

**STRUCTURAL CRISIS AND LIBERALISM: A HISTORY  
OF THE PROGRESSIVE FEDERAL PARTY, 1981 - 1989**

**DAVID SHANDLER**

Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in the Department of  
Economic History, Faculty of Arts,  
University of Cape Town, January 1991

The University of Cape Town has been given  
the right to reproduce this thesis in whole  
or in part. Copyright is held by the author.

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

## ABSTRACT

Whereas an extensive literature has developed on the broad conditions of crisis in South Africa in the seventies and eighties, and on the dynamic of state and popular responses to it, little focus has fallen on the reactions of the other key elements among the dominating classes. It is the aim of this dissertation to attempt to address an aspect of this lacuna by focussing on the Progressive Federal Party's responses from 1981 until 1989. The thesis develops an understanding of the period as one entailing conditions of organic crisis. It attempts to show the PFP's behaviour in the context of structural and conjunctural crises. The thesis periodises the Party's policy and strategic responses and makes an effort to show its contradictory nature. An effort is made to understand this contradictory character in terms of the party's class location with respect to the white dominating classes and leading elements within it; in relation to the black dominated classes; as well as in terms of the liberal tradition within which the Party operated.

## CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

List of Abbreviations

INTRODUCTION		1
CHAPTER ONE	A Brief History of the PFP: 1959 - 1981	31
CHAPTER TWO	Response to Reform: 1981 - 1983	45
CHAPTER THREE	The Failure of "The Politics of Power": 1984 - 1986	98
CHAPTER FOUR	The Party in Decline: 1986 - 1988	153
CHAPTER FIVE	The End of the Party: 1987 - 1989	211
CONCLUSION		247
BIBLIOGRAPHY		253

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would never have been possible without the assistance, support and encouragement of many people:

My supervisor Alan Hirsch provided me with invaluable guidance and encouragement

Professors Ian Phimister and Dave Kaplan were a sympathetic source of support.

The librarians at the UCT Centre for African Studies, the South African Library, the Centre for Policy Studies at Wits University, and the Democratic Party were very helpful. Thanks also to James Selfe of the PFP and DP.

I wish to express appreciation to the Human Sciences Research Council, the Council of the University of Cape Town, as well as the UCT Centre for African Studies for financially assisting the research.

Doctors Saville Furman, Frank Spracklen, and Rex Johnson without whose help I would not have been able to complete this thesis as I passed through the mist that is M.E.

My family who were always there for me.

And, Jane, my dearest one.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
ASSOCOM	Association of Chambers of Commerce
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
CBM	Consultative Business Movement
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CP	Conservative Party
DP	Democratic Party
FCI	Federated Chamber of Industries
FDP	Free Democratic Party
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HNP	Herstigte Nasionale Party
IDASA	Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa
IP	Independent Party
JODAC	Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee
LP	Labour Party
MP	Member of Parliament
MPC	Member of the Provincial Council
NACTU	National Council of Trade Unions
NCM	National Convention Movement
NDM	National Democratic Movement
NP	National Party
NRP	New Republic Party
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PE	Port Elizabeth
PFP	Progressive Federal Party
PP	Progressive Party
PRP	Progressive Reform Party
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
TIC	Transvaal Indian Congress
UDF	United Democratic Front
UMAC	Unrest Monitoring and Action Committee
UNISA	University of South Africa
UP	United Party
US	United States
USA	United States of America

## INTRODUCTION

As South Africa enters the 1990s and there is the prospect of a resolution of its crisis, the predominantly white Democratic Party is riddled with uncertainty regarding its future. Both members of the party and outside observers are uncertain as to the role that this liberal institution will play in the unfolding of a post-apartheid country. The DP's dilemma is not something new to most of the members of the party who had previously made up its forerunner, the PFP. Something of an understanding of the future of the DP can be found in looking back at the history of the PFP during the turbulent years of the eighties. In this earlier period the PFP battled to come to terms with a rapidly changing context which placed unprecedented pressures on it and its dominant liberal ideology. This thesis attempts to deal with this process.

An extensive literature has been built up over the years which investigates various aspects of the crisis of the seventies and the eighties. (1) Much emphasis in this literature has been placed on defining and analysing the broad structural parameters of the crisis. In this respect the structural weaknesses of the South African economy and the dominant system of social organisation have been comprehensively dealt with. The conjunctural dynamic of state initiative and popular resistance have also been

---

1 The basic foundation discussion of the South African crisis is that of Saul and Gelb (1981 and 1986); see also Gelb (1987); Morris and Padayachee (1988); Cobbet, Glaser, Hindson and Swilling (1987); Wolpe (1987); Johnson (1988); Frankel, Pines and Swilling (1988); Swilling and Phillips (1989 a and b); Moss and Obery (1989); Hyslop (1989); Cassim (1986 and 1987); Hirsch (1988); Black and Stanwix (1987); Sutcliffe (1986); Moss and Obery (1987); Glaser (1987); Kaplan (1987); Gelb (1991); and Osborn (1991)

widely considered. (2) There has, however, been a lesser focus on the response of the dominating classes generally, and capital in particular. There has been some work on the politics of the white community and its varying responses to the unfolding conditions of struggle. In the main this work has focussed on dynamics within the National Party, and the white right. (3)

With a few exceptions there has been no extensive consideration of the fortunes and responses of the Progressive Federal Party. (4) There has been some discussion of the experience of the liberal tradition in South Africa more generally, however. (5) Where this discussion has not originated from within the liberal community, it has been either superficial or limited in its focus. This leaves us with what is either a partisan appraisal of liberalism, or a confined focus on it. One notable exception has been the thesis completed by Brian Hackland on the history of the PFP until 1981. (6) It is a valuable contribution to the debate and has been of great benefit in the preparation of this dissertation. The period covered by it, however, covers the history of the PFP and

2 For coverage of the development of popular class responses during the 1980s, see e.g. the contributions to various editions of South African Review, such as Barrell; Lodge; McCarthy and Swilling; Grest and Hughes (all 1984); Lodge; Collinge; and Dollie (all 1986); Lodge; Muller; Helliker, Roux and White; Chaskalson, Jochelson and Seekings; and Keenan (all 1987); Webster and Friedman; Lodge; Nasson; Boraine; and Seekings (all 1989). See also the contributions to Cobbett and Cohen's 1988 collection, including Lambert and Webster; Seekings; Swilling; Molobi; and Hyslop (all 1988)

3 See Charney (1982); O'Meara (1982); Glaser (1986); Mare (1987); Freund (1986); Mann (1988); Welsh (1988); Sampson (1987)

4 Welsh (1987); Shandler (1989)

5 Godsell (1985); Bernstein and Godsell (1988); Butler, Elphick and Welsh (1987); Slabbert (1987 and 1988); Gerson (1987); Owen (1987); Simkins (1985); Glaser (1984 a and b; and 1989); De Beer (1984)

6 Hackland (1984)

its forerunners from its establishment in 1959 until its election successes in 1981. As such, it does not cover the whole period of the eighties and the ultimate dissolution of the Party.

### **Aims of the Dissertation**

The aim of this dissertation is to fill this gap by investigating the history of the PFP from 1981 until the end of the Party in 1989. Not only were these years of dramatic economic, social and political upheaval for the country as a whole, but they were also tumultuous in the history of the PFP.

The thesis will attempt to come to terms with the dynamic interaction between the broad context of structural and conjunctural crisis within South Africa, and the impact on, and response of the PFP. It will attempt to show how the Party was greatly influenced by outside forces and developments. An effort will be made to illustrate the party's varying, and at times contradictory, responses to events and developments. In particular, a focus will fall on the PFP's response in terms of its character as a liberal institution. In this respect it will seek to understand the class nature of the party, as well as the key non-class determinants in its behaviour.

The thesis does not purport to be an absolutely comprehensive history of the party during the period under review. Rather, it attempts to highlight key issues which illustrate the impact of the crisis on the party, and its most significant responses.

## Sources and Methodology

As a contemporary history this study suffers from a number of limitations. These are largely related to access to sources and information, as well as the "freshness" of the material. It was found during the study that while it was possible to gain access to certain valuable records of the PFP, it was not possible to make use of others. This related to the reservations that key PFP members had with divulging what was considered to be sensitive information. This applied as much to documentary sources as it did to interviews. In the latter case, interviewees were prepared to provide the researcher with sensitive information, but on condition that it remained "off the record".

Despite the constraints, it was possible to develop a useful picture of the Party during the period under review. This was feasible as a result of combining a variety of primary and secondary sources. This task was further facilitated by maintaining a narrow focus on the specific themes selected for discussion in this dissertation.

Primary sources used included a complete set of the official minutes of the meeting of the elected national structures of the Party, i.e. the Federal Executive, Federal Council, and National Congress. There was also access to a limited selection of correspondence, as well as internal memoranda. Interviews with key Party members, as well as selected members of the broader white liberal community provided important insights which provided an illumination of the written sources. Party newspapers and publications, as well as the commercial press were heavily drawn on.

Extensive use was made of the secondary literature, especially with respect to the broad societal developments

associated with the country's structural and conjunctural crisis of the eighties.

### Theoretical Foundation

The emergence of severe structural flaws within the South African economy in the seventies coincided with a major political challenge to the racially exclusive form of state from the black dominated classes. As Morris and Padayachee have put it

"it became clear to all and sundry that the narrow structures of apartheid policy could no longer provide the social basis for political stability and sustained further accumulation. The social structure of accumulation which underlay the previous cycle of social and economic development brought forth more contradictions than it resolved. Hence a major restructuring by the state was required and a new social structure of accumulation had to emerge if the crisis that had been engendered was to be resolved." (7)

The conflicts and contradictions associated with the crisis were rooted in the origins of the development of capitalism in South Africa. This development had been predicated on the system of migrant labour, or the "differential reproduction of labour power" (8); and, on the basis of South Africa's incorporation into the world capitalist chain whereby economic growth had been premised on primary production export earnings, most notably from the mining sector. The growth pattern under this framework depended on territorial segregation in the form of grand apartheid, and petty apartheid which excluded African workers from the "urban social welfare reproduction institutions reserved for whites". (9) Politically this social structure took the form of a racially exclusive state which provided conditions

---

7 Morris and Padayachee (1988), p 1

8 *ibid*

9 *op cit*, p 2

of representative democracy for the white dominating classes, while excluding the masses of the dominated classes.

The consolidation of the dominance of monopoly capital by the early seventies carried with it a key structural contradiction. Its requirement for skilled and semi-skilled black labour came to be restricted by the prevailing social structure. Migrant labour came to be a major obstacle to continued accumulation. In addition, the inability of manufacturing to realise profits internationally due to South Africa's disadvantaged position with respect to the world economy, meant that industry sought to develop an internal consumer market which was at that time restricted to whites in the main. Furthermore, the country was dependent on imported capital goods and technology which limited its ability to raise the organic composition of capital and so become competitive internationally.

A brief overview of selected key indicators give an indication of the degree of economic crisis South Africa faced in the early eighties. (10) According to Bethlehem the decline of the economy can be seen in comparing growth rates for the sixties, seventies and eighties. (11) Whereas South Africa experienced an annual average growth rate of 5,7% from 1960 to 1969, this declined to 3,4% for the years 1970 to 1979, with a further subsequent decline from 1980 to 1985 in which GDP increased by an average of only 1,1% per annum. During the early eighties there were years of negative growth in 1982, 1983 and 1985. These years coincided with recessionary conditions, and severe balance of payments crisis. The foreign debt crisis was stimulated

---

10 Note that specific economic developments during the eighties will be dealt with in greater detail within the body of the dissertation.

11 Bethlehem (1988), p 150

by large scale lending as a means to come to terms with economic decline. Between 1980 and 1985 foreign debt as a percentage of gross domestic product increased from 20,3% to 50,0%. (12) Despite the increase in foreign debt, fixed investments declined by 3% in the years from 1980 to 1989. This compares with the increase in fixed investment of 6,9% p.a. between 1946 and 1971, and at 2,2% p.a. between 1972 and 1979. (13) Coinciding with the increase in foreign debt was a decline in the value of the Rand which in 1980 was worth 88,63% of its value in 1971. (14) In 1985 this value had declined much further to 32,14%. Associated with the conditions of economic decline was a dramatic increase in bankruptcies. Between 1980 and 1985 the insolvency rate increased by 500%. (15) There was also an increase in the rate of unemployment which Bethlehem estimated as being 37% in 1985, as compared to 27% in 1980. (16)

These conditions of crisis within the South African economy coincided with the development of a nascent independent labour movement, as well as a resurgence of popular resistance from 1976.

Increasingly the leading elements within the state came to see the need to take formative action to remedy the structural malaise within South African society. They were responding to the growing demands from leading sectors of monopoly capital for reforms which would ease the constraints that apartheid had placed on labour mobility and organisation, as well as on the development of a black middle class. Associated with the rise of monopoly capital had been the coming to maturity of an Afrikaans bourgeoisie.

---

12 Hirsch (1988), p 20

13 Azzar Jammine quoted in Financial Mail, 22 September 1989

14 Hirsch (1988), p 6

15 Cassim (1986), p 7

16 Bethlehem (1988), p 118

The interests of this class, which played a leading role within the ruling party, increasingly coincided with that of other sectors of the capitalist community. The late 1970s, then, saw an unraveling of the National Party's hegemony over an alliance of key Afrikaans class forces. The ascendance of the NP in the forties had been dependent on it forging a unifying discourse for Afrikaans workers, middle classes and an emergent bourgeoisie. Conditions of accelerated economic growth during the 1960s had seen the Afrikaans bourgeoisie come into its own, no longer dependent for its survival to the extent it had been in the past on the political support of the Afrikaans working, and lower middle, classes. The needs of this emergent class together with the consequences of the failure of the policy of apartheid in ensuring conditions of continued accumulation in the seventies had seen the NP make its first tentative moves away from the policy tradition which had forged the historic bloc of Afrikaner nationalism. (17)

In an effort to overcome the constraints of South Africa's structural crisis a new alliance was forged under the leadership of the National Party. An alliance of elements of both the English and Afrikaans bourgeoisies and middle classes backed the initiatives of the NP in its attempts to bring about reform. This was done under the leadership of PW Botha and in close partnership with the military establishment.

The conditions sketched above were similar to those dealt with by Antonio Gramsci in his discussion of the concept of "organic crisis". (18) According to Gramsci

---

17 See O'Meara (1983) for a detailed discussion of the rise of Afrikaner nationalism.

18 This dissertation draws heavily on the concepts developed by Gramsci and various "neo-Gramscians". Core texts drawn on were those of Gramsci (1971); Simon (1982);

"A crisis occurs, sometimes lasting for decades. This exceptional duration means that incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves (reached maturity), and that despite this, the political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making every effort to cure them. These incessant and persistent efforts ... form the terrain of the 'conjunctural', and it is upon this terrain that the forces of opposition organise. These forces seek to demonstrate that the necessary and sufficient conditions already exist to make possible, and hence imperative, the accomplishment of certain historical tasks ..." (19)

Within this context, Gramsci argued, the contending fundamental classes would contest the outcome of the condition of crisis. Attempts would be made to resolve the crisis which would consist both of a coercive and a formative nature. According to Simon these attempts on the part of the ruling classes

"will consist in the struggle to create a new balance of political forces, requiring a reshaping of state institutions as well as the formation of new ideologies; and if the forces of opposition are not strong enough to shift the balance of forces decisively in their direction, the conservative forces will succeed in building a new system of alliances which will reestablish their hegemony." (20)

By "hegemony" Gramsci meant the "intellectual and moral leadership" of the dominating class, as distinct from "domination". In the Prison Notebooks he wrote that

"the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'. A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to 'liquidate', or to subjugate perhaps even by armed

---

Showstack Sassoon (1980); Merrington (1977); and Laclau (1977).

19 Gramsci (1978), p 178

20 Simon (1982), p 37

force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well." (21)

In terms of this concept a class will only become hegemonic if it gains the consent of other principal classes and forces through a process of political and ideological struggle. It needs to transcend its narrow sectional corporate interests through "taking into account the interests of other classes and social forces and finding ways of combining them with its own interests". (22) Laclau has described this process as a class attempting to

"give coherence to its ideological discourse by presenting its class objectives as the consummation of popular objectives." (23)

These processes can best be observed at moments of crisis as described above. Gramsci described the process whereby the capitalist class seeks to assert its dominance when its hegemony is threatened in times of crisis as a "passive revolution". Showstack Sassoon has summarised this process as follows:

"..the bourgeoisie will attempt a strategy of passive revolution whenever its hegemony is weakened or whenever its political superstructure in the integral sense (force plus hegemony) cannot cope with the need to expand the forces of production. If *allowed* to do so, the dominant class may find new forms of political domination." (24)

- 
- 21 Gramsci (1978), p 57/8
  - 22 Simon (1982), p 23
  - 23 Laclau (1977), p 109
  - 24 Showstack Sassoon (1980), p 210/211

A passive revolution is the characteristic response of the dominant class in times of organic crisis. It will involve wide ranging alterations to the country's economic and political structure from above, without the active involvement of the bulk of the people. (25)

The efforts of the dominant class to retrace its hegemony and to bring about major changes to the social structure are what determine the "terrain of the conjunctural" which Gramsci refers to. It is in the space created by the ruling class's efforts at reform that the major contending forces in society consequently struggle.

The response of the South African state to conditions of structural crisis similarly established this "terrain of the conjunctural". The efforts of the state at reform were comprehensively rebuffed by popular oppositional strategies. This intensified the crisis, further distancing the ruling group from achieving its sought after hegemony.

The response of the regime to the conditions of crisis in the eighties can be characterised as occurring in three phases, each of which created further and deepened conditions of crisis. The first phase from the late seventies until 1983/4 coincided with the emergence of the military dominance within the state and its programme of 'total strategy'. The state's reform programme was built on an acknowledgement of African urbanisation, while remaining committed to the homeland policy. In addition, labour reforms permitted independent trade union organisation. Associated with these reforms was a stated commitment to reducing state involvement in the economy, as well as monetarist fiscal policy. Politically the state sought to coopt sections of the black dominated classes through the

introduction of the tricameral system, as well as Black Local Authorities. This period also saw the termination of the traditional Afrikaner nationalist alliance and a new alliance emerging as was discussed above.

The second phase, partially coinciding with the first, can be dated from 1984 until 1986 and is associated with the failure of "total strategy" in the face of massive opposition from the popular classes as well as severe conditions of economic crisis. This period was also significant for the vacillation of the previously acquiescent bourgeoisie.

The final phase in the period covered by this dissertation coincided with the period of extended repression under the state of emergency, as well as a shift to executive rule and a significant rapprochement between the leading forces within the regime and those within the dominating classes, most notably large sections of the business community. The approach of the state in this period was also affected by economic crisis, popular opposition, and the gradual erosion of apartheid as an effective system of social organisation and control. (26)

In the face of the state and dominating classes' attempts to "cure" the crisis, the black dominated classes played a significant role in the new conjuncture. Wide scale popular unity, politicisation and mobilisation provided conditions whereby the "forces of opposition" greatly limited the efforts at reform. At points during the period the balance of forces between the popular classes and the power bloc was one either of equilibrium, or shifting in favour of the

---

26 The details of developments within each of these periods will be extensively dealt with in the body of the dissertation.

oppressed. This significantly shifted the character of struggle and created a new conjuncture.

Alongside the efforts of the National Party, other central groups from amongst the dominating classes also attempted to influence the course of events. At times leading elements from the capitalist community differed dramatically from the course adopted by the regime. (27) The right wing, primarily in the form of the Conservative Party sought a reactionary strategy which would attempt to engineer South African society into a form it had earlier assumed. It is also within this spectrum of dominating class groups that we locate the efforts of the PFP.

In a fundamental respect the PFP shared with other forces from within the white dominating classes a commitment to ensuring continued capitalist production and accumulation. It differed significantly in its commitment to the objective of an inclusive non-racial democracy. In this respect the patterns and courses of the PFP response were in large part a function of the party's liberal character. This notion is best illustrated through an observation of the Party's response to conditions of crisis in the eighties. The PFP was not by any means the exclusive bearer of the liberal tradition in the South Africa of the 1980s. Numerous other institutions and groups could also be defined as liberal, the South African Institute of Race Relations, the Black Sash, the English universities and churches. The PFP, however, could be seen as the dominant public expression of the liberal tradition in South Africa.

In order to understand the PFP's responses it becomes necessary to investigate the character of liberalism generally, and its South African experience.

---

27 This will also be further considered elsewhere.

## Liberalism

Probably the most important aspect of liberalism as an ideology is its contradictory nature. Manning has argued that to attempt to uncover the "essential liberal programme" would be "doomed to failure" since

"in the case of liberalism both policies and theoretical foundations constantly change." (28)

The contradictory character of liberalism can be found in the "historical tension" associated with its origins. As Hall has stated liberalism emerged out of an opposition to the "old order" of feudalism, and aligned to a new emerging bourgeois order. The tension between the oppositional and aligning characteristics incorporated within liberalism both a progressive aspect and an "establishment" component. (29)

Reflecting on the various strands in the liberal tradition Macpherson also draws attention to the duality inherent in it. He wrote that

"'liberal' can mean freedom of the stronger to do down the weaker by following market rules; or it can mean equal effective freedom of all to use and develop their capacities. The latter freedom is inconsistent with the former." (30)

The dominant character ultimately assumed by liberalism has been one associated with the emergence and consolidation of bourgeois dominance in capitalist society. Within this framework it has undergone numerous revisions and alterations in an effort to meet the challenge of changing times. Like all ideologies liberalism is historically contingent. As Hall has argued

---

28 Manning (1982), p 32  
 29 Hall (1986), p 39  
 30 Macpherson (1977), p 1

"Ideologies retain their relevance to changing circumstances only by constantly revising and 'updating' their basic concepts." (31)

Its hegemony as the ideology of the market was promoted by the formative intellectual work of major thinkers such as Locke and Smith. (32) There was, however, a second strand of liberalism which emerged at the same time, most notably at the time of the English civil war. This strand laid greater emphasis on social justice and freedom from want. During the 19th century Mill maintained this tradition with his stress on the need for liberalism to be premised on the development of human potential, something which the market was not always capable of providing. The market view of liberalism associated with the rise of the bourgeoisie has however become dominant. Liberalism, wrote Macpherson,

"has 'consciously or 'unconsciously' been assumed to mean 'capitalist'. This is true even though ethical liberals, from Mill on, tried to combine market freedom with self-developmental freedom, and tried to subordinate the former to the latter." (33)

In an attempt to reclaim liberalism's radical tradition, Macpherson was suggesting that a liberal stance

"need not be taken to depend forever on an acceptance of capitalist assumptions, although historically it has been so taken. The fact that liberal values grew up in capitalist market societies is not in itself a reason why the central ethical principle of liberalism - the freedom of the individual to realize his or her human capacities - need always be confined to such societies." (34)

---

31 Hall (1986), p 38  
 32 *ibid*, p 50 - 53  
 33 Macpherson (1977), p 2  
 34 *ibid*

It can be seen then that, despite its dominant attachment to the market economy of capitalism, liberalism contains within it an oppositional strand. This paradox lies at the heart of liberalism and has given rise to decisive contradictions in its development. Liberalism has never been a static ideology; or, indeed, consistent in the stances it has adopted. The classical liberalism of the late 18 th century was revised in the development of democratic liberalism, and again with the development of welfarism and its opposite "neo-liberalism" in the twentieth century. A number of important concepts have emerged in this evolving process which will now be considered. (35)

"Classical" liberalism was premised in the first instance on an opposition to the feudal order and also Catholic dogmatism. The primary starting point of liberalism was its opposition to the arbitrary power accorded authority within these orders. Liberalism responded by stressing the need for the "rule of law". It also saw the need for an open society in which the contractual competitive principle was preeminent as opposed to prescriptiveness. In this respect it introduced a new concept of individualism foreign to feudalism and Catholicism. In its formulation the liberal idea placed the individual "in direct confrontation with God". (36)

Society was determined in relation to the individual's right to maximum freedom. It followed that the state should interfere as little as possible in the life of the individual. The sphere of individual relationships was seen to be "civil society". Through its three major fields - the family, the market, and voluntary social and political

35 The discussion of the key concepts of liberalism is drawn in the main from Hall (1986), pp 39 - 43. It should be noted that the focus of the discussion falls in the main on the British strand of liberalism.

36 Hall (1986), p 39

association - civil society was placed above the state in importance. This was a fundamental reversal of earlier doctrine.

Individuals were accorded liberty. This was defined negatively as freedom from constraint, and the freedom of individuals to pursue their own drives and interests. Equality was subjected to this notion of liberty, such that individuals were deemed to be born equal. This didn't mean, as Hall points out, that

"people must have equality so that they can compete equally; or that those who start from a poorer position should be positively advantaged..." (37)

A legalistic notion of equality was linked to the negative conception of liberty. In this respect the concepts of equality before the law, and the rule of law were advanced. While these approaches replaced the previous arbitrary nature of power, they established a decidedly unequal notion of equality - both the prince and the pauper are free to sleep under the bridges of Paris!

Liberalism introduced the notion of strong but limited government. It is in this context that the division of powers between legislature, executive and judiciary was advanced. In addition to the concept of division of power, liberalism also introduced the belief in representative government. This, however, did not necessarily imply democracy. Many liberals feared that they would lose the rights accorded them by their liberalism if they allowed large groups of people not versed in their ideology the opportunity to elect their own government. Writes Hall

---

37 *ibid*, p 41. It is important to note that this aspect of classical liberalism was subsequently revised in its consequent development.

"This is yet another tension in liberalism - between its universalistic claims on behalf of all citizens and its alignments with the interests of particular sections of society; between its commitment to representative government and its doubts about universal democracy." (38)

As well as the political, civil and legal rights established by liberal beliefs, there was also the crucial aspect of economic freedom - the right to own and dispose of property, to hire labour, to make profits. In this sense liberalism came to assume a very definite class component linked to the interests of the bourgeoisie. It should be noted that the other aspects of liberalism can be seen to comprise the non-class aspects of the liberal discourses. These aspects, most notably that of equality, can be articulated to the interests of other classes.

Classical liberalism underwent significant changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Under the pressure of industrial capitalism, increasing pressures for democratisation and equality emerged from the dominated classes. Two leading liberal philosophers - Bentham and Mill advanced thinking within liberalism to incorporate the notion of extending suffrage to classes previously not enfranchised. Mill was particularly important in developing a new model of man and change which provides the basis of modern day liberalism. Macpherson termed his approach the "developmental model" of liberalism. (39) According to this approach people were perceived to be

"capable of infinitely developing their individual powers and capacities, in a society whose purpose must be to facilitate this life-long educative process." (40)

---

38 *Ibid*, p 43

39 Macpherson (1977), pp 44 - 76

40 Hall (1986), p 60

On the basis of this notion the idea of gradual evolutionary reform was advanced which would include the gradual extension of the franchise and democratic institutions. As Manning points out such extensions, according to the liberal outlook, would

"materialize in human societies whenever they reach the appropriate level of development..."  
(41)

For Bentham, Mill and other nineteenth century liberals the advance of the franchise would need to be very carefully attempted for fear of losing liberal freedoms to a mass vote. The incremental notion inherent in this approach remains a central aspect of liberalism. It is well captured by Manning:

"From the liberal point of view there is no way in which the human condition can be radically altered through an organised attack on imperfection. Man will never be eternally freed from the corruption of power, the exploitation of the weak and the tyranny of ignorance by resort to government oppression or revolutionary purge. The fight against deprivation and moral turpitude is the responsibility of every individual, and any attempt to transform the self-moving society into the directed society must necessarily destroy the harmony and balance of its rational order. Liberals believe that progress has been and will continue to be made in the quality of human life, but, from the liberal point of view, all such progress will be piecemeal and gradual." (42)

Liberal democracy, while introducing important democratising elements into liberalism, incorporated within the ideology a range of what Hall has termed "compromises and postponements"; (43) or, quite simply, contradictions:  
"Liberal democracy has tried to temper democracy with meritocracy; leaven equality in one sphere

---

41 Manning (1982), p 23  
42 *Ibid*, p 21  
43 Hall (1986), p 61

with inequality in others; emancipate majorities and protect minorities; look with hope to personal self-development and the education of sensibility, while in its actual arrangements propose to weight the talents of different classes differently; maintaining individualism at its centre while hoping to secure a more positive conception of the common good; maintaining intact an economic system based on competition and acquisitiveness while hoping somehow to constitute the conditions for the self-fulfilment and educative development of all." (44)

The aversion to intervention by the state into civil society was one of the founding principles of liberalism. With the development of capitalism and imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, came severe social and environmental problems which the laissez-faire approach could not deal with. State intervention was called for. The emergence of the assumption of extensive duties and responsibilities by the liberal democratic state in the twentieth century was a reversal of the earlier model. In effect it amounted to a reconstruction of liberalism under the pressure of changing circumstances and increased class struggle. A redistributive element, consciously distanced from socialism, was also integrated into a strand of liberal thinking through the efforts of major theorists such as Hobhouse, Hobson and Keynes. Another strand of liberalism made a return to the more traditional laissez-faire free market elements of the nineteenth century. This aspect of liberalism is best seen in the neo-liberal substratum of Thatcherism.

The tracing of the elements of liberal discourse and their historically specific nature highlights the contradictory character of liberalism. Not only is it an ideology which has a clear class component in its commitment to the capitalist mode of production, but it also contains very

significant non-class components which stress such values as liberty and equality which can, and have been, articulated to an oppositional class discourse. Most important for our purposes, however, is to understand the widely divergent paths that different kinds of liberals can take while at the same time being avowed in their commitment to the same broad system of ideas. An understanding of the PFP's behaviour can be found through an exploration of this tension within its liberalism.

### **Liberalism in South Africa**

Within South African liberalism we also find the dichotomy between a clear class commitment and that which stresses other aspects of the liberal tradition. While liberalism in South Africa has been dominantly associated with the development of capitalist relations, a variant which might be termed radical or left liberalism has developed which has been partisan in its support for the struggles of the popular classes. Notable in this respect have been groups like the Black Sash, The National Union of South Africa Students (NUSAS), the English language churches, and individuals involved in the liberation movement. As opposed to the mainstream, or centrist liberalism of groups such as the PFP or South African Institute of Race Relations who exhibit a clear class "belongingness" in their advocacy of a pro-capitalist stance, many left or radical liberals are either neutral with respect to capitalism, or adopt an anti-capitalist position. It should be noted that the PFP was also home to numerous members of this group. A strong theme of welfarism, and even social democracy can also be associated with this group, often with very strong philanthropic and religious roots.

Mainstream, or centrist, liberalism can be seen to be associated very closely with a key segment of the capitalist

class, most notably that linked to English-speaking monopoly capital. A pivotal aspect of this group's liberalism is its overt advocacy of capitalism, or the free market. Its aversion to the prospect of revolution caused this group to adopt various strategies which would either limit or isolate the liberation movement. In turn it has staunchly promoted an incremental course of action.

The above categorisation, while crude, gives a sense of the diverse, and even contradictory, nature of liberalism in South Africa. Very often the two strands - class-conscious and non-class liberalisms - have coexisted, most notably within the PFP. The effect has been to establish a tension within South African liberalism which can be traced to the origins and development of the ideology internationally. Conditions of crisis such as those of the forties, the late fifties and early sixties, and the seventies and eighties have illustrated this internal incoherence and conflict.

Just as it has done internationally, liberalism within South Africa has adapted to changing conditions. Its South African history has been remarkable for the many shifts and divisions it has taken. It is not intended here to provide a comprehensive historical overview of liberalism's South Africa experience. Rather an attempt will be made to briefly sketch the central trends which illustrate the tensions and contradictions within its history.

The source of liberalism in South Africa is most often traced to the "Cape liberals" of the nineteenth century. (45) The key characteristics of this period was the colour

---

45 For a discussion of the history of Cape liberalism see Rich (1984); Trapido (1980); Lewsen (1969 - 1970); and Davenport (1987). Other sources on the history of liberalism in South Africa include Godsell (1985); Rich (1989); Lewsen (1988); Robertson (1971); the contributions of du Toit, Elphick, Butler, Lewsen, and Irvine in Butler,

blind application of a qualified franchise within the Cape, as well as the strong evangelical and philanthropic roots of the liberalism. Missionaries, the bearers of this liberalism, were greatly concerned with black education. As Rich states, they were

"strongly influenced by the mid-Victorian ideal of social upliftment through the instilling of values of hard work and self-help." (46)

At root the liberalism of the nineteenth century Cape was predicated on an alliance between the Eastern Cape African peasantry and British mercantile capital. Trapido assessed its nature when he wrote that

"unlike liberalism in Britain, Cape liberalism was not posited on the incorporation of wage-labourers. On the contrary, Cape liberalism assumed a small prosperous peasantry which could act as a buffer against poor peasants and the already declining power of chiefs. Black wage labourers, on the other hand, presented no immediate threat and required no incorporating." (47)

Cape liberalism came under threat in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with the development of capitalist relations of production associated with the nascent diamond and gold mining industries. The political form associated with this development was the ultimate incorporation of South Africa, the establishment of African reserves as sources of cheap labour, and the constituting of a racially exclusive state. The development of capitalist relations was predicated on African exclusion and designation as a pool of wage labourers. Consequently, as Trapido put it

---

Elphick and Welsh (1987); Adam (1979); and, Leatt, Kneifel and Nurnberger (1986).

46 Rich (1984), p 1

47 Trapido (1980), p 268

"the franchise , legal equality and the market place could give them (Africans - DS) a strength that their early twentieth-century social situation did not justify. Little wonder, then, that liberalism in its incorporationist form would lose its prominence as an ideology of control in twentieth-century South Africa" (48)

Segregationist ideologies and policies after union in 1910 placed liberalism on the defensive. Liberals had failed to extend the qualified African franchise to the northern provinces at the time of union. As Rich has shown the "dominant political logic of segregationism ultimately defined the direction of political thinking amongst South African liberals..." (49) This activity was largely led by individuals acting through the South African Institute of Race Relations and the United Party. Many of the ideas formulated at this time provided the basis of much of the National Party's apartheid policies. The dominant idea shared by liberals and the Nationalists was related to the belief that the reserves should be the site of African development and guidance to the acceptance of western civilisation.

Another significant stream in the liberal response was that of the "left liberals" such as Margaret Ballinger. In reaction to the popular pressures of a nascent African nationalist movement in the late thirties and forties, and with the insertion of democratic ideas being developed internationally, they responded by seeking to extend African political representation.

The success of the National Party in the 1948 elections and the earlier erosion of the Cape African vote encouraged the establishment of the Liberal Party, which drew together the two strands of the successors of the Cape liberal tradition.

---

48 *ibid*

49 Rich (1984), p 7

It sought once again to incorporate black voters on a qualified basis. In doing so it pursued a incremental constitutionalism in its strategy:

"The parliamentary nature of the party indicated the continued survival of a Whiggish belief in the political potential of Westminster-style constitutional systems, and this was reflected in the protracted resistance put up by many liberals in the 1950s to the removal of the Cape Coloured voters from the common electoral roll. In an age, though, of the progressive devolution of control by the big colonial powers to newly independent states in Africa and Asia, constitutionalism was still an important political creed which was not yet tarred by the failure of so many of the Westminster-style constitutions in the 1960s."  
(50)

The Liberal Party had an uneasy relationship with the liberation movement throughout the fifties, although towards the end of that decade it considered adopting more militant strategies than it had first adopted. The major point of conflict between the Liberal Party and the Congress Movement was over the issue of communism. A strong trend in the Liberal Party thinking which has long existed in South African liberal thinking was its fervent opposition to communism. The Party alleged that the Congress alliance was dominated by communists with a hidden agenda.

The entrenchment of political apartheid in the late fifties and the crisis of the early sixties saw a watershed in liberalism within South Africa. Liberals found themselves caught between the contending nationalisms of Afrikaners and Africans. This dichotomy was present in the subsequent history of liberalism throughout the sixties, seventies and eighties. It served to provide the major points of pressure

acting on the liberal tradition, causing internal tensions and divisions.

The Liberal Party experienced internal ructions and divisions with the radicalisation of a large part of its membership. Younger members even resorted to the armed struggle in the form of the African Resistance Movement. Others moved over to the Progressive Party which came to assume the mantle of the leading liberal institution in South Africa. As will be shown in the next chapter liberals within the United Party broke away in 1959 to form the Progressive Party advocating the incorporation of blacks on the basis of a qualified franchise. (51)

Another significant trend within South African liberalism emerged in the sixties under the influence of American modernisation theory. South African liberal modernisation theorists, most notably Michael O'Dowd of the Anglo-American Corporation, contrasted what they perceived to be the essentially illogical system of apartheid, with the ultimately logical and rational system of capitalism. (52) The irrationality of apartheid was seen to impair the operation of the market system. The argument was extended to contend that the rationalising impact of a market economy would ultimately eradicate racist intrusions into the market. Strategically the theory encouraged accelerated economic development as a means to do away with apartheid. While the theory held currency through much of the sixties and seventies, the intransigence of the apartheid regime led to holders of this view ultimately seeing the need for greater voluntarist involvement in the polity. Even though the theory had been superseded in many respects in the

---

51 This will be more fully discussed in the following chapter.

52 For an account of the liberal modernisation approach see O'Dowd (1978); also see Wolpe (1987) pp 25 - 28; and Lipton (1986) pp 3 - 5.

eighties there was a residual notion held within the liberal community that accelerated economic development, and in particular the advancement of free market policies, would effect an incremental challenge to the system of apartheid. (53)

Liberalism came under fire from the black consciousness movement and the broader liberation movement in the sixties and seventies forcing it to lose many of its segregationist "throwbacks" and to assume a greater democratic content. One tendency saw left liberals develop within the churches, as well as through the universities and organisations such as the Black Sash. More conservative, or mainstream, liberals retreated to a more gradualist incremental politics within the PFP and Institute of Race Relations, very often with close links to the liberal capitalists located within the Anglo American Corporation. (54)

The history of liberalism in South Africa has been a bumpy one, with liberals adopting varying positions contingent on particular historical circumstances. A significant trend has been the major impact of outside forces on the liberal community. The impact of the entrenchments of segregation and the racially exclusive state, the development of popular politics and the consolidation and success of Afrikaner nationalism all played a role in its evolution.

When liberals in the PFP attempted to respond to the crisis of the seventies and the eighties, their response was overdetermined by this history of "historical tension" within their ideological foundation. And, just as liberals

---

53 The editor of Business Day, Ken Owen was a strong advocate of this view, as was the Executive Director of the South African Institute of Race Relations, John Kane-Berman.

54 For a useful consideration of the impact of black consciousness on liberals see Rich (1989).

in South Africa had always done, it adapted - for better or worse - to the changing conditions.

### The Thesis

This dissertation addresses a number of basic questions: Why did the PFP respond in a contradictory way to the "organic crisis" in South Africa? What was the effect of outside forces on the Party? To what extent did the PFP promote or defend the interests of big business? What role did the Party's ideology of liberalism play in its responses?

The dissertation will attempt to answer these and other questions. It takes as its starting point the varying responses of the Party to the conditions of structural and organic crisis in the eighties. The argument is advanced that these responses should be understood in terms of the nature of its liberal ideology. As I have attempted to show above, liberalism should be seen as an historically contingent ideology which is saturated with contradictions and tensions. This is the case for the PFP as well as where the tension between the class-specific and non-class elements of liberalism give rise to varying responses to the conditions of crisis, and in relation to the primary contending social forces. The situation of crisis brings into sharp relief the contours and fissures of this ideology, as the PFP as a political entity located within the dominating classes, sought to contest the outcome of the country's malaise.

The class character of the Party will also be considered, and an attempt will be made to show that it cannot be reduced to being understood as a party of big business. Rather, its class character should be found in the nature of its positioning with respect to core class forces within

both the dominating and dominated classes. As will be shown there was a tension within the PFP as to where it should locate itself.

The dissertation follows a broadly chronological pattern as it investigates the most significant aspects of the Party's behaviour in the context of crisis and polarisation. It shows how the Party moved from its firm location of contesting the form of state within the context of the dominating classes; to its confused attempts to transcend these limits with the gradual deracialisation of politics, and the ascendancy of popular resistance; and finally its muscular assertion of a non-racial class-conscious liberalism in response to its gradual decline in importance within the context of class and popular struggle within the country as a whole.

### Chapter Structure

Chapter one covers the period from the formation of the PFP until the 1981 general election which saw a high point in support for the party. This chapter will provide a context for understanding the Party in the eighties.

Chapter Two considers the Party's response to state restructuring and reform in the early eighties. It shows the contradictory nature of the Party's liberalism, as well as its non-liberal element.

Chapter Three covers the crucial period from 1984 until 1986 which saw a deepening of crisis in South Africa. It explores new conjunctural pressures placed on the party and its attempt to compete as a "third force" with both the regime and the liberation movement. The period ended with

this approach in tatters and the resignation of the leader Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert.

Chapter Four examines the response of the party to its crisis of legitimacy in the wake of the developments in the immediately preceding period. It shows the polarisation within the party between centrists and its left wing, its poor election performance in 1987, and ultimately the establishment of the hegemony of centrist liberals within the party.

Chapter Five traces the consolidation of the centrist liberal trend and the ultimate dissolution of the PFP in favour of broader reformist unity.

The conclusion pulls together a discussion of the major themes covered by the dissertation.

## CHAPTER ONE

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PFP: 1959 - 1981

#### INTRODUCTION

In the early eighties the PFP was confronted by the need to respond to: growing conditions of economic and political crisis; the state's reform programme; and an ascendant liberation movement. Its tradition of Parliamentary opposition with an emphasis on gradual incrementalist strategies would be brought into question by the course of events. The eighties were, indeed, the most vigorous and demanding years of the Party's existence.

Before looking at these years, however, it is necessary to briefly survey the preceding period in the its history. This chapter attempts to identify the major trends in the two decades from the Party's formation as the Progressive Party in 1959 until the early eighties. It is not intended that this be a comprehensive or detailed history. Rather it is the intention to very briefly and somewhat descriptively sketch the main trends in the Party's early history. As such many events may not be covered, but rather subsumed into a discussion of the broader trends associated with the ebb and flow of the Party story. (1)

---

1 This Chapter is almost entirely drawn from Hackland (1984). For this reason it should be assumed that all sources should be attributed to his comprehensive thesis.

## THE FORMATION OF THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY, 1959

The Progressive Party was formed after the United Party Congress held in August 1959. At this congress debates which had been simmering within the UP between liberals and conservatives came to a head. The right wing of the UP, rooted mainly among Natal farmers, subscribed to crude views of white domination, and at the Congress launched an attack on the National Party government for granting more land to Africans as part of the homeland consolidation scheme. The left favoured an extension of land to Africans, while the centre vacillated and tried to reconcile the two opposing wings.

