THE GREAT *VOLTE FACE* OF 1983? THE LABOUR PARTY AND THE TRICAMERAL SYSTEM

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Die groot *volte face* van 1983: die Arbeidersparty en die driekamerstelsel
Dit was not altyd duister waarom die Arbeidersparty in Suid-Afrika, na sowat ses jaar van teenkanting en aanhoudende verwerping van die grondwetlike voorstelle, asook volgehoue openbare ontkennings dat hulle ooit sou dink aan deelname aan die Driekamer-parlement, skielik in Januarie 1983 'n ommekeer gemaak het en besluit het om deel te neem. Die aanloop tot die Eshowe-konferensie, waar die besluit geneem is en die gebeure rondom die dramatiese ommeswaai, gee 'n fassinerende insig in magspolitiek, toe 'n kragtige Nasionale Party 'n kwesbare Arbeidersparty onder skoot geneem het. Die Arbeidersparty het swak weerstand gebied en het uiteindelik toegegee aan die druk en besluit om met die Nasionale Party saam te werk. Na sewe jaar van "regering" in die "Kleurling"-kamer van die Driekamer-parlement, het baie lede oorgestap en by die Nasionale Party aangesluit. Die gevolg was dat die Arbeidersparty in 1992 beheer oor die kamer aan die "bruin" Nasionale Party afgestaan het. Die Arbeidersparty het vervolgens nouer bande met die African National Congress gesoek en by die Patriotiese Front aangesluit. Dit was dalk 'n erkenning dat die 1983-besluit wel 'n fout was. Hierdie besluit kan nou in historiese persepktief ondersoek word.

It has always been somewhat of a mystery why the Labour Party in South Africa, after some six years of vociferous and consistent condemnation of the constitutional proposals, and persistent public denials that it would ever consider participating in the tricameral parliament, performed an amazing somersault in January 1983 and decided to participate. The events leading up to the Eshowe Conference where the decision was made, and the circumstances surrounding the dramatic about-turn, give a fascinating insight into power politics as a powerful National Party went after a vulnerable Labour Party. The Labour Party offered feeble resistance but eventually succumbed to the pressure and decided to cooperate with the National Party. After "ruling" for seven years in the "Coloured" tricameral chamber, the Labour Party suffered massive defections to the National Party in 1991 and eventually lost control of the House to the "Brown" National Party in 1992. The Labour Party then joined the "Patriotic Front" and forged closer links with the African National Congress. By doing so, it was perhaps admitting that its decision in 1983 to participate was an error. That decision in 1983 can now be examined in historical perspective.

1. Introduction

The tricameral system was inaugurated in 1984, eight years after an alternative to the Westmin-

ster system of government in South Africa was first suggested by the Theron Commission.[1] By then, the government had run out of options as far as coloured people were concerned.[2] It had been plunged into a crisis of profound proportions because of its inability to find a suitable political solution for coloured people.

Earlier attempts at a "coloured parliament" had failed dismally. The Coloured Advisory Council (CAC) of 1943 had ground to a halt when the members resigned *en bloc* in 1950 in the wake of the Nationalist victory in 1948.[3] The National Party's own creation in 1959, the Union Council for Coloured Affairs (UCCA), was crippled at the outset because coloureds refused to support it, and the government could not find persons to stand for election.[4] The most recent "coloured parliament" had come to an ignominious end when the Coloured Persons' Representative Council (CRC) was dissolved shortly before the 1980 election.[5]

The Labour Party, the majority party in the CRC, had also rejected the Theron Commission appointed in 1973, the CRC Liaison Committee, the Council of Cabinets,[6] and the President's Council formed in 1980. Between 1977 and 1982, the Labour Party had consistently and vehemently opposed the government's constitutional proposals. By 1983, then, a desperate and beleaguered government was in greater need of the coloured people than the latter of the former. Yet in January 1983, the Labour Party performed an amazing somersault and decided unconditionally to participate in the tricameral parliament.

2. The evolution of the tricameral system

The tricameral system owed its creation to recommendation 178 of the Theron Commission in 1976, which suggested that the Westminster system of government be scrapped and another system be found to accommodate coloureds in the political system.[7] The commission recommended that provision be made for satisfactory forms of direct coloured representation and a direct say for coloured people at the various levels of government and on various decision-making bodies.[8] The government immediately rejected the idea of direct representation in the present parliament but accepted that a system should be devised whereby coloured people could be represented in a separate House.[9] It thereupon appointed a cabinet committee under P.W. Botha, the Minister of Defence, to investigate such a possibility. During August 1977, new constitutional proposals were put to the National Party caucus, then to the party's provincial

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Report of the Commission of Inquiry into matters relating to the coloured population group (R.P. 38 - 1976).

2. With the repeal of the Population Registration Act in 1991, South Africans are no longer subjected to race classification. To therefore continue to refer to that section of the South African public as "Coloured" will only serve to perpetuate the humiliation and indignity which they experienced under the various apartheid laws. However, for the purpose of this article, the term "coloured" (denoting persons of mixed-race) will be used. This is done merely to assist in identifying those whom we are referring to. Use thereof, however, does not infer that such persons are or ever were, a "nation" or distinct population group, different in any way to the rest of the South African population.
3. P.J. Hugo, *Quislings or realists: A documentary study of "coloured" politics in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1979), p. 44.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 676-677.
5. *Debates of the House of Assembly* (3 March 1980), cols. 1877-79.
6. *Die Burger*, 21 April 1971; Minutes of Labour Party National Conference, Umtata, 1-3 January 1975; *Argus*, 21 October 1975.
7. *Report of the Commission of Inquiry* (R.P. 38 - 1976), p. 519.
8. S.T. van der Horst, *The Theron Commission: a summary* (Braamfontein, SAIRR, 1976), p. 9.
9. *Debates of the House of Assembly* (20 May 1977), cols. 133-134.

congresses, and finally to the white electorate in the 1977 general election.[10]

In 1979, an almost identical set of proposals was published in the form of the Republic of South Africa Constitutional Bill. This bill was never tabled in parliament and was referred to a constitutional commission under the chairmanship of Alwyn Schlebusch, the Minister of Interior. The commission's first major proposal was the abolition of the second chamber in parliament, the senate, and its replacement with a President's Council (PC). The PC was entrusted with the task of refining the previous proposals and drawing up an acceptable constitution. This council consisted of sixty nominated members which included "recognised" leaders of the coloured, Indian and Chinese communities, with the majority being made up of white members. Initially, fourteen coloured and Asian members were appointed.[11]

The PC tabled its first report in May 1982, proposing a system of "consociational democracy" for whites, coloureds and Indians but recommended the perpetuation of existing structures for Africans.[12] The second and final report in November 1982 spelt out the tricameral structures and how the whole system would work.[13] A bill containing the final constitutional proposals was presented to parliament in May 1983 and the proposals put to the white electorate in a referendum in November of that year.[14] The new constitution provided for a three-chamber system which envisaged the establishment of three parliaments for each of the white, coloured and Indian population groups. Each parliament would consist of elected members from that particular race group, and would also have its own cabinet (ministers' council) with its own "prime minister" as chairman.[15] Although the government proudly proclaimed that this system afforded other race groups a say in the political affairs of the country, the system had been carefully constructed to ensure that no power was "shared". Each parliament would only deal with affairs concerning its own race group (the "Own Affairs" concept). Matters that affected all race groups in general were debated separately and then consensus would be attempted on the matter (the "General Affairs" concept). If this could not be achieved, the matter would be referred to the President's Council and its ruling would be final. The matter would then become law.[16]

3. Reaction to the constitutional proposals: The public face of the Labour Party

The subject of participation in a new constitutional dispensation became the central feature of Labour Party debate after a new constitutional dispensation was first proposed by the Botha Committee in 1977. The public response of the Labour Party to proposals presented between 1977 and 1983 was consistently critical and one of unanimous rejection.

