

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



## PW & Pinochet

The Dictatorial Roots of Neo-liberal Democracy in  
South Africa and Chile

Michael Schmidt

Michael Schmidt

PW & Pinochet

The Dictatorial Roots of Neo-liberal Democracy in South  
Africa and Chile

June 29, 2009

Retrieved on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2021 from [anarkismo.net](http://anarkismo.net)

This article was written by Michael Schmidt, Zabalaza  
Anarchist Communist Front, South Africa, especially for the  
journal *Hombre y Sociedad*, which was established in Santiago,  
Chile, in 1985. It was kindly proof-read by José Antonio  
Gutierrez Dantón, “Hombre y Sociedad” editor 1997–2003,  
and co-founder of the Frente de Estudiantes Libertarios (FEL)  
and in 1999 of the Congreso de Unificación  
Anarco-Comunista (CUAC), which led to the establishment of  
today’s Organización Comunista Libertaria (OCL), Chile.

[usa.anarchistlibraries.net](http://usa.anarchistlibraries.net)

June 29, 2009



homes for the black poor according to apartheid geography – on the other side of the railway tracks from the goods, services, jobs and amenities of the old white suburbs where a few fortunate blacks were able to settle.

Perhaps the last word should go to right-wing General Constand Viljoen, whose reputation as a “soldiers’ soldier” allowed him to shelve advanced plans for an anti-ANC armed putsch on the very eve of democracy in 1994, enabling the ANC to take the reins of power relatively smoothly. In a telephonic interview with the now-retired general in 2007, Viljoen expressed, in echo of Pinochet congratulating his supporters with the words “mission accomplished,” that he was happy “communism” had not triumphed in South Africa.

PW and Pinochet died within days of each other in 2006, PW on October 31 and Pinochet on December 10<sup>22</sup>. Neither dictator was ever under real threat of being brought to trial and both died content that, in Pinochet’s words to his troops, their anti-communist mission had been accomplished and their right-wing neoliberal reforms entrenched in their country’s new, qualified democracies.

---

<sup>22</sup> Read my obituary Ghost of PW haunts George, Michael Schmidt, Sunday Argus, Cape Town (November 5, 2006), online at: [www.anarkismo.net](http://www.anarkismo.net) PW certainly did not like me very much because I repeatedly exhumed the skeletons in his closet: the last time I phoned him at home in retirement, he was outraged that I compared his luxury lifestyle in his multi-million-rand mansion De Anker to those of the poor coloureds living on the other side of the lagoon at Wilderness. For a more standard obituary, read [www.sahistory.org.za](http://www.sahistory.org.za)

## Contents

THE RACIAL-COLONIAL ORIGINS OF THE TWO STATES: GENOCIDE, THE ELITES & THEIR IMPERIAL RELATIONS . . . . .	6
THE RISE OF ANTI-COMMUNISM: THE FASCIST AFFINITIES OF THE DICTATORS . . . . .	9
DICTATORSHIP AS THE CRECHE OF NEOLIBERALISM: RESISTANCE & THE RATIONALE BEHIND REFORMS . . . . .	16
THE PSEUDO-DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA: THE FORCES THAT “GUIDED” TRANSITION . . . . .	19
AFTERMATH: SHOW-TRIALS AND THE VEXED QUESTION OF RECONCILIATION OR JUSTICE?	24
CONCLUSION: THE LEFT’S RESCUE OF THE RIGHT-WING CAPITALIST PROJECT . . . . .	27

Left that Mandela has not been condemned to pariah status for his venality. He who pays the piper calls the tune.

In South Africa, in the final analysis, the National Party itself initiated the reforms that led directly to the end of apartheid, a system that had to end for economic more than social reasons. This is not to argue that the transition was uncontested: roughly 2,000 people died every year between 1990 and 1994 in political violence, largely between black communities – large-scale massacres and assassinations, much of it provoked by proxy forces like the IFP in Zululand and the Witdoeke in the Cape, or secret “Third Force” death squads armed by the state.

These “armed negotiations,” fought by the white and black nationalists over the corpses of the people, may have seen the NP’s hoped-for “sunset clause” on special protections for whites evaporate, but by the time they handed over power in 1994, the main structural elements of grand apartheid remained unchanged: well into the new millennium, ANC-controlled municipalities would continue to build matchbox

---

In 1995 Mandela admitted that Indonesia had given financial support to the ANC. José Ramos Horta, “Mandela must take a stand on East Timor,” *Sunday Independent*, (Johannesburg), May 10, 1998; “Gaffes almost sink Mandela’s peace initiative,” *SouthScan*, vol.12, no.28 (August 8, 1997); Stefaans Brümmer, “Mandela’s strange links to human rights abuser,” *Mail and Guardian*, (Johannesburg), May 26, 1995, and Gaye Davis, “Mandela placates East Timorese from his bed,” *Mail and Guardian*, (Johannesburg), September 20, 1996. Another link is at *PoliticsWeb*: [www.politicsweb.co.za](http://www.politicsweb.co.za) Two of the ANC’s biggest donors, in the 1990s, were Colonel Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and President Suharto of Indonesia. Not only did Mandela refrain from criticising their lamentable human rights records but he interceded diplomatically on their behalf, and awarded them South Africa’s highest honour. Suharto was awarded a state visit, a 21-gun salute, and The Order of Good Hope (gold class). In April 1999 Mandela acknowledged to an audience in Johannesburg that Suharto had given the ANC a total of 60 million dollars. An initial donation of 50 million dollars had been followed up by a further 10 million. The *Telegraph* (London) reported that Gaddafi was known to have given the ANC well over ten million dollars. Here’s a Reuters photograph of the event: [www.daylife.com](http://www.daylife.com)

Renovation Party to win a seat at the neoliberal feast: a sorry end to even Allende's compromised vision if ever there was.

