

The Mass Action Campaign of 1992: The Ciskei Crisis and the African National Congress in Transition

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The Mass Action Campaign of 1992: The Ciskei Crisis and the African National Congress in Transition

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ABSTRACT

The politics of South Africa's transition to democracy played out beyond the negotiating rooms. In the Eastern Cape's Border region, where democratic mobilisation faced violent repression by the Ciskei bantustan regime throughout South Africa's years of transition (1990–1994), a confrontation escalated, which cast national politics into stark relief. By 1992, this developing crisis came to expose the uneasy compromises being made at the negotiation table; the complex politics of homeland reincorporation; and the disconnection between national negotiations and social realities on the ground. The dramatic and fatal march on Ciskei's capital Bisho on 7 September 1992, often understood as a pivotal moment of the transition, marked the culmination of a long local campaign to oust Ciskei's repressive military ruler. This struggle was belatedly supported by the national leadership of the African National Congress (ANC), to clarify its own mass action campaign and to evidence the organisation's mandate to negotiate. The politics surrounding the crisis in Ciskei and the ANC national leadership's efforts first to rein in and then to harness the local campaign reveal the tensions at play as leaders sought to transform the organisation from its disparate strands into a party prepared for multiparty elections.

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Introduction

1992 was the most turbulent, uncertain, and critical year of South Africa's transition to democracy. Hopes that were pinned on the success of the negotiations at the Congress for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) were dashed in May as the African National Congress (ANC) withdrew from the talks in the face of widespread criticism from among its own support base. Escalating political violence and evidence of the use of covert repression by the National Party (NP)

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government fuelled growing distrust between the main negotiating parties. The Boipatong massacre in mid-June 1992, which the ANC blamed on the regime under F. W. de Klerk, further undermined this relationship and sealed a new focus within the Tripartite Alliance:¹ the winter of 1992 was dominated by the contested politics of mass action. A dominant narrative emerges from various accounts of this period: that the Alliance shelved negotiations following the Boipatong massacre only to resume them again after the massacre at Bhisho in September 1992. According to this narrative, the two tragedies interrupted the principal frame of national politics, the violence apparently serving to caution and remind national politicians of their goals and responsibilities.² This story rests on a narrow perspective of the political contours of the transition and negates the dynamics of the mass action campaign. More than cautionary tale, political violence was a defining dynamic of the negotiations and their possibilities, no more so than in the months of mid-1992.³ Widespread suspicion within the democratic movement that the government was pursuing a dual agenda became, after Boipatong, a defining element of its political discourse. With absolute loss in the good faith of NP politicians, realpolitik now governed the transitional strategy of the Alliance, making room for the argument to renew pressure through mass action.

This article draws on diverse archival, published and oral primary sources to examine the escalating political crisis that developed in the Border region of the Eastern Cape in 1991 to 1992; the problems it created for emerging agreements at CODESA; its role in crystallising the questions around which the negotiations collapsed in May 1992; and its influence on the ANC's mass action campaign. The article argues that the escalating situation in the Ciskei forced ANC negotiators to change their conciliatory position towards what were known as the 'TBVC' states (the 'independent homelands' of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Ciskei) and instead to confront 'hostile' bantustan regimes through 'rolling mass action'. The latter offered an opportunity for the ANC executive, anxious amid popular unrest and criticism of their aloof negotiating style, to renew their links with 'the masses' through visible association with the signs and symbols of people's power. The article is the first of two that together reassess the transition 'from below' and develop an understanding of the context, political dynamics, and significance of the Bhisho march and massacre. While this first article examines the escalating crisis in the Border region, providing a backstory to the tragic massacre on 7

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1. A partnership between the ANC, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and the South African Communist Party (SACP).
 2. A. Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Road to Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 133–152; M. Murray, *The Revolution Deferred: The Painful Birth of Post-Apartheid South Africa* (London: Verso, 1994), 182–184; P. Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle: The End of Apartheid and the Birth of the New South Africa* (London: W.W. Norton, 1997), 216.
 3. L. Evans, 'Violence in the South African Transition', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (2024), <https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-1104>.

September 1992, the second article examines the September march itself: the consequences of local political violence for the possibilities and outcomes of the march; the multiple meanings of mass action within the Alliance; the tragic pattern of events that unfolded on Ciskei's border; and the political consequences and manoeuvrings that followed in the wake of the tragedy. L. Evans, 'The Bhishe March and Massacre of September 1992: The "Leipzig Option" and the Meanings of Mass Action in the South African Transition,' *South African Historical Journal*, 75, 3 (2024).

The emerging crisis in the Ciskei bantustan and in the Border region, which escalated throughout the early years of the transition, became a matter of growing national importance in 1992 as it exposed the uneasy compromises being made at CODESA, the complex politics of 'homeland' reincorporation, and the disconnection between national negotiations and social realities 'on the ground'. In keeping with tradition, the ANC sought to keep the disagreement that existed between national and regional leaders quiet, for it challenged the legitimacy of its leadership. Alongside pressure from COSATU and the NP's whites-only referendum called to legitimate the government's role in negotiations, the unfolding political crisis in Ciskei informed the decision by the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC) to launch a mass action campaign. In doing so, the leadership was ceding to escalating demands from across the left wing of the Tripartite Alliance: COSATU had for many months been calling for a general strike; young comrades and cadres of the uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) were rallying for further military support and a renewal of the armed struggle; and the civic movement was pressing for rent and bond boycotts. In the Ciskei, these dynamics were given political focus in a broad-based campaign against the hated military regime of Brigadier 'Oupa' Gqozo.

While violent, repressive, and tragic, the outcome of the September demonstration was not the great surprise that many claimed: for months, politicians and commentators across the political spectrum had feared the use of large-scale state violence against demonstrators as the campaign to oust Brigadier Gqozo grew in intensity. The large march on 7 September 1992 was not an initiative of the ANC's national executive nor a project of SACP insurrectionists, as some critics claimed; it was the consequence of a long-standing campaign by local civic organisations, churches, unions, and the regional ANC leadership. The national ANC leadership, aggrieved that this campaign threatened its negotiating strategy at CODESA and its approach towards the bantustans, made repeated attempts to rein in the local campaign. But organisers continued to mobilise against the escalating state violence in the Ciskei, demanding Gqozo's removal.

There remain few accounts of the mass action campaign of August-September 1992. Those that do exist describe the campaign as a national response to the lobbying by COSATU, SACP 'insurrectionists', and young militants. Steven Friedman focuses his account at the national level: the ANC faced pressure for mass action from COSATU and a minority of radicals influenced

by the so-called ‘Leipzig way’ of peaceful popular revolution in East Germany in 1989 while ANC negotiators looked to substantiate their position through popular action.⁴ Patti Waldmeir, meanwhile, describes how Mandela was forced into adopting mass action by SACP militants, who ‘captured ANC strategy’ and ‘cherished dreams of insurrection, fantasizing about million-strong crowds in the streets, à la Eastern Europe’.⁵ If Friedman’s national lens misses local and regional dynamics, Waldmeir’s anti-communist trope simplifies and misrepresents the realities. In many other accounts, the Bhisho march constitutes a shorthand for the mass action campaign and is depicted as an initiative by national leaders of the ANC and the SACP influenced by the Leipzig comparison.⁶

Contrary to dominant explanations of the Bhisho march that foreground the Leipzig imaginary, few participants in the civic movement in the Border region who were at the heart of the local campaign employed this discourse; they rather focused on the practical realities of bringing about a democratic interim administration in the Ciskei.⁷ Their points of reference were the United Democratic Front’s (UDF) discourses of ‘people’s power’ and the ‘one city’, or ‘open city’, campaigns for participatory democracy that had precipitated negotiations to deracialise several urban municipalities.⁸ Since 1988, ‘open city’ campaigns in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Port Elizabeth had called for desegregation of state provision and local government: ‘One City, One Tax Base’ became the popular slogan.⁹ In East London, Gqozo’s regime stood in the way of such reform, since Mdantsane, the city’s large township, fell within the Ciskei and Gqozo refused to recognise the authority of the region’s most powerful civic organisation, the Mdantsane Residents’ Association (MDARA). Resistance to the Ciskei regime, and to the bantustans in general, was not only a rural concern but involved densely populated urban areas too.

The principal and practice of a people’s assembly, a ‘relatively new idea in South African community politics’, was central to the Border campaign, shaped by the ongoing struggles of civic organisations and their political cultures.¹⁰

4. S. Friedman, ‘Back to the Streets’, in S. Friedman, ed., *The Long Journey: South Africa’s Quest for a Negotiated Settlement* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993), 139–160.

5. Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle*, 207.

6. Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country*, 147–151; W. Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 278–279; S. Dubow, *Apartheid, 1948–1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 261, 273; N. Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Apartheid, Democracy* (5th edn, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 172.

7. Interview by author with Lucille Meyer, Cape Town, 3 May 2019; interview by author with Lulamile Nazo, East London, 2 July 2019.

8. For a discussion of the influential political heritage of ‘people’s power’, see H. Brooks, ‘Differential Interpretations in the Discourse of “People’s Power”: Unveiling Intellectual Heritage and Normative Democratic Thought’, *African Studies*, 77, 3 (2018), 453–455, 465–467.

9. T. Botha, ‘Civic Associations as Autonomous Organs of Grassroots’ Participation’, *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 79 (1992), 57, 66.

