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SOUTH AFRICA:  
AN ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY  
CHANGE PATTERNS AND LIKELY  
FUTURE TRENDS**



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G.C. Olivier

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Universiteit van die Noorde  
Privaatsak X5090  
PIETERSBURG  
0700  
Republiek van Suid-Afrika

1980

SERIES/REEKS B18

ISBN 0 949992 70 4

## POLITICAL REFORM IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY CHANGE-PATTERNS AND LIKELY FUTURE TRENDS

The major crisis confronting contemporary South Africa is a crisis of transformation. At present this country is in the throes of an historical transition from an old and obsolete order to a new order of things. But, as Machiavelli said "There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things".

In view of the extreme complexity of the process of change in South Africa, it is important first of all to look at the basic realities or parameters that influence the political dynamics in the country before actual change-patterns and likely future trends are discussed.

### A. PARAMETERS DETERMINING POLITICAL CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICA

It is impossible to grasp the present political and constitutional processes in South Africa without a thorough knowledge of the cultural, social, economic and political forces prevailing in that country. It is the interaction of these factors that account for the present situation in South Africa while they also lay down the boundaries and tempo of change.

The *first* and foremost determinant of change is to be found in the history of South Africa. The historical roots of the policies pursued during the reign of the National Party during the past three decades go back far beyond the rise of modern Afrikaner nationalism. I make this point to indicate clearly that political thought among White South Africans concerning the essential nature and direction of change in the country is congruent with the political views of many generations of South Africans, and, secondly, to refute the often expressed allegation that the Afrikaners are racists who stand for the domination of Whites over Blacks. Discrimination in one form or another was practiced by rulers and governments in South Africa ever since 1652 and for the major part of our history most Whites, both English and Afrikaans speaking, were against equal treatment for the Blacks. Reflecting this situation, British Colonial Secretary, Lord Stanley stated in 1842 that at the Cape of Good Hope "it had been found to be a task of almost insuperable difficulty to reconcile the principles of free institutions with the legal equality between races".<sup>1</sup> In the years of colonial rule in South Africa a system of government was developed by the British which was in no way congruent with the local cultural, social and political configurations, with the result that racial discrimination became institutionalized. The stereotypes and institutionalized practices that developed through all these years were echoed in the findings and recommendations of important commissions such as the South African Native Affairs Commission (1903—5), the Indigency Commission (1906), the Natal Native Affairs Commission (1906—7) and the Transvaal Mining Industry Commission

(1908) and much of the philosophical and practical substance of the Afrikaner's segregation policies in later years can be traced back to the basic thinking that went into the reports of these Commissions.

Of course, the Afrikaners did not take the initiative with regard to the native policy until 1913 when the Louis Botha government gave a territorial dimension to it through the adoption of the Native Land Act. Although territorial segregation has remained a central theme in South Africa's race policies ever since, it was never pursued with sufficient farsightedness, vigour and boldness to render it the final answer to the country's race problem. Alfred Hoernlé's definition of the South African race policies as "an odd patchwork... of parallelism, assimilation, separation... subject to the overarching fact of White domination",<sup>2</sup> sums up the situation adequately.

The reasons for this seemingly piecemeal approach and lack of grand design are of course complex and manifold. For the purposes of this talk I will content myself with one important observation, namely, that for the greater part of South African history there was no urgency attached to the political aspirations of the Non-Whites in the country, with the result that the race policies of successive governments were by and large spill-offs of the intra-White political struggle, which was in turn dominated by such issues as nationhood, status, loyalty, language, neutrality and republicanism. On the other hand, it seems equally valid to state that Hoernlé's definition did not take fully into account the historical fact that South Africa's race policies developed as a dialectical continuum and not by way of a succession of policy alternatives, and that the end product is indeed destined to contain, inter alia, elements of parallelism, political integration, and separation, but of course, in a system void of White or any other form of domination.

