

TERMITES IN THE WALLS OF JERICHO: THE LABOUR PARTY AND "PARALLEL DEVELOPMENT", 1966-1980

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Termiete in die mure van Jerigo: die Arbeidersparty en "parallele ontwikkeling", 1966-1980

Die besluit van die ('kleurling') Arbeidersparty in 1983 om aan die Regering se nuwe grondwetlike bedeling deel te neem, is amper algemeen as volslae heulery afgekeur. Hierdie veroordeling was miskien sowel voorbarig as onregverdig indien in aanmerking geneem word dat die Arbeiders 'n sleutelrol gespeel het in die ontwrigting vroeër van die opgehefte Verteenwoordigende Kleurlingraad. Deur aan die Kleurlingraad deel te neem, het die Arbeiders bewys dat met die regte taktiek 'n segregasie-instelling gebruik kon word om segregasie te ondermyn. Die Kleurlingraad, wat voorsien was as 'n instelling om 'kleurlinge' permanent met hul uitskakeling uit die magsentrum te versoen, is nooit toegelaat om sy werk vlot te verrig nie en het inderdaad 'n groot reklameramp vir die Nasionale Partyregering geword. Dit is net soveel aan die Arbeiders se ontgemoeitkomende rol as aan die fundamentele gebreke van die instelling toe te skrywe. Die 1983-grondwet het inderdaad veel meer ruimte as die Kleurlingraad geskep vir die 'Trojaanse perd'-strategie wat die Arbeiders gedurende die sewentigerjare suksesvol gebruik het. Om hierdie rede sou dit redelik gewees het om die voordeel van die twyfel aan die Arbeiders te geege het waar hulle gekies het om ook daaraan deel te neem.

The decision of the ('coloured') Labour Party in 1983 to take part in the Government's new constitutional dispensation was almost universally condemned as an act of outright collaboration. This judgement was perhaps both premature and unfair given the party's key role in sabotaging the then recently-defunct Coloured Persons' Representative Council (C.P.R.C.). By taking part on the C.P.R.C., Labour members had demonstrated that, given the correct tactics, a segregatory institution could be used to undermine segregation. The C.P.R.C., conceived as an institution that would permanently reconcile coloured people to their exclusion from the centre of power, was never allowed to run smoothly and in fact became a major public relations disaster for the Nationalist Government. This was due as much to the Labour Party's non-co-operative role as to the fundamental shortcomings of the institution. The 1983 constitution in fact provided far greater scope than the C.P.R.C. for the 'Trojan Horse' strategies employed successfully by the Labour Party during the 1970s. Consequently, Labour members could reasonably have been given the benefit of the doubt when choosing to take part in it as well.

"Does the mere sounding of the ram's horn of equal rights bring the apartheid walls of Jericho tumbling down?" — Extract from Carter Ebrahim's speech to Labour Party delegates, April 1972.

In January 1983, the leadership of the 'coloured'¹ Labour Party surprised and angered many by agreeing to take part in the National Party Government's new Tricameral Parliament. The unexpected move dealt a severe blow to the party's already waning reputation as a genuine and effective anti-apartheid force. By the 1980s any participation on apartheid structures, for whatever reason, was widely held to be tantamount to collaboration. Condemnation, moreover, was not limited to the boycottist left. Oscar Dhlomo, then Secretary-General of the homeland-based Inkatha movement, said that those coloureds (and Indians) who agreed to participate in the Government's dispensation would thereby 'accept the status of partners in propping up white supremacy and be rightly regarded as co-oppressors'.² The fact that even Inkatha spokespeople, who were themselves vulnerable to accusations that they were upholding 'the system', could make such a statement, is revealing in itself. When elections were eventually held for the coloured chamber of the new Parliament, there was little doubt as to where the sentiments of most coloured voters lay. Barely 30% of registered, and only 17% of potential voters cast their ballots, making the election as much a triumph for the politics of boycott as it was for those of co-optation.

By their agreeing to take part in the new dispensation, it was perhaps inevitable that Labour Party members would lay themselves open to accusations of collaboration from some quarters. The policy of separate representation could only work if black people were prepared to participate in its structures. By agreeing to serve in the Tricameral Parliament, Labour leaders in effect breathed life into the latest instrument of enforced separatism, in the process making possible for the first time the entrenchment of racialism in the South African constitution.

On the surface, it is not difficult to find reasons for this extraordinary decision. It would be naive to assert that the Labour Party in 1983 did not have a fair number of opportunists, 'Uncle Toms', crypto-coloured Nationalists and charlatans in its ranks, people who were either in 'the system' for what they would get out of it or who were genuinely committed to the policy of apartheid. However, to write off all Labour leaders as traitors and quislings without further investigation would be premature. The reason for participating, it was said at the time, was to infiltrate the system, inadequate as it was, and use it as a platform for further resistance, in the process undermining it rather than making it work.³ This was not a weak defence. Participating in an unjust system while simultaneously opposing it has had a long, by no means dishonourable tradition in South Africa. This is well-illustrated by the example of Margaret Ballinger, and the role she played while serving as a Native Representative in the Union Parliament. F.A. Mouton has defended Ballinger against charges of collaboration, unwitting or otherwise, arguing that to automatically label her a collaborator merely because she was a Native Representative is an over-simplification. The essential point was that, if the correct tactics were employed, a segregationalist institution

The vexed question of how to deal with the term 'coloured' is something all those writing on the subject of people once classified as such must deal with. I have chosen to write it with a small 'c', just as 'blacks' is usually written with a small 'b'.

