

Guelke, Adrian. *South Africa in Transition: The Misunderstood Miracle War*. London: I.B. Tarus Publishers, 1999.

In a mocking vein of self-deprecating humor, Adrian Guelke, noted that "Political scientists make poor prophets . . . We are much better at providing explanations of events after they have occurred. In fact we are quite good at converting impossibilities into inevitabilities." (p. 23) Formerly Jan Smuts Professor of International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg from 1993 to 1995, Guelke is currently director of the Center for the Study of Ethnic Conflict at Queen's University in Belfast, Northern Ireland. As a political scientist, his principal purpose is to explain, rather than to describe in numbing detail, how this remarkable shift in political power occurred in South Africa from 1989 to 1994, when white minority rule was displaced by African majority rule. This displacement of one type of rule by another, competing type is customarily termed transition; such recent transitions to democratic modes of governance have been analyzed by Samuel P. Huntington of Harvard in his 1991 classic, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*.

The apartheid edifice built by the National Party government following its victory in the 1948 general election empowered Afrikaans-speaking whites, brought them closer to economic parity with their fellow English-speaking whites, on the one hand, and institutionalized as well as mythologized white rule. The principal beneficiaries of this stratification were modestly educated Afrikaners who feared economic competition with the more numerous Africans and were anxious about the status of their Afrikaans language and homespun culture. Once the apartheid state began to be dismantled, it was thought that these mobilized Afrikaner groups would take violent retribution on their enemies for the eroding of their racial privileges. There had been precedent for this, in the various non-state armies operating in the German Weimar Republic, and in the Afrikaner paramilitary groups that flourished in South Africa during the Second World War. Guelke shows that many commentators on the South African transition failed to see political violence as an ineluctable part of the path to majority rule. (pp. 47 and 64) Political violence and negotiation over political dispensations are not mutually exclusive categories. Linked with this thesis is Guelke's contention that the far right in South Africa was less fearful than observers had predicted. This group of disaffected Afrikaners did perpetrate acts of violence, but they were nevertheless unable to shape the main contours of the political dispensation to their liking by such sporadic spoiling tactics (chapter 4). As was true in World War Two, their rhetoric and violence were not decisive bargaining chips.

More troublesome than the white right was the loose cannon of Chief Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the powerful political kingpin of KwaZulu-Natal (a word signifying the amalgamation of Natal province with Zulu reserve areas sanctified by apartheid). His Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) contested the seeming hegemony of the premier liberation movement, the African National Congress (ANC), and championed a federalist approach to the territorial reorganization of the country. Not wholly unlike the Bugunda in Uganda some years ago, the Zulus in KwaZulu-Natal sought a kingdom within a republic. The IFP was considerably more dangerous to political stability than the

disaffected Afrikaners to the right of the established National Party. Indeed, some commentators lumped Buthelezi together with Dr. Jonas Savimbi, leader of the UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) movement who is still fighting the central government in Luanda despite United Nations interposition. Finally, both the IFP and the white far right decided to participate in the 1994 general elections.

The elections proved to be a triumph for the ANC, trailed by the National Party and the IFP, in second and third place, respectively. Guelke argues that the results illustrate the racial divide in South Africa, for there was little party crossover among the voters. The misunderstood miracle, then was the absence of non-racialism in the election and aftermath as well as very little economic growth and minimal economic redistribution. (p. 199) Although he focuses on the period of the De Klerk and Mandela presidencies in South Africa - the time of transition - he provides a rich offering of relevant concepts in comparative politics and places the shift from minority to majority rule within the larger context of ethnic politics, consociational politics and the politics of violence. Non-specialists will find the chronology, bibliography and ample endnotes most helpful in following the turns and twists of negotiations. This first-rate book is lucidly written, cogently argued, well organized and it makes an original contribution to the literature.

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