Democracy and Civil Society in South Africa:
A Response to Daryl Glaser

Introducing the Problematic

In a series of three articles, *Liberating "liberal" freedoms* (Work in Progress 61, 1989), *Discourses of Democracy in the South African Left: A Critical Commentary* (ROAPE Conference, 1989) and *Putting Democracy back into democratic socialism* (Work in Progress 65, 1990), Daryl Glaser has opened up a debate which will undoubtedly, and deservedly, run and run. These three articles written in early 1989, late 1989 and early 1990 respectively, span the period of the collapse of "actually existing socialism" in Eastern Europe and seek to radically interrogate the concept of democracy within South African socialist and liberation theory and practice.

This interrogation is particularly timely in regard to the dramatic developments within South Africa, which since early 1990 has seen the efforts of long years of resistance to apartheid beginning to bear fruit. The unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Communist Party (SACP) and other proscribed organisations, the release and triumphant return to public politics of Nelson Mandela, the lifting of the state of emergency and various related developments have completely changed the nature of the ball game defining the South African polity. Indeed that we can for the first time begin to talk coherently about a South African "polity" indicates that more has changed than simply the implementation of a few reforms by an "adapting" state.

Within this context an editorial of *Work in Progress* (65, 1990) has remarked on the extraordinary and singular "historic gift" bestowed on the people of South Africa due to a coincidence of their own efforts and pivotal international developments. This is that:

> "South Africa's final step towards democracy is being taken at a time of almost universal ideological fluidity. The steady replacement of calcified orthodoxies is accompanied by growing international acceptance of the supremacy of the popular will."

Glaser, though, is greatly perturbed by any assumption that South Africa has safely embarked on a clearly signposted journey to a democratic

1

society. This concern is undoubtedly heartfelt and wholly legitimate. However Glaser's attempted deconstruction of the South African "democracy" issue graphically reveals several of his own unreconstructed prejudices. These should be identified immediately lest a crucial debate start off on the wrong foot, and hence fail to yield its potential crop of vital perspectives on South African democratic theory and practice.

A Democratic South Africa?

In what has become a notable political tradition the ANC each year issues a lengthy keynote policy statement on the anniversary of its founding date of January 8, 1912. In 1990, with new times in South Africa clearly imminent, the ANC gave the theme for the year ahead as "People's Action for a Democratic South Africa". The full text was optimistically entitled *Freedom, Democracy and Peace,* and a paragraph under the sub-heading "South Africa Belongs to All" reads:

> "Throughout the seven decades of our existence we have fought against white minority rule and advanced a perspective of equality in freedom for all South Africans. We have put forward and defended the idea that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on *the will of all the people*. We espoused these principles because we value freedom, democracy and security for *all the people* of our country." [My italics]

This kind of language precisely highlights what Glaser sees as the "central deficiency" in the Congress tradition, as well as in other rival currents on the left. The congress tradition refered to is the historic ANC-led liberation alliance; presently consisting of the ANC, the SACP, the mass democratic movement or MDM, and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), (which has incorporated the exiled South African Congress of Trade Unions). This deficiency refered to stems from the location of the democratic subject in an amorphous group concept and "a lack of resolute commitment to political pluralism and civil liberties". (Glaser 1989b) As he explains:

> "While committed to various 'collective' definitions of democracy – whether majority rule or working class leadership or both – their discourses fail to recognise that a democratic

2

definition of either majority rule or working class leadership depends on a simultaneous commitment to individual rights of free expression, association and political choice." (Glaser, 1989b)

This failure should perhaps come as no surprise, since the main ideological currents of South African liberation politics "trace their historical lineage back through radical anti-colonial nationalism and orthodox communism - neither of which has proved very amenable to discourses of pluralism and liberty in other societies and contexts". (Glaser, 1989b) This situation is compounded by another factor, namely, the particularly dishonest role of liberalism in its long and cosy accommodation with the apartheid framework, by means of which capitalism developed in South Africa. Thus "the hostility of the left to discourses of individual rights represents a quite justified reaction against South African liberalism". (Glaser, 1989b)

Indeed, Glaser is particularly worried that South African socialists have come to think of such concepts as political pluralism and civil liberties as "bourgeois" or "elitist". By implication working-class people are patronized by being regarded as merely aspiring to certain levels of materialist consumption, and wholly uninterested in notions such as freedom of expression. (Glaser, 1989b) Thus the promotion of these freedoms, which should form part of any "defensible socialist project", would be abandoned to liberals with ruinous results for the democratic vitality of a future South Africa. Glaser, 1989a)

Authoritarian Sub-Texts

Glaser identifies three dominant issues around which recent political debate in South Africa has tended to turn. Firstly which strategies most effectively challenge the apartheid state; secondly which promote the supercession of capitalism along with apartheid;and thirdly which promote democracy as part of the struggle. In regard to this third issue the concept of "democracy" has tended to be conceived of in four different ways, namely:

