Résumé
P. H. Frankel — Consensus, alliance et cooptation dans la vie politique sud-africaine.
Analyse et discussion de la stratégie étudiée et partiellement adoptée par le gouvernement sud-africain pour aménager l'apartheid en lui donnant les apparences d'une démocratie pluraliste. Les deux communautés (anglophone et hollandophone) de la minorité au pouvoir se retrouveraient dans une sorte de consensus pour aménager des relations de clientèle avec les fractions relativement privilégiées de la population non blanche. Mais cette politique ne paraît guère avoir de chances de succès auprès de la grande majorité de cette population dont les exigences sont désormais tout autres.

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Much conventional thinking about South African politics is rooted in the assumption that differences in historic experience between English and Afrikaner are essentially unimportant as criteria for actions across racial boundaries. The White elite may be culturally heterogeneous yet, according to this school of thought, the essence of its political behaviour lies in the fact that its component groups jointly comprise an isolated minority dispersed amongst, yet monopolising power and wealth over a large indigenous Black population: while English and Afrikaner may cleave over oligarchical spoils they nevertheless tend to cohere in support of configurations of racial privilege and inequality.

In actuality, elite agreement on racial politics has been neither so simple nor complete, certainly not since the intrusion of the 'native' issue into Anglo-Afrikaner political relations during the nineteen-twenties. This in its turn mirrors the historical fact that the inter- and intra-racial dynamics of South African politics have never been entirely separable in operation and that, to a quite considerable extent, Anglo-Afrikaner cultural antipathies have spilled over into the political realm to condition strategies of White control. If Afrikaners have negatively reacted to their English counterparts in the inter-racial nexus, it has partially been because of the largely unfounded suspicion that the English would compromise racial unity to forge alliances with Blacks (Welsh 1975: 52, 63, 76), and partially, and perhaps more fundamentally, because of English responses to Black demands in the form of qualified franchises, race federations or whatever has been regarded historically by Afrikaners as dangerously amenable to Black manipulation in their quasi-liberal sentimentalities. The result has been that much of the history of White politics since Union, the dialectics of separation and integration and the shifting coalitions to which they have given rise, has been dominated by competition between different strategies of racial control, united in the principle of control, but divergent in their technical features, their adaptability and the nakedness of their racism. There have been no significant differences on the basic desirability of perpetuating White domination—White party divisions seldom arise out of differences of principle rooted

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in racial issues—yet there have been often deep conflicts as to the optimal means of doing so.

A major characteristic of South African politics during the seventies, particularly since the 1976 disturbances, is that the historic conflict over the mechanics of domination holds true with diminishing significance. There is little in the experience of the period to suggest that the elite is any more willing than previously to surrender its power monopoly, yet as questions concerning racial politics have tended to displace intra-oligarchical issues at the forefront of White concerns, the range of elite responses to Black demands has proportionately and uncharacteristically narrowed. White public debate still resonates on the grand polar themes of separation and integration, yet beneath the rhetorical flourish, the sharp edge along the ideological divide between Afrikaner supporters of apartheid and their largely-English antagonists has clearly been blunted. In the recurrent emphasis today placed by White politicians of all persuasions on 'identifying common areas', and 'consensus government', it is in fact possible to identify an emerging unity in the strategic conceptions of English and Afrikaner spread right across the White political spectrum.

It is the purpose of this paper to explore this emerging unity of means (as distinct from the long-standing consensus on ends), to identify its sources in the internal circumstances of South Africa in the seventies, its practical manifestations in the current constitutional thinking of the elite, and, in the last analysis, its implications for political relations between the races.

I

The international context of South African politics has drastically altered since the collapse of Portuguese colonialism in Southern Africa in 1974, and the subsequent establishment of radical Black regimes in nearby Angola and Mozambique has deeply sensitised both English and Afrikaner to the precariousness of White South Africa's position. Initial apocalyptic reactions have been tempered by the course of developments, particularly the pragmatic posture adopted by the new Mozambique government, yet the new regional constellation remains an important source of anxiety for the increasingly isolated White elite, and an important factor conditioning its political reactions. In one sense the tightening regional noose has conveyed the urgency of internal change to offset cataclysmic racial conflict in the foreseeable future, but within a context of conflicting standards where international paradigms for change are different and far more demanding than those at work on the local scene, the insecurities bred of threat have also encouraged psychologies of withdrawal right across the White political spectrum. In the

case of Afrikaners this is simply an intensification of historic patterns, as Afrikaner political culture has always been susceptible to the view that the international community is intent upon its destruction. What is different today is that many of these feelings have been generalised out to embrace the overwhelming majority of Whites, English and Afrikaner alike, all insecure in the growing conviction that even erstwhile friends in the international community represent a genuine threat to White survival.  

This tendency to confuse White survival with the survival of apartheid, buttressed as it is by intensive government propaganda designed to mobilise Whites around patriotic themes and anti-communist symbols, is an important source of elite integration. At the same time the growing coalescence of the elite is also the result of more fundamental sociological developments in both the English and Afrikaner communities which favour intellectual reorientations and the exchange or reconciliation of many previously divergent political values across group boundaries.