One bizarre project demonstrating the ANC's deep involvement with the right-wing was the 1996 Mosagrius Agreement signed between Mandela and Mozambique's Joaquim Chissano in which white right-wing South African farmers would be allowed to expropriate black peasants in Mozambique, much in the manner the British had forced the Zulus into penury as labour tenants by enclosing their land in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>20</sup>.

What precipitated this remarkable rightward shift? Well, the ANC was directly funded by some exceptionally shady sources: in 1990, the notoriously corrupt Saudi dictator King Fahd donated \$50-million; in 1994 and 1995, Nigerian dictator General Sani Abacha, responsible for repression against the anarcho-syndicalist Awareness League and the judicial murder of writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, donated £2,6-million and \$50-million respectively; and worst of all, Indonesian neo-fascist dictator Mohammed Suharto, responsible for the bloody pogrom that resulted in the murder of well over 1-million communists, Chinese and other people, donated \$60-million, for which services, Mandela awarded him our country's highest honour, the Star of Good Hope, in 1997<sup>21</sup>. It says much about the international

---

<sup>20</sup> For a critique of Mosagrius, read *Exporting Apartheid to Sub-Saharan Africa*, by Michel Chossudovsky, Ottawa (1996), online at: [www.hartford-hwp.com](http://www.hartford-hwp.com) Also, read *The ANC and the South African White Right in Mozambique*, Michael Schmidt, *Workers' Solidarity*, Johannesburg (1998), online at: [flag.blackened.net](http://flag.blackened.net)

<sup>21</sup> For more detail on Mandela awarding the Star of Good Hope to Suharto is the following, from Human Rights Watch's 2000 report on South Africa [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org) For an overview of political party funding in South Africa, go to: "Mandela will sell arms to Indonesia 'without hesitation'" *Electronic Mail and Guardian*, [www.mg.co.za/news](http://www.mg.co.za/news), July 15, 1997. On the same occasion, Mandela visited imprisoned East Timorese resistance leader Xanana Gusmão, marking the first time that Xanana, imprisoned since 1992, had been allowed out of detention to meet a visiting dignitary. The visit thus helped give an enhanced international profile to Xanana's plight. In November 1997, however, Mandela conferred to Suharto the Order of Good Hope.

In June 2009, one of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet's most renowned accusers, Judge Juan Salvador Guzmán Tapia, visited South Africa on a speaking tour. Dean of the Law School at the Universidad Central de Chile in Santiago, and also a lecturer in human rights at the School of Journalism at the Universidad de la República, Guzmán was originally a Pinochet supporter, but turned against him after being selected by judicial lottery in 1998 to hear the 186 criminal charges against the man who, until his death in 2006, cast such long shadows over Chilean political life.

For those Chileans who took to the streets of their poblaciones in the early 1970s and mid-1980s to demand the release from Robben Island of Nelson Mandela and for an end to the apartheid regime in South Africa, the rightward shift of the African National Congress (ANC) with its embrace of anti-working-class neoliberalism is likely to be confusing. How did the world's most celebrated new democracy come to be marred by ongoing violent protests by the poor against "their" government, faced down by police as bloody-minded as before, by continued housing evictions and mass forced removals so evocative of the depths of apartheid<sup>1</sup>? This analysis shall attempt to explain the trajectory of South African "democracy" and the failure of the "South African Revolution" by comparison to the Chilean experience of the popular overwhelming of Pinochetist reaction – in which the

---

<sup>1</sup> According to the Freedom of Expression Institute, there were 11,000 protests in South Africa in 2006 alone, while a report by the University of the Free State classed 30 of these revolts, often against a lack of municipal service delivery, housing evictions and water and electricity cut-offs, as "serious," involving violence, burning barricades and sometimes loss of life at police or vigilante hands. The FXI's website is at: [www.fxj.org.za](http://www.fxj.org.za) See *Democracy's burning issue*, Michael Schmidt, *Saturday Star*, Johannesburg (May 28, 2005) in which I note that the both the intelligence community at its National Security Conference and the radical social movements agreed that the existence of a permanent underclass remained the biggest threat to the new bourgeois order.

Left found itself fundamentally defeated, even as it attained its cherished victory.

## **THE RACIAL-COLONIAL ORIGINS OF THE TWO STATES: GENOCIDE, THE ELITES & THEIR IMPERIAL RELATIONS**

The southernmost countries of the South American and African continents were wild frontiers, both forged by bloody race-war, Chile from 1541 and South Africa a century later from 1652. Despite incidents of multiracial resistance to colonial rule (by Khoekhoen and Malay slaves and Irish sailors together, for instance), and of fraternisation and intermarriage between Europeans and Xhosas during the Frontier Wars, racial domination set the tone for the South African colony's (mal)development: I'm sure similar processes occurred during Chile's Indian Wars. Chile gained independence from Spain in 1818, but South Africa only nominally in 1910, and then still under the aegis of British imperialism. With a thin veneer of respectability coating the naked rule by force of a tiny elite, by the 1980s, both Chile and South Africa had descended into military dictatorships, redoubts of anti-communism whose guns were trained inwards on their own people.

The origins of the parallel – and mutually respectful – dictatorships of Augusto Pinochet Ugarte and of Pieter Willem Botha (better known simply as “PW”) lay in diverse concerns, however. For Pinochet, Salvador Allende had unintentionally opened a Pandora's Box of working-class self-management with his electoral road to socialism, behind which the paranoid reaction discerned the hand of Moscow. For PW as he was known, there was an equal concern with “communist” expansionism, but unlike Chile where the proud and combative Mapuche (who had once made Chile for the Conquistadors “the Spanish cemetery”) had been reduced to a minority of

## **CONCLUSION: THE LEFT'S RESCUE OF THE RIGHT-WING CAPITALIST PROJECT**

It has been forgotten by all but a few that an almost carbon copy of PW's reformist housing policy that saw the townships rise in revolt in the 1980s was reintroduced as the housing policy of communist Housing Minister Joe Slovo in the 1990s. The basic concept of undercutting black demands for self-governance by nominal economic concessions – designed to draw the black majority into the market, under increasingly lean neoliberalism and privatisation – remained the same. Slovo's sugar-coated poisoned pill would become the hallmark of ANC governance into the 1990s and 2000s, the harbinger of bitter things the working class, peasantry and poor were forced to swallow.