When the first proposals were presented in 1977, the initial reaction by Labour Party leaders was enthusiastic. Party leader, Sonny Leon, felt that the proposals contained "encouraging flexibility" and Norman Middleton, deputy-chairman, agreed that the proposals

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10. F. van Zyl Slabbert and D. Welsh, *South Africa's options: strategies for sharing power* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1979), p. 105.
11. *Survey of Race Relations* (Braamfontein, SAIRR, 1980), pp. 4-7. The coloured and Indian members were recognised as leaders by the government and not necessarily by the community concerned.
12. G. Behrens, "The other two Houses", (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1989), p. 74.
13. *Report of the Van der Merwe Committee* (November 1982).
14. F. van Zyl Slabbert, *The system and the struggle: reform, revolt and reaction in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1986), p. 61.
15. Republic of South Africa Act (No. 110 of 1983).
16. R.E. van der Ross, *The rise and decline of apartheid: a study of political movements among the coloured people of South Africa 1880-1985* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1986), p. 350.

offered more than the party and coloured people had expected.[17] However, the favourable reaction soon turned to criticism. At a specially called meeting of the party's National Executive Committee (NEC) on 10 September 1977, the proposals were discussed in detail. The NEC saw the formal ethnic divisions in the proposals as entrenching racism in the constitution. A resolution was thereupon adopted to the effect that an alliance of whites, coloureds and Indians "is totally unacceptable to the Labour Party because it will completely alienate the overwhelming majority of South Africans." The resolution pointed out that the exclusion of Africans would intensify, and not eliminate, racial conflict.[18] Party chairman, Allan Hendrickse, was especially scathing in his criticism and described the proposals as indicative of "decadence, immorality and a sick society and an attempt to entrench racism in the constitution".[19] The party then rejected the constitutional proposals and refused to entertain any further discussion on the subject.[20]

The Labour Party's rejection of the proposals was to be expected because it had always opposed institutions of separate representation, even while it was serving in the CRC.[21] The party had never accepted the CRC as meeting its demands for full and equal political rights and it was therefore not going to accept any other body which continued to perpetuate political separation. Thus, it was not surprising that when tentative plans and the possibility of a new constitution emerged from the Botha and Schlebusch commissions, the Labour Party not only summarily rejected the proposals but formed its own commission, headed by CRC chairman, Les du Preez, to draw up its own constitutional proposals.[22] The party also refused to give evidence before the Schlebusch Commission on the grounds that to do so was to give the government an opportunity to claim legitimacy for its plans.[23] Soon after, the party accepted the report of the Du Preez Commission which was scathing in its rejection of the constitutional proposals. The report rejected the 1977 proposals on the grounds that these would entrench inequality; rejected the idea of three separate parliaments; and rejected any moves to create a president's council.[24]

When the idea of a president's council was first suggested by the Schlebusch Commission in 1979, the Labour Party rejected it out of hand, refused to cooperate, and threatened its members with expulsion if they accepted invitations to serve therein.[25] The party pointed out that such a body would not enhance the role of coloureds in the political sphere because of the preponderance of whites on the council, and that the council was just an attempt to sidestep non-white demands for full political rights. Furthermore, the proposed constitutional dispensation was not power-sharing because each chamber only had jurisdiction over its own affairs with general affairs being subject to the final approval of the president's council which was controlled by whites. The state president, who, according to the new proposals would be an executive president in the place of the present prime minister, was to be elected by an electoral

17. Hugo, *Quislings or realists,* pp. 739-740.
18. Minutes of special Labour Party NEC meeting, Stellenbosch, 10 September 1977.
19. T. Abrahams, "'Coloured politics' in South Africa: the Quislings' trek into the abyss." *Ufahamu, Journal of the African Activist Association* (Los Angeles, University of California, 1983), p. 255.
20. Minutes of special Labour Party NEC meeting, Stellenbosch, 10 September 1977; *Survey of Race Relations* (1977), p. 9.
21. See for instance, Minutes of Labour Party National Conference, East London, 6-8 April 1972; *Diamond Fields Advertiser,* 14 March 1972; *Sunday Tribune,* 9 April 1972; Hugo, *Quislings or realists,* p. 120.
22. *Survey of Race Relations* (1979), p. 22.
23. Minutes of Labour Party NEC meeting, 8-9 September 1979.
24. *Report of the Committee on Alternative Constitutional Proposals,* p. 1. The report was tabled in April 1979.
25. I. Goldin, "The Coloured labour preference policy", in *The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries,* vol. 13, collected Seminar Papers, No. 33 (University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1984), p. 116.

college consisting of fifty whites, 25 coloureds and thirteen Indians. Thus the state president would always be the nominee of the white majority party. No matter which way they looked at the president's council and the new constitutional proposals, it still spelt "white domination."[26] Allan Handrickse later outlined the basis of the Labour Party's rejection of the PC and its initial proposals: "We would certainly reject such an arrangement. We would not accept any parliamentary system which excludes blacks. We want full and equal citizenship and nothing less will satisfy us."[27]

While continuing to publicly air hostility to the President's Council and rejection of a three-chamber parliament, the party leadership held a meeting with government ministers in June 1981 to discuss constitutional issues.[28] Immediately thereafter, David Curry, who had been elected party chairman in 1978, repeated the party's hardline position, stating that the party would only support a new constitution if it provided for universal franchise within a single political system, and if Africans were allowed to participate at all levels. The party rejected the President's Council and the three-chamber parliament because they were simply an "extension of the policies of apartheid", and because separate parliaments for Indians and coloureds, and the exclusion of Africans, would increase polarisation. Furthermore, three parliaments could not function effectively because the white parliament would continue to have a political monopoly.[29]

Despite indications that the party was beginning to show signs of dormancy and disintegration following the dissolution of the CRC in 1980, the party leaders continued to publicly voice rejection of the constitutional proposals. At the Labour Party's national conference in December 1981, Allan Hendrickse, who had replaced Sonny Leon as leader in 1978, spelt out the party's position on participation: "Nothing but direct representation in parliament for all South Africans is going to satisfy the majority of South Africans and particularly the Labour Party".[30] And at a meeting in April 1982, the party's NEC reiterated its support for the principle of a unitary state based on one-man-one-vote and confirmed that it would not accept a dispensation which did not include all South Africans.[31]

When the final report on the proposals were released in August 1982, Norman Middleton, who had been elected deputy-leader in 1978, condemned the exclusion of Africans and confirmed the party's rejection because of that. Middleton stated that the plan was not an advance on the 1977 proposals and that it could not succeed without the inclusion of the majority of the people of South Africa. Allan Hendrickse agreed that there was no possibility that the Labour Party would examine it to see how it could provide a basis for the attainment of the Labour Party's ideals.[32]

