

EDITORIAL

The 'Post-Apartheid' Society

Through our postbox has come a multitude of articles, some in journals, others in typescript, about the 'post-apartheid' society in South Africa. We read this literature with some scepticism and have been forced to ask ourselves whether this outpouring has any meaning, and if so, whether we are out of step with reality. Have we really reached the stage where it is possible to talk about the annulment, the renunciation or the overthrow of the apartheid system?

If this is indeed the case, then there is a case for this flurry of papers, discussions, seminars and conferences — although we would still need to know what events might lead to this change in the near future. Is Mr Botha about to resign? Because indeed he must go if the country is about to change its basic structure. And what about all the extreme right wing white parties. Surely they too must go. There can be no place in a post-apartheid society for the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB), the Conservative Party, and the host of small right wing groups that clamour for the intensification of apartheid regulations. Come to think of it, there is no place in that society for the present armed forces, or for the State Security Council, or the Joint Management Centres (as discussed by Brian Oswin in this issue). Presumably they too will all disappear in a puff of smoke in the very near future.

The writers of those learned papers must inform us on these questions. In our search for change in South Africa we believe that the construction of a new society must depend on the way in which the country rids itself of apartheid. If the whites were prepared to hand over power to an assembly elected by the population, and accept a position in a democratic society, we could only cry *Hosanna*. After all those years of oppression and discrimination, a new society has come in to being, and all by the stroke of a pen. But is this really so? Are the rulers of that country about to sign away their control of state power?

Before we leave that point we would still have to ask a few more questions. These need an answer from our post-apartheiders.

Firstly: Will the mining corporations, the banks, and big business still have a place in the post-apartheid society?

Secondly: Will the land still remain in the hands of agri-business and white farmers?

Thirdly: Will the wealth of the country remain in the hands of a small

minority, and if not, how will the population share in the new prosperity?

The answer to these questions, and to many more that need to be answered, must depend on the way in which apartheid is ended. But on this there is hardly a word. If the transition is not peaceful — and this is not a matter that most of these writers discuss — then how is the new state to be ushered in, and by whom? Unless this question is answered all the writings in the world cannot take us one step further.

The problem is that the government does not intend resigning; the AWB and the far right have their own ambitions, and these do not include disappearance; Anglo American, the banks, big business and agri-business do not contemplate capitulating; and the army and police are entrenched, and have no intention of handing over power to their enemies.

The talk of the post-apartheid society, the learned papers and conferences on the subject, reflects the dreams of politicians and academics who saw victory in the uprising of 1984–86 and who failed to recognize the reality of defeat at the hand of the government. There was a time in 1985/6 when the thought of victory went to the head of many scribes. Those were the days when people seemed to believe that victory would come with the ‘comrades’ and their tyres and matches (the notorious ‘necklaces’), or would follow instructions from afar to make the townships ungovernable. The illusion arose from exaggerated beliefs that the trade union movement could paralyse part or all of the country’s economy. In sum, it emerged from impressionistic belief that the government tottered on the brink of defeat. No thought was given to the armed forces — who were about to snuff out militants in the townships; to the vigilantes who were about to wipe out opposition forces in squatter camps, townships and the ‘Homelands’; or the resurgent right wing parties among the whites.

We know that we will be told that ‘power lies ultimately in the hands of the people’ and that ‘a battle might have been lost, but the struggle continues’. Ultimately we too hold by those slogans, but in so doing we have to take account of the banning of thirty political organizations, of the detention and imprisonment of militants, of the muzzling of writers and speakers and the cat-and-mouse game played with the lives of imprisoned political leaders, many of whom have remained behind bars for over a quarter century. The latest move in which Nelson Mandela has been placed in solitary confinement in a prison house represents a worsening of his position — and certainly not the anticipated release that was so confidently expected.

No amount of equivocation can escape the fact that there has been a defeat. This demands that responsible political thinkers find new answers to

the conditions that exist and cease their fanciful scribblings about a society that is still far from achievement.