After all the years of uncertainty, struggle and experimentation, it appears as if South Africa is now moving into the take-off stage of a new constitutional dispensation which is congruent with the country's unique societal structure and character. In this new dispensation there ought to be neither White nor Black domination. Present policy is to phase out White domination as quickly as possible. South Africa has indeed reached a stage in its constitutional development where "the Afrikaner nation no longer governs South Africa alone, but where a system of multi-nation government will take its place".<sup>3</sup>

In the light of these developments one can conclude that both the rigid apartheid and majoritarian paradigms have become obsolete in the South African political context. Although the one-person-one-vote-in-a-unitary-system idea was a political non-starter throughout South Africa's political history, its mere propagation created false aspirations and expectations among Blacks which could never be approximated. So also apartheid has failed, and while it is not totally dead by now, one can surely state that it is terminally ill. Of course, the psychological damage done by both these political doctrines to the South African society is still like an open wound

which will take time to heal completely. Both these "solutions" created greater problems than they were supposed to solve!

With the knowledge that the rigid apartheid dogma has utterly failed to supply a solution to South Africa's multi-ethnic problems, the government has systematically started to dismantle discriminatory practices, especially the so called "petty apartheid" measures in the country. At the same time, it set in motion machinery to find a new constitution for the Whites, Indians and Coloureds, to consolidate and even enlarge the Black States, to normalize the labour situation in the Republic and to find a new dispensation for the Urban Blacks.

With the knowledge that this is perhaps the last opportunity to find a firm pattern for evolutionary change in contemporary South Africa, Black and White leaders have in the past six months engaged in a dialogue of unprecedented intensity, urgency and purpose concerning the road ahead for the country and its peoples. In view of conciliatory attitudes prevailing on both sides, I am optimistic that this intellectual fermentation process will produce wine and not vinegar!

A second basic reality which strongly influences political and social change in South Africa is to be found in the extreme heterogeneity of the South African population structure. Being one of the most deeply divided societies in the entire world, none of the existing constitutional models or plural accommodation strategies elsewhere in the world can be transplanted into the South African body politic. Apart from racial, cultural, religious, language and socio-economic cleavages, which tend to reinforce each other, the problem of constitutional change is complicated by the fact that the majority of South Africa's Black population is either in a sub-modern or a transitional phase of development towards modernity. All these factors do enhance polarization and conflict and future peace and stability in South Africa will solely depend on the success or failure of conflict regulatory measures which have over the last decade or so been introduced into the South African political system. It is realized by South Africa's policy-makers that the Westminster-type parliamentary system of government presently operative in South Africa is by far not the most suitable type of government for maintaining order in a deeply divided society. The reality is that South Africa constitutes a nation of minorities and a winner-take-all system, such as the Westminster model, makes way for group domination and the negligence of minority rights. As a matter of fact, the system of government South Africa had from 1910 to the present exactly had the effect that conflict regulation primarily depended on the White's control of the instruments of power, rather than on positive depoliticization, compromise, concessions, etc. Being a developing country, this concentration of authority was of course not unique. S.P. Huntington wrote that: "In an early stage, modernization requires changes in traditional social, economic and cultural beliefs and behaviour, hence policy innovations and hence the concentration of power. The gap between the weak and the powerful become greater. At the same time, the social and economic change encouraged by the policy innovation leads new groups

to demand entry into the political system and requires the expansion of the system. In a third phase, much later, the expansion of the system may make possible a new dispersion of power within the system".<sup>4</sup>

This brings me to a *third* reality in South Africa, namely that while the effective state power is still concentrated in the hands of the Whites, political development in the country has entered the crucial third stage which Huntington refers to above, where a dispersion of power becomes necessary in order to cope with growing Black power aspirations. This poses the predominant challenge: how to move from control to consociationalism, i.e. how to expand the power in the system to accommodate the newly mobilized and politically active groups in order to create a totally modern system.

This is a problem of immense magnitude because in the absence of conciliatory attitudes and a solid institutional infra-structure, violence and instability inevitably follow "rapid social change and the rapid mobilization of new groups into politics".<sup>5</sup> As far as South Africa is concerned it is clear that both the no-change and the total-change strategies could bring tension and disorder. Most people agree that change must take place — but what change? Wide-spread instability would more likely seem to follow in the wake of an immediate and total change of direction involving the immediate introduction of majoritarian rule in a unitary South Africa rather than when the process of change is accelerated in terms of what I might call the "consociational extension" of the existing political system — dialogue, élite consultation, consensus, improvement to the quality of life of Blacks, regionalization, etc. — and of course the total demise of the Westminster system of government.