R.E. van der Ross, *The rise and decline of apartheid — a study of political movements among the Coloured people of South Africa 1890-1985* (Cape Town, 1988), pp. 352-3.

W.H. Thomas, 'The C.P.R.C. in action', in M.G. Whisson (ed.), *Coloured citizenship in South Africa* (Rhodes University, 1972), pp. 144-5.

could be used to undermine segregation.⁴

The strategy of the Labour Party, at least as stated in its constitution, conference resolutions and policy statements, has been summed up by one authority as 'non-collaboration within a collaborationist area'⁵ and as 'discretionary collaboration' by another.⁶ In other words, the idea was not to make apartheid work but to infiltrate its institutions and undermine them. The mere fact, of course, that people involved in the controversial politics of participation make such statements is not itself proof of their honourable intentions. Ultimately, the extent to which they put their resolutions into practice while serving on discredited political bodies should be the basis on which they are judged. It needs to be determined, therefore, to what extent the Labour Party lived up to its ideals, as stated both to its own racially-defined constituency and to the South African public at large, in the years leading up to the establishment of the Tricameral Parliament. Once this has been done, it is possible to analyse more objectively the decision of its leaders to take part in the new system.

1. The National Party's coloured dilemma

During the 1960s, the National Party sought to resolve the vexed question of the political future of South Africa's coloured population by creating separate, semi-autonomous representative institutions for them, in lieu of full representation in the "white" Parliament. A similar policy was devised for the Indian community during the same period. The scheme was essentially a compromise between the progressive and conservative wings of the party, whose diverging viewpoints had publically surfaced during a well-publicized debate on the 'Coloured Question' at the beginning of the decade. The progressive faction, mainly Cape-based, were in favour of the existing system continuing, i.e. that enfranchised coloureds in the Cape would continue to elect, on a separate roll, four white MPs to represent them in the House of Assembly. Many even hoped that eventually coloured MPs rather than white ones would sit on behalf of their people in Parliament.⁷ By contrast, the mainly Transvaal-based conservative faction was adamant that all links between non-whites and Parliament be severed altogether. Some had even begun lobbying for the creation of a coloured 'homeland'.⁸

Prime Minister H.F. Verwoerd, while dismissing the homeland option as impractical, was nevertheless determined to abolish any existing participation of coloureds in Parliament and the Cape Provincial Council. The provision of a mere four MPs for the entire coloured population was inequitable, he reasoned, and would eventually lead to demands that the number be increased relative to the number of coloureds in the Republic. Such demands would be pressed all the harder, of course, if coloureds rather than whites were allowed to represent their group in the Assembly.⁹

Verwoerd eventually chose a middle path between the integrationalists and the homelander. His solution entailed creating separate representative institutions for coloureds, to operate side by side with those of whites within the same geographical area but separate

4. F.A. Mouton, "Margaret Ballinger, opponent of apartheid or collaborator?", *South African Historical Journal*, 26(1992), p. 136.

5. R.E. van der Ross, personal interview, 27 October 1989.

6. I. Goldin, *Making race — the politics and economics of Coloured identity in the Western Cape* (London, 1987), p. 155.

R.E. van der Ross, *Coloured viewpoint: a series of articles in the Cape Times 1958-1965* (Western Cape Institute for Historical Research, University of the Western Cape, 1984), p. 175.

8. I. Goldin, *Making race*, p. 134.

9. House of Assembly Debates, 8 June 1961, col. 7572.

from them. This was the policy that became known as 'Parallel Development', whereby representative structures operating entirely on behalf of coloureds, would be created at the national and local level. The intention, according to Verwoerd, was that through these bodies, the coloured community would achieve full autonomy within ten years, thus removing the pressure to include them on representative structures earmarked exclusively for whites.¹⁰

The cornerstone of the Government's Parallel Development programme was the Coloured Persons Representative Council Act (No. 49 of 1964), in terms of which a representative council would be set up for coloureds, with administrative and some legislative powers. Once implemented, the Act would have the effect of rendering the separate voters' roll superfluous, enabling Verwoerd to remove the four coloured MPs from the Assembly if he so wished. In fact, Verwoerd was aware that regarding the latter question, he had to tread carefully. Many within his party had made no secret of the fact that they wanted direct representation in Parliament to continue with at least one Cabinet Minister (Ben Schoeman) threatening to resign if it was abolished.¹¹

In the end, it was the unexpected intervention of the Progressive Party that gave Verwoerd the opportunity to remove the four coloured MPs. In 1965, much to the disquiet of the ruling party, the Progressives announced that they intended to contest the four coloured seats in the next general election. This led to many coloured voters showing a renewed interest in the Parliamentary process at a time when the National Party wished them to direct their attention to their own political affairs.¹² It is not unlikely that the prospect of four more potential Margaret Ballingers in the Assembly was also a cause for concern. Ballinger, one of the whites elected to Parliament under the 1936 Representation of Natives in Parliament Act, had been a tenacious and forthright advocate of black rights during a long and busy Parliamentary career. Having legislated her out of office a few years before, the Nationalists were unlikely to want the door left open for any possible successors (particularly as the Progressive Party, in Helen Suzman, already had a representative in the Assembly who was proving to be a formidable moral gadfly in the Ballinger tradition). The Progressive bid to capture the four coloured seats, was therefore decisive in persuading the Government to implement its new policy for coloured people, even though many within the National Party remained uneasy, as later events were to show.

