FROM OBSCURITY TO OFFICIAL OPPOSITION: THE PROGRESSIVE FEDERAL PARTY, 1959-1977

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Van obskuriteit tot Amptelike Opposisie: Die Progressiewe Federale Party, 1959-1977

Die outeur skets die geskiedenis van die progressiewe partye tussen totstandkoming in 1959 en Amptelike Opposisie in 1977. Die redes vir die stigting van die Progressiewe Party (PP) word ondersoek, en die dalende kiesersondersteuning gedurende die oproerige 1960s word verduidelik. Daar word bewys dat die herorganiseering van die 1970s, tesame met die meer gunstige binne- en buitelandse politieke klimaat, verantwoordelik was vir die progressiewe deurbraak in 1974. Die onvermoë van die Amptelike Opposisie, die Verenigde Party (VP), om die Nasionale Party effektief teen te staan, het gelei tot ontevredenheid binne VP-geledere. Afgeskeide lede het by die PP aangesluit, eers om die Progressiewe Reformisteparty (PRP) en daarna die Progressiewe Federale Party (PFP) te stig. Agtien jaar na hul eerste vorming het die progressiewes uiteindelik die Amptelike Opposisie geword, net om te sien hoe effektiewe protes teen die regering al hoe meer van buite die parlement gekom het.

In the article the author outlines the history of the progressive parties between foundation in 1959 and official opposition in 1977. The paper examines the reasons for the establishment of the Progressive Party and traces and explains its declining electoral fortunes through the turbulent years of the 1960s. It shows that the organisational regenerations of the 1970s together with the more favourable internal and external political climate led to the progressive breakthrough of 1974. The inability of the official opposition United Party to effectively challenge and stem the National Party tide led to dissatisfaction within its ranks. Dissident members joined the PP, first to form the Progressive Reform Party and then the Progressive Federal Party. Eighteen years after its formation the progressives finally became the official opposition, only to find that the effective challenge to government increasingly came from outside of parliament.

The South African Progressive Federal Party (PFP), formed in September 1977, had its origins in the old Progressive Party (PP) of 1959. The formation of the Progressive Party in that year was the result of increased polarization within the United Party (UP) which culminated in a split at its Bloemfontein congress in August 1959. Twelve members of parliament, almost a quarter of its number, and five provincial councillors resigned from the United Party. The UP also suffered the loss of support of some influential members of the public, most notably the industrial giant and chairman of the Anglo American Corporation and De Beers Consolidated Mines, HF (Harry) Oppenheimer,

who almost immediately sided with the 'progressive'[1] group.

The dissent in the United Party which led to the break had deep roots. The ostensible reason for this split was the refusal of the majority in the United Party to remain committed to this party's support of the 1936 Native Land and Trust Act and to sanction further allocation of land to the African areas. This apparent
reversal of policy was the result of a belief in the United Party that, with the creation of the National Party's (NP) Bantustans, the Land Act had become irrelevant since "neither Hertzog nor Smuts had intended the African areas to be independent within a white South Africa".[2] On the other hand there were some in the United Party who argued that this constituted a breach of promise given to the Africans by the UP, when itself in government, that it would make more land available to the "tribal" areas as a sort of *quid pro quo* for the removal of Cape Africans from the Common Voters role.

However, for a long time before this, there had been considerable dissension within the United Party on a number of matters and it was evident that "some issue would come up on which it [a split] would be unavoidable".[3] In essence the differences between the majority and the 'progressive' minority in the UP lay in their different visions of what role and policy the United Party should follow within an ever changing and challenging South African situation. Increasing industrialisation and black urbanisation during the 1950s had brought new challenges and demands which, in the view of the 'progressives', necessitated greater flexibility amongst political parties. The 'progressive' group wished to respond to these demands with a programme of economic integration and social and political accommodation. This was anathema to the more rigid members of the United Party who adhered to a course of wooing the Afrikaner voter with a segregation policy only slightly more moderate than that of the National Party. Instead of narrowing the gap between itself and the NP in an attempt to attract votes, the 'progressive' group in the UP felt the need for far stronger opposition to the NP's apartheid doctrines and believed that the UP would do better with a clear-cut policy against the government's separation plans. This, it was felt, would give the UP greater clarity of purpose and sense of direction.[4] That this would not be forthcoming became patently obvious to the 'progressives' at the Bloemfontein congress. In a statement issued after the split the former UP leader in the Cape, Dr. Jan Steytler, remarked that "the temper of the Bloemfontein congress showed a complete unwillingness on the part of most delegates to face up to the challenge of contemporary events here and in Africa. The impression we have is of a party congress reluctant to move with the times, unwilling even to interpret its own principles in a forward-looking manner".[5]

