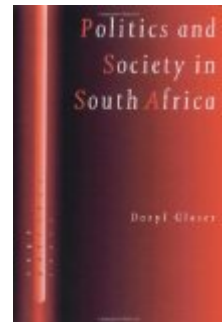


**Daryl Glaser.** *Politics and Society in South Africa: A Critical Introduction.* London and Thousand Oaks, Cal.: Sage, 2001. xiii + 278 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7619-5017-2.



**Reviewed by** Roger Pfister

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## 'The Left and South African Political History'

Daryl Glaser studied Sociology, obtaining a BA (Hons) and MA at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in the second half of the 1980s, and a Ph.D. at the University of Manchester in the 1990s. He is currently Lecturer in the Department of Government at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. In terms of political worldview, Glaser can be attributed to belonging to the left-wing camp. It is possible that this was influenced or furthered by his studies at what was then probably the most politicized of the predominantly white South African universities. He published several articles in the Johannesburg-based, left-wing magazine, *Work In Progress*, which was highly critical of Pretoria's policies.[1] Glaser also published on Pretoria's reform and industrial decentralization strategies in the late 1980s,[2] which was the focus of his MA thesis.[3] Yet, his main interest was and still is in democratic theory, and particularly the form of political representation appropriate to socialist democracy.[4] Indeed, his Ph.D. dealt with this topic.[5] The reviewed book is the product of his combined inter-

est in "the history of ideas, especially those connected with Marxism, socialism and liberalism"[6], as well as South African politics.

Sage published *Politics and Society in South Africa* with the intention to make it an "essential text for all students and researchers of contemporary African and South African studies across political science, sociology and development studies"[7]. Organized thematically in eight chapters, the book is concerned with the major debates on South Africa's political developments since the 1970s, and particularly the contribution of materialist and class-analyst approaches in this regard. In the Introduction, Glaser states that the scholarship of the 1970s on South African political developments was preoccupied with the relationship between two social orders, namely apartheid and capitalism, and that it "assumed at least the possibility of a third, namely socialism" (p. 1). Given the political transformation in South Africa since the early 1990s, as well as the changes in the academic debate since the 1970s, Glaser's central question is: "How relevant is the scholarship of the 1970s...? And what retrospective light is cast

on those debates by recent changes?" (p. 1) It is mainly in chapters four to eight that Glaser's main focus finds evidence.

Given the purpose of his book, Glaser does not put forward substantially new arguments but presents a review of the issues that were then debated, the relevant contributions and their authors. I therefore examine whether Glaser has been successful in selecting the relevant issues and if the discussion is presented in a balanced way.

Chapter 1 on "Colonialism and the Racial Order" discusses the contribution of colonialism to the racial order post-1910, when two Boer republics and two British colonies were united as the Union of South Africa. The reviewer feels that this is the author's weakest contribution. The themes are presented convincingly, but not in great depth, reflecting Glaser's academic background as a sociologist and not historian.

On the other hand, Chapter 2 on "Capitalism and Racial Domination" reveals Glaser's knowledge in this field and it is this chapter that stands out by its clarity and in-depth discussion. It lays the foundation for the understanding of later chapters by raising one of the key dividing issues between the liberal and Marxist revisionist schools of thought, namely the relationship between apartheid and capitalism. In a nutshell, their opposing viewpoints have been summarized as follows: "the [Marxist] revisionists emphasise the compatibility of apartheid with capitalism whereas the liberals view apartheid as alien to it" [8]. Given Glaser's political orientation, he is to be commended on taking an objective view of this issue and concluding that one must distinguish from one economic sector to another and also from one time period to another: "The discussion underlines the importance of precision in specifying the type of relationship being hypothesized or debated on a given occasion. It is not simply a matter of (say) apartheid being both good and bad for capitalism, or of being initially good and later

bad for it, or of there being a dialectical relationship between the racial and economic order" (p. 55).

