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SOUTH AFRICA John Hyde

In spite of the adulation of Oliver Tambo and Bishop Tutu by church and other left wing groups, most Australians know that disapproving of apartheid is not the same as approving the African National Congress (ANC). The ANC's defence of the none-too-charming habit of 'necklacing' other blacks has convinced most of us it is not a respectable organisation. Indeed many Australians despise both the ANC and the white supremacists.

Because the media emphasise the extremes they do not much think about the millions of black and white South Africans who feel the same way. South African liberals are increasingly isolated from the outside world which refuses to notice them. Yet, if they are not the majority already, at least they are potentially so. And, if South Africa is to have a decent future, they must provide it.

Recently The Australian Institute for Public Policy (AIPP) published a short paper by a South African author describing how he saw apartheid ended in a way which did not replace it with another marxist totalitarian state. The ideas are taken from a book, "South Africa: The Solution" by Frances Kendall and Leon Louw, which is a best-seller in South Africa. It advocates a political order along the lines of the Swiss cantonal system. The ideas seem eminently workable to me but I will leave people closer to the scene to be the judge of that. My point is that some South Africans are trying to think their way through their unhappy country's political impasse toward a liberal society and they deserve support.

People who really wanted a liberal South Africa would not isolate like-minded South Africans or fail to acknowledge steps taken in the right direction. Some advocating sanctions want a marxist state; some want the present situation to continue; but none want South Africans to enjoy a liberal democracy. South Africa is useful to distract attention from their own misgovernment, small church attendances, and other manifest failures.

Everywhere Labour parties are privatising, deregulating and talking about winding back the social wage. The left are running out of causes; they have only apartheid to stir their passion, and they really don't want it to go away.

The leaders of the ANC certainly don't want to end apartheid just yet. The rampages which cost many innocent blacks their lives and the excuse of a state of war proffered by Mr Tambo, in the run up to the election, were just right to convince the white voters that blacks were not to be trusted. White fears were carefully fostered to give the ANC the result it wanted. A swing to liberalism let alone a liberal majority would have dried up ANC funds and ANC authority.

South African whites cannot hold on but they will not give up their supremacy readily because about them they see only Kenya and Zimbabwe that are remotely well governed. South Africa attracts refugees from even those countries. By Australian standards South Africa is repressive but by Mozambican standards it is heaven.

Other Southern African governments don't want apartheid to go away either. It fills the role for them the Malvinas almost filled for the Argentine generals---a cause celebre to occupy the masses who are getting hungry and tired of being murdered. Further, if South Africa were decently run they would probably lose even more of their brightest and best educated young people.

Such is the substitutability of international trade that there is not much risk of sanctions actually working and thereby costing the sanctioning nation markets that it needs for its own prosperity. As many 'statesmen' have admitted, sanctions are just a political statement. They allow the sanctimonious to convince themselves and others that apartheid is treated seriously.

Trade, sporting and cultural sanctions are not harmless however; they deprive the less educated liberals in South Africa of almost all intellectual contact with the outside world. They make it very easy for South Africans to say it is no use trying to adopt liberal standards, which they know full well many of their most vehement critics do not follow, because the world will never play fair.

The Rand has fallen against even the Aussie dollar. Sanctions give the incumbent government a ready-made and credible excuse for its own mismanagement. Economic performance, which would have thrown out most Western governments, was barely an issue at the recent election.

Just as deregulation of other markets is putting pressure for reform on the Australian labour market, a free market in South African goods and services would destroy all remaining aspects of apartheid except the vote.

Political power is least important in a liberal society with small government and free markets; everyday life is largely depoliticised. Under those circumstances average blacks may be no more interested in it than the average Hongkong Chinese. On the other hand the average white may have no more worries about sharing it than the average Swiss. There are South Africans who desperately want their country to develop more liberal tendencies and are serious about devising political and social ways that minimise everybody's risks and fears. They deserve not sanctions, but help.

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