

Introduction

South Africa's experience of political systems began with the ruling houses of the independent chiefdoms that occupied the region before the colonial invasion of 1652. A slight and debased remnant of this heritage can be traced in traditional rulers of bantu-homelands imposed by the apartheid regime on reluctant national groups.

Of all the white-ruled states in the region, only the Cape had a non-racial franchise open to male subjects on equal terms. Introduced in 1853, the constitution was made in Britain with the declared aim of enabling ~~the~~ 'the intelligent and industrious man of colour to share with his fellow colonists of European descent in the privilege of voting for the representatives of the people'. For close on a 100 years the Cape franchise set a standard to which the voteless blacks of the northern provinces aspired in their struggle for liberation from white domination.

Natal, another British colony, adopted the contrary policy of excluding Africans and Indians from the franchise; an approach wholly acceptable to the trekboers who settled in the Transvaal and Orange Free State in the first half of the last century. Their notion of approved race relations was stated bluntly in Article 9 of the Transvaal constitution adopted in 1858. It declared that 'The Volk are not prepared to allow any equality of the non-white with the white inhabitants, either in Church or State'.

British imperialists defeated the republics in the war of 1899-1902 but agreed to the all-white franchise demanded by the defeated boer generals for the Transvaal and Orange River Colony. They set the pace in the all-white national convention organised to draft a constitution for a united South Africa. The draft provided for the maintenance of the existing franchise laws in each province and for safeguards against the disfranchisement on racial grounds of blacks in the Cape Province.

The British government and parliament approved the draft and passed the South Africa Act of 1909 which established the Union on 31 May 1910 with an all-white parliament that excluded black South Africans. The British washed their hands of responsibility

for their political rights and withdrew, leaving behind a racist society dominated by a minority of whites in which Afrikaners outnumbered the English-speaking in the proportion of 55:45. The stage was set for a process of conflict, manipulation and compromise that led to the coming to power in 1948 of the Nasionale party on a platform of racial apartheid.

Forty years later the same government under a different leadership has undertaken to do away with apartheid, leaving only those measures that it claims are necessary to maintain the identity of the white group and the system of 'independent' bantuhomelands. I now proceed to discuss the constitutional arrangements made to reach these objectives while at the same time ensuring white supremacy and the Nasionale party's hegemony.

The Constitution

An all-white parliament legislated itself out of existence on 31 August 1983 by passing the Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill. Although the state president gave his assent on 22 September, the bill came into operation only a year later on 3 September 1984. P.W.Botha, the NP's leader, vacated the position of prime minister, which fell away, and was unanimously elected on 5 September as South Africa's first executive state president. The electors consisted of 50 whites, 25 Coloured and 13 Indians, members of their respective chambers in a tricameral parliament, which I call 'tri-racial'.

The constitution's outstanding features are:

1. wide powers vested in the state president;
2. strict adherence to the principle of racial segregation;
3. the maintenance of white supremacy;
4. a federal-type structure;
5. exclusion of Africans, constituting a majority of the population, from parliament;
6. a widespread rejection of the constitution by black South Africans.

The Presidency

The president is both Head of State and Head of Government with the titles and functions usually attached to these offices. Outwardly he seems to fall in the same category as executive presidents in many African states and the United States of America, all of whom have wide powers vested in them. The unique feature of the South African presidency is its racist orientation. To repeat an observation made earlier, the president's unstated functions are to keep his party in power, ward off attacks from right-wing racists and ruthlessly repress the national democratic revolution.

He presides over the state security council (SSC) which conducts the counter-revolutionary offensive. According to the enabling statute the SSC's function is to advise the cabinet on security matters; in practice it supervises the whole range of the government's strategic policies including foreign relations and assaults on neighbouring states. The SSC is the primary decision-making body in the state and also the leading executive body in military operations, acting through the national security management system (NSMS).

Joint management centres (JMCs) that coordinate the activities of the defence force (SADF) and police (SAP) throughout the country, report to the SSC. A network of some 1 500 sub- and mini-JMCs operate at local level in towns and villages, meeting with municipal councillors, officials, businessmen and other members of the petty bourgeoisie to monitor the conduct of township residents and recommend to the SSC what action should be taken in the interests of national security. This 'state within the state' makes the president something of an autocrat.