In Chapter 3, on "Modernity and Racial Oppression," Glaser briefly discusses modernity and its explanatory value for South Africa's racial order, arguing that it is of only little relevance (p. 69). Chapter 4, on "South African States," deals with the South African state as it existed between 1910 and 1994. After examining the question of whose interests it served, Glaser appropriately challenges and rejects the Marxist conspiracy theory that the South African state was run by capitalists. He presents the principal political concepts and introduces organizations such as the Afrikaner Broederbond. However, a weakness in this chapter is that he mentions the United Party only in passing and the activities of the opposition Progressive Party[9] are completely absent. On the positive side, he rightly emphasizes that Afrikaner society was not as sociologically and even economically homogenous as often presented in the secondary literature (pp. 100-3). Finally, on the issue of the reasons for the political changes after 1989/90, Glaser presents his arguments lucidly and justifies his assumption, shared by this reviewer, that it was "a series of underlying economic and sociological changes that made possible the gear-change from a state of high apartheid in the 1960s to the reformist neo-apartheid state of the 1980" (p. 104).

Chapter 5, "The Continuing Significance of Class," is another well thought out contribution, outlining the class differentiation in South Africa's black and white society, as well as the rural-urban divide. The main concern of the Marxist debate in the 1970s and 1980s was the question why class affiliation could not overcome the racial categorization: "One of the key puzzles of South African history, from a Marxist point of view, was the failure in several cases of classes to engage in collective action across boundaries of race" (p. 122). After examining the relevance of the Marxist contri-

bution to understanding the class-race fissure during and after apartheid, Glaser readily admits: "However vulnerable the 'new South Africa' to a class critique, the fact is that left class analysts are labouring under the burden of a failure, until this point, to demonstrate that a more socially egalitarian (let alone classless) social order is feasible or even definitely desirable....Class analysis, and class politics more generally, thus finds itself in deep crisis even as a newly consolidating class order would appear to demand its critical scrutiny" (p. 130-1).

In Chapter 6 on "South African Ethnicities", Glaser discusses the sources of ethnicity, and its significance pre- and post-1994, as well as the problems in accommodating ethnicity in post-apartheid South Africa. The latter issue must be seen against the background that the Marxist school of thought considered ethnicity to be of transitional relevance only, to be overtaken by class divides as a result of continuing industrialization. However, Glaser agrees that ethnic identity "is certainly widely and deeply embedded in the consciousness of South Africans and a basis for their collective allegiance and action" (p. 143), thus refuting the validity of the Marxist proposition in the South African case (p. 153). In this chapter, the reviewer felt the lack of a longer discussion on Zulu ethnicity and its manipulation by Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

Chapter 7, on "Narratives of Resistance," presents the various aspects of resistance to apartheid, namely the forms it took, their social basis and sites of resistance. Glaser rightly refrains from idealizing the role of the African National Congress (ANC) in the struggle against apartheid (pp. 194f.). However, he under-emphasizes the role of the trade unions, particularly after their legalization in 1979. The concluding comments of the chapter also lack a balanced assessment of the importance of the various forms of struggle in bringing about the demise of the white regime.

Chapter 8 on "The Dynamics of Transition" presents a clear and comprehensive overview of the reasons for De Klerk's reform initiative in 1990, but less so on the ensuing transition process. In view of Thabo Mbeki's current position, the reviewer also feels that his role as Head of the ANC's Department of International Affairs from 1990 to 1992 should at least have been mentioned. In any case, Glaser's main concern in this final chapter lies with the prospects for democracy in South Africa, and he distinguishes, in this regard, socio-economic and cultural factors as contributors. Given his own political viewpoint, Glaser expresses his hope that post-apartheid South Africa will be characterized by what he refers to as "deeper democracy" and not by a "minimalistic form of non-racial liberal democracy accompanied by business-as-usual capitalism" (p. 230). However, he sees his radical political thought regarding democratic rule in South Africa as disappointed: "Expectations that the diverse and struggling civil sector might form the basis of a new kind of libertarian socialism have, however, dissipated. They were probably never very realistic. Radical possibilities have evaporated also in the sphere of economic policy" (p. 232). With regard to the latter, he refers to the government's change from the original concept of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) to the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), a move that Glaser deplors as move to the right in economic policy-making (p. 233). Yet, he concludes: "There are good reasons, all the same, to keep alive more radically egalitarian and democratic hopes" (p. 235).

