

# SOUTH AFRICA INTERNATIONAL



**VOLUME FIFTEEN**

**NUMBER ONE**

**JULY 1984**

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY THE SOUTH AFRICA FOUNDATION



## BONN AND PRETORIA: SOME GERMAN PROPOSALS FOR A MORE CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP

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THE OBSERVER of the South African scene in recent years will often have found himself wondering what concept, if any, underlay West German policy in the region. Except for Namibia, there does not seem to have been a concept at all, and even in the case of the former German colony, what passed as a policy was more the result of West Germany's association with the contact group than a product of its own planning. The results anyway are a failure – if the purpose of the exercise was to bring about independence for the Territory.

To retain its credibility, a liberal democracy like West Germany must uphold abroad the same human rights and fundamental freedoms as it does at home. Such consistency alone does not constitute a policy; nor does it necessarily make it constructive. For its policy to qualify under this heading – and thereby have any chance of success – the democracy must analyse with great care and take into account the interests of both sides. This is easier said than done, especially in so complex a situation as that in southern Africa.

In the Republic of South Africa, the whites have the reins of power firmly in their grasp – much more so, in fact, than their critics in the West are prepared to concede. They are not willing to relinquish their hold, nor allow themselves simply to be thrust aside. White South Africa regards itself as an integral, nay indispensable, part of the West – politically as well as militarily, strategically no less than economically. It sees itself as a bastion against communist expansionism. Indeed, so convinced is it of its indispensability to the West, that it tends to overestimate its bargaining position, and to see all its cards as trumps.

White South Africa is determined to survive – not merely physically, but culturally, politically and economically. No amount of argument or coercion will succeed in making it abdicate power in favour of the blacks. To almost all whites, in fact, the call for “one man, one vote” is a call for capitulation. Its introduction would be resisted even by those enlightened or progressive elements otherwise open to changes and reform of all kinds. Any government in Pretoria in which whites had the final say would demand of the West – and thus also of the Federal Republic of Germany – that this fundamental position be respected. It would expect not to be

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confronted with maximal demands, the origins and purpose of which are frequently nothing more than a desire to curry favour with black Africa. Nobody would any longer expect the policy of apartheid or "separate development" (as the system of racial segregation is now officially known) to be condoned by the West; but all still expect the fundamental needs of the whites to be recognised and respected, and all look for fair play. There is no understanding in South Africa for a situation in which the violation of human rights in the Republic can be criticised but their contravention elsewhere, especially in Africa, is simply ignored.

A pragmatic approach will have to bear these factors in mind – not merely with an eye to the exposed position of the whites who have no motherland in Europe to which they can return, but also with regard to their iron resolve to assert their claim to survival – if need be alone and at the price of a bloodbath.

The black inhabitants of South Africa – the majority of the population, in other words – have altogether different expectations of the West. However divided black politics may otherwise be, there is absolute accord when it comes to demanding unconditional support for the removal of racial discrimination and the transfer of power to the black majority. Beyond such unanimity, however, there is virtually no common ground between the various bitterly opposed factions and parties in the black camp. Whereas the radical, largely left-wing, elements – such as the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) – demand wide-ranging economic sanctions against South Africa and massive moral and material support for the armed struggle against Pretoria, and declare themselves satisfied with nothing less than "one man, one vote" in a unitary state, preferably at once, the more moderate forces – such as the Inkatha movement of Chief Gatsha Buthelezi – regard such a course as unrealistic. A transfer of power to the black majority, the latter have come to recognise, cannot be achieved by violence within the foreseeable future. If there were a victor at all at the end of such a struggle, he would inherit a ruined and devastated land. Such a price is too high – quite apart from the conviction that the use of force is morally wrong. Inkatha is consequently committed to peaceful change through contact and persuasion, but does not exclude economic dislocation as a weapon, and sees in industrial strikes and consumer boycotts a legitimate means of applying pressure. Thus far, however, such methods have hardly been applied.

Inkatha does not look to outsiders to solve the problems of the blacks for them, but it does expect of them that they support the process of peaceful change by all available means – if necessary, even by putting Pretoria under constructive pressure. Chief Buthelezi is quite clear in his own mind that there can be no progress, let alone a solution, if both sides persist in making maximal demands. His concern is thus to find compromise formulae that will prove acceptable to both sides. Such efforts can meet with success only if Pretoria is likewise willing to search for common ground through consultation and negotiation. Here, too, a constructive role is expected of the West.