On the Afrikaner side of the equation there is little evidence to support the view that the anticipated juncture where racial traditions bend before the secularising and differentiating forces of modernisation has been reached. The process working in this direction has however clearly been initiated and has even accelerated amongst mainstream rather than previously marginal groups in the interpenetrating blocs composing the Afrikaner community. Apartheid, the political arm of Afrikaner nationalism in its relations with Black South Africa, has not remained insulated from these tendencies with their capacity to ruthlessly denigrate conventionalised social myths and organisational formulae. Apartheid has of course always been dogged by the assumption that it is possible to reduce an increasingly complex and interdependent South Africa into neatly distinguishable human and political categories. During the seventies this sociologically naive conception has been ruthlessly exposed in all its nakedness and with it has gone the ideological certainty accompanying apartheid in the first twenty-five years of its implementation.

Apartheid has, for one thing, tended to interpret political reality in simplistic and dialectical racial terms which has meant that the Coloured and Indian communities, unfortunately situated as they are midway along the racial spectrum, are consigned to political limbo beyond the reaches of the grand design rooted in regulating relations between the Black and White communities. Yet the policy of ‘parallel development’, as even the most ardent Afrikaner nationalists have been forced to concede, is totally inadequate as a long-term prescription for these two groups, neither of whom can be matched with the ‘homeland’ framework

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2. These feelings form the basis for the emphasis currently being placed by South African foreign policy-makers on the ‘non-aligned’ status of the country in the East-West international conflict. In good part this position is a reaction to what is locally perceived as enduring Western, and particularly United States hostility towards White South Africa.
under present political and demographic conditions. The myth of a transient urban Black population has also been rudely challenged by the march of industrialisation with its ability to prompt human movement and reorient social values. Influx control policies have proved ineffective both in containing the expansion of a permanently rooted and largely de-ethnicised metropolitan Black grouping and in treating the far more complex political problem of counteracting its vociferous resistance to incorporation into designated homeland structures. Apartheid has generally understated the ability of centripetal economic forces to accelerate cultural diffusion and the development of networks of interdependencies between different racial groups which are at least partially resistant to political reversal. This has not necessarily led to democratisation at the rate anticipated by local liberals, yet it has pushed the grand objective of radical territorial and social segregation increasingly into the realms of fantasy and in so doing generated pressures for apartheid to justify its authoritarian structures in terms other than those of simple separation. In current terms Afrikaner apologists for apartheid are faced with the difficult problem of rationalising extensive State control and deeply institutionalised racial discrimination without the luxury of clear and morally acceptable legitimating objectives to refer to (Study Project 1973: 194).

These unresolved problems touch on the practical and ethical quick of apartheid and for this very reason they resonate with force on Afrikaner consciousness to fuel adaptive pressures if not to necessarily erode basic ideological principles. The ‘fit’ of the subject racial groups into the political framework, the erosion of civil liberties and the meaning and role of discrimination also set the parameters for the so-called verligte (enlightened) movement, the importance of which lies not so much in its intellectual rebellion against the Afrikaner establishment but in its role as a strategically located group within Afrikanerdom cogniscent of some of the basic inconsistencies in apartheid doctrines. It is important to emphasise that the verligtes do not represent a liberal outpost in the Afrikaner camp: their purpose is to revitalise apartheid and they do not shrink from endorsing the social application of illiberal mechanisms in doing so. At the same time this loose amalgam of Afrikaner technocrats, businessmen, professional politicians, academics and churchmen are sensitive to some liberal criticisms of apartheid in a way which is not

3. On the problems facing the political incorporation of the Indian and Coloured minorities, see LAWRENCE & VAN ZYL SLABBERT 1973: 34. The most extensive recent analysis of the social political problems confronting Coloureds in present-day South Africa is the Report of the Theron Commission (1976).

4. It has been estimated that 35% of the Black population lives in the urban areas, although this figure does not include Blacks living in dormitory townships adjacent to White cities but just inside ‘homeland’ boundaries; see LAWRENCE & VAN ZYL SLABBERT 1973: 24. Projections to the year 2000 estimate that there will be between 21.3 million and 37.2 million Blacks in ‘White’ urban South Africa by that date; see ibid.: 23. On influx control see FRANKEL 1979b. On urban Blacks and the homelands see MAYER 1972.
entirely hostile to a qualified reconciliation between the two seemingly ideologically divergent groupings. In present terms this is manifest in a discrepancy between public and private Nationalist Party reactions to liberal visions of racial confrontation: publicly they are dismissed as naive and historically unwarranted, yet privately, policy is alerted to the danger of rigid adherence to the status quo. Notions of racial interdependence and extended racial contacts in devising alternative political formulae have also made their mark on mainstream Nationalist thinking (despite dissent over the operational implications of these concepts), and virtually all Nationalists of any consequence have agreed with the White opposition on the importance of socially and politically upgrading the urban Blacks—even though Nationalist policy remains obdurate in its belief that their political rights derive from the homeland framework. While there is little consensus in Afrikanerdom as to the delicate threshold between ‘differentiation’ and ‘discrimination’—the cardinal principle of maintaining group identities remains inviolable—the Nationalists have publicly committed themselves to the removal of ‘petty apartheid’, or what is termed ‘negative discrimination’. Finally, the shift in much Afrikaner thinking from pure apartheid to more ethically sensitive and egalitarian notions of ‘plural democracy’ should be seen as more than simply terminological manoeuvring; it represents a cautious, if germinal and still incoherent concession to local liberalism defined in the Hoernleian tradition (Hoernle 1945).

