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FORECASTING THE POLITICAL FUTURE:
POSSIBLE COMPROMISE BETWEEN
WHITE AND BLACK INTERESTS IN
SOUTH AFRICA AND SOME HIDDEN BARRIERS

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1) Broad Patterns of Popular Black Attitudes

In their mammoth empirical analysis of the prospects for peaceful negotiation and change in South Africa, Hanf and his associates[1] found ample evidence of a basis for compromise in South Africa's political arrangements. More recently the same pattern has emerged from research conducted by Schlemmer.[2] What these and other studies show is that very substantial proportions of black people in principle are <u>willing to accept</u> constitutional arrangements for the future in which whites retain substantial political power, or in which representation is on a group basis avoiding the prospect of black political domination by sheer force of numbers. Furthermore, most rank-and-file blacks, <u>despite sharp discontent</u>, are still willing to support the idea of dialogue with the government, reject the inevitability or desirability of confrontation and violence and are willing to acknowledge the need to work for change within the system.

Similarly, among government-supporting rank-and-file white voters one finds majorities or near-majorities willing to subscribe to the idea of a degree of <u>power-sharing</u> between whites and blacks, to the principle of black (African) representation in the central legislature and to a wide range of political and socio-economic reforms for blacks (provided the consequences do not impinge on the private and semi-private sphere of white social life —— residential integration being perhaps the prime example of the threshold where whites draw the line, as it were). Furthermore, there is evidence in the research quoted that, despite a minority right-wing reaction, white attitudes in general are shifting steadily in the direction of political conciliation and compromise.

2) Key Political Actors

Broadly, rank-and-file attitudes lead one to conclude that there is considerable overlap in the <u>minimum</u> expectations of whites and blacks, and that there is a potential basis for a fairly broad inter-racial consensus on

1) Theodor Hanf *et.al. Sudafrika: Friedlicher Wandel?* Munchen/Mainz: Kaiser Grunewald 1978.

2) Lawrence Schlemmer (forthcoming) "Changes in South Africa: Opportunities and Constraints", Institute for International Studies, University of California, Berkeley.
Lawrence Schlemmer, "Political Alternatives for the Ciskei: Political Attitudes and Values among Xhosa Speaking Africans of Ciskeian Origin or Residence ", and "Political Alternatives for the Ciskei as seen by Whites living in East London and smaller towns in the Eastern Cape", Appendixes 3 and 4 of the *Report of the Ciskei Commission*, Pretoria: Conference Associates (Pty) Ltd., 1980.

the minimum requirements for a constitution which could be 'legitimate' in
the eyes of all groups, at least as a form of transition towards a more open
society in the longer-term future.

It would be naive to assume, however, that these patterns and trends
in popular attitudes will necessarily manifest in short-term modifications
of basic policy positions among the most relevant echelons of leadership,
both white and black. With certain very important exceptions like that of
Chief Buthelezi and the Inkatha movement, the official opposition in
parliament, certain Homeland leaders and perhaps one or two ministers in the
present Cabinet, the modal positions among very significant echelons of white
and black leadership seem virtually irreconcilable. The Prime Minister has
firmly rejected federal or consociational arrangements involving Africans
for a future constitution, hence rejecting any notion of power-sharing among
black and white in favour of what can be termed a 'division' of power on
a confederal basis (the term used being a 'constellation' of states). The
Coloured Labour Party and the du Preez Commission appointed by that party
in the Coloured Persons Representative Council, on the other hand, have stood
firm in insisting on a unitary system with an open franchise. The most
popular prominent leadership among blacks in the urban areas in the Transvaal
has taken a stand against participation in government-created local political
institutions and the impression generally obtained is that it will not depart
from the principles underlying a unitary-state democracy or 'one-man-one-vote'.
Very substantial numbers of youthful opinion-leaders in the black townships
are even more fervent in their desire for a complete 'liberation' of blacks
from any form of white influence, with some of them openly espousing exclusive
black control in any acceptable future system. Then again, there are leaders
of former Homelands who have willingly taken their territories to independence
almost in defiance of majority popular opposition to such developments.

