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THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY - USING PARLIAMENT IN THE SEARCH FOR A NON-RACIAL DEMOCRATIC FUTURE

James Selfe
National Director : Communications
DEMOCRATIC PARTY

INTRODUCTION

It is dubious whether the South African Parliament as an institution has ever served any other purpose but to entrench and extend white privilege in legislation. Even before Union, the Cape "liberal" tradition (a "colour-blind" but qualified franchise) had been whittled away, and by a series of shoddy compromises, limited in its application in the Union constitution. Moreover, in the search for a solution to what was then termed the "racial question", more compromises took place between the political parties representing English and Afrikaans, capital and white labour, to limit rather than extend the application of this tradition.

The elevation of racial prejudice to the status of an ideology, notably under Dr Verwoerd's guidance, saw the final demise of this tradition, and the birth of the group concept, whereby whether out of genuine conviction or simple desire to divide and rule, ethnic differences were legalised if not sanctified. Moreover, whether out of genuine conviction or simple avarice, politicians from those communities mobilised various degrees of support on ethnic bases.

The 1983 tricameral constitution saw the entrenchment of the group concept in the very constitution of the land. The referendum and the subsequent election of the Houses of Representatives and Delegates set up conflicts of enormous magnitude; conflicts which, however, left the National Party virtually unscathed and, indeed, even more powerfully entrenched.

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The ethnic politicians in the "Coloured" and "Indian" communities
found themselves pitted against the adherents of the non-racial
traditions within those communities. Both, for different reasons,
found themselves antagonistic towards the liberal opposition.
when, as a result of the government admission that black local
authorities were the constitutional "final solution" for urban
blacks (a remark of tragic and collosal stupidity), violence
erupted in the townships, government opponents found themselves
even more at odds.
The government reached to the violence by imposing a state of
emergency, refining the National Security Management System,
and thereby moving effective decision-making outside of Parliament.
Increasingly political conflict was shaped by an extra-parliamentary
government and an extra-parliamentary opposition.
This conflict was savage and costly both in lives and property;
more than this, it indelibly affected both white and black political
perspectives. It polarised the South African community, and it
marginalised white opposition as was so graphically illustrated
by the results of the 1987 general election.
But a sober assessment is that the government won if not the
war, then at least the battle. The State may be vulnerable
in many respects; violence is still an endemic feature of life
in South Africa, particularly in and around Pietermaritzburg;
political alienation is still expressed through the unions;
community political organisations are still active, but the
state of emergency and/or the NSMS has won the government breathing
Space. The extravagant claims of "turning the state on its
head" made in the heady days of 1985 have been replaced by a
more sober evaluation of the coercive power of the State.
Concomitantly, there has been a reassessment of strategies aimed
at ending apartheid. Participation, in the period 1984-87 regarded
as an issue of principle, has, at any rate in relation to the
House of Assembly, been replaced by a view that a combination
of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forces can cooperate
in undermining apartheid. The challenge is to develop structures
and strategies, which with full appreciation of the constraints

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and opportunities facing each set of organisations, so as to
enable them to seek and carry through such cooperation.

"LIBERAL" OPPOSITION IN SOUTH AFRICA

As was alluded to earlier, the history of liberalism in South
Africa has not been a chapter of political successes. There
have been brave stands, there have been conspicuous individuals,
there has been the odd victory, but by and large, liberals have
not decisively influenced government policy or legislation at
any time in South Africa's history.

In very large measure, the reasons for this failure are self-evident.
The liberal tradition calls for equal rights, and to a society
which is deeply divided along a fundamental have/have not line,
equal rights implies loss of privilege, if not the spectre of
redistribution. Human nature being what it is, whites have tended
to vote in favour of retaining present privilege for as long
as possible, rather than in longer-term enlightened selfinterest.
Moreover,. the support for the liberal cause has tended to wax
and wane depending on voters' perception of the ability of individual
political parties' ability to deliver. Relegated to the status
of permanent opposition, liberal political parties have not
been and are not regarded as viable vehicles to deliver the
fruits of enlightened self-interest whilst guaranteeing stability.
Thus during both the 1983 Referendum and the 1987 General Election,
white voters deserted the PFP in droves; in the former case
because the National Party was perceived to be taking "a step
in the right direction", and in the latter because the PFP was
perceived to be equivocal on the issue of violence.