Before the final draft of the constitutional proposals was presented to the government in December 1982, a meeting of the South African Black Alliance (SABA) was held to establish the position of the members of the alliance.[33] The Labour Party was at pains to assure its alliance partners that it would hold to its position and would not participate in the proposed tri-

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26. K.A. Moodley, "Structural inequality and minority anxiety: responses of middle groups in South Africa", in R.M. Price and C.G. Rosberg (eds.) *The apartheid regime: political power and racial domination,* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1980), p. 218; F. van Zyl Slabbert, *The system and the struggle,* p. 63.
27. *Argus,* 22 September 1980.
28. *Ibid.,* 12 June 1981.
29. *Survey of Race Relations,* (1981), p. 13.
30. Allan Hendrickse, Address to Labour Party National Conference, Cape Town, December 1981.
31. *Cape Times,* 31 April 1982.
32. *Natal Witness,* 4 August 1982.
33. Van der Ross, *Rise and decline,* p. 353. SABA was formed in 1978 by the Labour Party, Indian Reform Party, Inkatha Yakazulu; homeland leaders from Gazankulu, Basotho Qwa and KaNgwane; and white liberal groups as an attempt to present a united "non-white" front to the government.

cameral system. David Curry convinced alliance members of the strength of the Labour Party's stand by slating the proposals as "a clever and sophisticated scheme for entrenching white baasskap ... (which would not be acceptable to the coloured community ... and which) seemed to be a new version of the old recipe for conflict that we had in the old Coloured Representative Council."[34] Immediately thereafter, the party's NEC met to discuss matters pertaining to the forthcoming Labour Party conference. The NEC again confirmed that the party would not participate.[35] Thus, by the time the Labour Party prepared for its national conference in Eshowe on 3 January 1983, it had privately and publicly assured its members, its alliance partners, the government and the South African public that it would not participate in the tricameral system. It had also convinced the majority of coloured people that the Labour Party would reject participation.[36]

4. Reaction to the proposals: behind the public facade

While it presented a public face of unanimity in its opposition to the constitutional proposals, all was not well in the Labour Party. Although the public image of the party between 1977 and 1982 was one of implacable and resolute opposition to the proposals, in private the question of participation threatened to tear the Labour Party apart. For many years already, the party had been split into two camps;[37] those who advocated "confrontation through dialogue",[38] and those who adopted a hardline "confrontationist" stance. The former group, dubbed the "moderates", were bolstered in increasing numbers by regular defections from the Federal Party. These felt that the party should negotiate with the government and participate in all councils which could benefit coloured people. The second group, dubbed the "militants", consisted of the bulk of the founder-members and early supporters of the party, and increasing numbers of supporters of the banned African liberation organisations. These eschewed dialogue and negotiation and advocated a policy of non-cooperation with the government.[39] Members of this group insisted on political equality for all South Africans, not just coloureds.

The struggle between the "moderates" and the "militants" came to a head when the Botha proposals were first raised at a party meeting in 1977. Although the Labour Party voted to reject the proposals, the decision was only carried by the casting vote of the chairman.[40] The Labour Party defiantly formed its own commission to draw up its own constitutional proposals,[41] but appeared to soften its hardline attitude when, in August 1978, Leon hinted that the party might consider participation. He cited Buthelezi's use of the homeland system as a means of fighting apartheid and felt that the Labour Party could do the same with the tricameral system.[42] The indications were that the "moderates" were exerting pressure on the party to reconsider its position on participation.

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34. "Labour Party - a constitutional decision?" in *Work in Progress* No. 25 (1983), p. 9.
35. Miley Richards,interviewed by author, Johannesburg, 29 June 1992.
36. Van der Ross, *Rise and decline*, p. 353; *Survey of Race Relations* (1977), p. 9.
37. See for instance, Minutes of Labour Party National Conference, East London, 6-8 April 1972.
38. *Sunday Times*, 16 May 1976.
39. Mohammed Dangor, interview with author, 6 December 1993.
40. *Survey of Race Relations* (1977), p. 9.
41. *Survey of Race Relations* (1979), p. 22.
42. D.Y. Saks, "The failure of the Coloured Persons' Representative Council and its constitutional repercussions, 1956-1985" (M.A. dissertation, Rhodes University, 1991), p. 204.

In 1979, cracks began to appear in the seemingly implacable facade of the Labour Party when Les du Preez resigned in protest against the party's refusal to give evidence before the Schlebusch Commission, and its refusal to submit the findings of its constitutional committee to the commission. Du Preez thereupon submitted his committee's report to Schlebusch in his personal capacity. The party leadership responded by threatening legal proceedings against Du Preez.[43] Du Preez's resignation was followed by that of the party's former leader, Sonny Leon, who cited the party's refusal to cooperate with the Schlebusch Commission, as one of his reasons.[44] These resignations gave evidence of the turmoil within the Labour Party on the issue of participation, even though the party publicly continued to condemn the proposals.

In 1979, the Labour Party found itself at the crossroads regarding its future. The massive drop in voter numbers between 1969 and 1975 did nog augur well for the 1980 CRC election. The rising tide of discontent and criticism from all quarters in the coloured community led the Labour Party to believe that it would not survive this election.[45] It therefore agreed that the government not proceed with the election and that it dissolve the CRC.[46] However, the demise of the CRC soon presented a crisis for the Labour Party. The party owed its existence to the CRC. It had specifically been formed to contest elections for that body and to work within the "system". Deprived of a political environment, the Labour Party began to show signs of disintegration. Thus, thoughts increasingly turned to the question of participation in the constitutional system with which the government, in the meantime, had been doggedly forging ahead.

While the Labour Party continued to vilify the President's Council and its proposal of a three-chamber parliament, the party leaders, most of whom were in the "militant" camp, sensed that a spirit of revolt was brewing in the party. They therefore agreed to discussions with government ministers in June 1981 on constitutional issues, although the meeting was ostensibly held to discuss the unrest in coloured schools. After the meeting, both parties decided to hold further talks.[47] This meeting presented a significant victory for party moderates. However, it appears that these proposed talks did not take place because, at the Labour Party's national conference in December, "moderates" expressed alarm that only the government appeared to be involved in the formulation of the new constitution. Fearing that the interests of coloured people were not being represented, a resolution was passed that the party leaders "initiate a process of negotiation with the government of the day in order to achieve our political goals and to end the existing stalemate with regard to a new acceptable constitution for South Africa."[48] Hendrickse tried to quell the mounting disaffection by stating that the party would only be satisfied with direct representation in parliament for all South Africans.[49] Although he railed against the new proposals, many in the party were not all that certain that non-participation was a good idea.[50]

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43. *Sunday Times*, 30 December 1979.
44. Sonny Leon Papers, Letter to F.E. Peters, 19 January 1980.
45. D.F. Molteno, "The schooling of black South Africans and the 1980 Cape Town student's boycott: a sociological interpretation." (M.Soc.Sc dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1983), pp. 357-358.
46. Coetzer, *Awaiting trial, Allan Hendrickse* (Alberton, Librarius, 1984), p. 127; *Debates of the House of Assembly*, (3 March 1980), col. 1877.
47. *Argus*, 12 June 1981.
48. Minutes of Labour Party National Conference, Cape Town, December 1981; *Cape Times*, 6 February 1982.
49. Allan Hendrickse, Address to Labour Party National Conference, Cape Town, December 1981.
50. The ambivalence in the Labour Party was a reflection of the ambivalence in the coloured community itself. Roothman and Schutte's investigation into coloured attitudes towards the President's Council found that 37,9% felt that the introduction of the Council was a good thing, 15,5% were opposed to it, 39,7% were uncertain and 6,9% did not respond. See S. Roothman and D.W. Schutte, *Ondersoek na die aanvaarbaarheid van die Presidentsraad onder 'n groep Kleurlinge in die RSA* (Pretoria, HSRC, 1983), p. 15.

