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IS THERE A SOUTH AFRICAN NATION?

JAMES BARBER

THE JAN SMUTS MEMORIAL LECTURE programme was established in 1984 to commemorate General J.C. Smuts as a statesman of international stature and is intended to focus on current world concerns by means of lectures delivered by speakers who are themselves of international reputation.

The first Jan Smuts Memorial Lecture was given by SIR LAURENS VAN DER POST in Pretoria on 24 May 1984 on *The Importance of Smuts in the Future of the Afrikaner.*

This second Jan Smuts Memorial Lecture was delivered by Professor J.P. Barber at Jan Smuts House, Johannesburg, on 15 January 1987.

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Nationalism is one of the most powerful but elusive political forces of our time - here in South Africa as elsewhere. Within the South African state, powerful nationalist movements have competed with each other, and yet we can still legitimately ask whether there has been, or indeed is, a South African nation?

Before facing that question directly, let me first offer a classical statement on nationalism. In 1945 Hans Kohn wrote: 'Nationalism is a state of mind ... [It] is a new idea, ... which fills man's brain and heart with new thoughts and new sentiments, and drives him to translate his consciousness into deeds of organised action. Nationality is therefore not only a group held together and animated by common consciousness, but it is also a group seeking to find its expression in what it regards as the *highest form of organised activity, a sovereign state ... Nationalism* demands the nation state'.[1]

Kohn has rightly forced us to consider not only 'the nation' but also 'the state', and the relationship between the two. In thumbnail terms, 'the state' has four main characteristics - first, it occupies a precise space - we enter a state by crossing a border; secondly, it has a government which claims sovereignty; thirdly, it is recognised as sovereign by other states of the international community; and finally, there is a machinery of government - manned by government servants within the institutions of the state.

The relationship between nation and state has long been recognised, but not always agreed. After the First World War, President Woodrow Wilson swept into Europe, confident that he could ensure future peace by creating nation/states - *by identifying the seperate European nations and drawing* state boundaries around them. Like Kohn, he saw the nation creating the state. However, as well as the difficulties Wilson encountered because people of the same nation do not live in neat geographical packages, experience has shown that his assumption about the relationship of nation and state is often reversed - that instead of the nation creating the state, the state creates a nation. Massimo D'Azeglio declared in 1860: 'Now we have made Italy, we must set to work to make the Italians'. And in the USA itself, that great melting pot, all sorts and conditions of people have become 'Americans' because the government has preached a common nationalism. In more recent times, Zambian Radio regularly announces 'One *Zambia, One Nation' - not because it is a statement of fact, but because it* is the government's objective. The state in these cases precedes and shapes the nation, creating state/nations.

In turning to examine nation and state in South Africa, I want to investigate the idea of politicians. Of course, ideas are often not implemented, and like everybody else, politicians are inconsistent and

contradictory, and their views change over time, but it is possible to identify main streams which capture the debate about nation and state in this country.

Nation, State, and the Union

First, I want to look at three broad streams of ideas which were running during Smuts's time - from the formation of the Union to the post-Second World War years. The first of these streams was represented by Smuts himself in 'White Reconciliation'.

The White Reconcilers: Smuts - the Nation and State

Smuts's ambition was to build a South African nation through the reconciliation of the two main white groups - Afrikaners and English-speakers. In London in 1917 he spoke of building a stable and strong South Africa on the foundation of white unity. 'We want', he said, 'to create ... a new South African nation out of our allied racial stock, [and by 'racial' he meant the different white races] and if we succeed in doing that we shall achieve a new nationality embracing and harmonising our various traits and blending them all into a richer national type'.[2] Smuts never wearied of this task, so that when South Africa entered the Second World War, he appealed for a united white nation, and at the end of that war, he led a drive for increased white immigration (particularly from Britain) to reinforce the white nation. 'Let them come', he declared, 'the good and the bad, let them come in their thousands, their tens of thousands, their hundreds of thousands, we shall absorb them'.[3]

