

# Southern Africa: DETENTE OR PROLOGUE TO STRUGGLE?

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**A**FRICA, AND PARTICULARLY SOUTHERN AFRICA featured prominently in the news to an unusual degree during the last eight months of 1974. The April military coup in Portugal paved the way for the Portuguese recognition of Guinea-Bissau's independence. In September a transitional government was instituted in Mozambique under the leadership of FRELIMO, the liberation movement that waged guerrilla warfare against Portuguese domination for ten years. Talks began between the Portuguese and three liberation movements to set up a provisional government in Angola. None of this could have been prophesied as 1974 began.

The attempt, led by African countries, to expel the Republic of South Africa from the United Nations (which was defeated only by the veto in the Security Council of the US, Britain and France) was certainly one of the events that made memorable the 29th session of the United Nations General Assembly. Contrasting with this effort at international censure were the public statements by President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Prime Minister Johannes Vorster of South Africa, which seemed to signal the opening stages of a detente between the white supremacist state and black African countries. Speaking in Capetown in late October, Vorster said that South Africa was an African (rather than European) country and pledged his Government to work for peace, progress and development in the African context. Kaunda responded during the celebration of the tenth anniversary of Zambia's independence: "This is the voice of reason for which Africa and the world have waited for many years."

I have been traveling to Africa for varying periods of time over the past 20 years, most recently last fall. During this visit I was deeply impressed by a mood of rising expectation that prevailed everywhere. This was reflected by officials in such key countries as Zambia and Tanzania, as well as by leaders of all the southern Africa liberation movements. The effect of the changes in former Portuguese Africa has been contagious.

The formation of a FRELIMO-dominated gov-

ernment in Mozambique has particularly inspired the optimistic feeling that change will continue elsewhere. Leaders of the Zimbabwe liberation movements in Rhodesia have begun to see the end of their long struggle against the white minority Government. (Zimbabwe is the name used by African nationalists to refer to what others call Rhodesia.) Though they do not assume that their freedom will simply be handed to them, they feel that Ian Smith cannot hold out indefinitely against their expanding guerrilla activity, the economic pressure that an independent Mozambique could exert by limiting the use of the rail line to Beira on the Indian Ocean, and the growing international diplomatic and economic pressures. The same mood was reflected regarding the independence of Namibia (Southwest Africa).

Meanwhile, the reality of a soon-to-be independent Mozambique and Angola was causing South Africa to display a new and unexpected international image. Statements about "self-determination" in Namibia were reiterated. Prime Minister Vorster and Foreign Minister Muller wished the FRELIMO Government well, hinted at the withdrawal of South African troops from Rhodesia, and suggested that within six months there would be unexpected changes in South Africa's pattern of race relations. Things definitely were moving in southern Africa, and the seeming stalemate of more than a decade was apparently being broken.

This overwhelming mood of expectancy on the continent can only be compared with the early 1960's. Between 1956 and 1960, 21 African countries became independent. In February 1960 Prime Minister Harold Macmillan of Great Britain made his famous "winds of change" speech in Capetown. Many assumed that the change from colonial rule and white-minority domination could not be stopped—not even in South Africa. But it was!

The Portuguese gave no indication of leaving their territories, and the whites of South Africa, Rhodesia and Namibia were obviously resolved to hang on indefinitely. Guerrilla warfare began in earnest in Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique,

and more sporadically in Rhodesia and Namibia. In South Africa the Government simply strengthened the police state apparatus to make effective African opposition virtually impossible.

But the coup in Portugal ended the long period of violent struggle in its colonies. And, no doubt, the change will continue in Rhodesia and Namibia. An independent Zimbabwe and Namibia cannot be too distant. The question is (and the ultimate problem of southern Africa always has been): What will South Africa do? The reality of the new situation has forced South Africa to take a new look at its position. Unless it wishes to fight beyond its own borders in Rhodesia and Namibia, South Africa will be bordered shortly on all landward sides by independent black African states.

### **The Myth of Change**

Vorster has said that South Africa is at the crossroads. Kaunda has stated explicitly: "The time has come for the South African Government to make a choice. . . . The choice is either the road to peace, progress and development or to the escalation of conflict in southern Africa."

