

Howard Brotz, The Politics of South Africa: Democracy and Racial Diversity. London: Oxford University Press, 1977. xii + 164 pp.

Frederick A. Johnstone, Class, Race, and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976. xiv + 298 pp.

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The dustcover of Howard Brotz's latest book informs the

prospective reader that the author has come forward with a "fresh and original analysis" of South African society; that he has "undone the ideological straightjacket" that has surrounded that country's politics for many years; and that his is "the most accurate account of the political history of the race question to date." High praise indeed! And any writer who lived up to such claims would indeed have made a valuable contribution to the study of South Africa's conflict-torn polity. Unfortunately, The Politics of South Africa: Democracy and Racial Diversity is so inadequate an analysis that it adds nothing to our comprehension and can serve only to confuse the general reader who lacks a specialist knowledge of its topic. Methodologically unsystematic, anecdotal in style, and positively antiquarian in theoretical perspective, the study is also so redolent of factual error and unsupported statement that Oxford University Press should be ashamed to have published it--at least in its present form.

The central concern of Brotz is to combat the argument (which he takes to be widespread) that the political triumph of Afrikaner Nationalism in 1948 and thereafter was historically inevitable. This was far from being the case, for when viewed "from the perspective of the actors in the situation," such success was not only uncertain but was "derided as a utopian dream by established opinion" (p.1). It was achieved through a long struggle by a tenacious minority against great odds. What then emerges from his analysis is the thesis that the tragedy of South Africa has been the failure of the politically "moderate" majority of whites to consolidate their base; the fact that it allowed the National Party, which represents extremist Afrikanerdom, to strengthen its position in office and attempt to implement its utopian blueprint of separate development. Apartheid, which rests upon the political fiction that black urban dwellers in the "white heartland" are "temporary migrants" from their rural homelands, is incapable of providing any realistic basis for the country's racial problems. Given its political dominance in post-war years it has artificially dichotomized political discussion into a consideration of the varying merits of racial separation and integration, as if the first of these were ever a possibility.

Brotz sees the prospects for a constitutional solution to the South African racial conundrum as lying in the ideas of Henry Fagan, chairman of the Commission appointed by Smuts in 1946 to consider policy alternatives to cope with the burgeoning urban black population. Rejecting the fiction that these were temporary migrants, Fagan recommended that urban blacks be accepted as permanent residents. At the same time, recognizing that whites would not agree to the enfranchisement of Africans, who greatly outnumbered them, he argued that a large measure of municipal self-government should be devolved upon the black townships, and that proper consultative channels should be established between the white government and its black subordinates.

According to Brotz, these ideas were "the quintessence of practical commonsense" (p.25); and had not chance intervened, it is likely that a post-war moderate Government would have sought to implement Fagan's program and blacks would gradually have been incorporated into a democratic political community. But the Nationalists surprised even themselves by securing office in 1948 with the parliamentary assistance of Havenga's Afrikaner Party. Had Smuts then been prepared to make a magnanimous gesture by dissolving the United Party and serving under Havenga (who was lukewarm in his support for the nationalists) in a new centrist coalition linking moderate Afrikaners and English, the way would have been cleared for a commonsensical approach to the country's racial problems and the extremist Nationalists would have been isolated. Instead, Smuts's failure to turn to Havenga had a "profound effect upon South African politics, from which the nation is still struggling to liberate itself" (p.21); and the Nationalists were enabled to consolidate their power base by constitutional trickery and by pandering to the fears and prejudices of the white electorate. Yet, Brotz argues, all is not lost, for the ruling party has necessarily had to adjust its utopian policies to socio-economic realities, with the result that the government has moved closer to Fagan's ideas than it would care to admit. Thus, in the present circumstance, although legal majoritarianism should be avoided (since this would frighten the white electorate into embracing extremist solutions), the Government should seek to obtain the consent of the governed (the black majority) by recognizing the permanence of the black urban population and establishing effective consultative machinery with the black townships as a means of political communication. As such pragmatic policies are seen to prosper, the fears of the white electorate will be assuaged, and blacks will gradually be enabled to participate in the political community on a basis of equality.

This argument seems highly suspect to the present reviewer, both as history and as prescription for a future political settlement. In the first place, the centrist coalition of Smuts and Hertzog, which Brotz holds in such high regard, was held together more by force of the two leaders' personalities than by agreement on policy. More to the point, it has almost always been the case that when Afrikaner and English have come together in parliamentary alliance it has been at the expense of the black majority. Thus the 1922 "Pact Government" pursued the Civilized Labour Policy and the fusion of white parties in 1934 led to the passage of the notorious Land Act of 1936 which removed Cape blacks from the common electoral roll and subjected them to other forms of political discrimination. Therefore any idea that such a coalition holds the key to the solution of the "race problem" in South Africa has little precedent in historical fact.