Racial Segregation

Parliament consists of a white House of Assembly with 178 members, a Coloured House of Representatives with 85 members and an Indian House of Delegates with 45 members. To defeat the NP on a motion of no confidence or piece of proposed legislation the members of the two 'black' houses would have to gain the support of right-wing racists in the assembly - something that is quite inconceivable !

The principle regulating the separation of powers between the the three houses centres around a distinction between 'general affairs' and 'own affairs', the former relating to matters of concern to all national groups (~~wrongly described as 'races' in the constitution~~); the latter being of special interest to one or other national group. A multi-racial cabinet, naturally under white control, looks after 'general affairs'; a racist council of ministers in each house attends to its 'own affairs'. The state president has the final say in deciding what is 'general' and what is 'own' affair, of special concern to a particular national group.

It is impossible to avoid overlapping and a multiplicity of authorities. In education, for instance, there are 15 ministeries, including those established in the 10 bantu homelands. Multiplicity is costly but creates job opportunities for careerists; while friction between the parts is kept in check by dependence on a single treasury responsible for budgeting expenditure on general affairs and providing grants for use in 'own' affairs.

White Supremacy

B.W.Botha's 'reform' programme is primarily a response to black resistance to apartheid; and is meant to combine white control with concessions to blacks in marginal areas of the social structure. Some principles of state policy are declared to be 'non-negotiable'. These include political 'group' rights; separate residential areas for the different national groups; segregated schools; and the classification of people into 'races' which are actually national groups. Whites retain a veto over political decisions concerning the 'core' principles and apartheid continues to operate in the important strategic areas of the common society.

Appetites grow with feeding. Even marginal concessions sharpen the appetite for more and produce a climate of rising expectations. There comes a point at which reforms endanger white control. The declaration of states of emergency and rule by decree might provide temporary relief but no lasting escape from ~~the~~

the blind alley in which the regime is jammed between the irreconcilable forces of the mass democratic movement and rightwing racists.

Federation

The 1983 constitution is heavily tilted towards orthodox federalism . This bias though not stated explicitly is visible in the separation of powers between the central government and the individual houses representing whites, Coloured and Indians. A multi-racial cabinet appointed by the president administers 'general affairs, defined as matters that are not 'own affairs'. The cabinet controls the budget from which all houses obtain their funds, foreign relations, defence, security, commerce, industry, law and order and 'black', that is African affairs, the control and administration of which are vested by the constitution in the president.

The late Alan Paton, former leader of the dismantled Liberal Party, remarked that 'the seeds of a federal system' were clearly present in some of the statements made by P.W.Botha and that 'the only alternative to the federal concept is a path of revolution'. He added that 'the problem of racial fear in a unitary South African state is almost insoluble' (R.R.Survey, 1984: 145).

South Africa is still a unitary state and has been that since 1910. Prior to 1984 it was governed by an all-white cabinet responsible to an all-white parliament. What Paton, reputed to be a great liberal, had in mind was the fear among many whites of a non-racial democratic state under majority rule.

The African Exclusion

P.W.Botha, the newly elected executive president, undertook in his inaugural address on 14 September 1984 to look for ways of cooperating with the 'independent and self-governibg black states'. A special cabinet committee was appointed early in 1983 to advise on the political position of Africans living outside the homelands. It was a high-level, all white committee of seven senior cabinet ministers acting within the 'framework of National Party policy' which ruled out the prospect of adding to the tri-cameral parliament a fourth chamber for Africans

Their exclusion was a major issue in a referendum of white voters held on 2 November 1983. White businessmen, industrialists and Afrikaans academics declared their support for the constitution. Leaders of the Coloured Labour Party and the S.A. Indian Council ~~also~~ also called for a 'yes' vote, although their national groups were not allowed to take part in the referendum. The rightwing racists in the Conservative Party and white liberals in the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) rejected the constitution for opposing reasons: the conservatives because power-sharing in a racially mixed government would, they said, deprive whites of their sovereignty; the liberals because the exclusion of Africans ruled out inter-racial cooperation and entrenched apartheid.

