

# The Triumph of Folly: Carter and South Africa

By NATHANIEL WEYL

The policies of the Nixon-Ford administrations toward South Africa marked a significant departure from the posture of intransigent hostility and ideological outrage that had characterized its Democratic predecessors.

Resort to quiet persuasion rather than moralistic clamor contributed to the dramatic changes in South African race relations that occurred during those years, changes which have been under-reported by the U.S. press. In 1974 for the first time, the South African delegation to the United Nations included a Black, an Indian and a Colored representative. South Africa moved from total race segregation to integration of parks, libraries, museums, hotels, government buildings and sports arenas. In 1973, contestants from all of the nation's component races competed in the Third South African Games in Pretoria. The Colored and Indian peoples won membership in a Joint Cabinet Council. Recently, the laws making criminal inter-racial sex have been repealed.

The Carter Administration immediately reverted to the old hortatory and moralizing policies of the past and, through the voice of Vice-President Mondale, demanded publicly that South Africa accept as its goal "full political participation" and "majority rule," defining the latter as meaning that "every citizen should have the right to vote and every vote should be equally weighted."

This official statement of policy, subsequently reaffirmed by other Administration spokesmen, created two fundamental issues of conflict: South Africa viewed the demand as unwarranted and intolerable American interference in its internal affairs. Moreover, the political goal set by the Carter Administration has been repeatedly rejected by the South African electorate and is regarded as totally unacceptable.

The fact that the South African issue was seen as a black-and-white conflict between one-man-one-votism and the oligarchic rule of the dominant minority race was typical of Mr Carter's primitive populism and hardshell fundamentalism. A possible intermediate course would have been that proposed a century ago by Cecil Rhodes: "equal franchise for all civilized men." When my wife and I met with the leaders of the South African Indian community in Durban in 1967, the consensus opinion was that the Rhodes

formula represented the best practical solution to an extremely complex problem. (This opinion was no doubt influenced by memories of the January 1949 riots in Durban when a Zulu mob went berserk, murdering Indians and looting Indian shops during two days of horror in which 147 people were killed, more than 1000 were injured and 300 buildings were demolished. It would be reinforced by the subsequent mass deportations and expropriations of Indians from supposedly multiracial Black states because the former happened to be more energetic, more hard-working and more successful than the Black masses.)

A constructive approach to the South African problem along these lines would not, however, have given Mr Carter the Black electoral support he needs for 1980 nor would it have furthered the transformation of Ambassador Young's persona from domestic civil rights advocate to world champion of the nonwhite races.

## II.

The position of the South African Government is that the Black and White peoples of their land do not share the common values, institutions or other pre-requisites of common nationality. South African Whites also consider that Anglo-Saxon democracy on the Westminster model is quite alien to the African tribal heritage.

As Lord Balfour put it in his 1920 introduction to Bagehot's *The British Constitution*:

Constitutions are easily copied, temperaments are not, and if it should happen that the borrowed constitution and the native temperament fail to correspond, the misfit may have serious results. It matters little what other gifts a people may possess if they are wanting in those which from this point of view, are of most importance. If, for example, they have no capacity for grading their loyalties or for being moved by them; if they have no natural inclination to liberty and no natural respect for law; if they lack good humor and tolerate foul play; if they know not how to compromise or when; if they have not that distrust of extreme conclusions which is sometimes described as want of logic; if corruption does not repel them; and if their divisions tend to be either too numerous or too profound, the successful working of British institutions may be difficult or impossible. . . .

The word *nation* derives from Latin roots for "breed, stock or race . . .". One lesson of recent history would seem to be that nations composed of peoples with incompatible traditions, institutions, histories, folkways, religions, languages and origins are

seldom viable. Centuries of common history may solidify diverse populations into a strong and stable state, as for example Switzerland, but this is the exception.\*

The Moslem-Hindu massacres, following British withdrawal from India, may have claimed a million lives. Graeco-Turkish armed conflict in Cyprus and Moslem-Christian civil war in Lebanon almost destroyed both countries. Spain is plagued with Basque separatists, Canada by Francophone zealots, Belgium by Walloon-Flemish schism, Northern Ireland by religious war.

Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, tribal and religious wars have caused hideous genocide, of which the most salient recent example is Nigeria's suppression of the Ibo struggle for self-determination in the course of which two million men, women and children reportedly met death in its more unpleasant forms.

After his meeting with Vorster in Vienna, Mondale referred to the U.S. civil rights movement as "a transformation in American society of which we are very proud" and implied that the South African racial problem was analogous. This belief, as former Under-secretary of State George W. Ball put it in a perceptive article in the October 1977 *Atlantic Monthly*, reflects "the inability of our new political leaders to face the realities of the South African scene."

Blacks comprise 12 per cent of the U.S. population, 70 per cent of the South African. American Blacks are an English-speaking population, integrated into U.S. society, and ethnically mixed with anywhere from 15 per cent to 25 per cent white genes. The Bantu population of South Africa speaks its own native languages, has its own tribal reserves and homelands, is ethnically homogeneous, and is either cocooned in preliterate tribal witchcraft culture systems or in varying states of transition from that condition.

The two other non-European component elements in the South African population are the Asian Indians (3 per cent), brought in to do mine and plantation work toward the turn of the century, and the so-called Colored people (9 per cent) who constitute a fascinating ethnic mixture between Dutch settlers, Malayan laborers and the Hottentot-Bushman (Capoid) race which originally inhabited Cape Province.

The South African approach to the achievement of a society, based on the social, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious and educational diversity of its peoples and at the same time on their sharing a common territory and various common goals, is a fluid

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\* The Swiss are relatively homogenous. Probably the Celtic basis is accountable for this.—EDITOR.

and evolving attempt to approximate the Swiss system. The intent is to create autonomous or independent Black states, exercising partial or full sovereignty in their traditional homelands, to which all members of these tribe-nations would owe allegiance. These would coexist with a modern white state which contained institutions of representative self-government for its Indian and colored peoples. Supreme authority would be vested in a confederative body, representing all component elements.

While the South African officials my wife and I talked to 10 years ago were not at all sure that this evolving system would work, they were convinced that the simplistic one-man, one-vote solution, proposed by American and European liberals, would have disastrous consequences. They were even skeptical of the success of this approach in the United States. They asserted that the American civil rights movement did not assuage race strife, but exacerbated it and that the only political and social problem which the United States was unable to solve without civil war was the Negro problem.

The South African white view is that the majority vote formula would mean turning over state power to Black masses with low skills, deficient education, no demonstrated aptitude for self-government, and a tribal heritage incompatible with the values of western civilization. The consequences of this sort of devolution of power elsewhere in Africa, they assert, have ranged from flagrant corruption and incompetence in Kenya to genocide and savagery in their more hideous forms in such places as Burundi, Zanzibar, Zaire, Nigeria, Angola and Uganda.

The imposition of this solution would require a combination of invasion and civil war in the course of which the cities, mines, industries, wealth, amenities, civilization and culture of South Africa would probably be destroyed. Assuming it succeeded, the gainers from the ensuing retrogression and chaos would include the Soviet Union, the international communist movement, and the growing class of Black politicians in Africa and elsewhere who use racial demands as a means to political power. Majority rule in South Africa would almost certainly weaken Western influence there and hence bring about a shift in the global balance of power to the disadvantage of the Free World as a whole. Should the policy fail, it would create a burning and durable hatred of the United States in a country which has fought on our side in both world wars and in Korea, which shares Anglo-Saxon traditions of due process of law and free enterprise, and which has persistently sought good relations with Washington.

### III

The advocates of the Carter policy advance counter-considerations which they assert are more important:

First, by serving as the champion of race equality throughout the world, the United States will allegedly gain the support of powerful Black African states such as Nigeria. This proposition seems dubious on several grounds. Most African states have little or nothing that the United States needs. Those that have valuable strategic raw materials, Nigeria and Zaire, for instance, sell them on the most favorable market. American support of Black majority rule, in the form which it is assuming under Carter-Young, involves backing Marxist insurgents who have usually been financed, armed and indoctrinated by the Soviets or the Red Chinese. Their victory will enormously increase Kremlin control over the raw materials and strategic sea lanes of southern Africa and correspondingly weaken the military and economic strength of the West.

