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ANALYSING CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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LAWRENCE SCHLEMMER

The definition of what constitutes meaningful change in South Africa is a vexed question.

There is virtually no consensus in the public debate on change and reform. At the same point in time for example, one finds on the one hand prominent Afrikaans writer Andre Brink claiming that change and reform are a "big white lie" (*Sunday Times*, 24.4.83), reflecting no more than the increasing sophistication of repression in the system, and on the other a number of notable international observers of South Africa conceding that at least the preconditions for change exist (*The Center Magazine*, March/April, 1983).

A recent issue of Newsweek (21.3.83) carried a special report by Joseph Treen and Holger Jensen entitled "Apartheid's Harsh New Grip: Botha's 'reforms' help a few Blacks but the Majority finds life worse than ever". The article created a temporary furore in South Africa, with Foreign Minister Pik Botha slamming the negative diagnosis and making vehement counterclaims about change in South Africa, and about inaccuracies in the report.

The Newsweek article illustrates the difficulty of making assessments about change and reform. Very briefly summarised, the article conceded that some change had occurred in the following spheres:

- labour legislation
- desegregation of facilities, and
- constitutional policy, affecting coloured and Indian people only.

Against this it argued that retrogression had occurred in regard to:

- forced resettlement of blacks;
- prosecutions in terms of influx control laws;
- the supply of black housing;
- poverty, disease and under-nourishment in the homelands; and
- unemployment in the homelands.

It also placed emphasis on the gap in educational expenditure for black

and white children and on differential taxation laws which penalised blacks with families.

The ratio for the gap in per capita educational expenditure given in the article, 11 to 1, is inaccurate. The ratio in the 1980/81 financial year was 6,5 to 1, representing a very significant decrease from over 18 to 1 in 1970/71. Also, since the article was written, new taxation laws for blacks have been introduced in parliament so that blacks and whites are now to be taxed on the same basis. The analysis also overlooked the recent legislation providing for fully-fledged black local government in the townships of the common area.

In the other respects, however, the article is not incorrect in broad terms. If one overlooks the emotive language, innuendo, and the suggestion of trends for the worse where conditions are simply statically bad, it corresponds fairly closely to many of the facts relative to change cited in the previous (sample) issue of INDICATOR ("Balance Sheet of Change in South Africa Today", January 1983). However, while a mixed assessment was given in INDICATOR, NEWSWEEK drew a negative conclusion.

THE NEED FOR A BALANCED METHOD

The problem with the article and with the reactions to it from the side of the South African government lie not so much in facts but in interpretations. Interpretation rests on assumptions - usually based on a broader theory or philosophy - and on criteria of assessment. South Africa, like any society, is a complex reality, and at any given time manifests scores of contradictory facts and trends. Therefore, depending on assumptions made and criteria adopted, virtually any conclusion is possible. Most, but not all progressives or radicals claim that little or no significant change is occurring, and most conservatives argue that it is. Both support their conclusions with usually correct facts.

For this reason, it is necessary in the POLITICAL MONITOR to attempt to reach a consistent and comprehensive

method of assessing change, in which important assumptions are stated and criteria are specified. - This essay sets out a method, and subsequent analyses will be made within a consistent framework. In this way an attempt will be made to overcome some of the difficulty of balanced interpretation. Obviously any analysis has its own biases, but hopefully the method proposed below will at least limit partiality to some extent.

SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY: A SIMPLE MODEL

The social and political patterns in South Africa are not simply the outcome of shapeless, pervasive discrimination, nor of straightforward differences in level of socio-economic or cultural development between the different races. There is a firm and well-established structure to the system, and the prospects for change must be established in terms of this structure.

South Africa is a divided society, but the divisions are not simply those of race or ethnicity. Rather, the divisions in the established order are best understood in terms of four principles:

1. The first principle defines the identity of the political power establishment. This principle is racial/cultural in nature at the present time since white Afrikaans Nationalists, in combination with certain conservative, non-Afrikaans whites, are the established ruling group. This we will simply call the overt POLITICAL POWER division.

There is, of course, also hidden or latent political power exercised by lobbies and pressure groups outside the political establishment. Political pressures also come from covert and informal political movements or from underground movements such as the ANC. These forces act on and through the overt political establishment, however.