3) The Problem of Forecasting

There are, of course, finer nuances in the situation than the broad
description above would suggest, but it is sufficiently characteristic of the
world of key political actors in South Africa to highlight a major problem
in political forecasting. While one must assume that trends in popular
attitudes will always have some influence on policies and positions, the
course of events in the short to medium-term future most probably will be
dominated by the interaction of key groups of political actors and influence
groups. The effects of modal trends in popular attitudes on leadership
positions (always a two-way process) will vary widely from situation to

situation and from group to group. This makes political forecasting extremely difficult. Popular attitudes and interests are relatively stable, fairly easily measured and lend themselves to trend-based forecasting. The positions adopted by leader-groups and prominent lobbies and influence groups are much less-easily extrapolated. Firstly, political contingencies of a variable kind often have untoward but significant effects. Secondly, the political process among leaders and lobbies is much more deliberate and strategic in orienta-tion than popular attitudes: a particular viewpoint may be advertised publicly in order to leave room for manoeuvre, or for several 'fall-back' positions in a bargaining process, in order to consolidate support before changing direction, in order to demoralise political opponents, to project an image of political "will" and determination or even to be able to collect funds from specific sources. These are all part of a process which one authority, F.G. Bailey has called 'Stratagems and Spoils'. Predicting future developments among such groups therefore requires very substantial in-depth insights.

In South Africa, however, there are additional problems created by what are termed conflicting paradigms — widely different conceptual models of political reality. As an early step in making political forecasts, one has to understand these models and assess the likelihood of their changing.

4) Conflicting Models of Political Reality

An attempt is made below to outline some major contrasts in the basic assumptions and models of political reality held by significant community leaders and politicians among blacks and whites. The contrasts as described are 'typical' rather than precise pictures of reality, but they are presented as 'ideal types' for the sake of clarity. They are not the results of research as such, but they are insights which have emerged in the process of interpreting and understanding numbers of surveys, group discussions and interviews with key informants. The issues described separately below are all closely inter-connected in the real world.

4-1) Differing 'Existential' Consequences of Segregation and Inequality:

This is the simplest and most obvious contrast in political world views (so obvious, in fact, that it is included mainly by way of introduction). Whites, particularly those not in daily contact with blacks, do not experience their own lives as privileged — at a much higher level of living than ordinary blacks, whites struggle to balance their personal budgets and to improve their life-styles. Accusations of inordinate white privilege are simply

not believable. Blacks tend to perceive white standards of living as
illegitimately enhanced. This is less so among poorly-educated blacks who
to some extent may see white privilege as the reward for education, skill
and experience. For educated blacks, particularly unemployed or poorly-paid
youths, white standards of living appear to be monstrously inappropriate.

Segregation, to take another example, is experienced by most whites
as little more than the opportunity and right of a group to enjoy its own
facilities and amenities. Very often they are so accustomed to the benefits
that they do not reflect upon the rewards. For better-educated blacks who
have tastes similar to those of whites, the denial of the right to use
certain amenities is a double injury: the absence of the reward itself
(which causes a sense of deprivation far stronger than the corresponding
opposite pleasure of enjoying the reward) and the implied injury to self-esteem
and dignity. The Immorality and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Acts must be
viewed in this light as well.

The belief among many whites that the bitterness and discontent of
more highly-educated blacks is uncalled for or the result of 'political
agitation' stems from this 'existential gap'. So does the feeling among
blacks that whites are callous, selfish and unfeeling. If and when an adequate
awareness of what can be termed the "ongoing existential crisis" of better-
educated blacks becomes an input into policy formulation and public administra-
tion in South Africa, significant political shifts could take place. (Perhaps
it should be added immediately that many white politicians will have to repress
this awareness for some time in order to protect their other models of reality.)