   (a) Majority rule.
   (b) Working class rule
   (c) Direct local democracy
   (d) Worker self-management (industrial democracy)

Accordingly, he argues, the question of civil liberties imposes itself only accidentally, finding no independent place within the logic of 'democratic' discourse as presently constituted. Civil liberties are taken up only in so far as they tactically relate to one or other of the major themes; which all stress "the homogeneity and collective will of 'peoples' and the centrality of nation-building ". This is what Glaser calls the "authoritarian sub-discourse of national democracy" which tends to prevail within extensive sections of the national liberation movement; finding expression through "distrust of organisational independence and intellectual criticism at home" and "the endorsement of authoritarian models and actions among allies abroad". (Glaser, 1989b)

Glaser points out that the ultra-left have levelled criticism at over-arching collective concepts used in liberation politics in order to point out the danger that these may lead to a trojan horse type national democracy, which functions merely to empower the petit bourgeoisie, or else gives rise to a new bureaucratic bourgeoisie. However the real danger he sees is that once a certain discourse which ignores individual liberty gains hegemony, all opposition and criticism is liable to be seen as treasonous and as a betrayal of the struggle. This unfortunate kind of development, he suggests, may be on the cards in South Africa.

Evaluating the Arguments

I have tried to summarize some of Glaser's major arguments above without undue distortion or trivialization. Significant considerations and points not yet accounted for will emerge as we examine more specific topics below. Specificity is of the essence here as Glaser tends to argue along somewhat generalized lines whilst neglecting examples, case histories and policy documents. Within the broad ambit of liberation politics he lumps together the ANC, the SACP, MDM-associated community. and youth groups, certain trade unionists, "Stalinists" and nationalists in an extended neo-authoritarian pantheon. Five topics, however, will assist us in getting to grips with some of the more slippery concepts involved; both in direct relation to Glaser's concerns, as well as to the question of democracy in a post-apartheid South Africa more broadly considered. These topics or themes are as follows:

1. The ANC's Constitutional Guidelines and Bill of Rights Proposals.
2. The Political Culture of the South African Democratic Movement.
3. One and Two Stage Theories of Revolution.

4. Recent Strategies and Tactics of the ANC and Congress Alliance.
5. Civil Society in South Africa.

Two general errors in Glaser's approach need to be pointed out immediately however and borne in mind throughout. *Firstly*, the **methodological** error implicit in his teleological use of the concept of socialism. Essential to his framework is the apparent existence, however sketchily and vaguely described, of a proper and "correct" socialist programme against which the progress and efforts of actual social movements can be measured. Rather than democratic debate functioning to explicate what social institutions and mechanisms would be conducive to economic justice, full human rights and equality in diversity, Glaser insists that it is rather the achievement of socialism that will reveal, unfold and guarantee democratic integrity. Thus:

> "Only socialism can confer on its subjects the genuine *equality* of political citizenship – of political power and political capacity – needed to bring the democratic idea to its fullest flowering." (Glaser, 1990)

If socialism *means* full and complete democracy then the claim is simply a definitional tautology. If however we need to implement a particular blueprint called "socialism" "equality of citizenship" can be experienced we may be in for some trouble. Unless, of course, we all know in detail exactly what this blueprint is and all simultaneously agree to implement it! One hopes that we are not recognizing here the glimmerings of some new socialist triumphalism; the fresh model with added democracy, which rather like the old, hovers abstractly above our heads and "judges" the concrete endeavors, sacrifices and social agendas of actual struggle. We will return to this point below in our discussion of two-stage revolution theory.

Secondly, there are the **empirical** or observational errors. Glaser takes scant notice of the multi-layered culture and values of resistance politics in South Africa. Certainly he hardly attempts to assess what genuine democratic currents may already exist within the anti-apartheid forces which could be further nurtured and developed. He seems hardly aware of the ongoing debates within the ANC and MDM concerning democratic practice; and manifests a somewhat cavalier attitude to documents emerging from vigorous and sometimes bruising democratic processes inside the liberation movement. This point will be taken up in our discussion below on the ANC's Constitutional Guidelines.

5

The ANC's Constitutional Guidelines and Bill of Rights Proposals

Glaser partially welcomes the ANC Constitutional Guidelines document which affirms the fundamental human rights of all citizens, overtly supports a multi-party polity, and proposes a comprehensive bill of rights with clear guarantees for cultural, linguistic and religious minorities. He feels able to remark that these guidelines explicitly defend freedom of expression and association, "thus, on the face of it, addressing the central deficit I have identified in existing democratic discourses". He feels that these liberties might therefore become in the future "a lifeline for independent left critics of an ANC government" and constitute "crucial prerequisites for the development of a diverse socialist culture". (Glaser, 1889b) He nonetheless expresses his general scepticism as follows:

> "Of course, none of this is intended to let the framers of the constitutional guidelines off the hook even on the question of individual rights. In the first place, we need to know whether the expressed commitment to pluralism and liberties reflects genuine moral and philosophical conviction rather than strategic calculation. .... If the guidelines are the product of the Congress tradition, there is also considerable evidence that Congress-aligned politics is in practice much more illiberal than its constitutional commitments imply".