Any search for a solution to the problems of South Africa must proceed from the basic premise that there will be no future for anyone unless both whites and blacks

are accommodated. Though important in other ways, the coloureds and Indians play a subordinate role in this equation. It is accordingly as morally indefensible as it is politically perverse to back only one or other of the two major population groups.

The complexity of this situation, with its competing calls on the sympathy and self-interest of the observer, make it difficult to find the right approach to the problem. On the one hand, if we wish to retain any vestige of our credibility as a democracy, we must work for the achievement of human rights, and thereby also for the elimination of racial discrimination. Any departure from this standpoint or wavering about this objective would incur the loss of all moral and political legitimation. Even without such considerations, however, political self-interest alone demands the adoption of an emancipatory posture. The susceptibilities of blacks everywhere are thereby soothed and their demands fulfilled – not only in South Africa itself, but also in the rest of Africa and in the Third World. With an eye to greater prestige and popularity with the latter, there is even much to be said for adopting the standpoint of the ANC and other radicals, and embarking upon a course of total confrontation with South Africa. Apart from benefits elsewhere, such a posture would be certain to earn applause in black Africa and the Magreb. If it is furthermore assumed that the future of South Africa anyway belongs to the black majority, the adoption of such a posture offers the best prospects of good relations with the new masters following their take-over of power.

On the other hand, South Africa is an important trading partner. It is rich in minerals of all kinds, some of which are vitally important to the West, especially to its armaments industry. It lies at the southernmost tip of Africa, and thereby commands the crossroads of several major sea routes. To help bring to power a government that would lean towards the East cannot be in the interests of the West. It is thus perfectly legitimate to hold the view that, for the foreseeable future at least, political self-interest alone demands that the present South African government remain in power.

It is perfectly clear that it is not possible to do justice to all these competing claims and simultaneously to satisfy everybody. Nonetheless, the Federal Republic must find a course that it can steer with clarity and consistency. Only by doing so will it succeed in regaining the confidence and respect of others and creating the conditions for being heard at all, let alone being taken seriously again. For too long we have taken sides in no uncertain manner, but have not allowed deeds to speak louder than words. Too often we indulged ourselves in sanctimonious sermonising, and have had at the ready facile answers to all the complex problems of the country. Such conduct on our part did nobody a good turn, least of all ourselves.

In the long run, the Federal Republic of Germany has gained nothing by putting South Africa in the stocks in order to curry favour with the Organisation of African Unity. Words without deeds in such cases are meaningless, and strong words without commensurate deeds are doubly so. Trade and investment continued to flourish without let or hindrance – even export credit guarantees remained available. The blacks of South Africa, but also those elsewhere in Africa, soon came to the conclusion that the rhetoric was nothing but an empty gesture, and that, in reality, the regime in Pretoria was being bolstered by Bonn. Pretoria, for its part, took

offence at the one-sided criticism, but otherwise discounted it completely, since hardly anything ever happened to give effect to it.

The result was a loss of both credibility and influence in the region. This situation still prevails, even though in recent times a more reflective note can be heard emanating from Bonn. A clear and coherent approach, however, has yet to be found.

The prerequisite for playing a constructive role once more in South Africa and Namibia is the recovery of our credibility. Only then can we hope to be effective. This means that we must stop applying double standards, and cease knowing everything better from afar; it means, above all, that we should articulate and pursue our own interests, while not overlooking those of others.

It is not acceptable to heap South Africa with criticism for practising racial discrimination and violating human rights, while ignoring similar transgressions in Zaire, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Paraguay, Pakistan, Vietnam and the Soviet Union – to mention but a few examples – simply because such strictures are not politically opportune. It is also not acceptable to play down the economic ties with South Africa, as if they were something to be ashamed of, while simultaneously propagating trade links with the Soviet Union as a means of underpinning peaceful coexistence and modifying the existing order through new ideas and influences.

No attempt should be made to defend or palliate apartheid. It is simply not acceptable, and doubts on this score should not be allowed to arise. Nonetheless, criticism of it must be reasonable and fair, and give no cause for reproach on grounds of opportunism. What is found wanting in one country cannot be overlooked in another.

The impression must also be avoided that we are seeking to solve South Africa's problems for it, and thereby to interfere in its domestic affairs. European and American models have their good points, but are often not applicable to other countries and continents. We can and should make suggestions and introduce ideas, but we should take care not to supply ready-made solutions. They seldom fit the bill, and anyway need to be worked out and accepted by South Africans themselves.

