

Essay Review

Dialogue and Closer Association in Southern Africa

M. C. Steele

Department of History, University of Rhodesia

The Outward Movement in South Africa's foreign relations was launched by Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan's visit to Pretoria on 3 September 1966, the first made by the leader of an independent African nation to the Republic. Lesotho's willingness to discuss matters of common interest marked the beginning of what many white South Africans hoped would become an ever-expanding circle of constructive dialogue and mutual understanding between African states and themselves. Some signal advances were made over the next five years: the Malawi trade agreement of March 1967, the acceptance of technical and economic assistance by the former High Commission Territories, the vote of six African states in favour of dialogue at the Addis Ababa summit of June 1971¹ and Dr Banda's much publicised state visit to South Africa. The Vorster administration speeded up the implementation of 'positive' apartheid in the Republic itself, developing the political and economic infrastructure of the so-called Bantu Homelands as an outlet for African aspirations.

South Africa in the 1960s is the subject of

two works, one by Marquard* and the other a collection of essays edited by Rhoodie*, and is the principal focus of a third work, a series of essays edited by Potholm and Dale,* which appeared shortly before the Outward Movement began to lose momentum. Marquard's monograph, written by one of the Republic's leading historians, is a plea for Southern African federation on liberal lines. The other works are collections of essays spanning a wide cross-section of political views on the affairs of the sub-continent, although the range of opinion expressed in the Johannesburg publication is naturally more limited. The editors give reasons for the choice of symposium format in their respective forewords: Potholm and Dale refer to the lack in existing literature of 'a balanced presentation of the differing and often antago-

* 1. Marquard, *A Federation of Southern Africa*, London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1971, 142pp. £2.00. *South African Dialogue: Contrasts in South African Thinking on Basic Issues*, ed. N. J. Rhoodie, Johannesburg, McGraw-Hill, 1972, 611 pp. R8.95. *Southern Africa in Perspective: Essays in Regional Politics*, ed. C. P. Potholm and R. Dale, New York, Free Press, 1972, 418 pp. US\$12.95.

nistic views of African nationalist spokesmen, government officials and scholars on the politics of Southern Africa' (p.vii), while Rhoodie offers his collection as a dialogue between local contributors covering a wide spectrum of political views. Laudable aims, certainly; but there are major flaws in both works. Essays are variable in quality, often amounting to nothing more than mere statements of official policy or exercises in polemic better suited to the documentary history. Rhoodie musters together an impressive gathering of local contributors, including *inter alia* three government ministers, leaders of the two principal Opposition parties, four prominent non-white political personalities and the leader of the Liberal Party (disbanded in May 1968), Alan Paton. Unfortunately, an undoubted virtue in Rhoodie's approach has become a vice. There are too many short essays on similar topics, with consequent irritating repetition, and the value of the symposium would have been enhanced if there had been half as many contributors writing at slightly greater length and depth.

Relations between the Bantustans and the 'white' area of South Africa proper are discussed in some detail, but the early colonial background is presented with a degree of bias in Rhoodie and largely overlooked by contributors to Part Two of Potholm and Dale. The essays by C. J. Jooste (Director, SABRA) and J. H. Coetzee are re-statements of the Afrikaner interpretation of South African history.² Coetzee's contribution to Rhoodie's volume even perpetuates the myth that Bantu tribes arrived some time after the Dutch settlement at the Cape (pp. 131-3). In this connection, it is interesting to note that even the pro-Government African Institute does not accept this discredited thesis: a map issued in 1967 shows the Bantu in occupation of the Transvaal, Natal, the Transkei and most of the Orange Free State by 1650.³

Jooste's contribution betrays further historical distortions. He plays down the factor of Boer expansionism during the nineteenth century, and attributes the race structure inherited by the Malan government to the legacy of British forward imperialism. Concerning the Trekboers, he remarks: 'The conquest of peoples was foreign to them. Their approach was to occupy vacant land and to leave the Bantu peoples to govern themselves in their respective national territories' (pp.4-5). This is

at best a half-truth. The *Mfecane* had admittedly resulted in relatively depopulated areas in the Orange Free State with the withdrawal of tribes such as the Sotho and their associates to more readily defensible positions, but Jooste stretches the reader's credulity to breaking point when he implies an element of continuity between the Trekkers' early African policy and the modern Bantu Homelands concept. President Kruger's practice of allocating small locations for the occupation of Africans, subject to their good behaviour⁴ (referred to in G. Jacobs' essay, p.152), was designed to safeguard Boer security and furnish labour supplies: it cannot be interpreted as evidence of an early Afrikaner commitment to the Homelands principle.