Cultivated by PW, then FW de Klerk and the old military-racial-corporate establishment and backed by Washington and London, the ANC subtly renounced socialism, with Mandela's early 1990s demand for the nationalisation of industries replaced in the late 1990s with a call for privatisation instead. In government, its moderate socialist Reconstruction and Development Programme was swiftly supplanted by the neoliberal Growth, Employment And Redistribution (Gear) programme in 1996<sup>19</sup>. Likewise, in Chile, the “transition” was marked by the entry of Allende's denatured, disembowelled old Socialist Party into the centrist Concertación alliance which then, cap in hand, flirted with Pinochet and the right-wing National

---

<sup>19</sup> For a comprehensive overview of how the right wing's neoliberal agenda was rescued by the ANC, read *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa*, Patrick Bond, UKZN Press, Durban (2005). Also read *Gear versus Social Security* by Lucien van der Walt, *South African Labour Bulletin*, Volume 4 Number 23, Johannesburg (June 2000), online at: [web.wits.ac.za](http://web.wits.ac.za)

rankers of the old regime who were hung out to dry for the sins of the dictatorships they had served (Stark's superior officer was only tried and convicted because he had committed an act of terrorism on US soil, while the South African generals were all acquitted with Basson remaining in state employ – and sweeping amnesties for hundreds of killers left both Chilean and South African victims embittered).

Neither leader ever distanced themselves publicly from sacrificial lambs of this sort, which ensured they were ringed about by a hard core of loyal defenders. That some of those defenders, however, should be drawn from the ranks of the opposition surprised many – but should not have. In Chile, the Concertación's first successful post-dictatorship president, in 1989, was Patricio Alwyn, who had backed the Pinochet coup in 1973. His contribution to the secret transition was an unspoken pact not to prosecute Pinochet and his coterie – and the circumscribed Truth Commission which ignored the fate of the tortured, detained and exiled, hinting that the coup was inevitable (and thus justifiable). Alwyn's successor Eduardo Frei did his best to ensure the military and the right-wing remained untouched.

The entrenched strength of the Chilean right made compromise by the new government in favour of neoliberal transformation, perhaps, inevitable. It cannot be said, however, that in South Africa, where de Klerk's NP was forced by the overwhelming ANC victory in 1994 to enter into a "government of national unity" compromise with the new black elite, that Mandela was purely a creation of the right, or that a similar process of corruption by the former dictatorship occurred (despite the NP trying its damndest). No, in South Africa, the dominance of the ANC under Mandela, initially in seven of nine provinces, and later in all nine, ensured that while the NP had initiated the neoliberal process, it was the ANC itself which took up the torch with steely resolve – and callous disdain for the majority who had been seeking economic as well as paper freedom.

the population under white and mixed-race mestizo rule, in South Africa, the various tribes of the Bantu remained a growing majority, the sheer numerical dominance of which threatened to swamp the white settler elite. José Antonio Gutierrez Dantón says that by comparison, "Chile is not a case of [white] settler-colonialism like South Africa, since 70% of the population is [of] mixed heritage – although settlers did exist and played some important role in Chilean politics (Spanish in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and then British and German in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century). This probably explains the reasons why Chile could have more of a democratic space than South Africa for most of its history".

On the origins of the Chilean state, according to Gutierrez Dantón, during the three-century-long Arauco War – a partial corollary of the century-long Xhosa Wars in the Cape – "there was eventually an acceptance by the Spanish of both the border and [of] Mapuche autonomy, when by the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century they realised that the Mapuche were not to be conquered. The real conquest of the Mapuche only happens in 1880, when the Chilean state, already at war with Peru and Bolivia, invaded and occupied Mapuche land which they gave largely to a few German landlords in order to enhance the 'race'." This has some remarkable parallels with the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 in which the British recovered from defeat at Isandlwana to crush the Zulu nation and divided its territory under the stewardship of loyal chieftains, and with the British-expansionist Anglo-Boer Wars of 1880–1881 (won by the Boers) and 1899–1902 (won by the British).

Despite Chile's chequered experience with bourgeois democracy, scarred as it was by the dictatorships of Carlos "Paco" Ibáñez del Campo and Gabriel González Videla, Allende had been popularly elected. In South Africa, however, there had never been any semblance of majoritarian democracy – precisely because of the race question. Whereas the settlers had once shot out as "vermin," almost to extinction, the

indigenous population of the Khoekhoen and Bushmen (as they prefer to call themselves), white settlement encountered waves of Xhosa resistance and it took an outside force, imperial Britain, to subdue the militaristic Zulu nation.

Imperial Britain, the friend of the Chilean elite, many of whom still consider themselves the Britons of South America, was no friend to the South African elite, however: its concentration camp and scorched-earth policy during the Second Anglo-Boer War deeply marked the drive towards Afrikaner self-determination that would give the South African situation its unique character. First among African countries in terms of the mining-based infrastructure that drove higher levels of white settlement than anywhere else in the continent including Algeria, South Africa remains alone among the countries of Africa in the post-liberation period for having retained its white population. The reason is simple: they largely view themselves as African, not European<sup>2</sup>.

So the elites' reason to resort to dictatorship varied: backed by Britain, the Chilean ruling class tackled the spectre of Cold War statist "communism" as an internal ideological enemy; self-isolated from Britain, the South African ruling class tackled "communism" as an internal racial enemy. Both enemies were largely working-class, however.

But though the coming into being of Pinochet's and PW's dictatorships in 1973 and 1984 respectively has been amply documented by the Left, there has been little comparative analysis of how and why these dictatorships managed their own "transition to democracy" – and it is here that the similarities between the Chilean and South African experiences are striking. For if war is the pursuit of politics by other means, so too, these ex-

---

<sup>2</sup> For a great overview of white settlement in Africa and the exceptional case of the white South Africans, read *The White Africans: from Colonisation to Liberation* by Gerald L'Ange, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg & Cape Town (2005).

