

South African Prime Minister John Vorster's present policy of detente in Southern Africa is a gamble; so much is obvious. But what is he gambling on? He is trying to buy time. But how much time does he expect to get, and what does he intend to do with it? The answers to these questions are by no means clear.

Although it is certainly desirable that South Africa should support a move towards majority rule in Zimbabwe, and that South Africa should withdraw from Namibia, it is by no means obvious that these policies are in the interest of continued white supremacy in South Africa itself.

The rationale behind these moves is that the coming independence of Mozambique will involve new and crippling sanctions against Rhodesia, and will enormously increase the length of the Rhodesian border open to guerilla incursion. White rule in Rhodesia could probably not be continued without massive economic and military aid from South Africa, and even then only for a limited period. Therefore South Africa should withdraw now, before it is too late, before losing both men and money in an unwinnable war.

There is something in this, but from the point of view of white supremacists there is another argument. Independence in Mozambique followed in rapid succession by independence under black rule in both Rhodesia and South West Africa would have a profound psychological impact on both black and white in South Africa. Black expectations would be raised and white supremacist confidence lessened at exactly the moment that it becomes possible for nationalist guerillas to reach South Africa's borders at any point from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. ^{It is argued that} ~~Therefore it would be~~ There is going to be a fight, and so it would be more sensible to fight now, and in Rhodesia, rather than in South Africa itself; South Africa should go all out to crush the Rhodesian guerilla movements, even at the cost of possible aggressive action against Mozambique. Of course, such a policy would increase international pressure against South Africa. But the point is that in a few years time such aggressive acts will be necessary to defend white supremacy in South Africa itself. So better get it over with as soon as possible.

One argument against such a policy is that it would not work. That is ~~possibly true~~ probably true. But the point is that if it won't work now it won't work later either, and that is not a position which any white supremacist can accept. So from this point of view the hardline argument is very convincing.

But Vorster seems to believe that he has found a policy which can retain white supremacy without fighting a costly war. This policy contains three inter-related elements, each of which involves a gamble.

1) If South Africa can play a role in producing negotiated settlements in Zimbabwe and Namibia, then the prospect for neo-colonial-type regimes in those countries is much greater than if they are liberated by force. Settle now in Rhodesia, and you may hope to get a Banda or at worst a Kenyatta. Let the fighting go on and you may end up with a Nyerere or even a Machel. Vorster is gambling on producing client states in Rhodesia and Namibia. Given the fact that most African states are ruled by corrupt oligarchies interested only in lining their own pockets, it is not unreasonable of Vorster to assume that he will be able to help to install two more such regimes. He is as aware as anybody else that noble nationalist sentiments expressed before independence are no guide to post-independence policy.

2) In any event, the process of negotiations in these two territories will take several years, during which time the South African border will remain secure. In that time it might be possible to make certain internal changes which would have the effect of deracialising relationships on the elite level. Theatres and luxury hotels are being integrated. Restrictions on black businessmen are being relaxed. Blacks are to be allowed long-term leases on houses in the so-called white areas. The powers and privileges of the bureaucratic elites which exist in many of the "homelands" will be increased. None of these moves will make the slightest difference to the workers and peasants, nor will they change the nature of the society. But they might be hoped to have two consequences. Firstly, by giving privileges to an emerging black middle class elite, this group might be allied firmly to the system. This elite would include black businessmen protected by apartheid from white (and Indian) competition; black bureaucrats who obtain jobs, power, status and opportunities for corruption from the vast machinery for controlling the masses; and those amongst the political leaders using the instruments of separate development who are concerned mainly with their own incomes and prestige. Secondly, much overseas pressure against the South African government is aimed at the cruder forms of racial discrimination. By deracialising elite relationships, and letting economic rather than legal factors keep the black masses segregated, Vorster might hope to do away with that pressure. After all, if it were simply a matter of economic exploitation and police state brutality, there would be little to distinguish South Africa from the majority of the members of the United Nations. In fact, there are many which are far worse on these criteria than is South Africa. Vorster's police may not be very nice, but they are a lot nicer than Pinochet's or Amin's.

