SOUTH AFRICA AND MEANINGFUL CHANGE

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Change means different things to different people, and there are probably very few, if any, who are entirely clear as to the different meanings and implications of the concept in its numerous different contexts. What counts as change for one person may not count as meaningful change for another. In this paper I am concerned with a notion of meaningful change; but rather than analyse the notion as such, I shall be content to let my meanings emerge from the contexts and the kinds of arguments which I shall be presenting.

If one is going to address oneself to the problem of change in South Africa, then a question of basic importance and which is **absolutely** unavoidable is : What is the nature of South Africa, this country which is undergoing, or is about to undergo, or which one believes ought to undergo, change? It is surprising, actually, how frequently this question is neither asked nor answered in the context of discussions about change. How, then, would one describe and analyse the South African system? What sort of polity is South Africa? I shall begin by attempting to give broad and general answers to these questions.

I do not want to get involved here in the race-and-class debate. Suffice it to say that I do not believe that either notion or phenomenon can be reduced to the other, but that the two are closely inter-related. Thus neither concept can be dispensed with. What seems to me important is the fact that the past history of South Africa has to a very large extent been about the fight between new settler communities and the indigenous populations for the possession of the land, resulting in settler conquest, and this has led to class formation intimately related to racial factors. The relatively large indigenous population and the 'imperial factor' account for the indigenous population never having been entirely dispossessed of land, which is not to deny their having been dispossessed of a very large proportion of it. Dispossession was more often than not accompanied by continued occupation, but as squatters dependent upon and subordinate to the new settler owners.

LABOUR FORCE

The growth of agriculture necessitated an available labour force which was provided ready to hand in the squatter population whose status soon became in many respects analogous to that of serfs. The growth of market agriculture under the dominance of white farmers involved processes such as the limiting of the squatter population through their expulsion from white farms in large numbers, and, later, the development of structures which could be employed to ensure adequate supplies of farm labour, given the previous reduction in the squatter population and the competitive demand for labour from the developing industrial and commercial sectors.

The discovery of gold and diamonds led, of course, to the development of the industrial and commercial sectors of the economy, and again the development of these sectors depended upon adequate supplies of labour. The labour supply was secured and maintained by various devices and methods. These included the introduction of hut and poll taxes which forced blacks to enter the money economy, recruitment from without South Africa's borders, from neighbouring territories, and, over time, the growing populations within those areas which were reserved solely for African occupation steadily reducing the ability and efficacy of these areas in producing the subsistence of their inhabitants. Gradually the migratory labour system became an integral feature of the South African social and economic system. Class formation and racial domination and subordination became to a large extent functions of each other.

This is not the place to elaborate upon the emergence and development of the industrial colour bar, for there is ample and recent literature on that; nor shall I dwell upon the gradual development of a system, the social, economic and political dimensions of which are characterised by the institutionalised subordination of blacks in terms of class, status and political power. These systems not only maintained black subordination, but developed and institutionalised race segregation in new forms appropriate to the developing capitalist system. South African society came to be structured in very distinct and significant ways which included a labour system which not only barred blacks from acquiring economic power, but in which black wages on average have been restricted to small fractions of white wages, so that wage differentials have traditionally been very high but also consistent with the colour bar, and black wages seldom above what has come to be called the Poverty Datum Line. There are signs of greater differentiation within the class of black labourers within recent years, and even of the emergence of a marginal group of black capitalists, but this does not significantly affect the overall picture which I have been painting.

SEGREGATION AND DOMINATION

A central aspect of the South African system is the system of segregation. As mentioned briefly above, the colour-bar was systematically developed in all sectors of the economy.

Control of the land by whites and its efficient development for capitalist agricultural and industrial purposes resulted in Africans being confined to what first of all came to be known as 'reserves', and, later, 'homelands' in the rural areas, and 'locations' or 'townships' in the urban or industrial and commercial areas. At the same time the demands for white security, for residential segregation, the need to control property relations, and the social and economic relations which all of this implied, necessitated the parallel development of a vast system of control, a system which within a fairly short time seemed to take on a life of its own. The consequence is a society structured in complex ways and in which force and power relations in all spheres of life play a more important role in the life of the community than in most other societies. The mailed fist tends to be more frequently visible than in most other societies, certainly than in most relatively stable societies, and the velvet glove rather more rarely seen.

This invites the obvious question as to how stable a country is South Africa. Without analysing it in detail, it does seem pertinent to say that insofar as South Africa **can** be regarded as a stable state, this stability is a function of the highly developed structures of domination, the power structures, with severe sanctions threatening challengers to authority. Stability is a function of the presence and the employment of a highly militarised police force, of an ever growing defence force, and of a large and ubiquitous bureaucracy with quasi-legislative, judicial and wide discretionary executive powers.

