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GERMAN ATTITUDES TO SOUTH AFRICA

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IN considering German attitudes to South Africa two main factors must immediately be taken into account: firstly Germany's colonial involvement in Africa was a very short-lived one. Consequently there are few inherited political and economic ties, let alone military links with the African continent: nothing, in short, which bears comparison with the veritable web of connections linking the former metropolitan powers (Britain, France and even Belgium) to their erstwhile dependencies. And secondly Germany is today divided into two states whose opposing ideological systems bring them into intense rivalry in black Africa no less than elsewhere. It cannot surprise anyone, therefore, that their official and unofficial attitudes to the Republic differ fundamentally.

The paucity of traditional links is the main reason why the number of Germans interested in African affairs is fairly limited. In both German states, needless to say for very different reasons, what attention there is, focuses largely on the Republic. No other state in Africa attracts anything like the same degree of notice. In neither state, however, do all South African problems assume the importance these do in Britain. *Apartheid* is not a dominant topic in either state, not even at national students' conferences or trade union gatherings. Other than in Britain the number of South African political exiles is very small.

The language barrier also does much to explain why the average German knows far less about the Republic and especially her racial policies than his British counterpart. On the other hand there are quite a lot of people of an older generation who remember with gratitude and appreciation the fact that South Africa was the first country after World War II to restore to former enemy aliens the assets and property confiscated from them and to do so in full. They also remember the very generous food parcels to defeated and war shattered Germany, and the scheme for the adoption of war orphans.

West German politicians very rarely express themselves critically on South Africa's racial policies. And if it happens, this is done very tactfully. The Federal Chancellor and Nobel Prize-winner Willy Brandt, for instance, on the eleventh anniversary of the Sharpeville and Langa incidents only said that his government does not countenance any form of racial discrimination¹. This reserve should not be misunderstood. It is by no means approval of *apartheid*. It is merely an outcome of the practice adopted by most West German politicians that after the moral and political catastrophe of the Third Reich it cannot be the function of a West German politician to criticise other nations' political systems. As far as the opposition in Parliament is concerned, some members actually praise *apartheid* explicitly².

As far as unofficial statements are concerned the West German attitude to *apartheid* is many-sided. Those business circles with economic interests in the Republic generally emphasise that politics and business should not be mixed. It is significant in this context that most of the major West German firms have business connections with the Republic, and many of them are active members of the German South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Their influence should not be underestimated. Generally they refrain from all comment on *apartheid*³, concentrating instead completely on the opportunities of economic co-operation. Needless to say, for this non-committal attitude they are sharply attacked by the radical left⁴, which incidentally is unrepresented in Parliament. Its adherents argue that by this collaboration West German capitalists 'participate in the exploitation of the black South Africans'.

It seems to be characteristic of the thinking of these radical elements that they do not analyse the unique difficulties arising from South Africa's multiracial composition. The fact that in this part of the world economically speaking two millenia meet is simply glossed over. Conservative authors, in many cases, make the same mistake; they praise the South African system without ever seeking to refute its critics.⁵ It seems to be typical of the writing of these two opposing camps that this is based on emotions only—the epitome of '*un dialogue des sourds*'.

More serious commentators usually distinguish between *groot* and *klein apartheid*. The former as an idea is not rejected out of hand.⁶ Events in recent years, particularly in black Africa but also in the United States, have led people to reconsider more soberly their optimism of a decade or two ago. Integration no longer appears the universal panacea; but what such people still require is proof that *apartheid* as a territorial separation is practically feasible and can lead to a situation where domination and discrimination on grounds of race can be eliminated. If this proof can be provided there will be little difficulty in gaining the approval and support of such people. However, what observers still see after 24 years of National Party rule is pre-eminently what has come to be known as *klein apartheid*.

It may be that many features of everyday life in South Africa are so deeply-rooted in history that they no longer strike most White inhabitants as strange or even reprehensible; but to the European observer they come as a blow in the face. As the colonial period and its mentality recede in time, such practices become more, not less shocking. Even so balanced and conservative a thinker as Wilhelm Röpke, who indeed showed a maximum of understanding for the White man's very complicated situation in southern Africa and who had a very deep sympathy for the Republic and her achievements, spoke with distress of 'the often humiliating, narrow-minded and embittering discrimination of the Blacks in the White areas'.⁷ This remark could have included the Coloured and Indian communities.

This is an impression nearly every foreign visitor will take with him after having been to the Republic; and often it will be the overriding one. It is scenes like the Black and White sections of the Johannesburg railway station at peak travelling time, the disparity in size between the White and the non-White sections of the major offices, the segregated entrances to the Johannesburg zoo, the bureaucratic redtape involved in non-Whites' travelling from one urban area to another, the sight of black South Africans taking their lunch at the kerbside for lack of adequate eating-facilities for Blacks in the White cities, and the fact that a black doctor earns a fraction of his white counterpart's earnings with

the same qualifications, which strike even the well-disposed visitor as grotesque.

