

THE OUTLOOK FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA: A VIEW FROM EUROPE

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Although I do not claim to be an expert on Southern Africa, it may be interesting for South Africans to see how people who have general competence in international affairs and world problems in general look at their problems.

To speak about the outlook of a particular country or region is a difficult exercise in prediction, therefore I would first say a few words about the nature of prediction in history.

At the beginning of Part II of his book, Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy, Joseph Schumpeter, the famous Austrian-born economist, writes :

"Can capitalism survive? No. I do not think it can. But this opinion of mine, like that of every other economist who has pronounced upon the subject, is in itself completely uninteresting. What counts in any attempt at social prognosis is not the 'Yes' or 'No' that sums up the facts and arguments which lead up to it but those facts and arguments themselves".

We are here in a similar situation. If one predicts, for instance, that there will be black rule in South Africa thirty years from now, it is the argument which matters rather than the conclusion. A prediction which is not founded on consistent and empirically justified arguments is no more than a prophecy. It is necessary to make a clear distinction between prophecies and predictions based on sound reasoning. Currently, particularly in France, there is a lot of prophesying going on, (perhaps the beginning of the millenarian phenomenon). A book on the work of Nostradamus has sold 300 000 copies during the month of August, 1981, alone.

In trying to make predictions there are two basic methods of approach. One way is just to extrapolate in a more or less naive way from the past, because the only knowledge we have of the future comes from the past. That is very important, though elementary, because history gives a sense of time, one of the key points I want to emphasize today. The other way is more sophisticated. Economists in recent years have given us a new and interesting concept in prediction, i.e. "rational expectations".

This method is based on the idea that in certain circumstances more

information can be brought to bear on a prediction than merely that which is gained from the past.

It seems to me that most people have basically two models of history in their minds : what I would call model A and model B.

Model A is full determinism, that is the kind of Marxist view of the world which tells us that there is in fact only one possible course of history, and that world experience goes through necessary stages. One may hold such a determinist view of the world without being a Marxist; the only difference is that one does not then reach the same conclusions. One might think that this deterministic view could pose a problem for Marxism in that if history is written beforehand, why should one be revolutionary? The answer to that, however, is that the course of history may be slightly accelerated by revolutions. Model B, is based on the opposite view, i.e. no change at all; it holds the image of eternity, keeps things as they are.

When in South Africa two years ago, I had a chance to talk with many people of very different origins and experiences. Then, and also when speaking to South Africans outside their country, it seems to me that these two models are what most South Africans reflect, but also that their adherence to either one or the other form of perception is faulty.

On further reflection, it becomes apparent that these two models may be coupled; for instance a conservative may argue that the introduction of changes may lead to revolution. This argument uses a mathematically modern concept, that of the idea of a bifurcation between B and A. This leads to the conclusion that if one wants to change something slightly, events lead in the opposite direction; in this case, revolution. One may recall de Tocqueville's law, which says that revolutions overthrow regimes which weaken themselves through reforms. Nowadays, Henry Kissinger would probably refer to this "law" to explain the fall of the Shah of Iran, arguing that the Shah would not have been ousted had he not been under pressure by President Carter to start or accelerate a liberalisation process. Others (supporters of model A) believe that the revolution would have taken place anyway.

It is usual when arguing about support for one or the other mode of thinking, to rationalise preconceived ideas. In the South African

context, proponents from differing camps may quote examples from the experiences of other African countries: what lessons are to be drawn from what is going on in Kenya, in French-speaking African countries, or in Zimbabwe? Clearly if one believes in either A or B, the same facts may be used to draw opposite conclusions, thus supporting my statement on the rationalisation of preconceived ideas.

To my mind, neither of the above models is totally acceptable because the course of history follows the pattern of living organisms, or complex organisations comprising a mixture of determinism, hazard, randomness and will. The course of history is not written beforehand. The Iranian revoltion was not necessary; there is no certainty about the evolution of any particular country, but there are nonetheless, certain broad determinist features; there is an element of randomness and also the fundamental role of human action and of will.