Developments of this nature tend to reverberate favourably on English White South Africa at a time when there are powerful forces working to accentuate its historically close political and economic association with the Afrikaner segment of the oligarchy. Since the late sixties the Nationalists have been increasingly concerned with mobilising White support outside the communal fold, and although the doctrinal movements in apartheid are not specifically designed for English consumption their aura of flexibility and rational reformism flatters English sensibilities rooted in lingering attachments to abstract notions of democracy and racial justice. The materially prosperous English community has always in any case been ambiguous in these abstract commitments and with growing threats to the immediate interests of the entire White oligarchy, with Nationalist electoral invincibility and a record of concerted action in protecting oligarchical interests (even with bias in an Afrikaner direction), English receptivity to Nationalist overtures has been heightened.

The liberal core of the English community has additionally been weakened, ironically enough, by the breakdown of the centre in White politics and the elevation of the Progressive Party to a position of unprecedented parliamentary influence. With minimal representation prior to 1974 the party could not be anything but a pristine if powerless defender of the liberal faith: since 1977, as Official Opposition exposed to the ruthless logic of the White party politics, according to which to survive is to conservatise (Study Project 1973: 180), it cannot perpetuate this
role except at the expense of reversion to powerless status. The absorption of the pragmatic race federationists on the left of the now defunct United Party has done little for party unity—the Party is now formally known as the Progressive Federal Party—and even less to halt the movement to tailor liberal values to the interests and prejudices of a consistently illiberal White electorate. English liberal self-confidence has finally been shattered deeply and probably irretrievably by the development of Black consciousness with its vigorous critique of conventional liberal prescriptions (Gerhart 1979; Adam 1973; Khoapa 1972; Khoapa, ed., 1973). South African liberalism has always experienced difficulty in adjusting to the political and cultural implications of African nationalism (Robertson 1971). Confronted by it in a new, virulent and self-assertive form, liberals have reacted with a mixture of resentment, dismay and confusion. The resulting spiral of mutual hostilities has both consolidated White ranks in the face of the apparent common threat while severing most of the lines of communication between White liberals and the developing mainstream of Black opinion.

Despite marginal changes in the racial organisation of local society in the last two to three years, there is also very little in their experience to justify the traditional liberal contention that apartheid will disintegrate proportionate to advancing industrialisation. Some liberals have sought refuge in the argument that the process is slower and more discontinuous than expected, but for others, including many members of the intellectual establishment, the inconsistency between hope and reality has bred a distinctive disenchantment with the belief that South Africa is moving inexorably towards an open political system—certainly not of the type delineated by Westminster parliamentary democracy. As many in this group have conceded under pressure, this particular conception of change, rooted as it is in the accumulative workings of the capitalist profit motive and individuation processes, grossly underestimates the capacity of political structures to bend South African society to the ends of a perpetuated and entrenched racial order (Study Project 1973: 177).

5. This has, naturally enough, produced serious conflict within PFP ranks between the original and more 'purist' liberals of the old Progressive Party—who define the party as an instrument of political protest—and the 'reformist' group composed of individuals until recently associated with the United Party. This latter grouping tends to emphasise power- rather than protest-oriented styles of political action and is more amenable to making pragmatic adjustments to party principles in the interests of extended White support.

6. There are essentially two variations on this theme. In the first instance it is asserted that there is an inherent contradiction between apartheid and the capitalist drive to maximise profits: this contradiction will, it is posited, lead to the breakdown of the industrial colour bar and, eventually, political apartheid. The second variation argues that sustained economic growth will eventually create sufficient wealth for everybody and there will no longer be political conflict on racial lines over how it should be distributed; see Lawrence & Van Zyl Slabbert 1973: 27.

7. This is taken to mean a unitary State, a parliamentary executive, the sovereignty of parliament, a bicameral legislature and an electoral system based on a majority vote in single-member constituencies.
Apartheid is in any case more than just unexpectedly resilient according to the reasoning of an increasingly defensive local liberalism: in its attempt to systematically regulate inter-group relations since 1948 it has crystallised a variety of structures and behaviours directly antithetical to majoritarian democracy for the foreseeable future. Deeply institutionalised coercion, the functioning of ethnic political sub-systems in the homelands and resilient racial identities are irreconcilable with the social substance favouring parliamentary democracy, yet these apparently defining features of the present social order have fast become the reference points for liberalism in its search for new and ‘relevant’ identities. By extension of this logic the homelands are no longer seen as creatures of apartheid: they are rather parts of ‘an incipient institutional framework [. . .] creating new channels for political communication and deliberation between diverse groups’ (Study Project 1973: 191). Since existing structures reinforce racial divisions, race ‘cannot be ignored or wished away in politics and future developments’ (Randall, ed., 1973: 79): on the contrary, it is the race group rather than the individual which is the critical building block in the polity. Ultimately, as even stalwart defenders of the liberal faith such as Alan Paton concede, ‘the goal of the common society must now be striven for within the framework of separate development’ (Study Project 1973: 71).

