

HE decision this week by

Parliament's top watchdog

committee chairman to quit is a

sign of a much broader malaise

that it threatening the very core of
our new democracy.

For what is at issue here is a failure of
many of our politicians to understand, or a
cynical disregard for, the fundamental
guiding principles of the highest law of the
land, the Constitution. It is of special
significance when the people's elected
representatives are party to undermining
the provisions of the founding document of

state of

our new nation.

Mr Gavin Woods,

son

of the Public Accounts Commission had as the leader of

the public accounts

committee most

keenly. After all, it is this committee which -
perhaps best exemplifies what the
Constitution means when it requires that
public representatives in the legislative arm
of Government hold those in the executive
arm of Government to account.

The clear intention of the Constitution is
that Parliamentary structures serve as
guardians of the interests of the people so
that our taxes are not wasted or misused.
Woods was eventually drummed out of his

job because he could not stand seeing the
position of public trust, which the -
committee should enjoy; being undermined
by the executive with the active collusion by
the majority party in the legislature. -

What was meant to be a single-minded,
ruthless and fearless watchdog in the
service of the people had come to be
reduced to an ineffectual and misguided
lapdog with an acute identity crisis.

The Constitution requires that the
Cabinet and the Government should be fully
accountable to Parliament.

The emasculation of Parliament and its
oversight role is by no means a new
phenomenon. When Parliament and its

an IFP MP, felt the structures are afforded an opportunity to
responsibilities he exert their authority or show a steely

resolve on matters of principle, all too frequently the course of least resistance wins the day. So we find the Parliamentary Ethics Committee is happy to abrogate its responsibility and surrender its watchdog function by turning down a recommendation by the registrar of members interests for an official investigation into former chief whip Mr Tony Yengeni's 4x4 fetish. And, what becomes of the special Parliamentary Committee established to decide what should be done about a Government Minister (Penuel Maduna) slagging off the Auditor-General,

misleading Parliament and wasting

— 200 millions? The problem of ministers viewing themselves as the masters, rather than the

servants, of the voting public has been particularly evident in their cavalier attitude towards question time in the Parliament's second house, the National Council of Provinces (NCOP).

One of the reasons the NCOP has come to be regarded as something of an expensive joke is precisely because it has failed to take its Constitutional responsibilities as guardian of provincial interests seriously. Because the governing party enforces rigid party discipline and the links between the legislature and the executive are so close, members of the majority party in

* Parliament are increasingly unwilling to

subject Government to rigorous scrutiny. Lines between party and State become

blurred and the need for a distinction poorly

understood. Parliament is progressively 200

. becoming a side-show. The really important

decisions are made elsewhere - in the - national working committee and the national executive committee of the ruling party, in Cabinet committees and by an

inner circle of Presidential confidantes and

advisers. Once Parliament becomes more ceremony than substance, constitutional democracy becomes a misnomer.

Ashwin Desai is taking a few weeks' break.

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- After a long break, I went to the

theatre this week. Not a foot-stomping musical or a forgettable supper show, but the serious stuff that

gives you a squirm in your seat. Keely & Du

the harrowing subjects of rape, and

the battery and religious fundation. It was brilliant in its honesty and intimate Square Space Theatre

at the University on the Hill with tears in Those tears

and

though of very different content :

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nature, threatened again later in the week as

I listened to the deep anguish of artists who have been displaced by all that has happened

at our Playhouse Company. As a large portion of the remaining staff mainly those in the creative and marketing departments - are

now threatened with retrenchment, I recalled those dreadful days when the performing "artists were given their marching

orders. Then there were the ugly racist remarks which forced the acting managing

director Gita Pather to resign. Following an

~

investigation, Arts and Culture Minister Ben

Ngubane sacked the governi

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his talk of a bright future and great hope - ; simply faded. Over the December season the

from November last year Rodney Mthethwa.. Playhouse - still billed as KwaZulu-Natal

was appointed as the interim administrator, the home of live theatre, - should have been sparkling with festive productions. Instead

while Professor Caesar Ndlovu continued in his role as the new managing director. - . .- the Opera Theatre remained ominously
investigation. He started off just over a year badly managed-a
in such an optimistic and 'promising - another venue, {0
manner, inviting the province's artists to put * artists to use, it will rem
forward their ideas on the future of, the arts. - will lose its soul And that
and the Playhouse. How sad that so much of me cry.- revnolds@nnr

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william

saunderson -meyer

- Jaundiced eye

" ubuntu versus crass European materialism.

LESSER-known extreme sport is the willingness to charge in where angels fear to tread on matters of race. And, while few ; South Africans broach such issues outside the safe confines of family and like-minded friends, we all have theories regarding the behaviour of our fellow citizens of differing race, tribe, colour and creed to explain why â\200\224 compared to ourselves - they are such decidedly odd bods.