4-2) 'Developmental' versus 'Competitive' Models

Another basic contradiction in the political thinking of white and
black leaders lies in the understanding of black under-development. Whites
generally view the lower standards of living and achievement among blacks
as intrinsic to the group itself. Even among whites who stand for equality
of opportunity, many see the black group as a whole as yet having to acquire
certain attitudes, aptitudes and skills in order to earn rewards equivalent
to those of whites in modern society. This perception may not be wholly
wrong in all respects, but its implication is that the 'blame' is always
shifted onto the disadvantaged group. This is the 'developmental' view.

Black opinion-leaders, on the other hand, find it threatening to
their self-esteem to believe that much more than opportunities for education

are necessary for blacks to earn equal recognition and privileges in society.
Restricted opportunities for education and constraints on job-advancement
thereafter are diagnosed as the major problem. Their view is thus not
developmental but 'competitive' in the sense that they see discrimination as
the key to black disadvantage.

Neither model is wholly right or wholly wrong, but each view prevents
people from responding to what is valid in the other view and hence the
problem, the development gap and the apparent justification for each model,
persists.   At the moment a very basic underpinning of government policy seems
to be the 'developmental' model, i.e. that benefits, rewards and amenities for
blacks must be assessed against what blacks have had before, not in relation
to what other groups have. If and when the basic ideology shifts away from
the developmental toward the competitive model, significant changes in policy
and public administration could occur.

4-3)   Conflicts in 'Territory' Models

Conflicting 'territory' models in political thinking involve funda-
mental differences in notions of to whom the 'white' or 'common' area of
South Africa rightfully 'belongs'. On the white side, in the past there were
frequent official justifications for Separate Development expressed in terms of
the myth that white pioneers occupied territory which was not permanently
settled by blacks. Few people really believed this and it may have been an
indirect way of claiming ownership of territory by right of conquest. Whatever
the justification, a basic concept in much white political thinking is the
notion that whites, as the descendants of pioneers, have a legitimate claim
on the major part of South Africa as 'their own', or as a territory to be
shared only with certain groups of non-whites which are historically associated
with whites (i.e. Coloureds) or with Indians whose numbers are too small to
challenge the basic identity of the territory.

Blacks generally reject this concept of territory on the basis that
they are the indigenous 'owners' of the land. Some blacks of a more con-
servative persuasion might concede ownership to whites in terms of rights of
conquest, but the dominant view is either that blacks have the prior moral
claim or that the common area belongs to everyone.

In recent years a significant basic shift in government thinking has
occurred in the sense that the permanency of black settlement in 'white' urban
areas is more and more readily acknowledged. At the present time there are

strong suggestions that the government may be willing to concede a form of citizenship to all races on the basis of a confederal whole. Thus the basic paradigm is shifting; if and when the shift is sufficient to establish the legitimacy of claims to the common territory for all groups, an important underlying justification for Separate Development as applicable to Africans outside the homelands will disappear. At this point a greater flexibility and pragmatism in political policies will be more possible than it is at present.

4-4) Basic Concepts of Ethnicity

It is common knowledge that black opinion-leaders reject being labelled and administered as Zulus, Pedis, South Sothos, Xhosas and the like. This stems from the fact that 'tribal' identity is perceived as not being 'modern' and because it is associated with the policy of separate homelands for different tribes. There is a deeper problem, however. Having rejected ethnicity, educated, urbanised blacks have great difficulty in conceding the legitimacy of ethnic identity among others. Hence the ethnic pride of Afrikaners is seen either as a cloak for racism or as a form of rejection of non-Afrikaners.

This is why the situation in South Africa is more problematic than a situation of purely ethnic conflict (if indeed, any conflict is ever purely ethnic). If a territory is inhabited by two groups both with strong ethnic feeling then, however intense their conflicts, they will at least recognise the legitimacy of each others ethnic feelings. They will be prepared to take seriously political options like partition, plural divisions of states or ethnic representation. In South Africa, however, while many whites see the problems in ethnic terms, most modern blacks experience and perceive the problem as one of racism. Some blacks are ethnically rooted themselves and are prepared to concede the legitimacy of the Afrikaners' ethnic strivings. This position is not fashionable.