In Africa – and certainly not there alone – it does not pay to echo slavishly the sentiments of others, or proclaim as one's own conviction what they most wish to hear at that moment. Governments and politicians in Africa, as elsewhere, have their own interests uppermost in mind, and they instinctively distrust those who claim to behave otherwise. A candid admission of self-interest and its vigorous pursuit in practice are more likely to earn respect than duplicity about motives and hedging between opposing sides. Noisy denunciations of such politics should not be given undue weight. Having succeeded in putting western democracies and donor countries under pressure in the past by such easy and inexpensive methods, African governments are understandably reluctant to dispense with them.

The West, and that includes the Federal Republic of Germany, cannot do otherwise than have an interest in the removal of apartheid and racial discrimination in South Africa, and their replacement by a fairer division of rights and duties among the people of the country. At the same time, there can be no interest in a loss of political and economic stability, a decrease of trade and investment opportunities, and an encroachment by unfriendly powers upon the Cape sea route. Quite apart

from moral considerations, therefore, our policy must aim to prevent armed conflict in or around South Africa, since violence on a scale greater than already exists would not only threaten political and economic stability but also very probably endanger world peace.

A reduction in the level of violence or the prevention of its further escalation will succeed only if Pretoria can be persuaded to abandon its policy of separate development, and if the radical elements, such as the ANC, can be dissuaded from achieving this goal by force. This process is certain to be protracted, and the possibilities open to us are very limited in scope. We can hardly hope to win over one or the other side to our standpoint, but nothing must be allowed to happen that could be misconstrued by others as political recognition of separate development or tacit approval of violent liberation advocated by the ANC and others.

Even though our means are limited, there is more to them than a list of things to avoid doing. We are free to introduce new ideas and propose alternative remedies; we are even free to support them. The Federal Republic of Germany has always maintained aloud that it rejects both the system of apartheid and the use of force to overthrow it. This has not prevented it from lending moral and material support to the ANC at times, while ignoring those movements like Inkatha that work for peaceful change. The situation has tended to improve somewhat recently, but Chief Buthelezi is still treated with a mixture of caution and reserve.

This is not only incomprehensible; it is also inconsistent. If we claim to be in favour of peaceful change in South Africa, it makes no sense to withhold support from movements that are themselves committed to such a course. In the interests of all concerned, not least our own credibility, we should not depart from this position – neither to soothe the susceptibilities of Pretoria nor to pander to the sentiments of the ANC and the more radical members of the OAU. Instead, dialogue should consistently be sought with both sides, and no effort spared to reduce tension and eliminate violence. Such a policy can be successful, however, only if it is pursued unwaveringly.

It would be wrong to claim that Inkatha holds the key to the problems of South Africa, and that it is the only horse in the race worth backing. Inkatha is, like the ANC, an important liberation movement, but no more than that. Nonetheless, political recognition and support for its efforts to bring about change through non-violent means can only strengthen its position. This would have the merit in due course of prompting Pretoria to enter into dialogue with it, and thereby further enhancing its prestige, broadening its popular base, and improving its chances of success.

We cannot determine the future course of events in South Africa, but we can influence them. Whatever the future may hold for this country, we will at least have strengthened those who are committed to peaceful change through dialogue and discussion, and by such means arrive at a solution that is fair and just and acceptable to all. Opinions may differ on the prospects of success for such a policy, but if we wish to play a constructive role within the limits of our capabilities, we have no choice but to support such parties and movements. Self-interest alone demands that we play a role – and do so in this way.



The situation in Namibia is quite different – not only in terms of international law, but also with regard to the size of the population. A mere million people live in the Territory, of whom only one-tenth are white. Things have also gone much further than in South Africa, and opportunities of finding an accommodation have been wasted, irretrievably so. The time has come to face such unpalatable realities.

Nevertheless, the same fundamental considerations outlined above also apply to a constructive policy in Namibia. The problems of this country are too interwoven with the realities in South Africa for a clear dividing line to be drawn. Here, too, our credibility has been badly shaken, and the prerequisite for any kind of constructive engagement is its full restoration.

In Namibia, too, the actions of the Federal Government in cultivating the friendship of SWAPO by means of recognition and aid have tended to enhance its prestige, and have done so, needless to say, at the expense of other moderate forces. Once again, the impression was created that this was being done to curry favour with the OAU, which had earlier recognised SWAPO as the “sole legitimate representative” of the people of Namibia. Whatever else it may be, this it never was. It is neither the “sole representative” of the Namibian people, nor is it even legitimate. What it can claim to be is an important political force in the Territory. Thanks to the bungling of recent years in Windhoek and Pretoria, it can even claim to be the most important single factor; but the “sole authentic voice” and “legitimate representative” of the people of Namibia it certainly is not.

