

THE referendum — as politicians tirelessly remind us — did not end at 9pm on November 2.

The impact of that two-thirds-majority decision by white South Africans to give P W Botha-style reform a chance spelt two things. One was to open the way for fundamental political reform, if that, indeed, was what the Government wanted.

The second was that the official Opposition was placed in a highly invidious position. The consequences live with the party and the political process every day.

More than halfway through the last all-white session of Parliament and on the threshold of the new system, the question increasingly asked is: *Quo vadis* the Opposition?

For between the thunder of Nkomati oratory and the roar of government-style reform rhetoric, the voice of progressive parliamentary opposition in the country is struggling to make itself heard. And that holds both short and longer term dangers to the PFP.

Opposition politics are almost by definition reactive. Without power and the lubricant of patronage, there is little an opposition party can hope to offer the country except vision, principle and the image, if not the reality, of a credible alternative.

The Progressive Federal Party is no different. It has generally stood by principle throughout its life, and the harsh realities of South African white politics have ensured that it has also to some extent suffered because of it.

Take the referendum. The proposed constitution was in essence a violation of every party principle — it entailed entrenched segregation, excluded blacks and was not the product of consensus.

Principle dictated inexorable opposition to the structures. Pragmatism suggested acknowledgment of the possibly reformist processes which could emerge from it.

In the end purity won and the party called for an unambiguous No vote in the referendum — fully aware that it was likely to be a loser's stand.

The damage to the party in the wake of the defeat has been fairly considerable — not necessarily in terms of loss of support from followers (Pinetown tends to disprove suggestions of mass defections) but in terms of role, definition and profile.

Because, having lost the referendum battle, the PFP has sought to ensure it would not be excluded from the subsequent "reform" war. Not surprisingly and not contradictorily, it has opted to participate "positively" in the new constitutional set-up.

But there lies the rub. Until the new tricameral system is actually in place and functioning, the opposition parties — not least of all the opposition in the dominant white chamber — have no clear idea of what role they can or will be allowed to play in the processes of the new parliament.

Even less do they know how they will relate to

By **BRIAN
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other opposition parties in the new set-up — indeed the term "opposition" itself becomes ambiguous in a system where the majority parties in the other two chambers (parties which will no doubt declare the strongest opposition to Government poli-

cies) could well have members in the Cabinet.

One thing, however, is now beyond dispute. The relevance of the white opposition will diminish as

the locus of the fight shifts to the coloured and Indian chambers. That in itself is

not an encouraging thought for the PFP.

Until implementation date the PFP's utterances on the subject are thus

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doomed to veer from expressions of pious hope to ones of urgent inquiry.

But there is a second and more profound reason why the PFP has found itself caught in the cracks; the skill with which the Government has capitalised domestically on the aura of its "reform" initiative and the substance of its regional peace drive.

Confronting a government holding all the cards, the PFP is calling cautiously. And the Government, significantly, is bidding conservatively. The game plan could not have been better illustrated than in the Prime Minister's vote last week.

The PFP stopped just short of being fulsome in praise of the successes the Prime Minister had achieved thus far in regional initiatives and in breaking domestic log-jams. But, it warned, the real test of government sincerity was still unaddressed — resolution of the black-white problem.

Government response was diffuse. On one hand it reserved special venom for the far right in the

form of the Conservative Party, and on the other it refused to be drawn on controversial issues on which the official Opposition could batten — oil allegations excepted.

In what could be a pattern for the future it was an effective denial of target for PFP snipers. And it had the PFP — desperate for "issues" by which to define its own opposition status — foundering in a wave of vaguely defined government good intentions.

The PFP has long since discovered that the perception of success is as irresistible in the public eye as its reality. When the Government thus mixes substantive gain with the promise of further advance it has a winning hand.

Having been trounced in the referendum and still limping from its "negativist" and "boycott" images, the party is understandably cautious about taking stands which could be construed as attempts to strangle the reform baby at birth; hence

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the silence on coloured and Indian referendums and the dearth of criticism this session on the structures of the proposed new constitution.