Despite the intense dissatisfaction of the 'progressives' with the United Party and with the way in which it was moving, it would seem that they had hoped to rescue it from within. No concerted course of action was ever planned and at no time did they form a cohesive group intent on splitting the party. The schism within the UP was deep, however, and the inability, or unwillingness, of its leader, Sir de Villiers Graaff, to appreciate the seriousness of the differences meant that little effort was made within the party to reconcile the two factions. On the contrary, the view prevailed amongst the leadership that it would be in the interests of the United Party to get rid of the dissident members and before the Bloemfontein congress it was decided to "engineer a limited purge of the

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1. Although the Progressive Party had not yet come into being, the press had already begun referring to the different factions within the UP as 'conservative' and 'progressive'. The term 'progressive' is used here to identify those dissatisfied members of the party.
2. J. Strangwayes-Booth, *A cricket in the thorn tree: Helen Suzman and the Progressive Party of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1976), p. 145.
3. Transcript of interview with Mr. H.F. Oppenheimer, 4 September 1991, p. 2. This view is confirmed in many sources, for example *The Progressive News*, no. 1, October 1962 (Unisa, PP Papers, 2.3.2) and Harry Lawrence's letter to Mr. Ed Burke, 1 April 1965 (UCTL, HG Lawrence's Papers, BC640 H2.56).
4. J. Strangwayes-Booth, *A cricket in the thorn tree*, p. 136.
5. *The Progressive News*, no. 1, October 1959.

most prominent liberals".[6] The land controversy provided the ammunition as the proposer of the motion, Douglas Mitchell, knew that by "forcing the issue he would risk a break in the party".[7] It is evident that the UP leadership expected the strong protest from the 'progressives', but it is unlikely that they anticipated the large defection which this would spawn. In his discussions with the UP leader at the time, Oppenheimer had the impression that Graaff "thought that the people who might leave the United Party would be limited to Helen Suzman of whom, very foolishly, he had no great opinion. He also thought that Alan Butcher in Natal and one or two others, but he didn't think that people like Zach de Beer and also Colin Eglin, people like that, would leave at all. And, of course, he never dreamed that Harry Lawrence would go and he didn't think that I would go either".[8]

So disillusioned, though, were these members with the UP's direction and the vehement attacks on them at the Bloemfontein congress that they felt they had little option but to leave the party. However, it was only after they had tended their resignations that consideration was given to the formation of "a more viable political base".[9] This was achieved with the formal launch of the Progressive Party of South Africa at its inaugural congress in Johannesburg on the 13th and 14th November 1959. Steytler was elected leader of the new party with Harry Lawrence as chairman.

The formation of the Progressive Party came at a time when the National Party was well into its apartheid programme which systematically eroded individual rights and institutionalised white, mainly Afrikaner, domination and privilege. In contrast, the basic philosophy of the new Progressive Party was the acceptance and recognition of the freedom of the individual and equality of all before the law. In the view of Ray Swart, founder member of the PP, this made the party the first group, operating amongst a mainly white electorate, to espouse beliefs which "centred on a total rejection of race discrimination of any kind, with equal opportunities for all South Africans and a franchise with a common voters' roll".[10] This thinking accorded with many other groups at that time, such as the Liberal Party of South Africa, but the manner in which these principles were embodied in its constitution, and especially in its qualified franchise, showed that the PP presented a more "'moderate' alternative to the Liberal Party", which in 1960 had finally adopted universal adult franchise.[11] However, what made the formation of the Progressive Party even more significant was the fact that it had parliamentary representation. Its members were consequently in a position to fill the vacuum left by the Communist Party and the liberal "native representatives," and directly to challenge the government's emphasis on, and entrenchment of, race and class from within the highest legislative body in the land.

Not that this would make the PP's policies any more attractive to the electorate. On the contrary, few whites would be prepared to jettison their privileges and rights, which came from being part of a group, for the noble sentiments of individual freedoms. The party realised further that it could not attract white support unless it showed visible evidence of black endorsement. And, conversely, that blacks would not support it unless it gained significant white backing. The difficult task awaiting the Progressive Party was therefore to gain the (white) electorate's approval for its

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6. D. Welsh, 'The politics of white supremacy' in L. Thompson & J. Butler, *Change in contemporary South Africa* (Berkeley, 1975), p. 72. See also S. Uys, 'The white opposition splits', *Africa South*, January-March 1960.
7. R. Swart, *Progressive odyssey: towards a democratic South Africa* (Cape Town & Johannesburg, 1991), p. 53.
8. Transcript of interview with Mr. H.F. Oppenheimer, 4 September 1991, p. 4.
9. R. Swart, *Progressive odyssey*, p. 63. Many within the UP saw the action of the 'progressives' as pre-meditated. See, for example, J.O. Newton Thompson's letter to Harry Lawrence, 12 May 1969 (UCTL, H.G. Lawrence Papers, BC640 H2.99). However, the meeting of the 'progressive' group held in Johannesburg on 23 and 24 August 1959 had as one of its two points on the agenda the issue of forming "a new political party at this juncture" (UWL, PFP/DP Papers, AG883 Ab1).
10. R. Swart, *Progressive odyssey*, p. 9.
11. D. Irvine, 'The Liberal Party, 1953-1968' in J. Butler, R. Elphick & D. Welsh (eds.), *Democratic liberalism in South Africa: its history and prospect* (Cape Town & Johannesburg, 1987), p. 117.