10. *Ibid.*, 71. The dispute between headmen and the civic in Alice and that by Mdantsane Residents’ Association in Mdantsane had become key elements in the campaign against Gqozo. Thozamile Botha argues that Alice was one of the few localities in the country where civic organisation had completely displaced state authority and in its place operated an effective ‘people’s assembly’. Botha, ‘Civic

If Gqozo would not enter local negotiations over interim government and the ANC would not address this in national negotiations, change would have to be brought about through local initiative. Elsewhere in the bantustans, people's assemblies were also planned to effect local interim governments through direct democracy following the collapse of CODESA.¹¹

This article argues that the escalating campaign against Gqozo in the Border played a major role in clarifying the ANC's political strategy and had significant consequences for the shape of the transition. The campaign revealed the leadership's poorly conceived position on the 'homelands' and forced a more strategic approach, long advocated by the UDF, to pursue alliances with 'friendly' bantustans and to confront those 'hostile' to democratic change. Throughout the winter of 1992, the ANC's national leadership lacked strategy and direction in its mass action campaign and faced criticism for the latter's poor momentum. The intensifying popular campaign in the Border was at first considered a nuisance to be tempered, for it challenged the national leadership's approach in negotiations. Yet by August 1992, with the ANC national leadership needing a resolution to mass action – for its confrontational approach challenged possible conciliation in negotiations – the Border campaign against Gqozo presented new opportunities to resolve this impasse. If it pressured the government into conceding to the ANC's renewed demands by threatening the government's bantustan allies, the planned September march would make visible the 'organic' connection between national leaders and 'the people', renewing the former's claim to speak for the UDF and cementing these strained ties within the Alliance.

The ANC and the bantustans: national negotiations, local contradictions

In 1990 and 1991, ANC negotiators underestimated the thorny politics of the 'homelands'. Dominated by senior politicians from exile and Robben Island, the ANC's National Executive Committee was focused on national issues and over-confident that the organisation could build alliances with bantustan elites; it underestimated both resistance to reincorporation and the government's enduring support for the bantustans.¹² This was linked to its neglect of its own caucus in the broad social movement fostered by the UDF, not least in the Border.

Associations'. For an account of the civic movement in the Border/ Ciskei, see L. Wotshela, 'Overlying and Muddled Power: The Ciskei Bantustan's Disputed Rural Governance in the Twilight Decade of Apartheid, c.1985–95,' *Review of African Political Economy*, 51, 180 (2024), 290–307.

11. In the northern and eastern Transvaal, assemblies promised to address disputes with traditional authorities. 'Peoples Assemblies Plan Mooted by Civic Body', *New Nation*, 22–28 May 1992.
12. Padraig O'Malley Heart of Hope Archive, Mac Maharaj Papers, 'ANC NEC Extended Meeting 12 and 14 September: Main Points of Discussion' and 'ANC Extended National Executive Committee Meeting, 17 May 1991', <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/site/q/03lv03445/04lv04015/05lv04051.htm>, accessed 1 March 2022.

In the early 1990s ANC politicians, recognising their limited institutional strength and poor caucus in rural areas, hoped that alliances with bantustan leaders would offer them the opportunity to expand the reaches of their leadership through established political and social networks in the bantustans.¹³ This strategy found some limited success but did not rest easy with UDF activists, whose struggles against repressive bantustan regimes continued. In August 1990, the UDF held a conference to develop a common approach with the ANC towards the bantustans. The conference passed compacts designed to subject the ANC's negotiating practices to local structures of accountability, agreeing that national leaders should not meet with bantustan leaders without consulting local UDF structures. Partnerships with bantustan leaders should only be established if committed to free political activity and 'a non-racial, democratic South Africa free of bantustans'.¹⁴ But tensions remained: Mandela spoke of the ANC's role in forging black unity by talking with bantustan leaders, while the UDF's Titus Mafolo cautioned that the conference should not be interpreted as a shift towards a politics of cooperation with 'homelands'.¹⁵ Strategy should be amended according to whether regimes were sympathetic, ambivalent, or hostile, the UDF maintained.¹⁶

In practice, the ANC's developing position on interim arrangements in the run-up to CODESA breached these agreements. Less than two months after the August conference, Mandela hosted leaders of the 'self-governing' bantustans for a meeting at his home in Soweto, declaring that bantustan leaders and the ANC would 'speak with one voice' as a united front in developing strategies for talks with the government.¹⁷ By November 1990, three of the nominally independent TBVC states had agreed to back the ANC, except Bophuthatswana, the most powerful of the four.¹⁸ All had indicated they would be amenable to reincorporation.¹⁹ It might thus have appeared that bantustan leaders were falling into line, but the Popular Front alliance that ANC leaders hoped to forge with the support of bantustan leaders alongside the liberation organisations remained uneasy and illusive: unlike Transkei's leader, Bantu Holomisa, Gqozo was to extend a hand of friendship to the liberation movement for only a fleeting moment.

After the ANC's unbanning in February 1990, it enjoyed an unusual level of success in establishing local structures in the Border region, partnering in concrete campaigns with local organisations. The UDF formed the bedrock of the

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13. T. Lodge, 'Neo-patrimonial Politics in the ANC', *African Affairs*, 113, 450 (2014), 11–12; J. Robinson, 'Fragments of the Past: Homeland Politics and the South African Transition, 1990–2014', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41, 5 (2015), 966. Bantu Holomisa had become a firm ally in the Transkei.
 14. UDF Conference Report, cited in J. Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983–1991* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 274.
 15. Lance Nawa, 'ANC Parley with Bantustans', *South*, 16–22 August 1990.
 16. 'The UDF, ANC Discuss Homeland Issue', *The Citizen*, 14 August 1990.
 17. K. Modisani, 'Leaders Speak with One Voice', *Sowetan*, 8 October 1990.
 18. '3 Homelands Back ANC–Mandela', *Sowetan*, 12 November 1990.
 19. 'SA May Soon Foot R2bn TBVC Bill', *Business Day*, 21 November 1990.

ANC's formal revival in the region, but the two organisations had long been tightly and organically linked.²⁰ Under a new leadership from 1990, the Border ANC rapidly developed its branch membership, the region soon becoming one of the organisation's largest, its membership second only to that in the Transvaal.²¹ Working with local unions, churches, students, and civic, sport, and community organisations and focusing on concrete local grievances, under the leadership of UDF stalwart and ANC underground leader Rev. Arnold Stofile, the Border ANC became the political umbrella for a dynamic social movement focused on the multiple oppressions of the Ciskei 'homeland', the principal apartheid structure in the region.²² Civic associations remained outside the organisation's leadership and in some localities the methods of selection for local ANC representation were thrown into question by the appointment of some who possessed dubious political affiliations.²³ Nevertheless, while elsewhere the ANC lamented the abstract nature of ANC branch politics against the enduring importance of civic meetings to deal with concrete problems,²⁴ in the Border the organisation had, with some success, transformed the social movement into a political machinery whose agenda was strongly influenced by its broad base. If the 'homeland' of the Ciskei was often dismissed as politically irrelevant and among the weakest of the bantustans, the growing confrontation in this region was nevertheless influential in national politics. For while the Ciskei regime lacked the military capacity of Bophuthatswana or the popular support of the KwaZulu chieftaincy, political and military support from Pretoria provided the necessary clout to repress the well-organised local campaign.

Repression continues in Ciskei: 1991

The security state had long employed the Ciskei regime – as many others – as a military bulwark to repress opposition.²⁵ In March 1990, leaders of the Ciskei Defence Force (CDF) who were sympathetic to the ANC staged a military coup

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20. The Border UDF had from its inception been tightly connected to the ANC and its underground networks, through Hani's Lesotho network. J. Cherry and P. Gibbs, 'The Liberation Struggle in the Eastern Cape', in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, 1970–1980*, vol. 2 (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2006), 569–614. At the formation of the UDF, its constitution retained a 'border clause', underlining loyalty to the ANC as the principal liberation organisation. Seeings, *The UDF*, 56. By the late 1980s, the UDF was effectively 'an internal wing of the proscribed ANC' in the Border, Luvuyo Wotshela argues. L. Wotshela, 'The Fate of Ciskei and Adjacent Border Towns: Political Transitions in a Democratic South Africa, 1985–1995', in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 4 (Austin: Pan African University Press, 2019), Part 3: 1869.
21. J. Peires, 'The Implosion of Ciskei and Transkei', *African Affairs*, 91, 364 (1992), 377.
22. Interview with Lucille Meyer.
23. Personal communication with Patrick Mangashe, 12 July 2022.
24. T. Lodge, 'The African National Congress Comes Home', African Studies Seminar Paper 317, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 8 June 1992, 16.
25. C. Cooper, 'The Militarisation of the Bantustans: Control and Contradictions', in J. Cock and L. Nathan, eds, *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1989), 174–187.

to oust the then leader of Ciskei, Lennox Sebe; they replaced him with Brigadier Gqozo. Briefly, Gqozo enabled political expression, tolerating political organisations and permitting the ANC to stage a huge rally of approximately 100,000 attendees at the Bhisho stadium on 1 April. But if Gqozo made overtures to the liberation movement, he soon changed his position. The security state responded to the challenge with a ‘silent coup’ to resume dominance over government and military positions. Under the guise of a front company called International Researchers, military intelligence officers of the South African Defence Force (SADF) (including Anton Niewoudt, Clive Brink, and Ted Brasell) resolved to turn Gqozo’s regime against the ANC, persuading him that his fragile position would be better served by their backing. Turning against the civic associations, Gqozo reintroduced the hated system of local governance through headmen and bolstered this through the development of a vigilante organisation, the so-called African Democratic Movement (ADM), which was supplied with arms, training and financial backing by International Researchers.²⁶ For the rest of 1991 and throughout 1992, ADM vigilantes staged brutal night attacks, targeting activists and their families with automatic firearms, firebombs, and grenades. In Alice, Peddie, Whittlesea, Zwelitsha, and Dimbaza units of the ADM operated with intensity.²⁷ The perpetrators of this violence were not apprehended; it seemed clear to local communities that they were known to the regime. Indeed, the ADM had been developed in the mould of Inkatha, Mangosuthu Buthelezi’s repressive paramilitary organization in KwaZulu, through covert SADF operations. Meanwhile, Ciskei police engaged in the sustained harassment and intimidation of activists and employed increasingly repressive measures to prevent political meetings, including the use of teargas, rubber bullets, and live ammunition to disperse protesters.²⁸