Opposition to the constitution came also from the United Democratic Front launched in August 1983 to work for a non-racial unitary state embracing all South Africans, the Azanian People's Organisation, the National Forum and several church leaders. The heads of six bantu-homeland administrations rejected the constitution because it was based on racial divisions, gave the white minority control of 87% of the country and excluded 72 % of the population from the political process. They wanted a national convention of representatives of all national groups to work out a constitution acceptable to all. Chief Gatsha Buthelezi of Inkatha and KwaZulu campaigned against the constitution, saying that it maintained white domination, gave the president a personal stranglehold over Coloured and Indians, and pronounced a 'political death sentence against 22m black South Africans.

Of 2,7m eligible voters - all of whom were white - 76 % went to the polls. The 'yes' vote majority was 669 000, amounting to 66 % of the votes cast. P.W. Botha hailed the results as a great triumph for his policy: a clear majority of whites were in favour of national unity. The leader of the Conservative Party, Dr. Andries Treurnicht also claimed a victory. Six out of 7 'no' voters he said supported the CP.

The Regime's Response

Unable to hold down the revolutionary challenge, Botha toyed with the idea of a 'negotiated settlement' proposed by western states, represented by the Commonwealth Eminent Persons' Group (EPG) which visited South Africa in the first half of 1986. Commenting on P.W.Botha's statement that his government was not interested in bringing about a transfer of power, the Group reported that the regime's 'programme of reform does not end apartheid, but seeks to give it a less inhuman face. Its quest is power-sharing, but without surrendering overall white control' (quoted by Robert Davies, 'Power-Sharing' Apartheid-style: a Critical Analysis of the Botha Regime's Current political Strategy', Centre of African Studies, Maputo, December 1987, p.5, mime.)

Immediately after breaking off discussions with the EPG, the regime sent its troops on raids in Gaborone, Harare and Lusaka. A month later, unleashing a reign of white terror. This was a signal that Pretoria had decided to reject negotiations and instead intensify repression at home and aggression against neighbouring states.

The reign of terror involved murder, disappearances of opponents, detentions, unlicensed torture, banning and restrictions of persons and organisations, and the employment of 'vigilantes' against anti-apartheid activists. Though unable to smash the mass democratic movement, the repression has placed it on the defensive and slowed down its advance. In this process the government has changed the character of the state and its relations with the general body of citizens.

The Racist State

Its government is best described as a junta, an administrative council of civilians and military with supreme power. The emergency regulations under which it operates is the equivalent of martial law, a military government that takes the place of civil administration and does away with the Rule of Law.

The junta administers in the name of a white minority of 4,6m., which is far from being united. There are deep cleavages between Afrikaners and English-speaking

whites and among Afrikaners themselves.

The ruling Nasionale Party (NP) took office in May 1948 and is now one of the longest surviving parties in power anywhere in the world. The formula for this remarkable monopoly of power is partly demographic, partly manipulative, but its essence is the refusal of most whites to share their privileges, wealth and comfort with blacks. The basic contradiction and conflict are between the privileged, affluent white minority and the oppressed, deprived and poverty-stricken blacks. At the outbreak of the second world war South Africa had the lowest nominal unskilled wage rate among ten of the most advanced industrial countries in the west, but the second highest skilled wage rate, ranking second after Canada. The gap has narrowed in the last 50 years but the basic inequality in the distribution of wealth and power is substantially the same. The inequality is a major reason for the refusal of whites to come to terms with the demand of revolutionaries for equal rights and opportunities.

Afrikaans-speaking whites make up about 64 % of the white population. Given a high degree of national solidarity, they have no difficulty in dominating the non-Afrikaans, mainly English-speaking, white minority. Afrikaners are bonded together by three related ties - race, religion and language. A typical, acceptable Afrikaner is classified as white, belongs to a dutch reformed church, and speaks Afrikaans at home. There have always been factions among Afrikaners. The success of the NP in mobilising Afrikaners for support at the polls stems from many decades of organising efforts, the appeal of apartheid ideologies, benefits derived by members and followers from the fruits of office, and the closely-knit, inward looking and exclusive characteristics of the Afrikaner national group.

The systematic mobilisation of Afrikaners began after the formation of Union in 1910, gained momentum in the 1930s and during world war II, reaching a dramatic climax in the surprise victory of 1948 (For details see Jack and Ray Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950, Penguin, 1969, passim). A growing network of interlinking voluntary organisations revolved around Afrikaner churches.

