may be true in some cases, but certainly not all. The issue underscores the way in which poverty corrodes the legitimacy of government.

Secondly, parties were weakly articulated in many areas. It should be emphasised that although the weakness of the ANC has been widely commented on, the ANC had in fact achieved a greater degree of coherency than any other political group, and that it seemed to be the ascendant political formation in Mpumalanga. The fact that the far right organised covertly may suggest that it was embarked on a process of decline or disintegration in the longer term.

What was evident were the strains and contradictions of a liberation movement experiencing the transition to institutional politics. As the dominant representative of both forms of politics, the ANC experienced these strains in a particularly acute form.

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