In 1968, the C.P.R.C. Act was amended, now providing for a Council of sixty members, of whom twenty would be directly elected by coloured voters countrywide and the remainder nominated by the State President. Only those classified as 'coloured' under the Population Registration Act could vote, run for election or be eligible for nomination. The Council itself was not intended to be a mere advisory board, but was also to have administrative functions. A five-member executive would handle the portfolios of finance, education, rural areas and coloured settlements and social welfare and pensions. The Council was also conceived as being an original law-making body, although these powers were severely circumscribed. No Bill could be introduced during Council sessions without the consent of the Minister of Coloured Affairs, and once passed, it was dependent on the State President's assent to become law.¹³ It was made clear that any Bill that was repugnant to an existing Act of the white Parliament would be null and void. As it transpired, only three laws were passed during the first Council's term of office, and none of them had any

10. A. Kenney, *Architect of apartheid: Hendrik Verwoerd — a reappraisal* (Johannesburg, 1980), p. 218.

11. B.M. Schoeman, *Van Malan tot Verwoerd* (Cape Town, 1973), p. 249.

12. R.E. van der Ross, *Rise and decline*, p. 301.

13. Coloured Persons' Representative Council Act No. 49 of 1964, s23(1) and 2(a).

significant effect.¹⁴

There were numerous other aspects of the C.P.R.C. Act that hamstrung the independent functioning of the proposed coloured parliament. The Council would have no power to appropriate monies for the discharge of its duties, but its members were merely required to rubber-stamp an appropriation made on their behalf by the central Parliament.¹⁵ The Chairman of the Executive, who was authorised to sign the budget, was not elected by the councillors, but appointed by the State President, and could be dismissed from office at any time on the recommendation of the Coloured Affairs Minister. When not making laws, the councillors were expected to put forward and debate resolutions effecting the socio-economic and political interests of the coloured population group. Once passed, however, the implementation of these resolutions was left in the hand of the Minister. There was naturally little chance that a resolution in conflict with the apartheid ideology would be accepted.

Even Verwoerd, for all his undoubted debating skill, did not deny that two sovereign parliaments operating within the same territory was a contradiction in terms. In 1965, he admitted as much, stating in the Assembly that coloureds would be continuously subject to the entire state as controlled by the majority group. In defence of this, he argued that it was better for them to be given limited rights and opportunities than none at all.¹⁶

2. Formation of the Labour Party

Towards the end of 1965, a small group of Cape Town intellectuals decided to form a political party to contest the first elections to the C.P.R.C. The following year, this became the Labour Party of South Africa, with Dr R.E. van der Ross as its first president. The founders of the Labour Party claimed that their intention was not to co-operate with the Government, but to use the C.P.R.C. as a vehicle to oppose apartheid. This was a politically hazardous course to take, given the obvious powerlessness of the C.P.R.C. and the danger of unwittingly lending it credibility by their involvement. Any Labour councillors elected would have to fight an all-powerful Government within an institution carefully designed to facilitate collaboration and minimize confrontation. It was not certain that anything substantial could be achieved there, in which case the party's involvement could then well result in a propaganda victory for the very system they hoped to undermine.

Opposition, moreover, was unlikely to be limited to the white Government and coloured conservatives. Labour Party members could expect fierce opposition from more radical elements in the coloured community itself, particularly in the highly-politicized urban communities of the Western Cape where the boycottist ethic was strong. The strategy of actively boycotting institutions set up for the purpose of segregating coloured people socially and politically was not new in South African politics. It had been particularly pronounced after 1943 during the bitterly divisive debates over the issue of participation in the United Party government's Coloured Advisory Council. The extent to which boycotting had taken hold in coloured politics is illustrated by the fact that in the 1958 General Election, a white Congress of Democrats candidate who stood as a coloured representative (with the encouragement of the African National Congress) was soundly defeated by his United Party

Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Matters Relating to the Coloured Population Group (Hereafter Theron Report) RP 38/76, par. 17.60, p. 363.

15. P. Coetzer, *Awaiting trial — Allan Hendrickse* (Alberton, 1984), p. 76.

16. G.D. Scholtz, *Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd I* (Johannesburg, 1974), p. 176.

opponent when most of his potential supporters chose not to vote.¹⁷ For organisations like the Non-European Unity Movement and affiliated bodies like the African People's Democratic Union of South Africa, the C.P.R.C. could never be more than a 'Quisling parlementjie', providing 'dummy representation' in lieu of full democratic rights.¹⁸ In other words, at that level, there could be 'no degrees of collaboration', notwithstanding claims that the Council could be used for the long-term benefit of the coloured people.¹⁹

The founders of the Labour Party, and those who subsequently joined it, were not without counter-arguments of their own. They claimed, with some justification, that the official clamp-down on dissident black political movements since the beginning of the decade had made the mobilization of anti-apartheid coloured movements virtually impossible. Indeed, by 1966 the voice of coloured dissents had been effectively stifled by bannings, detentions and constant police harassment. Without supporting the Government's latest scheme, the founders of the Labour Party recognised that it at least provided an opportunity to mobilize politically within a legally-sanctioned framework. Such a course was a pragmatic one, even if it lacked the Che Guevara-like romance associated with operating illegally underground or the moral satisfaction provided by a blanket boycott. In particular, boycotting was seen as being unproductive, as being a reactive rather than proactive strategy that left its advocates with nothing to do once it was all over.²⁰ The proponents of boycott, as the anthropologist Michael Whisson once put it, could do little more than involve themselves in cultural circles and educational associations, "endlessly elaborating their own particular doctrines and damning those who disagreed with them as revisionists, collaborators, C.I.A. Agents, quislings or lackeys".²¹

