

# Présence Libérale

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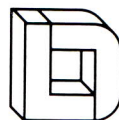
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# South Africa after Zimbabwe

Klaus Baron von der Ropp

## *I. Are times changing in South Africa?*

After the bloody riots in 1976/77 ("Soweto"), a number of prominent members of the governing Nasionale Party van Suid Afrika, which is virtually all-powerful in white South Africa today, have had cause to look with great concern at the future of South Africa. Since that time, more and more voices have been heard from within the strongholds of Afrikanerdom, such as the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, the Universities of Stellenbosch and Potchefstroom and in the important Afrikaans newspapers, Rapport, Beeld and Die Vaderland, calling into question the very principles underlying the policy of Apartheid. These Afrikaners, who represent little more than a tiny minority within the élite of Afrikanerdom, are asking themselves many questions: Are the critics inside and outside South Africa right in saying that apartheid is nothing more than institutionalised racism? Is it true that the current order

has brought immeasurable injustice to the black and brown South Africans? Is it true that, with a very few exceptions, only the black puppets are cooperating with Pretoria, whilst the real leaders have gone underground, or are in prison? Virtually all foreign visitors to South Africa would have no difficulty in answering "yes" to these questions. But this is not so for the white Africans, many of whom are staunch Calvinists; for them, this would mean distancing themselves from an internal order which many believe to be an expression of their Christian way of life. Only a very few white South Africans are aware that, for years, the Pretoria Government has been trying to "opt out of history"<sup>1</sup>.

It was the crushing defeat of Pretoria-supported Bishop Abel Muzorewa at the beginning of 1980, rather than the overwhelming electoral victory of Robert Mugabe's party which greatly strengthened this self-criticism. Hence, at the beginning of March 1980, Rap-

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<sup>1</sup> This phrase is taken from the highly readable paperback by Günther Gillesen „Rassenstaat – Ständestaat – Gottesstaat/ Südafrikas Versuch, aus der Geschichte auszuwandern“, Stuttgart 1978.

port, Beeld and Die Vaderland all called upon the Government in Pretoria to discuss the future of the country with the "real" leaders of the black and brown South Africans and to take decisions with them in the context of a dialogue. In so doing, they were endorsing a demand which had been repeated day in and day out for years, not only by the black and brown parties, but also by the white African liberal party (Progressive Federal Party) which, although small, has a considerable degree of political impact. Instead of the present system, where the minority dictates to the majority, there should be a new political order negotiated collectively by elected representatives of all South African ethnic groups. It takes a great deal of courage – a very great deal of courage – to say such a thing in South Africa. These Afrikaners are fighting a system which has grown up over centuries. Moreover, many of them played a not inconsiderable part, especially after 1948, in indoctrinating the mass of white South Africans in the policy of Apartheid. It should therefore come as no surprise that the overwhelming majority of conversations with white South Africans remind one of the cartoon which appeared a few years ago in the Johannesburg daily newspaper "The Star"; it depicted the earth in space and around it was circling a second moon inscribed "Suid Afrika".

It is only logical that the blacks should have countered the intransigence ("kragdadigheid") and self-righteousness of the whites with increasing militancy, indeed, with the first phase of a civil war. The attacks on police stations in Soweto and Johannesburg, the

attacks on coal gasification plants in Sasolburg and Secunda, which came to public attention in 1979/80, the discovery of two large caches of Soviet weapons built up by the African National Congress (ANC) and other similar occurrences in which ANC members have been involved, are apparently only the tip of the iceberg. There is the threat of conflict, but this will not be a colonial war as many observers in the West and Third World believe. It is the nation of black South Africans which will be standing against that of the whites. Thus, the conflict will take on a completely different dimension compared with the colonial wars in Algeria, the former Portuguese overseas areas and Zimbabwe. The position of the white South Africans can be compared only with that of the Israelis.

Much more than any other developments in the highly polarised world of South Africa, only the private talks over the last few years between leading representatives of both camps give any real cause for hope. For a long time, there were practically no encounters of this kind at any level. Although no details have been released, it is likely that nowadays, regular meetings are held between lecturers from Afrikaans Universities, leading Afrikaner journalists and maybe even Afrikaner businessmen and representatives of INKATHA, the "Committee of Ten" and possibly other political groupings having close contacts with the ANC. There can be no doubt that the Afrikaners involved are acting with the tacit approval of the government in Pretoria. The most important topic in these debates is the joint search for a new political and economic order for South Africa.