Lamenting the reluctance of the ANC Government to condemn Zimbabweâ\200\231s President Robert Mugabe, a colleague suggested glumly that part of the problem is that European cultural values - as largely held by light-skinned South Africans - are considerably different from the traditional cultural values of most dark-skinned South Africans.

The positive is African values such as

The negative is an apparent African tolerance of despotism and corruption, sycophancy and an intolerance of individualistic thinking and dissent. This view is certain to be dismissed by the politically correct as thinly veiled

- racism. Yet there is truth in the argument

that cultural variations inform political

structures and attitudes.

Where the theory starts tottering is on the shaky ground of generalisation, since it ignores the subtleties within all groups. For example, many traits perceived as undesirable and â\200\234Africanâ\200\235 are similar to Afrikaner group values during the National

Party years. Equally, think of the past century of genocide and pogroms in culturally advanced Europe.

Perhaps South Africans should just enjoy the idiosyncrasies and absurdities of their cultural differences.

An illustration is the tussle over who should be honoured with public memorials. At the instigation of African nationalists - but to the quiet delight, no doubt, of Afrikaner nationalists - Durban authorities are pondering the removal of various

English icons, including the statue of Queen Victoria outside the City Hall.

Critics of these remnants of colonialism want to erect - overlooking the harbour entrance - a Statue of Liberty-sized depiction of the Zulu chief, Shaka.

Last year blacks and English-speaking whites were briefly united in glee when a bust of Afrikaner hero, JG Strijdom, plunged from its plinth and smashed into the parking garage below the Pretoria public square where it had been erected 30 years earlier.

.There was much discussion around

whether JG should, like Humpty Dumpty, be "to make sense of one another?"

put back together again. This week the

authorities stated categorically that JG had been removed from the bowels of where he had come to rest and taken to a place of safety to prevent theft or damage.

One wonders who would have the inclination or means to pinch a 100-ton broken statue but, of course, in South Africa anything not nailed down is at risk.

Meanwhile, a monument to the might of the Zulu nation is getting its finishing touches before being transported to the eMakhosini Valley. The huge bronze monument is designed to symbolise the return of the spirit of the Zulu nation.

How a gigantic bronze Zulu beer pot surrounded by seven aluminium tusks is meant to symbolise this is not clear. Answers on a postcard and remember what happened to the last lot who offended the Zulu nation.

And, keep in mind the cultural subtleties that caused ANC provincial leader Mr Ndebele this week to condemn the arrival of King Goodwill Zwelithini at the opening of the provincial parliament in an 1980s model Mercedes 500SE. Previously the ANC

extracted much mileage out of attacks on
Zwelithini for wasting public funds. Now
Ndebele intimates that it was an insult to

- the entire Zulu nation that the king had to
drive.â\200\234a jalopyâ\200\235. â\200\230

The poor King. Here he was trying to be
frugal and, instead, he gave his own people a
klap in the face. What hope for the rest of us

Mosque row goes on

BUILT in the 16th century by a Moghul emperor, the razed Babri mosque has been a source of dispute between Indian Hindus and Muslims since 1788, when a Jesuit priest suggested the site was the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram.

The row over the brick and limestone shrine only really heated up in 1949 when a Ram statue appeared inside the mosque, which Hindus called a miracle act of divine mischief.

A year later, the state government of Uttar Pradesh, where the disputed site is located, acquired Babri mosque and locked its doors to both communities.

But in February 1986 a local court allowed Hindus to worship the deity in the three-domed structure. -

The Hindu revivalist BJP party and its hardline ally, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), laid a foundation stone for a grand Ram temple on a disputed site adjoining the Babri mosque and on November 11 1986 they

launched a nationwide campaign to garner Hindu support for their construction project. = .

and Muslims dubbed an'

the past two days

On October 7 1991, the BJP government of Uttar Pradesh acquired the 1.1-hectare adjacent site, also claimed by Muslims, and started constructing a temple, but a year

AFTERMATH: A policeman stands guard in a deserted street in

Ahmedabad, India, where religious violence has killed 190 people in

Picture: REUTERS

later New Delhi stopped the work to cool rising sectarian tensions.

But the same year, the BJP and its leader, Lal Krishna Advani, the current home

minister, asserted that the temple construction would continue irrespective of a verdict Supreme Court, which

re down the disputed structure, hurriedly establishing a makeshift Ram temple on the smouldering rubble.

The act triggered post-independence India's worst bout of sectarian violence in which 2000 were killed, most of them Muslims.

The ruin was then barricaded and ownership of the site is once again in the hands of the courts.

Since the BJP party came to power in India at the head of a multi-party coalition government, it has sought to distance itself from the Ayodhya issue for fear of antagonising its more

secular-minded allies.

However, the VHP has pledged to go ahead with its temple construction plans, even if it means a confrontation with the heavy security forces permanently posted at the site. - AP