A *fourth* important parameter influencing change in South Africa is to be found in the high degree of economic and functional interdependence among the various ethnic groups in the country. This interdependence constitutes perhaps the greatest, and most important stabilizing factor in the South African political system in the sense that it generates loyalties and spheres of cooperation which cut across ethnical cleavages. In view of the fact that the South African economic system operates as one single unit, Black and White have a common stake in the welfare of the country and, moreover, contact across racial lines is made on the factory floor, in the office and in the market place, aiding everybody to learn the art of associating together and to adopt conciliatory attitudes. Apart from cooperation in commerce and industry; Black and White work together in the fields of education, local government, transport, communications, homeland development, etc. Although some discrepancies still do exist with regard to equal treatment for equal performance for all, irrespective of race or colour, vast improvements have been made, especially over the last few months with respect to the elimination or narrowing of the wage gap, improved amenities and social security, the envisaged removal of job reservation and the legalization of Black Trade Unions.<sup>6</sup>

A *fifth* major factor influencing change in the RSA is the immense

international outcry against its internal policies, and the concerted efforts that are constantly undertaken to deligitimize these policies on moral grounds. These punitive actions which are constantly being applied against South Africa by the international society, effect the local body politics basically in three ways. Firstly they create a sense of urgency on the part of the South African government to speed up and finalize its policy — however, on the basis of the principles of the National Party. Secondly, in view of all the drastic changes which have already taken place in South Africa over the past decade, and the continued external blame the country received in spite of these changes, there is a *verkrampste* backlash urging the government not to yield any further but to return to orthodox apartheid. Thirdly there are the expectations created by these external forces in the ranks of Black radicals, strengthening their hands to refuse cooperation and negotiation with the White government in the search of a solution short of one-person-one-vote.

## B. MODES OF CONFLICT REGULATION IN PLURALISTIC SOUTH AFRICA

In the preceding paragraphs I outlined some of the basic realities which should be considered in the process of evolutionary change in South Africa towards a stable democracy. However, before this advanced stage is reached, the South African government, the South African society at large and also benevolent outside critics must work together in order to discredit and remove, what I would like to call ineffective or dangerous conflict-regulatory practices. One of the most menacing of these is the philosophy of majoritarianism, which is currently being favoured ahead of plural democracy or consociationalism as a panacea for South Africa's political problems by world public opinion and by Black and White radicals in South Africa. As Calhoun has pointed out, "government of the numerical majority" is an "absolute government" because it responds only to the majority segment of the society.<sup>7</sup> The danger of such a system of government lies in the creation of "a permanent impotence". Also Arthur Lewis has argued that majority rule in deeply divided societies is "totally immoral, inconsistent with the primary meaning of democracy, and destructive of any prospect of building a nation in which different nations might live together in harmony".<sup>8</sup> In South Africa we have to work on the assumption of equality of groups, rather than on the number of individual members they have. Open electoral competition in one political system therefore is out of the question because instead of promoting effective conflict-regulating practices it would "actually exacerbate severe conflicts".

An equally menacing and dangerous conflict regulatory method is *Apartism*. But, as I indicated earlier, apartheid if not dead, is terminally ill. It is government policy to put an end to racial discrimination. This is not a longterm aspiration, but an immediate goal of our policy-makers. Proof of this new urgency to eliminate discrimination is reflected in the words of Dr Koornhof: "We will not rest until racial discrimination has disappeared from

our statute books and everyday life in South Africa".<sup>9</sup>

Probably the most important step towards the elimination of conflict in South Africa would be to create or develop conflict-regulating motives or what Arend Lijphart refers to as "conditions that are conducive to the establishment and maintenance of consociational democracy".<sup>10</sup> These motives and conditions could be developed in South Africans of all racial groups would agree that our real common enemy is aggressive Marxism or Soviet imperialism; that intense conflict would drastically affect the economic well-being of all the inhabitants of our region, especially the Black people; that bloodshed and human suffering must be avoided at all costs, and, finally, that their aspirations could be achieved through modifications in the existing framework for change.

