

Mr F. Beukman

PARLIAMENT'S ROLE

The basis of the role of Members of Parliament is described in Section 42 of the Constitution:

"THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IS ELECTED TO REPRESENT THE PEOPLE AND TO ENSURE GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE UNDER THE CONSTITUTION. IT DOES THIS BY CHOOSING THE PRESIDENT, BY PROVIDING A NATIONAL FORUM FOR PUBLIC CONSIDERATION OF ISSUES, BY PASSING LEGISLATION AND BY SCRUTINISING AND OVERSEEING EXECUTIVE ACTION".

THE LINK BETWEEN VOTER AND REPRESENTATIVE

One of the most important arguments that is advanced, and that is described as a shortcoming of the current electoral system and an advantage of the majority system, is that a PR list system does not allow for a strong link to be formed between the voter and the representative.

The current problems in strengthening the so-called link or interaction between voter and representative are not caused by the electoral system, but various factors, including the following:

- Participation by Members of Parliament in plenary and committee proceedings is seen as primary focus by MP's, and constituency activities as secondary;
- Uncertainty regarding the specific constituency role of representatives;
- A lack of sufficient constituency weeks for Members of Parliament and a lack of monitoring measures by political parties and Parliament regarding the activities of MP's;
- The Parliamentary year of session runs over four quarters;
- Insufficient funding for constituency offices by Parliament;
- Lack of sufficient facilities / allocations for constituency work;
- Overlap between committee sessions and constituency weeks;
- Lack of specific Parliamentary debating time on "constituency issues";
- Lack of specific Parliamentary questions time on "constituency weeks";
- Lack of clear guidelines for voters on what can be classified as Parliamentary questions / matters and how to contact / consult MP's / MPL's; and
- Lack of continuous Parliamentary programme of introduction in order to introduce Members of Parliament at provincial and local levels.

PROPOSALS TO ADDRESS CURRENT SHORTCOMINGS – A NEW SYSTEM OF CONSTITUENCY ACTIVITIES

The NNP is of the opinion that shortcomings of the proportional system, and specifically those relating to the voter/representative relationship, can be managed and regulated by pro-active steps by Parliament / the Legislatures.

Accountability of Members of Parliament / the Legislatures can be practically developed by establishing a new system of constituency activities.

For the purposes of Parliament, parties must divide their members throughout the total service area (RSA). All magistrates' areas must be covered. Provincial legislatures must follow the same approach in their respective areas of jurisdiction.

The allocation of representatives must be officially published in the Government Gazette, and MP's/MPL's must be instructed to be officially available to voters in their official constituency for a prescribed number of days per year (e.g. three weeks).

The constituency office must have prescribed infrastructure and equipment, which can promote liaison with the Member of Parliament and Parliament.

The proper description of the mechanism, which should bring about interaction between MP's/MPL's and voters, e.g.: *Annual or quarterly feedback meetings in constituencies that are presented and financed by Parliament.*

Official notices in community papers / regional papers on availability of MP's/MPL's and official feedback sessions financed by Parliament.

Constituency allowances for MP's/MPL's must be adapted in accordance with the manifold functions of the offices.

A code of conduct for Members of Parliament with regard to compulsory constituency tasks.

Official monitoring visits together with responsible official to state institutions in constituency.

Formal "Parliament to the People" programmes, which are presented thrice a year on topical themes in constituencies.

Multiparty visits to constituencies during constituency weeks.

Specific statutory role for MP's with regard to monitoring / overview of state departments within constituencies similar to IDP at local government level.

Creating a Parliamentary unit, which serves as support department for constituencies.

Creating a formal liaison mechanism in all central and provincial state departments to effectively deal with and process voter problems / questions.