

AN APPROACH TO THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

INTRODUCTION

The September 6th General election, in particular the decision over participation in the Indian and coloured Chambers of Parliament, the DP's election platform and relations to the Labour party will prove critical to the DP's future. Specifically it will be crucial in determining future possibilities for the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) to build a relationship with the DP.

Clearly, and this has been communicated to the DP by MDM representatives, should they decide to participate in the Coloured and Indian chambers, they will face a conflict with the MDM which the DP are keen to avoid. Said Cas Saloojee, president of the TIC " instead of concentrating its energies on a single front fighting the NP, the DP will be forced to open a second front against the MDM".

The DP is it seems, looking for another way out of participating in the other two houses. It seems possible that the DP will form an election pact with the Labour Party. This will entail joint media and a joint election manifesto. It will prove controversial and is likely to be unacceptable to the MDM.

THE SEPTEMBER 6TH ELECTION

The stage is set for a dramatic general election in September. A likely boycott will occur against the background of an election in the white house that will reflect the fluidity in white politics. The Sunday Times editorial, June 11, 1989 commented: "Recent years have brought constitutional credibility crises, international isolation, a deteriorating economy, burgeoning state expenditure and banana-republic-style corruption. F.W. de Klerk has ratcheted up the reformist rhetoric while ducking the substance".

The DP's victory in the Linden municipal by-election is a big boost to it. According to Dries van Heerden, Sunday Times June 11, 1989 " Linden emphasised a number of factors which could prove crucial for its election prospects. " He cites:

- * the government is at its most vulnerable economic issues.
- * the hold that the NP had on the Afrikaner vote is loosening.

- * The DP has the ability to capture disenchanted Nationalists, especially in higher income constituencies.
- * The DP victory will give it a boost in the business community and media establishment which up to now has been sceptical of the DP's growth potential.
- * The DP has succeeded in projecting a very different image the PFP.

This however, does not mean that the DP, despite some of its own predictions, will win enough seats to create a "hung parliament". the NP will effectively use the new image of F.W. de Klerk trotting out the "soft on security" line and warn voters to support it lest the CP should win. Perhaps, however, the greater test is the capacity of the DP to channel white South African's discontent away from the NP. Says the Sunday Times "Sensible South Africans are hungry for imaginative and viable options, bold ventures and clear visions. They are tired of sitting atop Caspirs, the victims of international excoriation and internal decay".

The DP's election policy on issues such as its relation to the MDM, and the ANC in particular, security and conscription could prove controversial. The extent to which it targets the NP, the deteriorating economic situation, de-demonises the MDM, and makes a clear call for the creation of a climate for genuine negotiations, will be a positive indication of its direction and value. Should the DP attempt to win votes at the cost of relations within the MDM it may well blow itself out of the water. This is neither in the MDM or the DP's interests, says Coovadia, "The DP should rather lay the basis for 'post-election politics' which unify the Anti-Apartheid forces into a single thrust for change".

It is in this context that this paper examines the Democratic Party, its make up and the implications of its formation; and how the Mass Democratic Movement should respond, the strategies, objectives and overall approaches of an engaging policy.

THE OVERALL MDM STRATEGY

The primary strategy of the Democratic Movement is in grass roots community based organisations outside of parliament people's camp. At the same time a major strategy of the MDM is to isolate the Nats and erode its support base. The MDM recognises that the mass of whites view Parliament as a representative forum although (even for whites) it is increasingly becoming a powerless and toothless body. Parliament is a major instrument in the promulgation of Apartheid laws and therefore for whites who

believe in the parliamentary process and who are concerned with change, a key institution for contesting the legitimacy of these laws.

Says Cas Coovadia "Although the congress refuses to participate in the white-dominated parliament (including the House of Assembly) as a vehicle to bring about meaningful change, we acknowledge that the strong parliamentary ... in the white community. We realise that, unlike the toothless Indian and Coloured parliament, the House of assembly does wield real political power".

