

CSIS AFRICA NOTES

A publication of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C.

Is Democracy Achievable In Russia and/or South Africa?

by Patti Waldmeir

Of all the many nations struggling to cast off the burden of an authoritarian past, few face rougher paths to democracy than Russia and South Africa. Neither has the cultural habits, traditions, or history that would predispose it to democracy, and the societies of both countries have been deeply damaged by aberrational experiments in social engineering (communism and apartheid).

Yet both have now set off on the quest for a future in which government rules by consent and not coercion, and freedoms are guaranteed by law. Leaders of both nations—whether President Boris Yeltsin in Russia or President F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela in South Africa—profess a commitment to democracy that is absolute (at least at the rhetorical level). The next few years of political transition will sorely test this commitment.

Neither Russia nor South Africa is likely to follow a direct path to a liberal democratic ideal. As Samuel P. Huntington, a leading U.S. democracy theorist, observes in his recent book, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1991): “Historically the first efforts to establish democracy in countries frequently fail; second efforts often succeed.” Russia and South Africa may need more than two chances to reach the democratic goal—if indeed they ever do. Both face problems of ethnicity and economic hardship that pose formidable obstacles to democratization. South Africa shoulders an added burden that could prove too much for a fledgling democracy to bear: the problem of gross economic inequalities determined by race. As Huntington phrases it: “[D]emocracy is difficult in a situation of concentrated inequalities in which a large, impoverished majority confronts a small, wealthy oligarchy.” This is especially true if that oligarchy is racially defined.

But a return to either totalitarian communism (that most extreme form of authoritarianism) or to apartheid is out of the question. Both ideologies have been permanently discredited. The search is on for a (more or less) democratic form of government that can hold anarchy at bay while protecting at least a decent minimum of civil liberties.

In the near term, both countries could end up concluding that the state cannot be reformed under conditions of democratic freedom, which are perceived in some quarters as fostering chaos, crime, and violence. In both countries, many already yearn for a “strong man” to restore order. Less than a year after the August 1991 “revolution” that brought Yeltsin and his



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reformist colleagues to power, observers say Russians are gripped by "post-totalitarian depression." In South Africa as well, there is clear evidence among both blacks and whites of what political scientists call "authoritarian nostalgia." It is perhaps not surprising that, in Huntington's words, "memories of repression [fade] and [are] in some measure replaced by images of order, prosperity, and economic growth during the authoritarian period."

As Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out in the early nineteenth century, "it cannot be doubted that the moment at which political rights are granted to a people that had before been without them is a critical one." Russia and South Africa are living that dangerous moment now; whether they will survive it as democracies is impossible to predict. But they are struggling on, and there are lessons to be learned from the struggle—especially for South Africa, which, isolated at the tip of a distant continent, tends to view its problem as historically unique. For years the African National Congress (ANC), which was closely allied to the South African Communist Party, looked to the Soviet Union as a political model for a future South Africa; ANC leaders would do well to look for pointers now from the USSR's most powerful successor state, Russia.

Any comparison of prospects for democratization in Russia and South Africa must address four critical components:

- South Africa's postapartheid government will inherit at least one crucial element that Russian democrats are struggling to create against desperate odds: a functioning market economy.
- While Russians battle to establish political parties, independent courts, and the other institutions of parliamentary democracy, South Africans can draw on a long parliamentary tradition, which, though it has largely been limited to whites, can provide models for the future.
- The vibrant "civil society" so utterly lacking in Russia—the community associations, church groups, trade unions, and business organizations that are the fabric of democratic society—exists in both black and white South Africa to varying degrees.
- The South Africa bureaucracy, bloated and inefficient as it is, provides a functioning state apparatus, which Russia does not have. Pretoria may have lost control over black local government and black education, but the crisis of administrative and executive power is far more pervasive in Russia.