In recent years, most white opposition voters have come to perceive
the National Party as the political movement most able to "reform"
apartheid and simultaneously to guarantee white security. The
value of the PFP was to be a "pacesetter" or "pathfinder" -
to pressurise the government into taking gradual, incremental
steps which would make South Africa more acceptable to the world
(and thus to investment capital), but which would not, except

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peripherally, affect their standard of living and most certainly
not their security. The irony that "reform" consisted of retreats
from previously-held "non-negotiable" position of the NP escaped
these voters entirely: each such step justified both their support
for organisations like the PFP and their support for the NP
when occasion demanded it.

.At no occasion was this fundamental dichotomy more evident than
during the unrest and state of emergency in the period 1984
to 1987. The PFP in particular realised that the political
situation in South Africa (and specifically the constitution)
was the root cause of the unrest. It appreciated clearly that
the NP was unable to deliver "reform" which was even remotely
able to defuse the unrest, far less to enter into negotiations
which might have had the effect of ending it. It allowed itself
to be manoeuvred into a position where it "understood" the root
causes of the violence, and from there it was a simple task
for the government propoganists to portray it as condoning the
violence, which in turn was portrayed in glorious technicolour
on the State-controlled media.

The reaction of the white voters was to reject the PFP, either
because its contribution was "irrelevant" or because it was
downright subversive.

During this time, other political actors appeared on the scene
- notably the Independent Movement. These personalities managed
to communicate a similar message - that the national Party was
part of the problem rather than part of the solution - but in
a way which was far more reassuring to white voters. In part
this was because these personalities had hitherto been members
of the National Party, and it was presumed that they shared
the same toughness evidenced by the National Party in safeguarding
white security - in short, they would know when to pull the
trigger.

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The results: of the 1987 election are well known, as are the
subsequent developments in both the PFP and Independent Movement.
The reasons behind the fracturing of these organisations are
less well known but are essentially irrelevant. What is important
is that in the later part of 1987 and throughout 1988, there
was a growing realisation that the relatively slight differences
in strategy, approach and policy of the PFP, IP and NDM could,
and should, be integrated and sublimated if a coherent liberal
alternative to apartheid was to be at all viable. Indeed, each
of the constituent parties brought not only different political
"assets", in terms of support, but different perspectives as
to ways in which the South African dilemma might be resolved,
and a peaceful, free, prosperous, non-racial democracy established
in our country.

These organisations joined forces on 8 April 1989, and the Democratic
Party was born.

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND THE FUTURE

In at least one significant respect, the Democratic Party is
distinct from every other organisation operating within the
institutional confines of the South African parliament. In
its Programme of Action, it explicitly recognises that a change
from a white minority oligarchy to a non-racial democracy will
not occur as a result of actions determined by Parliament. That
Parliament is an important element in the process, the DP has
not the slightest doubt, but it recognises that Parliament is
not the sole, or necessarily even the most important institution
in shaping the future.

Of all the elements agreed to during the merger negotiations,
the Programme of Action is undoubtedly the most important. The
DP, in terms of this programme, will firstly establish strong
power bases in Parliament and other representative institutions
With a view to exercising control. The term "representative
institutions" is instructive: it implies that before the DP
is prepared seriously to participate in such institutions there
must be proof that they are indeed representative. Clearly,
not least because of a long historical tradition, the House

