

THE OCTOBER 26 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS - The People Demand Universal Adult Suffrage

On October 26, 1988 the Pretoria regime staged a much publicised election at the so-called third level of political representation - urban local authorities. Heralded by the Nationalist Party (NP) government as "the greatest exercise in democracy in Africa" when South Africans of all races would be voting on the same day (but for separate, racially defined bodies) for the first time, much was at stake in this election. Its outcome would decisively indicate the relative balance between the reactionary establishment and the forces of progress and revolution - whether the minority regime could overcome its crisis of legitimacy through cooption and an intensified reform strategy; and whether the National Liberation Movement (NLM) had been able to withstand the onslaught of the successive and intensifying states of emergencies to successfully repulse the regime and sustain the popular struggle for people's power. On the basis of still incomplete data available to us, this briefing will examine the October 26 Local Authority Elections in the following sections:-

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Part 1: The Regime's Strategy and The Popular Response

1. Why the Elections Were Called

The regime's decision to call a Local Authorities election in all urban areas for all races on October 26 can't be separated from its political-military strategy of reform, generated by the revolutionary upsurge and the repeated defeats it has suffered at the hands of the National Liberation Movement (NLM). It chose local authorities as the arena in which it hoped to kill security, political and legitimacy birds with one stone.

The black majority was the first target. Although cloaked in propaganda about "broadening democracy", uppermost amongst the concerns of South Africa's ruling circles was their determination to regain control over black administration, especially in urban African areas. Local authorities have never enjoyed any meaningful degree of credibility in the townships since the formal establishment of segregated residential areas for Africans in 1937. By 1985 the local authority structures were almost completely crushed by concerted popular resistance, when only 3 community councils still functioned in the country and urban policy lay shattered. The rise of organs of people's power in the townships in this period stood as a naked challenge to white minority rule. Popular authority and control had to be crushed by all means, a point reiterated in late 1987 by the state in a document where it stressed that all other objectives were to be subordinated to this cardinal aim. The Local Authority Elections therefore became central to the regime's efforts to reimpose its authority through an **urban low intensity conflict strategy**. According to this strategy, "elected", racially segregated local authorities are to combine, through "representation" on Regional Service Councils (RSCs) and provincial administrations, (second-tier political institutions which have been created as or transformed into state-appointed bodies since 1986), to determine "general affairs" and facilitate "codetermination". However, this seeming gesture to power-sharing masks the white minority bias built into them. Within RSCs the most votes and therefore the

decision-making powers are granted to those local authorities which consume the most services. In Apartheid conditions of an acute disproportion of wealth between black and white, these "naturally" favour whites. This network of separate local authority structures combined and controlled by white dominated RSCs is integral to the state security system of Joint Management Centres (JMCs) which feed into and are fed by third-tier political structures.

Establishing black local authorities was vital to the success of constitutional reforms introduced in 1983 as well. Although once again, these explicitly excluded Africans from national political institutions and instituted a three chamber parliament heavily biased in favour of whites, black popular opposition, especially by the communities directly targeted for cooption, combined with urban upheavals in African townships, sparked by the 1984 Vaal rent boycotts, to force Pretoria to rethink its approach to African incorporation into the racist power structure. The evident "problem of black political rights" could not be wished away. But instead of introducing universal adult franchise, a so-called "bottom-up reform process" was initiated. Starting at the lowest level, Africans were to be incorporated into "all levels of decision making up to the highest level" (Gerrit Viljoen, MP, Weekly Mail, 8.9.1988). Reconstituting compliant black local authorities was to be the first step in the process, as these would become the "building blocks" of a future South African "democracy", giving substance and credibility to the 1983 Constitution and its inherent racism. Pretoria thus called Local Authority Elections for October 26.

If in calling these elections Pretoria was concerned to crush and contain the mounting revolutionary tide, it also sought to use them to counter the threat from the **white right**, itself a product of the civil upheavals in the country and the divisions and uncertainties these have generated in the white minority. Since the white parliamentary elections in May 1987, the burgeoning of ultra-right, white minority politics has called into question the extent to which the NP government even represents them. The regime therefore chose to use the Local Authority elections as a proving and testing ground of its position in the white community. It was concerned to show that it continued to represent the interests of whites and that the majority of whites backed both the structural and ameliorative reforms considered essential for

sustaining minority rule and containing "the revolutionary onslaught".

Pretoria has also been concerned to address **the international community** to convince the world that it is truly committed to reform and thereby to break its growing isolation and the threat of sanctions. In particular, the emphasis on the allegedly democratic nature and the multi-racial complexion of polling procedure itself was targeted at a non-South African audience, especially in light of their growing concern about intensified internal repression.

