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Walking the Tightrope: The President's Council, P.W. Botha and the Rhetoric of Reform

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Abstract

The response by P.W. Botha to the economic crisis, civil unrest and international condemnation affecting South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s was described as his 'total strategy'. An aspect of this was a process of reform in the system of apartheid in order to meet the challenges to modernisation and economic development. The President's Council was an advisory body established by Botha to investigate and make recommendations regarding reform in the socio-economic and political spheres, which were undermining apartheid ideology of racial segregation. Comprising five committees with delegates drawn from diverse sectors of the South African population, the President's Council published several reports identifying the challenges facing South Africa and the means by which it hoped to address them. The reports focused on education, demography, black urbanisation, discriminatory legislation and constitutional reform. A hitherto largely neglected source, these reports and their ideological and intellectual influences are analysed in this article so as to assess the possibilities and limitations of Botha's reforming initiative.

Keywords: President's Council; P.W. Botha; apartheid; reform; modernisation; 'total strategy'.

Opsomming

P.W. Botha se antwoord op die ekonomiese krisis, burgerlike opstand en internasionale veroordeling teenoor Suid-Afrika in die 1970's en 1980's is as die "totale strategie" beskryf. 'n Aspek daarvan was 'n proses om hervorming in die apartheidstelsel te weeg te bring, om sodoende die uitdagings van modernisering en ekonomiese ontwikkeling die hoof te bied. Die Presidentsraad was 'n raadgewende liggaam wat deur Botha in die lewe geroep is om ondersoek in te stel en aanbevelings te maak aangaande hervorming in die sosio-ekonomiese en politiese sfeer waar die apartheidsideologie van rasse-segregasie ondermyn is. Bestaande uit vyf komitees,

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met afgevaardigdes vanuit uiteenlopende sektore van die Suid-Afrikaanse bevolking, het die Presidentsraad 'n aantal verslae gepubliseer wat die uitdagings wat Suid-Afrika in die gesig gestaar het, geïdentifiseer het, en maatreëls waarmee dit aangespreek kon word, aan die hand gedoen het. Die verslae het gefokus op opvoeding, demografie, swart verstedeliking, diskriminerende wetgewing en grondwetlike hervorming. In hierdie artikel word dié andersins verwaarloosde bron se ideologiese en intellektuele invloed ontleed om sodoende die moontlikhede en die perke van Botha se poging tot hervorming te beoordeel.

Sleutelwoorde: Presidentsraad; P.W. Botha; apartheid; hervorming; modernisering; 'totale strategie'.

In an interview with a conservative South African newspaper, *Die Transvaler* in 1979, Prime Minister P.W. Botha stated, 'We are moving in a changing world. We must adjust, otherwise we shall die'.[1] The incongruity of Botha's statement in a newspaper that could boast the 'architect of apartheid' Hendrik Verwoerd as its first editor, was due to the untenable position in which Botha found himself.[2] From the 1960s there had been a growing division in the National Party (NP) between the conservative *verkramptes*, who were opposed to any form of change in the system of apartheid, and the *verligtes* – or 'enlightened ones' – who were convinced that some degree of adaptability in the political, economic and social spheres was necessary for apartheid's survival.[3] This need for change became ever more urgent in the subsequent decade. The year 1973 had seen widescale industrial action in the country, compounded by a global economic crisis. Three years later, the state's response to the Soweto Uprising drew international condemnation, amplified by the election of Jimmy Carter – an American president who was politically and personally opposed to apartheid.[4] Simultaneously, South Africa's ignominious withdrawal from Angola in 1976 demonstrated the fallibility of its military forces. Whether internally or externally, the system of apartheid and formidable state control was being tested, creating the context of Botha's response.

Botha's previous role as Minister of Defence (1966-1980) had resulted in an overhauling of the Defence Force in a 'militaristic' bent and desire for control that was nevertheless described by Dan O'Meara as being tempered with a sense of levelheadedness in that he was willing to negotiate, to compromise and to reform.[5] Botha's election as the prime minister (and later as state president) of South Africa

1. Quoted in 'The Shape of P.W.'s Policy', *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 August 1979.
2. H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2003), 419.
3. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 548-549.
4. S. Dubow, *Apartheid: 1948-1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 190-191.
5. D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-1994* (Randburg: Ravan Press, 1996), 254-255.

in 1978 came at a point when the apartheid government was beset by internal turmoil and severe economic instability. Under his predecessor, John Vorster, there had been limited attempts to initiate reform to address the myriad crises of the 1970s, most notably in the form of the recommendations of the Riekert and Wiehahn Commissions, but there had been little in the way of actual political reform.[6] Botha, cognisant of the urgent need for reform yet still refusing to concede white minority rule, found himself having to maintain a balance between conservative and radical demands. His response was a 'total national strategy' to counter the 'total onslaught' – the challenges afflicting the country.

'Total strategy' was based on a number of pillars, including what were termed good governance, an alliance between white business and the state, the maintenance of 'good relations' with neighbouring African states and common cause against Communist enemies. Related to reform was Botha's belief that an amelioration of the stark social and economic inequalities that characterised South African society would contribute – in some measure – to a decline in support for perceived 'Communist agitators'. Reform was also needed, he declared, to meet the demands of economic modernisation.[7] Until the financial crises of the 1970s – both global and local – apartheid ideology had accommodated modernisation, which had fostered the economic boom of the country in the 1960s. But this was no longer proving possible.[8] Under Botha, the modernisation project was conceived as going beyond concerns regarding state security. Indeed, military concerns were another pillar of total strategy.[9] Botha was adamant that these reforms were not to be interpreted as a sign of weakness on the part of the apartheid state. Throughout his tenure, he remained defiant in his refusal to be forced into political negotiation as a result of the demands of international critics or by domestic protest. Eventually he came to prioritise the maintenance of 'order' to the ultimate detriment of reform.[10]

This article addresses one aspect of Botha's total strategy – the discourse of reform as evident in the work of the President's Council. In his earlier incarnation as Minister of Defence, Botha had served as chair on a Cabinet Committee to initiate a measure of constitutional reform that would include people officially designated as 'Coloureds' and 'Indians' within the vision of a 'multiracial state'.[11] And he was of the view that the President's Council would bring this to fruition. Established to make

6. H. Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders: A Supreme Test of Power* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2012), 137.
7. B. Pottinger, *The Imperial Presidency: P.W. Botha, the First Ten Years* (Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers, 1988), 75-77.
8. Dubow, *Apartheid*, 293.
9. Pottinger, *The Imperial Presidency*, 75.
10. Pottinger, *The Imperial Presidency*, 70.
11. D. van Zyl-Hermann, *Privileged Precariat: White Workers and South Africa's Long Transition to Majority Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 134.

recommendations for economic, social and political restructuring, the Council was nonetheless obligated to work within the limits of a reform initiative that was predicated on the indefinite maintenance of white minority rule and the concomitant suppression of the black majority. Moreover, the requirement for economic development and modernisation meant that the various committees that constituted the President's Council had no choice but to acknowledge these limits. This tension is evident in the reports published by these committees over the three years of the President's Council's existence. These reports therefore form the subject of analysis in what follows in this article.

As Adam Ashforth has discussed, neutral-sounding terms such as 'reform' and 'development' have a long and fraught history in South African political discourse. From as early as the Native Economic Commission Report in 1932, 'development' was taken to mean the teleological – but by no means equal – advance of all societies towards 'civilisation'. According to the Fagan Report in the mid-twentieth century, economic development was portrayed as inevitable, both in South Africa and elsewhere, and was principally related to the certain urbanisation of the work force, which largely comprised Africans. At the same time, development meant that Africans could exercise the rights of citizenship only in the Bantustans, the so-called 'homelands'. Thus, the African majority was to be excluded permanently from citizenship in white South Africa. Similarly, 'reform' was the byword of the state that culminated in the Tricameral Parliament in 1984. The term 'modern' was utilised by the Wiehahn Commission in relation to the implementation of a liberal, free-market economy that, as shown by Ashforth, only served to expose the contradictions in apartheid ideology.[12] But for Botha, modernisation meant the renewal of the economy which would serve as a means of countering the 'Communist onslaught on white minority rule'.[13] In addition, the free market was necessary for modernisation and with it, the maintenance of white dominance. Indeed, overall, under the guise of 'reform' there was the attempt to strengthen white domination and make it more effective.