policies while at the same time earning the support and confidence of the disenfranchised black majority.[12] Although the African National Congress (ANC) initially gave a cautious welcome to the formation of the PP, many people were of the opinion that the party's policies were "far too conservative to appeal to more than a handful of non-whites, or even to serve as a bridge between white and non-white politics",[13] and far too liberal to appeal to the whites. The future of the Progressive Party of South Africa was far from certain.

Its tenuous position was further exacerbated by current events which increased racial tensions and served to harden conservative attitudes. Within South Africa groups like the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were successfully mobilizing their supporters in the cause of African nationalism. Discontent over influx control (pass laws) and discrimination had reached boiling point among South Africa's Africans. Their anger found an outlet in the 1960 passive resistance campaign against government measures. State reaction to this protest led to the death of many Africans at Sharpeville on 21 March 1960. These slayings resulted in widespread unrest and to deal with the situation the government declared a state of emergency (lifted some five months later) and banned the ANC and the PAC.

This internal unrest, perhaps understandably, coincided with a mood of optimism for black aspirations throughout the rest of Africa. The process of decolonisation had begun, but unfortunately independence was often accompanied by unrest and turbulence. Lurid accounts of atrocities being committed in these former colonies and the seemingly sudden spate of black violence within South Africa served to entrench white prejudice and fears as well as the belief that blacks were unable to participate responsibly and peacefully in government. Within this unsettled climate the electorate was hardly likely to give enthusiastic support to a party whose ultimate goal was the inclusion of blacks in central government.

Small and relatively insignificant as the PP then was, it would seem that Prime Minister Verwoerd, nevertheless, had grave misgivings about the party, considering it a danger to the existence of white rule in South Africa.[14] This opinion, together with the NP's success in the republican referendum and South Africa's subsequent expulsion from the British Commonwealth, prompted Verwoerd to call an early general election in 1961. Since none of its parliamentary members had resigned their seats when they split from the United Party some two years previously, this election, held in October 1961, was to be the first true test of Progressive Party strength amongst the electorate. It was also, of course, the first general election held in the Republic of South Africa.

In no position to be a challenge to the NP, the PP pitted itself mainly against the United Party. In this way it hoped to draw support away from the UP and so secure for itself a solid foundation on which it could present itself as an alternative opposition.[15] In its endeavours PP candidates received the support of the president of the banned ANC, Albert Luthuli, as well as that of the *Rand Daily Mail*. But for the Progressive Party the results were a great disappointment. While Luthuli saw the PP's performance as encouraging,[16] the party was only able to return one member to parliament.[17]

It is likely that those who voted against the government in 1961 believed that only through a united opposition would there be the opportunity to oust the NP from power. Sentiment still favoured

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12. J. Strangwayes-Booth, *A cricket in the thorn tree*, p. 170.
13. P.L. van den Berghe, *South Africa, a study in conflict*, (Connecticut, 1980), p. 172.
14. Many believed that Verwoerd's real reason was his wish to eliminate the PP from the South African political scene. In the *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 September 1961, the then Minister of Justice, B.J. Vorster, described the PP as a "dangerous party undermining the foundations of our existence in South Africa". See also J. Strangwayes-Booth, *A cricket in the thorn tree*, p. 193.
15. *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 September 1961.
16. *Rand Daily Mail*, 26 September 1961.
17. Initially 23 candidates were nominated, but Swart withdrew in the Zululand constituency in order to prevent a three-cornered fight which might have split the vote and favoured the Nationalists.

the UP, the party of the well-loved Jan Smuts, as the vehicle through which this could be achieved. However, PP losses meant that leading and experienced political figures, such as Steytler and Lawrence, were denied a parliamentary platform from which to disseminate party policy. On a more positive level, however, the PP had secured sufficient support to dash Verwoerd's goal of its obliteration and to manifest its potential to win more seats in the next election.[18] For the moment, though, it was left to the relatively unknown and "unhappy"[19] Helen Suzman to keep the PP banner flying in parliament.