While the right wing of the UP identified closely with the policies of apartheid, language and cultural differences prevented them from joining the National Party. The liberals who although, coming from all provinces, could be seen to be the political descendants of the Cape liberal tradition. They were predominantly professionals, with a sprinkling of industrialists and farmers. The split within the United Party can in part be reduced to the distinction in the class base of the contending groups in which

"policy disagreements between liberals and conservatives broadly coincided with the different interests of urban-based, high technology producers, mainly commercial and industrial capitalists, and rural-based and labour intensive producers." (2)

The divisions came over issues of race policy. This was provoked by the massive increase in black urbanisation and proletarianisation in the forties and fifties. This had been associated with increased concentration of capital,

especially within the manufacturing sector. The response of the government had been to implement the policy of apartheid, both as a means to entrench white domination, and a way to ensure political and economic control over the black dominated classes. The rise of African nationalism in the 1950s was in large part accelerated by this. Within the UP disagreements revolved around the most appropriate way to respond to this situation. This debate became particularly acute in the light of the declining electoral fortunes of the Party between 1948 and 1958. Conservative UP members advocated that the Party adopt a more conservative stance.

Liberals believed that the best means of dealing with the threat of African nationalism was through the development and cooptation of a black middle class. The repression of black political aspirations, they believed, was no longer appropriate.

In August 1959, a group of liberals left the UP. A Progressive Steering Committee was established, and in November 1959 the Progressive Party was launched with Jan Steytler as its leader, and with nine members of Parliament. The Party was also founded with the support of the chief funder of the UP, Harry Oppenheimer. The primary policy platform was that the country should depart from racial discrimination in the form of the colour bar, towards a "civilisation bar" based on merit. The implications of this basis for policy was that the Party promoted the gradual extension to blacks of economic and political rights denied them in the past. The means whereby this could be achieved was a qualified franchise, and the advancement of education and training for blacks.

This stance was in keeping with the paternalism and segregationist notions associated with a central trend in South African liberalism. Whereas the PP became the heirs

to this trend, the Liberal Party, increasingly radicalised during the fifties, extended the left liberal tradition. At the same time as the PP was calling for a qualified vote, the Liberal Party adopted the policy of a universal franchise. It is not, therefore, surprising to see that the Party called for residential segregation, as well as separate schools and amenities for the different race groups. The Party went as far as to provide for separate black and white branches within its own structure.

Harry Oppenheimer described the Party as "conservative" in the sense that it sought to protect the interests of capitalism. (3) The PP sought to protect "western civilisation" and ward off the threat of communism. It believed that through the cooptation of a black middle class, the protection of individual rights while protecting racial "minorities", the threats of African nationalism and communism could be defused. Oppenheimer's views were far-sighted by the standards of capitalists at the time. As a consequence of the views held by Oppenheimer not being dominant among capitalists at the time, the Party failed to make much of an impact within the business community, which was in the main divided in its support between the National Party and the United Party.

#### **THE EARLY YEARS: 1960 - 1966**

The electoral performance of the Party in the sixties reflected broader developments within the country. In the period immediately after its formation the country was thrown into the post-Sharpeville crisis which included the banning of the ANC and PAC, as well as a flight of capital from the country. The PP rejected the declaration of a

---

3 *ibid*, p 158

state of emergency and the bannings of organisations as these actions ran counter to the liberal values of freedom of choice and association. The PP was the only white party to unequivocally oppose the state on these points, and because of this it attracted considerable support at the 1961 elections. Although the Party only managed to hold onto the seat of Helen Suzman in Houghton - a stronghold of liberal capitalists - it nevertheless managed to win 8,6% of the vote. (4) It gained in votes at the United Party's expense such that in the seats contested by both parties the UP received 83 000 votes, as opposed to the 56 000 of the PP. (5)

The Party made important organisational gains in the early sixties. It doubled its membership between November 1960 and March 1962, while at the same time increasing its number of branches by 50% (6) This growth was almost exclusively amongst affluent English-speaking city dwellers.

The organisational growth, however, did not match what became a declining electoral performance. In the 1966 general elections, as in 1961, Helen Suzman managed to win her constituency, but the total vote for the Party declined by 43% despite an increase in the number of seats contested. (7)

A significant trend of this period was the very close relationship between Harry Oppenheimer and the Party. He played an important consultative role in the formation of the Party, as well as in the development of policy. Not only did the PP closely represent the interests of large scale capital such as his Anglo American at the policy

---

4     *ibid*, p 162  
 5     *ibid*, p 164  
 6     *ibid*, p 173  
 7     *ibid*, p 184

level, but it was also heavily dependent on his financial patronage. In 1966 his personal contribution to the Party coffers amounted to 80% of its income. He also influenced the Party to seek a closer relationship with businesspeople who were considered to make up a "natural constituency".

At the ideological and policy level the Party advocated a view which defended and promoted the interests of businessmen. At the time of the Sharpeville crisis the Party focussed on the argument that the economic damage caused by the prevailing conditions was rooted in apartheid. When the economy picked up in the mid-sixties the Party, in keeping with liberal modernisation theories then the vogue, argued that accelerated growth would lead to the demise of apartheid.

The Party had a vacillating relationship with the black community. After its formation the PP sought an interactive relationship with the liberation movement. The ANC responded positively to this. After the banning of the ANC and PAC and the turn to armed struggle the stance of the Party changed dramatically. The PP no longer saw itself as a white group sympathetic to the call for black rights, but rather as a bastion of "western civilisation" against the extremes of African and Afrikaner nationalism. Not all in the Party agreed with the view that it should distance itself from the liberatory organisations. A memorandum drawn up by Donald Molteno and Peggy Roberts argued that PP success in the white community would flow from it being seen by voters as able to resolve the South African conflict through having a close relationship with leading elements in the black community. Since they felt that the Party was unlikely to recruit a significant number of black members they argued for a close working relationship with black political organisations. the Party after some debate rejected this

view in the belief that it should have an independent identity.

The Party never succeeded in recruiting many African members despite attempting to do so in competition with popular resistance organisations. This was at the same time as it was gradually taking a harder line view in opposition to the liberation movement. Party leaders travelled abroad to oppose the diplomatic initiatives of the ANC and PAC, especially the campaign for sanctions.

In the face of a poor performances in winning white support the Party, the PP decided to contest the four Cape Provincial "coloured seats" in 1965. Since 1956 there had been a boycott of these seats by many in the coloured community, and at its formation the Party decided to respect this situation. During the course of the years that followed, as the animosity between it and radical organisations grew, the Party became more comfortable with the idea of contesting these. It launched what became a successful membership drive in the coloured community in 1964 with ten new branches being established that year. It won two of the seats in the Cape election in 1965.

Motivated by this success and by growing links with the anti-apartheid Transkei Democratic Party, the PP positioned itself more firmly in antagonism to Afrikaner nationalism on the one hand, and the liberation movement on the other. It assumed a stance as a "third force" in South African politics, and believed that this would stimulate white electoral support for it. This was, however, not to be.

**REORGANISATION: 1966 - 1973**

The late sixties and early seventies were years of relative stability in the economic and political arenas, which were reflected in a slowdown in the performance of the Party. The poor electoral performances of the immediately preceding period played itself out in a leadership crisis and financial insecurity.

Following the 1966 elections Oppenheimer had made it clear that his continued patronage would be conditional on the Party improving its organisation and electoral strategy. Colin Eglin took over as leader in 1971 and set about redirecting party energies. The target constituencies of the Party were more closely identified and a decision was taken to concentrate especially on the business community and the youth. Zach de Beer's argument was accepted that it was necessary for the Party to seek a secure base among the progressive elements of the white community, most notably businessmen. He argued that this group, while small in numbers, constituted the "trendsetters" in society seeking progress, technology and a new urban industrial South Africa. This group was the closest to "the people of the great western nations - the nations who support the same ideals as do the Progs". (8)

In addition to focussing its target group, the Party also decided to focus on six or seven key constituencies in affluent English-speaking urban areas. It was in these seats that it had historically received its greatest support.

As a result of the reorganisation the Party, while not improving on its sole Parliamentary seat, significantly improved its performance in the 1970 General Election. It improved its vote in six priority seats by an average of nearly 2000 votes per seat as compared to the 1966 results. It received a total of 51 760 votes for its 19 candidates, as against the 41 065 it received for 28 in the 1966 poll.  
(9)

Following the elections the Party, motivated by its improved performance, embarked on a new programme to attract Afrikaner support and to interact with homeland leaders. This was possible on account of the fact that Harry Oppenheimer agreed to continue being the primary funder of the party at a rate twice that in 1966.

#### **CRISIS AND SUCCESS: 1974 - 1981**

A decline in the cohesiveness of the white dominating classes which was associated with the emergence of severe structural and conjunctural crisis in the seventies resulted in the Party becoming the Official Opposition in 1977. This came after a five year period which saw the development of severe constraints on continued accumulation as a result both of South Africa's location in the world economy, as well as the structural inability of apartheid to ensure the necessary conditions for the supply of labour and domestic consumption. Capitalists increasingly came to see the need for an increase in the supply of skilled labour. This was necessitated by increased monopolisation and the relative growth of the manufacturing sector. The emergence of nascent labour organisation and industrial action placed

capital on the defensive. Politically the period saw the gradual reemergence of political militancy among the dominated classes. The rise of black consciousness, the impact of the success of the liberation movements in Mozambique and Angola, and the wave of resistance which started in Soweto in June 1976 made this a period which was dramatic in its proportions, and extensive in its impact.

The Progressive Party capitalised on the United Party's inability to cohere in its efforts to respond to the changing situation in the seventies. Following the 1973 strikes, the 1974 elections saw a significant number of former UP voters switching allegiance to the Progressive Party. As it had in the early sixties, the PP also received support from voters fearful of the implications of a rising working class following the strike wave of 1973. The Party won seven seats in the 1974 General Election, taking 6,42% of the vote as compared to the 3,5% it registered in 1970. (10) Shortly after the elections the Party won another seat in a by-election.

In the period before and after the 1974 election the Party engaged in a programme of contact with homeland leaders. This came in the wake of the PP becoming a whites-only party following the 1968 legislation outlawing mixed parties. It returned to the strategy it had rejected in 1962 - to seek cooperation with black political organisations. In an attempt to show that there was black support for its policies, the Party from 1973 held a series of high-profile meetings with leaders of African countries, as well as with the leaders of South Africa's bantustans. In particular a close relationship developed with Chief Minister Buthelezi and the Inkatha movement. No effort was made to make contact with black consciousness and other radical groups.

---

10 *ibid*, p 327

This served to alienate the Party from the liberation movement.

The gathering crisis set in process major developments for the Party. Within the sphere of white Parliamentary politics the United Party was increasingly wracked by divisions. In 1975 a group of reformists within its ranks broke away under Harry Schwarz's leadership to form the Reform Party. After negotiations the PP and the new party agreed to merge and form the South African Progressive Reform Party under Eglin's leadership. The Party now had 11 MPs, 12 MPCs, and one senator. The image of a potentially effective Party boosted its support such that in 1975 23% of white voters backed it. The 1976 uprisings brought further shifts in opposition ranks. The United Party split under the pressure of financial bankruptcy and the withdrawal of important business support. Enlightened reformists who had remained in the UP after the Reform Party split in 1977 merged with the PRP to form the Progressive Federal Party. They brought with them five MPs, one senator and one MPC.

The 1977 elections, called early by Vorster in the hope of capitalising on the opposition disunity saw the PFP become the Official Opposition with 18 seats, compared with the 17 it entered the elections with. The PFP vote was double that of the PP in 1974, while the NP achieved its biggest ever majority, increasing its number of seats from 116 to 134. The two other offshoots from the UP reduced their standing with the New Republic Party winning 10 seats as opposed to the 23 it had before the election; and the South African party reducing its seats from six to three. (11)

The Party responded to the Soweto resistance with a combination of calls for reform, and for the convening of a

---

11 *ibid*, pp 364 - 365

National Convention, as well as hardline appeals for law and order. The context after Soweto, however, presented a new scenario for the Party both in its relation to black demands, and with respect to the development of a reformist programme by the government.

At the policy level the Party shifted from the call for a qualified franchise and provisions for "voluntary" segregation. Following a constitutional study by a rising figure in the Party, Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, a framework of consociational democracy was adopted as PFP policy. This approach would be based on a universal franchise, but sought to avoid majority rule and "black domination" through a combination of provisions for federal decentralisation, and minority vetoes, the size of which were not specified, but assumed to be 15%. While the policy was an attempt to accommodate the rising demands of democracy from the dominated classes, black leaders were not forthcoming in support of the proposals.

Party policy also came to assume a closer reflection of the broad needs of capitalist development than in the past. The Party echoed closely the calls of business leaders for urban upgrading, and the extension of trade union rights. It joined the chorus of appeals for investment in South Africa, and opposed disinvestment. This was motivated on the patronising basis that it was in the interests of black South Africans that the economy not be threatened. The fears of a radicalisation in black politics and the rise of a potentially revolutionary working class movement saw increasing appeals by PFP public representatives for a decisive move away from apartheid so that "free enterprise" not be threatened. It was in this context that the Party developed an economic programme strongly committed to market

relations, but which incorporated significant welfare provisions. (12)

The development of the regime's reform strategy established fears that the Party would be superseded by the National party in harnessing white supporters of political change. A particular point of concern was that the Party was not attracting sufficient Afrikaner support. It was in this context that Van Zyl Slabbert was elected as the Party leader in place of Colin Eglin in 1979. Despite this move, internal divisions were emerging within the Party.

A number of reformists who had joined the Party from the United Party increasingly identified with the state's attempts at reforming provisions for industrial relations, influx control as well as the initial discussions on constitutional reform. An MP, Jappie Basson, was expelled from the Party as he disagreed with the Party's negative response to the establishment of the President's Council to investigate a new constitutional dispensation. The PC, while incorporating coloureds and Indians, excluded the participation of Africans. The Party was divided in its response. Helen Suzman represented a faction vehemently opposed to participation in this structure as she feared it would increase racial polarisation. Slabbert's approach, which held sway, sought to encourage the government's steps towards reform but would not participate in the structure as it excluded a major section of the population. Basson refused to accept this view and was forced to leave the Party in 1980.

The division and mixed messages from the Party over its response to government reforms set the stage for the eighties. Its initial test was to be in the 1981 General

---

12 This is extensively discussed in Chapter Two.

Election called by Prime Minister Botha 18 months ahead of the required date.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RESPONSE TO REFORM: 1981 - 1983

#### INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The early years of the 1980s were marked by the state's efforts at implementing a reform programme as part of its "total strategy". These developments played themselves out against a background which quickly moved from ill-founded gold-boom optimism to looming economic crisis. A new spirit of resistance grew amongst the black dominated classes as they responded to the new conjuncture established by the state's efforts. The period also saw long standing alliances within the dominating classes come to an end, and new ones established.

The economy during this period was initially propelled by a short boom in 1980 and 1981 associated with a sudden increase in the price of gold. This upswing served to mask a deeper malaise within the economy which soon became evident. The gold boom encouraged increased domestic spending which was financed by a dramatic rise in foreign borrowings. Balance of payments deficits resulted in 1981 and 1982 as the country slowly slid into a recession. In both 1982 and 1983 there was a negative growth rate. Encouraging the recession was the Reserve Bank's monetarist fiscal policy approach which sought to control the growth in the rate of money supply, and saw the bank rate rise from 9,5% to 17% within 1981 alone. (1) Employment opportunities dried up as the unemployment rate reached an estimated total of 21% in 1981. (2) Economic policy shifts in early 1983 saw the abolition of the financial Rand giving rise to an

---

1 Cassim (1986), p 7

2 Charles Simkins quoted in Wilson and Ramphela (1989), p 85

outflow of foreign capital. The business community immediately sought to compensate by once again going abroad in pursuit of loans. Not only did this accelerate the importation of world recessionary conditions, but it also established a platform for further economic decline and crisis.

It was in these conditions of negative growth that the government initiated a number of reforms responding, in particular, to the demands of an ever more anxious business community. This phase of the reform programme, bearing many of the hallmarks of a "passive revolution" (3) can be termed "total strategy" after the name given it by the security establishment. The origin of this phase of reform can be traced to the Vorster government, which had embarked on reforms most reluctantly. The security establishment assessing the situation under Vorster to be amounting to an inadequate response appealed for a comprehensive state response which was termed "total strategy". This approach came to be dominant within the state with the coming to power of PW Botha in 1978. It was envisaged as a comprehensive response to the growing crisis, and attempted to overcome the limits in the political economy and system of control associated with apartheid.

The "total strategy" reforms were cast firmly within the framework of Grand Apartheid. They included key developments with respect to the controls and organisation of labour formulated in the main by the 1979 Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions of Inquiry. As well as legalising African trade unions, the reforms also acknowledged the permanence of urban Africans, while still being wedded to the notion of bantustan economic viability and political

---

3 See Introduction for a discussion of the concept "passive revolution".

representation. According to Morris and Padayachee this phase of reform could be characterised as

"a kind of 'selective Fordist' response; an attempt at incorporating a protected 'insider' urban black population, whilst compartmentalising the marginalised, unemployed, unemployable population in the bantustans. The basic idea that knitted it all together was for the economic and political policies to stimulate new demand, arising out of the increased wages for the 'insiders', at least part of which would be offset by increases in productivity." (4)

Associated with the Riekert reforms was a switch to increasingly monetarist free market economic policies whereby important financial protections were lifted in the hope of alleviating the pressures on the previous growth model which had been highly dependent on interventionist policy. As has been shown above this did not prove to be the case.

The principal political aspects of "total strategy" were the establishment of Black Local Authorities intended to provide a forum for local level African representation; and, the tricameral Parliament which, while retaining the absolute dominance of the white regime, incorporated coloureds and Indians as junior partners. Associated with these developments was a degree of political liberalisation which provided legal space for the growth of mass popular resistance. Repression was, however, not removed from the state's repertoire of tactics in dealing with the dominated classes.

The "total strategy" reforms defined a new conjuncture which saw a resurgence in popular resistance. At the forefront of this wave was the independent trade union movement which exploited the possibilities offered by the Wiehahn reforms.

Defying the objective of "total strategy", the unions succeeded in uniting those granted permanent rights of residence in urban areas, and also migrant workers who were not. Growing quickly in the early eighties, labour organisation received a boost with an unprecedented strike wave lasting from 1981 until 1983. Despite divisions within the labour movement regarding the political role of trade unions, there was extensive political activity by organised labour in antagonism to the state. (5)

Alongside the growth of industrial organisation, community and student organisation also grew in this period, at first focussing on issues of local concern, and later expanding to encompass national demands for democracy. This movement came to fruition with the formation of the United Democratic Front in 1983. As an alliance of unions, community, student, youth and professional groups it constituted a significant challenge to the state reform programme, and would in future years contribute significantly to its failure. Politically, the UDF represented a revival of the non-racial Charterist tradition established by the Congress Alliance in the fifties. The ANC at this time was focussing its energies on building an underground movement in the country, while also accelerating the armed struggle, especially at the time of the introduction of the new constitution. Black consciousness, while on the wane, was still a force and was represented in the main by the Azanian Peoples' Organisation (Azapo), and the alliance known as the National Forum.

Significant changes were also occurring within the dominating classes, most notably the readjustment in the

---

5 Debates within the Trade Union movement were well covered by the South African Labour Bulletin during this period. See e.g., Forster (1982), Food and Canning Workers Union (1982), General Workers Union (1983), and Njikelana (1984)

hegemony of the leading elements of the National Party. The 1981 elections can be seen as marking a decisive moment in the unravelling of the National Party's hegemony over an alliance of Afrikaans class forces. The ascendance of the National Party in the forties had been dependent on its forging a unifying discourse for Afrikaans workers, middle classes and an emergent bourgeoisie. Facilitated by conditions of accelerated economic growth during the 1960s, the Afrikaans bourgeoisie come into its own. No longer was it dependent to the extent it had been in the past on the political support of the Afrikaans working and lower middle classes. The needs of this emergent class together with the consequences of the failure of the policy of apartheid in ensuring conditions for continued accumulation in the 1970s had seen the NP make its first tentative moves away from the policy tradition which had forged the historic bloc of Afrikaner nationalism. (6)

In effect a new alliance of big Afrikaans and English capital, together with key sections of the white middle classes came to be represented by the regime. The "verkramptes" within the National Party broke away in 1982 to form the Conservative Party. In doing so they were the heirs to the Afrikaner Nationalist tradition, albeit on a new social basis in that principal class forces previously part of the Afrikaner historic bloc, now stayed with the National Party. The formation of the Conservative Party brought about a realignment of forces within the white bloc such that the National party assumed the mantle of being the centre party with the CP and PFP on either side of it. This location served to draw significant support away from the PFP as will be shown in this chapter.

---

6 See O'Meara (1983) for a detailed discussion of the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism.

As has been mentioned a key component of the realignment in the base of the NP and in its reform programme was a concerted effort to woo the business community. Since 1976 leading elements within capital had been calling for increased reform in order to ward off the possibility of revolution, and to ensure continued accumulation. While the response from within this class cannot be considered to be entirely homogeneous - there existed considerable differences regarding emphasis and, indeed, vested interests - it remained the case that there was an overwhelming orientation towards gradual top-down incremental change. An important focus of attention was on the system of influx control and labour relations which had not only proved to be politically explosive, but also threatened the ongoing basis of capitalist growth. That government responded to these demands from business was indicative of its enthusiasm to consolidate a base within the business community. The reform programme was enthusiastically welcomed by the business community. Notable events in the increased linkage between the state and business were the summit conferences at the Carlton Hotel in 1979, and the Good Hope Centre in 1981.

At the first conference the government announced plans for the removal of restrictions which inhibited the operation of free enterprise, the establishment of the Small Business Development Corporation, rationalisation of state development corporations as well as programmes to develop rural areas in conjunction with "homeland" governments. (7) The Good Hope Conference saw the government introduce a major economic decentralisation package which sought to divide South Africa into eight development regions. Also on the agenda were the discussion of the removal of restrictions on free enterprise, the provision of skills

training to alleviate black unemployment and the elimination of "unjustifiable" racial discrimination in order to increase economic freedom. (8)

Both conferences were cautiously welcomed by business leaders, although there was general disappointment expressed after the Good Hope Conference at the slow pace at which reform was taking place. According to the Anglo American Corporation chairman Harry Oppenheimer, there was not a single business leader at the conference who did not support an end to racial discrimination. He said that the general feeling was that racial discrimination was not being removed fast enough. He also stressed the need to accelerate reform with respect to the mobility of labour, a view echoed by the Chairman of Barlow Rand, Mike Rosholt, in a speech to the conference. The need to provide training to advance the skills of black workers was also stressed by Rosholt. (9) He also expressed the view of many within business when he called for a clear statement of government's reform programme:

"Business believes there is an absolute necessity for Government to spell out in detail its long-term strategy both political and socioeconomic, because without this basic data it cannot plan its own long-term." (10)

Despite these reservations the business community provided an ongoing source of support for government culminating in its majority backing of the tricameral constitution at the referendum in 1983.

This chapter in the history of the PFP was most significantly informed by the government's reform programme.

---

8 *ibid*

9 South African Foundation News, 7 (12) 1981

10 *ibid*

It provided a new challenge to the party as the regime was now moving into the policy territory traditionally occupied by the PFP. At times the Party seriously considered endorsing the major aspects of government's reform programme; at others it considered the possibility that it could enter into an alliance with the regime. As a consequence the Party experienced internal conflict and division regarding its response to reform. Two themes can be isolated which illuminate the Party's experience during this time.

The first concerns the make-up of the Party at this time as a loose amalgam, which although predominated by liberals, also included a significant number of reformists not as dedicated to the liberal tradition. When the Party was forced to respond to government reform moves, there was a natural process of attrition which saw the loss of these reformists.

The second, and possibly more significant, theme is that related to an understanding of the nature of the liberalism of the Party at this time. The question could be asked as to why a Party which was avowedly liberal could contemplate supporting the apartheid government at times, as it did during the period reviewed by this chapter?

The class-conscious nature of the Party's liberalism dictated the terms of its interactions at this time. While the non-class elements of its discourse remained intact, there was an overriding emphasis during this period on incremental reform and opposition to revolution. Despite not sharing a complete coincidence in thinking with the business community on many aspects of economic policy, the Party was ultimately committed to a path of capitalist development. Politically this stance manifested itself in the style of constitutional incrementalism long a hallmark

of liberalism. In so doing it countenanced the real possibility of close cooperation with the regime if this would gradually shift the country away from apartheid. The relationship between the PFP and the ruling party could in this sense be described as being one of difference rather than being based on a fundamental antagonism. Both the NP and the PFP were ultimately committed to continued capital accumulation.

The question might be asked then: Why did the PFP eventually not throw its weight behind the regime's initiatives? The answer might be found in considering that the Party's response was overdetermined by the non-class components of its discourse most notably those associated with civil rights and non-racialism. This overdetermination saw to its opposing most government moves.

The duality in the PFP's response was based in this tension which this chapter intends to highlight. In subsequent chapters it will be shown how the tension severely incapacitated the Party.

The chapter considers the following developments: the Party's successes at the 1981 General election and its subsequent debate concerning its response to the government reforms; the consideration of an alliance with the regime in the "balance of power" strategy"; the response to the referendum on the new constitution; the PFP's relationship with the business community; and, its links with the black popular classes.

#### **IN THE WAKE OF THE 1981 GENERAL ELECTION**

The 1981 election results consolidated the PFP as the official opposition in the House of Assembly. It also

marked the growth of a right wing, both within the National Party and outside of it, mobilised by the increasing moves towards political reform advanced by the dominant *verligte* faction within the governing party. This situation posed new opportunities and challenges for the PFP.

The 1981 General Election results were most notable for marking a decline in the fortunes of the National Party, a rise in support for right wing parties, and a consolidation of the PFP as the official opposition.

The campaign was hard fought with only 14 uncontested seats as against 44 in 1977. The PFP contested 76 seats as opposed to the 59 it fought at the previous poll.

While the NP gained 56% of the vote (65% in 1977), the PFP improved its share from 17% to 19%. (11) This translated into 26 seats, up 9 on its 1977 performance. Because the Party contested many previously uncontested seats the percentage gains in other seats are masked by the overall national performance. In those seats that it contested both in 1977 and 1981, the PFP's share of the vote went up from 13,8% to 19,9%. (12) The Party made important gains in most cities. In Johannesburg it drew votes away from the NP and NRP in many constituencies. In Bezuidenhout it made a gain of 10%, as it did in the wealthy constituencies of Bryanston (9%), Sandton (21%), and Edenvale (26%). (13) It made inroads into affluent Pretoria seats such as Waterkloof, while in Cape Town it registered gains in every seat ranging between 6% and 21%. (14)

---

11 Charney (1982), p 530

9 *ibid*, p 530

10 *ibid*, p 530

14 *ibid*, p 530

The Party made its hoped-for breakthrough in Natal, where it had strategically focussed in the main on the parliamentary elections leaving the NRP free to take control of the Natal Provincial Council. Whereas the PFP held only one Natal seat going into the election, it emerged with six new Natal MPs. (15)

The Party also won the traditional opposition seats of Albany, Walmer and PE Central which had been lost in three-cornered fights at the 1977 elections. (16)

Nationally the PFP's gains were made largely at the expense of the NRP's losses. Charney estimates that 50% of the PFP's net gain came as a result of NRP losses. This meant that there was a real swing from the NP to the PFP of only about 3%. (17) In effect the 1981 election consolidated the PFP's position as the official opposition while the real fight that was emerging in white politics was that between the ruling NP and the emergent right wing. The NRP was fast going into decline with its voters largely defecting to the PFP on its left and the NP on its right.

At the time of the 1981 elections the right was represented by the HNP and Connie Mulder's Conservative National Party, the forerunner of the Conservative Party. While the right did not take any seats they considerably dented the performance of the NP in traditional Afrikaner nationalist seats. While the NP held onto these seats it was considerably shaken by the performance of the right wing.

The electoral consequence of the NP's gestures towards reform had seen the right wing parties improve their vote from a mere 3% in 1977 to 15% in 1981. This translated into

---

15 Hackland (1984), p 398  
16 Charney (1982), p 531  
17 *ibid*, p 531

200 000 votes. (18) In certain farming and mining seats the HNP's share of the vote rose from a low of between 3% and 10% to 30%. The scale of the threat to the National Party from the right was further highlighted by internal division between party verligtes and verkramptes. Increasingly a vocal and militant right wing within the National Party was mobilizing and would subsequently break away a year after the election. (19)

In managing the emerging crisis within white politics the National Party under PW Botha attempted at the same time to appeal to both verligte and verkrampte voters. An opinion poll taken by The Star six weeks before polling day in 1981 showed that 71% of verligte voters, as well as 68% of verkramptes felt that PW Botha was moving in the right direction. (20) But the efficacy of this course of action would be greatly limited by the split in the National Party and the formation of the Conservative Party as the standard bearer of the traditional Afrikaner nationalist discourse, albeit on the basis of a class alliance which excluded key sectors associated with its rise. Most notable in this respect was the now mature Afrikaans bourgeoisie whose interests coincided increasingly with those of other sectors of capital, and not with the concerns of the Afrikaans working and lower middle classes.

The National Party in the meantime was beginning to forge a new alliance made up in the main of elements of both the English and Afrikaans speaking bourgeoisie and middle classes. With the cautious approval and support of the business community the NP set about building a new historic bloc to power its reform programme.

---

18 Charney (1982), p 529  
 19 Lemon (1982), p 512  
 20 Charney (1982), p 539

The approach of the PFP after the elections was heavily informed by these developments. The primary focus of PFP action and policy was the National Party government. In this task the party was dealing with a different animal from that of the past. With the growing crisis of apartheid government had started edging towards a reformist programme. To the extent that this policy marked a departure from apartheid, government moves were now encroaching in what had traditionally been the exclusive terrain of the PFP within white politics. A creative response was called for.

Slabbert spelt out three areas for the Party to concentrate on in the period immediately after the 1981 elections. These were to "clearly and understandably state alternatives to the government's policies"; "expose sham reforms and keep up the pressure for genuine and fundamental reforms"; and, "combat racial polarization and extremism by keeping open dialogue and emphasising the need for negotiation." (21) Another strong theme in PFP thinking was that it should give support to government in its reform moves.

A common theme in PFP thinking at the time was that of ongoing structural changes within the society that had to be imaginatively met by government with visionary policy. A failure to meet the imperatives of a growing population, unemployment and the need for high level skills would mean that the contradictions of apartheid would become acute. The Party's approach reflected the dominance of a centrist class conscious liberalism discourse within its ranks. Whereas the Party at times adopted positions at variance with the demands of many capitalists, as will be shown below, it operated within a broad rubric which stressed incremental change, most notably at the socioeconomic level. In this respect its thinking coincided with the emerging

---

21 *ibid*

thrust within the bourgeoisie which advocated gradual reform and accelerated economic growth as a basis to move away from apartheid. While this thinking differed in many respects from the liberal modernization theories of the sixties and seventies, it retained important residual elements of it.

In this sense Slabbert indicated that it was important that government be in a position to initiate evolutionary changes in advance of structural pressures and so avoid "revolution, violent or subversive change". (22) This would raise the likelihood of evolutionary and predictable change. He went on to note that to ensure evolutionary change,

"the responsibility and initiative for such change must come from the white parliament, for it alone has the sovereign power to create the conditions for such change." (23)

The rationale behind this stance was explained by Slabbert in terms of the immense hold that the state had over the power of coercion which would make change from below by the black community, i.e. revolution, highly unlikely. He later explained this thinking when he argued that:

"Given the constellation of power - the control over the instruments of coercion, the power of the state - you couldn't really open up the situation unless there was an initiative from those in power", and that

"the dynamics of the situation were such that I never accepted that a revolutionary collapse was objectively possible." (24)

While it was necessary for whites to take the initiative in reform it was stressed elsewhere by Slabbert that this group could not succeed in this task on its own :

---

22 Rand Daily Mail, 21 November 1981

23 *ibid*

24 Interview with Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, 28 September 1990

"A start would be to recognise that the acceptability, adequacy and success of reform does not, and cannot, depend on one group alone in South Africa. It must at least lie in the dynamic interaction between white initiative and black response to it." (25)

Despite this qualification, Slabbert saw the responsibility for change as resting primarily with the contesting groups within the white power bloc. This aspect of PFP policy was an essential characteristic of the Party's response to the crisis in the early eighties. In the absence of a coherent and mobilised liberation movement amongst the popular classes, it was comfortable for the Party to maintain what amounted to a residue of South African liberalism's tendency towards paternalism. The argument went that since the government was not perceived to be succeeding in the task of initiating change from above, the PFP was to encourage it to do so. The idealistic belief was expressed that government would do so since "ultimately people will resort to reason to resolve problems". (26)

Drawing on the Party's history, the notion was also advanced that the PFP should be an "effective opposition". This view is perhaps best understood when seeing it not in the negative sense of opposing government, but from the increasing references to the Party as encouraging government in its reform process. Slabbert argued that the PFP should not completely reject government reforms but needed to judge their adequacy on criteria that should not be based on the "quagmire of party political relativity". (27) Drawing on a liberal philosophical base the criteria according to which government reforms should be assessed were four-fold:

---

25 Leadership 1(4) 1982  
 26 Rand Daily Mail, 30 May 1981  
 27 Leadership, op cit

- 1) the reform should ensure the rights of citizenship for all;
- 2) it must not exclude any group from constitutional bargaining on racial or ethnic lines;
- 3) it must not place or maintain any racially discriminating measure in the way of anyone's economic progress; and,
- 4) it must not increase or maintain social deprivation in respect of education, welfare, housing, transport, etc. (28)

The PFP thus set out in the period after the elections both critical of government, but also willing to engage closely with it in the pursuit of political reform.

#### THE BALANCE OF POWER STRATEGY

The long-brewing split in the National Party eventually occurred on 23 February 1982 when Andries Treurnicht led a group of 23 MPs from the NP's caucus. Later a group of 16 MPs formed the Conservative Party at a gathering of 10 000 supporters in Pretoria. (29) The impact of these developments severely affected the strength of the National Party. Up to 25% of the NP's branch and district structures in the Transvaal deserted to the Conservative Party, while the joint vote of the CP and HNP in by-elections in the secure NP seats of Germiston District and Bothaville outnumbered those of the governing party.

As PFP spokespeople were quick to point out opinion polls showed that for the first time since 1948 the National Party did not have the outright support of a majority of white

---

28 *ibid*

29 Charney (1982), p 143

voters. (30) Slabbert moved fast to convince the party that this situation provided the party with an opportunity to move out of a position of being merely the Official Opposition. It could now potentially hold the balance of power in Parliament if after an election the NP had less than an outright majority. (31) In this situation "both the reformist PFP and the reactionary right wing hold the balance of power in a parliamentary situation". (32) Said Slabbert,

"This means that to have a particular measure adopted the Government will have to consult and negotiate with whichever party it hopes to get support from for its measure." (33)

Since the PFP was in favour of reform, he went on, and since the "majority" wanted it, it was "logical" for government to move in the direction of his party. (34) This strategy reflected a party immersed in a liberal constitutional incrementalism predicated on the exclusive form of state within South Africa. It was a logical course for the party to take given its location within the context of the dominating classes; it was situating its objectives and strategy outside of the dynamic of the people/power bloc contradiction. The stress fell on contesting the game of Parliamentary and electoral politics with the ultimate prize being a decisive role within the exercising of state power.

---

30 The April 1982 poll conducted for Rapport newspaper showed the following breakdown in support patterns:

National Party	43%
Progressive Federal Party	21,7%
Conservative Party	18,3%
New Republic Party	5,6%
Herstigte Nasionale Party	2,7%
New Conservative Party	0,5%

Quoted in Deurbraak, July 1982

31 See his speech to the Natal Party Congress, Sunday Tribune, 17 October 1982

32 Deurbraak, September 1982

33 *ibid*

34 *ibid*

Believing it stood a good chance of achieving a balance of power the PFP identified a further 37 seats in which to apply its energies in addition to the 26 seats it already held. It sought an 8% percent increase in its electoral support which would put a total of 45 seats within its grasp. (35)

According to this game plan the PFP would relocate itself from the ranks of opposition into a position of influence to significantly impact on the exercise of state power. It would no longer be simply a moral reminder to government of the need for reform but could, rather, actively influence the direction the government was going in. In his speech to the 1982 Natal Congress of the party Slabbert said that,

"a vote for the Official Opposition is no longer simply a vote for only what one believes to be right and defensible without the prospect of it being implemented. Now that vote has the real prospect of influencing a course of political development and decisions." (36)

The idea was projected that the dichotomy between government and opposition would break down into a new mode of politics "where you don't have simple two party majoritarianism in operation". (37) It was

"a new ball game in which the old style Opposition vs Government confrontation politics will increasingly be substituted by horse trading, negotiation and compromise." (38)

In essence Slabbert was calling on his party to enter into an alliance with its arch enemy if the opportunity presented itself. The government was therefore perceived not as an

35 ibid, and Sunday Tribune, 17 October 1982

36 Sunday Tribune, 17 October 1982

37 Deurbraak, September 1982

38 Sunday Tribune, 17 October 1982

antagonist, as much as a group with whom the Party had differences - but also points of commonality. The most significant point of convergence was an apparent common commitment to the maintenance of continued accumulation. Slabbert stressed that adopting such a course of action did not mean that the party would forego its moral positioning; rather it was a strategic shift which was being countenanced. He called on the party to be

"tough on principle but flexible on strategy. There are a number of ways in which one can realise the same principle or implement the same principle and one should be flexible in exploring these without having to sacrifice fundamental principles." (39)

While the party adopted the strategy of going for the "balance of power" not all in the party believed it be viable. Harry Schwarz said that the approach was

"the projected philosophy to the public as far as the leadership was concerned. But, I think that the majority of the office bearers and people who were involved in the party ... ever seriously believed that there would be a balance of power and, secondly, if there was a balance of power, how it would exercise it." (40)

There was a lack of confidence in the strategy from the longer standing members of the party with deep aversions to any co-operation with the government. To them the espousal of their liberal values would be threatened by "doing a deal" with the traditional opponent of those values. Years of opposition to what was perceived as an intransigent government had left their mark. The strategy according to Colin Eglin implied

---

39 Deurbraak, September 1982

40 Interview with Harry Schwarz, 14 May 1990

"that you have got to team up with somebody. It implies that you are going to team up with the National Party ...(that) There is in fact a relationship between yourself and the Nationalist Party. So, while they are your chief opponents at the ballot box, you are also saying to the public, "well by the way they aren't all that bad because in certain circumstances we would team up with them". (41)

It should be stressed at this point that the PFP was not at this time ignoring the domain of black politics. Rather, the overwhelming stress of its activity fell in the arena of white politics. Its notion of political change was premised on the concept of white initiative and black response in which Parliament was perceived as the site of political change. The ultimate test of the efficacy of going for "the balance of power" was whether the constitutional environment would accommodate such a strategy. In this vein Slabbert stressed that there was one proviso on the proposed course of action which was that if the "rules" should be changed to such an extent that in a new constitutional dispensation then there would be no scope for the Opposition to hold the balance of power. (42) The potential of the PFP to hold a decisive sway over state power was ultimately dependent, therefore, on the Westminster constitutional system associated with the semi-colonial character of South African state formation.

The Party, under Slabbert's leadership, was never presented with the opportunity to test the strategy. Shortly after starting on the road to potentially holding the balance of power, the PW Botha government introduced its proposed new constitution and later called a referendum to test its support. This "changing of the rules of the game" forced the PFP onto a new footing.

---

41 Interview with Colin Eglin, 25 April 1990

42 Sunday Tribune, 17 October 1982

## THE REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN

Following the announcement of the National Party's outline of constitutional reform in 1977, the President's Council was established to develop an outline of a new constitution for South Africa. The bulk of the President's Council's recommendations were accepted by the National Party in July 1982. The Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill was placed before Parliament in May 1983. During July of that year a Parliamentary Select Committee considered evidence on the Bill, and in August 1983 it was debated in parliament. During the debate Prime Minister Botha announced that a referendum for white voters would be held on 2 November 1983.

The proposed constitution departed from the Westminster-style system then in place in South Africa. The major features of the constitutional proposals were the following:

- \* A single parliament with separate chambers for whites, coloureds and Indians, with white representation being greater than that of the other two put together;
- \* An executive President elected by an electoral college made up proportionally of the leading parties of all three Houses. This would ensure that the candidate favoured by the white chamber would be elected;
- \* A multi-racial cabinet;
- \* Joint committees of all three houses to determine amendments to legislation;
- \* A President's Council to act, in part, to resolve disputes not solved in joint committees. As well as

the numerical majority of whites in this Council, the President would nominate a further 25 members. In effect this body would have a preponderance of members supportive of the Government.

When the government announced the broad outlines of its constitutional intentions in 1982, Slabbert immediately criticised the plan on three main grounds. These were that they would increase racial polarisation, entrench racial discrimination, and undermine people's rights to citizenship. (43)

Earlier in Parliament Slabbert outlined the PFP's perspective on the minimum requirements for a successful constitutional initiative. These highlighted the view that:

- \* negotiating a new constitution had to involve all of South Africa's population groups;
- \* all should have access to South African citizenship;
- \* the vote for all could not be ignored, falsified or disguised in a new constitution; and
- \* minorities needed to be protected and domination avoided under such a new constitution.

Slabbert argued that the government needed to incorporate these principles if it were to unite moderates of all persuasions and colours. It would also indicate to extremists, both black and white, that the search for a constitutional solution was a serious one. (44)

---

43 Rand Daily Mail, 26 May 1982

44 Star, 16 May 1982

In keeping with this framework of thinking, the Natal, Cape and Transvaal PFP Congresses rejected the constitutional proposals in their existing form. Slabbert warded off criticisms from the National Party-supporting Press and certain traditional opposition-supporting newspapers such as the Sunday Express that the party was boycotting the constitutional process. In his speech to the Transvaal Party Congress he stressed that the Party was going to stay on in the process of negotiating a new constitution. This it would do cautiously. It would not simply "oppose issues for the sake of opposition." (45) He explained that there would be three stages to the PFP's response to the constitutional proposals. The first stage was the Party's initial response in which it decided that the proposals in their initial form could not be supported. The proposals had been closely studied and not rejected out of hand. Slabbert stressed that an "all or nothing approach" had deliberately not been adopted. The government's proposals did not have to respond to the PFP's constitutional guidelines in all respects; rather points of correspondence were looked for. After weighing up the pros and cons it had been decided not to support the proposals in their current form. (46)

The Party, he went on, had not removed itself from the constitutional debate. Rather, it would now enter the second stage of its response. This Slabbert described as the period of negotiation and bargaining. It would engage government and other interested parties on ways to improve the constitutional proposals. It would promote public debate through the forum of Parliament. The PFP would participate in the relevant Select Committees where it would be possible to get away from the confrontation of the Assembly and get down to "horse trading". At this stage the

45 Argus, 9 November 1982

46 *ibid*

PFP would push for the inclusion of its constitutional policy, central to which was the idea of a National convention. (47)

The ultimate stage of the PFP's response would be to make a final decision on whether to support the new constitution and whether to participate in it.