The use of these terms in the reports issued by the President's Council therefore must be contextualised within attempts by the state to address what had previously been termed the 'Native Question'. This Council was the latest in a string of commissions in the twentieth century and like its predecessors, was created at a significant historical moment. It is helpful to note that in Ashforth's analysis of commissions in South African history, a commission of inquiry is the means by which state power is demonstrated in a manner that gives voice to the 'subjects of [that] power'. The commission in part obscures the coercive nature of that power by

12. A. Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 79-80, 124, 168, 202, 221.
13. Van Zyl-Hermann, *Privileged Precariat*, 169.

implying 'that state power is civilized, is a partner with "society" in pursuit of the "common good"', and the result of this is the written report, which is the concrete manifestation of the state's attempt to acknowledge the voices of its subjects. For Ashforth, a commission of inquiry is initiated during a moment of crisis and disjuncture between official rhetoric and policy and the lived experience of a state's citizens. The commission is thus a way of finding a new way of expressing this changing reality.[14] The slew of commissions in the 1970s thus functioned as a means of dealing with perpetual crises and the challenges to state power. It is within this trajectory that the creation of the President's Council can be placed as a means of fostering what Botha saw as the 'common good' which was development and modernisation. As an instrument of the state, the President's Council can be easily dismissed as a means of maintaining white dominance yet Botha's own precarious position, growing internal and external resistance to apartheid policy, and the demographic composition of Council members reveal both continuities and fractures – and these will be addressed below.

The President's Council: Formation and Dissent

The Fifth Amendment Act to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa was passed in 1980. This Act marked a significant change from the Constitution adopted in 1961 when South Africa was declared a republic. It created the office of the vice president, abolished the Senate and provided for the creation of a President's Council. The vice president would serve as its chair. Other members of the Council were to be appointed by the president, serve a term of five years, and would be paid for their service. Some of the criteria that excluded possible candidates were their age, citizenship and designated race. Members of the President's Council had to be at least thirty years old, hold South African citizenship and be classified as either white, Indian, Coloured or Chinese.[15] Both men and women were eligible for appointment. A key role of the President's Council was to advise the president on any issue deemed to be in the 'public interest' and to advise legislative bodies on 'draft legislation' should advice be sought. To fulfil its advisory role, the Council was permitted to consult with any individual or 'state organisation'. Its findings would then be made available to the president who would place it before the House of Assembly.[16]

14. Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse*, 7, 9.
15. This article makes use of historical apartheid era designations related to racial categorisation, i.e. white, Indian, Coloured and African with the term 'black' used to refer to Indians, Coloureds and Africans collectively. It should, however, be noted that the official reports on which the research is based made use of the term 'black' to refer to people currently classified as 'African'. When quoting directly from the reports, the original terminology will be employed although these are constructed and contested categories that bear no relevance to an individual's self-identification. They are used here solely for the purposes of discussion and analysis.
16. Republic of South Africa Constitution Fifth Amendment Act, Act No. 101 of 1980. *Government Gazette*, No. 7152, 1980.

The President's Council comprised five committees – each with fifteen members with the exception of the Constitutional Committee, which had sixteen. Members were permitted to serve on more than one committee. The committees were the Committee for Economic Affairs, the Planning Committee, the Constitutional Committee, the Committee for Community Relations and the Science Committee. The members, chosen by Botha, reflected what was described as a 'representative cross-section' of South African society – but, as already noted, Africans were excluded.[17]

No sooner had members been appointed however, when they – and the Council itself – were subject to caustic criticism. An opinion piece in the *Rand Daily Mail* of January 1981 written by Helen Zille, who was a journalist at the time, was accompanied by a cartoon depicting Botha's dilemma as he stood precariously on a tightrope holding a balancing pole, thus illustrating his attempt (however shaky) to address reform (as symbolised by the President's Council) while holding the disparate elements of the National Party together. In Zille's view, the President's Council was an attempt to institute reform with the co-operation of Indians and Coloureds to appease these 'groups', while being sufficiently modest not to alienate the *verkramptes*. Zille's conclusion regarding Botha's success at instituting meaningful reform was unequivocally pessimistic:

> It seems clear that the Prime Minister will attempt to avoid splitting the National Party because he believes the disadvantages of such a move would outweigh the advantages. Until this perception changes the expectations the country has of the Government cannot be realised.[18]

If Botha was faced with a daunting prospect, the position of some of his appointees to the President's Council was untenable. Unsurprisingly, criticism of the Council was aimed largely at its failure to include Africans. As such, there was little faith in its ability to implement real reform.[19] The reaction of African political leaders was varied – although there was a common refrain. Nthato Motlana was the leader of the Soweto Committee of Ten, an organisation formed in the largest township in South Africa, which had been the focal point in the unrest in 1976. The Soweto Committee of Ten advocated 'people's authority' in the townships.[20] Motlana was scathing in highlighting the hypocrisy and limits of Botha's reform: 'Even while the Prime Minister was busy establishing the President's Council, he and his lieutenants were

17. 'State President Approves Council', *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 November 1980.
18. H. Zille, '1981: The Year of High Expectations but Low Probabilities', *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 January 1981.
19. 'Give the Blacks 100 Seats in Parliament', *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 October 1980.
20. 'The Soweto Committee of Ten', *TRC Final Report,* Vol. 3, Chapter 6, Subsection 32, accessed 21 January 2022, https://sabctrc.saha.org.za/reports/volume3/chapter6/subsection32.htm#:~:text=The%20Soweto%20Committee%20of%20Ten%20218%20After%20the,Committee%20and%20was%20headed%20by%20Dr%20Nthato%20Motlana.

loudly proclaiming that there would be in the so-called "white" SA no common fatherland, no common citizenship and no sharing of power.'[21] Bishop (later, from 1986, Archbishop) Desmond Tutu of the South African Council of Churches acknowledged Botha's dilemma but pointed out that the inclusion of Africans might not necessarily lose Botha his NP supporters and that any loss would be ameliorated by the 'goodwill' incurred if the President's Council was inclusive with a membership that was representative rather than selected.[22] For Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, chief minister of the homeland KwaZulu, not only would the President's Council be ineffective, it also served as a means of allying Coloured people and Indians 'with the white power elite' leading to resentment and the potential for conflict between black 'groups'.[23]

According to Jan van Eck of the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), the official parliamentary opposition, interviews with various community leaders suggested that the vast majority of Indians and Coloureds were unmoved by their representation on the President's Council, with many rejecting it.[24] When Ismail Kathrada, a former member of the South African Indian Congress, accepted his nomination to the Council, he was described variously by other Indian political leaders as a 'sell-out', 'an old-fashioned opportunist' and a 'stooge dancing to the Government's tune'. Kathrada was defiant, asserting that his actions were '[supported by] the silent majority'.[25] Pat Poovalingam, editor of the newspaper, *The Graphic* was more circumspect in his acceptance, stating that he would only serve on the President's Council for a year and would then resign if Africans remained excluded.[26] For Poovalingam, despite its flaws, the President's Council offered the potential for a meaningful conversation between black South Africans and the apartheid state despite the 'blunder' made in the exclusion of Africans. He was optimistic that it was the opportunity for ushering in 'peaceful change'.[27]

For the critics, however, the very notion of these appointments was anathema. PFP leader, Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, acknowledged the possible individual merits of the appointees but also pointed out that they could not be perceived to be the ideal representatives of their respective communities. This view was reinforced by Alan Hendrikse of the Coloured-dominated Labour Party who did not mince his words when describing the great majority of the Coloured appointees as having 'nothing to

21. 'What we Really Think of the President's Council', *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 October 1980.
22. 'Council is Still-born Says its Opponents', *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 October 1980.
23. 'What we Really Think of the President's Council', *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 October 1980.
24. 'What we Really Think of the President's Council'.
25. A. Akhalwaya, 'Kathrada a "sell-out" for Joining Council', *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 September 1980.
26. A. Akhalwaya, 'More Candidates for President's Council', *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 September 1980.
27. P. Poovalingam. 'Govt has Given Ground', *Rand Daily Mail*, 30 September 1980.

offer'.[28] Upon the announcement of his nomination, Chinese South African Kenneth Winchiu stating: 'I hope I will be able to reflect the feelings of my community and be effective in the moves being made by the Prime Minister to strive towards a unified South Africa'.[29] He was subsequently expelled by the Pretoria Chinese Association for agreeing to serve on the President's Council and was deemed to be 'an individual acting in his own personal capacity'.[30]