Smuts's nation did not embrace black men. In his 1917 speech appealing for white unity, he said that an axiom of white/black relations was no intermixture of blood, for earlier civilizations had been 'submerged in the quicksands of African blood'. Nor did he favour shared institutions. 'It is useless', he said, 'to try to govern black and white in the same system, to subject them to the same institutions of government and legislation'.[4] He developed this theme further in a Rhodes Memorial Lecture at Oxford in 1929, when he spoke of Africans as 'children of nature'; a race 'so unique, and so different in its mentality and its culture from those of Europe [that it] requires policy very unlike that which would suit Europeans'. He argued that the Cape tradition of 'equal rights for all civilised men' had arisen before the strength of native traditional systems had been recognised, when it had wrongly been assumed that the only place for a civilised native was in the white man's world. The future, he said, lay in 'segregation'.[5]

Yet Smuts was too intelligent to ignore the practical and moral problems of segregation. He was in fact bedevilled throughout his political life by

uncertainty about how to handle 'the native problem'. He suffered both from the academic's complaint of seeing many sides to every question, and the politician's realization that the white electorate would not stomach much reform. He could understand the injuatice of the blacks' position but his instinct was to preserve the white position. Even in the 1929 Rhodes lecture, having set out his ideal - segregation - he recognised the difficulties in industry, where white and black were brought together; and opposed the colour bar, saying that 'The white man should be able to hold his own as a worker'. But Smuts did not stop there. How far, he asked, should political segregation go? He confessed that like others he could not see clear daylight on this issue, but his conclusion, which was astonishing for a man who had just been preaching segregation, was that in 'the supreme legislature of a country with a mixed population all classes and colours should have representation ... the weaker in the community should not be heard or should go without representation'.[6]

In all the shifts and pressures that were to follow, Smuts could never escape the dilemma of believing in segregation and in the superiority of European civilization, yet recognising that the policies which flowed from these were neither fully practical nor equitable to the blacks. During the Second World War, with blacks increasingly drawn into the urban economy, he said that economic and social segregation were dead. He tried to avoid spelling out a political alternative, for he admitted: 'it is demanding too much of human nature to ask Black and White to be just and fair to each other'.[7] Smuts recognised that on racial issues 'I am suspected of being a hypocrite because I can be quoted on both sides', but if forced to make a choice 'In the last resort I take the side of the European and what he stands for in this continent'.[8] Whatever the reasons, his indecision created a fertile field for his opponents. 'On the colour problem', said D.F. Malan, 'he never sounded a clear note'.[9]

When Smuts turned his attention to the relationship between nation and state, he saw the white South African nation playing a role similar to that of the Americans in spreading across a continent. He was committed to expansion. For that the British Commonwealth and Empire seemed the ideal vehicle. Already in 1917 Smuts was claiming: 'We have started by creating a new white base in South Africa and today we are in a position to move forward towards the North and the civilization of the African continent'. He spoke of a future in which 'South' Africa would be a misnomer because the limits of European civilization would have moved so far.[10] In 1922, when Smuts was trying to persuade the white Rhodesians to join the Union, he told them: 'The Union is going to be for the African continent what the United States has become for the American continent. Rhodesia will not stop the march, rather she will proudly form the vanguard'.[11] Of course, Smuts failed to persuade the Rhodesians, but a couple of years later, under the banner of 'The Highlands for the Whites', he was urging Amery, the new

British Secretary of State for the Colonies, to promote a vast European state (presumably led by the Union), stretching from South Africa to Kenya. That too led nowhere, but Smuts persisted. At the outbreak of the Second World War he spoke of the need for 'the larger African view', and of the Union's obligation to stand by the British colonies - 'Like an elder brother on the African continent'.[12] He asked for the transfer of the three British Protectorates and later called for a Commonwealth reorganisation in which the Dominions would become 'sharers and partners in the Empire', taking an interest in the Colonies 'within their sphere'.[13] Smuts was, of course, principally thinking of South Africa's sphere in Africa.

In brief, therefore, Smuts sought to create a common white nation, drawing together Afrikaners and English-speakers. The destiny of this nation lay not within the confines of the Union but across Africa in a vast white-controlled state or series of states within the Commonwealth. Although he vacillated on the position of the blacks, they were not part of his nation and within the state he usually favoured segregation.

Afrikaner Nationalism

Smuts was opposed by the Afrikaner Nationalists. Afrikaner nationalism is sometimes depicted as monolithic. That is only true in the sense that it has sought to present a united front to its opponents, but, as with all political parties, there have been continuing debates and divisions within its ranks, even about the definition of Afrikaner - should it embrace all whites who put South Africa first, or was it restricted to Afrikaans-speakers? Should the coloureds be included?