This implies that while the MDM might apply tactical differences to the white community there is an overall strategic rejection of participation in the Parliamentary system and a belief that the extra-parliamentary road is the fundamental one in asserting change. An MDM representative comments "While we need to build the people's camp and the unity of the oppressed in particular, we also need overall access to the white community to attempt to weaken the enemy camp and win more whites away from Apartheid."

This strategy is consistent with the attempts to build the unity of anti-apartheid forces behind a minimum program of action, the basic tenets of which are the support for a non-racial democratic South Africa, actions against repression and support for one person, one vote. It has also involved in recent times a recognition that in organising among whites, bridging the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary divide is an important tactical approach and challenge.

THE HISTROY OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

There is no doubt that the formation of the Democratic Party has its roots within the mass struggles over the decade of the Eighties when a fundamental shift was engineered by the struggles in the townships and the factories. This meant that the reference point in South African politics became the two major protagonists; the Liberation Movement as a whole and the Nationalist Party. In other words liberal opposition had to attempt to locate for itself a position in relation to these two.

The 1987 general election was the culmination of the crisis for the liberal opposition, when the PFP lost its official opposition status. This period was characterised by uneasy relations between the liberal opposition (specifically the PFP) and the MDM. The '87 election boycott (and the '88 municipal elections to a lesser extent) generated a lot of heat between the PFP and MDM, the PFP the UDF's boycott campaign as a major factor in its defeat as the official opposition. The FFF campaign in support of "those candidates who were clearly anti-Apartheid" in the municipal elections did much to repair the damage.

The UDF call to whites campaign, the abandonment of parliament by Van Zyl Slabbert and Alex Eoraine, as well as the creeping intellectual desertion of Afrikaner intellectuals from the Nationalist party contributed to the crisis within liberal ranks. This was intensified by the Safari treks by business leaders and others on an ongoing basis from 1985 onwards to visit the ANC in Lusaka.

It is informative that it was on the return of Danie Craven and Louis Luyt from their trip to the ANC to discuss the unity and isolation of rugby bodies that the issue of the unity of the fragmented forces to the left of the nationalists in parliament was placed firmly on the agenda.

Reports indicate that influential sectors of capital issued an ultimatum to the liberal forces to the left of the Nationalists to unite into one single force. They made it clear that they were not prepared to finance three divided parties when they could be funding one much more effective one.

The debates and developments arising from the shifting political terrain in the white community in the post 84-86 period, gave impetus to the formation of the Independent Party under the leadership of Denis Worrall and the National Democratic Movement under Wynand Malan. This opened up new opportunities for a broadened,, more effective and representative liberal force: "a creative opposition."

Worrall rested his appeal in the "hung parliament" approach whereby the combined forces of the liberal opposition in the three houses could present a challenge to Nationalist party control in the context of a split right wing vote.

Wynand Malan's approach differed fundamentally in that he believed the opposition should be brokers across the political spectrum. The strength of this creative opposition would be its ability to engineer and to facilitate resolution of the South African problem through process politics and negotiation.

It is in the context of the intensified resistance and crisis of the decade of the 80's including are and more whites seeking a way out of the Apartheid cul-de-sac while accepting the inevitability and desirability of a non-racial democratic future, that the three parties united, claiming (according to the recent "Rapport" voters survey), 24% of white support. Analysts predict that this could rise up to as much as 30%.

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY IS A SIGNIFICANT FORCE

The Democratic Party, launched on April the 8th thus represents a significant force which needs to be taken seriously in the body politics of South Africa today. Three points need to be raised here. First the Democratic Party has an impressive financial, infrastructural, political and intellectual support base.

Second, it has the ability to access and influence a broad section of whites at a number of levels. At the national level, the Democratic Party has a combined infrastructure reaching into all pockets of the country. The fact that two thirds of the national board is composed of Afrikaners reflects the substantial Afrikaans influence in the party. The latter group also has among its ranks ex-members of the Nationalist Party and even ex-security force officers who have broken ranks with the state.