2. The second principle arises from the society's status as a fairly advanced industrial economy. Position in the occupational structure of the economy and the modern bureaucracy introduces important divisions. While the variations in occupational

status result in myriad minor status-divisions in society, a major line of division occurs between those positions identified with economic, organisational or bureaucratic power and those which are perceived or perceive themselves to be in opposition to or subordinate to such power. This, then, would be the well-known principle of CLASS.

Here one must actually distinguish between two lines of division. One refers to the CONTROLLING CLASS, and the second to that section of the population which, despite lack of power, tends to identify with the controlling class rather than the working class. We will term it the MIDDLE CLASS. The remaining members of the population are usually referred to as the working class.

3. The third principle defines which groups are accorded full membership of the South African 'nation' --- it is the principle of CITIZENSHIP.
4. The fourth principle defines the groups which are included within the reach of the developed core of services and amenities in the Southern African region and those which are relegated to the less-developed periphery. This can be called the principle of marginality, but it will simply be termed INCLUSION-EXCLUSION.

These dividing principles are superimposed on one another in the complex pattern of South African society. Some lines of division reinforce each other where they coincide. Where they do not coincide they can weaken each other's effects.

One may depict the principles of division diagrammatically, as in Figure I, with the obvious qualification that no diagram can possibly reflect all the complexities of the structure.

Obviously the different principles of division influence one another; for example members of the controlling class are likely to

have more political influence than others, etc. One type of division may also be in part a consequence of another. It is frequently argued that race divisions are deepened by competing economic interests. The diagram is therefore of necessity oversimple. It cannot reflect all the complexities and processes in the system. It serves simply as a basic illustrative model for analysis of change.

ASSESSING CHANGE

What is important about the diagram is that each line of division represents a BLOCK or impediment to processes of change in the system. Each division is in a sense a line of defence for all sorts of vested interests.

By implication, then, each division of interests creates the possibility of opposition. Where opposition is effectively mobilised, the line of defence is placed under pressure. Hence, for example, class interests are placed under pressure by the independent trade union movement.

Change cannot be seen as a simple incremental process. Shifts in patterns within lines of division are far easier than change which impinges on the lines of division or in which groups or individuals try to cross them. Reform within African education will occur more readily than reforms involving an integration of services.

Each of the principles or lines of division, therefore, also represents a criterion of whether or not structural change is occurring. If the position of a black group shifts across a line of division, its access to power, privilege or social advantages is meaningfully increased.

CHANGE: A PHASED PROCESS

There is much talk about "cosmetic" change in South Africa; change which affects only a small minority or which increases an

irrelevant or unimportant privilege. One also hears a great deal about counter-productive reform - reform which simply decreases tension in society, providing safety valves or outlets for frustration, hence increasing stability and strengthening the *status quo ante*.

Both cosmetic change and counter-productive reform certainly exist. However, there is also a tendency among some observers to include too many developments in these categories. Some apparently cosmetic changes, and some ameliorative reforms, can create pre-conditions, pressures or needs for further change. If this in fact occurs then apparently mild shifts could have meaningful consequences over time.

Examples of this could be seen in the easing of restrictions on African businessmen in townships in "white" areas and in the granting of 99-year property leasehold for urban Africans. The implications of both were that urban Africans shifted closer to becoming recognised and accepted as permanent members of the common society. This recognition, in turn, will create contradictions in policy. Contradictions create credibility problems, which put pressures on the government to resolve the inconsistencies. How can a permanent population group be deprived of full citizenship in perpetuity?

In this way any change or reform, no matter how small, must be carefully assessed in terms of its capacity to create pressures for further reform. Equally, however, each one must be considered for its ability to defuse pressure and reinforce an existing state of affairs.

WHAT IS THE MOST BASIC ISSUE?

One must, however, be mindful of the fact that certain changes or reforms can affect major structures in our society, while others may be relevant to less-basic issues. There is very little consensus on the question of what the most basic organising principle or principle of division is.

One school, usually termed "revisionist" will insist that the basic issue is material interests, taking the form especially of an interest in the control and effective exploitation of the black labour force. This school sees an underlying association between political policies, including separate development, and the economic interests of capitalists. This school would argue that certain tacit and longer-run understandings and shared priorities exist between white capitalists and white political leaders, despite any short run disagreements over specific policies at any given time.

