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EDITORIALS

1. THE ELECTION

It seems to be generally agreed that the 1981 General Election result was different in character from that of any other held since 1948. The Progressive Federal Party's gains in votes and seats were remarkable. The Herstigte Nasionale Party's gain in votes was sobering, to say the least.

It seems incredible that, in the year 1981, nearly 200,000 Nationalists should vote against Mr. P. W. Botha because they think his policies are too "liberal" — and this without his having taken a single important step away from "traditional" apartheid. The omens for the future from this direction are not good. The professional analysts tell us consolingly that HNP support probably has a ceiling of just over 25% of the present electorate, as if that wasn't enough to be the potential cause of havoc one day.

In the meantime what should one make of the PFP's performance? What is its potential to influence the future?

The Party retained its solid blocks of urban seats in Johannesburg and Cape Town, several in the face of quite extraordinarily unfavourable new delimitations. It took the prize of Gardens from the Nationalist Party's glamour

candidate, Dawie de Villiers. Having lost the only seat it previously held in Natal through redelimitation, it then proceeded to bring that Province into the mainstream of white opposition politics by winning a block of six seats covering an area from the centre of Durban to north of Pietermaritzburg. It won Greytown and it nearly won Mooi River, both seats including some of the more affluent suburbs of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, but each containing a strong farming and small-town element. It won seats in the Eastern Cape for the first time. It did well in many seats which it didn't win and showed that it had support, even if not much, in some of the most unlikely places. What happened to the PFP was that, in many constituencies where this had not previously been the case, it became acceptable to be identified with it. This is an important threshold to have crossed. It is significant that its gains were made despite the Nationalist Party's efforts (and the New Republican Party's, for that matter) to depict it as a party of boycotters (its refusal to be involved in the President's Council) and potential traitors (the support some of its members had given to the "Release Mandela" campaign).

It is certainly something quite new in Africa to find white people in such proportions (a quarter-of-a-million of them) voting for change based on a future worked out together with their black fellow-citizens.

But the Progressives should not let their natural feelings of jubilation run away with them. The fact of the matter is that the Nationalists hold over 130 seats in Parliament and the Progressives less than 30 and the threat from the Herstigtes is growing ominously. The PFP has made a breakthrough, but time is short, and the momentum must be maintained. The Party's task now is not only to win more recruits from outside its ranks for a programme of negotiated change but to keep reminding those within its ranks of what that change is likely to involve. In particular they must be conditioned to the fact that the constitutional

guarantees the party advocates for minorities, desirable as they may be, will only get support from a new National Convention if they are clearly seen as an attempt to guarantee rights and not to entrench **privileges**. For ultimately, as Dr. Slabbert himself has repeatedly stated, any guarantees written into a constitution will only last if the majority of voters feel they are necessary and good. In short, white voters must be prepared for the fact that, whatever constitutional guarantees the National Convention accepts, the society which it ushers in will be very different from today's.

Keeping this fact before white voters will help build PFP credibility in black eyes, and on that credibility, as much as on white votes, will depend its capacity to influence the future. □

2. THE RAND DAILY MAIL

Allister Sparks has described his sacking from the editorship of the Rand Daily Mail as a symbolic act. And it is. It symbolises many things, not least the blindness of business.

Can the businessmen who own the Mail not see that they have given a spectacular, uncontested victory to the Prime Minister's "total strategy" which will make every other redoubt in his opponents' lines of defence more difficult to hold?

Can they not see that they have dealt a terrible blow to those black people to whom the Mail, over the years, has given the feeling that, perhaps, after all, there are still white people who will put out their necks and fight on their behalf — and who, in turn, have continued to give their support, even if tacitly, to the principles of negotiated change and a non-racial future?

Can they not see that they have given a powerful boost to those who argue that, in a capitalist society, when it comes to a clash between principles and profits, it is the profits that will always win? The owners of the Mail tell us that they sacked Mr. Sparks solely because his paper wasn't profitable enough. This, if one knows anything at all about the arguments going on in the black community about the future shape of our society, seems to us to be the worst argument of all. It will surely convince many black doubting-Thomases, not yet persuaded that Marxism is the answer to their prayers, that capitalism and the free market system is not for them? And how will the owners of the Mail feel about that?

Maybe this time next year the Rand Daily Mail will be showing a profit. We hope that, if it is, somewhere in its Balance Sheet will be recorded that it was almost certainly achieved at the expense of all the rest of us. □

3. MORE DIVIDED THAN EVER

If the Republican Festival in May was supposed to be some sort of healing exercise, binding together the diverse elements in our society, even if only for one brief hour, it could hardly have been more of a disaster. Its final days were marked as much by the sound of exploding sabotage devices and vehement protest as they were by that of marching feet, martial music and the cheers of the crowd.

Long before that the Festival was being boycotted by all the major non-Afrikaner churches, the non-Afrikaner universities, a host of lesser organisations, many white individuals, and the entire black community of any consequence. And how could it be otherwise? Why should anyone celebrate with everyone else a republic imposed on him

without his consent, and founded on the principle that only by keeping apart from those other people could conflict with them be avoided?

Yet even intelligent Nationalists seemed quite unable to understand this massive rejection of their celebrations. During May Archbishop Hurley wrote a letter to members of the Catholic Church urging them not to take part. The main reasons he gave for this call were that the twenty years of the Republic we were being asked to celebrate had been marked by, and continued to be marked by, uprooting of whole communities, increasing rural poverty, widespread urban misery, "and the constant humiliation of being discriminated against in the matter of human rights,