Now a sceptic he may be, and a good measure of pessimism of the intellect is surely the prerogative of us all. It is, though, quite incorrect to infer that the guidelines were constructed due to new thinking following "the revolutions of 1989", that is, the collapse of the Eastern European "communist bloc". However, in his article specifically devoted to this topic and quite clearly in this context Glaser states:

> "Already the shifting international climate has forced the ANC and SACP to rethink basic positions – hence the former's constitutional guidelines promising multi-party democracy and the latter's proposed Worker's Charter recognizing, among other things, the right of workers to strike in a post-apartheid South Africa. Theses shifts are welcome but it remains to be seen whether enough has been done to extirpate the legacy of Stalinism from the language and methods of Congress politics."
> (Glaser, 1990)

Now there is much to be said about learning from the Eastern European events, but it is quite another matter to imply that South Africans have few indigenous democratic ideas to draw on in the construction of a new society. Fortunately Glaser has seriously misrepresented the situation in regard to the ANC's *Constitutional Guidelines*, (tabled before a seminar of ANC delegates in Lusaka in March 1988 and widely discussed inside South Africa immediately thereafter), in portraying the document as some prescient response to Eastern European upheaval. We will go on to argue that the democratic and pluralist thrust behind the guidelines can be clearly located within a long tradition of South African resistance politics. A tradition which can potentially provide a foundation for the implementation and extension of democracy in all sectors of South African society.

The SACP's *Draft Worker's Charter* was being widely distributed and discussed in mid-1989, a while before the actual domino collapse of the communist regimes. (Considerable moral and ideological erosion having obviously occurred long before this.) Further, the *Worker's Charter*, while hopefully not immune to international lessons and influences, is also plainly the culmination of vigorous debates and discussions which had been going on inside COSATU and the South African workers' movement generally. (See SALB, Vol. 12, 1988)

The Political Culture of the Congress Movement

The themes of unity and diversity have played an important part in the South Africa liberation struggle this century. The ANC, (formed in 1912 in response to the establishment of South Africa under the 1910 white supremicist constitution), specifically set itself the task of uniting all Africans across language and regional divisions. As the term 'congress' suggests, the ANC was perceived as a "broad church" or "parliament of the people", and in its early days even included an upper house of Chiefs in its leadership structure. This determination to include multiple viewpoints within one primary anti-apartheid organisation, which even survived the attempt by an otherwise all-conquering youth league to remove the communists from ANC membership in the late 1940's, composes an ongoing tradition. The deepening alliance with the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses throughout the 1940's helped to bring the practices of passive resistance, pioneered in South Africa by Mahatma Gandhi in the Indian anti-pass campaign of 1906, into the Congress mainstream.

The Defiance Campaign of 1952, with Nelson Mandela as volunteer-in-chief, drew on the Satayagraha ideas as well as on the Western tradition of civil disobedience. These activities fed into the "Call for the Congress of the People Campaign" which involved congress activists in literally thousands of meetings with the general population to canvass opinions and suggestions for the future of South Africa; creating in the process a graphic and still powerful precedent of public consultation. The adoption of the Freedom Charter at Kliptown on June 26 by elected delegates from across the country followed; as well as the formal inclusion within the Congress alliance of organisations representing coloureds and whites, as well as Indians. This is symbolised in the logo of the Congress Alliance - a wheel with four spokes representing each of the four "national" or racial groups. The newly formed South African Congress of Trade Unions also joined shortly afterwards as an explicitly class-based component.

It is significant that the Freedom Charter, although undoubtedly a unifying document, clearly recognized the existence of a plurality of interests groups and cultural distinctions within South African society. Mandela, writing in the Congress newspaper, described the situation as follows:

> "The democratic struggle in South Africa is conducted by an alliance of various classes and political groupings amongst the non-European people supported by white democrats, African, Coloured and Indian workers and peasants, traders and merchants, students and teachers, doctors and lawyers, and various other classes and groupings; all participate in the struggle against racial equality and for full democratic rights. (*Liberation*, June 1956)

This formulation is important as it serves to define what kind of synergy or collective subject lies beneath the "unity" rhetoric of day to day struggle. Obviously firm alliances fastened into a coherent unity of purpose constituted the *sine qua non* of what has been a long and difficult contest against apartheid power and hegemony. A different deconstruction to Glaser's of this 'collective discourse' may serve to yield a more intimate understanding of the resistance tradition, and therefore a prognosis more favourable to the prospects of democratic pluralism in a future South Africa.

There can be no doubt that thirty years of illegality and exile have deformed and covered over certain critical aspects of the democratic movement and brought other influences and styles into the tradition. In

the section below on recent strategies and tactics of the ANC, however, it is argued that a continuing awareness and acute sensitivity to the issues of unity and diversity, public consultation and political pluralism account to a very large degree for the political sure-footedness and growing confidence of ANC politics in the 1980's.

