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"THE ROLE OF THE PFP IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT"

The one thing that must not be done is to predict with too much confidence what is going to happen to Parties, Chambers or even the State President and his President's Council in the new Parliament. Obviously, the PFP as the Official Opposition in the White Chamber, will carry on performing the traditional roles that remain in the new structure. It will move the traditional Vote of No-Confidence, in this case, in the Executive President and his Government, will criticize the Budget, it will participate in standing committees and scrutinise legislation and it will table questions.

As far as the latter is concerned, this is a very valuable service performed by the Official Opposition that goes largely unheralded and unappreciated. A massive amount of statistics are generated annually by these questions. For example, in the 1984 Parliamentary Session, 2 089 questions were placed on the Question Paper and 1 690 of these were asked by the PFP alone. Many Research Departments and Universities, both domestically and internationally, depend very much on replies to these questions for factual data concerning the South African situation. And it is definitely our intention to carry on with these questions to the best of our ability.

But it is not this traditional role of the Official Opposition and of the PFP that comes under the spotlight when the new Parliament is discussed and analysed.

Some dire and extraordinary predictions have been made from various quarters as to what the impact of the new Parliament is going to be on the PFP in particular and the Opposition in general. Many of these predictions are based on a gross misunderstanding of the structure of the new Constitution. Or, in some cases, an over-estimation and wishful thinking as to its potential for consensus and evolutionary reform. I am not being immodest if I say that I and some of my colleagues have been intimately involved in the unfolding of this new Constitution and from the outset, our concern has been to assess the role and contribution of opposition within its structure. We have not disguised the fact that we believe the role to be more demanding and more difficult in the new Constitution, but it is a challenge that cannot be avoided and that has to be taken up.

During the referendum the Government managed to sell the "sizzle" rather than the "steak" when it came to the new Constitution, whereas we, in the Official Opposition tried to draw attention to the quality of the meal that was going to be served. Now, the course is on the table and we will have to make do with what we have got. I see the task of the PFP in the new Parliament, in addition to continuing its traditional role, as consisting of the following :

- (a) Exploring and exploiting the contradictions of the new system for the sake of promoting reform and evolutionary change. Let me mention two examples already apparent. Why can't we have joint debates if we have joint sittings? It is ridiculous to sit together and listen to a second reading speech of a Minister and then go and debate that speech in separate Chambers.

Why can't people in the same Parliament, who believe in the same political philosophy not belong to the same political party, if they wish to ?

- (b) Highlighting the inadequacy of the new Parliament to cope with the real and central political issues in the country. Despite all the time, effort and money that has gone into creating and implementing the new Parliament, its very structure and composition makes it unsuitable to cope with problems of White/Black constitutional co-existence, and Black urbanization. The creation and terms of reference of the Cabinet Committee on Black constitutional development is an admission of this failure.
  
- (c) Seeking alliances and formulating joint strategies with other individuals and/or parties who share the same philosophy and goals as the PFP or simply adopt the same line or attitude to policy initiatives and legislation from Government. It is still early days to be more precise about this very important task and sufficient time should be allowed for members in the other Chambers to settle in and adjust to the new Parliament. But it is obvious that if there are members who have the same attitude on Bills, Private Members Motions and general political strategy inside the three separate Chambers, that they should get together and plan and coordinate their political input.
  
- (d) Even despite the very serious shortcomings of the new Parliament, it should be the task of the PFP to do everything possible to prevent the new Parliament from simply becoming an instrument of Black/White polarization.

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Therefore, we will have to continue to seek enteraction and co-operation with as many Black organisations and movements who are constitutionally excluded from this Parliament in order to undercut Black and White radicalization. This is perhaps going to be the most difficult job to perform, precisely because of the underlying assumptions which went into the construction of the new Parliament.

The extent to which the PFP as the Official White Opposition can be successful in performing these roles, will be one of the most important barometers for the existence and viability of a moderate political centre cutting right across the various racial groups and on which will rest the awesome responsibility of keeping alive the possibility of evolutionary and constitutional reform. I say, one of the barometers, not the only one. But to the extent that the PFP or any other similar Party do not perform these tasks, we and the rest of the country will to that extent have become the victims of radical polarization.

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