The third important section of whites the Democratic Party is targetting is the youth whom are seen as a vital element in the growth of the party.

Third, the Democratic Party shares a good deal of common ground in its vision and program for South Africa with Western governments. Specifically here, one must refer to their platform on negotiations, at the same time their position on violence, sanctions, minority vetoes, federalism, their policy of universal franchise and the creation of a new South African constitution.

While the MDM and the DP differ on several major issues there are two important points which decisively separate the DP from the Nats and create common ground with the MDM. First, they believe in a non-racial, democratic South Africa. Second, they support negotiations with the ANC.

It is its policy of engaging with extra-parliamentary groups and encouraging whites to negotiate a new democratic, non racial constitution for South Africa which has the potential to make the DP significantly different to its predecessors. Its broad appeal, especially to Afrikaners rests on it being able to successfully bridge the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary divide.

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY IS CONTESTED TERRAIN

It is critical in the formulation of strategy towards the DP to recognize the tremendous fluidity and tensions that are present within the party. This is perhaps best seen in the policy statements and emphases given by those within the leadership troika of the Democratic Party.

Wynand Malan's process politics argues it necessary to speak to all the major forces in change whether one agrees with their positions or not. To encourage dialogue and negotiations Malan has consistently and publicly defended the right of the Democratic Party to speak to the ANC. The DP's goal of "building a broad Front of co-operation, relationships, alliances and joint strategies with organisations and individuals inside and outside parliament who are striving to achieve the same objectives as the party", is a confirmation of an acceptance by the DP of the process politics approach.

The PEP old guard's traditional parliamentary emphasis on civil rights, law and order and centrist politics lends a conservative bent to the DP. The appointments of ex PEP members to the caucus positions of the Democratic Party and Zach de Beer as parliamentary leader has entrenched this approach in the party. While the PEP ranks seem to have been initially divided over the desirability of the formation of the DP, the PEP's infrastructure and control of the purse strings gives it tremendous power over the party's direction.

Denis Worrall's "going for a power" approach appeals to the traditionalist parliamentarian approach of change from within parliamentary structures. However, Worrall's vision of a hung parliament has been undermined by the cautious approach of both Inkatha and the Labour Party who have only given low key public support to the Democratic Party. Inkatha feels unable to openly support the Democratic Party for fear of compromising their own power base.

Worrall however, is an astute politician who seems able to adjust his sails to changing winds. He has shown flexibility, for example, on the issue of contesting the Indian and coloured elections, because he pragmatically realises this could antagonise the MDM. This strategic flexibility is sometimes not reflected by the PEP Old Guard. And Worrall has also been consistent in attacking the NP's scare tactics of using visits to the ANC to vilify its opponents. "What the public would like to know from Pik", Worrall asked (Citizen, June 8 1989) after Pik had reportedly said majority rule was inevitable "is whether he thinks (majority rule) can be achieved without ANC participation?"

The role of the fourth force is not insignificant. Despite Wimpie de Klerk's withdrawal from the DP, the "fourth force" seems to be playing an enlightened role within the Democratic Party supporting the process politics and negotiations approach of Wynand Malan. Their ability to bring into the fold, Afrikaners on a mass level, is still to be tried and tested.

However, certainly the image that their support gives to the Democratic Party will stand it in good stead in trying to widen its support base in the white community.

Some alleged that the "fourth force" was little more than an NDM creation to strengthen its own power base. The Linden result has however, confirmed that aconstituency does indeed exist. Slabbert, Terreblanche and Wiechers, the remaining advisors to the Democratic Party, are a formidable force of astute political strategists whom are more inclined towards the process politics approach. They would, it seems, underplay the strategy of building a power base within parliament. While the advisors have played a significant part in the formation of the Democratic Party, it remains to be seen whether this will continue. As the Democratic Party structure develops, the advisors will have diminished influence over the policy and direction of the party.