A second argument in favour of participation was the potential this offered for coloured people to make their dissatisfaction known to the ruling group. During the repressive 1960s, this was not an unimportant consideration. Excluded from the centre of power, coloureds had to undergo the added indignity of a succession of white politicians speaking on their behalf, often making highly controversial claims as to how they felt about their situation. P.W. Botha, for example, while Deputy Minister of the Interior, once asserted that only a vocal minority of coloureds were really in favour of being absorbed into the white community. The great majority, 80 to 85%, did not resent being treated as a separate racial group.²² Another similar claim was that most coloureds, apart from an educated elite, were too concerned with bread and butter issues to bother about political rights.²³ Labour Party candidates would argue that the forthcoming election would give coloured voters throughout South Africa an unprecedented opportunity to contradict these dubious statements by unequivocally registering their rejection of separate development at the polls.

The coloured right wing in the 1960s was by no means a negligible force, as the results of the first all-coloured elections would in fact demonstrate. This also needs to be

17. G. Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall — a history of South African 'Coloured' politics* (Cape Town 1987), p. 270.

18. P. Hugo, *Quislings or realists? A documentary study of 'Coloured' politics in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1978), pp. 417 and 419.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 450.

20. R.E. van der Ross, Interview; Address by L.P. leader M.D. Arendse, June 1968 in P. Hugo, *Quislings*, pp. 119-120.

21. M.G. Whisson, 'The Coloured People', in P. Randal (ed.), *South Africa's minorities* (SPRO-CAS Occasional Publication, No. 2 1971), p. 56.

22. House of Assembly Debates, Vol. 106, 25 January 1961, col. 124.

23. *Ibid.*, Vol. 104, 12 April 1960, col. 5380.

kept in mind when assessing the Labour Party's decision to serve on the Council. In the same year that the C.P.R.C. Act was passed, the Federal Coloured People's Party was formed, an unabashedly pro-apartheid organisation heavily orientated towards the upliftment of the coloured population as a distinct ethnic group under the policy of separate development.²⁴ Its leader, Tom Swartz, had been co-operating with the Government for some years in this regard, having been appointed in 1958 as chairman of the now-defunct Union Council for Coloured Affairs, a nominated advisory body that was the forerunner of the C.P.R.C.. Funded by the Government (and clandestinely by the Afrikaner Broederbond after the passing of the Prohibition of Political Interference Act had made such aid illegal),²⁵ the Federal Party was already assiduously propagating its policies in coloured areas at the time of Labour's formation, particularly in the rural districts where the electorate was traditionally more conservative.²⁶

The Federals were not the only conservative coloured organisation on the scene. Three further pro-apartheid parties, known respectively as the Conservative, Republican and National Coloured People's Parties and whose policies and constitutions largely mirrored those of the Federal Party, were formed after 1965. In the 1967 Johannesburg Coloured Management Council elections, all the seats were actually won by National Party candidates, demonstrating that the Federals could not expect to have all things their own way in the forthcoming C.P.R.C. elections. There was a danger that the Government would gain a major propaganda victory if these right-wing coloured groupings were seen to be the only representatives of the coloured population in the new Council.²⁷ The fact that a variety of pro-apartheid parties would be taking part in the elections would also serve to lend credibility to the whole process, giving the erroneous impression that there was widespread support for parallel development. It was thus partly to counter this rise of coloured conservatism that the Labour Party was formed.

The Labour Party was the only organisation to oppose apartheid from the start, and in its constitution declared its ultimate goal to be the effective participation of all South Africans in the government of the country.²⁸ There was never any question that the C.P.R.C. might come to be regarded as a viable instrument whereby full citizenship for coloured people might be obtained. Instead, aware that their participation might serve to legitimize it, Labour leaders declared their intention of rendering the Council unworkable through gaining control of it and then refusing to co-operate. This meant steering a difficult middle course between the extremes of outright boycott and outright collaboration, one that necessitated numerous strategic compromises in which ideological consistency frequently had to be sacrificed in order to attain long-term goals. In this regard, boycotting was recognised as being a useful tactic, but it was not to be transformed into a cast-iron principle.²⁹

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24. Eg. clause 2(c) and 3(a) of the F.P. constitution, reproduced in P. Hugo, *Quislings*, p. 279; G. Lewis, *Between the wire*, p. 273.
 25. I. Wilkins & H. Strydom, *The Super-Afrikaners — inside the Afrikaner Broederbond* (Johannesburg, 1980), pp. 160-1.
 26. S. van der Horst, *The Theron Commission: a summary* (South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 1976), p. 113.
 27. R.E. van der Ross, Interview.
 28. Labour Party constitution clause 2(c) and memorandum submitted by the L.P. to the Commission of Enquiry into the Improper Interference and the Political Representation of the Various Population Groups (R.P. 72/67), both in P. Hugo, *Quislings*, p. 112.
 29. University of South Africa Archives (hereafter UNISA), Sonny Leon Papers (hereafter SLP), Minutes, 11th Annual Conference of the Labour Party (Deputy Leader's address).