The period from November 1982 until the conclusion of the constitution debate was a difficult time for the Party. This point was highlighted by a member of the PFP's Federal Executive Committee who in November 1982 warned that both the Party membership and its public support base would have difficulty in formulating a response to the constitutional proposals. (48) The Party had since its inception promoted the cause of constitutional reform. Now that the Government was eventually getting around to this task it created confusion for those who were PFP supporters. As early as August 1982 the Sunday Tribune found that half of the PFP's supporters backed the constitutional proposals. (49) In a survey conducted by Rapport at the beginning of 1983 it was shown that 57% of PFP supporters wished to co-operate with the government's constitutional plans. (50)

For more than twenty years the PFP had been the only, or leading, proponent of reform within the white power bloc. It had consequently gathered around it the core of white class forces favouring such a course of action. Now that the National Party had outgrown its original class base and was rearranging a set of more progressive class forces into a new hegemonic bloc, it started to overlap in its constituency with that of the PFP. The debate between these

---

47 *ibid*

48 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 7 November 1982

49 Die Burger, 11 November 1982

50 Rapport, 16 January 1983

two competing forces was no longer about the need for reform. Rather, it was concerned with the pace and character of reform as Slabbert would state after the referendum campaign. After defining reform as

"any kind of development which would lead, in the different spheres, economically, politically and socially, to a sharing of opportunities, to a sharing of structures and institutions" (51)

Slabbert stressed that the PFP had introduced the idea of negotiation, reform and consensus into parliament. Now the debate was about the speed with which reform was implemented. Given that this generalised and vague concept of reform was capable of accommodating a broad array of interpretation, it is understandable that the National Party was able to draw support away from the PFP. Both parties were competing to establish their dominance within the white power bloc and so apply their differing interpretations of reform. Both were attempting this course of action in order that the country could extricate itself from the crisis it was in and so ensure the continuance of the capitalist system of production. For the National Party the exigencies of white group survival and domination overdetermined their course of action. For the PFP, however, the liberal imperative of a common citizenship and equality before the law overdetermined its approach to reform. But any incremental step towards reform, even originating from within the National Party, was openly considered as possibly promoting a liberal outcome. It is against this background that the rationale and character of the PFP's eventual approach to the new constitution and referendum campaign needs to be understood. Both within Party ranks and within the ranks of its supporters the PFP experienced a bumpy and divided ride in its response to the new deal.

---

51 Slabbert (1985 a), p 38

Divisions were reported regarding the Party's response to the Constitution Bill when it was debated in Parliament between May and August 1983. The motion put by the Party in response to the second reading of the Bill - that the bill be read " this day, six months hence" was the strongest possible form of parliamentary protest. The formal stand taken by the Party in this debate was supported by a majority of the PFP parliamentary caucus, while it was reported that Harry Schwarz and four other members opposed such a strong form of opposition. (52) This division reflected the difficulty that the Party was facing during this time. The differences within the Party were reflected in the debate on what the Party's response to the referendum call should be.

On 24 August 1983 Prime Minister Botha called a referendum for 2 November that year. The question to be placed before the white electorate was:

"Are you in favour of the implementation of the Republic of South Africa Constitution Act as approved by Parliament?"

The question was deliberately narrowly phrased in order that it serve to draw support from those who were hesitant about reform, as well as those who saw the new constitution as a step towards further reform, thus cutting into the PFP's support base. Slabbert, in response, stressed that this ambiguity would make it difficult to know who was supporting the constitution on the basis that it kept blacks out of government, or on the basis that it was a stepping stone to let them in. (53) He had a few weeks earlier, during the parliamentary debate proposed that three questions be asked of all South Africans, and not only whites. The proposed questions were:

---

52 Die Burger, 5 September 1983  
 53 Slabbert (1985 b), p 111

"(a) Do you believe that only whites should participate in Parliament?; (b) Do you believe that only whites, Coloureds and Asians should participate in Parliament?; (c) Do you believe that whites, Coloureds, Asians and blacks should participate in Parliament without one group dominating the others?" (54)

In proposing that the referendum questions be posed in this way Slabbert was seeing the need for South Africans to assess the principle of reform and not a specific Act of parliament. In so doing it would be possible to distinguish between those who wanted reform and the nature of the reform they desired. The fact that the referendum question as decided by the Government did not do so created a difficulty for the Party.

Many in the Party's support base believed that the new Constitution, which although greatly faulted, was a "step in the right direction". Most notable in this respect was the response of traditionally opposition supporting newspapers who adopted this posture. Liberal newspapers who recommended that voters support the new deal included the Sunday Times, Sunday Express, Daily Despatch, The Friend, Natal Mercury, Financial Mail, and Finance Week. (55) Within the Party's Federal Executive there was an extended debate on what the Party's response to the referendum question should be.

Two motions were put before the Federal Executive at its September 1983 meeting. The motion put by Colin Eglin was eventually carried *nem con*, only after a counter motion put by Harry Schwarz was defeated after a reported six members

---

54 *ibid*

55 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1983

of the Executive supported it while an unidentified number abstained. (56)

Eglin's motion read unambiguously that,

"The Federal Executive of the PFP resolves to urge the voters of South Africa, irrespective of their Party political affiliation, to vote no to the constitutional proposals on November 2." (57)

In response Schwarz proposed an amendment which would allow voters the leeway of deciding which way to vote. It called on the Federal Executive to resolve that:

"the issue whether the constitution should or should not be accepted is a matter going across Party lines and it recommends to the electorate that the constitutional proposals of the government do not offer a solution to South Africa's problems and that there are other and better alternatives particularly the proposals of the PFP." (58)

While Schwarz's motion was defeated, it reflected the ambiguity within the Party and amongst its supporters regarding an outright condemnation of government's reform initiative. According to Schwarz the Party caucus had earlier been evenly divided on whether to support the "new deal" as a step in the right direction. (59) A further example was the case of a PFP candidate for Sunnyside in the 1981 elections, Errol Musk. He resigned from the Party in response to the call for a "no" vote. He argued that he had joined the PFP three years earlier because he believed in the need of people of "race groups other than white" participating in government. Now that this appeared to be happening with the government's initiative, he agreed with

56 Die Burger, 5 September 1983, Cape Times, 5 September 1983

57 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 3 September 1983

58 *ibid*

59 Interview with Harry Schwarz, 14 May 1990

the leader of the NRP that the constitution, while not ideal, was a step in the right direction. (60) These incidents illustrate the contradictory interpretations inherent in the party's incremental liberalism.

Divisions also emerged on the left of the Party where there was the feeling that the PFP took too long in coming out unequivocally against the new deal. According to Tiaan van der Merwe, the Party's drawn out process of coming to a conclusion in its debate on the constitution allowed other parties who were potentially opposed to it, to ultimately support it and thus weaken opposition to the government's proposals. He said that the Labour Party had taken their decision to enter the tricameral system on the basis of the government's guidelines and not the finally drafted constitution. He recalled how he had told his colleagues

"that the PFP at the time could well have prevented that from happening, if we took a tough enough critical stand in that previous year when those guidelines appeared ... but the sort of gurus of the Party at the time, the leadership, felt that we should not knock these things down before we have seen more detail ... they may have just felt that was a reasonable thing to do; they may well have felt that the reform thinking in the minds of the Nationalists at that stage was a very vulnerable thing and that they should not be too destructive." (61)

The Party set about its referendum "no" vote campaign with a degree of trepidation. The Federal Executive stressed the need for the Party campaign to emphasise that it was a positive step to vote "no". The PFP campaign's criticism of the constitution focussed on three appeals: "no to racial conflict"; "no to one-party dictatorship"; and, "no to Apartheid '83". (62) This criticism of the new deal was

---

60 Argus, 4 October 1983

61 Interview with Tiaan van der Merwe, 6 March 1990

62 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 3 September 1983

wrapped up in an overall message to government to incorporate all South Africans in the drawing up of a new constitution. A Party pamphlet during the campaign made the following appeal:

"70% of the population would say NO if they were allowed. You can say NO.

"So don't be misled. Say no to the Nat plan and make them start again with all the people who should have been consulted in the first place."  
(63)

Elsewhere the Party stressed its own constitutional proposals and called for a National Convention as a means to formulate a new constitution. (64)

The PFP campaign departed from traditional election campaigns in two important respects. These were the focus on talking to the business community, and in having joint public meetings with moderate black leaders, or having them address PFP gatherings. (65)

In a percentage poll of 76% of the electorate, 65,95% of voters voted "yes", while 33,53% showed their opposition to the constitution. While there was no party political breakdown of the vote it was clear that large numbers of voters who had supported the PFP in 1981 backed the government in the referendum. PFP leaders admitted that this was the case and expressed the hope that these voters were not lost to the Party. (66) Dr Dirk Laurie of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research concluded that more than half of PFP supporters voted yes; 40% who had

63 PFP, "The Constitution has changed but not the problem", 1983

64 PFP, "The most crucial challenge for South Africa - an analysis of the Nationalists' Constitutional Plan - 1983", 1983

65 These two areas are discussed extensively below.

66 Cape Times, 4 November 1983, and Comment, December 1983

voted for the Party in 1981 stayed away; and of those PFP supporters who voted, there were five votes against the constitution for every seven in support of it. (67)

Assessing the referendum result, Slabbert admitted that the PFP had fared worse than expected. (68) A task for the Party in the post referendum period would consequently be to persuade PFP supporters who had voted "yes" that the PFP was their "political home". They had voted "yes" on the basis of "good solid PFP sentiments; they hoped for reform, for a step in the right direction, for constructive peaceful change, etc." (69)

Despite the fact that the National Party was still devoted to apartheid many PFP supporters had voted for it. Slabbert in a speech to the Party's 1983 Federal Congress identified four reasons why this was the case: (70)

1) The split in the National Party and the formation of the Conservative Party had meant that the National Party had come to assume the middle position in white politics. All opposition was consequently seen as extreme, a factor which the NP capitalised on in its propaganda.

2) The National Party has marketed its leadership successfully, rather than its policies. Through its marketing campaign the NP had hijacked the language of reform, negotiation and consensus politics. The government had thus "sold" the idea of reform, rather than the constitution itself. As a consequence strong opponents of the constitution, eg. those in the business community, still voted for it.

---

67 Star, 12 November 1983  
 68 Slabbert (1985 b), p 118  
 69 Comment, December 1983  
 70 *ibid*

3) The decision of the Labour Party to participate in the new constitution on the basis of the guidelines served as a blank cheque for government to accelerate the process. The PFP had not been prepared to take such a decision without having seen the constitution.

4) The response of the CP had been hysterical driving many PFP voters into supporting the new deal.

Slabbert's interpretation of the political moment guided the Party's uncontroversial decision to participate in the new constitution. He said that

"we are now moving out of the raising-of-expectations phases as far as reform is concerned and into the delivering-of-the-goods phase" (71)

This would present new opportunities for the PFP. It had become necessary for the Party to participate so as to "explore every possible opportunity to pursue its principles and ideals." (72) Not to do so would be to "abdicate all hope for peaceful, non-violent change towards our future". (73) This stance recalls the constitutionalism inherent in earlier statements on the nature of change being necessarily rooted in white action and along a path which should at all costs avoid revolution.

With very little debate the Party saw it as logical for it to continue its opposition role from within the precincts of the new constitutional system. According to a resolution taken at the 1983 Federal Congress it was argued that "opposition in parliament has ever been more relevant and

---

71 *ibid*  
 72 *ibid*  
 73 *ibid*

more necessary". (74). Participation was all the more important to ensure that the process of reform was expedited. The new constitutional environment, wrote Slabbert shortly after the referendum, represented

"quite a significant shift away from a situation where the white parties in Parliament predominantly argue amongst themselves on how to structure the system of racial domination more effectively". (75)

Slabbert stressed the need for greater linkages or contact with the black community in order to work against polarisation between the races:

"It is true that the referendum has contributed to white-black polarisation - we have seen all the signs of it. If the PFP has a special responsibility and a task which it set itself right from its inception, it is to counteract polarization and to keep the spirit of reform and negotiation politics alive. This must remain a priority." (76)

But one of the first priorities, according to Slabbert, was to deal with the outstanding issues of influx control, rural poverty and homeland development, urbanisation and housing, land, transport and other issues. For the PFP it was necessary to bring pressure to address deficiencies associated with these issues. A solution to them would

"affect economic growth, industrial relations, urban and metropolitan stability and all of us have a vital interest in these issues and are affected by them." (77)

The second priority was to promote the debate about African political incorporation. Thirdly, the struggle for civil

---

74 Minutes and Resolutions of 1983 PFP Federal Congress  
 75 Slabbert (1985 a), p 38  
 76 *ibid*  
 77 *ibid*

liberties and an end to racial discrimination had to continue.

Despite experiencing a setback at the referendum the PFP continued to locate itself firmly as a competing element within the white power bloc, albeit with a new commitment to reach into the realm of black politics.

### **THE PFP AND BUSINESS**

The referendum campaign marked a crucial moment in the PFP's outreach to the business community. In the period between the 1981 elections and the referendum the Party did not specifically identify this sector for special treatment, although policy development and debate reflected varying responses to the interests of capital.

At the Party's Federal Congress in November 1981 it accepted the Charter for Social and Economic Progress based on the report of the Economic Commission of the PFP under the chairmanship of Harry Schwarz set up at the 1978 Congress. The document proposed a form of welfare capitalism for the country.

The policy made provision for an urban-based market economy which would encourage private competition at the same time as providing for social welfare services. Care would be taken to avoid abuses and exploitation rooted in monopolisation and concentration of economic power. Corporatist structures of economic control would be encouraged with the focus being on a partnership between capital, management and labour. The objective of what was termed economic democracy was,

"to create an economic environment which will facilitate the achievement of economic well-being by all and to lay the foundations for a society in which there is no discrimination based on skin colour or sex and no privilege by reason of class, race, birth or sex; a society in which there is true equality of opportunity in an economic system in which we aim for as high a degree of efficiency as is compatible with an acceptable level of economic justice, in which poverty is eliminated and in which there is incentive for the industrious and protection for the disadvantaged."  
(78)

As well as calling for the elimination of all forms of discrimination, and the equalisation of access for all to the market, the policy document also called for provisions to be made to control economic relations such that competition "is fair and uninhibited by cartel, monopoly or other abuse of power concentrations". (79) Monopolisation was to be subject to the same public scrutiny as that for political concentration. The right to work and access to benefits for the unemployed were also incorporated into the document. A minimum wage would also apply under such a policy.

The PFP policy further went on to recognize the need for "the creation of a realistic and fully operational system of labour relations". (80) While nationalisation was rejected in general, the state was to be accorded a role in providing goods and services not, or incapable of being, provided by the private sector. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the policy was the stated desire for participative management. This preceded the trend towards this policy formulation within the business community by at

---

78 PFP, "Economic Democracy - The Progressive Federal Party's Charter for Social and Economic Progress in South Africa", 1981

79 *ibid*

80 *ibid*

least five years. At a time when the advanced sections of capital were calling for the regularisation and legitimation of trade union rights and collective bargaining within the South African economy, the document penned by Harry Schwarz called for

"the establishment of a relationship between capital, management and labour based on the recognition that each have an interest in the welfare of others. Processes towards industrial democracy should be encouraged. Share option schemes and worker participation for all employees and workers are also matters to be developed."  
(81)

The motivation for social welfare provisions argued for a "caring society" which would provide for those who could not for reasons of ill health, disability, age, or inability to find employment.

The policy document saw economic development and growth as being city based and that it would inevitably imply growing urbanisation. It was seen as

"important that provision be made for this process and that an environment be created in which both the public and private sectors contribute and in which individuals can be helped to house themselves". (82)

Harry Schwarz described the economic policy as drawing on the best aspects of both capitalism and socialism without complying with any one economic doctrine. While the policy referred to the reallocation of resources by the state, this would not mean "taking from the rich and giving to the poor". Ultimately the policy was concerned with ensuring economic growth and preventing the development of a revolutionary situation. Said Schwarz,

---

81 *ibid*

82 *ibid*

"If we are to avoid revolution in South Africa we have got to have economic progress." (83)

Motivating the PFP's economic policy a few years later, Van Zyl Slabbert argued that provisions for social welfare and the free organisation of labour were necessary. It was strategically important in the scheme of warding off of a socialist revolution that free enterprise not be permitted to exist in an unrestrained manner. The government had to follow policies to avoid "certain social conditions ... which will have political consequences profoundly detrimental to any free enterprise at all". (84)

Not all in the Party, or indeed the business community identified entirely with the new policy. Many within the Party were staunch free marketeers and the adoption of the policy of "economic democracy" was perceived as a compromise. A former Transvaal leader of the Party described this tension:

"I am a capitalist. I am not a social democrat or a socialist. That doesn't mean that I don't coexist very happily with other people. We have a policy of economic democracy which makes a lot of sense but it really is in a sense a compromise and there is nothing wrong with that in politics. Anybody who thinks that a country which has this first world and third world component, that you can totally ignore the weak and the poor and those unable to help themselves, lives in a dream world. Those certainly have to be taken into account. In many cases you have got to go in for affirmative action in order to try to redress the balances in the interest of everybody. You probably can't apply the straight, pure principles of capitalism which you might be able to do in a mature economy such as, for example, the British one. So perhaps that mix between free enterprise and social democracy is not a bad thing." (85)

---

83 Cape Times, 7 October 1981

84 Slabbert (1985 a), p 73

85 Interview with Douglas Gibson, 20 May 1988

A similar acceptance of the need for a public sector in the economy was voiced by the former Party leader and prominent businessman, Zach de Beer:

"My own stance would be that I think it is beyond any doubt at all that the free enterprise system a) delivers the goods, and b) allows more freedom of choice to human beings than any socialist system there has ever been. It is a matter of principle to me to be a free enterprise man and not a socialist. That does not preclude a mixed economy." (86)

Not all Party members agreed with the economic policy stance adopted by the Party. Some, such as Bobby Godsell, saw the need for the Party to identify a clearer class interest in its policy:

"In a normal society I see a great similarity in economic interests, in Marxian terms, of a party like the Progressive Party (sic) and parties like the Free Democratic Party in Germany, to some extent the Liberal Party, the VVD in Holland, of liberal Republicans. These are people who are genuine inheritors of eighteenth and nineteenth century liberals. They are concerned about the freedom of the individual in society and that freedom has a very important economic component.

"I think that there is an unresolved tension within the PFP. There are some glib and utopian socialists who I don't think have thought their socialism through. Then there is a kind of soggy non-racialism where people think, 'Black people want socialism and since we want to be nice to black people, we can't afford to disagree with a socialist analysis'. I say it is soggy non-racialism because you don't demonstrate your respect for the adulthood, citizenship and integrity of black South Africans by patronizing them.

"To some extent the PFP's most logical class base is that of an upper middle class and

professionals. Its class basis should be, in a way, new Tories, FDP, in some senses Reaganite Republicans. This is not all attractive, but if you are looking for reliable political alliances, you must combine personal and economic interests with what you are trying to achieve." (87)

It was because PFP economic policy was not seeking to serve precise class interests, but rather the generalised interests of capital accumulation, that it did not appeal to many in the business community. Economic policy was a balance between various intellectual strains within the Party reflecting a range of reformist and liberal responses. It was also a function of the diverse class character of the party, of which only a small number of members were captains of industry. According to Slabbert the party was largely made up of members of the middle class intelligentsia. He contended somewhat overstatedly that

"it was a bohemian party. It was an extraordinary collection of individuals. They were academics, professionals, yuppies; certainly not capitalists." (88)

As a consequence, it could not serve only the interest of the dominant monopoly sector of capital, despite extensive support from individuals within major corporations. While the Party did receive support and funds from leading individual businessmen, the business community as a whole did not fully endorse the Party. This was both because of the Party's economic policy, as well as the stress within business of directing political energies towards government. Commenting on business's lack of support for the Party, Gibson said,

"Most of the members of the business community are to a greater or lesser extent hostile to any

---

87 Interview with Bobby Godsell, 23 May 1988

88 Interview with Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, 28 September 1990

smack, any hint of social democracy. We could be stronger with the business community if we came out much more pro-capitalist than we did. I think we have got to deal with responsibility and we are much more than simply a business party. We are a Party who cares about the people who don't even have a vote at all." (89)

Slabbert argued that he never made a special effort to endorse business thinking and at times was highly critical of the thinking among capitalists, especially as regards the need for state intervention in the economy. This, he maintained, contributed to the party not having as much support in the business community as it could have. Said Slabbert,

"I attacked business, this view that you could simply let the trickle down effect solve the problem of inequality. There had to be intervention. You had to address the problem of inequality.

"I never defended capitalism as such, although I did defend the principle of free enterprise, or the market economy. But the kind of market economy which had a strong social democratic aspect. If anything I was rather bohemian in those circles." (90)

In many cases support expressed by business for the PFP was matched by similar support for the National Party in order, according to Schwarz,

"to keep in with those in power and on the other hand, they wanted to salve their consciences. They probably voted for us even if they gave money to the National Party." (91)

---

89 Interview with Douglas Gibson, 20 May 1988

90 Interview with Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, 28 September 1990

91 Interview with Harry Schwarz, 14 May 1981

In a similar vein Brian Goodall said that the PFP had

"had a long major disadvantage and that is the business community actually has to deal with political power because that is where the patronage lies. I think the business community have actually learned that politics really does affect how business can operate. To the business community government is a fact." (92)

While a large element of capital was not forthcoming in its support for the Party, specific PFP policies coincided with the needs of progressive monopoly business interests. Throughout the seventies there had been appeals from this sector for a stable educated urban-based work force capable of extending the base of the market in manufactured goods. Government developments, especially the reports of the Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions were welcomed in this respect. Organised business embarked on its own initiatives in the form of the Urban Foundation.

The PFP made much of issues related to black urbanisation and free labour organisation. The need to recognise the permanence of Africans in cities and the imperative of ending influx control were constants in the speeches and statements of Party leaders in the early eighties, especially those of Slabbert. A resolution adopted at the Party's 1981 Federal Congress called on government to accept black urbanisation as an economic and historical fact and appealed for forced resettlements to rural areas to be stopped. (93) The campaign on urbanisation was not only a reflection of the need to respond to the imperatives of a modernising economy. It was, in addition, as much the natural consequence of a staunchly moral stance on civil rights, as it was an attempt to outgun the National Party on an issue over which it was vacillating. This was stated by

---

92 Interview with Brian Goodall, 23 May 1988

93 Minutes of Federal Congress, 1981

Brian Goodall, who commented on the Party's stress on urbanisation issues by saying,

"That was a deliberate strategy to exploit a weakness within the NP and also because it was a key issue - the recognition that the future of South Africa was going to be determined by how you actually dealt with the urban black rather than how you dealt with the rural black. He was not a problem." (94)

Attempts by the PFP to woo elements of the business community were confounded by the government's reform initiatives and deliberate bid to draw more capitalists, especially English speakers, into the realm of its hegemony. Historically the PFP had received the support of a small section of capital, most notably from leading figures within the Anglo American Corporation. (95) According to Slabbert the PFP received

"a fair degree of support from Harry Oppenheimer; and because of that from Anglo American. But, comparatively the amount of support we got from them was miniscule compared to the kind of money they gave for other issues and causes; or the kind of money that they could have given if they were really concerned about the role of the PFP.

"If you did a head count at Anglo American right throughout my period in the PFP, I would say the majority would come out on the National Party side. The party of business was the National Party. But the image was that because Harry Oppenheimer supported us, we were." (96)

The bulk of English capital had given its support to the United Party. (97) Since the demise of that party, many within the ranks of the English speaking business community

---

94 Interview with Brian Goodall, 16 May 1988

95 See Hackland (1984), Chapter 11

96 Interview with Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, 28 September 1990

97 Interview with Zach de Beer, 18 May 1988

were divided in giving their support to the PFP, while at the same time "keeping in" with the governing Party. (98)

From the late seventies with increasing appeals from the business community for reform, especially with regard to the mobility of labour and urbanisation issues, government made an increasing effort to appeal to business leaders. The 1979 Carlton Hotel Conference, and the 1981 conference at the Good Hope Centre were vital events in this process. They came at the same time as the government was unfolding its constitutional plans and talking the language of reform.

Following the 1979 conference Slabbert responded to Botha's initiative by giving credit for creating a climate for change. He warned, however that government needed to stop talking in generalities. (99) After the 1981 meeting he again welcomed the initiative.

There was strong support for government's reforms in the field of labour mobility and organisation following the reports of the Wiehahn, Riekert and De Lange Commissions. The movement towards political reform desired by capital found expression in the proposed new constitution put forward by government in 1983. The business community, in general, supported Botha's initiative. Assocom and the FCI welcomed the constitution as "a step in the right direction and the start of an evolutionary process of constitutional reform". (100)

During the referendum campaign the PFP made a special effort to appeal to business leaders. A large group of prominent

---

98 Interview with Zach de Beer, 18 May 1988, Interview with Brian Goodall, 23 May 1988, Interview with Harry Schwarz, 14 May 1990

99 Hackland (1984), p 425

100 South African Foundation News, 9 (9) 1983

businessmen were invited by Harry Oppenheimer to hear an address by Slabbert. (101) According to Slabbert only two out of the approximately one hundred businessmen who attended the luncheon agreed with his arguments. (102) Commenting later, Slabbert said that most people in business had supported his arguments against the new constitution, yet voted for it. The "yes" vote, therefore, had nothing to do with the merits of the new constitution. The NP had sold,

"'reform', 'steps in the right direction', goodness', happiness', 'positiveness', every emotion and value it could dredge up. The 1983 referendum showed me that intelligent, successful people can collectively abandon reason and common sense." (103)

Among the individuals whom Slabbert cites as having voted "no" were Tony Bloom, Gordon Waddell, Clive Mennell and Harry Oppenheimer all with historically close links to the PFP. (104) Even Oppenheimer announced before the referendum that he would be voting "no" reluctantly.

Summing up the relationship between the PFP and the business community, Slabbert said that he

"never regarded them as a captive constituency or a monolithic constituency. Their interests were closely tied to government, to power. I never experienced business looking upon the PFP as a protector of their interests. How could we. We had very little power. But they certainly floated towards you when there was disillusionment with government. It was pendulum stuff."  
(105)

---

101 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1983, p 17

102 Interview with Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, 28 September 1990

103 Slabbert (1985 b), p 112

104 *ibid*

105 Interview with Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, 28 September 1990

The vacillating nature of business will be explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters. The early years of the decade saw a close relationship being built between large sections of the business community and the National Party government. To that extent the National Party could be seen as the "party of business". The PFP, by contrast, while advocating a policy platform which sought to advance the interests of the existing market economy, did not represent anything more than a small group of businessmen.

#### THE PFP AND BLACK POLITICS

The pattern of the PFP extending links to black moderates throughout the seventies was continued into the early eighties. (106) This was as much a consequence of radical black organisations and trade unions not wishing to have contact with the Party as it was of their relative inaccessibility and small-scale operation. It was also a consequence of the PFP's positioning of itself in antagonism to any potentially revolutionary force. Commenting on the situation of popular black organisations in relation to the Party before the implementation of the tricameral constitution, Colin Eglin said that the mobilisation associated with the new deal changed the character and perception of black organisations from the point of view of the PFP. In the early eighties, Eglin contended the focus of activity

"was really keeping in touch with information, a factual kind of relationship with other people. Once the mass movement started mobilising against the tricameral system, you weren't just on a fact-

---

106 See Chapter One for a discussion of the seventies.

finding mission. You actually had to have a relationship with people who were also actors on the scene. But I would say that in 1981 those external actors were relatively passive and you then had to deal with a new relationship with the external factors, your active external factors.

" There wasn't a UDF in 1981. There wasn't an MDM in 1981. There was a banned ANC. There was no mass movement to whom one had to relate. One just had to relate to black individuals, civic action committees and people like that. Once there was a mobilisation around movements and organisations, there was a new ball game and each one had to respond in a different way. " (107)

In many cases relationships with radical groups and individuals occurred on an ad hoc basis. The support work of PFP MPs, especially Helen Suzman, given to political prisoners and to squatter communities under threat of removal are useful examples of this work. Said Helen Suzman,

"I had connections and friendships with black people which were really not truly political. The fact that I went visiting and did what I could for political prisoners to try and improve their conditions." (108)

Commenting on her role with respect to forced removals, she added

"Don't forget I was the one who originally started the monitoring process by going to the Dimbasas and the Lime Hills in the sixties. I was the first to raise the forced removals. I was the first to go when being called upon whenever there was trouble in the townships. Ken Andrew and I used to go out at dawn over and over again when they were busy burning shacks at KTC and Crossroads and so on. That was more my role than looking for the leadership of the extra-parliamentary organisations." (109)

---

107 Interview with Colin Eglin, 25 April 1990  
 108 Interview with Helen Suzman, 9 April 1990  
 109 *ibid*

The overall thrust of Party activity also included the engaging of black leadership. Following an extensive assessment of the 1981 elections and the state of the white community by the Party's Federal Executive, the minutes of the meeting note,

"We must not forget the disenfranchised, and the question of a national convention was raised. It was suggested that the Party leaders make contact with Black leaders. Dr Boraine reported that this is happening." (110)

The character of the contact as has been pointed out was restricted primarily to moderate black leadership. At this time the Party, especially through statements by the Leader, sharply criticised the radicalisation of black politics. Slabbert distanced the Party from radical black leadership. He argued that at the root of the radicalisation was the apparent fusing of racial oppression and class exploitation associated with apartheid. Compounding the problem was the long-standing condition of racial polarisation:

"Because of the particular structure of the free enterprise economy, which largely until now, has meant whites have been more free to pursue enterprise and blacks more prone to experience the consequence of apartheid, there has, in terms of conventional class analysis, developed a situation where white corresponds to management and black to labour.

"This is now becoming a dangerous trend, because superimposed on this class division is the process of racial polarisation which has far more exploitable political and emotive potential than a simple class struggle. As long as white is associated with entrenched privilege and black with structured deprivation, a dimension of irrationality becomes part of the conflict which does not easily lend itself to peaceful resolution." (111)

---

110 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 16 May 1981

111 Rand Daily Mail, 30 May 1981

For Slabbert, the task for the PFP was to counter this polarisation, a mission confounded by numerous associated problems. Slabbert in speeches in late 1981 identified these constraints. Firstly, he criticised the fact that radical blacks questioned the bona fides of whites, something which either caused despondency on the part of young whites, or increased white militancy. Secondly, he highlighted "revolutionary romanticism" in seeing South Africa as being on the brink of revolution. The PFP as reformist or evolutionary was seen to be retarding the revolutionary process and was consequently nothing more than the "icing sugar on the system of oppression". (112) Associated with revolutionary romanticism was the development of "utopian socialist alternatives" which were fuelled by the increasing identification between apartheid and free enterprise:

"I believe that to the extent that private enterprise becomes associated in the minds of blacks with the system of separate development or apartheid, the development of such an utopian alternative will become institutionalised in black politics." (113)

In addition to the problem of "revolutionary romanticism", Slabbert also brought attention to his concern with "moral brinkmanship". This was the situation whereby,

"The parameters of the system are defined according to some moral quandary, and co-operation and negotiation are rejected or accepted depending on whether one is defined as being 'within' or 'outside' the 'system'. Thus, it is argued, to be a party in Parliament is to be 'part of the system' which somehow makes one morally more objectionable than living in a group area or riding in a segregated bus. It is necessarily accepted that one's intentions, however eloquently

---

112 *ibid*

113 Rand Daily Mail, 2 December 1981

stated, cannot be pure because one has become 'part of the system'." (114)

The problems identified by Slabbert were considered important as they directly affected one of the Party's fundamental goals - the deracialisation of conflict. It was crucial that black/white dialogue took place. (115)

While understanding the "anger, the bitterness, the frustration of those who suffer in terms of the status quo" the PFP declared its opposition to "those organisations and groups which seek to bring about revolutionary, violent or subversive change". (116) In the face of this it was necessary according to Slabbert to protect the country by means of a military "shield" behind which evolutionary change could take place. (117) The Party had hereby declared a vast gulf between itself and the ANC. In this context it was the role of the PFP to keep the,

"voice of reason and rationality alive at a stage when polarizing factions increasingly want to succumb to siege and irrational politics." (118)

The stance adopted by Slabbert and consequently most of the members of the PFP was informed, in part, by an ignorance of the liberation movement. Slabbert said later that at that stage he

"knew very little about the ANC and extra-parliamentary politics. I did not know people in the ANC. I had never met them. I never really understood, practically, 'the struggle of the people'." (119)

---

114 Rand Daily Mail, 30 May 1981

115 *ibid*

116 Rand Daily Mail, 21 November 1981

117 *ibid*

118 Impact, July 1981

119 Interview with Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, 28 September 1990

It remained that ongoing contact was almost exclusively with Inkatha at this time. Inkatha represented a body of opinion very close to that of the PFP in many respects. It was a conservative organisation, opposed to revolution and committed to free enterprise. As such it embodied the ideal ally for the Party in its pursuit of moderation and evolutionary change. In the absence of any clear alternative the Party set about forging a close relationship with Inkatha. This had started in the seventies at a time when the Party sought contact with homeland leaders in pursuit of black/white contact, and to represent the views of blacks in parliament (120) The Party concluded a joint declaration with the leaders of Gazankulu, Kwazulu, Lebowa, Qwaqwa, the South African Indian Council and the Labour Party expressing a joint determination to work together for peaceful change in South Africa and for a national convention. (121) No close permanent relationship emerged from this joint agreement with the exception of that with Buthelezi and Inkatha. This relationship was built on the strong and long standing personal ties already existing between Buthelezi and Slabbert, as well as between the Inkatha leader and the leader of the PFP in Natal, Ray Swart. (122) After a number of high level meetings the two groups formed a formal liaison committee. The close bond between the two organisations developed on the basis of the belief that there was sufficient common ground between them to negotiate and agree on an alternative constitutional framework for the country.

At the behest of the Inkatha Central Committee the Buthelezi Commission was appointed in 1980 to look into alternative constitutional, political and social policies for Kwazulu

---

120 See Hackland (1984), Ch 12

121 *ibid*, p 449

122 Interview with Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, 28 September 1990

and Natal with Denys Schreiner of the University of Natal and with close PFP links chairing it. Colin Eglin was the PFP representative on the commission.

In September 1981 the PFP and Inkatha formed a joint steering committee to investigate closer cooperation. Over the following four years the two parties engaged in many joint activities, in particular by the two leaders.

Slabbert and Buthelezi issued a joint declaration following the publication of the Buthelezi Commission's findings in early 1982. Their declaration stated that a new constitution had to be agreed to by all South Africans. They called for the peaceful promotion of a new constitution which should be based on negotiations between "the recognised and accepted leaders from all sections of our population". (123) They reaffirmed a commitment to full citizenship for all without discrimination; equality of opportunity; accountable government. In criticising the government's constitutional proposals they rejected any constitutional development which excluded any section of the population from participating in the new constitution.

The two leaders said that the process of the Buthelezi Commission represented a commendable attempt at negotiation and was worth repeating, specially in the light of the government's intransigence on negotiation:

"There is no other way of combatting polarization and confrontation than for South Africans of different cultures, race and attitude to get together and negotiate on the common future awaiting them all." (124)

---

123 *ibid*

124 *ibid*

Colin Eglin was full of praise for the moderation of the Inkatha leader following the publication of the report. He described the report as the result of a courageous attempt "by one of the most important black South African leaders of our time ... to find a way in which we who live in South Africa can live in peace." (125) Buthelezi was courageous in that he faced attack from blacks who were committed to an "all or nothing approach" and who in frustration had turned to violence. He had refused to play to the "black gallery" and had not accepted a universal franchise in a unitary state. The Buthelezi Commission exercise had proved, Eglin went on, that negotiations were not simply part of the process of finding a solution. They were part of the solution.

Later Slabbert at a joint public meeting of PFP and Inkatha at the Durban City Hall attended by 2000 people called for a joint meeting of the constitutional committee of the President's Council and the Buthelezi Commission. He motivated this by saying that such a meeting would represent an opportunity to open up the constitutional debate which appeared deadlocked; the Buthelezi Commission could provide valuable informations on how to bring about effective reform; it would stop the ignorance of President's Councillors about "what blacks are like and what they want"; it would prevent the President's Council from promoting black/white polarisation; and, finally the PC had nothing to lose by such a venture. (126)

The relationship with Inkatha blossomed during 1982 and 1983. Among many joint activities there was a joint PFP/Inkatha seminar in Durban; regular meetings of the joint steering committee of the parties; the PFP invited Inkatha to sit on the stage at its protest at the death of Neil

125 Deurbraak, April 1982

126 Deurbraak, July 1982

Aggett in detention; Helen Suzman had contact with the Inkatha Women's Brigade; 33 members of the Johannesburg North branch of the PFP had met with Buthelezi at Ulundi; and the PFP and Inkatha had held joint meetings during the referendum campaign. (127) A resolution at the Party's 1983 Federal congress recognised the contribution of Buthelezi to the referendum campaign and "his steadfast commitment to peaceful change in South Africa". (128)

If the PFP believed that it did not need to relate to radical black organisations before the introduction of the new constitution, this was certainly not the case at the conclusion of the referendum campaign. The introduction of the government's constitutional proposals had seen the consolidation and mobilisation of a considerable body of militant opinion in the black community.

The formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in August 1983 provided a new challenge to the PFP. The UDF united nearly 600 organisations nationally into a popular front opposed to the government's new deal. The national character of the new movement, its potential strength, as well as its militance made it an inescapable force within the political landscape. It took an uncompromising stance in opposition to participation in government created structures, rejected the white referendum as racist and did not recommend to white voters whether they should vote or not. (129) Shortly before the referendum day, the ANC called on white voters to vote "no" in the poll. (130)

At the same time as the formation of the UDF, the National Forum came into existence. It was an alliance of black

127 *ibid*; Deurbraak July 1983; and Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1983

128 Minutes and Resolutions of PFP Federal Congress, 1983

129 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1983, p 82

130 *ibid*, p 47

consciousness organisations and left wing groups outside of the ANC-linked non-racial Charterist tradition and it too sought to mobilise opposition to the government's proposals. One of the leading organisations in the forum, Azanian Peoples' Organisation (Azapo), also did not advise a no vote as this was deemed to be a futile exercise. (131)

The overall impact of this growing mobilisation and organisation within the black political community forced the PFP to reassess its limited contact with black political organisations. In this context the Party's 1983 Congress resolved to encourage the Party's leadership to expand contact with black leaders. In addition it called for continued co-operation and links "with all groups which are working for realistic and peaceful change in the country". (132) While the PFP was clearly not departing from its approach of seeking alliances with moderate black groups, it was being forced by a changing environment to break new paths into previously uncharted territory.

---

131 *ibid*, p 83

132 Minutes and Resolutions of PFP Federal Congress, 1983

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE FAILURE OF 'THE POLITICS OF POWER': 1984 - 1986

#### CONTEXT AND INTRODUCTION

The period between mid-1984 and early 1986 proved to be a turning point in South Africa's history. It entailed severe economic crisis, massive popular opposition, and a significant weakening in the power of the state to reform itself. While there was increased unity amongst the dominated classes, the dominating classes experienced a successive diminution of their cohesion.

A key factor contributing to the heightening of crisis was the faltering of the South African economy. The debt crisis of late 1985, the closing of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, and the outflow of foreign capital marked the peak of this process. The conditions for the crisis had been established much earlier. (1) Foreign debt as a percentage of gross domestic product increased from 20,3% in 1980 to 50,0% in 1985. (2) 1984 saw a R 1 billion deficit on the current account of the balance of payments; the value of the rand declining to its lowest ever level of \$ 0,33; inflation reaching 13,25%; and, the prime lending rate also reaching its highest ever level of 25%. (3) Associated with these dramatic conditions which continued into 1985 were rising insolvencies and unemployment. Bethlehem estimated that unemployment in 1985 stood at 37%, as against the figure of

---

1 See Hirsch (1988) for a comprehensive discussion of the late 1985 crisis.

2 *ibid*, p 20

3 Survey of Race Relations, 1984, p xix

27% in 1980. (4) Meanwhile the rate of insolvencies had increased by 500% between 1980 and 1985. (5)

The rise of popular opposition and near insurrectionary conditions severely affected business confidence in 1985. A combination of factors during the year contributed to the August/September crisis. Sanctions played a role as the US introduced new sanctions. In July Chase Manhattan Bank announced that it was cutting its line of credit to the country leading to other foreign banks calling in their short-term loans. This was followed by the State President PW Botha putting a further damper on business confidence with his August "Rubicon" speech. The value of the Rand dropped still further reaching an all-time low of US 34c. Trading on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange was suspended for three days in August, while the government announced a unilateral four-month freeze on debt repayments from September, as well as the reintroduction of the financial rand. 1985 saw the South Africa economy at its lowest ebb with average growth declining by 1%, inflation reaching 16,2% and a net outflow on the capital account of R 10,46 billion. (6)

The dominated classes experienced a heightened moment of resistance and mobilisation. 1984 saw widespread schools boycotts, a successful boycott of the coloured and Indian elections for the new tricameral Parliament which severely restricted the legitimacy of these structures, and rent boycotts in Transvaal townships which not only served to further impair the authority of the newly established Black Local Authorities, but also saw the SADF troops deployed in townships for the first time as part of a massive wave of repression. The repression, however, served to provide a

---

4 Bethlehem (1988), p 118

5 Cassim (1986), p 7

6 Survey of Race Relations, 1985, p xxviii

new rallying point for the popular classes as there were three highly successful worker stayaways in September and October 1984.

The conditions of resistance were maintained throughout 1985. As well as ongoing school and rents boycotts, there was also a rise in ANC insurgency, as well as violence between the people and security forces in townships throughout the country. Distinctive features of this period were the national proportions assumed by popular struggle, the increased demands for national liberation, and the growing hegemony of the ANC amongst the dominated classes. The trade unions also played a crucial role. 1985 saw the establishment of trade union unity in the form of the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and an increase in strikes which included strong political currents.