This view brings one to yet another problem, namely reform versus revolution, and concerning this, liberal philosophy advocates that it is possible to evolve adequate reforms in order to avoid revolutions, but for such a policy to be successful two very important conditions have to be met. First, the situation must be accurately diagnosed, and secondly, once the diagnosis is made, good remedies have to be found .

In this context, I recall a discussion two years ago with a senior official in Warsaw. I asked him the very naive question : "What will happen in your country? Do you think that there is a possibility of revolution?" His answer was : "Did you in France anticipate the events of May 1968?" And I had to concede that none of us did.

In certain cases, however, it is possible to foresee the likelihood of revolution and there is a very strong French tradition of thinking along those lines, as set out by political philosophers such as Alexis de Tocqueville. (He was an aristocrat and was certainly not a revolutionary, but he understood instinctively that the only way to avoid undesirable events was to take the lead, to anticipate the necessity for the right kind of change).

In his book, "The Old Regime and the Revolution", de Tocqueville investigated the causes of the French Revolution and its aftermath against a scenario outlining a situation in which it might not have taken place. Was the French revolution - which is in a way the model of all revolutions - necessary or not? Tocqueville's answer was "no", the revolution could have been avoided had the government understood the necessity for reforms.

Similarly, the 1848 revolution was also unnecessary. Speaking in the French Chamber of Deputies on 27 January of that year, Tocqueville tried to draw the attention of his fellow Members of Parliament to what would happen failing prompt action. Let me quote a passage of the speech in which Tocqueville speaks of the working class :

"But do you not see that their political passions become social ones? Do you not see that gradually ideas gained ground amongst them which sought not just to overthrow a particular law or a particular ministry or even a particular government, but society itself, so establishing it on the foundations on which it presently rests?" +

His advice fell on deaf ears; the regime of Louis-Philippe was similar, if you allow me, to the current South African one; full of competent people working for the sake of developing the economy and stressing nothing but the importance of economic development (France was experiencing an economic boom at that time).

On 22 February (1848) no one could have anticipated that two days later the King would have resigned and France would be in total chaos! Thus one sees that the strongest regimes may fall in an incredibly short time, and also that the revolution of 1848 could have been avoided.

Bearing in mind Tocqueville's assertion that revolutions may occur during attempts at liberalisation, one may be surprised at his insistence that reforms are needed to avoid revolution; but this is no contradiction. It is a fact that the more authoritarian the regime, the more likely it is that a revolution will eventually break out, and the more difficult it is to start a liberalisation process aiming at avoiding the revolution without precipitating it!

+ Free translation from the French

Let me quote Alexis de Tocqueville again, this time from his Souvenirs :

"Revolutions erupt out of a general intellectual and spiritual malaise, suddenly brought to the point of crisis by a chance circumstance which none have foreseen". +

Proceeding from the foregoing basis of argument, I would like to elaborate on a few points which I think are particularly relevant to history in general, and to speculate about the future of Southern Africa in particular. These three points substitute for the so-called laws of history.

The first one concerns the difficulty of the time scale. Economists usually distinguish between short-term, medium-term and long-term. Short-term is the immediate future, long-term is the period that may be described as the one by which time we are all dead, and the medium-term refers to the time in between. Short-term gives the image of eternity, (like model B), but long-term shows that absolutely nothing remains the same, everything changes, all empires collapse (and the Soviet empire will not be an exception; it will collapse, too). Nothing survives forever and this is a particularly important observation because when something is seen to remain the same for 40, 60 or 100 years, or more, the general tendency is to assume that it will never change and, concerning South Africa in particular, there are many people - not only in this country but also outside - who say; "Well, why will it change, it has worked like that for so long?" And here it should be noted again that this is the most dangerous way of looking at things, as becomes evident when considering examples from history.

