

## ● THE SOUTH AFRICAN CRISIS

ments, the assimilation of support work into domestic political issues will change the nature and import of that support work. Questions of national, ethnic and geographic identities are raised. Possible new alliances within the Left may emerge; for while most people support the ANC's leadership of the liberation struggle it has its critics on the hard Left for being too conservative and too close to the Communist party.

And precisely because these issues are so significant, white dominated organisations – and journalists – on the Left will have to make space as black political leaders and writers take the stage to define what the issues are, not just for black people.

These are some of the changes, most of them exciting, which South Africa can effect in Britain. It is an optimistic view. And even within that optimism, it does not count the cost in lives lost and damaged in South Africa.

There are much less optimistic possibilities. Black politics in Britain may remain too parochial to respond. White solidarity, when it gets over the drama of the last few weeks, may whittle back down to the dedicated few. Limited sanctions may be imposed; not enough to have any effect in South Africa but enough to close the gap between Thatcher and 'moderate' opinion, and enough to lose some people their jobs. Those who support apartheid will undoubtedly conspire – conspiracy theory has its moments – to defend their interests.

Images of bloodshed and chaos in South Africa, of blacks fighting blacks, of economic damage in Britain could produce a backlash. Instead of beginning the acceptance of end of empire it could provoke a sulky and racist insistence that only the

### white South Africa could use the nuclear bomb

empire worked. Instead of the Left turning outwards again, it will turn its back on the insoluble problems of South Africa, as it has on Ireland and have sectarian fights over the right line in solidarity work. And white South Africa could use the nuclear bomb.

Whether the best or the worst happens is not within the control of the British Left nor, indeed, the Conservative government. What matters, here, is whether the Left can think widely enough about the implications of the history being made in South Africa to make history again in Britain. □



The neo-Nazi Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) march through Pretoria (1985).

# DIVISIONS IN THE LAAGER

The white regime has been placed under quite new pressures. The result is growing conflict within the white community. But the regime is still very much intact.

Roger Omond

NOT EVEN PW Botha's most ardent admirers would call him an intellectual. The man who left Stellenbosch University more than 50 years ago to become an organiser for the National party has, however, dozens of underemployed academics to provide him with justifications and devices to 'reform' apartheid while maintaining power. The days of crude *wit baasskap* (white domination) are over – in theory. One of the few growth industries in the sagging South African economy is in political science where fiddling with constitutions, re-drawing maps and rationalising racialism is much in vogue.

South Africa's latest state of emergency may be thought to be incompatible with the reforming image Mr Botha has been at pains to present to the world. In fact the two go hand in hand. The academics who advise Mr Botha have devised a neat pseudo-science to explain it all based on two adages. The first is de Tocqueville's, 'The most perilous moment for a bad government is when it seeks to mend its ways', and the second is one that has

served white South Africa well for 300 years: 'Divide and rule.'

But it is not put so crudely. In May this year Mr Botha rewrote de Tocqueville: 'Whenever a country experiences a period of reform, there is bound to be uncertainty,' he told the president's council, one of the new institutions devised to put a gloss on apartheid. Divide and rule has been dressed up under a variety of names: separate development, parallel development, multinational development and now co-operative co-existence.

The reform policy has the intellectual blessing of a number of in-house academics in South Africa and also of a Harvard political scientist, Professor Sam Huntington, who is much in vogue.

### Reform and repression

'It is not inconceivable,' he wrote a few years ago, 'that narrowing the scope of political participation may be indispensable to eventually broadening that participation.' He went on to say that 'the centralisation of power may also be necessary for the government to maintain the

control over violence that is essential to carry through major reforms.' Further, the process of reform requires 'substantial elements of duplicity, deceit, faulty assumptions and purposeful blindness.'

Huntington's thesis has been characterised by the former leader of the Progressive Federal party, Frederick van Zyl Slabbert, as: 'Coercion and reform go hand in hand; a measure of instability is a symptom of successful reform . . .' Dr Slabbert, the most intellectual politician since Dr Verwoerd but with a rather more sane view of life, is unimpressed with the Huntington thesis: Machiavelli, he has observed, said it earlier and better in *The Prince*.