Uncertain of its future role in the structure of parliament and eclipsed by the momentum of political change (real, imminent and putative), the

PFP thus projects blandness and reflects ambivalence. For the Opposition it is a time of hiatus politics which is taking a wearying toll on party confidence and image.

But there is a third set of factors — one that lie deep within the PFP and relates to its own house-keeping.

White South Africans — no less than black ones — tend to follow power. An opposition party has to

project both an image of potential power and one of concurrent unity. The PFP too often fails here.

Confusion at local level about party policy, internal squabbles on what emphasis should be placed on issues such as defence and security, and stormy-petrel politicking all cast an image of dis-

unity.

The problem is compounded by other factors; lack of credible alternative leadership, concentration of leadership in the Western Cape, lack of profile on the Witwatersrand, insensitivity at times to the latent conservatism of their white constituents (Randburg is an example) when advancing party policy.

And, above all, the failure of the party to project

itself truly as a broader-based party.

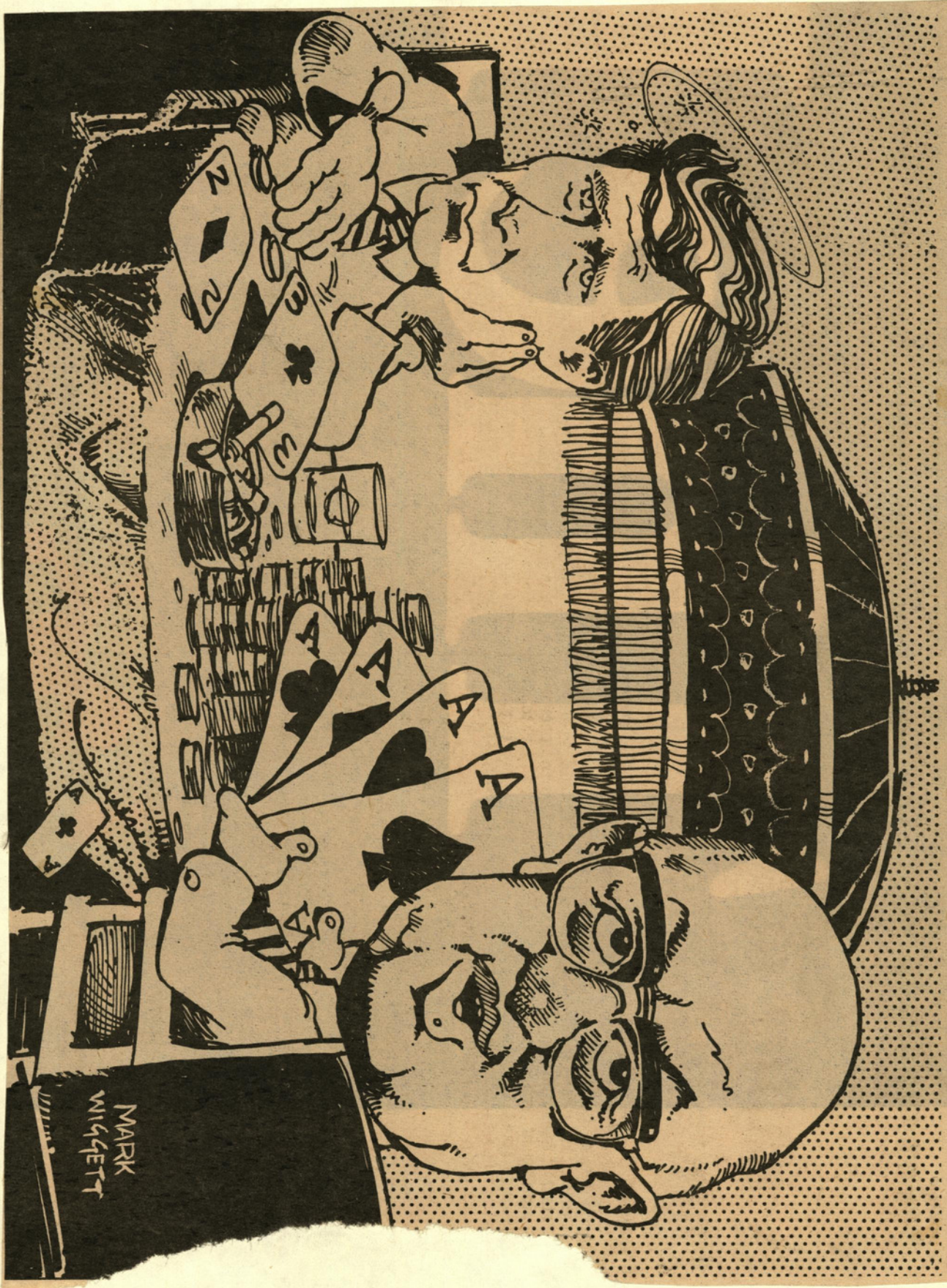
The anticipated swing of enlightened Afrikaner support to the PFP that accompanied the election of Dr F van Zyl Slabbert as leader of the party four years ago has failed to materialise on any significant scale.