With Van Zyl Slabbert's analysis of the white appointees as being likely to further the agenda of the National Party,[31] it appeared that the President's Council was doomed to fail even before its first sitting. And a description of the Council in session eighteen months later did little to inspire confidence. Concluding that politics 'was never like this', columnist John Scott portrayed a session that stood out for the novelty of having white and black South Africans not only occupying the same space but doing so with 'amity' and a sense of 'mutual affection'. This amicability may have precluded a reformist zeal, yet some members made a valiant effort with National Party member Piet Marais advocating the need for reform, albeit in metaphorical terms, declaring: 'If you pull on your trousers you must first lift a foot off the ground'. However, even when M. Rajab raised the omnipresent spectre of African exclusion, it did little to disturb the even tenor of the session and the Indian representative was 'accorded the sort of sympathy that a church congregation would reserve for one of its members who has gone completely astray'.[32]

However, to see Scott's irreverent portrayal as a simple indictment of the President's Council as it neared the end of its existence, is to ignore the initial motivation of individual members. In the early months of its formation, members were both vocal and ardent in their desire for reform. In addition to Rajab's consistent calls for full participation of all racial 'groups', Science Committee member Jack Penn called for the abolition of 'racial discrimination by decree' and this was echoed by Bill Sutton who described apartheid as a 'curse' and demanded a new form of thinking that he termed 'saamheid'. Other members demonstrated an awareness of the responsibility placed on members to initiate change.[33] This idealism – albeit within limitations – formed the context for the research carried out by the President's Council and the subsequent recommendations of its constituent committees.

28. 'Council is Still-born Says its Opponents', *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 October 1980.
29. 'Chop for Chinese Member', *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 October 1980.
30. 'Chop for Chinese Member', *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 October 1980.
31. 'Council is Still-born Says its Opponents', *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 October 1980.
32. J. Scott, 'Goodwill to All Men, but this Just wasn't Politics', *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 May 1982.
33. 'Council Members Call for an End to Racism', *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 February 1981.

Reports of the Science Committee: Nature, Nurture and Modernisation

In 1983, the Science Committee of the President's Council published its report on 'demographic trends' in South Africa which focused on the relationship between population growth and development, aiming to determine the 'attainable population levels and trends which would be the most advantageous for the economic and social development of the population and its potential'.[34] While Africans were excluded from membership of the President's Council, a consideration of their impact on the country's demography and development was central to the Council's report that highlighted the increasing African population and concomitant decrease in the growth of the white, Coloured and Asian 'groups'. According to the report, the increasing urbanisation of Africans was recognised as 'inevitable and universal'.[35] In fact, a decade earlier no small amount of consternation was caused when a demographic prediction for 2020 suggested that the African population would then be more than five times that of the white population, with whites eventually comprising a mere eleven percent of the country's population. This data marked an acceleration of Vorster's efforts to reverse the trend of African urbanisation into what he termed 'white' South Africa.[36]

By 1983 however, the President Council Report was obliged to acknowledge not only the permanence of an urbanised African population but also the changing national need for economic development. Demographic patterns were associated with modernisation and the report argued that the Sotho-speaking people who lived in proximity to urban areas demonstrated a lower birth rate than the largely rural Nguni-speaking people. This, the report suggested, was evidence of the greater advancement of the Sotho people. This was envisioned as having repercussions in urban South Africa where initial population numbers (of Africans) would increase with urbanisation but, the report opined, would eventually stabilise due to the demands of a modern, urban environment.[37]

Despite the report's terminology, the modernisation it proposed was by no means free of apartheid ideology, being based largely on white Western values and norms. According to the report, the importance of education produced by a 'Western middle class' and '[imparting] Western norms – if not explicitly, then implicitly,' would be key to changing 'traditional and family social structures'. In conjunction with reform initiatives aimed at an urbanised population such as measures for social welfare and the availability of employment, education would be a means of altering

34. Stellenbosch University Library (hereafter SUL), SP (PC 1/1983), *Report of the Science Committee of the President's Council on Demographic Trends in South Africa*, 1983.
35. SP (PC 1/1983), *Report of the Science Committee on Demographic Trends*, 20, 33.
36. Dubow, *Apartheid,* 153.
37. SP (PC 1/1983), *Report of the Science Committee on Demographic Trends*, 47, 56.

demographic trends and leading to 'fertility decline'.[38] Yet, even as the report took for granted the easy association of the West with modernisation, the demographic picture suggested that apartheid policy in terms of the reservation of labour needed to be adapted to changing circumstances. The declining white population meant that there would be a labour shortage. Or more delicately put in NP-speak, there would be an 'insufficiency of … skilled labour necessary to foster modernisation'. A long-term solution proposed then was the training of black labour and incorporating Africans into South Africa's modernising ambitions.[39]

In 1977, both the Riekert and Wiehahn Commissions were set up to look at labour – the first addressing utilisation and the second legislation. The Wiehahn Commission, through its recommendation for the recognition of black trade unions, challenged the racial divisions associated with labour that had been a dominant feature of modernisation for much of the twentieth century. Proposing a 'free market', the commission reflected the spirit of reform that permeated the late 1970s in the wake of the economic crises and the Soweto Uprising. The initiation of the Wiehahn Commission was itself an act of walking a tightrope as evident when the Minister of Labour, Fanie Botha, referred to it as being part of a process to repair the country's tarnished international image while simultaneously not alienating the more conservative elements within the government. The Wiehahn Report was devised to uphold the language of neoliberal reform with 'freedom of association' used to justify the formation of black trade unions. Yet this proved to be qualified reform with the government amending its terms to apply only to workers who were permitted to live in white South Africa.[40] In short, the colour-blind language of neoliberalism was adapted to the South African context.

Similarly, the Science Committee remained tied to the language of distinction. Integral to its mandate was education – the focus of the subsequent report in 1984. By the 1970s it was evident that the system of Bantu Education had hampered the development of skilled black labour.[41] Yet it was not the system of Bantu Education on which the report focused but that of 'culture', a byword for racial difference. While it should be borne in mind that the use of racial nomenclature in South Africa changed over the course of the twentieth century, it was on the basis of these legal distinctions of 'race' that the more notorious pieces of apartheid legislature had been structured, underpinned by the Population Registration Act of 1950. And it was this overt racial categorisation and discrimination that was also the basis for the condemnation of apartheid policies when a United Nations report in 1953 found that 'the doctrine of racial differentiation and superiority on which apartheid policy is

38. SP (PC 1/1983), *Report of the Science Committee on Demographic Trends*, 82.
39. SP (PC 1/1983), *Report of the Science Committee on Demographic Trends*, 185-189.
40. Van Zyl-Hermann, *Privileged Precariat*, 81, 98-99, 110-111, 142.
41. Van Zyl-Hermann, *Privileged Precariat*, 78.

based is scientifically false'.[42] 'Culture' therefore came to stand in for racial distinction. This was a term that had its origins in the segregation era and could either mean 'race', which made it a fixed marker of distinction or 'civilisation', that introduced notions of hierarchy tempered with 'upliftment' through 'cultural adaptation'. In the pre-apartheid era, culture was used to buttress segregation with the belief that each culture should develop separately.[43] While the Science Committee drew upon the term along with its connotations of hierarchy and superiority, it did so with a more assimilationist view and as a means of supporting modernisation.