39) The third component of the policy is likely to be increased repression of any sign of mass activity, and in particular repression of any kind of "leftist" movement which either does or may influence mass action. It would be hoped that without external support, without black middle class leadership and without guerillas crossing the border, it should be possible to keep black discontent at a disorganised level. Every attempt would be made to identify popular discontent with the "world-wide communist conspiracy". It would be hoped that this would legitimise repression in the eyes of english-speaking white progressives, in the eyes of black a black middle class anxious to keep its economic privileges in the face of the threat of socialism, and in the eyes of western capitalist powers.

So Vorster's scenario can probably be summed up as follows:

- 1) ^{Creating} the creation of comfortable neo-colonial client states on the borders.
- 2) Mollifying international opinion and coopting the black elite by deracialising elite relationships.
- 3) Successfully repressing dissidence under an anti-communist rather than a racist guise.

Will these three gambles come off? Certainly, if this is really what Vorster is aiming at, it has more chance of success than the alternative "fight now and fight everywhere" policy. It does not seem to be a policy inherently doomed to failure; it will depend very much on the counter-policies adopted by the other actors. People opposed to white supremacy in South Africa cannot simply carry on as though nothing has changed. They must adapt their analyses and their strategies to the new situation.

IN Namibia and Zimbabwe, the Swapo and the ANC would appear to be essentially "bourgeois nationalist" movements. Neither would seem likely to adopt a revolutionary socialist policy. But a bourgeois nationalist government is not necessarily the same thing as a South African client state. And South Africa will not possess the same leverage in their regard as it does in the case of Lesotho or Swaziland. So these territories could go either way; and it may just be that Vorster has left his gamble too late.

In South Africa itself things are even more complicated. There certainly is a section of the black elite who will go along with Vorster's policy. But the question is, how many will do so? It is important not to confuse using separate development institutions with the process of cooptation. It may well be that if genuine patriots like Buthelezi and Leon were to boycott the separate development institutions, this would in fact make the process of

cooptation even easier. It would leave important sources of power and patronage in the hands of the more corrupt sections of the black elite. As it is, it is simply ridiculous to lump all those using the institutions of separate development together in one "stooge" basket. Some are clearly concerned to serve the interests only of themselves and a restricted circle of allies. Others are equally clearly trying, in very difficult circumstances, to work out practical strategies for change. These strategies may at times be wrong. But it helps not at all to ignore the strategic problems and simply to accuse ^{people} ~~them~~ of moral turpitude. White supremacy can only be overcome by strategies which involve building popular organisation ~~at all levels~~, and this will require the use of all available organisational means, and so may well include the use of separate development institutions.

Inside South Africa one is forced to compromise at all levels with the apartheid structure: travelling on segregated buses, going to segregated schools and universities; living in segregated towns; sleeping in segregated beds. A position of moral purity would require total non-cooperation, and immediate imprisonment. Non-cooperation of this kind is just not a practicable policy. The decision as to where ~~to~~ and how to ~~not~~ "collaborate" is a tactical decision. A white who is involved in organising non-racial trade unions may still continue to serve in the army, because one cannot both be an imprisoned conscientious objector and an active trade union organiser. A black consciousness advocate still goes to a "tribal" university because one cannot both build a black student movement and ignore the universities that exist. And an outspoken political opponent of separate development may nevertheless decide that the institutions of separate development are the best organising tool available for the task of mobilising popular ~~support~~ ^{against} ~~discontent with~~ separate development. apartheid. Whether or not any of these sets of positions is contradictory can only be decided by looking at it in the light of the strategy which it embodies, rather than by reference to abstract principles.

Opponents of apartheid operating outside South Africa also need to react with a greater degree of sophistication. Vorster's policy is designed to obscure the central issue of exploitation. Critics who continue to talk both literally and figuratively in manichean black and white terms are going to help him in that task. They are going to make it ^{defenders of white rule} easier for ~~white~~ supremacy advocates to divert attention from the real issues by pointing to concessions on petty apartheid. And they are going to make it more difficult to work out and apply successful strategies for bringing about change. As ~~and in consequence~~ ~~pure~~ ~~baasskap~~ methods of enforcing white rule give way to more subtle policies, people opposed to white supremacy cannot just carry on as though nothing has changed. They must adapt their analyses and their strategies to the new situation.