

The Pace of Modernity

Accelerated Development in Southern Africa; edited by John Barrat, Simon Brand, David S. Collier, and Kurt Glaser, London: *The Macmillan Press, Ltd.* and New York: *The St. Martin's Press*, 1974. xiv + 706 pp. £ 7.00 and \$16.95.

THIS IS A WELL EDITED COMPILATION of papers and discussions on the theme indicated in the title, which was aired at a four-day conference held at Johannesburg in March, 1972, under the joint auspices of the Foundation for Foreign Affairs of Chicago, the Rand Afrikaans University, and the South African Institute of International Affairs. Participating were more than two hundred and fifty academic specialists, mainly economists, sociologists, and political scientists, from various parts of the world, including the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Brazil, Madagascar, Rhodesia, Angola, Mozambique, Swaziland, Lesotho and Malawi; most, however, were white and black South Africans. Nothing in the way of a policy or a recommended program emerged from the conference; but despite the wide divergence of views there was some general, though not unanimous, agreement on a few points, among them the principle of "separate development" for different racial cultures, as envisaged in 1959 in the report of the Tomlinson Committee, adopted and carried forward with some refinements by successive South African Nationalist governments. This issue, however, was not central to the main discussions, though it kept cropping up throughout the conference.

The chief interest of the book is in the light that it sheds on some of the great social and international tensions and complex crises of our time. "Development," as the term is used here, means the adaptation of scientific knowledge and modern technological methods to the major concerns of

life. Besides the manifest material benefits, which are hardly to be disputed, industrial development results in radical alterations of the social structures and cultural practices of the peoples among whom it is introduced. Thus of all the experts assembled at Johannesburg only Chancellor Weidner of the University of Wisconsin at Green Bay seemed able to consider development fairly much an unmixed blessing. It means, he asserted in an introductory "pep talk," more of "the good things of life" for all concerned and "a greater fulfillment of individual happiness." It may also mean the eventual elimination of inequities, not only those hitherto imposed by race, sex, class and so on, but hopefully even those that were deemed to have been imposed by nature or heredity.

It might appear that no matter how hard we try to reduce these differences, some will always remain. Still, we are on the verge of a time when the secrets of the chemistry of the body, of the brain, and even of reproduction itself are within our grasp. . . . Chemistry aside, we can remove many of the differences among individuals more effectively and quickly than previously. And within a decade or two, and certainly by the twenty first century, we shall be on entirely new ground. . . .

Thus the great goal of "development," as Professor Weidner saw it, is a kind of benign egalitarianism. Proper planning and direction can not only remove differences among persons but reduce differences among nations, for we can "no longer justify differences in standards of living based on exclusive control over particular resources"—but this of course was said before the era of oil embargoes and extortions. In his commentary on Chancellor Weidner's paper, Professor Marcus Arkin of Rhodes University, observed that whatever may have been the experience elsewhere, the effect thus far of technological development in Southern Africa has been to widen rather than to remove "divisions

between different groups and different regions." This, as his colleague, Professor Anna Steyn, a sociologist, undertook to show, has been especially true among the Bantu tribes peoples. Professor Arkin considered Weidner's vision of universal equality to be "unrealistically utopian"; surely, he went on, it would be more useful to recognize that

communities, like individuals, have markedly different aptitudes and propensities and to aim on a global scale at international equality is to raise false hopes and generate avoidable friction.

. . .

The inseparable concomitants of development are industrialization and urbanization. Dr. Steyn in her long and interesting chapter described their disruptive influence on tribal organization, tradition, and mores. Since the Second World War there has been a continual and accelerating movement of the black populations from their rural homelands to the cities with consequences sadly familiar to the elder and middle generations of Americans. One of the gravest consequences in South Africa, according to Professor Steyn, has been the creation of urban ghettos and an urban proletariat. These conditions, she tells us, arise

whenever and wherever urban populations increase faster than employment opportunities and facilities such as housing, water supplies, and sewerage. Such an inundation of great urban centers by people who have no work there can easily lead to a very explosive situation.

Similar warnings, as Professor Dotson of Cornell acknowledged, have been sounded again and again by a growing school of political scientists, from whom, however, he was at some pains to dissociate himself. T. G. McGee and other representatives of this school—now so influential, it seems, as to suggest "a neo-orthodoxy"—see the principal fruits of massive urbanization as "dis-ease, starvation, alienation, *anomie*, vio-

lence—personal and political”; and the creation of vast blighted areas, or “waste-lands.” But then, observed Dr. Dotson,

Crowding, crime, unemployment, etc., are indeed more conspicuous when concentrated than when spread over rural landscapes. Costs are more easily perceived than benefits; and short range considerations displace those more distant.