Shifts of this nature in the liberal interpretation of South African politics and society are widely welcomed in Afrikaner circles, the reason being that beneath liberal protestations affirming the ideal of the common society, a pragmatic dilution of faith has occurred which admits to the essential irreversibility of apartheid and, even more importantly, accepts some of its elemental philosophical postulates, the building of segmented racial identities into the political framework in particular. Defenders of local liberalism have argued in favour of its ‘new realism’, yet, irrespective of the practical question of whether a basis exists for a political system rooted in individualistic conceptions of representation, the indubitable fact remains that the theoretical adjustments taking place come dangerously close to shifts in basic premises catering to an apartheid reality intrinsically hostile to the majoritarian democratic conceptions upon whose commitment South African liberals have always, if often waveringly, prided themselves.

In reality, the price of absorption into the White mainstream is the partial or total surrender of these traditional commitments, and measured against the increasing risks of isolation on a racial limb this is a cost which liberals are inclined to bear. In present terms both White liberals and Afrikaner nationalists are equally hostile to majoritarian democracy—even if the former are understandably more apologetic and qualified in their antagonism—and both, while disagreeing over specific modalities, stress the importance of institutionalising race group differences as the departure point for future political developments. Many liberals today toy with the belief that racial separation ‘can be viewed as a beginning of
a new potential common political system' (Study Project 1973: 191). This should be viewed not only as an echo of the tortuous Nationalist conviction that segregation is both a necessary and desirable precondition to integration (Vosloo 1976): it should also be seen as an indicator of the present state of intra-oligarchical political relations and of the atrophy of local liberalism as an oppositional movement.

II

As the core of Afrikanerdom moves outwards in the face of modernisation, so English liberalism moves inwards in response to the increasingly magnetic attractions of the racial status quo. This is the basic dynamic fueling the intellectual exchanges taking place between the two entities. In order to fully appreciate the tactical implications of these developments with their connotations of intensifying elite integration, it is important that they also be viewed against the backdrop of two other defining features of the post-1976 period.

The intellectual shiftings amongst the elite and their relationship to strategies of political control are in the first place reflections of the fact that White reactions to political developments, both internally and internationally, are more fragmented and tinged with uncertainty than at any time in the recent past. It should be emphasised that the ruling oligarchy will in all probability continue to set the parameters of change for the immediate future (Gann et al. 1979), yet authoritarianism has the characteristic tendency to blunt the political reflexes of supporting elites over long periods of time, and White South Africa, with the experience of decades of effective domination, seems to be no more immune to this process than any other long-standing ruling grouping. The toll is taken not only in an appalling insensitivity to elementary concepts of social justice but in a declining ability to effectively pinpoint pressures for change and to make adjustments in a felicitous and creative manner. The period since the beginning of the seventies has also witnessed the growth of Black consciousness with its capacity to stimulate Black political self-confidence and back it with new organisations and symbols. The result has been a gradual and often imperceptible shift in political initiatives from the White to the Black community.

It is largely because of the resulting insecurities bred amongst the elite that there has been no significant diminution in the role of State violence in the South African political process: not a single important piece of security or discriminatory legislation has been repealed since 1976 despite the attempt by the White government and public to portray the period as one of enlightened reformism. At the same time the disturbances of that year, set within the context of the growing internationalisation of Southern African issues, have encouraged an examination of the political and economic costs of the more blatant forms of coercive State
policy. Quite independent of the fact that the 1976 riots indicated the resilience of Black resistance despite decades of oppression, South Africa’s international image is an important consideration in this regard, both in terms of access to overseas capital markets at a time of domestic economic constriction and in terms of the country’s continuing diplomatic isolation. The result is a probably more concerted attempt than ever before to mingle coercive and non-coercive techniques of political control and to downgrade the visibility of the more overtly coercive features of the system. White interests remain decisive yet there is evidence, at the level of rhetoric and (less so) at the level of action, that the elite has come to the realisation that a variety of accumulating Black, Indian and Coloured claims can no longer be treated with the cruder forms of repression—at least not at a social price which it is presently prepared to bear (Adam & Giliomee 1979). The task at hand is not necessarily to address these claims, the most important of which are irreconcilable with the present power configuration concentrated in White hands: the imperative is rather to streamline their diffusion within the framework of domination, to neutralise them and to steer them into minimally disruptive if mildly reformist channels.

Much White political thinking over the last three years has been preoccupied with the twin issues of recapturing political initiatives and diluting Black challenges, and out of this search process for strategies to delicately raise the ceiling of domination there has emerged a broad interest, embracing liberals and Afrikaner nationalists, in the transplantation of consociational models of government into South African context (Lijphart 1977a; McRae 1974; Nordlinger 1972; also Lijphart 1971: 4; Daalder 1974; Barry 1975a: 494; 1975b; Lustick 1979). Publicly this interest is justified by the apparent success of political formulae of this type in stabilising other multicultural societies, yet in reality the growing fascination with consociational models derives from the more basic fact that in both spirit and form they mesh perfectly with the prevailing intellectual climate and the demands of neutralisation politics at the heartland of current oligarchical concerns. The present emphasis placed by both liberals and Afrikaners on pluralistic interpretations of the local social universe and their common rejection of majoritarian notions of political organisation in favour of some as yet undefined midpoint between ‘pure’ apartheid and total integration is, of course, perfectly compatible with the consociational logic. Consociations may be democratic but they are also pragmatic and hybrid enough, as forms of political organisation, to be convoluted to virtually any political purpose (Barry 1975a: 483-486). From the point of view of South African liberals, consociation can be blended readily into the framework of residual democratic ideals balanced by the illiberal realities of the local situation, while, from the Afrikaner perspective, consociation with its emphasis on ‘maintaining the distinctive characteristics of each of its constituent units’ (Apter 1977: 318) provides a conduit for politically incorporating
the Indian and Coloured minorities into grand coalition politics without the direct embarrassment of violating the cardinal apartheid principle of maintaining group identities. Consociation and control may offer alternative conceptions for explaining stability in deeply divided societies (Lustick 1979: 326), yet consociations can also be bent to control purposes. As South Africa's limited experience with consociation at the local government level and its proposed solutions for Namibia attest, political arrangements of this type can be instituted with minimal structural alterations, allowing incumbent elites to modulate the rate at which power flows from joint decision-making between socially unequal groupings.8 The appeal of consociation to local Whites finally flows from the fact that, unlike federalism with its patchy record in protecting settler interests in other parts of the continent, consociation comes to South Africa with a historically untarnished, if untested, record.

