

In another challenge to David Welsh, COSMOS DESMOND asks: Why jettison democracy because of divisions deliberately introduced and sustained by apartheid? Desmond is an ex-priest who was banned for four-and-a-half years. He worked in Britain as British director of Amnesty International and is author of *The Discarded People* and *Persecution East and West*.

Bid to protect privilege

DAVID WELSH does indeed, as he suggests himself, counter his own argument when he points out that blacks are as politically divided as whites and that it is not known how Indians and 'coloureds' will vote.

In that case, who constitutes the minority about whose rights he is concerned? They are not an ethnically or culturally homogeneous group; they are people who differ politically from the ruling group elected by the equally heterogeneous majority. They are 'The Opposition' in an 'ordinary democracy'. There is no reason for anybody to 'ride roughshod' over them. And they are quite able to become the majority if they can persuade enough people that they can represent their interests better than the existing majority; though they would then, of course, not be a minority.

In Britain, the Labour Party, the Liberals, the Social Democrats, the Greens, the Monster Raving Loony Party and numerous other minority groups have not been able to do this for the past thirteen years. Should they too give up the pursuit of democracy?

Britain is just as divided a society as South Africa. London schools, for example, have children with well over a hundred different home languages. But the basic divide, not as pronounced as in South Africa, is between the haves and the have-nots. People vote according to their perceived economic interests, not according to their language or ethnicity. On the other hand, the inter-black solidarity and their alliance with the white working class in the 1970s was fragmented by both Tory and Labour governments' emphasis on ethnicity. They may have learnt the lesson from the Nationalists; or perhaps it was a British colonialist idea in the first place.

I HAVE no doubts at all about David Welsh's commitment to anti-racism, but I do think that he is implicitly assuming the validity of apartheid's definitions of people and of groups. A person's culture and ethnicity (I do not believe that the concept 'race' has any validity) are very important but it is apartheid which *defines* people in those

terms.

Why jettison democracy because of the divisions deliberately introduced and sustained by apartheid? Steve Biko, for example, categorically rejected the concept of 'so-called guarantees for minority rights', precisely because of the echoes of apartheid inherent in it: 'guaranteeing minority rights implies the recognition of portions of the community on a race basis. We believe that in our country there shall be no minority, there shall be no majority, just the people.

But perhaps that is too liberal even for Liberals.

Concern for minority rights serves only to perpetuate the divisions which presently exist in South African society. It thus becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that democracy will not work. It is apartheid which has created the abnormal society in which David Welsh claims 'ordinary democracy' cannot work. The obvious solution is to get rid of apartheid and thus create a normal society; then we can have an 'ordinary democracy'.

Getting rid of apartheid means righting the economic inequalities and compensating for the past inequities and iniquities. That is a prerequisite for, not a consequence of, democracy. And it is something that should be being done *now*. But it isn't. Concern for the future seems to make people forget the past and neglect the present. Any effort made now to redress the balance would improve the chances of a future 'ordinary democracy'.

IT IS apartheid's apologists who would have us believe that 'race' and ethnicity are in themselves causes of division and conflict. Apartheid made them so. But as Rick Turner, to whom nobody (apart perhaps from those who killed him) really listened, said many years ago, 'the major cause of conflict is the unequal distribution of wealth. Neither cultural nor racial differences are in themselves inherently causes of social conflict . . . if the wealth gap is done away with, there will no longer be any inherent reason for conflict. Cultural or racial groups can and do co-exist

when they are not also divided by different economic interests.' (*The Eye of the Needle*, p.70) And elsewhere: 'Conflict will not end until the grievances and the privileges end. But once these have ended, there is no basis in race difference for further conflict. That is, there is no reason why whites should expect to be discriminated against in a democratic South Africa because of their whiteness'. Neither do we have any right to expect special treatment.

Creating an egalitarian society will not automatically bring about 'non-racialism as an attitudinal predisposition'. But politics are not about attitudes; they are about actions. As Sivanandan has written, 'People's attitudes don't mean a damn to me, but it matters to me if I can't send my child to the school I want to . . . if I can't get the job I'm qualified for and so on. It is the acting out of racial prejudice and not racial prejudice itself that matters.' People can be as 'race-conscious' as they like but if they have no power to do anything about it that is not a cause of social conflict. Prejudice is, in any event, the product, rather than the cause, of a discriminatory society. That is as true of religious prejudice in Northern Ireland as it is of racial prejudice in South Africa.

WHITES HAVE reaped the benefits of 300 years of minority rule. Are we now to cry 'foul' at the prospect, albeit still distant, of majority rule? Of course whites will suffer, whatever the ethnic composition of the majority. But we will be losing privilege not rights. There is no way in which our past, and even current, life-style can, or should be, protected while millions are hungry and homeless and will continue to be even under majority rule. We cannot have our cake and eat it: be rid of what we have always known was a totally immoral system and yet not pay any price. The majority have already oversubscribed their contribution.

To argue for a 'power-sharing coalition' because the Nationalists 'will not acquiesce in a majoritarian system' is

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Chilling insights into a sick society

IN THE HEART OF THE WHORE by Jacques Pauw, (Southern Book Publishers, Half-way House.)