As noted, according to the Science Committee, education would be key to development but 'culture' was also related to development. South African societies, it said, fell across a spectrum of cultures ranging from 'traditional' to its opposite, 'industrial culture'. While the former was described as applying largely to rural 'blacks',[44] the latter was supposedly the prerogative of urban whites and defined by the embracing of 'industrial and technological development'. 'Industrial culture' was moreover imbued with what was described as 'a Christian work ethic' associated with the betterment of society for all and a sense of 'accountability and responsibility'. In contrast, in this view, 'traditional' culture lacked prescience, was not associated with progress and 'structure', and was concerned only with the advancement of one's immediate circle. Defined by a lack of 'motivation', traditional societies were also marked by lower socio-economic development.[45]

At the outset then, the Science Committee Report ascribed culture as the factor 'most responsible' for economic and social disparities. Yet despite being termed 'traditional' culture in the report, with the implication that it was an absolute category and that clear distinctions could be drawn between the traditional and the modern, I would argue that so-called 'traditional' culture did not exist in an isolated state of purity, nor was it solely racially-based. The report viewed it as a given that industrial culture had its origins in nineteenth century Britain and that it had been 'exported' to southern Africa, leading to industrialisation and modernisation. It was a culture, it maintained, that was completely at odds with the agrarian lifestyle of the descendants of Dutch settlers, yet that group had demonstrated a propensity and ability to adapt to industrial culture at a rate that outpaced that of Africans. Indigenous societies had been exposed to Christianity and the teachings propounded by missionaries for centuries resulting in a 'transitional' culture. The report suggested that the fully-fledged adoption of an industrial culture had been impeded due to the

42. Quoted in Dubow, *Apartheid*, 48-49.
43. S. Dubow, 'The Elaboration of Segregationist Ideology', in *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa,* eds W. Beinart and S. Dubow (London: Routledge, 1995), 160-161.
44. Africans.
45. SUL, SP (PC 6/1984), *Report of the Science Committee of the President's Council on Informal and Non-Formal Education in South Africa*, 1984, 13, 17, 21.

'deep-rooted' nature of 'traditional' elements that were resistant to change.[46] This perception was not a uniquely South African phenomenon. As David Edgerton has argued in his study of technology in the twentieth century, European dominance in science and technology took on a racial and national cast. Between the two World Wars, some intellectuals argued that the characteristic of 'inventiveness', for instance, could not be applied to people of colour in the United States and the British Dominions. The same argument was made for the USSR during the Cold War. These racial and national distinctions did not only relate to invention but to the utilisation of technology.[47]

Education was central to technology. Apartheid policy was predicated on the reservation of skilled labour for whites compounded by an unequal system of education. As Secretary for Native Affairs in the 1950s, Werner Eiselen's concept of education was not linked to modernisation but was instead a means of preserving African 'tribal' culture.[48] In contrast, the De Lange Commission on education in 1981 shifted somewhat to avow the principle of equal education for all with the provision of a single education department to oversee this. The overarching framework of this re-imagined future were the country's developmental needs. The De Lange Commission continued the process of limited educational reform under Vorster to address the lack of skilled white workers and a corresponding need for skilled black labour. This commission recommended aptitude testing to determine 'inborn mental abilities', placing the student on a particular career path, whether academic or 'apprenticeship' – which would resonate in the findings of the Science Committee.[49]

In the Science Committee Report, socio-economic, ideological and political factors were conflated with capability and drew heavily upon existing racist thinking. This was notably evident when, under the aegis of the Institute for Educational Research, D.J. van Berg contemplated African suitability for mathematics, concluding that any difficulties with mathematics was due to the 'culture' of the 'black man' and a 'lack of inclination' towards 'objective time' which did not form part of the 'traditional' mindset.[50] Shades of Van Berg's thinking are evident in the Science Committee's 1984 Report on education where, even if schooling systems were to be identical for African and white children (as suggested by the De Lange Commission), cultural factors would account for differences in learning and the incompatibility of

46. SP (PC 6/1984), *Report, Science Committee, Informal and Non-Formal Education,* 23, 25.
47. D. Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900* (London: Profile Books, 2009), 133-136.
48. Dubow, *Apartheid,* 60.
49. C.B. Collins and R.R. Gillespie, '"Moving Education Forward to Keep Society Back": The South African "De Lange Report" Re-evaluated', *Comparative Education Review*, 28, 4 (1984), 625-626, 629.
50. B. Freund, *Twentieth-Century South Africa: A Developmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 135-136.

'tradition' as evident in, 'a rural area where mechanical things are not handled and the highest toy is a cart made of wire; where parental talk is about water, cattle and food; and where time is measured by the position of the sun…'[51]

This was also evident in the earlier writings of a member of the Science Committee – Jack Penn, a plastic surgeon who wrote extensively on race and 'capability'. In his autobiography *The Right to Look Human* published in 1976, Penn considered the supposed capabilities of the 'black races' in acquiring the technological skills necessary for modernisation. He reached the conclusion that because of the 'inherent cultural incompatibility' between Africans and whites, there was a necessity for [white] 'guidance and trusteeship for the foreseeable future', a hallmark of segregationist thinking.[52] For the Science Committee, Penn's conclusions were embodied in the term 'cultural deprivation', which was defined as when 'a person's cultural background, although suited to his functions in his native cultural environment, does not equip him to function successfully in a *different* environment.' Sensitive to the possibility that this could potentially be seen as suggesting cultural inequality or hierarchy, the term was subsequently amended in the report to the less loaded term 'environmental disadvantage'.[53]

Yet the change in phrasing did little to challenge the notion of culture difference – environment was merely substituted for culture. According to the Science Committee Report, African children in rural areas came from a largely 'traditional' environment with supposedly different notions of time, lack of familiarity with technology and consumer goods. Furthermore, it suggested that they were accustomed to a hierarchical system that promoted an unquestioning obedience that stifled original thinking and acquired a group ethos that did not allow for the development of 'personality attributes such as competitiveness, individual effort and personal achievement'.[54] While some acknowledgement was made of socio-economic factors such as poverty and lack of education, the report vacillated regarding whether factors such as poverty contributed to apathy or whether apathy (and hence culture) contributed to the lower socio-economic status of these 'groups'.[55]

Whether the determinant factors could be traced to culture or environment, or a conflation of the two, as far as the Science Committee was concerned, measures should be taken to address an 'untenable situation' that served as a barrier to effective modernisation and excluded a particular 'group' from the narrative of progress.[56] Yet it

51. SP (PC 6/1984), *Report, Science Committee, Informal and Non-Formal Education,* 48.
52. J. Penn, *The Right to Look Human: An Autobiography* (Johannesburg: Hugh Keartland Publishers, 1976), 234-235.
53. SP (PC 6/1984), *Report, Science Committee, Informal and Non-Formal Education,* 39-40.
54. SP (PC 6/1984), *Report, Science Committee, Informal and Non-Formal Education,* 48-50.
55. SP (PC 6/1984), *Report, Science Committee, Informal and Non-Formal Education,* 45.
56. SP (PC 6/1984), *Report, Science Committee, Informal and Non-Formal Education,* 45.

was ultimately the narrative of an unsuitable culture that held sway in the report and for inclusion to occur, the report pointed out that it had to come at the expense of 'those residual elements of traditional culture that resist change and hinder development'. It would be the role of the various departments responsible for each 'racial group' to facilitate the hegemonic narrative of the 'dominant industrial culture'.[57] In contrast to the ideology of separate development that had for so long been a cornerstone of apartheid ideology, the future of South Africa's modernisation project was predicated on a 'long-term' vision of the creation of inclusionary and 'appropriate culture, unique to South Africa'.[58] Simultaneously, the vision of an inclusive South African culture was one that was based on the marginalisation of certain so-called 'cultural' elements – clearly 'rural African tradition' was seen as impeding progress.

In fact, although separated by half a century, the Science Committee reports bore no small resemblance to the findings of the Native Economic Commission formed in the wake of African worker unrest in 1929. The 1932 report suggested that the problem of the 'Native economic question' or their development, lay not with urban Africans but with their rural counterparts, 'the millions of uneducated tribal Natives, held in the grip of superstition and of an anti-progressive social system'.[59] The Science Committee reports were thus part of an ongoing narrative concerning the development of African people. This also formed the intellectual and ideological foundation – ambivalent, idealistic and limited – that was evident in the recommendations made by the other constituent committees.

Reports of the Planning Committee and the Committee for Community Relations: Segregation and 'Civilisation'

With members including Kathrada and Winchiu – both of whom had already been rejected by political elements within their 'respective communities' for their participation on the President's Council – the Planning Committee was chaired by NF (Nic) Treurnicht who had also served on the Theron Commission of Enquiry a decade earlier. Initiated by B.J. Vorster, the Theron Commission had made early overtures towards reform in its report released in 1976 recommending the repeal of the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and advocating direct representation for Coloured people in certain tiers of government.[60] Even so, Treurnicht – the only member of the National Party to sit on the Theron Commission – had been recalcitrant, believing that it had exceeded its authority in its recommendations.[61]

57. SP (PC 6/1984), *Report, Science Committee, Informal and Non-Formal Education,* 177.
58. SP (PC 6/1984), *Report, Science Committee, Informal and Non-Formal Education,* 96.
59. H.A. Wyndham, 'The Report of the Native Economic Commission of the Union of South Africa', *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 31, 125 (1932), 377-378.
60. See J.M.M. Barnard, 'Die Erika Theron-Kommissie, 1973-1976: 'n Historiese Studie' (MA thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2000).
61. Barnard, 'Die Erika Theron-Kommissie, 1973-1976', 142-144.