Meanwhile, government initiatives have cut the ground from under the PFP's feet by wooing back many who now believe genuine reform can best be served from within a transforming National Party.

The challenges of change — as the PFP can attest — are never greater than at the moment of change.

Opposition finding it more difficult to make voice heard

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THE relationship between the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) is one which has engaged the attention of many observers of South African exile politics.

To what extent is this relationship a marriage of convenience between parties which share a common hostility to apartheid?

Does the SACP have a hidden agenda in its relationship with the ANC? Is the ANC such a dominant partner that it is able to dictate its terms of alliance with the SACP?

The answers to these questions determine a wide range of positions taken towards South African political movements in exile.

Western states are apprehensive of any exile political movement in alliance with communism, and Eastern-bloc countries are assured if exile movements ally themselves with communist parties.

The South African Government uses the communist presence as a device for generating internal support and for soliciting external assistance.

It is well known that the Government believes that the ANC is little more than a pawn of Moscow, but liberal opponents of the government in South Africa dismiss this view because they do not like to be associated with virtually any of the Government's beliefs.

Western sympathisers with the ANC, who are themselves non-communist, argue that the ANC is a coalition of different political viewpoints and there is insufficient evidence to assert that the communists have more than marginal influence upon it.

Nobody questions that the SACP and the ANC enjoy close links: but how close are they really? Is there any evidence to believe that the communists control the ANC? And what is likely to be the future of this relationship?

Evidence for communist involvement in the ANC is of two sorts: the stated programmes of the SACP, and the cross-cutting membership between the ANC and SACP at its leadership levels.

In its 1962 Programme the SACP made no secret of its intention to enter into an alliance with all those struggling to overthrow the system of "racist capitalism"; it accepted the goals of the Freedom Charter as the immediate aims of the liberation struggle; and it saw itself as the vanguard of the working class.

Problems from Moscow link

The way was now open for it to enter into an alliance with South African "liberation" movements which enjoyed a much greater level of popular support.

This was a necessary step for the SACP. It had never enjoyed significant support in South Africa (blacks tended to be suspicious of the downplaying of "race" in favour of "class" analysis); and after its banning in 1950, it had ceased to be a political movement of any note in South Africa.

HOW RED IS THE ANC?

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In 1968, the ANC removed an obstacle to collaboration with the communists by allowing whites to join its Revolutionary Council which had the authority to direct Umkhonto (the ANC military arm).

Joe Slovo, a South African exile communist, and Yusuf Dadoo (then chairman of the SACP) emerged as two dominant figures in the council.

These closer organisational links between the ANC and SACP have had their benefits for the ANC.

They have given the ANC access to diplomatic and military support from eastern-bloc coun-

tries — military assistance being particularly welcome as western countries have willingly supplied diplomatic and humanitarian aid, but have refused to give military supplies.

The links have also had their costs. The ANC has had to take a strong pro-Soviet line in international affairs, as witness its support for the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and of Afghanistan in 1981.