THE ANALOGY of the whore — a degraded and depersonalised victim of society — is, in many respects, an appropriate one for apartheid's death squads. It is, however, not their bodies but their very humanity that these dealers in death prostitute. This book by *Vrye Weekblad* assistant editor Jacques Pauw tells the compelling story of these squads and, in the process, provides penetrating — and chilling — insights into the nature of our sick society.

It is a journey into our very own heart of darkness.

The book opens with a familiar enough South African scene: Braai fires at sunset on a river bank. It is, however, a braaivleis with a difference, for as those assembled eat, drink and are merry, the bodies of two men who have just been cold-bloodedly 'eliminated' slowly burn to cinders on their nearby pyre. The story then moves to a different setting with a graphic description of the brutal assassination of lawyer Griffiths Mxenge, the subsequent shooting of his wife Victoria, and the cover ups which accompanied these murders.

The ensuing chapters cover, in great detail, the stories of former security policeman Dirk Coetzee and some of his fellow hit men, the security structures of which they were part, and the events set in motion by their revelations, initially published in the *Vrye Weekblad*: The Government-appointed Harms Commission of Inquiry, and the ensuing defamation case brought by General Lothar Neethling against the newspaper, which finally vindicated Coetzee and those journalists who had dared, at enormous risk, to publish the truth.

IT IS not a pretty story: It tells of the way in which the government waged a massive disinformation campaign

against opponents of apartheid, and of the devious means used to destroy them — at huge cost to the taxpayer — through subjecting them to various forms of harassment, torture and death. It describes the impunity with which cross-border attacks on activists were carried out in total disregard for the sovereignty of neighbouring states. It details, too, the deliberate destabilisation policy of the government, in its support of movements such as Renamo, and its manoeuvres to disrupt elections in Namibia.

The prevarications and blatant untruths of government ministers, and senior policemen, are laid bare. So too, is the way in which the judicial system of the country has been subverted, through drawing convicted criminals into police operations, and the way in which policemen themselves combined their political duties with illegal activities such as diamond and pornography smuggling and car theft.

This strategy was rationalised by ingrained beliefs about the legitimacy of the task, and was facilitated by unquestioning obedience to authority.

DEATH SQUADS operate in many countries, but it is the national disease of racism, which permeates our society, which gives the local version its unique character. With notable exceptions the victims are almost all black. It is inconceivable that so many whites could have been murdered, or simply disappeared, and nothing done (just as it is inconceivable that the euphemism unrest would have been applied if over 6 000 whites had died in political violence in Natal).

As a result of the separation caused by apartheid, the majority of whites have neither known, nor even wanted to know, the realities of black life in this country. The central message of this book is about the frightening con-

sequences of grossly distorted power relationships, and of the accompanying secrecy and lack of accountability on the part of such a government, and as such holds important lessons for the future.

There is, however, a glimmer of hope: The book points to the way in which whites can be transformed through encounters with 'the enemy', and the reconciliation which is still possible. Dirk Coetzee, e.g. learns that ANC members are not the ogres he had been led to believe, and accept him in spite of what he has done.

It also highlights the important role of both good investigative journalism and the courts in ensuring that justice is done.

THERE IS still a very long way to go. The legacies of the past, Dr Van Zyl Slabbert warns us in the Foreword to this book, must be recognised and transformed if a new start is to be made. The recognition has been but grudging and partial, and there is little sign that the necessary transformation process is taking place. The murderers and perjurers have still not had to face the consequences of their deeds. The 'country's madness', as Pauw calls it, is still upon us. The credibility of the police must be restored: Unless the perpetrators of the ongoing violence are arrested and brought to book, the transition our society makes will, to use Slabbert's words, be a 'gearshift into madness'.

That gearshift must be avoided at all costs. This book is a timeless warning about the dangers of not knowing, and not wanting to know. It presents an opportunity to know.

Its greatest strength — the painstaking documentation and attention to detail — is also its major weakness for a non-academic readership. Better, however, to read even parts of it than nothing.

— MARY DE HAAS

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surely to bow to the continued tyranny of the minority which we have had for 300 years. So either way we will have a tyranny. Is it perhaps the 'majority' rather than the 'tyranny' that is to be feared?

The 'tyranny of the majority' as John Stuart Mill noted (approvingly) was feared by 'thinkers' and the 'important classes'. (In South African parlance, I presume, that would mean 'whites'.)

Mill also believed that there were 'exceptional individuals who instead of being deterred, should be encouraged to act differently from the mass'. Again, in the South African context, that doubtless means 'whites'. The proponents of 'minority rights' seem to be claiming not equal but more rights for the minority than for the majority.

The new-found concern for minority rights seems to me to be a thinly veiled attempt to protect white privilege on the

rather spurious basis of individual human rights. But neither one's individuality nor one's minority status can be the basis for human rights. They are both factors which separate one from other people, whereas human rights are based on what we all have in common, our humanity.

Nobody can enjoy them fully unless everybody does; and no individuals or groups can arrogate some to themselves. ●