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"The Balance of Power strategy in white politics"

The PFP as the Official Opposition, has committed itself to going for the balance of power in white electoral politics. What does this effectively mean?

For one, it assumes that there is a sufficient degree of flexibility and fluidity in white political allegiance to plausibly argue that one could, after a general election, reach a situation where no one single party could dominate the procedures in Parliament on the basis of a simple majority. Already, in the latest opinion polls conducted by Rapport and Sunday Tribune, we see that, for the first time since 1948, the National Party does not enjoy the support of the majority of the white electorate. The distribution is more or less 43% for them, 21% plus for the PFP, 18,5% for the CP. In fact, if all the people who do not support the Government in the white electorate could be in one party, the Government would no longer be the government. However, deep ideological and policy divisions make this totally impossible. II But what would happen if, for example, you had a situation where the Government had 40% support in Parliament and the rest was distributed amongst the other political parties? Remember that Parliament works on a simple majority decision-making basis. There is no proportional representation in the Executive nor is proportional representation taken into account in voting on ordinary Parliamentary procedures, such as Bills and MOTions. Under these circumstances you would have a Balance of Power situation where the opposition parties, to a very large extent, hold the balance of power in deciding in which way a Vote will go. The Government then has to decide in which direction it will seek a compromise in order to get decisions taken. The manner of the compromise will determine to what extent reform can take place or ~~we~~ drifts back into reactionary politics.

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This, then, is the underlying philosophy of the Balance of Power strategy.

Is it feasible for the PFP to go for this strategy under the present circumstances? I believe it is, for the following reasons :

- 1) The split in the National Party has not finally resolved itself. I believe it has given momentum to a process of political realignment which started in 1974 when the ^{U.P.} Official Opposition began to disintegrate. Eventually the options confronting the white electorate will be either to cling to the status quo at all costs, or to commit the country to a process of systematic reform. By saying that the split hasn't finally resolved itself, I mean that the National Party hasn't finally made up its mind in which direction it really wants to move. It is still trying to woo back those who left it and, at the same time, trying to placate those who demand reform. Therefore it has to fight on two fronts.
- 2) The disunity of the right hasn't resolved itself either. I believe united, the right-wing has a growth potential of up to, say 25%. But its impact goes far further than its simple numerical strength. We already see ramifications of the split in other Afrikaner institutions, such as the church, university life and cultural organisations. However, the fact that one, on an electoral level, has a disunited right-wing means that in some cases in a general election situation, there could be four-cornered fights which means that smaller parties can, as has happened for example with the PFP in Greytown, win seats that, under normal circumstances, would not be within their reach.
- 3) A characteristic feature of electoral life in South Africa is that there is a disproportionate relationship between the percentage of electoral support and the number of seats that a party can win as one moves from the right to the centre.

For example, in the last general election of 1981, the HNP managed to get approximately 14,5% of the electoral support but could not win 1 seat. The PFP got 17,8% of the electoral support and came back to Parliament with 26 seats. Why this is so can be attributed to a number of factors - amongst them being the distribution of the support of the HNP which more or less is peri-urban and rural and concentrates on particular occupational categories amongst whites, for example, farmers, blue collar workers, etc. The Germiston District by-election result was an exception to the general rule as far as I am concerned due to the fact that the National Party was disorganized and particularly their machine in the Transvaal had experienced a rapid change of leadership over a fairly short period of time. Generally speaking the rule still holds, namely the more right-wing the party, the more disproportionate the relationship between electoral support and number of seats that can be won.

- 4) The National Party finds itself in a dilemma with regard to the right-wing and the PFP. Should it decide to unload the rural constituencies in order to neutralize the right-wing threat, it will obviously create more urban constituencies which the PFP would ^{prefer} favour. On the other hand, if it decides not to unload and to maintain the status quo, it will experience a threat from the right in the rural areas. Whichever way, it has to fight on two fronts.
- 5) Whatever else may be said about the feasibility about going for the balance of power, one thing is quite clear and that is that the pressures for reform in South Africa are going to increase significantly over the next five to ten years. The PFP has been anticipating this for quite a long time and I believe, has positioned itself strategically to be the best articulator for such reforms in white politics.

Reasons ✓

The above are the objective conditions which make going for the balance of power a feasible strategy for the PFP. What would this mean in practice?

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with the above in mind ✓
It means that against the above, we will have to identify priority seats and regions and concentrate our resources and energies ^{to} on making progress in them. This, we have already done with a nationwide and very successful fund-raising campaign. In the Southern Transvaal, seats like Florida, Randburg, North Rand, Helderkruin, Rosettenville, ^{and} Jeppe, suddenly become very interesting and worthwhile. In the Western Cape - Simonstown, Helderberg, Maitland. In Port Elizabeth - Newton Park. In East London - East London City and East London North. But it is in Natal where I believe the PFP is poised to make a dramatic breakthrough. Opinion surveys show that the NRP is fast becoming a spent force in national politics. They have lost their sharpness of focus and in the mind of the average voter simply seem to be a milder variation of the National Party.

Overall, we have set our targets at a reasonable 8% increase in electoral support which we believe will put approximately 45 seats within our reach. Obviously it would be short sighted for any political party to declare all its tactics and strategies beforehand but one thing is certain, a vote for the Official Opposition is no longer simply a vote for only what one believes to be right and defensible without the prospect of it becoming implemented. Now, ^{that} the vote has the real prospect of influencing the course of political developments and decisions. Consider the fact that if the PFP had participated in the Germiston District by-election the outcome would have been dramatically different to the one that we had. Also, given the present distribution of electoral support, the Government can in no way be certain that it will win a referendum should it hold one on any controversial issue. This is a new ball game in which the old style Opposition vs. Government confrontation politics will increasingly be substituted by horse-trading, negotiations and compromise.

There is one proviso however. The Government and the Prime Minister can change the rules of the political game to such an extent that, in a new constitution, they will have entrenched their position so that no balance of power situation can arise. If this happens, South Africa will have drifted even closer to totalitarianism and away from the already limited democracy it experiences. That is why the PFP scrutinizes the Government's constitutional proposals with such a critical and analytical frame of mind.

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12 October 1982