One and Two Stage Theories of Revolution

The 1928 Sixth World Congress of the Comintern, debating the national question in South Africa, instructed the South African Party to "determinedly and consistently put forward the slogan for the creation of an independent native republic, with simultaneous guarantees for the rights of the white minority, and struggle in deed for its realization". (South African Communists Speak, p.91. See Mzala, 1988) No other issue in South African ideological disputation has led to such reams of Marxian scholasticism as the "native republic" slogan and strategy, with its associated two stages of revolution setting..

Without wishing to embark on a major excavation of this problematic we do need to look at Glaser's comments on the issue, which take us to the heart of his major concerns. Firstly, he asserts that:

> "the ANC's constitutional commitments to democratic rights remain inadequate as long as they continue to be cast in the logic of the two-stage theory of revolution associated with the struggle for 'national democracy', a theory which divorces so-called 'democratic' from 'socialist' goals." (Glaser, 1989b)

This is a peculiar comment in a number of ways. To start with the ANC does not have nor has ever professed, a two stage theory of revolution. To deliberately conflate ANC and SACP policy is the mischievious habit of both the ultra-left and apartheid ideologists and is always out of place in serious discussion. The ANC has a one stage theory of revolution which involves the liberation of South Africa and the concomitant establishment of national democracy. Thereafter, ANC policy makes clear, the citizenry of South Africa will be free to democratically decide what social and economic policies the country should follow.

Following on from this is the *prima facie* case that the "failure of socialism" in Eastern Europe (and elsewhere) teaches precisely that democratic rights and civil liberties should not be conjoined with or

bonded to historical-specific, speculative or downright arbitrary models of socialism. This does not represent, as Glaser and the ultra-left put it "a divorce" between democracy and socialism (when was the marriage?). Instead it serves to reinforce the specific and independent role of civil rights and liberties in the discussion and/or construction of any socialist alternative. The question must arise therefore, whether it is ANC policy, or whether it is not indeed Glaser himself, who is in most need of reconstruction following the recent popular upheavals in Eastern Europe.

A second, and more serious fear is voiced by Glaser in regard to any failure to fully integrate programmes for democracy and socialism. This is that following a successful "first stage" revolution, culminating in national democracy, the establishment of civil liberties and pluralism, "a second stage will be commenced under the aegis of a single entrenched vanguard party, fused with the state and dominating civil society". (Glaser,1989b) This would reveal the establishment of civil liberties *et al* to have been in the nature of a strategic concession. Unity and passivity would be ensured until such time as an authoritarian model, dressed-up as a higher democratic form, could be activated in the name of "proletarian" or "people's" democracy".

Now this scenario has some puzzling aspects. If the establishment of democracy was both genuine and hard-won, how is it so easily swept away as if by a conspiracy? Further, is it not the existence of clear and permanent democratic guarantees independent of and discrete from any one particular version of "socialism" which precludes the "nightmarish" denouement Glaser is concerned to avoid?It is surely true that socialists must also be sincere and committed democrats – but isn't the point that democracy should be seen as a worthwhile practice outside of any specific socialist vision, whether sectarian, catholic or whatever? Or should pluralism be considered to be good in everything, except in socialist theory itself?

As it is, the "one half" of the two stage theory is now being vindicated in South Africa, whether by the laws of history, by self-fulfilling prophecy or by accident. The establishment of a democratic South Africa with full civil liberties and safeguards for pluralist politics is now being widely demanded. A vigorous and healthy debate on economic policy is beginning. Different visions of the way forward following the establishment of national democracy are already on offer, whether conceptualized as "second stage" strategies or simply as incremental-type policy options for progressive social development.

10

Recent Strategies and Tactics of the ANC and Congress Alliance

We have been concerned with the discourse of democracy amongst the South African left, most especially within the congress tradition which during the 1980's decisively achieved a widespread and effective mass political mobilization. At stake is the degree of consciousness and concern indicated regarding democracy, individual liberty, pluralism and diversity, both within liberation politics and in a future non-racial South Africa.

It should be borne in mind that liberation politics in the entire decade of the 1980's was conducted under immense difficulties due to extreme repression, intermittent state terror and the lack of clear legal space in which to build on organisational successes. Nonetheless the period can be seen as one of consistent gains by the liberation movement against an increasingly desperate and besieged state apparatus. In his account of congress strategy Glaser concentrates on the mobilization of the townships during the height of the "peoples' power" campaigns as well as on the ideological struggles within the union movement. These were (and indeed remain) extremely important areas of political struggle, without which the democratic achievements of the era are unthinkable. They are also the most visible and most commented on aspects of liberation politics, which together with the armed struggle constituted the leading edge of ANC activism and militancy.

