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by: Tom Lodge

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The African National Congress Comes Home

Tom Lodge

Two years of legal existence have enabled the ANC to acquire 900 branches, 500 000 signed-up members, a 20-storey office block in central Johannesburg, a fresh leadership, a democratic constitution, an elaborate administration, and an annual income which in 1990 topped R90-million. Its homecoming is consequently a story of considerable if uneven achievement.

In February 1990, the ANC's leaders were suddenly confronted with the challenge of adapting an authoritarian and secretive movement formed by the harsh exigencies of exile to the requirements of a South African environment shaped by the tumultuous politics of the 1980s. Two years later, the process of changing the ANC into a organisation geared to open and democratic forms of popular mobilisation is far from complete. In 1992 the ANC still struggles to absorb and reconcile the experiences of three generations of leadership: the elderly veterans who emerged from decades of confinement on Robben Island; the middle-aged managers of an insurgent bureaucracy; and, finally, the youthful architects of the most sustained and widespread rebellion in South African history.

The exile organisation

To understand what the ANC has become in 1992, it is essential to know what kind of organisation it was in 1990. One way of doing this is through investigating its institutional structures and internal procedures. This is the approach which characterises most studies of the exile ANC during the 1980s.1 This literature depicts a most intricate and elaborate organisation which can be represented as an embryonic state - a `government-in-waiting'. It resembled a state in several respects. It ordered the lives of members of a 12 000-strong2 exile community and while doing so performed many of the functions of a modern government. For example, on the ANC's 3 400 acre estate in Morogoro, Tanzania, three schools, a cluster of administrative buildings, a hospital, a furniture factory, a farm and suburban rows of ranch houses provided for the needs of 2 500 South Africans, as well as detachments of Cuban doctors, Nigerian and Swedish nurses and Unesco teachers, not to mention 1 500 pigs and a herd of dairy cattle.3 This community existed quite apart from those which neighboured it in this sparsely populated part of Tanzania, subject to its own governance, laws, and financial provisions. In many Third World countries, ANC leaders were treated with the same courtesies as visiting heads of government and its officials were accorded partial or full diplomatic status; indeed by 1990 its 40 `embassies' reflected a more widespread foreign `representation' than was maintained by the South African government. With its diplomats, its flag, its press, its radio, its army and its autonomy in regulating the lives of its `citizenry', to many onlookers the ANC appeared a polity in miniature.

Researchers who tried to identify the internal dynamics of this polity emphasised its formal structure, decision-making processes, and communications systems. The ANC in the 1980s was an intensely militarised body. The greater proportion of its recruits from 1976 underwent military training and served as guerillas in South Africa or counter-insurgent fighters in Angola. The best-developed parts of the ANC's organisation were those concerned directly

with military matters. Between 1976 and 1990 a shifting hierarchy of appointed committees supplied a command structure and lines of communication for Umkhonto weSizwe combatants. A revolutionary council (renamed in 1983 the politico-military council) laid down overall strategy. This was interpreted operationally by Umkhonto's military headquarters. Directives would be communicated to regional command structures in `forward areas' (Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland/Mozambique). These would be translated into tactical objectives by the `machineries' which controlled the activities of the guerilla units within different areas of South Africa. In 1985 the ANC established regional and area politico-military committees (`senior organs' or PMCs) in an effort to correct a persistent problem - weak co-ordination between guerilla actions and underground political work. In fact the ANC's specifically political network inside South Africa remained poorly developed until the close of the 1980s. It was unable to achieve its strategic aim of promoting a generalised insurrection. This would have required much more precise orchestration of its insurgent warfare with the wider popular opposition led by the United Democratic Front and the trade unions. In any case, the scope of guerilla activity was much too limited for this; peaking at 281 attacks in 1988 and declining thereafter, it never amounted to more than `armed propaganda', as ANC spokesmen today readily concede.4

In an effort to improve the ANC's political presence within the country as well as to tighten up political/military liaison, a special `president's committee' was established in 1987. This dispatched a number of senior leaders into the country who for the next three years endeavoured to construct clandestine organisation in Southern Natal and the Transvaal. `Operation Vula', as it was known, was sufficiently extensive for its achievements to have been recorded on 4 500 pages of computer files, if we accept the police claims made when the leading Vula partisans were captured along with their computer in June 1990. Just before its unbanning, journalists were noting the efficiency of the ANC's propaganda dissemination: `speeches delivered by leaders anywhere in the world are freely available in the country in a few days'.5 Siphiwe Nyanda, one of the Vula leaders, claimed later that `the approach was not to differentiate between combat and political work', but his testimony suggests that the emphasis was on building political structures.6 In Southern Natal, ANC spokesmen attested later, Vula had established `strong propaganda units' in all the townships. In the view of Jabu Sithole, chairman of Vula's Durban network, the literature distributed in 1989 represented a `crucial input... into the defiance campaign'.7

In addition to its operational structure, the ANC developed a compartmentalised bureaucracy with various departments clustered around the three main nodes of authority; the offices of the president, the secretary and the treasurer. A separate security directorate policed all sections of the organisation including Umkhonto camps and the Morogoro educational complex. A parallel political department fielded commissars entrusted with ideological instruction in military and civilian sections of the organisation alike. Diplomats, journalists and teachers each had their own administrative divisions. Compared to its executive departments, the ANC's representative institutions were rudimentary. In 1985 a national executive committee was elected; to its 30 members, a further five were co-opted in subsequent years. Of the 30 elected members, 22 had belonged to the previous executive. Before the Kabwe consultative conference, the most recent leadership elections were held in 1959.8 At Kabwe, the ANC committed itself to summoning a

representative conference at least every five years. In addition to whatever democratic procedures were attached to convening such `consultative conferences', elected `zonal' and regional `political committees' began functioning within those sections of the ANC community which lived outside South Africa itself and the `forward areas'.9 These seem to have been best developed in at the ANC's Tanzanian school, Somafco, where apparently `a battery of committees' each day hammered out policy.10

This is the sort of picture which can be assembled from the academic analyses of the ANC, most of which are broadly sympathetic to the organisation. They describe a highly structured and intensely regulated organisation in which internal functions are subject to codified procedures and routinised processes. It is an ideologically monolithic organisation - disagreements and debates occur over strategic and tactical choices rather than long-term aims.11 What unites leaders is essentially more important than anything that may distinguish them from each other; for example, the extent of affiliation to the Communist Party is considered inconsequential.12 Such accounts are not altogether uncritical, though; for example, they point to the poor communications which result from `a culture of subterfuge',13 and they are sensitive to the highly centralised and authoritarian character of ANC leadership. On the whole, though, the emphasis is on the organisation's coherence of purpose, moral integrity and disciplined rule-bound functioning.

A sharply contrasting picture emerges from a more recent literature which is characterised by its dependence on ANC dissident sources. A series of leaks from a well-informed source within the ANC supplied the essential information for a number of revelatory articles in the London newsletter, Africa Confidential. This material was subsequently incorporated into a book.14 An emigre Trotskyite journal, Southern African Searchlight, supplied further insiders' testimony, this time from a group of former participants in an Umkhonto mutiny. In these sources, power within the ANC is personal rather than bureaucratic. It is manifest in intradepartmental feuds conducted by the different administrative bosses: security versus military, military versus diplomatic, and so on.

Though such feuds may have strategic implications, in their essence they arise out of the jockeying by different individuals for political paramountcy. In the dissident literature each boss staffs his own section of the organisation with tried and trusted proteges; the organisation's essential inner dynamics derive from webs of personal loyalties. It is a leadership system which centres on patronage exercised through the tight control by those who control money, material resources, passports and jobs. Leadership competition generates considerable tensions, sharpened by personal animosities and ethnic jealousies between Zulus and Xhosas. Power is arbitrary, especially when exercised by the security organ, Mbokhodo, `the stone that crushes'. Authority is corrupt, and this is manifest in venality, crime and sexual exploitation.

Though the Africa Confidential reports attach great importance to identifying communists within the hierarchy, the main fissures within the organisation cross-cut partly affiliation; indeed some of the most powerful patrons are non-communists (Umkhonto commander Joe Modise, treasurer Thomas Nkobi, and Mbokhodo head Mzwai Piliso, for example).

Whereas the academic sympathisers of the ANC accord a central place to the

armed struggle in their narrative of the 1980s, in this version of the ANC's history the key episode is a 1984 mutiny among Umkhonto units serving against Unita guerillas near Malanje in central Angola. Fighting against Unita was unpopular, but the mutiny can also be understood as a response to the harsh behaviour of Mbokhodo after the detection of a spy network in Umkhonto camps in 1981. The events of the uprising reached their climax in the takeover of Pango camp by mutineers and their subsequent defeat by a loyalist Umkhonto force. The aftermath of the mutiny included public executions, tortures, beatings and, for most of the mutineers, nearly five years' confinement in the ANC's prison-camp, Quatro, before their partial rehabilitation in 1988. The regime at Quatro featured hard and pointless labour, atrocious living conditions, sadistic brutality and intense personal humiliation, a programme - the Searchlight writers claim - adapted by KGB trainers from Soviet and East German prison routines.