A 'consociational' or ethnically based federal system, while it may be very appropriate as a constructive alternative to both Separate Development and one-man-one-vote is likely to be resisted by the black intelligentsia whose own personal needs are to distantiate themselves from ethnic backgrounds. If ever modern revivals of traditional ethnic identity take place in South Africa, the prospects of a consociational form of government for the future will be markedly enhanced. If blacks and whites come to disentangle racism from ethnicism in their own basic political ideas, then too will

acceptance of an ethnic consociation become more possible.

4-5) <u>Unsystemic or Non-relational Models of Change</u>

Any society is a system involving interdependence of groups,
classes, segments and processes. Stability and development require a
political 'wisdom' among key actors which is sensitive to such interdependence.
The high-key ethical viewpoints surrounding political issues in South Africa,
the strong claims of contending groups and social segregation which limits
the mutual understanding of each other among groups tends to jeopardise this
'wisdom'. Various examples can be given.

Integration: many white political actors who desire social separateness for
their own group have generalised this value to encompass a basic resistance
to 'integration' in a general sense (which they confuse with social intimacy),
yet any system needs to have its parts and processes 'integrated' in order
to function. An index of successful integration in a society is the emergence
of a basic minimum of society-wide shared loyalty to the system. It is
impossible to integrate some processes and not others. This may even increase
discontent, because, for example, people will have discrepant statuses in
different spheres. For many years now the inevitability of economic inte-
gration has been accepted, but until very recently other forms of integration
were rejected in terms of official policy. At present there is a fairly
marked trend towards the encouragement of the growth of a black middle-class
with a stake in the system (i.e. a basic loyalty). Yet moves to stimulate the
emergence of such a class are partial; even suggestions that limited numbers of
affluent or prominent blacks be granted exemptions to live in white group
areas are rejected. A newly-emerged middle-class will be particularly
sensitive to status-discrepancies, inter alia, because of stresses associated
with upward mobility. Hence current attempts to secure the loyalty of a
black middle-class may even be counter-productive.

Another group — one possibly with great potential bargaining
power — is the army of black migrant contract workers who account for roughly
70% of the black labour force in the common area. After the 1973 strike-wave
in Durban and elsewhere the need to 'integrate' black labour into a formal
system of control over labour-relations was increasingly realised and this
process has resulted in the recent changes in labour law. Migrant workers,
first excluded from the dispensation, are now included; hence a form of inte-
gration of migrant labour has taken place. The integration of migrant workers
into the formal system of labour relations is not matched by any other ties

to the system (except of course, the remuneration). This integrative dis-
crepancy renders the system highly vulnerable. A key issue in political
forecasting is the question of whether or not economically disruptive conflict
will be avoided. Assessing the speed with which key decision-makers are likely
to understand the need for 'system-integrating reforms' will be crucial to the
success of forecasting.

Acceptance of the utility of Limited Conflict: A basic model among decision-
makers in State security services over past decades appears to have been the
notion that certain types of 'opposition' are illegitimate, to an extent
irrespective of the seriousness of destructive intent in the particular move-
ment. This proposition is based on the apparent fact that some of the people
restricted in terms of security legislation were activists for reform rather
than having intentions to subvert the political order (one thinks, for example,
of the bannings of trade unionists working for black trade-union recognition
and certain educationalists working in black education outside the formal
system).

Given the latent strain in South African society and the inter-
nationalising of its internal conflicts the strictness of security measures
would not surprise a sociologist or political scientist. Yet the effective
adaptation of a society to internal strain requires an effective 'feedback'
function. Clearly the feedback has failed in the past; the 1973 strikes, the
Soweto disturbances being prime examples. Feedback sufficient to avoid these
disruptive events would have been facilitated if certain critics had been
taken seriously and certain forms of protest had been allowed and had served
as warnings. A key issue in forecasting the future course of political
development and the likelihood of stability will be the sensitivity of the
security system to distinguish between 'constructive' conflict (albeit
unpleasant) and subversion or potential subversion. Any changes in basic
official assumptions regarding security policy thus have to be monitored care-
fully as an adjunct to making political predictions.

