

ARTICLE APPEARED
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Anthony Lewis**Mr.
Botha's
Poodle**

WASHINGTON
After President Reagan's speech, the hope for a negotiated transition to democracy in South Africa is at the vanishing point. The prospect is for years of repression and violence, eroding a great country's future.

Here was a moment in history, a chance to use America's influence to advance Western values, American values, in a highly important place. Instead, the President gave South Africa a tragic push in the wrong direction.

In Washington, reaction to the speech focuses on economic sanctions and whether Congress will override Mr. Reagan's opposition to them. But sanctions are only means to an end. The larger question is: Which side are we on?

Mr. Reagan is on the side of P.W. Botha and the National Party rulers of South Africa. That was the real message of his speech. Indeed, the speech could have been written by Mr. Botha, so perfectly did it echo the justifications he gives for governing by force and refusing to negotiate with the leaders of his country's black majority.

"The South African Government is under no obligation to negotiate the future of the country," Mr. Reagan said, "with any organization that proclaims a goal of creating a Communist state. . . ."

But no one is urging Pretoria to negotiate with such an organization.

The issue is negotiation with the country's black leadership and especially with the preeminent anti-apartheid movement, the African National Congress.

The A.N.C. was born 74 years ago, and its goal ever since has been a non-racist South Africa. In contrast to black power organizations, the A.N.C. is open to people of all races. Its basic policy document is the 1955 Freedom Charter, which calls for a multiracial democracy.

There are Communists on the A.N.C. executive. Anyone who cares for South Africa must be aware of that fact and concerned about it. But the question is how to deal with it.

Mr. Botha and his Government deliberately paint the A.N.C. as a mere instrument of the Soviet Union, using that as a reason for refusing to negotiate. President Reagan in his speech referred to the A.N.C. in similarly hostile terms. For Mr. Botha, that was crucial support.

The devil theory of the A.N.C. cannot be reconciled with a sincere belief in negotiation. For the theory would exclude from the process the group that embodies the hopes of more South Africans than any other.

The leader of the A.N.C., Nelson Mandela, has been in prison for 24 years. Yet a poll of urban blacks in 1985 showed that 31 percent supported him and the A.N.C., and a further 14 percent said they were for groups with similar objectives. The next largest support was 8 percent for the Zulu leader, Gatsha Buthelezi, and his organization.

The Commonwealth mission that completed an intensive study of the South African situation last month said: "There can be no negotiated settlement in South Africa without the A.N.C. The breadth of its support is incontestable, and this support is growing."

Secretary of State Shultz tried to take the hard edge off the President's comments on the A.N.C., saying he was ready to meet its president in exile, Oliver Tambo. But it is becoming ever clearer that, whatever Mr. Shultz thinks, the hard men of the Reagan Administration do not want white minority power to end in South Africa. Hence the flow of U.S. intelligence on the A.N.C. to Pretoria, as just detailed by Seymour Hersh in The New York Times.

Only Ronald Reagan can speak truth to P.W. Botha and make him listen. That is why the President's failure was so disastrous. That is why Bishop Desmond Tutu, who symbolizes the frail hope for a peaceful and democratic solution, reacted to the speech with such despair. He sees the men of violence taking over in his country.

Ronald Reagan knows nothing of realities on the ground in South Africa. He sees South Africa as he sees all the world, through the glass of ideology. The principal draftsman of his speech, appropriately, was his House ideologue, Patrick Buchanan. And so those who decry chaos and Communism help to bring them on.

South Africa is a test — I think the most profound now — of man's political rationality. What a wonderful country it would be without racism. As Secretary Shultz told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee yesterday, we see there "a vision of what can be." Could have been. □