Professor Steyn, with extensive citations from the investigations of Philip Mayer and B. A. Pauw, shows that the most significant social change wrought by urbanization among black Africans has been the substitution of the citified “nuclear family”—*i.e.* parents and child or children—for the “extended kinship” principle of the tribal society. Where this has occurred the familiar generational conflict appears to follow. The children who have been to school tend to despise their ignorant elders. The parents are unable to control children who have never been subjected to the disciplines of tribal initiation. As a result there is much vagrancy and delinquency. The urban youth problem is further complicated by the multiplicity of illegitimate births among the black urban proletariat. According to Mayer, it is mainly among the offspring of unmarried mothers that the growing criminal element of the cities is being recruited.

There are many of the Bantu, however, who resent and resist the changes that have accompanied “development” and cling tenaciously to the old tribal ways. They may—and in fact most now do—live and work for some years in the cities but their hearts and their loyalties remain in the homelands, to which eventually they return. Among the Xhosa Mayer distinguished two strong groups: the Reds—so called from their custom of daubing their bodies with ochre—who reject as far as is possible all the innovations resulting from contact with the whites. The “Schools” are largely the products of the Christian missions. Most, having acquired some education, have

adopted Christianity in some form or other, not infrequently mixed with witchcraft and other pagan survivals, whereas the Reds hold fast to the animistic beliefs and practices of their ancestors. Yet as urban workers the Reds appear to represent the more stable element, not given to strikes or riots or frequent changes of employment; though in November, 1958, in the Duncan Village area, incensed by a series of affronts and outrages, bands of Reds invaded some of the “bad shack” districts near their locations to beat up the *abakunthuzi*, or young hoodlums, who infested them, some so badly that they needed to be hospitalized. As one of the Red seniors explained it afterward: “When uncircumcised boys are rude and irresponsible and have no respect for their elders, beating is our traditional way of correcting them.”

In those urban areas where the “school” element predominates, Professor Steyn tells us, a new social stratification has replaced the old hierarchies of kinship status, but with no discernable advance toward Dr. Weidner’s goal of universal equality. At its top a small but immensely respected élite has emerged, which has lately, it seems, tended toward ever greater exclusiveness and a growing indifference to the needs and concerns of the strata beneath.

Professor G. van N. Viljoen, Rector of Rand Afrikaans University, speaking at the concluding session of the conference lamented the failure of the assembled savants to “come to grips with ethnicity, with the ethnic factor,” despite all the talking they expended on it. He also regretted the tendency of some speakers to draw parallels between states which have racially homogeneous populations and multi-racial states like South Africa. He was also inclined to deplore the emphasis some had placed on the importance of “planning” and “goals.” Any program of development, he felt, ought to be “open ended,” so as to allow “the ingenuity of the human mind and the increasing experience of human generations [to] find better solutions than we can at this stage finally formulate.” To Professor Vil-

joen the alternative proposals to openendedness, such as plans looking toward the ultimate integration of races, seemed dogmatic and closed, directed toward some "final solution" into which "very little change can be introduced."

"In Africa in the second decade of independence success stories are few," wrote Leif Egeland in a foreword to the proceedings here published. Today with much of the continent in the grip of famine or in the throes of anarchy, revolution and civil wars, these words have a special poignancy. The African failures can be ascribed no doubt to many causes, but chief among them certainly has been the insistence of the native political leaders on a fiercely accelerated pace of social change, their determination to achieve in a single generation what in Western or Westernized societies had taken centuries. The chief and formidable obstacle to their ambitions was what they were pleased to call "the scourge of tribalism," for the tribal institutions and culture, as Mr. Lawrence Schlemmer, a sociologist of the University of Natal observed, represent a total antithesis "of the pattern of modern or modernizing society." But the destruction of long-established custom, as Pascal warned more than three hundred years ago, "leads straight to ruin," that is, to social chaos and so it has often proved. This seems to point up the farsightedness of the race policies of the South African government, which have aroused so much opprobrium from Western liberals and the disapproval of some of the Johannesburg conferees. These policies embody a sort of compromise between progress and tradition. They recognize and strive to preserve the tribal entities, as is exemplified in the creation of the black homelands, now autonomous and presently to become wholly independent.

Reviewed by ALLEN T. BLOUNT