The Economic Scorecard

The South African economy, like that of Russia, has suffered the effects of excessive state intervention over 44 years of National Party rule. The party (and its governments) pursued a kind of "Afrikaner socialism," using state capital to set up nationalized industries dominated by Afrikaners, and packing the bureaucracy with members of the "white tribe of Africa." But the extent of state control over economic production never

approached Russian levels. A vigorous private sector was active throughout, and a large property-owning white middle class (both English-speaking and Afrikaner) had evolved by the 1980s. Since then, a fledgling black property-owning class has also begun to develop. In recent years, government has privatized and deregulated a number of industries, leaving an economy that is still constrained but no longer stifled by the state.

The ANC also professes its commitment to "the market," but with the crucial caveat that, if the market does not deliver "economic empowerment" to blacks, it will be made to do so by the state. ANC leaders are now restraining their earlier rhetoric on the issue of nationalization, but their instincts remain overwhelmingly statist (see "Who's Where in the Debate on 'Nationalization' in South Africa" by Witney W. Schneidman, *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 114, July 1990). They make the point that they seek political power in order to improve the standard of living of the disenfranchised. That priority could still entice them into the eventual use of "commandist" methods.

Before ANC leaders decide to tamper with the market, however, they should first consider the ways in which a mixed economy could underpin the democratic system that they profess to be their goal. A vigorous private sector can function as an important "check and balance" on the power of governmental authority. Moreover, only a market economy can provide the prosperity that, in the long run, will bolster democracy from below. As de Tocqueville observed: "General prosperity is favorable to the stability of all governments, but more particularly of a democratic one, which depends upon the will of the majority, and especially upon the will of that portion of the community which is most exposed to want. . . . When the people rule, they must be rendered happy or they will overturn the state."

Admittedly, the structure of the South African

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SUBSCRIPTION RATE: *CSIS Africa Notes* is sent airmail/first class to subscribers worldwide. The annual subscription price for 12 issues and occasional supplements is \$48.00. Please make checks payable to: *CSIS Africa Notes*, Suite 400, 1800 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006, U.S.A. Telephone: (202) 775-3219. Telex: 7108229583 Cables: CENSTRAT. Fax: (202) 775-3199

ISSN 0736-9506

economy needs adjustment to correct its flaws of low growth, low productivity, high unemployment, and inflation. As Frederik van Zyl Slabbert (a South African political scientist, former member of Parliament, and founder of the influential Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa [IDASA]) points out, "it is inconceivable that there can be any serious progress towards a democratic constitution" under sluggish economic conditions marked by an inexorable rise in both unemployment and the cost of living. (See "South Africa in Transition: Pitfalls and Prospects" by Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 133, February 1992.)

Rather than repairing an existing flawed structure, Russian leaders must build that very structure itself, and from scratch. They lack the institutional supports for capitalism—the active financial markets, the detailed body of company law that South Africa inherits from the apartheid era. ANC leaders should (and some do) recognize this legacy as an advantage.

Institutional Building Blocks Compared

Paradoxically, leaders of the new South Africa will also inherit other potentially democratic institutions from the apartheid era. Although apartheid violated the first principle of democracy, the right to elected representation for all, the white state operated as a parliamentary democracy within the racial limits prescribed by apartheid. A variety of political parties have been formed over the years, giving whites (at least) decades of experience in party politics—something that Russian politicians lack.

There are currently three parties in the (white) House of Assembly in South Africa's tricameral Parliament—the ruling National Party, the ultraright Conservative Party, and the liberal Democratic Party, each with a significant bloc of seats. And despite the fact that the National Party has been dominant since it won power in 1948, its success has not done much more to stifle parliamentary democracy among whites than has the dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party in the case of Japan. This has been especially true since the early 1980s, when President P.W. Botha's political reforms prompted a number of National Party MPs to break away and form the Conservative Party. The Democratic Party (formerly the Progressive Federal Party) has also gained many more seats over the past decade.

