
Foreword

The collapse of white domination and the emergence of a freely-elected government in Zimbabwe have brought home the rapidity with which change has occurred in Southern Africa. It is only five years since the break-up of the Portuguese empire in Africa that led to the independence of Angola and Mozambique, and indeed to a fundamental re-drawing of the political map of the region. These events, too, have shown how baseless were the expectations of those who, until recently, held political power. It was, after all, Ian Smith who said that black majority rule would never come in his lifetime.

It is of course dangerous to draw conclusions about the future from the past. We cannot say how long the South African government will be able to continue to temporise about the future of Namibia. And there are innumerable possible scenarios about the future of South Africa itself, ranging from the reinforcement of the existing repressive system, through a process of peaceful change by mutual agreement, to a period of bloody confrontations and violent revolution.

IDS as a development research institute is concerned with the broader impact of these political changes on the pattern of development in the region, particularly as it affects the welfare of the majority of the African population. Our concern is with trying to understand the processes at work. Our particular emphasis in this number of the

Bulletin is on recent changes in a number of Southern African countries – and how they have affected a long-standing preoccupation – one could say, *the* dominant characteristics – of economic and social development in Southern Africa: inequality – how has it changed? How is it now maintained? How do those concerned with combating it see the problem? What constraints do they face?

These issues, the longer-term development dimensions of political change, reach the headlines and news stories of the press far less than political upheavals or breakthroughs which may have occasioned them. Yet the political and economic are often closely related – as Southern African experience makes clear, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else in the world. And they need to be better understood and analysed, by outsiders as well as by those in the countries concerned, if future changes are not to catch us unawares.

We believe that the social scientist has much to offer in enlarging our understanding of the issues involved and the underlying processes at work. He must try to be objective but he need not pretend to total detachment. As this number of the *Bulletin* shows, the issues are complex and there is no common view or 'line' – whether analytically or prescriptively. But I believe that there is a common commitment to the welfare of those whom Southern African societies has for too long excluded. And it is this commitment which is our unifying theme.

Richard Jolly