

# South African Spectrum

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**South African Dialogue: Contrasts in South African Thinking on Basic Race Issues**, edited by N. J. Rhoadie, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973. xiii + 623 pp. \$12.50.

HERE IS A COLLECTION of thirty-five articles, intended to bring together the basic demographic, economic, and sociological data bearing on the political and social problems of South Africa, and to present the highly divergent points of view of political party leaders, spokesmen of public-interest organizations favoring and opposing separate development, and prominent Coloured, Indians, and black Africans. It is difficult to review this kind of compendium, since comments on each and every article would take up all the available space without leaving room for generalizations. Let it be said at the outset that *South African Dialogue* is surprisingly well integrated for a joint effort of so many authors. Factually, it is comprehensive enough so that this reviewer has adopted it for a senior-graduate seminar on Southern African political and economic systems. A black South African colleague told me he thought the contributors well chosen and that the book offered a balanced spectrum of views.

The main weakness of the book is the lack of an adequate theoretical framework

to explicate and organize the mass of facts, problems, and particularist arguments that confront the reader. While this should not present a problem for the college teacher, whose function is to provide his students with theoretical tools, the noninitiate might perhaps experience moments of bewilderment. He or she might even be propelled toward the conclusion that the problems of a multi-ethnic Southern Africa are inherently insoluble: that justice and common sense stand in flagrant contradiction. A further edition of the book would be improved by some kind of integrating theoretical commentary.

The first impressive fact, made evident in C. J. Jooste's opening demographic essay, is the sheer size of the task faced by barely four million white South Africans, who are held responsible for upgrading the earnings, education, and living conditions of two million Coloured and fifteen million black Africans and are frequently belabored for not doing more. The solution found by the National Party is to turn over to each of eight Bantu-speaking nations increasing responsibility for its own development, while providing technical, educational, and financial support. This policy is challenged by Ellen Hellmann, who observes that despite evidences of a "probably now already irreversible" process of nation forming, the black nations are to a certain

extent arbitrary; she and other writers affiliated with the South African Institute of Race Relations define the basic problem as one of races and not of nationalities. The major argument for this point of view is the fact that 53 percent of the Bantu-speaking Africans live in the white areas, even though they are treated as citizens of their respective homelands. Miss Hellmann and other critics of separate development emphasize the fact that the homelands as now demarcated contain only 13 or 14 percent of the square mileage of the Republic of South Africa.

Willem van Heerden, however, points out that "it was merely incidentally that Swaziland, Lesotho, and Botswana remained under the authority of Britain after 1910, and that the Transkei, Zululand, and other Bantu territories came to be administered by South Africa." Taking the whole of British South Africa as the point of departure, the areas under black administration add up to 44 percent. What is more important is that the homelands include about 45 percent of the usable farmland under present irrigation conditions. In view of the primitive state of black agriculture, and the cultural obstacles to efficient soil management—which are explained in some detail by J. H. Coetzee and Sheila van der Horst—any massive transfer of land from white farms to tribal cultivation would provoke an acute food shortage, of which the blacks would be the first victims.

A fact that may surprise the American reader is that hardly any white South Africans—certainly not the two main opposition parties—favor total political integration under universal suffrage, though the Progressive Party comes closest to this. Instead, the debate seems to be about *what kind of differentiation* is the most workable. The United Party, for instance, proposes a limited and qualified franchise for Indians, Coloured, and black Africans—yielding enough votes, as one critic suggests, to end the Afrikaner majority in Parliament but not enough to oust the English-speaking whites from control.

The non-whites whose views appear in Professor Rhoodie's book seem as aware as the whites that amalgamation in an undifferentiated body politic would mean the end of the white South African nation as such. That proposal, therefore, is not seriously discussed in South Africa, even though it may reverberate in the halls of the United Nations.

