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BLACK-WHITE DIALOGUE:
WHAT IS THERE TO TALK ABOUT?

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Negotiation between opposed political factions in a situation where substantial changes in the structure of power are at stake is usually a complex and long-drawn out process. As one has seen recently with regard to Zimbabwe-Rhodesia and the Israeli-Egypt negotiations, the early stages in which conflicting basic terms of reference and different demands about what should be on the agenda can prove to be the most difficult of all. As the negotiation proceeds the party's differing frames of reference are drawn closer together, conflicting assumptions are shifted. If the process proceeds far enough the most important stumbling blocks are overcome and negotiation can move towards details and technicalities. Where parties keep some of their assumptions secret; i.e. have "hidden agendas", negotiations can break down at a late stage as the technicalities begin to reveal the hidden agendas. However, the point being made here is that the initial phases and conflicting basic assumptions provide the most difficult challenges to the successful negotiation of conflict.

Many people think that 'dialogue' is less problematic than negotiation. This is not true. Dialogue around issues of serious conflict has all the difficulties of the initial stages of negotiation. The added problem is that there is no strong incentive for people to shift their positions as there is in negotiation where a successful outcome will always be of at least some benefit to all parties. In the absence of this 'carrot', dialogue can bog down in the quagmire of conflicting ideals about what the dialogue should be about and differing notions about the 'legitimacy' of each other's needs to state certain viewpoints. Particularly the last issue is problematic. In negotiation the parties take each other seriously because they have to — circumstances have forced all of them to the negotiating table. In dialogue one can afford to be far more 'moral' about conflicting issues, and this impedes communication very greatly.

The major problem of dialogue in a situation of conflict is that the different groups tend to see themselves as the centre of the political world (as we all do in all situations in which we do not have to take other people's views into account). Other viewpoints are often seen as 'way out'; very peripheral to the centre of the world of political possibilities. It is then that certain viewpoints are labelled as 'illegitimate' and not taken seriously.

For this reason it may be helpful for political dialogue between black and white in South Africa to start off by encouraging groups to look beyond their political world. In the notes which follow, I have attempted to sketch a picture of political positions and assumptions which encompasses

the whole spectrum of 'political world views' of different major parties. I do not do this in order to try and convince any group that it is wrong. The intention simply is to show that nobody is at the centre of the world and that all viewpoints have to be taken seriously, however unpleasant they may be or how firmly they may have to be opposed. The intention is to introduce at least the shape if not the substance of political reality into the process of dialogue, in order to make it as meaningful as possible.

1) Political Positions in South Africa

In 1976 several group interviews were conducted with teenagers from Soweto. The group interviewer came to one of the final questions in one of the groups: 'What should be done to improve life in Soweto?' The first answer was quick and crisp: 'Soweto should not exist — scrap it!' The group was about to agree until one member added another suggestion which carried the whole group with him: 'No, keep it and make the whites live there!' So much, one might feel, for the Urban Foundation, the Community Councils and Mr. Louis Rive.

Does the same gulf in thinking between the black youth and the white establishment exist about political policies in general? The general impression one obtains from the statements of Azapo, predecessor Black Consciousness organisations, viewpoints carried in the press and the occasional personal discussion is that keynote thinking among younger blacks varies between the goal of 'total liberation' on the more progressive extreme, and total non-racialism as the more conservative position.

Establishment-white politics varies between early 1970's style Separate Development to the federalism of the PFP with the Prime Minister in a centre position. The attitudes of ordinary people, blacks and whites tend to vary more widely than the more public positions one sees indicated in the press.

As a talking point let us consider the following rough diagram of political positions in South Africa. (Diagram I). The positions are broadly what several studies have revealed, including the very large investigation of Professor Theo Hanf of Germany and the research conducted very recently by the author for the Ciskei Commission.

DIAGRAM I.

SOUTH AFRICA'S POLITICAL POSITIONS
(Judgement and Survey-based)

- White and ● Black Leaders and Trend-setters and degree of influence.
- ⊙ Dominant position
- ▭ White and ~~Black~~ Black: rank-and-file willingness to accept options.
- ▨ Current policy position

