

# REVOLUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ONE can support Julius Lewin's view that revolution is not just round the corner without agreeing with him that the present state of affairs can go on almost indefinitely. A lot depends on what we mean by revolution.

Lewin makes much of Professor Brinton's study of the four classical revolutions—the English, the American, the French and the Russian—and then shows, fairly conclusively, that all the ingredients do not exist in our country. Certainly we are not in the running for a classical revolution, but there is another kind of revolution, typical of our modern post-war world, for which South Africa may be a very likely candidate. It would have been more appropriate if Lewin had compared and contrasted the situation here, not with seventeenth century England or eighteenth century France, but with post-war Indonesia, Kenya or Algeria.

The classical revolutions were all social revolutions not seriously complicated by racial factors. A "colonial" element appeared in the American and also in the Russian revolution; but in the former the colonists were rebelling against their own king, and in the latter the Russian revolutionaries, though assisted by Ukrainians, Georgians and so on, were concerned to break the power of their own ruling class and what it stood for.

Our modern colonial revolutions are essentially different. They combine social, economic, national *and racial* factors—and the racial factor, with its psychological implications, is of the greatest importance.

It is almost an axiom that any stable form of government can continue only with the consent of the majority. The organs of state power, police, army and so on, are accessory to government but the most important factor is psychological. Even in a slave state, such as our Western Cape in the eighteenth century, stability depended on the slave accepting his inferior status as something akin to a law of nature.

I wish to affirm that in South Africa the overwhelming majority of the Non-Europeans still accept their second-grade status as inevitable. They believe the white man is "baas" not merely by virtue of the law, the sjambok and the machine

gun, but because he is naturally the ruler. This is an illusion, but as long as the illusion remains in the minds of the overwhelming majority, the government's position is invulnerable. To question this belief is something very close to heresy or treason.

One of the most significant books written about Africa recently is O. Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban*. It deals with the Madagascar revolt of 1947, an event which passed unnoticed in South Africa, but which cost 80,000 lives and made it necessary for the French to reconquer the island. The author's thesis is that the African, having accepted the white man as lord and patron, is willing, nay, anxious to be ruled by him, but that once disillusionment becomes common, the master-servant relationship is destroyed, and then anything can happen. The Malagasy were disillusioned when Paris fell to the Germans in the second world war.

It is the dependence of the South African set-up, as of all colonial regimes, on the consent of the governed that provides the clue to the present situation. It is not economic instability but psychological instability that the supporters of apartheid should fear. What evidence is there that quiescence on the part of the segregated will continue?

The static conditions of the old Cape have been replaced by the dynamic industrialism of modern South Africa. In spite of discriminatory and repressive legislation, the African's economic significance and power grow together with his sophistication. His acceptance of the status quo must suffer continued erosion. The final swing over to non-acceptance may be sudden and dramatic and may be triggered off by some event, great or even comparatively trivial, which we at present cannot foresee.

We must not place too much emphasis on the present political inertia of the African, the disunity in the A.N.C. and the almost complete disappearance of the Non-European trade union movement. Given certain conditions, organization can mushroom overnight. The spores of revolution have long since been scattered and they have germinated. There is hardly an African school child over twelve years old who does not know the "Afrika" salute or the meaning of "Mayibuye!"

The kind of revolution that involves the seizure of power by an insurgent majority (the classical type of revolution) is, for reasons that Lewin has pointed out, not at all likely to happen to us in the near future. One can, however, picture a crisis in

racial relations that would require drastic remedies for its solution. Under such circumstances a government might attempt to rule by permanent martial law, but the strain of this would prove intolerable and inevitably concessions would have to be made, as in Kenya. Once that happened, apartheid, *as a policy*, could hardly be revived. Thereafter political parties, white, black or multiracial, would be mainly concerned with the speed of advance.

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