Although it was operating within a predominantly white constituency, the PP endeavoured not to lose sight of the importance or influence of extra-parliamentary (mostly black) organisations. This was reflected in a memorandum drawn up by Dr. D. Molteno, QC, and Peggy Roberts in 1962 which argued for closer co-operation between the PP and such groups.[20] In support of this Dr. Z. de Beer, then chairman of the party's national executive, proposed that a "special Liaison Department of the party be created to keep in touch with bodies outside of political Parties".[21] These suggestions were rejected by the national execut committee of the Progressive Party who felt that the PP should operate on its own and that any co-operation with extra-parliamentary groups should be assessed as the occasion arose and as determined by the party leader.[22] Moreover, for the PP there was an underlying incongruity in working with such groups since the grassroots support for many of these extra-parliamentary organisations, such as the ANC and PAC, came from precisely those people who would be ineligible to vote under the PP's franchise system. Despite this, the PP did make a concerted effort to enlist black, especially coloured, membership and two organisers were employed by the party to work amongst the coloured voters in the Cape.[23] While its recruitment amongst coloured people proved marginally effective,[24] the party was largely unsuccessful in attracting African support.

Not that the PP had any greater success in enlarging its white membership. Both within and without South Africa the political climate remained unconducive to the acceptance of its policies. Driven underground by the banning of the ANC and the PAC, their respective affiliates *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, POQO and the African Resistance Movement, began a campaign of confrontation culminating in the Rivonia treason trial and more repressive state measures to combat the unrest. So successful was the government's security legislation that by the end of 1964 the power of the resistance movements had all but been crushed. International censure of South Africa's internal policies continued unabated and the country was becoming increasingly isolated. However, instead of searching for meaningful and acceptable solutions to the problems facing the country, whites generally became arrogant and defensive, retreating into the proverbial *laager*.

Not surprisingly, then, the election results showed a general swing towards the right, and the National Party, which dealt the Progressive Party a severe blow. In terms of opposition politics the conservative swing meant increased UP support at the expense of the PP. As in 1961, only Suzman was returned and, alarmingly for the party, in seats where it had fared reasonably well in the 1961

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18. K.A. Heard, *General Elections in South Africa 1943-1970* (London, 1974), p. 145.
19. Transcript of interview with Mrs. H. Suzman, 2 December 1991, p. 2. With regard to returning to parliament after the 1961 election Suzman states that she "was very unhappy about it. I didn't want to be there alone, but I was not going to give up that chance of keeping the door open for the party and the same thing applied in '66, in '70 and in '74".
20. UWL, PFP/DP Papers, AG883 B6, D. Molteno & P. Roberts, Memorandum on extra-parliamentary activities , 1 March 1962.
21. UWL, PFP/DP Papers, AG883 Ab. 2.1, Minutes of meeting of leader's committee, 10 March 1962.
22. UWL, PFP/DP Papers, AG883 Ab. 2.1, Minutes of meeting of leader's committee, 9 June 1962.
23. UWL, PFP/DP Papers, AG883 Ab. 2.1, Minutes of meeting of leader's committe, 10 March 1962.
24. *Progress*, no. 12, November 1962. Coloured members of the FP included Alan Hendrickse, later leader of the Labour Party, David Currie and Sonny Leon.

election, the results this time were appalling. Even in the victorious Houghton constituency, where Suzman had increased her winning margin, it was postulated that voters had given their support specifically to her rather than to the Progressive Party. The growth potential, and the continued existence of the PP was consequently in some doubt. It was clear that PP policies were perceived as being out of touch with white feelings. Despite having reached the nadir of its political fortune, the Progressive Party remained undeterred, believing that it would eventually triumph.[25] The realisation of this conviction, however, relied on Suzman's continued representation in parliament. On her shoulders rested the onerous task of probing, questioning and challenging government policies as the NP introduced a continuous stream of apartheid and other oppressive legislation.[26] She received virtually no support from the official opposition United Party, which by then was of little effect in opposing the government; rather it supported much of the legislation being introduced.

The disappointments of the 1966 general election were, to some extent, tempered by the party's successes in the 1965 coloured provincial council elections.[27] For the PP these election results provided evidence that the party enjoyed "the confidence of an ever-increasing proportion of the non-white groups in South Africa",[28] and augured well for PP success in the parliamentary elections for coloured representatives. This was seen as an important development in view of the party's belief that a breakthrough in either the white or the black constituency would reinforce support for the party. PP optimism was short-lived, however, as the government first abolished the coloured representatives in parliament (creating instead the Coloured Person's Representative Council) and then passed the Prohibition of Political Interference Act in 1968 which placed a ban on multi-racial political parties. This created a major dilemma for the PP. As a party "dedicated to upholding democratic principles and values"[29] the forced exclusion of people who were not classified as white from party membership went against everything in which it believed. The choice facing the PP was either to compromise and continue in opposition to the government or to disband and cease to operate within the parliamentary framework. The latter course would have left parliamentary opposition to the totally ineffective and "me-tooish" UP - something the PP could not countenance. Furthermore, despite its own dislike of the all-white parliament, the PP recognised that it remained a "very valuable forum"[30] in which the oppressive policies of the NP could be exposed and countered. The PP's decision to operate within the parliamentary framework kept it active in politics, but it was inevitable that the party would be seen more and more as a white party representing a purely white constituency. Indeed, since its power base was now to be exclusively white, it would inevitably increasingly have to cater to this membership.