They 'took a leading role in the process of mobilisation and thereby contributed to the legitimisation..of the concept of white Afrikaner exclusivity . The development of Afrikaner hegemony owes much to this legitimisation founded on religious beliefs' (Simon Bekker and Janis Grobbelaar, 'The white rightwing movement in South Africa: before and after the May 1987 white general election', a chapter in the forthcoming book The South African Election of 1987 - an analysis, ed. Owen-Burgess)

The Conservative Party, formed in 1982, adopted the same strategy of mobilisation employed by the NP with much success in earlier years. 'The rightwing is employing the identical mobilisatory tactics which brought the NP to power in the forties and fifties' (Ibid, p.18)

An important contributory factor is the isolation of Afrikaner youngsters during their formative years from 'outsiders', both English-speaking whites and black South Africans. Political socialisation starts, as in other societies, in childhood. In the Afrikaner community it persists into adulthood and is diminished only slightly by exposure to university life or absorption in the 'world of adults. A slight amount of 'liberalising' influences affect a fair number of Afrikaner university students but only within the limits of the typical Afrikaans culture. Parents, teachers and students belong to an identical political generation, share a similar kind of political consciousness and are equally conditioned by the manipulative control of authorities that inhibit far-reaching changes in political attitudes. (For a survey of Afrikaner student opinions see Susan Booysen, 'Change within the parameters of non-change: a panel study of the Afrikaner Student youth', Congress of Pol. Sci. Ass. of S. A., October 1987, Stellenbosch)

The National Democratic Revolution

Lenin on Revolutions

'The social revolution is not a single battle, but a period covering a series of battles over all sorts of problems of economic and democratic reform, which are consummated only by the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. It is for the sake of this final aim that we must formulate every one of our democratic demands in a consistently revolutionary way'.

Writing in 1915, Lenin was replying to an argument that 'the proletariat's revolutionary mass struggle against capitalism' should take precedence over struggle for national liberation. ('The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination', C.W., v.21: 408).

Lenin maintained that 'The proletariat cannot be victorious except through democracy, i.e. by giving full effect to democracy and by linking with each step of its struggle democratic demands formulated in the most resolute terms' (Ibid) If we apply this advice to the South African NDR within the framework of the ANC's Constitution Guidelines we are likely to specify the demands for an independent, unitary, democratic, non-racial state; a system of universal suffrage based on the principle of one person, one vote; the promotion of a single national identity coupled with facilities for free linguistic and cultural development; the eradication of inequalities produced by racial discrimination; a mixed economy with a public sector and a private sector; the right to strike and bargain collectively; equal rights for women in all spheres.

The demand for the right of oppressed nations to secede from the oppressor nation, wrote Lenin, was an integral part of the revolutionary struggle for socialism. He insisted that social democrats presented this demand as a democratic principle and to promote the struggle for socialism, and 'not because we have dreamt of splitting up the country economically, or of the ideal of small states, but on the contrary, because we want large states and closer unity and even fusion of nations....' (Ibid., p.413) .

South Africa's liberation movement wants much the same things: a single state system, closer alliances between peoples, the immediate removal of discrimination and the ultimate fusion of national groups. Unlike in pre-revolutionary Russia, however, much of the spade work has already been done in South Africa during centuries of colonial conquest, seizure of land, forced labour, urban-industrial growth, and the emergence of a cultural pluralism. There exists now a common South African society, embracing all national groups and including the peoples of the bantu-homelands. They too accept the ideal of one South Africa, one country and one nation - an ideal that can be realised as and when we have done away with racism and the racist regime. ^{The} problem facing the movement is how to bring this about.

A United Front

The indicated strategy is to build a united front of persons and groups belonging to all sections of the population and willing to work together on a limited programme of demands for social change and opposition to the racist regime. There must be, in the first place, a strong commitment to the principle of a negotiated settlement. Oliver Tambo spoke about this at some length in his address on January 8th, 1987, marking the 75th anniversary of ANC's formation. He recalled the 'many occasions when the representatives of our people' organised in the ANC had offered to talk to the racist forces; the 'long and bitter conflict' which has claimed 'too many lives already'; the 'murders and massacres' inflicted by colonial and racist rulers; and the movement's determination 'to fight on until the democratic revolution triumphs, whatever the cost to ourselves'.

