

ARTICLE FOR THE SUNDAY STAR

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Lately people have been saying the following things to me about the PFP. "Since PW Botha's opening speech for Parliament the Government is moving more and more in your direction, don't you think the time for coalition politics is going to come; what the Government is going to lose to the right-wing they will have to make up with you and the PFP. Don't you think Party politics is going to become more and more irrelevant as we move towards a Government of national unity", etc. etc.

"What is the PFP's game plan of strategy after the next General Election ?"

I wish to make two responses to these statements. The one is that it is quite remarkable that these questions are being put in all seriousness to the PFP when many commentators wrote us off after the Referendum.

These questions alone is sufficient evidence that such conclusions were entirely off the mark and unfounded.

The second response is that the nature of the question and the statements are such that for me to respond on behalf of the PFP to them in all seriousness would be tantamount to a poker player declaring his hand before the cards have been dealt, or the bets been placed.

We are entering a dynamic phase of White politics in which opportunities and strategies will continually have to be re-assessed and redefined. As long as one has clarity about the goal one is pursuing, one should be flexible about the strategies which are employed to achieve that goal.

Apart from a certain irksome superficiality which is implied in the statements and questions, I do believe they are indicative of a mood and a climate in White politics at the moment. There is no doubt that there is some kind of shifting of assumptions, of perceptions and attitudes taking place in the White political arena. One senses this in the analyses of political commentators and also in the lobby talk in Parliament. I believe this shifting was precipitated not when the Government changed its policy towards Coloureds and Asians through the tri-cameral Parliament, but when it started changing its policy towards Blacks, as indicated in the speech of the President at the Opening of Parliament. This is what has really grabbed the imagination. If one reads the President's speech carefully, one thing is disturbingly clear. One comes away with a greater sense of certainty as to what the Government is trying to move away from, rather than what they are trying to move towards. In other words, one has a feeling of - "they don't know where they are going, but they are on their way. And this is definitely better than where we all were.

So what must the PFP prepare for in this new process of change? What kind of role must it try and hammer out for itself? Let me identify some trends against which the PFP will have to position itself.

1. It is quite evident that we are well on our way to experiencing the disintegration and dissolution of the Apartheid policy and ideology. The Government plan is coming apart at the seams, the Blacks know it, we know it, and the Nats know it.
2. This coming apart is not the result of any one organisation, individual, or group's activity, it is a combination of factors. Perhaps most important of all, the rate of population increase, the tempo of Black urbanization, Black demands for education and job opportunities, the fall in the gold price, the exchange rate of the Rand to the Dollar, the drought, the Government's mismanagement of the economy, and of its own political programme. All these factors somehow in 1985 came to a head and defined the crisis in which we find ourselves now.
3. Whether the Government or South Africa likes it or not, we are already beginning to prepare ourselves for living in a post-Apartheid society. This is going to present us with new challenges in our cities, in our race relations, in education, in labour and in government administration.

4. Ironically, this Nationalist Party Government has the historically important task to begin dismantling old-style Apartheid and preparing South Africa for the post-Apartheid era. It is a task which they do not really want, are not prepared for, and do not really understand. We see it in the way in which they try clumsily and cautiously to come to terms with Black urbanization, with citizenship, with Influx Control and with their own traditional support.
5. The Government finds itself in a classical political squeeze-play, between right-wing pressure against change and reform pressure for change. It is either going to be pulled back by those behind it, or it is going to be pulled forward by those ahead of it.

It is against the background of these trends and developments that the PFP has to define its strategy and role in the next couple of years. The PFP is not left or right of Government, but ahead of it when it comes to the process of reform. This Government after three and a half decades of trying to implement a policy that has now failed, does not have the ability, the will, the talent or the credibility to govern effectively and successfully in post-Apartheid South Africa. It is being overtaken by the time-table for reform. It cannot fix this country on its own, even if it wants to. Negotiation and reform politics cannot be single party, single group or single individual politics. In fact, after the next General Election, this country will not and cannot be governed and dominated by one political party. We are moving irrevocably to a future where White, Coloured, Indian and Black will, either informally or formally, indirectly or directly, participate in the decisionmaking process and government of South Africa.

Even the Nationalist Party begins to acknowledge this in its own clumsy way by having a Coloured and Indian member in its own Cabinet. I believe the PFP has the talent, the ability, the credibility and the will in the politics of the future to play a key role in the power structure preparing for a post-Apartheid South Africa, and it is our intention to play that role to the end and to the full.

As we begin to prepare for the next General Election, whether it be in three years, two years or next year, the White electorate will have to decide whether they want the Nationalist Party Government to move back in time, spirit and attitude to the futile politics represented by the Conservative Party or whether it wants to move forward to the reform politics represented by the PFP. This is the crucial significance of the next General Election. The PFP is determined that after that election, no effective reform can take place without our mediation, assistance and contribution. We have the flexibility and the creativity to play a leading role in the decisionmaking processes of this country and negotiation politics. Two years ago I started talking about the "balance of power" situation beginning to develop in the White political arena; I was laughed out of court by most Nationalist Party commentators. That laugh is beginning to sound more hollow as events unfold before us. The arena of politics is broadening beyond the old boundaries and in that wider arena the policy, philosophy and the role of the PFP is becoming more, not less, relevant.