The experience of brutality and repression – first under Sebe and then under Gqozo – only served to further politicise local communities and harden their resolve against this illegitimate bantustan regime. The members of the new leadership of the Border ANC were picked as representatives of the broad Alliance but also for their radical politics.²⁹ In office, they were pushed further into confrontation, since the local branches, formed from the structures of the UDF,

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26. R. Southall and Z. de Sas Kropiwnicki, ‘Containing the Chiefs: The ANC and Traditional Leaders in the Eastern Cape, South Africa’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 37, 1 (2003), 57–58; Wotshela, ‘The Fate of Ciskei’, 1876–1885; Peires, ‘The Implosion’, 379–381.
27. American Friends Service Committee, ‘The Politics of Hope and Terror: South African in Transition: Report on Violence in South Africa’, November 1992, 13, <https://projects.kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/210-808-3471/AFSCSATransition11-92opt.pdf>, accessed 23 March 2022.
28. Wotshela, ‘The Fate of Ciskei’; L. Evans, ‘The Bantustan State and the South African Transition: Militarisation, Patrimonialism and the Collapse of the Ciskei Regime, 1986–1994’, *African Historical Review*, 50, 1–2 (2018), 101–129.
29. Members of the regional ANC leadership included Smuts Ngonyama, Silumko ‘Soks’ Sokupa, Crispian ‘Chippy’ Olver, Lucille Meyer, Rev. Arnold Stofile, Andrew Hendricks, Marion Sparg, and Donée ‘Nicol’ Cooney.

were militantly opposed to Gqozo's regime.³⁰ Branches were unable to carry out meetings and activities without continual harassment, intimidation, and police violence. Branch members and their families were being targeted by ADM hit squads, with elderly people and children also subject to violent attacks; comrades were being abducted and killed.³¹

From late 1990 the deteriorating situation in the Border led to discord between the Alliance's regional structures and its national negotiators. While local UDF leaders foregrounded the need for a response to the growing levels of violence in the Ciskei, Wilton Mkwayi – a contemporary of Mandela, also released not long before from Robben Island – declared at a rally in Mdantsane that the ANC would support and protect the 'homeland' military regimes as allies of the ANC. It seems unlikely that his position would have found much sympathy among local activists.³² The Ciskei regime faced a fiscal crisis, governmental graft and popular rejection, so in February 1991 a deal was struck between the South African government and Ciskei: the government would provide financial assistance and 'support for law and order' in Ciskei, while sending South African personnel to fill Ciskei ministerial positions.³³ Gqozo proclaimed the treaty was 'the first step on the road to incorporation in a new, non-racial, democratic South Africa' and the press echoed this representation.³⁴ Yet it was clear that Gqozo wished for further military support to oppose democratic mobilisation and prevent what he referred to as the expansion of Chris Hani's MK 'fiefdom' in the region.³⁵ In practice, the intervention signified South African support to stabilise the territorial power of the Ciskei bantustan state.

As violence escalated, mobilisation in the Border hardened into a focused campaign against the Ciskei, despite efforts by the ANC executive to rein in the challenge. The campaign had three principle demands: an end to repression, the creation of an environment for free political activity, and Gqozo's resignation. Bhisho, Gqozo's seat of power, became the focus of demonstrations. In January 1991, Rev. Stofile criticised the government for using negotiations to stall change while employing repression to weaken the ANC.³⁶ His assertion might also have been intended for the ears of ANC negotiators who still hoped to win over Gqozo. On 1 March 1991 the local Alliance organised a march of 3000 people to the Ciskei Council of State buildings, where they

30. Interview with Lucille Meyer; interview by author with Crispian 'Chippy' Olver, Johannesburg, 11 July 2019.

31. Interview with Lucille Meyer.

32. 'Mkwayi: ANC Will Protect Ciskei, T'kei', *Daily Dispatch*, 10 December 1990; 'ANC Plans Rally in Mdantsane', *Daily Dispatch*, 5 December 1990.

33. These included economic affairs, finance and administration; justice; transport and public works; and agriculture. 'Ciskei Opts for Reincorporation', *Business Day*, 28 February 1991.

34. 'Ciskei to Return to SA Fold', *Cape Times*, 28 February 1991; 'Ciskei First to Start Move Back into SA', *Star*, 28 February 1991.

35. A. Maimane, 'Crossing the Kei to End Chaos – and Halt Hani', *Weekly Mail*, 1–7 March 1991.

36. 'Govt Using Talks to Delay Black Freedom – Stofile', *Daily Dispatch*, 21 January 1991.



Figure 1. Bhisho, 1 March 1991. Demonstrators return to Bhisho from the Ciskei Council of State Buildings. Source: *Daily Dispatch*, 2 March 1991. Reproduced with the kind permission of the *Daily Dispatch*.

handed over a memorandum of demands (Figure 1).³⁷ In response, a national ANC delegation met with the Ciskei regime and committed its ranks not to attack Gqozo in public.³⁸ Yet in June 1991, the Border ANC launched a consumer boycott in the region, demanding Gqozo's resignation and the reincorporation of Ciskei into South Africa 'through a proper process of consultation with mass-based organisations and with the popular mandate of the Ciskei people'.³⁹ In July, a broad representation of political, church, civic, and business organisations convened at the Border Peace Conference to address the situation of enduring and escalating violence in the region. The political statement that emerged from this conference identified Gqozo and the Ciskei regime as the prime obstacles to peace and free political activity in the region: the only solution would be to remove Gqozo, they concluded.⁴⁰ By late 1991 the situation in Ciskei had deteriorated badly: repression was intense and violence was escalating. Under a state of emergency imposed in late October, hundreds of activists were arrested.⁴¹ Marches took place in Alice, Dimbaza, Mdantsane, Zwelitsha, and Whittlesea amid increasingly

37. 'Thousands Join Bisho March on Govt Offices', *Daily Dispatch*, 2 March 1991.

38. 'No Let Up on Gqozo', *City Press*, 31 March 1991.

39. 'Ciskei Confrontation Looms', *City Press*, 9 June 1991; 'Tensions Rise in Ciskei', *Weekly Mail*, 7–13 June 1991.

40. Interview with Silumko 'Soks' Sokupa in 'Focus: Ciskei – The State Wants to Start a Cycle of Violence', *Mayibuye*, 3, 9 (October 1992), 13.

41. 'Hundreds Arrested Under Ciskei's Draconian State of Emergency Laws', *New Nation*, 8–14 November 1991.

repressive and violent policing by the Ciskei regime, which attempted to intimidate and disperse the protesters.⁴² Rev. Stofile and Maguza Sigabi of the Whittlesea ANC branch launched an application to challenge the Ciskei National Security Act in the bantustan's supreme court.⁴³

Marginalised from national negotiations, local organisers pressed national negotiators on the necessity of meaningful local reform to enable free and fair elections. To coincide with the start of the CODESA meetings, the Border Civic Congress and the regional Tripartite Alliance again renewed their campaign to highlight ongoing violence. In November 1991, the Mdantsane Residents' Association planned to march against the Ciskei government's refusal to consider their grievances.⁴⁴ When Ciskei refused to grant them permission for the march, the ANC national leadership intervened, pledging that they would manage local negotiations and urging that the campaign be tempered. The Border Civic Congress duly conceded and called off the march.⁴⁵ On 17 November 1991 Mandela went to meet Gqozo in East London: Gqozo agreed to lift the state of emergency that had been in place since October on the understanding that the ANC would cease its 'war of words'. At a rally in Duncan Village, East London, Mandela urged protesters to maintain peace and discipline in the marches that were planned across Ciskei, revealing concern about militancy in the Border.⁴⁶

With the state of emergency lifted, the Border ANC nevertheless went ahead with intensified mass action.⁴⁷ Disregarding the National Executive Committee's efforts to rein in the campaign, demonstrations proceeded: on 1 December 1991, the Tripartite Alliance and the Border Civic Congress marched to Bhisho to demand an interim administration in Ciskei; the reinstatement of civil service workers who had been laid off following strikes; and an end to the targeted harassment of elderly activists. They appealed to Ciskei police and soldiers to join the march for freedom. Led by Rev. Stofile and M. Makalima, president of the SACP in the Border region, the demonstrators were heavily policed on their journey from the Bhisho stadium to the Council of State Buildings, where Gqozo refused to meet the marchers or receive their memorandum of demands. Finding the gates to the council complex closed, the marchers sat outside and sang. They tried to force the gates, which were quickly secured by police (Figure 2). The march leaders made speeches

42. 'Protesters Dispersed?', *Daily Dispatch*, 30 November 1991.

43. 'Ciskei Regime to Stay - Govt', *Star*, 13 November 1991.

44. Human Rights Watch, 'Ciskei: Ten Years On - Human Rights and the Fiction of "Independence"', *Human Rights Watch Reports*, 3, 16 (1991), <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1991/southafrica3/#5>, accessed 10 March 2022.

45. Interview with Lulamile Nazo.

46. 'Mandela Urges 7000 Rally to March Peacefully', *Daily Dispatch*, 18 November 1991; 'Whittlesea Protest March Planned', *Daily Dispatch*, 28 November 1991; 'ANC, BOCCO Apply for Ciskei March', *Daily Dispatch*, 28 November 1991; 'Ciskei to Lift State of Emergency', *Star*, 18 November 1991.

