

## EDITORIAL

# Disarray in the D.P.

**T**HE PARLIAMENTARY Democratic Party is falling apart, and it couldn't be happening at a worse time.

The DP member for Pietermaritzburg North first flew a kite suggesting that the time had come to form a right-of-centre party as a counterweight to the ANC. Others, after behind-the-scenes talks with the ANC, joined it. Yet others are said to be thinking of joining the Nationalists. All this without so much as a by-your-leave of the people who elected them.

These developments hold serious consequences for the future of the Democratic Party. They could hold serious consequences for a great many more people than that.

Not many organisations at CODESA can claim to represent a real constituency. The DP can. Of the others who do, not many can claim that their supporters have a firmly-based commitment to a democratic culture and the multi-party contest which that implies. The DP can.

The National Party, the ANC and Inkatha all have within their ranks elements which, in one way or another, are associated with violence. All over the country 'territories' have been carved out where public, political debate is non-existent. People either support the prevailing view, keep quiet, or move out.

As for the National Party, its much-trumpeted commitment to "consensus politics" is so shallow that it feels free to introduce such controversial measures as VAT on basic food-stuffs and a return to hanging without even consulting its fellow-members in CODESA.

One may have reservations about DP policy, or some of its actions in the past. One may not like everyone who belonged to it. But at least it is fully-committed to the democratic process in a multi-party system and it has never been in-

volved in violence. This, if nothing else, gives it special status at CODESA and a watchdog role which could be increasingly important as the negotiations towards a new constitution unfold.

To be able to play this role, however, the party needs to speak with a reasonably coherent and united voice. Unity has now been lost. Voices which might have been influential in advocating new approaches to the extremely difficult transition to democracy will be muted as they accommodate to a new party line.

**I**T IS an illusion to count on new recruits being able to change much the policies and habits of long-established organisations. "Working-from-within" is a long-drawn-out process and, in the rush towards a new constitution, is not likely to be a very effective short-term proposition. On the other hand, views put forward independently at CODESA by an organisation with the DP's background could well have an important influence on the agreements eventually reached there.

There have been serious differences within the Democratic Party's parliamentary team for some time now, but there were certain fundamentals, essential props to a future democracy, on which we thought they were all agreed. They owed it, not only to those who elected them, but to the nation, as a whole, to stick together at least until those had been accepted by CODESA.

After that, and when they had explained to their constituents why they felt they should do it, there would probably have been a reasonable case for individual MPs to go where they thought that those fundamentals could best be defended. ●

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