Basson revealed the most notorious series of such death flights.

According to the testimony of Colonel Johan Jurgens Theron – accepted as genuine by the trial judge – captured Swapo guerrillas were flown, naked and bound, from a remote airstrip to a location about 100 nautical miles off the Skeleton Coast, where they were dumped into the ocean from an altitude of about 3,6km. The indictment against Basson, accused of supplying the drugs to dope the victims, cited only 24 death flights between July 1979 and December 1987 (I have eyewitness evidence that Basson was involved in drugging Zimbabwean detainees who were then thrown from an aircraft over Mozambique as early as 1978, a charge he denies). Theron admitted the total number of disappeared "must have been hundreds": the indictment cites a rough total of 200 disappeared in this fashion<sup>18</sup>.

In 1999, in a twist of justice, Basson was cleared of the Swapo mass murder on the grounds that a blanket amnesty had been granted to all South African security forces operating in South-West Africa just prior to it gaining independence in 1990 (an event used by the NP as a test case for a smooth transition to black majority rule). In Chile, similarly, an amnesty law passed in 1978 when conditions in that country were starting to change, exempted from prosecution security forces who had committed human rights violations between 1973 and 1978, covering the deadliest period of the dictatorship.

South Africa had its torture centres like Vlakplaas south of Pretoria, just as Chile had its Villa Grimaldi, and its version of Sergio Arellano Stark's "Caravan of Death" which swept the Chilean countryside summarily executing opponents of the regime were the Vlakplaas death-squads of Eugene de Kock. And in both countries it was only these few relative middle-

---

<sup>18</sup> No final solution to SA's worst war crime, Michael Schmidt, Saturday Star, Johannesburg (February 26, 2005).



attempts in Chile to sponsor the moderates to the exclusion of more radical options as change in the regime gradually became a given.

## **AFTERMATH: SHOW-TRIALS AND THE VEXED QUESTION OF RECONCILIATION OR JUSTICE?**

The crimes committed by the two dictatorships are well-documented, in part because of the constant monitoring of their internal situations by international human rights groups (Amnesty International having been founded in 1961), and because both countries ran inquiries into their pasts: the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Chile (1990–1991) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa (1995–2003). Both commissions were deeply compromised by political horse-trading including the endorsing of significant blanket amnesties to perpetrators of human rights violations, and it is probably accurate to say the Afrikaner nationalists were encouraged by the success of the Chilean right-wing in covering up their crimes to embark on their own exercise in telling the “truth”.

In the case of Chile’s commission, the initial figure of 2,025 dead and “disappeared” was revised upwards after further investigation in 1996 to 3,197. Roughly 4,000 were killed in South Africa during the states of emergency from 1985–1990 (an exact figure is impossible to ascertain, in part because many of the killings were black-on-black and irregularly recorded). Certain experiences of repression were similar in both countries, notably the practice (carried out in Argentina under the Galtieri dictatorship also) of dropping dissidents to their deaths from aircraft into the ocean. In South Africa, the trial of former chemical warfare chief Brigadier Wouter

periences have shown, is politics the pursuit of (class) war by other means.

## **THE RISE OF ANTI-COMMUNISM: THE FASCIST AFFINITIES OF THE DICTATORS**

In both countries, racial ascendancy was ritualised in national celebrations: the Day of the Vow on December 16 in South Africa (which recalls the Battle of Blood River defeat of a superior Zulu force by the Boers); and the Day of the [Hispanic] Race on October 12 in Chile and by “all of the Hispanophile elites in Latin America,” in Gutierrez Dantón’s words. The comparison of how this attitude was worked out in terms of sheer brutality is telling: under both Pinochet and PW, several thousand opponents of their regimes were murdered or “disappeared”. For us South Africans, PW was “our Pinochet” (not “our Hitler” as claimed by the Johannesburg-based Sunday Times after PW’s death: far too extreme a comparison which denatures the Holocaust in which 15-million were put to death).

Neither dictatorship was explicitly neo-Nazi, but both PW and Pinochet had clear Nazi sympathies in their early days, an affinity that, combined with their natural narrow-minded militaristic views of the world, left a visible brown stain on their periods of rule while distinct neo-Nazi elements linked to their ruling cliques attempted to push their regimes in a more distinctly fascist direction: the Patria y Libertad group in Chile; the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) in South Africa.

Both countries had seen their working classes brutally disciplined in the early 1900s: the 1907 Santa María de Iquique Massacre of up to 3,600 striking nitrate workers and their families in Chile at the hands of the army; and the 1922 Rand Revolt which saw the first use of aircraft to bomb civilian ar-

was in peace-time and left more than 200 dead. And yet Chile was in the 1920s-1940s a stronghold of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), which survived until it merged with other syndicalist forces in 1951, and in similar vein in South Africa in 1917, syndicalists of all races had founded the first black union in British colonial Africa, the Industrial Workers of Africa (IWA) along IWW lines<sup>3</sup>. In 1920, many of the IWA's militants founded a libertarian-syndicalist Communist Party of South Africa, the first such "party" on the African continent which advocated the Chicago IWW's anti-electoral, direct action politics. It was challenged the following year by a Leninist party by the same name, and changed its name to the Communist League (this process was not unique: libertarian-syndicalist "communist parties" were also founded in France and Brazil prior to the founding of their Leninist competitors). The Soviet state-sanctioned CPSA initially included in its ranks only one black militant, the syndicalist Thomas William "TW" Thibedi (later purged as a Trotskyist) but in 1928, it adopted the two-stage "native republic" line forced on it by the Comintern which stressed a "national democratic revolution" in a cross-class alliance with the blacks-only ANC before socialism could

---

<sup>3</sup> For the libertarian/syndicalist origins of the South African left and the country's first black, coloured and Indian trade unions, read "Bakunin's Heirs in South Africa: race, class and revolutionary syndicalism from the IWW to the International Socialist League, 1910-1921," *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, volume 30, number 1, by Lucien van der Walt (2004). Notably, these unions were built by militants of all colours.

oligarch Carlos Caceres appointed by Pinochet as Interior Minister in charge of the talks.