So, at least in the white community (and to a lesser extent among Coloureds [mixed race] and Indians, who have their own elected token houses of Parliament under the terms of the new constitution that went into effect in 1984), parliamentary procedure is understood and the tradition of party formation is established. White parties have efficient grass-roots organizations and could form the nucleus of a strong opposition to the ANC, which has yet to transform itself from a liberation movement to a political party. (See "The ANC in Transition: From Symbol to Political Party" by Marina Ottaway, *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 113, June 1990.) Both the National Party and the Democratic Party hope to attract moderate

blacks, Coloureds, and Indians as members; these parties could prove a powerful check on the activities of any radically oriented government.

For Russian politicians, on the other hand, party formation is a far more difficult challenge. The dominance of the Communist Party, which invaded every aspect of personal and public life, has deeply discredited the very notion of "party." As one U.S. diplomat phrased it, "Politics is a dirty word in Russia." Although limited political reforms were introduced under the Czar during the brief 1905-1917 window and political parties began to form, aspirations to multiparty politics were crushed after the November 1917 Bolshevik coup, when the elected Constituent Assembly—dominated by the Bolsheviks' opponents, the Social Revolutionaries—was simply dissolved by Lenin.

Given these circumstances, it is no surprise that true political parties are slow to develop in today's Russia. Western commentators quip that most Russian parties as of 1992 are really only "three men and a fax machine," groups that rely heavily on the personality of their leader, with little or no grass-roots organization. Larger groups have formed and re-formed, but they splinter rather than coalesce. Even President Yeltsin is something of a one-man band: he lacks a political party that can disseminate his ideas, and he commands no faction in the Congress of People's Deputies upon which he can count to pursue his legislative program. If the essence of democracy is political choice, exercised through regular elections, it is difficult to see how this could operate in Russia as long as there are no coherent party alternatives to Yeltsin himself.

Perhaps more important even than parties—certainly from the point of view of protecting civil liberties—is the question of that quintessential liberal democratic institution, the independent judiciary. Here, too, South Africa's new leaders will inherit an institution that they destroy at their great peril. (This is not to suggest that the ANC opposes the notion of an independent judiciary. Constitutional principles published by the organization stress the need for independent courts of justice. But the real test will come only when a future court frustrates the will of a new government—especially if that government is convinced that it is acting in the national interest. The independent judiciary has scarcely been noted for its flourishing good health elsewhere in Africa.)

One significant disadvantage the South African judiciary carries as the new multiracial era begins is that it is almost all white. Despite this racial imbalance, however, the courts managed to preserve a tradition of independence even in the worst days of apartheid abuse. Antipartheid lawyers have challenged (often successfully) state repression through the courts, establishing a tradition that augurs well for protecting the much-extended civil liberties promised by both the ANC and the government under the anticipated new constitution.

Russia has no such tradition of challenging state power through the courts—certainly not under communism,

when challenging party decisions by any means at all was effectively forbidden. The establishment of Russia's new Constitutional Court is clearly a milestone on the path to democracy. Valery Zorkin, the Court's chairman, has defined his mission as that of creating "an expanse governed by the rule of law." Graham Allison, director of the Strengthening Democratic Institutions project at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, points out that the new court has already tested its power as a check against the executive, ruling unconstitutional President Yeltsin's decree merging the KGB with the Internal Ministry for Security of the Russian Federation: "It had been previously unimaginable to challenge a decree by the head of state, let alone expect the executive powers to concede. . . . But the court's decision held, marking a decisive step in its institutional empowerment."

Although this is surely a vital first step toward a fully independent judicial system, the fact remains that Russia lacks the institutions and the practitioners (courts, judges, and lawyers schooled in the exercise of independence) that exist in South Africa. The South African legal system is far from perfect (the bench has handed down some shockingly racist judgments in its time, refusing to convict or imposing trivial sentences on whites who kill blacks), but it is a crucial building block of a democratic South Africa.

