

FIVE FREEDOMS FORUM-AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS CONFERENCE, JULY 1989
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION
ON THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT AND PARLIAMENTARY POSITION

Summary of discussion that took place on Role of Parliament and Parliamentary opposition. It was agreed at the outset of the discussion that there would be no attempt to reflect a consensus and that no particular view would be attributed to any individual.

Steve Tshwete's Input

The premises on which the ANC bases its attitude towards Parliament, were put forward as:

- 1) the Apartheid Parliament is illegitimate as it exists and has to be replaced
- 2) That this Parliament cannot be considered as the major vehicle for change

On the basis of this range of forces, two extremes,

- a) total boycott of Parliament
- b) tactical participation

There are a variety of positions between these two extremes. In considering the White house it was noted that whites have a tradition of participation and in this aspect it enjoys legitimacy. Recognising this tradition and reconciling it with the fact that Parliament is per se illegitimate, the ANC does not call for a boycott of the white house, but neither will it call on whites to vote. There is a number of challenges facing the National Party - there is disintegration of the previously homogenous face of the National Party, which creates the opportunity to draw whites towards the democratic front.

Factors that have been raised as pre-conditions for negotiations, are the type of issues that can be raised amongst the white electorate. However, the ANC approach to the other chambers is one of total boycott due to their illegitimacy and mass rejection of these constitutions at grassroots level.

Helen Suaman

Agreed that the Tri-Cameral Parliament was illegitimate, the PFP although campaigning for the rejection of the Tri-Cameral Parliament in 1983, thereafter decided it would engage in the system.

Perception that ANC had changed its position between 1987 and 1989, in that in 1987 the ANC called for a boycott, which contributed to the PFP's losses in that election. However, in 1989, the ANC was not calling on whites to vote although not at the same time calling on whites to vote.

She disagreed that Parliament was not a major agent of change, because if the right party is in power change will come. Parliament being the law making body can create and scrap laws.

In her input she recognized that there were arguments for and against participation in the Indian and so called coloured houses, she then set out the manner in which Parliament can play an

important role in change eg a vehicle for keeping whites informed and that the mechanisms exist to frustrate the intentions of the government at particular points.

Discussions were opened and the following points raised,

* it was recognised that Parliament was a vehicle for change but it was certainly not the major instrument for change - and that there was therefore a need to focus on other strategic tasks and Parliament should be used to complement the other forces of change.

* it was raised that the Conservative Party had a potential substantial support base and that it was therefore necessary to counteract the growing support of the CP and this would necessitate playing the Parliamentary game.

* on the question of election results the following views were expressed

* as parliament is not the major vehicle for change the election results can be viewed as irrelevant.

* opposed to this was the view that the election results were important as the DP showing favourably in the elections could create a) possibility of a hung parliament which could then frustrate the system

b) that if a Parliamentary role was to be seen as complementing the action of the MDM, it would therefore be in the interests of the MDM to have a stronger DP.

* it was acknowledged that some recognition should be given to the DP as it sought to locate itself in developing a new South Africa. It is a clearer voice for change and has a crucial role to play in picking up the pieces of white opposition to apartheid

* key element in the mobilisation of whites is the choice of correct strategies and issues.

* the DP needs to be sensitive to the relationship between the white extra-parliamentary groups and the MDM.

* Issue of participation in the tri-cameral system was raised:

+ it was recognised that this was an issue of strategy and not principle

+ in discussing this strategy a variety of ways in which participation could be used to undermine and destroy the structures and the system

+ it was opposition to the tri-cameral system that had consolidated and deepened the MDM and cannot afford to jeopardise this consolidation over an issue such as participation and must recognise the extent and depth of the anger evoked by the tri-cameral system

+ strong view expressed that any decision over strategic participation should not be unilateral but should be worked out on a common understanding of how it will achieve a rapid transformation to a non-racial democracy.

Boycott

Question was raised whether ANC would call for a boycott if DP participated in tri-cameral system. The response was that this would have a serious effect on the ANC attitude to the elections

in the white house.

Alliances

DP and MDM have interests which are not mutually exclusive. That their work influences each other. Basis of alliance is to complement each other. Must also recognise that too close a relationship between MDM and DP can have negative effect on work of DP, but that one could seek joint mobilisation around specific issue campaigns eg Group Areas Act as in Cape Town and JHB and mediating structures eg Paarl Democratic Forum, which accommodates a variety of groups - some from MDM and some from parliamentary groupings.

Point was also raised on what the DP will take on ANC - there was disagreement about whether the DP would be able to convince the electorate that contact with the ANC was necessary.