The troika of Malan, de Beer and Worrall will lead the party into the September Elections. If the appointment of ex-PEP leaders to the leadership of the Democratic Party caucus is anything to go by Zach de Beer will probably assume the leadership of the party at its Congress in October despite Worrall's charisma and popular support.

This would be paralleled by an emphasis on traditional power politics with the politics of negotiation and relationship building playing second fiddle.

The Democratic Party thus has a contradictory character. It would seem that the conservative elements are currently most influential in determining the DP's direction. The DP is however, a significant force on a national basis, especially among the sector of Afrikaners and youth. Its influence will be greatly bolstered by its support from Western International Governments and local capital. It has the potential to make a significant contribution in catalysing white opposition to the Nationalists.

REDEFINING THE POLITICAL DEBATE

The process leading up to the DP's formation has been characterised by a partial redefining of the political debate within the white community. Specifically here it is necessary to refer to the debates concerning parliament, the economy and non-racialism. The DP has the potential to present coherent opposition to the Nationalists.

This redefining of the political debate builds the potential for the profile and ideas of the Mass Democratic Movement to be raised in the white community. This may well contribute to creating a climate conducive to the Mass Democratic Movement as the Nats look over their left as opposed to their right shoulder

in response both to internal pressure (of which the DP plays a part) and international pressure on the Nats to embark on "meaningful reforms".

Worrall's call for the release of the hunger strikers; Malan, Van Eck and other parliamentarians consistent support for the MDM and talking to the ANC; should be seen in this context.

SITUATING THE DP IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEBATE

The changed economic and international climate, the settlement in Namibia, South Africa's debt and balance of payments crisis, the new Bush/Thatcher negotiations initiative, the changed superpower relations, the "FW Factor" all make for a significantly new and volatile situation. The Nats have little option but to embark on important reforms. This may entail the release of Mandela. This debate has intensified divisions within the state, and weakened the National Security Management System (NSMS) counter revolutionary program. But the NP is presenting a new face to the public which may well attract change minded whites. The DP in this context has the potential to expose the Nats at a time when most white South Africans are bound to be confused by NP intentions. It may find its support, however, eroded by the impact of the Nat moves.

If the DP Linden victory is anything to go by however, it may succeed in exposing the NP, particularly as the DP hammers the NP for the economic mess which South Africans are confronting. Even the Citizen editorial (June 8 1989) admitted "We are not going to have magical changes that will resolve our problems simply because a new generation of Nationalists is taking over. there is no quick fix, but only a long haul".

The fundamental challenge to the DP is to respond to this heightened conflict between the two major protagonists in the South African conflict: the Liberation Movement and the Nationalist Party State. As the stakes get higher, and the conflict enters a new critical phase of a negotiations process, the DP will find it difficult to pose as a centrist force in this political context.

Therefore, the question on the one hand for the MDM in examining DP policy and determining strategy towards it, and on the other hand for the DP itself is how the DP situates itself in relation to these two major forces. What role the MDM plays in this process is a matter for careful strategic consideration.

A few points need to be made here:

1. The DP's policy situates it within the forces

supporting the creation of a non-racial, democracy.

2. The direction the DP takes will be determined by its strategic and tactical flexibility in attempting to run the gauntlet between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary strategies for change.
3. The DP cannot afford to be in conflict with the Mass Democratic Movement. This gives the MDM leverage and power over the direction the DP takes.
5. In the growing political climate of talks about negotiations, the DP could play a useful role in encouraging whites to accept and demand a genuine negotiated settlement.
6. The DP is not in a position to initiate alliances. The Mass Democratic Movement is the key force in the initiation of alliances of the forces supporting the creation of a non-racial, democratic South Africa. Over and above their policy statement in support of building alliances, there are strong indications that the DP would be keen to participate in any attempts to reformulate the Anti-Apartheid conference initiative, banned from being held last year.