Less documented however are various other ANC campaigns carried out in alliance with a variety of groupings and constituencies which constituted a vital weaving of diverse interests into the overall tapestry of struggle. The ANC's success in penetrating these other areas, which called for a pluralist vision and non-sectarian approach provides crucial background to the impressive germination of Congress political pre-eminence by 1990. In Gramscian terms the ANC had already moved some way from a simple "war of movement" approach, and was, some time before its unbanning, already conducting an energetic "war of position". Whilst a pure "war of movement" which a frontal attack on the state apparatus, "war of position" goes beyond the mere building of alliances with existing, fully formed social movements. Instead,"the task is to stimulate their development, striving continually to extend the sphere of politics to the whole of society and to create a more complex and multi-dimensional civil society". (Simon, p.103)
I will mention a number of areas of intense ANC activity in support of

11

the above analysis. The first and most obvious example is the churches, with which the ANC has engaged in intimate dialogue for two decades. The crucial political roles of Allan Boesak, Desmond Tutu and Beyers Naude , to name a few of the most prominent leaders, during the 1980's provide the outward evidence of the close working relationship between the churches and the broad church of the struggle.

Another example is the campaign in the field of culture launched by the ANC in the early 1980's which first gained attention during the 1982 *Culture and Resistance* Conference in Gaborone Following this pioneering large scale open meeting between exiled ANC cadres and activists from inside the country, ANC structures took the lead in the formation of a plethora of cultural organisations, community art projects and discipline-based working groups. These functioned to decisively break the hegemony of apartheid on South African cultural practices. The resonating and burgeoning culture of opposition which quickly grew up extended far beyond the ANC's "natural constituency" into "white" and elite culture environs. In the late 1980's top commercial bands consisting of both black and white musicians were composing lyrics openly sympathetic to the liberation struggle and raising issues such as the release of political prisoners, return of exiles, police brutality and trade union rights. In July 1989 a writers' meeting between ANC literati and the cream of Afrikaans intellectuals at the Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe reached an unprompted and empathetic consensus on a whole gamut of issues including the cultural and academic boycott policy. As occurred also in Czechoslovakia around this time, an authoritarian state was decisively losing the "war of position".

Sport constituted another field where ANC strategy aimed not at ideologically dominating the field, but rather acting as a catalyst to reconstruct the apartheid scenery. The famed meeting convened by the ANC in 1988 between Danie Craven on behalf of the South African Rugby Board and a delegation from the non-racial and militant South African Rugby Union did not lead to immediate unity. Similar unity meetings with administrators from other sporting codes however, initially convened in Zambia but soon moving into South Africa under the auspices of the newly formed National Sports Council broke-up decades of stand-off and stagnation within South African sport administration, and began a frenzy of activity aimed at establishing a non-racial and democratic sports culture in South Africa.

The work done by the ANC during the 1980's in stimulating the formation of national and non-sectarian professional organisations is most

significant. Democratic medics and healthworkers, lawyers, academics, teachers and journalists made crucial organisational advances; at the same time widening and deepening the scope of civil society and weakening apartheid hegemony over processes of knowledge. ANC structures participated in the creation of women's organisations, as gender issues progressed slowly but steadily into the liberation mainstream. (See ANC Statement on the Emancipation of Women, May 2, 1990.) The organisational efforts of white war resisters, whether political or pacifist, were given critical all-round support by the ANC, as were white democrat initiatives of all kinds. The establishment of such groups such as the Five Freedoms Forum was welcomed and channels of communication were immediately opened up. During the 1980's close links were consolidated with black businesspersons, whose organisations were well represented (and whose input considerable) at an major 1989 policy seminar in Harare on human resource planning for a post-apartheid South Africa, hosted by the ANC's Department of Manpower Development.

These multiple linkages into the marrow of South African society provide a different insight into ANC strategy in the 1980's, so often portrayed as mere undifferentiated mass mobilization around simplistic nationalist slogans and rhetoric.

Civil Society in South Africa

The list of ANC activities orientated towards extending and deepening the limits of civil society during the 1980's is lengthy. The notable political success of the congress movement during this period cannot be understood without an understanding of how these projects, often unobtrusive, sometimes entering the sudden glare of publicity, underpinned and reinforced the more obviously militant and "revolutionary" campaigns. In all of this the battle to secure "legal" space was crucial. The congress tradition generated mechanisms such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) to brace, nurture and coordinate the myriad shoots of democratic organisation contesting apartheid dominance. The newly-minted freedom song *i'UDF lyasivumela*, so popular in the period after 1983, catches the strategic mood of the time perfectly. ("*The UDF allows*").

In his article *Putting democracy back into democratic socialism* Glaser lays great emphasis on the necessity of an "active voluntary civil society

13

between the state and the individual". He also gives warnings on two accounts. Firstly, that the formal extra-state character of civil society does not guarantee its freedom from internally generated pressures. Oppressive gender attitudes, for example, are reproduced in the civil society context. Emancipatory struggles will still have to be waged, perhaps with support from a progressive state when appropriate. Secondly, the concept of a free civil society should not in any way be conflated with a "free market" approach to economics. This would be to accept the New Right's truncated vision of freedom.

