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Glenn Adler, Jonny Steinberg, eds.. *From Comrades to Citizens: The South African Civics Movement and the Transition to Democracy.* Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000. xvi + 253 pp. $00.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-333-77457-1.

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The essence of this valuable collection of essays on the civics movement in South Africa is that the grounding of democracy is throwing up enormous dilemmas to particular elements in society which played a key role in bringing the transition about. This is no more evident than in the sphere of local government, which has recently undergone a major restructuring and for which elections were held towards the end of 2000. As expected, these elections confirmed the predominance of the ANC throughout most areas of the country; and it is now these new local municipalities which are charged with major responsibilities in bringing delivery of services to local communities and in stimulating local economic development. Meanwhile, these new municipal structures are also meant to 'bring government closer to the people'--yet opposition parties are already alleging that a top-down model of ANC discipline, enforced by 'executive mayors' (who choose their own local 'executives'), is already beginning to erode local accountability. Democracy at the local level, so such critics allege, is already under threat.

It is not necessary to endorse this version of contemporary reality to appreciate that the politics of struggle against apartheid was always going to have a very different character from the politics of democracy and development after apartheid. It is this problematic which is taken up at length by the seven different papers brought together by Glenn Adler and Jonny Steinberg in *From Comrades to Citizens: The South African Civics Movement and the Transition to Democracy*. As noted in the Preface, this is the product of a long-term collaborative project on popular resistance in South Africa, which started in the early 1990s and has only just seen the light of day. Nonetheless, although some chapters were penned some time ago (Steinberg's own singly authored Chapter 6 was drafted way back in 1994), they remain fresh, and they are skilfully wedded together by the editors in their penetrating introduction.

Adler and Steinberg set the scene by outlining a tension--"perhaps an inevitable one" (p. 2)--between the ideas of the civics movement (the residents' associations of South African townships

which mobilised resistance to the apartheid regime and which aspired to giving birth to a new and revolutionary politics after its overthrow) and the post-apartheid system, which is formally based upon liberal democracy. The question that the authors pose is: has the civics movement, by declaring its victory over apartheid, not assisted in its own demise? "Can the civics movement survive, in its current form, the birth of the new order and its own transition from comrades to citizens?" (p.2).

As they observe, the democratic ethos with which the civics became synonymous was not only non-parliamentary, but decisively anti-liberal: the civics thought of themselves as the receptacles of democratic sovereignty, if not also as a means for overthrowing oppressive state power. Embodied in many of the forms of organization adopted was a distinctive notion of participatory democracy, which asserted that the democracy of the ballot box constituted only a truncated and deformed form of citizen power. In this vision, a new post-apartheid politics would be one in which the gap between governors and governed would be closed "by virtue of a political form that inducts everybody into the realms of political and administrative decision-making" (p. 8).

However, as the editors observe, the terrain changed in the transition to democracy in a way not imagined by the insurrectionist and socialist elements of the liberation movement. First, the transition was a product of negotiations; and second, the end of the cold war heralded the victory of liberal democracy. Consequently, "Rather than entering the envisioned socialist utopia, post-apartheid South Africa would make a detour into pluralist democracy. Comrades would become citizens" (p. 9). However, as the editors go on to elaborate, further dilemmas are thrown up first by the fact that the South African liberal state is rather weak; and second, that the civics are becoming less uniform, and more diverse. They therefore suggest that the key issue which the book is raising is whether the "new citizens and their forms of associational life will be more comfortable in--and supportive of--a pluralist order than the comrades who preceded them" (p. 24).

The book proceeds via series of case studies, all of which are of high quality. Colin Bundy kicks off by reminding readers that the civics movement in South Africa has deep roots which reach right back to the late nineteenth century, concluding with important observations that whilst the fusing of civics' structures and concerns with the national political movements in the 1950s paid initial dividends, it led to their repression when the latter were banned in the 1960s. Jeremy Seekings explores "The Development of Strategic Thought in South Africa's Civic Movements, 1977-90": initially, the predominant strategy had seen civics as providing the basis for political struggles; in the mid-80s, civics were seen as embodying "people's power" as an alternative to conventional state power; and by the early 1990s civics were confronting a situation where the ANC began to dominate "politics", with civics focussing their activities upon "development". Janet Cherry, in a chapter based on her work for a Rhodes politics PhD (now completed), looks at political participation in Kwazakele township in Port Elizabeth between 1980-93. She details how the formation of street and area committee structures proved not only extremely effective for mobilizing people for non-violent action against repression, but pointed the way to a qualitatively new form of politics in which local residents found they could have a voice in decision-making (although she adds that these structures have now suffered a demise). Steven Robins examines the struggles of civic activists in Namaqaland against attempts by the apartheid state, in alliance with local elites, to parcel off reserve commonage into individual plots for sale to 'modern' commercial livestock farmers, noting as he does so that these coloured farmers drew on ethnic particularist claims that were "at times progressive and empowering, yet also reactionary and exclusionary" (p. 115). Jus-

tine Lucas provides a remarkably rich study of civic organization (or disorganization) in Alexandra, the township located amidst some of Johannesburg's wealthiest northern suburbs, demonstrating how intense competition for space has exacerbated social divisions. Particularly valuable is her detailed study of Shabangu, a Swazi political entrepreneur who challenged the Alexandra Civic Organisation's legitimacy but who she identifies as "not simply a patron, broker or 'warlord', but a combination of all these, blending legitimate and illegitimate features" (p. 172). Steinberg follows with a chapter which asks whether there is a place for civics in a liberal democratic polity. And Seekings chips in again with a study of the South African National Civics Organisation. Formed in 1992, when hitherto independent civics became 'branches' of SANCO, this took the lead in the negotiated transformation of local government, yet has subsequently fallen prey to a whole set of challenges, notably the shift of personnel and resources to the ANC.

I would argue that for the general reader, it is Jonny Steinberg's chapter which most clearly elaborates the dilemmas faced by the civics. After having an enjoyable poke at the National Party's espousal of post Cold War Fukuyama-style 'end of historyism' (i.e., a la Thatcher, 'There Is No Alternative to Capitalism and Democracy'), he tears apart ambiguities in the South African Communist Party's conception of the national democratic revolution (NDR) (the stage which it foresees as preceding socialism). Basically, he argues that the SACP's idea of the NDR "is left stranded between two competing conceptions of democracy; the first, a pluralist representative democracy and the second, a platform on which history's privileged agent (here the oppressed (black) nation) is to destroy the raison d'etre of political contestation in any form" (p. 184). As he goes on, if democracy resides in the 'will of the people' yet this will is always the site of contestation, then the will of people can express itself directly, "but can only exist as a conflict between competing representations". His argument constitutes a major challenge to the efficacy of direct democracy, whilst raising all sorts of uncertainties about the future of pluralist democracy in South Africa. However, with South Africa now subject to the rule of a party whose 'democratic dominance' at times borders on arrogance, the importance of civic organisations which can pose alternatives to received doctrines and demand accountability is self evident.

This is a collection that hangs together well. It should be required reading for all those engaged with the nature of contemporary South African politics. And it provides valuable food for thought for political theorists of democracy and students of the new social movements alike.

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