

ARTICLE FOR SUNDAY TRIBUNE

Undated

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In West Germany all the major political parties have foundations which support them : The Adenauer Foundation for the Conservatives (CDU), the Naumann Foundation for the Liberals (FDP), and the Ebert Foundation for the Socialists (SPD). These foundations are important opinion formers for these parties and do, amongst other things, research on various topics and channel funds to and set up projects in various developing countries. The Seminars I attended over the last 18 months were arranged by the Neumann and Ebert Foundations respectively. The common topic of discussion : Foreign Policy Options towards South Africa for the Bonn Government. The debate that took place on both these occasions is a fairly common in Europe at the moment and also one of increasing significance for South Africa. It is a debate with basically two arguments. When it comes to the question : What should the (West German, British, USA, etc.,) Government's policy be towards South Africa?, the answer, simply put, is either : Confrontation or Constructive Engagement. These two options work with different assumptions about the nature, tempo and outcome of change in South Africa and in terms of strategy recommendations are becoming increasingly irreconcilable with one another. The confrontation option assumes that violence is not only inevitable as part of the final "solution" to South Africa's conflict, but in fact necessary. Therefore anything which prevents or prolongs the "inevitable" is bad and must be eradicated or undermined. Thus, as far as foreign policy recommendations are concerned, the following strategies should be considered : Disinvestment, sanctions of any kind, increasing isolation, support for the liberation movements in and around South Africa. All forms of, what this option defines as collaboration, is condemned and ridiculed : Parliamentary Opposition policies, homeland governments, Urban Foundation, Fair Employment Codes etc. In short, the attitude is that things have to get worse before they can get any better.

The other option of Constructive Engagement assumes that a violent confrontation will lead to an irresolvable siege situation for a very long time in which no side would "win" in any significant sense of the word and that the resources of this country would be systematically destroyed. Therefore, anything which can encourage reform and a rational response to the pressures building up should be supported as well as that which increases the skills and resources of people involved in the struggle for freedom and justice. Thus, as far as foreign policy recommendations are concerned, the following strategies should be considered : selective investment which improves skills and natural resources, applying pressure on multi-national companies to implement fair employment practices, applying a carrot/stick approach to sport, cultural and political contacts and interaction. This option rejects the viability or effectiveness of sanctions or boycotts and the attitude is more one of : we must prevent it getting worse because if it does, it could stay like that for a very long time without it getting any better.

Behind these two options is of course the matter of interests. What are the interests concerned and how best can they be protected or promoted? In answering this question it

is important to realize that there is not one set of interests common to all groups in West Germany or Britain. It is a dangerous fallacy to treat Bonn or London as a single actor with one set of interests. South Africa's significance can be defined from a military, mineral or super-power rivalry perspective amongst many other possibilities and each such definition brings different and often competing interests groups into play. What is interesting though is that whatever the diversity of interest groups, as far as foreign policy options are concerned, they have been narrowed down to the two of confrontation or constructive engagement. Which option is going to win? It is not as simple as that. Now one will dominate and then the other. What will determine this? Largely, what happens inside South Africa. What are the options inside South Africa? Come to think of it only two : Confrontation or Negotiation.