Starting with European history, in particular French and German history, it is almost impossible to find a period of 100 years free of some catastrophe. In the field of economic history one finds a unique period when prices, especially in post-Napoleonic France, remained stable for more than 100 years - until 1914 - and the idea

+ Free translation from the French

of stability was so deeply rooted in people's minds that nobody could anticipate, could even grasp a phenomenon such as inflation. That is why, after the First World War all governments, and in particular the British Government, made a big mistake in wanting to return to the gold standard and the exchange rates of the pre-War era, because they could not mentally conceive of any other system. However, the normal course of historical events approximates more closely to contemporary experience; stagflation is the oldest problem of economic history.

Secondly, it is impossible for any country or region to exist in isolation, and this is truer today than ever before. This observation leads me to the question of the diffusion of values. When I came here two years ago, holding as do most Europeans, strong feelings against apartheid (or call it separate development, I think the concept remains the same), I could not understand how it was possible to advocate such a policy. But through discussions with South Africans, I began to discover with amazement that the policy was well grounded on a totally different system of values. (One might remark, equally as valid as all systems of values because there are no criteria to discriminate between two systems of values, and one would have to be above all possible systems to make such a judgment). The fact remains that the kind of Calvinist ethics which support the policy have become unique in the world today.

This discovery led me to the conclusion that the people who designed this policy came to South Africa in the Seventeenth Century, and have since become isolated from the kind of evolution which has taken place in Europe and elsewhere in the world. In particular, they have not been influenced by the American Declaration of Independence, the French Revolution, and the new system of values which evolved from these events.

I know it disturbs most South Africans that the Soviet Union - which practises discrimination of all kinds and whose record, as far as human rights are concerned, is poor - is not condemned by the international community as strongly as is South Africa. Two answers to this spring to mind.

One is obvious : the Soviet Union is a superpower; but there is also another explanation, namely that the Soviet Union's philosophy, the communist philosophy, is based on the same values as those pertaining in most of the world today, because one should not forget that bolshevism, communism, is the child of the French Revolution. Nor should one forget that the 1917 Revolution in Russia was seen as the continuation of the French Revolution. Therefore, if this value system is not applied in practice, at least the rhetoric is close to the values evolved then. If one reads the Soviet Constitution one finds that it is rhetorically perfect, it is a wonderful model. Unfortunately, in South Africa a very different system of values pertains, and is written into the legislation, and that causes a major problem. It is always difficult for a collectivity to understand a different value system but it is particularly difficult when one belongs to the same "ethnic group". The West, generally, accepts more easily differences of value in Asia for instance, in Japan or in Black Africa. In Latin America, however, the differences present a problem for Western understanding, and the same is true in White Western-oriented South Africa.

Returning to the question of South Africa : until quite recently it had a very localised history. Now, for the first time, the country is faced with the situation of being very openly part of the international system.

Finally, there are, I think, two basic criteria by which to evaluate the position, to judge the stability of the position on the international scene. I see these as being internal legitimacy and external legitimacy, respectively. Internal legitimacy may be described as the factor relating to a degree of consensus within the country, amongst all its inhabitants. Machiavelli stressed a basic truth when he pointed out that there is no possibility of stability without a minimum degree of internal legitimacy.

Turning to external legitimacy : here again, when one looks at history, one discovers that the United Nations phenomenon is not new. South Africa often claims that a lot of her troubles stem from the United Nations system and what is seen as the artificial way in which it deals with problems.

My view is that there has always been a United Nations system. Let me elaborate on that. When the Kings of England, France, Spain, etc. had troubles, particularly in the case of difficult successions, in order to establish or to reinforce their position they had first to make sure that there was a minimum internal unity or internal legitimacy. But they also had to ensure that they were recognized by those who embodied the source of external legitimacy, for instance the Pope or the Emperor.