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of Assembly is so; in the case of the Houses of Representatives
and Delegates there is less cause for confidence.
Secondly, the DP will seek cooperative arrangements and/or alliances
with organisations with whom it shares common aims and objectives.
Such aims and objectives need not necessarily be of a long-term
nature; short-term strategic alliances also have their place
in isolating the National Party.
Thirdly, the DP will seek to extend contact and dialogue with
organisations with which it does not share common aims with
the objective of promoting understanding and seeking national
accord.
The national accord envisaged by the DP is a constitutional
and economic system which is the product of genuine negotiation
by the accepted leaders of the various groups (both naturally
formed and those thrown up by the system of enforced group membership)
which make up the South African polity.
The DP has definite ideas about the nature of such a constitutional
and economic system. It envisages a true South African democracy
in which each and every South African adult has a vote of equal
value. It envisages this vote being exercised by means of proportional
representation within a geographic federation. It believes
that a deeply divided society - as part of a system of national
accord - must have executives on all levels which are representative
of all parties and which operate on the basis of consensus.
The DP believes in a justiciable Bill of fundamental human rights.
The Party adheres to the belief that economic prosperity for
all South Africans will be served by freeing the economy and
allowing the maximum degree of entrepreneurship. The DP accepts
as self-evident that the historical disabilities which have
stunted black advancement will have to be addressed and redressed
as a matter of urgency, and that therefore the State has special
responsibilities in the field of human development and social
upliftment.
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The DP accepts, at the same time, that in order for a constitutional
or economic system to have legitimacy and therefore long-term
viability, it must be the product of negotiation. Equally, it
accepts that negotiation towards a satisfactory national accord
will not occur as a once-off, seminal event, nor will such negotiations
be concluded quickly. The Party accepts that post-apartheid
South Africa is being shaped even now, in conferences such as
this one, in myriads of less well-publicised contacts, on the
shop floors of South Africa's industries on the sports fields
and in many other places where informal negotiations are taking
place.
Such are the DP's aims, principles and programme of action.
The question is whether its aims and principles are able to
be realised given the constraints outlined in the first part
of this paper, and specifically whether the DP can use its institu-
tional base in Parliament to achieve these aims and principles.
It needs to be stressed right at the outset that the very structure
of the tricameral parliament poses serious dilemmas for the
DP, dilemmas which the National Party must have been fully aware
of when it repealed the Improper Interference Act. For the DP
is (and must be) a noneracial party. It has also decided, in
its programme of action, to build strong power bases in Parliament.
The Houses of Delegates and Representatives are as much part
of Parliament as is the House of Assembly, and if white members
of the DP appropriate for themselves the right to contest seats
in the House of Assembly, its non-racial composition deny the
right of its "coloured" and "Indian" members similarly to contest
seats in the other two Houses.
For while from a Brincigled point of view there is absolutely
no difference in the powers and functions of the three Houses,
there is an enormous Eractical and strategig difference. The
degree of popular support (measured in percentage polls) for
the House of Assembly differs significantly from that of the
other two houses; besides this, the House of Assembly effectively
selects the State President and therefore the Cabinet. Moreover,
the issue of participation in the other two Houses cuts right
across the other two elements of the DP's programme of action.
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The DP is aware that unless it can effectively demonstrate that
there are practical and strategic advantages in participation,
such participation could weaken the achievement of overall strategy
on a broad front for ending apartheid.

what, then, can and should the DP be using Parliament to achieve?
Judging by its previous experience, the DP can firstly use Parliament
to elicit information, either by the placing of Parliamentary
questions, or by cross-examining the responsible Minister during
the discussion of his vote. Question time is by no means as
effective in South Africa as it is in other Westminster systems,
and new rules make it increasingly less 50. Moreover, there
is a tendency not to answer questions which "affect the security
of the state". This notwithstanding, much of the information
regarding the operation of the National Security Management
System was elicited from parliamentary questions, and this information
allowed extranparliamentary organisations to deal more appropriately
with this bureaucracy.

Secondly, Parliament can be used to "read into the record" information
which might, in terms either of "ordinary" security legislation
or of the state of emergency, be unable otherwise to be reported.
In this way, the PFP was able to read the names of emergency
detainees into the record in the 1986 State of Emergency.

Thirdly, individual Members of Parliament can and do intercede
in specific cases, and in some cases have made significant changes
to executive policy. Helen Suzman and Colin Eglin's intercession
on behalf of the Sharpeville Six, during which they obtained
important admissions from the President may not themselves have
been determinant in his decision to reprieve those people, but
their intercession added significant pressure to that of church
and world leaders and others.

Fourthly, Parliament can be used to expose, and has been used
in this way with devastating effect by amongst others, Helen
Suzman, on many occasions in the past. From prison conditions
to corruption in government, Parliament provides a privileged
platform to say whatever one likes and wants.