Despite all that, a predominant stream of ideas can be identified. First was the conviction that the Afrikaners were a distinctive people, a nation in their own right - forged by the dual struggle against both the British and the black Africans. Unlike Smuts, the Nationalists rejected the idea of fusing the two white streams, for that, said Tobie Muller in 1913, would be 'a curse for South Africa', producing 'a colourless, flaccid uniformity, neither fish nor fowl'.[14]

Secondly, the destiny of the Afrikaner nation had been shaped by God, whose hand could be seen working through their history, nurturing the 'volk' through suffering and tribulation. 'We hold this nationhood as our due', said Dr D F Malan, 'for it was given to us by the Architect of the Universe', who 'has a unique calling for our People ... My feeling of nationality thus rests upon a religious foundation'.[15]

Thirdly, the group (the volk/nation), not the individual, was emphasised. In 1935 Dr Nic Diederichs declared that: 'Only in the nation as the most

total, the most inclusive human community, can man realise himself to the full. The nation is the fulfillment of the individual life'. He dismissed the notion of a common humanity as meaningless, unless seen in terms of a community of nations, which were 'the only true realities'. God had willed the diversity of nations, concluded Diederichs, so that service to the nation was service to God.

Diederichs's views were criticised even by some of his Nationalist colleagues, who accused him of setting the nation above God, but they did not dispute his view that the Afrikaners were 'not a section. We are a nation ... with anchors and roots in this country and this country alone. If there is a "section" in this country, then we may in all honesty say that our English fellow citizens ... are no nation in the true sense of the word but a section of a nation overseas'.[16]

The implications of Diederichs' views were profound. The Afrikaners were not only the core element of the South African state, but all other groups were less than 'true' South Africans - the blacks because South Africa was a white man's country, the English-speakers because they were 'a section of a nation overseas'. The Nationalists believed that by right they should control the state - not a larger state as Smuts envisaged, but South Africa. In 1935 L J du Plessis called for the 'self development of the Afrikaans nation as an independent member of the great world community of Peoples', claiming that Afrikaners should have control over the soil and riches of South Africa and 'should bring forth by their own power their own Afrikaans constitutional organization as armour and shield for the Afrikanerization of South Africa'.[17]

Nationalists were indignant at the Afrikaners' subordinate position in government and business under an Anglicised elite. The Nationalists were determined to control the state, to remove Afrikaners' humiliation by using state powers and patronage to bring them status, to renew their pride, to promote a Republic, and transform them into 'the' dominant group. The Nationalists, although led by professionals - lawyers, teachers, predicants, civil servants - set out to mobilise all Afrikanerdom, to overcome 'the poor white problem' and ensure that Afrikaner workers saw their salvation in a nationalist movement and not a class struggle. L J du Plessis urged the 1939 Congress to 'mobilise the volk to conquer the capitalist system and to transform it so that it fits our ethnic nature'.[18]

There was an exception to the Nationalists' view of expansion. They wanted the incorporation of three British Protectorates - Basutoland, Bechuanaland, and Swaziland - as contemplated in the Act of Union. The Protectorates were seen as potentially dangerous models for native policies, and their separate existence as a slight to South Africa's sovereign status. At a dinner in 1950 given in honour of Patrick

Gordon-Walker, the visiting British Colonial Secretary, Malan turned to his guest to say that apart from 'the question of grievous mistrust' (of whether South Africa could be trusted 'with the protection or promotion of native interests') the failure to transfer the territories 'affects our status and place among other Commonwealth members'. Unlike any other member, South Africa had to harbour within her borders territories 'entirely dependent on her economically and largely also for defence, but belonging to and governed by another country'. He asked if anybody could blame South Africa if she felt she had been 'relegated to a position of inferiority'; a semi-independent or third class country.[19]

In short, while Smuts favoured a broadly-based white nationalism, with an expanding state within the British Commonwealth, the Afrikaner Nationalists favoured an exclusive Afrikaner nationalism, based on the conviction that the 'volk' had been shaped by divine providence to lead South Africa, and that through control of the state, they could ensure that Afrikaner interests were protected and promoted.

Liberalism

The third stream active in Smuts's time was liberalism. Liberalism is a broad political orientation - more a cast of mind than a set of clear objectives - and there were differences among South Africa's liberals. For instance, Hoernlé, one of the leading white liberal figures, suggested in his 1939 Phelp Stokes lectures that a 'liberal native policy' might be built on full racial assimilation, or parallelism (differentiation without territorial segregation), or total separation.