In South Africa, the trajectory of secret talks was: first the spies, then the businessmen, then the commissars, then the intellectuals, then the politicians. Both sides of the nationalist war were running death-squads by this stage and engaging in outright torture and terrorism aimed at the civilian population<sup>16</sup>. There was never any popular forum of discussion, not even when the open negotiations process began in 1991: after all, the ANC had unilaterally, anti-democratically forced the disbandment of the UDF in March 1991 to prevent the grassroots challenging its elitist conception of power (an illegitimate move given that the UDF was not an entirely ANC formation).

In such conditions, South Africa's transition to democracy was doomed to be tainted by dubious agendas. One of the strangest involves Operation Vula, the SACP's plan to insert underground leadership into the country which was exposed in July 1990, with a range of arrests including that of leading communist Mac Maharaj who, a US spy claimed (repeated with caution in a classified US Embassy signal from Pretoria to Washington DC), told him the fall-back plan of Operation Vula was to assassinate Mandela to provoke a "national insurrection"<sup>17</sup>. The signal makes it clear that ambassador Bill Swing was aware the state was trying to drive a wedge between the ANC and the communists, a position that reflected the US

---

<sup>16</sup> For a timeline of the secret negotiations in South Africa in the 1980s, go to: [www.sahistory.org.za](http://www.sahistory.org.za)

<sup>17</sup> Madiba 'death plot' revealed, Michael Schmidt, *Saturday Star*, Johannesburg (June 11, 2005). The declassified signal was dated July 26, 1990, from Ambassador Bill Swing at the US Embassy in Pretoria to Secretary of State James Baker III at the US State Department in Washington. Maharaj said the claim was government disinformation intended to drive a wedge between the ANC and the SACP, something Swing, in the signal, considered plausible. Swing claimed not to remember sending the signal when I interviewed him, however.

Three months later, Pieter de Lange, leader of the Broederbond, the secret Afrikaner power-clique that steered grand apartheid strategy, having met with the ANC's Thabo Mbeki in New York, was urging PW to negotiate with the ANC. The hard realities laid out by de Lange to PW are believed to have centred on saving the economy: ending the damage caused to the economy by isolation and sanctions; growing the manufacturing skills base by dropping the colour-bar which deliberately underskilled black workers; and growing the domestic market by paying black workers well enough for them to afford housing bonds and luxury consumer goods. In Senegal in 1987, 61 Afrikaner intellectuals, led by liberal Progressive Federal Party leader Frederick van Zyl Slabbert met 17 ANC members led by Mbeki, and on 5 July 1989, PW met Mandela (then still a prisoner) in secret talks.

PW suffered a stroke in 1989 and by the end of the year had been supplanted in a palace coup by FW de Klerk who accelerated the secret negotiations process. While Pinochet clung to power in name, he too was outmanoeuvred by another faction within his own military in 1988 after he lost the plebiscite and wanted to impose a by-then unpalatable state of emergency.

I'm not privy to the secret negotiations process in Chile (for surely, secret talks like the 1998 pact between Pinochet and the conservative Christian Democrat Andres Zaldivar preceded open ones)<sup>15</sup>, but what is clear is that the first major round of talks was between the centrist Concertación, the right wing and the military, with the Left out in the cold, and outright ne-

---

<sup>15</sup> Gutierrez Dantón says: "The pact you mention between Pinochet and Zaldivar in 1998 has to be put in context (for it is not directly linked to the 1985–1986 secret dealings for the transition to democracy). At that stage both the Concertación and the right wing wanted to bridge the useless divide put [up] by the 11<sup>th</sup> of September (useless for their purposes), so they decided to eliminate the national holidays that ended up in protest anyway, and declared it a sham day of national unity," much like how Boer-supremacist Day of the Vow in South Africa was recast by the ANC-NP government of national unity as the Day of Reconciliation.

be implemented<sup>4</sup>. This compromise would have far-reaching and damaging implications for the liberation movements.

In South Africa, as in Chile with its putschist Vanguardia Obrera Nacionalista, (Nationalist Workers' Vanguard) a range of fascist-styled movements arose in the 1930s, primarily among Afrikaners and among the German population in South African controlled South-West Africa, notably the Ossewabrandwag (Oxwagon Sentries), Grey Shirts, and the New Order, which supported Nazi Germany during the war, but which tended to prefer home-grown fascist "Christian nationalism" to outright Nazism. Many of these fascists were interned in camps during the war because South Africa joined the Allies, and this experience (which to their mind recalled the British concentration camps of their grandfathers' day), confirmed in some nationalist Afrikaner leaders their far-right politics. Many Italian Fascist prisoners, detained in South Africa and released after the war, elected to stay in the country, swelling the ranks of the white right (as would occur again with Salazarist Portuguese fleeing Angola and Mozambique in 1975). Within two years of coming to power in 1948 (first Prime Minister Daniel Malan had a few years earlier told parliament that national socialism was the wave of the future), the National Party (NP) had outlawed the CPSA, reserving

---

<sup>4</sup> Those who believe in the ANC's anti-racist credentials conveniently forget that from its origins as the South African Native National Congress in 1912, the ANC was a racial-exclusivist organisation, only deracialising fully 73 years later on 25 June 1985 when it finally opened its ruling National Executive Committee to all races. Segregationist repression cannot fully explain this: after all, the anarchist and syndicalist movement was and remains multiracial while legislation outlawing multiracial political parties was only introduced in 1968. The fact that a simplified form of race-classification remains in place today (applied even to children born after 1994), is sure to sow dragons' teeth for the ANC in future, regardless of the fact the government uses race to track transformation. Notably missing from the four official racial categories of white, coloured, Asian and black is any for indigenous peoples like the self-described Bushmen (who consider themselves "yellow" people).

for themselves the right to ban and restrict all opponents as “communist”.