3. The Labour Party and the C.P.R.C., 1969-1974

The first C.P.R.C. elections, held in September 1969, resulted in a resounding defeat for the Federal Party and their Government backers. The percentage poll was low (49,7% of registered and 35,7% of potential voters casting their ballots), but not abysmally so. In 1984, the number of potential voters turning out at the polls was less than half this number, indicating that at the outset, a considerable number of coloured people were at least prepared to give the new system a chance.³⁰ Coloured political parties were, of course, an entirely new phenomenon in coloured politics and most coloureds were being given an opportunity to vote for the first time.³¹ This novelty might well have been a factor in the reasonably high turn-out. For coloured women, who even under the old Cape franchise had never been allowed to vote or stand for election, the elections were a particularly novel experience. A number of women were to serve as councillors during the next decade although only Alathea Janssen, who was appointed Chairman of the Executive by the Government in 1975, ever attained positions of leadership, either on the council itself or on the executives of the rival parties.

The Labour Party won 26 of the 37 seats it contested compared with the eleven gained by the Federals and one each gained by the Republican and National Parties and independents. In reality, the victory was not quite as comprehensive as it looked. Added together, the total votes cast for pro-apartheid parties actually outnumbered those won by Labour, and in addition, a fair number of votes were also cast for independents, none of whom campaigned on an anti-apartheid platform. In fact, if there had been just one pro-apartheid party contesting the elections instead of four, the Federals would have gained eighteen seats to Labour's 21, and without independents, the two parties would have had twenty seats each. Despite Labour's victory, therefore, and notwithstanding a strong boycott campaign (in six urban Cape communities, the percentage poll was under 30%),³² it was evident that a significant minority of coloured people were prepared to support parallel development for what they could get out of it.

Unfortunately for them, Labour had not won the election conclusively enough to enable them to make good their promise to render the C.P.R.C. inoperative as soon as they gained control of it. There were still twenty nominated positions to be filled and Coloured Affairs Minister J.J. Loots, concerned lest 'radicals' be allowed to kill off his Government's infant institution in its cradle, made sure of nominating only Federal councillors to these positions. Admitting that he had loaded the Council, he pledged to do so again if necessary.³³ This ensured that Swartz, himself a nominee after almost losing his deposit in the Kasselsvlei constituency, would have a narrow majority when the first Council session began. In the short term, the Minister's intervention allowed the C.P.R.C. to get on the road, but it backfired in the end, undermining what little credibility the institution might have had in the coloured community and stiffening the resolve of angry Labourites to destroy it.

For the next five years, the Labour Party found itself on the opposition benches in the C.P.R.C., hardly the ideal position to be in if the intention was to oppose apartheid. After the single successful independent candidate had joined it after the election, the Federal Party had 32 seats to a combined opposition of 28 and was therefore able to regularly block anti-apartheid motions put forward by Labour councillors (while passing a number of pro-

30. UNISA, Tom Swartz Papers (hereafter TSP), Table of Results, 1969 C.P.R.C. election; *Die Burger*, 26.9.1969.

31. G. Lewis, *Between the wire*, p. 273.

32. I. Goldin, *Making race*, p. 154.

33. *Cape Times*, 23.3.1970.

apartheid motions of their own, for example requesting that the Group Areas Act be tightened up in order to exclude black migrants.³⁴ Labour was also plagued by disunity, defections and expulsions at one time reducing the party to 21 members, barely a third of the total. On several occasions certain caucus members, including executive members, were taken to task for their willingness to reach an accommodation with the Government or for being unduly concerned with the affairs of the coloured community to the exclusion of other non-whites suffering under apartheid. In 1970, M.D. Arendse was ousted as party leader after unilaterally meeting with high-ranking Government officials in defiance of party policy and for suggesting that the Western Cape might be partitioned off as a separate state (an idea felt to be dangerously close to the coloured homeland theory).³⁵ Later in the decade Sonny Leon, who replaced Arendse as party leader, also fell foul of the hardliners in his caucus for being too moderate and was compelled to resign. Dissatisfaction with what was seen as an unnecessarily confrontationalist stance from within the party came to a head in 1972 when disaffected Labour Councillors, including the still-resentful Arendse, formed the Social Democratic Party as a middle group between Labour and Federal. Although it was unable to win widespread support, and was wiped out altogether in the 1975 election, the S.D.P. was nevertheless an unwanted thorn in the side of its parent party, splitting the anti-apartheid vote.