The assassination of Prime Minister Verwoerd on 6 September 1966 and the split in the National Party in 1969[31] under his successor, Mr. B.J. Vorster, led to the calling of an early general election for 22 April 1970. Once again an election took place against a background of external chaos and internal dissatisfaction. The decolonisation of the 1960s had been traumatic and the effects of violence, instability and impoverishment throughout Africa on the Progressive Party's fortunes had not gone unnoticed by the party. In the foreword to the 1969 edition of *Safeguard your future: the*

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25. UCTL, H.G. Lawrence papers, BC640 H2.71, Harry Lawrence - Maud, 15 April 1966
26. R. Lee (ed.), *Values alive: a tribute to Helen Suzman* (Johannesburg, 1990) and P. Lewsen (ed.), *Helen Suzman's solo years* (Johannesburg, 1991).
27. The PP won both coloured seats in this election.
28. UCTL, H.G. Lawrence Papers, BC 640 H4.13, Report on the state of the party to be delivered at the national congress, Johannesburg, 6 November 1964.
29. *Policy, fact & comment*, no. 97, March 1970. UWL, PFP/DP Papers, Ag883 Ab2.2.2, Also Report by eighth national congress of the Progressive Party held in Johannesburg on 2nd & 3rd September, 1968.
30. Transcript of interview with Mrs. H. Suzman, 2 December 1991, p. 1.
31. Four National Party MP's left the party to form the more conservative Herstigte Nasionale Party under the leadership of Dr. Albert Hertzog.

principles and policies of the Progressive Party of South Africa, it was stated that "what has made it difficult for us to advance has primarily been the failure of the governmental institutions introduced in various underdeveloped countries".[32] Although the party had never advocated a constitution based on one man one vote, its qualified franchise policy was seen by whites as sufficiently radical to rapidly result in universal franchise and black majority government.

After ten years as a political party the results of the 1970 general election came as a bitter blow to the PP. Suzman retained her Houghton seat and increased her majority by 1 338 votes, but not one of the other eighteen PP candidates was successful. Although the party did receive slightly more votes overall than they had in 1966, the election showed a general swing of some 4.3% to the United Party.[33] The UP gained eight seats from the NP, its first gains since 1948, and the belief in a united opposition and its ability to unseat the NP was bolstered. But the prognosis for PP survival seemed far from good. Repeated defeat of PP candidates, with the exception of Suzman, illustrated that the party's political appeal was very limited. Clearly it had only aroused support from a small, affluent, exclusive (mainly urban) and essentially English-speaking section of the electorate. The majority, mainly Afrikaans-speaking voters, were not being attracted to the party's policies. Their interests were seemingly better served by a government wedded to group rights and there was little in the PP's policy which could woo them away from such privileges. Indeed, it would seem that this group felt that the PP's policies would turn the whites into a helpless minority and this "allowed for the constant successful reinforcement of a corporate identity".[34] The PP recognised these fears, and the obstacle which they created in terms of party support, but it was also clear to the party that without visible evidence of growth it could not continue into the 1970s. Survival of the Progressive Party now became its prime strategy.

In an attempt to address its problems, major reconstruction of the Progressive Party was undertaken after the 1970 general election. This corresponded also with the election of a new party leader since Steytler had made known his intention to retire. His most logical successor was Colin Eglin, then chairman of the national executive of the PP, who was duly elected leader at the national congress of the Progressive Party in February 1971. Eglin was a popular choice, and was described as "probably the most promising politician English-speaking South Africa has produced since Harry Lawrence [and his election as leader] has boosted morale within the party and given it the political thrust which it desperately needed".[35]

The new leader immediately set about improving the image of the party. Part of Eglin's strategy included canvassing support amongst urban Afrikaners, improving relations with the press and more actively promoting the party in an effort to increase its parliamentary representation in the next general election.[36] Although the white electorate had to remain the focus of Progressive Party attention, it still attempted to maintain and develop its links with black leaders, both in and outside South Africa. This was effected with Eglin's 'Outreach' programme which had as its goal the establishment of formal links with black leaders.[37] Its relationship with the more "extreme" groups such as the ANC, however, had all but disintegrated and it was clear that the PP was struggling to find broad acceptance.