47. 'Mass Action Threat to Force Gqozo Out', *Cape Argus*, 19 November 1991.



Figure 2. Demonstrators from the Tripartite Alliance and the Border Civic Congress are prevented from presenting their demands to Brigadier Gqozo at the Ciskei Council of State Offices, Bisho, 1 December 1991. Source: *Daily Dispatch*, 2 December 1991. Reproduced with the kind permission of the *Daily Dispatch*.

and left their memorandum and then the demonstrators returned to the stadium.⁴⁸

At the end of December, the alleged murder by ANC comrades of three people in Masele, one of whom was a headman, led to the dispatch of a further national ANC delegation to the region: Govan Mbeki and Raymond Mhlaba were sent to talk with Gqozo. In an interview after the talks Mhlaba confirmed that the ANC was committed to working with Gqozo to 'restore peace', and he recommended that the National Peace Accord be invited to intervene. He reported that '[a]lthough the exact cause of the conflict is not yet known, it appears that there has been a misunderstanding between our supporters and members of the newly-formed African Democratic Movement in the area'.⁴⁹ Likely aimed to smooth over the evidence of ANC aggression, Mhlaba's vagueness regarding the conflict over headmen and the ADM's repression in the region would surely have rankled with local activists and leaders who suffered the realities of the ADM's violent night raids and hit squad murders.⁵⁰

48. 'ANC Members March in Ciskei', *Daily Dispatch*, 3 December 1991. The march was cancelled and then belatedly reinstated, likely due to the Ciskei's refusal to grant permission and disapproval from the ANC executive. 'Alliance Cancels March in Bisho', *Daily Dispatch*, 23 November 1991.

49. 'ANC, Ciskei Hold Talks after 3 Slain', *Star*, 30 December 1991.

50. In Dimbaza, the house of Smuts Ngonyama, vice-chairman of the Border ANC and organising secretary for the Border Council of Churches, was attacked on 28 May 1991 by a gunman with an R5 rifle. The latter suggested vigilante violence which, Ngonyama argued, was being introduced to the

The Campaign for Peace and Democracy and the CODESA crisis of March–April 1992

The ANC's constitutional proposals had during 1991 suggested provision for an interim administration in the Ciskei. However, as the CODESA working groups got down to business in early 1992, it became clear that national issues trumped regional ones: no democratic interim council would replace Gqozo's regime. The ANC negotiators in the CODESA Working Group 3 proposed an interim government with two phases: the first would involve the appointment of an Interim Government Council, which would include all parties represented at CODESA (and therefore the TBVC states) and would oversee the Tricameral Parliament, the NP Cabinet, and the structures of the TBVC states and self-governing bantustans. Preparation for elections to a constituent assembly, responsible for drawing up a new constitution, would proceed directly under these arrangements.⁵¹ This proposal found broad agreement within Working Group 3; it was outside the negotiating rooms that the discord emerged. Within the proposal for an Interim Government Council was the acceptance by ANC negotiators that the TBVC states would play a role in the transitional arrangements before eventual reincorporation. While for the ANC leadership this accommodated the wishes of their ally in the Transkei, for the residents of Bophuthatswana and the Ciskei, whose regimes were uncompromisingly hostile towards political opposition, this was deeply problematic. The negotiators underestimated resistance to reincorporation, its multiple meanings, and the changeable politics of bantustan leaders on this issue. As negotiations on the bantustans failed to reach agreement in Working Group 4, it became clear that reincorporation would be neither speedy nor straightforward: failure to carve out plans for reincorporation cut to the heart of the agreements already reached in Working Group 3 regarding the interim structures.⁵² In the Border, where an escalating campaign demanded the removal of the Ciskei military regime and the immediate implementation of a locally accountable interim administration, these proposals were roundly rejected, exposing the negotiators as out of touch with popular sentiment and reality.

The ANC's approach to the bantustans was thus ambivalent, as the organisation struggled to weigh up its alliance with Holomisa in the Transkei and with other supportive bantustan leaders against the hostile regimes of Ciskei and

region to 'neutralise' the impact of the ANC. Rev. Stofile had also been threatened. 'Ciskei Blamed for Attacks on ANC', *Sowetan*, 29 May 1991; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, vol. 3 (London: Macmillan, 1999), 136.

51. M. Sparg, 'Gqozo Must Go!', *Mayibuye*, 3, 3 (April 1992), 18; J. Rantete and H. Giliomee, 'Transition to Democracy through Transaction? Bilateral Negotiations between the ANC and NP in South Africa', *African Affairs*, 91, 365 (1992), 533–536; L. Stack and K. Shubane, 'Phoney Peace in a Phoney War: Working Group 3', in S. Friedman, ed., *The Long Journey: South Africa's Quest for a Negotiated Settlement* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993), 92.
52. R. Humphries, 'Rescrambling the Egg: Working Group 4', in S. Friedman, ed., *The Long Journey: South Africa's Quest for a Negotiated Settlement* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993), 106–128; Stack and Shubane, 'Phoney Peace', 86–105.

Bophuthatswana: dealing with the TBVC as a bloc revealed inescapable contradictions. The intensifying violence of the Ciskei regime was neglected by the ANC's national leadership, which prioritised the integrity of constitutional deals at CODESA that would see the TBVC states included in interim arrangements. Furious that the despised and illegitimate Ciskei regime should continue to represent the people of the Border region in arrangements for interim governance and that preparations for an election would be compromised by continued rule under the repressive bantustan regime, local organisers made their own strategy for interim government in the region.⁵³

In March 1992 the Border ANC launched its Campaign for Peace and Democracy, intensifying efforts to oust Brigadier Gqozo for an interim regime. Early in the month, their plans for mass action were leaked to the press, causing furore. Gqozo accused the ANC of mounting a plot against him. This was no secret conspiracy, the ANC's Border leadership maintained, but a legitimate campaign to 'symbolically oust' him through mass action, with support from more than 100 branches in the region.⁵⁴ The campaign planned intensified action to destabilise the Ciskei regime and isolate Gqozo politically; to weaken Gqozo's position at CODESA and thereby the government's; to expose the involvement of SADF Military Intelligence in Ciskei; and, ultimately, to bring about a local interim administration.⁵⁵ Yet, planned without sanction from the ANC executive, the campaign exposed the tensions between a leadership engaged in national negotiations and the movement for democracy in the Border facing the realities of violent repression. A national ANC delegation – including Thabo Mbeki, Joe Slovo, and Cyril Ramaphosa – met with Gqozo in early March, but the regional leadership, which might ordinarily have accompanied such a national delegation, did not attend.⁵⁶ Gqozo had repeatedly refused them an audience. An impasse emerged: the regional leadership would not call off the campaign and the national leadership could not force them to do so, while Gqozo vowed to repress any action violently. Ramaphosa, faced with little alternative, eventually came out in public support for the campaign,⁵⁷ but, he cautioned, 'our commitment to the negotiations process is unchallengeable'.⁵⁸

A crisis emerged, which shook CODESA and, many argued, threatened its very future. In response to revelations about the planned action, the Ciskei pulled out of the regional peace body, the Border-Ciskei Regional Dispute Committee, arguing that the ANC had displayed contempt for the principles of the National Peace Accord.⁵⁹ On 9 March 1992, a lobby of leaders from Ciskei, KwaZulu, Qwaqwa, and Gazankulu demanded that the negotiations be suspended until

53. T. Woker and S. Clarke, 'Homelands', in *South African Human Rights Yearbook*, 4 (1993), 141; Interview with Lucille Meyer; interview with Chippy Olver; interview with Lulamile Nazo.

54. C. Keeton, 'Softly Softly versus the Big Stick', *Weekly Mail*, 6–12 March 1992.

55. 'ANC "Coup" is "Symbolic"', *Cape Times*, 2 March 1992.

56. C. Keeton, 'Softly Softly versus the Big Stick', *Weekly Mail*, 6–12 March 1992.

57. 'Ciskei, ANC Fail to Settle Differences', *Cape Times*, 9 March 1992.

58. 'Call for Codesa Suspension over ANC Drive in Ciskei', *Star*, 10 March 1992.

the ANC abandon its campaign against Gqozo. Their call was supported by Bophuthatswana.⁶⁰ The CODESA Management Committee initially attempted to intervene but, caught in a dispute that threatened the cohering consensus, it withdrew on 10 March, leaving the ANC and Ciskei to devise a resolution.⁶¹ The following day, national ANC leaders met with representatives from both the Ciskei and the South African governments. In return for a commitment by the Ciskei regime to review repressive security legislation, the ANC national leadership committed to review the campaign against Gqozo.⁶² Having made this commitment, on 13 March the ANC sent a further delegation – including Ramaphosa, Thabo Mbeki, Joe Slovo, Steve Tshwete, Terror Lekota, Chris Hani, Govan Mbeki, and Raymond Mhlaba – to discuss the situation with alliance leaders in the Border.⁶³ While many among this delegation later attended major marches in the Border – especially the September march – Mbeki was notable in his absence from later demonstrations. It is telling of the emerging priorities, and was surely a slight felt by local organisers, that the national leadership chose to make quick assurances to the Ciskei government before they moved to consult regional structures of their own organisation. In the wake of these discussions, the regional leadership duly agreed to amend its campaign, toning down its challenge to Gqozo through defiance of security legislation and stepping back from its plans to occupy Bhisho.⁶⁴ While keeping Gqozo onside, the ANC national leadership were also surely concerned to prevent the possibility, widely reported, that the campaign's spectacle of radicalism might undermine the government's success in its forthcoming referendum on the negotiations.⁶⁵ The ANC needed the white electorate to concede to negotiations, and COSATU had duly delayed a long-proposed mass action campaign in advance of the referendum.⁶⁶

But the Ciskei government quickly demonstrated what organisers in the Border already knew: that it was an unreliable negotiator, determined to prevent political freedoms. No sooner had agreements been traded than the Ciskei government declared that the security legislation in question, Section 43 of the National Security Act, would not be abolished.⁶⁷ The People's Assembly, which was to be the centrepiece of the Campaign for Peace and Democracy, had been proposed as an

59. Conveniently, this came just as the Ciskei regime was called to answer to the Peace Accord as to why its Section 43 security legislation, used to ban meetings and rallies, had not yet been repealed. 'Ciskei Pulls Out of Peace Body', *Sowetan*, 4 March 1992.