The frost of the Cold War set in and South Africa was firmly in the anti-communist camp, becoming a key London and Washington ally thanks largely to its reactionary strategic alliances – including Pinochetist Chile – to its mineral resources and to its strategic position straddling the Indian-Atlantic shipping lanes. In the same period in Chile, the 1950s, Ibáñez was back in the saddle, and his support for the military enabled the unimaginative Pinochet to climb through the ranks (although let us not forget the near-victory of 1956 when the syndicalist-dominated Chilean Workers’ Central which had absorbed the old IWW was offered power by a frightened Ibáñez – only for the nascent revolution to be undercut by Chilean Communist Party capitulation. This stillborn revolution for the people must have scared Pinochet no end)<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> In 1983, the Coordinadora Libertaria Latino-Americana recalled the stillborn revolution so, starting in 1953 when the anarcho-syndicalist General Confederation of Workers (CGT), which had been founded in 1931 and which absorbed the Chilean IWW in 1951, united with the communist and the socialist factions of the Confederation of Chilean Workers (CTCH): “in February the Chilean Workers’ Central (CUT) is born. The National Committee consists of Clotario Blest (President – an independent left-wing Christian), Baudilio Cazanova and Isodoro Godoy (Socialists), and Juan Vargas Puebla (a Communist). The National Council of the CUT consists of two Christian Democrats (a reformist Church-supported party), seven Socialists, a Phalangist, a Communist and four anarcho-syndicalists (Ernesto Miranda, Ramon Dominguez, Hector Duran and Celso Poblete). The unification of the labour movement is followed by a period of unity and action. Manual workers, intellectuals, campesinos [peasants], students and professional workers join up with the CUT. The workers are developing a consensus towards a confrontation with the bosses and the State. This is reflected in a 15-point program drawn up by the National Council. The CUT develops a campaign of partial work stoppages, preparing for a general strike. The workers are demanding changes that are social and political as well as economic. 1956: It is in this social climate of rebellion that the national general strike of July 1956 takes place. For 48 hours nothing moves in Chile. Ibáñez threatens to

pared for him by Foreign Affairs Minister Pik Botha (today an ANC member) that would state: “The government is ... abolishing discrimination based on colour and race and is promoting constitutional development with a view to meeting the needs and aspirations of all our communities”. All detainees would have been released.

Instead, Botha gave his notorious hardline “Rubicon” speech and by mid 1985, the apartheid authorities had declared a state of emergency in many districts of the country. In Chile, likewise, by 1984, the reaction saw the detentions without trial, internal exile and the establishment of isolated detention camps. State proxy armed forces – Inkatha’s Self-Protection Units and Chilean Anti-Communist Action spring to mind – emerged in both countries. In South Africa, the state of emergency was extended to the entire country in 1985 and lasted until 1989 (1990 in the province of KwaZulu-Natal), with unprecedentedly violent clashes between residents, workers and the authorities and their proxy forces. This insurgency is well documented but I do need to stress the grassroots nature of the struggle: with hundreds of multipartisan community, youth, labour, political, church, human rights and other organisations working together within the broad UDF and other similar initiatives aimed at the overthrow of apartheid by the masses themselves.

Despite escalating violence, detentions, torture, murders and disappearances, behind the scenes, the forces of white and black nationalists were striking back-room deals, with NP and ANC intelligence operatives meeting in Geneva. In September 1985, a group of white businessmen and newspaper editors led by Anglo-American Corporation chairman Gavin Reilly met the ANC leadership led by president Oliver Tambo at its headquarters in Lusaka. Some aspects of petty apartheid (like the prohibition of mixed marriages) were repealed and by February 1986, the SACP’s Joe Slovo declared the party would accept a negotiated settlement while Pik Botha stated the country could one day have a black president.

of its members were jailed and constituent organisations subsequently outlawed<sup>13</sup>.

This period corresponds to the rise in Chile of the broad Popular Democratic Movement which embraced the Communist Party, Socialist Party, Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR), and human rights groups like the Committee for the Defence of the Rights of the People (Codepu) and May, June and July 1983 saw the first mass protests in Chile against the regime (spurred by economic recession). Between 1983 and late 1986, local community committees were formed in urban areas, and as in South Africa where leftist guerrillas of formations like the ANC/SACP's Umkhonto weSizwe operated in the townships, the Chilean Communist Party-linked Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front guerrillas were active in the poblaciones<sup>14</sup>.

A mass anti-rent and anti-Local Authorities stayaway on 3 September 1984 led to mass dismissals by employers but only served to spread the insurgency into the ranks of the workers. Meanwhile, then Prime Minister PW Botha had in July 1984 ordered Justice Minister Kobie Coetsee to begin secret negotiations with jailed Nelson Mandela. But Mandela's refusal to renounce armed struggle made PW dig in his heels. A year later and by then state president, he rejected a radical speech pre-

---

<sup>13</sup> For a critique on the politics of the UDF, other resistance organisations and the compromises they struck, read *Lessons of Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960–1990*, by Anthony W. Marx, Oxford University Press, New York (1992).

