

South Africa

Ancient racism in a modern world

by Robert Bodrog-Goodland

It's 1984 and we're supposed to be living in a rational and civilized world.

After all, every great philosopher in the history of mankind from Aristotle to Sartre has agreed that what separates man from all other creatures is our ability to think and reason.

Why is it then, that after all these thousands of years, there are still nations on earth which have been completely missed by social evolution in many areas such as basic respect for one's fellow man, every person's right to vote; or equal privileges for all people regardless of background, religion, or color?

Perhaps we, as Canadians having so many freedoms, sometimes have a tendency to take these for granted and do not realize that there are still many nations where not only are all men not equal before the law, but deprived of any real education, devoid of any possible future, and actually segregated on the basis of their color.

Today I will discuss the Republic of South Africa (its government, its people); and examine how the battle for basic human rights such as adequate medical care, education and the right to vote are all part of the fight to freedom for today's South African blacks, who remain slaves in their own nation.

South Africa is an ideal model of a police state. All South Africans live in constant fear of BOSS (the Bureau of State Security), the country's secret police, who do not have to answer to anyone except the prime minister, and have the power of life and death over all citizens of the country—both black and white. The head of BOSS, together with the prime minister can, if he so chooses, circumvent parliament and the legal court system to deal with people as he wishes.

Although non-whites make up 85% of the population, they have absolutely no voice in selecting the government of their nation. However, in spite of fierce government oppression, the political climate at any given time is uneasy.

Retaliation such as bombings and sabotage of government installations is not uncommon, but largely ineffective as a result of the saboteurs' inexperience and poor organization.

In recent years, thousands of African students have fled their homeland to neighboring countries such as Mozambique and Angola, where they receive instruction and training in guerilla warfare tactics (often by the KGB), with hopes of one day overthrowing the present regime.

And because the governments of several of these other African nations are left-wing Marxist dictatorships which receive extensive military aid from the Soviet Union, the South African government is indirectly contributing to the actual creation of thousands of communist guerillas who, in the event of a coup, would probably be very sympathetic to the installation of a leftist-oriented administration.

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The South African government is well aware of the chances of a potential uprising. This is best reflected in how the country is administered from not one, but two capital cities.

Pretoria, located in the north-eastern sector of the country, serves as the administrative capital, while Cape Town, 800 miles away on the south-west coast, function as the legislative

capital.

This system of dual-capitals has proven to be quite an effective deterrent against possible uprisings for the simple reason that should a coup be attempted, both cities would almost certainly have to be seized simultaneously. Failure to do so would allow the ruling government to retaliate with full military force and would probably crush any such attempt regardless of how well-planned. (And taking two cities at the same time is far from an easy thing to do. It would be like trying to seize Toronto and Halifax concurrently.)

Perhaps for this simple reason, the present regime had been able to control things this long. South Africa currently spends about two billion dollars annually on defense.

Aside from its political make-up, South Africa is one of the richest nations on earth in terms of natural resources.

It ranks first in terms of gold production and accounts for about 67% of the world total.

In terms of diamonds it ranks third, almost all of which are controlled by the international DeBeers monopoly. In addition, nearly every useful mineral is found within the country, particularly copper and uranium (of which it ranks second) as well as asbestos, iron ore, platinum, antimony and manganese.

Coal reserves, in which it ranks tenth, are expected to last for half a century at least.

The back bone of this country is clearly its mining industry, manned mostly by migrant black workers who are exploited, over-worked, and under-paid by the very companies for which they make hundreds of millions annually.

It has only been in the last few years that black labour unions have attained what little bargaining power they presently possess.

We can only hope that as time goes by, this power will spread further into the political domain.

This is the South Africa of today. A land of oppression, tyranny and exploitation.

And we must ask ourselves, why do so many of the supposedly civilized nations of the world continue to trade commercially on a large scale with such a nation?

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Basic facts

Name
Republic of South Africa
Capital
Pretoria (administrative), Cape Town (legislative)
Government
State President: Marais Viljoen. Prime Minister: P.W. Botha. Parliament is composed exclusively of whites holding 166 seats.
Area
1 221 037 sq. km
Population
29m
People
Divided by the South African government into
'Africans' 21m
'Whites' 4.5m
'Coloureds' 2.6m
'Asians' 0.8m
(Population figures for 1980, rounded up.)
Main Languages
Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana, Afrikaans, English, Tamil, Hindi
Religion
70% Christian
Health
Hospital beds per 100 000 people
'Africans' 277
'Whites' 1 614
'Coloureds' 195
'Asians' 256
Skills
48% of Africans over the age of 15 are illiterate.
Economy
GDP 1980 (million Rand at current prices)
Agriculture 3 817
Mining 13 432
Manufacturing 13 129
South Africa is the most industrialised nation on the African continent: manufacturing contributes over three times as much to GDP as agriculture. Main exports: minerals, especially diamonds and gold.
Income distribution
Average monthly earnings (1980)
'Africans' R197
'Whites' R780
'Coloureds' R257
'Asians' R337
Land distribution
Whites 86.3%
Blacks 13.7

Note: 'Blacks' is used by the South African government to designate 'Africans'. Opponents of apartheid use it as a common term for 'Africans', 'Coloureds' and 'Asians', and this usage has been followed in the Profile.

Chronology

9th century AD

Khoikhoi and San peoples inhabit region; Nguni-speakers in northern Transvaal.

15th century

Cattle-herding Nguni-speakers settled along coast in south-east as far as Fish River.

1652

Dutch East India Company establishes trading post at Cape.

1815

Cape becomes British possession.

1818

Mfecane, mass movement of peoples north and west, as a result of rise of Zulu nation.

1836

Beginning of eastward 'Great Trek' of Dutch-speaking settlers—'Boers'—to

escape British control. 'Boers' begin to call themselves 'Afrikaners'.

1840s-1860s

Rise of Boer republics (pop. c. 20,000) and of Zulu, Pedi, Swazi and Ndebele kingdoms.

1860

Indians introduced to Natal as indentured labour on sugar plantations.

1867

Diamonds found at the confluence of Vaal and Organe Rivers.

1879

British Imperial forces defeated by Zulus at Isandhlwana.

1886

Gold found in Transvaal near Johannesburg.

1899-1902

South African War. British defeat Boers. Many Boer women and children die in British concentration camps.

1910

Union of South Africa formed on 31

May. Limited franchise for blacks only in Cape.

1912

African National Congress (ANC) formed to press for black rights in the Union.

1922

General strike and -insurrection by white workers quelled by force with loss of life.

1925

Black Industrial and Commercial workers Union reaches membership of 100,000.

1939-1945

Afrikaners interned as Nazi sympathisers include the future prime minister, J.B. Vorster.

1945

Black Urban Areas Consolidation Act creates system of black townships.

1948

National Party under Dr. Malan sweeps to power with apartheid policy.

1949

Indian voting rights in Natal abolished. Mixed-race marriages prohibited.

1950

Suppression of Communism Act defines 'communism' to include a wide range of dissent. Group Areas Act restricts blacks to small 'Bantu' areas and allows expropriation and forced resettlement.

1952

ANC organises defiance campaign against racialist laws.

1959

Programme to give bantustans separate identity begins.

1960

Anti-pass law protests in Sharpeville and Langa result in 69 deaths at the hands of the police.

ANC and PAC proscribed.

1962