Acting on the "negotiation" resolution, several leading members of the Labour Party requested a meeting with the Prime Minister in February 1982. David Curry indicated that the Labour Party was tired of being merely a "post office" for government decisions and that it wanted to start serious negotiations.[51] In July 1982, after the interim report on the constitutional proposals had been presented, the NEC invited Chris Heunis, the Minister of Constitutional Affairs, to a meeting in order to gain clarification on the constitutional guidelines. The guidelines were then sent to branches throughout the country for study and comment. Branches were instructed to "examine them for any aspects which could be used to achieve the Party's objectives."[52]

Despite mounting pressure within the party to negotiate with the government, the party leadership continued to present a defiant public face, but it was becoming apparent that they were out of step with the direction which the rank-and-file wanted the party to take. However, the "moderates" did not appear to be strong enough, numerically or influentially, to force a change in the party's position.

5. The Eshowe conference and the amazing *volte face*

As the participation of Indians and coloureds was needed for the successful implementation of the new dispensation, it was essential to win the support of those parties or groupings which appeared to exert the greatest influence in, or represent the gratest number of people from their respective communities. As the Labour Party had overshadowed all other parties in the CRC, that party became the target for the government's agents. To Chris Heunis was entrusted the task of selling the new constitutional dispensation to the Indian and coloured parties, and it was therefore his job to woo the Labour Party.[53] Heunis recruited the "Young Turks" in the National Party, a younger and more liberal breed of National Party MP's who had entered parliament after the 1977 and 1981 elections, to assist in this task.[54] Use was also made of a public relations firm, Communitel, to promote the new constitution.[55] Communitel was especially productive and with a seemingly unlimited budget, conducted seminars, held parties, and "wined and dined" members of the Labour Party.[56]

Private meetings between the "Young Turks" and members of the Labour Party took place already in 1981, but Heunis's first official contact with the Labour Party came in July 1982, after the interim report on the constitutional proposals had been presented to the government. The NEC invited Heunis to a meeting in Lansdowne, Cape, in order to gain clarification on the constitutional guidelines.[57] The efforts of Heunis and his agents caused disquiet in the ranks of the Labour Party's allies. Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the president of SABA, was particularly concerned that the Labour Party might be wavering, and convened a meeting in November 1982 to establish the position of the members of the alliance.[58] The Labour Party allayed their fears and assured alliance members that it had not changed its position on the proposed tricameral system. The assurances appeared to ease their fears. Immediately after the SABA meeting, the

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51. *Cape Times*, 6 February 1982.
52. P. Coetzer, *Awaiting trial*, pp. 158-159; John Nash, interviewed by author, East London, 30 August 1992.
53. Saks, "The failure of the CRC", p. 230.
54. Miley Richards, interviewed by author, 29 June 1992.
55. Willie Meyer, interviewed by author, Stellenbosch, 21 January 1994.
56. John Nash, interviewed by author, 30 August 1993; Willie Meyer, interviewed by author, Stellenbosch, 21 January 1994.
57. John Nash, interviewed by author, 30 August 1993.
58. Van der Ross, *Rise and decline*, p. 353.

party's NEC met to discuss matters pertaining to the Labour Party national conference due to be held in January 1983. At this meeting, held on 9 and 10 December, the NEC closed ranks and confirmed, without dissent, that the party was not considering participation in the tricameral system.[59]

The NEC's decision disturbed Heunis whose behind-the-scenes work to sway the Labour Party was in a delicate balance. He immediately arranged for an urgent meeting with some of the NEC members, among them, Allan Hendrickse, David Curry and Jac Rabie. Norman Middleton, the party's deputy-leader, was not informed of the meeting. Buthelezi had for a long time been concerned that the Labour Party might waver and eventually throw in its lot with Botha and the new dispensation. Middleton, a consistent opponent of the tricameral proposals and an ardent admirer and staunch supporter of Buthelezi, had kept the latter appraised of Labour Party decisions regarding this matter. Afther the NEC meeting, he had assured Buthelezi that the Labour Party would publicly declare at the Eshowe conference its irrevocable refusal to participate. Heunis was wary of Middleton, not only because of the latter's vehement opposition to the participation, but because he feared Middleton would tell Buthelezi, who would promptly try to undermine Heunis's influence. Heunis wanted the discussions, and whatever decision came out of it, to remain secret. Middleton was therefore deliberately left out of the discussions.[60]

John Nash, Labour Party member up to 1983, describes Heunis as "a real diplomat, very smooth, and very persuasive",[61] and Saks speaks of Heunis as possessing "persuasive powers".[62] Heunis drew on all his skills and used the meeting to "plead, beg and cajole". He "hinted, suggested and implied, but not once was a definite public promise extracted or a definite shift in Nationalist policy offered."[63] By the time the meeting was over, the Labour Party leaders had resolved upon an amazing somersault and decided to change their position. Unfortunately, minutes were not kept of this secret meeting and none of the members present ever gave an indication of what was discussed,[64] but after the party leaders had decided to change their position, they went to extraordinary lengths to ensure that the conference would support their amazing about-face. They refused to tell Norman Middleton, that they had met with Heunis. As deputy-leader and NEC member, he was entitled to know. This was done to keep the decision secret until it was discussed at the conference, and so forestall the mobilisation of opposition to the move. They also did not want Buthelezi to hear about it because he would have released the news to the media. An angry Buthelezi was more than they could handle at the time.[65] However, shortly before the conference, Middleton realised that something was amiss and immediately contacted Hendrickse about rumours of a switch in policy. Hendrickse was evasive and advised him not to listen to idle talk.[66]

As the Eshowe conference was to be held in Natal, the Labour Party paid Buthelezi the courtesy of inviting him to address its conference as the key-note speaker. Armed with Middleton's assurance that the Labour Party had decided against participation, Buthelezi addressed the delegates with confidence, lauded the party for its wise decision, and lambasted the government and the new constitutional proposals.[67] It therefore came as a shock to him when,

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59. Miley Richards, interviewed by author, 29 June 1992.
60. *Ibid.*
61. John Nash, interviewed by author, 31 August 1993.
62. Saks, "The failure of the CRC", p. 230.
63. F. van Zyl Slabbert, *The last white parliament* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1986), pp. 109-110.
64. Miley Richards, interviewed by author, 29 June 1993, and Allan Hendrickse, interviewed by author, 23 May 1989, were both present at the meeting but neither gave an indication of what was discussed.
65. Miley Richards, interviewed by author, 29 June 1992.
66. N.S. Middleton, interviewed by D.Y. Saks, 18 December 1989 in "The failure of the CRC", p. 230.
67. Coetzer, *Awaiting trial,* p. 159.

soon after his address, Labour Party leaders entertained discussion on the new dispensation and urged the delegates to accept Heunis's invitation to participate. The conference thereupon voted to participate in the tricameral system.[68] Buthelezi's reaction was immediate and explosive. He felt that he had been insulted. Being of royal blood, Buthelezi had the kind of personality which did not accept insults, rebuffs and refusals.[69] He angrily rounded on the Labour Party for making a fool of him, and there and then expelled the party from SABA. Middleton too was furious that he had been betrayed, and summarily resigned from the Labour Party, taking with him all the members of the Natal Branch.[70] Thus, even before parliament voted to accept the tricameral system, and even before the white electorate had accepted it in a referendum, the Labour Party declared its acceptance of the new dispensation and indicated its decision to participate.