There is a general consensus amongst the elite today that the Westminster model of parliamentary politics needs to be replaced or changed to meet the plural realities of South African conditions, beyond the existing pattern of modifications built into it by the South Africa Act of 1909 and carried over into the Republic of South Africa Constitution Act of 1961.9 Following the blanket recommendation of the Theron Commission that 'it be accepted that the existing Westminster system of government will have to be changed to adapt to the requirements peculiar to the South African plural population structure',10 a cabinet committee was established at the end of 1976 to investigate 'possible and desirable adjustments to the existing constitutional order',11 and in the subsequent period trace elements of consociational theory with their emphasis on principles of grand coalition, mutual veto, proportionality and segmental autonomy have made their appearance with differing degrees of pronunciation in the policies of both the major White political parties.

During 1977, in the guise of 'the positive developmental nature of apartheid' the Nationalist Party introduced legislation to create a new constitution for South Africa which dispenses with the central characteristic of British-style parliamentary democracy, i.e. the sovereignty of Parliament in favour of three largely elective segmental parliaments, White, Indian and Coloured, each with jurisdiction over the interests of their own groups; an over-arching Council of Cabinets to discuss matters

8. On the use of consociational formula at the local government level, especially in Natal, see The Star (Johannesburg [hereinafter: same publication]), 7 Nov. 1978; also 22 Apr. 1977, 22 Sept. 1978.
9. South Africa's present constitution is not a 'pure' Westminster constitution in that it excludes Blacks from the political process while recognising the provinces as integral tiers of government; see Vosloo 1979. On the South African constitution more generally, see Hailo & Kahn 1965; Thompson 1966.
of common interest and to reach decisions through consensus; a number of joint parliamentary committees to resolve issues at variance between the parliaments; an elected and appointed presidential council of specialist advisers to the State President; and, at the apogee of the system, a powerful State President armed with the authority to appoint the three Prime Ministers, chair the Council of Cabinets and take decisions on its behalf should it fail to reach agreement. Significantly enough the State President will be elected by majority vote in an 88-member electoral college, 50 of whose members are White and elected by majority vote in the White, i.e. Nationalist-dominated, parliament. The Progressive Federal Party (PFP) has also moved away from graduated majoritarianism in its new constitutional proposals of 1978 which reject the qualified franchise in favour of a federal system based on a universal franchise hedged by a variety of mechanisms for the protection of minority group rights. These include a number of cultural councils each with the power to veto action in the Upper House of the proposed bicameral parliament, a proportional representation arrangement ensuring that minorities are 'fairly represented' in parliament, and a minority group veto in the Lower House (the Federal Assembly) which can be used on all measures excepting money bills, administrative matters and the election of the Prime Minister. While the federal parliament will control national affairs the consociational notion of segmental autonomy is expressed in provision being made for an unspecified number of State legislatures controlling regional matters, each of which may decide on their own form of government and franchise system provided that it is not discriminatory.

It is important to emphasise that while both parties are acting upon principles of consociation there are significant differences in their specific proposals. Firstly, the Nationalist consociational plan has, unsurprisingly enough, strong authoritarian features, not only in its definition of executive powers and in its blunt emphasis on the decisiveness of White power but additionally in its adherence to existing statutory classifications of the various racial population groups. The PFP plan is far more ambiguous on these issues, consociational conceptions are generally less strongly emphasised and the whole exercise is seen as tentative subject to acceptance at some future national convention. This suggests a greater tolerance for bargaining and cross-racial negotiation over conso-


14. Arendt Lijphart (1978: 20) has made the point that the imposition of group boundaries in terms of existing racial legislation is one of the major defects of the Nationalist Party constitutional plan.
cation on the part of the White opposition. Secondly, while the PFP proposals define consociation as a generally applicable political formula encompassing all of territorial South Africa and its various racial groups, the Nationalists see it as supplementary to apartheid, relevant only to the ‘common area’ (i.e. where modernisation has inextricably meshed the various race groups), and then subject to the critical exclusion of urban Blacks whose political rights continue to derive from the ethnic homelands. These potentially ‘independent’ areas will be linked to consociational South Africa (in which the interests of Whites, Indians and Coloureds remain paramount) to form a constellation of Southern African States. Finally, while both packages ensure White domination and are therefore unattractive to the Black majority as they now stand, the different mechanisms supporting White privilege are salient for the reactions of other minorities, i.e. the Indians and Coloureds. Under the Nationalist plan as it is presently conceived, sovereignty remains vested in the White parliament and the whole system turns on a Nationalist President who can, with the assistance of the White parliament, break deadlocks in disputes over common legislation. This makes Nationalist Party proposals far less acceptable to Indians and Coloureds than those of the PFP where each minority group has an effective veto over the others.