Just how deep the rift is between the two sides and thus how difficult it will be to have a constructive exchange of views is perhaps best illustrated by the recent history of the Rand Daily Mail. This Johannesburg daily has always been committed to liberal ideals and fights the present order more vehemently than any other daily newspaper. And yet it decided a number of years ago (of its own free will!) to print separate editions for its black and white readers. Occasionally, the two editions of the Rand Daily Mail have entirely different contents. This happened at the beginning of April 1979 in connection with the hanging of Solomon Mahlangu, a member of the ANC, who had been sentenced to death, under a constitutionally faultless procedure, for committing two politically-motivated murders. The hanged man was simply a common criminal as far as the whites were concerned, but for the blacks, he was a symbol of freedom. The same impression was confirmed one year later on the occasion of the burial of three other ANC members. They had been shot by police after a raid on a bank in Silvertown/Pretoria in which hostages had been taken. Members of the procession following the coffins were repeatedly heard to shout, "They were no criminals, they are our heroes!"

In the light of the foregoing, is there any chance of preventing South Africa from heading towards tragedy? Surely considerations of an economic or security-policy nature alone should guide Western Europe into looking for a way out, for a constructive policy. And nobody is in a better position to do this than the Liberal Parties of Western Europe, for

they have a natural ally at the Cape of Good Hope in the form of the (white) Progressive Federal Party (PFP).

## *II. Weaknesses and Strengths of the PFP*

Because of the existing electoral system, the PFP has barely an eighth of the seats in the Parliament at Cape-Town and there seems little room for improving on this position. On the other hand, the governing NP party holds more than four-fifths of the seats. Thus human estimates would tend to suggest that the PFP stands no chance of taking over the responsibility of government from the NP in the foreseeable future. However, particularly since the country's change in leadership from J. B. Vorster to P. W. Botha, the PFP has played a very important rôle. Despite its character, the "volksbeweging" NP is threatening to split because of the in-fighting taking place between the "verligte" wing, led by P. W. Botha and P. G. Koornhof and their reactionary opponents led by A. Treurnicht. In the most favourable hypothesis, this power struggle may bring to prominence an Afrikaner leader with the authority of the former French Head of State, General de Gaulle. The man most likely to step into the breach is Gerrit Viljoen, a leading member of the NP and President of the Broederbond, the Afrikaner brotherhood which has more than once been referred to as white South Africa's secret government. What would be the guidelines of his programmes? What would be the characteristics of the "revolution from above" which he would have to organise? It should be noted here that the dissident NP members referred to at the

beginning have not yet managed to work out their own concrete ideas on this and present them to the public. This is because they are afraid of being branded as “traitors” and thus of becoming social outcasts within Afrikanerdom. However, there are clear signs that the PFP’s ideas<sup>2</sup>) on the future of South Africa are very much in line with those of Gerrit Viljoen and his supporters. This, then, is the PFP’s greatest strength.

### *III. The summoning and functions of a National Convention*

For many years now, the South African liberals of the PFP have been pleading for the summoning of a National Convention bringing together representatives of all of the politically relevant groups in South Africa. As already explained, it would be up to them to negotiate a new constitution for the country.

In the view of the liberals, if the work of the conference is to be successful, it will be necessary for all of the participants to accept the following two conditions as binding, even before the negotiations begin:

- a) the new constitution must recognise the civil rights of all South Africans, without discrimination on the grounds of race, colour of skin, sex or religion;
- b) the new constitution should prevent any single ethnic group black, white, coloured or Indian from dominating one or more of the others politically.

Amongst other things, the latter condition means that the PFP is once and for all expressly rejecting the customary system of “one-man-one vote in one country”, as propounded by the South African liberation

movements, the ANC and the PAC, the UN and the OAU. This means that the PFP is distancing itself from the cry which can be heard all over black South Africa today “One Azania, one nation”, a fact which is overlooked all too often – even by Liberals – in Western countries.

### *IV. The right to self-determination versus protection of minorities*

For years, indeed decades, the PFP had thought that it would be possible to solve the problems arising from South Africa’s uniquely heterogeneous population mix by bringing the Indian, coloured and black South Africans (“qualified franchise”) step-by-step into the system of values and order of white South Africa and it was for this that they campaigned. It was hoped, in this way, to set up a non-racial western democratic society in the southern tip of Africa. But developments in post-colonial Africa reduced this hope to mere wishful thinking. For the road followed by post-colonial Africa has not led to anywhere remotely resembling Westminster. In particular, the flight of the Portuguese settlers from Angola and Mozambique in the mid-70’s, has led to disillusionment within the PFP. Even though they are so sharply critical of the existing order, South Africa’s liberals nevertheless assume that the white, non-European nation which has grown up over more than three hundred years in South Africa, just as in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, should be prepared to discuss any issue – with one exception: its right to exist can never be a matter for negotiation.