However, again, a broad stream can be found - emphasising individual rather than group rights; equality before the law; representative institutions; political participation based on personal qualifications, not on group or race; but there was less concern with social and economic rights. It was a search for individual constitutional and legal rights, not economic and social equality. South African liberalism is usually associated with the Cape and a small group of white politicians and white-sponsored institutions - such as the Institute for Race Relations. However, that view fails to recognise the importance of liberal ideas among black political leaders, who were perhaps the most commited bearers of liberal ideas. They sought a common society based on equal rights, but they accepted that blacks could only gain those rights through personal qualifications. Selope Thema, writing in 1922, said that the Africans had no wish to encroach on white society, but 'we claim our rights of citizenship first as the aboriginals of this country, and second as British subjects'. He asked for a voice in government and for equal protection before the law. 'In short', he wrote, 'we claim equal political rights with our fellow subjects'.[20]

Both white and black liberals identified educated Africans as the key group. Dr A B Xuma told students in 1930 that a revolution of ideas was needed, in which 'the educated African is our hope, our bridge. He is an asset that responsible and thinking white South Africans cannot afford either to ignore or to alienate without disastrous results in the long run'. Without recognition or the franchise, the blacks would be forced into a racist movement - driving 'all the Bantu; civilised or uncivilised; into one camp'.[21] It was this which made them fight so hard for the Cape colourblind franchise, for it gave blacks equal status.

The liberals believed that potentially the nation could embrace all who lived in South Africa, irrespective of race, in a common unsegregated society. In 1935, when the government introduced legislation for segregation, the All African Convention warned that it would create 'two nations in South Africa, whose interests and aspirations must inevitably clash', because the implication of political segregation was separate racial states and that was not only undesirable but impractical. The way forward was to further the interests of all the races 'which constitute the South African nation', and adopt 'a policy of political identity' to ensure the 'creation of a South African nation in which, while the various racial groups may develp on their own lines socially and culturally, they will be bound together by the pursuit of common political objectives'.[22]

The liberals of the day had no thought of immediate black majority rule, and denied that race would be the distinguishing factor of political life. Professor D D T Jabavu, giving evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee in 1927, argued for the extension of the Cape franchise to the whole Union, but, with the characteristic moderation of the liberal, he suggested a 'modified form of franchise with a high educational and property qualification'. He denied that the Cape franchise was a danger to European civilization, because the criterion was 'civilization', and every black who obtains the vote had 'abandoned the position of barbarism'. 'We are', he said, 'ranged on the side of civilization'. The Natives, he said, would not swamp the Europeans because the extension of the Native vote would be slow, whereas the Natives could no longer be satisfied with traditional forms of authority, because African life had been transformed.[23]

Yet the 'nation' of the liberal image was unclear. Although potentially all could eventually participate, it was the nation of 'the qualified', and that lacked both passion and clarity. Liberalism was an imported product and, although it had caught the imagination and commitment of leading Cape Afrikaner politicians, its limits had been demonstrated by the failure to extend the Cape franchise. Moreover, liberalism was then based on African acceptance of white leadership and white civilization and, although white liberals were genuinely eager to give black men opportunities, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship were confined to an elite with

qualifications which most blacks did not and could not have.

Also, because of lack of opportunity in the white-dominated political parties, black politicians were forced to go it alone. When the South African Native National Congress was established in 1912, 'National' was in the title, but so was 'Native', and John Tengo Jabavu for one, rejected it because that put it outside the Cape non-racial tradition. Ironically, therefore, in trying to foster a non-racial society, the black liberals were obliged to form a racial party.

With regard to the state, the liberals were concerned with institutions and constitutional arrangement, and in that they often looked admiringly to Britain. The black liberals also appealed there for support, and reminded the British Government of the imperial tradition encapsulated in Rhodes's dictum: 'Equal Rights for all civilised men'. As late as 1930, J T Gumede gained little support at an African National Congress (ANC) conference, when he said it was an illusion to expect justice from Britain, that Africans must rely on their own strength and revolutionary fervour to gain freedom.