Indeed, the ruling National Party, which has embraced the virtues of liberal multiracial democracy now that it sees its interests threatened by a black government, cherishes the hope that the democratic institutions used in the past to protect whites against whites can now be used to protect whites against blacks. President de Klerk is not advocating changing the system in South Africa. He simply wants to include blacks as full members, and to add checks and balances to ensure that no black government can ever exercise the power white presidents have wielded.

Contrasts in Civil Society

As Shirley Williams, former British politician and now director of Harvard University's Project Liberty, points out: "Democracy is much more than the holding of free, multiparty elections at regular intervals. . . . Fundamental to democracy is civil society, the structure that underlies the political system, a structure fashioned from innumerable relationships among friends and colleagues. . . ." Democracy requires more than political parties and even elections to sustain it. A vigorous civil society must underpin the political system. This includes everything from independent trade unions to women's organizations, from churches to chambers of commerce, from independent universities to local community associations, all of them providing a check on would-be tyrants. De Tocqueville made much the same point about U.S. democracy over 150 years ago: "In the American townships, power has been disseminated with admirable skill, for the purpose of interesting the greatest possible number of persons in the common weal."

Although South Africa falls far short of de Tocqueville's ideal, civil infrastructure is well developed in both white and black society. Liberal lawyers have formed a wide range of organizations to protect prisoners' rights, protest against the death penalty, and provide defense teams in human rights cases. Professional associations, charities, think tanks, liberal universities, church groups, and, most important, business organizations and trade unions also thrive. Business organizations provide the most potent white antidote to state power, and trade unions (with a membership probably approaching 2 million) the strongest black challenge to the state. The largest union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), is now affiliated to the ANC but has served notice it intends to pursue independence under a postapartheid government.

Business and labor represent crucial building blocks for democracy in the new South Africa. To achieve the kind of social accord that alone can deliver long-term peace and stability, these two key players must work together in the national interest. Recent negotiations between COSATU and the South African Employers' Consultative Committee on Labour Affairs (SACCOLA), representing major employers, failed to produce a pact aimed at jointly pressuring the white government to accelerate the transition to democracy. But the groundwork may have been laid for a future deal that would have important implications for the achievement of democracy in South Africa.

The extensive range of civic associations in black townships have acted as perhaps the most important agents of the liberation struggle. Although these organizations (which are overwhelmingly dominated by the ANC) found it much easier to organize boycotts of council rents and utility payments than to persuade residents they should resume payments as part of a deal with neighboring white cities to develop township facilities, they could in the future provide a far more effective network for articulating community grievances than exists in other African countries.

Church groups could also prove crucial. Census figures show that three-fourths of the South African population is actively religious, belonging to one of the country's many Christian and non-Christian sects. Church leaders have often intervened in the past to ease conflict; their mediating skills may be called for often in the future. (See "Why Racial Reconciliation Is Possible in South Africa" by Steven McDonald, *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 109, March 1990.)

The media, too, will have an active role to play in protecting democracy in the new South Africa. It is far from clear, however, whether it is as yet up to the task. The broadcast media, dominated by the state-owned South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), seldom shows a flicker of independent spirit and is demonstrably negatively biased in its reporting of the ANC. The board of directors will be changed under an interim government, but it is a moot point whether the news

staff, dominated by conservative Afrikaners, will quickly develop the habits suited to independent reporting.

Perhaps conditioned by past decades of censorship, the mainstream press also seems to lack initiative in its reporting—with the notable exception of the weekly *Sunday Times* and its outspoken editor-columnist Ken Owen. But recently the “alternative” press—small antiapartheid publications such as the *Weekly Mail* and the Afrikaans-language *Vrye Weekblad*—have played a courageous role in exposing scandals such as the use of state funds to finance Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi’s Inkatha Freedom Party and the existence of security-force assassination squads. It is reasonable to hope these publications will apply the same critical spirit to apartheid’s successors as to its perpetrators.

