

TOWARDS CHANGE?

A review of TOWARDS AN OPEN SOCIETY IN SOUTH AFRICA: the Role of Voluntary Organisations, edited by

Hendrik W. van der Merwe, Marian Nell, Kim Weichel and Jane Reid. David Philip, Publisher

by Colin Gardner

For those hoping for and trying to work for some real change in South Africa, 1980 has been a dreadful year. In the last months of 1979 it was possible to believe (though one was aware all the time that it might be no more than a dream) that P.W. Botha's Government, pushed perhaps by military people who sometimes have a greater sense of reality than politicians who have dedicated themselves to blind prejudice, might really try to dissolve from above some of the chains that hang so heavily and so elaborately on our society. But the early months of this year revealed what seems to be the present truth, and is perhaps the final truth, of the National Party: neither wisdom nor religion nor intelligent self-interest will prevail against the rock-like fort of fearful stubbornness and mad greed.

In decrying our rulers in these terms, I don't want to imply that non-Nationalist whites are innocent victims or bystanders. Almost all whites and some blacks are implicated deeply in the social arrangements which need to be drastically overhauled: whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, we are benefiting from a socio-economic system which is unjust in almost every detail. But in October of last year – I think it must in honesty be said – a fair number of non-Nationalist whites, and even a sprinkling of Nationalists, were hoping that some changes would come about.

They didn't. Essentially nothing has altered. What now?

The ANC's response to the present state-of-affairs, as indeed to the whole situation since the early 1960's, is well known: the Pretoria regime must be weakened, then toppled by force. The ANC presence has become more noticeable, both inside and outside South Africa, in the last few years. It is clearly a power to be reckoned with.

But what options are open to those – both blacks and whites – who live in South Africa and who believe that change should be brought about if possible in a peaceful manner? Can one do anything significant?

TOWARDS AN OPEN SOCIETY IN SOUTH AFRICA: THE ROLE OF VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS is an optimistic title. The book is produced under the auspices of the Centre for Intergroup Studies and the Human Awareness Project, two organisations which believe in and are committed to the gradual transformation of attitudes and institutions. Whether one's initial mood is one of hopeful interest or merely one of gloomy scepticism, the book makes interesting and challenging reading.

Published a few months ago, it is made up largely of brief papers delivered at a workshop which was held in Cape

Town in February 1979. The papers, which describe the history, the work and the aims of various voluntary organisations, were (and are) grouped into six sections; and each section is preceded by an introduction and rounded off with a summary of the discussion that the papers aroused. The sections and the specific organisations chosen are as follows:

1. Religion (Church of the Province of S.A.; Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk; Afrikaans Calvinist Movement).
2. Cultural Organisations (Afrikaanse Skrywersgilde; Inkatha).
3. Recreation and Amenities (S.A. Council of Sport; National Professional Soccer League; Johannesburg Central Business District Association).
4. Service and Welfare (Rotary; Cape Town Child Welfare Society).
5. Development Organisations (Urban Foundation; Peninsular Youth Association).
6. Change-Promoting Organisations (Kontak; Committee of Ten; Black Sash). Amongst the speakers are Desmond Tutu, Esau Jacobs, Jan Rabie, Gibson Thula, Hassan Howa, Robin Lee, Ellen Kuzwayo and Mary Burton.

The variety of organisations and attitudes is almost bewildering, but this effect is perhaps deliberate: we are made aware of numerous groups approaching a complex common problem from many different angles. At the same time one is conscious of absences: there are all those organisations which were banned in October 1977, and the many others which were forced out of existence before that. Then, more surprisingly, there are no trade unions. The editors may have omitted trade unions because an earlier workshop, co-sponsored by the Centre for Intergroup Studies, dealt with organised labour and produced, in 1974, a 250-page book entitled LABOUR PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH AFRICA (David Philip). The fact remains, however, that a good deal has happened in this field since 1974, and an important area of voluntary activity has been neglected.