There is a third caveat worth raising, however, to add to Glaser's two. This is to point out the need to move beyond a classical Gramscian conception of the contest for hegemony within the civil sphere. The bedrock of this concept is the need for a new historic bloc to replace the old. Thus the advancing progressive forces cannot be sure that their hold on the state apparatuses will be secure, unless they also adequately dominate civil society. In this scenario hegemony within civil society is crucial to the legitimacy of the new order as well as to control over production, as civil society inter-penetrates and partially defines both these domains. But perhaps, after all, what should be sought is not the domination of the "new historic bloc", but rather a permanent and enduring pluralism and a civil society capable of levying irreverent criticism on whatever pretensions the new state may assume. (See Femia, 1989) This independence of civil society, (within the constitution and according to the bill of rights), need not exclude joint state/civil society initiatives freely entered into; for example, campaigns on poverty, on crime, for a better environment, for high employment, for the democratization of the economy, and so on..

 Unfortunately Glaser does not develop his civil society comments with any reference to the South African situation. This is a grave omission as civil society by its very nature cannot be imported from Western Europe, Eastern Europe or anywhere else. Only the maturation of the South African polity, brought about by manifold processes of struggle (and sacrifice) can create the democratic institutions, consciousness and political culture required. The tapestry of such a sphere of civic freedom must however be woven out of the history and political, social and cultural reality of the existing society. It cannot be wished for or analysed into existence. This underlines the need to seek out sustainable discourses of democracy within the indigenous political experience. We must search on the very terrain which Glaser found barren, that is, amidst the operational discourses of the South African struggle.

Sources of Democratic Discourse in South Africa

Various sources of democratic discourse and practice can be identified in South African political culture. Seven specific areas spring readily to mind;

Firstly there are the indigenous traditions of community discussion and consultation. We are not concerned here with any romanticization of pre-colonial Southern Africa, but rather with the various forms of social consensus and consent operational in the complex tapestry of traditional African life. One example is the kgotla gatherings which form an important part of local government and accountability in contemporary Botswana. The institution of the kgotla has of course been modified and adapted through time. For example, women, who traditionally did not attend, now participate on a level of formal equality.

Secondly, there are the universalist democratic demands made by the ANC since its formation in 1912. These reflect the historical demands for the representation, for equality before the law, and for constitutional recognition of basic human dignity. These firmly rooted demands form an important an influential strain in South African political practice and language.

Thirdly, there are the political ideas in the South African polity directly traceable to the existence of functioning "Westminister style" institutions in South Africa. It should not be forgotten that the question of broader participation in the white parliament was a live political issue until well into the 1950's. To a large extent whites were seen to be monopolizing democratic institutions and rights which properly belonged to the society as a whole. Concepts of democratic representation, constituency politics, parliamentary debate, regular elections, etc. are far from alien to a South African resistance culture which vicariously "experienced" the Westminister system in action.

Fourthly, deeper and more subtle democratic concepts entered South African political culture through the civil rights campaigns of the 1950's. These involved questions of just and unjust laws, the rights of civil disobedience, the rule of law in the society, the role of the police and security apparatus, as well as questions of state legitimacy. These campaigns, especially those centred on the 1955 Congress of the People, enshrined a concept of democratic consultation and community debate outside of parliamentary or "formal" political processes which is a powerful presence in contemporary political culture. It is impossible to

make sense of the ANC's recent campaign to gain a public mandate on issues such as the constitutional guidelines and the criteria for meaningful negotiations without reference to this background. Many similar civil rights themes surfaced again in the 1970's and 1980's adding to this specific form of democratic contestation of illegitimate state power.

Fifthly, there is the question of the internal democracy inside the political organisations of the Congress tradition. The vigorous internal democratic political life of the ANC in the late 1940's and 1950's must be pointed out. In the period of clandestinity and exile the principles of democratic centralism operated, that is, as described by Gramsci:

"........ a continual adaptation of the organisation to the real movement, a matching of thrusts from below with orders from above, a continual insertion of elements thrown up from the rank and file into the solid apparatus of the leadership apparatus which ensures continuity and the regular accumulation of experience." (Selections from Prison Notebooks, p.188)

That democratic centralism has numerous defects and is open to many abuses is not at issue here. The point is that in conditions of extreme repression and difficulty, principled and consistent efforts were made to preserve some level of internal democracy and accountability. The ANC's robust emergence from three decades of clandestinity and exile is part evidence of significant centripetal consultative processes extant throughout this period, despite periods of crisis and organisational trauma.

