

South Africa: for your information

#4 September 1966

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE ASSASSINATION OF

DR. VERWOERD

The Act

Assassination as a method of political change is to be regretted both morally and politically. The assassination of Dr. Verwoerd will further polarize the hatred and fear of the protagonists in a society where suspicion and repression are daily bread. Acts of violence are hardly the panacea for eradicating the most complex problems of society. Yet violence and terror have been the natural order in South Africa for a decade or more. The assassination is understandable. It cannot be condoned. But in South African terms it is the logical product of Verwoerd's Government.

Primary Observations

The immediate circumstances of Dr. Verwoerd's death may never be known.

Was the deed part of a plot?

Were there rational political motives to the deed?

Was the killer insane?

Answers will be "managed" by South African Government sources and it is not in the interest of the ruling group to declare the existence of an extensive plot. It is however of some significance that the assassin is white: there are unlikely to be mass reprisals against Africans.

Secondary Observations

1. South Africa is an oligarchy not an autocracy. The removal of Verwoerd does not destroy the Government nor the system of Government. The death of the apartheid prophet will not destroy the fetters of fear which bind the whites, the Europeans, together. The assassination does not change differences in color or culture, language or tradition, the common excuse for the pursuance of a racial supremacy which, above all, will continue to be economically profitable.

2. The principle tenet, of racial dominance, will not be altered. If the killer acted on behalf of "poor" whites, the reaction might increase budgetary priority for Europeans, sharpen separation in the cities and tighten job discrimination against Africans. If the killer acted on behalf of a liberation group, the resultant priority will be several more rounds of restrictive legislation. The effect on the political system is almost identical whatever the motive for the assassination. In each case, the fear engendered by the act of violence, increases the repression of the second-class majority race.

3. The assassination may lead to inadequate and bungling decisions by Verwoerd's successors. The void of leadership is expansive. The master planner, the great exponent of mass psychology, the courageous and crafty commander of foreign policy is gone. The experience and talent among potential successors is thinly distributed. There will be mistakes in the execution of apartheid, the progress of the Bantustans

and the consistency of foreign policy. But these errors can only be turned to good account, if persuasion and coercion are more firmly applied by Western countries. Between the two most likely successors - Dongses and Vorster - there are only different emphases or means, not ends (Dongses is the more "moderate".) Though there are superficial cracks in the veneer of apartheid, the fundamental unity of Afrikanerdom cannot be doubted.

4. It might be supposed that the assassination would affect the internal liberation struggle. However the leverage for active subversion among Africans no longer exists, because of the grip of the security police, the ubiquitous informers, and the completely repressive laws. Most African leadership is either in prison or in exile now.

Tertiary Observations

The killing has badly shaken the even tenor of the South African racist consensus. Fear and uncertainty among the ruling elite is likely to last but a few short weeks. These weeks nonetheless present an opportunity for outsiders to exert influence on the tragic direction of South Africa.

1. The application of a mandatory oil embargo on Rhodesia, with the threat of further oil sanctions mandatory upon states which did not permit United Nations inspection teams at road and rail border posts, is now more feasible. South Africa without Verwoerd might be ready to abandon Rhodesia to the vacillation of Prime Minister Wilson. It might be difficult at this time to maintain white unity in the Republic under the threat of selective sanctions. (The expected quality of South African leadership has been mentioned previously.)
2. It is conceivable that within the Republic some ground may now be gained by intense diplomatic and propaganda activity, pointing up the contradictions of Bantustan policy and the bleak future for the youth of all races under the system.
3. South West Africa. The International Court of Justice decision has been built into such a great victory by the South African Government that a face-saving line of withdrawal from South West Africa is now impossible to find.
4. In the economic sector it is highly unlikely that there will be the capital flight of post-Sharpeville proportions: there has been too much recent investment and too solid a build-up of security forces for that. Furthermore the \$40 million revolving credit which the South African Government holds with ten United States banks, has positive psychological impact by demonstrating to Western business circles the continuing esteem of American financial leaders for the stability of the South African system.

International Relations

To South Africans, the issue of South West Africa is clear and all South African politicians recognize the steps of diplomatic escalation starting from the priority on the agenda of the General Assembly. As in the Rhodesian case, the fulfillment of Afro-Asian demands is severely handicapped in the last resort by Britain's shaky economic standing: the pound would almost certainly be devalued following the

application of total economic sanctions on South Africa. Moreover it is unclear how the United Nations may legally proceed in order to remove apartheid from South West Africa.

But an oil embargo on South Africa resulting from their assistance to Rhodesia would not affect Britain; and the firm resolve to implement such a measure would severely weaken the ties between South Africa and Rhodesia and would most effectively undermine Smith's foundations. Also sections of white youth and those of English descent might on this issue courageously demonstrate their dissatisfaction with a Government without Verwoerd at the helm.

Initiative and pressure by the United States at the United Nations at this time can drive South Africa into making hurried and contradictory decisions. The death of Verwoerd could then contribute to broadening the fissures of mistrust which exist within the white minority. The core of apartheid will remain, but opportunities do exist now for eroding confidence in the racist system.