These economic and political conditions served to cause disarray within the dominating classes with many leading capitalists expressing strong opposition to government policies. This was especially the case following the debt standstill in September 1985. Whereas business had in the early eighties been broadly supportive of government developments, there was now a real and growing fear that the regime's approach would undermine their long-term survival. Capital increasingly engaged in the political terrain. Significant developments were direct contacts and negotiations between businessmen and the liberation movement both at the national and local level. Anglo America's Chairman Gavin Relly led a delegation of business leaders in discussions with the ANC in September 1985. At the local level in Port Elizabeth businessmen negotiated with popular leadership in an attempt to end the consumer boycott of white enterprises. Business also acted collectively in making political statements. A full page advert in the Sunday Times endorsed by 91 leading businessmen called for

the ending of the state of emergency, an end to racial discrimination, full citizenship rights for all, and negotiations with acknowledged black leaders. (7)

A further development of the oppositional tone in business thinking at this time was the direct involvement of business in the formulation of alternative constitutional frameworks for the country. The Buthelezi Commission in Natal set a precedent for these ventures. As Glaser has indicated these efforts departed significantly from the efforts of capital in the post-1976 period in that for the first time it was attempting to provide alternative constitutional models for the state. (8) Both Assocom and the FCI proposed broad frameworks which endorsed the idea of a non-racial future. These frameworks combined a rejection of apartheid with a commitment to the international monetarist current. As Freund put it:

"If corporate South Africa receives a message from overseas about the need to break with racial privilege and move towards opportunity for all, (the narrowest definition of post-apartheid society), it also receives an equally powerful message about fiscal controls, deregulation and distribution away from the working class." (9)

The anxiety within the business community was echoed by similar developments within the state. The much vaunted "total strategy" was all but destroyed. Emergency measures included widespread repression and a short-term State of Emergency from June 1985 until early 1986. There was a realisation that there was need to move beyond the system of apartheid to remedy the malaise. But for most of 1985 state policy was guided by attempts to still the rising tide of revolutionary passion amongst the dominated classes.

---

7 Mann (1988), p 81

8 Glaser (1986), p 17

9 Freund (1986), p 10

Associated with the impact of economic decline, "total strategy" also came under pressure from increased urbanisation and a restructuring of the spatial political economy which policy had not kept pace with. As Morris and Padayachee put it,

"The classic patterns of labour supply and reproduction based on the simple migrant/settled rural/urban dichotomies were being superseded by restructured urban regional economies based around the industrialised metropolitan areas which encompassed traditional rural-bantustan, rural-white, urban-industrial, and urban-black areas."

(10)

Associated with this changing pattern was the emergence of large scale squatter resistance and increased calls from the business community for the abolition of influx control.

The state's intention to establish the Black Local Authorities on a financially self-sufficient basis proved to be a failure as widespread popular resistance mounted following the imposition of raised rent and service charges by local councillors. This resistance coincided with the development of mass opposition to the tricameral system and the exclusion of Africans from central state organs. The resistance served to delegitimise the regime's efforts at reform. Ironically it was the reform process which, as Swilling and Phillips put it,

"by aiming to widen the access points to political society, 'total strategy' inadvertently created spaces for initiating and deepening popular mobilisation and organisation. ... All these manifestations of resistance and opposition short-circuited key state strategies and prepared the way for new ones." (11)

---

10 Morris and Padayachee (1988), p 6

11 Swilling and Phillips (1989 a), p 141

This combination of conjunctural and structural pressures led to a new phase of reform as the state attempted to come to terms with problems it faced. This new phase occurred in the period covered by the next chapter. During the latter stages of the period covered by the present chapter, the state was unsure as to what course of action it should follow.

Conditions during this period presented the PFP with an entirely new context from that within which it had become used to operating. Escalating struggle, the failure of reform, repression, a deteriorating economy and a degree of deracialisation within constitutional politics all played a role. The failure of "total strategy" in the face of a rising liberation movement undermined the legitimacy of Parliament. It was no longer the decisive site of struggle with the result that the PFP found itself sidelined from the main battles unfolding within South Africa. Liberals within the PFP felt alienated from what were perceived as the forces of revolution and repression.

In the face of this scenario the PFP under Slabbert's stewardship redirected itself away from its traditional role as a white liberal opposition party. This chapter explores this shift from a preoccupation with contesting the terrain of the white dominating classes to a "power strategy" which sought to establish the Party as the leading edge of a non-racial centrist social movement premised on an antagonism to both the state and the liberation movement. The strategy embarked on an attempt to forge a new historic bloc which would attempt to cut across the fundamental cleavage between the white dominating and black dominated classes. The party attempted to achieve this through a major campaign to recruit black members, as well as establish links with black moderate groups.

The time chosen for this strategy meant that it was destined to fail dismally. So much so that the leader of the Party resigned in early 1986 unable to see a clear future role for the PFP. This chapter explores the party's "power" strategy and the decisive factors which caused it to be undermined. Important among these were the opposition that it faced from the liberation movement; its inability to successfully interface with the black community; the sway that the left within the Party held over the PFP due to its being strengthened by the conditions of crisis; and most importantly the post-Rubicon crisis from August 1985 which deepened the country's malaise.

The broad theme that emerges when looking at the period is that of the impact of outside forces on the direction taken within the Party: the mainstream shifting from the traditional liberal opposition mode, the left enjoying an importance beyond their numbers, and a staunchly counter-revolutionary stance adopted by Party hawks.

The chapter is structured thematically and considers the following issues: debate within the Party on defence policy in the wake of rising conflict in the townships; the repositioning of the Party in an effort to forge a new non-racial historic bloc of the centre; the campaign to recruit black members to the PFP to back up this shift; the debate within Party ranks about participation within the coloured and Indian Houses of Parliament which was significantly impacted on by the liberation movement and the left wing of the PFP; the deepening of the relationship with Inkatha and the attempt to forge a centrist alliance in the form of the National Convention Movement; and finally the relationship with the liberation movement which had an enormous impact on the Party and its members.

## DEBATES ON DEFENCE POLICY

A significant indicator of the impact of rising resistance on the Party was its debates on defence and conscription issues. These came to a head in late 1984.

Following the formation of the End Conscription Campaign in 1983 increasing pressure came to bear on the Party to call for the termination of compulsory military service. Members of the youth section of the PFP had become actively involved in the activities of the campaign and lobbied for it within the Party. This was intensified, when in September 1984, troops were first deployed in the townships. Following a decision by the Natal, Cape and Transvaal Congresses of the Party to endorse a call to end conscription in late 1984, the PFP Federal Council formalised this position as Party policy. Previously it had been the Party policy to advocate the establishment of a professional defence force, and the call for an end to conscription was argued to be in keeping with this. (12) The decision was not, however, endorsed by all within the Party. The Party's defence spokesman Phillip Myburgh and deputy spokesman Brian Goodall were opposed to it. The Transvaal Party leader Douglas Gibson, and other Transvaal members Harry Schwarz, Reuben Sive, Alf Widman and Dave Dalling also strongly opposed the stance taken. (13)

Myburgh, Sive and Widman resigned from the Party defence group in protest at the stance taken. When resigning from his position as Party defence spokesman, Myburgh said that he could no longer be the Party representative on defence matters as he did not agree with the policy. He felt that ending conscription would

---

12 Cape Times, 19 November 1984

13 *ibid*, Die Burger, 20 November 1984, Argus, 20 November 1984, and Rand Daily Mail, 21 November 1984

"have the effect of weakening the SADF and further politicizing its role, as well as dividing the country on the issue of defence which is in the interests of the country as a whole, I have consistently tried to avoid." (14)

He felt that it was not the SADF or the system of conscription which should be criticised, but rather the government.

The position of those who opposed the Party's new conscription policy was informed in the main by a desire to take a strong stand against revolutionary organisations, especially with respect to revolutionary violence. It was the view of Harry Schwarz that "in order to have peaceful, negotiated change you actually need a very strong security situation". (15) For others, such as Gibson, a strong stand on security policy was also informed by the need to accommodate the security fears of white voters threatened by black domination. These fears extended to

"personal security in the larger sense, rather than just in the thing of whether one is dealing with the communists or whatever else. I think it goes right down to the basic that people don't feel safe and secure in their homes or their flats." (16)

The debate and conflict in the Party over the conscription issue was eventually resolved in the parliamentary caucus with all agreeing to an interpretation of the new conscription policy as given by the leader Slabbert. His statement, as accepted by the caucus argued that the country needed a strong, efficient and non-racial Defence Force. The task of the country's Defence Force was

---

14 Cape Times, 21 November 1984

15 Interview with Harry Schwarz, 14 May 1990

16 Interview with Douglas Gibson, 20 May 1988

"not only to protect us all from external aggression, and to guard our borders, but also to provide the kind of stability without which no evolutionary transition can take place." (17)

In the context of a divided society it was crucial that the defence force be above controversy. It was important to end conscription for political, economic and military reasons. The political reasons advanced were that conscription applied to whites only; extending conscription to blacks at that time would be "extremely provocative"; it "introduced a racial dimension" into the "sensitive domestic activities" of troops in the townships; and it furthered polarisation which was destructive to bringing about evolutionary change. Economic grounds for ending the call-up included its negative impact on the shortage of skilled manpower and productivity. Military reasons offered were that a professional army would be more efficient and cost effective; the call up, training and follow-up of conscripts was cumbersome, costly and time consuming; a professional army would be more motivated and effective overcoming problems of alienation and low morale; and the regional context was argued as being conducive to a reduction in troop numbers which would be associated with an end to conscription. (18)

Together with the enlargement of the permanent force on a professional and non-racial basis and the promotion of a volunteer reserve force, he argued that a start could be made to the "phasing out of conscription as part of our military organisation until it is no longer necessary". (19)

It was necessary to deal with organisations who may wish to exploit the situation in the country for "revolutionary,

---

17 Sunday Express, 25 November 1985

18 *ibid*

19 *ibid*

violent or other disruptive ends" by means of an uncontroversial Defence Force. It was necessary that the Defence Force be

"above controversy and should be accepted by all groups as an impartial guardian of stability and order." (20)

In calling for an end to conscription, Slabbert argued, the PFP was not attempting to

"undermine the role of the Defence Force or to hamper it, but to allow for the possibility that it can become an effective and necessary agent of reform." (21)

Slabbert's interpretation was welcomed by those who had been so strongly opposed the new Party policy earlier. The casting of an end to conscription within the context of a reformist programme which would avert revolution proved to be acceptable.

#### **THE PARTY OF THE "MODERATE CENTRE"**

The period from late 1984 until 1986 saw a dramatic shift in the context within which the PFP operated. The rise of the liberation movement as a central pole of struggle, as well as the gradual deracialisation of politics forced the Party to reposition itself in mid-1985. However, initially, in the first year after the referendum there was still a degree of optimism that the PFP was the major force which could dislocate the Nationalists from power and so accelerate reforms. Jan van Eck, the editor of the Party newspaper Deurbraak, wrote in October 1984 that only a white party could remove the NP from office and implement its own

---

20 *ibid*

21 *ibid*

policy. He argued that, despite the introduction of the tricameral Parliament, the PFP was the only party other than the government which could obtain a white majority and thus it was "therefore in reality an alternative government and the official opposition." (22)

Despite van Eck's optimism, the Party leadership doubted the PFP's ability at that time of winning a majority of the white vote. Slabbert, addressing the June 1984 meeting of the Federal Council acknowledged that the Party had lost the short-term initiative to the government's reform programme.

(23) This view was echoed in the conclusions of a Party Image Committee which reported to the same meeting of the Federal Council. The Committee concluded that the Party had lost potential support to the National Party and that the constraints of its image prevented these voters from returning to the PFP fold. The concerns with the Party's image problem were confined to the Party's status among whites. Four areas were identified by the Committee:

1. The PFP was seen by white voters as being more concerned with black than with white rights. It was felt that whites could not trust the PFP with defending their interests, a view reinforced by the Party's stance on the referendum.

2. The PFP was perceived as being a permanent opposition and not an alternative government with clear alternative policies.

3. The PFP had a strong image as a "boycott party".

4. The PFP was viewed as being a party of rich English speakers.

---

22 Deurbraak, October 1984

23 Minutes of PFP Federal Council, 16 June 1984

The Federal Council responded to the report by recommending a number of measures aimed at improving the image of the Party among white voters. (24) To a large extent this was a continuation of the PFP's existing constitutional incrementalist trend. There was, however, growing concern that the Party was not meeting the challenge of a changing context.

Not all within the party accepted the restrictive view of the committee in defining the Party's problems as resting largely with its negative image among white voters. This approach was criticised by a PFP researcher as not coming to terms with the changing circumstances of politics in South Africa. (25) During the Vorster era, he argued, the Party had focussed on two distinct "markets": voters who wanted reform, and voters who wanted effective opposition. PW Botha's reforms had changed this situation fundamentally. Former PFP supporters came to see the NP as the vehicle for reform. Opposition to the reforms were seen by these former supporters as "petulant and obstructive". (26) The emergence of a strong right wing had encouraged other former PFP supporters to shift their allegiance to Botha in response to the conservative threat. Consequently, neither of the two unique "markets" existed any longer for the Party.

He went on to state that outside the confines of white politics, the introduction of the new constitution had significantly challenged the PFP's previous presumption that it had "an unchallenged right to speak on behalf of all the disenfranchised". (27) The decision of the Party to

24 *ibid*

25 James Selfe, "A comment on the report of the Image Committee", October 1984, in Minutes of PFP Federal Council

26 *ibid*

27 *ibid*

participate in the new constitution after calling for a "no" vote in the referendum had drawn back many supporters who had "strayed", but had resulted in "alienating others, especially blacks, who felt it was inconsistent with opposition to the system". (28)

The debate about the Party's image and consequent positioning was subject to intense pressure over the subsequent year as popular protest and extra- and intra-parliamentary pressures came to force the PFP to sophisticate its strategy. The PFP was gradually finding itself excluded from the main trajectory of struggle in which the main actors were the regime on the one hand, and the organisations of the dominated classes on the other. The popular resistance was gaining in momentum and authority both within the country, and abroad. In particular, it came to be seen as the standard bearer of the anti-apartheid and non-racial causes - to the exclusion of the PFP. It also proved to be a threat to leading elements amongst the dominating classes who believed that the UDF and ANC could mount a revolutionary assault on the basis of South African state, and more particularly the capitalist mode of production.

In an attempt to come to terms with these pressures the Party in June 1985 announced a major initiative in order, according to Slabbert, to go "flat-out" for what he termed "the politics of power". (29) The objective of the strategy was to make the Party a political force "among all race groups and put it at the centre of negotiation politics in South Africa". (30) The initiative to advance the party as a centrist force had two key components:

---

28 *ibid*

29 Leadership, 5 (1) 1986

30 Sunday Tribune, 9 June 1985

1. to position the PFP as a Party which could play a mediating role between government and black opposition groups. This would require the Party to engage both with the government and with resistance organisations to a far greater extent than had been the case in the past. Slabbert was projected by the party as the pivotal individual who could achieve this task. A PFP newspaper argued that Slabbert was increasingly seen as

"the leader who can act as a mediator, as honest broker between the two opposing forces of Afrikaner Nationalism and black liberation." (31)

2. to win "effective control" of Parliament by winning majorities in the House of Representatives and House of Delegates. This aspect of the strategy was premised on the belief that the repeal of the Prohibition of Political Interference Act was imminent. The repeal of that legislation would open the way for a major recruitment effort for the Party within black communities. The Party believed that by winning majorities in the coloured and Indian Houses of Parliament and by holding the balance of power within the House of Assembly in the event of right wing growth it could effectively control government.

The initiative was a response to the growing realisation that the Party could no longer operate in the isolation of whites-only politics. It was however premised on the Party's participation within the existing constitutional structures. In motivating why the Party was setting out to become the "largest and most broadly based political Party in the history of Parliament" (32) Slabbert argued that he regarded the strategy as an aspect of "the politics of power", as opposed to "the politics of protest". (33) This

---

31 Deurbraak, August 1985

32 Argus, 19 June 1985

33 Leadership, 5 (1) 1986

was a reference to the growing popular resistance movement. Slabbert later said that he

"never denied the validity of a party or group in Parliament protesting the injustices of Apartheid. But I set myself an objective to see to what extent I could get rid of apartheid, not just protest against it." (34)

Slabbert's refrain of 'repression, revolution or reform - those are the options' became the lodestar of the Party strategy. He characterised the government's programme as being repressive, while that of the liberation movement was revolutionary. Both approaches were considered to be "anti-democratic, anti-individual and fundamentally irrational". (35)

At the same time as he was seeking for the PFP alliances in the extra-parliamentary field he was criticising the dominant protest strategy of organisations in this arena. He appealed to extra-parliamentary groups to realise the limits of protest politics, and described those who confuse protest with bringing about change as having

"the Walls of Jericho approach to change: If enough people can be mobilized to walk around and trumpet against the citadel of apartheid and display intense moral anger the walls may begin to crack. I am afraid Jericho was a one-time affair. What distinguishes protest action from bargaining or negotiation action is institutional leverage. that is why protest action without institutional leverage will always be vulnerable to counter-repressive measures." (36)

The strategic imperative for the PFP came to be to promote a "third way" which united Parliamentary and extra-parliamentary sites of struggle, but which did not depend on

---

34 *ibid*

35 Slabbert (1985 b), p 59

36 *ibid*, p 136

protest and which accepted that Parliament was the instrument to bring about constitutional reform. The initiative was a recognition on the part of the PFP that it could no longer hope for the state to lead the process of change from above as its reform initiatives were all but undermined by popular resistance. It was also an acknowledgement that the Party would have to break with many of the traditions of its liberal past. Perceiving the need to take the counter-revolutionary initiative, the PFP broke with the tradition of white liberal opposition politics. It sought now to establish a new non-racial class alliance - a new historic bloc - in competition with similar efforts on the part of the liberation movement. It, however, pursued a social movement which, in contradistinction to the ANC and UDF, would be avowedly capitalist, yet non-racial.

The exact form that the strategy was to take was not clear at the time it was unveiled. Over the months that followed it became clear that the Party had underestimated the scale and contentiousness of its stance. It underestimated the precise nature of the moment in the history of South Africa in which there was an extreme polarisation between the dominated and dominating classes. The reformist programme proposed by Slabbert could only succeed on the basis of the manipulation of state power and the consent of the liberatory organisations. This, of course, was not to be. The Party embarked on its course of action being at the same time antagonistic to the liberation movement, and also ignorant of the power of resistance organisations to limit the PFP's efforts. Events from August 1985 also severely undercut the initiative. The mid-1985 strategy is best understood by exploring the character of the relationship of the Party to the black community and black political organisations in the period under review.

The following sections thematically explore the various aspects of this relationship and highlights their confusing and contradictory character.

#### THE OUTREACH CAMPAIGN AND DEBATE ABOUT PARTICIPATION

A central aspect of the "power strategy" was a campaign to recruit members of the dominated classes into the PFP. Although the campaign was only started in mid-1985 there had been earlier moves in this direction.

The introduction of the tricameral system immediately placed before the PFP the reality of working with blacks in the Parliamentary context for the first time since the introduction of legislation prohibiting mixed parties in 1968. The issue of participation in the white House of Assembly had not caused much of a debate within the Party. In addition, this logic was extended to a resolution whereby the Party Caucus was requested to consider joint caucusing with "like-minded members" of the coloured and Indian Houses. (37)

The Party did not actively pursue such a joint caucus at any stage although at points there were close working relations between it and parties in the House of Representatives and the House of Delegates. (38) PFP members adopted an open approach to these parties as was demonstrated by an editorial in Deurbraak in May 1984. Jan van Eck, the editor wrote that the Labour Party was intent on destroying apartheid laws. This would lead to a clash between the LP and the NP. He also suggested that since the PFP and the LP both believed "in the destruction of apartheid" they were "bound to become closer allies in the new constitution".

---

37 *ibid*

38 This is discussed in detail in Chapter Five below.

(39) The tone of van Eck's comments was indicative of a growing feeling within the Party that the tricameral system could provide the constitutional opportunity for the PFP to wield the decisive force of state power and thus be in a position to bring about reform.

In the midst of pressures from the Party for the repeal of the Prohibition of Political Interference Act key PFP structures took decisions in late 1984 to open the Party's membership to all races. Party regions had reported that a "number" of blacks had joined the PFP in the Transvaal, the Cape and Natal. (40) Following resolutions of the Cape and Natal provincial congresses calling on the Party to admit members of all races (41) the PFP Federal Council resolved similarly. The resolution read:

"In the light of the PFP's rejection of compulsory race classification and consequently of the Race Classification Act, and in the light of the PFP's acceptance of voluntary association as necessary for political co-operation and stability in South Africa, the Federal Council of the PFP wants to state unequivocally that when a person applies for membership of the PFP, the PFP under no circumstances will inquire into, or take into account, the colour, race or other ethnic origin of that person." (42)

In motivating this decision Party Chairman Alex Boraine said, "There is a deep anxiety within the Party that we can't go it alone if we are to solve South Africa's problems. We must be in contact with all race groups." (43) The only hesitation to the resolution came from the Transvaal Congress which was, as always, informed by a preponderance of conservative liberals and reformist. It was

---

39 Deurbraak, May 1984

40 Sunday Tribune, 11 November 1984

41 Sunday Express, 14 October 1984

42 Minutes of PFP Federal Council, 18 November 1984

43 Cape Times, 19 November 1984

concerned that the decision could be construed as encouraging people to break the law. (44) The Leader of the Party smoothed over the potential conflict by stating that while the Party was formally open, prospective members would be warned that they could face prosecution.

The decision to open membership encouraged a sharp rebuke from black extra-parliamentary groups. Speaking for the UDF, Frank Chikane said,

"The PFP is at present working within the framework of apartheid. Whatever change they can impose within their own organisation does not have a bearing on our struggle for a just South Africa." (45)

The response from the Black Consciousness sector was equally damning with the publicity secretary of the Azanian Student's Movement Kabelo Lengano suggesting that

"to say that the PFP has the black people's interests at heart, by seemingly deceptively going against the Prevention of Political Interference Act, would be both flimsy and unconvincing." (46)

The repeal of the Act preventing mixed political parties in mid-1985 paved the way for the Party to launch a concerted drive to recruit black members. In inaugurating the drive, known as the "outreach campaign", Slabbert called for the PFP to become the "largest, most broad-based political party in the history of the South African Parliament". (47) In making this appeal and in setting itself on this course of action Slabbert and the PFP were setting themselves on a collision course with the liberation movement on whose terrain they were now actively seeking to operate. The

---

44 Rand Daily Mail, 20 November 1984

45 Sowetan, 20 November 1984

46 *ibid*

47 Deurbraak, August 1985

Party put extensive resources into the campaign with the chairman Alex Boraine and the National Director Neil Ross guiding the recruitment drive. Assisting them was a national task force made up of MPs Peter Gastrow, Ken Andrew, Andrew Savage, Erroll Moorcroft, Roger Burrouws and Peter Soal. Marlene Webber, the OFS leader of the Party joined the national team for this campaign. (48) The focus of the recruitment campaign was the coloured and Indian communities with the possible medium term intention of contesting seats in the Houses of Representatives and Delegates. PFP leaders at this point stressed, however, that the Party had not taken a firm decision yet to contest elections for these two Houses. This was to be the subject of debate and strategic assessment within the Party in the months to come.

The decision of the Party to recruit black members was treated by the UDF as coming close to a declaration of hostilities between the groups. Speaking on behalf of the UDF, Gerry Coovadia said that the PFP had

"no moral right to try to corrupt and erode our sense of unity. The PFP must come and ask the coloured and Indian communities whether they want to participate in the tricameral Parliament. Yet 82% did not participate in the sham elections last year. If the PFP have not learnt that yet, they must learn that now, otherwise we will find ourselves on different sides of the fence. And we don't want that". (49)

Shortly thereafter, a claim by Boraine that an affiliate of the UDF wanted to join the PFP as a group was rejected by a UDF spokesman as "difficult to believe" (50) In a hostile press debate another spokesperson for the UDF warned the Party that if it continued its recruitment drive it could

---

48 *ibid*

49 Cape Times, 17 June 1985

50 Sunday Tribune, 23 June 1985

face the same reaction that coloured and Indian parties had experienced during the 1983 elections when these had been vigorously opposed and effectively isolated from the communities they were seeking to represent. Slabbert's response to this warning was curt and stressed the PFP as an independent political force intent on taking the liberation movement on:

"We cannot expect everybody will like the PFP. We appreciate there will be possible conflict with other groups who do not share our ideals. We are not spending our time finding out how many people do not like what we are doing. We are rather looking at how many people like it." (51)

Not all in the Party were happy with what was described as a "bullish" approach on the part of Slabbert. (52) They would have preferred a more cautious approach in which the re-emerging liberation movement was engaged with on a more diplomatic basis and not confronted head-on. This difference was a reflection of differing emphases within the Party as to the meaning of the outreach campaign. For the majority it meant a focus on recruitment; whereas, for an emerging minority "outreach" was best interpreted as a constructive engagement with extra-parliamentary forces. (53) The latter interpretation grew as many saw the pugnaciousness of the extra-parliamentary left for the first time being directed at their own party. For many in the Party the recruitment drive was their first interaction with black politics. Previously contact had consisted in the main of support and civil rights work by Party members. The new experience had a major impact. According to Peter Gastrow, UDF opposition to the PFP had

"a dampening effect and removed some of the romanticism around moving into the black community

---

51 *ibid*

52 Interview with Colin Eglin, 25 April 1990

53 *ibid*

and I think it reduced some of the paternalistic elements in that approach, where somehow people thought that the black community was, politically speaking, actually quite keen to be linked to the PFP. For many it resulted in a sort of a move back into white politics. The resistance seemed to be, on the face of it, so strong that people thought, 'To hell with it then! I for one am not going to try and bash my head against the wall'. "

(54)

For others, like Gastrow, the challenge presented by the UDF response, forced them to reassess the traditions of white liberal constitutional politics. Jan van Eck described the impact as follows:

"You were saying, 'If this isn't working, then the people in townships are primarily working through extra-parliamentary organisations. Then obviously we have to start looking at closer liaison with those organisations.' Because, then you are involved, although indirectly, with the people in the townships." (55)

There had been great optimism about the prospect of recruiting large numbers of black Party members because the principles and policies of the Party were deemed to be shared by the great majority of South Africans (56). The campaign, however, failed to draw many black members. It became half-hearted and sporadic with Party organisers having little expertise in operating within the complicated terrain of the popular classes. The culture of the liberation movement was the dominant one in popular politics with the consequence that the liberal constitutionalism of the PFP was seen as alien. (57) This came as a shock to hopeful PFP recruiters who soon learned that their campaign would never get off the ground.

54 Interview with Peter Gastrow, 28 March 1990

55 Interview with Jan van Eck, 29 March 1990

56 Deurbraak, August 1985

57 Interview with Tony Leon, 27 March 1990, Interview with Harry Schwarz, 14 May 1990, Interview with Jan van Eck, 29 March 1990

The outreach campaign was not only a failure to the extent that there was resistance to it, and that recruitment numbers were low, but also due to the complications it caused for the Party internally. An example of the PFP's inexperience in black politics can be seen in its appointing of Dinky Pillay, an individual with a very low public esteem with the Transvaal Indian community, to its National Council. The derision of the Transvaal Indian Congress at the appointment of Pillay. (58) forced a number of Transvaal PFP branch chairmen to question the wisdom of the appointment. (59) The matter was eventually resolved with Pillay's resignation from the Federal Council.

The most significant consequence of the Party opening its membership related to the debate this initiated regarding participation in all three Houses of the tricameral Parliament. At the launch of the outreach campaign in June 1985, Slabbert indicated that it was the Party's intention to win a majority of seats in the Indian and coloured Houses of Parliament. A formal decision on participation in these structures was seen as complicated and was delayed at that point. The response of extra-parliamentary groups to the recruitment campaign of the PFP served as a warning that it should not venture into participation in all fora of the tricameral system too glibly.

The PFP's participation as a white party in the white House had already been questioned by a UDF leader in an article in the Rand Daily Mail as early as August 1984. Joanne Yawitch, the leader of Jodac a UDF affiliate comprised of white leftists, wrote that the PFP's opposition to the new constitution had raised expectations in black communities that it would not participate in its structures. The

58 Sunday Star, 8 September 1985

59 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, October 1985

decision of the PFP to be active in the white House of Assembly was seen as a "compromise of principles, and not only a tactical compromise." (60) In addition to criticising the PFP's participation as giving legitimacy to the structures, Yawitch also suggested that it obscured "the fact that there is a growing movement of democratic whites who have entered into the mainstream of opposition to apartheid". (61) This, she contended, was an important symbolic statement of non-racialism which the PFP's actions were obscuring.

The UDF made an appeal to the PFP on the eve of the Party's Federal Congress in August 1985. The UDF cautioned the Party against going into the coloured and Indian Houses. It said that the PFP would assist the government in legitimising its structures through a campaign of recruitment and participation in elections for all three Houses. Drawing attention to the recently promulgated state of emergency, the statement went on to suggest bitterly that the PFP had used "the gap the repression of the UDF had provided to recruit black members". (62) Continuing, the statement warned that if the PFP put up candidates for elections in the House of Representatives and the House of Delegates its candidates would be treated in the same way as candidates in the earlier election for these two Houses. It suggested that whites should accept that the type of change that would satisfy the "majority" could only come through the actions of the majority.

The gauntlet had been thrown down; and it had a considerable effect on the debate within the PFP. Expressing sensitivity to the warnings of the extra-parliamentary movement, and mindful of the need to be cautious in its relations with

---

60 Rand Daily Mail, 21 August 1984

61 *ibid*

62 Cape Times, 29 August 1985

these groups, Colin Eglin suggested that the PFP needed to be "deeply aware" of the skepticism and sensitivity regarding participation. He said that in a normal democracy the PFP would go all out to gain power, but South Africa was not a democracy. The PFP would not rush into the new structures without consulting the people affected. (63) A stauncher position came from Mark Stein, the vice president of the PFP Youth, who warned that he would lead a walkout of members from the Party if it was decided to participate in all three Houses of Parliament. Stein was suspended from the Party for adopting this stance. (64)

In the debate at the Federal Congress Slabbert took a strong pro-participation position. Responding to criticisms of participation from extra-parliamentary organisations he argued that participation was a matter of strategy and not principle. He went on to repeat his contention that constitutional change could, by definition, only come about through the constitution. In a statement intended to distance the Party from the liberation movement and to reaffirm its Parliamentary strategy he continued that the alternative to constitutional change was to use "violent, revolutionary, or military means". (65) He concluded by saying that "one cannot demand a perfect constitution before one participates to bring about constitutional change". (66)

The Party eventually agreed in principle to participate in all three Houses of Parliament but that the ultimate decision to do so would rest with the leadership who would have

"to be sensitive and take into account

---

63 Cape Times, 19 July 1985; Deurbraak, August 1985

64 Sunday Star, 18 August 1985

65 Star, 1 August 1985

66 *ibid*

"1. the practical problems that may result from the PFP's use of the political structures following the repeal of the Prohibition of Political Interference Act;

"2. the duty of the PFP as a broad-based party to play a mediating role in South African politics."  
(67)

The resolution was a compromise between those for and against participation. At the Federal Congress there was a heated and lengthy debate on the motion. Those most virulently opposed to the motion were a group of Cape MPCs led by Jan van Gend, and including Molly Blackburn and Di Bishop. Drawing on their active experience in assisting popular organisations in the struggles then reaching a zenith in Cape townships they warned that the Party should delay participation until it was certain it had "substantial support from the communities to be served" by the two Houses. (68) Blackburn and Bishop advised that the Party would lose credibility in black communities if it were to proceed with the strategy. According to Blackburn the Party would be committing "political suicide " if it proceeded.  
(69)

The stance adopted above was informed by the active involvement of a small but influential group of Party members in popular struggles. Others not directly involved were also influenced and attracted to the discourse of popular organisations. Their involvement in debates within the PFP was guided by this. The influence of the left went beyond their numbers. Conditions of exacerbated crisis had allowed the left to assume an important role within the Party. In searching for a new identity the PFP both sought out and was attacked by all sides. It no longer sought to only appeal to a limited white constituency. Interaction

67 Minutes and Resolutions of PFP Federal Congress, 1985

68 Cape Times, 31 August 1985

69 *ibid*

with a black constituency came to assume a primary importance. Those that concentrated on this aspect of Party work - mostly on the left - therefore came to be the unofficial representatives of the liberation movement within the PFP. From this platform they could predominate in debates, whereas in the past they could not due to the lesser strength of the liberation movement. (70)

The Federal Congress decision was followed by numerous calls from the UDF and its affiliates for the PFP not to proceed with the strategy. In strong language the TIC said that it regarded the PFP Leader Slabbert as "no better than the Rajbansies and Hendrickses who, despite massive rejection of the tricameral Parliament, entered it." (71)

With the failure of the recruitment campaign, as well as the strong response from popular organisations, the Party, while Slabbert was still the leader, backed down from its initial enthusiasm to participate in all three Houses of Parliament. (72) The Western Cape region of the PFP felt particularly strongly about this matter and introduced a motion to the December 1985 meeting of the Federal Council calling on the Party not to participate in a forthcoming by-election for the House of Delegates in their region. After assurances from Slabbert that under the current conditions the Party would not contest the election, the Western Cape motion was withdrawn. (73)

The PFP's attempts to recruit black members and to participate in all three Houses of Parliament, therefore, proved to be a failure. In large part the pulling back from the decision to participate can be seen to be linked to the

70 This will be more fully discussed in the section on the Party's relationship with the liberation movement below.

71 Herald Tribune, 8 September 1985

72 Interview with Tiaan van der Merwe, 6 March 1990

73 Minutes of PFP Federal Council, 1 December 1985

efforts and opposition of the UDF and its affiliates. Harry Schwarz said that there could be "no doubt that the attitude of extra-parliamentary organisations played a role in regard to participation in the other two chambers". (74) The impact of these organisations on Party strategy could be likened to a power of veto, he argued, illustrating the fragile base on which the PFP stood.

#### **RELATIONS WITH INKATHA AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL CONVENTION MOVEMENT**

Central to the strategy initiative launched in mid-1985 was that the PFP should assume the mantle of leading the centre of South African politics. Prior experience and changed circumstances had shown that it, as a white party, could not do this alone. Consequently a two-fold outreach programme had been launched both to recruit black members, and to consolidate links with black extra-parliamentary organisations. The logical organisation to foster such links with was Inkatha. The PFP and Inkatha had long-standing ties, and held similar moderate policy platforms.

The historically smooth relationship between the two organisations had been blemished earlier in 1985 following the shooting of 19 mourners by policemen at Langa outside Uitenhage. A delegation of PFP MPs and MPCs led by Errol Moorcroft had conducted a study of the event and its aftermath and its report had stated that the South African government had sent Zulu speaking police to the area in order to stir up ethnic rivalries. Buthelezi, the leader of Inkatha, took very badly to this assertion suggesting that the report was "naked racism" and "filthy Nationalist propaganda". (75) When Moorcroft responded that Buthelezi's attack had been "intemperate, unjustified and offensive",

74 Interview with Harry Schwarz, 14 May 1990

75 Sowetan, 24 April 1984

the Inkatha leader retorted that Moorcroft was contemptible and that there was nothing worse than "a racist masquerading as a liberal". (76) The Natal leader of the PFP Ray Swart immediately intervened by meeting with Buthelezi and smoothed over the ruffles that had been created.

The outreach campaign from June 1985 saw a renewed impetus in PFP/Inkatha relations. Slabbert held a number of meetings with Buthelezi and met jointly with the Kwazulu cabinet. He was also the guest speaker at the opening of the its Legislative Assembly in June 1985. (77) At the end of June Helen Suzman led a delegation of 11 PFP MPs as observers at the Inkatha Congress in Ulundi. They were warmly welcomed by Buthelezi who praised the PFP highly. (78)

Not all in the Party welcomed the intensified relationship with Inkatha. Party members and leadership figures in the Western and Eastern Cape can be identified as being strongly opposed to the relationship. (79) This was in large part due to their growing relationship with the UDF which was strongly antagonistic to Inkatha. (80)

Whatever objections there were to Inkatha were insufficient to upset the overall course of Party strategy which was to elevate the relationship to a primary place in the PFP's extra-parliamentary dealings. This was particularly so with respect to the National Convention Movement. While the NCM was not a formal initiative of the PFP as much as it was the brainchild of Slabbert, it was associated closely with the Party and should be seen as the core attempt at creating a

---

76 *ibid*

77 Cape Times, 20 June 1985, Sunday Tribune, 23 June 1985, Deurbraak, August 1985

78 Sunday Tribune, 30 June 1985

79 Interview with Tiaan van der Merwe, 6 March 1990

80 Interview with Harry Schwarz, 14 May 1990

moderate alliance which could present a viable alternative to the liberation movement and present a united front of establishment opposition to government.

Motivating for the establishment of the Convention Alliance and for Party support for it, Slabbert said to the PFP's August 1985 Federal Congress that it was unlikely that government was going to facilitate political change. It was necessary, therefore, to create a new initiative outside of government structures to facilitate such change. This was an important departure from the Party's earlier stance of encouraging the state to bring about reform. Now, freed from its earlier constraints of whites-only politics, the PFP pursued a non-racial alliance to offset the possibility of revolution and to encourage liberal reforms. While Slabbert recognised the need for opposition politics - "to shout and protest" - he argued for something more:

"an initiative which can show an alternative between the two options that are beginning to polarise at an alarming rate.

"Repression versus revolution. Those are the options being forced upon us by the present circumstances." (81)

The choice between repression and revolution was a false one according to Slabbert.

"We must show that there is a third option. An option in the middle away from violence to change the status quo and away from repression to maintain it. This is what I have in mind with a convention alliance." (82)

This third option was that of reform which Slabbert argued was favoured by the great majority of South Africans. These

---

81 Argus, 30 August 1985

82 *ibid*

people were caught between the poles of repression and revolution. The strategy behind the Convention Alliance idea was to harness these people into a potent social force in order to possibly establish a new historic bloc behind a unifying discourse of opposition to revolution and in favour of reform.

The appeal to join the Convention Alliance was made to all including what were deemed to be the revolutionaries - the ANC and UDF. Slabbert later said that he set out in the belief that the NCM would not work if it excluded key elements from the liberation movement. He said that he had consulted Alan Boesak and Desmond Tutu, believing their endorsement of the initiative amounted to the support of the UDF. (83) He was, however, severely misguided.

In his speech to the PFP Federal Council in which he floated the idea before taking it to the Party Congress Slabbert anticipated the Alliance being a sole force in the political terrain being attacked by both the left and right. This was despite claims to wanting the involvement of the liberation movement. He was minuted as saying that

"within the foreseeable future , the PFP and the Convention Alliance will be the only platforms of protest and he said that the Party must be very clear on its opposition to violence and its commitment to the rule of law. He warned that when the Party moves into the middle road with the Convention Alliance, it will be attacked from both sides, right and left." (84)

The NCM was, therefore, born consciously at odds with the liberation movement. As such, it represented a continuation of a long established trend. (85)

---

83 Interview with Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, 28 September 1990

84 Minutes of PFP Federal Council, 29 August 1985

85 A detailed discussion of the Party's relationship with the liberation movement follows below.

Party leaders saw the Convention idea as holding the possibility for the Party gaining power. It presented the opportunity of breaking with a past of limited success, and to fabricate a new social movement. Said Colin Eglin at the time:

"We have been caught in the well of white protest politics. The accent must not be on protest alone but on gaining political power. Our purpose is to change the political order." (86)

The first meeting of the Convention Alliance was convened jointly by Slabbert and Buthelezi. A 12 member steering committee was elected at this meeting under the chairmanship of Advocate Jules Browde. The committee also included senior Inkatha member Oscar Dhlomo, Alex Boraine and Colin Eglin of the PFP, businessmen Raymond Ackerman and Tony Ardington, Prof Denys Schreiner of Natal University, Prof D Bosch of UNISA, Rev Stanley Mogoba of the Methodist Church, and Joyce Harris of the Black Sash. Ibrahim Bawa of the Islamic Council of South Africa was later co-opted into the group. (87) The launching meeting was characterised by the absence of the UDF, Azapo, the NP and trade unions. A significant group of businessmen did attend the meeting including Pick n Pay Chairman Raymond Ackerman, Anglo American Director and Chairman of a number of major companies Zach de Beer, First National Bank's Chris Ball, Mike Rosholt of Barlow Rand, Premier Group Chairman Tony Bloom, Chris Saunders of Tongaat Sugar and National African Chamber of Commerce President Sam Motsuenyane. (88) The participation of business at this time coincided with an increasing unease within the capitalist community regarding the failure of government's reform initiatives. Business

---

86 Cape Times, 2 September 1985

87 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1985

88 Argus, 21 September 1985

was increasingly looking elsewhere to implement alternative plans. Also attending were Hudson Ntsanwisi, the Chief Minister of Gazankulu, and the Cape New Republic Party leader Pat Rogers. Archbishop Desmond Tutu and South African Council of Churches General Secretary Beyers Naude sent messages of support to the gathering. (89)

The initiative was soon on the rocks as the major elements of the Liberation Movement refused to come into the Alliance. The UDF said that it refused to work with the PFP, Inkatha or any other "bantustan leader". The ANC, despite the urgings of Slabbert that the Alliance was not set up in competition with it, refused to become part of it. It argued that a National Convention could only be held once apartheid had been dismantled. The PFP and Inkatha were forced in October to withdraw from the steering committee of the Alliance in order to get the UDF to participate, but this effort was a failure leading to the eventual withering away of the alliance. Slabbert knew that the Alliance could not succeed without the participation of organisations from the liberation movement. He said that when the ANC announced their opposition to the initiative shortly before its official launch

"the thing died just there. But it was too late to stop it. It must have been one of the most embarrassing days of my life in politics. You end up at the Sandton Sun and there you have all these people, but you don't have any substance." (90)

Within the PFP there were mixed feelings about the alliance. While the Party's Federal Congress endorsed the idea of the alliance, it soon became clear to many within the Party that the idea would not work. Some claimed that the idea was not fully canvassed within the Party, and rather than being seen

---

89 *ibid*

90 Interview with Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, 28 September 1990

as a PFP initiative, it should be seen as being an idea pursued by the leader Slabbert. Commenting later Peter Gastrow said:

"It was not canvassed within the Party; it was not discussed in great detail by the Party. This was one of Slabbert's weaknesses. He suddenly became very enthusiastic about the idea and then ran with it at such a speed without doing the necessary networking. At that stage one wasn't familiar with the politics of extra-parliamentary groupings." (91)

The Convention Alliance failure was a hard school for the Party. It had been a confused attempt by the leader, with most Party members in tow, to build a new hegemonic bloc drawing from the dominating and dominated classes. At the same time as he was distancing the Party from revolutionary politics, Slabbert attempted in a confused manner to draw groups such as the ANC and UDF into his initiative. The character of the Alliance's politics, with its stress on negotiations, was a far cry from the mobilisation of the popular classes and calls for ungovernability then dominant within the liberation movement. The Alliance either failed to come to terms with this difference, or deliberately took it on.

The Alliance can be seen as being associated with the emergent thrust of opposition to the state emerging at that time within the business community. The participation of several leading businessmen gives weight to this argument. It should not, however, be seen as a deliberate attempt by business leaders to establish a new historic bloc under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie. While it held this potential it should not be cast as having this intention. Rather, initiatives such as this, are characteristic of periods of severe crisis in which contending forces explore new

---

91 Interview with Peter Gastrow, 28 March 1990

approaches to redefining and redirecting social conflict. Slabbert's alliance idea was just one adventure in this context, just as the various business initiatives of the period 1985 to 1987 were as well. The Convention Alliance attempt was an idea, not of the making of a dominant social class, but born out of an ideology linked to the interests of that class. This is not to decry the very real attempt that Slabbert was making to terminate conflict in South Africa. It was, nevertheless, an attempt to do so on the basis of defending unhindered capital accumulation.