And, as a result, the ANC has been viewed with suspicion by many anti-communist pressure groups in the West.

It is this link with Moscow that is likely to cause problems for the ANC as it attempts to establish its bona fides with the West.

The official Soviet media rarely refers to the ANC without stating its links with the SACP, and it is this alliance which is a pre-condition of Soviet support.

Communist involvement

The Soviets are not only interested in seeing majority rule come to South Africa (a view which they share with many non-communists in the West), but they want to ensure that the revolutionary struggle is led by a Marxist vanguard as happened in Angola and Mozambique.

This is in keeping with Moscow's general condition of support for any nationalist "liberation movement": that it must be in alliance with the communists, or

"workers parties", sympathetic to Russia and antipathetic to Peking. Inevitably, ANC policy has

tended to become more socialistic in character and its rhetoric shows signs of a strong communist involvement.

It now openly accepts a class analysis of South Africa and subordinates "racial" issues to "class" issues. However, it continues to accept the mildly socialist goals formulated in the Freedom Charter, and the multiparty competitive democratic system which it presupposes.

Strains on unity likely

There have also been costs for the communists in their alliance with the ANC. They are now open to the accusation that they are diluting their socialist goals for South Africa — a charge made during the late '70s by white ANC members who were subsequently expelled from the ANC.

But the communists are probably correct in believing that these costs are outweighed by the advantages: the ANC (unlike the SACP) enjoys a high degree of popularity with South African blacks, and has strong popular support.

This certainly cannot be said for the SACP. Indeed, if the SACP did not have a link with the ANC it would be a totally ineffective political movement.

There can be little doubt that the mutual involvement of the ANC and SACP is, and has been, extensive. The SACP plays an important part in determining ANC policy and strategy, and the present advantages to both the ANC and SACP outweigh their disadvantages.

However, increasingly close links with eastern-bloc countries and the Soviet Union are likely to put severe strains on the unity of the opposition in exile as closer support links are forged with anti-communist western nations.

The communists have never had a hidden agenda in their relationship with the ANC.

They have continually asserted that their strategic aim is to destroy the system of capitalist exploitation in South Africa, and to replace it with a socialist system. This they believe can only happen if political power is placed in the hands of the working class.

The national democratic revolution (the goal of the Freedom Charter) is only the first step towards the communist goal. The alliance with the ANC is a necessary initial step towards this goal which is openly stated by the communists.

The communists see South Africa's future developing through successive phases. The first is the liberation struggle of the SACP/ANC alliance through Umkhonto.

The second is the national democratic era of the implementation of the principles of the Freedom Charter as a result of the successful overthrow of the South African Government through the military power of Umkhonto in alliance with the black working class.

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The third is the setting up of a people's democracy, not stated, but presumably through a single party state; and, finally, a developed socialism on the lines of a pure Marxism-Leninism in a pure socialist state.

The first three phases are periods of an eroding capitalism in which the ANC is to play an important part. In the final phase the ANC will be either supplanted or become a governing proletarian party.

It is not surprising that such a relationship between the ANC and the SACP is a cause for concern among some western observers of South African exile politics, and a periodic cause of conflict within the ANC itself.

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If the ANC successfully solicits support from western countries it is likely that this will be at the cost of decreasing communist involvement in the movement.

As a result factional pressures will grow within the ANC. The alternatives for the ANC will be perfectly clear, but the choice very difficult: it will either have to jettison the communists or forgo its western support.

Pressures will lighten

Whatever it chooses, the ANC will probably find itself facing severe internal splits.

The Nkomati Accord has already put severe strains on the ANC and it is likely that it will re-examine its military strategy.

A new brand of ANC leadership may be tempted to follow a more expedient political strategy and to lay less emphasis on the military role of the ANC, but hardline communists will almost certainly resist such a move.

These problems for the ANC in exile will lighten the pressure upon the South African Government over the next two or three years and give it the opportunity of demonstrating its commitment to policies of reform.