One would like to believe that the change trig-

gered in 1974 by Portugal's new policy would extend to South Africa itself. This would seem logical. And yet, I am convinced it is not happening, and it will not happen without a bitter struggle that will be, in part, violent. Those who view South Africa as a radically changing country prepared to adjust readily to the new realities are making a serious error. Such an assumption can lead individuals, organizations and governments to adopt policies that will hold back the fundamental changes that must take place.

Gradual and peaceful change can take place only within a country that is essentially stable. Those who assume that South Africa is now changing believe in its long-range stability. The more than 300 American corporations that have invested a billion dollars or so (and their British counterparts who are investing much more) have confidence in South Africa's stability. And US Government policy based on "communication" and "dialogue" assumes its stability.

The argument for stability has several bases: (1) South Africa's wealth—it uses or produces 40 percent of the automobiles of Africa, 50 percent of the electrical power, half of the telephones of the continent, 80 percent of the coal, and 64 percent of the



whole Western world's gold; (2) firm political control by the National Party, which has 122 seats out of 171 in Parliament; (3) military strength—military expenditures have been increased to over a billion dollars for the current year. On the surface at least, everything would appear to be safely set for the foreseeable future.

It is well-recognized that the Republic has significant problems based primarily on its racial divisions. Virtually all sections of the American community involved with South Africa are critical of the apartheid (separate development) policy. At least this is their public posture, whatever their private views might be.

However, those who have the greatest economic involvement assume that change will come about, that it will be gradual and orderly, and that greater investment will quicken the pressure for change. They argue that the need for black labor and its influx into urban communities will lead to the erosion of apartheid. They argue that as more skilled positions in industry are opened to black workers the industrial color bar will gradually fade away.

These arguments are frequently bolstered by pointing to recent changes: the beginning of multi-racial sports events, the abolition of certain aspects of petty apartheid in some of the major cities (separate park benches, waiting lines, etc.), the abolition of the Masters and Servants Act (thereby permitting servants to leave their employers), the election of seven Progressive Party members to Parliament in the recent elections (there has been only one for many years), the announcement of a noninterference policy toward the FRELIMO Government of Mozambique, the offer of economic aid to black African states, and hints that South Africa will not try to sustain the Ian Smith regime and will opt for new forms of self-determination in Namibia.

It is important to note that those working within the system tend to argue that apartheid can be humanized, that the system itself is not essentially bad, and that changes will make it acceptable. Business interests abroad optimistically argue that the changes taking place presage the erosion of the system itself and that a genuine multiracial society can evolve through the pressures of industrial growth.

But is real change taking place? I would argue that the changes are superficial and cosmetic. They do not take into account the dynamics of injustice inherent in apartheid or the tenacity with which a privileged minority will hang on to its special

status. Furthermore, the stability of South Africa is more apparent than real. This statement is based on the historical, political and moral judgment that a minority cannot indefinitely preserve a system based on exploitation and repression of a majority.

The whites, although in control of the country through a police state mechanism, are only 17 percent of the total population. There are about four million whites as over against 16 million Africans, almost one million Asians and approximately two million Coloureds (mixed blood).

The differential in living standards between whites and blacks continues to grow. Blacks' wages have risen in the last few years, but in absolute terms the economic gap is growing. The average white income in urban areas is about \$600 a month, and that of the blacks is just over \$100. Over half of the blacks live below the \$120 estimated as the Poverty Datum line for a family of five.

Apartheid is not being eroded by the growth of the economy and the opening up of new jobs for Africans in the urban communities and in industry. African trade unions are still not permitted in the collective bargaining process. A growing number of strikes have taken place in the last few years, and the Government has taken a somewhat tolerant attitude towards them. However, the alternative might have been industrial chaos.

According to the South African Institute of Race Relations, over two million Africans have been removed forcibly from their locations in the urban areas to African reserves (also called Bantustans or "homelands") since 1962 under various apartheid laws. Since 1968 the wife and family of an African worker (who may be allowed to remain in an urban area to work) can no longer stay and live with the wage earner; they are forced to live separately in the reserves. The Government has extended the migratory labor system and established labor recruiting centers in the reserves to sign up workers for one-year contracts. By 1971 over 50 percent of Africans working in the urban areas were on one-year contracts.

### **A Change of Tactics**

The "homelands," moreover, are not economically viable. Most of the men are at work elsewhere, and the women and children are forced to eke out a meager existence from the nation's poorest, least productive lands. About 47 percent of the African population lives there, but only 15 percent of the income of the people in the Transkei and nine percent of the income of the people in Kwazulu (the

two largest Bantustans) are earned within these "homelands" themselves.

