

The root of the trouble

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"Politics" is defined as "The science and art of government, the science dealing with the form, organisation and administration of a state or part of one — that branch of moral philosophy dealing with the state or social organism as a whole." A political party is therefore presumably a group of people sharing a common view about the science and art of government with reference to a particular state or part of one, having regard to the state or social organism as a whole.

It is an interesting exercise to examine the South African political scene in the context of the above definition, and the first and most striking conclusion is that it does not fit. Neither the Nationalist Party, nor its official opposition, the United Party, conforms to the concept of a group of people sharing a common view about the science and art of government having regard to the state or social organism as a whole. Only the Progressive Party contains the required ingredients.

The fundamental reason for this unorthodox political set-up is to be found in the roots of the Nationalist Party, its development, its growth and its acquisition of power. It did not start off as a political party at all — in the accepted sense of the term. Rather did it have its beginnings in the determination of a limited group of people — a race of people — to retain their identity, their language and their independence. The appeal of the party has always been an emotional one, a call to the blood, an emphasis on the exclusiveness of the Afrikaner people — their language, their culture, their traditional way of life. The Afrikaner people felt threatened, so they erected their defences and retreated into their "laager". They were in no way concerned with the form, organisation and administration of a state or part of one, but only with their own survival, and with the acquisition of power in order to ensure that survival. The moral philosophy of dealing with the state or social organism as a whole had relevance only in terms of how best to secure their own interests.

It has been South Africa's tragedy that a party should have come to power which was not a political party in the true sense of the term, but a party based on race, its membership motivated by the fact of belonging to a particular people or ethnic stock. The science

and art of government did not enter into their calculations except insofar as they themselves were affected by government.

However when, to their own surprise, they actually came to power in 1948, they found themselves faced with all the problems implicit in governing. But the leopard could not change its spots. This was a party based on race, and it proceeded to govern according to race. This was a party whose fundamental purpose was the survival of the Afrikaner people, and it proceeded to govern the whole country in terms of the survival of the Afrikaner people.

Inevitably it has had to widen its horizons, for it found itself responsible for the country as a whole. Inevitably the years have given it experience in the mechanics of government. But its original premise has never altered. It was formed in the interests of the Afrikaner people, it attracted support and it grew in the interests of the Afrikaner people, it came to power in the interests of the Afrikaner people, and it has never ceased to govern in the interests of the Afrikaner people.

Its whole policy of divide and rule, of Apartheid, of Separate Development, of segregation in the schools and Christian National Education, of Influx Control and Efflux Enforcement, of Group Areas and Black Spot Removals, of physical planning, border industries, decentralisation, the slow throttling of the largely English-speaking Witwatersrand and the strangulation of the economy, the growing arrogance and authoritarianism and harsh silencing of criticism — all stem ineluctably from its own beginnings.

Never has its concept of the art of government been extended to incorporate the interests of the social organism as a whole, except insofar as its hand has been forced by world

opinion, by expedience and by the need to fulfil its responsibilities of governing, and always have its own interests been paramount. The Nationalist Party has never pretended to be anything but a party of Afrikaner nationalists, though expediency has on occasion forced from it an unwilling invitation to English-speaking South Africans to join its ranks — on its own terms, naturally. It has been true to itself and its own ideals. It has had the support of a majority of white South Africans, for the Afrikaner people are in the majority, and on that basis has subjected all the people of South Africa to the realisation of its purpose, which was not that of a political party but of a racial group.

The Official Opposition has reacted accordingly. It has found itself in the unhappy situation of having to fight emotionally-based legislation with reason — of having to fight racism with politics — of having to fight a call to the blood with the science of government — and it has succumbed to the unequal struggle. It has had to watch the growing ranks of the ruling party — through natural increase, through “Volk” identification, through in-group consolidation encouraged by out-group fear such as the much-vaunted “Swart Gevaar” — and it has had to watch its own ranks dwindling. Small wonder, then, that it has tried to emulate the Nationalists, to be more “patriotic”, more aware of the “white man’s burden”, more ready to co-operate on what is euphemistically termed “state security” which in reality is Nationalist Party security. Small wonder that it has tried to be all things to all men in a frantic attempt to attract more support from an electorate which the Nationalist Party has brainwashed into believing that it is the State, that criticism of the Government is unpatriotic and even treasonable, that black people are dangerous, are “superfluous appendages”, are inferior, are expendable. If race attitudes have been so rewarding to the Nationalist Party, why then should the United Party not try to climb onto the bandwagon?