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32. Progressive Party, *Safeguard your future: the principles and policies of the Progressive Party of South Africa* (1969).
33. South African Institute of Race Relations, *Race relations survey* 1970, pp. 4 & 5. The PP received 3,5% of the total vote as compared to 3.1% in 1966.
34. H. Adam & H. Giliomee, *The rise and crisis of Afrikaner power* (Cape Town, 1979), p. 267.
35. 'What Eglin has taken on', Editorial, *New Nation*, vol. 4, no. 12, July 1971.
36. C.W. Eglin, *Priorities for the seventies* (Cape Town).
37. *Progress*, November 1971; *Progress*, September 1972; Progressive Party of South Africa, *Africa — a prospect of reconciliation* (Cape Town) and R. Swart, *Progressive odyssey*, p. 115.

Eglin, though, had a more practical view of the party's immediate potential amongst the white voter. He acknowledged that the PP had no chance of seriously challenging even the official opposition at that stage, but that increased parliamentary representation and a sound financial base was essential if the party was to remain viable. Consequently, a few key constituencies were identified as prime targets for the next general election and with the aid of two prominent businessmen, Gordon Waddell and Tony Bloom, the PP launched a major donor drive amongst the business community. Fundraising dinners were held throughout the country,[38] and by 1973, at the national congress in Durban, Swart, then chairman of the national executive, was able to report "an overall increase in membership throughout the country of approximately 20%" and "a staggering increase in our fund raising activities".[39] Perhaps this is what made it possible for the PP to engage the services of an advertising company, Hedley, Byrne & Co (Cape) (Pty) Ltd, to promote the party for the 1974 election. An amount of R10 000 was allocated to place advertisements in the major English-language dailies with "the prime objective of the party [being] to win additional seats to Parliament. Apart from Houghton, our priority Constituencies are Sea Point, Rondebosch, Parktown, Johannesburg North and Berea".[40]

Circumstances in the early 1970s also proved to be more beneficial for the Progressive Party. The turmoil in Africa had abated somewhat and the Vorster government appeared to be making progress in its attempts to forge links with countries in the rest of the continent. Although the beginnings of an economic recession were evident in South Africa and the inflation rate was an alarming 12% by 1974,[41] the country was experiencing a period of apparent calm. Within white opposition politics, too, there were movements more favourable to the PP. Despite, or perhaps because of, their successes in the 1970 election, the United Party was once again struggling to maintain its unity. There were sharp divisions within the party and the 'Young Turks' led by Harry Schwarz, UP leader in the Transvaal Provincial Council, caused an upset by ousting many of the old UP members from their positions during the 1973 Transvaal congress of the party. The 'Young Turks' vision of, and plans for, the development of the UP were so different from that of the 'old guard' that reconciliation seemed improbable. There was, however, no time for these forces of change to consolidate as the government took advantage of the temperate atmosphere and opposition disunity, and called a general election.

There is little doubt that the election of 1974 was of cardinal importance for the Progressive Party and this is underscored both by its strategy and its fundraising efforts. Understandably, Suzman appears to have reached breaking-point at that time, being unwilling to continue in parliament on her own. As she put it: "By 1974 I had said to Colin that if I'm the only one returned again then I think I'm going to resign. Because if the party after thirteen years can only return one MP [member of parliament], it's not worth the time, effort and money to keep it going and we must accept we're not wanted."[42] This was apparently also the view of their principal backer, Oppenheimer. According to one analyst "intimates reported that if the Progressives could not win at least three seats, they could no longer count on his support. Mr. Oppenheimer felt he would have to seek some other avenue to

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38. For example, Fowle telex - Swart, 9 February 1972, Morrison telex - Eglin, 13 April 1972, Fowle telex - Morrison, 17 April 1972, Morrison telex - Fowle, 17 April 1972, Fowle telex - Swart, 27 June 1972 (Unisa, PP Papers, 4.4.1) and *Progress*, February 1973.

39. Report by the chairman of the national executive of the Progressive Party to the national congress of the party at Durban, on the 3rd September, 1973 on 'The state of the party' (Unisa, PP Papers, 2.1.1).

40. M. Osler, PRO, letter - David Beersky, Hedley, Byrne & Co (Cape)(Pty) Ltd, 25 March 1974. See also Hedley, Byrne & Co (Cape)(Pty) Ltd, 'Advertising schedule for Progressive Party', April 1974, (Unisa, PP Papers, 5.4.3).

41. Address by C.W. Eglin at the 14th national congress of the Progressive Party, 22 November 1974, (Unisa, PP Papers, 1.1.5).

42. Transcript of interview with Mrs. H. Suzman, 2 December 1991, p. 2.

bring pressure for racial justice in South Africa".[43] Eglin seems to have shared these feelings,[44] and it was therefore fortunate for the Progressive Party that the 1974 election saw the breakthrough for which its leaders had been waiting and which brought it out of the political wilderness. Five of Eglin's six targeted constituencies delivered what he had hoped and the PP returned to parliament with six members.[45] The Progressive Party had survived.