60. 'Row over Ciskei Rocks Codesa', *Business Day*, 10 March 1992.

61. 'Codesa Committee Pulls Out of Ciskei, ANC Dispute', *Citizen*, 10 March 1992.

62. The Ciskei government would review Section 43 of the Ciskei National Security Act (1982). 'Pact Averts Codesa Crisis Over Ciskei', *Business Day*, 11 March 1992; 'Ciskei to Review Security Laws', *Pretoria News*, 11 March 1992; 'ANC, Ciskei Truce', *Sowetan*, 11 March 1992; 'Ciskei and ANC Shake Hands and Look to the Future', *Star*, 11 March 1992; Woker and Clarke, 'Homelands', 148.

63. 'Ciskei Row: ANC Sends Top Brass', *Daily Dispatch*, 13 March 1992.

64. 'ANC's Ciskei Action Starts', *Cape Times*, 12 March 1992; 'ANC Launches its Ciskei Campaign', *Business Day*, 12 March 1992; Woker and Clarke, 'Homelands', 148.

65. F. Kruger, 'Ciskei Braces for ANC Protests', *Weekly Mail*, 13–19 March 1992.

66. Friedman, 'Back to the Streets', 141–142.

67. *Daily Dispatch*, 20 March, cited in Woker and Clarke, 'Homelands', 149; 'Pact Averts Codesa Crisis over Ciskei', *Business Day*, 11 March 1992.

occupation of Bhishe; instead, it was a meeting held at the Victoria Grounds in King William's Town on 6 April 1992. Many national leaders turned out to address the crowd of 25,000, including Ramaphosa, who assured the demonstrators that an agreement on an interim constitution was in close reach.⁶⁸ Several of the campaign's other demonstrations were refused permission, and marches that did go ahead were met with repression.⁶⁹

Discord over the holding of referenda on homeland reincorporation further tested the fragile consensus at CODESA and heightened the tensions between the ANC's negotiators, its national leadership, and its structures in the Border.⁷⁰ According to the ANC's interim proposals, the inclusion of the TBVC states in an Interim Government Council assumed their reincorporation. But as it became apparent that reincorporation would not be straightforward, the NP pushed for further referenda, this time within the 'homelands' to test support for reincorporation. After suggesting in early April that the TBVC states would oblige by holding referenda, they soon turned against the idea.⁷¹ The national ANC leadership also opposed such plebiscites which – without time or capacity for preparation and with the threat of repression – they might lose and which would then legitimate the existence of these regimes. But the ANC Border region, against the national stance, supported a referendum on reincorporation of the Ciskei to expedite the demise of Gqozo and the introduction of interim government. Under pressure to temper the campaign following the despatch of further national ANC delegations to the Border and following a Ciskei Supreme Court interdict which prohibited the Border ANC from holding a referendum, plans for polling across the region were scaled back to a symbolic and rhetorical campaign at forthcoming rallies.⁷²

Writing in the ANC's journal *Mayibuye* in April 1992, Marion Sparg, the Border ANC's spokesperson, explained – diplomatically, for this was an ANC publication – the problems that the ANC's proposals posed for democracy in the Border. Alluding to the way that the situation in the Ciskei had been ignored in the ANC's proposals, Sparg explained:

It is now clear that there will be no separate interim administration in the Ciskei. The interim government in both phases will be a national structure and it will include Ciskei. Therefore the call for an interim administration in Ciskei had to be revised. This, however, does not deny the people the right to demand the resignation of the Gqozo administration.⁷³

68. 'ANC Vows to Carry on Fighting Gqozo', *Daily Dispatch*, 7 April 1992; 'Interim Rule: Ramaphosa Predicts Consensus', *Daily Dispatch*, 7 April 1992.

69. 'Ciskei Police Hurt 4 People – ANC Claim', *Daily Dispatch*, 12 March 1992.

70. 'Homelands Become Area of Disagreement', *Star*, 22 April 1992.

71. 'Bantustans to Test the Will of the People', *Sowetan* 2 April 1992; '3 TBVC States Say No to Poll', *Sowetan*, 22 April 1992; Humphries, 'Rescrambling the Egg'.

72. 'ANC Calls off Vote on Ciskei', *Sunday Times*, 15 March 1992; 'Ciskei Goes to Court over ANC Campaign', *Cape Argus*, 18 March 1992; 'CDF Fires Teargas at ANC Marchers', *Daily Dispatch*, 7 April 1992.

73. Sparg, 'Gqozo Must Go!', 18.

In response to the rejection of referenda on reincorporation in the TBVC states by the organisation at national level, the Border ANC organised a symbolic voting campaign at several planned rallies in late March and April. This voting campaign appears to have been as much a message to the ANC's national leadership as it was an address to Gqozo. Voters would be asked: 'Do you support the call for the speedy implementation of an Interim Government to ensure that Gqozo does not remain an obstacle to peace and democracy in the Ciskei?'⁷⁴ The wording clearly signalled as unacceptable the inclusion of the Ciskei regime in the proposed Interim Government Council. Furthermore, if the national negotiations could not offer meaningful interim arrangements to enable free and fair elections in Ciskei, change would have to come about through local mobilisation to remove Gqozo: 'The Campaign for Peace, Democracy and Free Political Activity in Ciskei continues', Sparg affirmed.⁷⁵ The Border regional leadership, responding to local demands, thus rebelled against the ANC's national leadership which was preoccupied with progress at CODESA. They would not stand to allow Gqozo to represent 'the people of Ciskei' in an interim government.⁷⁶ Constitutional decision making could not be confined to the boardroom, nor separated from the material realities of apartheid which, in the Ciskei as in Bophuthatswana, still prevailed under repressive and violent bantustan regimes. As the regional ANC leaders in the Border intended, the escalating campaign forced the ANC's national leadership and negotiating teams to take these realities seriously, as matters of national importance.

The mass action campaign: June–August 1992

The breakdown of the CODESA negotiations in May 1992 has often been attributed to disagreement between the NP and the ANC in Working Group 2 over the '70 per cent' – the majority of votes in a constituent assembly necessary to change the constitution. The NP pushed for a 75 per cent majority while the ANC demanded a lower two-thirds majority. By conceding to a 70 per cent majority, Ramaphosa nearly brought the ANC into an agreement, but this offer was quickly withdrawn. It has been argued that Ramaphosa engineered the crisis in Group 2 as it dawned on ANC negotiators that their concessions at CODESA would find little support among the Alliance.⁷⁷ It is rarely acknowledged that events outside the negotiations and questions concerning interim governance in the 'homelands' were of great significance in shaping this turn. The crisis in the Border in March 1992 was a critical juncture for the ANC,

74. *Ibid.*

75. *Ibid.*, 17.

76. S. Johnson, 'Ciskei Ripe for Conflict', *Daily News*, 8 September 1992.

77. Padraig O'Malley Heart of Hope Archive, P. O'Malley, 'Overview of 1992', <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/cis/omalley/OMalleyWeb/03lv00017/04lv00344/05lv00607/06lv00608.htm>, accessed 20 March 2022.

as the national leadership struggled to balance negotiating priorities and its claims to legitimacy. The national leadership managed to briefly temper the campaign and its overt challenge to Gqozo and sought to minimise the public exposure of such internal cleavages within the organisation. Nevertheless, amid ongoing repression, the local campaign continued to gain momentum, putting pressure on the national leadership to respond to their demands for satisfactory interim arrangements. At a 'Popular Front' consultation meeting of the Alliance shortly before the CODESA plenary in mid-May 1992, it became clear that the ANC's supporters remained committed to the position of a two-thirds majority.⁷⁸ While Ramaphosa put forward a compromise proposal to CODESA of a 70 per cent majority, he withdrew this offer on 26 May in the knowledge that this, alongside the interim proposals, would provoke a crisis for the organisation and undermine the legitimacy of the ANC's national negotiating teams.⁷⁹ Ramaphosa conceded the following year that they had focused too much on national issues and had neglected questions of regional government. Of the interim proposals he reflected: 'Taking everything into account, the totality of everything, it would have looked like the ANC had actually sold out completely'.⁸⁰

De Klerk emerged from his success in the March 1992 whites-only referendum confident of his leadership, while the ANC leadership faced criticism for being out of touch with its grassroots. Amid growing dissatisfaction among its constituencies – calls for mass action by COSATU and for a return to armed struggle by MK and the Youth League – the organisation's leadership sought to renew its legitimacy to negotiate on behalf of the Black majority. Mass action offered a plebiscite through public performance, to renew the mandate of ANC negotiators and to reinvigorate connections between the leadership and the grassroots of the organisation. ANC leaders spoke about 'harnessing the power of the people' to strengthen their hand in negotiations,⁸¹ but the adoption of a mass action campaign was as much about dealing with anxiety over the leadership's relationship with its own constituencies.⁸² As Chris Hanani argued in late July 1992:

There was a gap in perceptions between the leadership and the people on the ground. The majority of the people never really understood negotiations. [The] people [began to] think, 'These guys are talking and yet the killing is going on.' It was only when a