In these accounts, the ANC is demonstrably incapable of instituting internal reforms. A purge of the security department acknowledged that officials had over-reached themselves but left the essential apparatus intact. Similarly half-hearted were the efforts to construct democratic checks on the power of leadership. At the 1985 consultative conference, nominations for national executive positions had to be ratified by the president and voting was by show of hands or acclaim by delegates who were, at least in the case of those from Angola, selected by leadership rather than chosen by rank-and-file.15 Abuses were halted or corrected only though the more-or-less accidental intervention of the more courageous humanely-predisposed leaders; Gertrude Shope, head of the ANC's women's section, for example, succeeded in ending the torture of mutineers at Pango after she visited the camp.

The Thami Zulu affair, as reported in the British press in 1991,16 tends to corroborate the picture of authoritarian arbitrariness and personal factionalism which characterises the ANC of the `dissident' literature. Thami Zulu joined the ANC in 1980 while studying at the University of Botswana. Following his military training in the USSR, he enjoyed a meteoric rise to commander of Umkhonto's Natal theatre in 1983. In 1988, South African security police success in penetrating the Swaziland-based regional political-military committee (RPMC) resulted in a series of disasters including the assassination of senior personnel and the arrests of contingents of incoming guerillas. Acting over the heads of Umkhonto's command, Mbokhodo detained Thami Zulu and a number of other members of the Natal `machinery'. Both Umkhonto commander Joe Modise and chief of staff Chris Hani on several occasions attempted to obtain Zulu's release. Zulu was held for 17 months; no evidence was ever produced to indicate his complicity in any treachery. He was released in November 1989 and died mysteriously five days later. A post-mortem subsequently revealed he had been poisoned with pesticide. Both The Guardian and Africa Confidential attributed Zulu's fall to institutional animosity between Mbokhodo and Umkhonto and more particularly to the personal rivalry of Jacob Zuma, then heading security, who had apparently resented both Zulu's ascendancy, and Umkhonto's chief of staff, Chris Hani, whose protege Zulu had been.17

These two very different portrayals of the ANC are not impossible to reconcile. The academic authorities tended to interpret the ANC in terms of its own intentions and the images the ANC projected outwards. Such an analysis, however critically astute, can at best be partial. It certainly

leaves little room for the play of the idiosyncrasies of personalities or the malfunctioning of bureaucratic structures. The dissenting version gives these primacy, painting a general picture of tyranny and corruption from an impressive series of anecdotes.18 But the conclusions seem exaggerated; the totalitarian terror described in contributions to Searchlight 19 does not accord with experiences of the mutineers after they had left Angolan prisons. In Tanzania they were initially welcomed and elected onto a number of representative bodies despite expressions of disapproval from Mbokhodo. Nevertheless, the dissident literature represents a substantial indictment of the silences of the academic authorities. The seamier side of the ANC's existence in the 1980s reflects an important part of the experience the cadres brought home with them in 1990-91 together with exile state-building and guerilla militarism. Subsequent events would demonstrate whether the ANC had been infected by the factionalism and patronage to the extent claimed by the dissidents in the narration of the organisation's history in exile.

Coming home

President de Klerk's annulment of prohibition took the ANC by surprise. Even the recently-released internal leaders were unprepared for the pace of events. Walter Sisulu, after arriving in Lusaka on 17 January 1990, speculated that the ANC could be once again legal in South Africa `even by the end of the year'.20 The lifting of the restrictions occurred at a time when the ANC appeared to be floundering. On 18 January, Alfred Nzo by mistake read out to a group of journalists an internal document which with unusual frankness admitted that `we do not have the capacity within our country to intensify the armed struggle in any meaningful way'.21 The statement conflicted with a public pronouncement by Nzo a fortnight before.22

One week later Joe Modise maintained the ANC was still determined to `escalate' the armed struggle but confirmed that `some problems' had caused a reduction of military operations.23 Umkhonto leaders were naturally reluctant to concede that these problems were anything more than the `logistical' difficulties caused by the movement of guerillas from Angola, Tanzania and Uganda. By then, though, it was uncomfortably obvious that Umkhonto's war had failed to achieve its primary purpose, the generation of a popular insurrection; and given political changes in the region and the Soviet Union's predisposition to compromise in Southern Africa, it was unlikely to progress any nearer to it in the foreseeable future. Reporters visiting Lusaka in February noted the `chronic inefficiency and general malaise' characterising the ANC's offices.24 Morale could hardly have been improved by Mbokhodo's counter-espionage activities; security chief Jacob Zuma later claimed that the ANC held 100 people in its new Ugandan detention camp who had `instruction to sow discord within our forces'.25 A series of brawls involving displaced Angola guerillas in Lusaka provided an additional pointer to widespread demoralisation. When Sisulu in Lusaka exhorted the organisation to examine itself critically, apparently his audience responded with an angry litany of dissatisfaction about the behaviour of their leaders.26 Clearly, the ANC may have been unready to come home but its prospects in continued exile were darkening rapidly.

Bringing the movement back to South Africa was easier said than done; in February 1990 it was unclear how extensive the government indemnity would be and which leaders would be permitted to return. While this issue was being sorted out, the former Rivonia prisoners, together with first generation UDF leaders Terror Lekota, Popo Molefe, Arnold Stofile and Raymond Suttner constituted themselves as an internal leadership group (ILG).27 This body, under the chairmanship of Nelson Mandela, resolved to establish regional committees which would undertake the task of setting up branches and initiating recruitment. The ILG effectively assumed the authority which up to that point had been asserted by mass democratic movement principals. In anticipation of Mandela's release, a national reception committee, chaired by Cyril Ramaphosa and including the main UDF notables who had predominated in the events of 1989, had been formed. Already it was clear that the revival of mass organisation in the decade preceding the ANC's unbanning had nurtured several groups of rival claimants to the key positions of authority. Creating an integrated organisation from the domestic open opposition, the exiles and the underground was obviously going to be problematic.

For the time being, the ANC resolved to build its structures alongside those

already existing under the aegis of the UDF. The hurriedly-opened headquarters in Sauer Street nominated `conveners' for the first nine regions, delegating to them the creation of regional and subordinate bodies.28 Officials were emphatic that existing UDF affiliates should not be used for these purposes.29 Quite apart from maintaining the front as an insurance against the government changing its mind about the ANC's freedom, there were issues of deeper principle as well. As Raymond Suttner put it, the ANC did not want community organisations to be `swallowed up' and civics, womens' and cultural groups should retain their independent identity. The Eastern European experience had important lessons for those who sought to transform these bodies into transmission belts of ANC influence.30 Moreover, civics had `a breadth of politics' which the ANC could not aspire to represent.31

As the initial organisation was hastily assembled, exiles began arriving from Lusaka. The first NEC member, Jacob Zuma, disembarked at Jan Smuts on 21 February, accompanied by members of the ANC's legal and security departments. A second contingent flew in for talks with the government in April; this group included Alfred Nzo, Joe Slovo, Thabo Mbeki and Joe Modise. By June the organisation's centre of gravity was once again where it had been, 30 years before - in Johannesburg.

Subsequent developments are best discussed thematically. The next four sections of this review will examine in turn the evolving character of the ANC's leadership; the efforts to recruit and organise a mass following; strategy, action and policy making; and the continuing exile activities. A conclusion will attempt to evaluate the degree to which the ANC has succeeded in adapting to the environment of democratic mass politics which was created by the popular upheavals of the 1980s.

Leadership

Notwithstanding the rhetoric of collective leadership and the ANC's efforts since 1990 to develop constitutional procedures, any discussion of contemporary ANC leadership must begin with one man, Nelson Mandela. Mandela's dominant role is attributable to several factors: the leadership vacuum in Lusaka in 1990 caused by Oliver Tambo's illness and the unassertive quality of his immediate deputies; the slow pace of organisation building in the months following the ANC's legalisation; the tensions between the different groups of notables: exiles, Robben Islanders, trade unionists, and UDF officials; Mandela's own role in initiating negotiations well before his release; and, most important of all, the extraordinary cult developed around his name and reputation in South Africa and overseas during the 1980s. This cult was partly a consequence of the inevitable personification of politics which takes place when newspapers and television interpret complex events to a popular audience, but it was also the result of the government's systematic efforts to thwart the development of successive generations of political leadership after its suppression of black opposition in the 1960s. In justice to Mandela, his own intelligence, courage and honour were crucial in sustaining the moral authority his name commanded. Not all UDF leaders were comfortable about the devotional quality of Mandela's public following, though; they resisted, for example, the efforts of Mrs Mandela to promote the Release Mandela Campaign as the UDF's `core' organisation,32 and Reception Committee spokesmen emphasised after Mandela's release that he was an ordinary member of the ANC, subject to its discipline and conventions.

Mandela belongs to a generational elite which from a very early stage in its development assumed a dominant political role. The ANC in the 1950s was weakly constituted; strong and forceful personalities had to compensate for organisational inadequacies. In the 1950s, leaders did not attempt to reflect consensus through consultation, they led. Mandela's aristocratic origins and family circumstances may also have contributed to an authoritarian element in his personality; his daughter, Maki, told journalists just before his release, `My father is a domineering fellow, who feels he has to make decisions for everybody. You have to do things his way. You can't challenge'.33 Of course, Mandela is too complex and too private a man to be easily characterised and his public behaviour often demonstrates an aversion to personality cults. The impersonal quality of the interviews he gives are a reflection of this: `When he spoke he rarely gave views from a personal perspective. He did not see himself in isolation - even on personal matters'.34 To be sure, Mandela's frequent use of `we' rather than `I'35 can often sound magisterial rather than self-effacing, but the intention which underlies it is probably genuinely modest.