However, even during the Second World War, fought ostensibly for liberal values, South African liberals were increasigly conscious of their weakness. In 1943 Leo Marquard wrote that in the face of the strength of the United Party and Afrikaner Nationalism, liberalism was 'fighting a gallant rear guard action ... all it can do is to try to prevent the forces of reaction from having it all their own way'.[24] Among white liberals there was a hope that Jan Hofmeyr would form a separate party or at least lead a liberal group within the United Party Government, but that hope died with Hofmeyr.

The gloom was well founded. Although a Liberal Party was created in 1953, liberalism failed to gain white electoral support, and by that time, most black political leaders had abandoned it. Commenting on the formation of the Liberal Party, Nelson Mandela said that liberals were searching for a middle ground where none exists. They condemn and criticise the Government for its reactionary policies, but they are afraid to identify themselves with the people 'and they limit their action within the constitutional structure but that structure was created by the oppressors to defend themselves'. The struggle, he said, is between the oppressors and the oppressed.[25]

Liberals have not taken such criticisms lying down. Alan Paton wrote: 'I hold in contempt those young white radicals who sneer at liberals ... who were their mentors? If it had not been for the Jabavus, Marquards, Hoernlés, they would have been in darkness until now ... One expects black power to sneer at white liberals. After all, white power has done it for

generations. But if black power meets white power in headlong confrontation, and there are no black liberals and white liberals around, then God help South Africa'.[26]

Nation, State, and the Republic

Of the three streams prominent in Smuts's time, Afrikaner Nationalism proved to be the most powerful. The United Party survived after Smuts's death, but as a declining force. Elements of liberalism live on in the PFP, the churches, and organisations like the Black Sash, but it was Afrikaner Nationalism that flourished. After gaining power in 1948, the National Party Government systematically set out to ensure that the races were rigidly separated, that control of the state was in Afrikaner hands, and that Afrikaner interests were promoted.

In implementing its policies, the government not only imposed territorial segregation, but created a government machine manned by Afrikaners and dedicated to implementing apartheid. Therefore the self-interest and motivation of a substantial section of the bureaucracy lay in the separation of people, and the promotion of Afrikaner interests.

The Multi-National State

The Afrikanerisation of the state was crowned by the achievement of the Republic in 1961, but ironically, in the moment of triumph, the inadequacy of Afrikaner nationalism became clear. Under the challenge of internal black nationalism and international opposition, the government was forced, in defence of its own position, to redefine nation and state. It introduced two new concepts - first, a 'white nationalism', and secondly, 'the multi-national state'. Verwoerd, the central figure, revised his ideas of a unitary apartheid state with the claim that there were in South Africa separate nations, each with its distinctive characteristics, traditions, and destinies. He identified eight black 'national units' which, together with the coloured, Indian and white national groups, made up the multi-national state. However, the characteristics of each of these 'nations' was different - the white based on race; the black on tribes; while the coloureds and Indians were seen as 'aspiring nations'.

The aim, said Verwoerd, was to develop separate, parallel streams - 'within every stream it is the goal to achieve the fullest rights and opportunities for a particular population group, to protect them and extend them'.[27] There could, for Verwoerd, be no fudging of the issues - it was either integration or complete separate development - and suggested concessions, like allowing coloured MPs, or white investment in the Bantustans, were forbidden because they would undermine apartheid. Vorster, who followed Verwoerd, although more flexible, underlined that the movement had to be

away from and not towards each other, and it was under his Premiership that some of the Bantustans moved to 'independence'.

That was a remarkable, perhaps unique, step. Without a military defeat, the government was carving out sections of its own territory to try to create new states. While other governments try to integrate those who live within their borders and consolidate those borders, the South African Government was emphasising differences among its inhabitants and reducing the territorial state. It did so to ensure that the great bulk of the state remained in white hands. Those white hands were not exclusively Afrikaner. 'When I talk of the nation of South Africa', declared Verwoerd, 'I talk of the white people of South Africa'.[28] He argued that this had become possible because of the Republic, but at least as important was the threat to white control of the state, so that the Afrikaner rulers needed the backing of the English-speakers.