Rigid Apartheid/defence of race discrimination	HNP Mineworkers Union	○ ▭
Defence of most Apartheid/homeland separation	Cons. Nat. Party Some Afrikaans voluntary organisations	○ ▭
Defence of 'Large' Apartheid/homeland separation	Right Wing of NP	⊙ ▭
Segregation and pragmatic status-quo politics	SAP/Right Wing NRP	○ ▭
	▨	
Confederalism/white control/limited political accommodation of blacks in white areas/slow desegregation/rapid socio-economic development/full Homeland autonomy	P.W. Botha Position Cons. Homeland leaders	⊙ ▭ ● ▭
White-dominated Ethnic Consociation (joint white-black decision-making)/federalism on racial basis	Left Wing of NP and NRP/ Afrikaans Editors Conservative township elite (mainly civil service)	○ ▭ ● ▭
Qualified Franchise	Older Progressives Conservative township elite (mainly businessmen)	○ ▭ ● ▭
Balanced Consociation/ Federalism on a racial basis	Ex NP and NRP 'verligtes' Conservative Coloured and Indian leaders/Some Homeland leaders	○ ▭ ● ▨
Real decentralisation of power/ federalism on a non-racial basis with minority safeguards	PFP Centre Buthelezi/Inkatha short-term position	○ ▭ ⊙ ▨
Unitary franchise/minority rights/ private enterprise or mixed economy	PFP 'liberal' Wing Black Professional Elite/ Establishment ANC	○ ▭ ⊙ ▨
Rigid non-racial unitary franchise	White liberals	○ □
Radical positions/Black Power/ Africanism/Socialism	Black progressive Intelligentsia Black students/radicals (a few whites included)	● ▨ ● ▭

B) Means of Change

	Change initiated only by white authorities; external lobbies resented	Civil service	<input type="radio"/>
	Change initiated by white authorities and lobbies in interaction	Emergent govt. position	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Churches/ Voluntary organisations/ Businessmen	Change initiated by lobbies and influence groups	Churches/Voluntary organisations/ Big business	<input type="radio"/>
	Change initiated by specific problems and issues (moving from precedent to precedent)	Unacknowledged government position/ Business/Conservative opposition	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Black middle class/ Non-militant intelligentsia Voluntary organisations	Change initiated by moral imperatives (protest politics)	Older Progressives/ Liberals	<input type="radio"/>
Some Black students/ Perhaps a small number of trade unionists	Change initiated by limited specific issue-related activism (demonstrations, strikes, boycotts)	Some radicals/ Fewer liberals and trade unionists	<input type="radio"/>
Some members of the progressive Black intelligentsia	Change initiated by pressure (mainly from overseas)	Some liberals and radicals	<input type="radio"/>
Older ANC(Xuma) position/ Buthelezi-Inkatha	Change initiated by <u>peacefully demonstrated</u> ability to mount large-scale unrest	A few academics and observers	<input type="radio"/>
Some members of the progressive Black intelligentsia/ Students	Change initiated by unrest/ warfare, terrorism which is <u>vaguely</u> expected to materialise	Encountered among opposition groups and NP left-wing	<input type="radio"/>
Current ANC/PAC m"underground"/ Possibly some students	Change initiated by unrest/ warfare/terrorism planned by activist group	Perhaps a tiny number.	<input type="radio"/>

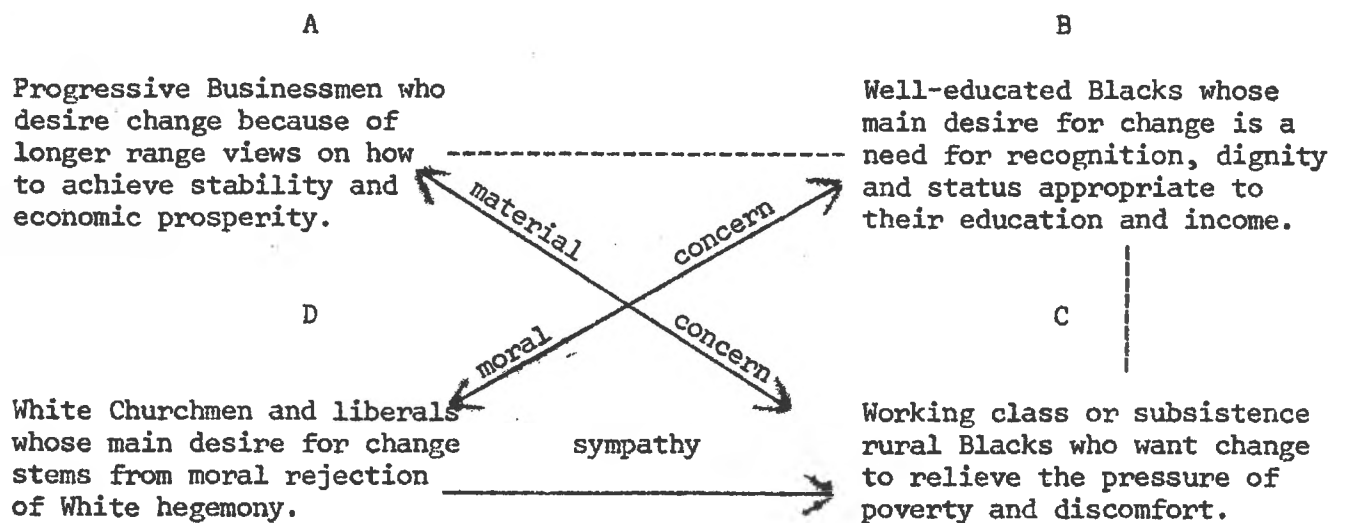
NOTE: at a different level not easily accommodated in the scheme above is a position emerging at the PFP centre which emphasises longer-range strategic analysis as a means of encouraging change.