There are no signs of significant changes in the inequity of this society. Nevertheless, developments such as the forthcoming independence of Mozambique and Angola have indeed shaken the sense of stability of the white South African regime. Vorster has reacted with a change of tactics. Instead of reiterating statements of the past—such as that South Africa could take care of the rest of Africa before breakfast, or that a friend knows what to do when a neighbor's house is on fire—he announced a policy of noninterference in Mozambique. But in explaining his new tactical approach to his own constituents, Vorster said: "I have made no promises of change in domestic policy."

The fear among the white minority is, nevertheless, real and apparent. Rapid increases in defense expenditures are a case in point. Also indicative is the rapidity with which the Government introduced a bill in Parliament with drastic penalties to punish anyone who in any way encouraged or incited another to refuse to give service to the state. This was a response to an action of the South African Council of Churches supporting the right of conscientious objection to military service. The Prime Minister was led to comment:

I am aware that there are some of these clerics . . . who among themselves are bandying about the idea they should do the sort of thing in South Africa that Martin Luther King did in America. I want to say to them: Cut it out immediately, because the cloth you are wearing will not protect you if you try to do this in South Africa.

The contradiction between domestic and international action was revealed tellingly in Mozambique policy. Internationally, Vorster announced a "correct" policy toward Mozambique. Inside the country, however, things are different. When three organizations—the South African Student Organization, the Black Peoples Convention and the Black Allied Workers Union—announced they were holding a public rally in support of FRELIMO, the Government acted promptly. It banned the rally, arrested the leaders (who are now on trial) and raided the offices of the sponsoring groups.

The fundamental policy of apartheid has not changed; it is simply stated more politely, primarily for consumption abroad. Republic spokesmen speak of separate development and the "homelands" policy as being nondiscriminatory. They still justify their system by contending that South Africa is made up of many nations. The difference they

say is based not on race but on nationhood. Thus each national (or ethnic) community (there are nine) should have freedom of expression within its own homeland.

However, within the white man's community—which happens to be the most desirable 87 percent of the country—control legislation exists, backed up by police enforcement, to keep the African majority in the status of "visitors." Thus the pass laws, which restrict Africans' freedom of movement, are as strong as ever. Black trade unions are not yet permitted to operate. And there is no right of African political organization or of blacks being elected to office.



Chief Buthelezi, head of the Zulu "homeland" commented: "I do not feel less of a 'kaffir' [read "nigger"] in 1973 than I did in 1948." And Prime Minister Vorster recently told a student conference: "I have spoken recently to many who have integrationist tendencies. They are people who have already thrown in the towel . . . , do not advocate a course which would lead to a sharing of power over your own people and over other people."

In late November the Committee For Human Rights, a newly established South African group, called for international expressions of solidarity with their plan to hold Human Rights Day rallies on December 8. They seemed to me to understand the real situation in their country. They said:

The world appears to be easily misled on the whole question of change in South Africa. White election results, the speeches of "homeland leaders," black entertainers in white concert halls, "multinational" sports teams, and even a

"multinational" delegation to the United Nations, all seem to be interpreted as cracks in the edifice of white supremacy.

But these peripheral concessions are nothing other than the elimination of certain tangible racialistic irritants, the effect of which will be to consolidate the power basis for the perpetuation of white supremacy.

Those, both internationally and domestically, who believe that significant change is occurring . . . are those whose interests in South Africa are such that they must uphold such changes as a rationalization for their exploitative practices in South Africa.

I am firmly convinced that—with the changes taking place in Africa north of the South African border—the foundation is laid for a bitter struggle ahead. The white minority of South Africa is powerful. They have given no expression of intention to make the fundamental changes required if a true multiracial society is to be constructed. Yet they have no more chance of maintaining their position of special privilege than have Ian Smith and his fellow whites in Rhodesia. Indeed, their relative size and strength make it likely that the struggle will be ultimately all the more intense. South Africa is simply stronger and can, therefore, drag out the process of struggle.

I do not look upon this view as pessimistic. It takes seriously the way change occurs in history. When has a highly privileged minority ever given up its superior status willingly, without genuine struggle? And when has a repressed majority ever accepted its inferior status indefinitely?