Unlike Smuts's reconciliation, this was white consolidation. The English-speakers were asked to rally behind the Afrikaner-dominated government. They were allowed into the club but not to help run it. When Vorster was later accused by 'right wingers' of endangering Afrikanerdom by vigorous white immigration, he responded: 'There will be no immigration scheme which will prejudice the survival of Afrikaans or the Afrikaner or materially change the composition of this people'. His vision was 'of the Afrikaner nation ... proud of their language, their customs and traditions; and ... the English-speaking people who love South Africa just as much, who endorse the policy of the National Party ... With these Afrikaners and English-speakers we must and shall build a nation in South Africa'.[29]

The Chartists

The main challenge to the government came from black-led movements. Among these were 'the Chartists' - those groups, including the ANC, which accepted the Freedom Charter of 1955.

Like most political documents, the Charter is open to conflicting interpretations - with its mixture of egalitarianism, liberalism, socialism, and the recognition of different races and cultures. The Charter speaks of the 'people' of South Africa rather than a 'nation', but it declares that 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white', and in that sense, can be taken as a statement of an inclusive nationalism based on residence in the South African state.

According to the Charter, the basis of authority is the will of the people, which can only be achieved in a democratic state, without distinction of race, sex, or belief, and in which individuals enjoy equality of political and legal rights. However, the Charter also speaks of equal rights for

national groups. The state, as seen in the Charter, should play an active part in the economy: by providing enhanced social services and equal opportunities; by ensuring that wealth is restored to the people through nationalisation of the mines, banks, and monopolies; while land should be redistributed more evenly but not nationalised. In foreign affairs, South Africa was to live in peace, respecting the rights of other states.[30]

In endorsing the Charter, the ANC was following the line adopted by its Youth League in 1948, when it drew a distinction between two streams of African nationalism: that associated with Marcus Garvey - based on 'Africa for the Africans'; and a more moderate stream, supported by the Youth League, which took account that 'different racial groups had come to stay' in South Africa. Yet, while accepting the presence of different races, the Chartists were clear that white domination must go. The aim was to win 'national freedom' and inaugurate a 'people's free society where racial oppression and persecution will be outlawed'. The Europeans could share in the continent's fruits only if they were prepared to abandon domination, accept an equitable redistribution of the land, and help build the people's democracy.[31]

Following the adoption of the Charter, Chief Albert Luthuli spoke of: 'An all-inclusive African nationalism which ... embraced all people ... regardless of their racial and geographical origin who reside in South Africa and paid undivided loyalty and allegiance' [to South Africa].[32] The ANC leaders rejected the government's narrow, exclusive nationalism, and dismissed the Bantustan policy as 'Verwoerd's tribalism'. 'Partition', said Mandela, 'never has been approved by Africans and never will'. The government's policies, he said, left urban Africans as 'outcasts' with no rights, it involved mass removals, and further overcrowded the Reserves. 'Politically', he said, 'the talk about self-government is a swindle. Economically it is an absurdity'.[33]

Mandela said that the Charter was not revolutionary in methods but that it was revolutionary in ideas, 'precisely because the changes it envisages cannot be won without breaking up the economic and political set up of present South Africa'. It was not a socialist blueprint: 'It calls', he said, 'for redistribution but not nationalisation of the land', and for the nationalisation of major industries because they are monopolies in the hands of one race'.[34] Later, at his trial, Mandela stated that the ANC had never advocated revolutionary change in the economic structure of the country, nor had it ever condemned capitalist society.[35]

In brief, therefore, the Charter was a mixture of liberalism and African socialism, envisaging a multi-racial, unitary South Africa, without apartheid. In exile, the ANC has continued to advocate the Charter, although sometimes the emphasis has been on the black cause, as in 1972,

when Oliver Tambo said that as the blacks had suffered misery, humiliation and oppression in South Africa, 'therefore, the enemy of the Black man is the White man'.[36] Care has also been taken to underline that mention of all 'national groups' having equal rights refers to such matters as language and customs, so long as they are 'compatible with the overall democratic, unifying and egaliterian content of the Charter'.