The involvement of business, as has been noted, was part of an emerging trend away from supporting government. The escalating political and economic crisis had unsettled the comfortable complacency of this community. The PFP sought to capitalise on this not only through the Convention Movement idea, but also through a sophisticated fund raising campaign under the title of the Van Zyl Slabbert Trust. The Trust chaired by Tony Bloom and carrying the endorsement of leading industrialists Harry Oppenheimer and Chris Saunders sought to raise R 10 million from time of its launch in June 1985 until Christmas of that year. (92) While it did not reach this target, it managed to gather R 7 million by early December. The campaign was closely linked to the overall PFP strategy, and under the changed circumstances it found a degree of success within the business community, managing to draw back the support of individuals who had been lost through their endorsement of the regime's reforms. A notable example in this respect is Chris Saunders.

---

92 Cape Times, 20 June 1985; Sunday Times, 13 October 1985

## THE PFP AND THE LIBERATION MOVEMENT

As has been shown the liberation movement had a major impact on the activities and strategies pursued by the PFP in the period under review. Many of Slabbert's strategic initiatives had been opposed by party members significantly influenced by resistance politics. Others were virulent in their opposition to the liberatory organisations. In this context it is necessary to consider several important direct contacts between the PFP and liberation movement at this time.

From late 1984 statements at PFP Federal Council meetings stressed the need for Party leaders to have greater contact with the extra-parliamentary resistance movement. In this respect contact with trade union and UDF leaders was stressed. (93) As well as providing a means for the Party to garner information, it was also seen as a means of promoting the "politics of negotiation". The leadership were criticised for not moving quickly enough in this field and appeals were made for it to take more visible action concerning the unrest in the country. (94)

The first notable involvement of the Party in the emerging conflict in the townships was its response to the March 1985 killing of 19 people by the SAP in Langa, Uitenhage. The PFP immediately sent a delegation of six MPs to the area amidst a blaze of publicity. Party spokespeople urged government to appoint a judicial Commission of Inquiry into the shootings, which it eventually did. There was also a visible presence of PFP public representatives giving assistance to the community following the shootings.

---

93 Minutes of PFP Federal Council, 18 November 1984 and 4 May 1985

94 Minutes of PFP Federal Council, 18 November 1984

Slabbert's response, directed at government, stressed the need for a restoration of calm in the townships by a resort to conventional policing methods. He also stated that it was necessary to redress the root causes of "black dissatisfaction" which had given rise to the shooting. These were the political and economic frustrations of people in the Eastern Cape:

"To avoid repetition of these tragic events, we need now to lay the foundations of healthy long-term economic development. Such economic development cannot be shackled to the demands of an obsolete ideology." (95)

He went on to state that it was necessary for government to make a declaration of intent about its political and constitutional plans for blacks. He urged government to negotiate with black leaders. Further pointing to what he perceived as action that government should take, he stressed that problems with black education and local authorities should be addressed. (96)

Slabbert's response was a good example of the distance that was emerging between the mainstream of the PFP and that of the liberation movement. His emphasis was still heavily informed by the imperatives of a traditional Official Opposition - to point out the mistakes of the government of the day and suggest alternative policy approaches for it to adopt. The liberation movement was at this stage increasingly concerned with popular defence and mobilisation - a quite different emphasis. That Slabbert was well aware of this at the time was reflected in his repeated statements concerning the differing strategic emphases of the respective groups. He was very critical of the approach of the township organisations. While understanding the anger

---

95 Argus, 23 March 1985

96 *ibid*

and recognising the legitimacy of resistance strategies, he did not conceal his opposition to the language and style of popular politics. He said that revolutionary rhetoric

"creates the illusion of a revolutionary movement being in control of the actual violence in the townships. People in the townships begin to believe they are acting in correspondence with some kind of strategy - a next stage in the revolution, with victory around the corner." (97)

As has been discussed elsewhere, Slabbert also dissociated the party from the liberation movement by his criticism of violence as a strategy, and his firm commitment to the strategy of participation in the tricameral system. He also criticised popular politics for overstressing its opposition to apartheid while being little concerned with developing alternative policies. In an interview in 1985 he described the unity of the ANC and UDF as being built out of a common opposition to apartheid,

"but if you had to ask the UDF what kind of constitution they think would work for South Africa and they had to move away from the cliches of 'power to the people' and 'democratic forces unite' and that kind of thing - the result would be interesting!" (98)

This was contrasted with the PFP policy of a universal franchise in a non-racial South Africa organised on federal lines, with veto rights for minority groups.

Opposition to liberatory strategies was a common theme among many members of the Party, particularly in the southern Transvaal. The leader of the Party in that region, Douglas Gibson, was vehement in his opposition to the ANC. He said,

---

97 Sunday Tribune, 22 September 1985

98 Leadership, 4 (4) 1985

"I am as opposed to them as a Nationalist would be opposed to them; and I don't regard them as freedom fighters. Some people say that the ANC was forced into the violence option. Well, I am sorry I don't agree with that. They have adopted the violence option for the last fifteen or twenty years. It has been no more successful than any other strategy that was adopted and I think what it is doing is to force the white people into the laager and they are likely to put the cause of change in South Africa back by another twenty years by carrying on blowing everybody up." ( )

A major area in which the PFP differed from the liberation movement was on the issue of sanctions. As has been shown the PFP had always opposed sanctions and disinvestment. (100) Members of the Party including Slabbert, Eglin, Suzman, Schwarz, Boraine and Horace van Rensburg had travelled abroad to campaign against the international economic isolation of the country. Some of these trips had been sponsored by the Department of Foreign Affairs. (101) The stance against sanctions was in keeping with broadly defined class character of the PFP in promoting continued capitalist development within South Africa.

It should be stressed that while many within the Party held these views and were strongly opposed to the strategies and tactics of the liberation movement, there was universal acceptance of the need to legalise resistance politics and to allow all to participate in a negotiated political process. In the wake of popular calls for the release of resistance leaders, PFP public representatives also added their voice to the appeals. Notable in this respect were the appeals of Boraine and Suzman.

The growth of popular organisations was welcomed by a small, but vocal group within the Party. A number of prominent

---

99 Interview with Douglas Gibson, 20 May 1988

100 See Chapter One

101 Citizen, 10 May 1985

individuals such as the Cape MPCs Molly Blackburn, Di Bishop and Jan van Eck came to be very closely associated with popular organisations, especially with respect to unrest monitoring and intervention, negotiation with local police, attendance at funerals and rallies, and other support work. This activity which increased dramatically during 1985 had a major impact on the Party, while also changing perceptions within the liberation movement. Jan van Eck, who became very involved in such activity, provided a sense of what it entailed:

"I was just another white liberal politician who believed that on liberal values, certain things should be done to those who haven't got rights. But one wasn't involved in the townships. You weren't involved with black people. You were so insular from them and the whole Progressive Party was insular to a large extent. To the extent that some of us were either dragged into the townships situation, as I was by Molly Blackburn, who I was together with on the Provincial Council in the Cape - Molly Blackburn and Di Bishop. But if I take those two with their massive contacts and understanding and the input they made into our provincial council caucus, for example, our whole provincial council caucus moved about 30-40 degrees left in the sense. We were exposed by them to real leadership, real young comrades and so on. My specific situation related to the funeral of Mathew Goniwe which Molly sort of dragged me to saying, "You can't be in politics unless you know what is happening in the townships". And from that day onwards, those of us who got involved deeper had to pay the price as I call it.

"And that was that you can't just be a liberal politician now with liberal values which are narrowly aimed at the white electorate and saying to people: "I believe we should have full democracy and so on". But that you had to actually be an active participant in the broader community. Maybe I got too deeply involved. It was never a conscious decision. It just happened." (102)

The Party was encouraged to welcome this activity to the extent that it promoted the PFP among blacks in an editorial written by Jan van Eck for Deurbraak in 1985 which read:

"The way in which PFP public representatives such as Molly Blackburn and Di Bishop have been accepted by the besieged black communities illustrates that it is indeed possible for 'white politicians' to be involved in both 'white' and 'black' politics - if one retains one's credibility. It is indeed an asset which the PFP should cherish." (103)

It indeed proved to be an asset as it changed the stance of a number of UDF leaders who were prepared to draw a distinction between the PFP as a party with which it had many differences, and individual representatives of it. As a result there was, from early 1986, increasing contact between UDF and PFP representatives. Motivating this, the Publicity Secretary of the UDF Murphy Morobe said at the beginning of 1986:

"On numerous occasions we have sounded our rejection of the attempt to move into what we consider the black arena. That position is borne out of our rejection of organisations which operate within the government's structures.

"We, however, acknowledge individuals' progressive challenge of apartheid. Our relationship with the PFP is on that basis because as an organisation we make distinctions" (104)

The contact with the liberation movement by Party members assumed a distinct regional pattern with the bulk of contact happening in the Western and Eastern Cape. According to Suzman and Gastrow the Southern Transvaal Party was dominated by a conservative leadership which veered away from contact with radical extra-parliamentary organisations. Suzman describes this aversion as being a "nervousness" to

103 Deurbraak, August 1985

104 Sowetan, 16 January 1986

be associated with the ANC or any organisation which could be accused of being a front for it. (105) Gastrow described the Southern Transvaal leadership as "incestuous". They were, he explained,

"inward-looking, and dominated very much by a network of people who had been there for a very long time. They were in close contact with each other, and setting the pace." (106)

The relative lack of extra-parliamentary contact by the Southern Transvaal Party at this time can, therefore, be attributed in part to the hold that the conservative leadership in this region held over the PFP. This conservatism can be seen as arising out of a number of factors. Important Southern Transvaal leaders such as Harry Schwarz and Dave Dalling had joined the Progressive Party from the United Party at a much later stage than the original "true blue" Progs. They brought with them a more cautious approach politically. The "true-blue" element in the Transvaal were also cautious in matters of contact with radical organisations. This can be attributed largely to the strong links with the business community held by this group. It was not at this stage in business's interests to forge close ties with radical groups - indeed it was their project to seek a moderate alternative. This factor played a role in the Party as well. A further consideration was the very real concern that the Southern Transvaal leadership felt with the growth of the Conservative Party which they feared would drive PFP voters to support the National Party in an attempt to ward off a right wing threat. Slabbert also pointed out that the Southern Transvaal Party was very committed to participation in municipal politics and had always been cautious that the PFP not adopt policy positions

---

105 Interview with Helen Suzman, 9 April 1990

106 Interview with Peter Gastrow, 28 March 1990

which would lose it votes. (107) There was a concern that the PFP should not be seen to be too closely linked to radical organisations.

The more radical stance of the Cape Party can be attributed to an absence of many of the above factors. The class character of the Party in the Cape was much more firmly rooted among the professional middle classes - a group with no clear and independent political agenda. The Cape tradition of liberalism had a more staunchly non-racial flavour. This factor informed the approach of Party representatives in the Eastern and Western Cape who sought out contact with popular organisations.

The reemergence and growth of a vibrant liberation movement forced the Party at the highest level to reassess its approach in the latter part of 1985. The trajectory of class and national struggle had considerably reduced the importance of conflicts within Parliament. Despite regional variation and assertions by the Party leadership that the white constitutional domain was the primary site in which reform could take place, there was growing understanding that the re-emergent liberation movement was a force which could not be ignored in the PFP's strategy for the future. The rise of the liberation movement and the growth of an hegemonic position around the ANC represented a challenge to the PFP. The PFP had long since realised the limits of solely attempting to gain the support of a majority of white voters. The key lesson learned in the NCM experience was that to attempt to create a new non-racial bloc would be impossible without the support of the leading organisations of the liberation movement. But even this task, it was being realised, was becoming impossible. The organisations of the dominated classes had no interest in subscribing to

---

107 Interview with Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, 28 September 1990

the moral and political leadership of a predominantly white liberal party. Its interests lay in forging a potentially revolutionary alliance built out of the unity of the black dominated classes and left-wing whites. In doing so it sought to assert its hegemony and programme over the process.

While the Party remained very critical of the strategies of the ANC it had come to advocate the view that a solution to the conflict was impossible without its active involvement. An example of this could be seen when in a report to his constituency in August 1985 Alex Boraine had been highly critical of the government's attempts to negotiate only with bantustan leaders and discredited community councillors. Credible negotiations with black leaders, he said, had to include the ANC. Nelson Mandela could not be ignored and there could not be stability in the country while he and other leaders remained imprisoned. He proposed that a judicial commission be appointed to determine the process whereby blacks could elect their leaders freely and fairly in order to participate in negotiations. (108) This stance incorporated a realisation of the essential need for the liberation movement to participate in negotiations. It was also informed by an attachment to the liberal notion of an independent judiciary for which, he implied, black consent existed. It was an attempt to come to terms with the emergent power and authority of the ANC. The call for unconditional negotiations then being made by Boraine and other PFP members was not endorsed by the ANC and the liberation movement more generally, while the call for a judicial commission to facilitate such talks was even further from the mind of liberatory strategy. To this extent Boraine's attempt to come to terms with the hegemony of the liberation movement betrayed the distance that

---

108 Argus, 22 August 1985

existed between the PFP and the organisations of the dominated classes. At the same time, it was a display of the impact of these organisations on the work of the PFP.

The events of 1985 had a profound effect on key PFP leaders, not least on Slabbert. According to Peter Gastrow:

"1985 was the year of unbelievable turmoil. Slabbert was starting to make his first real contact. My impression was that he was experiencing for the first time the turmoil the agony, but also the potential within black power. He had been to townships in the past. There's a photo of van Zyl and Alex Boraine amongst the squatter children of Crossroads. I call that Red Cross stuff. It's important, but it's not politics. In that year (1985) he went to Uitenhage during the Kannemeyer Commission. He saw what was going on there. He spoke to political activists. He went to numerous hot places. The whole turmoil sucked him in and I think really broadened his whole perspective about what was happening in black politics." (109)

This was true for Slabbert as it was for other significant Party leaders. While they were not attempting to embrace the liberation movement, they were attempting to engage with it on a new basis. The attempt at forming the Convention Alliance was one such attempt.

The meeting with the ANC by four of the Party's leaders - Slabbert, Boraine, Eglin and Gastrow in October 1985 was another. According to Jan van Eck the meeting was an attempt to respond to the pressure as the Party was very sensitive that it may be becoming irrelevant." (110) The meeting was also in keeping with the stance the Party had adopted of attempting to mediate between the conflicting parties.

---

109 Interview with Peter Gastrow, 28 March 1990

110 Interview with Jan van Eck, 29 March 1990

The meeting with the ANC was not deliberately sought by the Party leadership but arose out of a chance meeting between Peter Gastrow and ANC members in Zimbabwe. A meeting was proposed which Slabbert and the Party leadership decided to run with. They did not seek the consent of the Party as a whole due to the contentious nature of such meetings at the time, but they were confident, however, that there would not be a substantial opposition to it in the PFP. (111) After the meeting Slabbert rationalised it in terms of the PFP's stated goal of talking to anybody or any organisation in order to "decrease violent confrontation and promote the politics of negotiation". (112)

At the meeting the two organisations agreed that apartheid lay at the root of the conflict in South Africa. There was common statement that in order for negotiations to take place it was necessary that certain preconditions such as the release of leaders and the removal of apartheid had to be met. This acknowledgment by the PFP leaders was a decisive departure for the Party which had been calling for unconditional negotiations.

There were important points of difference. The PFP tried to sell its idea of the Convention Alliance. But this was rejected by the ANC on the grounds that the time was not right for such an initiative, and also because of the participation of Buthelezi and Inkatha in the initiative. The PFP delegates responded that their participation was essential. The ANC, the PFP leaders were happy to report, did not rule out any future negotiations or National Convention. The conditions for such developments had, however, to be appropriate.

---

111 Interview with Tiaan van der Merwe, 6 March 1990,  
Interview with Peter Gastrow, 28 March 1990

112 Argus, 14 October 1985

The PFP also expressed opposition to the strategy of armed struggle. Despite this they accepted the rationale that the ANC gave for the armed struggle and both Slabbert and Boraine promoted this on their return to South Africa. In an article in the Financial Mail, Boraine wrote,

"It is our view that it is futile to expect the ANC to abandon the armed struggle if the conditions which led to the armed struggle persist. For them the continuation of apartheid and the armed struggle are inextricably linked. Therein lies the tragedy and potential violence of the future." (113)

The burden did not lie with the ANC to end the armed struggle. For Slabbert the issue was

"how far the Government is prepared to go to get rid of apartheid and to seek a peaceful resolution of our problems. This would determine how many lives are lost in the final analysis. This is where one's first loyalty must lie - to all the young people of South Africa." (114)

This was a major departure in the outlook of Slabbert who had earlier gone to great lengths to decry and condemn all political violence in general, and the strategy of armed struggle in particular. It was a sudden departure and difficult to explain as being related specifically to the meeting with the ANC. That meeting may well have been the catalyst for this shift, although the reasons should be found in the overall change in the conditions within which the PFP was operating and the successive failures of its strategies. Slabbert was effectively shifting out of the confines of white politics and attempting to adopt an holistic approach. His stance came to be increasingly at odds with the main stream of Party thinking.

---

113 Financial Mail, 18 October 1985

114 Argus, 14 October 1985

While there was no overt opposition to the meeting from within the Party since it accorded with the broad strategic drive of the Party, there was concern that the Party should not be seen to be too closely linked to the ANC and revolutionary politics. This would not only conflict with the Party principle of opposition to revolutionary ideologies, but also be detrimental to the Party's electoral chances in a conservative white electorate. Many in the Party held, that while there should be talks with revolutionary groups, it was crucial that the Party strongly oppose their strategies and advocate a firm security strategy in response to them. This was a view which had manifested itself in the debate on the Party's defence and conscription policy in 1985.

#### **SLABBERT RESIGNS**

At the end of the Parliamentary debate of no confidence in the government in February 1986, Slabbert shocked his party by announcing that he was both resigning as its leader and as a member of Parliament. The resignation came after what Slabbert viewed as a year of failures in 1985. As well as being based in a personal aversion to carrying on in his role as the leader of a political party, it was also built out of a growing realisation of the limits of Parliamentary politics. It was a statement of no-confidence in the politics of a white liberal opposition party in the context of a dramatically changing environment.

On resigning Slabbert explained his move as being based in what he believed to be the limited context of Parliament:

"The circumstances in our country are simply too serious to bluff ourselves in the clubby

atmosphere of Parliament, no matter how desperately a way out is needed." (115)

He contended that his decision to resign was

"not an act of desperation. It is actually an act of affirmation - affirming that the future of South Africa does not lie with that Parliament alone." (116)

The experience of failure after failure in the initiatives of 1985, as well as the new understanding he had developed through his increasing contact with popular organisation had encouraged Slabbert to review his role. In an interview after his resignation he described how in 1985 he had attempted to steer the PFP away from being a perennial opposition party. He attempted to drive the Party flat out on the path of what he described as the "politics of power". He wished to change the role of the PFP:

"I have never denied the validity of a party or group in Parliament protesting the injustices of apartheid. But I set myself an objective to see to what extent I could get rid of apartheid, not just protest against it." (117)

To this end he identified three strategic goals for the Party. The first of these was to engage the government in negotiations about constitutional reform. To this end he had 5 meetings with President Botha as well as other meetings with individual cabinet ministers. In addition he agreed to serve on the specially extended cabinet committee on constitutional matters. It was his assessment that very little came of these engagements. He had come to the conclusion that the security forces were increasingly playing a role in government in which context traditional

---

115 Argus, 8 February 1986

116 Argus, 11 February 1986

117 Leadership, 5 (1) 1986

parliamentary opposition was ineffective. (118) The failure of the government's "total strategy" reform programme had reduced the prospects of success for a strategy of encouraging a state-led process of incremental change.

His second goal was to get representation for the PFP in the coloured and Indian Houses of Parliament following the lifting of the restrictions on racially mixed parties. It was his goal to recruit black members to the Party and consequently gain control of the House of Representatives and the House of Delegates, while attempting to hold the balance of power in the white House. This configuration would provide the Party with the leverage to make a distinctive impression on the exercise of state power. This project also failed. The final strategic goal was to forge a coalition of anti-apartheid groups in the form of the Convention Alliance. This objective also ended in disappointment.

The "politics of power" proved to be an illusive objective. The lessons of 1985 for Slabbert were ultimately that the white Parliamentary opposition could do little to facilitate the process of change by means of negotiation. Slabbert said later that the PFP had become

"increasingly sidelined in the conflict between extra-parliamentary government and extra-parliamentary opposition. And a growing awareness on my part that the debate wasn't here; it wasn't even touching it." (119)

At the end of 1985 Slabbert assessed this situation in the midst of what many of his colleagues described as a growing despondency and disenchantment with the organisational

118 Interview with Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, 28 September 1990

119 *ibid*

responsibilities of leading a political party. At the start of 1986 he convened a group of close colleagues to discuss an appropriate way forward. At this meeting he presented a paper which outlined a radical new strategy initiative for the Party. (120) He also consulted other leading members of the party individually. (121) In the paper he argued that the government had become intransigent and that earlier approaches of the PFP were not being effective. He proposed that he could not continue as in the past:

"According to my light and wisdom I have done whatever can be done with the available opportunities and to continue as before I would be bluffing myself and others that I was making any significant contribution to the politics of negotiation." (122)

He proposed that PFP MPs resign their seats in a statement of rejection of the tricameral system. In the event of by-elections being called the MPs would once again stand for their seats seeking a mandate:

" not to return to Parliament until the Government clearly commits itself to restoring freedom of choice by dismantling Apartheid completely". (123)

If the government committed itself to such change the elected MPs would

"support and assist it in bringing about constitutional and non-violent change towards a non-racial democratic alternative". (124)

He argued that if the PFP caucus pursued such a course of action it would facilitate a "constitutional crisis and

---

120 Slabbert (1986)

121 Interview with Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, 28 September 1990

122 *ibid*

123 *ibid*

124 *ibid*

could have a galvanising effect on the whole tri-cameral system". (125)

He presented this paper to a select group of colleagues who collectively discussed and agreed to reject it. In a memorandum they suggested that if Slabbert resigned it would have a seriously detrimental effect on Party finances and morale. Most significantly their responding memorandum suggested that the PFP would lose the purported centrist positioning it had attained:

"We contend that the PFP are the real conservatives and occupy the middle ground. In one stroke we will sink the middle ground and polarise the situation between Nat and ANC". (126)

Those MPs who resigned along with Slabbert, it argued, would be applauded by blacks "and forgotten - no voice, constituency, clout". (127) Those who remained in Parliament would be isolated from the black community.

They proposed that rather than resign, Slabbert and other MPs should be relieved of many of their Parliamentary duties in order to concentrate on extra-parliamentary activities. This would

"move the centre of gravity of PFP effort away from Parliament. There would be nothing against increasing the Parliamentary load of certain members who prefer or who are more suited to conventional Parliamentary functions. Central funds could be used to augment the salaries of members whose extra-parliamentary duties cut back their attendances in the House." (128)

---

125 *ibid*

126 Anonymous, Untitled Memorandum, February 1986

127 *ibid*

128 *ibid*

It was proposed that Slabbert address Parliament at the end of the no confidence debate and say

"a. That PW Botha had systematically diminished the status of Parliament and increased the role of the executive to a degree where the official opposition has had to re-appraise its role.

"b. The PFP is consequently no longer prepared to waste its time on Parliamentary procedures designed to create a democratic facade behind which authoritarian government can operate.

"c. He therefore intends to downgrade the Parliamentary obligations of members and increase their non-parliamentary role so that they are better able to serve all South Africans." (129)

Slabbert did not agree to this and proceeded to resign. Shortly after his resignation the National Chairman of the Party Alex Boraine also resigned for similar reasons to Slabbert's but only, it has been alledged, after assessing first whether he would run for the leadership of the Party. (130) A former leader of the Border region of the Party, Donald Card, also resigned in support of Slabbert.

The departure of Slabbert was a severe setback for the PFP. He had been a very popular leader of the Party and had led it to a very strong public position. He had stamped his personal style on the Party and had been very dominant in determining the strategic direction of the Party. (131) Of greatest significance was his ability to hold the different factions of the Party together. The wedding of the different sides in the emerging debate about the Party's role in Parliament and outside of it came apart on his departure. With the captain leaving the ship the Party

129 *ibid*

130 Cape Times, 10 February 1986, Die Burger, 14 February 1986

131 Interview with Peter Gastrow, 28 March 1990, Interview with Jan van Eck, 29 March 1990

found itself dumped in the stormy seas of an existential crisis. The turmoil experienced by Slabbert about the role, direction and potential of the Party was now in the court of the Party as a whole - and without a strong leader who could see them through. At root the challenge posed by Slabbert's departure lay in his reducing the legitimacy of the tradition within which the PFP operated. The very foundation of the Party's liberal opposition and incrementalism was open to question.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE PARTY IN DECLINE: 1986 - 1988

#### CONTEXT AND INTRODUCTION

South Africa entered the period covered by this chapter immersed in the most acute crisis of its history. A faltering economy, escalating popular struggles, divisions within the dominating classes, and a succession of failures in government policy all added up to what amounted to a situation which begged dramatic moves from the regime.

The state in early 1986 tried to respond to the mounting internal and international pressures in an attempt to roll back the impact of isolation from the world economy, and also to bolster the existing structure of capitalist production and white domination. The key aspects of this new phase was a move away from Grand Apartheid, while still retaining race as a central social determinant; and, there was an attempt to depoliticise the provision of the means of social reproduction. When many aspects of this reform phase broke down, the state once again resorted to naked coercion following a renewed declaration of a State of Emergency in July 1986.

By 1985 there was realisation within the state that the pattern of spatial separation of the political economy associated with Grand Apartheid was a failure. It was necessary now to pursue a course which acknowledged the interconnected and interdependent nature of the political economy. The policy of "regional development" received extensive promotion, which together with the approach of "orderly urbanisation" became the cornerstone of state policy. Nine development regions cutting across bantustan

boundaries established earlier were actively promoted. It was the intention that these would allow for

"the planning of economic development within coherent regions free of the constraints imposed by political borders." (1)

With the coordination of development programmes between South Africa and the "independent" homelands, the establishment of Regional Development Advisory Committees, and with a central role accorded to the Development Bank of South Africa an effort was made to overcome the structural maladies of apartheid.

Of greatest significance was the realisation that black urbanisation was no longer simply a reality, but a necessity given the projected growth imperatives of the country. Consequently the policy of "orderly urbanisation" was promoted which ended the system of influx control, pass laws, forced removals and decentralisation based on the bantustans. In effect it was a tacit acknowledgement that apartheid had failed. In addition, through the abolition of pass laws, the state hoped to remove an important point of popular political antagonism and mobilisation. It marked the end of the Riekerk reforms' distinction between urban and rural Africans. By permitting orderly squatting and informal business, the state was, in effect, withdrawing to a large extent from the provision of housing and services to urban African communities, hoping that the cost of these would be carried by both the working classes and the aspirant middle classes, as well as by the private sector.

A central aspect of the regionalisation programme was an attempt by the central state to decentralise administrative and planning functions to metropolitan and regional authorities, i.e. the Regional Services Councils, provincial

1 Cobbett, et al (1988), p 9

executives, and regional liaison committees. It was an attempt to depoliticise the role of the central state in the allocation of regional and local resources. Later, a crucial development was the incorporation of Africans into local and regional levels of the state through the RSCs and provincial executives. This was an attempt to address the political crisis associated with mass resistance to the form of the central state.

A third strand of this phase of reform was the promotion of privatisation and deregulation policies. This also illustrated the state's attempts to depoliticise the provision of goods and services. It was also based in the realisation that it could not "deliver goods to its black subjects on the scale necessary to coopt them". (2) This had especially become the case with acceptance of African urbanisation and the consequent need to downgrade the supply of social welfare provisions. An example of this development was the privatisation of housing and the use of site and service schemes as opposed to state-provided housing. In addition, an effort was made to promote informal business activity through the dropping of various constraining regulations. The rationale behind this development was partly due to the desire to build a black middle class supportive of capitalism; and also to ease unemployment. (3)

The tide of popular resistance spilled over into 1986 serving to diminish the impact of these reforms. Continued rent, consumer and schools boycotts, as well as continued insurgency and violent resistance limited the ability of the state to pursue this course of direction. Furthermore, the state could not respond coherently as it was internally divided over the direction it should follow. The division

---

2 Glaser (1987), p 384

3 Innes (1987), p 560

could be reduced to that between the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning under Chris Heunis on the one hand, and the security establishment on the other. (4) Heunis's department sought to establish legitimacy for the state through the provision of goods and services to black communities through political structures. This path was blocked by a combination of popular resistance, and the Byzantine network of political structures established by his department. Ultimately his department could not ensure that sufficient distribution could take place. The security establishment also sought the same objective - legitimacy for the state through the provision of goods and services. It believed, however, that firm security action was required to do away with mass resistance; and, that strong executive measures were required to implement policy. This approach was presented as a "counter-revolutionary warfare" strategy and ultimately won the day in what has been termed a "shift towards executive rule". (5) From mid-1986 this approach became dominant within the state with the introduction of a massively repressive national state of emergency, and the activation of the National Security Management System.

This shift in policy which marked the final departure from "total strategy" should be seen as

"quite clearly a political initiative sidestepping whatever representative structures exist at all levels in the society in order to ensure a coordinated security and redistributive intervention." (6)

The strategy marked a shift from what Swilling and Phillips have described as "grand visions of reform from above to

---

4 See Morris and Padayachee (1988), pp 17 - 18; and Swilling and Phillips (1989 a), p 141

5 Morris and Padayachee (1988), p 14

6 *ibid*, p 16

building up new foundations from below". (7) The state now sought through a combination of repressive action and welfare provisions to remove all vestiges of popular resistance, while at the same time attempting to "recaste civil society" through a combination of infrastructural upgrading, housing development, and local government reform. (8)

Despite the wide implementation of this strategy, and the severe repression of the liberation movement, continued international opposition and the resilience of the popular classes meant that it ultimately failed. At the same time as its implementation, there was ongoing debate within the National Party and Broederbond as to the future direction of policy. There was considerable internal division within the NP in the period from 1986. In 1987 important members of the NP such as Wynand Malan, Dennis Worrall, Wimpie de Klerk and a number of Stellenbosch academics broke away in pursuit of a more reformist programme than that being implemented by the regime. These breakaways would eventually coalesce into the "independent movement" which fielded candidates in the 1987 General Election in which Malan won his seat in Randburg, while Worrall narrowly missed defeating Chris Heunis in the Helderberg constituency.

Coinciding with this challenge to the regime from its left flank was the increasing success of the Conservative Party. In the May 1987 elections it increased its Parliamentary representation from 18 to 23 seats, and replaced the PFP as the official opposition in the House of Assembly. In December 1987 it increased its representation by winning a by-election in Sasolburg.

---

7 Swilling and Phillips (1989 a), p 144

8 *ibid*, p 144 and p 146

The business community's behaviour during the period covered by this chapter can be divided into two clear periods. In the first which coincided with months leading up to the declaration of the state of emergency in July 1986 there was a continuation of the near panic response which followed the September 1985 debt standstill. As well as turning against the regime, business leaders became increasingly involved in alternative political initiatives. Notable amongst these were the involvement of business in constitutional policy formulation. Notable amongst these was the FCI Charter of January 1986. (9) Another initiative which took off in 1986 and 1987 was the Kwa Zulu Natal Indaba which was heavily sponsored by business. At the first meeting in April 1986 the Indaba brought together the KwaZulu administration and the NRP-led Natal Provincial Administration, as well as other major establishment political and business groups. The Indaba adopted a liberal Bill of Rights in July of that year, and followed this with a non-racial constitution for Natal in November. Following Cobbet, et al we should see this initiative as an attempt by the dominating classes to resolve the crisis by forging a federal constitutional solution for the country which would incorporate Africans while retaining capitalism. Federalism presented a way to extend political rights without the threats inherent in a unitary majoritarian state. (10)

The declaration of the state of emergency as well as the rescheduling of South Africa's foreign debt was broadly welcomed by the business community. The stabilisation of the economy, which after growing by only 1% in 1986 recovered with a GDP growth of 2,5% in 1987, eased business confidence. (11) 1986 saw the value of the Rand dropping

---

9 See Introduction to Chapter Three.

10 Cobbet, et al (1988), p 18

11 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa (1986), p LVi

to an all-time low of US 19c, inflation climbing to 18,6% (against 16,2% in 1985), and 48 US companies disinvesting.

The initial success with which the state implemented its programmes after July 1986 provided a measure of relief to leading capitalists. Associated with this trend was a retreat by business leaders from overt involvement in political issues, as well as a backlash against outspokenness in their community. This was illustrated in the 1987 dismissal of the author of the FCI Charter from his chief executive position within that organisation, as well as the election of a conservative leadership to replace the more liberal incumbents. (12)

For liberals the period from 1986 to 1988 was a trying time as they battled to come to terms with the dramatic changes occurring within South Africa. Extensive debate and publication was associated with this soul searching. (13) The concern of liberals revolved around their perception that liberalism was both under attack and being marginalised in the bigger scheme of the South African struggle. As they had done historically liberals saw themselves as distinct from the two main warring bodies of the state and the mass popular opposition. Particular developments such as the entrenchment of authoritarian and illiberal rule on the one hand, and what was perceived to be revolutionary intolerance and the threat of socialism on the other combined to threaten the small predominantly white liberal community.

12 Morris and Padayachee (1988), p 19; See also Welsh (1988) for a discussion on the coincidence of economic recovery and business conservatism.

13 In this respect there were two important conferences held in 1986 on the future of liberalism in South Africa. For a collection of the proceedings see Butler, Elphick and Welsh (1987), and South African Institute of Race Relations (1986 a). Other key documents of the period are the series of lectures by Simkins (1985); Berger and Godsell (1988) as well as articles by Slabbert (1988), Owen (1987), Schlemmer (1988) and Gerson (1987).

At a moment of revolutionary polarisation liberals found it difficult to have their voices heard. As in the past, however, liberals were divided in their responses. A significant number of them had drifted into a position of alliance with the mainstream of the liberation movement. In this respect members of, e.g. the Black Sash, the churches, the End Conscription Campaign, and indeed the PFP had come to identify closely with the UDF and ANC in the anti-apartheid struggle. This development was in keeping both with the tradition of liberalism in South Africa, but also the history of the tradition internationally. This group was motivated on the basis of the non-class determinants of the liberal discourse.

Main stream liberals, by contrast, were more firmly committed to a class-conscious path and saw in the liberation movement the threat of revolution and the possible demise of capitalism in South Africa. Their stance was, however, a contradictory one in that the non-class elements of their discourse compelled them to recognise the right of the liberation movement to operate freely. It furthermore established a common ground between mainstream liberals and the liberation movement to the extent that both were committed to eradicating South Africa of apartheid. The mainstream, especially that located around the South African Institute of Race Relations and the liberal elements of big business, drew together on the issue of the nature of the relationship that liberals should have with the liberation movement. They opposed what Jill Wentzel of the SAIRR called a "slide away" by many liberals from condemning tyranny and violence on all sides. (14) She argued that a combination of group pressure, fear and guilt had led many liberals to support what was described as illiberal policies and strategies promoted by the liberatory organisations. In

---

14 Wentzel (1986), p 47

contrast she and others who held her view called for a steely determination in advocating their understanding of the liberal tradition - a centrist, incremental tradition occupying the middle ground between the opposing forces of revolution and repression.

Within this latter framework a strategic programme was proposed which would at the same time as it sought to enhance and promote extant liberal institutions such as the courts and the market mechanism, also pursue a course encouraging gradual incrementalist change. In this respect there was return to the view that a promotion of free market forces - the unshackling of the economy from dirigism and racial regulation - would unleash forces able to advance the cause of a bourgeois liberal democracy. A staunch and vocal proponent of this view was Ken Owen, the editor of Business Day, a daily newspaper primarily serving the capitalist community. He advocated the argument that only a stalemate situation between the contending forces of the state and the liberation movement would allow for a break in the cycle of struggle. Until that point was reached it was the role of liberals to

"try to present, not too dogmatically, the alternatives that lie in rapid economic growth, in free markets, in the rule of law and in the piecemeal improvement in the law itself.

"There is no escape from moral dilemmas, no pristine position to take. Liberals can urge and support limited reforms in the hopes that reform leads to reform. It often does." (15)

This incremental stance was increasingly advocated over the period from 1986/1987. (16) The incrementalist liberalism was wrapped in a class-conscious pursuit to avert revolution at all costs. Revolution was presented as being associated

15 Owen (1986), p 30

16 Berger and Godsell (1988); Schlemmer (1988)

with armed struggle. There was an appeal to liberals not only to reject the oppression of the state, but also the tyranny of the left. (17) But, as Anglo American's Bobby Godsell and Ann Bernstein of the Urban Foundation, both senior members of the PFP, pointed out, those pursuing an incremental path often did not have clear strategic objectives:

"If revolution is rejected, then it is important to define other avenues for change. Incrementalist actors need to couple their twin rejection of the status quo and of armed struggle with vocal and thoughtful answers as to what other means of political change are available to both black and white actors." (18)

A debate developed amongst incremental liberals who presented various strategic analyses of the best means of encouraging incremental change within the state. Significant contributors to this were Schlemmer, Godsell and Berger. (19)

There were however strong critics of the incrementalist middle ground view. Most notable amongst these was Van Zyl Slabbert who had quickly developed away from his early centrist views to a stance that endorsed the need for liberals to become "critical allies" of the liberation movement. (20) His premise appeared to be that for liberalism to succeed in South Africa it was no good for it to be espoused by a group isolated from the main contending forces in society. Rather, efforts should be made to articulate it to the the discourse of one of the two primary antagonists. The logical target of this strategy at that time was the liberation movement, which while perceived to

---

17 See Gerson (1987), p 250

18 Godsell and Bernstein (1988), p 186

19 See Schlemmer (1988); and, Berger and Godsell (1988)

20 Slabbert (1988), p 112

be illiberal in certain respects, was nevertheless imbued with a significant democratic and liberal content.

The debate amongst liberals was never concluded, but it served to harden and focus positions which had been emerging somewhat confusedly over the previous years of escalating struggle and polarisation.

For the PFP the period saw an initial continuation of the earlier incoherence as it attempted to come to terms with the many new pressures acting on it. Chief amongst these was the growing illegitimacy of Parliament and the shifting of the key site of struggle to a terrain far removed from its confines. Slabbert's resignation brought these issues to a head within the Party. A further point that the Party was attempting to respond to was the evident weakening of the NP and the state in the first half of 1986. Trying to respond to both of these outside points of reference proved to be a difficult task. The PFP attempted to do both through its "hinge assumption" which placed emphasis both through attempting to forge ties in the black community, and also through trying to develop its support among white voters.

This approach only served to show up the divisions between the Party's left which placed a primacy on the non-class element of its liberal ideology, most notably on non-racialism; and, the moderate, centrist group who sought to stress a class-conscious advocacy of capitalism. The left assumed a power beyond its numbers as it had done in the immediately preceding period.

Dramatic setbacks at the elections as well as the growth of a backlash to the liberation movement within the dominant classes generally, and amongst liberals more specifically, saw the rise to ascendance of the centrist trend within the

Party. This coincided with the broader retreat of the liberation movement in the face of an assault of state repression. The left continued to operate within the Party but many of its leading members left after the visit of a group of Afrikaners to the ANC in Dakar in mid-1987. This allowed for the complete consolidation of the centrist trend and the advocacy of a more class-conscious discourse by the PFP. Its approach came to be founded on an opposition to the liberation movement, a reassertion of constitutional incrementalism, and the increasing influence of the Southern Transvaal Party formation over the PFP as a whole.

This chapter explores these issues in the following sections: a look at the new leadership elected after Slabbert's departure and its incoherent centrist attempt to deal with the new situation facing the Party; extra-Parliamentary work which saw a growth on the left of the Party; the major setback at the 1987 General Elections in which the polarisation of the Party was evident, despite its stated centrist election platform; the post election malaise; the isolation of the left; and the consolidation of centrism in the form of a new 'mission statement'.

#### **A NEW LEADERSHIP**

The departure of Slabbert and Boraine left the PFP with a severe leadership vacuum. The two who had left had filled the crucial positions of Leader and Chairman in which both, and especially Slabbert, held a firm grip over the Party. At a meeting of the Party's Federal Council in mid-February 1986 Colin Eglin was unanimously elected the Leader, Peter Gastrow became the National Chairman, Ken Andrew was voted in as the Chairman of the Federal Council with Douglas Gibson as his deputy. In addition, a new position of Secretary General was created which was filled by Robin Carlisle.

Bravely, Eglin pronounced that the leadership was "young, aggressive and politically ambitious". (21) Carlisle said that the Party was adopting a "new, more aggressive" management style. He said that in future there would be

"a greater degree of planning, strategy development and professional management style in the way the Party operates." (22)

While this was the intention, Eglin's leadership proved to be ineffective in reaching this objective. While attempting to guide the Party towards a consolidation of a centrist stance, he failed to limit the rise of the PFP left. The effect was that over the period until mid-1987 the Party presented an incoherent front balancing its various tendencies with no clear direction.

The departures also had the pronounced effect of forcing the Party to reevaluate its positioning and strategy. There had been a growing pressure within the Party over the previous year for greater contact with extra-Parliamentary groups and struggles. These pressures had been very carefully directed by Slabbert into his strategic plan. His departure had, however, increased the level of doubt in the Party's Parliamentary base. The doubt raised by Slabbert in the legitimacy of the institution of Parliament was compounded by the broader rejection of the tricameral system by the popular classes. Those on the left of the Party made their voice known and were agitating for more emphasis on the struggle outside Parliament. The Western Cape region of the Young Progressives committed themselves to this work and stated that

---

21 Cape Times, 17 February 1986

22 Cape Times, 3 March 1986

"in view of the desperate situation in which South Africa finds itself, we call on the leadership of the PFP to respond to the crisis by acknowledging the limited role of Parliament as a means of bringing about an end to apartheid rule." (23)

The Party leadership responded to the pressures by attempting to bring about a clearer definition of the role of the PFP in Parliament and in the extra-Parliamentary terrain. According to Eglin, Slabbert's departure had

"forced the Party and caused me to consider more seriously than one might have done the relevance of the Party and one came to the conclusion that one was only relevant if one had a twin track strategy, and that you couldn't only go the Parliamentary route." (24)

Eglin quickly developed an interpretation of the situation which represented a consensus of the differing trends within the Party. The point of departure in his analysis was that the nature of South African politics had changed dramatically such that the view that whites were the "main political actors and Parliament the main site of political activity" no longer applied. (25) Political activity in the future was

"going to take place in a much larger political arena; the political actors are going to be black as much as white". (26)

Despite his gesture to the extra-Parliamentary field, Eglin's stress fell on the traditional Party domain. In this respect Parliament was still unique as it was deemed to be the only place where laws could be made or repealed. It was here too where Government could be called to account and face to face debate with it could take place. He

---

23 Cape Times, 14 February 1986

24 Interview with Colin Eglin, 25 April 1990

25 Argus, 25 February 1986

26 *ibid*

considered it folly to leave Parliament and leave the government unquestioned and unchallenged. The PFP, he concluded, had "to utilise to the utmost of its ability its position in Parliament". (27) This was a retreat away from the position developed under Slabbert which had played down the traditional opposition role of the PFP. It was a return to the safety and comfort of what the Party had historically grown used to.