The Russian press, on the other hand, seems to have taken on enthusiastically the role of guarantor of democracy. Readership has declined since the heady early days of *glasnost*, when Russians flocked to buy publications that aired (for the first time in decades) criticism of the regime. Nevertheless, the print media continues to operate freely and in a relatively independent spirit—although with most printing facilities state-owned and most newspapers subsidized by the state, total independence of the press has yet to be achieved, and informal political pressure on editors is not unknown.

While today’s Russian civil society can boast an energetic press, the same cannot be said of its other institutions. *Glasnost* spurred the formation in 1987 and 1988 of thousands of informal clubs and associations, from conservation societies to associations for the preservation of historical monuments to political debating groups, but this blossoming of civil society proved short-lived. As the economic revolution took hold, Russians were left struggling so hard to survive that they gave up such luxuries.

Community spirit has survived much more nearly intact in South Africa, despite apartheid repression. Although it seldom crosses the color line—most members of each community (white, black, Indian, Coloured) feel an obligation only to its own members—the damage done to the overall society is probably less in South Africa than in Russia.

How Functional Is the State?

South Africa’s new leaders will inherit a state machine that actually works, albeit inefficiently in many areas and with the qualification that the departments administering black affairs are permeated with corruption and lack legitimacy in the black community. In Russia, as Alexander Motyl of Columbia University’s Harriman Institute phrases it, “the collapse of totalitarianism has not yielded democracy but instead a complete and total void, a vacuum.” Because party and state were practically indivisible in Russia, the demise of the one has destroyed the other as well.

A new South African government could face a crisis of executive power, but of much lesser intensity than the one Russia is experiencing. Although many senior

bureaucrats are Afrikaners, and some are staunch conservatives, they are unlikely to be either keen or able to form a united front against a postapartheid executive (especially if, as expected, that executive includes prominent Afrikaner politicians). And unless events take a dramatic turn for the worse, South Africa will never face a situation of state collapse comparable to Russia’s.

Thus, the triple challenge facing Russia is to create a modern state, a modern market economy, and democratic political institutions, and to do so simultaneously under conditions of great economic hardship. Whatever other problems South Africa will face—and these are huge—Russia’s democrats face a breathtaking task of institution-building that is likely to prove far more difficult than South Africa’s.

Cultural Constraints

The Russians, no less than the Afrikaners and the Africans, have long been autocrats by nature, and are democrats only by recent persuasion (if at all). Some observers believe a new authoritarian Yeltsin could emerge under pressure to replace this year’s democratic Yeltsin. On the other hand, there is considerable evidence that Russians have adjusted to greater political freedom more easily than South Africans (white or black). At least the Russians tolerate different points of view (as evidenced by the new vigor of their press) without murdering each other in the numbers now being slain in South Africa.

Although the Afrikaners have in the past observed the democratic niceties in dealing with their own people (with the exception of left-wing whites), they have not found it easy to achieve a spirit of democratic tolerance toward blacks. A striking example is the evidence that right-wing whites in the police force, through callous omission or simple incompetence, have exacerbated the violence in black townships that has left some 14,000 people dead since 1984.

Africans, too, have a weak record in the area of sustained democracy. In the 35 years since Ghana gained independence from Britain in 1957, only a few sub-Saharan African nations have managed to sustain multiparty governments for any significant period. Botswana, Namibia, Mauritius, and Gambia are the most convincing examples in 1992.

The ANC and its main black opposition, the Zulu Inkatha Freedom Party, profess to be different; they both support multiparty democracy in principle. But it would be difficult to imagine a more hierarchical, tribalistic, and intolerant party than Inkatha; and the ANC’s professed commitment to internal party democracy has always clashed with the Stalinist model adopted by its close ally, the South African Communist Party, some of whose members occupy senior leadership positions within the ANC. In this interim period, the ANC’s commitment to democracy can only be taken at face value. As Huntington points out, “Political leaders out of office have good reason to advocate democracy. The test of their democratic commitment comes when they are in

office." The ANC's desire for democratic elections is only exceeded by its desire to win them.