This goal having been achieved, the task which now lay ahead of the PP was that which it had embarked upon some 13 years previously: to oust the UP as official opposition. In this it was assisted by the beleaguered UP itself. Disappointed in its election results, the tensions within the UP re-emerged and steadily increased. This resulted in the expulsion of four 'Young Turk' MP's in 1975. Under the leadership of Schwarz, then UP MP for Yeoville, this group established the Reform Party which, after protracted negotiations, merged with the Progressive Party on 26 July 1975 to form the South African Progressive Reform Party (PRP). In form and content the policy of the PRP was essentially that of the old Progressive Party although the PP's senate plan and qualified franchise proposals were no longer featured.

The merger with the Reform Party held both negative and positive consequences for the PP. It drew into the party a more conservative element and for the first time the party included in its ranks those who had previously opposed its policies and its members over a long period. Harsh words had been spoken in the heat of parliamentary debate as well as in election battles and there is little doubt that the Schwarz faction and the core Progressive Party members made uneasy bedfellows.[46] The PP leader himself made mention of this in a special message to party members. Eglin wrote: "The decision of the National Executive [to recommend to a special national congress that the Progressive Party merge with the Reform Party] was not taken lightly for members of the National Executive from 'old timers' to relatively new Progs are all jealous of the status which the Progressive Party has earned and the role which it has played over the years in fighting for basic values in South Africa."[47] On the other hand, the party's presence in parliament was increased to eleven members and the rank and file support of the PRP was correspondingly enlarged. This not only had the potential for further parliamentary gains in the next general election but also held the promise of increased income for the cash-stricken party.

The first test of the PRP's parliamentary strength came with a by-election in Durban North where the party pitted its candidate against those of the UP and the NP. In this instance the three-cornered contest worked to the PRP's advantage and the party recorded a narrow victory.[48] This was naturally a blow to the United Party as it demonstrated not only the renewed growth potential of the PRP, but also the continued falling support for the UP. Coming so soon after a poor election performance and the departure of the reformists, the UP had little option but to join in the calls for a fundamental realignment of the opposition forces so as to provide a collective challenge to the government.

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43. E.S. Munger, *South Africa's 1974 general election* (Hanover, 1974) p. 1. Also D. Pallister, S. Stewart & I. Lepper, *South Africa Inc: the Oppenheimer empire* (New Haven & London, 1988), p. 21.
44. *Die Volksblad*, 22 March 1973.
45. The PP won the seats of Houghton, Johannesburg North, Orange Grove, Parktown, Rondebosch and Sea Point. Its representation was increased to seven shortly after the election with a win in the Pinelands by-election.
46. Suzman, for one, was resentful of the merger "at the time, because Harry and I had fought like cat and dog. He was always attacking me and attacking the Progs until he wanted to join us; until the UP's position became untenable as far as he was concerned. Then he formed his Reform Party so that he could have a bargaining counter. My standpoint was 'here we are. If they now agree with us, let them join us'. The minute you start bargaining then you have to give them something to satisfy them". Transcript of interview with Mrs. H. Suzman, 2 December 1991, p. 2. Also R. Swart, *Progressive odyssey*, pp. 128-132.
47. Progressive Party of South Africa, Public relations and research department, undated, (Unisa, PP Papers, 24.1).
48. The PRP candidate received 4 293 votes, the UP candidate 3 919 votes and the NP candidate 3 139 votes.

The English-language press and the business community took a leading role in attempting to forge the various different groups into a united opposition. After a meeting between prominent businessmen and academics on 5 October 1976, a press release stated: "The meeting decided that in view of the seriousness of the times and the urgent necessity of bringing pressure to bear on the Government to accept more realistic and enlightened policies, an appeal would be made to the leaders of the United Party, the Progressive Reform Party, and the Democratic Party[49] to co-operate to establish a steering committee to examine the feasibility of creating a new [political] party which will be a real alternative government."[50] In response to such calls, a steering committee under chairmanship of the Hon. J.F. Marais was appointed to investigate this possibility. The committee reported back favourably in December 1976, providing fourteen principles on which such a joint opposition could be founded. However, consensus on these principles could not be reached and on 28 June 1977 the UP was formally dissolved and in its place the New Republic Party (NRP) came into being.[51] Six members of the old UP refused to join the NRP and under the leadership of UP MP Japie Basson entered into negotiations with the Progressive Reform Party.