Thus, as a state inspired initiative, the Local Authorities Election on 26 October were designed to entrench and extend the increasingly challenged authority of the white minority. It was a reform bid for very high stakes - the legitimacy of the ruling military-industrial complex ! Given this, Pretoria was determined to do everything in its power to ensure itself a favourable outcome. At the same time, the danger they posed to the (Mass` Democratic` Movement`)MDM and the popular struggle for power was a challenge which could not be ignored. Confrontation was inevitable.

2. Who Would Make What Happen

The state launched its election campaign under the slogan **You Can Make it Happen!** Remarkably ambiguous, what the contest between the authorities and popular majority would decide was who would make what happen. The months before the elections proved to be a period of intense political, physical and ideological confrontation as Pretoria prepared to impose its will on the masses, and the masses responded and prepared to resist.

2.1. The Regime's Repressive and Propaganda Onslaught

Conscious of an unbroken record of failure in imposing compliant and cooperative local authority structures on South Africa's urban black communities, the apartheid regime prepared a multi-pronged offensive to prevent or, if not, at least to contain popular opposition to its reform initiative well in advance. It announced its intention to hold the elections almost a year in advance. From then it began to prepare the ground for their "success" through a strategy of intensive repression and propaganda directed, in the first instance, against the MDM and the national liberation

movement as a whole. Without chronicling every action Pretoria took in the run up to the elections, this section will look at key measures.

"Taking Out" the Opposition

The restriction/banning of 17 organisations and 18 prominent anti-apartheid activists on February 24, a full eight months before the elections were due to be held, signalled the beginning of the regime's offensive to "clear the decks" of organisations and individuals who would oppose the elections in an organised way. This process of what the military strategists refer to as "taking out" key activists or organisations continued throughout the pre-election period, growing in intensity from September onwards with the detention of 11 national and regional South African Youth Congress (SAYCO) leaders on the 2nd (New Nation, 2.11.1988). Organisations affected by restrictions ranged from national bodies such as the UDF, COSATU, AZAPO, the NECC, the Release Mandela Committee (RMC), the Detainees Parents Support Committee (DPSC), SANSCO and SAYCO down to youth, student, civic and women's organisations in small towns and communities in remote parts of the country. Restrictions also affected prominent national personalities such as MaSisulu and Archie Gumede, touched provincial and regional figures and reached down to leaders and activists in every township across the country. At least 300 people were known to be detained over this period simply because they opposed the elections (South, 20-26 October, 1988), a high figure given the large number of key activists who had already been locked up.

The state's free-hand to repress with impunity was extended when on renewing the State of Emergency on June 10, it added new regulations to muzzle opposition to the elections. It became a criminal offence, punishable by a fine of up to R20 000 or 10 years imprisonment to encourage or incite the public to boycott or impede an election in any way. Thus, only political parties or individuals who intended participating in the elections were allowed to hold election meetings. On September 22, direct stifling of opponents of the elections took an even harsher and more dramatic turn when new regulations enabled the Minister of Law and Order to house arrest activists or place them under area restrictions simply by placing a notice in the government gazette.

Intimidation and Coercion

In addition to outright suppression, the state began an intensive campaign of intimidation and coercion to force people to vote. Security police raided church, newspaper and other organisations' offices confiscating publications and other documents. They also visited activists in their homes carrying out searches, accusing them of campaigning against the elections and threatening them with detention or arrest. An application to the Supreme Court in Kimberley by the De Aar Youth Congress (DAYCO) for an order restraining police from unlawfully assaulting, detaining or intimidating its members revealed the extremes to which the security forces were prepared to go to bludgeon people into silence and compliance. DAYCO members were picked up and brutally beaten by security forces who alleged that they were campaigning against the elections. They were threatened with indefinite detention if people did not vote or even if any anti-election pamphlets or stickers were found in the township (South, -28.9.1988)! In some townships pamphlets offering rewards to anybody who gave information to the police about individuals active in the anti-election campaign were also distributed.

Prominent anti-apartheid church leaders and the clergy in general were warned by Stoffel van der Merwe (Minister of Information) not to "play with politics" by calling on people not to vote as they were not "untouchable" and action would be taken against them. This was reinforced by the circulation of smear pamphlets intended to discredit Rev Alan Boesak and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The state offensive was supplemented by countless right wing church groups which actively campaigned for the elections.

Intimidation and coercion was not confined to individual activists and opposition organisations, however. Whole communities or sections of them were subjected to threats and direct intimidation. In particular, the most vulnerable were targeted by the state. It was made clear to pensioners, for instance, that if they did not vote they would no longer receive pensions. And in the few "squatter" communities eligible to participate in the elections, municipal police threatened residents that they would not get houses if they did not vote.