But Huntington is a rather more respectable name than Machiavelli for politicians and political scientists to quote in support of what could be called repressive reform. One key question, however, is whether the South African government is really intent on Huntington's 'major' reforms or whether it is merely modernising white domination. Following on from that, what further 'reforms' can be expected?

To date, the Immorality and Mixed Marriages Acts have been abolished, the pass laws scrapped, much 'petty' social apartheid buried. Promised for the future is a statutory council on which Africans will serve (although they will probably still be in a minority) that will join the existing tri-cameral parliament for whites, Coloureds and Indians.

There have been hints that the Group Areas Acts may be amended, relaxing the strict residential segregation that the gov-

ernment has spent so long in implementing. Under the guise of 'local democracy', decisions to allow 'grey' areas will not be made by central government but by municipal councils. This has a double purpose: it allows the government to escape right-wing flak by putting the onus on city councillors and it also challenges those liberal city authorities which have been pleading for apartheid to be relaxed to implement their principles at the risk of losing votes.

#### The limits of reform

But that may be as far down the reform path as Mr Botha cares to go. There is a limit: Gerrit Viljoen, a former head of the once-powerful Broederbond and one of the more *verlig* (enlightened) members of the cabinet has said that reforms will not affect

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'own residential areas, own schools, own education departments, and own separate political representation'. Mr Botha himself is on record as saying that he does not favour 'endangering my own people's right to self-determination'. Shorn of the not very subtle code language, this means continued white – and particularly Afrikaner – control.

That control rests on a number of pillars, one of the most important being the Population Registration Act that classifies every South African into one race group or another. Without it, legislated apartheid is



P W Botha at a military parade in his honour.

impossible – and there have been no significant indications that the government is prepared to go as far as scrapping the act.

Mr Botha knows the situation in which he has placed himself. The reforms he has introduced – and even the ones to come – are not enough. One *verligte* Afrikaner Nationalist, Harald Pakendorf, recently fired as editor of the *Vaderland* newspaper because he was too liberal, has recalled President Paul Kruger's words in a meeting with Lord Milner shortly before the Anglo-Boer War: 'It is not the vote you want for the *Uitlanders* (foreigners); it is my country you want.'

Mr Botha probably thinks the same way today. He set in motion the 'reform' process not because of a newly-discovered love of democracy but because it became clear that classical apartheid was too expensive – at all levels – to defend. 'We have outgrown the outdated concept of apartheid,' he said earlier this year.

The statement was greeted with cheers from the wish-fulfilling English-speaking establishment: it meant, they said, that Mr Botha had given the presidential seal of approval to the claim made some years ago by the *verlig* Dr Piet Koornhof, now chairman of the president's council, that 'apartheid is dead'.

It was left to Dr Slabbert to point out that Mr Botha's announcement was capable of another interpretation: that South Africa would still have apartheid and only outdated conceptions would be scrapped. Hence the abolition of the Immorality and Mixed Marriages Acts, the pass laws and 'petty' social apartheid. The major structures of apartheid – the homelands, for example – still remain and will continue to do so. Divide and rule still applies.

#### Fissure amongst the whites

On the right-wing of Afrikanerdom there is no such thing as an outdated concept of apartheid. In those ranks, anything that



Mounted parade at an Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) cultural day.

## ● THE SOUTH AFRICAN CRISIS

changes the model of apartheid *circa* 1966 – the year that Dr Verwoerd was killed – is heresy.

But even those backwoodsmen are thinking. While Mr Botha's academic advisers draft and redraft constitutions, the far Right re-draw maps. What is of paramount importance to them is the survival of the Afrikaner *volk*. The best way to achieve that, some argue, is to revive the concept of the original *Boerestaat* – the Afrikaner homeland – and the rest of the country can take care of itself. Just where the borders are to be drawn is a matter of some dispute.

The simpler, back-to-the-land *volk* with a distrust for modern civilisation are apparently prepared to settle for a relatively small, undeveloped stretch of the Transvaal and Free State with access to the sea through Richards Bay in northern Natal.

Others, including the neo-Nazi Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB), want the three 19th century Boer republics – all the Transvaal, Free State and northern Natal – which just coincidentally contain most of the country's wealth. In this new *Boerestaat*, wherever the borders are drawn, would be revived the old constitutional concept of 'no equality in church or state' between black and white.