By way of light relief, but not without sorrow, we turn to one of the zanier publications that has emerged on the post-apartheid society. Leon Louw and Frances Kendall, a man and wife team, have produced a best-seller that has apparently gripped the imagination of some South Africans. Their book, *South Africa: The Solution* (Amagi, Ciskei, 1986/7) claims a sale in South Africa of over 25,000 copies, and has also been translated into several languages. We would not have spent many hours on this work, and would not have mentioned it here if it had not been for the enthusiastic introduction by Winnie Mandela. She commends the work,

as an extraordinary and long overdue challenge to South Africa to come to terms with the tragic apartheid blunder of a century ... They offer South Africa what they need most — a broad alternative we have been looking for ... In the ensuing impasse, Frances and Leon's vision is an excellent historical alternative all freedom lovers embrace ... Here lies hope for a shattered nation ... Here lie some of the efforts of the African National Congress.

If this does represent the 'hope' of the nation, and the efforts of the ANC, the people face a grim future. Louw and Kendall (on first name terms to Ms Mandela) propose a canton system, based on the 306 magisterial districts in SA, all autonomous, linked by a strictly limited central government which 'entrenches equality at law for every individual' but without the subjugation of minorities or individuals (p.129). The Homelands and national states could decide whether they wish to join the canton system or become independent. Most of them form sensible units as they are (p.134). We will not detain our readers over this absurd text, but the flavour needs to be indicated. On p.113 they say 'A free society has a free economy, governed by market forces. It is characterized by individual planning, entrepreneurial activity, competition and spontaneity. There is rapid wealth creation, and living standards are high. In an unfree society, the economy is centrally planned and people with the ability and resources are compelled by the state to provide the needs of others'.

This kind of thinking, which outstrips anything that Hayek has written, is remarkable in its call for a canton system only in its resemblance to the 650 mini-Joint Management Centres that the government proposes establishing in South Africa (see the description of the JMCs in this issue). The solution that this pair offers is obviously different from the literature on the post-apartheid state discussed by those who consider themselves socialists. To us the latter would say: 'Do we not want an end to apartheid?' However,

that is not the question which must be addressed. Yes! Apartheid must go, but to achieve that there must be an analysis of the power of the state and of the class forces involved in the struggle. This does not follow from some strange idea that we hold — but from the need to understand the strength and resources of those opposed to change in the country, and an examination of the class forces that are available to effect a change.

To make our point quite clear. We believe that the struggle in South Africa is not for a reformed capitalist society: that would not provide a solution for the vast majority of the population. What is required is a programme that will lead to the working class taking power in South Africa and building a socialist society. The immediate question is not the nature of the post-apartheid society, but how the existing society can be changed. It is to this programme of action that the people of South Africa must turn.

Again we hear the impatient accuse us: 'Do you not wish to know what that "liberated" society will look like?' And we repeat. In the first instance, that society will be shaped not 'after liberation', but by the way the society is liberated. If there is some miserable compromise in which talks (secret or otherwise) lead to some blacks joining the administration of a so-called post-apartheid society, then whoever such blacks might be, the struggle will not have ended, even though the nature of the enemy might have changed somewhat in colour. It is to protect against any back-room deal, by the ANC or any other organization, that we called in our first issue for the summoning of a Constituent Assembly (or National Convention). Not a mass meeting or Freedom Rally, in the shape of an updated Kliptown gathering (and a fresh 'Freedom Charter'), but an *elected body responsible to its electors and presenting their demands*. We do not believe that 'freedom' will be won that way, but it is our only protection against a sell-out.

Yes, we do have ideas of what we would like to see replacing the present regime. We demand an end to all racism and all segregation (in the towns and on the land); we want workers control of production in collaboration with consumers and distributors; we want a socialist democracy that will act against all bureaucratic perversions, and root out any signs of Stalinism; we want trade unions to protect the rights of workers against any 'party bosses' and the state itself; we want the right of expression for any group that fears the loss of its liberties. Above all else, we want a workers' state that will forge links with the proletariat of other lands and build an international socialist commonwealth — because our perspective is global and not parochial. These are big 'wants', but this is the only way in which liberation can be won in South Africa. All other talk about building freedom is little more than cant — unless it can be shown that alternative measures can secure not only political freedom, but also economic equity and social equality (for men and women; for black and white; for old and young; and

for every creed).