A leading German Social Democrat, Egon

<sup>2</sup> See the “Report of the Constitutional Committee of the Progressive Federal Party and Policy Decisions made by the Federal Congress of the P.F.P. at its Federal Congress held in Durban on 17th and 18th November 1978”. See also Frederik van Zyl Slabbert and David Welsh’s “South Africa’s Options/Strategies for sharing power”, Cape Town and London, 1979; Arend Lijphart “Majority Rule versus Democracy in deeply

divided Societies” in *Politikon* (Pretoria) Vol. 4 No. 2 (1977.12), page 113–126; and also Heribert Adam and Hermann Giliomee “Ethnic Power Mobilised: Can South Africa change?” New Haven and London, 1979 page 286–298.

Bahr, put it in a nutshell when he said<sup>3</sup> that it was necessary to evolve in South Africa "a hitherto unknown model of co-existence with equal rights and special protection for minorities". The determination and military strength of the white Africans alone demands that they too be shown concrete prospects for their own future. If this factor is overlooked, the result will be bedlam or holocaust.

Strangely enough, it is all too rarely realised in Western countries that the black South Africans can only be liberated once the right of existence of the white (and brown) Africans is secured by political power providing copper-bottomed guarantees of existence.

Neither the (white) Afrikaner, nor the (black) African nationalist is prepared to accept the abovementioned prerequisite for any discussion on a future South African constitution. At the moment, the majority of white Africans is only prepared to go so far as to adjust the status quo, to bring into being a system of "Apartheid with a human face"<sup>4</sup>. But even on this issue, Prime Minister P. W. Botha is having to fight some very fierce resistance. On the other hand, the rapidly-growing number of black radicals in South Africa sees the sole function of such a conference-round as allowing the whites to sign a charter of capitulation to the benefit of the radicals in the black camp. Hence, the ideas of the two sides in this conflict are worlds apart<sup>5</sup>.

#### *V. Swiss democracy for South Africa?*

At the end of 1978, the PFP put forward a new programme which would represent its contribution to the debate in the proposed

National Convention. It offers a system of institutionalised sharing of political power between the different ethnic groups in the multi-racial South African State. Thus the proposal represents a system involving a permanent Grand Coalition, along Swiss lines. In accordance with their own understanding of their rôle, the liberal white Africans discussed their programme before approving it with representatives of other ethnic groups. The main participants in the discussion were, first and foremost, U. M. Gatsha Buthelezi and his important INKATHA movement, the Coloured Labour Party and the Indian Reform Party. Obviously, the discussions with these groups, which are quite close to the PFP on a number of issues, were far less difficult than those with the Committee of Ten civil rights movement and the other equally militant nationalist groups. However the PFP is also intensively cultivating its contacts with the latter parties.

The PFP is trying to restructure the entire territory of South Africa, including the seeming independent homelands of the Transkei, BophuthaTswana and Venda, along the lines of a normal federal state. Ignoring the unfortunate experiences which have occurred in the rest of Africa, the separate "Land" governments and the Federal Government should be the object of elections on the usual Western pattern, according to the rules of proportional representation. In this way, democracy would be given another chance in Africa. All of the factions represented in Parliament should also be members of the "Land" or Federal executive, provided, of course, that they command a certain

<sup>3</sup> In an interview with the *Deutsche Allgemeine Sonntagsblatt* (Hamburg) of 10 July 1977, page 8.

<sup>4</sup> On this aspect, see Wolfgang H. Thomas "Plural Democracy: Political Change and Strategies for Evolution in South Africa", Johannesburg, 1977.

<sup>5</sup> On the white Africans' willingness to change and the black

Africans' expectation of change, see above all the study by Theodor Hanf, Heribert Weiland and Gerda Vierdag "Südafrika: Friedlicher Wandel?", Mainz/Munich 1978, pages 138-254 and 255-382, now also available in English. See furthermore the very important contributions by Lawrence Schlemmer "The Quail Report Feb 8 80" Silverton/Pretoria, 1980, pages 177-300.



minimum strength. However, this participation in government does not put an end to the protection for the three South African minorities, since the draft constitution proposed by the PFP stipulates that the executive and legislative bodies are to take decisions on the basis of a consensus. Hence, any minority factions commanding at least 10 to 15 % of the total will have a right of veto on virtually all important decisions.

