

the Sutherland Observatory which has become one of the major observatories in the Southern Hemisphere. Since the decision of the British Science and Engineering Research Council to withdraw from the observatory, ostensibly on the grounds of economy (it used to pay 30 per cent of the running costs at Sutherland in return for 40 per cent of the observing time), South Africa has picked up the tab.

The reorganization appears largely to be the conception of Dr Brian Clarke, until two years ago director of the materials research institute but now a vice-director of CSIR. The programme for the months ahead is disconcertingly rapid, and perhaps meant as such. Almost a score of applied research institutes are to be rearranged into eleven, each of which has "technology" as the dominant noun.

The posts of director have been advertised publicly, and present incumbents invited to apply for posts in the new struc-

ture. CSIR's decisions will be known in mid-June, whereafter the new directors will spend two months training for their new responsibilities. There will follow a two-month period of more detailed assessment of what the new structure might expect to do for (and earn from) industry. Employees in the present structure will be told their fate by mid-November. The new arrangements will come into effect on 1 April next.

Reducing staff numbers is no part of the plan, but there are many at all levels who wonder whether there will be a place for them in the new organization. Dr E.N. van Deventer says that CSIR will be able to offer generous severance terms to those for whom there is no place. On the question whether CSIR is sure that it will be able to avoid the mistakes of other government research organizations seeking to bend research to industrial needs, he says simply "We don't know". □

of electoral colleges so as to prevent one community establishing dominance over the others, or the rights of locally elected authorities to relax the apartheid rules as they decide, appear to be the favourites, with the abolition of the Group Areas Act a second choice.

The most chilling opinions are those of a handful of non-white academics (echoed independently by one white researcher) to the effect that change will come about only if there is a discontinuous sharing of political power, most probably brought about by confrontation. Some put the point more in sorrow than in anger, regretting opportunities now lost. But others are very angry.

These views are not necessarily representative of non-white opinion generally, but in the absence of a mechanism for enabling all non-white opinion to be democratically expressed, nobody can know how far the non-white community is already radicalized.

One curious feature of what seems to be the more general opinion that reform is necessary, but that the recipe for reform is hidden, is that the intellectual community itself has been silent about the directions in which peaceful change might be engineered. This is why the Stellenbosch group has had such an influence.

In its statement on 7 March, the group asked for the abolition of the Group Areas Act, the statutory definition of race by the Population Registration Act, the tricameral parliamentary system and the Separate Amenities Act (now as much honoured in the breach as otherwise). The group also asked for an unambiguous declaration that political power would be shared with non-whites in a manner to be determined by negotiation.

It is also worth remarking that there has been a wealth of studies of the social problems of South Africa, by academic think-tanks, by public commissions and by private industry, typified respectively by documents put out by the Institute of Strategic Studies at the University of Pretoria, the Langer report on South African education which in 1981 put the case for a concentration of effort on non-white education (conducted under the wing of the Human Sciences Research Council) and the recently published report on pathways to a peaceful transition by Dr Clem Hunter of the Anglo-American Corporation.

So why has the academic community been so silent on a subject on which its future may depend? One explanation is that people have not been silent, but have spoken out in muffled code. Another, offered by one research administrator, is that "We South Africans belong to secret societies, not big ones like the *Broederbond* but small groups. My friends and I know what we think, but we do not like to tell other people." □

Intellectual opinion

What people are saying

HERE is a remarkable discovery — intellectual opinion in South Africa is despondent at the result of the election on 6 May. Most people are also impatient that the government hangs fire on reform, but there are some who expect nothing else and others who may welcome a state of affairs in which the present system is likely to collapse under the weight of its inconsistencies.

These are the impressions left by a series of remarkably open conversations with researchers and academics, individually and in groups, as well as with a small number of businessmen. They do not have the validity of formal opinion surveys, but that may be more than compensated for by the passion with which people frequently expressed themselves.

One sharp contrast between South Africa now and what it was in the 1970s is that there seems to be no great danger of running into eager declarations, by supporters of the present system, of the reasons why the pace of enlightenment must be slow. Only one (encountered in London) has offered the opinion that black people would remain disadvantaged for a long time "because there were living in mud huts one or two generations ago". Most academics holding this opinion tend to hold their tongues.

The most common view is that, because the National Party which forms the government has been startled by the strength of the vote for the Conservative Party to its right, and particularly by the fact that no fewer than 53 of its parliamentary seats are now held by majorities of fewer than 1,000 votes, it will be forced to be more accommodating to the conservatives and less attentive to reform.

Some white voters blame external pressure for this state of affairs, saying that South Africans are stubborn folk ready to retreat into the *laager* when they are attacked. Others blame "the West" for failing to give the government credit for the reforms brought about since 1980 and the general improvement of living standards. "Why is it always the stick and not the carrot?" Asked why the Common wealth's group of three "eminent persons" had been treated disdainfully in South Africa more than a year ago, one research administrator volunteered that "our government is often terribly tactless". Many people say they are convinced that the decision of the US Congress to impose economic sanctions reflects the attempt of the Democratic Party to capture the "black vote" in the United States, and that it will be a bad business if the Democrats win in 1989.

Some blame the frailty of other white voters, alarmed either by the security threat or by the Progressive Party's statement that it would negotiate with the African National Congress, implying a rapid transfer of power to the majority. Only one seeks seriously to see the result of the election in a cheerful light, saying that it is not the case that the electorate has moved to the right (against reform), but that the government party has moved in the opposite direction. That is balanced by a whispered "I'm terrified of what will happen".

Most white voters eager for reform are nevertheless unsure of what reforms they would like the government to attempt. Constitutional changes of the kind suggested last year by the Natal *indaba*, involving universal suffrage within a system