Right now these motives are not particularly strong among especially the Black and Coloured sections of the population. However, through measures such as the purposive elimination of extreme socio-economic and political inequalities, the creation of a strong Black Bourgeois-element, greater emphasis on the development of local and communal authorities (on sub-systems of representative government rather than on super-structures), and the introduction of new or additional conflict regulating practices such as purposive depoliticization, compromise, concessions, and even coalition (in respect of the Coloureds and Indians) the situation could only improve.

Finally, in conjunction with these efforts, we are trying to develop in South Africa what Karl Deutsch has referred to as "mutual compatibility of main values", or, to use F.S.C. Northrop's terminology, "a common living law", based on a common moral and intellectual outlook.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, while we accept the fact that the "melting pot solution" is not applicable to the South African situation, we realise that we cannot neglect beliefs, norms, and values that are held in common. "For even if shared values occupy only a small fraction of the total cultural sphere, they tend to be among the most highly relevant values for political action".<sup>12</sup> The maintenance of order in South African society must have as its starting-point the development of a sense of common interests in the elementary goals of life. To try and create an open, competitive political system without the prior existence of strong conflict regulation motives which spring from some over-arching common value hierarchy, is a recipe for instability and perhaps revolution. In many Third World countries instability and conflict occurred as a result of the fact that equal conditions were created at a rate faster than the "art of association together" was mastered, and, as de Tocqueville said, there is one law that is stronger than all the others, and that is "if men are to remain civilized or to become so, the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of conditions is increased".<sup>13</sup>

### C. OPTIONS FOR CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICA

In the light of the foregoing, the question arises: Which options are open to

South Africa? When trying to answer this question, one should bear in mind the fact that while the Afrikaner has the command over the instruments of power, change in South Africa will be guided by certain basic preconditions, on which there is a consensus among Afrikaners. These are:

1. That the multi-ethnic character of the total South African society is an undeniable empirical fact which any constitutional plan should recognize and incorporate.
2. That the preservation of group identity and the respect for, and protection of, minority interests are the foundations upon which a stable state system free from institutionalized discrimination should be constructed in South Africa.
3. That Christian and civilized values should be maintained as the normative framework for political and social group-interaction in South Africa.
4. That the Afrikaner's historical commitment to South Africa and coupled to that, his own struggle for liberation and freedom against the forces of foreign imperialism legitimized his role as change-agent and catalyst in the transition of all groups in South Africa towards a stable democracy.

However, thinking for a moment that Afrikaner political dominance is not an immutable fact, and also considering the fluid and changing internal and external situations and the various policy sequences, contingencies, strategies, etc. that may flow from this, one will have to think in terms of a range of options. These options could be identified in terms of the following categories or teleological types:

1. A system based on permanent and total separation, legally defined and artificially maintained by means of institutionalised social rigidities with White supremacy permanently entrenched (Apartheid-model).
2. The logical continuation of the homelands policy by the addition next to the existing Black homelands of a White homeland in which the Whites will have exclusive residential and political rights (Partition model).
3. A plural society, vertically differentiated with strong self-determination overtones among the segments; interrelated via an over-arching South Africanism, the economic system and anti-Marxism, with a strong commitment to negotiated and transactional political change and based on a federal or confederal structure (Consociational model). This option could be approached in two possible ways:
  - i) By way of a gradual process of social change during which culture and achievement will replace race and colour in the allocation of political rights, resulting in a spontaneous common society in a century or so (Evolutionary or Fabian strategy).