Some of Rhoodie's writers emphasize how much is being done or in any case attempted for the development of non-white population groups in South Africa, while others proclaim the total inadequacy of accomplishments to date. Substantial agreement, however, emerges on economic facts, which are cited by writers of various persuasions and summarized in the tables appended to G. M. E. Leistner's objective analysis entitled "Non-Whites in the South African Economy." Among facts that are salient for policy judgment, the following are typical:

1. Despite the efforts of the Bantu Investment Corporation, only 75,000 new jobs have been created in the homelands during the last fifteen years—one-tenth of the number called for by the Tomlinson Report which provided the programmatic base for the separate development policy.
2. The average monthly earnings of black Africans (as of 1969) ranged between one-fifth and one-sixth of average white monthly earnings in the various branches of business and government, in a labor market limited by influx control. Despite this discrepancy, the average family income of blacks in urban areas is three to four times the average family income in the homelands, including remittances from migrants.
3. None of the homelands has reached what Walt Rostow calls the "take-off point" in its progress toward a modern economy. Except for a minimal number employed in the homelands (for instance 42,000, half governmental, in the Trans-

kei with its population of 1,750,000 in residence plus another 1,250,000 "absentees"), almost all gainfully employed blacks are involved in the white-managed economy, in which they constitute 58 percent of the non-farm labor force.

4. While the border-industries scheme, involving the location of plants in white areas along the fringes of black homelands, has achieved some short-range success in creating employment, it appears counterproductive to development in the homelands themselves. The multiplier tends to be dispersed into adjacent white urban centers, where black workers spend much of their wages, rather than into the homelands, where there is little to buy.

Facts like these cannot be integrated into judgments about the feasibility and justice of alternate policies without the necessary theoretical tools. While all the authors contribute significant data and perceptions, most of them shy away from theoretical analysis—perhaps because it would not prove what they wish to prove. Where such analysis might lead is suggested by Leister when he points out that the wage level is determined by supply and demand as well as by productivity. It follows from a juxtaposition of facts and economic laws that, however irksome and unjust black Africans may find the influx control that denies them residence in urban areas without permission, its removal would produce massive instant slums of the sort found on the outskirts of South American cities. Unregulated competition of job-seekers would topple the market level of black wages, whereas enforcement of minimum pay laws would cause large-scale unemployment.

Several critics of separate development argue in their contributions that South African industry is *dependent* on large numbers of black workers, and that such dependency will probably increase in the future. White employers, they suggest, "exploit" their black workers by paying low wages. The choice between labor-intensive

and capital-intensive production methods, however, is a matter of relative cost. South African industry employs masses of black workers precisely because they are cheaply available, using men for operations which in Europe—and even more in America—would be done by machine. A rapid absolute and relative increase in real wages paid to blacks, an ideal imperative of social justice, requires (a) improved education, with emphasis on vocational training, (b) continued limitation of the availability of black labor, and (c) an increased flow of investment capital both within the white area and in the homelands. In the meantime, the job reservation laws that exclude blacks from skilled and supervisory positions should be repealed (they are being widely ignored), and black wages allowed to rise as high as the market will take them.

While several authors make a good case for continuing those aspects of petty apartheid that protect against interracial friction, others urge that its more irksome aspects be eliminated. As the Coloured writer David Curry asks, "Has white South Africa become so spiritually bankrupt that its culture has to be protected by opera apartheid, bus apartheid, post office apartheid or even toilet apartheid?" The remedy suggested by most reformers is not instant and total integration, but rather the easing of restrictions so as to permit voluntary social contact and the sharing of cultural resources.

Population pressure as a cause of poverty is mentioned only marginally in *South African Dialogue*. But a reading of all of the articles in context suggests that a rapid increase in productivity and standards of living would be greatly aided by expanded family planning services and a planned shift in cultural norms to support their use.

To sum up, Professor Rhodie's compendium offers a wealth of information and the most balanced selection of divergent views from within South Africa that has appeared to date. It is a book that can be accepted as a basis for discussion by people with strongly differing viewpoints, and hence a generator of further dialogue.