by Ralph Lawrence

EXPLAINING THE PRESENT: EXPLORING THE FUTURE

Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley, **South Africa without apartheid: dismantling racial domination,** Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman, 1986, Pp. xviii + 315. R22,95.

Heribert Adams' **Modernizing Racial Domination** made a tremendous impact when it appeared in 1971. At the time I was an undergraduate on the Durban campus and we fledgling political scientists pored over the book under the tutelage of the late, and much lamented, Dr Rick Turner. Here at long last, we thought, was an innovative, rigorous examination of South African society that offered us relief from the arid, hopelessly outmoded texts that we had been saddled with until then. So we should not forget Heribert Adam's importance as a pioneer of contemporary scholarship on South African affairs. Nowadays, of course, he is widely known as one of the most shrewd and best-informed observers of apartheid rule. **South Africa without Apartheid** is his latest offering, written in collaboration with his wife, Kogila Moodley, a Natalian by birth and a sociologist at the University of British Columbia.

South Africa without Apartheid is a sophisticated attempt to take the country's pulse. The prognosis, they say, is quite hopeful. Commentaries on South African politics have passed through three distinct stages in the last decade. First, we endured the prophecies of doom, the 'one minute to midnight' scenarios. Then, secondly, we had a plethora of constitutional blueprints. Constitutional draftsmanship has not yet waned, far from it, but now the emphasis has shifted to futurology. What will the post-apartheid society look like, assuming that we will ever get there? The Adams' book is in keeping with this latest genre. They seek the South Africa of tomorrow in the South Africa of today and yesterday.

Sensibly, then, they begin by trying to make sense of what has happened in South Africa in the early 1980s. What social trends are discernible? What social forces are at work? What is the configuration of the trade union movement? And they also go on to describe the various political parties and movements in 'white' and 'black' politics. The rationale for doing so is simple and compelling. In order to ascertain whether apartheid rule can be overcome, and how, and what will replace it, they argue, one has to be realistic. That means undertaking an honest appraisal of the conditions prevailing in South Africa. Their 'snap-shot' of South Africa is effectively dated 1984, although they have made sporadic efforts to include later developments in the text. That's always a hazard for authors. Events unfold so rapidly in South African politics that a book is virtually outdated even before it leaves the press. Still, the Adams have gone to such lengths to obtain information and make so many pertinent and incisive comments that any reader will find their account informative.

I do, however, have some reservations. The authors have aimed to present what they call a 'think-piece', designed to provoke discussion among South African policymakers and public alike. Consequently, they state, they have eschewed social science jargon wherever possible. Well, I beg to disagree. Obscure, unhelpful phrases are littered throughout. Try this one: 'the Lebanization of South Africa'. What nonsense. (Perhaps social science publications should be forced to carry a health warning: **DANGER** - reading this book may impair your literacy.) The Adams also have an unfortunate passion for taxonomy. Categories abound, and the argument proceeds by jumping from one pigeonhole to the next. Categories, I admit, can serve a useful explanatory purpose, but, equally, they can be positively misleading. For instance, the United Democratic Front is relegated to the chapter dealing with 'black' politics. The only other category used is 'white' politics. Strictly speaking, the UDF belongs to neither. And there are many other anomalies too. For various reasons, then, readers may find the early going rather tough and unyielding. Persevere, if you can, for the last section is highly topical at the moment.

The final chapter looks ahead to a possible post-apartheid society. Politics, as is often said, is the art of compromise. If all the interested parties sat down to consider how South Africa should be governed, what political order would they agree on? The majority, apparently, would opt for a dispensation that bears striking similarity to the proposals that emanated recently from the KwaNatal Indaba. But whereas the Indaba, of course, is concerned solely with regional government and administration for Natal and KwaZulu, **South Africa without Apartheid** concentrates on national issues. Nevertheless, the parallels are intriguing. In the Adams' view, the post-apartheid society must be a democratic one, in which the franchise is universal and individual rights are given precedence over group rights. A federal system of government would be preferable. Legislative powers could be divided between two central assemblies. Individuals on a common voters' roll would select representatives for a lower house. The outcome would be determined by a system of proportional

representation. By contrast, an upper house would give recognition to cultural groups formed on a voluntary basis. Those who do not identify themselves with any specific group could be accommodated, by having a non-group group, presumably 'other South Africans'. An appropriately South African solution, don't you think?