- ii) By way of a relatively fast, planned, innovative and dramatic process involving the consolidation and enlargement of the Black homelands, the granting of separate constitutional status to the urban Blacks, the merging of White, Coloured, and Indians, into a single political unit by means of some federal structures and consociational mechanisms and guaranteed minority rights, and the construction of an overarching confederal structure in terms of which White, Black, Coloured, and Indian could be reunified into a South African society of nations acting as a single unit for the purposes of foreign policy, trade, and defence, but maintaining their ethnic character and their right to determine their own group interest (Blitzkrieg strategy).
- 4. The creation of an open pluralist society in a unitary South Africa based on the (Westminster) liberal constitutional model, which includes extended franchise to all races for direct representation in one central parliament and constitutionally entrenched personal and civil liberties (Majoritarian Democratic Model).
- 5. Rapid and radical concessionary changes with the immediate aim of bringing about a common society, without ethnic guarantees, of the melting pot variety, resulting eventually in a majoritarian Black government (Full integration Model).
- 6. The creation of an authoritarian Marxist type socialist political order involving the expropriation and collectivisation of private property and means of production and the establishment of a dominant one-party Communist State (Marxist Model).
- 7. The concentration of authority in the hands of small White military élite whose main task it will be to maintain law and order and to stave off foreign military intrusion (Garrison-state Model).

Given the particular circumstances, all of these options and their sub-options could materialize in South Africa. In this context it should be borne in mind that the Afrikaner is rather ambivalent in his approach to the politics of his fatherland in the sense that his mood tends to waver between survival and humanism. While the Afrikaner remains in power, the full integration and Marxist models are for obvious reasons out of the question. Continuous and relentless pressure from outside and from inside will as an expected response bring out the survival element and will drive the Afrikaner back to the partition or apartheid or even garrison-state models. If under these conditions, the Afrikaner should lose control, a Marxist victory would become a distinct possibility. Under "favourable" external and internal conditions, the humanistic side of the Afrikaner will dominate and the "consociational" model will continue to make headway as this is the method of social change without violence and high social cost. This should remain the type of solution on which South Africa and its friendly foreign critics could or should have a consensus.

Of course progress has been made during the last few years in the quest for a workable solution for South Africa's racial problems. A stage has indeed

been reached where one can no longer refer to South African race policy in simplistic, undifferentiated terms as separation, apartheid, partition, or separate development. None of these terms describe the intellectual changes, dynamics, and substance of the political transformation process now unfolding in South Africa adequately. A new situation, and in the wake of it, a new mood, has emerged in South Africa rendering the old apartheid as well as the liberal democratic paradigms completely irrelevant and obsolete. This new situation must be interpreted in terms of a new rationale or theory of social change in a multi-ethnic and plural society with its own framework and vocabulary. In terms of this theory, certain preconditions should be observed and certain strategies should be followed if South Africa is to develop peacefully towards a new version of a stable democracy. The vantage point of what may be referred to as the "emergent paradigm", is that South Africa is in terms of culture and ethnicity a deeply divided society that must be carefully guided towards a form of democracy that synchronizes with the unique cultural, social, and political characteristics of the total South African society. In terms of this theory it is further argued that democracy should not be equated with the one-person/one-vote or the Westminster variety; that the majoritarian type of democracy is impossible to implement successfully in a deeply divided society; that, if democracy were to be the aim at all, a differentiated democratic model (to the one-person/one-vote-in-one-system variety) should be devised for South Africa, and finally that the logical political structure all this should lead to and in which political relations could be stabilized and institutionalized through evolutionary and orderly forms of change, should take on the form of a federal or confederal form of government with strong consociational overtones. This line of argument is consistent with option 3, i.e. the "consociational" model, and if it is to be fully operationalized at all in this era of "stop-watch politics", a "blitzkrieg-strategy" should be given preference above the *festina lente* approach pursued by successive governments in South Africa in the past. However, it is important to note that there exists no ready model of federalism, confederalism or consociationalism anywhere in the world on which South Africa could base its constitution. The terms consociationalism, federalism and confederalism as referred to in the South African political context, are therefore mere approximations of the ideal type textbook models, as I believe that South Africa will have to find its own particular brand of federalism, its own constitutional mix, to fit with the unique circumstances prevailing in the country.