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78. Pádraig O'Malley Heart of Hope Archive, P. O'Malley, Interview with Chris Hanani, 15 July 1992, <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/site/q/03lv00017/04lv00344/05lv00607/06lv00635.htm>, accessed 5 June 2019.
79. P. Bulger, 'End of Innocence: Working Group 2', in S. Friedman, ed., *The Long Journey: South Africa's Quest for a Negotiated Settlement* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993), 78–80; H. Ebrahim, *The Soul of a Nation: Constitution-Making in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998), 126.
80. Pádraig O'Malley Heart of Hope Archive, P. O'Malley, Interview with Cyril Ramaphosa, 17 August 1993, <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/site/q/03lv00017/04lv00344/05lv00730/06lv00774.htm>, accessed 5 June 2019. See also A. Butler, *Cyril Ramaphosa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2008), 293.
81. R. Suttner, 'The Bisho March and Massacre: An Assessment', *African Communist*, 130 (1992), 25.
82. H. Adam and K. Moodley, *The Opening of the Apartheid Mind: Options for the New South Africa* (London: University of California Press), 101.

few of us went around that we began to feel we had moved too fast ahead of the people. If we had not called a stop [to negotiations], the net result would have been growing disaffection and even alienation [from the ANC].⁸³

The ANC launched its mass action campaign on 16 June 1992 with a mass stayaway and planned a week of action to begin on 3 August with a two-day stayaway. COSATU threatened to strike if their demands were not met in negotiations with business; the ANC echoed this with plans for mass action to bolster renewed demands for interim government and progress towards democratic elections.⁸⁴ The real debate within the ANC was not between communists and moderates, as some alleged, but over ‘the correct blend of negotiations and mass action’, James Hamill argues: ‘Should mass action be seen as a fallback (and essentially reactive) tactic to be used in the event of deadlock or should it be viewed as complementary to negotiations, continually casting its shadow over the negotiations?’⁸⁵ If the latter perspective dominated in the civic movement, the former came to dominate among the national leadership during the winter of 1992, underpinning the hard-ball negotiating strategy that evolved in August. Hani and many colleagues on the left of the Alliance feared that the ANC was being drawn into the ‘trap’ of coalition through interim government. As Hani argued in July:

[T]he future of SA is not going to be decided at CODESA. There are millions of people out there in the streets [...] who want change as soon as possible [...] we are going to go to those people for a fresh mandate [...] If negotiations are deadlocked, we have got to make sure that we unlock those deadlocks through mass action [...] I think we saw illusions that everything would be solved at CODESA, the people must just wait and should be passive spectators, and I think that was one of the weaknesses of our negotiations strategy.

I believe that now we should go back to negotiations with clear positions. We must not go back to negotiations to repeat the protracted, endless exchanges and discussions of technical matters. First of all de Klerk must do something about this violence; he must do something about the hostels; he must accept the presence of international forces so that he is not a referee and a player; and finally, de Klerk must be made to agree to certain strategies in terms of the interim government and in terms of elections for a sovereign Constituent Assembly. That Constituent Assembly should be a one chamber house with no veto from anybody [...] 66% ratification.⁸⁶

Mass action was thus seen as essential to bolster these clarified demands and to renew support for the leadership in negotiations. As the campaign took shape in the winter of 1992, the stayaway of 3–4 August was understood as a performative plebiscite to match the NP’s whites-only referendum.

83. Hani, cited in J. Hamill, ‘South Africa: From CODESA to Leipzig’, *The World Today*, 49, 1 (1993), 14.

84. Friedman, ‘Back to the Streets’, 150–151.

85. Hamill, ‘From CODESA to Leipzig’, 16.

86. O’Malley, Interview with Hani, 15 July 1992.

Campaign leaders such as Jay Naidoo spoke of striking a ‘yes vote’ for the Alliance’s negotiators; mass turnout was celebrated for its demonstration of the ANC’s political mandate. As Naidoo proclaimed to a small crowd in Johannesburg on 3 August:

The strike has been a resounding yes vote for the programme of the ANC, COSATU and the SACP. It has been a resounding yes vote for the demands that Nelson Mandela has been chasing in our negotiations with the De Klerk regime [...] This referendum [...] indicates the beginning of the end of the white minority regime.⁸⁷

The affair in March 1992 had raised the profile of the campaign in the Border where, in contrast to other cities, marches were consistently large and militant.⁸⁸ In Mdantsane, the Mdantsane Residents’ Association and the Border Civic Congress spearheaded the fight around housing and against the reimposition of headmen in the Ciskei. On 16 July Mdantsane’s new branch of the South African National Civic Organisation staged a march and four-hour occupation of the office of the NU1 Magistrate in Mdantsane, to coincide with the scheduled auction of houses repossessed by the Ciskei Building Society. Ciskei security forces manhandled protesters, who responded with stones, and the security forces opened fire, hurling teargas into the crowd.⁸⁹ Teargas and sjamboks were used to disperse protesters at the Zwelitsha magistrate’s court, where 40 people were arrested.⁹⁰ No longer constrained by the politics at CODESA, some national leaders turned out in support of comrades in the Border. At a rally in Mdantsane on 12 July, Harry Gwala likened the situation of low intensity warfare in the Ciskei to that in the Natal Midlands, while Steve Tshwete urged protesters to direct mass action at Gqozo’s military regime.⁹¹

On Saturday 25 July 1992, prior to the planned week of action, the Alliance held a people’s assembly in East London, occupying the city’s main thoroughfare of Oxford Street. Among the speeches and performances, a mock trial was staged in front of City Hall in which Brigadier Gqozo, played by an actor, faced multiple charges including ‘illegal occupation of the seat of government’ and was sentenced to life imprisonment (Figure 3).⁹² Gqozo was incensed by this public humiliation.⁹³ This occupation of public space was held up as the example of the people’s assembly that regional Alliance and civic leaders

87. UWC Robben Island Mayibuye Archive, University of the Western Cape, VNS/Afravision Collection, Mass Action Campaign: Stayaway – Jay Naidoo Speech in Downtown Johannesburg, VNS 2181, 3 August 1992, Item ID: RIM.FV.2000.2120, Video 3 of 4 tapes.

88. Poor turnout was reported at marches in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria, and Port Elizabeth. ‘De Klerk Insists on Transitional Government as ANC Gets Poor Turnout for Protests’, *Ottawa Citizen*, 26 July 1992.

89. ‘Police, Protestors Clash in Mdantsane’, *Daily Dispatch*, 16 July 1992.

90. ‘40 Held after Sit In’, *Daily Dispatch*, 22 July 1992.

91. ‘Gwala: SA in Grip of Low Intensity War’, *Daily Dispatch*, 13 July 1992; ‘Tshwete Sees Ciskei as Target for Protest’, *Daily Dispatch*, 13 July 1992.

92. ‘Border Mass Action Peaceful’, *Daily Dispatch*, 27 July 1992.

93. Truth and Reconciliation Commission, ‘Bisho Massacre – Day 1 – 9 September 1996’, Pik Botha hearing, <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/bisho1/day1.htm>, accessed 20 March 2022.

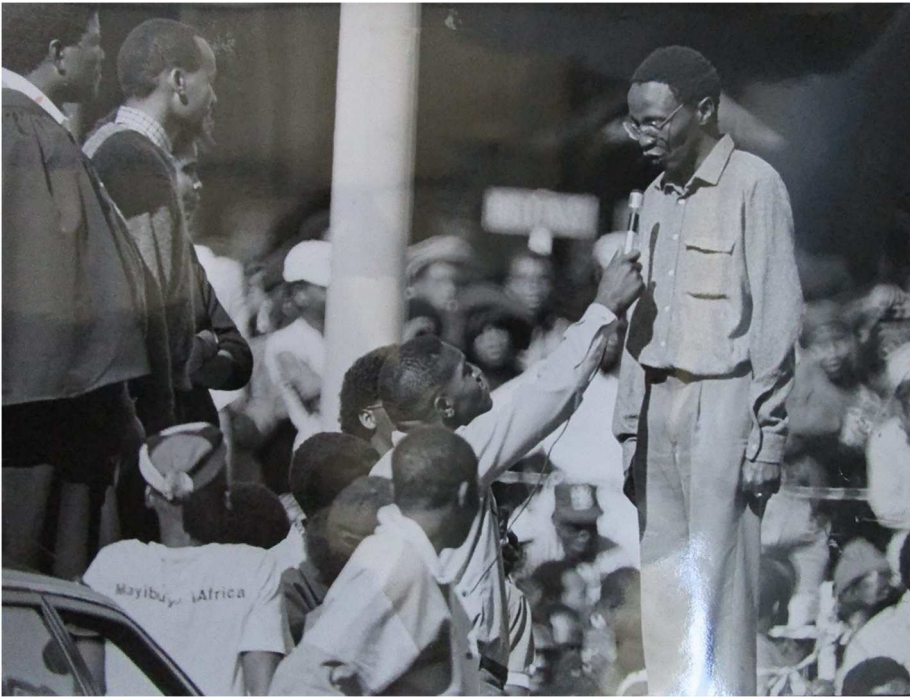


Figure 3. ‘Gqozo’ is sentenced to life imprisonment in a mock trial staged at the People’s Assembly, Oxford Street, East London, 25 July 1992. Source: *Daily Dispatch*, 27 July 1992. With permission: Daily Dispatch.

wished to hold in Bhisho.⁹⁴ Heartened by a radicalising national campaign, regional organisers planned a march to Bhisho to hold an assembly on 4 August.

