

Will The Solution Solve the Problem?

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South Africa: The Solution

By Leon Louw and Frances Kendall.

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ONE COUNTRY, ONE HUNDRED SYSTEMS

In the wake of the swing to the right in the whites-only election there has been a return to a fashionable despair about South Africa. One source of hope is the success of *South Africa: The Solution*, an all-time, non-fiction, bestseller in that country. which has been endorsed by opinion leaders like Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Winnie Mandela. *The Solution* will not be well received by those wishing *Götterdämmerung* with the whites getting their just deserts at the hands of the indignant masses. Nor will it be acceptable to white supremacists who see blacks as immigrant labourers in Boerland. But it should provide grounds for discussion for anyone who wants a future worth living in.

The Swiss Solution

Husband and wife team, Leon Louw and Frances Kendall, want nothing less than to turn apartheid South Africa into the freest society in the world. Their model for this is a radical version of Swiss federalism. South Africa is to be divided into cantons each given extensive powers over social and economic policy. Central government will be kept to a minimum, it will not even have a direct taxing power. South Africans will be able to boast, like the Swiss, that they do not know the name of their president. Instead loyalties will be directed towards local communities and cantons, as will all political energies. In an amusing afterward the authors sketch the possible local alternatives, which include a black separatist canton, an Afrikaner supremacist canton, a free market paradise as well as various middle-

of-the-road cantons (the majority) all coexisting in the same country.

The weak central government is no doubt intended to reassure nervous whites, but what about black radicals? It offers them common citizenship, one person one vote, an end to all racial legislation and free migration throughout South Africa. Not the unitary state the ANC and UDF demand but a genuine end to apartheid and white minority rule. Federal solutions are of course regularly advanced as a solution in South Africa (and in many other African countries). The case is usually based on tribal and ethnic divisions. As significant in South Africa are the major political divisions with both white supremacists and black radicals deeply divided between mutually antagonistic political alternatives. However in a pioneering survey of the history of the peoples of the country. Louw and Kendall suggest that federalism is especially appropriate. Both Boer and Bantu have strong traditions of localised authority, and antagonism towards central government. Both peoples traditionally left systems they disliked and established new communities. A feature well suited to the radical decentralisation the authors are proposing.

The advantages of cantonalism in reducing government regulation is a major attraction for Louw and Kendall. Indeed the couple's libertarianism (of the sort that makes Mrs Thatcher look decidedly damp) is a marked feature of the book. It is often pointed out that apartheid creates two political systems, democracy for whites and dictatorship for non-whites. but what is not often added is that there are also two economic systems. white capitalism and black socialism. Whereas whites live in a relatively free economy, blacks suffer an East European degree of state regulation of schools, hospitals, speech and even movement. The Nationalist state has the same paraphernalia of planning controls, quangos and government agencies with ideas of bettering the underclass that are so familiar in other parts of the world. The difference in South Africa is that they are linked to a system far more coercive, far less representative. Slums are cleared and communities removed with

an insensitivity hardly concealed by the paternalistic concern with which it is justified by the authorities. Recent reforms, however impressive whites may see them, do little to lift bureaucratic interference with black lives, and nothing to assuage black resentment that their treatment at the hands of this bureaucracy is so much different from that of whites. Louw and Kendall do not want majority rule to lead to socialism, which would be the extension of present restrictions on blacks to whites as well. They want to extend white freedoms to blacks and then take those freedoms even further. As a short-term practical measure they suggest a Racial Equivalence Act, to remove restrictions in black areas to the same extent as in white areas - short-term before the removal of all restrictions whatsoever including the very concept of black and white 'areas'. Before people suggest that Africans are essentially socialist, the authors' research into the historical record suggests that blacks were doing very well for themselves before the state stepped in. They did not need state paternalism to improve their lives. Indeed the Afrikaners needed it to stop black competition.

Forward to the Future

The book is intended to offer something for everybody. What it might add is that no one should expect everything. No one should have the right to reconstruct South Africa according to their own blueprint from above. That has been attempted and the consequences have been tragedy and disaster. The failure of grand apartheid has created the urgent need for people to construct free communities from the bottom up. Orthodox commentators have suggested that the only means to peace is ethnic division or even partition. Louw and Kendall are right to stress that cantons must be multi racial. The ethnic character of cantons ought to be the subject of personal preference and free migration, which is clearly preferable to allowing racial designations into the new constitutional system.

Does *The Solution* really offer a solution? The prospects must look less hopeful than when the book was written, in the heyday of reform. The National Party does not look in the least likely to throw its power into the

free-for-all of a constitutional convention. But people who spend too much time examining electoral results forget that real change comes from the ideas motivating politics. As an ideology apartheid has lost its intellectual credibility and there are grounds for optimism. Unlike other settler societies, and unlike most African countries, South Africa had developed a significant body of liberal opinion, and maintains a commitment to the rule of law despite the increasing repression of the Nationalists. South African liberalism still has a role to play in finding a just solution to the intolerable conflicts brought upon the country by apartheid. In 1962 Leo Marquard wrote that "South Africa is a country (whose) people have not yet discovered a fundamental unity, a common South Africanism, a common purpose." It may be that a "common South Africanism" will be found in diversity. If so *The Solution* provides the boldest programme yet, and has already inspired a pressure group (Groundswell) for its proposals. With the help of Louw and Kendall South Africa could just provide a model in race relations for the whole world, by doing the opposite of what Dr Verwoerd planned. Despite the pessimism of recent events, *The Solution* is an idea whose time has come.

Free Life