

Wednesday October 31 2001 **SOWETAN****Sowetan Reporter**

THE Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) had used black voters to reinforce racism and white supremacy in Paulpietersburg in KwaZulu-Natal, the African National Congress (ANC) said yesterday.

This follows the resignation of mayor Mr Gilbert Meyer for undisclosed reasons on Monday.

Meyer, an IFP member, apparently said in his letter of resignation that he

Mayor 'who stood for whites' quits pos

had never been interested in politics but had stood for election because he wanted to save the dignity of white people in the town.

Meyer has been reported to have been absent from his office for the past six months, claiming that he was sick.

During this time the council was run by deputy mayor Mr S. Mkhabela.

The ANC said Meyer's attitude was an insult to black people who had merely been used to endorse the racism and white supremacy still prevalent in town.

The ANC has called for Meyer to be completely removed from the council.

"How can someone who has been absent from work for more than six

months remain on the council? It is even worse to learn about his insult to black people, the very people who voted him into power," said the ANC's Mr Zama Ndaba.

An IFP representative on the town's executive committee said yesterday that local IFP leaders had begged Meyer not to resign because they had

not wanted to lose the ward which represented.

This had resulted in Meyer's resignation, the source said. He had then decided that, although he would vacate the mayoral position, he would still remain a member of the council.

Meyer could not be reached for comment yesterday.

It is now obvious that the expulsion of Peter Marais as mayor of Cape Town unicity and a member of the Democratic Alliance (DA) has had far-reaching implications for opposition politics in South Africa and perhaps far more than DA leader Tony Leon anticipated.

The withdrawal of the New National Party (NNP) led by Marthinus van Schalkwyk from the DA has left it a hollow shell.

Events in the near future will impress upon members of the tattered DA that they have to come to terms with the fact that the DA is no more and that they have to go back to the drawing board, away from the glare of the media, for sober political soul searching.

When that happens, Leon's leadership skills ought to be thoroughly scrutinised.

Not only is Leon viewed as a non-democrat, but as a despot and a dictator -- at least in his own party. Therefore, there is an emerging opinion that there is nothing democratic about the DA.

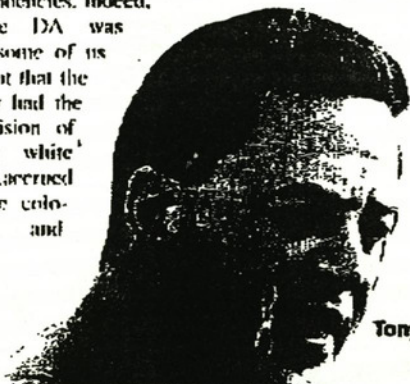
For students of politics, the DA formed principally by Leon's Democratic Party (DP) and Van Schalkwyk's NNP was bound to be a short-lived marriage of political convenience. But few political observers will have anticipated that this marriage would be so dramatically short-lived.

I vividly remember the interview I had with one radio station on the formation of the DA, when I asserted that the alliance would not work because it was predicated only on opposing the African National Congress (ANC).

This was, indeed, an uncommon manner of establishing an alliance. In normal multiparty politics, opposition parties are usually formed with a view to becoming ruling parties at some point and not merely to restrict themselves to opposing a ruling party.

The notion of creating an opposition party solely on the basis of checking the powers of the ruling party smacks of reactionary tendencies. Indeed,

when the DA was formed, some of us pointed out that the new party had the limited vision of protecting white privilege accrued during the colonial and



Tony Leon

apartheid eras.

For this reason the DA's constituency was narrow from its inception and it has failed to expand. The DA remains predominantly a party of white privilege, with a few so-called "coloureds", the majority of whom were brought in by Marais. Now that Marais is out in the wilderness, one wonders what will be their future in the DA. Whether these so-called "coloureds" will leave the DA remains to be seen.

The coming few weeks will witness the parting of the splinter groups of the dying or already defunct DA. Important components of the dying DA, which will matter to the public, are Leon's DP and Van Schalkwyk's NNP.

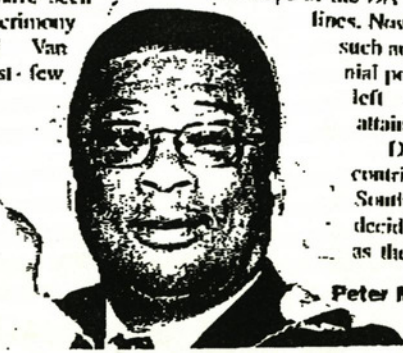
Both parties are destined to burn the midnight oil to figure out their future in South African politics. There is already speculation about a coalition government of the ANC and the NNP in Western Cape.

Whatever happens next to the DP and the NNP will profoundly change the face of opposition politics in this country.

One thing is certain: the notion of racial opposition politics, that is, an opposition party or alliance created largely on racial affiliation, belongs in the archives of the country.

The opportunism and hypocrisy of white opposition parties have been exposed by the acrimony between Leon and Van Schalkwyk in the past few days.

The public has benefited from the Leon-Van Schalkwyk



Peter Marais

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Dying DA is end of a white opposition

scuffle because it revealed which of these two wishes to be a true South African politician as opposed to merely being a politician who preserves the sectarian interests of a fast-disappearing colonial and apartheid order.

Now that the DA is becoming a thing of the past, a question arises: what is the future of white opposition politics in South Africa? The remnants of the DA, DP and NNP have a pressing responsibility to their white supporters: to convert their members and constituencies from being colonial settler enclaves into true citizens of a multiracial South African society.

This means a wake-up call to these parties' leaders and their constituencies to embrace the irreversible democratic dispensation within the context of decolonisation that occurred in April 1994.

The ANC has preached non-racialism from its inception, and continues to do so. It is therefore time for sectarian and racially inclined parties to recognise that their notion of racialising South African politics is futile.

The disarray of the DA marks the end of an anomaly, which has made South Africa a unique country in Africa by having an opposition party in the shape of the DA constituted mainly on racial lines. Nowhere in Africa will you find such an arrangement. Former colonial powers packed their bags and left when African countries attained their independence.

DP and NNP members could contribute to the rich emerging South African history by deciding to choose this country as their sole country and by so

doing convert themselves from colonisers into patriotic citizens.

Should they decide to do so, they would earn themselves and their future generations an enduring place in the history of this country, instead of earning themselves a reputation for denigrating the indigenous inhabitants of this country.

Unlike the DP, the NNP has even tougher challenge which it must address this time around: a name change. The NNP failed to transform itself into the fashion of the day by at least adopting a name that identified it with democracy. It has failed dismally to repackage itself into something which could be acceptable to the public or at least something to make it sound like a politically correct party, like Tony Leon did in adopting the name Democratic Alliance.

By changing its name, the NNP would be attempting to cleanse itself of its notorious baggage of the past. It ought also to embark on policies that would benefit the majority of South Africa, instead of a few whites.

The writer is a senior researcher at the Africa Institute of South Africa.



Marthinus van Schalkwyk