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EDITORIALS

1

INTO THE DARK

When Mr Vorster decided to call a General Election 18 months before due time he told us that there were three reasons why he was doing this. Firstly, the opposition parties had gone through so many changes since the last election that he wanted to give the voters an opportunity to vote on their new policies. Secondly, he wanted to give them the opportunity to vote on his new constitutional proposals. Thirdly, he wanted to give them the chance to show the world that they stood behind him in his resistance to outside 'interference' in South Africa's 'domestic' affairs.

We attach no importance to the first of these reasons. Mr Vorster wasn't interested in giving voters a chance to sort out their ideas on opposition policies, he was just hoping to pick up a few more seats for himself out of the confusion which existed, and of course he succeeded marvellously. Nor do we attach any to the second. Voters knew as little about the implications of the new constitutional proposals at the end of the election as they did at the beginning and no serious attempt was made to enlighten them. It was the third plank in Mr Vorster's election platform, the 'stand together against the world' plank, which overshadowed all the others, and which was

used as a whip to beat frightened or indignant voters into line, swallowing the constitutional proposals as they rushed to man the barricades. The fact that the constitutional proposals will very likely lead to a presidential dictatorship and that, long before polling day, they had even been rejected by the most accommodating black leaders, influenced most white voters not at all.

The Nationalist Party's calculatedly hysterical 'come into the laager' campaign produced results which must have exceeded its wildest dreams. In the short term its position is impregnable, but in the long? The campaign against the outside world was directed particularly against the West, and particularly against the Carter administration. The West, overnight, became an even greater threat to South Africa than the Russians. Mr Pik Botha, Minister of Foreign Affairs, the not-so-long-ago great White hope for change, was its most strident critic. South Africa 'will never satisfy the West', no matter what it does, he declaimed from one platform after another.

Mr Botha is quite wrong of course, and knows it. South Africa could very easily satisfy the West. It is the

policies of the Nationalist Party which will never do so. All South Africa would need to do to satisfy the West and, indeed, many signatories to the Lusaka Manifesto, would be to announce that she was setting out on a new course which would lead to the abandonment of apartheid. Provided she kept moving in that direction she would probably be given a good deal of time to reach the one-man-one-vote goal which we and most non-voting South Africans would welcome tomorrow. Unfortunately change outside the limits of apartheid is the one thing the Nationalists can't yet bring themselves to contemplate, or certainly not to talk about in public.

If this election had been used by the Nationalist Party to start persuading its supporters to begin moving in the direction of a policy more acceptable to the world it could have exercised a profound influence for peace in this part of Africa. Instead it was used to stress the inevitability of conflict and to stampede a whole new army of white voters into a dead-end defiance of the world. Yet anyone who thinks South Africa can stand against the world for ever is blind to what is happening on his own doorstep. We are more dependent on the opinion of the outside world in 1978 than we were the day the Nationalist Party came to power thirty years ago. Then the Nationalists could ignore the world on Namibia, now they have been brought to the point where they are having to negotiate with it very largely on its terms. And Rhodesia? Where has defiance of the world got it?

And yet, what *about* Rhodesia? Is there not a small glimmer of hope from that unexpected quarter? Has Mr Smith not now pronounced what, since UDI, he and his supporters have regarded as the ultimate heresy? Did he not say that he would be prepared to negotiate with black Rhodesian leaders for a constitution based on universal suffrage?

Now we are sure that Mr Smith has come to accept this position not because he wants to but because he has at last seen that this is the best deal that white Rhodesians can hope for. And he has been driven to this acceptance by the pressure of the world. He would have saved the people of Rhodesia a great deal of suffering if, instead of declaring UDI, he had set out willingly, all those years ago, towards the goal he has now reluctantly conceded. So too, in Namibia, it is world pressure which has wrought the changes and at least induced the apparent acceptance by most Namibians, including quite a lot of white ones, that all the country's inhabitants are equal. One just hopes the change has not come too late to make a peaceful future possible.

If outside pressure has brought change to Rhodesia and Namibia is there any reason why it shouldn't to South Africa? It is true that South Africa is far stronger than either of those two countries but, unlike them, it has no large and friendly neighbour to prop it up. So one should not underestimate the force for change which outside pressure could bring even in South Africa, and it is idle to think that it will not be used when the whole world community regards apartheid as a monstrosity.

The sensible thing to do in South Africa's present position is to work towards an accommodation with potentially friendly world opinion, not to fly in its face. The depressing thing about the election result is the fact that a government whose actions have led South Africa from relative international respectability to total isolation and impending disaster should be seen by a growing number of voters as their saviour, that in spite of the uncontested evidence in the Biko Inquest that we have now bred our own version of the Gestapo here, many people who were prepared to die to oppose Hitler now seem to be getting ready to die to defend a system which, to survive as it now is, will have to depend more and more on Hitler's methods. And many English-speaking white South Africans seem to be getting ready to die to defend the abrogation of the most worthwhile things in their own heritage — habeas corpus, the rule of law and the freedom of the press.

The swing to Mr Vorster on November 30th was an emotional act, not one of reason, a blind faith that Big Brother would look after you, if you were white, when things turned nasty. But he won't be able to do that because it will be what he stands for which has turned things nasty and, as long as he stands for them, they can only get nastier. As Mr Vorster had hoped, the opposition was thrown into disarray by the early election. Except in Natal, the New Republican Party, successor to the UP, virtually ceased to exist. Except in Natal, where it won only one seat, the PFP held its own in seats and increased its votes to become the official opposition. Its 17 seats to the Nationalists' 134 shows just how heavy has been the responsibility placed on it to speak out on behalf of the 80% of our population who are black. This job allows of no back-sliding. There were disturbing signs during the election that some PFP leaders might be starting to turn into new de Villiers Graaffs, trying to be all things to all white men in the hope of picking up votes. This is disastrous. There is only one thing South Africa needs from an opposition now. Something black people can have faith in. □

A COMMENT ON THE ELECTION AND ON VARIOUS OTHER RECENT MATTERS

by Vortex

Had this comment been written down
it would be censored, banned,
abolished from the sight of man,
as being unworthy to be perused
by good white-living South Africans;
but in fact it never got expressed
(how can one utter one's thought
when one's whole heart is depressed?)
and a perfect, though tense, silence —
even a silence that implies
disgust and indignation
and quiet fierce resolution —
can never be suppressed.