The MDM thus potentially has substantial influence and leverage with the DP. Consistent with the MDM policy of building a united Front against Apartheid, alliance strategies could be critical in moving the DP, despite the DP's internal strategic contradictions, into identifying with the MDM. This could have significant advantages for the MDM in building its legitimacy in the eyes of whites, as well as lending the MDM a protection factor from state repression. It may prove key in promoting the MDM's objective of winning whites away from the Nats. In the present situation, while white UDF affiliates and organisations such as the Five Freedoms Forum have a significant role to play, the DP is the only force with substantial access to and influence over white public opinion on a national level.

This challenge is significant if the MDM's to build anti-Apartheid unity, non-racialism, and encourage whites to see a place for themselves in a liberated South Africa. The corollary of this argument is the realisation that this may contribute to a significant fragmentation of white opinion. As the pressure on the Nats becomes stronger, a strong party to its left may well capture disenchanted Nationalists. Together with Nationalist fragmentation to its right the process of the erosion of the

social base of the Nationalist Party is likely to force the Nats more quickly into a political solution while at the same time increasing its military and "unconstitutional" exertion of control over decision making.

Moving the DP closer to the MDM should in this context be understood as a long process requiring patience and political leadership, the objective of which will be to draw the party and its constituency behind the MDM. At some point this may result in the MDM influencing the DP if deemed tactically correct to withdraw from parliament, thereby dealing the system a severe blow at a critical stage.

ENGAGING THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

It is the party's support for universal franchise, negotiations, and human rights which provides the basis for engagement with them. However, we must point here to the fundamental differences of approach within the party to these issues.

First, relations with extra-parliamentary groups are by no means unambiguous. Zach de Beer stated at the launch that while he was prepared to talk to those whom he did not agree with, he was not prepared to work with them. Second, de Beer's comments at the launch indicate that the Democratic Party intends to position itself as a centrist force within the South African political scene. He said "when the Nats say those who oppose them are allies of the ANC - they lie; and when the ANC says those who oppose Apartheid but don't join them, are Nats, they lie also". Third, at root is whether the politics of the Democratic Party is aimed at elections exclusively or an "inclusive" politics also aimed at process politics and the politics of negotiation.

It is in this context that the debate whether to participate in all three houses of parliament and the about turn on Van Eck's application to join the DP has emerged. But it is at the constituency level where the balance of forces within the party, the election of office bearers and party policy will be determined in the medium term.

The support base of the DP at present is largely PFP dominated. The supporters of process politics and the politics of negotiation are, it seems, thinly spread on the ground and are unlikely to feature boldly in the choosing of constituency committees and representatives. However, it is at this level that a great amount of fluidity will manifest itself and the contradictory nature of the party be contested. The PFP itself in this process should also not be regarded as a block, but as individuals committed to the DP, open to change.

It is also here where the greatest possibility for mobilising whites in the party is realisable. The merging of the three

parties into various constituency and regional committees to be completed in June, will be critical in the formulation of the leadership in the medium term.

MDM OBJECTIVES IN ENGAGING WITH THE DP

To recap, the MDM's objectives (consistent with the strategy of the NDS in engaging the DP are:

- * to bridge at all levels of the DP the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary divide in building a united Front against Apartheid;
- * to build non-racialism;
- * to develop a strong anti-Apartheid voice in the white community;
- * to build the profile of the Mass Democratic Movement;
- * to win whites away from Apartheid in support of a genuine negotiated solution, based on the creation of a climate conducive to negotiations.
- * to win organisational space for the MDM.
- * to gain access, knowledge about and respect in the white community;
- * to weaken the enemy camp;

We have said that because the DP is contested terrain, the MDM has both limitations and possibilities facing it in attempting to achieve these objectives, and that it requires a patient approach to a long process of engagement. Therefore we should have modest expectations of success in regards to these objectives. At the same time the gains to be achieved through this engagement are deserving of energy and commitment to this political task.