Sixth, there are the more recent paradigms of community action and direct people's power which emerged during the struggles of the mid-1980's. Glaser deals with this phenomenon which involved the proliferation of street and area committees, people's courts and defence units at some length, and expresses concern regarding the many undemocratic manifestations of this kind of "direct democracy". (Glaser, 1989b) His disquiet regarding tendencies flowing from this period to subject individual and groups to the tyranny of local majorities is well founded, given the many recent incidents of violence between partisans of the various political organisations. However the concern that this particular popular quasi-democratic form, shaped as it was by the ungovernability campaigns against illegitimate local and state authorities, could became the standard for a future South Africa seems

16

misplaced. The mechanisms of direct democracy, developed as part of anti-apartheid insurrectionary technique, are not seen by major groups as an appropriate framework for future constitutional development. Their heritage is more likely to be a concern for grassroots participation in the political process and the encouragement of strong community organisation within civil society. (See Sachs, 1988)

Seventh , there are the embryonic stirrings of industrial democracy, very possibly prefiguring future demands by an increasingly powerful and well-organised trade union movement for the democratization of economic decision-making in South African society. The political role that the trade union movement was forced to shoulder in the 1980's, and concomitant political sophistication developed at all levels of COSATU in particular, may well lead the trade union movement away from the usual militant abstentionist posture of "sectional defensive collectivism" typical of Western European unions to the wholly more creative posture of "pluralist interventionist collectivism" in future economic management. (Mathews, 1989)

The above constitute seven "democratic conversations" occurring within the South African polity. Some go unheard by various positions claiming an interest in a future democratic society. (See Swilling and Shubane on this point) Yet all these conversations are important and taken together they constitute the democratic "conference" of the future. They are discourses to be recognized and acknowledged, investigated and interrogated, expanded and adapted, in the interests of a future democratic and pluralist South Africa.

Socialism and Democracy

In the section above on one and two stage theories of revolution we discussed Glaser's eagerness to fuse together the concepts of democracy and socialism. He feels strongly that in contemporary South Africa the "integration of democratic and socialist programmes has become an urgent priority". (Glaser, 1989b)

Now the problem here is that Glaser continues to talk about democratic socialism unproblematically as if the phrase represents some self-evident concept on which consensus may easily be reached. It is surely relevant to pose the question of whose version of socialism democratic advance will be premised on. Which version is the one socialist basket in which all the democratic eggs are to be placed? We should also ask

whether the society is going to be given the opportunity to discuss the whole matter of socialist alternatives democratically and thoroughly.

In a recent noteworthy discussion paper, *Has Socialism Failed?*, Joe Slovo, General-Secretary of the SACP, directly addresses the issue of socialism and democracy. Among the points he touches on is the over-simplistic nature of the classical description of bourgeois democracy and "the under-developed state of classical Marxist theory in relation to the form and structure of future socialist society". At no stage in the document does he proceed as if the concepts of democracy and socialism are essentially the same project, or simply varying points of emphasis in the general socialist emancipation process. In a detailed interview published in the *South African Labour Bulletin* Slovo endorses the legitimacy of any sincere political group or party in South Africa to claim to be socialist. (SALB, Vol. 14, No. 8, 1990) So if there can be a plurality of socialist projects, which may be to varying degrees and at different times antagonistic or amenable to one another, then to which of these claimants is the custody of democracy to be entrusted? And what then should be the relationship between democracy and other social movements, whether feminist, environmental, gay, religious or whatever? The proposition that democracy belongs only to "socialists" and can only be considered true to its own name when subsumed in an appropriate "socialist programme" is no longer generally convincing. John Mathews, in *Age of Democracy: The Politics of Post-Fordism*, puts the matter with admirable clarity:

"Gone is the concern with a single, world-historical, epochal transition from capitalism to socialism. One hopes we have more respect now for the intractability of the social order; for the status of the existing organisations; for the necessity to intervene strategically and not simply wait for contradictions to mature; and for the mobilizing appeal of specific and concrete proposals rather than vaguely formulated goals."

Statues Inside the Stone

We have argued above that it is vital not to downgrade the critical importance of democracy outside of any particular socialist project. The very question of exactly what constitutes a viable socialist project is by no means clear and should be democratically and broadly debated. Democracy is the legitimate concern of a plethora of social movements whether they overtly fly a socialist flag or whether they concentrate on

single issues. By implication we have also suggested that perhaps not every citidal of oppression and exploitation can be stormed simultaneously, but that a continual strategic struggle to extend existing democratic space must be undertaken.

In full agreement with Glaser, it has been argued that democracy in South Africa will benefit enormously from a vibrant, independent and radically expanded civil society. Contrary to him we have argued that the syntax necessary for a healthy democracy in South Africa has developed through decades of resistance to oppression, not least within the Congress tradition. The realization of these many "democratic conversations" into a sustainable democratic society is of course not automatic. As ANC constitutional expert Albie Sachs explains:

> "........... the elimination of apartheid does not by itself guarantee freedom even for the formerly oppressed. History unfortunately records many examples of freedom-fighters of one generation becoming oppressors of the next. Sometimes the very qualities of determination and sense of being involved in a historic endeavour which give freedom-fighters the courage to raise the banner of liberty in the face of barbarous repression, transmute themselves into sources of authoritarianism and historical forced-marches later on. On other occasions, the habits of clandestinity and mistrust, of tight discipline and centralized control, without which the freedom fighting nucleus would have been wiped out, continue with dire results into the new society.
>
> More profoundly, the forms of organisation and guiding principles that triumphed in insurrectionary moments, on long marches, in high mountains, that solved problems in liberated zones, might simply not be appropriate for whole peoples and whole countries in conditions of peace." (Sachs, 1990)