Federalism in South Africa would satisfy neither the diehard segregationists nor the unitarians. But their very different proposals are equally utopian. Federalism offers an immediate, practical way out of South Africa's political conundrum. For a start, a federal arrangement gives political expression to South Africa's cultural and regional diversity without making this the only criterion for deciding political representation. 'Cultural councils' could oversee the protection of language, education and religious practice for specific groups or regions. Will this federal system work? There are two main shortcomings. The Adams' type of constitutional engineering is geared towards rigging the governmental structures so that certain outcomes are much more likely than others. In their scheme, individual rights and group or regional preferences are both incorporated in the composition of the central legislative assemblies. But to put it crudely, would not 'black' majority rule be the upshot? To allay this fear a bit more tinkering is required. By introducing proportional representation the minorities are given more weight. The one shortcoming, then, is that federalism devised in this way can be seen as the last throw of the dice by 'white' South Africans to preserve their privileged political position. It's the 'white' man's answer to unfettered majority rule.

Moreover, there is the suspicion, too, that federalism will confer legitimacy on the homelands, particularly the TVBC bloc, by making them federal units. Perhaps, most importantly, though, many believe that federalism divides, while a unitary state unites. The call is 'one South Africa, one nation'. The segregationist plans which have afflicted South Africa for so long need to be countered by drawing people together and forging a common society under a common government. These are the very real political objections to federalism which constitutional draftsmen often ignore. To their credit, the Adams do recognise such pitfalls, but they fail to tell the reader how federalism can circumvent them.

The second major shortcoming of the Adams' federalism is that by concentrating on expedient considerations they ignore the conflict of principles of representation that result. Equal voting among individuals is ensured when participation is based on a universal franchise and a common voters' roll. This is one principle of representation. Voting for groups or regions introduces a further principle of representation. Here individual votes have a differential weighting. If, for instance, corporate entities are given parity, then the statistical value of individual votes will depend on the number of voters in the group or region to which a person is affiliated. There is equal voting among groups, but not among individuals. Thirdly, in principle, when the voter enters the polling booth is he casting a vote to determine which individual will represent his constituency in a legislative body? Or is he voting primarily for a political party because what is most important is who forms the next government? If one chooses the former, as they do in the United Kingdom, then one cannot have a system of proportional representation because the principle underlying it is entirely different. Proportional representation is a means of calculating party strength; who exactly represents whom in each constituency is a comparatively minor matter.

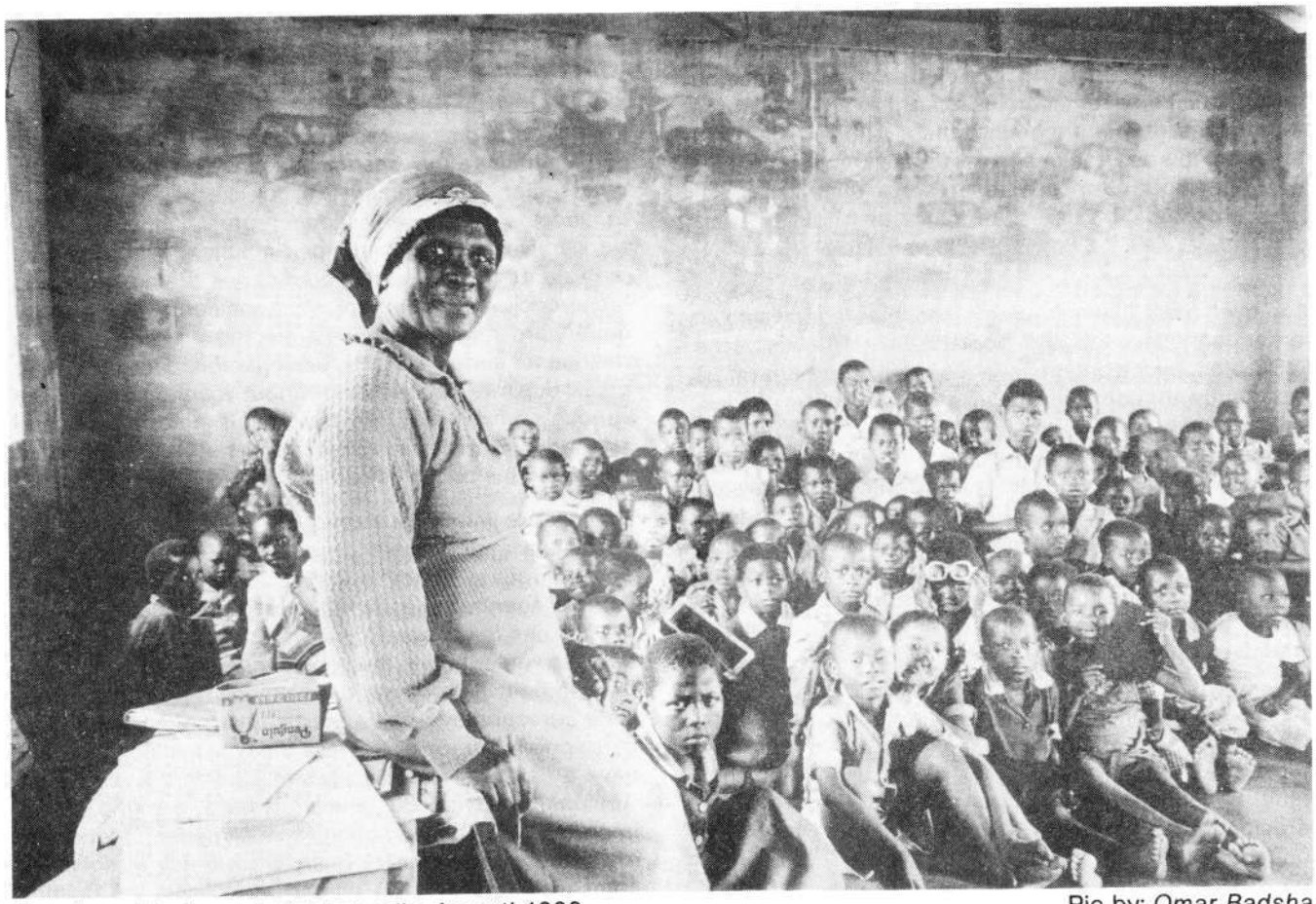
In **South Africa without Apartheid** the authors are so preoccupied with trying to capture the so-called middle ground of South African society in their constitutional engineering that they happily overlook the inconsistencies in principles of representation that are at the very heart of their scheme. What bothers me is not so much the inconsistencies themselves, since countries have been known to live with them, but the failure to address such issues at all. In this they are in good company - virtually all the literature on South Africa ignores them. Blame the political scientists. I do. And I'm one too. These issues may be boring to some, technical to many, but they are significant and should become part of public debate. We ignore them at our peril.

