

Alliance politics "could hold the key to government"

Within three years, South Africa is expected to face its first one-person-one-vote general election. Electoral alliances are likely to have a decisive impact on the outcome. The IFP has stated that it is prepared to form alliances, if this will help to bring about its goal of a multi-party democracy. Here, in these extracts from a speech delivered to the National Students' Federation annual congress at Midrand, IFP National Chairman, Dr FRANK MDLALOSE, argues the need for a broad Liberal Democratic Alliance.....

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"If we take what the major parties are putting forward as their constitutional principles and proposals, you cannot fail to agree that prospects for liberal democracy have never looked better.

"By liberal democracy, I mean that form of representative parliamentary democracy characteristic of much of the West. No one country is identical to any other, but there are core features that our parties are advocating here: a Bill of Rights (or the equivalent) guaranteeing fundamental human freedoms, the separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers, the rule of law, a market-related economy, regular, fair and free elections, a multi-party system etc.

"You do not have to like the National Party to agree that most of these constitute the cornerstone of its constitutional thinking, or will soon do so. The same goes for the DP, the ANC and the IFP. Can we therefore sit back and relax because liberal democracy is assured? The answer to this rather polemical question is, of course, no. And this has less to do with formal

constitutional thinking than it has to do with politics and political processes.

"As the transitional process proceeds, the terrain or struggle should change to a more normal process of competing value systems, so that by the time the general election is held, parties are competing on the basis of election manifestoes, rather than on repressive or liberatory rhetoric." We are already seeing the first tentative line of demarcation between what in continental Western European terms might loosely be called Christian Democratic and Social Democratic parties.

"While the IFP is firmly committed to an enterprise-based, market-driven economy stressing the redistribution of opportunity and production of greater wealth, we accept that others might reject this for a more redistributive system. It is, after all, the right of the electorate to make mistakes and it is our duty to prove that our ideas are the best.

"But let us be careful of accepting at face value what parties say of themselves. There is a fundamental difference between social democracy and democratic socialism. Social democracy is a welfare-orientated, but fundamentally capitalist, liberal democracy. Democratic socialism, on the other hand, represents what its proponents propose as the democratic face of socialism - its model though is reformed Communism, not liberal democracy.

"There is a very large constituency in South Africa that believes democratic socialism is the way to go for this country. If they succeed, liberal democracy is dead. As has been proved time and time again, and as Winston Churchill once said, liberal democracy may not be perfect, but its better than anything else. There really is no middle way. We want to be sure that the process of political normalisation results in

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agreement on new rules of the game that respect the fundamental tenets of liberal democracy. We are not guinea pigs for social experiments."

NATIONAL UNITY A TOP PRIORITY

Dr Mdlalose said the drawing up of a new constitution was not the sole objective of the political transformation that South Africa was going through. This was only half of the equation.....

"We are trying to totally change our divided society to a non-racial liberal democracy. Success is two-sided. One is that we all agree on the new rules of the game. This is the new constitution. I believe we are making good progress here and that the centrist convergence that is occurring reflects this. Second, is that we play by the rules and do not treat the first infringement as an excuse to tear the agreement apart and revert to naked aggression."

The IFP believed that national unity - and

therefore reconciliation - had to be placed very high on the agenda. Minority fears, fears of the jobless, the homeless and the sick - all these had to be assuaged.

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"It is in this context that I feel the need for a broad Liberal Democratic Alliance is epitomised. We have to be big-hearted enough to be accommodative, to know that truth and reality may not be found in one philosophy only. We have to be broad enough to work closely with other South African parties as long as the essential fundamental base among us is cherished.

"No one party, I feel, will command the necessary majority to rule this country without extending its hand of alliance to at least one other Party."