Following the crucial Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act (1959), the Homelands became the principal focus of the Republic's policy towards Africans, in response to rising international condemnation of apartheid. This policy, based on the assumption that the Homelands are self-contained nation-states in embryo, is set out in the official contributions of C. P. Mulder and M. C. Botha to Rhoodie's collection. The ideology of apartheid emphasised the historic ethnic differences between South Africa's major tribal groupings, an approach which gained apparent *post hoc* justification from later events in Black Africa such as the Nigerian Civil War. It received an adventitious boost from Britain's grant of independence to the High Commission territories, two of which were ethnic states. While it is unwise to gloss over the problem of 'tribalism' in African politics, as Hamutenya and Geingob have done in their contribution to Potholm and Dale (p.88), Hellman's trenchant observations in Rhoodie's collection (pp. 20-6) of this aspect of South African Separate Development are very much to the point:

Elsewhere in Africa, the newly independent nations are struggling to subdue tribalism and to develop an over-riding national unity within their arbitrarily defined borders. But in South Africa the national South African consciousness that was developing is deliberately being undermined and a fading tribalism is being revitalised. If divide and rule is the final objective, then success is undoubtedly being achieved. Compartmentalisation of the African

majority into so-called 'Black Nations' has a definite psychological advantage for South Africa's Whites in that it provides the illusion of near numerical equality between the 'White Nation'⁵ and each of these areas: according to Jooste's table (pp.5-6), the only Bantustan which exceeds the European population of the White area is Kwazulu. However, the Homelands policy is fraught with potentially embarrassing problems for the Republic which might, given the right circumstances, destroy the ideological facade of Separate Development and induce a return to the naked *baaskapism* of the Malan-Strijdom era. Bantustan leaders such as Chief Kaiser Matanzima of the Transkei, and Gatsha Buthelezi of Kwazulu, a contributor to the Rhodie volume, have learnt not only the rhetoric of apartheid but also to take advantage of their symbiotic relationship with Pretoria to demand more intensive development and the restoration of ancestral lands. Banton's prediction⁶ that Matanzima's electoral victory of 1963 would ultimately lead to a dilemma for the Department of Bantu Administration far deeper and much less tractable than any which might conceivably arise from the victory of his integrationist rival Victor Poto appears to have been vindicated by recent events. In February 1973, a meeting to discuss Homeland independence held between Vorster, Buthelezi and Matanzima reached deadlock when the two African leaders refused to accept any further constitutional advance until more land was added to their areas.⁷ The impending extension of Black Africa's frontiers to the northern boundary of Kwazulu adds a new, possibly disturbing, element to the relationship between the Bantustans and Pretoria. In this context, Jacobs' reference (p.163) to the homelands as potential 'Cubas' is likely to win more sympathy from the white electorate than it did when it appeared in the United Party platform for the 1966 election.

The move towards political devolution in the Bantustans has been accompanied by an extended dialogue on a possible association of states to embrace not only a Republic partitioned between Black and White but also the former High Commission Territories and possibly some of its northern neighbours. Several contributors to the works under review have taken Dr Verwoerd's 'common market' speech of 1961 as the starting point, but the

policy is of much earlier provenance. The concept of a South African commonwealth comprising a federation of component ethnic groups was put forward in a SABRA policy statement issued in 1952.⁸ It was developed further in Rhodie and Venter's now classic work on apartheid philosophy published in 1959.⁹

Historical evidence shows that interest in closer association, based on the extension of political control, had been a significant theme at various stages after unification. The 1910 Act of Union itself had facilitated eventual Afrikaner political and ideological dominance over the country as a whole, while the award of a mandate over South West Africa, captured by Union soldiers in 1915, had given Pretoria virtual sovereignty over an adjacent territory. According to the late Richard Meinertzhagen, South African forces serving in the East African campaign had hoped that German East Africa would be granted to South Africa as well.¹⁰ General Smuts' offer to the Southern Rhodesian electorate in 1922 and his later vision of a 'great African Dominion stretching unbroken throughout Africa'¹¹ were further manifestations of South African sub-imperialism under the British aegis.