I quote two paragraphs from the statement in full because they indicate clearly the movement's insistence on a peaceful settlement if possible and the faith in democratic and united South Africa.

As we mark the 75th Anniversary of our movement, we reiterate our commitment to seize any opportunity that may arise, to participate in a negotiated

resolution of the conflict in our country. This we would do in the interests of the masses of our people and those of Southern Africa as a whole, with the specific aim of creating a democratic, non-racial and united South Africa'

'The masses of our people have been inspired enormously by the ideas and the perspective of a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa. It is in the realisation of this perspective that they see the fulfilment of their deepest aspirations'.

Most people have to be convinced that the vision can become a reality. To do this is hard work, requiring persistence, tact and an ability to overcome deeply ingrained prejudices and fears. In spite of being outlawed and in exile, the leaders of the liberation movement have succeeded in laying the foundations of a united front by arranging talks, seminars, workshops and conferences with leaders of many organisations. In the recent period, during states of emergency and ^{in spite of} the dangers involved in having anything to do with the banned ANC, it has met representatives of big trade unions, mine owners, chambers of commerce and industry, both white and black; the heads of universities, student bodies, lecturers and prominent churchmen; leaders of women's organisations, youth groups and several bantu homelands. The list is impressive in terms of both quantity and quality, and unmatched by the contacts of left-wing organisations working inside South Africa.

An internal anti-apartheid movement exists in close contact with the ANC or sometimes in opposition to it, but similarly committed to a non-racial future. One of these is the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO). Formed in 1978 after the banning of black consciousness organisations, some of its members have been involved in clashes with the United Democratic Front (UDF) a close supporter of the ANC, each side blaming the other for the fighting. The internecine quarrels between the two bodies clearly violate the principle of a united front.

The leadership at home, inside South Africa, actively develops alternative government structures, encourages the formation of street committees, unofficial community and municipal councils, supports consumer boycotts of white-owned shops, the payment of rents and taxes, promotes 'stayaways' from work on June 16 and other important dates of Freedom's Calendar. Outside observers have remarked on the ANC's widespread popularity. The Commonwealth's EFG, which visited South Africa between February and May, 1986, reported that 'the open identification with the ANC through banners and songs, in funerals and in churches throughout the country, despite the risks involved, supports the widely-held belief that if an election were held today on the basis of universal suffrage, the ANC

would win it' (R.R.Survey, 1986, 1: 132)

People's War

The missing factor is an effective military presence that would reinforce the political pressures. It is acknowledged that the South African Defence Force and Police are the main obstacles on the way to success. To overcome them a revolutionary army is needed to back up the political revolt. Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation - popularly known as MK) was formed some 27 years ago, but remains only the nucleus of such an army.

Chris Hani, chief of staff and member of the ANC's national executive committee, claimed in October 1986 that the stage was set for an advance from 'armed propaganda' to a 'people's war'. He described it as the participation in the political struggle of trade unions, community councils, the youth, women and students. He saw them actively supporting MK with recruits, vital intelligence and underground work.

It is acknowledged by the military leaders now, that the armed struggle, proclaimed on 16 December 1961, is still at a fairly low stage of development. (Steve Tshwete, 'Politics and the Army'; Ronnie Kasrils, 'Politics and the Armed Struggle: the Revolutionary Army'. Papers presented at the Workshop organised by the Department of Political Education, 23-28 February, 1988, ANC, Lusaka) . The MK has been unable to take full advantage of the political upsurge over the last three years, either by deploying sufficient forces at home or arming resisters who face the enemy with sticks and stones.

People in South Africa still regard MK as an external force that will come one day to liberate them and destroy the 'Boers'. They do not think of themselves as being an integral part of the armed struggle. To mobilise them for armed resistance, the revolutionary army must prepare a suitable strategy and put it into operation, improving organisations, providing correct guidance, creating the forces and means to carry out the tasks of the struggle. In the words of

Ronnie Kasrils, 'the people have demonstrated just how ready they are to take up arms. In fact one might say that "insurrection has been knocking on the door".'