But Brotz's major failing is his emphasis on race and ethnicity to the exclusion of class as explanatory factors in South African historical development. This would not be so serious

if he showed any awareness of the present liberal-marxist debate, but he cites not one of the works of writers who have made a major impact in recent years, such as Legassick, Wolpe, and Johnstone. As a result, he makes some extravagantly curious statements. He claims, for instance, that there has never been a peasantry, black or white, in South Africa. This is a controversial topic, but has he not read the work of Bundy--or that of other scholars now examining the impact of capitalism on pre-capitalist modes of production? We are also informed that no South African industrialist has "ever really wanted migratory or casual labour" (p.25) and that the thesis of Cresswell, the leader of the Labour Party in earlier years, that the mines preferred cheap black labour was an "exaggeration" (p.7). In support of this, Brotz cites Cresswell's own experience as a mine manager, when he claimed that a mine could be worked with a totally white labor force, at white rates of remuneration plus machines, at a lower cost than with a black labor force (p.66); yet Johnstone (p.84) indicates that Cresswell's costs were in fact much higher. Nonetheless, despite the fact that all mines other than Cresswell's relied upon black labor (which he implies was less productive than white), Brotz argues that industrial development in South Africa began with a "highly efficient mining industry" (p.105). Yet equating profitability with efficiency (p.66), the author totally fails to query the extent to which this was dependent upon the exploitation of a politically unfree, black labor force, nor does he relate the creation of the labor migration system to the underdevelopment of the African reserves.

Brotz's analysis also evidences a total inability to comprehend the nature and basis of black protest. For him, legitimate politics in contemporary South Africa takes place only within the white ordained order. Thus the critical problem is to find a way to "establish trust between the Government and the non-white population groups" (p.99) and to give the non-whites an effective voice which would fortify "the constitutional character of the regime" (p.56)! He exhibits little awareness that such a conservative and impractical platform has long been rejected by the black majority, and that the necessarily violent overthrow of the regime is now not the objective of merely the "lawless" in the large urban townships (p.117) but commands a much wider support. The blacks with whom Brotz talked seem to have been drawn from the minority of businessmen and politicians who have material interests in the politico-economic structures of apartheid, and consequently he has come to the startling conclusion that the bantustan system has restored "legitimate black leadership" and that the homeland leaders are recognized by the black population as their legitimate spokesmen (pp.38, 51, 125). It is only such a distorted perspective that can ignore the multitude of pressures upon the present regime and refer to it as possibly "the most stable government in the West" (p.58).

Class, Race and Gold is empirically so systematic and theoretically so rigorous that it provides a sharp contrast to Brotz's presentation. Johnstone's central purpose is to de-

velop an explanation of racial discrimination in the gold mines. His general thesis is that the racial system that evolved "may most adequately be explained as a class system...generated, and determined in its specific forms and its specific nature and functions, by the specific system of production and class structure of which it formed a part" (p.4). Rejecting the concept of race relations and seeking to redefine the field in marxist terms, the author proceeds to analyze the historical development of the mining industry until the mid-1920s. In doing so, he argues cogently that, given the unique cost structure of the South African mines--the low average grade of ore, the fixed price of gold internationally, and the high level of investment required for development--profitability required the absolute minimization of costs and the maximization of output (given the guaranteed market, the industry was not subject to crises of overproduction). It followed that the mines were dependent upon the creation and maintenance of a supply of cheap labor; and in the context of the South African social formation black labor power was available--when subjected to various forms of "extra-economic" coercion (the pass laws, the contract and compound systems, etc.)--for "ultra-exploitation."

Since the laborers' wages were not equal to the value of their output (p.2), white workers were also subject to exploitation by capital; but since they were not subject to the system of forced labor, they were enabled through their monopolization of skills and their right to organize in unions, to extract much higher wages, and thereby to become a labor aristocracy. Only in 1922, when their pre-eminence was challenged by the mine-owners, who wished to lower costs of production by employing more cheap black labor to cope with the profitability crisis following World War I, did the white workers resort to strike action and armed revolt.

The broad outline of this thesis has become familiar in recent years (even if Professor Brotz is unaware of it). So in some ways the delayed publication of Johnstone's book (the dissertation on which it is based was presented in 1972) has robbed it of the impact it might otherwise have had. At the same time, although it should become required reading for any student seriously interested in Southern African affairs, it is unfortunate that Johnstone's style is rather inelegant and repetitive, although he has eschewed the tendency of much contemporary marxist literature to use jargon incomprehensible to all but the initiated few. Nonetheless, since the marxist school centered around Legassick, Wolpe, and Johnstone, has for sometime been offering its critique of liberal historiography of South Africa in purely article form, it is good to have a book length study which presents their analysis in detail. Even though the differences between much of the latter-day liberal and marxian interpretations of historical developments often appear to be somewhat exaggerated, the latter form of analysis does have the overriding merit, evident in Johnstone's contribution, of demonstrating that capitalist development in Southern Africa has been dependent upon, not restricted by, the varying forms of racial discrimination.