Why, in the Middle Ages, was it so important to maintain good relationships with the Pope or with the Emperor? The Pope had little direct power and the Emperor was powerful only to the extent that he was the ruler of some country; but the point is that both of them and some organisations as well, represented some kind of external legitimacy. It is, therefore, not only since the Second World War, not against South Africa, that the UN system was founded. Such a system, embodying the principle of external legitimacy, came into being centuries ago.

Moreover, this is not a question of international law, but rather of legitimacy, and remembering the different criteria discussed previously, it is easy to understand Western reaction to South African "hot pursuit" into Angola. It is easy to understand the mechanism through which radical movements first obtain recognition externally; then internal support, recognition, legitimacy, and ultimately power. This leads me to the conclusion that eventually SWAPO will rule Namibia, and that it was probably predictable that Zimbabwe would evolve as it has.

Let us now consider a few scenarios on the future of Southern Africa. First, I would like to say a few words about the concept of the Constellation of States, because if my understanding is correct, it is still the kind of model that the South African Government would like to promote or to see realised in the next decades.

This is a very nice model, a very satisfactory intellectual construction and particularly in a purely economic sense, it is highly meaningful, but it will not work because it does not fit the criteria for domestic legitimacy. It would have to be recognised and accepted by the Black community within South Africa, which is unlikely to happen. In terms of external legitimacy, there are perhaps a few exceptions like Malawi, but it is difficult to think of many countries or any international organisation, that would be ready to accept the model.

Further, it is connected with the homelands policy in South Africa, and there is little to say about that policy, except that the only way in which it could perhaps work would be through a totally new division of territory in South Africa, but I am not sure that the White community is ready to do that. Secondly, another political problem would probably arise in these re-shaped states, with the need to build some kind of a federation or confederation incorporating some form of shared power. It would certainly be something totally different from what those who invented the model of the homelands had in mind. I think, rather, that we are going to see radicalisation in the neighbouring states, and major attempts by all of them to win external support, not only from the East but also from the West, to reduce their dependency on South Africa until something has really changed there. Then perhaps, paradoxically, the model of a Constellation of States could make a new start, but only then.

In conclusion, just a few words on East-West relations in the context of Southern African problems. There is a general discussion here which is highly important, i.e. to what extent are East-West relations and North-South relations necessarily intertwined, and to what extent is it possible to uncouple them? This is a burning issue today and it seems that there is no simple answer, but basically one has to agree with the view that the Soviets, in particular, can exploit the racial problems in South Africa to their advantage. This is an interesting point, because the same argument is used as the basis for the opposite view to that generally held in South Africa. Many White South Africans say; "Well, you see, the West should reinforce its solidarity to fight against the Soviets' influence", but the European view is; "If you do not move towards internal reform, the Soviets will increase their influence because they will have more opportunity".

There is also the matter of the strategic importance of Southern Africa; the dependence on raw materials, the Cape sea route. The argument is well known in Europe and in the United States. It is known that Southern Africa is important, but this being said, again it is possible to draw different conclusions because of differing views on how these interests can best be handled, and here one returns to the time framework problem.

When discussing national interests in the framework of time, of long-term considerations, the conclusions reached will depend on the historical framework being used. The French socialists, for instance, as far as the Third World is concerned, have certain views which they see as serving the national interests of France and of Europe, and more generally of the West. One cannot, therefore, draw any one single set of conclusions from arguments about the importance of raw materials.

The future of South Africa must depend essentially on one factor, namely the degree to which South Africa will be able to solve her main problem; how to bring the Black community into a system of power sharing. If the liberal approach prevails, it will be one of the most positive developments of our times. It would ensure a peaceful transition to a new way of organising the political life of South Africa and it would have formidable consequences all around Southern Africa, in Africa and the world. But one cannot fail to question the possibility of the alternative course, that is adhering to model B, outlined at the beginning of this discussion, and thus risking the experience of revolution at some time.