

bringing people together, opening up new perspectives, getting people to encounter new pressures and possibilities. Each opposition group would continue to do its own thing; but they would try to find ways of understanding one another and working together.

A final conference resolution — passed unanimously — included the agreement to meet again in six months time, to review progress. In the meantime participants from each of the major regions are to pursue the thrust of the Conference at their own local level.

(Reprinted with the permission of **The Natal Witness**.)

P.S. — This article was written shortly before the formation of the NDM (the National Democratic Movement).

In several centres mini-conferences, based on the Five Freedoms National Conference, will take place before long.□

Reviewed by Ralph Lawrence

## THE LEGACY OF APARTHEID

Robin Cohen, **ENDGAME IN SOUTH AFRICA?**, London, James Currey and Paris, UNESCO Press, 1986, 108 pp. Price £4.95.

Robin Cohen is a former South African now living in Coventry, where he is Director of the Centre for Ethnic Relations and Professor of Sociology at Warwick University. He completed this slim volume on the character of apartheid in late 1985 when South Africa was rediscovering the experience of living under a formally declared state of emergency. His study is one of three evidently commissioned by UNESCO. In addition to Cohen's book, we can savour the prospect of seeing the South African state subjected to Harold Wolpe's scrutiny, and the role of Pretoria's military to Abdul Minty's.

Robin Cohen limited himself to considering the demographical and geographical manifestations of apartheid. Not again, you say to yourself. How many more trees have to be felled for paper before such a well-worn topic is finally laid to rest? Well, the modest sapling necessary for Cohen's cause is a worthwhile sacrifice. He set himself a fascinating exercise. First of all, what are the defining characteristics of apartheid in South African society? What, in other words, makes apartheid apartheid? Then, secondly, if South Africa's current rulers fell from grace somehow and were replaced by a regime determined to dismantle apartheid, how successfully could this be done? Would any vestiges of apartheid survive in a post-apartheid order? And, if so, which elements would prove intractable? In attempting to respond to the second set of questions at the moment, the social scientist is forced to indulge in speculation, as Cohen acknowledges. Still, speculation, if informed and prudent, can aid our understanding of the likely turn of events in a society's course. With that in mind, let's reflect on the argument advanced by Cohen.

### A LEAP OF FAITH

We begin with a leap of faith. The scholarly weight of **Endgame in South Africa?** is founded on two telling assumptions. Reject either of them and the edifice they are upholding will collapse. The one assumption can be expressed simply: white minority rule will be replaced by black majority rule. The transformation is inevitable, but how and when it will come about are beyond our ken. It's quite an assumption, isn't it? I want to dwell on this a little, for I believe it is yet a further illustration of what I call "the rationalist fallacy", so prevalent among observers of the South African scene who would dearly love apartheid to end. The fallacy takes various forms. I cannot specify them all here; a few representative cases will have to suffice. The moral exemplar is the most frequently stated. Good will eventually triumph over evil: apartheid is inherently unjust, an affront to human dignity, an anathema to contemporary societies the world over; therefore its demise is assured. Alternatively, apartheid is viewed as irredeemably contradictory. By such reckoning, the economic imperatives and the political imperatives of apartheid are incompatible; thus apartheid contains the seeds of its own destruction. Lastly, apartheid is anomalous: a minority cannot hold out perpetually against the majority, especially when the very existence of a ruling racial elite runs counter to the trend whereby colonial governments, notably in Africa, have handed over the keys of state to their erstwhile subjects. Of course apartheid is immoral, illogical and anomalous. Yet any or all of these judgements, of themselves, cannot be regarded as infallible predictions of apartheid's fate. The fact is that South Africa's future is inevitably uncertain.

Merely taking for granted the death of apartheid shows that wishful thinking has supplanted sober analysis. This is how the unwary fall prey to the rationalist fallacy: despite his agile mind, Cohen did not elude its clutches completely.

The second basic assumption made by Cohen is intertwined with the first one. What is it? In the long term, so his reasoning goes, South African history moves in a progressive, if not always linear, direction. Apartheid will be succeeded by a better, more just, social order. The process of change is likely to be problematic, even violent. There may be regressive steps, but adversity will be overcome eventually. Here, too, it is worth noting just how bold an assumption this is; an assumption, I might add, that Cohen nowhere spells out directly, yet it clearly suffuses his entire analysis. Quite obviously, there is no absolute guarantee of apartheid yielding to a less oppressive and more accommodating, shall we say, social and political life. To repeat, hope is a poor substitute for proper analysis. If you, dear reader, for the purposes of Cohen's argument, are prepared to accept these two major assumptions he makes, then you can proceed to follow his path of thought from such a point of departure to find out where it ends. The journey is both absorbing and rewarding. I can do no more than to highlight those aspects that most engaged my attention.

