

EDITORIAL

Make sure the ayes have it

EVER SINCE Albert Hertzog and Jaap Marais walked out of the Nationalist Party to start the Herstigte Nasionale Party a succession of political analysts has been telling us that the white Right-wing was no real threat, that its potential for growth was strictly limited.

They have produced all sorts of sociological arguments to show what those limits were, and almost without exception the next election has proved them wrong. First they told us its ceiling was 5%, then 10%, then 20%. Now, after Potchefstroom, when that percentage has inched close enough to 50% to persuade President De Klerk to call a referendum to decide the matter one way or another, there is no certainty that the Right-wing won't win.

With regard to the Potchefstroom result, however, one or two points should be made.

For one thing, the previous Nationalist incumbent, Louis Le Grange, was, to all intents and purposes, indistinguishable from a member of the Conservative Party. No doubt some people voted for him in the last election for that very reason, but weren't so sure about the new man.

Secondly, the Nationalists ran a singularly inept campaign. They seemed to start taking it seriously only in the last few weeks and then, on the eve of polling, made the lunatic announcement that in future whites would be expected to pay much more for the education of their children than they had ever been asked to do in the past. That could only have pushed voters the CP's way.

Thirdly, as in most by-elections, there would have been a certain floating, protest vote against the government of the day which could return to support it on another occasion.

We suspect all this was marginal though. Most of the CP voters at Potchefstroom *did* vote for old-style apartheid. Although it seems unlikely (this is a guess not a prediction) that that vote would be sufficient to win a nationwide, all-white referendum, it could be a close run thing.

So what do we do about it?

Dr Treurnicht and his Conservative Party say they believe in partition, in something they call "co-operative self-determination".

What do they mean?

There is no way that South Africa can return to

old-style apartheid. Even if the number of people supporting that nightmare scenario were to amount to 50% of the whites, that would still be no more than 7% of the whole population.

Nevertheless, it is an extremely potent 7% with the capacity and, it seems increasingly, the will, to fight for what it wants.

So what does it want?

It wants a state in which Afrikaners will be boss. It has no faith in Bills of Rights or any of the other checks with which modern democracies attempt to control the abuse of power. It thinks that the only way in which it can protect itself from future persecution is by being boss in its own homeland.

Is such a solution possible?

The answer in the past has always been an emphatic no, but now even an unnamed ANC source has put it forward as a possibility.

Where would that homeland be? Every Right-wing organisation has a different plan, most of them ludicrously favourable to Afrikanerdom. If their support should amount to 7% of the population any claim to much more than 7% of the national resources would be unreasonable and morally untenable. Let them be challenged to say where a viable Afrikaner homeland could be, based on a division of resources bearing some relation to the numerical strength of their support, and what the consequences for those supporters and the rest of us would be.

There is nowhere where such a solution would not involve a massive displacement of people.

The idea is crazy, but is it crazier than the prospect of a South African Lebanon or Northern Ireland? For Potchefstroom has shown that Right-wing white South Africa is driven by an emotional obsession which owes nothing to logic or common sense.

In the meantime we are faced by the referendum. Apartheid based or not, now that the country is committed to a poll, everyone who is opposed to the Right-wing should help to make sure the Right-wing does not win. ●

Join the debate on changing South Africa.

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