Because the United Party itself embraces too wide a spectrum of political opinion, because its members do not really share a common view about the science and art of government, because its political objectives are too ill-defined, because its members have become infected with Nationalist-induced fears and prejudices, and because it has been in the exceedingly difficult situation of having to fight emotion with

a reasoned policy which it has never succeeded in establishing even to its own satisfaction, it has not stood a chance. It has been expedient and equivocal, it has compromised itself, it is ‘against’ more than it is ‘for’. It may conform more to the requirements of a political party than does the Nationalist Party, but it falls far short of the ideal.

The Progressive Party was formed by United Party members who tired of its constant expediency and equivocation, and it set out to establish for itself a body of principles which would meet the common view of its members about the science and art of Government with reference to the total South African scene. It ought to have appealed to a wide cross-section of the general public in terms of its policies and its ethical principles — the fundamental one being the anti-racial one of “Merit — not Colour” — but in fact this appeal has failed to crystallize to any meaningful degree. It has not been able to meet the challenge of rampant racism. The result has been that many of its members now feel that it ought to compromise some of its principles in order to gain more support, and it remains to be seen whether principle will prevail. In the meanwhile it is being subjected to the same frustrations and difficulties as those which have confronted the United Party and caused it to become ineffective.

The Liberal Party, the only party which was not prepared to compromise in any way, was forced out of existence, so the Progressive Party is faced with an unhappy choice.

This, then, is the political scene in South Africa, the outcome, directly and indirectly, of the racially-orientated Nationalist Party to which a majority of white South Africans belong. Racism, with its attendant ills of prejudice, hate and fear, is the disease which is eating into the body politic — a virulent infection exceedingly difficult to eradicate. It has spread to the United Party, the defences of the Progressive Party are being assailed, and black nationalist movements are manifesting themselves with all the trappings of black power. Politics in South Africa is not the art and science of government with reference to the social organism as a whole, but a concentrated endeavour directed at dividing the social organism into its many constituent racial components, labelling them, separating them, discriminating between them.

Until this process can somehow be revers-

ed, until each and every member of the social organism can come to be regarded as a human being in his own right and not as a member of a racial group, and until the political parties can conform to the true definition of a group of people sharing a common view about the art of government with regard to the state or social organism as a whole — and the population can be prevailed upon to vote accordingly so that the democratic process can operate as it is intended to — South Africa will continue to be a country torn by conflicting interests and peopled by schizophrenics who cannot decide where their own best interests lie.

If the root of the trouble is indeed to be found in the form, the constitution, the aims and objects of the Nationalist Party, then perhaps a tiny glimmer of hope can be discerned on the horizon with the growing indications of dissent within the party. If some Afrikaner nationalists are indeed beginning to think with their heads, and maybe even with their hearts, but not with their blood; if they are beginning to see that they share common

interests with other sections of the community, the promotion of which could be to the advantage of the whole community; and if the United Party and the Progressive Party can take advantage of these signs by emphasising the constructive aspects of their policies and clamping down on racism, then perhaps the granite-like resistance to change which has persisted for the last 24 years will at last begin to crumble and a way will be opened for the dammed-up potential for progress, for peace, for productivity and for mutually rewarding human relationships across the entire social spectrum.

South Africa is a living microcosm of the divisive problems besetting the world as a whole. If it can solve these problems with amity, honour and justice it can be a pathfinder for the rest of the world, holding up its head with justifiable pride. The solution lies in the subjective attitudes of the people of South Africa, for no problems are insurmountable for those motivated to solve them, not with self-interest but in the interest of all.



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