At the same time as maximising its position within the confines of the tricameral Parliament it was also necessary to be "relevant to the wider South African political arena. It is not an either/or situation". (28) From this Parliamentary base he called on the PFP to

"reach out to the people of our South African nation. We must deal in a practical way with the issues that affect their daily lives. We must build bridges." (29)

Building "bridges" would require closer ties and contacts with popular organisations. A special "task force for negotiation" under the leadership of Peter Gastrow and National Director Neil Ross was established to forge closer links with popular resistance groups. (30)

The existing programme to recruit black members had been a failure and had not met the Party's need to establish a bridgehead within the dominated classes. Addressing the February meeting of the PFP Federal Council, Colin Eglin said that while the campaign had been well intentioned, it was not well managed or conceived. It needed to be rethought, he went on. (31) The programme eventually

---

27 *ibid*

28 *ibid*

29 *ibid*

30 Sunday Times, 23 March 1986

31 Minutes of PFP Federal Council, 15 February 1986

withered away to become a minor part of Party strategy as little energy was put into it by any of the PFP regions.

As well as a realisation that it needed to be relevant to the total political environment, and not only the white one, the notion that the Party could forge a centrist hegemony capable of uniting core black and white constituencies and potentially sweep into a position of power was again growing in the Party. The rudiments of this emergent strategic goal could be seen in the "There is a way to save South Africa" campaign conducted in May 1986. In this project extensive resources went into publicity material and full page newspaper advertisements. The objective of the Party drive was to appeal to disillusioned NP supporters, as well as to win credibility within the black community. The emerging signs of disenchantment within the National Party were welcomed by the PFP leadership as a new opportunity to once again attempt to seize the controlling interest within the white political arena. It realized that earlier strategies which ignored the black community could no longer be pursued. As well as a means of presenting the Party's policies to the public, the PFP saw this campaign as an opportunity to present itself as the Party of the centre capable of fighting what it perceived as the extremism of right and left. (32) Eglin emphasised the focus on the National Party which, he contended, had

"to break to enable a new realignment of groups in the centre. We will assist in this process and we will have an important position in that power structure". (33)

The rationale behind the belief that the Party could unite a non-racial centrist grouping was based on what was known within the PFP as the Hinge, or Andrew Assumption, after its

---

32 Die Burger, 21 May 1986

33 Sunday Star, 25 May 1986

deviser Ken Andrew. The Secretary General Robin Carlisle explained this concept:

"The key to the Party's future is to increase black and white membership. Once whites realise that the PFP has substantial support in the black community, more will support us. Once blacks see that a large number of whites support us, more of them will see us as a party with a prospect." (34)

The publicity material for the campaign focussed on the PFP's stress on individual rights as well as the appeal for negotiations. In this aspect the campaign engaged directly with the then current tone of government which was based on its notion of negotiations. The PFP questioned this notion and suggested its own. In focussing on negotiations, the PFP was both challenging government and the liberation movement which, while not rejecting the concept of negotiations, had at that point not seen it as strategically appropriate and was insisting on certain preconditions being met before it would consider that course of action. The tone of the pamphlets and adverts captured this dual thrust:

"The PFP's concept of negotiations is very different from the way the government is trying to do it.

"It has to do with the spirit of the thing. With gaining trust, without which nothing will be achieved.

"You have to show intent by scrapping apartheid and unbanning political parties and leaders so that people are free to negotiate." (35)

The campaign made the bold appeal that the PFP was the single organisation capable of taking the lead in this task:

---

34 Argus, 24 March 1986

35 Sowetan, 20 May 1986

"The PFP is the only Party with the resources, the people and the credibility to take the centre stage and form an alternative government. Support for the PFP has been growing at a rate that has surprised our critics, warmed the hearts of our friends and hastened the day when the PFP can actually form an alternative government." (36)

The ideas incorporated into the "Save South Africa" campaign were incorporated into a far larger strategy project culminating in a major programmatic document finalised in September 1986. It came two months after the massive crackdown on the liberation movement associated with the declaration of a national State of Emergency in July 1986. The document authored by Robin Carlisle proposed a major initiative whereby the PFP would consolidate itself as a leading centrist party with significant black and white support and which could hold the balance of power within the constitutional system. The strategy was in many respects similar to that unveiled by Slabbert the previous year. It differed in its appeal to technocratic political techniques, as well as in incorporating a more sensitive approach to the black community and popular organisations. While the document represented the overall drift towards a centrist stance, the document accommodated the views and objectives of the Party's left. It was, consequently, another incoherent attempt at a non-racial centrism.

The belief that the PFP could once more aspire to being a leading party came as a result of extensive opinion survey analysis conducted by the Party. According to the principal PFP pollster Jannie Hofmeyr, voter support for the Party at that time stood at between 16% to 18%. This compared with as many as 30% to 45% of the voting public agreeing with the PFP's policies. (37) The Party believed that the latter group needed to be targeted in order to become PFP voters.

---

36 *ibid*

37 Star, 2 October 1986

Hofmeyr contended that the situation of conflict and violence in the country had encouraged a mood of despair and apathy. The PFP was perceived as being unable to guarantee stability. The major target for the PFP was a large section of NP supporters who, while voting for the National Party, no longer supported its policies: According to Hofmeyr the PFP was in a position to convince these people that the government was unable to "deliver reform fast enough". (38) He contended that the message that would convince most voters was that the PFP was the party more likely to establish "a realistic partnership with significant black leadership". (39) It was his belief that the task at hand for the PFP was a marketing one:

"This is not a question of changing people's basic attitudes and values. People have already made up their minds on all the important issues such as open schooling and integrated residential areas. We must isolate the obstacles which prevent them from voting for us. The fundamental barrier is that we are not trusted with the transition. People think we are going to give the country away. People do not think we are able to handle the dynamic which transition will set in motion because we are soft on security." (40)

The Party believed that it would gather support by projecting an image which showed the PFP as being more likely to be able to share power with "significant" black leaders who could be trusted and who would be prepared to come to some kind of settlement. In turn, the NP would be exposed as being incapable of negotiating a peaceful resolution of conflict.

This approach encouraged the PFP leadership. Said Ken Andrew,

---

38 *ibid*  
 39 *ibid*  
 40 *ibid*

"The government is making a mess by any yardstick and we have a marvellous chance of picking up disenchanting voters who supported the NP before. We don't have to change people's attitudes. We merely have to get people who share our attitudes to support us. For the first time in ten years the PFP has a strategy and knows where it is going." (41)

The emergent strategy set the Party clear Parliamentary and extra-Parliamentary objectives. The Parliamentary objectives were based on four assumptions. These were that there would be sufficient stability to ensure the integrity of electoral politics; that it could gain two-thirds of the NRP vote; that it would hold onto voters who might support the NP through fear of the right wing; and, that it could achieve the same swing as the Party had gained between 1977 and 1981. Given these assumptions it believed that it was capable of winning 52 seats in Parliament. A position of this kind would allow the Party to either hold power outright, or the balance of it in the event of a hung Parliament in the House of Assembly. (42)

The extra-Parliamentary thrust sought to make the Party a "relevant factor" in the "total political market place" and "power equation" through establishing and gaining the "trust, credibility and endorsement of leaders and organisations of all races". (43) This was crucial to the fulfillment of the "hinge assumption" which presupposed that the more that whites believed that blacks accepted the PFP plan, the more they would be prepared to do so, and vice versa.

The plan called for a three year programme of developing support in the Parliamentary and extra-Parliamentary terrains. In the Parliamentary field the strategic plan was

---

41 Sunday Star, 7 September 1986

42 PFP, Strategy for a new South Africa, September 1986

43 *ibid*

called "turbocharge" which called for sophisticated recruitment and canvassing techniques which the Party would deploy in pivotal Parliamentary constituencies. It would make use of direct marketing techniques which had been used in politics in the USA, Canada, France and Austria. The extra-Parliamentary thrust called for a professionalisation of the Party's monitoring and mediating work in the black community. A network of "outreach" officers were to be appointed whose tasks were to implement the six stated objectives of the "national outreach programme" which were:

"To become truly relevant in the current political situation;

"To mobilise and conscientise our supporters and members;

"To become a rallying point for the middle ground and for liberal values;

"To develop a comprehensive battery of contacts and establish a data bank of black communities;

"To be recognised as the authoritative force in the peace-making process;

"To grow white and black support for our principles and policies by practically demonstrating their effectiveness in real life situations, and thereby grow our membership in all areas." (44)

With this programme the PFP set about an optimistic course of becoming the central force in South African politics. This ambition was, however, soon dashed. The programme was both too ambitious, and the Party was precluded by circumstances in its fulfillment. As will be discussed below, the grand plans laid down in the programme were never fulfilled. While the Party became very extensively involved in the extra-Parliamentary field it never succeeded in becoming a force among the dominated classes. The plan was

---

44 Robin Carlisle, "National Outreach", May 1986

an imprecise attempt to engage with the liberation movement on the one hand, while at the same time attempting to gather increased white support. This was to prove to be a collision course for the Party, especially since there was no attempt to integrate the two objectives. This reflected the rift between a dominant centrist liberal group within the Party, and a small but effective left wing. This condition was a recipe for an incoherent and disjointed attempt at forging a new national hegemony. Rather than achieving this, the plan allowed for further polarisation within the PFP, and little success outside of it.

Within the Party, while there was no overt opposition to the plan, not all members saw it as a priority and continued with the traditional mode of liberal opposition politics. Said Helen Suzman,

"I never saw us as a power party. There were others who did and were constantly talking power, but I must say, perhaps I was more realistic or maybe I was just so used to being in opposition the idea of being in power never occurred to me. But it didn't mean in any way that I thought that diminished the role the Party had to play." (45)

It was also the calling of a General Election in January 1987, just four months after the announcement of the strategic plan, that confounded the three year plan of the Party.

## THE OUTREACH PROGRAMME

1986 saw extensive activity by the PFP in reaching out to the black community and to a lesser degree to popular organisations. The exercise in recruiting black members, started the previous year, was continued, although on a much decreased scale. Emphasis fell in the main on monitoring, support and back-up work in townships then in the grips of conflict and repression.

The announcement of the national state of emergency in June 1986 saw a vigorous response from the PFP. As well as running a series of public protest meetings, the Party also established a "missing person's bureau". This name was given to what was effectively a detainees support project as a means of circumventing the curb on reporting Emergency detainees. By October the Party reported that it had a list of 6000 detainees on its books and was co-operating with popular organisations in detainee support work. (46)

By the end of 1986 well over 100 PFP members had been involved in over 70 townships. Activities included mediating between residents' organisations and police in conflict situations; being present at meetings and funerals as a deterrent to police action; negotiating between "comrades" and vigilantes; mediating between Inkatha and the UDF; negotiating with the authorities to lift restrictions on meetings and funerals; putting pressure on government to lift bans on popular leaders; assisting detainees families materially; assisting victims of violence in bringing legal actions. The National Director of the Party was put in charge of these activities with many MPs and Party members participating. In the Western Cape two people were

appointed to full-time positions to assist in outreach work.  
(47)

The Party leadership valued these activities highly as they promoted the image and credibility of the PFP in the black community. Said Colin Eglin,

"Operation Outreach, whatever it was intended, was converted to something quite valuable. It led to the development of widespread monitoring activities which was a way of gaining access to the extra-Parliamentaries in the community without being seen to be in competition with them." (48)

The Party also felt that these activities could potentially have a moderating influence on popular resistance politics. In the words of Robin Carlisle outreach work served to open

"lines of communication not normally available to blacks and therefore facilitating negotiations rather than confrontation". (49)

There were, however, serious concerns that while the Party was interacting closely with affected communities, it was not succeeding in forging links with popular leadership. This was repeatedly pointed out by Colin Eglin in his presentations to meetings of the Party's Federal Executive in the latter part of 1986. He was concerned that although the PFP's

"monitoring at grassroots was having an effect ... very little was being done at leadership level to forge contacts and increase understanding for our position." (50)

---

47 PFP, Strategy for a New South Africa, September 1986; Newsline, November 1986.

48 Interview with Colin Eglin, 25 April 1990

49 PFP, Strategy for a New South Africa, September 1986

50 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 22 October 1986

Despite this, the extra-Parliamentary activities had a significant educative effect on those Party members who were involved in them. It served to reinforce the left within the Party through encouraging both a greater understanding of, and sympathy for, the liberation movement by those who got involved.

While the Party was not making contact with the leadership of the liberation movement, it was closely involved in the KwaNatal Indaba in which moderate black groups were actively involved. The Indaba represented very closely the interests of key sectors of the dominant classes who were seeking a means to overcome the impasse that had arisen as a result of the inability of the state to resolve the structural crisis. The eight-month long project was highly regarded by Party members as a triumph for negotiation. (51) The proposals developed by the Indaba included a bill of individual rights and a constitutional framework for the region based both on a one-person one vote system, and a scheme to ensure group participation. "Groups" represented within the constitutional framework would have a right of veto over legislation affecting their language, religion or cultural rights. (52) The Party was represented at the negotiations by its Natal leader Ray Swart and Durban MP Peter Gastrow.

The identification of the Party with the agreement reached in the Indaba process brought it into conflict with the liberation movement. The Indaba was strongly criticised by the UDF as being an inadequate regional approach to the national question in South Africa. It called on PFP supporters to rethink the Party's support for the Indaba proposals. It argued that

---

51 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, p 171

52 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, p 103

"the Indaba was flawed from the start, built on ethnic politics and going ahead without the support or mandate of the people. The Muzorewa experience should have taught white South Africans not to build castles in the air." (53)

A significant consequence of the impact of radical extra-Parliamentary politics on the PFP and an important band of its members was the reassessment it forced of the Party's policy of including a veto right in its constitutional framework. The policy stated that the size of the minority veto would be determined by the National Convention in drawing up a new constitution. This would mean that in the legislature

"any group of say 10% - 15% will be able to veto legislation which is against its vital interests. In the executive the minority veto will work by requiring broad policy decisions to be taken by consensus." (54)

Many critics of the Party had argued that this veto right could lead to a white (or any other) minority placing a block on decisive changes and thus reserving power in the hands of a minority. At the 1986 Federal Congress a vote was taken to scrap the veto clause in the Party policy. A total of 110 votes went in favour of scrapping the veto, while 90 backed its retention. As a two-thirds majority was required to change the Party's constitutional policy, the veto was retained although a committee was appointed to investigate this aspect of the Party platform. (55)

The division over the veto debate reflected the delicate balance the Party was attempting to achieve between white and black support. Speaking in favour of scrapping the veto

---

53 UDF, "United Democratic Front Position on Whites-Only Elections", 19 March 1987

54 PFP, "What it stands for. Your questions answered", 1987

55 Argus, 22 November 1986

Jan van Gend argued that it placed a block on "general democracy". He went on to say that if the Party was truly in favour of democracy it would not place stress on the minority veto. The majority should be allowed to rule, while the minority could be defended by a Bill of Rights. (56) Van Gend's comments were endorsed by many, who were also impressed by the appeal of a guest speaker to the Congress Nthato Motlana, a leader of the UDF.

Those who supported the retention of the veto argued that this was necessary in order to win white support. Said the Party's Director of Research Prof Nic Olivier,

"While it is important to increase our credibility among blacks, we will never achieve anything as a Party unless we can get more support from white voters." (57)

The veto debate was left unresolved, reflecting the unresolved nature of the Party's ongoing direction.

#### THE 1987 GENERAL ELECTION

In January 1987 PW Botha called an election for the white House of Assembly. This announcement caught the PFP off guard as they were anticipating an election only in 1989. The Party had to move fast to adapt its recently unveiled strategy to the constraints of a General Election at short notice.

The calling of an early election by PW Botha had bedeviled the PFP's three year programme to gain power. (58) Nevertheless, the Party took the essential elements of the strategy and incorporated it into its approach to the

56 Rapport, 23 November 1986

57 Citizen, 24 November 1986

58 In terms of the new constitution the next elections were due to be held within 180 days of 1 September 1989.

elections. In lieu of the Party trying to win as many seats under its own flag as possible it chose rather to adopt a strategy of forging an "alliance of moderates". This implied a series of electoral alliances and partnerships which avoided opposing other centrist parties and movements. In particular, the NRP and the newly emergent "independents" - exiles from the left wing of the National Party - were identified for special treatment.

This stance adopted by the Party reflected its attempt to constructively deal with a real shift in attitudes within the white community. The rise in black urbanisation and increased participation in the urban economy was reflected by this shift in attitudes. On the "soft" issue of racial integration in theatres whereas 40% of whites endorsed this view in 1978, the figure rose to 74% in 1986. Hofmeyr shows that it was particularly during the period of heightened resistance between 1984 and 1986 that there was significant easing in attitudes. (59) On the "harder" issue of integrated group areas, there was also a gradual, although lesser, drift towards liberalisation. Support for integration of this kind rose from 17% in 1982 to 29% in 1986. Hofmeyr's research shows that by the mid-eighties there was "a substantial majority of whites" who were "prepared to accept a loosening of the Act as long as it did not impact on them directly". (60) Politically these trends were reflected both in internal division within the NP, as well as significant breaks from that Party.

In January 1987 the PFP decided to enter into an "election alliance" with the New Republic Party. (61) The nature of the alliance was ~~such that the two parties~~ agreed not to oppose each other during the election. The PFP stressed,

---

59 Hofmeyr (1990), p 39

60 *ibid*

34 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 25 January 1987

however, that it wished to retain its own identity within the alliance. While most of the regional formations of the NRP agreed to the alliance, the Albany branch of that party actively opposed the agreement. Less than two weeks before the polling day the branch placed an advert in a local Grahamstown newspaper saying that there was "no alliance in Albany". (62)

While the PFP did not enter into any formal agreements with the newly emergent "independent movement" - the independents sought to distance themselves from the Party fearing that too close a link would be detrimental to their chances - it did stand back from contesting seats where Wynand Malan, Dennis Worrall and Esther Lategan were standing. According to Federal Council chairman Ken Andrew this was a manifestation of the PFP's approach to "realignment politics". (63) The Party saw this approach as being in keeping with its goal of cementing a centrist political movement within South Africa. Election media emphasised this objective extensively. An election advert read, in part,

"I am going to vote PFP because they have had the courage to put aside party politics to form an alliance of moderates.

"I am going to vote PFP because they are bringing talented people together to build a new South Africa.

"I'm going to vote PFP because I agree with them and Wynand Malan that there must be real negotiation.

"I'm going to vote PFP because they agree with Chief Mangosutho Buthelezi's efforts in the KwaNatal Indaba.

---

62 Die Burger, 23 April 1987

63 Citizen, 20 February 1987

"I'm going to vote PFP because I agree with them and Dennis Worrall that there should be real power sharing.

"I'm going to vote PFP because they agree with Wimpie de Klerk about National Party intolerance of uninhibited political reporting.

"I'm going to vote PFP because they agree with the Stellenbosch professors that the Group Areas Act must go." (64)

As well as accommodating the independents within its electoral plans, the PFP also stood back from opposing individuals still within the National Party who were known to be very critical of government policy. Those not opposed included Albert Nothnagel, Leon Wessels and Sam de Beer. (65) This approach was informed by the belief that if the PFP/NRP alliance and the independent candidates held the prospect of forming an alternative government more than thirty Nationalist MPs would join up with it. (66)

After the bluster of its election campaign, PFP members were shocked at how badly the Party performed. Not only did it not gain any new seats, but it lost MPs and its position as the Official Opposition in the House of Assembly to the Conservative Party. After putting up 77 candidates in the election, the PFP won only nineteen seats (plus one nominated MP), down from the 26 it held going into the election. Two PFP candidates were unopposed. The Party lost eight seats to the National Party, while gaining one from that party. (67) The PFP's election ally, the NRP

---

64 Argus, 8 April 1987. The Stellenbosch professors referred to were a large group of academics at the University of Stellenbosch who in 1987 distanced themselves from the National Party. Wimpie de Klerk was the former editor of the government supporting Rapport newspaper who had also distanced himself from the direction of government policy.

65 Citizen, 20 February 1987 and 3 March 1987

66 Welsh (1987), p 94

67 *ibid*

lost four of the five seats it held - all to the NP. Among the independents, only Wynand Malan won a seat, while Dennis Worrall came within 39 votes of defeating the Minister of Constitutional Development Chris Heunis in the Helderberg constituency. The PFP won only 14,11% of the total votes cast and the NRP won 1,92%. Against this the National Party won 52,45% and the Conservative Party received 26,37% of the vote. (68)

Compared to the Party's performance during the 1981 elections, the 1987 results illustrated a dramatic decline in support for the PFP. Various factors contributed to the PFP's failure. Among the factors identified by the Party's Federal Council were the effect of government control of television; an absence of youth involvement in the campaign; the fact that the Party had disbelieved opinion surveys in the run up to the election; complacent and ineffective organisation; an unfocussed message; the "election alliance" only served to lose the Party support; not addressing the crucial issue of security which the NP concentrate on; the Party had an elitist image.

At root, however, the Party's poor performance was a function of its location as a liberal Party in the context of a far broader struggle between primary antagonists, neither of which was the PFP. Three issues served to illustrate this during the elections: the contest around "security", the impact of the liberation movement on the election campaign, and the close identification by the PFP with a "third force" - the KwaNatal Indaba.

The elections came in the midst of an intensive State of Emergency in which the state was attempting to destroy or paralyse the liberation movement. The reform of the

political state which had characterised government action until 1986 had all but come to a stop. In its place government efforts went into an extensive low-intensity campaign to reformulate civil society in the absence of an effective resistance movement. A two-fold approach of socio-economic reform and high-profile repression were pursued by the regime in an effort to ensure continued accumulation, while simultaneously attempting to defend the interests of a variety of white class forces. This state programme was closely associated with the work of the State Security Council and the National Security Management System. (69) The root of this programme was the conflict between the state on the one hand, and an alliance of dominated black class forces led by a liberation movement directed in the main by the ANC, the UDF and Cosatu on the other. The election for the white House of Parliament was not, therefore, central to the primary conflict. It was, though, an attempt by the National Party, to consolidate its position in the context of a growing right wing and splinters within its own ranks.

The main thrust of the National Party election campaign fell on its efforts to oppose the liberation movement. With little by the way of new policy initiatives it resorted to stressing the "threat" to the country posed by the ANC and Communist Party and its allies. The NP had a two-stream election manifesto which on the one hand referred to the vague notion of "broadening the democratic base of the government", but placed greater stress on security by "fighting and neutralising the revolutionary offensive". (70)

---

69 See Swilling and Phillips (1989 a and b)

70 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1987/88,  
p 746

In order to reinforce the government's appeal to "security" the Foreign Minister twice called meetings of foreign representatives to inform them of an "ANC plan to disrupt the elections". (71) A highly orchestrated campaign by the National Party sought to exploit the links leading PFP members had with the liberation movement. In doing so the National Party was both exploiting and furthering the trend of opposition to the ANC within the white community. Hofmeyr shows that whereas 72% of whites in January 1986 supported the idea of negotiations with the ANC on condition that it renounced violence, only 40% supported similar talks in 1986, and 36% in 1988. (72) The NP placed adverts in newspapers publishing photographs and statements attempting to link the Party to the ANC and SACP. Nationalist speakers referred extensively to the various contacts that the PFP and its members had had with resistance organisations. NP candidate and a former senior security policeman Craig Williamson questioned the PFP on its security policy and its views on the ANC. (73) Minister of Defence Magnus Malan argued that PFP delegates to a meeting with the ANC had spoken highly of SACP General Secretary Joe Slovo, the implication intended that the Party found the Communist Party acceptable. (74) Adding to the fray Pik Botha asked why the PFP did not speak out against the ANC. Instead, he said, it had been "soft" on the ANC while being "hard" on the SAP. (75) He went on to warn that the ANC would use the PFP as a "Trojan horse" in its struggle. (76)

In response to these claims by the government, the PFP at first restated its policy which was that all parties should be permitted to operate freely, unless their stated goal was

- 
- 71 *ibid*, p 745  
 72 Hofmeyr (1990), p 40  
 73 Citizen, 24 April 1987  
 74 Cape Times, 25 April 1987  
 75 Die Burger, 28 April 1987  
 76 Argus, 28 April 1987

to pursue the violent overthrow of constitutional government. (77) Elsewhere a spokesman was quoted as saying that the PFP viewed the ANC as an enemy because it pursued a policy of violence. He went on to say that no party should be invited to participate in negotiations if it supported a policy of violence. (78) The Party did not, however, stress its security policy during the elections and the ongoing badgering of the NP took its toll. In the face of what was becoming evident as a poor performance in the elections, the Party Leader Colin Eglin assumed a pugnacious tone and contended that if the PFP came to power it would "eat the communists for breakfast". (79)

The response of the Party on the ANC and security issues was, according to a leading Party member David Welsh a result of a classic dilemma

"confronting liberal parties in polarising multi-ethnic societies. True to its liberal principles, it could never condone the violations of civil rights and the strong-arm methods used by the State in combatting unrest." (80)

As a result the Party appeared only to condemn the actions of the state. But, the Party was in similar dilemma in respect of the ANC and SACP issue. According to Welsh,

"The polarisation of South African politics demands ideological specificity. The crudeness and raw emotion generated by racial politics in an atmosphere of heightened insecurity consequently offers little scope for nuanced or subtle positions on highly controversial issues. Given the logic of its principles and the first-hand knowledge of PFP members about the ANC's strength, the PFP could do little else other than what it did: express its opposition to the ANC's violence

- 
- 77 Citizen, 19 March 1987  
 78 Die Burger, 9 April 1987  
 79 Cape Times, 12 April 1987  
 80 Welsh (1987a), p 97

and its communist members, but also recognise that its influence could not be wished away." (81)

The "middle position" on the ANC proved to have no place in the context of the 1987 elections. Not only did the Party come under attack from the National Party to its right, but extra-Parliamentary groups, especially the UDF came out strongly against the elections and the PFP's stance. The Party's approach reflected its polarised response to the increasing illegitimacy of Parliament, as well as to the hardening of opposition to the liberation movement within the white community.

In a position paper released before the elections, the UDF declared that its "theme" in response to the elections was to be "Down with apartheid elections: Votes for all in a united South Africa!" (82) It considered the elections to be a "farce" as they perpetuated minority rule, they were not free or democratic, and the poll would take place in the context of a State of Emergency, repression, censorship ignorance on the part of white voters.

The UDF then went on to make a direct appeal to the PFP. It reiterated its criticism of the PFP's participation in the tricameral system, but was aware that the Party was not about to leave Parliament and its supporters would be voting in the forthcoming elections. It made an appeal to PFP supporters to

"turn away from the racists, look toward the majority. Abandon the myth of change through Parliament. And when the Nats come to power on 6 May, think deep and hard about the political situation.

---

81 *ibid*, p 98

82 UDF, "United Democratic Front Position on Whites-Only Elections", 19 March 1987

"For the fact of the matter is that PFP supporters will have to recognise that their children's future lies neither in a futile bid for a few extra seats in a moribund Parliament, or in leaving South Africa ... get in touch with the thinking of the majority. Investigate the harsh world behind government imposed censorship and misinformation, and then be in a position to make informed judgements." (83)

The UDF then went on to oppose participation in Parliament. It argued that

"the real engine for change lies outside Parliament. It is based in the democratic and mass based organisations of our people." (84)

The Party was well aware of the artificial nature of the election in the context of widespread repression and resistance. Addressing the January meeting of the PFP Federal Executive Colin Eglin was quoted as saying that the

"election was set against a very unnatural background where the focus would be on White politics in a White political arena, and whilst this would be on the forefront of everybody's minds and the news, it did not reflect the realities of this country." (85)

Responding to the UDF appeal Helen Suzman reiterated the view in a leader page article in the Sunday Times that "for the foreseeable future" only Parliament could make or break laws which would bring apartheid to an end. (86) She rejected the notion that the election was a "sideshow" to the main struggle between the state and the popular opposition. She questioned how the liberatory organisations could get rid of the Government short of through an

---

83 *ibid*

84 *ibid*

85 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 25 January 1987

86 Sunday Times,

election. The PFP was not simply trying to win a "few more seats", rather

"the aim is to form a powerful alliance of like-minded people in Parliament who are determined to get rid of apartheid and thus create a climate for negotiation." (87)

While the UDF, Cosatu and Nactu did not call for a boycott of the elections their opposition to them was intensified by the stayaway call for 5 and 6 May which focussed among other issues on the whites-only poll. In a statement Cosatu said that the election

"capitalises on and deepens racism, fear and ignorance among the white electorate, and ... aims to entrench power more firmly in the hands of a minority. The white elections have not remotely touched on the real issues dominating the lives of millions of the oppressed and exploited." (88)

The stayaway proved to be very successful with the Labour Monitoring Group estimating that more than a million workers stayed away. Cosatu claimed that 1,5 million workers joined the action, with one million students also staying away. (89)

Certain members of the PFP claimed that the call to action by the organisations of the liberation movement had the effect of discouraging left-wing white voters, especially students, from voting. Party spokesmen argued that the Party had lost the Wynberg, Albany, Edenvale and Hillbrow seats because of this factor. They also contended that there had been a close call in Green Point due to this reason and also that it had not been possible to gain

---

87 *ibid*

88 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1987/88,  
p 686

89 *ibid*

Simonstown. (90) Said Douglas Gibson reflecting on the election results

"The people who did most of the damage were the white adherents of those black political movements like, for example, the UDF. There is no doubt about it that the UDF put a question mark over the whole Parliamentary election and almost went out of their way to persuade people that if they voted, they were sort-of being untrue to the cause and we think that more than anything else put the CP in as the official opposition in South Africa."

(91)

He argued further that if the PFP had won three of the marginal seats that it had lost, it could have retained its position as the Official Opposition. Whether this would have been the case or not is open to conjecture, but the interpretation offered by Gibson was a prominent one within the Party, and served to alienate the more conservative elements within the Party, especially those in the Southern Transvaal further from organisations of the dominated classes.

The PFP also faced criticism during the election campaign from both the National Party and the UDF regarding its endorsement for the KwaNatal Indaba. The PFP/NRP alliance fought the election in Natal largely in support of the Indaba proposals. The NP attacked the proposals arguing that support for them would be tantamount to giving approval for "black domination". Chief Buthelezi joined the PFP/NRP election campaign by speaking at an election meeting in Westville on the eve of the voting day. (92)

The National Party won convincingly in Natal. They lost only one seat to the PFP while gaining three previously held

90 Welsh (1987), p 96; Interview with Douglas Gibson, 20 May 1988

91 Interview with Douglas Gibson, 20 May 1988

92 Natal Mercury, 5 May 1987

by the Party in Natal. In addition they won three NRP seats. It is most likely that previous NRP voters had given their votes to the NP in the face of the black domination and security threat fears of the National Party. The NRP in Natal, as was the case with Natal United Party, was a conservative formation more inclined to the authoritarian and racist stances of the National Party than the PFP's liberalism.

The 1987 elections proved to be a severe setback for the Party from which it would never recover. It deepened the rift within the PFP over future direction in the context of popular resistance on the one hand and government policy on the other.

#### **THE POST-ELECTION MALAISE:**

The year after the 1987 elections was one of the most difficult in the Party's history. Pressures which had been building over the course of the preceding decade came to a head with an intense debate in the Party as to its future direction, and ultimately the resignations of a number of important members. The Party emerged from the period retreating from its previous desire to engage with the liberation movement. It assumed a position which stressed its centrism and there was a return to an emphasis on the Party's "liberal values". In essence this was an assertion of a more overtly class-conscious liberalism.

The grand plans that the Party had of becoming a power broker within South African politics lay tattered at the backdoor of the May election in 1987. PFP sympathetic newspapers in their response to the poor showing of the Party at the polls stressed the need for it to return to a more traditional mode of operation. Stating that the

Party's election strategy had been a "spectacular failure", the Cape Times went on to suggest that

"to revert to a Suzman-style function as a voice for civil liberties is well within the PFP's range and can be effectively sustained by the Party's traditional and impregnable constituency in upper-income areas. As it seems to be a futile endeavor to broaden the Party's base of support among whites in current circumstances, the road ahead is plain enough as a civil rights lobby. At the same time existing contacts in the black community should be further developed and fostered" (93)

In its attempts to contain the damage suffered during the elections the Party stressed its Parliamentary role. The Federal Council resolved to consolidate its work in the House of Assembly, while Eglin emphasised the Party's role in eliciting information and highlighting abuses of human and civil rights. (94) The fact that the Party was no longer the Official Opposition meant, as well, that it had to work that much harder at being heard within Parliament. The rise of the Conservative Party also led to the PFP needing, according to Eglin, to "counter the negative impact of the CP, opposing them at every turn". (95) For Eglin it was like a "bad dream" that the Official Opposition was now to the right of government. (96)

The emphasis on the Party's role in Parliament was in large measure a knee jerk reaction to mounting criticisms by the liberation movement. Long standing pressures from the extra-Parliamentary movement once more weighed on the Party after the elections. The UDF made an appeal to the PFP to withdraw from participation in Parliament. () A UDF National Conference resolution also called for the dissolution of the House of Representatives and that of

---

93 Cape Times, 18 May 1987

94 Argus, 20 June 1987, and 15 June 1987

95 *ibid*

96 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1987/8, p 763

97 Cape Times, 4 June 1987

Delegates. Archbishop Desmond Tutu also urged the Party "to get out of Parliament" since its participation in the tricameral system gave "the world the impression that we have a multi-party democracy when it is now quite clear we have a total charade." () The more moderate leader of the National African Chamber of Commerce Sam Motsuenyane also added his voice to the criticisms of the PFP. He warned with accurate foresight that

"more and more the PFP will become redundant. I think the PFP will persist in their weakened position until they are finally liquidated by history. The credibility of the PFP among blacks is going to diminish, although, in fairness, the Party has articulated some black aspirations very strongly." (99)

The election defeat, together with criticisms from black leaders both encouraged and coincided with an existential crisis within the Party. At the same time, as has been shown elsewhere, there was a deep soul searching within liberal circles more generally. (100) Many staunchly liberal members of the Party were increasingly viewing their position as being under attack by the repressive nature of the state in which the tradition of white democracy had been sacrificed to the machinations of the National Security Management System; while to the left there was the perception that while there was the shared perspective of opposition to apartheid, common ground ended there. The intensification of armed struggle, and in particular the bombing of soft targets, led to a view which perceived the prospect of tyranny arising from the left in future. The conclusion that many liberals were drawing was that the Party needed to reflect their opposition, not only to apartheid, but also to ideologies of the left which were

98 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1987/8, p 763

99 Argus, 20 June 1987

100 See the chapter introduction for a discussion on the debate among liberals in the 1980s.

viewed as holding the seeds of tyranny. They wanted a firmer statement of the Party's commitment to liberal values and ideals. In particular, there was a stress on the economic aspects of free enterprise and private property. This amounted to a class-conscious centrist liberalism.

This would require a distancing not only from the apartheid state, but also from the liberation movement to the extent that these forces departed from the values of the Party.

### ISOLATION OF THE LEFT

Individuals to the left of the Party did not welcome the retreat to a centrist liberalism. They had been drawn into a new mode of politics by their increasing contact and participation in the activities of the liberation movement. The emerging conflict came to a head when, in July 1987, three leading left wingers within the Party joined an IDASA sponsored meeting with the ANC in Dakar, Senegal. The three - Party Chairman Peter Gastrow, Greytown MP Pierre Cronje, and President's Councillor Pieter Schoeman - were subsequently subjected to intensive criticism by most leading PFP members for their participation in the trip which had been led by the former leader of the Party Van Zyl Slabbert.

The Dakar meeting was a very high profile event and had elicited a storm of condemnation from the government. The participation of PFP members in the trip had, therefore, given further ammunition to the Party's conservative opponents. The response from within the Party had as much to do with the damage such an identification would have on the Party, as with the fact that the three had participated without Party permission. The bulk of the criticism levelled at Gastrow, Cronje and Schoeman related to the

latter procedural matter. The behavior of the three was considered unacceptable by the Federal Executive which agreed that

"no public representative or senior office bearer of the Party should accept politically sensitive invitations without timeous prior consultation with the leader who will determine what acceptance procedures may be appropriate in each case." (101)

In addition the three were forced to apologise for their actions and expressed regret at not discussing the trip "properly and timeously" with the Leader. (102) The Party caucus furthermore issued a hard-hitting statement which clearly distanced itself from the ANC. The caucus resolved that

"while the PFP is opposed to apartheid and will continue to strive for its abolition, and wishes to bring about a democratic government in South Africa with constitutional, social and economic concepts which accord with recognised Western liberal principles, its policies differ fundamentally in many respects from those of the ANC and, even more importantly, also differ in regard to the means to be used to achieve change." (103)

The formal Party response to the Dakar visit, therefore, amounted to a slapping down of the left in the Party. Not only did the Party reiterate its distance from the ANC while stressing its commitment to liberal values, but it also instituted a procedural mechanism which could limit the contact of Party members with the liberation movement. Some members, such as Harry Schwarz felt more strongly about needing to express opposition to the ANC. He called on those who had had talks with the ANC to justify why they had done so, since in his opinion the ANC was a "killing

---

101 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 27 July 1987

102 Argus, 6 August 1987

103 Citizen, 7 August 1987

machine". (104) He said that he was not "prepared to negotiate with someone who has an AK47 on the table". (105) Colin Eglin was more moderate in his response, although he distanced the Party very clearly from the ANC. He said that the PFP would talk to anyone in a "blunt, direct manner" but that this did not mean that it would seek a cosy arrangement with people who espoused terrorism, "whether they called it an armed struggle or anything else." (106)

The response to the Dakar visit related in the main to the retreat from the previous pattern of seeking out extended contact with the liberation movement. It was part of the withdrawal to being a party of centrist liberal ideals distancing itself from both the left and the right. This was a consequence of the growth of the liberation movement and the threat it posed of undermining continued capital accumulation. It was also a result of the declining support among white voters for the PFP due to its increased contact with the liberatory organisations, a fact successfully exploited by the NP at the May elections. It reflected, as well, the growth of new centrist ideologies within the capitalist community aimed both at preserving the interests of capitalism, and at limiting the militance of the popular opposition. Theories of economic growth as facilitator for political change reminiscent of the liberal modernisation approach of earlier years came to the fore. This development coincided with the upswing in the economy during 1987 and the consequent business silence on political reform. It reflected the broader balance of forces in which the liberation movement was on the retreat. Business could consequently afford not to engage with popular organisations to the degree that it had in the past.

---

104 Citizen, 1 August 1987

105 *ibid*

106 *ibid*

The left within the PFP was increasingly isolated as the centrist liberalism of the PFP came to be hegemonic within the Party. Over the following four months the Party lost a number of its significant left wing members unable to reconcile their views with continued membership of the PFP. The first key member to resign was the Claremont MP Jan van Eck. Van Eck argued that he was committed to the overall goals of PFP policy, but found that its strategic orientation was increasingly at variance with the politics of the black community. He said that the Party had becoming increasingly loath to shape its vision of the future "through active involvement in the total community" as it was afraid to lose the support of conservative white voters. (107) He contended that the Party was remaining aloof from the struggles and concerns of ordinary black people:

"It's that aloofness that drove one around the bend because the belief that you can sit in a library, go through all the newspapers, magazines and books that are others, write a very nice, beautiful analytical liberal speech on liberal values, on how they should be preserved; but you do not dirty your hands at the bottom." (108)

Other members of the Party left the Party in sympathy with Van Eck's stand. These included members in Pietermaritzburg, Stellenbosch and the youth wing of the Party in the Western Cape. (109) Shortly before Van Eck's resignation, the Party's Western Cape regional director left for the same reasons. (110)

The three members who went to Dakar were about to resign at the same time as Van Eck, but decided to delay their departure on hearing of his resignation. In October

- 
- 107 Cape Times, 17 August 1987  
 108 Interview with Jan van Eck, 29 March 1990  
 109 Die Burger, 18 August 1987; Business Day, 21 August 1987  
 110 Cape Times, 17 August 1987



Gastrow, Cronje and Schoeman resigned from the Party to join the National Democratic Movement formed by Wynand Malan. (111) This party had similar policy goals to the PFP although it was not as rooted in the tradition of South African liberalism. It laid a greater emphasis on pursuing contact with black South Africans, while trying to forge a base of support among Afrikaners and disaffected NP supporters. Reflecting on his departure from the Party, Gastrow said that he was

"strongly influenced by the events in South Africa in 1985 and 1986. For the first time, really, I had started to get a feel for what was going on in black politics. It wasn't only the Kannemeyer Commission. It was also involvement in Natal townships. It was the contact I was starting to make with political activists and political leaders. That whole turmoil which people were going through in black politics and which South Africa was going through was somehow not being experienced within the Party. The Party carried on as though nothing was happening while the rest of South Africa was shifting and moving and clashing and fighting and debating and arguing and feeling the crisis situation. That created tremendous tensions as far as I am concerned as an individual. Somehow it became unreal, but at the same time after Slabbert's departure, I was unable to put a crisp alternative strategy for the Party. I was digesting all these influences. I was trying to formulate an alternative in my own mind." (112)

The response of the Party to the Dakar visit, together with the establishment of the NDM by Malan proved to be the catalyst which saw Gastrow and his two colleagues leave the Party. It was another tremendous blow to the Party. Not only had the PFP lost three public representatives, but also the Party chairman. Eglin responded by admitting that their departure had "sown confusion in reformist ranks". (113) He

111 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1987/8 p 765

112 Interview with Peter Gastrow, 28 March 1990

113 Progress, October 1987

called their resignation a "self indulgence" which only the National Party would benefit from. He further stated that they could achieve in the PFP what they aimed for in the NDM. (114) This view put by Eglin was, however, unlikely given the dominant mood within the Party. There was a hardening of positions around a centrist liberal platform. This positioning had been formalised in a Party "mission statement" completed in August following a round of workshops in all regions of the PFP.

#### THE "MISSION STATEMENT"

The mission statement was interesting in that it consolidated the trend of centrist liberalism which had been somewhat unclear over the preceding period. The centrism of this period differed from that under Slabbert in that it did not tolerate "soppy" non-racialism. It would not seek non-racial contact to satisfy emotional compulsions. Rather it adopted a harder edged approach which sought to promote clearer class interests. Non-racial contact and strategies would be selectively determined on the basis of this objective.

