

# CONTACT

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## THE NATAL ELECTIONS



**T**HE results of the recent Natal Provincial Council elections have probably caused more concern to Liberals living in the other provinces than they have to Liberals in Natal.

Natal Liberals did not go into the elections expecting very much. They certainly did not expect to poll many votes. For the first time the Party contested seats in which the United Party was opposed by candidates other than Liberals. This had serious disadvantages. It meant that people who were disgruntled with the U.P. could choose how they voted. It meant also that some people, who were avowedly liberal, voted U.P. because they were afraid that, if they did not, the Federal Party would get in and it meant that other liberals voted Federal for fear that the U.P. would get in.

The Liberal Party realised that this might happen and that it must suffer as a result—but its hopes lay in other directions. Through the election it hoped to gain as much publicity as possible for itself, it hoped to worry the Natal electorate into having to face up to the impact of new ideas, it hoped to make quite clear to that electorate the differences between itself and the Parties it opposed, it hoped to learn a great deal about how to conduct an election campaign and it hoped to lay the foundations upon which it could successfully build in the future. Although, in certain cases, votes may have fallen short of expectations most of these other hopes have been, or should be, realised.

On the whole the Party received a fair press. Although it did not hold any "mass" meetings it held a great many smaller ones, and these were usually well attended by members of all racial groups. Through its canvassers and its pamphlets the fact of the Party's existence was brought forcibly home to many people who had never heard of it. If it has done nothing else the election has confronted a great many new people with the liberal idea and forced them to think about it.

Possibly the greatest single advantage the Party itself has derived from the election has been through the esprit de corps and the sense of serving a common purpose which have been built up amongst its members. It is often said that Non-Europeans, who are voteless, have no part to play in a political party which must appeal to people who are voters. The fallacy of this argument was proved in this election. Speakers of all four racial groups appeared on the Party's platforms. For the first time in an election in Natal, Africans, Coloureds, Europeans and Indians put their point of view from a common platform. There is no doubt that this fact alone has had some effect on European opinion. But this is not the only sphere in which Non-Europeans have played a full part in the election. They have done so as transport officers, as clerical workers, as poster officers, as drivers and as canvassers—in fact in every sphere of election work. A common spirit which could not have been built up in three years of ordinary political activity has been achieved through three months of working together.

Another significant point which emerges from the election is revealed by the canvass. Natal is traditionally anti-Indian and paternalistic towards Africans. There are signs that it may be becoming less of both these things. Certainly Liberal canvassers have been received sympathetically almost everywhere. There appears to be a fair body of opinion which is moving slowly towards Liberalism but which has not quite arrived there yet. With consistent propagation of the principles for which the Liberal Party stands it may well be that in five years time these people will be ready to take the plunge.

By its rejection of the Federal Party, Natal has shown clearly in this last election that it has become much more South African than it was in the days of the Dominion Party. Although the Federal Party will continue to exist it may, through its defeat at this election, have lost its one chance to play an effective part in South African politics. If it has, then the Liberal Party's task will be made much easier, and it will be possible in future to make the United Party face up to the real problem which confronts us at every level of politics in South Africa—that of creating a common multi-racial society.