If free and fair elections were to be held in Namibia today, SWAPO would almost certainly emerge as the absolute victor. Every further delay, moreover, only adds to the size of its majority. This was no inevitable development. Even as late as 1978, the moderate political forces grouped together in the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) still had a chance of beating SWAPO in an open contest. Today, they no longer represent a serious contender for power. More and more, SWAPO is perceived as the only real opponent of South Africa. As such, it draws growing support even from those who cannot identify themselves with its socialist aims.

At the latest by 1979, the chance of beating SWAPO in free and fair elections had been irretrievably lost. South Africa had been unable to decide whether to risk independence for Namibia on the basis of internationally supervised elections. It hoped to gain time in order to weaken SWAPO and strengthen its opponents. Time was indeed gained, and SWAPO was even weakened militarily; but politically, the reverse of what had been expected actually occurred. SWAPO is stronger than ever, and its opponents weaker than before.

The West, too, must bear part of the blame for this development. Its efforts, as exemplified by the work of the contact group, were not exactly calculated to encourage South Africa to take risks in the direction of Namibian independence. The manner in which SWAPO was courted and feted was a negative example of such efforts; worse still was the parallel drawn between Namibia and South Africa, and the indication that whatever solution was found for the former would later serve the international community as a model for the latter. Suspicion and mistrust were the inevitable result in Pretoria. The similarities between SWAPO and the ANC were admittedly great; but there the comparison between Namibia and South Africa

ended. Decolonisation might be required in a former mandate territory like South West Africa; but it had no place in a sovereign multi-national state like South Africa.

The clock cannot be turned back, nor can history be undone. A solution for Namibia must be found within the framework of conditions now pertaining. It cannot be expected of Namibians that they endure the *status quo* much longer. Faced with continued domination by South Africa in the present and every kind of uncertainty in the future, it is not surprising that people are anxious and insecure, and that initiative everywhere is at a discount. This is especially serious in the economic sphere.

There is some evidence that South Africa would like to be rid of Namibia. It has become too great an economic and especially a political burden. Nonetheless, there are domestic political repercussions to be borne in mind, and Pretoria can and will agree only to a settlement package that allows it to save face.

Given such a background, a constructive policy for Namibia must seek to bring about free elections, and thereby independence, at the earliest opportunity. To achieve that end, mistrust and suspicion in Pretoria have to be removed. If it were made clear that the essential differences between Namibia and South Africa were recognised, and that the manner in which the problems of the former were settled would not be regarded as a model for the latter and actually foisted upon it, much would have been achieved. The manner in which the moderate and democratic forces in the Territory have sometimes been shunned and generally neglected must also cease.

The demand for a withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola prior to a Namibian settlement presents special problems, and stands in the way of further progress. This demand is today made in all seriousness only by the United States and South Africa. For SWAPO, and especially for Angola, it is unacceptable. The MPLA regime in Luanda would have little chance against the forces of UNITA, if it were not for the backing of the Cubans. The USA has meanwhile adopted so strong a stand on this demand that it will not be possible for it simply to drop the issue. A constructive policy by the Federal Republic should thus seek ways so to modify the demand that it becomes acceptable to both sides.

A policy of this sort could contribute substantially to resolving the Namibia Question. We must, however, be clear in our own minds that such an approach is almost certain to bring SWAPO to power in the Territory. Yet another African state would thereby move into the Soviet orbit. This cannot be to our liking, and yet we will have to accept it, since more is at stake than such short-term gains or losses. Our very credibility as a democracy is at issue. We cannot afford to be associated with the efforts of those who are standing in the way of independence for a country whose inhabitants overwhelmingly desire it, and yet simultaneously proclaim our belief in democracy, human rights and self-determination.

In any event, we should do whatever we can to assist Namibia economically, and do so without delay. Such aid should be designed to help create the conditions for a smooth transition to independence, both political and economic. It should also be used to strengthen the moderate and democratic forces in the Territory, since it is



not beyond the realm of possibility that SWAPO will lose ground in the post-independence period and no longer be as strong as it is today. In such circumstances, it could be beaten at the polling-booth – provided, of course, that adequate safeguards have been taken to ensure the holding of future elections.

The complexity of the situation and the multiplicity of conflicting interests in the region do not make it easy to formulate and implement a constructive policy. Criticism, by contrast, is cheap. Nonetheless, one should not fall prey to the temptation of taking the line of least resistance, and of running with the hares and hunting with the hounds. In the long run, such an approach does not pay. A policy that is clear in its objectives and consistently applied, even if it is later found to have been wrong in some respects, is usually better than none at all.