Under Slabbert the strong assertion of centrism had been undermined by various pressures acting on the Party. The growth of the left within the Party had had a crucial impact. The departure of the main left-wingers during 1987 had cleared the way for an unbridled hegemony by centrists.

With the core of the PFP weakened and in retreat the "mission statement" set out to make a strong statement of the liberal philosophy of individualism. The statement said that at the heart of the PFP's existence was

"the simple yet basic philosophy, i.e. that it is not the group, or the section, or the class, or the system, but the individual human being that is the touchstone of value in society" (115)

As a corollary of this belief the document then restated the Party's commitment to a non-racial democracy "where Government and society respected the fundamental human rights and dignity of the individual citizen". (116) The statement went on to argue that this philosophy and commitment positioned the Party as a centrist body in the scheme of South African political society, consciously distancing itself from other fundamental groups:

"The PFP is positioned firmly at the centre of the broad spectrum of South African politics. From there it will lead while rejecting the racists, the Marxists and other extremists at both ends of the political spectrum." (117)

Elsewhere in the document a similar statement of a "centrist" positioning is made which sought to distance the Party from the "violence" of "revolution" and "repression". The Party believed that the majority of the country's people supported this view:

"The PFP refuses to believe that the only options facing South Africans are to join the forces of repression and the forces of revolution.

"These options - the 'laager' option and the 'showdown' option - may reflect the despair of many South African. But they do not reflect the hopes, the aspirations or the desires of the vast majority of our people.

"Millions of ordinary South Africans of all races, languages and creeds desperately want an end to violence. They are prepared to share. They want to live in peace.

---

115 Eglin, Colin "Mission Statement: 'The Negotiation Option'", PFP, 22 August 1987

116 *ibid*

117 *ibid*

"The PFP has a duty to show to this divided nation that there is another way. It has to persuade the people of this country that the third option - 'negotiation option' - is the one that offers real hope for the future." (118)

A consequence of its rejection of violence and commitment to a negotiated resolution of the country's conflict was both to strengthen the

"middle ground in South African politics where millions of South Africans share the PFP's basic philosophy and its vision for the future"

and engage

"those on both sides of our rapidly polarising political society who do not share the PFP's philosophy or vision in order to promote that philosophy and vision and to persuade people that negotiation is the alternative to violence." (119)

✓ In a speech to the 1987 Cape Provincial Party congress, Cape leader Roger Hulley described this positioning. He said that in the face of violent polarisation within the country which presented two options - repression or revolution - it was the PFP's duty to strive for a "third option of a negotiated non-racial democracy". (120) This meant that the Party had to talk to anyone in the interests of peace, while also condemning all violence "for or against the oppressed". To deny this "third option" was tantamount to promoting polarisation and a civil war. (121)

The theme of opposition to violence proved to be a central aspect. In announcing the mission statement Party Chairman Ken Andrew said,

---

118 *ibid*

119 *ibid*

120 Progress, December 1987

121 *ibid*

"Whatever may be said about the need for security in the short term, surely no-one wishes to see rule by military force in perpetuity. At the same time we see activities aimed at the overthrow of the state by violence. These must be rejected likewise, for both moral and practical reasons."

(122)

Leading Party members also asserted that the centrist position of the Party needed to be strongly stated. Said the leader of the Party in the Johannesburg City Council Tony Leon,

"The middle ground is not going to be preserved by mere occupation. The hard edges of the centre need to be defined. The guiding philosophy of the Party is very simple: to allow each individual the maximum amount of freedom, drawing a line where such freedom conflicts with the rights of others."

(123)

The strong assertion of liberal values which accompanied the release of the Mission Statement was linked to the Party's contention that it occupied the centre of South African politics. Leading Party members argued that a centrist view was the dominant one in society and coincided with a liberal democratic outlook. Said David Welsh in a keynote address to the Cape PFP Congress in 1987:

"You will find that middle-grounders span the political spectrum from elements inside the NP to the ANC. They don't agree on every aspect of future policy, but they are united by a common fear of the abyss of racial war, and a belief that reasonable people arbitrate their differences through democratic Parliamentary institutions."

(124)

Significant to the context of these developments was the Party's increased comfort with an explicitly class-based

---

122 Argus, 22 August 1987

123 Sunday Times, 17 April 1988

124 Progress, December 1987

politics. In the late seventies and early eighties an avowed identification to a bourgeois class project could be perceived as racist on account of the very small black bourgeoisie and aspirant bourgeoisie. This was no longer the case given the rise of black middle and entrepreneurial classes in the eighties, a process encouraged by the state and big capital. Consequently, a class-politics could no longer be decried as racist.

This theme of a common commitment to liberal values was essential in the thinking around the "mission statement". According to Ken Andrew the first task for the Party was to win support for the PFP's "essential values". In the longer term this could be developed into a "broad-based South African movement which can restore peace and build prosperity". (125) In a similar vein the Natal Party leader Ray Swart believed that

"the role of the PFP must be emphasised in Parliamentary and extra-Parliamentary politics because it is primarily the role of a bearer of standards and it is vital that these standards are kept aloft in South Africa at the present time."  
(126)

The fact that liberalism and liberal ideals were perceived to be under attack at the time proved to be a spur motivating the PFP. According to Eglin the attack on liberal values did not make them

"any less important. In fact, it makes it even more important for people to stand up for these values so that, when apartheid is gone, they will still be there to help build a new South Africa on the basis of equal rights, individual freedom and the rule of law." (127)

---

125 Argus, 22 August 1987  
126 Progress, December 1987  
127 Star, 29 January 1988

The assertion of liberalism coincided with the left being ousted from the increasing influence it had been having on the Party. The primary commitment to liberalism allowed the Party to maintain its independence of both the left and the right. In effect it marked the start of a consolidation by centrist elements within the party. The pattern of not criticising the liberation movement for fear of losing vital contacts was also diminished. It also allowed the Party to be rid of what Tony Leon termed "fellow-travellers" in the sense that they were not "committed to any form of liberal democracy". For this group, argued Leon, the Party

"was just a vehicle, a cover for their own anguish against the government and they really had no role. They really never had a pro-active belief in a liberal party. They were there simply because it was an attack on the government." (128)

The effect of this stance was that the Party took a harder line than previously in respect to its relationship with the liberation movement. Harry Schwarz put this view most strongly when he said:

"There is no instant solutions and quick fixes. Nor is strength to be obtained by alliances with those whose methods and objectives differ from those of the PFP.

"Common opposition to apartheid cannot be allowed to put the Party into bed with revolutionaries who seek violent methods to overthrow the state.

"The choice of political processes is negotiation, revolution or reaction. The end results of such processes are Western-style democracy, one-party leftist tyranny or permanent conflict.

"Those who believe in a peaceful process leading to a Western-style democratic government not only can, but should be together.

"All the rest - the reactionaries, the revolutionaries and those who reject Western political and economic systems - are the PFP's political opponents." (129)

The view adopted by Schwarz was the strongest held within the Party. The dominant approach in the Southern Transvaal, fast becoming the political centre of the Party, was similar however. The regional leader of the PFP Douglas Gibson said that

"the people in the PFP don't have such a burning desire to have the approval or the good wishes of the UDF as they used to." (130)

While this was the main current in PFP thinking there was at the same time the objective of engaging with the liberation movement in the hope of getting it to shift to a more moderate positioning. This involved repairing diplomatic damage from the past, a task seriously undertaken by the Southern Transvaal Party, especially with white radical groups. (131) Differences with the UDF were seen to rest in the style of politics it pursued - characterised as protest politics - and its strategic opposition to participation within the tricameral system and to negotiations at that time. Colin Eglin argued that if the tactical issue of participation ceased to be a point of disagreement "there could be greater areas of agreement". (132) Similarly Gibson argued that the Party had to "make sure they (the UDF - DS) operate within the mainstream" and "try to do whatever one can to force the various parties in the direction of negotiation with each other". (133)

---

129 Sunday Times, 31 January 1988

130 Interview with Douglas Gibson, 20 May 1988

131 Interview with Brian Goodall, 23 May 1988

132 Interview with Colin Eglin, 25 April 1990

133 Interview with Douglas Gibson, 20 May 1988

The "mission statement" defined the Party's role in the "wider political arena" as being rooted in its role in Parliament. It acknowledged that

"Parliament is not the only site in the wider South African arena where political power and influence are expressed." (134)

It followed, said the statement, that if the Party were to use its base in Parliament effectively it would have to be relevant to all South Africans. The document then set out five extra-Parliamentary tasks for the Party. These were to

"(1) be involved, wherever it can, with communities and in particular expand and improve its negotiating, mediating, monitoring and awareness activities;

"(2) build bridges of mutual trust across the racial divide;

"(3) identify with the plight of those South Africans who are denied fundamental rights;

"(4) co-operate with the individuals and organisations that share our philosophy, our vision and our commitment to non-violent change;

"(5) engage and interact with others in order to reduce the level of violence and raise the prospect of negotiation." (135)

At the time of the adoption of the "mission statement" the Party had learnt the hard lessons of its earlier outreach campaign. The Party was not about to set out to compete with organisations operating within the extra-Parliamentary terrain. Colin Eglin said in the pages of the Party newspaper Progress, that the PFP could not simply go out and recruit black members as this would lead to it running into conflict with other organisations "who see you as a

---

134 Eglin, Colin "Mission Statement: 'The Negotiation Option'", PFP, 22 August 1987

135 *ibid*

competitor". (136) It was therefore more important to establish trust and credibility at the grassroots and leadership levels within black communities. He further stressed that it was necessary to do this at the level of individual communities since this was the way in which the extra-Parliamentary groups worked. The primary means for this was through the Party's monitoring and support work through the UMACs. Through these committees it was the aim for the Party to not just be

"a third party watching others scrapping it out. It is actual involvement to try to avert the conflict." (137)

The Party's federal executive took a decision to upgrade the work of the UMACs and mandated the Party's National Director Neil Ross to travel around the country improving the organisation of the committees. (138)

Despite the intentions of the Party in the extra-Parliamentary sphere, the weak organisational condition of the Party as well as an emphasis on its work in the white community meant that there was not a great spurt in work in black communities. Said Brian Goodall in May 1988,

"We are systematically trying to improve relationships with the black community. I think at the present moment it is a low priority for the very simple reason that the first priority is in fact to try and re-establish a power base within the white community; because if you have no credibility within the white community, you are going to have no credibility within the black community as a political force. There I think you have got a slower process." (139)

---

136 Progress, October 1987

137 *ibid*

138 Sunday Times, 23 August 1987

139 Interview with Brian Goodall, 23 May 1988

In effect the party toned down its extra-Parliamentary to concentrate on the Parliamentary context. In interview Zach de Beer denied that the party was "retreating" from its extra-Parliamentary role, although he acknowledged that there had

"been a considerable diminution of such activity. Of course, personalities count in this thing. We must find all the time, energy and money that we can devote in the extra-Parliamentary area. But what the PFP has been doing for the last year is fighting for its life. It has only been able to handle that which was its immediate priority, and that was in the electoral area." (140)

As has been stated, leading Party members were also more outspoken in their opposition to the liberation movement, a course of action not favourable to an improvement of relationships if this in fact was what was desired. Dave Dalling criticised the UDF for having "little to show" for all its struggles. He said that it was time for it to get involved in the tricameral system:

"While the UDF elects to stay politically pure and aloof, others will dictate the future. The message to the UDF is that it must get involved." (141)

The UDF rejected Dalling's statement saying that the PFP was "preoccupied with criticising the democratic movement." (142)

Just as the Party adopted a harder edged approach to the liberation movement while seeking to engage with it, it also took a vacillating approach to the ruling National Party. The Party remained uncompromisingly opposed to apartheid as well as to the state's militarism and cooptive approach to

---

140 Leadership, 7 (3) 1988

141 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1987/8, p 766

142 *ibid*

negotiations. The PFP expressed strong opposition to the existence and operation of the National Security Management System. It also opposed the National Council Bill, government's proposed forum for negotiations as not providing for all. The Party would not simply support any approach to negotiation. Eglin contended that if the government proceeded

"to set up negotiating machinery that is not fully representative, not only will its efforts fail, but the process of negotiation will be set back still further." (143)

Yet, while the Party continued to oppose government policy, it considered that it may need to come to the NP's assistance if the regime were threatened by the Conservative Party. The PFP centrism and opposition to the left and right, therefore, accepted that it may need to vote with the government in Parliament. (144)

In terms of the Party's approach to its participation in Parliament the "mission statement" stressed that it should be a custodian of liberal values. It was also to play the role of preparing white voters for change. This aspect of the policy was stressed by Robin Carlisle in a speech to the Five Freedoms Forum conference in Johannesburg in September 1987. He argued that the decisive group who could facilitate change were white South Africans, and that

"the central obstacle to a non-racial future lies not with blacks but with the whites of South Africa." (145)

He rejected the possibility of a revolutionary overthrow of the government or that the government could be pressurised

---

143 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1987/8 p 765

144 Business Day, 18 April 1988

145 Five Freedoms Forum (1988), p 32

into bringing about change. The only viable strategy was to bring about a change in government through resort to the Parliamentary process, particularly through the House of Assembly. It followed that

"the principal role of the PFP in Parliament as a force for change lies squarely in bringing about changes in white attitudes and the change of government that must inevitably follow if this change in attitude was successful. Every white who is persuaded to believe in non-racialism lowers the obstacle we face." (146)

In addition to the above, the Party also set itself the task of strengthening its support base and winning back seats it had lost in the 1987 elections.

The PFP was more concerned with forging unity among the divided opposition within Parliament than establishing contacts with the liberation movement. In answering a question about the PFP's extra-Parliamentary role at the time, Colin Eglin acknowledged the need for work in this broader context, but contended that the Party's

"basic platform is a Parliamentary one and within this it has to reach out to others who share its values and objectives. Greater cohesion is needed among these Parliamentary groups for them to have greater impact." (147)

The backlash against engagement with the liberation movement was almost complete. Over the next year - the final one in the history of the Party - all efforts went into forging unity within the Parliamentary context to the exclusion of forging a broader role.

---

146 *ibid*

147 Star, 29 January 1988

**CHAPTER FIVE:****THE END OF THE PARTY: 1987 - 1989****INTRODUCTION**

The period covered by this chapter saw the ultimate dissolution of the PFP as it became part of a new and bigger reformist formation - the Democratic Party. This development represented the eventual outcome of the overwhelming drift within the Party towards an assertive class-conscious liberalism. It represented, as well, a resurgence of reformist thinking within the dominated classes generally, and in the business community more specifically. This development came in the wake of the conjuncture manifesting conditions of deepening crisis illustrated by economic decline, the further failure of state reform initiatives, and liberation movement resilience.

In early 1988 the economy experienced a "mini boom" which had the effect of stimulating imports. This gave rise to new balance of payments crisis, with a deficit being posted for the first time since 1986. Associated with a decline in the gold price and the rising effect of sanctions urgent measures were called for. An indication of the impact of sanctions could be seen in a US government report which stated that statutory economic isolation had cost South Africa R850 million in exports to the USA alone, as well as the sale of R50 million in South African stocks by American interests. The report also indicated a decline in exports to South Africa's other trading partners. (1)

---

1 Niddrie (1988), p 53

In an effort to still the balance of payments turmoil government was forced to draw on crucial foreign exchange and gold reserves. These stood at \$2,17 billion in August 1988, a decline of 35% on the figure for August of the previous year. (2) This deteriorating position was a major cause for concern for the state and business community since there had been a massive slow down in the flow of capital into the country meaning that current account deficits could not be financed through the capital account. New import surcharges were announced in September 1988 in an attempt to limit the flow of funds from the country.

Increasing emphasis came to be placed on generating growth through domestic consumption. Much discussion went into the development of the informal business sector, with increased attention being focussed on deregulation measures. The prospects for a rising black middle class to emerge out of the ranks of taxi owners, hawkers and skilled artisans, and other entrepreneurs was constantly promoted. Privatisation was also placed higher on the government agenda in an effort to raise windfalls for the depleted fiscus.

A further important development during 1988 was the relocation offshore of significant interests held by such leading South African companies as Anglo American, Liberty Life, and Rembrandt. This was an important sign of a lack of confidence in the future of the country by leading elements within the business community. This disease was also manifested in a discomfort by businessmen with the continued inability of the regime to successfully implement political reform. In August 1988 the country's two elder statesmen of the business community, Harry Oppenheimer and Anton Rupert, issued a joint statement on behalf of the Urban Foundation decrying the fact that government did not

2 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1987/8, p lvii

scrap the Group Areas Act, rather than simply reforming an aspect of it as it was at that time attempting to do. (3) The FCI, in September 1988, called for urgent deregulation of the economy to remove racial restrictions. (4)

An important political development in the business community was the formation in 1988 of the Consultative Business Movement following a meeting in August 1988 between business leaders and representatives of the liberation movement. (5) The meeting was a significant shift away from the conservative tone which had dominated business political thinking since the implementation of the July 1986 state of emergency. While many major businessmen were not at first represented in the CBM, its formation was a significant marker of a shift in business political thinking. It illustrated the rising tide of discomfort with the state's efforts, and the need to look elsewhere for solutions to the country's problems.

An important contributor to this shift towards a greater reformism within the business community was the progressive failure of government's cooptive reform initiatives, and the effective breaking down of apartheid. From the time of the declaration of the state of emergency government had followed a three part programme which attempted: firstly to destroy the liberation movement through extensive repression; secondly to redistribute essential social resources to black communities through "upgrading" programmes in an effort to remove points of popular antagonism and to raise the credibility of the Black Local Authorities; and, thirdly in order of priority, the state sought ways of extending political rights to Africans.

---

3 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1988/9, p 590

4 *ibid*, p 591

5 See Du Preez, Evans and Grealy (1988) for a detailed report and discussion of this conference.

1988 saw extensive activity on all of these aspects. Repression was intensified with major restrictions effectively banning the UDF and many other popular organisations in February. Cosatu was restricted from engaging in political activities. Detentions increased in the run up to the October elections, there was an increase in political trials, and also the development of "informal" repression in the form of vigilantism.

The state, in an effort to take the initiative in much called for negotiations, set about establishing an National Statutory Council which would be a forum for talks with representatives of state structures in the bantustans and in the townships. As this initiative would exclude major black political groups it was rejected by most moderate and radical black political groups. The state had hoped that the Black Local Authority election of October 1988 would increase the legitimacy of these structures, as well as provide a source for negotiating partners. Extensive resources went into promoting these elections. However, despite repression, the liberation movement managed to mobilise the popular classes to reject these structures by boycotting the elections. Only 10% of eligible African voters took part in the poll. As a result the state's attempts at political reform stood in tatters by late 1988.

In addition, the limitations placed by the country's poor economic performance provided an inadequate fiscal basis for township upgrading schemes. The state was also further placed on the defensive by the effective breaking down of apartheid. A trend which became particularly evident during 1988 was the development of de facto racially mixed areas. The state was forced to acknowledge these through allowing for "free settlement areas". While this was not a complete

move away from a cornerstone of apartheid, it represented a major chink in its armour.

The war in Angola proved to be militarily undermining and financially draining on the state. The combined impact of Angolan government and Cuban forces stopped the SADF's advances in that country. The South African government was forced to negotiate a peaceful settlement to the war and to commit itself from withdrawing from both Angola and Namibia.

The combined impact of these pressures and failures led to increased divisions and conflicts in the ranks of the state and the ruling National Party. Adding to the pressure was a threat from the right illustrated by the successes of the Conservative Party in two Transvaal by-election victories in March 1988 and in the October municipal elections in which it won control of more than two-thirds of the municipalities in the Transvaal. (6) The Conservative Party also claimed massive growth, as did the neo-fascist Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging. This growth was a manifestation of the fears among the Afrikaans lower middle and working classes that apartheid, which had provided for their development, was faltering and that they would lose their position of racial privilege.

The divisions within the ruling group manifested itself in a number of ways. The Broederbond, historically a key policy development forum for the National Party, had been moving away from the notion of racial segregation since 1986. The activation of the emergency state, the shift to executive rule and the increased authority of the repressive apparatuses of the state had limited the impact of these policy shifts. The incumbents within the state were at odds with this more enlightened thinking. The collapse of

---

6 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1988/9, p 656

apartheid, the success of negotiations in Angola, and a rising wave of reformism within the business community caused many within the state to reassess the direction being followed. Throughout the period covered by this chapter there was growth in this debate without any clear resolution.

The apparent inability of the NP to deal with the crisis led to many reformists within the dominating classes looking elsewhere for a solution. The growth of the Independent Party was evidence of this. The IP advocated a strong reformist programme of change from above, as well as a commitment to free market ideologies. It sought close ties with other centrist groups, most notably Inkatha. The IP was formed after the 'independent movement' of exiles from the National Party could not agree on a common approach. The other main group was the National Democratic Movement which sought broader non-racial contact than the IP, and pursued social democratic economic policies.

For the PFP this period was characterised by a determined effort to forge centrist unity. In the context of a weakened and divided National Party, a weakening of the liberation movement in the face of repression, and a resurgence of reformist thinking within the dominating classes, the Party sought to advance a brand of class-conscious liberalism. This chapter explores these attempts, most notably efforts to cooperate with coloured and Indian parties in Parliament, as well as with the white opposition parties. The latter development led ultimately to the dissolution of the PFP and the formation of the Democratic Party.

Another theme explored is that of the Party not being entirely homogeneous. A residual left wing - especially within the youth wing of the PFP and in the Western Cape -

remained. It made its presence felt especially in debates on defence policy.

The most important development within this period, however, was the eventual consolidation of the centrist trend within the Party. This was manifested in a shift of the centre of Party power to the Southern Transvaal, the resignation of Colin Eglin as leader, and his replacement by a major industrialist, Zach de Beer. The change in leadership paved the way to unity between the PFP, IP and NDM. The formation of the DP was the culmination of this process, although there were fears from within the PFP that the new party would be less committed to liberalism than the PFP. This illustrated a tension within the centrist discourse of the PFP between a commitment to a class-conscious programme which would ensure unity of the major reformist groupings; and, a residual attachment to the non-class aspects of the liberal discourse, e.g. civil rights, which it was feared would be waylaid by the new Party.

The chapter explores these issues in the following sections: an examination of Colin Eglin's attempts to cooperate with coloured and Indian parties, the decision to participate in the House of Representatives and House of Delegates, as well as his inability to forge unity with the white groups; debate on security policy; the rise of the Southern Transvaal Party and its campaign to take over power in the Johannesburg City Council; and, the ascendance of Zach de Beer to the leadership and the ultimate dissolution of the PFP and the formation of the Democratic Party.

### TOWARDS CENTRIST UNITY

In the midst of a desperate weakness in its popular support and organisational ability the Party set about the task of

attempting to forge broad centrist unity in accordance with the objectives set under Colin Eglin's leadership. It sought to unite the disparate white political parties to the left of government. It also attempted to investigate possibilities for co-operation with parties in the coloured and Indian Houses of Parliament.

The Party's Federal Council in November 1987 agreed that the leadership should seek ways of building opposition unity. The resolution called for the formation of a group which would have the task of

"investigating what common values, principles and areas of concern may exist between opposition groups in order to make recommendations furthering these values." (7)

Over the year that followed PFP leaders conducted extensive talks with the parties in Parliament. They did so despite the Party's previous hesitance in engaging in the politics of the coloured and Indian Houses of Parliament. These new developments represented a consolidation of the anti-left centrist trend in the PFP. After initiating contact with the Labour Party, Progressive Reform Party and Solidarity on the possibility of greater co-operation, Eglin informed the Party's Federal Executive that it would in the PFP's interests to align with members of the other Houses. He warned, however, that this would be a "tricky" exercise, but was given a mandate to deal with the situation as it developed. (8)

In February 1988 the Party decided that the time was appropriate for the PFP to participate in the other two Houses. The stated purpose of this departure was to

---

7 Minutes of PFP Federal Council, 21/22 November 1987

8 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 31 January 1988

"fight apartheid and to replace the tricameral system with a truly democratic and non-racial Parliament." (9)

This resolution should be seen as being part of the broader objective of forging a comprehensive centrist political Party which leading PFP members saw as potentially incorporating a range of incrementalist organisations which included the PFP, the NDM and "independents" from the white arena, the Labour Party, Progressive Reform Party and Solidarity from the other Houses, Inkatha and other moderate African groups, as well as less militant elements from the liberation movement. This was set against the background of a weakened liberation movement and divided National Party. Said Zach de Beer in May 1988:

"If you take the hypothetical centre of the white community and the hypothetical centre of the black community, the gap between them is very wide; the art of compromise between them very narrow. If you take that portion of the white community which is most liberal, and that portion of the black community which is most conservative, then there is very little gap in ideological thinking ... so, take this twenty percent of the whites and this twenty or thirty percent of the blacks, then the task is not so difficult." (10)

This objective was later developed in a Federal Executive resolution as the

"development of a broadly-based 'middle-ground' democratic movement or alliance, including both Parliamentary and extra-Parliamentary groupings." (11)

Here we see the consolidation of what was perceived as an increasingly legitimate class politics which changed conditions had facilitated. These developments played

- 
- 9 Minutes of PFP Federal Council, 20/21 February 1988
  - 10 Interview with Zach de Beer, 18 May 1988
  - 11 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 18 November 1988

themselves out against a rising conservatism within the business community. In effect the Party put all its energies into forging unity among the Parliamentary groups. Part of the process of reaching this objective was the forging of co-operative relationships with, in particular, the Labour Party and in the House of Representatives, and the Progressive Reform Party in the House of Delegates.

In March 1988 after several meetings Eglin and the LP Leader Alan Hendrickse agreed that their parties would co-operate practically "on issues of common interest". (12) This implied co-operating in opposing the government's apartheid policies in joint committees and elsewhere in Parliament.

The co-operation with the Labour Party was possible because of a number of factors. These included the increased profile and staunch opposition of the LP to government initiative over the previous year. This included walking out of Parliament in protest at the government's National Council Bill; an act of civil disobedience when Hendrickse and other Party members swam at a whites-only beach in protest at petty apartheid, and the consequent dressing down of Hendrickse by State President Botha which led to the LP leader leaving the cabinet. At the end of 1987 Hendrickse's high profile in the business community was rewarded by him being made the Financial Mail's "man of the year". (13)

In the context of a liberation movement struggling to regain its feet after suffering severe blows inflicted by the state of emergency, Hendrickse's actions were seen as a sufficiently militant alternative for a PFP seeking to win support in the black community. The PFP, as well, was no longer seeking to be on close terms with the liberation

---

12 Beeld, 4 March 1988

13 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1987/8  
p 738-742

movement which was vehemently opposed to the Labour Party. The latter was perceived by the liberation movement to be giving legitimacy to the government's reform initiatives. The LP's prominent opposition to government policies while still participating in the "system" accorded with the emerging dominant view within the PFP which pursued full participation in the constitutional process, while at the same time forging a centrist unity in opposition both to the regime and to the liberation movement. Said Zach de Beer:

"Until Hendrickse left the cabinet, the general feeling in the PFP was that we wouldn't touch the coloured elections with a barge pole. Now people are inclined to say we would." (14)

Despite ongoing statements of the intention to engage with organisations in the liberation movement, there was generally a slowing down in this activity at the time. (15) The bulk of the PFP's energies went into forging a united front in Parliament. It was the stated goal of the PFP to try and alter the strategic direction of the liberation movement, or alternatively to isolate it, which served to distance it from resistance organisations. This distance was reinforced by the view that an alliance with a popular organisation would only be useful if it was based on the PFP's liberal philosophies. Commenting at the time on the possibility of an alliance with the liberation movement, Douglas Gibson argued that it depended very much on what the approach of the particular liberatory organisation in question was:

"If they are radical in the sense of believing in blowing up shopping centres and bridges; and, that what you have to do is make South Africa ungovernable, then there is no possibility whatsoever of links and alliances. If it is on the basis of political rights and the rule of law,

---

14 Interview with Zach de Beer, 18 May 1988

15 Interview with Brian Goodall, 23 May 1988

and the freedom of the individual, and freedom of the press, and freedom religion and those things, well then with out any doubt at all, there is a possibility of an alliance. Any further than that, the people who have chosen the violence option - I am as opposed to them as a Nationalist would be opposed to them - and I don't regard them as freedom fighters." (16)

Within the Party there was soon the realisation that the most that could be gained out of the engagement with the LP was a relationship of co-operation. Seeking to forge a single party would pose too many difficulties. Among the problems identified by Douglas Gibson were language differences, differences in economic policy, and the fact that the many LP members were probably closer to the National Party than the PFP in their political orientation. (17) Despite these problems the Party maintained ongoing co-operation with the LP throughout 1988 even when progress in forging unity with the IP and NDM were advanced. (18)

The situation in relation to the Indian Progressive Reform Party (19) was quite different. This Party led by Pat Poovalingham and with three MPs in the House of Delegates was formed in January 1987 after a breakaway from Solidarity. The breakaway had occurred because of the close co-operation between Solidarity and Rajbansi's National People's Party which was perceived to be too closely linked to the government and the system of apartheid. (20) The PRP policy platform was very similar to that of the PFP.

Following discussions between Eglin and the PRP's Poovalingham and Mohammed Rajab, both of whom the PFP leader found "very impressive", it was decided that the PRP would

16 Interview with Douglas Gibson, 20 May 1988

17 Ibid, 20 May 1988

18 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 15 October 1988

19 Not to be confused with the forerunner of the PFP

20 Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1987/8 p 752-

disband and its members could apply to join the PFP. (21) In March 1988 this was done and the three PRP MPs soon became PFP members. The Party was now represented in both the House of Assembly and the House of Delegates. Ken Andrew saw the development as holding enormous potential for the PFP:

"It is an historical occasion, and I am confident it is the beginning of a truly non-racial Parliamentary-based Party whose impact will be considerable on the South African political scene." (22)

Colin Eglin rejected a criticism of the move by Farouk Meer of the Natal Indian Congress who argued that the House of Delegates had been "totally discredited". (23) The PFP leader responded by contending that the three Indian MPs were "true South Africans" and that the legitimacy of participation did not depend on the system, but on how individuals behaved within it.

The PFP also conducted talks with JN Reddy of Solidarity at various times, although little came of these. It refused to have any contact with the National Peoples' Party.

While the above efforts were underway the bulk of the Party's energy was going into forging unity between the white anti-apartheid opposition groups operating within the Parliamentary context. Colin Eglin and Zach de Beer took primary responsibility for forging contacts with these groups starting in September 1987. As well as the stated aim of forging unity in the "middle-ground", the PFP was also seeking to stem the flow of its members to the independents and the NDM who were potential competitors.

---

21 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 17 May 1988; Business Day, 5 March 1988

22 Citizen, 21 March 1988

23 Star, 29 March 1988

There was also a popular retreat by PFP voters away from support for the Party. By mid 1988 the Independent Party - which was formally launched in March of that year - overtook the PFP's level of voter support. Whereas Rapport newspaper's poll gave the PFP support among a mere 8,8% of the white electorate, the IP received 10,7% and the NDM 3,5%. By comparison the National Party was supported by 44,4% of whites and the Conservative Party by 18,5%. (24)

In this context the enormously weakened PFP could ill afford to compete with the other white anti-apartheid parties. This was described by Tony Leon as an "image problem" that he "did not think was actually salvageable". (25) In March 1988 the Federal Executive concluded that there was no room for competing opposition parties. Colin Eglin also expressed the fear that if the situation were not "sorted out rapidly" the parties would "end up fighting each other". (26) The Party attempted to engage with both the NDM and the IP but did not have much success in forging unity until late 1988.

There was a distinction in the approaches to the two parties. The NDM was formed in October 1987 amidst the resignations of key PFP members who were founders of the Party. There was much bitterness and resentment within the PFP about this and Colin Eglin had to work hard to ensure that leading PFP members did not "engage in guerilla war against the NDM". (27) He advised the PFP's Federal Executive that the Party should not be seen to be in conflict with groups like the NDM which shared the same principles as the PFP.

---

24 Citizen, 20 June 1988

25 Interview with Tony Leon, 27 March 1990

26 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 29 March 1988

27 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 18 October 1987

Efforts to forge unity with the NDM initially failed as Wynand Malan's group did not wish to be associated with the PFP. (28) The NDM sought to extend contacts with leading members of the black community and especially with the liberation movement. It did not wish to be associated with the PFP's conscious distancing from the mainstream of popular resistance politics.

Relations with the fledgling Independent Party both before and after its formal launch in March 1988 were better. The PFP took greater care in creating links on this front. Worrall was deemed to be a force to be "reckoned with" and so worth engaging with. (29) The IP, however, while broadly interested in conducting talks about unity decided in June 1988 that its interests were better served by having a separate identity to that of the PFP. In particular it believed that it had the prospect of winning the support of former NP voters, something very unlikely for the PFP. (30)

By mid-1988 then, the PFP's efforts at forging centrist unity had made very limited progress. In one of his final appeals to the Party before resigning as leader at the end of June 1988, Eglin stated that the PFP would continue to seek unity with the other groups. He made an appeal to the Party leadership for the PFP not to be seen to be attacking the IP and NDM despite the floundering of the unity initiatives. (31)

There was much pressure within the Party for success in creating a unified party. Middle-level Party leadership felt this objective was not being actively enough striven for. (32) There was also a growing feeling that the PFP

28 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 25 January 1988

29 *ibid*

30 Argus, 20 June 1988

31 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 18 July 1988

32 Sunday Times, 24 January 1988

would be better served by a new leader in the pursuit of this task. In the run-up to the October 1988 municipal elections in Johannesburg the Business Day reported that many of the PFP candidates for city government there were running for election on condition that Party stalwart Zach de Beer would take over as leader. (33)

Eglin's leadership had been in question since late 1987. Before the October 1987 meeting of the Party's Federal Executive Committee, there had been some lobbying for de Beer to take over as the leader, a step which he explained to the meeting he would not be availing himself of. Eglin in a speech to the meeting accepted responsibility for the weak state that the Party was in. He argued that if Party members did not support the "mission statement" which he had drawn up, he could not continue to be the leader. Drawing attention to the sense of chaos in the Party and amongst its supporters, he went on to say that an immediate change in the leadership would add to the problems faced by the PFP. He would notify the Party at a later stage of the steps to be taken. A decision was taken that the Party hold a Federal Congress in August 1988 at which the issue of the leadership be settled. (34)

There was further pressure on Eglin's leadership when it became known that a group of Party members under the leadership of the former Secretary General Robin Carlisle who were wishing to push faster for "middle-ground" unity, were planning a "think-tank" to which Eglin was not invited. Carlisle stated that the proposed meeting, which eventually did not take place, was called by a group of Party members concerned about the future of liberalism and disunity on the "left". He said that there was

---

33 Business Day, 13 June 1988

34 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 18 October 1987

" a sense that liberal values still have a race to run in South Africa. There is tremendous concern about what will happen to the tradition of liberalism, which has lit the sombre light of public life in South Africa. We want to discuss how it can be strengthened and maintained." (35)

Eventually a month before the Party's Federal Congress Eglin announced that he would not be standing for reelection as leader. (36) This opened the way for Zach de Beer to become the leader and so consolidate the hegemony of the centrist liberal element within the Party. It also facilitated the way for a speedy process of unity with the IP and NDM and the eventual dissolution of the PFP.

#### DEBATE ON SECURITY POLICY

The ascendant centrists within the PFP were convinced that a decisive factor in the Party's poor performance in the 1987 elections was its liberal stance on security issues. In the context where the white voting public was rallying behind PW Botha's strong-arm security approach the PFP found that its policies fell on deaf ears. Views on security issues within the white public were hardening in the face of increased crime and revolutionary violence. (37) The context for this was an intensification in armed insurgency and an escalation in the war in Namibia and Angola. Continued activism by the End Conscription Campaign and conscientious objectors added a crucial oppositional component to the conjuncture.

The departure from the Party of a number of important left-wing members had allowed a more conservative discourse to predominate. The Party was not, however, completely drained

---

35 Star, 23 January 1988

36 Argus, 1 July 1987

37 See Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1987/8, p 509; and, Hofmeyer (1990).

of its more radical members. Within the Party's youth wing, especially, there was a vocal group of members who adopted many positions at variance with the bulk of the rest of the Party. With respect to security policy many youth members were informed by their active involvement in the radical End Conscription Campaign. This campaign was single-issue alliance of leftists, radicals and liberals closely linked to the liberation movement. Other elements within the Party remained very strong adherents of civil rights and found themselves at variance with more conservative members. The debate on security issues at the 1988 Federal Congress in Cape Town witnessed this conflict.

The Party debated its entire security policy at this Congress in the wake of a report by its Security Commission. This group chaired by Helen Suzman, and including Roger Burrows, Brian Goodall, Tiaan van der Merwe and James Selfe had been appointed to investigate the Party's security policies in the midst of the concerns identified above. The Security Commission report proposed broad principles which would guide PFP policy, and also presented detailed guidelines on approaches to the SAP, internal security, the SADF, and armaments production.

The principles guiding policy reflected a commitment to the Party's liberal democratic tradition. It argued firstly for a government based on the popular will, a Bill of Rights, and an independent judiciary which would define the parameters in which "adequate, effective and well-disciplined police and defence forces" could protect the rights of individuals. (38) It went on to reject all forms of violence regardless of its source. The rule of law was identified as the means whereby the rights of individuals could further be protected. The report then went on to

claim that "revolutionary activity" in South Africa was in part due to "the current political, social and economic injustices which characterize South Africa". (39) Real and lasting security would only be reached

"when new political and social structures are brought about by negotiation and consent amongst South Africa's accepted leaders." (40)

The document concluded its section on broad principles by expressing concern at the increased militarisation of South African society and of the state. It especially drew attention to

"the lack of accountability by the security organs of the government to Parliament and the people of South Africa." (41)

In order to deal with the escalating rate of crime within the country the Commission recommended

"a strong Police Force which is well disciplined, well trained, well equipped, well paid, well managed, adequately staffed, and accountable for its actions." (42)

In addition it was recommended that municipalities optimise their resources to ensure the

"safety of residents and to provide for security in the suburbs, in homes, on the streets and in recreational areas." (43)

To this end it was proposed that municipal police forces be created and neighbourhood watch systems be encouraged. The stance adopted on policing was warmly received by Southern

---

39 *ibid*  
 40 *ibid*  
 41 *ibid*  
 42 *ibid*  
 43 *ibid*

Transvaal delegates who were about to embark on a municipal election campaign in which one central plank was the ensuring of effective policing by city government. It was particularly in the Southern Transvaal where pressure for the Party not to look "soft on security" was strongest. (44) There was also opposition in this region to the generalised attacks on the SAP following the committing of excesses by members of this force. This view was illustrated by Douglas Gibson when he said that he thought it was

"terrible to characterise everybody in the Police Force being some sort of fascist bully, because it is simply not true." (45)

With regard to policy on internal security the commissioners restated the Party's opposition to the existing security laws and the State of Emergency. They also condemned the National Security Management System which was considered to

"have a distinctive internal political agenda which goes beyond what is generally accepted in Western Societies as legitimate. The structures are non-elected, are not accountable to anyone for their actions to anyone except the Executive, and are secretive in their operation. While the Party obviously supports the essential socioeconomic upliftment for which these bodies have been responsible, it questions whether the NSMS is the appropriate institution to initiate such programmes, more particularly as the NSMS seek thereby, apparently deliberately, to undermine broadly-based community organisations." (46)

This commitment to civil rights was repeated in the statement that the Party believed in lifting the bans on all banned organisations and individuals. In an effort, once again, not to be adopting too soft a line on security the commission expressed the belief that

44 Interview with Douglas Gibson, 20 May 1988, Sunday Star 7 August 1988

45 Interview with Douglas Gibson, 20 May 1988

46 PFP, Security Commission Report, August 1988

"no organisation or individual should be permitted to engage in, foment or advocate violence, terrorism., insurrection or revolution. Such organisations or individuals ought to be dealt with firmly and expeditiously through the courts and in terms of the ordinary law of the land."  
(47)

Qualifying this gesture to the right, the report went on to state that a solution to the conflict in the country would only be possible if political prisoners and detainees were released, apartheid was eradicated and negotiations with recognised leaders for a new consensual constitution were begun.

Despite the qualification left wing members of the Party led by Groote Schuur MP Jan van Gend expressed concern that the policy would alienate the PFP from the liberation movement. On the other hand conservative centrists wanted the Party to be more explicit in its opposition to the organisations of the liberation movement. This group led by Harry Schwarz should be seen as fitting in the with dominant thrust of the Party. They differed with the mainstream in advocating a hawkish harder line opposition to the liberation movement, while being strongly supportive of the security establishment. A motion from the Natal Inland Region called on the Party to point out to the ANC that it should refrain from violence as this served to aggravate polarisation and did not advance the cause of a "prosperous non-racial society". (48) It also called for the PFP to commit itself to "exposing the Communist Party and its ideals as totally irreconcilable with the ideal of an open free society." (49) A similar motion was introduced by the Pietermaritzburg South branch. (50)

---

47 *ibid*

48 Citizen, 23 July 1988

49 *ibid*

50 *ibid*

The debate was inconclusively resolved when the Congress accepted Helen Suzman's interpretation in which she stated that the policy on freedom of association and bannings would allow due process and the rule of law. This was a neutral liberal stance, rather than one which would cause the Party to side with the liberation movement. By implication it served to further distance the Party from popular organisations.

With respect to SADF policy the report restated the Party's view that conscription should be phased out and replaced by a professional standing force with a volunteer reserve. It called for the defence force to be free of Party politics and that it should be politically neutral and accountable. When this aspect of the proposed policy was debated at the Congress numerous speakers condemned the SADF for being partisan and working in the interests of apartheid. Harry Schwarz was heckled when he rejected the notion that the SADF was an instrument of apartheid. Militarists within the Party shared his view that the SADF should not be criticised as this played into the hands of the country's enemies. Rather, the government's policies should be condemned. This view was illuminated in an interview with Douglas Gibson:

"I think some people have allowed themselves the luxury of adopting the stance that the police are bad per se, and that the South African Defence Force is, per se, bad. I think that is a disastrous, totally wrong approach." (51)

His view was expressed in the belief that the SADF could provide a "shield" for the country behind which change could take place. While this was no longer official policy, the attitude of Party conservatives was heavily informed by this outlook. He said that

---

51 Interview with Douglas Gibson, 20 May 1988

"the PFP favours law and order, and we say that the army has got to provide the shield behind which the politicians must find the political solutions. If the army does bad things, it is the politicians who must have their asses kicked and nobody else - not the army." (52)

Policy on conscientious objection and alternative service also drew debate. The policy proposals adopted recognised the right of individuals to conscientious objection, and that while conscription existed there should be alternative service, albeit of a longer duration than military service. Heated debate ensued when an amending motion was introduced by members of the PFP Youth in the Western Cape in which they called for the Party to back campaigns in support of conscientious objectors. (53) This motion not only made it possible for the Party to support individual objectors, but also the End Conscription Campaign. Amidst much emotion those opposing the motion managed to defeat the motion by only ten votes out of a total of 166. Many of those who motivated for the motion did so from a personal perspective of themselves facing, or having sons facing conscription. Opposition to the motion was primarily informed by a concern with the Party not being seen to adopt a security policy perceived as being too radical, and through not wishing the Party to be compromised into supporting militant resistance strategies which were not initiated by it.