It is interesting to note that, at this stage, Smuts' Afrikaner opponents strongly condemned his 'outward movement', feeling that it would strengthen the Imperial tie and expose South Africa to the *swaart gevaar* from the North. No such reservations were expressed in the case of the High Commission Territories, which, though black, were regarded by all parties alike as an integral part of South Africa and sooner or later destined for incorporation. Thus Afrikaner nationalists were in the forefront of the fifty-year struggle (see J. P. Stevens' contribution to Potholm and Dale) with Britain over the issue of their absorption. The protracted debate ended only in 1962, when Verwoerd evidently decided that South Africa's objective could be achieved by economic means.

Verwoerd's change of heart over the future of these territories and the commencement of the Outward Movement in general was induced by Britain's rapid decolonisation of her dependencies in the early sixties, a process which threatened to isolate the Republic. While it was militarily secure for the foreseeable future, the outward movement provided a valuable psychological crutch to an administration that wished to regain international res-

pectability after adverse reactions to the Sharpeville massacre and its implementation of petty apartheid measures.

In character, the outward policy of Verwoerd and Vorster has been naturally quite different from that of their predecessors forty to fifty years before. The stridently anti-colonial tone of international politics precluded any proposal involving the extension of sovereignty, however limited — indeed, South West Africa (Namibia) became the Achilles heel of the outward movement, despite the breathing-space given South Africa after the International Court of Justice's surprising judgment of July 1966 — and in practice, the Republic's endeavours have been in the fields of Dialogue, economic assistance and co-operation. Several schemes have been put forward by South African experts: one such, comprising an economic community covering the sub-continent south of Zaire and Tanzania, is discussed in Eschel Rhoodie's contribution to Potholm and Dale.

A further outline, involving a measure of South African control over its neighbours, is set out at length in Marquard's *A Federation of Southern Africa*. The author argues eloquently for a federal association between South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana and possibly South West Africa (Namibia) to stem what he terms the drift towards 'stagnation or to a collision between white and non-white' (p.1). However attractive his liberal treatise may seem to those hopeful of a just and peaceful solution to South Africa's racial problems, it shows little regard for present-day realities. For reasons discussed more fully below, it is difficult to foresee either the black states of Southern Africa agreeing to surrender a moiety of their sovereignty to a federation which would be dominated economically if not politically by the white regions, or the United Nations approving the inclusion of South West Africa (Namibia). Marquard's federal proposal rests on the further assumption that a drastic liberation of apartheid should be made, including *inter alia* the possible political inclusion of Coloureds and Indians in the white regions (p.4), free movement of African labourers (p.98), by implication, the augmentation of Bantustans (p.71) and the release of non-white political detainees prior to a constitutional conference (p.131). If these are to be pre-requisites for federation, it is unlikely that the Marquard plan will be realised in the near

future; moreover, one doubts whether the former High Commission Territories and the United Nations would consider them adequate.

There has been a tendency for observers to overstress the central role of economic and geopolitical factors when discussing relations between the former High Commission Territories and South Africa: Weisfelder, one of the contributors to Potholm and Dale (pp.125-140) has couched his essay in such a framework. However, a thesis based solely on these elements is much too limited. Three other factors must be taken into account: the lingering memory of South African expansionism, outlined above; the related hatred of apartheid, which has at times overridden economic and geographical considerations; and the unpredictable personality factor of certain black African leaders.