Whatever his own inclinations may have been, Mandela as ANC deputy president (a post to which he was appointed in March 1990), was swiftly surrounded by people who encouraged a Caesarean manner. As the ANC consolidated its bureaucracy, observers noted that the `Mandela factor (was) crucial in the scramble for posts' with the majority of them being filled by exiles or people close to the Robben Islanders: `uncritical supporters of the old guard'.36 Acquiring proximity to the great man was one way for exiles or old guardists to even the scales against the younger trade union and UDF leaders whose political influence was solidly based on the densely woven organisations of the 1980s. The Robben Islanders brought back from their prison experience an especially rigid and exclusive hierarchical form of authority which critics likened to a system of chieftaincy.37 Those UDF leaders who were active in 1989 were particularly disadvantaged as a consequence of their forthright condemnation early that year of Mrs Mandela's supposed complicity in the misdeeds of her bodyguards. The evolving mode of presidentialism began to be outwardly discernible in the course of 1990; for example Mandela, on returning from his expeditions overseas, would be met by the entire ANC executive lined up at Jan Smuts Airport.38

Mandela's foreign journeys were vital in generating cash donations needed to keep the organisation functioning but during his absence people appeared reluctant to make decisions. Commentators pointed to `the development of a dependency syndrome as a consequence of Mandela's stature within the movement'.39 Trade unionists complained of the `commandist, top-down' fashion in which Nelson Mandela and the exiles managed the ANC's affairs (and those of its allies).40 Overbearing management seemed to be matched by an intellectual insensitivity for the wider concerns of democracy. Poor advice and naive speechwriters may have been responsible for such potential embarrassments as Mandela's praise for Fidel Castro's `love for human rights', his public acceptance in Libya of the Gadaffi International Prize for Human Rights, and his angry defence in Kenya of Daniel Arap Moi against critics of one-party rule,41 but they reflect also an old fashioned `Third Worldism' at odds with the ANC's professed commitment to constitutionalism.42

The most alarming symptoms of the political degeneration which can result from charismatic autocracy were evident in the treatment accorded to and the role

played by Mrs Mandela in the first 18 months of the ANC's reconstruction. At the time of the ANC's unbanning, Mrs Mandela was beginning again to make public appearances, a reflection of a growing sentiment among MDM leaders that she should be afforded a measure of `rehabilitation' from the isolation imposed on her after the murder by her bodyguards of Stompie Moeketsi, a child in her care.43 Powerful Lusaka-based officials had never favoured her complete exclusion from public events and after returning to Johannesburg former exiles engineered her ascent to a series of senior positions: head of the ANC's social welfare department (nomination by Alfred Nzo), member of the PWV ANC regional executive (election by show of hands with Nzo and Nelson Mandela present),44 and Witwatersrand Women's League chair (elected with a three vote majority).45 These moves provoked an outcry - more than 100 branches protested her appointment as the ANC's social work director which seemed especially inappropriate because of the unanswered questions arising from the Moeketsi affair. The efforts to promote Mrs Mandela by members of the inner circle surrounding her husband seemed a particularly blatant instance of a more generalised favouritism; as one senior unionist put it, `many employees (at the ANC headquarters) are friends of other people; it has caused a lot of dissatisfaction'.46

Mrs Mandela's own demeanor during this period was hardly reassuring. She sat in on a national executive meeting despite the discomfit of certain NEC members. She made a series of warlike speeches at a time when the ANC was trying to curb the militarism of sections of its following. She was spotted in New York on an extravagant shopping spree in which her companions chose to persuade boutique proprietors not to charge for the outfits she selected.47 Now none of this was particularly reprehensible; her rhetorical excesses probably delighted as many as she offended, her showy assertiveness might be welcomed in a movement in which women still tend to be relegated to stoic, demure and supportive roles, and her ostentation easily forgivable in someone who for so long had suffered very intense material and emotional hardship. But her trial for the assault and kidnaping of Moeketsi and the events surrounding it raised rather more serious issues.

The proceedings themselves, while clearing her of assault, nevertheless showed Mrs Mandela in a most unflattering light. The most charitable interpretation of the record is that she failed to protect the children her bodyguards kidnaped, absenting herself from Soweto without taking sensible precautions about their welfare. At the very least, she must have been aware that Stompie Moeketsi and his friends were already receiving rough treatment from members of her `football club'. As disturbing as the events recounted in the trial was what was happening outside the courtroom. First, there was a statement by the ANC in January that the trial was essentially political, that it was `designed to undermine the ANC's reputation' and breached the spirit of any agreements concluded with the government.48 This contradicted an earlier statement in which the ANC claimed that it sought `no special treatment' for Mrs Mandela now that the charges against her were `in the hands of the court'.49 At the opening of the trial, high-ranking ANC officials appeared in the public gallery in what was understood to be a show of support for Mrs Mandela while outside members of the Winnie Mandela Support Committee wearing ANC insignia waved banners with the legend `Stop harassing our Mother'. Chris Hani announced from the United States that if she was jailed the ANC would release Mrs Mandela as soon as it came to power.50 More serious in its implications was the disappearance of five of the state's witnesses, youths who had already

given newspapers what they claimed to be first-hand accounts of Mrs Mandela participating in the beatings of children held by the football club. The ANC denied it had ordered the abduction of the witnesses but two turned up in Lusaka claiming they had been brought there by the ANC.51

In the middle of the trial, though, the ANC seemed to shift course. Top leaders stopped attending. The publicity department and the PWV regional offices refused facilities to the Winnie Mandela Supporters Committee.52 Nelson Mandela, responding to sentencing and application to appeal, said that `it is proper to leave the matter in the hands of the court... (T)he case has no relevance to the negotiations.'53 During the trial the national Women's League elections were held. Mrs Mandela stood for president against the incumbent, Gertrude Shope. Albertina Sisulu stood down and advised her supporters to vote for Shope. Western Cape branches threatened to dissolve themselves in the event of Mrs Mandela winning. She lost the secret ballot by 400 votes to 196.

The ANC's journal, Mayibuye,54 published a letter criticising the ANC leaders for `failing to separate the political context of the trial from the trial itself'; the trial, it contended, was `clearly a criminal trial', not a political one. This was evidently a view shared by the principal contributors to International Defence and Aid who refused to allow the use of their funds in Mrs Mandela's defence.55 As opposition to Mrs Mandela within the organisation began to coalesce her opponents among the ANC's leadership began to be identified by the press,56 an indication that highly-placed insiders were leaking information vigorously. All these events suggest that, imperial predispositions notwithstanding, the ANC had managed to develop the democratic reflexes needed to check the readiness of senior courtiers to create a different set of rules for leaders and their families.

The story is not over, though. Mrs Mandela remains popular amongst youth leaders and their constituency who share her taste for martial phraseology. She had traditionally enjoyed the backing of the youth congresses, whose leader, Peter Mokaba, had promised Nelson Mandela his unqualified loyalty with the words `We are your storm troopers... (W)e have no qualms in taking commands from you'.57 Nor should it be supposed that Mrs Mandela's defenders are limited to Mokaba's storm troopers. She is an tireless campaigner and regularly appears on platforms in some of the ANC most remote and isolated branches. She is known for small kindnesses and an infallible memory for faces and biographical information. In many respects she is a superb politician. She remains a celebrity abroad, especially in the United States where she continues to be feted, in the words of Julie Belafonte, as `a wonderful role model for women'.58 She received a respectable share of the votes in the July 1991 national executive elections. She continues to head the ANC's social welfare department. Mrs Mandela remains an influential figure. Meanwhile, the missing witnesses remain hidden.

It would hardly be fair, though, to blame all the manifestations of autocratic leadership on the mistakes made by Nelson Mandela. Though Cosatu officials complained that the `top-down' style of ANC decision making was `very different from the MDM',59 not all the problems were new ones. Though it was true that the UDF had a strong ideological commitment to grounding its decision making in `community-wide consultation',60 a doctrine taken over from the trade union movement, its leaders did not always practice what they

preached. In 1987, RMC leader Aubrey Mokoena denounced the activities of a `cabal' which he said functioned within the UDF's national and regional committees, a group which confined decision making to a very select circle and otherwise stifled debate. Two internal commissions proved to be inconclusive and failed to satisfy Mokoena who in 1989 made a second emotional speech about the cabal, accusing its members of being the treasonable authors of a document which advocated speedy negotiations, and which attacked Peter Mokaba, the president of the South African Youth Congress (Sayco). The document suggested that Mokaba's followers were out of control and that the Sayco president did not understand the dynamics of negotiation politics.61 By themselves, Mokoena's charges might not have been very persuasive. They had a racial dimension - the cabal's identified members were mainly Indian - and might reasonably have been perceived to express the rancour of a slighted leader. And if the alleged cabal was saying that the youth were out of control then it was only echoing a view which was widely shared: Walter Sisulu himself in 1990 noted with alarm that `many of the youngsters are not really interested in negotiations', appearing to endorse the observation of Murphy Morobe (a supposed cabal member) that `for many of the youth the struggle has meant simply shoot your way to Pretoria'.62 Nor was having reservations about Peter Mokaba's sagacity a reliable indication of treachery. But the cabal allegations were not limited to a few wild speeches by Aubrey Mokoena. In November 1990 the ANC's Natal regional executive began an investigation of cabalism in Natal in response to an allegedly 900-page memorandum composed by seven Robben Island prisoners, including Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, and relating to events over the second half of the 1980s. Again, Indian Congress office holders were at the centre of accusations.63 The contents of the memorandum were not made public but an interview with a Natal Indian Congress (NIC) member who claimed to have belonged to the cabal supplied substance to the charges. The interview describes a small core claiming to function in a `democratic centralist' fashion, operating as a tightly disciplined caucus and leading by decree. Accomplished in `theory', professing a `scientific' Marxism, and ostensibly well connected with the exiles, they claimed a monopoly of understanding of the `correct line' and were able to isolate or marginalise people who disagreed with them, labeling them as `workerist' or `racial capitalist'. Cabal members also apparently were antagonistic to young activists who wanted to join the underground,64 though they were most tolerant of the youthful bullies who laid down their `line'.65

Even if these accusations were overdrawn and unfair, clearly high-handed and undemocratic decision making characterised sections of the UDF. Nor was this confined to factions within national and regional leadership. At a lower level, UDF officials allowed and sometimes sanctioned the violent and coercive behaviour of youth congress activists. While it was true that through its rhetoric and parts of its practice the UDF promoted within its constituency a moral sensitivity to democratic values, it by no means always upheld them. It is likely that many of the imperfections of its experience were carried over into the ANC; by early 1991, according to Mayibuye,66 most full-time UDF officials were absorbed in ANC duties.