Black Consciousness organisations have not been specifically located in the scheme above because no typical strategy position seems to have emerged for them. They are distributed among the range of positions above, but mainly in the 5th, 6th and 7th positions.

The broad range of differences outlined in Diagram II should give some idea of the underlying reasons why different strategies are adopted by groups whose ultimate desires or goals may be very similar. Strategies can divide political actors almost as much as divergent goals. These basic differences in concepts of change and the resultant strategies are of obvious significance in dialogue and debate in a situation of political conflict. One example that springs readily to mind is the strain which exists between two significant black labour groupings: Fosatu on the one hand, and the Black Workers' Consultative Committee, on the other.

3) Differing Needs for Change

The particular quality of the motives for change can subtly influence the stances and attitudes of various participants in the change process to such an extent that they come to distrust or feel uneasy with one another. For example, one may think of four groups, all desiring change quite fervently, who are likely to find their differing motives a stumbling block to effective dialogue. Let us depict the four groups as follows:



It is possible that, despite conflicts of interests, there might be easier communication between A and C than between A and D or even perhaps between A and B or B and C. At the conference which launched the Urban Foundation, held in Johannesburg in December 1976, only one of the many urban Black spokesmen and women present pleaded the cause of the migrant workers living in hostels in Soweto. The author found this lack of expressed concern very suggestive.

4) Sensitivity to Constraints on Change

An even more significant cause of basic differences in political outlook can be the awareness of how difficult change may be or the consequences of too abrupt a process of change. For example, it is impossible to be a revolutionary if one realistically assesses the capability which five million well-organised Whites have of mounting a counter-revolution which would rip the 'new' society asunder. The listing given in Diagram III is a tentative scale of typical perceptions of constraints to change, in rough order of the difficulty of achieving change.

Those who hold views on the constraints on change similar to the top two positions, for example, will tend to accept either partition or a form of separate development as solutions or at best argue for the impossibility of anything more than autonomous states in a confederacy. Change towards a unitary state democracy will be seen as very difficult indeed. Position number 3 will suggest that 'real' change, if it is to occur, requires the forbidding task of mounting a political and economic revolution. People holding views similar to 4 or 6 will see the pace of change as determined by the rate of economic development or by the outcome of a ruthless conflict over material privileges. Those whose view of the constraint is that outlined in position 5 could adopt a variety of strategies (some of which may be revolutionary or violent) but always realising that change will be difficult. Views 7 and 8 will tend to encourage a strategy of slow, steady organisation, mobilisation and political education of Blacks. Positions 9 and 10 might be associated with economic growth and socio-economic development as views of the change process; here again requiring time, hard work and patience.

From position 11 down to 15, notions of the type of strategy required will tend to be facile and superficial. Those who have endured undergraduate campus politics will be familiar with some of the stances. An unrewarded implicit faith will tend to be placed on simple policy-based solutions, or on the possibility of rather sudden moral shifts. The view that the system of White domination is a fragile structure teetering on the brink of collapse is probably associated with positions 12 and 13. Those whose views on the constraining features are close to 11, 14 or 15 will place great reliance on protest politics and often will believe that sooner or later Whites will "come to their senses" or "shake off their complacency".

In ways indicated above, the popular wisdom on the change process

DIAGRAM IIIPERCEIVED CONSTRAINTS ON CHANGE

<u>More Difficult</u>	<u>Nature of Perceived Constraints:</u>
Change seen to be Complex or requiring a long time.	1.0 South Africa seen as Microcosm of Western Nation-Third World conflict with Apartheid an equivalent of immigration controls, etc.
	2.0 A White/Afrikaner Nationalism and National entity that requires its own 'territory' and political order.
	3.0 Inherent nature of Capitalist system which exploits racism in order to survive.
	4.0 White occupational, life-style and material interests.
	5.0 White hostility and prejudice of a deep-seated, emotional or irrational kind.
	6.0 Scarce resources and lack of material pre-requisites for democracy — barriers between developed and less-developed sectors erected on the basis of race (i.e. O'Dowd thesis that growth will facilitate change).
	7.0 Black disorganisation and lack of unity.
	8.0 Black apathy and conditioned compliance — system is so entrenched that it demoralises.
	9.0 White parochialism, traditional attitudes and group concern which will change with 'modernisation'.
	10.0 Black values and culture which will change with 'modernisation' and have changed already.
	11.0 Education and skills disadvantage of Blacks which is readily solved by new policies.
	12.0 Black leaderlessness — given direction Blacks will overwhelm the system.
	13.0 White power ' <u>bluff</u> ' — small numbers of Whites will give in very quickly to Black pressure when it occurs.
<u>Less Difficult:</u>	14.0 Habit and precedent that determined leadership and new policies will alter quickly.
View of Change as being possible in a relatively short time.	15.0 Whites seen as resisting change because of mis-perception or misunderstanding of Blacks, i.e. simple communication and contact required.