Similar forms of Government have already proved their value, not only in some other Western European countries, but also in the Lebanon. Before the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy tried this solution to deal with the problems arising from the heterogeneous nature of its peoples. But do the prerequisites for such a constitutional order exist in South Africa? Even the PFP has grave doubts. There is for instance no clear single enemy: moreover, as explained at the beginning, what the blacks call "the fight for freedom" is seen by the whites as politically-motivated terrorism. For a very long time now, the political climate in South Africa has been one of segregation. The racial groups differ considerably as regards strength of numbers: blacks (approximately 70 % of the total population), whites (approximately 17 %), coloureds i.e. mixed race (approximately 10 %) and those of Indian descent (approximately 3 %). Finally, the meeting of whites and blacks in South Africa is really the coming together of the First and Fourth worlds. The Pretoria government sees itself as having to face within its own national borders, the same North-South conflict which may prove insoluble for the Western indus-

trialised countries.

Clearly, the South African liberals too are continually asking themselves whether the peoples of South Africa really have a social, cultural, economic and political common denominator, for without it, even their proposed form of democracy will not work. A very informative answer<sup>6</sup> has here been given by the politically and academically highly-esteemed new chairman of the PFP, Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, "The only hope that some narrow basis for consensus could be established and consolidated is if the antagonists have a glimpse into the abyss of violence, economic disaster and all the miseries that go with unrestrained conflict".

#### *VI. Alternative liberal strategies*

The criticism of the PFP's ideas, which has been briefly touched on here, has led to an increasingly wide search over the last few years for a better form of protection within a black-ruled South Africa for the white and brown minorities than the proposed "paper guarantees". In other words, the search is on for the "copper-bottomed guarantees of existence", an element which would be enshrined in the constitution and which would distribute the political power amongst the main protagonists in such a way as to ensure that each side wields enough power to oblige the others to respect the constitutional order. This is another issue which a National Convention will need to debate at length. There will also have to be some discussion of the other proposals currently being advanced by the PFP, particularly the one which calls for each of the most important constituent

<sup>6</sup> Frederick van Zyl Slabbert and David Welsh, as above, page 119.

“Lands” of the future South Africa to have its own independent police force and armed forces (the so-called cantonal armies). There is some doubt as to whether such a system could ever be made to work in practice.

Whilst not doubting the appropriateness of the solutions it proposed, the PFP in 1981 is nevertheless still looking for alternative strategies. It will be many years before this balance can be brought about inside South Africa. The polarisation between whites and blacks will become correspondingly greater all the time. Thus, it is possible that the National Convention, if it is established, will get into the decisive phase of its discussions only after a cease-fire has been called. With such a scenario in mind, there are those, even within the PFP, who recall that it was a highly respected liberal, R. F. Alfred Hoernlé, who, nearly half a century ago, first mooted and spread the idea of a South Africa radically split between blacks and whites<sup>7</sup>.

Today, in this context, we would do well to consider the geographical partitioning of Cyprus, the former Palestinian Mandate zone, Ireland, the Ottoman Empire, the former Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy and the Indian sub-continent. Here and there, good hedges do make good neighbours. In South Africa in 1980, more and more liberals are coming to the conclusion that the unavoidable “copper-bottomed guarantees of existence” for the minorities will only be brought into being with the hammering into the ground of border-markers.

Linked up with R. F. A. Hoernlé’s contribution and, in the light of the fact that a radical partitioning of South Africa will very

likely be the (only) common fall-back position of all of the white South African parties, the following proposal was put forward for discussion during the 70’s in the German periodical “Aussenpolitik” and the “South African Journal of African Affairs”<sup>8</sup>. It entailed:

- a logical territorial division of South Africa into two independent states: a northern State (Azania) with an exclusively black African population and a southern state (South Africa) with an exclusively white and brown population. The dividing line would pass through Oranjemund, Kimberley, Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth, with the abovementioned towns being the northern or eastern border of the white/brown state;
- complete integration of the coloured and Indian South Africans in the southern state;
- borders would be drawn, taking into account historical circumstances and the need for the detailed division to be both fair and justified (the black state would have approximately 70 % of the total population, more than 50 % of the territory and getting on for 75 % of the GDP). Also, in drawing the borders, consideration would be given to an equivalent of development potential, seen in terms of raw material and infrastructures. Thus, for example, each state would have three major ports;
- very considerable transfers of population which, unlike the segregation policy to date, would affect mainly the white South Africans and those of Indian descent. A

<sup>7</sup> R. F. Alfred Hoernlé “Anatomy of Segregation” in *Race Relations* (Johannesburg) Vol. 3 No. 1 (1936.2), pages 14–21; also, “South African Native Policy and the Liberal spirit”, Johannesburg, 1945, page 181–182. On the change in South African liberal thinking, see Heribert Adam and Hermann Giliomee, as above, pages 258–285.