#### **1975 AND 1976**

Like so many authors taking the pulse of South African society, Robin Cohen identifies the uprising by black children of Soweto in 1976 as heralding a new phase in resistance to apartheid rule. There is no turning back. The declaration of a state of emergency in mid-1985, he suggests, reveals a government rocked back on its heels, being compelled hereafter to surrender the initiative to the forces of resistance. Before, the government acted and the people responded; now the situation is reversed. Social and political change will take place according to the dictates of the majority. Commentators should take this into account in their prognoses, Cohen avers. Whilst opposition by the majority of South Africans to Nationalist governments over the years is undoubtedly significant, what of other factors at play? Has not Cohen overly narrowed his focus on the dynamics of social change in South Africa? Allow me to demonstrate, again broadly, how the focus could usefully be widened.

1975 was a crucial year. Portugal had recently shrugged off the yoke of authoritarianism with profound consequences for her colonies in Africa. Angola and Mozambique gained independence in 1975. South African armed forces invaded southern Angola in the latter half of that same year, partly at the behest of President Ford's administration, in order to forestall a MPLA victory in Luanda. Although the South African military failed in this instance, something of a precedent had become established. Pretoria has regularly launched armed offensives against neighbouring countries during the past 12 years. The sole colony in Africa, Namibia remains illegally under South African occupation; the South African Defence Force has retained an almost perpetual presence in southern Angola, lending support to Jonas Savimbi's rebel movement, UNITA. Similarly, the Mozambican government's authority has been gravely threatened by persistent acts of rebellion, largely the work of the MNR, an organisation the SADF abets. 1986 saw a successful military coup in Lesotho. If not actually toppling the government there, South Africa's

virtual blockade of the territory in the weeks leading up to the coup was a decisive contributory element. And ever since Rhodesia became Zimbabwe not a decade ago, Mr Botha's government has proved distinctly unneighbourly. From all these escapades three lasting conclusions can be extracted. First and most strikingly, the regime in Pretoria is at war against other countries in the sub-continent in an endeavour to shape the political fortunes of the region according to its own dictates. Secondly, this strategy of armed diplomacy is exacting a considerable toll on the South African economy and testing the morale of all those involved in the war effort. Thirdly, South Africa's aggressive stance towards its neighbours is, in essence, a fearful response denoting an admission of weakness. The fear? The fear of relinquishing power, signalling that the writ of apartheid is finally run.

Colonial governance's sudden demise in Angola and Mozambique left a deep scar on the South African psyche, among defenders and opponents of apartheid alike. For many black South Africans there was the revelatory experience of seeing that white minority need not be invincible. The transfer of power from Britain to the Patriotic Front at Lancaster House some four years later simply reinforced the lesson learnt. A resurgent, confident black youth took to the streets of Soweto shortly thereafter. The turbulence then spread to the townships of the Cape. Sustained acts of rebellion drove out the quiescence of the previous two decades. Furthermore, incoming governments surrounding South Africa offered sanctuary to the exiled African National Congress. Being closer to home made it logistically feasible for the ANC to build up political support and to wage bombing campaigns within South Africa. The might of black resistance was thus further fuelled.

#### **SINCE 1976**

Ever since 1976 the South African regime has been in an extraordinary bind. In addition to conducting military campaigns across its borders, the SADF has become increasingly embroiled in waging war against its own black citizenry within. Not only foreign policy but, of late, domestic policy as well has a pronounced military component. How has this come about? The reasons are twofold. The initial incursion by the SADF into Angola in 1975 brought military factors to the fore in national policy-making. Then, the SADF's champion, its longtime Minister of Defence, P. W. Botha, won the battle for the Prime Minister's office, before writing himself a new job description and so becoming State President in the Second Republic of 1984, the chief executive vested with, in practice, plenipotentiary powers. And, secondly, where Mr Botha goes, the military drifts along in his wake. As is common in government throughout the world nowadays, policies are not determined by legislative assemblies but by inner councils of the executive. In South Africa, the State Security Council, in which military personnel figure prominently, appears to have been accorded such a role. Indeed, the SSC is at the apex of an elaborately articulated nationwide network, the National Security Management System, constituting, perhaps, an alternative government and public administration working secretly beyond public purview.