As chair of the Planning Committee, Treurnicht's mandate was to preside over reforms to 'petty apartheid', the belittling experience of everyday racism that could not be justified by the ideology of 'grand apartheid'. The committee nonetheless attempted to do this while still upholding the ideals of segregation. The Planning Committee Report released in 1984 began by acknowledging the changing face of South African society – development and urbanisation with a growing African population that required the provision of amenities in urban areas as well as the potential 'embarrassment' incurred to the government when international black visitors were confronted with overt racial discrimination.[62]

According to the Planning Committee, discriminatory measures were 'harsh realities' in the South African context, not to be condoned – but also not to be discounted. Yet, for this committee, it was economic development that had already lessened racial distinctions between Africans, Indians and Coloureds in urban areas. Its report pointed out that within these 'groups' there were distinct 'differences in living patterns and living standards' and that those who had achieved a higher 'standard of civilisation' maintained certain standards compared to 'groups' who had not done so. Following from this, using race as the sole marker of difference had the potential to cause offence to those who were more 'civilised'. The use of amenities such as public transport or recreational and sports facilities was related to notions of development and with it, 'civilisation', rather than race. The role of the Planning Committee was to provide clear guidelines to ameliorate overt racism – that reflected poorly on the state – and create a climate of 'good relations' between 'groups'.[63]

From 1976 onwards, there was a growing awareness on the part of the state of what Ashforth terms 'the fragility of the social order'. In response to this, the changing rhetoric of the state revolved around highlighting class divisions *within* 'black groups' in contrast to the strict racial distinctions of the past. By promoting a black middle class as well as a permanent urbanised African labour force, the state could (potentially) collude with these 'groups' as well as the Bantustan leadership and by so doing, cement its overall control.[64] It is thus evident here that rather than absolute categories of race as used by the apartheid state, the Planning Committee focused on 'civilisation' and 'development'. As with hierarchies of culture, the notion of 'civilisation' was unquestioned. It related to the degree to which the modern was adopted. It was also aspirational – it no longer excluded simply by virtue of racial categorisation and all South Africans could potentially attain a 'civilised' status as determined by the narrative of development.

62. SUL, SP (P.C. 3/1984), *Report of the Planning Committee for Community Relations of the President's Council on Principles in Respect of the Provision of Amenities for All Races in Towns, Cities and along the Open Road*, 1984, 2-3.
63. SP (P.C. 3/1984), *Report of the Planning Committee for Community Relations*, 3-4, 112.
64. Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse,* 200-201.

The Planning Committee looked neither forwards nor outwards but turned for inspiration to the period prior to 1953 when the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act was passed. This was the era of the 'separate but equal doctrine' where separate amenities were provided for all 'groups' but were done so on a principle of equality, namely the same or similar amenities for all or, at the very least, distinctions that did not lead to 'substantial inequality'.[65] For the committee then, the implementation of the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act was now recognised as racial discrimination. This Act was a product of 'the ideological-political philosophy of the Government' during the early years of apartheid.[66] As such, the Planning Committee suggested the adaptive nature of the state and of apartheid ideology. The committee's recommendation was either the complete removal of segregation in terms of amenities or, where this was expected to meet strong resistance from local authorities and communities, a return to the provision of amenities that were 'separate but equal'. There was also envisioned a point where the attainment of an ideal level of development on the part of all black people – on par with their white counterparts – would render these discriminatory measures superfluous.[67] The Planning Committee's recommendation that 'discriminatory measures based solely on colour must as far as possible be phased out',[68] was met with some resistance on the part of two members, namely C. Hanekom, an academic at Stellenbosch University and C.J. April, who had also sat on the Yeld Committee, which had investigated the feasibility of creating 'independent Coloured municipalities'.[69] Both men objected to the qualifier 'as far as possible' that was indicative of the Planning Committee's intent to introduce qualified reform.[70]

Also under the Planning Committee's purview was the Group Areas Act.[71] Although a slim booklet in contrast to other reports, the Report on the Group Areas Act (1966) devoted significant attention to the common tendencies of human societies to congregate in homogeneous societies, marked by commonalities of 'race, nationality, language and culture'. It noted that South Africa was not exempt from this and that in fact, the extreme diversity of the country's population foregrounded the issue. The report traced a long lineage of segregation beginning in 1660 with Jan van Riebeeck's use of a 'bitter almond hedge' to serve as a barrier against the Khoekhoe. Oblivious to the myriad *de facto* relationships and interactions (economic, religious and so on) occurring across societies, the Planning Committee Report also noted that distinctions maintained between the San and Khoekhoe as well as 'the territoriality of Black ethnic groups', conveniently formed the 'nucleus' of these

65. SP (P.C. 3/1984), *Report of the Planning Committee for Community Relations*, 9-11.
66. SP (P.C. 3/1984), *Report of the Planning Committee for Community Relations*, 21.
67. SP (P.C. 3/1984), *Report of the Planning Committee for Community Relations*, 4, 116.
68. SP (P.C. 3/1984), *Report of the Planning Committee for Community Relations*, 127.
69. 'Pen Pictures of all the Councillors', *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 October 1980.
70. SP (P.C. 3/1984), *Report of the Planning Committee for Community Relations*, 132.
71. *Report of the Planning Committee for Community Relations*, 21.

territories and were also at the core of the Bantustans. Segregation was thus portrayed as the means of reducing 'friction' between disparate 'groups'.[72]

While upholding the utility of segregation, the Planning Committee Report was therefore unlikely to advocate radical change in the Group Areas Act, however there is an indication of some dissent in the joint committees in that the 'principle of segregating population groups by statutory compulsion as embodied in the Group Areas Act (Act No. 36 of 1966)' was 'unacceptable' to certain members of this committee. The final consensus however was that the report did not recommend the 'repeal of the Act'.[73] It was left to the Constitutional and Economic Committees to recommend pervasive reform.

Reports of the Committee for Economic Affairs and the Constitutional Committee: The Adaptation of Democracy

As early as 1964, Hendrik Verwoerd, who used the metaphor of a 'granite wall' to describe the apartheid edifice, conceded that the incorporation of Africans into the economy was necessary. According to a recent account, Verwoerd acknowledged the unsustainability of apartheid but believed privately that changes had to be implemented incrementally.[74] His successor, John Vorster, illustrated divisions in the National Party when, as prime minister, he sought the greater incorporation of English speakers into the government, alienating the *verkramptes*. He also made overtures to leaders of some independent African states.[75] In 1976, the Theron Commission even recommended constitutional reform and with Vorster's acquiescence, a committee was appointed (under the then Minister of Defence P.W. Botha) to consider the feasibility of amending the constitution to address the inclusion of Coloureds and Indians. Vorster subsequently did a *volte-face,* delaying the implementation of constitutional reform.[76]

When Botha took office in 1978, however, the country was in economic turmoil, dealing with the wake of the Soweto uprising and an arms embargo called for by the United Nations. Reform was no longer a choice but a necessity. It was a pressing concern for the Constitutional Committee and the Committee for Economic Affairs, arguably the key committees in the President's Council, tasked with political

72. SUL, SP (P.R.2/1982), *Report of the Joint Committee Consisting of the Planning Committee and the Committee for Community Relations of the President's Council on the Principles and Implementation of the Group Areas Act, 1966 (Act 36 of 1966), and Aspects of the Act which Affect Community Relations*, 1982, 2-4.
73. SP (P.R.2/1982), *Report on the Principles and Implementation of the Group Areas Act*, 10.
74. T. Simpson, *History of South Africa: From 1902 to the Present* (Cape Town: Penguin, 2021), 196, 198.
75. Simpson, *History of South Africa*, 209-210.
76. N.M. Stultz, 'Interpreting Constitutional Change in South Africa', *Journal of Modern African* Studies, 22, 3 (1984), 362-363.

and economic reform respectively. The joint report released by the committees in 1982 was a clear indication that the political features of apartheid could not be divorced from the economy.