The deterioration of relations between Lesotho, significantly the most dependant of states in the sub-continent, and South Africa after 1971 affords an apt illustration of these factors. In October, 1971, Chief Jonathan launched a strong attack on Separate Development at Lesotho's fifth anniversary celebrations, and intervened to prevent the visit of an Ivory Coast representative to Pretoria for talks on Dialogue. His Minister of Foreign Affairs declared Lesotho's support for African guerrillas at a conference of non-aligned states held in Guyana during August 1972. Two further events, Lesotho's vote against South Africa in the United Nations sanctions debate of November, 1972, and Chief Jonathan's spontaneous outburst at the time of the Carletonville shootings further demonstrate that a model of Lesotho-South African relations based solely on the 'hostage theory',¹² is inadequate to meet all circumstances. It remains to be seen whether the recent accord reported between Chief Jonathan and Vorster has really healed this widening ideological breach.¹³

Moving north from the Southern African heartland, the personality factor in regional politics is exemplified further by the strange case of Malawi, whose links with South Africa are not entirely explicable in economic terms. The internal split between Dr Banda and his 'Young Turks' over a number of issues including (according to Speck in Potholm and Dale, p.211) relations with the white south reflected the common political dichotomy amongst older and younger nationalists; a similar feature may be discerned in Banda's distrust of his more

ideological contemporaries in Zambia and Tanzania.

Regional politics in Southern Africa have moved into a period of extreme uncertainty since the publication of the works under review. Apart from the manifest tension between the Republic and some of its enclave states,¹⁴ noted earlier, and the continued Rhodesian stalemate which has in turn contributed to the failure of Pretoria's approaches to Lusaka,¹⁵ the Portuguese coup of April 1974 has injected a more fluid element into the body politic of the sub-continent. Potholm's remark that 'Mozambique

is in many ways the key swing unit in the sub-system of Southern Africa' (p.150) is no longer a mere academic speculation. Portugal's abrupt decision to de-colonise its overseas possessions has drawn attention to the now self-evident factor, under-rated in Potholm's projection (p.324), of metropolitan Portugal in Southern African regional politics. It remains to be seen whether, as in the instance of Zambia's decision to keep its border with Rhodesia closed, ideology rather than economic self-interest will determine the future pattern of inter-state relations in Southern Africa.

REFERENCES

- ¹Gabon, Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi and Mauritius. Five other nations abstained.
- ²See particularly F. A. Van Jaarsveld, *The Afrikaner's Interpretation of History*, Cape Town, Simondium, 1964. The best objective account is that of E. S. Munger, *Afrikaner and African Nationalism: South African Parallels and Parameters*, London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1967.
- ³See *Bulletin of the Africa Institute of South Africa*, 1967, 5, iii, cover.
- ⁴E. A. Walker, *A History of Southern Africa*, London, Longmans, 1959, p.277.
- ⁵Terms as used in South African Information Service, *Progress through Separate Development: South Africa in Peaceful Transition*, New York 1968, p.4.
- ⁶M. Banton, *Race Relations*, London, Tavistock Publications, 1967, p.183.
- ⁷Financial Mail (Johannesburg), *Decentralisation: a Financial Mail Special Survey*, 30.iii.1973, p.53.
- ⁸South African Bureau of Racial Affairs, *Integration or Separate Development?* Stellenbosch, Sabra, 1952, p.35.
- ⁹N. J. Rhoadie and H. J. Venter, *Apartheid: a Socio-historical Exposition of the Origin and Development of the Apartheid Idea*, Cape Town, H.A.U.M., [1959], p.26.
- ¹⁰R. Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary 1899-1926*, Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1960, p. 164.
- ¹¹S. G. Millin, *General Smuts*, 2 vols., London, Faber & Faber, 1936, II, p.412.
- ¹²After J. Halpern, *South Africa's Hostages*, London, Penguin, 1965.
- ¹³*Bulletin of the Africa Institute of South Africa*, 1974, 7, 141-6.
- ¹⁴President Khama of Botswana followed Lesotho's lead in September 1973 and expressed support for the guerrilla movement, later officially recognising Guinea-Bissau, *Bulletin of the Africa Institute of South Africa*, 1974, 7, 5.
- ¹⁵Prospects of a detente between Zambia and South Africa brightened at the time this review was being written, with a speech by the South African Prime Minister, *The Senate of the Republic of South Africa, Debates, First Session, Fourth Senate*, cc.3335-46, 23.x.1974. The cooling of relations between Zambia and Tanzania over increased railage costs on copper may have been a contributory factor to this new development.

