

John Papworth

a new look at South Africa

another generation

Although few of those most directly concerned with ending minority race rule in South Africa would care to admit it, the situation there has jelled to an extent that could continue for at least another generation. The history of tyranny in the Russian Empire during the last half century makes it clear that when a determined and ruthless minority is firmly in the saddle, the only prospect of dislodging it from power by force lies either in waiting for a favourable moment when it is divided and demoralised, or in obtaining outside help.

In South Africa neither of these two alternatives is in prospect. The ruling group is united as it has never before been in the country's history, whilst the prospect of armed intervention by a foreign power or a group of them is more remote than it was a decade ago. Then at least it might have been deduced that Russia was prepared to make life difficult for the Western Powers by helping the African nationalists with money and arms, if, with the former at least, they were not already doing so. Today it is clear that Russia's horizons are dominated by its quarrel with China and with the second revolution to have occurred inside Russia in this century, the revolution in the rising tide of consumer expectations. Both these points incline to restrain Russia from foreign adventures, and there is also evidence that their awareness of the overall danger of a nuclear world war is prompting them to temper their quarrel with the United States, a fact which again lessens its drive to interfere in Africa.

It is true that the Chinese Empire has replaced the Russian as Vorster's chief headache, but apart from its own domestic preoccupations, and its preoccupations with its relations with its border states, especially the Russian and the Indian Empires, China's capacity for serious intervention in South Africa is limited, as indeed is that of everybody else, by geography and the basic elements of military logistics.

This is true not less of the newly independent states of Africa. Even if they were united on the need for

military intervention in South Africa, which they are not, and even if they set about promoting a joint military intervention, which they won't, they would be defeated by South Africa's wealth relative to their own poverty, and by the sheer distances to be traversed before such action could begin to make any kind of impact at all. No independent African country has an air force capable of much more than 'law and order' operations within its own borders, none has a naval force of any significance outside its own territorial waters, and none has a significant military force capable of crossing the Zambesi, far less the Limpopo, without encountering predictable obliteration. It is doubtful for that matter if the internal political situation in any independent African state is stable enough for its leaders to permit more than a token force to engage in such an adventure, assuming they were persuaded of the wisdom of such a course. In terms of force South Africa, the most powerful and heavily armed, as well as the wealthiest and militarily by far the most impregnable, nation of the African Continent, is unlikely to be defeated in these terms by token forces of any kind.

It may be thought that quick changes can be looked for as a consequence of changes in Mozambique, Angola, Rhodesia and the Protectorate territories of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland. This is unlikely, the drift seems in fact to be in the reverse direction. The leaders of all the Protectorates speak in terms of maintaining friendly relations with South Africa after independence. They *must* do this to survive, (on the terms they have chosen to survive), and it is clear that any suspicion that these countries were being used as a base for hostile operations against the Union would provoke overwhelming retaliatory measures.

The Portuguese colonies of Mozambique and Angola are large, poor, thinly populated and characterised by numerous natural obstacles to the development of modern forms of land communication. Whatever their immediate political prospects their economic outlook is unlikely to alter for a generation or so, so that once the African nationalists attain power here their economic weakness will rule out