Another factor that must be taken into account is that the Western-style democracy advocated by the ANC—with its emphasis on the individual—may take root only with difficulty in the soil of communally oriented tribal Africa. Although South Africa has the most highly urbanized population on the continent, rural Africans bring their beliefs and political principles with them to the city, and abandon them only slowly.

Despite the willingness of both major black parties to make major concessions to whites (the ANC's offer to allow a one-third minority to block constitutional changes could mean an effective white veto), neither will give an inch to its black opponent. As a result, thousands have died as politicians jockey for power, and as the white government looks on, unwilling or unable to stop the carnage.

In the final analysis, however, the weight of history and culture alone will probably not sink South Africa's democratic experiment. Nations can change their political habits if it is sufficiently in their interest to do so. Otherwise, democracy would not exist on earth. There are few nations that seem to be naturally born to it. Under the influence of Western television, which feeds audiences capitalist and more-or-less democratic values along with all the pap, habits can change; some commentators believe TV was a major factor in feeding Russian opposition to communism.

Paradoxically, Russia's recent history of totalitarian communism could actually work to its advantage in the quest for democracy. If nothing else, that experience has taught Russia what it does *not* want from a political system. A period of strong, even authoritarian rule from the center is a near-term possibility, but a return to totalitarianism—authoritarian rule at its most chillingly brutal—is out of the question.

In South Africa, on the other hand, what has been discredited is domination by race, not authoritarianism per se. This was demonstrated during the (currently suspended) constitutional negotiations of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), when the ANC and the government agreed that a multiracial interim government would reimpose detention without trial and a state of emergency—the very measures used by whites in the 1980s to crush black opposition to apartheid.

The Two Major Threats

In the end, ethnicity and economic hardship probably pose the gravest threats to democracy in both Russia and South Africa.

South Africa's ethnicity problem becomes more obvious by the day, as ethnic tensions fuel quasi-political struggles in the townships. This is scarcely surprising, when one recalls that ethnic division was the guiding principle of apartheid, which sought to confine South Africa's races and ethnic groups to geographically separate neighborhoods and homelands, on the principle

that mixing them was both dangerous and theologically forbidden.

Millions of blacks were forced to live in ethnically segregated rural homelands, and those who were "lucky" enough to dwell in Soweto, the largest black township, were segregated by neighborhood (though intermarriage between ethnic groups later blurred the barriers). The Afrikaners' obsession with ethnicity led to absurdities of race classification and has left a legacy of division that will be hard to overcome. Although daily relations between whites and blacks are remarkably cordial, the political transition has put these relations under increasing strain, and relations among the various nonwhite racial categories and ethnic groups are if anything worse.

Russia also has ethnic problems, but probably less severe than those of South Africa. It faces a dual threat, from non-Russians living within what is now the Russian Federation, and, more important, from the millions of ethnic Russians living outside Russia, in the other republics of the former Soviet Union. Commentators disagree over the seriousness of the threat posed by non-Russians in the Russian Federation. They point out that some 82 percent of the Federation's population is ethnically Russian, and the next-largest group, the Tatars, represent only a little over 3 percent. That scarcely compares with South Africa, with its 5 million whites, 3 million Coloureds, 1 million Indians, as well as 7 to 9 million Zulus (census figures are unreliable), 6 million Xhosas, and hosts of other black ethnic groups.

The problem of the many millions of ethnic Russians left marooned in outposts of the former Communist empire is potentially more serious. The three Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, home to as many as 2 million ethnic Russians, have all drafted constitutions that would bar many ethnic Russians from citizenship and force them to use the local language. Ethnic Russians have declared part of Moldova an independent republic. Aided by troops from the Russian Federation, they have fought against the Moldovan army. Numerous other potential conflicts are brewing. Indeed, some commentators believe there is a risk that right-wing nationalist sentiment might be exploited as the basis for a coup that could topple President Yeltsin himself, ushering in a hard-line Russian chauvinist dictatorship.

