

two colours in your human rainbow (black and white); or three (black, white, brown) or four, or seventeen. All those classifications reflect something, all have some sort of meaning to some people – although how anyone could cheerfully define **himself** as “Other Coloured” is beyond my imagination! But how the significance of each category is perceived and translated into political factions and political rights – indeed, whether each is given any political significance at all, is a crucial issue. It is an issue that will dominate politics as long as some people endeavour to protect or advance their interests by appeal to ethnicity. It will only subside when people realise its artificiality and find alternative principles of cohesion around which to organise in order to pursue their interests – when, as Mboya put it, the Patels and the Singhs are sufficiently at ease to marry the Khumalos and the van der Merwes – and vice versa.

At university we should be engaged in trying to distinguish between rhetoric and reality, between what people say and what people do – and how those dyads relate to each other. In the new society, beyond the abyss all the skills mastered in this area of decoding rhetoric and assessing reality will be needed quite as much as they are here today. When politicians speak of the dictatorship of the proletariat we should ask ourselves (or better them if we dare) whether they are part of the dictatorship or part of the proletariat. When they speak of fair shares for all, ask how **their** income compares with the national per capita income, and what **they** will give up so that all may start equal. We should be experienced at

asking the questions by now, as members of this strange society of ours. (You heard what happened when Advocate Lombard, the public prosecutor for Stinkwater went to the Holiday Inn in Maseru? He met a local who was dressed in a smart white uniform with lots of gold braid. “You a commissioner?” asked Lombard. “Certainly not”, replied the officer, “I’m a ...”. “Don’t play the fool with me”, said Lombard, “Lesotho is land locked – you haven’t got a Navy”. “What department did you say you worked for?” asked the Sotho Admiral “Ministry of Justice”, said Lombard. “Then we do have something in common”, replied the Admiral, “Our Navy, your justice”). In short, the faces on the TV will change, the rhetoric will change, but until what the mass of us perceive as reality changes, the ethnic and social landscape will remain familiar to us. Those of us who learn – by our studies of history and culture, and by our close observation of the world about us – how categories and relationships can be re-interpreted, and how they are manipulated in the names of ideology and reality, should be well equipped to survive and even prosper in a modest sort of way, through our own creative adaptation. Do not believe the doctors who tell you that rigidity sets in only a few hours after death – that is bio-logic. Rigidity of thinking in an age of revolution is the cause, not the consequence of cultural extinction. And maybe at least the younger generation are getting the message – anthropology is the fastest growing social science at Rhodes University, a fact which not only gives me pleasure but also hope for us all beyond the abyss. □

A reply to Christopher Merrett on “That Election”.

It is true that there is no statistical evidence to support the contention that people who might normally have been expected to vote for the PFP in May stayed away from the polls because of the “irrelevant circus” campaign. Nevertheless it is the conviction of people who worked in the election that they did, and it is certainly their view that many former and potential workers did nothing to help them this time.

As to the question whether the PFP was worth voting for on May 6th (or should all white voters energies be going into extra-parliamentary work) my own view is that, whatever reservations anyone might have had about some of its policies or its campaign, it was.

The crucial dividing line in white South African politics seems to me to be whether one rejects apartheid and

commits oneself to a non-racial future or not. For many white voters support for the PFP has been their affirmation of that commitment. Most of these people are not political “activists” or ever likely to be, and we are deluding ourselves if we think that they are. They are therefore highly unlikely to attach themselves to the “extra-parliamentary democratic movement”. But, unless they are persuaded otherwise by the Right or the Left, they will not resist the coming of a non-racial society and will accept it with reasonably good grace when it does come.

This is a bonus for the future and not an irrelevance. It should be helped to happen, something which the “irrelevant circus” campaign did not do.

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