Ralf Dahrendof, in a consideration of democracy in Eastern Europe, has spoken about three processes which are required in parallel on the road to freedom. (Marxism Today, May 1990) We can however usefully apply his rule of thumb formula to South Africa. First, there is the hour of the lawyers. The priority here is to find a appropriate and stable system of constitutional freedoms and guarantees on the one hand, whilst on the other, preserving the ability of the government to effectively govern in a situation which demands fundamental reform and extensive social reconstruction.

Next there is the hour of the politicians. Once a constitution is in place "normal" politics may commence. As the hour of the lawyer was "euphoric and filled with visible progress", so the hour of the politician, though at times tense and fraught with dangers, is generally heady and exhilarating. The hour of the politician allows some participation by the masses, but the masses have no necessary structure or permanence in the equation. Thus the crucial hour is the third, the hour of the citizen. After the establishment of a just constitution, after the achievement of normal politics, comes the question of the social foundations of democracy. Here, as Dahrendorf, summarizes:

> "Civil society is the key. It pulls the divergent time-scales and dimensions of political and economic reform together. It is the ground in which both have to be anchored in order not to be blown away."

Notions of human rights, the critical role of the rule of law, democratic pluralism, freedom of expression, cultural tolerance and so on cannot simply be legislated. The attempt to over-legislate on some of these matters, as for example the consociationalist school proposes, through ethnic vetoes and guaranteed participation in the executive, may well yield entirely counter-productive results. Instead an emancipatory and practical concept of citizenship should be built within the broad political culture of a society. As Dahrendorf warns, this is likely to be a long and complex business as "the hour of the citizen drags on through numerous ups and downs, and its successes can never really be measured". Nonetheless, there is some reason to be optimistic that in the South African situation the seeds of citizenship and civil society have already been planted and nurtured via several democratic discourses, and that despite many difficulties this democratic potential can be realized.

South Africans will have to deal with the socio-economic and cultural materials which history has delivered into the present. It is not helpful to see the values and ideas developed during a long tradition of struggle simply as so much undifferentiated debris to be cleared away so as to make space for democracy. History in South Africa may have bequeathed a lot of stones - but some of these stones certainly contain statues. We need to chisel away until we discover these shapes and forms. While this work is going on the various democratic conversations should be assiduously cultivated within all possible sectors of the society.

Bibliographic Note

The three articles by Daryl Glaser cited are Glaser, D. *Liberating Liberal Freedoms* (Work in Progress 61, June 1989a), *Discourses of Democracy in the South African Left: A Critical Commentary* (ROAPE Conference, 1989b) and *Putting democracy back into democratic socialism* (Work in Progress 65, April 1990).

References on Civil Society in Gramsci, A. *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971), Simon, R. *Gramsci's Political Thought* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1982), Femia, J. V. *Gramsci: Marxism's Saviour or False Prophet?* (Political Studies, 1989, XXXVII), Dahrendorf, R. *Europe's Vale of Tears* (Marxism Today, May 1990), Mathews, J. *Age of Democracy: The Politics of Post-Fordism* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, Australia,1989), Swilling, M. and Shubane, K. *Black Politics and the South African Political System: Policy Implications for the Transition to Democracy* (Forthcoming).

On the constitutional debate see Sachs, A. *Towards a Bill of Rights in a Democratic South Africa* (March, 1988), Sachs, A. *The Future Constitutional Position of White South Africans* (South Africa Constitutional Studies Centre, London, 1990), Ncholo, P. and Sedibe, P. *South Africa and the Bill of Rights Controversy: Do We Need a Bill of Rights?* (London, 1990), *ANC prepares guidelines for S. Africa's post-apartheid constitution* (Southscan, April 13, 1988).

Congress Alliance sources are Mandela, N. *Freedom in our Lifetime* (Liberation, June 1956 collected in *Selected Writings on the Freedom Charter*, ANC, London, 1985), Mzala *Revolutionary Theory on the National Question in South Africa* in van Diepen, M. *The National Question in South Africa* (Zed Books, London, 1988), *Freedom, Democracy and Peace* (ANC January 8 Statement 1990, Lusaka), *Position Paper on the Cultural and Academic Boycott* (ANC National Executive Committee Statement, 1989, Lusaka), *On the Emancipation of Women* (ANC National Executive Committee Statement, 1990, Lusaka), *Constitutional Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa* (ANC, Lusaka, 1988), Slovo, J. *Has Socialism Failed?* (SACP, London, 1990), *Interview with Joe Slovo* (South African Labour Bulletin, Vol. 14 No 8, 1990).

Patrick FitzGerald
28/6/90