The members of the Economic Affairs and Constitutional Committees were drawn from a wide segment of the political spectrum, including M. Rajab, a figure in the business community who made repeated calls for the inclusion of Africans in the President's Council. Another member was Adriaan Mynhardt van Schoor, the director of the South Africa Foundation dedicated to the maintenance of the Bantustan system and a proponent of *baasskap*.[77] A moderate National Party member in the 1980s, political scientist and academic, Denis Worrall, was the chairman of the Constitutional Committee, serving from 1980 to 1982. He described himself as the 'most *verligte* member on government benches'. His appointment to this particular committee displeased the *verkrampte* elements.[78] He was perhaps too *verlig* and would later leave the National Party due to political differences. He was the perfect counterfoil to figures such as Van Schoor.[79]

In his preface to the first Report of the Constitutional Committee, Worrall wrote optimistically of '… a vision of the South Africa of Tomorrow' and the work of a committee made up of a diverse mix in terms of culture and political affiliation as well as the demands and needs of their constituencies, but which had nevertheless reached some form of consensus.[80] These two committees both focused on reform but, again, did so by upholding and challenging the inherent limitations of the President's Council and the reform process. As was indicated clearly in a joint report in 1982, the country's new constitution could not simply be an adoption of the Westminster system of parliament, particularly the notion of 'one man [sic] one vote' that would lead not just to majority rule but the fear of suppression of 'minority groups', thereby creating the potential 'for serious conflict' and proving an obstacle to harmonious co-existence for all South Africans.[81]

The system of government was further addressed by the Constitutional Committee which decided on 'A consociational democracy which includes all population groups'.[82] The committee drew upon the work of political scientist, Arend

77. A.M. van Schoor, *Notes from My Diary* (Pretoria: Makro Books, 1979), 146.
78. D. Worrall, *The Independent Factor: My Personal Journey through Politics and Diplomacy* (Wandsbeck: Reach Publishers, 2018), 87.
79. Worrall, Denis John, accessed 7 February 2022, https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv02424/04lv02426/05lv02702.htm.
80. SUL, SP (P.R.3/1982), *First Report of the Constitutional Committee of the President's Council*, 1982.
81. SUL, SP (P.R.1/1982), *Joint Report of the Committee for Economic Affairs and the Constitutional Committee of the President's Council on Local and Regional Management Systems in the Republic of South Africa*, 1982, 2-3.
82. SP (P.R.3/1982), *First Report of the Constitutional Committee*, 6-9.

Lijphart, who advocated a consociational democracy. He conceived a model best suited to a society deeply divided along ethnic lines, with an alliance between whites, Asians and Coloureds and the so-called 'Black States'. South Africa was envisaged as a 'confederation' with the various 'groups' coming together to address common issues in a 'central organisation' while simultaneously maintaining a degree of autonomy and limitations imposed on this 'central organisation' – which harmonised with the Committee's view of limited presidential power.[83] As Dubow shows however, Lijphart's consociationalism was not at all radical and his 1985 monograph, *Power Sharing in South Africa*, was disparaged for its unquestioning assumption of 'ethnic differences' viewed as 'unalterable fact'.[84]

The idea of 'confederation' as raised by the Constitutional Committee also appeared to follow Botha's early vision in 1979 when he arranged a meeting with key figures in business to discuss the possible creation of a 'constellation of states' with its leaders collaborating in addressing socio-economic ills. This would ultimately come to naught due to the lack of legitimacy accorded the Bantustans as well as Chief Buthelezi's refusal to declare independence for KwaZulu. But the 'constellation' was nevertheless resurrected in the envisaged 'confederation'.[85]

The Constitutional Committee was further influenced by the work of Samuel Huntington in its rejection of a majoritarian system. The American political scientist had delivered an address at Rand Afrikaans University in 1981 that was subsequently published as 'Reform and Stability in South Africa' in the prominent journal *International Security*. In it, Huntington differentiated between 'hierarchical' and 'parallel' political systems with the latter tending towards inequality and the former being a preferred ideal in countries with the potential for ethnic conflict.[86] A parallel system lent itself to the notion of a 'consociational democracy' and the Report quoted Huntington's consideration of the 'minority groups' in South Africa: 'Without some form of concurrent majority, whites, Coloureds, and Asians would feel threatened in the political sphere by the automatic black[87] majorities produced by a one-person one-vote system'.[88] Huntington's view of South Africa was a country that was composed of 'racial communities' rather than 'individuals', and was therefore wholly unsuited to the 'one man one vote' system.[89] Ethnic identities were seen as stable and fixed and the system of government had to be tailored accordingly by protecting both

83. SP (P.R.3/1982), *First Report of the Constitutional Committee*, 40-41.
84. Dubow, *Apartheid*, 204.
85. Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders*, 164-165.
86. See S.P. Huntington, 'Reform and Stability in South Africa', *International Security*, 6, 4 (1982), 3-25.
87. African.
88. Quoted in SP (P.R.3/1982), *First Report of the Constitutional Committee*, 37.
89. SP (P.R.3/1982), *First Report of the Constitutional Committee*, 36.

the rights of the group as well as those of the individual.[90] Huntington's model was necessarily a moderate one described as 'reform by stealth' that accounted for its popularity with the Constitutional Committee. For the American, drastic reform would alienate both ends of the political spectrum, leading to an undesirable situation where the government would be 'fighting a two-front war against both stand patters and revolutionaries' with inadequate support to pass reform measures.[91]

However, this was not simply another form of 'separate but equal' but an acknowledgement of the interdependence of the various 'groups' that comprised the South African population. Of note in the Joint Report by the Constitutional and Economic Committees was the recognition that the exclusion of Africans both from the President's Council and from white South Africa itself, neither reflected the reality nor the needs of modernisation and development.[92]

It was more than three decades since apartheid had been implemented and according to the joint report of these two committees, the changing global economy, the demands of modernisation and development necessitated unequivocal reform, that challenged the limits of exclusion.[93] A key point made in the report was that change was therefore inevitable and could happen in two ways: the first was revolution associated with a 'rapid' and 'violent' overturning of the status quo. The second was the gradual process of reform, the 'opening up of social and economic opportunities in the society and the broadening of participation in its decision-making processes'. For the President's Council, the latter was preferable to – and may have also been a way of averting – the former.[94] Underpinning the formulation of a new constitution was therefore the understanding that the rights of both the individual and the group had to be preserved, the acknowledgement that much of white South Africa would be opposed to desegregation while black South Africans had 'equally justifiable interests and expectations' and that there was a need for a strong and effective government in order to address competing interests and prevent conflict.[95]

The limited reforms implemented under Vorster's tenure in terms of labour and education had created an expanding black middle class who were increasingly frustrated by their inability to 'escape the burden of colour'. There was a growing realisation on the part of the state – and the President's Council – that a failure to

90. SP (P.R.3/1982), *First Report of the Constitutional Committee*, 24-25.
91. Stultz, 'Interpreting Constitutional Change in South Africa', 357.
92. SP (P.R.1/1982), *Joint Report of the Committee for Economic Affairs and the Constitutional Committee of the President's Council*, 5.
93. SP (P.R.1/1982), *Joint Report, Committee for Economic Affairs and the Constitutional Committee of the President's Council*, 6.
94. SP (P.R.1/1982), *Joint Report, Committee for Economic Affairs and the Constitutional Committee of the President's Council*, 14.
95. SP (P.R.1/1982), *Joint Report, Committee for Economic Affairs and the Constitutional Committee of the President's Council*, 14, 17, 44-45.

assuage these frustrations would result in widespread resistance. The emphasis then was on the fostering of black middle-class loyalty to the state. However, omitted from this endeavour were the Bantustans, 'the national states' whose 'citizens' were excluded from this process of reform.[96]

Under Worrall's chairmanship, another recommendation of the joint committees was for a 'non-parliamentary executive president' who was not affiliated to any political party. It was suggested that this executive leader would preside over 'a multi-racial Cabinet' and by so doing, surmount divisions along party and racial lines.[97] This was evident in a Constitutional Committee report where along with a 'strong' executive, it was recommended that the powers of the executive should also be 'limited' with a 'decentralisation of authority and power' so as to give 'local groups' a greater measure of autonomy and to foster 'the creation of wealth, cultural progress and the self-realisation of persons'.[98]

Based on the divisions within the National Party, Botha was unwilling to countenance anything other than a powerful executive presidency, domination over the white minority electorate in parliament and leader of the National Party. Worrall was subsequently relieved of his position on the President's Council and made ambassador to Australia, eventually leaving the National Party. His replacement as the chair of the Constitutional Committee was S.W. van der Merwe who would be more amenable to Botha's demands.[99] Worrall attributed his dismissal to a conflict with Chris Heunis, the Minister of Constitutional Development, when Worrall wished to incorporate Africans into the 'constitutional framework [that] exceeded the bounds of government policy at the time.'[100] The removal of Worrall was therefore an apt illustration of reform within inflexible limits.