Apart from federalism being seen as the optimum mechanism for sharing political power, it can be argued that it is the most desirable form of governmental administration in the South African context. Heribert and Kogila Adam take this view. Federalism allows groups and regions autonomy over their own affairs. Decision-making and administration become decentralised as a result. What regional government will look like they do not say. At the local level, they envisage a representative assembly with active political party participation. Wards will be large, cutting across the boundaries of the prevailing racial enclaves. A number of councillors will represent each ward and they will be elected according to the method of proportional representation. The idea is to break down racial barriers without sowing panic in the various communities. As the Adams note, dismantling apartheid involves changing people's attitudes as well as reshaping the country's political institutions.

Even all this will prove inadequate unless radical shifts in policy are implemented urgently in the post-apartheid South Africa. Economic redistribution is high on the authors' agenda: revenue will have to be allocated fairly to regions and to economic sectors, employees may have to be given some stake in their companies, the tax system will have to be overhauled and employment practices in the state bureaucracy require drastic revision. They mention these points cursorily. However, maybe just doing so will have a catalytic effect on future studies, for we South Africans need to do a lot of hard thinking. Most importantly, we need to obtain a much better understanding of how governments really work today in societies comparable to our own. It's no use describing polities solely in terms of constitutions. Federalism may look attractive on paper, but what are the potential disadvantages in practice? Would not a unitary order prove to be the most equitable and efficient mode of government in a post-apartheid society? It might. We don't know enough now. The Adams' book pays no attention to governmental institutions at all. However, in order to avoid the danger of generating false expectations about what is possible in a future South Africa we have to learn how the state operates here and in other similar Third World societies, like Brazil and India. Only then will we have an indication

of what policies are practicable and how they should be administered. The question is not only whether democracy is, in fact, feasible in South Africa, but what kind of democracy can succeed here.

Herbert and Kogila Adam are optimistic about apartheid being replaced by a multiracial society. They believe that apartheid's demise can be negotiated. The majority will settle for social democracy in a federal state. Realistically, one will have to be content with second-best solutions. But they will not appear miraculously. We have to seek every opportunity now to ensure that apartheid is dismantled as peacefully as can be managed. I share the spirit of their endeavour, even though I am sceptical about their conclusions. But I'm sure the authors would not mind. Their aim is to engage the reader in debate. They certainly captured my attention; I hope many readers will share my experience. It takes a bold author to guide us through the minefield of South African politics. Heribert and Kogila Adam have done so with admirable fortitude and integrity.□



Teacher with class of eighty pupils, Amouti 1982

Pic by: *Omar Badsha*