STRATEGIC OPTIONS FACING DEMOCRATICS

In order to achieve these objectives the bottom line is the need to engage with the DP, recognising our strengths and limitations, our leverage and power in relation to it and the interests that are served in having a strategically aligned and strong DP.

The following strategic options face the MDM:

- * Public and/or private challenge to the DP in relation to policy, direction, activities etc;

- * Co-operation through joint activities/campaigns and the sharing of platforms;
- * Networking with individuals in the DP;
- * Direct involvement of white democrats in the party.

Four points need to be made here:

- * The failure to engage in these options or the adoption of a boycott approach will leave the DP to the right wing forces in the party to develop a third force approach.
- * These strategic options should be tactically applied in the interests of building the DP into a strong force closely aligned to the MDM.
- * We cannot expect the DP to agree with us on issues such as sanctions, federalism, etc or make these the bottom lines for co-operation.
- * If these options fail to achieve their objectives, the boycott weapon may become an appropriate strategy.

This paper argues that it is correct in engaging the DP to meet our objectives, to use a combination of these strategic options. This process would be complimentary to building white UDF affiliates and the FFF, not be a replacement for it. It is only in the context of an engaging policy, that white democrats and the MDM will be able to mobilise DP grassroots supporters in support of campaigns such as the "Inner City" campaign. Involvement at the grassroots of the DP will give the MDM access to the thinking and influence over the direction of the party.

DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN THE DP PARTY MACHINERY

Some National Democrats argue that while the strategic options of engagement are well and good, one can engage the DP without direct involvement in the party itself. This point-of-view is fair enough and sounds reasonable. But engagement on the periphery alone can never replace a combination of internal and external grassroots pressure on the party. What better way to engineer change than from within the party machinery itself?

The involvement of a minority of activists in each centre within the DP could be both a very powerful source of

information about the party and its constituency, and have a tremendous impact within the party itself. Who else will carry the message of non-racialism into the party? Who else will encourage grassroots joint activities with extra-parliamentary groups? Who else will catalyse the mobilisation of whites beyond electioneering?

This strategy should be viewed as an essential element of an overall strategy to strengthening the party behind the MDM. Some members of the DP will inevitably also be dual members of organisations such as UDF affiliates, FFF and so on. This is not a negative, but rather a signal of a potential symbiotic unity of strength between the DP and white democrats in UDF affiliates. If the call of the MDM is for the DP to join them, does this not imply joint dual membership?

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the DP is a significant force over which the MDM can gain access and influence. This is possible to engineer through a combination of strategic approaches including challenges, co-operation on joint activities, sharing platforms, networking with individuals and direct involvement in the party by white democrats. This strategy is consistent with the overall objective of building anti-Apartheid unity and alliances to isolate the Nats and erode their base. This is with the understanding that the MDM's strategy for change relies on a simultaneous process of building the people's camp and isolating and weakening the enemy camp. The task of white democrats in this process is directed towards splitting and dividing the enemy forces, and building anti-Apartheid unity.

Winning the DP over to the side of the people's camp is a historic task which cannot be ignored and which requires the support and unity of the entire Democratic Movement.

In the meantime, the DP's election strategy and its decision over participation in the Coloured and Indian houses remains an explosive situation. The ball is firmly in the DP's court. Should they decide to participate in the Indian and Coloured Houses they will win votes at the cost of their relationship with the Mass Democratic Movement. This will not only be tantamount to shooting themselves in the foot, but will be a blow to the development of broad anti-Apartheid unity. The rewards of a positive relationship, both for the DP and the MDM, will far outweigh the cost of a hostile and confrontational relationship, which can only be to the benefit of the Nationalists themselves. The DP stands to make an important contribution to a non-racial, democratic future should it manage the gymnastics of