



## What is really wrong with South Africa?

THOSE whose only criticism of Apartheid is that "it won't work" need only go to South Africa to see that the system does work. They will then find that Apartheid is not only an idea, but it is a reality that is noticeable in the organisation of public services, it is reasonably efficient in its separation of the different races and it has created a consistent system of government which, even allowing for the anomalies here and there, has cohesion and, above all authority.

Why does it work? No one in South Africa really believes that Apartheid is a good thing, not even those who impose it. The Africans and some whites condemn it as manifestly unjust and, of late, the government and its supporters ignore these condemnations. They do not try to answer them because they do not need to. Those who condemn are silenced or gagged but the government, confident in its own strength and the unflinching support of its followers does not really need to sell the doctrine of Apartheid. It preaches to the converted and reproves and chastises those who would undo these teachings.

Superior power then, enables the government to carry through its aims. But this hardly explains why the system does not collapse because of the deep hatred, conflicting and irreconcilable objectives between its makers and those who have to endure it.

The reason, ostensibly, is that intimidation and violence force the dissenters to obedience, albeit only grudging obedience. True though this may be, it leaves many questions unanswered. Why, for instance, does the government succeed in implementing the host of laws it passes? Why are its courts used by the oppressed? Why are its officials - policemen, civil servants

and teachers - accepted in their communities and not condemned ipso facto as lackeys? In short where does it derive its authority from? (And by authority we simply mean that it can expect, does expect the public, black as well as white, to recognise its legitimacy and to recognise duties and obligations to the State, and these expectations are seldom flouted.)

One reason is that, having legislated national opposition out of existence, it has destroyed common purpose and direction among those who oppose, so that its claim to authority receives no coherent challenge. Protest, loud and embittered though it may be, is centred around specific issues and is gradually being deflected away from the fundamental questions. Indeed, the bureaucratic institutions like the Bantu Affairs Department and the Bantustans seduce dissenters into attempting to bring about change through these institutions. Numerous points of consultation are created and people are made to believe that although they have no bargaining power, they might be able to get something by availing themselves of these opportunities of consultation. There is a real danger that this belief might become widespread as people become more and more beleaguered by negation and despair.

Some people while rejecting most of the things done against them in the name of the state, have however, developed habits of deference and have through sheer experience come to accept Apartheid as an accomplished fact. Through habit, then, they take off their hat when they see a white man, go to their side of a segregated bus queue and never have the temptation to desire a woman or man (as the case may be) of the other race. Where relations are not of hate they are of indifference.

The government feeds on this indifference, on the absence of feeling of whatever sort, between people of different races.

Similarly, the greatest contribution of the white community (there are notable minorities among the whites who reject the system, we are well aware), is from those who are not devout ideologues but ordinary folk who take the system for granted and live apartheid in a 'normal' way. It is on this inert though collaborating section that governments ultimately depend when they wish to transform an idea into a way of life - the inert plebs (some of them very erudite, indeed), the masses, politically unsophisticated and so susceptible to prejudice.

There are many things wrong with South Africa but the one single and most important is that far from the South African government trying to create an apartheid state, an apartheid state does in fact exist, furthermore its actions are still carried out with some legality.

There is, however, a limit to the extent to which dishonesty can be dressed up in the robes of respectability. Even 180-day detention has to be warranted by the semblance of a parliament and the spectre of a minister of justice, through a civil servant, the attorney-general. But it is predictable that extreme pressure of some sort may cause the government to be seen to deviate from this "orderly" way of doing things. It might start infringing its own, sham, Queensbury rules. This may not be caused by pressure at all, it can just as well be caused by over-confidence.

If such a situation arose and lasted long enough, the oppressed may be expected to rise in a defiant frenzy of indignation, shaking off the inertia that makes government possible. When that day comes, Apartheid can say its last prayers. The grievances of the people are explosive. It needs only some slight omission, some mishap, one of those miscalculations with which historians are so familiar, to turn poison into fire.

The State here, rests completely and totally on its efficiency. Having to contend with irreconcilable dissensus, the State gives regulation and efficiency where there is doubt and apprehension. This was its primal strength; this may be its final OO secret.