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We start the 1985 Session of Parliament with an untested and entirely new constitution. Inevitably a great deal of time is going to be taken up by all the Parties involved in getting to know the ropes. The time for posturing and bluster is over. Now we are going to find out what is possible and whether the promised goods can be delivered.

It is also important to remember that this new constitution was marketed and promoted as a "reform" constitution; as a mechanism of constitutional change that could meet the aspirations and wants of the people more effectively than the old one. It is, in other words, a constitution that has generated expectations of reform. What does "reform" actually mean in the SA context? I think one can distinguish between two kinds of reform: symbolic and material reform. Symbolic reform is the kind of reform that changes the status of the individual - it is essentially legal reform. Thus if racist and discriminatory laws are scrapped from the statute books, the majority of people who are affected by such laws will experience a change in status. For example, consider what a change in influx control laws, the Group Areas Act, the Political Interference Act could mean for people in this country. Material reform on the other hand refers to the expenditure of money, expenditure that will either close or narrow the gap in state expenditure for housing, education, transport, health etc. between the different population groups in South Africa.

For symbolic reform to take place in this new constitution, the Government will have to display political will to face up to the "right wing threat" as it perceives it. That is all that is holding back the scrapping of racist laws. This "right wing threat" is both inside and outside the Nationalist Party. The 1985 Session will clearly be an opportunity for the NP to display such political will. For material reform to take place not only political will is necessary, but also the economic means to do so. At present we are going through a very difficult time economically and no matter how good the intentions of Government, it is better not to spend money that you do not have, than to feed inflation by doing so. The new constitution, which has been presented as a reform constitution by the Government, confronts it with a dilemma : too much symbolic reform brings the Government into difficulty with the right wing; too much material reform brings it, and us all, into difficulty with the economy.

But the dilemma of the Government simply defines the predicament of the new parties which have come into the new Parliament. On them rests the responsibility to "show" their constituents and others who have criticized them for doing so, that their participation is "working", i.e. it is bringing about the reform that they promised. Thus, too little reform of either the symbolic or material kind

brings them into difficulty with their own constituencies and this in turn must undermine the credibility of the new constitution.

But there is another, perhaps more important, dilemma which this new constitution will have to face up to in 1985. Despite all the difficulties I have just mentioned, the one thing this new constitution must avoid is to create the impression that whatever reform takes place, it is not only limited to those groups who participate in the new Parliament. Nothing will increase the growing antagonism and polarization between Black and non-Black more than the idea that the new constitution is only there to bring about symbolic and material reform for Coloureds and Asians, and not for Blacks. Perhaps this is going to be the severest test of this new constitution in 1985. The unrest and violence in the Black townships during 1984 has served to highlight the urgency for reform in these communities, as well as the lack of adequate constitutional bodies to negotiate for them.

Against this background, the role of the PFP in this new Parliament in 1985 will be the following :-

To continue with as many of the traditional functions of an official opposition as possible, to highlight Government shortcomings, question its expenditure and policies and spell out clear alternatives.

To explore the possibilities of this new constitution;
To promote negotiation politics;
To forge associations and seek common strategies with whoever wishes to combat racism and get rid of racially discriminatory laws;
To highlight how Government policy is undermining this country's economic potential and increasing hardship and deprivation for us all;
To point out continually the fact that the new constitution does not adequately provide for the need for White and Black to negotiate a constitution acceptable to both.

The one thing the PFP is not prepared to do, and that is to be seduced by Government into a kind of false "consensus" politics where consensus means compliance and opposition is allowed only by permission of the President; in this sense, we as the Official Opposition in the House of Assembly have a clearer role in opposition than the dominant parties in the House of Delegates and House of Representatives. On them rests the new task of demonstrating how consensus, reform and opposition is possible as part of the structure of Government. It is a great challenge and I wish them well. But it is equally important to realise that we in the PFP as the "Official Opposition" in the House of Assembly have a different role to play in different circumstances and we fully intend to play that role. Whereas in 1985 the test for some is going to be to show whether consensus and credibility is possible; for others it will be to show that opposition is still possible and constructive. For all in Parliament 1985 is going to be a testing time.