

ARTICLE FOR THE SUNDAY TRIBUNE ON THE PINETOWN BY ELECTIONDR. F. VAN ZYL SLABBERT, M.P.

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It is not the job of an Opposition to make the Government look good, it is the job of an Opposition to keep the Government on its toes. It is not the job of an Opposition to walk hand in hand with Government, it is the job of an Opposition to walk in front and lead the way. In Pinetown the choice is not between choosing someone to represent you in Government or in Opposition, but the choice is that of deciding what kind of Opposition you want.

What is the overall picture of the two Parties contesting the by-election. The latest available statistics show that the PFP has approximately 20 per cent of electoral support, the Conservative Party about 15.5 per cent, the New Republic Party about 6 per cent. I want to state quite categorically that there is not one constituency left in this country, not even in Natal, that the New Republic Party can win purely with its own genuine support.

Especially in Pinetown it is conceded by all parties in Parliament that the New Republic Party cannot hope to win that seat without the substantial backing and support of the Nationalist Party. Therefore, without the active support and collusion of the Nationalist Party, the governing party, the NRP cannot hope to bring back another member of the Opposition. This is simply another way of saying that the Nationalist Party determines the fortunes of the NRP as an Opposition. Or, to put it quite bluntly, the Government can choose its Opposition

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in this respect. Point number one therefore, the NRP as an Opposition Party has no independent growth potential.

The second point is perhaps even more important. We are on the point of implementing a new Constitution for the Republic of South Africa. It is critically important that Opposition, constitutional opposition, be kept alive in that new Constitution. Opposition can only be kept alive and grow, if it has an independent power base. In other words, if it can win and hold constituencies on its own terms. The PFP can do this, the NRP cannot.

Thirdly, and also very important, the first task of an Opposition must be to tackle the Government and to state its own alternative. We have just come through the last No-Confidence Debate of the present Constitution before we move into a new Constitution. During this debate the PFP spent 99 per cent of its time challenging the Government and confronting it with its own shortcomings and problems. The NRP spent 90 per cent of its time attacking the PFP and 10 per cent of the time in finding ways in which it could agree with the Government. The PFP agrees that we are approaching a new style of consensus politics, but consensus does not mean collusion and compliance. Consensus does not mean to lose ones critical ability. Consensus quite simply does not mean that one should be afraid to tackle the Government. On the contrary, it means that you must be able to bargain even harder than before to reach an acceptable compromise. It means that eventual co-operation must be the result of give and take and not only giving without being prepared to demand anything.

To sum up, a Pinetown voter can easily make up his or her own mind by asking the following simple questions :-

Do you believe that in the new Constitution Opposition is necessary and important ?

Do you believe that Opposition should be effective and principled ?

Do you believe Opposition should have an independent power base and can stand on its own feet ?

Do you believe an Opposition should not be afraid to tackle Government and challenge it with new alternatives ?

If the answer to all the above questions is "Yes", then the PFP is the only Opposition worth supporting in Pinetown.

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