Second, it is asserted that the new policy merely recognizes an inevitable "wave of the future" — rule by nonwhites wherever they are in the majority. Failure on the part of the U.S. to support this inexorable historic trend would hand over leadership of the Third World by default to Moscow and Peking.

Marxists and Nazis have consistently claimed to be able to discern historically inevitable trends which coincided with their ideological prejudices and ensured their domination of the world. However, the one thing that history teaches us is the existence of the unforeseeable and the unexpected. Chicken entrails may suggest that Westminster parliaments are the wave of the future. The empirical evidence points in a different direction.

Even more dubious is the third proposition — that the U.S. can best defend Western Civilization by competing with the Soviet Union in tearing down the strongpoints and bastions of the existing order. The Soviet Union, as a system dedicated to destroying old power complexes and replacing them with its own power system, can pursue certain social revolutionary foreign policy objectives. The United States, if it continues to champion international freedom and order, cannot effectively compete in this sort of contest.

The final argument is that the South African social system is morally obscene, or at least contains morally obscene elements, a view that even such a comparatively realistic observer as George W. Ball at times expounds.

This view is based, I believe, either on misinformation or on the use of inappropriate standards and measuring rods. The extent to

which habeas corpus has been suspended, emergency powers brought into play and other sweeping repressive measures instituted against a real or imaginary Black uprising may seem wholly inappropriate to Americans. Would it seem irrational if Blacks constituted 70 per cent of our population and if a foreign power gave its official support to their demands for political power?

"One of the least forgivable sins of the South Africans," Ball writes, "is that the literacy rate is only 55 per cent and that no more than a handful of Blacks have been allowed to advance educationally beyond the rudimentary level."

Consider the second charge only. The implication is that the South African Government is trying to keep its Bantu population uneducated. In 1975, there were 5,427,000 South Africans in school, of whom 3,698,000 were Blacks. Thus, Blacks comprised both 70 per cent of the population and 70 per cent of the school population. The number of children in secondary schools is increasing at the rate of 41 per cent per annum.

Another frequent allegation is that the whole program of separate development is a sham and a hoax, or, as Ambassador Andrew Young expressed it with his habitual infelicitude and incapacity for accurate judgment, "it is all in Mr Vorster's mind". Billions of dollars have thus been spent by the South African state in fostering what we are told is a subjective, delusional state of a single political leader.

The areas set aside for Black autonomous evolution toward independence are said to be waste lands of infertile soil, concentration camps in which the Bantus are to be free to starve.

As South African economist D. Hobart Houghton observes in the 1976 edition of his standard *The South African Economy*, the native lands are above average because they are well-watered. "Under good management they could be highly productive."

But unfortunately they are execrably managed. The Bantu-speaking Negro people of South Africa are traditionally herdsmen, not farmers. The number, and not the quality of the cattle a man owns determine his wealth and status. Crop cultivation is on a subsistence basis and is relegated to women. On marriage, every man traditionally applies to his tribal chief for tillage land which he receives gratis regardless of his capacity to farm it.

The cattle on the native lands are seldom culled; they are not slaughtered, but allowed to die of old age or disease; they are poor milk yielders and inefficient draft animals. For over a century, missionaries and white agronomists have tried to persuade the Bantu to use their land resources intelligently, but with little

success. Egged on by revolutionary intellectuals, the traditionalist native Africans on the reserves threaten and sometimes murder those progressive Blacks who try to adopt modern farming methods.

It takes four to five African sheep to yield as much wool as the average sheep on white-owned land, according to Houghton. Maize is the main subsistence crop. Yields on white-owned farms rose from 551 kg. per hectare in 1946 to 1186 kg. in 1970. On the African farms, they remained stationary at around 230 kg.

There is chronic and sometimes desperate poverty on the African lands, but is this poverty the result of white oppression or the consequence of the unwillingness of the Blacks to shift from their tribal society of status, egalitarianism and envy to individual enterprise and a competitive economy?