Another "school" with a much less consistent or more flexible analysis, to a large extent separates the economic and political dimensions. It would see economic and political forces as determining societal patterns interactively, but often in conflict with one another. Ethnic policies, like separate development, are seen as having a dynamic of their own, derived from group power interests, in contrast to the specific interests of capital.

Both "schools" would agree, however, that the exclusion or marginalisation of African people as embodied in the homeland policy is one very important basic feature of our system (see line of inclusion-exclusion in the diagram).

This article concludes with a brief assessment of possibilities of change in this major division in South Africa. More detailed assessments of this issue will appear in subsequent reports as well as examinations of change in the other principles outlined in the diagram.

INCLUSION OR EXCLUSION OF HOMELAND REGIONS: FEDERALISM OR
CONFEDERALISM

The function of separate development and the confederation policy

The policy of separate development aims at the creation of sovereign mini-states in which the vast bulk of Africans, divided into ethnic groups, are supposed to pursue their political destiny. However

idealistically government spokesmen defend this policy, it is widely recognised that its effect will be that the mini-state homelands and their populations of subsistence farmers, migrant workers and their dependents will be formally and systematically excluded from South African nationhood, and from access to the developed services, amenities, industrial infrastructure and economic opportunities of the common society. As such it is seen to represent the ultimate degree of rightlessness in South Africa.

It is generally accepted, however, that these territories and the industrial core are completely interdependent in economic terms. In order to accommodate this interdependence the government proposes a "confederation" of independent but economically interacting states. The overarching confederal body will be consultative and advisory; it will not impinge on the autonomy of the white-ruled Republic. The confederation, if successfully launched, will no doubt assist the government in countering demands by homeland-based Africans for participation in common-area politics and their claims to South African citizenship.

For these reasons certain non-independent homelands and particularly the biggest of these, KwaZulu, are resisting independence and the idea of a confederation. Chief Buthelezi, Chief Minister of KwaZulu and president of the very large black political organisation, Inkatha, repeatedly and emphatically states his followers' claims to full South African citizenship. Hence there is very strongly mobilised opposition to both the denial of South African citizenship and to geographic-political exclusion.

Initiatives towards a possible federal alternative

Accompanying this opposition are various initiatives in support of a "federal" alternative to separate development. In 1980 the Quail Commission, appointed by the then non-independent government of the Ciskei, proposed *inter alia* a "condominium" of Ciskei and the Eastern

Cape - a form of shared regional government but within the Republic of South Africa. (The Ciskei, however, chose independence after a controversial referendum.) In 1981, the Bureau of Economic and Political Analysis of the University of Pretoria, commissioned by the Natal Sugar Association in response to homeland consolidation investigations by the government, concluded that separate development for Natal-KwaZulu was unworkable. It recommended a linked government and administration for rural Natal and KwaZulu with political integration in metropolitan areas, all within the Republic. The Buthelezi Commission, established by the KwaZulu government, after an exhaustive enquiry and research, proposed as part of its political recommendations, a process of regional unification for Natal and KwaZulu with safeguards for minorities, with representation in, and full citizenship of, the Republic as a whole.

The South African Cabinet rejected all three proposals although certain members of the government privately have given cautious and qualified support to possibilities of closer association between homeland regions and the South African state. The KwaZulu government is currently drafting a white paper on the political-constitutional aspects of the Buthelezi Commission and will no doubt be presenting formal political proposals to the South African government in due course.

All these initiatives imply broadly a federal relationship between the central government and the homeland regions. In a federal system, the homelands would remain part of South Africa, and their political representatives would participate in central decision-making on issues of common concern for all regions in South Africa.

More recently, Dr. Cedric Phatudi, the Chief Minister of Lebowa has spoken in favour of federation as opposed to confederation. The President of Transkei has approached KwaZulu and Inkatha, and the possibilities of a unified approach on the federal possibility have been discussed. (Transkei would, of course, have to modify its status of sovereign independence in such a future dispensation.) The Transkei claims to be motivated by the failure of separate development to adequately

serve the development needs of the territory and its people.