These are all essential features of the structures of domination. The first question which ought therefore to be asked of any proposals for change, is whether and to what extent they will contribute to the dismantling of these structures.

"NATIONAL STATES"

Now it seems to me that there is one factor which confuses the issue and which must therefore be placed in perspective. This is the 'homeland' policy and the emergence of the new satellite states, if 'states' is the correct term. It could be, and sometimes is, claimed that, in terms of the policy of creating new 'national states', the structures of domination are in fact being dismantled, and that in the course of time South Africa will have no African citizens, only citizens of the groups which government constitutional proposals are to cater for. There is, of course, no doubt that new power structures have been erected over the past years, and that the newly created 'national states' have achieved legal autonomy in the sense that theoretically they may legislate as they please, subject only to the limitations of their own constitutions. But the key to interpreting the implications of these changes lies in examining the overall context within which these 'states' exist, together with the fact that far from leading to the dismantling of the structures of domination in South Africa itself, these structures are actually being tightened up, and the bureaucracy is being given new teeth. I refer here to the implications of Wiehahn and Riekert, and to Dr. Koornhof's new Bills, among other developments.

The fact of the matter is, that although government policy aims at granting independence to all the 'homelands' so that in the eyes of South African law there will be no South African citizens of African descent, the **de facto** population of so-called 'white' South Africa includes at least 46% of the total black population. While it is government policy to decrease this percentage, it is unlikely in the extreme that the black population will ever be much less than it presently is, and it seems fairly safe to say that the number of Africans working, as distinct from residing, in 'white' areas, will always be considerably higher than the number of whites. The legal position and the **de facto** position are and will continue to be very different, with the former masking the realities of South African life. This carries with it the clear implication that the structures of domination, far from being dismantled, will require shoring up. Apart from anything else, the forces driving blacks to the 'white' areas are strong enough to ensure a permanent illegal population in the urban areas of South Africa.

The position of the majority of people in 'white' South Africa insofar as legal rights are concerned is changing not for the better, but for the worse, for the future legal status of black Africans will be that of resident aliens, but resident aliens of inferior status. Unlike aliens who are accepted as 'white', blacks are and will continue to be prohibited, in terms of their race, from the privileges and rights which are normally accorded to and enjoyed by aliens. An African born and brought up, say, in Soweto, will not only be an alien in terms of the law, but will enjoy far fewer privileges and rights than a visitor from Europe or North America.

DEPENDENCE AND DOMINATION

The dependence of the 'homelands' upon 'white' South Africa is a structural dependence which is in part revealed by the fact that at any one time at least half of their working populations are in employment in South Africa. This dependence is likely to increase rather than decrease over the years, for the chances of development on a scale sufficient to lessen it, given the natural growth of the black population, the large-scale resettlement of blacks in 'homelands' which is in process, and the vast overpopulation which at present exists, are, apart from a few marginal areas, negligible.

The 'homelands' serve as little more than impoverished and therefore reliable reservoirs of cheap labour for 'white' South Africa. In addition they have the advantage of being legally self-administered, so freeing the South African government from the responsibility of caring for their starving populations despite the fact that starvation and impoverishment are largely the result of the apartheid structures and policies. At the same time, South Africa supplies their very life-blood in the form of employment for their labour, technical expertise, grants-in-aid and loans etc.. Consequently their ruling classes and elites are captives of the system of dependence, a dependence which substantially undermines their sovereignty in political and economic terms, and indirectly affects their legal sovereignty.

The regional system is thus not only dominated by South Africa but it bears striking resemblances insofar as military, political and economic power are concerned, with the Soviet Union presiding over its Eastern European satellite states, particularly if the post-World War II Stalinist period is considered. The raid on Maseru and the reactions which followed in Lesotho and Swaziland are indicative of South Africa's dominance in the region, especially when it is remembered that the dependence of 'homeland' states is even greater than that of Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland. Policies which are disapproved of by the South African government, and which are seen as affecting South African security, will not be tolerated, a fact which is corroborated by the strategy of destabilizing the socialist oriented states in Southern Africa.

DISMANTLING OF STRUCTURES

It follows from this broad analysis and description that the dismantling of the structures of dominance is a necessary condition for meaningful change. A partial dismantling of these structures as could be brought about by a new dispensation for urban blacks would not include the regional structures so that the effect would be to include some blacks within the structures of privilege while retaining the overall dominance of 'white' South Africa within the overall system. To look at South Africa in isolation, or at 'homelands' in isolation is to run the risk of overlooking the fact that the region forms an organic system which has developed over the past century or so, and which is characterised by closely integrated structures and relations of dominance and dependence. The 'homeland' states, far from serving to dismantle 'white' hegemony, perpetuate that hegemony, for they are necessary conditions for the survival of the system of domination in 'white' South Africa itself.