There are many West Germans who share the *verligtes*' hope very sincerely that Hastings Banda's recent state visit to the Republic will help to overcome at least some of the most humiliating aspects of petty *apartheid*.

Some people would be prepared to accept these practices as necessary evils in a transitional period; but to do this they require that territorial separation can be implemented and that the authorities and the electorate are serious in wishing to bring about a new dispensation. The fact that no Bantustan outside South West Africa consists of a geographically consolidated area impresses the West German observer adversely. And when official publications like *Journal Südafrika*⁸ seek to justify this state of affairs by claiming that a nation does not need to exist in a geographically consolidated area by citing the US and the UK as successful examples of segmented states, this adverse impression gives way to downright distrust. In this context it is interesting to note that the two best informed and most influential German speaking dailies, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and the great Swiss paper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, have been emphasising recently the increasingly important role being played by black South Africans like Kaiser Mantanzima and the hitherto less well-known Huddy Ntsanwise and Gatsha Buthelezi.⁹ Particularly the latter is seen to be the standard-bearer of a new black South African *élite*. The demands of these politicians for more land and consolidation of the Bantu-Homelands evoke much sympathy among West Germans. On the other hand it seems to be almost completely unknown that there are *verligte* white South Africans who support these demands and indeed find many aspects of petty *apartheid* as distressing and unacceptable as the overseas visitor. Their efforts to change the situation are little known and rarely reported in Germany.

The pace of economic development in the Bantustans is another decisive factor in determining the attitude of serious-minded West Germans.¹⁰ It is appreciated that there are many South Africans who gave a great deal of time and effort to the solution of this

problem, but the question almost invariably posed is what, in practice, has been done to implement the recommendations of the Tomlinson Commission. No reasonable person with any experience of the economic problems of black Africa will expect the Bantu-Homelands to be like the White areas in economic structure within a few decades. No less than elsewhere in Africa it will take much time to overcome the existing, often incredible, economic backwardness. This will need many generations; but people in this country who try to understand South Africa's unique problems continue to argue that these obstacles to the industrialization of the Bantu-Homelands are no excuse for failing to accelerate the construction of industries in these territories as is done nowadays in nearly all independent black states. The separation of hundreds of thousands of black families, a favourite subject of criticism for South Africa's opponents (and not an undeserved one) seems to be mainly the consequence of the existing drastic gap between the economic development of the country's White and Black areas.

A special element in contemporary German attitudes is the role of the churches. The issue which brought things to a head in this connection was the anti-racism programme of the World Council of Churches. The only church to give heed to the call for financial support was the Evangelische Landeskirche Hessen-Nassau with a grant of DM 200 000: an example which provoked a storm of controversy in German church circles and was not followed by any other body. The Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, the umbrella organization of all Protestant churches in the Federal Republic, in a resolution dated February 21st 1971 made clear its position to the WCC initiative.¹¹ It welcomed the interpretation of the WCC's Central Committee at a meeting in Addis Ababa that all sanctioning of violence by the church is not allowed, but that the fundamental question of the use of force in areas of social upheaval requires thorough and comprehensive ecumenical investigation. It also accepted that the Church could co-operate with political groupings, but should not become wholly identified with them and their aims. Finally it insisted that organizations receiving financial aid should submit proper plans for the use to which such funds were to be put. This

resolution represented to many observers a considerable watering-down of the WCC's original programme. The Lutheran member churches, for their part, decided to have no part of the anti-racism programme, but donated instead DM 1 000 000 to the Christian Institute in Johannesburg as a sign of their commitment to a policy of conciliation and communication. The Roman Catholic Church as a non-member of the WCC has not officially taken up a position on the programme.

The East German attitude—a very uniform one—to South Africa differs sharply from the more diverse situation in West Germany. East German ministers and other state functionaries frequently comment on South Africa's racial policies. Otto Winzer, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, for instance, said in a telegram addressed to his African colleagues and the Secretary-General of the United Nations that, 'in line with her fundamental attitude to the peoples' fight against colonialism and neo-colonialism . . . East Germany will continue to support with all her energy the legitimate fight of South-West Africa's National Liberation Movement'.¹² On countless occasions other East German officials have made similar statements.