*Politics and Society in South Africa* is a useful contribution to the literature and will be helpful for advanced students doing courses on sociology and politics in South Africa. Glaser's innovative contribution is the presentation of the Marxist discourse on several topics of importance to South Africa's political history in the second half of the twentieth century. Within this context, Chapters 4, 5 and 8 stand out as the best contributions. Glaser

is to be commended for presenting the Marxist viewpoint with the necessary academic objectivity and distance.

Glaser's work can be considered as very comprehensive, presenting the main debates and their contributors. A reading of his book however does require knowledge of the basic background on South African history and politics. For that purpose, the reviewer suggests the standard works of James Barber, Rodney Davenport and Christopher Saunders. [10]

On a final note, directed to the publisher rather than the author, the Table of Contents is unnecessarily divided into "Summary of Contents" and "Contents". The Dutch East India Company is mentioned together with its Dutch name on three occasions (p. 10, 61, 72), even though it can also be found among the "Glossary of Acronyms" (p. ix). Furthermore, several Afrikaans names are explained in English yet there are no obvious reasons why this should not have also been done for the *Herstigste Nasionale Party* (Reconstituted National Party), the *Broederbond* (Brotherhood Union) and the *Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut* (Afrikaner Commercial Institute). *Osewabrandwag* (Ox-wagon Guard) is written as one word (p. 85) and the English abbreviation SAR for South African Republic is rather unusual. SAR usually refers to the former South African Railways.

Notes:

[1]. Glaser (1984). "Liberalism in the 1980s", 30: 12-19; (1984). "Debating Liberalism in the 1980's: A Response", 31: 9-13; (1984). "The State, the Market and the Crisis", 34: 32-38; (1988) "Democracy and the Indaba", 55: 19-23; (1988). "Democracy, Socialism and the Future", 56/57: 28-30 - all in *Work in Progress*

[2]. Glaser (1987). "A Periodisation of South Africa's Industrial Dispersal Policies" in Richard Tomlinson and Mark Addleson, eds. *Regional Restructuring under Apartheid: Urban and Regional Policies in Contemporary South Africa*. Johannes-

burg: Ravan: 28-54; (1987). "Introduction: Ruling Groups and Reform in the mid-1980s" in Glenn Moss and Ingrid Obery, eds. *South African Review* 4. Johannesburg: Ravan: 383-92; (1988) "Regional Development in South Africa: Towards an Alternative?" in John Suckling and Landeg White, eds. *After Apartheid: Renewal of the South African Economy*. London: Currey: 76-89; (1988), with William Cobbett, Doug Hindson and Mark Swilling. "A Critical Analysis of the South African State's Reform Strategies in the 1980s" in Philip Frankel, Noam Pines and Swilling, eds. *State, Resistance, and Change in South Africa*. London: Croom Helm: 19-51.

[3]. Daryl Glaser. "The State, Capital and Industrial Decentralisation Policy in South Africa, 1932-85". Unpublished MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1988.

[4]. For an early work, see William Cobbett, Daryl Glaser and Doug Hindson. (1985). "Regionalisation, Federalism and the Reconstruction of the South African State" *South African Labour Bulletin* 10(5): 87-116. See also Glaser (1991). "Post-Apartheid Democracy: Rejoinder to Patrick Fitzgerald", *Review of African Political Economy* 19 (52): 66-72.

[5]. Daryl Glaser. "Radicalising Representation: Towards a Defence and Radical-Redesign of Representative Democracy". Ph.D., University of Manchester, 1994.

[6]. See <<http://www.strath.ac.uk/Departments/Government/politics/glaser.htm>>

[7]. From the back cover of the book.

[8]. Ben Fine and Zavareh Rustomjee. *The Political Economy of South Africa: from Minerals-Energy Complex to Industrialisation*. London: Hurst, 1996: 63. Cf. Brian Dollery. "Capital, Labour and State: A General Equilibrium Perspective on Liberal and Revisionist Approaches to South African Political Economy", *South African Journal of Economics* 57, 2, 1989: 124-136.

[9]. Formed in 1959 and changed its name to Progressive Reform Party (PRP) in 1974, to Progressive Federal Party (PFP) in 1977 and to the Democratic Party (DP) in 1989.

[10]. James Barber. *South Africa in the Twentieth Century: A Political History--In Search of a Nation State*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999. T.R.H. Davenport, Rodney Hope and Christopher Saunders. *South Africa: A Modern History*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000. (Fifth Edition)

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