6. Allan Hendrickse's role in the Eshowe *volte face*

The question which immediately came to the fore after this amazing about-face was why the Labour Party, which had always been vehemently anti-apartheid, which had always vociferously opposed institutions of separate representation, and which had consistently and publicly disavowed the new dispensation, did such an abrupt about-turn and become partners of the very government which it had opposed for almost twenty years. Nothing in the Labour Party's official attitude and public utterings had ever given an inkling that they would want to participate in what Justice Minister Jimmy Kruger had long before admitted, were only going to be "talking shops".[71] Although the Labour Party had become increasingly vulnerable in the years following the dissolution of the CRC, and the promises held out by participation became increasingly tempting to those who considered the Labour Party to be on the brink of disintegration, it still came as a shock to many when the party suddenly, and without apparent warning, accepted the constitutional proposals and decided to participate in the proposed tricameral system.

As the party's somersault began to come under scrutiny, the role of certain leaders, especially that of Allan Hendrickse, began to loom large, and it appeared that many of the leaders who had been at the forefront of opposition to the constitutional proposals, were, in fact, the driving force behind the party's decision to change its position.[72] This suggested three possibilities: Either, the leaders had undergone a dramatic change of heart; or, they had not been projecting an honest image in the years of opposition to the proposals; or, Heunis possessed extraordinary powers of persuasion.[73]

Hendrickse's somersault was the most astounding of all. He had been the most vociferous and consistent opponent of apartheid, political separation and separate institutions of representa-

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68. Miley Richards, interviewed by author, 29 June 1992; Arthur Stanley, interviewed by author, Cape Town, 10 September 1992.
69. Coetzer, *Awaiting Trial*, p. 159; Miley Richards, interviewed by author, 29 June 1992.
70. Miley Richards, interviewed by author, 29 June 1992.
71. Minutes of Labour Party National Conference, Oudtshoorn, 27-28 December 1977.
72. Miley Richards, interviewed by author, 29 June 1992; John Nash, interviewed by author, 30 August 1993; Mohammed Dangor, interviewed by author, 6 December 1993; Willie Meyer, interviewed by author, 21 January 1994.
73. It has been a matter of discussion and conjecture for some time in coloured political circles that Heunis, on behalf of the National Party, made the Labour Party leaders "an offer which they could not refuse". Whether this was in the form of "perks" which were too good to turn down, or blackmail and some threats, or perhaps a combination of all three, we will never know.

tion, since he entered the CRC in 1969.[74] Prior to, and for years after, his election to the party leadership in 1978, Hendrickse was at the forefront of opposition to the constitutional proposals.[75] Moreover, he had long been regarded as the leader of the "militants" in the Labour Party and had forged close links with the ANC, even publicly declaring his support for that organisation in 1978.[76] Hendrickse had also been a founder-supporter of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), and this factor, together with his anti-government stance in the CRC, led to his arrest and detention in August 1976.[77] Furthermore, he had had a hand in the dismissal of two former Labour Party leaders because they had talked with the government, and he was also credited with the scrapping of the CRC in 1980.[78] In 1980, Hendrickse had been offered a lucrative appointment to the President's Council but he turned it down because he was "not prepared to sell out his people."[79]

As late as August 1982, five months before the Eshowe *volte face,* Hendrickse had still assured the public that he was not in favour of accepting the proposals,[80] and in November that year, he was party to an assurance given to SABA that the party would not participate. Three weeks before the Eshowe conference, he attended the NEC meeting which confirmed the party's rejection of the proposals and its refusal to participate. However, it appears that while Hendrickse was presenting a public face which advocated rejection, in private, he was reconsidering his position.[81] This view was given some credence by the involvement of his son Peter Hendrickse and prospective son-in-law, Desmond Lockey in the activities of Communitel. They arranged introductions with members of the Labour Party on behalf of Communitel and were instrumental in party members attending seminars and parties arranged by Communitel which were used to influence members to consider participation.[82]

However, nowhere was the hand of Hendrickse and his coterie more evident than at the decisive conference where the decision to participate was taken. Firstly, the congress was "loaded" with delegates from rural branches which, in former years had been unable to afford

74. Evidence of Hendrickse's stance in the ten years of the existence of the CRC can be studied in greater detail in, Saks, "The failure of the CRC"; R.H. du Preez, "The role and policies of the Labour Party of South Africa, 1975-1978" (M.A. dissertation, University of South Africa, 1987); B. Mina, "The CRC - ten years hard labour" (B.Soc.Sc. dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1978).
75. See above.
76. Mohammed Dangor, interviewed by the author, 6 December 1993. In 1977, Hendrickse received a letter from Nelson Mandela in which he asked Hendrickse to call on colourds and Indians to reject the Botha constitutional proposals. Fear of Security Police interference led Hendrickse to read the letter from the safety of his pulpit during a church service. Immediately after, the letter was destroyed.
77. Coetzer, *Awaiting trial,* pp. 93-95; S. Gastrow, *Who's how in SA politics,* No. 3 (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1990), p. 105. The Labour Party leadership have always tried to claim affinity with the liberation movement because their leader had also been a detainee. However, questions have been raised over Hendrickse's detention and subsequent release. He was apparently released before the majority of other detainees, after he had given a written undertaking to disassociate himself from extra-constitutional agitation, and denounce the "violence" unleashed during the Soweto riots. It has even been suggested that the seeds of participation were planted when Hendrickse was in detention. See *SASPU National* (March, 1983).
78. Coetzer, *Awaiting trial,* pp. 11, 13.
79. *Ibid,* p. 146.
80. *Natal Witness,* 4 August 1982.
81. Coetzer, *Awaiting trial,* pp. 140, 151.
82. Willie Meyer, interviewed by the author, 21 January 1994. Meyer was one of the Labour Party members who were the objects of Communitel's attentions.

the costs of sending delegates to the annual conferences.[83] Now, suddenly, the Labour Party found the money to bus in delegates from remote rural areas. Where did the money miraculously come from? Secondly, the voting procedure was altered for the meeting. Hendrickse first presented an ambiguous resolution which appeared to reject the proposals but which also called for a decision in favour of participation.[84] He then called for a show of hands without calling for amendments or objections.[85] Freedberg maintains that the resolution was pushed through the conference by a "power clique" consisting of Allan Hendrickse, David Curry, Jac Rabie and Carter Ebrahim.[86] Thus, if one bears in mind the clandestine nature of the Heunis meeting three weeks earlier; the exclusion of Middleton from that meeting; the secrecy surrounding the discussions and decisions taken; and the stratagems employed at the conference to ensure a positive decision, it becomes apparent that the party leadership were particularly keen to deliver their constituents into the hands of Heunis and the National Party.[87]

