

Book Reviews

THE WORLD, THE WEST AND PRETORIA

By Alexander Steward, David McKay, New York, 1977. Pp. 308.
Price \$14.95.

This volume is a systematic exposition and defense of the South African philosophy of separate national development by the editor of *RSA World*, a publication that is without doubt the most intelligent and thought-provoking analysis of African events.

Mr Steward has attempted to view the evolving and deteriorating position of South Africa in world opinion from the standpoint of postwar developments in the United States, Great Britain, Black Africa, and South Africa itself. The exposition of the developing environment of Western expectations is a rather fascinating account of the transition from the euphoric belief that the Asian and African peoples would progressively evolve into increasingly enlightened democracies or at least modern states once the Axis had been defeated to the disillusionment that swept the modern non-Soviet world in the sixties and seventies.

Steward's book was evidently completed during the Ford Administration, a time of seemingly justifiable optimism for South Africa. As Mr Steward perceptively viewed the situation, the Nixon Administration had engineered a fundamental, though largely unnoticed, revolution in U.S. foreign policy. Mr Nixon had cast aside the illusion, which had been characteristic of Wilson, Roosevelt, Kennedy and Johnson, that America had the mission of serving as moral schoolmaster to the world, and that it had the right and duty to intervene anywhere that governments were set up which did not conform to its own criteria of justice. Nixon recognized that the power of the United States was not infinite; that the political system which had contributed to our own felicity and power was not necessarily appropriate to other states; that diversity is a law of social organization as well as of nature, and that American foreign policy should consist primarily of the pursuit of American national interests. Under President Nixon and Secretary Kissinger, South Africa was regarded as a friendly nation rather than as the target for an ideological crusade. An effort was made to understand the conditions and circumstances which made South Africans opt for separate national development and move tentatively and experimentally towards new forms of confederation and autonomous organs of government.

Steward could not have foreseen either the election of Jimmy Carter or the disastrous consequences of that electoral decision for both the people of the United States and the citizens of South Africa. We are not only back in the crusading rut of Wilson and Kennedy, but the new Administration for the first time openly co-operates with the Soviet Union and with communist forces within Black Africa to destroy the Republic and thus obliterate the one great focus of modernity and civilization below the Sahara.

Steward, however, did foresee and does expatiate on some of the neuroses of Western Civilization that the Carter policy exemplifies. He notes the fact that disillusionment with the United Nations and the post-war dream of a stable and just international world order transformed itself into a collective masochism, a distrust of civilization itself, and above all what Toynbee called "a failure of nerve," that is to say, a disbelief in one's moral right and one's competence to govern. In Great Britain, these pathological developments were intermeshed with stagnation and regression under the Labour Party, with rising communist power in the

key trade unions, and with the growth of a passionately-held secular religion of egalitarianism in accordance with which any intimation that the African tribal Negro was incapable of furnishing his proportionate quota of Lincolns, Shakespeares, Mozarts, Newtons and Leonardos was to be regarded as a recrudescence of Nazism.

Steward gives much interesting detail about the long and sorry litanies of murder and misrule that constitutes the history thus far of the independent nations of Black Africa. He explains the South African belief that viable nations must consist of communities of people who share a heritage, a language, a history, institutions, habits, traditions and religions and that, when nations are mere de facto hodge-podges of mutually incongruent peoples and races who happen to occupy the same or contiguous territory, the result is discontent, riot, perhaps civil war, the accumulation of centrifugal forces until the artificial order is blown apart.

The salient weakness of the book, to my mind, is that it does not deal with the hard questions implied in the separate development approach. It is all very well to talk about cultural autonomy and to aver that all peoples have significant contributions to make to civilization. But this does not get us down to the bedrock questions. If South Africa is permitted by the rest of the world to carry out her experiment, will the Bantustans be able to create modern civilization? What will happen to any South African confederation of associated autonomous or independent entities, if the Black ones become staging areas for offensive actions against the civilized core? Where in short will power really reside and how are the power relations between Whites, Blacks, Coloured and Indians to be defined?

These questions may become increasingly irrelevant unless Mr Carter (but never, I believe, such ideologically committed advisors as Mondale and Young) has a change of heart and a return to common sense, unless Britain promptly elects a vigorous Tory government, or unless Congress simply refuses to support the new Carter adventurism in Africa. Failing these developments, South Africa will have her back to the sea and political experiment will yield to the hard laws of military expediency. In any event, Mr Steward has written a wise book that illuminates many dark corners in the much misunderstood South African attempt to pioneer in new forms of racial accommodation and racial justice. Whether his book has an impact on events or whether he discovers that, like Bolivar, he has spent his time plowing the seas, he has made a good contribution to a worthy cause.

NATHANIEL WEYL

THE IDEA OF RACE

By Michael Banton. Tavistock, London, 1977. Pp. 190. Price £6.50.

This book is written from the sociological point of view and has little to contribute on the question of race as such. Rightly, of course, he points out the incorrectness of using the word "black" for the immigrant communities. The Pakistanis, for instance, are far from black, and are often Caucasoids.

THE SINGING DUST

By Odette Tchernine and Gerald Moore. Neville Spearman, London, 1976. Pp. 87. Price £2.

This is a book of poems by Dr Gerald Moore and Miss Tchernine (our correspondent who has written on subjects more closely related to the purposes of this publication). We wish it well.