It is important to note that the new or emergent paradigm in terms of which present and future change in South Africa is explained and justified, is consistent with the normative guidelines suggested by political theorists who studied the essential prerequisites for stability and change towards stable democracy in plural societies elsewhere in the world. What we are trying to devise is by no means some devious or devilish concoction or a sham-democratic model aimed at the retention of White privilege for it has indisputable intellectual legitimacy and merit. However, it is also clear that there are still overlapping elements between the old and new paradigms and that a wide gulf exists between empirical reality in South Africa and the

normative prescriptions of the above change theories. Whether or not this gulf will persist or diminish over the short term, depends very much on the success or failure of conflict regulatory patterns and interaction systems operative in the South African political system, the structural changes that are introduced in the country's political system, and also on the behaviour of foreign governments and pressure groups.

### **Prevailing attitudes in South Africa concerning political and social change**

South African politics has never really been stagnant over the past two decades. However, there are some important distinctions between present perceptions and attitudes in respect of change and those that existed in the past. *Firstly* the urgency that prevails at present that meaningful socio-political change should take place is unprecedented. *Secondly*, the limits or scope of change, as laid down by the Afrikaner power establishment, are much wider and far-reaching than previously. *Thirdly*, while the strongest demands for change have in the past come from outside the ranks of Afrikanerdom, Afrikaners are now in the forefront of this new movement. In addition, the Afrikaner power hierarchy has become much more tolerant of criticism that does not rest on outright moral condemnation. In the past many respectable Afrikaner intellectuals who pleaded for the abrogation of statutory discrimination were frowned upon, and even ostracized from the Afrikaner establishment's reward system. Today Afrikaner students, church leaders, academics, newspaper editors, etc., criticise discriminatory apartheid more freely and vehemently than before without facing the community sanctions of a few years back. My observation is that the ongoing debate and urgent search for policy alternatives are regarded by many Afrikaner leaders as an essential element in the present struggle for survival hence the remarkable tolerance on the part of the Afrikaner power establishment. *Fourthly*, whereas demands for change in respect of race discrimination have in the past emanated overwhelmingly from sources outside the government hierarchy, government spokesmen from the Prime Minister downwards have in the past six months, committed themselves to sweeping reform measures in respect of the improvement of race relations in South Africa. For instance, in a speech at Palm Springs, California on June 19, 1979, the Minister for Cooperation and Development stated that he did not need anybody from abroad to remind him "that a society where any man, whatever his creed or colour, is denied human rights, is an unjust one. I am fully aware of this and so is my government... We will not rest until racial discrimination has disappeared from our statute books and everyday life in South Africa... I believe in full human rights for all people in my country". Also the Prime Minister committed himself and his Party to eradicate racial discrimination and to give equal attention to the interests of all South Africans, Black and White, because he did not believe in the politics of hate but in positive politics based on Christian principles. *Fifthly*, whereas there have been numerous proposals for change in the past but few adoptions, the situation has now change considerably if one takes into consideration the Government's adoption of proposals that emanated from the Wiehahn and Riekert reports, the Prime Minister's confirmation

that his government's policy is to divide power among the Coloureds, Indians and Whites in terms of a new constitutional dispensation, the announcement by the Prime Minister that the government will go further than the provisions of the 1936 Act concerning land allocated to the Blacks, the granting of local autonomy to Urban Blacks, the government's new policy of non-interference in sports, etc.

While substantial reforms are being implemented or envisaged in South Africa, there is, however, no complete unanimity among all South Africans concerning the specific nature and directions of change that ought to prevail in the country. In fact the government has to fight a two-front war against both the far-left and the far-right factions in South African politics. The radical left stands firm on a one-person-one-vote in a unitary South Africa type of constitutional set-up. They refuse to participate in the negotiating machinery set up by the government in respect of the political future of the urban Blacks or to participate in the democratically elected Community Councils for the Black Urban areas. They aim to weaken and destabilize South Africa, hence they support boycott actions, encourage disinvestment campaigns and propagate the diplomatic and cultural isolation of the country. Their role is therefore largely a negative one insofar as they try to simplify political issues into a single clear-cut Marxist dichotomy between the "forces of progress" and the "forces of reaction", thus attempting to rigidify the political choices in South Africa for the purposes of enhancing the conditions for conflict.