Constraints on Idealism or the Acceptance of Second-best options: The possi-
bilities of preventing an escalation of conflict to levels of revolutionary
fervour depend on the political aspirations of contending groups being limited
by what is realistically possible given the balance of forces in the society.
Therefore the prospects of relatively stable evolutionary development depend
on both black and white political actors in South Africa settling for 'second-
best' but achievable political goals. The goal of complete socio-political
separation of blacks from whites, once proudly proclaimed and defended, is

substantially eroded at the present time and new, tentative goals incorporating various notions of black-white political interdependence with safeguards are gradually and tentatively taking form in establishment political thinking.

Black political goals are variable along a dimension of willingness to accept second-best alternatives but certain very prominent tone-setting members of the black elites appear to adhere rigidly to a goal (universal franchise in a unitary system) which given the constraints imposed by countervailing political interests, is as idealistic as the former 'white' goal of complete separation; at least until group identities soften with the gradual emergence of links which cut across racial identities. At the heart of this problem lies the same implicit 'model' as mentioned earlier under the rubric of ethnicity. Blacks experience the system in racial, not ethnic terms, and what might otherwise be considered as moderation is perceived as a 'compromise with racism'. However remote it may be, the emergence of political goals among black elites which make some concessions to group identities (not racism) will be extremely significant in future developments.

The 'disadvantaged minority': A particular factor bearing upon the external dimension of pressure on South Africa from the western countries is the fact that the basic elements of the critique of South Africa are derived from racial conflict in the West itself — mainly the persecution of Jews in Germany and later the Soviet Union and anti-black discrimination in the United States. The West has experience of the victimisation of minorities and in the U.S.A. of the partial success of a human rights movement in reducing the discrimination. The same basic conceptual model is applied to South Africa and the third world without concession to the fact that in South Africa the question of rights relates to a majority much larger than the establishment group (in fact this is taken into account in a way to suggest that the discrimination is all the more reprehensible because of it). Needless to say this view is encouraged by South African practices which include all the forms of social and symbolic 'labelling', segregation and racially-based justificatory arguments all too familiar in the West itself.

The solution of problems of minorities, however, in large part involves different processes to the problem of integrating societies where large scale divisions have implications for the fundamental nature of the state and of the society. Minorities can be and have been integrated on the establishment's terms as it were, once symbolic resistance was overcome. Blacks cannot be politically integrated on the white's terms and the nature

of the state will change when this occurs. For this reason political theorists of the so-called plural society propose broadly that inter-group accommodation take a different form to the assimilation of minorities in the West. Despite the persisting examples of Northern Ireland, and Israel-Palestine, the Southern African solution is viewed as an extension of the 'civil rights' solution with mild concessions to the fact that it may be more difficult to solve.

Pressure on South Africa is an important variable in the future and this pressure to some degree will be influenced by the model of change adopted in the West. Forecasts of the future must involve the monitoring of changes in the nature of the models adopted by the West (which has tended to be influential in diagnosing the problem for the rest of the world). Similarly the extent to which South Africa can modify the external model by removing the type of practice typical of anti-black discrimination in pre-civil rights U.S.A. will be an important mediating factor.

5.   What have been called models of political reality or paradigms are more basic than specific attitudes or opinions. They are belief-systems which are associated with patterned sets of attitudes among key political actors. Their pattern of variation over time is an important element in the mix of indicators required for political forecasting. To illustrate this point one need only think of one other basic conceptual change that has occurred in government thinking over the past three years; a change which can be predicted to influence policies very significantly in time. This has been the emergence of *strategic* goals in the political process —— witness the Prime Minister's concept of a national strategy, the new importance of military planners, the drive towards efficiency in the public service and the long overdue concern with the quality of life in the urban black townships. If this model of political planning survives the current resistance to it from powerful conservative lobbies a new politics could slowly emerge. The same order of consequences might be expected if changes occur in some of the other roots of political thinking discussed in this paper.