It is also important to stress that since consociation implies government by elites, each elite representing different cultural entities, there is the common presupposition in both constitutional plans that elites exist amongst the subject groups who are amenable to absorption into the consociational framework. This means that an important element in White strategies of control at this point in time lies in exploiting the tensions inherent in the ambiguous social and political position of the Indians and Coloureds in order to induce their identification with the White power structure, and in encouraging the emergence amongst Blacks of moderate elites whose interests can be orchestrated in a consociational direction. White liberals have always argued for the development of such a counter-revolutionary évolué group drawn from the Black middle class, and even though the Nationalist brand of consociation presently envisions what is in actuality a tripartite alliance between White, Indian and Coloured, there exists a current of verligte thought, dating back to the early seventies, which is favourable to the idea of bringing certain select urban Blacks into some sort of four-fold power constellation. There is some evidence suggesting that the constitutional commission now at work to refine the 1977 Nationalist proposals will build a modulated form of this notion into its eventual consociational plan, possibly in the form of an urban Black city-State arrangement.

Apart from the increasingly unconvincing and rhetorical references to the ethnic homelands as repositories of political rights for urban Blacks, Nationalist Party policy on so-called 'denationalised' Black city-dwellers is far from fully crystallised. At the same time there is a growing feeling in the party—one reflecting a broader sentiment amongst the White elite—that some sort of basis be developed for the cooption of this group, and inasmuch as this reverberates on official government policy, it introduces a new element into the dynamics of divide and control supplementary to ethnic cooption traditionally worked through the political leadership of the homelands (Adam & Giliomee 1979; Adam 1971: 156; Flynn 1974; Schmidt et al. 1977). Today, policies of this nature are increasingly worked in conjunction with policies of class cooption directed at foci of leadership and organisational skills vested in the more affluent sections of the urban Black communities.

The limited political and economic concessions made to urban Blacks since 1976 should be interpreted in this light, i.e. as part of a strategy to cleave the small but influential Black middle class from the popular masses in anticipation that they will respond favourably to future offers of participation in some as yet undefined consociational framework. It is in terms of what is essentially a patron-client logic that since 1977, the Government has established a number of urban Black local authorities armed with administrative powers substantially greater than those enjoyed by the now defunct Urban Bantu Councils. These essentially middle class 'community councils' (including the Soweto Council) are regarded as important preparatory mechanisms for Black municipal self-government in the foreseeable future (Frankel 1979a). Most of the marginal benefits stemming from the post-1976 reforms have in any case worked to the advantage of already privileged elements in the Black townships. Thus the returns of the decision to allow 'qualified' urban Blacks ninety-nine year leasehold rights in the metropolitan areas, undoubtedly the most important concession since 1976, will flow largely to the more affluent township dwellers who alone can absorb the hidden economic costs built into the present arrangements.19 The attention given by government policy to eliminating some of the major restraints on commercial activity by urban Blacks also displays a certain favouritism to the middle class, particularly when viewed against the recent introduction of new legislation designed to more strictly control Black labour and industrial organisation.20 Official social policy with its emphasis on desegregating 'elite' facilities is formulated in much the same spirit since

20. On the removal of some of the constraints on the operations of Black traders and businessmen, see Rand Daily Mail, 5 Nov. 1977; The Star, 9 Feb. 1979. Current government policy on Black labour is set either in conformity with or reaction to the recommendations of the Wiehan and Rieckert Commissions, both of which produced reports during 1979. For the nature of these recommendations and the manner in which they extend political control over Black labour, see Rand Daily Mail, 2 May 1979, 25 June 1979; Sunday Times, 27 May 1979.
there are few Blacks with the resources to patronise the ‘international-status’ facilities placed at their disposal. Finally, plans have been mooted in government circles to selectively dilute influx control through the introduction of a system of exemptions for wealthier and professionally-skilled urban Blacks, much along one of the proposed lines of the 1923 urban areas legislation (Frankel 1979b; Welsh 1971: 198) under which so-called ‘civilized’ Blacks—doctors, ministers, and educators—would not be required to carry passes. Whether or not these plans materialise (they did not in 1923), they fit the scenario of class cooptation.

III

The cooptic momentum currently transcends English-Afrikaner divisions so that government activity of the cooptic type is not only welcomed by the White opposition but actively backed by a variety of cultural and business organisations in the English establishment working in an auxiliary capacity. This adds significantly to the forces working to build a conciliatory and cooperative urban Black grouping. It is also important to stress that despite the tendency of rigid racial strata to compact the Black community in a way diminishing its internal fragmentation in political relations with Whites, there is still an important township constituency, particularly among the emergent bourgeoisie who forms a target group for the establishment and development of the patron-client system envisioned by the elite and the White authorities. As has already been noted, the consociational plans elaborated by the White parties fail to come to terms with Black political thinking rooted in majoritarian democratic concepts, yet the channels for dialogue between the races, while shrinking, are far from closed, both because of the individualizing forces which continue to attract the urban Black bourgeoisie to the White sector, and because the majority of this group continues to shrink from the option of revolutionary race warfare, with all of its deleterious human consequences. In the circumstances there are still large numbers of influential Blacks who have a material stake in the sincerity of White assertions that consociation heralds a new era in socio-political relations, and who are still prepared to wait on developments.