As we have seen, though, `commandism' encountered substantial resistance. Rank-and-file dissatisfaction did not stem only from oligarchy; due to its unfamiliarity with local conditions and its reluctance to delegate responsibility, the bureaucracy was notoriously inefficient. It left letters unanswered, including those arriving from foreign heads of state, its members failed to keep appointments, and it often seemed unconcerned with the problems of its followers; for example, in November 1990, members of the ANC working group on the release of prisoners promised on four occasions to visit people on death row and each time did not turn up.67 This last issue was a particularly sensitive one; since September there had been only 66 releases and the ANC's leaders were being blamed by rank-and-file for not maintaining sufficient pressure on the government. The December `consultative' conference allowed plenty of chances for these criticisms to be voiced; as Nelson Mandela noted somewhat plaintively during his closing speech, for him and his colleagues `one of the most disappointing features of the conference was that there was hardly a word of praise'.

The national conference of July 1991 supplied the opportunity for ordinary members to institutionalise checks on office holders. In fact the skirmishing began before the conference when headquarters circulated a draft constitution which enlarged the national executive from 35 to 128, including 15 co-opted members, 15 regional chairs, two youth league officers, and 17 Women's League representatives. Elections would be held every three years; voting by secret ballot would be by delegates themselves elected at regional conferences in a similar fashion. The NEC would meet quarterly and in between its meetings a full-time paid national working committee chosen by the executive from its members would assemble every month. In the first draft of the constitution a number of clauses would have enabled the incumbent NEC to influence the outcome of the elections of its successor: it would be able to nominate ten per cent of the voting delegates and also combine with two regions to nominate candidates (alternatively, candidates would need the nomination of three regions). It could additionally propose by itself up to 75 candidates. The expansion of the executive was widely perceived as a way to ensure that most of the existing NEC members would retain their seats. In revisions to the constitution, the regions cut these aspirations down to size, reducing the membership from 128 to 90, 50 of whom would elected, doubling regional ex-officio representation, allowing provision for only three co-options between elections and eliminating the nomination powers of the executive.68

One-hundred-and-twenty-six candidates appeared in the final list at the conference. Of the 50 elected candidates, 15 had belonged to the previous

executive. The 21 former NEC members who were not re-elected tended to be the most elderly figures or virtually unknown functionaries. Twenty-five exiles remained the largest bloc within the elected membership. Seven ex-long-term prisoners gained places. Sixteen former UDF or labour leaders were also voted in and this group was augmented by the regional chairs and secretaries who were frequently drawn from the front's structures or those of the unions. With Cyril Ramaphosa's election to secretary general, the `internal' leaders' influence within the ANC hierarchy was significantly extended. Returned exiles, though, were to predominate within the working committee, taking 14 of the 20 ordinary positions and the posts of chairman (specially created for Oliver Tambo), deputy secretary general (Jacob Zuma), and treasurer (Thomas Nkobi). Mandela was elected as president with Walter Sisulu as his deputy. Communists did well in the elections, though proportionately they are now less preponderant within the ANC's chief leadership than they were before the conference. They are well represented in regional executives. Eleven out of the 26 NWC members are active in the party but with the SACP itself showing less and less inner cohesion and with a proliferation of publicly `lapsed' communists,69 it becomes questionable whether the SACP can operate in the factional manner claimed by its detractors.

The one public revelation of manipulative behaviour by members of the NEC and NWC associated with the party left a final impression of vulnerability rather than strength. This was at the beginning of August when 12 communists on the executive, six of them in the NWC, took advantage of Nelson Mandela's absence to assign portfolios in such a way as to weaken or eliminate more conciliatory members of the ANC's negotiating team (Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma) while at the same time awarding to themselves some of the key policy-making departments.

One effect of their decisions, almost certainly intended, would have been to place Winnie Mandela's office under the overall authority of Cheryl Carolus, the director of a newly-created department of health, welfare and human resources. On returning, Mandela unraveled many of these arrangements, reinstating Zuma, the dismissed negotiator, placing Mbeki once again at the head of the team, insisting that the six top office-bearers should belong ex-officio to all departments and commissions, and transferring Mrs Mandela's department to the formal ambit of treasurer Thomas Nkobi. If this clumsy manouevre really represented communist politicking at its most calculatedly adroit the party's opponents within the ANC have little to fear.70

In the realm of leadership, then, the last two years have witnessed a conflict between oligarchic and democratic tendencies within the ANC, both of which seem to be strongly entrenched. After its July conference, though, it has been much less easy for leadership to select its successors or act autocratically. This has not yet made the ANC notably more efficiently administered. Mbulelo Mdledle, a recently returned and thoroughly exasperated Umkhonto cadre had this to say after encountering the bureaucrats at head office in the second half of 1991:

"To returnees, the ANC's administrative horror feels something like trying to fit square pegs into round holes. Officials are always in meetings. Those with minimal authority have their discretion fettered by policy while those with a lot of power are, in some instances, abusing their discretion."71

Constitutional changes cannot affect managerial revolutions. Nor has inertia and muddle been confined to the ANC's Johannesburg headquarters. It is to the wider dimensions of organisation that we now turn.

Turning followers into members

In April 1990, the ANC optimistically ordered two-and-a-half million membership cards from the printers. These would be available in exchange for a R12 annual subscription to all adult members of its following. Rejecting its pre-1960 subdivision into provincial congresses, the interim leadership group divided the country into 14 regions and named a `convener' for each. In early May, several regional committees had already been appointed and had publicly launched the ANC in their respective areas with well-attended rallies. Generally, the pattern was to sign up members before forming branches, either at the rallies themselves or in some of the better organised centres, in the Eastern Cape, for example, through door-to-door recruitment.72

Branches were supposed to have a minimum of 1 000 members but many were much larger and for practical purposes were subdivided into neighbourhood zones. After a reasonably brisk start the pace of recruitment and branch formation fell well behind expectations. Two years later, a large stock of membership cards remained unsold. The table below uses the publicly available figures to chart the growth of the ANC's organised following:

Date,	Branches,	Membership,	Source
1 Sept 1990,	315,		Mayibuye, March 1990
Sept 1990,	60 in PWV,	31 000 in PWV,	FM 28 Sept 1990
Oct 1990,	351,		FM 26 Oct 1990
Nov 1990,		150 000,	WIP, Nov 1990
Nov 1990,	62 in S Natal,	25 120 in S Natal,	WM, 23 Nov 1990
Dec 1990,	605,	200 000,	ST, 9 Dec 1990
April 1991,		400 000,	Obs, 14 April 1991
June 1991,		500 000,	Cit, 17 June 1991
Nov 1991	900,		BD, 6 Nov 1991

These statistics would be really rather impressive if they indicated the scale and pace of the ANC's disciplined, motivated and effectively mobilised following. They do not, though. Part of the problem has been the purposeless quality of the process. As a contributor to Mayibuye lamented in late 1990: `There has been, in general, no clear and coordinated programme to involve people as they join in the life of the branch'. The branches were often too large `to allow for the direct involvement of members in anything other than mass meetings'.73 This was partly a reflection of the haste with which these structures were established; as the table above demonstrates, the number of branches doubled in three months before December 1990, doubtless in anticipation of the consultative conference.74

But quite apart from any problems arising from the speed with which branches were assembled, there was a deeper difficulty arising from the lack of a clear vision of what branches should actually do once they existed. Should they duplicate the role of the civics and concern themselves primarily with local grievances? By the close of 1990, it was evident that many people preferred

attending civic meetings in which everyday issues were discussed rather than the consideration of `abstract policy questions' which predominated at some ANC gatherings.75 Certain civics began issuing their own membership cards - possibly deliberately competing with the ANC, for they had not previously given cards to their supporters. People liked acquiring cards, and the civic ones at R2 each were much cheaper than the ANC cards.76

In 1991, ANC officials disagreed over whether ANC branches should take up community issues. Gugile Nkwinti, a former UDF leader in the Eastern Cape, felt that local organisations should not be displaced by an ANC which subsumed their functions; though it was true that UDF affiliates `had been used by some activists as a base for undermining the ANC', if the front's substructure disappeared civil society would be impoverished.

