

# That Election

Dear Sir,

The first editorial of **Reality's** July issue entitled "That election" contains criticism of radicals who opposed the 6 May 1987 whites-only General Election and labelled it an 'irrelevant circus'. "Perhaps", the editorial continues, "without the 'irrelevant circus' campaign the PFP would have retained its position as the Official Opposition, and that would have been very important. . ."

This approach needs challenging on three levels. Firstly there is as yet no statistical evidence that left wing abstention from party political activity or voting played a significant part in the loss of seats by the PFP. Until such detailed analysis is available it would be wise not to jump to recriminatory conclusions. Other factors which will have to be assessed are emigration, the number of immigrants from Zimbabwe and elsewhere enfranchised since the 1981 election and the general effect of government propaganda and censorship on the minds of English speaking white voters. If it is proved that radical absenteeism was so decisive as to deprive the PFP of its status in Parliament this will show that the white left is larger and carries greater political clout than is generally recognized; and that the PFP has been foolish to ignore its message.

Secondly, one must question the assumption that the PFP is a party worth supporting. While it has a well earned reputation as an organization which responds well on human rights issues, especially in a situation of crisis, in 1986 it lost its two most admirable Parliamentarians to extra-Parliamentary activity and has policies on economic matters and issues such as sport and the SADF which

make it extremely suspect in the eyes of the left.

Thirdly, to many left wing voters the implementation of the new constitution and the tricameral Parliament represented the end of the road for participation in conventional politics. Such decisions were based on deeply held convictions that a racially based constitution must be rejected in every possible way; that Parliament has in any case become an irrelevance in the face of the rise of the National Security Management System; and that identification with the extra-Parliamentary democratic movement offers a more realistic pathway to the attainment of a non-racial democracy. Furthermore, this election took place under a national State of Emergency which constrained to an even greater degree than is normal in South Africa a free exchange of information and ideas which is an essential part of political process.

The **Reality** editorial unfortunately offers no reasons why left wing whites should have supported the PFP, which ran a colourless campaign primarily aimed at placating its right wing. Nor does it acknowledge or give credit to honestly and carefully developed left wing positions. From the election campaign emerged a development far more important than electing PFP members to Parliament: The Five Freedoms Campaign and the call from 14 organizations as diverse as COSATU and the Black Sash for a democracy based on one person one vote in a unitary South Africa. By ignoring such nuances this editorial does no credit to a publication with the sub-title a journal of liberal and radical opinion. □

**Christopher Merrett**

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