Despite these obstacles and set-backs, much was achieved by the Labour Party during the first C.P.R.C. sessions. The Government was continually and publicly embarrassed by the refusal of Labour councillors to attend official openings of the sessions or to serve on liaison committees. Minor as these gestures were, they at least served to demonstrate that the largest coloured political grouping was only serving on the C.P.R.C. under protest. More substantially the Council sessions themselves, thanks to vociferous Labour opposition, had hardly been the model of decorum its creators had intended it to be. This was summed up neatly by Carter Ebrahim, editor of the party newsletter, who declared that the C.P.R.C., instead of becoming 'the quiet, efficient machine designed to smoothly implement and rubber stamp Separate Development', had instead become a public forum where the inequities of apartheid were exposed and debated. The Labour Party, Ebrahim said, was in the Council in the capacity of watchdogs of the people's interests, so that nothing could be done against them without their knowledge and without their protest.³⁶ What Labour councillors also began to achieve in the frequently acrimonious Council debates was to help bring about the gradual radicalization of the conservative opposition. Federal members, particularly those who had been nominated rather than elected, were taunted mercilessly for their stance. By steadily railing against the negative effects of apartheid on coloured people, and the evident failure of the C.P.R.C. to ameliorate this, they had much to do with the steady retreat from apartheid orthodoxy by most Council members. Pro-apartheid motions were increasingly watered down and were eventually not put forward in any form (much to the disgust of W.J. Swartz, the National Coloured People's Party's sole representative, who remained unrepentant to the end). Even before the second C.P.R.C. election, the Federal Party had removed all references to apartheid and separate development in its constitution. It virtually put paid to the Government's carefully-nurtured plans to create a credible, conservative coloured bloc to help it implement apartheid.

One could perhaps argue that the C.P.R.C. was a 'prefabricated disaster'³⁷ and would have failed even without Labour's participation. There can be little doubt, however, that the

34. UNISA, TSP, Minutes of the Proceedings of the C.P.R.C., 5.9.1972.

35. UNISA, SLP, Labour Party Congress minutes, April 1972.

36. *Ibid.*, Labour Party conference minutes, April 1972.

37. H. Giliomee, quote from introduction to R.E. van der Ross, *Rise and decline*.

role played by the party both speeded up and magnified the extent of that failure. As early as 1971, the coloured issue had re-emerged as a major debating point within the National Party and its supporters, with the 1969 election debacle and subsequent inability to get the Council sessions to run smoothly having much to do with the resurfacing of this dangerously divisive question.

As in 1960, the ruling party found itself split into three broad camps. On the right were the 'Tuislanders' or Homelanders, those who argued that a coloured homeland should be created to solve the problem of coloured political representation. On the left were the 'Integrationists', those who believed that coloureds would ultimately have to be granted full personal and political rights in a common society.³⁸ The Government continued to reject both options, clinging to its much-maligned policy of Parallelism in public but behind the scenes investigating alternatives. In February 1973, it appointed a Commission of Enquiry to investigate the socio-economic and constitutional progress of the coloured population since 1960. The findings of the commission, chaired by and named after Professor Erika Theron of Stellenbosch University, would have important constitutional repercussions later in the decade.

4. The failure of the C.P.R.C.

The C.P.R.C., which had been limping along after a fashion thanks to the presence of the Government nominees, finally collapsed altogether during the July 1974 short session. Thanks to two by-election victories, and the defection of a number of Federal and independent members to its benches, the Labour Party was able to carry a motion of No Confidence by 29 votes to 25. The session dissolved into chaos shortly afterwards as Swartz doggedly attempted to run the Council regardless, and the Minister was forced to step in and prorogue the C.P.R.C. Two months after his final humiliation Tom Swartz, who had at one time been groomed to become, in effect, the first coloured Prime Minister, was forced into retirement by a stroke and died the following year.

The 1975 C.P.R.C. elections were once again boycotted by a large number of coloured people. Only 521 557 people qualified to register as voters, out of an estimated 900 000, actually did so before polling day.³⁹ When voting did take place, the percentage poll was still just under 50% (therefore making the percentage of potential voters who actually went to the polls a mere 25,3%).⁴⁰ Shortly before the election, the Anti-Coloured Representative Council Committee (ACRCCOM) had been formed to discourage people from voting. It was composed of members of the South African Students Organisation (SASO) and the Black People's Convention, both Black Consciousness movements which at the time had considerable influence in the coloured community, particularly in the Western Cape.⁴¹ ACRCCOM rejected any involvement, whether direct or indirect, in the policy of separate development, believing that it fostered racism. It also rejected the argument that coloureds had to make the best of a bad situation, claiming that to do so was to yield to blackmail since the white Government counted on certain coloureds being willing to accept half a loaf in preference to none in order to get its oppressive structures to function.⁴² ACRCCOM was actively involved in the boycott campaign during the 1975 election, and was estimated by the

38. Survey of Race Relations 1971 (Johannesburg, 1971), pp. 8-9.

39. R.E. van der Ross, *Rise and decline*, p. 356.

40. *Die Burger*, 22.3.1975

41. Theron Report, par. 20.21, p. 441.

42. P. Hugo, *Quislings*, pp. 473-5.

Theron Commission to have had considerable influence.⁴³

Despite the low poll (which hurt Labour more than it did its rivals since conservative Federal supporters were naturally less susceptible to boycottist arguments), Labour was this time able to gain a decisive victory, winning by 31 seats to the Federal's eight and therefore being ensured of a majority no matter whom the Government chose to nominate. In the end, four Labour members were nominated, giving the party 35 seats to a combined opposition of 25. During the first short session of the Second Council, the party was fiercely attacked by its opponents for being elected on a destroy-the-C.P.R.C. platform and then merely stepping into the Federal Party's shoes. Labour councillors rejoined that they would use whatever platforms were available in order to politicize the people and keep them informed.⁴⁴ This might have been seen as a somewhat lame response but in truth, rendering the Council unworkable was not as easy as it looked. Anticipating a Federal collapse as early as 1972, the Government had twice amended the C.P.R.C. Act to enable the Minister to assume emergency powers and run the Council on his own if necessary.⁴⁵