With the likelihood of the ANC becoming a governing party, independent organisations were needed to perform `watchdog' functions.77 Blade Nzimande, a social psychologist at the University of Natal and a member of the SACP (writing from a province in which the front had been weak historically), disputed this. ANC branches themselves should assume `watchdog' functions and promote community issues: if they did not do this, what should they do otherwise? Given the civics' popularity there was a `danger of them emerging as alternative power centres to the national movement'.78 These concerns about the relationship of ANC branches to civics and the local roles ANC branches should play were very evident in townships around Pretoria. In Atteridgeville, the residents' association was a most effective force with its 15 area committees (including a migrant workers' hostel committee), weekly meetings, and effectively-conducted local campaigns around electricity tariffs and similar concerns. ANC members were conspicuous in the Atteridgeville-Saulsville Residents Organisation (Asro), but despite their misgivings honoured its independence. Former UDF supporters in Asro, though, were now saying they were `neutral forces' interested only in local matters. Meanwhile, PAC adherents complained that the civic had effectively excluded them from its leadership. In retribution, they formed a separate `liaison committee in competition with Asro which began conducting its own negotiations with the provincial authorities over electricity charges. ANC officials felt that allowing the civic an autonomous existence severely compromised the ANC's own popular appeal. Their feelings were neatly summed up by Glenda Daniels, a reporter with Work In Progress:

"What will ANC branches address once all political prisoners have been released and all members have discussed what a constituent assembly and an interim government mean? Many ANC members are tired of marching, chanting slogans and discussing relatively abstract issues such as interim government which they have given up trying to fathom anyway. ANC branches have been left with very little activity to keep them alive."79

From the perspective of the ANC's national leadership, the main function of the branches was to give substance to the ANC's authority and leverage at the negotiation table. This did not give branches very much more to do than merely exist and periodically participate in limited demonstrations of the extent of the ANC's active support. For despite its repeated disclaimers, the ANC was reconstituting itself as a political party - a force geared to electoral competition - rather than the broad multi-functional movement which the UDF had embodied so powerfully.80 As Mayibuye noted in its issue of July 1991,

leadership had a tendency to view negotiations `as the main terrain of struggle' and see everything else as secondary. An `ANC activist' was similarly critical in October. `Ordinary people', he or she suggested, `were no longer at the centre of our thinking'. Today, `mobilisation by decree is the norm'; in the event of a campaign, `a leaflet issued from central office was (usually) the sum total of preparations'.81 The inept appointment of one-time exile security chief, Mzwai Piliso, as head of the national campaign committee confirmed the impression of a leadership which was insensitive to the requirements of grassroots activism. To be sure, not all senior leaders eschewed participatory politics. Former Vula operative Ronnie Kasrils was amongst those senior figures who were becoming increasingly critical of the way in which negotiation politics was distancing the ANC from its popular base. The ANC should nurture rather than neglect its heritage of `mass struggle', he argued, for `by developing this strength we can transform the negotiation process into a democratic transfer of power to the people'.

Kasrils' concerns were not limited to national negotiations; he felt the impact of community struggles was `being defused through negotiations at the local level where we are weakest', a view which reflected once again the ANC's distrust of community organisations over which it had no direct control.82 Kasril's advocacy of negotiations in which `mass struggle is the key' was essentially adversarial, though. For it to become plausible the ANC would have had to be much stronger than it was and the government far weaker. Though the ANC's 8 January 1991 policy statement used comparable language, contending that `mass involvement' in negotiations was `vital', Mandela had already made it quite clear that talks with the government would continue behind closed doors and not always openly, as his critics demanded; the nature of the negotiation process required this. Carefully-qualified language in the 8 January NEC statement made provision for future shifts in the ANC's prescriptions for an elected constitutional assembly;83 clearly the principal ANC negotiators had little faith in imposing their views on the government through orchestrated `mass struggle'.84

Even if they had wanted to, by early 1991 the ANC was in poor shape organisationally. In many areas on the Witwatersrand its support had been immobilised by the violence accompanying Inkatha's attempted expansion along the Reef.

The ANC's inability to protect people was having a corrosive effect on its local credibility. On the East Rand, members of locally assembled `defence units' told journalists that they had asked the ANC to provide them with guns, expressing disappointment that no guns had as yet been delivered.85 Though former Umkhonto cadres filled most of the posts in units set up in Soweto,86 Umkhonto leaders openly acknowledged that they had neither the resources nor the organisation to supply adequate protection in all the areas threatened by Inkatha supporters.

Shortages of resources seems to have been a pervasive problem, not just affecting Umkhonto. At first hearing, the statistics supplied by treasurer Nkobi in July 1991 suggest the ANC has a substantial budget. Its income between February and December 1990 totalled R90-million. Ninety per cent of this sum was derived from grants and donations, mostly from foreign countries. Sweden remains the most important donor as it was during the 1980s. Membership fees represented only five per cent of income. The ANC owns a substantial quantity of real estate, including houses and offices in Europe and America as well as its base in Tanzania; together these constitute a `portfolio' with a notional value of R593-million.87 Salaries in 1990 cost the ANC 20 per cent of its income and purchasing an office block in Johannesburg used up R20-million.88 At the beginning of 1991, the ANC faced the prospect of having to bankroll the repatriation of its exiles. The cost of their transport, health needs, and accommodation in South Africa was projected at R160-million. Aside from this expense, the day-to-day operational costs of its administration were estimated at R4-million a month.89

By September 1991, the ANC was no longer able to afford the modest R2 225 resettlement grants it had awarded each repatriated exile.90 This is hardly surprising; in exile the ANC's non-military budget totaled $50-million, $30-million in the form of supplies, equipment and personnel. With the collapse of the eastern bloc many of the in-kind contributions have ceased; it is likely the ANC's income today is in real terms rather less than it was in exile. Moreover, in South Africa, it has to pay for many services it used to receive free from African host governments.

It is of course possible that considerable sums are wasted. In Natal, for instance, European Community funding was halted because it was discovered that money was being expended on salaries for allegedly incompetent officials rather than being used on the projects for which they were given.91 In the Western Cape, there was apparently considerable discontent resulting from the `hijacking' of full-time positions in UDF structures by returning exiles.92 The ANC-sponsored Economic Policy Research Unit was finally disbanded after spending over R3-million of donor money, mainly on air fares.93 Another probability is that resources were concentrated at the Johannesburg headquarters. Here, the `sense of entitlement' felt by exiles for first claim to any paid posts has been a particular problem.94 Meanwhile, regions have persistently complained of insufficient numbers of full-time officials who could visit branches regularly and facilitate communications between them.95

Shortages of human and financial resources are not by themselves sufficient to explain why the ANC often seems to have a weak local presence. With less material support from outside,96 the UDF at its peak could be much more pervasive. As we have seen, effective competition with the civics is another factor which detracts from the ANC's ability to sustain a vital branch culture. As well as this, though, in certain areas the ANC's weaknesses may be attributable to the fashion in which it has been constituted. In the Eastern Transvaal, for example, the region chose as its chairman a recently returned exile working at headquarters in Johannesburg, Matthew Phosa. He had departed South Africa in the early 1980s leaving behind his partnerhsip in a firm of Nelspruit attorneys. phosa's election was ostensibly surprising, given his continueing absence from the region. Sources suggest that the real power

within the Eastern Transvaal ANC lies in the hands of those who helped `convene' the organisation. This group had emerged from the Sayco network. Before the regional executive elections, there were allegations that ANC `branches' were set up, in at least one case three in a single village, after bulk sales of membership cards to traders. In many districts the ANC's organisation rested on a substructure of of youth cohorts mobilised around local `big men', effectively reproducing customary patterns of patronage. Sitting on today's regional executive are a number of old bantustan notables including an MP who underwent a political conversion after losing his seat and a former chief recently deposed by his community. Also detracting from the leadership's credibility has been its propensity to call stay-at-homes without consultation over issues of limited local concern; the protest in 1991 against Margaret Thatcher's visit was a case in point.97 In one town, the ANC branch chairman doubles as the president of the civic. To enhance attendance he combines meetings of both organisations. If he began with the civic's agenda, people left before any ANC business. Reversing the order of the programme was no use, most people would not arrive until it was the civic's turn.