The continuing expansion of Black population has not caused a shift to efficient, intensive farming, as in Japan or China, but has accelerated the erosive consequences of slash-and-burn tillage. This is transforming much of the native lands into desert. The Blacks on the tribal lands are thus kept alive by remittances from about 2 million emigrant Blacks who work in the mines and factories, in the cities and on the white-owned farms.

The large disparity between the average wages of Whites and Blacks in the non-agricultural economy, roughly a factor of eight to one in 1970, reflects differences in aptitudes and skills, over-supply of native labor from the gutted tribal lands, and discriminatory legislation. The last is being repealed about as fast as political conditions permit. The wage disparity will probably continue as long as Black labor is unskilled and redundant. It is not peculiar to South Africa, but characteristic of nations with reservoirs of unskilled labor and uncontrolled population growth.

Critics of South Africa and Rhodesia habitually contrast the squalid living conditions of the Blacks with the opulent lifestyles of the white middle class. A similar effect could be obtained by contrasting housing in the south Bronx with the oceanside residences of Palm Beach. The comparison is irrelevant. Most of the Whites would probably live about as well in other countries as they do in South Africa. Similarly, no revolution could magically endow the huddled Negroes of Soweto with the productivity of the white managers, scientists and technicians of Rivonia. A more relevant comparison is between the living standards of African Blacks and those of adjacent Black republics. In 1970-75, the United Nations reported life expectancy at birth of 52 years for South Africa and Rhodesia, 49 for Kenya, 45 for Zambia, 44 for Zaire and Botswana, 38 for Ethiopia and 37 for Nigeria.

#### IV

The Carter policy was launched with massive public relations pressure on South Africa to accept majority rule. The probable expectation was that this would forge a victorious coalition of white liberals and nonwhite dissidents powerful enough to force the government to its knees.

As soon as this opposition alliance began to coalesce, the government used its sweeping emergency powers to stamp out the lawlessness, riotings and killings which Mr Carter's rhetoric had helped provoke and to decapitate the movement by arresting and incarcerating its leaders and militant cadres. The Carter Administration then joined the chorus of righteous indignation at the UN. To quote Anatole France from memory: "*Cet animal est méchant, il se défend quand on l'attaque.*"

It seems evident that the Carter Administration cannot overthrow the Vorster government, American interference is more likely to strengthen its hold on the white voting population and to fortify moods of nationalism, outrage and resentment of injustice. Economic pressure to destroy the Franco regime shortly after the Second World War was similarly counterproductive.

No black force on the African continent can invade South Africa without inviting disaster. A commitment of American forces to any such adventure would arouse deep popular resentment and perhaps decisive opposition in Congress. If either Mr Carter or his evil genius in African affairs, Andrew Young, should use American power to arm, finance or support Soviet or Cuban forces deployed against white Africa, the political repercussions could be catastrophic for both of them.

What remains is a policy of increasing harassment and economic sanctions, forcing South Africa to move toward autarchic economic policies. One immediate consequence would be to jeopardize U.S. supplies of gold, uranium and chromium. Minister of Mines S. P. Botha recently predicted that by 1980 South Africa will be producing 40 per cent of the world's ferro chrome output. Another will be to jeopardize the enormous U.S. and U.K. direct investment stake. A third will be that control of the Cape of Good Hope route from the Persian Gulf oilfields to Europe will no longer be in the hands of a regime which has any reason to feel friendship for the West.

These consequences are self-evident. The possible effects within South Africa have been less frequently considered. Curtailment of gold production will jeopardize the jobs of 219,000 Black immigrant workers (1975 figures) from Lesotho, Botswana, Mozambique and other independent African states which already



face dire poverty and, in the case of Marxist Mozambique, famine.

Within the Republic, international encirclement will stimulate a reversion to the laager psychology. When attacked by Zulus or other warrior Black tribes, the South African Vortrekkers formed a ring of their covered wagons and fought behind them until they either drove off the attacking savages or met death together with their women and children.

This would mean a reversal of direction in South African race relations from gradually increasing co-operation to strict segregation dictated by security considerations. Millions of Blacks, now in the cities and on the white farms, would probably be extruded and sent back to the native reserves.