Each of the organisations represented in the book puts forward its strategies, its problems and its hopes. The discussion-summaries which conclude each section are especially illuminating. Here the reader confronts some of the central difficulties and tensions which run through all the South African organisations which are hoping to promote change: Should blacks at the moment work only in black groups or should they participate also in non-racial ventures or projects? Which is the more effective approach – gradualism or confrontationalism? Are almost all organisations hamstrung by the fact that they are working "within the system"? What constitutes really meaningful change?

Clearly all those issues must be important to anyone who plans to continue to try to work for change. Besides, in

regarding South African society as something that is fluid and constantly capable of modification (despite the views of those who dictate policy), the book throws down a gauntlet to those who believe (as many people now do) that ultimate confrontation and some form of social chaos are inevitable.

The concluding discussion-summary seems to express the views not only of the participants in the workshop but of the editors of the book too. The last two paragraphs are worth quoting:

It was generally agreed that both approaches (the "hardline" and the pragmatic) had value. Organisations adopting one type of strategy should not necessarily condemn those adopting another strategy, but rather realise that both together could provide a multi-dimensional approach to change. The "pragmatists" often opened a door through which the "hardliners" could jump, which in turn enabled the pragmatists to walk faster. Each balanced the other, and the competition between the two could be beneficial in the long run. An open society involves tolerance of all groups and organisations.

In conclusion, certain suggestions emerged which could increase the effectiveness of all change-promoting organisations.

1. Organisations must be sure about what they want to achieve but also flexible as circumstances change (as in the case of the Black Sash).
2. They must recognise the limitations of their particular position in society and of the general South African situation.
3. "Mixed" membership is not necessary as an end in itself.
4. White groups must, in Ms Kuzwayo's words, "look with-in themselves" and examine their own behaviour and the whole political and economic situation in South Africa.
5. Organisations must soldier on even if objective results are limited: they must not be judged by visible results.
6. They must recognise that diversity is desirable in a plural society and that different strategies are appropriate for different organisations.
7. The worst failure is the failure to act at all. □

ARMY PROPAGANDA "TOTAL STRATEGY" STYLE

by John Passmore

The phrase "winning the minds and hearts of the people" achieved a considerable measure of fame and/or notoriety during the Vietnam War. It signified a massive and costly attempt on the part of the American invaders to shut off the avenues of mutual co-operation which existed between village communities and Ho Chi Min's guerilla forces.

The 'hearts and minds' policy involved the setting up of communal health centres, education camps, food centres and information networks. In this way, General Westmoreland and the Pentagon top brass hoped to gain the support of the Vietnamese community or, at least, to neutralize that community as regards the war against the Vietcong.

The 'hearts and minds' policy never really got off the ground, but it's failure seems to have had little impact on the strategies pursued by the South African Defence Force.

The South African 'hearts and minds' policy is, like its American predecessor, the product of the military. As such, it forms an integral part of the overall "Total Strategy" policy the Botha/Magnus Malan/Big Business axis is trying so hard to incorporate. A disturbing off-shoot of the 'hearts and minds' policy is "The Warrior", an eight page monthly magazine put out by the S.A.D.F.'s "Command Information" centre in Pretoria.

"The Warrior" is a clear example of the symbiotic relationship that exists between the Botha administrative hierarchy and the S.A.D.F. The ostensible aim of "The Warrior" is to attract an increasing number of blacks into the S.A.D.F.' ranks. However, it goes much further than that. Most of the articles in the magazine give "details" which "indicate" how disastrous it would be FOR BLACKS if majority rule came into being. Here are some extracts from the editorial column:—

"The constant call that life for our blacks in this country is miserable should be carefully weighed against the facts and figures available for living standards for Blacks in the R.S.A."

"Many photo's and figures can be produced as evidence of even poorer whites in the R.S.A."

"It is high time this disease in our society of demands and then throwing childish tantrums if these demands are not met should stop." (Article written at the height of the school boycotts.)

"Start appreciating what you've got, then you will certainly get more."

The front page of "The Warrior" is devoted to a lengthy article entitled "Uhuru : But what then?". The article