This is not to say that a new dispensation for urban blacks ought therefore to be scoffed at, for once embarked upon it will create new centres and bases of power which are likely to gain a momentum of their own. The important point is that such a new dispensation will not of itself change the basic nature of the structures of dominance within the region. It will still be a case of economic and political power being vested in the dominant centre at the expense of an impoverished periphery. The majority of blacks will still be on the wrong side of these power structures.

All the proposals which have so far come from the government and from the President's Council may be said to be designed to put the finishing touches to the system of dominance as it has evolved over the past decade or so. They are schemes of co-option whereby domination over Coloureds and Asians may be secured, while allowing for minimal participation on their part. A modicum of participation is the price which the government is prepared to pay for the security of the system. But, as Alasdair MacIntyre has succinctly put it, "The cost of consensus is paid for by those who are excluded from it."

Some people have suggested that meaningful change would be signified by the repeal of the Immorality Act and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, but this would not result in structural change, and I suggest that one of the most significant indicators would be the dissolution of or even a significant reduction in the size of the Department of Co-operation and Development. And of course this implies the abolition of the functions which the department fulfils, and not merely their transfer to some other department. For this kind of change would signify the dismantling of the institutionalised structures of domination, or at least some of them.

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The proposals for constitutional change which have thus far emanated from the government side are all based to some extent upon the concept of the consociational democracy. This is true too of the thinking of the New Republic Party and more particularly of the Progressive Federal Party. Consociationalism is apparently the latest constitutional 'fad' in South Africa. I should like to make one or two methodological and theoretical points at this juncture in order to try to reveal what I believe to be the fundamental weakness in pluralist and particularly in consociational theory, at least insofar as its applicability to South Africa is concerned.

There is no need to labour the point that consociationalism is a variety of pluralism, and a variety in which the theorists lay stress not only upon the relationships between groups, but more especially upon the relationships between the elites or the leaders of the various groups. The theory tends to assume intergroup conflict, and also — and this is important — stable relations between group leaders and the groups which they represent, between leaders and followers. It is a theory which is appropriate in cases where accommodation between leaders of groups results in the lowering of the levels of inter-group conflict and succeeds in containing such conflict. But stable relations between leaders and led, and strong links between them, are essential aspects of consociational theory as Brian Barry also stresses.

But the history of Southern Africa suggests that this is precisely the assumption which cannot with any confidence be made of powerless and rightless nationalist groups. To mention one example : Joshua Nkomo's leadership first came under fire after he accommodated with white Southern Rhodesians over the 1961 Constitution, and he was forced to retract and to condemn the constitution. Shortly afterwards the African Nationalist movement split and Ndabaningi Sithole emerged as leader of a rival organization. As Barry succinctly puts it : "If the present leaders agree to something on behalf of their followers it is always open to some rival to denounce the terms as a sell-out and seek to gather support for repudiating them." The history of political movements among the Coloured population and the history of African nationalism in South Africa itself, especially after the formation of the A.N.C. Youth League, reveals many examples of this kind. There are good reasons for supposing that consociationalism is appropriate only in very special circumstances, and that these circumstances do not obtain in Southern Africa, and this is what I shall now turn to discuss at a more theoretical level.

ASSUMPTIONS

Pluralist theory assumes far more about the nature of societies than its proponents are generally aware of, or at least than they articulate, and certainly more than they have conclusive evidence for. It assumes that elites are able to negotiate within a framework of equality, or at least that such inequalities as might exist are not likely to materially affect that consociational approach and the accommodation which is sought. The full implications of the existing distribution of power, political and economic, tend to be brushed aside or to be made no more than obeisance to. The Constitutional Committee of the President's Council, for example, stresses several times the importance of the inter-relationship between economic and political factors, but proceeds to ignore the economic factors. The same tends to be true of most South African discussions of consociational solutions. (e.g. **South Africa's Options**, by David Welsh and F. van Zyl Slabbert).

What I should like to try to demonstrate is the crucial importance of existing power structures, both political and economic. An example taken from an article by W.W. Sharrock, will, I hope, serve to illustrate just how important getting one's analysis and thus one's description of society right is, if reforms are to provide any chance of resolving problems and producing the kind of anti-conflict therapy which the proponents of reform presumably desire. For the shape or content of proposals for reform will depend upon the way in which the ills of society are diagnosed. Diagnosis determines therapy.