A widespread Western illusion is that South Africa desperately needs cheap unskilled Black labor to maintain its prosperity, a variant obviously of Lenin's theory of imperialism. It is true that this labor is at present necessary in the gold mines and in other mining export industries. Rapid elimination of the Bantu labor force would cause painful, temporary readjustments, but in the long run it would have the economically salutary effect of speeding up mechanization and attracting non-Negro skilled immigrant workers. An affective economic embargo of South Africa's international trade would accelerate the elimination of Black labor and this process would probably prove irreversible.

These developments would leave the native reserves and the Bantustans without the remittances from Black urban workers that they currently need for survival and would accelerate a rural crisis in these lands, compounded of slash-and-burn agriculture, cattle accumulation, tribalistic egalitarianism, soil erosion and overpopulation.

If the UN applies harsh economic sanctions long enough, it might persuade the South Africans to abandon their separate development plans for a multiracial confederation. The alternative would be to partition the country; remove all the Blacks permanently from the white, or at least non-Bantu, state; and, having removed them, let them sink swim.

Surgery of this sort might rid South Africa of her racial problem insofar as it concerns Blacks and in time perhaps the international chorus of denunciation and harassment to which she has been subjected. After all, nobody today makes an issue of the fact that white Australia's millions of acres are out of bounds to the teeming millions of Southeast Asia.

Even if these possible consequences have been carefully considered, which seems dubious, they are not likely to profoundly

affect American policy. To most American intellectuals, Mr Carter's character and motivations contain an element of mystery. The *Washington Post* speculated last June that his South African policy derives from a guilt complex occasioned by his tardy acceptance of the ideology of the civil rights movement. According to the same source, "he feels a disciple's respect and humility before an apostle," the apostle being, of all people, Andrew Young.

We have no means of judging whether this analysis has any truth in it. But it seems clear that the entire problem of American foreign policy is immeasurably complicated by having a born-again fundamentalist in the White House, a man of painfully evident educational and experiential limitations, and a member of that class of "terrible simplifiers," to use the phrase of philosopher of history Jacob Burckhardt, who have caused so much misfortune and evil through history.

## V

What sort of South African policy would correspond to the national interests of the United States and to the affirmation of the values for which this nation has traditionally stood?

Perhaps the most essential thing is to abandon the illusion that we are the moral schoolmasters of the world. Our own achievements and successes may or may not be applicable to peoples with radically different origins and histories. That is a matter for them to decide for themselves. And on practical grounds, we have neither the power nor the will for a foreign policy of diffuse and officious meddling. We should perhaps learn that there is sometimes virtue in restraint and wisdom in masterly inaction.

To place matters in realistic perspective, both for African and for American audiences, U.S. officials should stop making historically preposterous parallels between the contemporary breed of terrorists, strutting dictators and Marxist agents in some of the newly hatched nations and the organizers of the American Revolution of 1776 and those who shaped the American Constitution. Recent history demonstrates that many of the former seize power to destroy due process of law, abolish basic personal freedoms, and create social organizations reminiscent of concentration camps. They are not carriers of the ideals of 1776, but its destroyers. American Government officials who represent uncouth military cutthroats as the heirs of Thomas Jefferson are engaging in an obscene defilement of their nation's history.

We should recognize that South Africa has supported the

West against the totalitarian tides, not merely because of expediency, but by reason of shared institutions, values and cultural heritage. We may disapprove of South Africa's racial policies, but she remains an outpost of modernity, freedom and order in a continent of oppression and misrule.

General support for, and friendship with, South Africa does not preclude criticism of her racial policies. The latter should involve a recognition that the success or failure of the separate development strategy will only become a matter of fundamental American national interest if its fiasco threatens to self-destruct South African society.

The larger implication is that the order, prosperity and progress of the world as a whole will better be served by supporting societies which are taking constructive steps toward modernization of the basis of political and economic individualism — efforts beneficial to all classes and all races — than by joining the clamor of have-not nations and resentful politicians to seize other peoples' lands by force. For having seized this power, they will predictably abuse it.

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