In the Northern Transvaal, there has been a proliferation of organisation with civics springing up alongside ANC branches - again suggesting that the two draw their most active commitment from different constituencies. In the 1980s, Azaso's Turfloop branch was energetic in setting up youth groups in surrounding villages, and today the ANC's Youth League has many supporters in this region.98 ANC policy, according to one of its organisers, former Umkhonto cadre Calvin Khan, is to `go along with any homeland leader that accommodates the organisation'.99 In Venda the ANC held its launching rallies with the new ruler, former security policeman Brigadier Ramushwana, as guest of honour. As in the east, civil servants and entrepreneurs feature conspicuously in Northern Transvaal ANC structures. The largest concentration of members was in Thohoyandou, and according to convener Joyce Mabadufhasi, Venda civil servants and police were especially keen to join.100

The evolving symbiotic alliances between the ANC and rural elites are not conducted only at a regional or local level. Chris Hani's strong personal relationship with Transkei's General Bantu Holomisa is at least one instance of a national leader developing a regional political base through constructing such linkages. Hani, though, it must be remembered, played a personal role in assembling an underground ANC in Transkei during the 1970s and 1980s and his local standing also stems from strong loyalties to him.101 He has an impressive record, unusual among the former exile leaders, for being a tireless worker at the `grassroots level'.102 His rival, Joe Modise, is reputed to be cultivating a series of clients in the Transvaal countryside, including Rocky MalebaseNetsing, leader of the 1987 Bophuthatswana coup attempt, and since July 1991 a member of the ANC's executive.
Of course, one can reasonably expect ANC organisation to be socially uneven in those rural areas in which it never developed a strong presence historically. In such circumstances dependence on and adaption to existing patterns of political relationships are understandable. In urban areas, though, the ANC's following should be more broadly based, given the stronger organisational culture which developed around unions and civic organisations in the 1980s. Here, though, as we have seen, there are tensions between the surviving community organisations and the ANC and even in the cities, according to a Mayibuye correspondent, much work needed to be done if the ANC is `to rectify its image as an organisation which was predominantly composed of youth'.103 At

the July 1991 conference, Mandela expressed concern at `the low level of success we are making in drawing whites, coloureds and Indians into the organisation'. He was also alarmed at the ANC's overwhelmingly working-class character. The conference resolution, accordingly, urged the conducting of `door-to-door campaigns and home visits, especially in the middle classes of all communities'.104

Strategy, action and policy making

For much of 1990, ANC activists were chiefly preoccupied with the formation of organisational structures as well as summoning the public events which launched them. This task, together with preliminary negotiations with the government and the violence which accompanied Inkatha's expansion, distracted the ANC's leaders from any sustained effort to mobilise their popular following in a systematic fashion. In different localities in Natal and on the Rand, Umkhonto cadres were active in helping to form defence units,105 but in many areas `there (was) not any discernible input by the ANC... where defence structures existed'.106 In truth, as ANC spokesmen sometimes conceded, Umkhonto's network had never been sufficiently extensive: `In reality there has never been a people's war... (S)truggle remained largely at the level of armed propaganda'.107 ANC officials warned against inflated expectations that Umkhonto could protect communities.108 The guerillas were, in any case, in Mandela's words, `confined to barracks'.109 Turning instead to the battalions of labour, the ANC orchestrated an impressive political response to the violence with its call, in conjunction with Cosatu, for an `Isolate Buthelezi' stayaway on 2 July. Despite public misgivings expressed by Archie Gumede, doyen notable of the Natal Congress, and notwithstanding opposition from the PAC and Nactu which complained they were not consulted properly, and contrary to the expectations of the Durban press, the call was heeded by three million workers, closing most of the factories in Natal and Port Elizabeth. The event was a telling reminder of the potency of the nationalist/labour alliance and of the limits of Inkatha's authority even on its home ground, but it did not nothing to halt the fighting.

In October 1990, the SACP's newsletter, Umsebenzi, published a tartly worded editorial criticising the absence of `solid strategic planning', the substitution of `organisation building' for `mass struggles, mass campaigning, and mass mobilisation', and the tendency for `future-gazing' conferences to `blind us all to the real struggles on the ground to day... The broad masses must not become mere spectators', Umsebenzi urged. `If they become spectators then our negotiating hand is drastically weakened'.

This editorial echoed sentiments which were widely voiced and which rose to a crescendo at the December 1990 consultative conference. A series of toughly worded resolutions reflected the discontent felt within ANC branches: a programme of mass action should lend force to demands that the government should accelerate the release of prisoners and the indemnifying of exiles; public demonstrations should accompany the opening of parliament to herald a season of militant campaigning for the ANC's chief political demands; an interim government and an elected constituent assembly; ANC demands should be backed by ultimatums including the return to guerilla warfare. At the same time the 1 603 delegates to the conference - most of them under the age of 30, according to observers - rejected out of hand proposals from Thabo Mbeki and Oliver Tambo that a more flexible approach should be adopted to sanctions.

Despite the stirring language of the resolutions, a note of caution prevailed in the decisions taken at and after the conference. The ANC set four conditions to be met by 30 April: the release of all prisoners, the return of all exiles, the repeal of security laws, and the ending of political trials. But in the event of these not being met, the congress would only `consider' withdrawing from negotiations. Pragmatic sentiments also influenced the wording of the 8 January NEC anniversary statement which hinted at a readiness to compromise over an elected constitution-making body; though the ANC preferred elections the statement allowed for the possibility that an all-party conference could turn itself into an assembly. Moreover, the notion of sanctions being `phased' or tied to specific bargaining points bobbed up again during Mbeki's presentation at the Abuja OAU summit.110 The statement omitted any reference to nationalisation of the economy.111

Nevertheless, `mass action' began as promised with marches in Cape Town and Pretoria on the day parliament opened. A stayaway was proclaimed on the Witwatersrand and in the main towns of Eastern Cape. Mayibuye's reporter was unimpressed: the strike was a flop mainly because Cosatu locals were approached much to late to communicate effectively with their members, many ANC branches did not know what was meant to be happening, and school teachers and students organisations felt that their support had been taken for granted. Publicity was poor; leaflets reached the regions too late to be used and were printed in English only. The marches which did take place were ragged and undisciplined: `our capacity for marshaling and co-ordinating large crowds still needs to be improved', and, moreover, `the streets were mostly filled by the same old activist faces'.112

It was a start, though, and the campaign's managers were determined that protest `should not be (limited) to one day events'. An ambitious schedule of activities was drawn up for the first months of 1991 including a door-to-door signature campaign for the ANC's demands for an elected constitutional assembly, concentrated efforts to recruit soldiers and police into the movement, the establishment of branch adult education units, and the `reorientation of students to a culture of learning'. Of these, the signature campaign seems to have absorbed most activist energies and it represented a telling barometer of the ANC ability to mobilise its following. The campaign started officially on 11 March with rallies. Two weeks later, regional and national executive members led teams of volunteers into different locations to collect signatures. Apparently signature drives slackened off in most localities after a month or so. Though branches were meant to submit reports of their progress, many failed to comply. Those which did, testified to people being too frightened to either sign forms or attend meetings; too many known ANC figures had been the target of Inkatha attacks. The campaign was reinvigorated after the July conference and Mayibuye began publishing monthly figures.

The figures, though quite respectable in comparison to historical signature campaigns in the 1980s, 1950s and 1940s, do not suggest that this was a form of campaigning which inspired great excitement. The overall tally of signatures was rather less than the ANC's claims o 7 3 for its own total membership, though the good response in the Transkei is worth noting and does suggest that in one region at least, people collected signatures outside the ranks of the movement.

	August	September	October
PWV			50 000
E Cape,	96 030,	96 030,	99,356
W Cape,		31 425,	34,674
Transkei,	90 000,	140 000,	140 000
N Cape,	7 431,	8 376,	
Border,	23 383,	30 750,	51 464
S Free State,	19 325,	15 873,	73 000
N Free State,		6 420,	16 875
E Tvl,		2 610,	2 610
N Tvl,	27 000,	27 000,	36 375
W Tvl,		17 207,	18 627
N Natal,		10 500,	10 500
[illegible]al,			18 920
	263 169,	386 191,	522 393

In comparison to the previous year, though, there were plenty of events to suggest that `mass activity' once again occupied a central position in the ANC's agenda. There were a number of marches on or around 6 April, `Solomon Mahlangu Day', focused on the release of prisoners and exiles and subsequent consumer boycotts to protest the refusal by certain municipal authorities to issue permits for marches. There were rallies on May Day; these drew 125 000 people in the Eastern Cape but only 4 000 on the Reef. A second round of protests outside parliament and elsewhere marked anti-Republic Day; some over-enthusiastic marchers burned a coffin supposedly containing an effigy of FW de Klerk, an action from which Albertina Sisulu and Joe Slovo promptly disassociated themselves. Such happenings may have helped to sustain morale at the grassroots, but they were hardly forceful or widespread enough to constitute serious backing for ANC ultimatums.

However, the scale of demonstrations may be unimportant as long as the actions adhere to an increasingly predictable repertoire and ritual. The ANC/Cosatu stayaway in November 1991 to combat the imposition of VAT was a most formidable demonstration of the alliance's capacity to empty business districts and factories, but it did not stop the imposition of the tax or soften its terms. Speeches at the 48th conference drew attention to the unimaginative routine into which `mass action' had fallen. Nzo's outgoing secretariat report set the tone of the criticisms: `We lack enterprise, creativity and initiative. We are happy to remain pigeonholed within the confines of popular rhetorical cliches'.113 New types of happenings were needed: cultural festivals, flower marches to military bases, and so on.114 The real problem, though, was not the form of protest. Consumer boycotts and industrial stayaways were extremely effective in the 1980s when targeted at local grievances. A series of local protests in small towns in the Northern and Eastern Transvaal in the second half of 1991 continued to indicate that they still could be. It had always been much more difficult to induce shifts in central government policy through crowd action and industrial insurgency; this required very special conditions and a level of local organisation which the ANC did not yet possess. It is difficult to imagine that street theatre, rock concerts and flower marches could have made much of a difference.

The fact was that by mid-1991 the ANC's real capacity for intimidating the authorities was by deploying the threat of refusing to participate in negotiations. This was because its expressed willingness to do so was becoming an increasingly important element in the government's public credibility both at home and abroad. Events at the end of July 1991 underscored this point. In the wake of disclosures of official covert funding of Inkatha, De Klerk acceded to Nelson Mandela's demand that Magnus Malan and Adriaan Vlok should be dismissed from their ministries of defence and police. It is true that the ANC leader had included in his ultimatum the threat of a consumer boycott; in fact a boycott had already been instituted in the Transvaal on 25 July, but outside Pretoria - where local branches had emphasised grievances arising from electricity tariffs - most shops reported business as usual.115 Short of bringing back the days of ungovernability there was little street activists could contribute as participants in the `negotiating process'.

