

3 Multi-racial local authorities would control common areas — i.e. all commercial areas and all open residential areas (for those who chose to live outside group areas).

4 General cultural councils would provide facilities for people who did not wish to affiliate with a communal authority or make use e.g. of its educational facilities.

5 All services supplied by the federal government and local authorities in the common area would be available to all citizens.

6 Authorities in group areas, and private bodies, could impose some segregation at their own expense, if they so wished.

A BRIEF FURTHER COMMENT

by Colin Gardner

This comment is brief, not because *South Africa's Political Alternatives* is uninteresting or unimportant, but for precisely the opposite reason: the book inspires a good deal of that appreciative silence that is the proper response to an achievement which is both subtle and revelatory; and one senses that one must resist the temptation to provide one's reader with a body of secondary commentary which may get in the way of the work itself. The Report, the last and the most elaborate of the reports of the six spro-cas commissions, deserves above all to be *read* — carefully, thoughtfully, imaginatively.

To say this is not to say that the Report is necessarily wholly "right". No study which provides both a full analysis of the present complicated political situation and a series of strategies for creative future development could conceivably be infallible. I personally find most of the Commission's arguments convincing, including almost all of its criticisms of some of the central policies that were adopted by the now-disbanded Liberal Party (I was myself, like several of the signatories of the Report, an active member of that party); but at the same time I think one cannot but be grateful for Dr Edgar Brookes' minority report which sturdily reaffirms the traditional liberal viewpoint. The majority report and the minority report are at one as to the basic ethical principles which a just political system must embody: the tension between them in regard to strategy and tactics seems to me to be, at the moment at any rate, a healthy one.

One of Dr Brookes's criticisms of the Report runs like this: "I do my colleagues the justice — and it is no more than justice — to say that they have framed their report with an honest and earnest desire to make that impact which they feel traditional liberalism to have lacked. But, subconsciously as good South Africans, they have considered the impact on the white voters, and forgotten what impact their report would have on the black community and on world Christian consciousness."

These remarks pinpoint interestingly, though I think rather unfairly, one of the Report's main achievements, and its one serious shortcoming. Deliberately avoiding the eloquent denunciations which made up so large a part of the rhetoric of the old liberal opposition, the Commission has produced a document which could be

read and responded to even by many supporters of the Nationalist Government. Clearly the Commission has worked on the assumption that it is right to try to talk to the people who have power, and to offer them — since it seems possible to do so — a not dishonourable way out of their present dilemma. Perhaps no book on South Africa written by a liberal or by liberals has ever before had quite this appeal.

But of course in a country where the range of political attitudes and experiences is so wide, speaking to one group of people is apt to involve neglecting or indeed insulting another group. In fact — and this is another of its achievements — I don't think this Report would offend any reasonable person, whatever his race, or any but fanatical groups of persons. But the Report is not likely to be immediately *accepted* by most blacks, for several reasons: the fact that it suggests a way of progressing from the present hated situation is bound to be a cause of suspicion; the very complexity of its analyses and proposals is likely to be regarded by many as yet another instance of wily obfuscation; but most important of all, the Report is written and signed only by white people. For various reasons (the chief of which was I believe the understandable reluctance of many blacks to commit themselves to public declarations which might arouse a punitive mood in the Government) the spro-cas commissions consisted mainly of whites. The Political Commission had only one black member, Dr W. F. Nkomo; and he died before the Report was written. In one most unhappy respect, then, *South Africa's Political Alternatives* resembles the calamitous Anglo-Rhodesian settlement proposals . . .

This Report deserves a better fate. But it cannot hope to succeed properly unless it is widely circulated and thoroughly canvassed among influential blacks — as well as among influential whites. Indeed I suspect that circulation and canvassing will not be sufficient: the Report will have to be added to, modified, rewritten in various ways. It is perhaps a starting-point rather than a finishing-post (it is only fair to add that the Commission does not claim to have predicted or controlled the future). Still, in the deadlock, the logjam, that the country has endured for so long, a starting-point is what is needed. I believe that this Report offers us all the chance of a flying start.□