On 3 August 1992, the first day of the two-day stayaway, violent confrontations took place across the Ciskei. Knowing that the planned march on Bhisho the following day would go ahead despite his refusal to grant permission for the demonstration,⁹⁵ Gqozo had called in reinforcements from the SADF. Parts of Mdantsane, especially the NU1 and NU2 zones, resembled ‘a war zone’. The township was brought to a standstill, and few went to work. The Ciskei police fired teargas to disperse a peaceful memorial gathering at Egerton station, held to commemorate the anniversary of the five people who had been shot during the Mdantsane bus boycott of 1983. The crowd responded, throwing stones, and the Ciskei police opened fire. A crowd marching to Sisa Dukashe stadium was teargassed; the Ciskei Building Society was set alight; the rent office in NU1 burnt to the ground. Barricades of tyres and vehicles

94. SABC News, Interview with Petros Vantyu, 7 September 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdX5_78fCZg, accessed 1 February 2022; Interview by author with Petros Vantyu, East London, 3 July 2019; P. Vantyu, ‘The Bhisho Massacre’, ANC Political School Assignment, 10 July 2010.

95. ‘Gqozo Refuses Permission for ANC March to Bisho’, *Daily Dispatch*, 4 August 1992.



Figure 4. Demonstrators march from King William's Town to Bhisho, led by national and regional Alliance leaders, 4 August 1992. Source: *Daily Dispatch*, 5 August 1992. Reproduced with the kind permission of the *Daily Dispatch*.

were erected and lit in the centre of the township and on the Ziphunzana Bypass.⁹⁶

With Gqozo determined to prevent marchers reaching Bhisho and Alliance leaders resolved to ignore these declarations, the march on 4 August came excruciatingly close to the use of fatal violence by the Ciskei. A crowd of more than 50,000 people gathered at the Victoria Ground in King William's Town, where the people's assembly had been reluctantly held four months earlier, preparing to walk the five kilometres to Bhisho (Figure 4). Organised and led by the ANC Border Regional Executive Committee and joined by national leaders including Chris Hani, Steve Tshwete, and Raymond Suttner, the organisers planned to hold a people's assembly in Bhisho where they would issue a list of demands, principle among which was the removal of Gqozo. At the border with the Ciskei, the march was met by Ciskei riot police and CDF soldiers who prevented their entry into the bantustan.⁹⁷ A deadlock ensued: protesters and security forces stood in the sun for five tense hours as negotiations unfolded between Chris Hani, Cyril Ramaphosa, Bantu Holomisa, the Ciskei government, and the South African foreign minister,

96. 'Ciskei Forces, Protesters Clash: Gqozo Calls in SADF', *Daily Dispatch*, 4 August 1992.

97. Footage of march on 4 August 1992, in Associated Press, 'Mandela on Dismantling Armed Wing of ANC, Second Formal Round of Convention for a Democratic South Africa', from 1m 20s to 1m 45s, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJ0M6Ib5nhk>, accessed 20 March 2022.

Pik Botha. Peace negotiators Anthonie Gildenhuys (National Peace Accord) and José Campino (United Nations) engaged in a lengthy and tiring ‘shuttle diplomacy’ between the Alliance leaders and Ciskei officials at the Council of State offices. Instructed by Gildenhuys to telephone Botha, Hani travelled by car to the Amatola Sun hotel in Bhisho and two hours of telephonic negotiations – involving Ramaphosa, Gqozo, and Botha – ensued.⁹⁸ A deal was brokered through the effective intervention of the peace negotiators. The Alliance delegation returned to the demonstrators waiting at the border where Hani declared ‘[i]t’s a stalemate’: they had negotiated that the crowd could march to the Bhisho stadium but would not be allowed to proceed further. The possibility of violence reached a critical moment: the crowd surged forward, to be warned that soldiers would shoot. One soldier told a reporter: ‘people are going to die here today’, while Holomisa described the determination of the demonstrators: ‘God knows what would have happened if people had been shot. At that late hour ANC members were preparing to move in and defy the order.’⁹⁹ While the concession to enter the stadium was later represented as a victory for all sides, for the activists and their leaders determined to get into Bhisho it was a source of deep frustration. In the nick of time, the compromise had been enough to avert a confrontation, but the events of this march would shape the tenacious resolve among Alliance leaders in September to get to Bhisho at all cost.

Following the 4 August march, violence in the region escalated significantly. The defiance continued: on 5 August, the day after the two-day stayaway, most workers in East London city left work by mid-morning to attend a further occupation of Oxford Street,¹⁰⁰ in Queenstown, another mock trial was held during a large rally in the town’s central Hexagon.¹⁰¹ Repression increased: the general incidence of violence reached proportions ‘almost impossible to monitor’, the Border ANC reported.¹⁰² Numerous peaceful demonstrations were broken up by security forces waging ‘a concerted campaign of harassment, intimidation and [...] state terrorism’.¹⁰³ Counter-violence also escalated in August: there were numerous attacks on Ciskei state property and personnel; six Ciskei police were killed in three days by planned attacks.¹⁰⁴ On 7 August a bus

98. ‘Talks Avert Bisho Clash’, *Daily Dispatch*, 5 August 1992; Padraig O’Malley Heart of Hope Archive, P. O’Malley, Interview with Pik Botha, 24 August 1992, <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/site/q/03lv00017/04lv00344/05lv00607/06lv00703.htm>, accessed 1 March 2021; Vanyu, ‘The Bhisho Massacre’, 9.

99. ‘Talks Avert Bisho Clash’, *Daily Dispatch*, 5 August 1992.

100. ‘De Klerk, Mandela, Hopes for Renewed Talks’, *Daily Dispatch*, 6 August 1992; ‘Workers Join EL Protest’, *Daily Dispatch*, 6 August 1992.

101. ‘Mock Trial at Q’town Rally’, *Daily Dispatch*, 6 August 1992.

102. University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers Research Archive, Kasrils Papers, A3345 (hereafter Kasrils Papers), E2.1.1, ‘Border ANC Report on the Events Surrounding the Bisho Massacre on Monday 7th September 1992’, 1–2.

103. There were multiple attacks on the homes of ANC members and assaults in which seven people had died, including a four-year-old girl and a two-month-old baby. *Ibid.*, 2.

104. P. Goodenough, cited in C. White, ‘The Rule of Brigadier Oupa Gqozo in Ciskei: 4 March 1990 to 22 March 1994’ (MA thesis, Rhodes University, Makhanda, 2008), 128.

carrying CDF soldiers was attacked with hand grenades and AK47s; on 8 and 9 August, CDF soldiers were attacked at their homes with hand grenades and rifles.¹⁰⁵

Subsequently, the August march was regarded as having made clear ‘gains’ for the Alliance: leaders in the Border celebrated the fact that the march had managed to ‘push our way into the Bisho stadium in spite of Gqozo’s threats’.¹⁰⁶ In his report of the August march, Raymond Suttner described how the crowd had marched past the stadium intersection and towards the government buildings, highly disciplined as they waited for negotiations to unfold. The crowd surged forward, forcing police and the Casspir (an armoured troop-carrying vehicle) to retreat. When the agreement was finally made for the march to proceed into the Bisho stadium, the crowd were instructed by security officials to turn around, back to the intersection, from where they should enter the stadium. Instead, the crowd surged ahead, gloating as they toyed past police, forced into retreat, before turning towards the stadium.¹⁰⁷

Many of the Alliance’s regional leaders were encouraged that they would, with the pressure of another large march, be able to enter and occupy Bisho. Thus, on 11 August the Regional Alliance Campaigns Committee decided that they should plan a repeat march to Bisho, which might take the form of ‘an occupation of Bisho with different marches converging on Bisho all along the main roads’. Having consulted with ANC leaders at sub-regional level and with the strategic aspects still to be refined, their programme of action was approved by the ANC regional executive committee on 19 August.¹⁰⁸

The August week of mass action witnessed significant demonstrations across the country involving a total estimate of 5 million people, the largest of which included a march to Pretoria’s Union Buildings on 5 August (on par with the scale of the Bisho march the day before).¹⁰⁹ The ANC claimed that 90 per cent of workers had observed the stayaway in the country’s largest ever strike.¹¹⁰ But organisers of the mass action campaign, in particular campaigns officer Ronnie Kasrils, faced some damning public assessments. The stayaway on 16 June had lacked ‘clout’, some argued, and was ultimately overshadowed by the tragedy the following day at Boipatong.¹¹¹ Poor turnout was also reported at many of the major city marches in late July, threatening hopes

105. White, ‘The Rule of Brigadier’ Oupa Gqozo, 133.

106. Kasrils Papers, E2.1.1, ‘Border ANC Report on the Events Surrounding the Bisho Massacre on Monday 7th September 1992’, 4.

107. Kasrils Papers, E2.1.1, Raymond Suttner, Report on march on 4 August 1992.

108. Kasrils Papers, E2.1.1, ‘Border ANC Report on the Events Surrounding the Bisho Massacre on Monday 7th September 1992’, 4–5.

109. ‘Mass Action Focus: The Alliance Assesses the Past Two Months’, *South African Labour Bulletin*, 16, 7 (1992), 31.

110. ‘Roll, Mass Action, Roll’, *Mayibuye*, 3, 8 (September 1992), 12.