Patterns of political activity have been markedly reshaped in reaction to the provisions of the South African constitution unveiled in 1983. The National Party splintered. Parliamentarians who deserted the fold gathered under the

umbrella of the new Conservative Party. The Conservatives have turned out to be not only a substantial electoral force, especially in the Transvaal, but also a countervailing power, making the government's attitude to the dismantling of racial barriers ever more circumspect. At the other end of the political spectrum, the United Democratic Front arose as a vehicle to give organised opposition to the birth of the Tricameral Parliament. Extra-parliamentary opposition has been a painful thorn in the government's flesh from that moment on. Parliament's emasculated role in attending to the affairs of state has lessened faith in that institution, prompting many citizens to transfer their efforts to the extra-parliamentary arena instead. Moreover, the trade union movement has grown rapidly in recent years since the government lifted restrictions, thus permitting black workers to be organised more or less free from direct state control. In December 1985, greater impetus and cohesion was given to the labour movement when an overarching body, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, was launched. These days COSATU is a major actor on the political scene outside parliament, often working in conjunction with the UDF to bring pressure to bear on the organs of apartheid rule.

This brief survey of noteworthy developments in contemporary South Africa would not be complete without some mention of the economy. Malaise is evident: foreign debt; divestment, disinvestment and sanctions carried out by companies abroad and trading partners; inflation, unemployment and recession at home. And add to this the crippling burden of the military's budgetary requirements. Add further the costs of drought and floods experienced in the 1980s. Hardly an edifying balance-sheet. What's most dismaying of all is the impression I have that those who are worst placed in the economy are really floundering. Who are affected most severely by the ravages of floods and drought? Where does unemployment strike hardest? Who feels increased prices of essential goods most keenly? I leave you to conclude the obvious. At the opposite end of the scale, those in sheltered employment, typically in the government service, and those who are associated with corporations that are able to impose their will on the market, barely notice any adjustment to their personal welfare caused by misfortunes in the South African economy. It should be patently clear, I trust, from the items I have just enumerated that the course of events in South Africa's immediate past is exceedingly complex. In order to chart the fate of apartheid, one would have to explore all of these so as to discern the trends and tendencies at work. And yet even after completing so exhaustive, and exhausting, an analysis, no guarantees can be attached to the conclusions reached. But to revert to Cohen's study. What are his findings?

#### **APARTHEID AND RADICAL CHANGE**

What elements of apartheid, supposing there are any, will prove most impervious to radical change in South African society? To address this issue, Cohen maintains, one has to have some idea of what a post-apartheid order will be like. Cohen hazards a guess, based on a series of assumptions, all of which he believes are eminently plausible. Violence and economic crisis will beset South Africa, causing the downfall of the present regime and, in the long-term, ushering in black majority government, although some other bargained compromise may come earlier as the initial move away from apartheid proper. The ultimate

victors will be proponents of the Freedom Charter, a political party combining many, though not all, ANC and UDF sympathisers. To give it a name, Cohen invents the United National African Party, the UNAP. On gaining hold of the reins of power, a UNAP government will pursue a foreign policy akin to Mugabe's Zimbabwe: the Eastern bloc will not be shunned, South Africa will join the Non-Aligned Movement and will seek re-entry to the Commonwealth. Trade, foreign investment and aid will all be sought on a pragmatic basis. Power will be wielded by a black bourgeoisie by virtue of the monopoly it acquires over the state apparatus. This, then, is the scenario. If it came to pass — quite an assumption, after all, for which no concerted argument is offered — would apartheid disappear overnight? No. Let's discover why.

The real strength in Cohen's book is the way he manages to reduce apartheid to its fundamental elements, each having a form of ideology associated with it. Apartheid, says Cohen, comprises four pillars. Three of these he discusses in detail, revealing how they have altered with the passage of time. Though not as fulsome as Alf Stadler's **The Political Economy of Modern South Africa**, Cohen's account is stylish, erudite and succinct. All credit to him for embarking on so ambitious an analysis, even though it fails to accomplish all that it was designed to do.

#### **FOUR PILLARS**

The first pillar of apartheid is white minority rule itself. When apartheid goes, this will go too. Presumably a universal franchise will be adopted, although Cohen omits to say so explicitly. At any rate, a unicameral legislative assembly at the national level will come into being. Conceivably, participation by whites, coloureds and Indians might be assured for a specified period. Local government will be a crucial organ of representation, allowing communities to have their urgent needs dealt with by officials with whom they would be in close contact. Cohen maintains, however, that once the novelty of participation has worn off, blacks will lose interest in government and whites will carry a disproportionate weight in relation to their numbers. It's an interesting assertion, contentious but not unreasonable, which merits extended treatment. Cohen, however, is content just to make the point.