Nationalism on its own is difficult enough to combat, but economic hardship makes the task tougher still. And there is no sign that Russia's hardships will ease in the near term. Lives that were hard enough have become immeasurably harder since Russia first began stumbling down the path to a modern market economy. Real wages have fallen, in some cases sharply, or are paid in kind, not cash; standards of living have sunk; Russians have been left exhausted and apathetic by the daily struggle to survive. There is no shortage of those willing to claim that life was better under Brezhnev—or of those who call for authoritarian methods to force through economic reform (what Martin Wolf, Moscow correspondent of the *Financial Times*, has called the "despotic route to the market"), à la Chile under General Pinochet.

But it is in South Africa that the potent cocktail of ethnicity and poverty is likely to prove the most serious challenge to democracy, because of the correlation between wealth and race in that country. Russians struggle (more or less) equally to survive; in South Africa, on the other hand, race largely dictates the degree of hardship one experiences.

History provides no apparent solution to this problem. Democracy invites the individual to use his vote to obtain a fairer share of wealth. But any South African government that seeks to close this wealth gap rapidly, through redistribution, will seriously jeopardize economic growth by alienating (white) skills and capital. So successive governments are probably doomed to frustrate the immediate expectations of blacks and to suffer for it at the ballot box. One must wonder whether a new government would take its democratic chances under these circumstances or instead seek other means to perpetuate its rule.

It is worth remembering that whatever kind of postapartheid government emerges will inherit one of the globe's most radicalized populations. Although the battle cry "liberation now, education later" has largely given way in the 1990s to a view that education is a fundamental need that should not be used as a political tool, the millions of young blacks who spent most of the 1980s boycotting or burning down their schools in the struggle for liberation can hardly be expected to be transformed overnight into responsible and patient citizens. (See "Reconstructing Education for a New South Africa" by Bruce McKenney, *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 131, December 1991.) It is also possible that the long-suffering black majority—who have known great privation under apartheid, especially during the past decade, when per capita incomes have fallen steeply in real terms—may be converted to greater militancy by the acquisition of political rights. They may find intolerable what had previously seemed a bearable burden.

Options

Slabbert concludes his recent book, *The Quest for Democracy: South Africa in Transition* (Penguin, 1992), with this assessment of South Africa's options: "There is nothing inevitable about a democratic outcome to transition in South Africa. The dynamics of its transition may precipitate undemocratic outcomes. . . they may even mix or alternate until South Africa becomes a democracy (if indeed it does at all)." The most he can say is that "the prospects of South Africa becoming a democracy are daunting and challenging but not out of the question."

Slabbert explores possible short-term results of the current transition. If negotiations fail to yield a new deal by the next general election, due in 1994 or early 1995, the National Party might postpone elections or even hold them under the apartheid constitution, which excludes blacks. He dismisses these options as unlikely. Two other broad scenarios seem more plausible. The white government could impose a new security clampdown,

either with or without the cooperation of moderate blacks. Slabbert's description of the latter option: "[A] new modernizing nonracial oligarchy, together with the security forces, effect a clampdown, pleading that it had 'no choice' to restore stability to South Africa and save it for a 'future democracy' and a 'vibrant market economy'" (the Chilean option). Or an unelected multiracial "government of transitional unity" could be installed, with or without a referendum to test its legitimacy. He concludes: "South Africa has the capacity to become democratic, but it is going to be much more difficult to achieve than remaining undemocratic in any one of [these ways]."

For four months earlier this year, black and white South Africans met almost daily at the CODESA negotiating forum in an effort to agree on a postapartheid constitution. The process is currently halted, but when it resumes (and there is a broad consensus that it will), the debate will be the same: whether majority rule or power-sharing is best for a country of such enormous diversity.