The Africanists

Among blacks, the Chartists were challenged by 'the Africanists', who split from the ANC in 1959 to form the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). One of the reasons for the split was the Africanists' suspicion of ANC whites, and particularly white communists, but Robert Sobukwe, the PAC leader, also identified three basic assumptions - first, that 'the illiterate and semi-literate masses of the African people are the key to the struggle for democracy'; secondly, that African nationalism would weld the masses together, providing a 'loyalty higher than that of the tribe and giving formal expression to their desire to be a nation'; and thirdly, that the struggle in South Africa was part of a continental struggle, with the ultimate goal of creating a United States of Africa.[37]

The PAC, claiming to be the true 'Africanists', rejected the opening sentence of the Charter which proposed sharing the land between all who lived in South Africa. The PAC Manifesto spoke of African leaders who had been 'captured' by the white rulers, who 'regard as equals the foreign master and the indigenous slave, the white exploiter and the African exploited'. In contrast, the PAC view was that liberation could only be organised by Africans themselves. They denied that this was racist, for Africans must first establish themselves by their own efforts before they could stand equal with others. They argued that the decks were now clear for the final conflict between African nationalism and 'Herrenvolkism'. The outcome was not in dispute. The PAC, as 'the advance guard' of the African masses, would lead the people to freedom as a single African nation, in a state based on 'an African socialist democratic order' - rejecting the exploitation of the many by the few, seeking an equitable distribution of wealth and income, but accepting Western democracy and avoiding the totalitarianism of the communist states.

Sobukwe's approach had echoes of earlier Afrikaner nationalism. He too appreciated the importance of an historical awareness, of shared struggle and suffering. He honoured those Africans who had sacrificed themselves in the fight for freedom; he spoke of 'the humiliation and degradation of the indigenous African people', the theft of their land, and their treatment as inferiors. And he recognised also the importance of self-respect and self-reliance. He announced a 'Status Campaign', within a 'nation-building programme', to free the African mind, for once that was free, the body

would follow. 'We are blazing a new trail.', Sobukwe declared, 'We invite you to be creators of history. Join us in the march of freedom'.[38]

In defining the nation, the Africanists dismissed the notion of racial divisions. They argued that we all belong to the human race, and rejected not only apartheid but multi-racialism, which they saw as 'racialism multiplied'. They stated that ethnic origin was not the essential characteristic for national membership - there was room for all who identify themselves with 'the African nation', but the core element was the African people, who 'will not tolerate the existence of other national groups within the confines of one nation'. In Sobukwe's words, 'government of the Africans by the Africans, for the Africans'.[39] That commitment has been interpreted in different ways, both within the PAC and by its opponents. One interpretation would see the Africanists 'driving the whites into the sea', but another would emphasise that the Africanists are simply ensuring that Africans have the status and self-confidence to talk equally with others.

If the PAC appeal to shared suffering and the need for self-esteem had echoes of Afrikaner Nationalism, their views of the state had echoes of Smuts, although on an even grander scale. The PAC was committed to Pan Africanism. Sobukwe, dismissing the view that South Africa was an exception because of its diverse people, supported Kwame Nkrumah's vision of a 'democratic United States of Africa'. The Manifesto spoke of South Africans recognising themselves 'as part of an African Nation stretching from the Cape to Cairo, Madagascar to Morocco', and working to find 'expression for this nation in the merger of free independent African states; a United States of Africa'.[40] Yet, like Smuts's dream of a mighty white state, the Pan Africanists' hopes of a United States of Africa led nowhere - the state system moulded by colonialism stood firm.

The Present Scene

The ideas of the Africanists, the Chartists, the supporters of the multi-national state live on, but surrounded by uncertainty. The black movements, banned at home and exiled abroad, have had no opportunity to try to implement their ideas, and in their circumstances, have been less concerned with ideas than with survival, and the power struggle not only with the government but among and within themselves. However, the ideas of the Chartists are held in the ANC and the United Democratic Front (UDF); of the Africanists - in the PAC, the Black Consciousness Movement, and Azapo (Azanian Peoples' Organisation).

The government's position is no clearer. In its case, it has tried to implement its idea of the multi-national state, but has failed. The

concept is rejected by most blacks; it is full of practical difficulties; it is not recognised internationally, and without that recognition (which simply will not come), the Bantustans are not 'independent states'. Who now believes in 'grand apartheid'? Who now believes that blacks will not be in the central government? Even government ministers admit that apartheid is dead, and yet they continue to implement apartheid policies - partly from bureaucratic inertia, and partly because they have no alternative.

If, therefore, a clear answer is to be given to the question 'Is there a South African nation?', the answer must be 'No'. There are still competing perceptions of nationalism, without agreement on what constitutes 'the nation'. Denis Worrall, as Ambassador to the United Kingdom, admitted this to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee in June 1986. 'We are not', said Worrall, 'really a nation, and do not have a single perceived history or a single set of shared heroes'. (House of Commons - Sixth Report from the Foreign Affairs Committee Session 1985/86 - South Africa (1986) Vol.II, p.123).