With the release of the Second Report of the Constitutional Committee under Van der Merwe, the key word was 'confiliation' with an emphasis on greater central authority and it is here that the seeds of the Tricameral Parliament can be seen.[101] The committee drew upon the work of political scientists, Albert Blaustein and Jay Sigler, both of Rutgers University. The former was instrumental in helping new nations such as Liberia and Zimbabwe formulate their constitutions so that a constitution was 'a nation's frontispiece [that] should be used as a rallying point for the people's ideals and aspirations, as well as a message to the outside world as to

96. Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders*, 140-142.
97. Pottinger, *The Imperial Presidency*, 103-106.
98. SP (P.R.3/1982), *First Report of the Constitutional Committee*, 10, 20.
99. Pottinger, *The Imperial Presidency*, 103-106.
100. Worrall, *The Independent Factor*, 89.
101. SUL, SP (P.R.4/1982), *Second Report of the Constitutional Committee of President's Council on Adaptation of Constitutional Structures in South Africa*, 1982, 19.

what the country stands for.'[102] This was a sentiment that Botha echoed in his address to the National Party Federal Congress in 1982. Blaustein's compatriot, Sigler, later edited the *International Handbook on Race Relations* published in 1987. In the book's introduction, the importance of 'race' was acknowledged as a significant feature in societies, whether heterogeneous or homogeneous with the view that 'race-thinking appears to be a worldwide phenomenon'. South Africa was singled out for its history of racial oppression even before 1948 that could not easily be explained by either colonial or class oppression as touted by Marxists. The conclusion, however, was that white minority rule was nevertheless 'an experiment in futility'.[103] This was not something that the Constitutional Committee was willing to concede in 1982.

The Constitutional Committee drew upon various articles of United Nations bodies that emphasised the protections of the cultural and political rights of 'minority groups'.[104] With this in mind, it made a distinction between 'segmental matters' or those related to particular societies and 'common matters' affecting the entire nation. Between the two lay a 'mixed area'.[105] To determine what constituted 'segmental' or 'group' concerns, the committee turned to the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the Communist Revolution where minorities were forcibly incorporated and deprived of their distinctive identities. Using the actions of South Africa's Communist foe, the committee analysed the various aspects of these 'groups' that were targeted by the Soviets for eradication – language, history, religion and government. These were therefore understood by the committee to be integral to a 'group's' identity and thus would fall under areas of 'segmental concern'.[106] The resulting list included education – where this did not conflict with the National Education Policy – 'community planning', social welfare and community health services. The 'common matters' that fell under the auspices of the central government – and Botha – included defence, the economy (mining, agriculture, mineral resources), communications, security and foreign affairs. For Africans in the homelands, there was the notion of a confederation between South Africa and these 'independent' African states.[107]

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102. R. Perez-Pena, 'Obituary: Albert Blaustein, who Drafted Nations' Constitutions, Dies at 72'. *New York Times*, 22 August 1994, accessed 19 February 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/1994/08/22/obituaries/albert-blaustein-who-drafted-nations-constitutions-dies-at-72.html.
103. 'Introduction', *International Handbook on Race and Race and Race Relations,* ed J.A. Sigler (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1987), xiii-xiv.
104. Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 27; Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice (UNESCO); Second Report of the Constitutional Committee, 19-20. It should be noted with some sense of irony that the apartheid state's early policies on race were subject to censure by the UN. See also Dubow, *Apartheid,* 278.
105. SP (P.R.4/1982), *Second Report of the Constitutional Committee*, 23.
106. SP (P.R.4/1982), *Second Report of the Constitutional Committee*, 30.
107. SP (P.R.4/1982), *Second Report of the Constitutional Committee*, 38-39, 92.

As Hermann Giliomee shows in *The Last Afrikaner Leaders,* Botha had, from the previous decade, advocated the 'division' rather than the 'sharing' of power – and this resonated in the demarcation of responsibilities for a central authority and for 'segmental' concerns. It was also a further illustration of the maintenance of central/white dominance that formed the core of Botha's vision of reform – a core that was non-negotiable.[108]

In a manner that could only serve to emphasise Botha's vision, the appendix of the Second Report included an address delivered by him at the National Party Federal Congress in Bloemfontein in 1982. Containing his usual threat of the country's military preparedness to maintain 'order', Botha also acknowledged a changing economic climate that had resulted in the permanent urbanisation of Africans. This was the context informing the 'Black Local Government Act' – officially known as the Black Local Authorities Act, passed in 1982 – that provided for local self-government for Africans in white South Africa. For the Bantustans, Botha spoke of the vision of what he called the Confederation of Southern African States as well as the increasing ties between South Africa and the TBVC states.[109] For the rest, Botha spoke of the 'civilised standard' held in common by all South Africans, regardless of cultural differences which gave them a sense of unity and solidarity to withstand the 'total onslaught'.

Botha acknowledged past failures on the part of the government in the lack of representation afforded to Coloureds who were described as not constituting a homogeneous 'volk' thus making a homeland unlikely. He also referred to the large contingent of Indians based mainly in Natal. These disparate 'groups' presented a 'problem' that needed to be rectified. He stated that it was the role of his government to redress past injustices and protect the political and cultural rights of the 'minority groups' within South Africa's borders. The Tricameral Parliament would therefore be formed with, in Botha's view, the clarion call: 'We want to see South Africa survive as a bastion for civilisation. We are determined to uphold the rights of minorities and if necessary to fight for it.'[110]

Botha's words spoke to the supposed 'protection' of all 'minority groups' in the face of an African majority. By including Coloureds and Indians as 'minority groups' along with whites, Botha could thus justify white political dominance without giving this dominance an overtly racially exclusive cast. As with other recommendations of the Constitutional Committee, the antecedents of the Tricameral Parliament can be found in earlier reform initiatives. In 1977, the suggestion was distinct parliaments for

108. Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders*, 147, 168.
109. Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei. See SP (P.R.4/1982), *Second Report of the Constitutional Committee,* 100-103.
110. SP (P.R.4/1982), *Second Report of the Constitutional Committee,* 100, 105-106.

whites, Indians and Coloureds and this would eventually evolve into the Tricameral Parliament – a single parliament with separate houses for the 'racial groups'.[111] Excluded from both in deference to the preservation of 'minority rights', were Africans.

Released in August 1985, the Constitutional Committee's Report on the country's 'Urbanisation Strategy' came after the efficacy of Botha's reforming initiative was already being called into question. A State of Emergency had been proclaimed a month earlier in areas in the Eastern Cape and the Vaal region due to widespread unrest in African townships and this was later extended to include the entire country in 1986. The report itself focused on the thorny issue that arguably lay at the heart of the system of apartheid – African urbanisation. In addition to oral and written evidence, site visits were paid by the Constitutional Committee to townships such as Soweto and Alexandra as well as major metropolitan areas, including Durban and Pietermaritzburg.[112] Paradoxically, this committee understood urbanisation to be both the cause of the socio-economic issues affecting the country as well as the solution. Urbanisation was the means by which 'groups' could become modern and 'acculturated'. As evident in the Science Committee Report, this acculturation would lessen the existing differences that were a source of tension in the country's heterogeneous population. Simultaneously, an adoption of the 'modern' would also lead to lower birth rates, thus addressing the underlying concerns regarding black population growth. It would also foster modernisation and development.[113]

Of note to the Constitutional Committee was the 'duality of the South African economy' and reference was made to the 'core-periphery model' derived from the work of urban theorist, John Friedman to explain the developed urban areas and the poverty that characterised rural areas, an imbalance that required redress. Moreover, while the Committee acknowledged that urbanisation was unavoidable – and, in some cases, desirable – this urbanisation needed to be 'orderly' with provision made for migrants in existing urban spaces or with the creation of 'viable new towns' with the infrastructure necessary to support permanent urban populations.[114]

