

# Decaying NP has lost all moral authority

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BEFORE the 1987 general election I wrote in Leadership about the NP's inability to be an effective vehicle for appropriate reform in South Africa. I argued that only if the NP disintegrated would the opportunity arise for a democratic takeover of the government by a truly reform-orientated party.

The NP has not disintegrated. No reform has taken place. What is happening is a process of internal decay. Instead of an explosion, we are witnessing the clear signs of an implosion.

During the 1987 election it was unthinkable to talk about a hung parliament. Now even supporters of the NP admit that although a hung parliament is not a probable outcome it is nonetheless a real possibility.

It is very likely that the NP will win less than 100 seats. If that should happen, we will not have a hung parliament but at least a "bang" (fearful) parliament.

The NP has been spoilt by extraordinarily large majorities. In the event of a "bang" parliament it is likely that the NP Government will have no choice but to call another election within two or three years' time — hopefully after a new delimitation.

The performance of the NP during the election campaign has been pathetic. It has availed itself of dirty tactics in publishing a full-page advertisements to portray members of the DP as traitors for talking to the ANC! On the one hand the NP is engaged in a fatal struggle with the CP because the CP reinstated apartheid in Boksburg, but it uses security forces in a provocative way to enforce the hated system of apartheid in the Western Cape!

It has used every thinkable method to scare the electorate again with the Black and Red peril, without considering the damage this lamentable strategy has done to group relations in South Africa.

Probably the clearest sign of panic in its own ranks was the unworthy and cruel way in which it got rid of P W Botha as State President only a month before he was due to retire in any case.

The NP is no longer the Grand Old Party with an abundance of confidence and purpose. It has lost its nerve. It has lost its direction. It has no answer for the growing international isolation. It has no answer for the chronic township unrest other than the extension of the State of Emergency.

The NP has also lost imagination and style. During the 1987 election it lost a large part of its intellectual support. During this election it is going to lose a large part of its professional support. It has become yesterday's party with frozen ideas of a bygone era.

The NP has also no answer for the poor and deteriorating state of the economy. The only (feeble) excuse Barend du Plessis can offer is to allege that South Africa does not have a foreign banker any longer.

What he should tell the electorate is that no foreign banker is prepared to give an overdraft (or credit) to a bankrupt customer like the NP. The frightening

thing is that we have reached a point where one cannot blame the foreign bankers even if we remain hopeful that they may change their minds.

During the election campaign not a single new idea on reform was put forward by the NP.

The only new thing is the new leader, F W de Klerk. But he is conspicuous for his vagueness. The only point we can grant him is that his footwork is good in evading all issues. He speaks in meaningless terms. He uses lofty phrases without substance like "fundamental reform" and he talks about the necessity of creating a "just" system for all, without elaborating. He has committed himself to one thing only and that is to use statutory defined groups as the building blocks of the new constitutional dispensation. He and the NP clearly did not get the message that this is a very dangerous approach.

Any attempt to perpetuate Own Affairs apartheid — in whatever disguised form — will continue to build conflict into the body politic of the South African System. It cannot but lead to disaster.

The most important reason for the inevitable internal decay or implosion of the NP is its moral decay. The NP can no longer lay claim to morality.

The system of apartheid, built and maintained by force by the NP, is to an alarming extent without the usual ethical qualities of a political system in the Western world. As we could have expected, this unethical system has inculcated unworthy social attitudes in the citizens of the country, and especially in those citizens in positions of power, privilege and patronage.

Morality has also been undermined chronically by the NP government's conspicuous and lamentable manner of using not

only its fiscal powers but also the bureaucratic and securocratic systems to favour and enrich small sections of the population — while the great majority remain trapped in the vicious circle of poverty, deprivation, discrimination and powerlessness.

The political system constructed and maintained by the NP government is so deprived of moral qualities that we have no choice but to identify it as a corrupt system. The corruption already disclosed and the corrupt attitudes discerned, are of such a deep-seated nature and ostensibly so comprehensive that we have to identify the corruption as structural corruption.

To top it all the NP has over the years employed very doubtful methods to justify and to legitimise this unethical system and to propagate itself to the electorate (especially in election times). These doubtful methods to maintain the system of structural corruption and the Party's power base can be described as a structural cover-up. It has effectively removed all pretence of morality as far as the NP is concerned.

A party that has become as deprived of moral symbolism and legitimacy as the NP is doomed to internal decay or implosion. It is very much in the long term interest of South and Southern Africa that the NP's implosion should take place as soon as possible.

Luckily we have every reason to suspect that the "bang" parliament will also be the last parliament with a NP majority. In the next few years the lack of moral courage in NP circles will take its toll and the moral decay will make the NP an even more powerless victim of the unethical racist system it has created and continues to maintain.

The inevitable downfall of the NP will prove to be an integral part of a total system in an irreversible process of total decay.