111. ‘Protests Lack Clout to Topple De Klerk’, *Guardian*, 17 June 1992.

that mass action would sway negotiations.¹¹² Hani conceded in July that the campaign lacked strategic clarity.¹¹³ Friedman argues that if the highpoint of the campaign was 3–4 August, it was short lived and its ‘practical effects’ were limited.¹¹⁴

Meanwhile, private talks resumed between the ANC and the NP: it was widely assumed that open negotiations would soon resume.¹¹⁵ After news of secret meetings on 9 August (attended by Ramaphosa, Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, Joe Nhlanhla, Roelf Meyer, and Dawie de Villiers) leaked out, there followed popular discontent that the meetings contravened the agreed protocol for the resumption of negotiations.¹¹⁶ As a COSATU discussion paper later proclaimed, the ‘ill-considered bilateral with the regime on 9 August’ ‘reflected strategic unclarity’ and ‘nearly threw away all the ground we had won in the previous two months’.¹¹⁷ Frustrated by the lack of movement by government on their key demands and responding to criticism from within the Alliance, Ramaphosa reframed the purpose of these meetings and assumed control over future negotiations. All further meetings with the regime would cease: the government should address any ‘practical implementation’ of the ANC’s demands to the office of its Secretary General.¹¹⁸ This intervention also implied a criticism of Mandela and others taking a more conciliatory approach.¹¹⁹ Valli Moosa reasserted that nothing short of a response by the government to the list of demands laid out by the alliance in a memorandum from 23 June 1992 could lay the ground for new negotiations.¹²⁰ By late August, with bilateral talks established between (principally) Roelf Meyer and Ramaphosa, it was widely anticipated that a new round of multiparty talks was on the cards: the Alliance thus held a summit to discuss its strategy.¹²¹

At this summit, COSATU criticised the Alliance’s failure to analyse and build on the mass action campaign.¹²² They had so far struggled to translate mobilisation into political gains. Responding to this and the recent resumption of talks, the Border campaign – which had seen one of the largest marches and the most dramatic event of the stayaway – was considered to be of national significance as leaders sought to use the campaign to tactical effect in negotiations. The Border region presented its programme of action to the ANC National

112. Poor turnout was reported at marches in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria and Port Elizabeth. ‘De Klerk Insists on Transitional Government as ANC Gets Poor Turnout for Protests’, *Ottawa Citizen*, 26 July 1992.

113. O’Malley, Interview with Hani, 15 July 1992.

114. Friedman, ‘Back to the Streets’, 151.

115. ‘I Had Discussion with FW on Friday, Says Mandela’, *Star*, 10 August 1992; ‘Hopes that Talks Will Resume’, *Sowetan*, 10 August 1992.

116. ‘No More Meetings with Govt’, *Star*, 14 August 1992.

117. ‘Mass Action Focus’, 33.

118. ‘No More Meetings with Govt’, *Star*, 14 August 1992.

119. ‘FW, Mandela on “Hotline”’, *Star*, 15 August 1992; ‘Now You See It’, *Financial Mail*, 21 August 1992.

120. ‘Talks Are On, One-to-One This Time’, *Weekly Mail*, 14–20 August 1992.

121. ‘Govt ANC in Bid to Restart Negotiations’, *Star*, 26 August 1992; J. Baskin, ‘A Winter of Discontent’, *South African Labour Bulletin*, 16, 7 (1992), 15.

122. ‘Mass Action Focus’, 31–35.

Campaigns Committee, headed by Ronnie Kasrils, on 21 August at an early session of the National Alliance Summit. Those present at the session agreed that 9 September should be a national day of focus on the bantustans, regarding Ciskei as the ‘weakest link’ in the government’s alliance and Gqozo’s removal thus highly strategic. Divisions were identified among the Ciskei’s security forces: to ‘maximise the gains’ of the August march, mass action should be escalated both ‘qualitatively and quantitatively’ to ‘lead to Gqozo’s removal’.¹²³ Two days later, the matter was discussed further at a national meeting of the Tripartite Alliance: here it was suggested that the proposed march on Bhisho, scheduled for 9 September, be brought forward to coincide with De Klerk’s conference on federalism, scheduled for 7 September.¹²⁴ Alliance leaders thus hoped to use the Bhisho march to blunt the NP’s efforts to formalise regional alliances with bantustan leaders, challenging Gqozo while he was away at the conference.¹²⁵ The Border Regional Working Committee invited national leaders, including Kasrils as campaigns officer, to engage in a planning meeting on 26 August ahead of the impending march.¹²⁶

Conclusions: the ANC in transition

Having held the simmering crisis in the Border at arm’s length, the ANC’s national leadership now found a new opportunity in the planned march for September, which promised to strengthen their mandate by visible association with the signs and symbols of struggle in the organisation’s heartland. The mass action strategy could now be clarified with a tangible focus on the Ciskei as the ‘weakest link’ in the government’s alliance and the first metaphorical domino on the path to power.¹²⁷ The September march – which was to be a showdown by all expectation – promised to be widely reported and televised. Leaders aimed to fulfil the frustrated ambitions of the August march: to hold a people’s assembly in Bhisho and thereby to force Gqozo’s resignation. This new phase of ‘rolling mass action’ looked to topple the bantustans of Ciskei, Qwaqwa, Bophuthatswana, and KwaZulu and promised to serve various functions for national ANC leaders: to strike a blow against their opponents by challenging the NP’s bantustan allies and thereby to strengthen the ANC’s demands for an interim government and elections to a constitutional assembly, meanwhile consolidating their leadership through association with mass mobilisation. Some Alliance leaders adopted a

123. Kasrils Papers, E2.1.1, ‘Border ANC Report on the Events Surrounding the Bisho Massacre on Monday 7th September 1992’, 6.

124. Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country*, 147.

125. ‘Federalism Summit to Kick off Amid Conflict’, *Business Day*, 7 September 1992; ‘ANC Plan to Drive a Wedge into the Nats’ Alliance’, *Business Day*, 7 September 1992.

126. Present at this meeting were Silumko Sokupa, Lucille Meyer, Andrew Hendricks, Donne Cooney, Chippy Olver, Skenjana Roji, Shepperd Mayatula, Temba Kinana, ‘Giwu’, Mcebisi Bata, Mac Maharaj, Chris Hani, Ronnie Kasrils, and Arnold Stofile. Kasrils Papers, E2.1.1, ‘Border ANC Report on the Events Surrounding the Bisho Massacre on Monday 7th September 1992’, 6.

127. *Ibid.*

vanguardist rhetoric, as they looked to ‘harness the power of the people’ in hard negotiations.¹²⁸

This episode reveals the contradictions and conflicts inherent in the ANC, itself in transition, as leaders sought to transform it from an exiled organisation dominated by a political elite into a broad-based political party through the absorption of the structures and caucuses of the UDF. By 1992, in the Border this transformation appeared to have been partially successful. Set against the financial struggles of the ANC at national level and the limited branch membership in many regions,¹²⁹ the Border ANC enjoyed an unusual level of financial independence and thus control over its activities. This financial and operational independence in turn supported a coherent regional identity for the organisation and enabled the campaign against Gqozo to develop despite opposition from the ANC national executive, no doubt frustrating those in the executive who saw branches existing to perform a legitimating function, ‘to give substance to the ANC’s authority and leverage at the negotiating table’, as Lodge has argued.¹³⁰ Despite repeated attempts by the national leadership to rein them in, structures in the Border region escalated their campaign against Gqozo. In doing so they challenged the national leadership, its assumed authority, and its negotiating strategy at CODESA.

The campaign in the Border was crucial in shaping the national ANC position on the ‘homelands’ by September 1992. While the National Executive Committee’s approach towards the bantustans throughout 1990 and 1991 was ambivalent – even in March 1992, it continued to court Gqozo – the Border campaign pushed back against the executive’s more conciliatory politics. As time wore on, the campaign exposed the organisation’s problematic approach to the TBVC states. After the CODESA negotiations collapsed in May 1992, it was no longer expedient to temper the local campaign or to deal with the TBVC states as a bloc in order to hold together constitutional proposals; ANC negotiators at last realised that a more strategic path should be taken. Adopting the approach outlined by the UDF in its August 1990 conference, from late August 1992 the ANC leadership highlighted a distinction between ‘sympathetic’ and ‘hostile’ bantustan regimes.¹³¹ While ANC leaders learnt about the landscape of transitional politics and clarified their strategy through the negotiations at CODESA, it is evident that developments outside the negotiations were equally significant.

After two long years, the campaign against Gqozo in the Border was belatedly supported by national ANC politicians as they moved to develop a strategy for mass action. Amid widespread dissatisfaction with the course of the negotiations, and their eventual collapse, the left among the leadership, now vindicated, identified an irresistible opportunity to renew their mandate to negotiate by visible

128. Suttner, ‘The Bisho March and Massacre’, 25.

129. Lodge, ‘The African National Congress Comes Home’, 18.

130. *Ibid.*, 15.

131. Sparks, *Tomorrow Is Another Country*, 147.

association with the struggle at the grassroots. Only after the nationwide stayaway in August 1992, when it became unavoidably apparent to national leaders that the campaign in the Border presented some of the most militant and popular action in the country, did the ANC leadership take the objectives of the local campaign in the Ciskei seriously: it adopted the campaign against Gqozo as a strategic stepping stone to topple the more powerful bantustan regimes of Bophuthatswana and KwaZulu and thereby to weaken the NP. But unlike Kasrils' new national strategy for the mass action campaign, the impetus behind the September march extended far beyond the narrow circles of the SACP and was less caricatured than narratives of the so-called 'Leipzig option' proposed. The radical aims of the march were not simply derived from Eastern Europe, nor were they little considered as the criticisms later suggested. The September march was rooted in a longstanding local civic campaign inspired by the various ideologies and practices of 'people's power' developed in South Africa's mass movement: activists aspired to force the introduction of an interim administration, broadly representative of local political organisations, through a participatory people's assembly. There was no suggestion that they believed they might overthrow the state entirely: local ambitions were focused on bringing about the necessary local change of interim administration in the Ciskei to enable democratic mobilisation and preparation for elections. Nevertheless, the showdown planned for 7 September was to become a theatre of national politics.

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