On the far-right of the South African political spectrum, the present spate of reforms by the government are being opposed by a group of well-organised, dogmatic Afrikaners whose aim it is to restore the Verwoerdian *status quo ante* and to perpetuate White domination. Of all the factors inhibiting reform in South Africa, this group of Afrikaners is perhaps on top of the list. However, the new Prime Minister has so far pointedly ignored the threat of a *verkrampte* backlash. Instead he has committed himself and his party increasingly to a clearly defined enlightened policy and the "revolution from above" continues. Under his leadership the National Party has once more assumed an innovatory role in South African politics, leaving behind them the debilitating *status quo* posture and the indecisive policy-making style of the Vorster years.

Fortunately, however, the two extremist factions referred to above constitute rather negligible forces in terms of popular support and elite-membership. The political mainstream in South Africa today consists of people and leaders who favour bridge-building, mutual consultation and negotiation as modes of bringing about political and social change rather than negativism or violent confrontation. They also strongly oppose outside interference, boycotts and sanctions as modes to force change onto South Africa. The goodwill and conciliatory attitudes on the part of Black leaders were dramatically demonstrated by the recent talks between National Party and Inkatha leaders in Natal, the willingness of prominent urban Black leaders to serve on multi racial regional committees which are to consider the future of urban Blacks, and above all by the enthusiastic



response on the part of Blacks to the historic visit the Prime Minister made over the past three weeks to the Blacks in rural areas and Soweto.

While it would be naive not to admit that the political stability of South Africa is very precariously balanced, a new mood of optimism and expectation has replaced the gloom of a year ago. This optimism is largely based on the expectations which flow from the government to unequivocal commitment to improve the lot of the Black man in South Africa. From these commitments the government cannot divert lest the country be lured into a revolution of rising expectations. These circumstances provide the surest guarantee that change and reform will continue to take place in South Africa. This will no doubt be an extremely difficult task because the politics of reformation always requires a much higher order of political skill than the politics of revolution. However, with the formidable power-base which the government has at its command the chances of success are good, provided, however, that a firm and legitimate political structure could be established within which various forces operative in the South African body politic could be contained and orchestrated.

#### **The prevailing and emergent political structure in South Africa**

A policy of partition which could lead to ultimate sovereign independence still seems to be the most logical way to accommodate the political, cultural and social aspirations of the various Black ethnic groups in the rural areas of South Africa. Significant progress has been made in the past decade with the implementation of this policy, not only in the sense that Transkei, Bophuthatswana and Venda have already achieved independence, but also with reference to the economic, social, institutional and administrative development of the various homelands. However, while the partition policy has a convincing and tested theoretical *rationale*, there are certain weaknesses in its practical application, casting some doubt on the finality of the plan in its present form and practical application. The most important weaknesses of the homelands policy plan are:

- i) Their smallness, underdevelopment and unconsolidated nature.
- ii) The fact that some homeland leaders reject independence.
- iii) The limited scope of the plan in the sense that it offers no equitable solution to the problem of the urban Blacks.
- iv) The geographically interspersed nature of the spatial distribution of the various segments of the South African population.
- v) The international reaction to the so-called "balkanization" of South Africa. "The twentieth century bias against political divorce, that is, succession, is just about as strange as the nineteenth century bias against marital divorce".<sup>14</sup>

However, these weaknesses do not mean that the homeland policy is a failure. This policy through which at least half of South Africa's total Black population find the highest form of political expression and social security,

must be seen as an important stabilizing factor in Black politics. Urgent attention is presently being given to the consolidation and enlargement of the various homelands by the Van der Walt Commission. If a positive report is made, as is generally expected, Black acceptance of the policy will grow. Should one add the fact that 10,8 per cent of South Africa's national budget (R1 108,7 mill. for 1979/80) is being allocated to Black homeland development, there is no doubt that the government has every intention to make a success out of the homeland policy.