Could there be a South African Nation?

In considering the question: 'Could there be a South African nation?', I move from identifying the ideas of others to giving my own ideas: my answer is 'Yes'. But not without what would amount to revolutionary change.

That change could come in two ways - either a reversal of the government's ideas and policies, or a replacement of the existing government by one committed to building a single nation. I say this in the belief that the creation of a South African nation would have to be state-led - that those in power would have to preach and implement a single South African nation, comprising all people, based on the existing state. It would be impossible to build a nation with the government opposed to it - that is, with a government committed to sectionalism, whether it be for Afrikaners, or whites, or Xhosa, or blacks, or whatever.

Clearly, it would be extremely difficult to achieve such an inclusive South African nation. If it could not be gained from the present political system, it seems likely that that system could only be overthrown after a long and bitter armed struggle, which might or might not produce a government committed to inclusive nationalism.

If, on the other hand, the present government set out to build a South African nation, it would have to change its (and its followers) strongly held perceptions; be prepared to change the central power structure, to give all a stake in the government of the state; and to distribute economic rewards more evenly. The government would have to emphasise common

experiences, shared values and interests, and not the distinctiveness of particular sections. It would have to say: 'Despite our many differences, we are all South Africans. Fate has brought us together and we cannot be separated. We must seek a common destiny'.

Even if the government were prepared to make such a remarkable change, many difficulties would remain. The differences in the society would still be there, and it would not be easy to reach agreement on government structures and power relationships, but a common nationalism would provide an immediate framework for co-operation rather than conflict, and therefore have more chance of success.

A constitutional structure can only work if those within it are prepared to play by the rules of the game, even if they disagree on many issues. Thus western democracies operate with 'loyal oppositions' because the sense of unity is greater than that of division - the opponents learn to trust each other enough to make the system work. In trying to create such trust in South Africa, there would be grave risks, not least for the whites. The effort might fail, and a government equally exclusive and perhaps more repressive, might come into power. However, what is the alternative? A white government continuing indefinitely to try to suppress the political aspirations of the black majority to play a full part in central government? That sounds a much greater risk - with a prospect, to use John Vorster's phrase, 'too ghastly to contemplate'. Yet, because of the difficulties of effecting change through the present system, that might well be the prospect. These difficulties are illustrated by two well-known issues - the Total National Strategy and the Rubicon Speech.

The Total 'National' Strategy was based on the assumption that security depended on combined political and military activity, with the political the more important. That sounds encouraging, but we find that while the military effort has been reasonably successful, the political has not - particularly in the black townships. The security forces now sit in some townships like an alien occupying army.

And what of the Rubicon speech, when the eyes of the world were fixed on State President P W Botha? His speech was important not only for its substance but for its tone - the attitude it conveyed. In substance, the State President said little that was new, but perhaps that was only to be expected. More striking, however, was the tone. This was not a statesman speaking to all South Africans - it was not a man crossing the Rubicon by putting the past behind, and committing himself without the chance of retreat - rather it was a party leader speaking to and for his own section. You will say: 'But after all, it was a party conference and he has to satisfy his own followers'. That is right, but it shows the difficulty of achieving major reform, for even if the leaders want it (and

that is unclear), they have to carry their followers with them.

The road is therefore extremely difficult, but remarkable things do happen, such as the French and the Germans agreeing to live in accord after three wars in one lifetime, and in this country, although the structure of apartheid remains, there has been much reform within that structure. Remarkable changes do take place, but you have to be an extreme optimist to believe that the degree of change I am suggesting is possible here, within the present system. As an outsider, I sometimes feel like a member of a theatre audience. On the stage are the various South African actors. They are very different, but they seem to have great talents. At first we in the audience are not clear about the nature of the play. Is it a farce or a tragedy? Soon, however, it becomes clear that it is a tragedy, and one of potentially immense proportions. Yet those on the stage either do not seem to understand, or are incapable of doing anything about it. By now we in the audience have become so engrossed and involved that we start to shout out, trying to attract the attention of the players, to point out the dangers, but they are so wrapped in fear and suspicion of each other that they can absorb nothing else. They don't hear us as we shout: 'Come together; work together - Make a Nation'.

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