

Opinion

by Ned Munger

Munger teaches African politics at Caltech. The author of eight books, he recently left on his 70th visit to Africa.

THREE YEARS AGO, Nonkululeko Nyembezi, a young Zulu woman from Durban, was admitted to Caltech for graduate study in electrical engineering. Before she could come, her UN scholarship was canceled. Upon inquiry I was told that the revolutionary forces didn't want the money spent on her, because she wouldn't help the revolution much a) as a woman, b) as a scientist, and c) because she was planning to return to South Africa. It made me angry. It was not easy to secure her the funding. Now that she has her MS from the Institute, Nyembezi may become the first black South African woman to earn a PhD in science.

When I think of some of the vehement critics of American policy toward South Africa, who gave me no encouragement in raising funds for this student's education, I have to question the sincerity of some protesters. Some shout that the time for constructive action has passed and only destruction



is to be encouraged. I challenge that.

The temptation to rush to the conclusion that South Africa is blowing up or will do so shortly has an honorable lineage. Since 1921 it has been regularly predicted that "next year South Africa will explode." In 1960 the *Observer's* Colin Legum, the most respected British analyst of South Africa, set 1968 as the last year to which the white regime might possibly survive. Obviously, no one can predict these things with much certainty. But despite the bad record of such predictions, I am reasonably confident that within five years the territory comprising South Africa will be governed with the consent of the majority of its inhabitants. What is cloudiest in my crystal ball is whether we will see the tragic loss of 1,000 or 500,000 lives.

Is there any chance of avoiding a *Götterdämmerung*? My affirmative answer is based on 40 years of friendships with black and white South Africans. Peaceful change depends on both. It is not generally appreciated that the so-called *verligte* (enlightened) movement has had strong support from key generals, who tell the politicians that there is no military solution for them in the long run. All the might of South African armaments can only buy time for the political leaders to reach an accommodation.

In my judgment, the great majority of key Afrikaners are prepared to abandon every vestige of racial discrimination. But I believe that a majority of these leaders secretly hope to maintain their power over events. History offers many examples of a minority giving up legal power but maintaining a grip over events. To me this is a false hope, but still the scrapping of apartheid would be real. I agree that changes in desegregating airplanes, restaurants, beaches, sports, and higher education do not go to the heart of the matter. The dynamic growth of black and integrated trade unions, however, is politically potent and cannot be dismissed as cosmetic.

If I am correct, and if the key Afrikaners now want seriously to discuss the salvation of all South Africa, they face the dilemma that there are few blacks who will talk to them. I know many blacks prominent in business, teaching, and government who are, frankly, afraid that when they talk to the government (and they do), they

risk their homes and families going up in flames. Alan Paton, South African author (*Cry, the Beloved Country*) and co-founder of the Liberal Party, correctly pointed out the danger 40 years ago when he wrote that "when the whites have turned to loving, the blacks will have turned to hating."

I am glad that more Americans are showing a deeper concern for events in South Africa because that concern may be translated into lives saved. On a local level, a survey of Caltech attitudes by students Lisa Skrumeda and Steven Loyola revealed serious concern about South Africa among both students and faculty. They found that undergraduates, however, while most outspoken, were the least interested in making any personal sacrifice.

When I stayed with him recently in Natal, Paton suggested that Americans redouble their efforts to help black education in South Africa. Paton recalled that during the worst riots in the American South, white liberals never abandoned black education.

Two Caltech students are doing something positive. Kathleen Fletcher (biology) and Robin Whitt (applied physics) volunteered as teaching assistants at the predominantly black but racially inclusive University of the Western Cape. With the help of Caltech friends I organized the Cape of Good Hope Foundation to enhance the quality of education and reinforce the autonomy of that university. Can such volunteer efforts influence decisions in South Africa? Perhaps not, but rather than remaining neutral in a crisis, I prefer to be positive for a change. □