This, however, is the stuff of pipe-dreams, however attractive the theory may look to the beleaguered right-wing Afrikaner. That Afrikaner is confused and angry: the enemy now is not only British imperialism, communism and the blacks but also the forces of *verligtheid* represented by Mr Botha. Having been fed a diet of undiluted racism since 1948, the Right is having to adjust to the 'reforming' government admit, as the Minister of Constitutional Development and Planning, Chris Heunis, did recently that apartheid had led to 'lunacies'.

As a result the far Right, in the form of the Conservative party and even more fanatical Herstigte Nasionale party, has, for the first time since the original split in the National party in 1969, been making strong showings in rural constituencies of the Transvaal and Free State. One estimate is that the far Right could conceivably win up to 64 seats in the white parliament – still short of a majority of 84 but enough to result in a hung parliament.

It is to combat this perceived electoral threat and because he is a genuine Afrikaner nationalist that Mr Botha has reverted to his hard-man image – what the Afrikaners call *kragdadigheid* – and introduced states of emergency, unleashed the security

forces on the townships, and revived B J Vorster's defiant dictum to the West during the 1977 general election: Do your damndest.

### The altitude of business

The far Right pose another threat to 'reform'. They are securely entrenched in the bloated bureaucracy that has been necessary to administer apartheid and which also provided secure and relatively



The AWB leader Eugene Terre'Blanche.

well-paid employment to hundreds of thousands of Afrikaners. Piet Koornhof, now chairperson of the president's council, once called this bureaucracy a 'tortoise' and was said to have been kicked upstairs because he had failed to persuade the civil servants who actually deal with blacks of the need for reform.

More recently, a cabinet minister accused the police of failing to protect his colleague Pik Botha, the foreign minister, from the forces of the AWB at a political meeting in the Transvaal. Large elements of the security police still prefer to blame 'communist agitators' for township unrest and have persuaded at least the previous and present minister for law and order not

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to make concessions to the African National Congress or its internal allies. The military, once regarded as a bastion of *verligtheid*, has been willingly co-opted to suppress dissent inside the country while at the same time destabilising South Africa's neighbours.

While looking over his right shoulder trying to minimise conservative electoral losses, Mr Botha – like his predecessors – has been trying to win English-speaking white support. The AWB plays an unwitting role: pictures of jackbooted AWB members guarding the chilling figure of

their leader, Eugene Terre'Blanche, against a backdrop of a swastika-like emblem, send English-speaking voters flocking to Mr Botha's side.

But even before the strong emergence of the AWB, the English vote had become an important factor in Mr Botha's calculations. Big business, notably Gavin Relly, head of the giant Anglo American Corporation, supported the government in the 1983 referendum on the new constitution. Their desire to help Mr Botha was given impetus by his promise that the government would be less interventionist in the economy.

Since then, however, the love affair has cooled. There is some despair at what is perceived as Mr Botha's lack of strong leadership. There are protests at the detention of trade unionists with whom business has to deal. There is much hand-wringing at the iniquities of apartheid. And there have even been talks with the banned African National Congress. But there has not been much concrete action, merely a succession of appeals to the government which have been ignored.

There is also now, after decades during which apartheid provided a plentiful supply of cheap (although often inefficient) labour, concern that Black South Africans equate oppression with capitalism. Self-interest and the prospect of continued profits demand faster changes than Mr Botha is prepared to deliver.

### And the future?

What of the future? One of the few things that South Africans of all persuasions agree on is that the government is determined to keep control of whatever reform changes it introduces. That means, in the words of the University of Cape Town's Institute of Criminology, that 'highly repressive state measures, with detention as a central device, constitute part of the reform package' and are not 'a hangover from earlier authoritarian periods'.

Reform notwithstanding, Mr Botha and his academic advisers are united in their determination to maintain power for as long as possible. To that end, there have been ominous warnings that the full might of the state has yet to be deployed against the restive black population. Combined with Pretoria's signals that it is prepared to weather sanctions rather than be forced by external pressure into making more concessions, this seems to indicate that the laager, which proved so useful to the Voortrekkers 150 years ago, is not about to be abandoned. □