Sharrock, in his article, is wanting to show how important the concept of **ownership** is in social analysis, and how fundamental a difference it can make to the kind of analysis which is produced, or which results. He is concerned only with the ownership of **knowledge** in his article, but of course, ownership of other kinds of goods can obviously be at least as crucial. Ownership of property, particularly **property for** power, is the most crucial of all. **Property for power** is property which is productive of power relations, particularly relations of economic power.

TWO GROUPS

In the passage which is quoted from, Sharrock has been concerned with the implications of attributing a cultural feature or element to a particular group or collectivity, as he terms it, which cultural feature is adopted, or has been adopted, by another group or collectivity. What implications do such facts have for the analysis of the relations between the two groups or collectivities? Sharrock writes:

"The relationship between two collectivities, did we not ascribe ownership of cultural elements to the one, would be no more than that of resemblance in that they shared the same knowledge or beliefs; but where beliefs can be assigned to an owner, then we are able to conceive of collectivities as standing in an asymmetrical relationship. A brief discussion of Latin American politics shows what is involved here. Emmanuel de Kadt, in a discussion of political parties in Latin America, observes that

'Alan Angell . . . suggests that political parties should be seen as conglomerations of the politically ambitious from all classes, rather than as simple instruments of the oligarchy. It is an interesting viewpoint but seems to underestimate the extent to which those lower on the ladder identify with and express the interests of those higher up. (de Kadt, 1967, p. 468).'

We are here being offered two views of the social structure of political organization. On the one hand, we are offered what might be called 'pluralist democracy', the view that parties are constructed out of personnel drawn from different social classes and that the parties are not, therefore, aligned with any particular social stratum. The holding of the same beliefs by co-members of a party in such a setting represents the occurrence of a consensus which transcends lines drawn by social class membership. These same facts, that parties are made up of persons drawn from various social classes and that there is some consensus amongst party members independently of their class affiliation, alternatively can be reconstructed and transformed into a picture of political organization in which parties are entirely subordinated to social class, by the simple step of assigning ownership of beliefs to those 'higher up' the status system. The fact that those of higher and lower social status subscribe to the same beliefs is no longer conceived as simple agreement amongst persons of different social status: those "who are of lower social status can now be seen as taking their ideas from those of higher status, identifying with them and expressing their views. Without assigning ownership of a corpus (i.e. of knowledge or beliefs) to one or other collectivity we should, then, be unable to talk of people 'identifying' with collecti-

vities in which they do not have membership and we should be unable to populate the social structure with such social types as 'stooges', 'mouthpieces' and 'tools of the oligarchy' in the ways that we presently do."

ONLY ONE RIGHT

What seems to me to be important in Sharrock's analysis is that:

(a) of the two alternative descriptions of Latin American politics only one of the descriptions can be right, and that the question of which description is right is an empirical matter. For we can and do discover the kinds of relationships referred to; and

(b) that the two descriptions, the pluralist and the 'structural', are so different in their implications that it is a matter of crucial importance which of the two is adopted and that the one which is adopted be the right one.

In other words, should the pluralist description be the right one in a particular case, then obviously pluralist answers to political problems, and perhaps the consociationist answer, could well be appropriate. But should the pluralist description be a misdescription, and the 'structural' description the right one, then pluralist recipes, including the consociationist one, would be inappropriate, and could, instead of leading to a lessening of inter-group conflict, exacerbate that conflict. Of course, when I refer to **right** answers in these contexts, it must be taken relatively, for no social diagnosis can be all-inclusive or right in a 'hard-science' sense.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Pluralist solutions tend to disregard the significance of social stratification, positing as they do, the adoption of **supposedly** symmetrical political relations to be secured through formal political institutions, while ignoring the asymmetrical relations of class, status and power which characterise the society. I say **supposedly** symmetrical political relations, because insofar as pluralist schemes embody the principle of group parity and the group veto in contexts in which asymmetrical relations of class, status and power prevail, formal equality serves to maintain the existing system of stratification and conceals what are substantively asymmetrical political relations.

It is precisely because pluralists ignore or underestimate the significance of social stratification that pluralist solutions tend to be restricted to the level of formal and primarily political institutions. When we are dealing with a society such as is encountered in South Africa, a society which is characterised by the domination, political, social and economic, of a minority group over a whole population, and one in which the dominant group possesses an overwhelming preponderance of power and wealth, the attempt to apply consociational schemes of a formal political kind could hardly be more inappropriate unless accompanied by schemes to dismantle the social and economic systems of domination. Otherwise they can be seen as so many attempts to limit the scope of change, for devices such as the group veto serve to ensure that substantial dismantling of the structures of social and economic dominance and significant redistributions of wealth become well-nigh impossible. Hence such schemes may well turn out to be recipes for heightened inter-group conflict. There are thus good reasons for scepticism regarding the suitability of consociational schemes in South Africa.