At the end of 1975, Labour threw down the gauntlet and voted to reject the Council budget on the grounds that it had no say in the preparation of the estimates and that insufficient funds had been made available.⁴⁶ The Minister, as expected, used the relevant clauses of the 1975 C.P.R.C. Amendment Act to dismiss Sonny Leon as Chairman of the Executive and replace him with Althea Jansen, a nominated councillor who compliantly signed the budget on the Council's behalf (she would continue to do so until the C.P.R.C. was abolished). However, the rejection of the budget was more than a symbolic gesture of defiance. By forcing the Government to publicly intervene yet again, it made further nonsense of the pretence that the coloured people were on the road to full autonomy under apartheid. The C.P.R.C. would evidently take a longer time to die than anticipated, but so long as Labour was in control, the Government would not be allowed to salvage it.

In November 1974, following the overthrow of the Swartz faction, Prime Minister B.J. Vorster addressed the C.P.R.C. and outlined a number of changes in the composition and functions of the Council that were being introduced. The most notable innovation was the transformation of the institution's liaison committee into a consultative Cabinet Council, which would make provision for the C.P.R.C. executive and an equal number of white Cabinet Ministers to meet on a consultative basis and discuss matters of common interest.⁴⁷ Later, the executive of the South African Indian Council was also included in its deliberations. Once the Labour Party refused to serve on it, however, the Cabinet Council's coloured component became so unrepresentative as to render the whole scheme pointless, leading to its abandonment after only a handful of meetings. Nevertheless, the virtually still-born experiment was not without relevance. In retrospect, it represented an important shift in the coloured policy of the National Party, from total segregation to the first signs of reincorporation in a multi-racial framework. It was, in fact, the first step away from the C.P.R.C. towards the Tricameral Parliament.

The Labour Party also threw a spanner in the works of the Government's new constitutional proposals in 1977, rejecting them and forcing the National Party's constitutional planners to go back to the drawing board for another five years. The new proposals had envisaged a form of executive and legislative government through inter-group negotiations

43. Theron Report, par. 20.22, p. 441.

44. Debates and Proceedings of the C.P.R.C. Vol. 31, pp. 144, 147 and 151.

45. See clause 6(c) of the C.P.R.C. Amendment Act, 1972, and clause 22A of the C.P.R.C. Amendment Act, 1975.

46. Survey of Race Relations 1975 (Johannesburg 1975), p. 20.

47. P. Hugo, *Quislings*, pp. 93-6.

and joint decision-making at the highest level between whites, coloureds and Indians. They provided for the executives of three ethnic 'parliaments' to form a joint 'Council of Cabinets' where legislation would be debated, prepared and initiated. There was never any doubt, however, that effective power would remain firmly in the hands of whites. This was made abundantly clear, among other things, by clause 26(1)(a) of the Draft Bill on the new proposals, which stated that the legislative power of the Republic would be vested in the Assembly (i.e. the white parliament).⁴⁸ The two non-white parliaments could not even make irrevocable decisions that were their exclusive 'ethnic concern', and if necessary, the white Assembly could abolish them and govern on its own. At best, therefore the new proposals sought to merely upgrade the existing forms of coloured and Indian representation without essentially changing the substance.

The new proposals were rejected by the Labour Party, which claimed that they sought to entrench racism in the constitution, concentrated real power in the hands of the Nationalists, had been unilaterally formulated and excluded blacks (thereby intensifying racial conflict instead of eliminating it).⁴⁹ This decision was endorsed by the C.P.R.C., but only by the casting vote of the chairman. For all its shortcomings, the proposed new system was welcomed as a step in the right direction by many councillors, and a growing number of Labour members believed that if the Government did put its plan into operation, the party would have no choice but to take part in it.⁵⁰

Labour's waning reputation

Before 1975, while never accepted by the proponents of boycott, the Labour Party had had a reasonably positive profile in the coloured community. This was demonstrated in 1972 by the fact that invitations were issued to Labour members to share political platforms with Black Consciousness representatives at the University of the Western Cape.⁵¹ By mid-1975 the political climate had changed. On 23 May, Leon was pelted with eggs by students of the University of the Western Cape for his alleged 'selling out' and at the opening of the first session of the second C.P.R.C., a general student march on the council buildings was narrowly averted. This dissatisfaction was by no means limited to student radicals. Many loyal supporters were disappointed that election promises to destroy the C.P.R.C. once Labour gained control of it had not been kept. In 1978, the Federal Party was even able to win a by-election in Tafelberg, a traditional Labour stronghold, after a large part of the Labour constituency stayed at home. Moreover, the Government's attempts to drive a wedge between blacks and coloureds in South Africa was failing. More and more coloured people were finding common cause with black South Africans, something vividly demonstrated by the solidarity that existed between the two communities during the 1976 Soweto unrest, in particular among the youth.⁵² This meant that institutions that fostered a separate coloured identity became even more taboo than before, and contributed to steady shrinking of the Labour Party's support base.

Increasingly, Labour was seen to have replaced the moribund Federal Party in the collaborationist role. The fact that many Federal stalwarts had crossed to the Labour benches

48. Government Gazette 6386, Vol. 166, 3.4.1979.

49. UNISA, SLP, Labour Party National Executive Council meeting minutes, 10.9.1977.

50. Survey of Race Relations 1977 (Johannesburg, 1977), p. 9.

51. G.J. Wilmot & M. Simons, *The angry divide — social and economic history of the Western Cape* (Cape Town, 1989), p. 198.