<sup>8</sup> Jürgen Blenck and Klaus Baron von der Ropp “Republik Südafrika: Teilung als Ausweg?” (The republic of South Africa, is partition a way out?), in *Aussenpolitik* (Hamburg) Vol. 27 No. 3 (1976, 3rd. quarter), pages 308–324; also “Republic of South Africa: Is partition a Solution?” in *The South African Journal of African Affairs* (Pretoria) Vol. 7 No. 1 (1977), pages 21–32; also “Is territorial partition a strategy for peaceful



total of approximately 4.6 million people would have to be re-settled;

- in order to safeguard its position, the white/brown African state would be brought into the Western defence alliance.

Any long-time observer of South Africa will tell you that here and there, similar projects and models for partitioning the country are being discussed behind the scenes in the government camp. Quite obviously, the arbitrary tearing in two of a highly-developed industrialised country like South Africa goes against all the laws of economics. But it should also be remembered, in this context, that all white South Africans, English and Afrikaans speakers alike, give the physical existence of their nation priority over any considerations of maintaining South Africa's economy. The black South Africans, for their part, following Robert Mugabe's victory in Zimbabwe, are even more likely than before to reject such a compromise solution. But the cost of an armed conflict in South Africa will give even the black Africans cause to reconsider their position. Perhaps Frederik van Zyl Slabbert is right in commenting on "Aussenpolitik's" proposal that guns would take over the task of political negotiators if South Africa were to be divided up. "It is conceivable that partition may be a last-resort option in a no-win situation, but quite likely the line will be drawn where the battle has ended and not where it has been thought out in morally and intellectually defensible terms in some scholar's study".<sup>9</sup>

## VII. *Final comments*

A regional conflict in South Africa would

be just as likely to develop into a major international crisis as those in South-West Asia and the Middle East. The vast raw material wealth and strategic significance of South Africa both point to the danger of this conflict increasingly assuming an east-versus-west aspect which is essentially alien to it. The western countries and especially Western Europe should prevent this from happening, if that is still possible today. It is a question of acting instead of merely reacting. The negotiating success of Lord Carrington in Zimbabwe, which had been written off as impossible by virtually everyone, should be the cue for a re-think of the policy towards South Africa. The largest possible number of black African countries should be involved as closely as possible in this.

The sole aim of this policy must be to bring the representatives of all South Africa's important political groups to the negotiating table. A conference of this nature will give rise to many different crises. The negotiations will frequently break down. The danger then is that they will be replaced by a war over South Africa's future. It is thus all the more important for the mediating Western and African states to bring into this internal South African discussion proposals of their own which take account of the legitimate interests of both groups. The talks within the PFP and the talks which the PFP is having with representatives of the black and brown African parties today should point the way for the mediating countries.

U. M. Gatsha Buthelezi remarked at the July 1978 Road Ahead conference in Grahamstown, South Africa, "Constitutional

change in South Africa?", in *International Affairs Bulletin* (Braamfontein/SA) Vol. 3 No. 1 (1979.6), pages 36–47. Among the reactions to these papers see especially Gavin Maasdorp "Forms of Partition" in Robert I. Rotberg and John Barratt (Hrsg.) "Conflict and Compromise in South Africa", Lexington, 1980, pages 107–146; Newell M. Stultz "On Partition" in *Social Dynamics* (Cape Town) Vol. 5, No. 1 (1979),

pages 1–13; C. L. Sulzberger "Eluding the Last Ditch" in *The New York Times* of 10 August 1977, page 27.

<sup>9</sup> Frederik van Zyl Slabbert and David Welsh, as above, page 169; also Heribert Adam "Three Perspectives on the Future of South Africa" in *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* (Leyden) Vol. XX No. 1–2, pages 122–136.

developments in Southern Africa are going to be a by-product of bullets and power." The Liberals of Western Europe, especially where they bear the responsibility of government, are called upon to make their contribution to ensuring that this does not happen. The Lib-

eral International took a modest but important step in this direction at its meeting in Ottawa in 1979, (Res XV) and in Berlin in 1980 (Res VII), when it assured the PFP of its support.