<sup>14</sup> The MIR included Trotskyists and an anarchist component from its founding in 1965 until the anarchists left in 1967. In 1987, the armed wing of the Chilean Communist Party (PCC), the Manuel Rodriguez Popular Front (FPMR), split from the party and went it alone, attracting a new generation of anarchist guerrillas into its ranks. Ironically, the CUAC was founded in 1999 by a core of ex-MIR and other guerrillas and a new generation of militants. In a twist of fate, acting for the Anarchist Black Cross (South Africa), I visited former MIR militant Jaime Yovanovic Prieto – known as Profesor Jota – jailed in South Africa's Modderbee Prison in 2002, prior to his extradition to Chile to face charges of having assassinated the military governor of Santiago. See [www.geocities.com](http://www.geocities.com)

Pinochet, born in 1915, supported Nazi Germany as a youth and in his heavily plagiarised “great work” *Geopolítica* (1968) lauded the “German school of geopolitics” including such thinkers as Karl Haushofer who had contributed the concept of lebensraum to *Mein Kampf*. Born in 1912, PW was an Ossewabrandwag supporter in his youth. South Africa under apartheid was not only in substance a racial state (as with the Nazis), but also in form a Pinochetist-styled military state rather than a Nazi-styled police state. The differences are perhaps subtle to those who suffered, but in all countries the police are designed for internal repression yet are compromised and subornable simply by virtue of living within their communities, whereas the military by profession disdains internal repression (their rationale being external aggression),

---

resign and give the responsibility for running the country to the CUT. However, 70 percent of the leaders of the CUT are of the Marxist parties. Ibáñez calls upon the left-wing parties for a solution to the crisis. The parties of the left ask the leaders of the CUT to call off the general strike. A committee is set up by the CUT, headed by the CUT president, Clotario Blest. When the committee presents a list of demands to the Ibáñez government, Ibáñez demands that the workers return to work before he will respond. With the Communists, Socialists and Radicals supporting this proposal, the general strike is called off. The four anarcho-syndicalists on the National Council protest that the strike should not be called off without first consulting the rank-and-file, but they are overruled. The return to work creates disorientation and demoralization. Having gained nothing, Chilean workers cannot understand why they should return to work. 1957: A new general strike is called, to back up the original demands made during the July 1956 general strike, which had not yet been fulfilled. This strike is a failure and the government responds with strong repressive measures. After this experience, the four anarcho-syndicalist members resign from the National Council. The 1956 general strike, and its aftermath, demonstrated the destructive role of the political parties, which prevented revolutionary unionism from accomplishing its work of social transformation. The interests of the political parties were successfully imposed above those of the workers. After 1957, the CUT became a fish pond, with the parties fighting for control of the unions. Under the government of Allende, the CUT continued as an arena for the manipulations of the Marxist political parties, and the Christian Democrats perfected their competition for control, as well.”

yet live in isolated barracks and this can make them more brutal and less sympathetic to the people.

Not all types of reaction are as identical as the Left often likes to paint them. So to claim, as the CPSA communist Brian Bunting did in his *The Rise of the South African Reich* (1964) – which remains very influential in ANC intellectual circles – that South Africa was a full-scale fascist state was incorrect<sup>6</sup>. There were indeed some international fascist contacts: in the 1960s Sir Oswald Mosley of the British Union of Fascists visited the South African cabinet several times, while Adolf “Bubi” von Thadden of the Deutsche Reichs Partei (successor of the outlawed Sozialistische Reichs Partei and fore-runner to the moderately successful electoral Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands) maintained close ties with leading Nationalists. Regionally, Pinochet’s secret police, Dina, was involved in the anti-communist Operation Condor death-squad network; South Africa’s Security Branch had extremist killer allies in white-ruled Rhodesia, the Belgian Congo, and Salazarist Mozambique and Angola. Yet while it retained some strong elements of fascist culture, South Africa under the NP still had a parliament, however compromised by its skewed racial composition, and allowed a degree of independent trade union (and business) organising – things no fully-fledged fascist state would tolerate. By comparison, Gutierrez Dantón notes, “in the period of Pinochet, formal democracy in any form was abolished to establish a firm military dictatorship,” a dictatorship clearly backed by “the hegemonic imperialist force” of the USA which had dominated Chile since World War I. Apartheid South Africa, independent of the Commonwealth since 1961, was likewise backed as an anti-communist bulwark by the USA.

---

<sup>6</sup> *The Rise of the South African Reich*, Brian Bunting (1964), available online at: [www.anc.org.za](http://www.anc.org.za)

reform, PW’s regime instituted the white-Indian-coloured Tricameral Parliament of 1983, which gave “representation” to all but the black majority, and which as a result stoked the fires of the 1984–1990 Insurrection.

## **THE PSEUDO-DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA: THE FORCES THAT “GUIDED” TRANSITION**

The Insurrection had its roots in widespread resistance to both the Tricameral Parliament and specifically to the system of Black Local Authorities established under it to which a minority of black conservatives voted in apartheid-approved councillors. As in 1976, the spark to revolt began on the economic terrain as the widely hated Local Authorities raised municipal rates and service charges and as PW’s regime instituted a new housing programme (the provision of tiny two-roomed “match-box” houses to try to buy off black anger) – while municipal public properties including bars and community halls were privatised and sold to the puppet councillors.

An explosion of popular organising saw a rash of civic associations formed as dual-power alternatives to the Local Authorities; alongside them, street committees, often dominated by youth, established physical control of neighbourhoods, making life dangerous for the councillors, the informers and the police. The United Democratic Front (UDF), consisting of some 575 organisations adhering to the Freedom Charter (and thus opposed to Black Consciousness), was formed as a broad resistance umbrella grouping, including civics, NGOs, church organisations, political formations (including the Communist Party, albeit in disguise), human rights organisations and others. The UDF was legal, though many

de Klerk that also voted convincingly 68% to 31% for change, though the nature of that change, as in Chile, was deliberately kept vague.