After the decision to participate had been taken, Hendrickse became the party's chief apologist, with much of the justification contained in his biography published the year after the Eshowe decision. What is significant is that the book, *Awaiting trial: Allan Hendrickse,* was written by Piet Coetzer, head of the public relations firm, Communitel, which had assisted Heunis and the National Party in turning the Labour Party around to the idea of participation. In the light of Hendrickse's role in the Eshowe *volte face,* the significance of Coetzer's new role in "selling" Allan Hendrickse and the Labour Party's decision to the South African public and the coloured people, did not escape many critics.[88]

Soon after 1983, Hendrickse tried to clarify his position, and the Labour Party's decision to participate: "The decision taken by the Labour Party at its National Conference in January 1983 was an act of faith. I don't care who says what, but in the six months prior to taking that decision I was on my knees every night praying for guidance."[89] Even though the decision led to the resignation of a number of Labour Party stalwarts, Norman Middleton, deputy-leader of the Labour Party and leader of the party in Natal; Sam Solomon, former Transvaal leader; and Mohammed Dangor, its vice-chairman; and precipitated a split with Buthelezi and SABA,[90] Hendrickse persisted that the decision to participate was the correct one:

> I have no doubt about the rightness of the decision we took at Eshowe ... We seriously want the new dispensation to succeed, we will do our best to ensure that it does. But whether the government like it or not, I say in all seriousness that I'll give the new dispensation five years to see

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83. Only sixty of the 350 delegates were from the Cape which contained 65-70% of the total coloured population. Statistics of the CRC elections of 1969 and 1975 showed that rural coloureds were more in favour of parties which advocated collaboration, than their urban counterparts. See, J. Freedberg, "Changing political identity of the 'coloured' people of South Africa: a political history, 1652-1982" (Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1987), p. 236.
84. Freedberg, "Changing political identity", p. 235.
85. Abrahams, "'Coloured' politics in South Africa", p. 255.
86. Freedberg, "Changing political identity", p. 235, quoting an anonymous commentator in *Work in Progress,* No. 25 (1983), p. 8. Rabie and Ebrahim were known "moderates"; Rabie having been a prominent leader in the pro-apartheid Federal Party during the days of the CRC.
87. John Nash, Mohammed Dangor and Willie Meyer are unequivocal in their view that Hendrickse was the driving force behind the conference's decision to participate and that he relentlessly set out to ensure that such a decision would be favourable.
88. Willie Meyer, interviewed by the author, 21 January 1994.
89. Coetzer, *Awaiting trial,* p. 156.
90. Miley Richards, interviewed by the author, 29 June 1992; Coetzer, *Awaiting trial,* p. 159.

> if it delivers the goods ... If there are no positive results, the government can forget about further Labour Party co-operation.[91]

In a further address to the party conference in 1984, Hendrickse again defended his and the party's decision to participate:

> The new constitution did not meet the demands of the party and of our time because of the exclusion of the largest section of the South African community. The party also declared its belief in the effective participation of all South Africans in all processes of lawmaking but decided to participate in the new system not as an end in itself but as a means towards an end. We have clearly stated that the new constitution had to be seen as a point of departure and not as a place of arrival.[92]

In trying to explain what he meant by "the means to an end" and "point of departure" Hendrickse quoted William Cobbett: "Tactically speaking, some reform is better than no reform." He then explained the Labour Party's stance based on Cobbett:

> ...dat 'n gematigde mate van hervorming aanvaar moes word, want dit sou dan makliker wees om verder treë op die pad van hervorming te neem. Cobbett's approach was historically correct for later governments were to amend the constitution until they have in Britain today a real representative government. So, I believe history will prove our decision a correct one.[93]

However the Labour Party had other motives for participating and the philosophical arguments were developed later and tailored to suit their decision. The Labour Party had no historical basis for trusting the National Party and believing that the government was truly committed to reform and democracy. The experience of coloured people with the CAC in 1943, the UCCA in 1959 and tie CRC in 1969 did not provide any basis for believing that the government could be sincere when it spoke of reform. The National Party had also dealt horrendously and treacherously with the coloured people since 1948 and had immorally removed them from the voters' roll in 1956. And while the National Party was declaring that the CRC was the solution to coloured political aspirations, more petty apartheid laws affecting coloured people were passed between 1969 and 1975 than at any other time.[94] Yet the Labour Party still decided to trust the National Party and accept its bona fides.

7. The spirit of collaboration in the Labour Party

Despite the philosophical reasons for participation, it was always on the cards that the Labour Party would go along with the tricameral system. Its involvement in the CRC between 1969 and 1979 had shown a marked shift from its earlier policy of confrontation. Although it was openly confrontational after its formation in 1966 and during the first few years in the CRC, the Labour Party had gradually allowed itself to be coopted. Its election victory in 1975 and the de-

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91. Coetzer, *Awaiting trial*, p. 162.
92. Allan Hendrickse, Address to Labour Party National Conference, Kimberley, December 1984.
93. *Ibid.*
94. See P. Joyce, *The rise and fall of apartheid: the chronicle of a divided society as told through South Africa's newspapers* (Cape Town, Struik, 1990), pp. 69-84.

cision to accept the chairmanship, seats on the executive and nominated seats in the council, was a decisive shift from opposition to cooperation with the concept of separate representation.

Although it kept up a facade of confrontation by indulging in anti-government and anti-CRC rhetoric, the Labour Party's continued support of a discredited and ineffectual institution, despite threats since 1969 to walk out and cripple the CRC, had laid it open to the charge of collaboration.[95] Even its request to the government in 1979 to scrap the CRC was not above suspicion. The Labour Party realised that the electorate was disenchanted with its presence in the CRC, the deviation from its principles and the ineffectiveness of that body. Thus, an election in 1980 would have proved highly embarrassing for the Labour Party.[96]

Furthermore, it had become evident that the attractive salaries, lavish perks and accompanying prestige and status, had ensnared CRC members and caused them to waver in their opposition to that body.[97] Many had given up their jobs to stand as coucillors. A number were close to receiving full government pensions for life. The closure of the CRC meant that members had to forfeit their annual incomes of R15 000.[98] Longer-serving members were able to claim a government pension of half their annual salary.[99] Members were also deprived of the prestige, status and power to give patronage which membership of the CRC had afforded. Others found themselves unemployed after the closure of the CRC while some were even unemployable.[100] Thus, the scrapping of the CRC in 1980 caused a devastating imbalance in their lives. However, membership of the new institution, the House of Representatives, would restore them to their former positions, with even greater advantages. The ordinary member of parliament would receive R43 000 per annum, a generous housing and car allowance, 36 free air tickets per annum, pension and "golden handshake" after 7½ years or two parliaments, and numerous other perks.[101] For those who had remained in the CRC because of prestige, status and financial self-interest, it was not very difficult to make a "principled" decision in 1983 to participate in the tricameral system.[102]

It is also strange that, after years of rejecting the tricameral proposals, the Labour Party suddenly found the 1982 proposals acceptable. When the 1977 constitutional proposals were first presented, the Labour Party had rejected them out of hand,[103] and when the 1982 proposals were released, David Curry described them as a "clever and sophisticated scheme for entrenching baasskap."[104] Yet, six weeks later, this same Curry rose at Eshowe and urged delegates to accept these proposals, which were essentially the same as those of 1977. Although there were some minor differences, these were not significant enough to warrant such an about-face.[105] Thus further reasons had to be sought for the participatory turn-around.