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Fifthly, one can use Parliament to influence policy and legislation. As peripheral as much of Nationalist "reform" may (in some cases rightly) be regarded, equally much "reform" legislation has unintended consequences which the NP only dimly appreciates at the time of enacting the original measure. Steven Friedman has highlighted this in the case of the labour legislation and the pass laws; the Free Settlement Areas Act (as unsatisfactory as this is) is a direct response to the repeal of the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act in 1985. By 1991, by which time the first "legal" products of "legal" mixed marriages will be of school-going age, the presently non-negotiable issue of mixed schooling will be firmly on the legislative agenda. A parliamentary presence is decisive in pointing out not only the moral indefensibility of girtheid, but the untenability of piecemeal "reform" thereof. These five functions have been performed up until present with significant success. Parliament, of course, also constrains its members. It is one of the most exclusive clubs; like all clubs it has set rules by which its members are expected to behave. The DP and its predecessors have, to their credit, refused to allow themselves to be entirely coopted. However, in order to perform some of the very functions outlined above, one is ipso facto coopted. It is impossible, for example, to elicit information about "coloured" education without posing questions in the House of Representatives, and this is impossible Without either having a member in that House or having a cooperative ally there.

Moreover, merely being in Parliament implies having being elected to that institution. This in turn implies not only operating Within a racist system but actually persuading voters whose basic interests do not incline them naturally to support the DP for reasons outlined above, to do so, despite the influence of the state-controlled media.

HoweVer, the DP must deliver more than its constituent elements have done in the past. In order to justiEy being in Parliament, and if this is its decision, in more than merely the House of Assembly, it is necessary to deliver more than these functions. tht more could it deliver?

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First, it could act as a "wedge" and in doing so, forcefully
represent black demands in what is essentially a white-dominated
forum. It could constantly raise issues pertinent to the establish-
ment of a true South African democracy and force the National
Party to respond to these issues. In doing so, the NP could
be placed on the defensive; there are amongst its ranks people
who realise the untenability of constitution-making based on
enforced group membership but who lack the appreciation of how
to build constitutions in any other way. To "wedge" in the demands
of the mass democratic movement could fundamentally alter the'
nature of debate and make Parliament far more "relevant" than
has hitherto been perceived to be the case.
As was stressed earlier, the DP can only do this effectively
if it can retain its white support-base. It therefore needs
to play an educative role in persuading its own supporters and
potential supporters to become real democrats. But the extra-
parliamentary organisations have a responsibility to assist
in this process; if the mass democratic movement wishes whites
to retreat into the laager and fight, it need only make the
spectre of democracy and the transition thereto sufficiently
frightening and it will achieve this. The DP can only deliver
whites closer to national accord if such accord is perceived
to be non-threatening, not in terms of loss of privilege, but
in terms merely of physical safety.
It goes beyond the ambit of this paper to discuss the merits
and demerits of the armed struggle with all its external and
internal implications. It suffices to say that every time a
bomb kills civilians (whether in the so-called "cross-fire"
or not) and every time mob violence claims another victim, it
makes the task of the DP in delivering whites closer to a settlement
more and more difficult.
It is possible that the view of the mass democratic movement
is that the fears of whites are either irrelevant, or alternatively
that such fears pale into insignificance in a much broader canvass.
To determine this is presumably one of the purpOSes of this
conference. But whites can and should be part of a settlement;
their skills can and should contribute to the development of
South Africa rather than that of Australia. Alienated, frightened
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whites could turn increasingly vicious and convert South Africa
from the economic powerhouse of Southern Africa into a wasteland.
Militarised whites might not be able to delay the establishment
of a true democracy in South Africa, but they have the potential
to make the transition violent, painful, bloody and long, and
in the process to leave far more scars than are evident at the
moment.

The Democratic Party could synthesize both "wedge" and "educator"
functions by performing a nation-building role. Indeed, alL
organisation dedicated to the eradication of apartheid could
and should be focussing their attention to building the post-agartheid
nation. There is enough that we have in common to begin, even
now, to construct that united, free, prosperous, democratic
and noneracial nation.

The DP believes that it can assist in that process by participating
in Parliament - if necessary, in all three Houses (for all the
roles outlined above are valid for all three Houses). The DP
is unequivocally opposed to violence and to the armed struggle
believing it to be counterproductive. The DP believes that
sanctions and disinvestment will not only cause immense suffering
in the short term, but will negatively affect the chances of
creating the type of post-apartheid society which can fulfil
the noble expectations contained in the Freedom Charter.

It is clear that while we share the same broad goals we differ
fundamentally on strategies to achieve these. The challenge,
as was mentioned at the outset, is to develop strategies and
Structures which might synthesize these different approaches.

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