In our first editorial we pointed to some of these requirements. Among the criticisms that have come back to us was our failure to call for a revolutionary proletarian party. That omission was not accidental. We do believe that there is a need for such a party if socialism is to be established (although we probably differ with some of our critics on the way in which such a party would function — particularly in the light of the degeneration of many small sects into miniature Stalinist bodies). However, a call for such a party now, if successful in South Africa, would only lead to the formation of another splinter group and further confusion among the working class. The paucity of Marxist thought in and out of South Africa and the stagnation in the international working class movement suggest that our most responsible path is to deepen Marxist understanding, and by this means encourage groups of revolutionaries to band together, so that the nucleus of such a party can be shaped. We want a party informed by the ideas of Marxism, but we cannot force the pace, and our object is to engage in a dialogue with men and women who see the need for forming such an organization. We certainly have no intention of dictating policy, and no intention of building a party that has no support among the workers of South Africa. At some stage the party must be built, and it will have to learn how to function in a police state and avoid being wiped out. The era of amateurism must end if a revolutionary movement is to be organized, and is to survive. We know of no short cut for the building of a cadre. Our contribution for the present must be the analysis of the problems of socialism and socialist struggle, both internationally and in Southern Africa.

We continue in this issue to present accounts and documents from the history of socialism in Southern Africa. This includes the story of Clare Goodlatte, together with articles from *Spark*, the journal she edited in 1935–39. This is not only the story of the political evolution of a remarkable woman, but it also provides one of the first accounts of the left opposition in the Cape province. While collecting material for this issue we heard of the death of Kenneth Jordaan in Harare, a friend and comrade of the 1950s. In writing an appreciation of his work we realized that his work constituted a summation of the work started in the 1930s: not as the 'last word' in socialist theory, but as a decided step forward in our understanding of South African problems. From Ivon Jones and S.P. Bunting to Frank Glass, and from Goodlatte and the groups inside the Lenin Club through to the writings of Jordaan, there was a development of ideas that must be retrieved in order to take the next step forward.

We believe that the contributions of Goodlatte and Jordaan are unknown to most students of South African affairs, and we print these as a contribution to the preparation for a revolutionary socialist party. In saying this we

wish to appeal to our readers. Our essays are as accurate as we can ensure. However, if errors are spotted we would welcome communication so that corrections can be made. Two errors were brought to our notice in the Glass essay, relating to his publishing activities in China, and one incorrect title noted in the bibliography. We are grateful for this information.

In our effort to provide analyses of contemporary events we print articles on events inside South Africa today (something which readers have asked for), and also a long article on gold and the call for the extension of sanctions against South Africa today. It is the contention of Paul Trehwela that the commodity gold is still the universal equivalent as understood by Marx. He argues that sanctions cannot work without the boycott of gold — but that it is precisely such a boycott that is unrealistic. Most proponents of sanctions, do not discuss the nature of gold, South Africa's chief export, as money incarnate, while some Marxists claim that the role of gold in this period of late capitalism has been downgraded. That is, they argue that the world monetary system does not necessarily depend on reserves of gold for its continued functioning. As Trehwela says, such critics need to argue their case theoretically, and we will open our pages to readers who wish to contribute articles on this topic.

We end, as we did last time, regretting that as yet we carry no articles by persons outside our small circle. *Searchlight South Africa* has only been distributed recently, and it is probably too soon to expect other contributors. We hope this will change, before readers tire of us! One document, written by Zeph Mothopeng, president of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), was sent to us by a reader and is printed in this issue. We do not agree with many of its sentiments, and do not believe it adds to our analysis of South Africa, but it is an account by a leading political figure who suffered at the hands of the government and its agents, and needs to be known. No other organization (including the PAC) and no other journal seemed prepared to print it. We would willingly consider other documents if submitted, and hope that readers will send us items with this in mind.