can divide people just as much as differences in ideals. Naturally, there is often a close relationship between political ideals and views of the change process. Because the two dimensions can reinforce each other one often encounters very rigid stances in South Africa. If, for example, one is attracted to a separate development position and you believe that change towards any other system is well-nigh impossible then you will be very doctrinaire in rejecting any other strategies as being dangerous, misdirected and unrealistic. Similarly, if one is wedded to the idea of a non-racial unitary democracy and you believe that all that prevents its realisation is an absurd misperception of Blacks by Whites which can be corrected by contact and communication, then you are likely to be an unwavering and hopeful 'liberal protester'. Sometimes, however, people can have the same goals but hate each other for their strategies. Is this perhaps the difference between Chief Buthelezi and many of his detractors?

5) What is there to Talk about?

Dialogue in South Africa is difficult. The presentation given above has been offered with the one intention of encouraging some sense of relativity and discouraging simple "them and us" views that make dialogue so difficult.

It is hoped, however, that it will also make people involved in dialogue realise that is is not enough to talk about end goals. It is equally, if not more important, to talk about strategies. Strategic discussion may surprise participants in that two groups with completely divergent end-goals may find that what they expect and would like to work for in the first instance may not be too far apart.

There may even be a wider purpose to be served in talking about intermediate or transitional goals and strategies. South Africa is an incongruous society in many ways. Few people would deny that:

the majority of Blacks are deeply discontented;
 that Black-White inequality is very large;
 that most Black opinion-leaders reject the system totally; and
 that change and reform at present is slow and uneven.

Yet, South Africa is also:

internally more stable from year to year than most Third World countries;
 and not marked by brutal coercion of a blanket kind (it is rather coercion of a limited and strategic kind).

This contrast tends to have certain effects. Whites are easily lulled into believing that no particular urgency in change and reform is required. The absence of viable ongoing political activity among Blacks (with certain exceptions like Inkatha) may be causing Blacks who strongly feel the need to be active in seeking change to see no scope in any public internal political programme but to be inclined towards underground or externally-based activities. Neither orientation is likely to facilitate a peaceful resolution of our conflicts. Limited, restrained open 'conflict' can be very creative — indeed it is one of the ways in which social systems adjust to changing needs and priorities.

Let me give one example. Three homelands have taken independence. Research and the utterances of urban Black spokesmen show that overwhelming majorities of Blacks living outside the homelands in question were implacably opposed to these moves. Yet, there was no attempt in the urban townships to attempt what could have been very peaceful, very 'respectable' and very restrained demonstrations of opposition to the moves towards independence. No mass petitions were signed, no opinion research was commissioned, no deputations were sent to the homeland leaders and very few people bothered to vote against the independence parties in pre-independence elections. I know what the rejoinder to these points could be: protests would not have prevented the independence, public opposition would have been risky; the 'dice was loaded'. I accept these replies but I also know that one cannot blame many supporters of the White government for thinking that those opposing independence were small, unrepresentative minorities.

On the White side, there is ample evidence that 50% or more of government-supporting White voters see no point in the severe brakes on reform resulting from right-wing, or ultra-conservative lobbies. They too are unorganised, apathetic, defeatist and unimaginative in their strategies.

If one believes that change is necessary in South Africa and that it must be peaceful, then one must try to become clear about means and possibilities for the short to medium term. Speculating about ultimate revolution is a terrifying form of political masturbation. One need only think of Zimbabwe. After the loss of thousands of lives and the apparent collapse of Smith, General Walls still holds one very important trump card — he can control the cities at will (one even hears a rumour that at least one of the Patriotic Front leaders has tried to do a deal with him). Whites who want peaceful change should also realise that they must do something to encourage (or support) the

government to act with courage. For five years now the government has been tinkering with constitutional change in a way which raises expectations without producing hope and confidence, thereby jeopardising internal stability.

Peaceful change requires intelligent commitment to problems of transition rather than being solely concerned about trying to convert others to end goals which could be submerged by the tide of history. Solutions depend on selling achievable objectives and on the quality of strategies to reach them. This is what dialogue should be about.



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