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## FEDERALISM AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICA

ANDRE DU TOIT

(1974 Maurice Webb Memorial Lectures), University of Natal, Durban.

Reviewed by John Wright

'Federation' is one of the words often bandied about today by white opponents of apartheid, but very little incisive discussion has taken place of its connotations in the South African political context. In this booklet Dr Andre du Toit, senior lecturer in political science at the University of Stellenbosch, seeks to widen the ambit of what debate there is on the subject by drawing attention to a number of basic issues that the protagonists of federation in South Africa will have to face if their ideas are ever to be realised in the sphere of political action. This publication reproduces the text of the two Maurice Webb Memorial Lectures which the author gave in Durban and Pietermaritzburg in September 1974, the first entitled 'The meaning and relevance of federalism in South Africa', and the second 'How can a federation of Southern Africa come about?'

As Du Toit points out, the idea of federalism in South Africa goes back at least to the governorship of Sir George Grey in the 1850's, but for reasons that he does not detail it has never entered the mainstream of local politics. His

own attitude to the concept is confessedly lukewarm: he sees federalism as essentially a compromise in a society where fundamental political change is necessary. Nevertheless a case for considering federalism as a vehicle of political change has been made by the emergence in the 1970's of what the author calls 'a kind of "federal consensus" among those political leaders and parties who are actively pursuing political change within South Africa', that is, the white opposition parties and the black homeland leaders. Of the ideas held on federalism by the black nationalist leaders we are not told.

The idea of a 'federal consensus', however, as Du Toit is at pains to point out, conceals basic differences in approaches and aims among its supporters. On the one hand, white liberals, and probably members of other minority groups as well, tend to see a federal constitution primarily as providing a means of safeguarding individual and local rights and interests against arbitrary action on the part of the central government. On the other hand, the black homeland leaders

probably see federalism as a means towards the gradual redistribution of wealth and power in South Africa. There is thus a basic divergence between the liberal stress on rigid constitutional safeguards, and black desires for extensive social reform.

But in any case the issue will remain an academic one so long as the group that holds power in South Africa, the Afrikaner nationalists, remains unenthusiastic about federalism. Though the Bantustan policy contains important federal elements, the aim of its proponents, though admittedly so far vaguely expressed, is the formation of a "Common Market" of politically independent states rather than a federation under a single government. This, the author suggests, is mainly because the leaders of Afrikanerdom see federalism as leading ultimately to the decentralisation of the existing party political system and, concomitantly, the fragmentation of Afrikaner nationalism.

Du Toit concludes his first lecture with a discussion of a number of practical points that South African federalists will need to consider if they are to update their rather antiquated notions of what federation means. On the important issue of how power should be exercised from the centre, he specifically takes issue with Leo Marquard's view that it matters little whether a parliamentary (i.e. British-type) or presidential (American-type) executive is chosen. Du Toit feels strongly that to avoid a winner-take-all situation, where one interest group comes to power and then holds on to it indefinitely, the executive and the legislature should be independent of each other as in the American system. He admits that this 'un-South African' proposal is unlikely to find much favour, but, in conjunction with the other points he makes about decentralisation of power within a federal framework, it merits serious consideration by planners of constitutional blueprints for South Africa.

In his second lecture Du Toit moves on to consider how a federal government might be established in the actual conditions of South African politics. As he sees it, the major catalyst is likely to be the spread of guerrilla warfare to South Africa's borders and the parallel growth of internal resistance movements aimed at overthrowing the white government. In the face of these threats to security, he maintains, it would be in the common interest of the central government and of the homeland governments to co-operate against them. This situation would provide the conditions for a 'federal bargain'—instead of pushing the homelands out of the central political system, as it is now doing, the Nationalist government would increasingly acquire an interest in keeping them within it, while for their

part the homelands would use their increasing strategic importance to bargain for a larger share of the land and wealth controlled by whites. The only alternative for the Nationalist government would be to form some kind of white 'garrison state' with authoritarian powers far in excess of those it holds today.

The author then proceeds to consider a number of serious obstacles to the achievement of a federal accommodation between blacks and whites. First: the conditions of crisis, which the author sees as needed to make a new accommodation necessary, might well make impossible the formation of the delicate system of checks and balances entailed in a federal system. Second: given South Africa's present winner-take-all parliamentary system, white authoritarian rule might well be replaced by a black equivalent, Third: the leaders of Afrikaner nationalism are reluctant to do anything that might weaken Afrikaner unity. He nevertheless perceives 'certain federalising tendencies' in the policies of separate development, and sees a much faster devolution of powers to the homelands as the first of the major stages by which federation could come about. The second stage would see the extension of homeland territories to include substantial 'white' areas, while the third would see the subdivision of white South Africa into a number of smaller regional units on a par with one another and with the homelands within the federation, and also perhaps the addition of the former protectorates and Rhodesia/Zimbabwe.

Given the existence of the homelands, and the Afrikaner nationalist government's determination to proceed with its apartheid policies, Dr du Toit presents a thoughtful assessment of how a southern African federation might-just-come about. The great imponderable, however, and one which he hardly touches on, is how the growth of black nationalism and working class power in South Africa might limit the room for independent manoeuvre both of the white minority government and of the homeland leaders. Admittedly it would have been difficult to compress more material into the compass of two already closely argued lectures, but it would have been useful to have learnt the author's views on how, for instance, the central and the homeland Governments might in the future respond to the rising growth in bargaining power of black urban workers—surely a necessary element in any analysis of southern Africa's future. Nevertheless he has in these lectures made a useful contribution to the debate on South Africa's political alternatives and has helped give some much-needed definition to the concept of federalism in the local context.□