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95. *Sunday Times*, 16 November 1975; Saks, "The failure of the CRC", p. 56.
96. Behrens, "The other two houses", p. 27.
97. Sonny Leon, Address to Labour Party National Conference, Umtata, 1-3 January 1975; Hugo, *Quislings or realists*, p. 479.
98. A considerable sum then, when one considers that the starting salary of a teacher was half that.
99. Behrens, "The other two houses", p. 27.
100. *Ibid*, pp. 136-137.
101. Labour Party Collection, Circular from W.F. Rossouw to members of the House of Representatives, (n.d.); Behrens, "The other two houses", p. 137; *Die Nasionalis*, March 1986.
102. B. Pottinger, *The imperial presidency: P.W. Botha, the first ten years* (Johannesburg, Southern Book Publishers, 1988), p. 158.
103. Minutes of Labour Party NEC meeting, 10 September 1977.
104. Abrahams, "Coloured politics", p. 255.
105. Saks, "The failure of the CRC", p. 229.

It was not the changes in the 1982 proposals which caused the Labour Party to reconsider its stance but the altered political climate and the Labour Party's position after the demise of the CRC. Firstly, the Labour Party had begun to show signs of disintegration and dormancy after the closure of the CRC in 1980. Apart from financial considerations, the Labour Party, as a political party, began to realise that the lack of an institutional platform would lead to its demise. The party had been formed to operate within the "system". That was the reason for its existence. Like a fish out of water, the Labour Party could not function or survive outside of the "system". Deprived of its platform, the Labour Party stagnated and showed signs of disintegrating. Participation was therefore essential for its continued survival. In fact, participation in institutions for political representation was its only reason for existence. Secondly, Prime Minister Botha's decision to entertain the notion of the tricameral system had led to a breakaway by the National Party right wing and the formation of the Conservative Party. The Labour Party leadership perceived Botha's willingness to risk the breakaway as proof of his political sincerity and commitment to reform. Thus, the split in the National Party provided the Labour Party with one of its excuses for rejoining the "system".[106]

However, more importantly, the Labour Party's apparent about-face was merely a continuation of the tradition of collaboration which had come to characterise coloured politics since the beginning of this century.[107] In the 1920's, a number of coloureds had lent support to the segregationist National Party because of promises of a "New Deal".[108] In 1943, the coloured community were divided over the issue of acceptance of the CAC. In 1958, a large number of coloured people had voted on the separate voters' roll and the government was also able to find some willing to accept nomination to the UCCA. In 1969, five of the six parties contesting the CRC election supported the government's policy of separate development.[109] Even the anti-apartheid Labour Party had gradually allowed itself to be coopted and made the CRC work. All of the parties, individuals or organisations which participated in government structures over the years, advanced the same arguments which the Labour Party eventually used to justify its participation in 1983.[110] Thus, the strong trend towards collaboration in the coloured community eventually caught up with the Labour Party in 1983,[111] and it became clear that its *volte face* was not really so amazing after all.

The party's collaborationist tendencies came in for harsh criticism from a wide variety of individuals and community organisations.[112] Trevor Abrahams summed up the criticism thus:

> It should come as no surprise that at this very moment when confronted

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106. P. Coetzer, *Awaiting trial,* p. 157.
107. N. Alexander, "Non-collaboration in the Western Cape," in W.G. James and M. Simons (eds.), *The angry divide: social and economic history of the Western Cape,* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1989), pp. 181-182.
108. See H.J. Lubbe, "Vergeet die Arbeiders en wen die Kleurlinge: die 'swart gevaar' propaganda in Kaapland gedurende die parlementêre verkiesingstryd van 1928 tot 1929" *Kronos, Journal of Cape History* (October, 1991), pp. 15-28.
109. Hugo, *Quislings or realists,* contains a number of documents highlighting these issues.
110. These arguments are dealt with at length in an article by Rowan Elliot, "The politics of collaboration," *Bandwagon,* No. 5 (April, 1975), pp. 4-5.
111. The reasons for this phenomenon are too detailed to be dealt with here but are discussed in greater detail in a variety of books such as R.H. du Pre's *Separate but unequal: the "coloured" people of South Africa; a political history* (Johannesburg, Johathan Ball, 1994); R.E. van der Ross's *Myths and attitudes: an inside look at the coloured people* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1979); and H.F. Dicke-Clark's *The marginal situation: a sociological study of a coloured group* (London, Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1966).
112. See for instance, *Argus,* 25 February 1983; *Cape Herald,* 15 January 1983; *Cape Times,* 1 February 1983.

> with the demise of the terrain which in the past had constituted their stomping grounds, that the L.P. has now shed its radical veneer and exposed their anachronistic opportunism and racial political leanings. Personal ambition and opportunism have long been a part of the tradition of collaborationist politics and no doubt this stigma is as strong as ever in the L.P.'s decision.[113]

The Labour Party, undoubtedly, found itself in a dilemma in 1983. It wanted to give the appearance of oppostition, yet was drawn into a situation which it had no ideological basis for resisting. Dr. Mohamed, chairman of the Ad-Hoc Anti-P.C. Committee summed up the Labour Party's dilemma:

> I think that the Labour Party was faced with a problem at Eshowe. It was not sufficient just to reject the proposals. To gain credibility within the country it would have to throw in its lot with the whole democratic struggle. And I think it has not got the stomach for that difficult struggle ahead. The easiest way out was to go in, to delude people and to say we are going in, in an attempt to produce changes from within.[114]

8. Implications and consequences

After making its decision in January 1983, the Labour Party had to wait until August 1984 to contest the elections. This long delay enabled its opponents to rally the opposition. Thus, having obtained a commitment of support, the government threw the Labour Party "to the wolves".[115] Hendrickse expressed his bitterness at having to endure the escalating opposition and criticism which came his way during the long wait before the election.[116] This in itself should have been a warning to the Labour Party leaders that perhaps the government was not being honest with them and that it merely wanted their support to make the tricameral system work. This is not surprising when one considers that the National Party had a long history of using the coloured people for its own ends and then abandoning them when they had outlived their usefulness.[117]

A grave error was the acceptance of the government's offer of participation, without any pre-conditions whatsoever. The Labour Party had the upper hand in 1983. The National Party desperately wanted the tricameral system to work. Thus, it had to have the Labour Party's co-operation.[118] The importance of coloured support for the constitutional proposals had already been highlighted in 1978 when the *Transvaler* commented: "A wide measure of agreement among different peoples and groups will be necessary to introduce a new structure to make it endure".[119] Thus, the Labour Party already had prior knowledge of the importance of coloured support for the new dispensation, and that from an Afrikaner newspaper. Given that, if the Labour Party was hell-bent on participating, it could at least have exacted government agreement on a number of issues, e.g. the creation, or promise of, a "black" chamber; a timetable for the abolition of apartheid and introduction of universal suffrage; unbanning of the

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113. Abrahams, "Coloured politics", p. 251.
114. *Speak*, March 1983.
115. Arthur Stanley, interviewed by the author, 10 September 1992.
116. Coetzer, *Awaiting trial*, p. 162.
117. See, for example, R.H. du Pre, "Beware of the fox in the coloured chicken coop", *South*, 2 May 1992.
118. Freedberg, "Changing political identity", p. 225.
119. *Transvaler*, 18 February 1978 (translated).