Even before FW, however, significant economic and political reforms had been begun under PW and by his predecessors – only to be alarmingly embraced by the new democratic dispensation – and that is the core of my argument. There was the legalising of black trade unions in the wake of the '73 Strikes that finally led to the consolidation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) in 1985, shadowing the 1983 formation of the leftist National Workers' Command (CNT) in Chile. Cosatu aligned itself with the ANC against stiff internal opposition from rank-and-file syndicalists (disdainfully called “workerists” by the Communist Party)<sup>11</sup>. The ANC and Communist Party until today remain alarmed at any sign of the resurgence of such tendencies, precisely because rank-and-filers clearly appreciate the class-compromise threat that the ANC leadership represented and still represents. It is worth remembering, as an aside, that the watershed 1976/7 Uprising was a popular revolt before it was even a Black Consciousness (BC) backlash, and that at that time, the ANC was remote, insignificant, sidelined and as out of touch as the BC leadership would be in exile after the crack-down of 1976/7<sup>12</sup>. It would take the creation of a “Charterist” movement a decade later that adhered to the moderate social-democratic 1955 Freedom Charter – plus the secret endorsements of PW's regime – to rescue the ANC from obscurity. Lastly, in a vain attempt at

---

<sup>11</sup> On Jeremy Cronin speaking about the rank-and-file “syndicalists” in Cosatu, read Fat-cat Nationalism vs. the Ultra-hungry, Michael Schmidt, Zabalaza, Johannesburg (June 2003), online at: [www.zabalaza.net](http://www.zabalaza.net)

<sup>12</sup> For a great libertarian socialist critique of the 1976 uprising by one of its leading participants, Selby Semela, read Reflections on Black Consciousness and the South African Revolution, by Selby Semela, Sam Thompson & Norman Abraham, Zabalaza Books, Johannesburg (1979, 2005), online at: [www.zabalaza.net](http://www.zabalaza.net)

As Patrick J Furlong puts it, while Afrikaner nationalism embarked on the large-scale racial engineering of “Grand Apartheid,” multiplied the number of state corporations, eroded the rule of law to allow for de facto martial law if needed, curbed the press and black trade unionism, purged the military and civil service of English-speakers, outlawed communists and fellow travellers, dramatically extended detention without trial, and flirted with anti-Semitism, it “made no attempt to create a fascist-style corporate state, with parliamentary representation along professional and occupational lines, as in Mussolini's Italy, and with overarching umbrella organisations for both employers and employees, replacing trade unions and employer associations, as in both Germany and Italy”<sup>7</sup>.

Thinking like Bunting's however, was to have tragic (and presumably unintended) consequences in the 1970s when the ANC cold-shouldered independent black trade unions as “fascist” simply because they were allowed by the state – despite the involvement of ANC rank-and-file militants, mostly Zulu women, in establishing such trade unions.

The National Intelligence Service may have adopted the wolf's hook symbol of the pre-war Dutch Nazi movement as its secret emblem, but despite the fact that every single NP head of state up to and including PW had been pro-Nazi as youths, the notorious security policeman who wore a Waffen-SS helmet when firing on black insurgents in Soweto in 1976 was the exception rather than the rule (this was demonstrated numerically when the minority AWB split from the NP in 1973)<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> Between Crown and Swastika: the Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era (1991), Patrick J Furlong, Wesleyan University Press, London (1991).

<sup>8</sup> A photograph of this policeman in action is on display at the Hector Petersen Museum in Soweto.

It is often forgotten also that substantial portions of the black population (the homeland elites, quietist religious conservatives, ethnic chauvinists like the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), and others) were won over to varying degrees to the apartheid vision of “separate development”. Thus for a few (the state, the AWB and the Pan Africanist Congress, for example), the battle was a race-war, but for the majority it was between reactionary and progressive social and political traditions. The real battlefield, however, was not only in the realm of ideas, but in that of the economy, and from 1973, the tactics on that front changed dramatically, in both Chile and South Africa.

## **Dictatorship as the Creche of Neoliberalism: Resistance & the Rationale Behind Reforms**

1973 in Chile was of course, the year of the infamous CIA-backed Pinochet coup against Allende. In South Africa, the port city of Durban (visited in the about 1987/8 if I recall correctly by the goose-stepping Chilean Navy) was wracked by a series of strikes by black workers that spread across the country, the first such unrest since the 1948 miners’ strike, despite the fact that in real terms, black wages had remained the same between 1910 and 1961. The deeper reasons behind both actions, different as they were, was the onset of global recession from the early 1970s, and the response of both Northern and Southern elites was neoliberalism, the by-now recognised enemy tactics of: the privatisation of public assets; cuts in state expenditure on public services and infrastructure; the disembowling of entire industries through exposure to a rapacious market that values profit before people; labour “flexibility”, or the return to precarious near-slavery by the workers, peasants and poor; and last, but not least, the strengthening (not weak-

ening as Trotskyists and other Leftists falsely argue) of the coercive functions of the state.

And so we have the rise of a phenomenon that is too often misunderstood by those “newly-liberated” – and deliberately obscured by the brutal nouveau-riches whose greed has driven the process, the turbo-capitalists who strip the people’s industries and infrastructure down to the bare bones as vultures do, selling off equipment at fire-sale rates (the transition from gangster state-capitalism to gangster private capitalism in Russia – and the resistance of some communities and factories, taken over by their workers – is exemplary).

So what exactly happened in Chile and South Africa? Marny Requa in *The Bitter Transition* chapter of *The Pinochet Affair* (2003), which covers the crucial 1990–1998 period in Chile, has offered one of the most cutting insights into the Chilean “transition to democracy” and it has strong echoes for South Africans, for a very similar process of deception of the masses occurred here<sup>9</sup>. The fact is that, pressurised by the global economic downturn, the lack of domestic growth opportunities, and increasingly by insurrection, isolation and sanctions, PW Botha’s regime began the democratic and neoliberal reform processes in South Africa.

If that seems strange to Chileans, don’t forget that you experienced a similar “guided transition”: do you recall the plebiscite in 1988 that saw Pinochet outvoted 54% to 43%?<sup>10</sup> There was a similar unprecedented plebiscite of the (white) South African electorate in 1992 under PW’s successor FW

---

<sup>9</sup> *The Bitter Transition 1990–1998*, Marny Requa, Chapter 5 of *The Pinochet Affair: State Terrorism and Global Justice*, Roger Burbach, Zed Books, New York & London (2003). I have drawn heavily on this book and Requa’s chapter in particular for my understanding of the transition in Chile.

<sup>10</sup> José Antonio Gutierrez Dantón suggests that Pinochet’s real support in the plebiscite was “inflated in order to give some legitimacy to Pinochet’s legacy (which is up to the present virtually untouched). Real votes for the dictator I assume would have been around 25%, that is, the votes of the traditional right wing in most elections”.