These initiatives are proceeding, and further meetings are planned soon, possibly involving a wider range of homeland leaders. The Prime Minister, however, has attempted to minimise the significance of these developments by attempting to distance the "white" Republic from them, stating that the homelands were welcome to form a federation on their own. How viable, then, are these initiatives?

Prospects for changes in policy

The formal stance of the white government is that South Africa is not a single state but a system composed of multiple nationalities, each of which must have its own autonomous territorial base. The totally interdependent economy, however, has consistently contradicted the multi-national principle. The government is attempting to resolve this in its most recent regional development policy, by making provision for an elaborate consultation process based on advisory committees on issues of economic development in each of the eight development regions. The soon to be established development bank is also to have a multi-national board, and it seems that the non-independent homelands will have representation as part of the South African contingent.

There is, however, no provision for any joint decision-making in the initial allocation of homeland development capital in the South African budget. This will gainsay any claims that the populations of the national states have an equitable share of the fiscal revenue which they, through migrant labour, help to generate.

The basic weakness in the credibility of the policy will exert a constant moral pressure for joint overall planning and budgeting, and hence also a pressure for something more like a federal than a confederal relationship between regions.

Another major pressure acting against confederation is the massive and increasing concentration of "commuters" around common-area industrial areas like Durban-Pinetown, East London, Richards Bay and others which

will create increasing needs for metropolitan planning and servicing across the borders of "national states".

An issue of considerable significance as well is the huge cost and impracticality of consolidating certain homelands into cohesive geographic entities. There is considerable opposition to consolidation from white business and farming interests in Natal, for example. Even if consolidated, KwaZulu would probably comprise ten separate pieces of territory; hardly an adequate territorial basis for sovereign independence. Independent homelands as potential security threats must also be of some concern to the government. A further major factor is that the independent black unions, which implicitly or explicitly must increase their political influence; are non "multi-national" in organisation, as will be the envisaged urban African local authorities (early attempts by the government to introduce ethnic criteria in each have been abandoned). "Cosmopolitan" black local government under a minister in the central South African cabinet is hardly compatible with the notion that all Africans should be citizens of totally independent homelands, in which even urban Africans would be expected to exercise a vote.

To this one must add that even sympathetic overseas governments reject the homeland policy and are insistent on a common citizenship. This view is shared by influential industrialists. Finally, the official opposition is implacably opposed to a divided citizenship.

For these reasons one can anticipate that government policy thinking will be put under pressure to move back to a position tentatively enunciated in 1981, in which a softening of homeland boundaries was envisaged; co-operation across "soft" political boundaries was the phrase used.

A major consideration in this regard is how a "federal" dispensation would affect the vested interests which have developed within the homeland administrations and among the political and business elites in these territories. Very broadly assessed the type of alternative in question might suit them fairly well in some respects. Since a federal

arrangement would involve the type of regional devolution of powers that non-independent homelands presently have, it would protect existing power bases and political constituencies. It would presumably also suit some of the existing interests of homeland businessmen and bureaucrats. The real impact of this type of constitutional arrangement would lie in two areas. Firstly, the greater "legitimacy" of homeland politics might mean that there would be more enthusiastic voter participation and hence more pressure on homeland politicians to address basic needs. Secondly it would influence national development policies and aid including industrial decentralisation strategies, and probably also improve the access to employment of homeland-based peri-urban commuters and rural migrant workers.

Given the pressures on the government and the impracticalities of the present homelands policy, and taking into account the "federal" initiatives already in progress, some modification of the current government policies in this direction could very well eventuate in due course.

The question of significance

What kind of change would this be? Many people would see it as ameliorative and cosmetic, if not as dangerous because it might continue to divide the African political constituency. It would also strengthen African political leaders who are perceived by progressive groupings as being too moderate or "collaborative". In this regard a lot would depend on the responses of the homeland electorates.

Given the probability that more far-reaching political changes affecting Africans are not likely in the short to medium term, and given the level of need in the homelands, a more positive interpretation can be placed on these possibilities. If the kind of possible system being debated involves a development towards effective representation in central decision-making and a common South African citizenship, it will counter what is often termed the "marginalisation" of homeland-based Africans. As one way of establishing or re-establishing the rights of Africans in South Africa it would amount to a fairly meaningful process of "structural" reform.



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