Apartheid's second pillar is the attempt to create and to harmonise racial categories and territorial boundaries. Here apartheid will linger after the UNAP comes to power. Although the Group Areas Act will be expunged from the statute book, communities will not become transformed as an immediate consequence. The market for land and housing will impose imperatives, and areas will come to reflect their character according to class rather than race. The homelands, notionally independent or otherwise, will be problematic. Cohen seems to imagine that they might continue as distinct entities, given some autonomy but linked somehow to the central government. Shades of the princely states in colonial India?

Regulation and control of the labour supply is the third pillar of apartheid. Freedom of movement and freedom to seek employment will prevail under a UNAP government. But a system of incentives will have to be introduced to direct labour to where it is required. The agricultural sector will remain dependent on the commercial farms owned by whites. A continuing supply of labour to these enterprises will have to be guaranteed. Likewise, workers will have to

be enticed to the gold mines, for the economy could not survive without the sale of the metal on the world market.

Finally, apartheid's fourth pillar is the ability of the regime to keep social control, to restore stability whenever the need arises. In fact, any government is charged with this responsibility. Given South Africa's turbulent past and present, Cohen remarks, violence is unlikely to come to a halt as soon as apartheid is formally abolished. Truculent, unrepentant whites might resist the new order, as might conservative blacks deeply hostile to a UNAP government. Appropriate steps will have to be taken by those in power. They may have to deal, in addition, with angry, frustrated, black youths when economic rewards do not match their expectations. And how will the government of the day view squatters amassing in the urban areas in search of education, employment and similar services? Order will be a major priority for a UNAP administration; and in pursuing it liberal values may well go by the board.

The general picture Cohen paints is familiar enough: in a word, Zimbabwe. The trade is a simple one. In return for relinquishing political power to the presently disenfranchised black majority, whites will be able to retain substantial economic power and privilege. No government, unless bent on economic, hence political, suicide could contemplate replacing the captains of industry with idealistic recruits. As Cohen argues, the nightmarish comparison white South Africans frequently draw with other African countries is both misleading and unnecessary. The Republic's mineral wealth and strategic location keep her in the reckoning of the global community. In South Africa there is sufficient skilled personnel and resources to allow further industrial development. All in all a reassuring vision, except to the residents of Soutpansberg, no doubt.

In my view, there are too many unexplained assumptions in

Cohen's argument to make it thoroughly compelling and convincing. If only there had been fewer assertions and more evidence. Nevertheless, there is much to commend in his book. Above all, I enjoyed the spirit of his enterprise. It's vitally important for we South Africans to eschew wishful thinking. There is nothing more dangerous and counterproductive in politics than false expectations. The abolition of apartheid rule will not transform South Africa into heaven on earth, and it's as well to realise that. But, by the same token, infernal hell need not be visited on us either. In trying to calculate what a post-apartheid South Africa might look like, Cohen does us all a service. Debate and discussion about the future of this country can usefully be centred on a set of proposals, and these Cohen gives us.

A closing thought. Societies under siege, under threat, tend to become intensely inward-looking and parochial. Such is the situation in South Africa; it has been so for quite some time. But in order fully to comprehend our society and to gauge what lies ahead, we have to pay attention not only to the peculiarities of South Africa, but also to what is transpiring in comparable countries. Cohen mentions the post-colonial societies of South-East Asia. Over the last few years I have come to believe there is much to be gained by trying to discern the character of what I call advanced Third World societies. South Africa belongs in such a category, I suggest, together with Nigeria, India, Argentina, Brazil and, maybe, Indonesia. Whilst not embarking on quite such a voyage of discovery, Cohen does expose the reader's thoughts to such a possibility, which is indeed welcome. For this reason too, then, apart from the others I have alluded to elsewhere, **Endgame in South Africa?** is an unusually timely and relevant contribution to the understanding of our troubled society.□

### ***Among our contributors:***

**Mervyn Frost**, Professor of Political Science, University of Natal, Durban.

**Colin Gardner**, Professor of English, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

**Ralph Lawrence**, Lecturer in Political Studies, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

**G. D. L. Schreiner**, retiring Vice-Principal, University of Natal.

**David Welsh**, Professor of South African Studies, University of Cape Town.

**Michael Worsnip**, Lecturer, Federal Theological Seminary, Pietermaritzburg.