

THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS AND SOUTH AFRICAN STABILITY

by Terence Beard

In my previous article on the government's constitutional proposals, written against the background of the conference on Constitution and constitutional change in Maritzburg, in 1978, I was content to confine myself to a consideration of Dr. Denis Worrall's defence of them and of the arguments which he employed in attempting to show that they implied a shift to consensus politics. My argument was little more than a refutation of Worrall pointing at the same time to the internal inconsistencies of his argument. Only at the end did I mention the basic defect — the exclusion of Africans — a defect which I simply took for granted. I wish now to turn my attention to this basic defect and its implications.

If we look at South Africa as it was before Transkeian independence, what was striking was the fact that the areas which were reserved for Africans, the so-called "homelands", were without exception overpopulated, overstocked, underproductive, devoid of significant infrastructures, and unable to provide even for the subsistence of their respective populations. Only by exporting labour was it possible for the peoples of these areas to subsist. At any one time at least 50% of the able-bodied men were away in the so-called "white" areas labouring to provide for their own subsistence and for that of their families left behind. Since the granting of independence to three of the "homelands" the picture has not altered in any significant way. All of the "homelands", independent or not, depend for their very existence upon the export of their labour and upon substantial capital grants from the South African government. Without the system of migratory labour in South Africa the populations of these areas would face starvation on a massive scale. The states as well as the remaining "homelands" are utterly dependent upon South Africa for survival of their peoples.

The granting of independence to "homelands" far from enabling their peoples access as of right to the material resources in the developed areas of South Africa, denies them such access except as foreign labourers without rights and subject to the "good grace" of the South African government. The "homelands" policy involves the acceptance, or rather presumes the acceptance, on the part of Africans of the foregoing of any rights to the resources of the developed and industrialised areas of South Africa, areas which were developed and could only have been developed with the large-scale use of African labour as well as the skills, know-how and capital resources of those who possessed them, in this case, for largely historical reasons, mainly whites. The development of South Africa was essentially a joint enterprise, and the "homelands" policy denies this by implication. The "homelands" policy also, of course, flies in the face of international law in denying people citizenship in the land of their birth. In many cases people are deemed to be citizens of countries they have never even seen.

Africans are being granted "self-government" and independence of a kind but without the economic basis with which to provide even a tolerable standard of living within the foreseeable future. And the bulk of their active labour forces, especially those sectors of their labour forces which are skilled or semi-skilled, instead of being employed in the building up

of the "homeland" economies, are employed in "white" South Africa, contributing to the further development of the South African economy and receiving in return minimal wages. In other words, they are devoting their energies to building up what is in terms of South African law to them a foreign state, rather than their own.

This is a result of policies which they have been permitted to play no part in formulating, policies which have been unilaterally imposed from above by the South African government. In no case has there been a referendum in which "homeland" populations have been offered an opportunity to indicate their preferences and been able to choose between independence and any of the possible alternatives. At no stage have the arguments for and against, and the implications of, independence ever been clearly articulated and made known.

Matthew Arnold once wrote:

"If experience has established one thing in this world, it has established this: that it is well for any great class and description of men in society to be able to say for itself what it wants and not to have other classes, the so-called educated classes acting for it as proctors, and supposed to understand its wants and provide for them. A class may often itself not either fully understand its wants or adequately express them; but it has a nearer interest and a more sure diligence in the matter than any of its proctors and therefore a better chance of success."

One might ask who the beneficiaries of "homelands" policy are? Firstly they are the proctors, "white" South Africa, and secondly the new political elites in the "homelands" together with a small number of subsidised new entrepreneurs. Benefits to the rest of the populations are marginal and are far outweighed by the losses.

Again one might ask what are the implications of granting "full" local government powers to towns such as Soweto, noting that such powers are to be consistent with the "homelands" policy and not to be seen as an integral part of the South African polity along with existing municipalities? Are the denizens of these towns and townships likely to be satisfied with such minimal powers, where the sources of taxation do not include any significant parts of the commercial and industrial sectors in which they are employed? The policy seems designed to exclude all major sources of revenue. Sowetans are not being asked what their opinions are; the government has decided to create municipalities unilaterally, although of course the recent history of Soweto has apparently influenced government policy.

The disparity in wealth and development between "white" South Africa and the "homelands" areas, independent or otherwise, is likely to grow. And the greater this disparity becomes the greater discontent is likely to be.