The chief importance of the activists (and indirectly perhaps, `the masses')

is not so much supplying the pavement protest during crucial altercations over the negotiation table, but rather in maintaining pressure on ANC leadership to hold firm to those policy essentials which would constitute a programme of radical socio-economic reform. ANC policy formulation deserves a separate essay by itself; it can only be mentioned in passing here. Since 1990 the organisation has developed an elaborate policy-making apparatus with specialised units or commissions examining constitutional issues, economic planning, land reform, women's rights and a host of other issues, even extending to the destiny in a post-apartheid South Africa of statues and monuments. In the crucial economic arena, Cosatu has helped to set the initial parameters. An ANC/Cosatu conference in Harare held in April 1990 prescribed a post-apartheid reconstruction which would be largely domestically financed, which would restrict capital export, and which would extend the scope of public ownership. Significantly, though, the recommendations did not specify nationalisation of the mining industry, suggesting instead a variety of regulatory measures to improve wages, disaggregate ownership, and subject marketing to public control.116 Nelson Mandela, though, emphasised in his early post-release speeches the ANC's commitment to nationalisation of major industries, stressing that `Modification of our views in this regard is inconceivable'.117 Mandela was not at that time reflecting a view unanimously held within the ANC's executive; in mid-February 1990, during a break in the NEC's meeting after Mandela's arrival in Lusaka, a spokesman told journalists that `nothing in our constitutional guidelines... makes nationalisation mandatory'.118

Conflicting claims about the ANC's economic intentions have since become common; to an extent they signify honest confusion among people without specialist understanding of economics, but also suggest competition for ascendancy between different sections of the movement. Since the Cosatu/ANC recommendations, ANC prescriptions have become much more cautious; its land reform proposals, for example, are careful to exempt commercial property from redistribution though they still argue the redistribution of farmland should not be contestable in court. ANC economic strategists now recognise that foreign investment must play a much greater role than implied in the relatively autarchic ANC/Cosatu document. In February 1992 Nelson Mandela returned from an international economic summit apparently persuaded that nationalisation would damage the prospects for fresh investment. Assembling a consensus around such views might be a very tough task. In October 1990, Umsebenzi had warned that

"...our ANC-led alliance is besieged daily with the concerns and worries of the ruling class... but what about the concerns of the oppressed majority? These concerns for us must occupy prime place."

In this light, the switch in emphasis in `mass action' in late 1991 and early 1992 from protests directed at constitutional issues to those more directly related to poverty may reflect the left's concern, in the words of the Umsebenzi editorial, that `mass demands will more clearly be heard in the present debates'.

The ANC abroad

With the relocation of its headquarters to Johannesburg the ANC's diaspora has become marginalised. At the July 1991 conference the `external' ANC was

represented by 83 delegates, a fraction of the total.119 Of these, most came from Tanzania and Uganda where the ANC retains educational centres and military camps. A change of government in Zambia accelerated the scaling down of the ANC's establishment there; by the end of 1991 the Zambian authorities were complaining that the ANC's departure had left in its wake a host of unpaid electricity bills.

Though Umkhonto leaders continued to insist through 1990 that the cadres `would remain in their trenches awaiting orders from the ANC',120 and despite the continuing symbolic importance to many of the ANC's younger supporters of keeping the army intact, with nothing to do in effect the military has been sidelined. There is still a military headquarters <196> indeed Winnie Mandela in August 1991 referred to a mysterious `supreme military council' composed of 20 people with equivalent authority to the working committee.121 But to judge from the way in which many members of Umkhonto's senior command have become full-time politicians, the army's bureaucracy no longer represents a major locus of decision making. Lower-level underground command structures seemed to be collapsing, and the politico-military councils were reported to be no longer functioning by late 1990.122

To judge from delegate representation at the 48th congress, most of the ANC's soldiers are now in South Africa. Umkhonto held its own conference in Venda in September 1991, which gave the cadres the opportunity to express their unhappiness about the way they had seemingly been abandoned. Joe Modise delivered a report which evoked derisive comment and the two military headquarters officers who had been appointed as ex-officio representatives on the ANC NEC were voted down by delegates. The leaders did not enhance their popularity when they sat at a separate table for every meal.123

As the prospects of resumed guerilla campaigning become less and less likely, the main concern of Umkhonto's commanders has shifted from maintaining combat readiness to equipping their soldiers with the skills needed to manage a regular army. In late 1990 Umkhonto began a programme of fairly selective recruitment of candidates for officer and pilot training at foreign military academies. Hani claimed in October that hundreds had left in recent weeks. Training would last for about three years. The recruits needed to have matriculated from high school and to be aged between 17 and 25; the educational requirement would have disqualified much of Umkhonto's existing rank-and-file though an `upgrading' programme would also be instituted. Once trained, the new officers would have to remain outside South African in terms of the ceasefire agreement.124

In December 1991, Chris Hani announced that the first graduates of Soviet officer training schemes had returned to their East African bases; in future, though, most of the cadets would learn their skills in India.
Quite apart from the practical and political importance to the ANC of preparing its cadres for senior roles in a post-apartheid SADF, `upgrading' might help to alleviate morale in the Tanzanian and Ugandan camps. In August 1991 Mbokhodo was said to be holding five people at Mazimbu after a stabbing incident. Relatives of the detainees claimed that Zulu-speakers were losing posts at Somafco and were being subjected to various types of unpleasantness after unfounded accusations of being `Inkatha bandits'.125 If these melancholy reports are true, than clearly it is time for the remaining population of the ANC's diaspora to come back home.

A story of mixed achievement

As noted at the beginning of this article, the ANC's renaissance as a mass political party is a story of mixed achievement. It has been extremely difficult for different generations of leadership to adapt to an unfamiliar political culture and in certain areas old authoritarian habits persist. But the narrative of the last two years does not represent an indictment. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that democratic procedures within the organisation have been strengthened by events; leaders may continue to make mistakes but they also demonstrate considerable capacity to learn from them. Much of the critical reportage of the ANC's organisational shortcomings can be found in its own publications and statements. Many of the tensions within the ANC are the consequence of an extraordinary situation in which a movement schooled in an absolutist climate of insurrection is having to adapt to the necessary compromises of realpolitik. That it has to do this in the open makes the process all the more difficult. It remains a vital and lively organisation, its huge and unruly army of supporters continuing to represent a following which holds leaders accountable for their actions. Untidy patches remain, but the ANC looks in better shape than it did two years ago.

Notes

1. See especially: Howard Barrell, MK: the ANC's Armed Struggle, Johannesburg, 1990; Stephen M Davis, Apartheid's Rebels: Inside South Africa's Hidden War, New Haven, 1987; and Tom Lodge, `State of exile: The African National Congress of South Africa', Third World Quarterly, 9(1), 1988. Of these, Barrell's short book is easily the best informed, combining academic dispassion with the advantage of an insider's knowledge.
2. Sunday Times, 21 January 1990.
3. Sowetan, 22 February 1992.
4. Citizen, 22 January 1990. And see, for example, Jeremy Cronin, quoted in Work in Progress, 75, June 1991.
5. Weekly Mail, 26 January 1990.
6. Mayibuye, 1(3), 1990.
7. Work In Progress, 78, October 1991.
8. At its last legal annual conference in Durban, in 1959. Since then the NEC had been `reconstituted' by Oliver Tambo after `canvassing' the views of African delegates at the Morogoro consultative conference in 1969 (see Central Committee of the SACP, The Enemy Hidden Under The Same Colour, London, 1976).
9. The only reference I have come across to these is in the `dissident' literature which describes the suppression of the Tanzanian committee after it elected ex-mutineers into leadership positions in 1989. Searchlight South Africa, 5, July 1990.
10. Davis, Apartheid's Rebels, 65.
11. For an illuminating summary of these up to 1987 see Colin Bundy, `Around which corner? Revolutionary theory and contemporary South Africa', Transformation, 8, 1989.
12. On different views concerning communists within the ANC see Tom Lodge, `The Second Consultative Conference of the ANC', Journal of South African International Affairs, 16(2), October 1986; Thomas Karis, `South African Liberation: The Communist Factor', Foreign Affairs<, Winter 1986/7; US Department of State, `Communist Influence in South Africa', memo released to US Congress, 2 January 1987.

13. Davis, Apartheid's Rebels, 55.
14. Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, Comrades against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile, London, 1992.
15. An ANC handbook published in 1990, `Joining the ANC', states that only the three chief offices were voted by a show of hands after a single nomination was received for each position but otherwise voting was secret and delegates had a free choice for persons for whom they could vote (p. 24). @NOTES NO. =
16. The Guardian, 6 September 1991.
17. Africa Confidential, 1 June 1990; 26 October 1990; 25 January 1991.
18. Some of which have been publicly confirmed by prominent ANC members. Pallo Jordan, for example, has described to the press his detention by Mbokhodo in June 1983 (Weekly Mail, 23 August 1991), a story first reported in Africa Confidential, (12 January 1990). Joe Nhlanhla acknowledged that `malpractices' had occurred in the ANC's detention camps but since then, he said the department of security had been restructured and the offending personnel expelled (Business Day, 2 July 1991). Albie Sachs, though, conceded that the reforms were superficial and that abuses persist (Star, 25 May 1990).
19. Paul Trewhela (Searchlight, 8, January 1992, 67), claims that each and every member of the ANC abroad was a prisoner of this security apparatus. Even in parliamentary and judicial Britain, ANC members had their passports kept under lock and key by the security department: ANC members studying in Britain were under constant threat of transfer from a university of college to the university of pain at Quatro.
20. Citizen, 20 January 1990.
21. Independent, 19 January 1990.

