

PUBLICATION OF PAPERS FROM SEMINAR ON REGIONAL EQUALISATION**PREFACE - ALBIE SACHS**

The debate over regions in South Africa has been restricted almost exclusively to power and boundaries. Almost nothing has been said about the most important question of all, namely resources. Whether regions have exclusive powers or concurrent powers, without guaranteed resources there is little they can do. Until now it has been assumed that the foundation for financial autonomy is fiscal power, that is, a region's capacity for development will depend on its power to raise taxes. Fiscal autonomy has been seen as fundamental to political autonomy.

The only real autonomy, however, has been the autonomy of the debate. We South Africans have cut ourselves off from international governmental experience. We have preferred metaphysical disputation about the virtues and defects of unitary and federalist states, to examining how governments actually work. The reality is that regions in a unitary state with guaranteed access to funding have more actual power of local decision making than regions in a federal state who would have to rely on raising their own funds.

This book, and the conference on which it was based, represent the first serious attempt to link up South African analysis in this important area with actual international practice.

Regional equalisation deals with two fundamental questions. The first is how to view the country's resources - natural, human, technological and financial - as a whole and then to develop appropriate national, regional and local levels of managing and developing those resources.

The second is how to structure a constitution and system of government in such a way as to progressively eliminate the massive imbalances between regions created by apartheid. This is particularly important in South Africa because the underdevelopment of the poor parts of the country is historically and structurally related through the migrant labour system to the development of the wealthier areas.

It is a fundamental principle of constitutionalism that all citizens are entitled to the basic minima of a decent and dignified life, whatever their background and wherever they might have been born. This principle is found not only in countries referred to as social-democratic, but also in the Japanese constitution and the basic law of West Germany. Just as our life chances should not depend on the colour of our skin or the nature of our sexual parts, so they should not be determined by the part of the country in which we are born. Yet, the sad reality in South Africa is that the rich of poor regions are poorer than the poor of rich areas.

Simply to wish or even to decree equality is not enough. Clear, sophisticated, realistic and workable principles of regional equalisation have to be built into the new constitutional structure from the very beginning. This will apply whatever form of state emerges out of the constitution making process. The ideas and information contained in this book will help us to achieve the formulations appropriate to the South African situation. The apparently dry and technical texts summarise experiences and express a range of options that all South Africans concerned with the future structures of government need to be familiar with.