Prime Minister Botha's declared intention to consolidate the "homelands" and to go beyond the limits prescribed by the 1936 Land Act has perhaps given some people cause for

optimism. But no consolidation which retains the developed and industrialised areas of South Africa purely in "white" hands can be more than ameliorative. The argument that apartheid is viable because it is acceptable to whites, while a common society is not because whites will never agree to a redistribution of power and wealth is a false argument, for whites are even less likely to agree to developed parts of South Africa being included in "homelands" than they are to sharing within a common political and economic framework. The only conditions under which "homelands" policy has a remote chance of long term survival are if the developed areas and areas with natural resources such as coal are divided up among the various states which are being created. And is there even the remotest possibility of this being acceptable to whites? Present day policy is predicated upon the assumption that "white" South Africa is and will continue to be developed South Africa.

While I have pointed to the complete economic dependence of "homelands" upon "white" South Africa, it is also true that the latter are dependent for their prosperity upon an adequate supply of African Labour. The migratory labour system has over the years become an integral part of the South African economic system, and the "homelands" policy entrenches it by defining all African labourers as citizens of "homelands". An implication of this is that as the disparity in economic wealth between blacks and whites grows, so will the sense of relative economic deprivation among blacks, and this is bound to have political implications over time.

Added to this is the fact that "homelands" will not receive international recognition, which can only add to feelings of deprivation, anomie and discontent. It is hard indeed to see the "homelands" policy as contributing to peace and contentment in South Africa and therefore as a viable policy in the long run. Indeed it can be seen as creating deep cleav-

ages between various sectors of the population, and so as contributing to disharmony; making a viable solution to our problems all the more difficult to secure. Stability depends largely upon defusing inter-group conflict, and policies of divide and rule are frequently policies not only with diminishing returns but creative of disruption and instability.

Looking at the constitutional proposals and Prime Minister Botha's ideas of a "constellation" of Southern African states against this background, the former are seen to constitute little more than tinkering within a context which has little relevance to our real problems. It seems to be a case of "tinkering" while Rome burns! And as for the latter, given the dependence of "homelands" upon "white" South Africa, the notion of a constellation can only be a misdescription. The term planetary system would be much more apt; a planetary system in which the "black" states would be seen as planets revolving around a "white" sun.

A few years ago I was a signatory to the SPROCAS political report, a report which I somewhat reluctantly signed, for I signed it only after persuading myself that it could be seen as proposing at least a first step in the direction of loosening up the rigid system which we now have, changes which could open up the possibilities of further and later moves towards the creation of a common society. Edgar Brookes refused to append his signature because he presumably was unable to see it in this light and because of his belief in a common society. I like to see this as a disagreement over means, for if there is one matter upon which I agreed with Edgar Brookes, with his great experience, knowledge and prescience, it was the firm belief that only a common society will enable South Africa to defuse conflict and begin to move in the direction of a working democracy based upon equality and a fair distribution of wealth. □

GLENMORE

by Michael Whisson

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

"Grand Apartheid" — the policy of residential and political segregation developed under Dr. Verwoerd — involved the consolidation of the African reserves, their constitutional evolution into autonomous states and the removal from "white" South Africa of all Africans other than those required as employees in white controlled enterprises.

These goals, while apparently consistent, involved delicate timing if they were not to involve conflicts and contradictions. As the reserves (homelands or black states) advanced constitutionally, the credibility of their leaders depended in part upon their ability to resist "dumping without development" — the enforced removal of perhaps two million people from their homes in "white" South Africa and their re-location in the reserves. Since the majority of those being re-located were children, unemployed or unemployable men, women and the aged, development was retarded by dumping, even when development capital was available.

One "solution" to this problem was the construction of large towns on the edge of the reserves, on land appropriated by the S.A. government for incorporation into the black states in fulfilment of the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act. Another "solution" — possible in Durban but not in Port Elizabeth — was the incorporation of existing townships into the adjacent reserve.

In the Eastern Cape, the Great Fish River had achieved symbolic significance as the boundary between black and white. Nevertheless, the idea developed that a border city of up to 200,000 might be built at Committees Drift on the western side of the Great Fish River. The city could accommodate most of the "Ciskeians" west of the Great Fish — other than those whose labour was required elsewhere. The scale of this undertaking was so vast that even the planners quailed — and its incorporation into the Ciskei would have constituted a breach of the legendary great divide.

Meanwhile the Administration Boards were established to carry out government policy and meet the needs of employers more efficiently than had been done by the various local government bodies in the past. The Boards took their cues from the Department of Bantu Affairs/Plural Relations/Co-operation and Development, but as "agents" of the Department often exercised substantial discretion and virtual autonomy in delegated areas.

In the Eastern Cape the policy of not expanding African townships within 30 miles (48 km.) of the reserves was leading to appalling over-crowding in towns such as Grahams-town. The implementation of the 1954 Native Trust and Land Amendment Act exacerbated the problem as farmers were encouraged or compelled to evict "unproductive" blacks from their farms, which were inspected by officials