liberation organisations, etc. as pre-conditions for participating in the tricameral parliament. Hendrickse had in fact stated in 1980 that the Labour Party would not participate "unless certain conditions are met. Among these were that blacks be included and that laws such as the Group Areas Act and Mixed Marriages Act be scrapped."[120] David Curry even added: "I have no hesitation in saying that we will keep our word on this."[121] Yet, the Labour Party did none of those things. It reneged on its promises and decided to participate, even though it knew that the new dispensation could not function without its support.[122]

A deeper investigation of the Labour Party's *volte face,* the quiet abandonment of its pre-conditions for participation, and its timid reaction to the long wait before the election, unearthed some disturbing facts. According to Van Zyl Slabbert, the Labour Party leadership were so eager to become a part of the government's "gravy-train" that they did not even know what the structures of the tricameral system were when they decided to participate.[123] Even more puzzling was the fact that they did not even wait for the results of the white referendum, nor, for that matter, parliament's acceptance of the tricameral bill, before indicating their willingness to participate; neither did the Labour Party protest the decision of the government not to hold a referendum for coloureds.[124] Allan Hendrickse later confessed that the Labour Party leaders made a mistake in taking the decision so early. They had evidently expected the tricameral elections to take place in 1983.[125] Miley Richards, however, confided that a number of Labour Party leaders, while agreeing in principle to participate, nevertheless opposed making a decision before the referendum and before parliament had accepted the proposals.[126]

It also appears that the Labour Party made no attempt to examine the implications and consequences of its decision, nor did it even try to find experts to analyse the new constitution. This constitution was so obviously flawed that even a cursory examination at that time would have made the Labour Party think twice about participating. In fact, the SA Law Commission, in its 1991 *Report on Constitutional Models,* condemned the 1983 tricameral constitution as lacking "substantive principle, constitutionalism, and even a regard for the law".[127] Furthermore:

> It also failed to protect individual human rights, showed a fundamental lack of democracy, lacked an independent judiciary in the broad sense of the word, did not have adequate checks and balances, had no minority protection and gave excessive power to the president.[128]

Van Zyl Slabbert slated the tricameral proposals in 1983, in word which were to prove prophetic:

> The tragedy for South Africa is that at a time when the voters have come to acknowledge the need for such reform, the National Party has come forward with a plan that is so defective and ill-conceived that if implemented will set back the process of reform for at least a decade.[129]

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120. *Argus,* 22 September 1980.
121. *Ibid.*
122. Africans were never included in the tricameral system. The Mixed Marriages Act was only scrapped in 1988 and the Group Areas Act in 1991.
123. F. van Zyl Slabbert, interview on *Agenda,* South African Broadcasting Corporation, 26 May 1991.
124. G. Leach, *South Africa* (London, Methuen-Mandarin, 1989), p. 65.
125. Coetzer, *Awaiting trial,* p. 161.
126. Miley Richards, interviewed by the author, 29 June 1992.
127. *Sunday Times,* 23 February 1992.
128. *Ibid.*
129. Leach, *South Africa,* p. 54.

Even Professor Van der Ross, the founder of the Labour Party and a supporter of the principle of participation in government structures, stated at the time: "The great value of the constitutional proposals now before the country is that they cannot work."[130] Thus, if the Labour Party had done even some rudimentary homework in 1983, it would have realised that the tricameral system was clearly flawed. However, it apparently did not want to know this because it wanted to join the tricameral system, come what may. By doing so, the Labour Party continued a tradition of collaboration which had come to characterise coloured politics since the beginning of this century.[131]

9. Conclusion

Was the Labour Party correct in electing to participate? Was the tricameral system really designed to rectify the racial and political injustices of the past? Who was the tricameral system really designed to benefit? A.L. Muller, in 1968 already, gave an insight into government thinking which eventually culminated in the tricameral system in 1983: "A close affinity between the Whites, Coloureds and Indians can only strengthen the ranks of the Whites and increase the confidence with which they can work for a 'peaceful solution' of the Bantu problem."[132] The tricameral system was therefore devised to serve the National Party's own ends. It was necessary to get coloureds and Indians out of the way so that they could not link up with Africans to form a coalition of oppressed groups against the government.[133] It allowed the National Party to continue with its policy of apartheid, remain in power, and dampen the clamour for equal political rights by coloureds and Indians. In addition, the tricameral system posed no threat to continued Afrikaner domination in South Africa.

Thus, the tricameral system came into being. Hendrickse and the Labour Party thought it was the beginning of reform but it turned out to be white domination in another guise. The National Party simply replaced overt white domination with covert domination by using coloured and Indian surrogates to do its work. It appeared as if whites were ruling South Africa with their fellow-(non-white) South Africans. Of course, this was not so as David Welsh, professor of African Studies at the University of Cape Town, pointed out at the time:

> The new constitution is an exercise in co-optation. It seeks to incorporate the Coloured and Indian categories into the white-controlled structure so that their incorporation will strengthen that structure, but without jeopardising white power.[134]

The tricameral system had a veneer of democracy, but below the surface it was still "white domination".[135] Thus, if the Labour Party had heeded the warnings and rejected the tricameral

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130. R.E. van der Ross, "In this failure lies our hope", in F. de Villiers (ed.), *Bridge or barricade?: the constitution, a first appraisal,* (Johannesburg, Johathan Ball, 1983), p. 117. Interviewed by the author, Cape Town, 9 September 1992, Van der Ross confirmed this statement.
131. Alexander, "Non-collaboration in the Western Cape," pp. 181-182.
132. A.L. Muller, *Minority interests: the political economy of the coloured and Indian communities in South Africa* (Johannesburg, SAIRR, 1968), p. 221.
133. M. Attwell, *South Africa: background to the crisis* (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1986), p. 113.
134. D. Welsh, "How can coloureds be an ethnic affair?" in *Bridge or barricade,* p. 85.
135. See, Van Zyl Slabbert, *The system and the struggle,* pp. 58-67. Slabbert gives a detailed analysis of the constitution and indicates the extent to which it was designed to maintain white domination.

arrangement, it is likely that the National Party would not have implemented the tricameral system and would have been forced to continue its search for an equitable political dispensation.[136] Likewise, the government would have been forced to do in 1983, or soon thereafter, what it eventually did in 1990, viz. declare its intention to create democratic sturctures and grant equality to all South Africans. Negotiations and the events of 1990-94 would, conceivably, have taken place earlier. Thus, the tricameral system probably delayed an early transition to a non-racial democratic society. Tragically, that delay had devastating consequences, with the Labour Party largely held responsible for the tricameral system ever having seen the light of day.[137]

In 1991, the Labour Party suffered massive defections to the new "non-racial" National Party.[138] The Labour Party thereupon joined the Patriotic Front formed by the liberation movements in October 1991, and decided soon after to forge closer links with the ANC; moves which were, perhaps, a belated admission that it had made an error in electing to participate in 1983.

136. Saks, "The failure of the CRC", p. 230.

137. Leach, *South Africa*, p. 54. Many historians and political commentators have pointed to events in South Africa which began in 1984 with the boycott campaign against the tricameral elections, and which led to various states of emergency, the "Rubicon" fiasco of 1985, the collapse of the JSE and the Rand currency, sanctions and disinvestment, school boycotts, the ANC's "armed struggle" and the collapse of the South Africa economy, as evidence of the destructive consequences of the implementation of the tricameral system.

138. *Sunday Times*, 26 May 1991. The Labour Party subsequently lost control of the House of Representatives to the "Brown" National Party in January 1992.