However, the homelands policy as such is no longer being regarded as either a final point in the geopolitical ordering process of South Africa, or as an all-embracing policy for all the Black people in the country. It is therefore only a partial solution, and at some stage in the future, depending on the consent of the independent Black states, these states could become part of greater South Africa. In Dr Koornhof's words: "My government's policy is not static on the contrary it is an open ended policy which leaves the door open for a greater measure of political participation on the basis of the free association of independent states on the lines of the British Commonwealth, or the European Common Market, but tailored to the needs and circumstances particular to our part of the world".<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, what we aim at in South Africa coincides significantly with Willie Brand's futuristic view of Europe: "It is neither a federation or a federal state, it is a society *sui generis*, a kind of combining of responsibilities in certain fields in a way that hasn't been done historically before. Nobody knows where it ends, but I am absolutely sure that the national entities will not disappear".<sup>16</sup>

As far as the non-homeland based Black people concerned, the government has acceded to the need for a differential policy as against its previous stance that the homeland policy should be seen as an all-inclusive policy for the Blacks. The process whereby municipal status is to be granted to Soweto has started and other Community Councils may follow. This seems to be the starting point of a process of regional devolution in terms of which the non-homeland Blacks will be given a separate political and constitutional status in South Africa, possibly on the basis of a territorially-based federal/confederal system. However, whatever future constitutional arrangements are followed, the fact remains that the Black cities in South Africa are on their way to develop as dynamic and attractive modern cities where business, culture and science can thrive and where the Black bourgeoisie of the future could live a full and meaningful life.

As far as the new constitutional plan for the Whites, Coloureds and Indians is concerned there are still many unresolved questions. However, the fact that the government has in 1977 decided to embark on a new political framework, making way for power sharing and joint decision-making among these three population groups, marks a dramatic break with a 70 year old systems which has concentrated effective political power in the hands of the Whites. The 1977 proposals have not been presented as a final blue-print but merely as a starting point. Presently a Parliamentary Commission is receiving evidence from all population groups on the

constitutional plan. Already there are indications that some of the initial proposals, inter alia the non-inclusion of the urban Blacks, are being reconsidered. The 1977 plan has its imperfections, but to make it work conciliatory attitudes, and a willingness to cooperate towards the goal of peaceful co-existence, power-sharing and joint decision-making are more necessary than anything else. Time alone will tell whether the new constitutional proposals will succeed. However, what is important is that a political process has been set into motion which could spell the difference between peaceful evolution and violent confrontation.

South Africans of all racial groups are in the midst of an important learning process at present and to achieve positive results we need time, encouragement, benevolent attitudes and positive advice. Should these circumstances prevail, I am sure South Africans can make their version of democracy succeed just as admirably as the advanced nations of Europe and North America.

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5. *Ibid.*
6. Examples of discriminatory legislative provisions which will be removed are:
  - a) section 20 A of the Black Labour Act, 1964 which provided for a form of statutory job reservation in that it empowers the Minister of Co-operation and Development to prohibit the employment of a Black person in certain circumstances;
  - b) Section 31 of the Blacks (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act, 1945 which provides for regulations — the so-called curfew regulations — to restrict the presence of Blacks in public places in urban areas during certain hours; and
  - c) the prohibitions on the employment of certain categories of employees in terms of proclamations under the Group Areas Act, 1966, i.e. the provisions that in trade a member of the one population group may not work for a member of another population group in the group area of the latter in the capacity of manager; chargehand; supervisor; executive, professional, technical and administrative employee.

In addition to the above, several Acts which apply only to Blacks are to be repealed, such as for example the Better Administration of Designated Areas Act, 1963; the Blacks Resettlement Act, 1954; the Black Services Levy Act, 1952 (this Act has, in fact already been repealed) and the Masters and Servants Act (Transvaal and Natal) Amendment Act, 1926. The repeal of the Contributions in respect of Black Labour Act, 1972 which was recommended by the Commission is to be considered at a later stage, in the light of the recommendations of the Committee of Enquiry into the Finances of Local Authorities, The Commission also recommended that section 3 of the Environment Planning Act, 1967 should be repealed and that Proclamation R6 of 1968 and Proclamation 190 of 1974 should be withdrawn on account of their discriminatory nature and negative effects on economic growth.

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