Again, the Constitutional Committee's recommendations were reminiscent of the segregation era. On the eve of the rise of the apartheid state the Report of the Native Laws (Fagan) Commission was released in 1948 with a recognition of both migrant and permanently urbanised African labour. In the wake of a World War fought against totalitarianism, it emphasised liberalism with little state intervention in the economy.[115]

111. Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders*, 168.
112. SUL, SP (P.R.3/1985), *Report of Committee for Constitutional Affairs of the President's Council on an Urbanisation Strategy for the Republic of South Africa*, 1985, 2.
113. SP (P.R.3/1985), *Report on an Urbanisation Strategy, RSA*, 16, 48.
114. SP (P.R.3/1985), *Report on an Urbanisation Strategy, RSA*, 59, 68.
115. I. Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

More than three decades later, with the aim of implementing future reform contextualising the Urbanisation Strategy Report in 1985 was the then current unrest in South African townships and this was alluded to in a number of ways. 'Relative deprivation' or a feeling of inequality in relation to other urban dwellers was cited as a source of discontent that could manifest in hostility to 'institutions' – such as local government institutions – and take on a 'political' dimension.[116] Another source of discontent was the leasehold system where, in an attempt at reform, township residents could obtain 99-year leases on their homes. The evidence presented to the Commission suggested that this was viewed as 'second-class' ownership, and the recommendation was for freehold homes that could fund local government through the imposition of rates and taxes. Home ownership was also related to 'upward mobility', a means of incorporating residents into the capitalist economy and averring the resentment created by 'relative deprivation'. These reforms would also ideally reinforce the system of local government where embattled councillors were 'targeted' by the disaffected for either being seen as collaborating with the oppressive state or having little power to improve the social and economic conditions of township residents.[117]

Despite the moderate stance evident in earlier reports, the Constitutional Committee was unequivocal in its condemnation of the system of influx control, features of which had existed in southern Africa since the nineteenth century and had been refined with the passing of various pieces of legislation from 1948.[118] While weighing the evidence for and against the maintenance of the system, the committee was convinced that the arguments for the abolition of influx control were more compelling.

Against the arguments made for African urbanisation resulting in the potential for increasing racial animosity, concerns regarding security and the implications for enfranchisement of what would be an African majority, were the counter-arguments made in the report that took on a moral dimension. The report saw influx control as a violation of human rights with a 'discriminatory' aspect as it applied only to a single 'racial group', it compounded African poverty, actually increased resentment and thus racial hostility and was an expensive system to maintain. Moreover, in its control over the movement of people, it bore a marked resemblance to the authoritarianism of the USSR. Finally, the high number of arrests for pass offences suggested both the inefficiency of the legal system as well as a 'contempt' for the law.[119]

116. SP (P.R.3/1985), *Report on an Urbanisation Strategy, Republic of South Africa*, 85, 86.
117. SP (P.R.3/1985), *Report on an Urbanisation Strategy,* 107, 112-113, 181.
118. SP (P.R.3/1985), *Report on an Urbanisation Strategy*, 139-146.
119. SP (P.R.3/1985), *Report on an Urbanisation Strategy*, 151-156.

To emphasise the point of 'the degrading of human dignity' and exclusion inherent in the system of influx control, the report cited the pained words of a witness, 'I am a modern slave in my own country'.[120] With a preference that 'orderly urbanisation' was the solution and that urbanisation itself was both 'unavoidable' and necessary for development, influx control was considered superfluous and morally repugnant.[121] The tone and phrasing of the report is revealing. While framing influx control as a moral issue that infringed upon individual rights, it was ultimately incompatible with the needs of development, the requirement for a skilled and permanent urban African workforce. The hated and pervasive system of influx control would be abolished less than a year later.

Conclusion: An Exercise in Futility?

Writing in 1988 in his biography of P.W. Botha, Pottinger was of the view that there were various factors that could potentially contribute to the success of reform as envisioned by the President's Council. These factors included the level of criticism aimed at it as well as internal stability and the economic context.[122] Based on these criteria, as numerous historians have shown, the President's Council was an abject failure. From its very inception, it was viewed with implacable hostility by opposition political groups as well as conservative elements within Botha's own party. The decade witnessed an unprecedented level of urban unrest. International protests against apartheid grew, compounded by the implementation of economic sanctions. Botha's presidency was marked by increasing levels of violence and state repression.

In their recommendation for a second President's Council under the new constitution, it is possible to gain a sense of how the members of the President's Council envisaged the role of the body and their own roles in reforming apartheid. Here, the Constitutional Committee stressed that the ideal council member should adopt a practical approach while retaining their individual values, be able to work with members of South Africa's heterogeneous population and focus on achieving progress, even if this 'is slow and the result far removed from where [one] … would eventually like the society to be'. Significantly, the most important qualification was an understanding that any reforms needed to consider 'the protection or promotion of the vital interests of those who hold power and those whom they represent …'[123]

These requirements, published in 1982, demonstrated a certain naivete regarding the President Council's ability to withstand the political pressure exerted from the executive or that these moderate attempts at reform would simply enflame

120. SP (P.R.3/1985), *Report on an Urbanisation Strategy*, 149, 151.
121. SP (P.R.3/1985), *Report on an Urbanisation Strategy,* 151, 157.
122. Pottinger, *The Imperial Presidency*, 77.
123. SP (P.R.3/1982), *First Report of the Constitutional Committee,* 80-81.

an already volatile situation. Perhaps, as Dubow suggests, the 'idea of apartheid' was itself so powerful and inextricably linked with the National Party government that it resisted 'reinvention'. The reforming elements in the form of the *verligtes* had arisen from a background of 'loyal opposition' that did not challenge apartheid ideology significantly. This meant that reform was seen as the prerogative of the apartheid state itself and thus curtailed by an instinct for self-preservation.[124]

A new constitution of South Africa was enacted in May 1983. Bearing the hallmarks of the Constitutional Committee, it allowed for the creation of a Tricameral Parliament with separate representation for whites, Asians and Coloureds. Africans remained excluded and those living in so-called white South Africa were subject to legislation that made some allowance for 'black local government'. There would also be a new President's Council that acted as an advisory body to the president. The powers of the president were formidable and ultimately, he had the final authority over decisions taken by the various parliaments and could determine the notion of 'own affairs' which fell under their control. With 50 white representatives in contrast to 25 Coloured representatives and 13 Asian representatives, white dominance in parliament was assured. Black political groups came out in opposition to the Tricameral Parliament, forming the United Democratic Front (UDF). Both the liberal PFP and the Conservative Party opposed it – the latter because it was a measure of reform, the former because African exclusion symbolised the limits of that reform.[125]

With the enaction of a new constitution and provision made for a new President's Council, the original body had fulfilled its mandate. It had been established during a precarious time for the South African state where a changing economic, social and political climate – both internationally and domestically – had demonstrated a weakness in the 'granite wall' of apartheid. Using the rhetoric of reform, it followed in the trajectory of previous commissions from as far back as the formation of the Union of South Africa, each attempting to reconcile white minority rule with the relentless advance of modernisation. For a time, this was compatible with and buttressed the system of apartheid but the 1970s precipitated a move towards a liberalisation of the economy that was increasingly unsuited to enforce racial discrimination, demonstrating that the economic and the social could not be isolated from the political.

The President's Council reflected this moment of transition, its possibilities and its limitations. Composed of members drawn from different 'racial and ethnic groups' and across the political spectrum, the reports issued by the Council were an amalgam of the different ways in which reform had been addressed over the course of the twentieth century. Faced with the failure of the policies implemented during

124. Dubow, *Apartheid*, x, 121, 123.
125. Simpson, *History of South Africa*, 258-259.

'high apartheid' and the failure of the Verwoerdian ideal, the President's Council built upon current attempts at reform while also drawing upon the language and ideology of the pre-apartheid/segregation era. Yet the latter was ultimately anachronistic. In a hostile environment marked by the vociferous demands of black radicals, the criticism of liberals, the recalcitrance of conservatives and Botha's determination to retain a stranglehold on power with his so-called 'Rubicon' speech emphatically placing limits on reform, any potential idealism on the part of the President's Council was silenced, ultimately rendering it a footnote in South African history.

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