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EDITORIAL

THE REFERENDUM

REALITY last went to press before Mr. Botha had announced the referendum date, and this editorial is being written before the result is known. We hope, without much confidence, that by the time you read it white South African voters will have taken their opportunity, on November 2nd, to throw the Nationalist Party's constitutional proposals out.

Our reasons for hoping this are much the same as many other opponents of those proposals, but we record them briefly here.

First, the proposals are the Nationalist Party's and nobody else's. There is no question of the Government having tried to achieve any sort of consensus on them. Second, black South Africans are totally excluded from the new constitution and the Nationalist have made it abundantly clear that this is the way they intend it to stay.

Third, the powers of the President are far greater than any man should ever enjoy and controls over them scarcely exist.

Fourth, there is no Bill of Rights, and the Nationalists are emphatic that they have no intention that there should ever be one.

Fifth, for those three groups for which it does cater, Whites, Coloureds and Indians, the constitution provides an inflexible framework for the perpetuation of apartheid between them, in every field in which the Nationalists choose to perpetuate it.

If they do not reject this new constitution on November 2nd white South Africans will have committed not only themselves but every member of every other group to life in an apartheid straightjacket for as far into the future as any of us can see. And this will have been made possible by English-speaking White South Africans, given their first real chance to influence the future course of events since 1948, having decided to support the Nationalists. Many of them will have done this under the illusion that the constitutional proposals are "at least a step in the right direction", that change once started can't be stopped, that soon the inevitable force of logic will compel the inclusion of Africans in government at the point where the real decisions affecting them are made.

This, we fear, is all wishful thinking. We do not think any benefits will come to Africans by way of this constitution, and they don't think so either. In fact one of the most remarkable things about it is the unanimous rejection with which it has been greeted by the entire African community. Those who have asked white voters to vote against the proposals have included the predominantly black Catholic, Methodist and Anglican Churches, which at the last count had 4 million African adherents; Chief Buthelezi's Black Alliance; the United Democratic Front, supported by more than 400 organisations across the country; the Black Consciousness Movement — and the Black Trade Union Movement. Together this represents the most complete alignment of black opinion on one issue that South Africa has ever seen.

If white voters who claim to oppose apartheid turn out to have rejected this massive black appeal for a "No" vote on November 2nd that rejection could have profound and lasting effects on the prospects for eventually building a non-racial society here. But if Mr. Botha's proposals are thrown out, the way will have been left open to start working out a new constitution, Black and White together, when the dust from this dangerous referendum exercise has settled. □