22. Sunday Mail, Harare. 7 January 1990.
23. Christian Science Monitor, 26 January 1990.
24. Sowetan, 22 February 1990.
25. New Nation, 25 May 1990.
26. Africa Confidential, 24 February 1990.
27. Weekly Mail, 5 April 1990.
28. Weekly Mail, 5 April 1990.
29. Daily Mail, 27 June 1991.
30. Business Day, 29 June 1990.
31. Mayibuye, 1(3), 1990. This principle was not always adhered to. The ANC Youth League has `swallowed up' a considerable number of previously independent groups. For example, the Sebokeng branch incorporated the local branches of Sayco, Cosas and Sansco, as well as the Vaal Arts Tapestry, the Noviena Youth Club, and the Sebokeng Karate Club (Horizon, July 1991, 11).
32. Africa Confidential, 28 July 1989.
33. Business Day, 25 January 1990.
34. Sowetan, 23 February 1990.
35. Even on such occasions as his graduation on 6 September 1991 for an honourary doctorate at the University of the Witwatersrand, Mandela was careful in his subsequent address to interpret the award of the degree as a tribute to the ANC rather than a recognition of personal achievement.
36. Business Day, 7 March 1991.
37. Weekly Mail, 21 September 1991.
38. Citizen, 10 November 1990.
39. Front File, October 1990.
40. Weekly Mail, 9 November 1990.
41. BBC Africa Service, 13 July 1990.
42. A loyal sense of moral obligation to established allies may explain Nelson Mandela's speeches and actions favouring Cuba and Libya, two countries which have give generous support to the ANC. In the case of Kenya, though, there can be no such feeling of obligation; Kenya's support of the ANC during its exile was largely confined to diplomatic gestures. Mandela has always made a point of refusing to publicly comment on the internal affairs of other countries, a convention he maintained even when asked in the United States during his 1990 visit for his opinion about the situation of African-Americans.
43. Star, 19 November 1990.
44. Financial Mail, 14 December 1990.
45. Work In Progress, 74, May 1991.
46. Financial Mail, 24 August 1990.
47. Star, 1 July 1990.
48. Independent, 26 January 1991.
49. Star, 19 September 1990.
50. Business Day, 24 April 1991.
51. Guardian Weekly, 19 May 1991; Star, 22 June 1991; Zambian Daily Mail, 14 May 1991; Independent, 30 August 1991; Business Day, 27 November 1991.
52. Business Day, 7 March 1991.
53. Business Day, 15 may 1991.
54. Mayibuye, March 1991.
55. Star, 19 May 1990.
56. Business Day, 7 March 1991; Star, 27 April 1991; The Times, 14 May 1991.
57. Christian Science Monitor, 28 April 1990.
58. Star, 1 July 1990.
59. Weekly Mail, 9 November 1990.

60. Mayibuye, October 1991.
61. Citizen, 22 August 1990; Daily Mail, 23 August 1990.
62. Weekly Mail, 26 January 1990.
63. Sunday Tribune, 25 November 1990.
64. Work In Progress, 75, June 1991.
65. Weekly Mail, 23 November 1991.
66. Mayibuye, April 1991.
67. Financial Mail, 14 December 1990.
68. Financial Mail, 3 May 1991; Star, 27 May 1991; Work In Progress, 75, June 1991.
69. Star, 14 July 1991.
70. Front File, September 1991.
71. Work In Progress, 78, October 1991.
72. Daily Mail, 27 June 1990.
73. Mayibuye, 1(3), 1990.
74. As well as the ANC proper, the Youth League began to be constituted through the course of 1991. By the end of the year it boasted 400 000 members. The League seems to have been especially successful in recruiting in rural areas. According to its magazine, Horizon, (4, 1991, 7), the League's Northern Transvaal region was the largest in the country.
75. Sunday Times, citing Mayibuye, 9 December 1990.
76. Mayibuye, June 1991.
77. Mayibuye, February 1991.
78. Mayibuye, June 1991.
79. Work In Progress, 76, July 1991.
80. ANC strategists would dispute this. One of the ANC's conference resolutions in July 1991 rejected the option of calling their organisation a political party rather than a national liberation movement. Obviously the former suggests a more narrow range of representation and more limited concerns than the latter, but arguably as soon as the ANC becomes committed to competing with other political groupings for voter support than whatever it chooses to term itself it will function as a political party.
81. Mayibuye, October 1991.
82. Work In Progress, 72, January 1991.
83. Independent, 9 January 1991; Star, 13 January 1991.
84. The 8 January 1991 statement implied that under certain circumstances an all-party conference could transform itself into a constitution-making forum. Thabo Mbeki, at a meeting in Mayfair, Johannesburg in April 1991, seemed to believe in the inevitability o 7 3 of compromise with the government over `the whole idea of a constituent assembly' (Work In Progress, 74, May 1991). The 1992 ANC statement, though, commits the ANC to striving for `elections for a constituent assembly to be held by December 1992' (`Year of Democratic Elections for a Constituent Assembly', 13). However, ANC constitutional specialists have more recently suggested that assembly elections might be held only after agreement on basic constitutional principles by members of the interim government. The interim government, according to the ANC, would not be elected, its `composition should be negotiated' in Codesa (`Year of Democratic Elections for a Constituent Assembly', 12). See Johannes Rantete, `The ANC and Transitional Mechanisms', Centre for Policy Studies, Johannesburg, February 1992.
85. Star, 23 September 1990.
86. Star, 21 April 1991.
87. Sunday Times, 7 July 1991.
88. Star, 8 July 1991.

89. Star, 4 November 1990.
90. Citizen, 26 September 1991.
91. Financial Mail, 14 December 1990.
92. Star, 22 May 1991.
93. Star, 4 November 1990.
94. Weekly Mail, 7 December 1990.
95. Daily Mail, 27 June 1990; Financial Mail, 26 October 1990; Weekly Mail, 23 November 1990; Sunday Times, 9 December 1990).
96. The UDF's annual budget in 1987 was reported to be R2-million, sufficient to employ 80 officials (Star, 7 May 1987).
97. It must be acknowledged that at its inception the regional ANC helped to launch a most effective consumer boycott at the end of July, calling for the abolition of local authorities and protesting against local firearms sales to white farmers. Over two weeks the boycott organisers reproted `95 per cent participation' by black shoppers; the protest was suspended after meetings with the Chamber of Commerce and the Provincial Authority. Mayibuye, 1(2), September 1990.
98. Horizon, July 1991, 39.
99. Work In Progress, 75, June 1991.
100. Daily Mail, 27 June 1990.
101. See `The Great Black Shark: Chris Hani interviewed', Monitor, December 1990, for an account of Hani's efforts while based in Lesotho from 1975 to 1981 to build a clandestine ANC network in the Transkei. The network was unusually extensive and depended on good lines of communication maintained by couriers living Herschel, Matatiele and Mount Fletcher. Documentation captured by the SADF during their raid on the ANC's Maseru bases in 1982 confirms that the ANC had a substantial underground organisation in Transkei (`The Lesotho Incident', Paratus, 34(1), January 1983). This background helps to explain why Transkei appears to be one of the ANC's strongest regions. Its executive includes several Umkhonto and SACP cadres who worked closely with Hani underground, including Ezra Sigwelo, Phuzile Mayaphi, Zola Dabula, Mzwandile Vene and Pat Holomisa, a cousin of the general (Africa Confidential>, 22 February 1991).
102. Financial Mail, 12 April 1991.
103. Mayibuye, July 1991.
104. ANC National Conference, July 1991, `Report', 29. In Cape Town, the Youth League has been especially unsuccessful in its recruiting. This is odd; the Western Cape was a powerful base for Sayco. Many coloured Sayco activists are antipathetic to negotiations, and apparently are reluctant for this reason to involve themselves in the Youth League (Horizon, 4, 1991, 10).
105. Natal Witness, 13 April 1990; Star, 23 September 1990.
106. Work In Progress, 75, June 1991.
107. Jeremy Cronin, quoted in Work In Progress, 75, June 1991, 20.
108. Business Day, 7 January 1991.
109. Citizen, 21 September 1990.
110. Independent, 9 January 1991; Work In Progress, 72, January 1991; Work In Progress, 75, June 1991.
111. Financial Mail, 11 January 1991.
112. Mayibuye, March 1991.
113. Citizen, 4 July 1991.

114. Mayibuye, July 1991.
115. Mayibuye, September 1991.
116. Sechaba, October 1990, 18-23.
117. Star, 26 January 1990.

118. Business Day, 16 February 1990.
119. ANC National Conference, July 1991, `Report', 17.
120. Hani, quoted in Star, 12 August 1990.
121. Business Day, 13 August 1991.
122. Work In Progress, 70/71, November/December 1990.
123. Work In Progress, 77, September 1991.
124. Business Day, 1 October 1990.
125. Searchlight South Africa, 8, January 1992, 29.