

Serious oversights in Lijphart's solution for SA

MACHTSDELING: DE OPLOSSING VOOR ZUID-AFRIKA?

by Arend Lijphart (Uitgeverij Gottmer en Beht, Bloemendaal, Haarlem, 1987)*

SINCE Lijphart's "Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration" was published in 1977, the theory of consociational democracy sparked off a fierce academic debate. The theory and application of consociational democracy was questioned. Arguments for and against consociationalism — also called pacificatory democracy (Dutch: *pacificatie-demokratie*) — were published widely in the Netherlands, Belgium and the rest of Europe. Eventually this academic exchange also reached the United States and South Africa.

Some elements of consociational democracy, although adapted to the "peculiarities" of South Africa, are to be seen in the President's Council Report of the early 1980s (constitutional committee). After further adaptations a form of "sham" consociationalism was implemented by Act No. 110 of 1983 in the form of the tri-cameral parliamentary system. Which, by the way, excluded the majority of South Africans as no black person was allowed to vote for parliament as a central legislative body. This contributed partly to the fact that the theory has become one of the "casualties of 'reform politics' in South Africa" (Pierre du Toit, in *Politikon*, vol. 13(2), December 1986, p. 106).

Machtsdeling: de Oplossing voor Zuid-Afrika? is a restatement by Lijphart of the case for consociational democracy in South Africa. It also deals with other constitutional proposals in the South African context. The proposals of several political parties, the SPROCAS-Report, Buthelezi-proposals (1982) and criticisms against the theory of pacification is dealt with. Lijphart concludes that most of

these proposals include elements of consociational democracy. However, very few of them went the whole way. Some other proposals were never implemented. He correctly refers to some of these proposals as semi-pacification and quasi-pacification. Such proposals, it is said, have very little hope of succeeding in broadening the basis of democracy in South Africa. An extreme example of this phenomenon of quasi-pacification is the 1983 tri-cameral constitution. It is suggested that this "sham constitution" is not only a bad step (in the wrong direction?) but also that it would result in a political impasse. And greater polarisation and violence, one feels like adding.

The book reflects intensive research and "a bibliography which is a compliment to many South African scholars" to quote Pierre du Toit (*Politikon*, 1986, 13(2)).

There are however some problem areas. Lijphart suggests a system of full pacificatory democracy as a solution to South African problems. Even if one accepts the assumption that consociational theory is sound, and that it can be transplanted to Africa (which is indeed a very, very optimistic assumption), there remain several inadequately addressed issues.

Firstly, in the whole book there is barely a single reference to the role of non-civilian (para-)military decision-making and policy-implementing bodies as found in South Africa. The State Security Council, the structures of the national security management system and militarisation are not discussed at all. Does the mere existence and operation of these bodies and structures not severely influence the process of attaining democracy? It can be argued convincingly that it is putting severe restrictions on any process of democ-

ratiation. Not to mention this, is a severe oversight.

Secondly, South Africa is a highly politicised country. It does not necessarily follow that the masses will follow their leaders into a negotiated settlement based on consociationalism (and this applies to all the major actors — NP, CP, ANC, PAC, UDF, etc). This issue is not discussed properly. The fact that the major actors in the liberation struggle (ANC, UDF, PAC and National Forum) and their followers give preference to a non-racial unitary system based on universal suffrage is not sincerely taken. Surely more attention could have been given to the link between high politicisation, the unitary state option and consociationalism. In that respect, the theory could have gained some practical application. This, however, was not done. In this respect, the book seems to lack practical application value.

This, together with the issues discussed above, are serious limitations in the theory and *Machtsdeling* barely succeeds in dealing efficiently with that.

The book is no doubt a sincere contribution to the South African debate. One hopes that the aforementioned limitations will be seriously addressed in later works.

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* English Title: "Power-Sharing in South Africa" by Arend Lijphart, University of California, Berkley: Institute for International Studies, 1985.



Regional focus

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Africa — A Look Into The Future". The main speaker was IDASA board member Professor Peter Vale, who is the director of the Institute for Social and Economic Research at Rhodes University.

The topic was a very wide one and allowed for a very

broad look at South Africa's future, including the crisis within the National Party, the independence of Namibia and the social and economic implications this process could have for South Africa. Prof Vale also touched on corruption within government structures, an issue which is particularly relevant in East London where an MP has resigned under a cloud of corruption allegations and

almost the entire city council was unseated in the October municipal elections indirectly as a result of corruption allegations.

During question time, issues such as IDASA's involvement in the Democratic Party were deliberated. Some people appeared to be under the impression that the newly formed Democratic Party was the parliamentary wing of IDASA! However, the issue

was clarified to the audience who learnt that IDASA's director of planning and research, Dr Van Zyl Slabbert, would be advising the new party in his private capacity while the institute itself would obviously, in the interests of a democratic future for South Africa, be prepared to share debating platforms with the DP.

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