As far as the author is informed, it is typical of East German publications on the Republic, the Portuguese dependencies and Rhodesia, 'the unholy trinity'¹³, that they never pay the slightest attention to the unique problems of these areas. In the case of South Africa, for example, it is the underlying premise of all articles that this country must be governed (most probably from tomorrow on) on a one-man-one-vote basis. The innumerable difficulties that would accompany and follow upon such a development are simply ignored. On the other hand, these publications will never miss any opportunity to call Mr. Vorster 'an advocate of fascist racial mania', 'whose ideological idol is Adolf Hitler'.¹⁴ The Bantustans are said to be giant concentration camps. Gatsha Buthelezi is described as the white man's stooge.¹⁵ The life of the non-Whites in South Africa is compared with that of the non-Aryans in National-Socialist Germany. The Immorality Act for example is compared with those parts of the Nuremberg Laws which made sexual intercourse between Aryans and Jews a crime.¹⁶

The ultimate aim of these polemics is not merely to damage South Africa's position in the world. Its main aim is pre-eminently to weaken West Germany's political and economic position in black Africa.

Until recently East Germany had relatively few economic and nearly no political ties with the black African states. This was largely a result of West Germany's attempts to hinder the recognition of East Germany by the black states as a second German state. In order to overcome this isolation the East German mass media always very skilfully exploited the much-publicised confrontation between Black and White in Africa as well as the Federal Republic's manifold ties with South Africa.

There can be no doubt that East Berlin's comments on 'the axis Bonn-Pretoria', 'the West German-South African partnership in crime, which resulted in close economic co-operation and a secret agreement on the military and nuclear fields and the production of poison gas in joint laboratories', the comments about 'B. J. Vorster and his West German disciples'¹⁷ have had its serious consequences for West Germany's position in Black Africa. The same is true for the carefully researched articles dealing with economic relations between the Republic and West Germany.¹⁸ Here for obvious reasons details are disclosed which are almost never disclosed in the West German press.¹⁹ This propaganda cannot be expected to cease if and when (as appears very likely within the next 18 months) East Germany will have diplomatic relations with most black states. In all probability East Germany will seek to use her diplomatic missions to intensify her propaganda onslaught and lead the black states to lessen or even break their economic and political ties with West Germany.

This possible development is the main reason why few news stories from sub-Saharan Africa in recent years have created so much interest in West Germany as the prospects for dialogue between Africa's black states and the Republic.²⁰ For the East German press the idea of having a dialogue is just another 'horse-dealer's trick' by Vorster to cheat the progressive forces of the world.²¹

If the actual confrontation between the Republic and her northern neighbours continues or even intensifies, inevitably a

country like West-Germany will be forced one day into making a choice. She will have to set priorities. She will be forced to make up her mind whether to break with Pretoria or risk alienating those black states which criticise the Republic because of her racial policies. There are far more black states with a very critical attitude towards South Africa than many South Africans seem to realise. It should not be forgotten that the feelings of politicians like Busia, Bongo or Houphouët-Boigny towards *apartheid* do not differ at all from Nyerere's and Kaunda's views.

If the time of decision-making should arise, legal and economic considerations in West Germany as well as in other countries will not be the only deciding factors. Even a country like West Germany which depends so heavily on its external trade will have to take long-term political aspects into account as well. The Republic today is by far the most important trading partner West Germany has in Africa.²² Yet even now many voices are heard doubting whether the existing relations between Pretoria and Bonn can be maintained. There are quite a lot of influential people in West Germany who argue that as a consequence of these relations the USSR, the People's Republic of China and even a relatively small country like East Germany can more easily acquire zones of influence in black Africa, because the West at the moment is playing their game by co-operating with the Republic.

Talking about East Germany's chances to weaken her western neighbour's position in black Africa, two additional factors should not be overlooked: the USSR with all her economic potential will always do her best to support such a policy; and secondly West Germany's relatively very weak position (lack of traditional links and so on) in Africa can easily be replaced by other, non-African powers, e.g. the USSR and her allies. This could never happen to Britain or even to France. West Germany took the lesson to heart, when East Germany took over development projects in mainland Tanzania (1964) and Guinea (1970/1971) which had been started by West German experts and with West German capital. It would be a grave mistake to believe that West Germany's economic potential, far bigger than that of the other German state, can fully compensate the consequences of the

East German propaganda in black Africa. The case of war-torn Chad which recently recognised East Germany diplomatically showed this very clearly. Thus, other than Britain and France, West Germany might well be among the first states to be forced by events in Africa to make the choice of breaking with Pretoria or with quite a number of black states.

Since Houphouët-Boigny's and Busia's proposal of having a dialogue with the Republic, for the first time there seems to be a chance (at the time of writing still a slender one) that a *modus vivendi* can be found which would make it possible for all Western countries to extricate themselves from a serious dilemma. If this chance is used, West Germany need not be faced with that threatening choice one day. If the opportunity is missed it might be impossible for West Germany to maintain the existing political and economic relations with Pretoria. It is to be hoped that this is clearly seen in Pretoria.

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