Similar considerations moderate the reaction of the ambiguously situated Coloured and Indian communities, many of whose differences


22. The process at work here is one of ‘situational selection’ as described by Epstein (1958).

23. The cultural and political climate of modern-day South Africa, naturally enough, seriously complicates the systematic gathering and interpretation of data on African political attitudes. A considerable amount of research has nonetheless been undertaken, by different scholars working at different points in historic time, See, for example; Brett 1963; Kuper 1965; Schlemmer 1976.
with White notions of constitutional development turn on technicalities rather than fundamental conflicts of principle. Much has been made by their spokesmen of an alliance with Blacks against the White structure, a rather tendentious Black Alliance has been formed between the Coloured Labour Party, the Indian Reform Party and Buthelezi’s Inkatha movement, and initial reactions to Nationalist proposals have been largely negative. At the same time neither of these minorities regards the possibility of a more definite reserve elite status as entirely unattractive (Study Project 1971), and it is not inconceivable, should the Nationalists arm the Council of Cabinets with real decision-making powers, should the new arrangements provide for some sort of Black participation (at least enough to offset Black suspicions that the two minorities are offshoots of the White establishment), and should these arrangements be complemented by the implementation of the major socio-economic recommendations of the Theron Commission, that the fiction of ‘Black solidarity’ will be conclusively and irretrievably shattered. It is precisely for this reason that the Nationalists have taken pains to emphasise the negotiable and dynamic features of their constitutional plan to Indian and Coloured leaders. It is finally not impossible that the politics of neutralisation will spill over into more genuine reformism provided the Indians and Coloureds are successful in extracting rewards in return for participation in the ruling alliance and provided the Nationalists can in their turn override internal rightist dissension. Indians and Coloureds may well enter the consociational system in anticipation that they can hasten this process, although this is likely to be accompanied by some dissension in both communities; particularly among the Coloureds whose younger generation is deeply sceptical of meaningful change under Afrikaner auspices. These points having been made there can be little doubt that the politics of neutralisation, rooted in consociational and cooptive conceptions, face considerable difficulty either when analysed in their own right or viewed against the historic and current physiognomy of local society. This is particularly the case with the Nationalist constitutional plan whose introduction is projected to the early nineteen-eighties.

24. See, for example, statement by Adam Small, the noted Coloured poet and dramatist, Rand Daily Mail, 25 July 1973.

25. The Black Alliance does not have any White members since Whites are prohibited by law from joining ‘non-White’ political groupings.


27. It should be emphasised that both minority groups are so highly sensitive to Black criticisms that they are inclined to make common cause with the White elite. In the case of Natal Indians in particular there is a deep fear of reprisals from the local Zulu community: for this group the reactions of Chief Buthelezi to the Nationalist proposals are crucial. In the case of Indians and Coloureds in general the scrapping of the Group Areas Act would be an important incentive to participation in the new political system.


29. Rand Daily Mail, 8 Aug. 1979. It has been estimated that the new Nationalist constitution will not be brought into operation before 1982.
In the first instance the Nationalist plan as it is presently conceived embodies a number of serious defects, undoubtedly the most important of which is that it excludes Black participation in the new political order, i.e. it fails to cater for roughly 70% of South Africa's population. In addition it builds political formulae into the system which must immeasurably compound the entire governmental process at the very time when concerted and rapid change is demanded. The single bottom-heavy White bureaucracy is already a severe constraint on political change, yet the tripartite constitution to be introduced foresees no less than three racial bureaucracies functioning at the national, regional and local levels. Intense juridical conflict can therefore be expected if the system is introduced, particularly if the whole convoluted arrangement is linked up with a string of artificially constructed Black city-States. The proposed system also divides constitutional power between the White, Indian and Coloured groups on the basis of the contentious assumption that it is possible to clearly isolate the interests of one race group from another under South Africa's complex and interdependent conditions. Compensating for this deficiency in governmental practice will require the executive President taking decisive action; yet should he exercise the considerable powers for arbitrary behaviour vested in his office to override the various racial parliaments, the whole exercise in consensus government becomes meaningless. Since the President will inevitably be a White Nationalist (at least in terms of the provisions of the present plan), the unenviable choice for South Africa seems to be between increased stagnation in the formation and implementation of public policy (where the President does not forcefully intervene), and consociational authoritarianism under a National presidential dictatorship (where recurrent deadlock demands that he does).

