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 willing to accept 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, despite sharp discontent, 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 power-sharing 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 minimum expectations of whites and blacks, and that there is a potential basis for a fairly broad inter-racial consensus on

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2) Lawrence Schlemmer (forthcoming) "Changes in South Africa: Opportunities and Constraints", Institute for International Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

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 administration 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 fundamental 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 conservative 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) Unsystemic or Non-relational Models of Change

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 integration 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 integration 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 discrepancy 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 movement. 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 internationalising 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 carefully as an adjunct to making political predictions.

Constraints on Idealism or the Acceptance of Second-best options: The possibilities 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
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.