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

I turn now to examine consociationism, from yet another perspective, a perspective from which the principle of constitutionalism is, **contra** the above arguments, conceded. In the past, which is to say before pluralist theories were fitted out in modern dress, and when pluralism was concerned primarily with federalism or with the recognition of the importance of interest or pressure groups within political systems, the question of democracy was addressed in a rather different way from what now seems to have become the practice, at least in South Africa.

Democratic writers were then concerned with the whole question of the representativeness of political systems, and this led to inventive individuals such as Thomas Hare, Charles L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), and C.C.G. Andrae, coming up with ingenious schemes in order either to increase the representativeness of political systems substantially, or to eliminate as far as possible those features of electoral systems which were the cause of their unrepresentativeness. They concentrated, therefore upon what came to be termed **giving the vote its value.** Hare and Andrae, independently of each other, devised the Single Transferable Vote system, and a multitude of systems and sub-systems of proportional representation (P.R.) were devised, many of which were put into practice in various parts of the world. It seems to me to be a matter of some significance that these alternative electoral system have not even been considered in South Africa.

LEAST REPRESENTATIVE

The Constitutional Committee of the President's Council, to use their own words, "formulated six conceivable choices before South Africa at the national level, which it then proceeded to discuss. They are:

(1) One man, one vote in a single (whether unitary or federal) state. (This choice is **simple majoritarianism.)**
..........''

All the other choices, apart from partition pure and simple, comprise compromises between simple majoritarianism or consociational democracy and majoritarianism. Is it not strange that only the least representative of the unitary and federal systems which do not accord specific weight to racial and ethnic groups should have been regarded as a **conceivable** choice and discussed by the Committee? Anyone with the least knowledge of electoral systems knows that the First Past the Post or simple majority, single-member constituency system, is disastrous for minorities which are thinly spread across electoral divisions.

The electoral history of the British Liberal Party over the past fifty years is a lesson in itself, and for those whose horizons do not stretch across oceans or continents, we have right at our door the example (and it is but one of many) of the Orange Free State. When the last opposition seat vanished in the Free State, between one quarter and one third at least of the electorate were opposition voters. And yet with this kind of knowledge available the Constitutional Committee saw fit to consider only the least representative of the common voters-roll systems.
The Single Transferable Vote system could be employed, for example, in such a way as to ensure that all minority

groups of more than a certain specified size are guaranteed representation, provided only that their members vote as a solidary group. Not only would such a system enable group membership to be voluntary, which at present it is not, but it would provide groups with a 'fall-back' position should their members feel threatened, while it would permit individuals either to choose their own group allegiances or abandon them for allegiances based upon straight political and ideological principles rather than racial and ethnical ones. Only constitutionalism based upon some such system of **individual** equality would be compatible with the kind of economic and social changes which are necessary conditions, albeit not sufficient conditions, of social justice and social stability.

GROUPS, NOT INDIVIDUALS

It is indeed ironical that in a context in which protection of minorities is avowedly considered to be of fundamental importance, the only type of 'one man, one vote' system in a unitary or federal state which was regarded as 'conceivable' was precisely the one which affords least protection to minority groups! But the main reason for having raised this question of the desirability of giving the vote its value, is because consociationalism **abandons** this principle except perhaps within the confines of specific groups. Groups, and not individuals, are treated as equals, all groups having veto rights, and, as has already been pointed out, if one group already dominates the economy, the effect of the group veto is to maintain this dominance, with the consequence that group equality is purely formal, substantive inequality being perpetuated.

The only case in which it is possible to give the vote its value under such a system would be in the special and unique case where the constituent groups are all of a size; and consociationalism is likely to be compatible with stability, even in this case, only where all groups comprise fairly consistent cross-sections of the class and status systems. Apart from these special cases, consociational plans are not concerned with democracy in the traditional sense, and place the notion of conflict-resolution above democratic values and procedures in the scale of priorities in what is likely to prove an abortive attempt to contain conflict. In other words, except in these special cases, consociationalism is likely to prove self-defeating.

I conclude that the path to future stability and social justice lies not in the direction of consociationalism but in change of a kind which does not divorce constitutionalism from social and political realities. At the same time this leaves unanswered the question as to whether or not or to what extent consociational schemes such as the government's plan will generate or lead to conditions under which further and more meaningful change will be brought about.

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