It is not of course impossible to treat these technical lacunae in the Nationalist plan by administrative rearrangements, but the fact remains that consociational or cooptive politics, either of the Nationalist or PFP brands, is seriously inhibited by a variety of inbuilt features of South African society. Cooptive type political arrangements, for one thing, always have a limited lifespan because their continuation depends on accumulating redistributions of social goods which must at some point

32. The problem of isolating the interests of the various race groups has formed the basis for most local critiques of the Nationalist Party plan. See *The Star*, 8 Sept. 1977, 4 Nov. 1977.
34. It has been argued in some circles that the real purpose of the Nationalist plan is to centralise power in the office of the President who will subsequently be armed with the legal power to inhibit or force through political change at will. This, it is posited, fits in with the 'total strategy' for South Africa enunciated by the Prime Minister and his coterie of military advisors since the accession of Mr. P.W. Botha to office. See *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 Aug. 1977, 5 Nov. 1977; *The Star*, 12 Sept. 1977, 10 Apr. 1979.
or another challenge the political and economic interests of older established power-holders. In South Africa there is every reason to believe that this point where the interests of new and old elites conflict is very close to the point of inception of the entire cooptive process, not only because there are good grounds for believing that the Black middle class is not an inherently conservative political group (Kuper 1965; Mkele 1960), but also because White South Africans are too deeply socialised to accept racial dominance rather than inter-racial balancing, reciprocity and cooperation as the normal mode of social and political transactions. The whole principle of accommodating White interests to Black demands (however limited these might be) is alien to the political culture and basic style of White politics: in neither the Nationalist Party nor the PFP is there much in the way of accumulated experience in the delicate process of genuinely bargaining across racial boundaries.

In both White parties the whole notion of consociation has already become a source of internal conflict between groupings who foresee it as a realistic adjustment of the status quo, and more nostalgic elements committed to traditional and established party policies. In the PFP this manifests itself in conflict between old-style liberals inclined towards majoritarian democratic concepts, and the Young Turks, the rump element of the left-wing of the defunct United Party who dislike the compromises entailed by consociational formulae. In the Nationalist Party there is strong opposition not only to the technicalities of the proposed constitutional plan but also to the whole principle of consociation, seen by the right as an adulterated form of power sharing. Consociational and cooptive concepts are still in the process of being filtered through the ideological commitments and internal power constellations of both White parties, yet it is already clear that their translation into political actuality leans very heavily on the ability of the elite to come to terms not only with the normally difficult problem of extending the ruling coalition but of extending it to bring in new members historically assigned pariah status. It may be able to meet these imperatives in the case of the Indians and Coloureds, but even with educative action on the part of English and Afrikaan opinion-formers it will doubtlessly experience considerable difficulty in making the psychological and political adjustments necessary to the incorporation of a Black buffer group drawn from the lowest and broadest rung of the local racial ladder. The fact that racial polarisation has already reached the point where Black elites jeopardise their communal power base by favourably responding to White overtures hardly facilitates the situation.

Of possibly far deeper significance is the fact that many of the preconditions for successful consociationalism are far more rigorous than those demanded by majoritarian democracy, and that few of these requi-

sites are identifiable features of the present South African context. The success of consociation in creating consensual power balances in deeply-divided plural societies is, ironically enough, heavily dependent on the pre-existence of some elementary consensus between the groups in question, and while it is difficult to specify the critical threshold in any given case, there are good grounds for believing that South Africa is too deeply divided to support a viable consociational order. In South Africa ascriptive racial identities are deeply crystallised, intense, increasingly antagonistic and heavily politicised by a dangerous coincidence between race and class segmentations auguring explosive conflict rather than a coming together of the profoundly unequal power blocs to negotiate the survival of the social and political arena. The development of a client Black middle class with an overarching transracial stake in the system could temporarily delay the emerging pattern of confrontation by filtering down political and economic gains to the Black masses, yet if they are to continue to sustain popular support for accomodative consociational arrangements, it will ultimately require major changes in the presently inequitable concentration of wealth in the White community. Neither the Nationalist nor PFP plans cater to this consideration while there is considerable evidence to suggest that the race-class coincidence has intensified rather than diminished as patterns of inequality and Black poverty have hardened in the inflationary climate of recent years. This means that both plans are essentially sociologically disembodied exercises in constitutional tinkering which, as befits neutralisation devices, leave power and wealth where it has always been, i.e. in White hands. The consociational movement does not represent a ‘substantial break from the past [...] a vast improvement in the status quo’ (Vosloo 1979). On the contrary, it is perfectly continuous with a past whose defining characteristic is White monopoly and domination.

It is finally of importance to note that consociations can aggravate as well as rehabilitate inter-group conflict (Barry 1975b), particularly where they are socially inappropriate. Failed consociations can in their turn degenerate into extensive political violence (Lebanon being a case in point), precisely because they institutionalise the differences between culturally divergent groups. Consociation, as it is envisioned in South Africa today, does not depart from the politically explosive issue of race: rather, by building race more firmly into the political system, it articulates

38. LIJPHART (1977a: 236) has made the point that in South Africa ‘the outlook for democracy of any kind is poor, but if there is to be a democracy at all it will almost certainly have to be of the consociational type’. For the ongoing debate over the merits of consociationalism in the South African situation, see also LIJPHART 1978; VOSLOO 1979; CRESPIGY 1979; BENYON, ed., 1978; P. H. FRANKEL, ‘South African Consociationalism: A Dangerous Fantasy’, Sunday Times, 14 Jan. 1979. This last piece elicited a number of responses from South African academics and political leaders which were subsequently published on a weekly basis following upon January 14.
the lines of social and political conflict more clearly than ever before. The politics of neutralisation may ultimately fail because the Black majority continues to press its claims to real power: but they may also fail because of the use of techniques of control which, in the climate of present-day South Africa, contain the seeds of their own destruction.

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