### **Growth of Opposition**

I confidently expect African opposition to grow rapidly. This will be one of the infectious results of the changes in southern Africa. Ever since 1960 the old liberation movements of the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress have been banned. Their leaders have been killed, imprisoned or exiled. New attempts to organize movements have suffered almost the same fate. Although the South African Student Organization and the Black People's Convention have not been banned, their leaders have been. Yet in the present atmosphere of expectancy an exiled leader of the African National Congress said to me: "This is the period of greatest hope for us since Sharpeville [the 1960 massacre]."

The first new sign of African action has been in the industrial sector. This can be expected to grow. Thousands of workers have begun to strike for

higher wages. They have been winning some concessions. Their demands have not yet been political, but soon they will be: full trade union rights, abolition of the migratory labor system and the pass system, and establishment of the right of political organization and electoral participation.

Where will the white minority draw a line and say, "this far and no further"? Such a line will be drawn, not once but many times. But small concessions will not end the protest action or the demands of the struggle. Concessions will lead to greater demands because the majority will accept nothing less than full participation in the life of the country.

It is significant that only one of the Bantustan spokesmen, Chief Kaiser Matanzima of the Transkei, has accepted the idea of independence for his area. The eight others have turned down the idea on the ground that, if independent, they would be excluded from sharing in the total riches of South Africa.

The movement toward black consciousness is growing. Growing numbers in the Coloured and Indian communities are beginning to see their future in terms of identification not with the whites but with the Africans. In the late 1960's even the indirect representation of the Coloureds in Parliament was removed, and the Government established a separate Coloured People's Representative Council. In recent elections the Labor Party won a majority on this Council. But because this party was dedicated to ending the Council's paternalism and to working more closely with African groups, the Government suspended the Council.

The struggle for a new society in South Africa need not be characterized only by violence. Yet given the nature of Government repression it would be unrealistic to think violence can be avoided. The nation's basic instability will be apparent for all the world to see as the struggle intensifies. Furthermore, any real detente with black African states will be impossible—regardless of what happens in Namibia and Rhodesia—as African political demands increase and as conflict grows.

Governmental, business or organizational policies that assume stability and the possibility of an orderly erosion of apartheid are politically unrealistic and morally bankrupt. Any temptation by Washington to enter into a military understanding with South Africa to preserve the Cape shipping route or to protect American interests in the Indian Ocean would be disastrous. Continued American business investment may, for a short time, lead to continued high profits. But this cannot last.

Most important of all, this investment strengthens the status quo. The role of IBM in supplying computers to South Africa's Department of Defense hardly undercuts apartheid. The role of ITT in supplying a complex communication system does not erode apartheid. The role of Mobil and Caltec in refining almost 50 percent of the Republic's oil hardly qualifies as a stroke for undermining the white minority regime. Foreign business interests are, of necessity, integrated into the apartheid structure. Those who are making profits under the present system can hardly work effectively against it. They also are fearful of what change will do to their operations.

It follows from this analysis and orientation that there is urgent need for a shift in US governmental and nongovernmental policy. Foreign business interests should move towards withdrawal from South Africa as long as present conditions prevail. Cultural exchanges with white South Africa must be discouraged because they help to bolster the false

image of significant change. Trade in products such as locomotives, trucks, telecommunication materials and planes that can be converted into military use should end forthwith. Official visits by Government leaders to talk with their American counterparts should be forbidden. International pressure of all sorts, governmental and nongovernmental, must be increased.

An end to the present governmental and business dialogue would open up new ways of encouraging and supporting black trade union organization and action, of supporting legal defense funds for white and black opponents of the regime, and of dealing creatively with the political refugees and exiled political leaders of South Africa. Let us have instead a new American policy of "communication"—not with the unstable apartheid regime of the white minority, but with those forces, both white and black, that are utterly opposed to racial separation and are the only hope for a free, independent and multiracial South Africa. □

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Twenty-two years ago, virtually on his own and initially without salary, George Houser set about creating the American Committee on Africa (ACOA), of which he is now the Executive Director. It was in many ways a natural step, since prior to that George and James Farmer had founded the Committee on Racial Equality (CORE) out of their deep concern for the rights of American Black men and women. For over two decades ACOA has been a prime instrument by which concerned Americans have struggled against colonialism and racism in Africa and worked for an enlightened United States policy for that continent. His first contribution to these pages, "Our Faltering UN Strategy," appeared in 1963 in the first issue of *C&C* to have a graphic cover and to include more than eight pages.

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