The role of the SADF in preemptive activities in southern African countries also caused friction. The Security Commission in motivating for a limited preemptive role for the SADF argued that there were

"legitimate security concerns implicit in the presence of expatriate and foreign forces in large numbers in the frontline states, and of the volume

---

52 *ibid*

53 Beeld, 6 August 1988

and sophistication of military equipment in such states." (54)

Given this scenario which accorded closely with that of the SADF the commission proposed a policy which stated that

"use may have to be made of limited preemptive cross-border operations against forces with demonstrably aggressive military or other violent designs towards South Africa, as well as of hot-pursuit operations in accordance with international practice." (55)

An amendment to this motion was accepted which made such preemptive action conditional on seeing it

"as a last resort and only after all other avenues have been exhausted." (56)

The discussion on the debate on security issues, while illustrating the conservative element within the Party, also shows that there was a residual left element within the Party. This group was located largely within the PFP youth, and in the Western Cape Party formation where MPs such as Tiaan van der Merwe and Jan van Gend could be seen to be broadly aligned to the left.

#### **THE JOHANNESBURG ASSAULT**

Associated with the ascendancy of De Beer was the shift of the power within the Party to a traditional conservative liberal base in Johannesburg. Here the Party had significant ties and interrelationships in the business community and its dominating incrementalist ideologies and commitment to bourgeois interests. In the midst of the

54 PFP, Security Commission Report, August 1988

55 *ibid*

56 Minutes and Resolutions of PFP Federal Congress, Cape Town, 5 and 6 August 1988

malaise and disorganisation within the Party following the 1987 General Election a special effort was made by the Southern Transvaal Party leadership to rebuild the organisation there. Brian Goodall took over as the regional chairman at this time and described the local Party organisation as a "walking disaster". (57)

The perception of those in power within the Party in the region was that something had to be done urgently to improve the performance and image of the Party or else it would die. The forthcoming national municipal elections set for October 1988 presented the opportunity to give the Party a clear direction as an institution committed to free market ideas and with an uncompromising dedication to furthering liberalism. Goodall believed that if the PFP fared poorly in the elections for the Johannesburg City Council then the Party should conclude that it was not a "suitable vehicle" for the promotion of liberal values. This view was shared by the Transvaal leader of the Party Douglas Gibson who said that the

"municipal elections are going to be crucial to the future status and image of the Party because if we have a substantial setback in Johannesburg - and that's really the one that counts - then you are going to get the question arising among the public: 'Does the PFP have any substantial role to play?'. It is one thing being the conscience of the public and having two or three or ten people in Parliament. It is another if you are a power factor. If we were to win ten or 12 seats in Johannesburg instead of 16, 17, 18, then it would be a substantial setback and would bode ill for the general election which is to follow within a year or two." (58)

Goodall indicated that there was a feeling among the PFP's supporters in the business community that the elections

---

57 Interview with Brian Goodall, 23 May 1988

58 Interview with Douglas Gibson, 20 May 1988

"might actually be the last chance for a liberal free enterprise political grouping in South Africa. So whatever we do, this time we mustn't screw it up. I've actually had businessmen who have been quite desperate, almost pleading, saying, "God, are you people going to perform?" (59)

Against this background pivotal individuals set about a programme which would change the Party's image in the region. It was decided that the best way that the Party could do this would be to "change the nature of people who stood" for election. (60) Said Goodall

"We took the view that we would go for younger leadership. We would in fact try and draw our candidates from an age group 30 to 40 who either had professional or managerial experience. So that was to try and project the image of a party that could at least run Johannesburg; man for man that would be better than the government." (61)

The Party proceeded to assemble a group of candidates who could meet the demands of this image and competence. It meant that key members of the PFP who had been in the city council for many years and did not fit the bill were ousted. In March 1988 Tony Leon took over the leadership of the PFP in the Council from a long time Party stalwart Sam Moss. (62) Leon immediately projected a confident image warning the National Party in the municipality that the PFP was

"hitting the deck running, determined to succeed in introducing the Party's vision of a non-racial democracy in Johannesburg." (63)

---

59 Interview with Brian Goodall, 23 May 1988  
 60 Ibid, 23 May 1988  
 61 *ibid*  
 62 Star, 29 March 1988  
 63 *ibid*

This bluster was echoed by another PFP Councillor Rae Graham who described the Party caucus as a "mean machine". She went on to reflect on the election of Leon:

"What has changed is that we have had a blood transfusion at the top that is set to put the fight back into the Party." (64)

Amidst a carefully planned publicity campaign the PFP released their election manifesto which focussed on seven principal objectives. These were "real security"; "community harmony"; "clean and open government"; a 'user-friendly' city; "a winning partnership with business"; "creative planning"; and, "towards a post-apartheid city". (65)

More important than the policy positions contained in the manifesto was the overall image projected that the PFP team running for office had the ability to competently run the city and to implement its policies. The campaign was successful with the Party increasing its seats in the council from 17 to 18. (66)

The most significant aspect of the Johannesburg campaign was that it served to elevate the politics of the Southern Transvaal Party into the forefront of the PFP. This approach, described by Leon as a "liberal toughness" made an important impression on a Party which was floundering at the National level. (67) It was also a key marker of the consolidation of the centrist liberal discourse as hegemonic within the Party.

- 
- 64 Star, 2 April 1988  
 65 Business Day, 16 August 1988  
 66 Pretoria News, 27 October 1988  
 67 Interview with Tony Leon, 27 March 1990

## DE BEER LEADS THE PARTY OUT

Zach de Beer was elected to lead the PFP at its Federal Congress in August 1988. He was the popular choice of those who wished to see the Party merge with the other white opposition groups. His assumption of the leadership represented a consolidation of a centrist liberalism as the dominant discourse within the Party. He also represented interests closely associated with monopoly capital. At the time of his election he was an executive director of the Anglo American Corporation, chairman of the construction giant LTA, as well as the corporation's two property subsidiaries, and the insurance companies Southern Life and African Life. He was also a director of several other companies. (68) He had been an MP for the United Party and was a founder member of the Progressive Party in 1959. He returned to Parliament from 1977 until 1980 as the PFP member for Parktown.

His views represented the dominant trend in the Party's thinking. He saw his role as pushing forward the PFP's primary goal of centrist unity. In an interview shortly before assuming the leadership he said that:

"an extremely important objective would be to regain our former status as the Official Opposition, but the general strategy will remain one of seeking alliances with other like-minded groups and organisations. Dr DF Malan put it this way: Bring bymekaar diegene wat by innerlike oortuiging bymekaar hoort. (69) I will be doing everything in my power to bring together people of all races, in and out of Parliament, who believe in the same things we do. As far as those parties represented in Parliament are concerned, my ideal would be a full merger, a single Party on the Parliamentary left." (70)

---

68 Leadership, 7 (3) 1988

69 transl. "Bring together those who belong together by inner convictions"

70 *ibid*

A common theme of his speeches and interviews on becoming the leader was that of broader unity based on a common set of principles, or a single philosophy. In one speech he said that

"while loyalty to a Party is important, loyalty to principles is even more important." (71)

The principles he believed to be important were those associated with democratic liberalism: equal rights, personal freedoms and the rule of law. (72) He was also a staunch advocate of the free market ideology. His views were well illustrated in an article he wrote for the Cape Times in September 1988. In it he argued that political systems should be determined by the degree of intervention the state plays in society. He contended that fascism and communism were therefore similar systems given the degree of state involvement in civil society. They represented the extreme of interventionism and authoritarianism. Liberal democracy, by contrast, represented the optimum:

"As one moves away from the free society, either towards the right or towards the left, government gets bigger, more powerful, more interventionist. The liberty of the individual and the freedom of the market progressively invaded. When one reaches either fascism or Marxism, the two are extinguished." (73)

He stressed that, while he supported the free market, this did not mean that the state should not provide certain welfare service:

---

71 Cape Times, 8 August 1988  
 72 Business Day, 12 August 1988  
 73 Cape Times, 23 September 1988

"To be in favour of free enterprise need not and should not imply any lack of compassion for the unfortunate." (74)

De Beer's public speeches displayed an uncompromising class consciousness and promotion of capitalism.

There was general support for De Beer within the Party, although there were isolated exceptions. Marlene Webber the Chairman of the Party's Orange Free State and Northern Cape Region publicly voiced concern that De Beer's appointment could lead to the Party being associated in consequence with mining capital which had had a very bad record on job reservation. She also resigned her position at the time, although she denied that this was in protest at De Beer's election. (75)

The Federal Congress at which De Beer became leader was significant in its stress on the need for white Parliamentary unity. Five resolutions were made encouraging unity. A crucial motion called for the Party to merge into

"a new, non-racial, progressive party committed to the liberal values the PFP has so stoutly defended in the past." (76)

Talks were conducted by de Beer with the IP and NDM. The Party's Federal Executive concluded in October that there was greater chance of unity with the NDM than with the IP. (77) The IP was at this time confident of its chances if it retained its integrity and separate identity. The Federal Executive mandated de Beer at this stage to make an effort to unify with the NDM, while keeping Worrall informed of developments.

---

74 *ibid*

75 Citizen, 15 August 1988

76 Cape Times, 8 August 1988

77 Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 15 October 1988

Over the subsequent months the IP became more amenable to considering unity. This was a possible response on its part to the fact that the IP was not making the gains among the white public at the expense of the PFP that it had originally anticipated. A Rapport opinion poll published in December 1988 showed that the PFP was supported by 10% of voters, the IP by 9,1%, while 3,4% of the white public backed the NDM. In mid-December the three parties, together with a fourth group of unaffiliated "new Nats" decided at a meeting in Johannesburg to unite into one party. They issued a joint statement in which it was argued that the unification of the different groups would have the effect of maximising the strengths of the parties. The PFP was seen to have a strong organisation and infrastructure, the IP would contribute its effective marketing orientation, while the NDM would provide important extra-Parliamentary contacts. (78) A joint steering committee made up of the leaders of the three parties as well as Wimpie de Klerk who represented the "fourth force" was established. (79)

De Beer saw the new party as holding the prospect of becoming a fundamental force for change in South Africa through it seeking to be the cornerstone of a non-racial alliance. He said that

"the political movement that can save South Africa is going to be a non-racial one. The new party must be able to form coalitions and alliances across the colour line. It has already begun to do so and has the potential to achieve much more."  
(80)

The agreement came in the context of a renewed decline in the economy in late 1988 and rising pressure from business

- 
- 78 Cape Times, 15 December 1988  
 79 Star, 15 December 1988  
 80 Sunday Times, 18 December 1988

for a coherent alternative voice to the government. The regime was experiencing severe internal divisions at this time confronted as it was by the breaking up of apartheid. It lacked a clear response. A growing tide of reformism within the business community and amongst the white middle classes encouraged the formation of a new party as a viable vehicle to represent their interests.

The dominant feeling within the PFP was that it should dominate the new organisation. This was due both to the fact that the PFP was the largest party, and to the fear by many Party members that the liberalism of the PFP would be lost in the new arrangement. Developments around this issue focussed on the prospective leader of the new party. The PFP proposed throughout December 1988 and January 1989 that the leader should be democratically elected by its members. The implication of this suggestion was that the Leader would be someone supported by the bulk of former PFP members who would have a clear numerical majority within the party. The minutes of the December PFP Federal Executive meeting read in part that:

"whilst it was strongly felt that Dr. de Beer should lead the new Party, a compromise option of a leadership committee of four could be offered to the IP and NDM. This committee could operate for a short period until the founding congress is held." (81)

The IP was seriously concerned about the attempt by the PFP to dominate the new party and sent a message to the PFP expressing its concern in this respect. It was anxious that the new party should not be seen as a:

- "a) recycled opposition
- b) the PFP in drag

c) a mechanism for retaining suspect opposition seats, etc, etc." (82)

The message went on to claim that

"the impression (maybe wrongly gained) is that really the NDM and IP are going to have to finish their quarrelling and then slot in with the PFP whose concession will be to disband and reconvene under a new name with newly included partners."  
(83)

Despite the opposition to the PFP's proposal, the Party maintained its stance that the leader of the new party should be democratically elected. Both de Beer and the Cape leader Roger Hulley made public statements to this effect. (84) The PFP was pursuing this course of action believing that its superior numbers would ultimately win the day.

Many in the Party did not want the PFP to lose its identity. Party members, particularly in the Southern Transvaal, were also motivated by the Party's good showing in the Johannesburg municipal elections in October 1988. According to the leader of the PFP in the Johannesburg City Council, the election results had

"created a great sense of vigor and renewed determination. People, ... among them many leading members of Parliament who had been extremely negative and down on the whole PFP, and thought it was a disaster area, suddenly discovered that the Party was worth preserving and keeping. They were very, very unenthusiastic. They thought we were selling out the birthrights, the name, the tradition, there was a lot of criticism of the negotiations." (85)

- 
- 82 Letter from the IP to Zach de Beer, 12 December 1988  
 83 *ibid*  
 84 Star, 16 January 1989; Cape Times 22 December 1988  
 85 Interview with Tony Leon, 27 March 1990

Among those opposed to the merger was Harry Schwarz who also referred to the boost the Party received in the municipal elections:

"We thought that we had reached the bottom, the nadir in 1987 and we were on the way up and now there was an endeavor for us to disappear after we had overcome the very difficult times..." (86)

The organisational and infrastructural basis of the PFP was a further reason given by Schwarz for the opposition to a merger. He said that there was the view that

"if these chaps wanted to join in with us, they should join us. We had the Party, we had the organisation, we had the MPs, we had the money, we had whatever was going and therefore they should join us. There was no reason to form a new party." (87)

There was also concern that the liberal ideals of the PFP would be lost. Schwarz expressed the fear that the commitment of the PFP to civil liberties would be diluted by an influx of people who until shortly before had been members of the National Party. He contended that as soon as it appeared that

"apartheid was crumbling, the people who had been in the Nationalist Party, and party to the creation of apartheid laws, now were becoming more holier than thou, and that created a high degree of resentment amongst what could be called the 'blue blood Progs' who were in the PFP. That resentment was a problem and there was a lot of getting used to getting people drawing up policy for you who had actually been part of the architects of apartheid." (88)

---

86 Interview with Harry Schwarz, 14 May 1990  
 87 *ibid*  
 88 *ibid*

Others who shared the views expressed by Schwarz included Ray Swart and Helen Suzman. (89)

Despite the pressures for the PFP to be dominant within the new party, the Party leadership perceived that public opinion was against its refusal to have a triumvirate leadership. De Beer expressed this view to the Party and at the end of January 1989 the Federal Council gave him the mandate to negotiate the merger of the parties on the basis of there initially being a joint leadership. It was further proposed that a single leader be elected at the first congress of the Party which should be held in August that year. (90) This paved the way for the finalisation of the negotiations to establish the new party.

After further negotiations the steering committee announced in early February that a new party, to be known as the Democratic Party, would be launched in April. There was also an agreement that the party would be co-led by De Beer, Worrall and Malan.

The steering committee stated that they wished to see a "new political party with a personality which is distinctive from the PFP, the IP and the NDM." (91) There was, however, still the belief within the PFP that after a short period of joint leadership De Beer would emerge as the single leader of the party and so ensure the hegemony of former PFP members. (92) This was the view at the disbanding congress of the PFP in April 1988. At this Congress Tony Leon motivated for a resolution prepared by the PFP Federal Council that the Democratic Party would be best served in

---

89 Interview with Helen Suzman, 9 April 1990; Minutes of PFP Federal Executive, 27 January 1989

90 Minutes of PFP Federal Council, 28 January 1989

91 Statement by Steering Committee of New Party, 5 February 1989

92 Interview with Helen Suzman, 9 April 1990

the Parliamentary elections to be held later in the year by fighting them "under the leadership of a single leader".  
 (93) The Congress adopted the motion.

The Final Congress of the PFP formally dissolved the Party. It was a sad day for Party members and most of the Congress dealt with reflections on the PFP's history. Ray Swart addressed the Congress on the founding of the Progressive Party, Max Borkum spoke of the "lonely years" from 1961 until 1974, while Douglas Gibson told the history of the period 1974 to 1989. (94)

On the day after the dissolution of the PFP the Democratic Party was launched amidst much spectacle and glamour. Despite a commitment to a new identity for the DP the co-leaders - De Beer, Worrall and Malan - in their addresses to the Congress simply restated the strategic thinking of their former parties in their addresses to the gathering. De Beer's speech repeated the views dominant within the PFP since the departure of Slabbert. He positioned the DP at the centre of South African politics pledging that it would only work with those who shared its values. (95)

The formation of the Democratic Party was the culmination of the process of the consolidation of centrism within the PFP which elevated the class aspects of the liberal discourse. The DP retained this aspect although it was not initially as imbued with the spirit and tradition of liberalism as the PFP had been. Despite its centrist assertions, it was the ultimate irony that the formation of the Democratic Party once again introduced a coherent left wing into mainstream liberal politics.

- 
- 93 Cape Times, 7 April 1989  
 94 Pretoria News, 8 April 1989  
 95 Business Day, 10 April 1989

## CONCLUSION

As South Africa departed from the eighties, the PFP had become no more than a part of history, so dramatic was the impact of the decade's events on it. At all times in the years from 1981 until 1989 the Party battled to come to terms with the changing nature of a country in the grips of escalating struggle and teetering on the brink of collapse.

This dissertation has sought to understand the response of the PFP to these conditions of organic and conjunctural crisis. An attempt has been made to understand the Party as an institution of the dominating classes competing with other class forces to determine the outcome of the country's dilemma. The specific characteristic of the Party which made its response unique was its personality as a liberal and institution. In this respect the tensions inherent within liberalism have been considered as a basis to understanding the PFP's responses. This conclusion will endeavor to explore some of the major themes that emerge out of this investigation.

A distinctive aspect of the PFP's behaviour was its vacillating character. It constantly shifted positions and strategies in an effort to deal with a changing context. This vacillation can be periodised according to the cycles of the shifting conjuncture; as the economy either dipped or rose; and, as the popular classes escalated or deescalated their struggles against the exclusive state. The period between 1984 and 1986 was crucial in this process. It was during this time that shape of South Africa was to change for ever. Not only did the economy enter a severe phase of crisis, but the state floundered as its efforts at reforming the contradictions of apartheid failed. The black dominated

classes led by a reemerging liberation movement took the struggle to the regime and succeeded in shifting the polity's centre of gravity away from the white political state. In this context the PFP found itself increasingly isolated from the central terrains of struggle. Over the years that followed its efforts went into shifting from being a party devoted to contesting the politics of the dominating classes, to one which engaged in the total field of the South African struggle. In doing so it exposed itself to many new challenges, points of pressure and internal division. The most notable pressure acting on the Party, and limiting its capacity for coherence, was the tension between the class and non-class components of its liberal character.

Before drawing conclusions on this tension, it is worthwhile to note the impact that outside forces had on the Party in the period covered by the dissertation. The tensions that manifested themselves within the Party were a reflection of varying responses to these external stimuli. The moves towards reform and the appropriation of isolated aspects of the liberal discourse by the regime were one such pressure. Another was the impact of popular mobilisation and resistance amongst the dominated classes. This had the dual effect of shifting the site of struggle away from that within the white dominating classes, to a broader arena. It also served to delegitimise the institution of Parliament, a process which the PFP battled to come to terms with. The way in which the Party ultimately resolved its attempts to deal with these external points of pressure, was to adopt a path of independent distance from both.

The class character of the Party can be found more through an understanding of its relationship to other class forces, than through a survey of the class nature of its membership and support base. The PFP was a party of the dominating

classes. If we are, though, to accord a specific class character to the party, we should conclude that it was ultimately a bourgeois party. It projected an ideology which advocated the interests of capitalism and continued accumulation. It sought incremental constitutional change and worked to avoid revolution. In doing so, however, it was not as has been contended, a representative of monopoly capitalist interests. As has been shown, it was often at odds with the mainstream of the business community. The advocacy of an explicit class politics came to the fore especially in the latter years of the period, as the growth of a black middle class accorded a legitimacy to this activity. In earlier years an explicit stance as a Party promoting class ends would have been denounced as racist due to the much greater coincidence of race and class at that time.

Efforts to transcend the limited base of the Party and extend into the terrain of the dominated classes were failures. This was a function of the Party misreading prevailing conditions, in which polarisation militated against non-racial Parliamentary parties. The isolation of the Party as a whites-only institution in the years from 1968 until 1985 led to PFP organisers having little grasp of the character of politics within the black community. Even despite this legal obstacle, the Party had never had more than a token presence in the black community. and it can for all intents and purposes be seen as a whites-only institution. It was also a consequence of the Party's location outside of the two major class blocs in South African society. As a party advocating the right of the individual as paramount, it was always unlikely to gain much of a foothold within the the blocs of dominated and dominating classes mobilised on the basis of communal discursive elements, such as race, class, ethnicity, and the common experience of political oppression.

Despite the failure of the attempts to create a non-racial Party, individual Party members succeeded in establishing close working relationships with oppressed communities and the organisations of the liberation movement. The dissertation has attempted to show that this behaviour had its roots in the non-class elements of the liberal discourse. In this respect we should see such liberal features as a commitment to non-racialism and civil rights as overdetermining the behaviour of Party members. Because of the historical moment at which this activity was taking place, the left within the Party assumed a role as vicarious "representative" of the liberation movement. The sensitivity of the Party as a whole to the organisations of the oppressed, especially in the early to mid-eighties, meant that the left assumed an importance far greater than its numbers. Their strength was directly proportional to that of the liberation movement. When the popular classes were on the march and appeared to be on the verge of a breakthrough we saw an assertive left within the PFP. When the resistance movement went onto the retreat, so the impact of the left receded and mainstream class-conscious liberals stamped their authority on the Party.

Reflecting on the period as a whole we can conclude that the Party failed to become a force strong enough to assert its hegemony over the resolution of the South African crisis. The question might be asked: is it at all possible that a liberal programme could succeed in the South African context? The answer is to be found in an understanding of liberalism as an historically contingent tradition.

The emergence of modern South Africa created a fissure between the dominating and dominated classes on the basis of access to state power. The form of state emerged as a result of the nature of the development of capitalism in

South Africa. Unlike the bulk of the European and American experience in which the development of capitalism was associated with the rise of liberalism, the fostering of capitalist relations of production within South Africa was premised on the authoritarian and illiberal exclusion of the popular classes from access to civil society, political society and the state.

The chances of the dominated classes gaining access to such power would be through cementing their unity in antagonism to the dominant classes. The ideological character of this unity would be based on a collective striving which played up the common nationalist features of the bloc of oppressed classes. There would be little room for an individual-based ideology such as liberalism. The popular classes would, as well, have an interest in the seizure of state power through struggle and collective action. By contrast, the authority and privilege of the dominating classes was predicated on the mobilisation of a unifying ideology antagonistic to the black dominated classes. It was materially entrenched by an exclusives state premised on the consent of the white dominating classes, and the coercion of the black oppressed. There was little place for a liberal ideology which advocated the extension of political rights within this schema.

The isolation of liberalism within South Africa after the development of capitalism from the late nineteenth century found its nemesis in the failures of the PFP in its efforts to deal with the crisis of the eighties. Long excluded from power South African liberals had pursued the idealist notion of encouraging the entrenched regime to effect incremental change. When it became apparent that the regime was losing its grasp on power, the PFP sought to establish a new hegemony. But historical legacy and heightened conditions of crisis made for a doomed attempt.

Power and liberalism in the semi-colonial condition of South Africa appear to have been two mutually exclusive notions. New historical conditions which will emerge with the resolution of the crisis in the form of a non-racial democracy may well turn this contention on its head. Such is the contingency of history and the liberal discourse. Indeed, we see the rise of liberal discourses now within the ideologies of both the regime and liberation movement. Changed conditions, and the prospect of a removal of the fundamental divide between the empowered and the politically oppressed determined by access to the racially exclusive state, presents the opportunity for the primary blocs of classes to depart from past hegemonic discourses; and to integrate elements of the liberal discourse which had in years gone by been rejected as contrary to the interests of the dominating and dominated classes. The PFP failed precisely because it operated in the wrong context, at the wrong time, and on a limited class base.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHYPrimary Sources

## PFP PUBLICATIONS, PAMPHLETS AND DOCUMENTS

Anonymous, "Untitled Memorandum", February 1986

Carlisle, R "National Outreach", May 1986

Eglin, C "Mission Statement: 'The Negotiation Option'",  
PFP, 22 August 1987

Minutes of PFP Federal Council Meetings

Minutes of PFP Federal Executive Meetings

Minutes and Resolutions of PFP Federal Congresses

PFP, "Economic Democracy - The Progressive Federal Party's  
Charter for Social and Economic Progress in South  
Africa", PFP, 1981

PFP, "The Constitution has changed but not the problem",  
PFP, 1983

PFP, "The most crucial challenge for South Africa - an  
analysis of the Nationalists' Constitutional plan -  
1983", PFP, 1983

PFP, "Strategy for a New South Africa", PFP, September 1986

PFP, "What it stands for. Your questions answered", PFP,  
1987

PFP, "Security Commission Report", PFP, August 1988

Selke, J "A comment on the report of the Image Committee",  
Minutes of PFP Federal Council Meeting, October 1984

Slabbert, F "A possible strategy to apply constitutional  
leverage towards a non-racial democracy", handwritten  
document, 1986

## PFP NEWSPAPERS

Comment  
Deurbraak  
Impact  
Newsline  
Progress

## MISCELLANEOUS UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS

UDF, "United Democratic Front Position on Whites-Only Elections", UDF 19 March 1987

Independent Party, Letter to Zach de Beer, 12 December 1988

## INTERVIEWS

Zach de Beer, former Leader of the PFP, Johannesburg, 18 May 1988

Elizabeth and Peter Clogg, former senior PFP members in Bryanston, Johannesburg, 18 May 1988

Colin Eglin, former Leader of the PFP, Cape Town, 14 May 1990

Peter Gastrow, former PFP MP and Party Chairman, Cape Town, 28 March 1990

Douglas Gibson, former PFP MPC and Transvaal Leader, Johannesburg, 20 May 1988

Bobby Godsell, senior former PFP member and businessman, Johannesburg, 23 May 1988

Brian Goodall, former PFP MP and Southern Transvaal Leader, Johannesburg, 23 May 1988

John Kane-Berman, Executive Director of the South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 16 May 1988

Tony Leon, former PFP Leader in the Johannesburg City Council, Cape Town, 27 March 1990

Michael O'Dowd, director of the Anglo American Corporation, Johannesburg, 13 May 1988

Ken Owen, formerly editor of Business Day, Johannesburg, 16 May 1988

Harry Schwarz, former PFP MP, Cape Town, 14 May 1990

Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, former PFP Leader, Cape Town, 28 September 1990

Helen Suzman, former PFP MP and Party Chairman, Johannesburg, 9 April 1990

Tiaan van der Merwe, former PFP MP and Party Chairman, Cape Town, 6 March 1990

Jan van Eck, former PFP MP and MPC, Cape Town, 29 March 1990

#### NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

Argus

Beeld

Die Burger

Business Day

Cape Times

Citizen

Financial Mail

Herald Tribune

Indicator SA

Leadership

Natal Mercury

Pretoria News

Rand Daily Mail

Rapport

South African Foundation News

Sowetan

Star

Sunday Express

Sunday Star

Sunday Times

Sunday Tribune

## Secondary Sources

### BOOKS, THESES AND ARTICLES

- Adam, H "The Failure of Political Liberalism", in Adam, H and Gilliomee, H The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power, Cape Town, 1979
- Barrell, H "The United Democratic Front and national Forum: Their Emergence, Composition and Trends", in SARS (eds) South African Review 1, Johannesburg, 1984
- Berger, P and Godsell, B "South Africa in comparative context", in Berger, P and Godsell, R A Future South Africa: Visions, Strategies and Realities, Cape Town, 1988
- Bernstein, A and Godsell, R "The incrementalists", in Berger, P and Godsell, R A Future South Africa: Visions, Strategies and Realities, Cape Town, 1988
- Bethlehem, R Economics in a revolutionary society: Sanctions and the transformation of South Africa, Johannesburg, 1988
- Black, A and Stanwix, J "Manufacturing development and the economic crisis: restructuring in the eighties", in Social Dynamics, 13 (1) 1987
- Boraine, A "Managing the Urban Crisis, 1986 - 1989", in Moss, G and Obery, I (eds) South African Review 5, Johannesburg, 1989
- Butler, J "Interwar Liberalism and Local Activism", in Butler, J, Elphick, R and Welsh, D (eds) Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect, Cape Town, 1987
- Butler, J, Elphick, R and Welsh, D (eds) Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect, Cape Town, 1987
- Cassim, F "Growth, crisis and change in the South African Economy", University of York conference paper, York, 1986
- Cassim, F "Economic crisis and stagnation in South Africa", in Moss, G and Obery I (eds) South Africa Review 4, Johannesburg, 1987

- Charney, C "Towards rupture or stasis? An analysis of the 1981 South African General Election", in African Affairs, 81 (325) 1982
- Chaskalson, M, Jochelson, K and Seekings, J "Rent Boycotts and the Urban Political Economy", in Moss, G and Obery I (eds) South Africa Review 4, Johannesburg, 1987
- Cobbet, B, Glaser, D, Hindson, D, and Swilling, M "South African Regional Political Economy: A critical analysis of reform strategy in the 1980s", in Tomlinson, R and Addleson, M (eds), Regional restructuring under apartheid: Urban and regional policies in contemporary South Africa, Johannesburg, 1987
- Collinge, J "The United Democratic Front", in SARS (eds) South African Review 3, Johannesburg, 1986
- De Beer C "Debating Liberalism in the 1980s: a critique", in Work In Progress, 31, 1984
- Dollie, N "The National Forum", in SARS (eds) South African Review 3, Johannesburg, 1986
- Du Preez, M, Evans, G and Grealy, R The Broederstroom Encounter: Business meets the UDF and Cosatu, Johannesburg, 1988
- Du Toit, A "The Cape Afrikaners' Failed Liberal Moment, 1850 - 1870", in Butler, J, Elphick, R and Welsh, D (eds) Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect, Cape Town, 1987
- Elphick, R "Mission Christianity and Interwar Liberalism", in Butler, J, Elphick, R and Welsh, D (eds) Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect, Cape Town, 1987
- Five Freedoms Forum (ed), Conference Proceedings September 1987, Johannesburg, 1988
- Food and Canning Workers Union, "Search for a workable relationship", in South African Labour Bulletin, 7 (8) 1982
- Forster, J "The workers' struggle: where does FOSATU stand?", in South African Labour Bulletin, 7 (8) 1982
- Frankel, P, Pines, N, and Swilling, M (eds) State, Resistance and Change in South Africa, Johannesburg, 1988

- Freund, B "South African business ideology, the crisis and the problem of redistribution", Univeristy of York conference paper, York, 1986
- Gelb, S "Making sense of the crisis", in Transformation, (5), 1987
- Gelb, S (ed), South Africa's Economic Crisis, Cape Town, 1991
- General Workers Union "On the UDF", in South African Labour Bulletin 9 (2) 1983
- Gerson, J "The future of liberalism in South Africa", in Optima, 35 (4) 1987
- Glaser, D (1984 a) "Liberalism in the 1980s" in Work In Progress, 30, 1984
- Glaser, D (1984 b) "Debating liberalism in the 1980s: a response", in Work In Progress, 31, 1984
- Glaser, D "Behind the Indaba: the making of the KwaNatal Option", in Transformation 2, 1986
- Glaser, D "Ruling groups and reform in the mid-1980s", in Moss, G and Obery I (eds) South Africa Review 4, Johannesburg, 1987
- Glaser, D "Liberating 'liberal' freedoms", in Work In Progress, 61, 1989
- Godsell, R "Liberal Ethics in South Africa since 1948: Power, Principle and Responsible Action", MA Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1985
- Gramsci, A Selections from the Prison Notebooks, London, 1971
- Grest, J and Hughes, H "State Strategy and Popular Response at the Local Level" in SARS (eds) South African Review 1, Johannesburg, 1984
- Hackland, B "The Progressive Party of South Africa, 1959 - 1981: Political responses to structural change and class struggle", D. Phil. Thesis, Oxford University, 1984
- Hall, S "Variants of Liberalism", in Hall, S and Donald, J (eds), Politics and Ideology: a reader, Milton Keynes, 1986

- Helliker, K, Roux, A, and White, R "'Asithengi' Recent Consumer Boycotts", in Moss, G and Obery I (eds) South Africa Review 4, Johannesburg, 1987
- Hirsch, A "The Cause and Consequence of the 1985 Credit Crisis", Department of Economic History Seminar, University of Cape Town, 1988
- Hofmeyer, J "How white political opinions have changed: 1977 - 1990", in Monitor, April 1990
- Hyslop, J "School Student Movements and State Education Policy: 1972 - 1987", in Cobbet, W and Cohen, R Popular Struggles in South Africa, London, 1988
- Hyslop, J "Section One: State and Politics - Introduction", in Moss, G and Obery, I (eds) South African Review 5, Johannesburg, 1989
- Innes, D "Privatisation: The Solution?", in in Moss, G and Obery I (eds) South Africa Review 4, Johannesburg, 1987
- Irvine, D "The Liberal Party, 1953 - 1968", in Butler, J, Elphick, R and Welsh, D (eds) Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect, Cape Town, 1987
- Johnson, S (ed) South Africa: No turning back, London, 1988
- Kaplan, D "Beyond the indicators: A perspective on the South African Economy", in Moss, G and Obery I (eds) South Africa Review 4, Johannesburg, 1987
- Keenan, J "Reform and Resistance in South Africa's Bantustans", in Moss, G and Obery I (eds) South Africa Review 4, Johannesburg, 1987
- Laclau, E Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory, London, 1977
- Lambert, R and Webster, E "The Re-emergence of Political Unionism in Contemporary South Africa?", in Cobbet, W and Cohen, R Popular Struggles in South Africa, London, 1988
- Leatt, J, Kneifel, T, and Nurnberger, K (eds) Contending Ideologies in South Africa, Cape Town, 1986
- Lemon, A "Issues and Campaigns in the South African General Election of 1981", in African Affairs, 81 (325) 1982

- Lewsen, P "The Cape Liberal tradition - Myth or Reality?", in The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries, Collected Seminar Papers, University of London Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1969 - 1970
- Lewsen, P "Liberals in Politics and Administration, 1936 - 1948", in Butler, J, Elphick, R and Welsh, D (eds) Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect, Cape Town, 1987
- Lewsen, P (ed) Voices of Protest: from segregation to apartheid, 1938 - 1948, Johannesburg, 1988
- Lipton, M Capitalism and Apartheid: South Africa, 1910 - 1984, Cape Town, 1985
- Lodge, T "The African National Congress, 1983" in SARS (eds) South African Review 1, Johannesburg, 1984
- Lodge, T "'Mayihlome - Let Us Go To War!': From Nkomati to Kabwe, The African National Congress, January 1984 - June 1985" in SARS (eds) South African Review 3, Johannesburg, 1986
- Lodge, T "The African National Congress after the Kabwe Conference", in Moss, G and Obery I (eds) South Africa Review 4, Johannesburg, 1987
- Lodge, T "People's War or Negotiations? ANC strategies in the 1980s", in Moss, G and Obery, I (eds) South African Review 5, Johannesburg, 1989
- Macpherson, C The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy, Oxford, 1977
- Mann, M "The giant stirs: South African business in the age of reform", in Frankel, P, Pines, N, and Swilling, M (eds) State, Resistance and Change in South Africa, Johannesburg, 1988
- Manning, D Liberalism, London, 1982
- Mare, G "'Mixed, Capitalist and Free': The aims of the 'Natal Option'", in Moss, G and Obery I (eds) South Africa Review 4, Johannesburg, 1987
- McCarthy, J and Swilling, M "Transport and Political Resistance" in SARS (eds) South African Review 1, Johannesburg, 1984
- Merrington, J "Theory and practice in Gramsci's Marxism", in New Left Review (ed), Western Marxism: A critical reader, London, 1977

- Molobi, E "From Bantu Education to People's Education", in Cobbet, W and Cohen, R Popular Struggles in South Africa, London, 1988
- Morris, M and Padayachee, V "State reform Policy in South Africa", Paper presented to the Canadian African Studies Association Conference, Kingston, Ontario, 11 - 14 May 1988
- Moss, G and Obery, I "Reforming the Contradictions: Crisis and the State", in Moss, G and Obery I (eds) South Africa Review 4, Johannesburg, 1987
- Moss, G and Obery, I "General Introduction" in Moss, G and Obery, I (eds) South African Review 5, Johannesburg, 1989
- Muller, J "People's Education and the National education Crisis Committee", in Moss, G and Obery I (eds) South Africa Review 4, Johannesburg, 1987
- Nasson. B "Opposition politics and ideology in the Western Cape", in Moss, G and Obery, I (eds) South African Review 5, Johannesburg, 1989
- Niddrie, D "The Economy", in Work In Progress, 56/57, 1988
- Njikelana, S "The Unions and the Front: A Response to David Lewis", in South African Labour Bulletin, 9 (7) 1984
- O'Dowd, M "The stages of economic growth and the future of South Africa", in Schlemmer, L and Webster, E Change, Reform and Economic Growth in South Africa, Johannesburg, 1978
- O'Meara, D "'Muldergate' and the politics of Afrikaner Nationalism", in Work In Progress, 22, 1982
- O'Meara, D Volkskapitalisme: Class, capital and ideology in the development of Afrikaner nationalism, Johannesburg, 1983
- Osborn, E "Why the lacklustre 1980s?", in Nedbank Guide to the Economy, February 1991
- Owen, K "Liberalism: What kind of South Africa?", in South African Institute of Race Relations, "Liberalism and the Middle Ground: The 1986 presidential address and the proceedings of a symposium on liberalism at the South African Institute of Race Relations on 21 March 1986", Johannesburg, 1986
- Owen, K "Farewell to Santa Claus", in Optima, 35 (4) 1987

- Rich, P White power and the liberal conscience: Racial segregation and South African liberalism, Johannesburg, 1984
- Rich, P "Liberals, radicals and the politics of black consciousness, 1969 - 76", Africa Seminar, University of Cape Town Centre for African Studies, 1989
- Robertson, J Liberalism in South Africa, 1948 -1963, Oxford, 1971
- Sampson, A Black and Gold, London, 1987
- Saul, J and Gelb, S The Crisis in South Africa, (first edition), New York, 1981
- Saul, J and Gelb, S The Crisis in South Africa, (second edition), New York, 1986
- Schlemmer, L "Beyond Protest: Thoughts on change strategies in South Africa", Centre for Policy Studies Occasional Paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988
- Seekings, J "The Origins of Political Mobilisation in the PWV Townships, 1980 - 84", in Cobbet, W and Cohen, R Popular Struggles in South Africa, London, 1988
- Seekings, J "People's Courts and Popular Politics", in Moss, G and Obery, I (eds) South African Review 5, Johannesburg, 1989
- Shandler, D "Between repression and revolution - the PFP in the 1980s", in South African Labour Bulletin, 13 (8) 1989
- Showstack Sassoon, A Gramsci's Politics, London, 1980
- Simkins, C "Reconstructing South African Liberalism", Lectures delivered at the University of Cape Town, 1985
- Simon, R Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction, London, 1982
- Slabbert, F (1985 a) "The nature of the South African problem and the PFP's approach to its solution", in Friederich Naumann Foundation South Africa, a chance for liberalism?: papers presented at a seminar of the Friederich Naumann Foundation in December 1983, Konigswinter, 1985
- Slabbert, F (1985 b) The Last White Parliament, Johannesburg, 1985

- Slabbert, F "Incremental change or revolution" in Butler, J, Elphick, R and Welsh, D (eds) Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect, Cape Town, 1987
- Slabbert, F "Liberalism: A time to choose", in Optima, 36 (2), 1988
- South African Institute of Race Relations, Survey of Race Relations 1982, Johannesburg, 1983
- South African Institute of Race Relations, Survey of Race Relations 1983, Johannesburg, 1984
- South African Institute of Race Relations, Survey of Race Relations 1984, Johannesburg, 1985
- South African Institute of Race Relations, Survey of Race Relations 1985, Johannesburg, 1986
- South African Institute of Race Relations, Survey of Race Relations 1986 (2 vols), Johannesburg, 1987
- South African Institute of Race Relations, Survey of Race Relations 1987/88, Johannesburg, 1988
- South African Institute of Race Relations, Survey of Race Relations 1988/89, Johannesburg, 1989
- Sutcliffe, M "The crisis in South Africa: Material conditions and the reformist response", University of York conference paper, York, 1986
- Swilling, M "Stayaways, Urban Protest and the State", in SARS (eds) South African Review 3, Johannesburg, 1986
- Swilling, M "The UDF and Township Revolt", in Cobbet, W and Cohen, R Popular Struggles in South Africa, London, 1988
- Swilling, M and Phillips, M (1989 a) "State power in the 1980s: from 'total strategy' to 'counter-revolutionary warfare'", in Cock, J, and Nathan, L War and Society: The militarisation of South Africa, Cape Town, 1989
- Swilling, M and Phillips, M (1989 b) "The Emergency State: Its Structure, Power and Limits", in Moss, G and Obery, I (eds) South African Review 5, Johannesburg, 1989
- Trapido, S "'The Friends of Natives': Merchants, Peasants and the Political and Ideological Structure of Liberalism in the Cape, 1954 - 1910", in Marks, S and Atmore, A (eds) Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa, London, 1980

- Webster, D and Friedman, M "Repression and the State of Emergency: June 1987 - March 1989", in Moss, G and Obery, I (eds) South African Review 5, Johannesburg, 1989
- Welsh, D "The ideologies, aims, role and strategy of the PFP and NRP", in Van Vuuren, D, Schlemmer, L, Marais, H, and Latakomo, J (eds) South African election 1987: Context, Process and Prospect, Pinetown, 1987
- Welsh, D "Politics and business in South Africa", in Optima, 36 (3) 1988
- Wentzel, J "The Liberal Slide-Away", in South African Institute of Race Relations, "Liberalism and the Middle Ground: The 1986 presidential address and the proceedings of a symposium on liberalism at the South African Institute of Race Relations on 21 March 1986", Johannesburg, 1986
- Wilson, F and Ramphele, M Uprooting Poverty - The South African Challenge. Report of the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa, Cape Town, 1989
- Wolpe, H Race, Class and the Apartheid State, London, 1987