A joint statement issued by the PRP and the Basson group, on 28 June 1977, declared that "in the firm conviction that the interests of our country and of Parliament and the requirements of good government have made a realignment of the present party political forces essential — we have decided to combine our forces in forming a unified verligte opposition based on the fourteen principles formulated by the original three-party committee under the chairmanship of Judge J.F. Marais. To this purpose we are immediately forming a joint committee to define a programme of action and to deal with the mechanics of the formation of this unified opposition force".[52] The result of this was the formation of the South African Progressive Federal Party.

The PFP was formally launched at a congress in Johannesburg on 5 September 1977, with Eglin elected its first leader.[53] As with the earlier merger, this joining of forces held similar advantages and disadvantages. The more important of these was that although its parliamentary representation had increased to eighteen, subsequent events revealed that its members had little in common. The particular interests of each group remained paramount and the party never really consolidated into one united corps.

With the opposition in relative disarray and with the NP's plans for a new constitutional arrangement ready, the perfect opportunity was created for the government to go to the polls and the Prime Minister called a snap election for November 1977. Once again an election was fought under extremely adverse conditions. Throughout the seventies the NP had continued with the introduction of restrictive and authoritarian legislation which had steadily increased the burden of blacks. Their resistance struggle had finally erupted in the Soweto riots which began in June 1976 and which speedily escalated to unmanageable and tragic proportions throughout the country. Instead of addressing the root cause of the dissatisfaction, the state resorted to force and oppression which simply fanned the flames of discontent. Outside the borders, the South West African/ Namibian issue had involved South Africa in a full-scale border war, guerrilla activity had intensified sharply in

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49. The small Democratic Party was led by Theo Gerdener, a former Nationalist cabinet minister who had defected from the NP. See S.L. Barnard, 'Die Demokratiese Party van Suid Afrika, 1973-1977', *Journal for contemporary history*, vol. 9, no. 2, December 1984.
50. South African Institute of Race Relations, *Race relations survey* 1976 (Johannesburg, 1977), p. 9.
51. Merger between the Democratic and United parties.
52. Joint statement by C.W. Eglin MP & J.D. du P. Basson MP, Johannesburg, 28 June 1977 (Unisa, Graham McIntosh Papers).
53. Leadership positions in the PFP were devided amongst the three groups making up the party. The old PP was represented by Eglin as leader and Swart as national chairman, the reform party by Schwarz as chairman of the federal executive and the Basson group by Basson as deputy chairman of the PFP and Derick de Villiers as deputy chairman of the federal executive.

Rhodesia and the newly independent countries of Mozambique and Angola were being ravaged by civil strife. Whites tended to respond to the unrest in one of two ways: either to retreat into the *laager* or to leave the country. Many took the latter option and the outflow of capital after Soweto was so great that the economy suffered severely.[54] In addition, the gold price dropped to one of its lowest levels and at 1.4% the country's growth rate in 1976 was at its lowest point since World War II.

Despite, or because of, the unfavourable social, political and economic conditions within and without the country, the white electorate re-affirmed its confidence in the National Party which won 134 out of the 164 seats[55] — the biggest majority in South African political history. The Progressive Federal Party finished a very poor second with 17 seats and barely 17% of the total votes cast, but this was sufficient to make it the largest opposition party. Completing the parliamentary representation was the New Republic Party with ten seats and the South African Party with three. Although this made the PFP the smallest official opposition ever in South Africa, it was the first time that a party which could truly be considered to be to the left of government had managed to become the country's official opposition.[56]

Perhaps the lack of a strong united opposition facilitated the NP's landslide victory at the polls, but at no time since 1948 had the NP ever looked in any danger of being unseated. What the 1977 election results seemed to show was that the opposition electorate had finally come to the realisation that a united opposition was not the answer - the NP was plainly invincible within white politics. Consequently all its enfranchised opponents could hope for was an opposition which could, and would, *oppose* the government. The PFP's track record of uncompromising opposition made it the most likely choice to fulfill this demand.

For the Progressive Federal Party the 1977 election results meant that after some eighteen years the progressives had finally achieved their primary goal. But was it not all too late? For despite having risen from a rather lengthy period of obscurity to the status of official opposition, the PFP would find that its parliamentary position was of little value in providing a persuasive and meaningful challenge to a rampant and authoritarian National Party government. Increasingly the most effective opposition would come from outside parliament and this would undermine the validity of the PFP's challenge from within the confines of parliamentary politics.

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54. During 1977 and 1978 a sum of R1 379 million from the private sector flowed out of the country. Quoted in H. Giliomee, *The parting of the ways: South African politics 1976-1982* (Cape Town, 1982), p. xi.

55. One seat was not contested due to the death of a NP candidate. In the by-election this seat was retained by the NP giving it 135 out of 165 seats in parliament.

56. S.L. Barnard, 'Die groei van die liberale gedagtegang in Suid-Afrika', *Journal for contemporary history*, vol. 7, no. 1, July 1982.