

ARTICLE FOR SENATOR G. MALAGODI
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SOUTH AFRICA ON THE THRESHOLD
OF A NEW EXPERIMENT

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In September of this year, 1984, the present South African Parliament will finally have come to an end and a new Parliamentary system will come into operation. Up until then and since 1910, South Africa had a Westminster type of Parliament in which only the White minority was represented. One of the basic political paradoxes of this system was that the representatives of the White minority passed legislation and took political decisions in this Parliament which affected the lives of everybody in South Africa, i.e. Blacks, Coloureds and Asians. But, only the White minority could call to account those representatives for their political actions.

A quick look at the population composition of South Africa underlines the significance of this paradox. According to the 1980 Census there were 4.5 million Whites, 2.6 million Coloureds (people of mulatto or mixed descent), 800,000 Indians and 22 million Blacks. Succinctly put, 1.3 million registered White voters elected representatives to a White Parliament that governed the lives of 29 million people. Everyone, including the governing National Party in South Africa, agreed that this kind of racial domination was untenable, and that something had to be done. As far as the Government is concerned, that something is taking place in September of this year, when for the first time, people other than Whites are being included in a new Parliamentary system of government in the country.

The new system will consist of a three House Parliament, one House for Whites, one for Coloureds and one for Asians. No provision is made for Black representation within the new Parliamentary system. As far as the Government is concerned, the Blacks consist of a number of tribes or nations that have to be accommodated in their respective Homeland areas, and constitutional structures have to be promoted in these areas which eventually will lead to complete constitutional and political independence for the various Black tribes. So far, four of these Homelands have taken independence "South Africa" style. They are Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei. However, this independence is recognised only by the South African Government and by the respective homelands that have taken independence themselves. No other country in the world is prepared to acknowledge the independence of these Homelands. Because of its policy of separate Homeland independence, the Government argues that it is justifiable to exclude Blacks from any participation in the common Parliamentary structure. That is why Coloureds and Asians, according to the Government, can be included in a new Parliamentary system and Blacks have to be excluded.

Within the new Parliamentary system for Coloureds, Asians and Whites, however, political control is still firmly entrenched in the hands of the White minority. The dominant Party in the White House elects the President, and through him, its will prevails at all the key sites of decision-making. However, it is argued that for the first time people, other than Whites, in other words, Coloureds and Asians, can participate in decision-making and through their participation influence the outcome of political decisions. This, it is argued, at least is a change that deserves not to be ignored.

It is further argued that this change in itself will introduce a new dynamic into the political situation in South Africa which could spark off a whole range of unintended consequences that can lead to further changes, particularly with regard to black constitutional development. Some commentators say that precisely because of this change, a hidden constitutional or political agenda is beginning to take shape over which the Government cannot have final and complete control. The beauty about such an argument of course, is that precisely because of the nature of the argument, anyone's guess is as good as anyone else's.

However, there are some sobering facts and statistics, against which one must always temper one's optimism about the unintended consequences of political experiments of this kind.

1. Measured in terms of its stated goals, namely, to provide political accommodation effectively for the Black majority the Homeland policy is simply not working. It is not politically effective, nor economically viable. What is more, the Homelands are primarily situated in the rural areas of South Africa comprising approximately 13% of the land area. Conservative population projections show that South Africa's population will increase from approximately 29 million in 1980 to about 45 million by the year 2000. It is also clear that the urban population is likely to increase from 13.7 million in 1980 to about 30 million by the year 2000. In short, South Africa's political problems will be located in the urban metropolitan complexes and not in the rural areas and the Government's present policy towards Blacks has a very strong rural bias.

2. The centre of the South African economic strength is based in the metropolitan and urban complexes. It is abundantly clear that increasingly this economy is becoming more and more dependant on Black labour. At present of the nearly 9 million economically active persons in South Africa, almost $\frac{2}{3}$, i.e. 6 million, are Black. 16% of those in clerical work and 87% of all ordinary labourers are Black, 63% of all workers in the Transport industry are Black, 60% of all workers in the service industries are Black, 80% of all workers in agriculture are Black, in Mining 87%, in manufacturing 83%, the construction industry 57%, trade 53%, electricity and water supply 53%. A simple point to sum up these statistics - economic stability is inextricably bound up with political rights for all South Africans. In the metropolitan and urban complexes of South Africa we face a political and constitutional vacuum in the interaction between Whites and Blacks.
3. To highlight this last point, one simply has to take a cursory look at the vast socio-economic changes that the Black majority is going to experience, largely as a result of the process of urbanisation over the next 20 years. For example, the number of black school children is likely to increase from 4.9 million in 1980 to about 10 million by the year 2000. If a teacher/pupil ratio of $\frac{1}{25}$ should be achieved by the year 2000, about 14,500 teachers for Black pupils would have to be trained every year for the next 2 decades, compared to the present actual number of about 8,000. The potential supply of labour is likely to increase from 10.5 million in 1980 to about 17.6 million by the year

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2000 which implies that 970 new jobs would have to be created every single day over this period if we set the norm of full employment. This figure does not include the number of jobs needed for those presently unemployed and under-employed.

Skill shortages, especially of entrepreneurs and the highest skilled categories are critical, for example, assuming a maximum contribution of Whites to the skilled categories, we may need about 4,300 other than White executives to enter the labour market every year over the next two decades. This figure compares with an actual net addition of 500 executives per annum during the last decade. The urban housing needs are likely to require an annual addition of 125,000 units between 1980 and 1990 and of 145,000 units between 1990 and 2000, excluding existing backlogs of about 350,000 units. This compares with the construction rate of 70,000 units per year between 1970 and 1980.

The new Constitution which comes into effect this year does not directly address itself to these problems that I have just sketched. It is geared primarily to a Parliamentary system of consultation and bargaining between the three minorities, Coloureds, Asians and Whites. However, the fundamental paradox which I referred to in the first few paragraphs, still remains, because the budget which affects the lives of the total South African population, is passed by this new Parliament.

This budget determines the quality of life and physical infrastructure of not only Coloureds, Asians and Whites, but also of the Black majority. By their very exclusion from the new consitutional system, Blacks are going to make their presence even more keenly felt. This fatal flaw could become a vital precipitant for new constitutional changes. The Government is aware of the gap as far as Blacks are concerned, particularly those living in the urban areas, and has created a special Cabinet Committee to go into the whole question of further Black constitutional development. Thus as far as Coloureds, Asians and Whites as well as Blacks are concerned, South Africa is poised on the threshold of a new constitutional experiment. Is this experiment going to be nothing more than, as one commentator put it, re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, or will it help us to change course and avoid the ice bergs ? For those of us who work for a more democratic, more humane and more just South Africa, we have no choice, but to pursue the latter course, even with the most inadequate of instruments, and even though the former remains an ever present reality.

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