52. I. Goldin, *Making race*, p. 174.

gave substance to this view. One of the defecting councillors was Jac Rabie, previously an outspoken coloured nationalist, who had once discussed the possible establishment of a coloured homeland in Malmesbury with members of the Broederbond.⁵³ Despite the party's commitment to non-racial democracy, there were frequent occasions when members demonstrated an orientation towards a narrowly coloured identity. One celebrated instance of 'colouredcentricism' occurred in 1971 when two councillors were expelled for advocating 'Brown Power', a philosophy that sought to apply the principles of Black Consciousness specifically to coloureds.⁵⁴ It is noteworthy that while job reservation was condemned when it blocked coloured advancement, Labour members never attacked measures that protected coloureds from black competition, either in the C.P.R.C. debates or in the evidence they submitted to the Theron Commission.⁵⁵ The coloured labour preference policy as it was applied in the Western Cape thus never came under fire in the C.P.R.C. or at party conferences. It is only fair, however, to note that even the left-wing Non-European Unity Movement and associated organisations, while condemning the coloured labour preference policy in theory, never themselves actively campaigned against it.⁵⁶

It was also suspected that many councillors were motivated more by financial gain than by a desire to destroy the C.P.R.C. Not blind to this perception, Leon found it necessary on at least two occasions to upbraid those Labourites whom he said were more concerned with their salaries and benefits than with party loyalty and devotion to principle.⁵⁷ Ironically, Leon himself laid himself open to accusation of self-interest when, against the will of his executive, he moved into a house provided by the state.

For all its waning influence, and despite its falling standing in the community, victory was almost at hand for the Labour Party. Try as they might, Nationalist attempts to breathe life into the C.P.R.C. had been conclusively thwarted through constant boycotts, the rout of pro-apartheid conservatives and the steadfast refusal of the Labour leadership to co-operate in plans to upgrade the institutions of parallel development. By 1980, it was evident to all that the Council was a dead institution, and all that was left was for the white Parliament to bury the corpse. In March, therefore, an Act was passed dissolving the C.P.R.C., and on 1 April it was consigned, unmourned, to oblivion. Conceived as a measure that would reconcile the coloured population to their permanent exclusion from the centre of power, it had been a costly and embarrassing failure from the start and perhaps the first real defeat for the policy of separate development. In this regard, Labour had played the role of chief destroyer, and it was not without justification that party leader Allen Hendrickse, who at one stage had been detained without trial for his opposition to the Government, claimed on the C.P.R.C.'s dissolution that he and his colleagues had no regrets; they had achieved that which they had set out to achieve.⁵⁸

6. Conclusion

What this paper has hopefully established is that Labour's decision to take part in the new constitution was not necessarily tantamount to accepting a collaborator's role. After all, the

53. I. Wilkins & H. Strydom, *The Super-Afrikaners*, pp. 159-160.

54. A.J. Venter, *Coloured: a portrait of two million South Africans* (Cape Town, 1974), pp. 508-509.

55. I. Goldin, *Making race*, pp. 161-162.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

57. UNISA, SLP, Labour Party 9th Annual Conference minutes, January 1975 & 12th Annual Conference minutes, January 1977.

58. *Ibid.*, Labour Party National Executive Committee meeting, minutes, April 1980.

Party had already sabotaged one apartheid institution by taking it over and then refusing to co-operate. There was nothing to stop its members doing the same to its successor. If anything, the Tricameral constitution allowed far more scope for defiance and non-co-operation than the defunct C.P.R.C. had done. One power the coloured house would have, for example, was the right to veto proposed constitutional amendments if they so wished. This would be put to unexpected and effective use at the end of the decade when the party prevented President P.W. Botha from postponing the 1989 General Election to 1992.⁵⁹ Had it not done so, the far-reaching reforms initiated by the National Party soon after the 1989 election might have been postponed, and with potentially catastrophic results for the country at large.

Even without exercising whatever powers the new system provided, a totally unco-operative ruling group in the coloured house could have paralysed the Government's dispensation. Boycotts, walkouts, filibustering and other gestures of defiance might well have turned the House of Representatives into an even bigger public relations disaster than the C.P.R.C. finally became, particularly as the disruptions would have occurred not in the little-known building in Proteaville where the C.P.R.C. held its sessions, but within the country's most important and prestigious legislative body. Even Franklin Sonn, rector of the Cape Peninsula Technicon and normally one of the party's harshest critics, acknowledged this when he later criticised Labour MPs for not sabotaging the House of Representatives when it was in their power to do so.⁶⁰ Why Labour on the whole failed to do to the Tricameral Parliament what it did to the C.P.R.C. is something future historians will have to establish. Perhaps had the party received more encouragement from the broad majority of South Africans instead of unyielding hostility, its members might have been encouraged to do more with their opportunities than they actually did. Instead of boycotting, coloured voters could also have elected candidates who could be relied upon to be as unco-operative as possible. It could be argued, in fact, that prematurely writing off those working within the system as collaborators might have turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

59. Race Relations Survey 1988-1989 (Johannesburg, 1989), p. 500.

60. G. Leach, *The Afrikaners — their last Great Trek* (Johannesburg, 1988), p. 227.