The government favors a complicated solution known to the cognoscenti as "consociational democracy," which involves power-sharing among various groups at the executive level (rigidly enforced or voluntary); maximum devolution of power in a federal state; and a minority veto in Parliament. An advocate is Berkeley political scientist Arend Lijphart, who argues: "Majoritarian democracy may be preferable in terms of democratic quality, but because the probability that it will work in a plural society is very low or nil, it is not a realistic option. Practically speaking, the only choice is between consociational democracy or no democracy."

Huntington partially concurs: "In most cases of communal pluralism, democracy can operate only on a consociational rather than a majoritarian basis. . . . [But] it will often break down because of social mobilization that undermines the power of elites; the only way it can be stable is if it becomes consociational oligarchy." The latter is also one of Slabbert's options. Pretoria often cites Switzerland, with its cantonal system of government, as a model for South Africa. But Switzerland's language divisions are surely nowhere near as deep as South Africa's ethnic and racial ones, and they are minimized by prosperity. Not surprisingly, the government seldom cites Lebanon—a striking example of consociational government gone wrong.

Still, some elements of consociationalism obviously make sense in South Africa—especially the principle of federalism (though this is an element of many other systems as well). Many of the thorniest problems of governing a multicultural society can only be dealt with at the local level. When the country is both large and divided, as is true of South Africa, federalism makes a lot of sense.

Although the ANC now seems willing to accept a degree of devolution of power to regions, most ANC leaders continue to believe a strong central state is necessary to direct the process of overcoming economic

inequalities. In general, the ANC favors a majority-rule constitution, albeit with large majorities required for changing its provisions. President Nelson Mandela and Secretary General Cyril Ramaphosa have said that the ANC will voluntarily share power with whites in the first executive government of the new era (not just in the transition to a new constitution, but after the first postapartheid elections have been held). It is not clear, however, how much power they have in mind. Whichever form of constitution is eventually chosen will have to include a significant amount of power-sharing, or the white government will simply not agree to it. And without white support, the ANC knows that the economy would collapse and political power would be meaningless.

A constitution that imposes a white veto in perpetuity would obviously be unacceptable to blacks. Sooner or later, there will have to be a major reallocation of political power in South Africa. There will have to be majority rule. But the prospects for successful majoritarian *democracy* appear doubtful unless power-sharing governments can solve the economic inequality problem more rapidly than seems feasible at the moment.

In Russia, a fragile democracy is already in place. The country's leader has been chosen legitimately through the ballot box for the first time in a millennium; the press is free and active; government respects all the democratic freedoms of speech, association, protest, and so forth. Many worry that a right-wing nationalist coup could displace all of this, or even that Yeltsin himself could decide to put democracy aside for the moment, dissolving the legislature and ruling entirely by decree (with or without protecting civil liberties). Stephen Sestanovich, director of the Russian and Eurasian Studies Program at CSIS, doubts this outcome. "Russia is *very* pluralistic. There's been a dissolution of power and it would be very difficult to reestablish central control," he argues, adding

that it would be harder to put an authoritarian regime in place than to deal with Russia's problems by more democratic means.

The prospects for democracy in Russia—although they may look bleak at this time of economic, political, and social chaos—are probably better than in South Africa over the long run. As Dimitri Simes of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C. argues: "Russia's problems are horrible but they're temporary. There are no structural reasons why they can't muddle through to democracy and prosperity." He adds, however, that this "muddling through" is likely to be a long process.

No Going Back for Either Country

Even if both Russia and South Africa revert temporarily to some form of authoritarian rule, there can be no returning to the specific abominations of the past. Totalitarianism and apartheid are ruled out forever. The Russian and South African peoples can only hope that the system chosen to govern them next time is at least more humane, responsive, and representative than the last one.

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