Para-statal violence

Direct state repression and intimidation was supplemented and reinforced by a campaign of physical violence by ultra-right and

puppet forces which the regime condoned and even facilitated. Almost coincident with the beginning of Pretoria's intensified crackdown on activists, the Southern African Council of Churches' office block, Khotso House, was devastated by an expertly placed bomb on August 31. The *Wit Wolwe*, a para-military ultra-right organisation, claimed responsibility. A few weeks later, Khanya House, the headquarters of the South African Catholic Bishops Conference was gutted by arsonists. Both attacks followed clear and unequivocal calls from the respective church bodies for people not to vote in the municipal elections. There were several incidents of arson attacks against the homes of anti-apartheid activists and "mysterious" burglaries at union and advice offices (South, 16.11.1988). In addition, individual candidates in various townships, such as Mali Hoza in Khayelitsha, used vigilantes ("Hoza's Gangsters") to force residents into voting for them, assaulting and threatening them with the destruction of their homes and eviction if they resisted. In others, people were assured of protection from eviction if they voted, a promise which barely masked the concealed threat. In Crossroads, Johnson Ngxobongwana, "mayor" and *witdoek* leader demanded that squatters pay a R5 election "fee" and when they refused their shacks were demolished (South, 19.10.1988). In Natal people were threatened with R50 fines if they could not prove they had voted and in other areas they were threatened with the withdrawal of services, including cutting off water and electricity supplies.

Cajoling with withered carrots

In addition to force, election pundits in various townships tried to attract people to the polls and to vote for them by offering free gifts of various kinds and by making election promises based on people's desperate need for housing, welfare support and services. Some traders offered boxes of groceries in return for votes at the same time as they threatened clients to withdraw credit assistance or even not to serve them at all if they did not. Mali Hoza, vigilante boss presented as one of Khayelitsha's most popular candidates by the state Bureau of Information, offered "to give people anything they wanted" (South, 26.10.1988). Tamsanqa Linda, former mayor of Ibhayi Town Council, and an aspirant councillor, personally dished up soup to pensioners, promised housing to the unemployed and homeless and offered to upgrade hostel facilities if people voted for him. Similar vote catching ploys were used all over the country. In some areas township

management lent a helping hand. In Lamontville and Chesterville, for instance, stickers, t-shirts emblazoned with the words *I love Chesterville-Ningizimu*, and caps and oranges were distributed with the assistance of other state departments (South 5.8.1988). In others the lure of free beer, food and even money was used to attract people to register and to vote. Few urban residents, with the possible exception of Sofasonke supporters in Soweto, however, responded favourably. Linda was stoned out of Little Soweto (P.E.) by angry commuters (City Press 16.10.1988). Florence Mangala, another aspirant candidate mobilising shack dwellers in Duncan Village (East London) fared little better. Chased out of the township three years ago, people walked out of an election meeting when she asked them to vote for her "as they had done before". She had promised them housing (New Nation, 25.8.1988), although the development area she was offering had not even been approved! Many election agents were accompanied and "assisted" by municipal police as they canvassed for their candidates. Most aspirant councillors, however, dared not risk holding election meetings.

The state also solicited the support of employers to get blacks to register and vote. Not only did they help in distributing state propaganda material and election registration forms, but they also cajoled workers to vote by promising them a paid day off on election day (Sowetan, 14.7.1988). This strategy of endearment through repression and force was supplemented by a massive, multi-media propaganda offensive.

Propaganda Squirrels - the People Smell A Rat

Coupled to an intense and increasingly repressive campaign against the press, which has escalated since the State of Emergency was introduced in 1985, together with the stifling of publications and public statements calling on people to boycott the municipal elections, the state itself mobilised all media to sell apartheid "democracy" and to pressurise the black community in particular, to participate in its reform exercise.

A confidential report on the Bureau of Information's R4,7 million advertising strategy leaked to the Conservative Party revealed the regime's objectives. Drawn up to counter the problem that Pretoria's "credibility as a future reform agent is under

suspicion", it spelt out its determination amongst other things, to "place the election in the correct perspective *as part of the process of peaceful reform and broadening of democracy*; to market democracy as the only moral and practical solution for South Africa; and to prevent propaganda undermining the election " (Sunday Star 5.6.1988, emphasis not original).

As planned, the regime's propaganda offensive escalated as the elections drew nearer. By mid-July, for instance, election registration forms had been distributed to workers at various plants and shops in Johannesburg followed in the next weeks by close on a million "informational" booklets targeted at employers and residents in the province. In Natal, the Provincial Administration was distributing a 7 minute video selling the election as a means of getting "houses, better roads, sports fields and stadiums, big things like that" to the residents of the province's 18 townships. The videos were scheduled to be shown at the various municipal offices and allegedly were designed to be included in the canvassing kit of prospective candidates (City Press, 31.7.1988).

In addition to posters and billboards calling on black people to vote, and at least in the white community to vote for various political parties, the state propagandised through regular adverts in the mainstream newspapers. 22 adverts were scheduled for each Sunday paper and 41 for each of the main dailies before polling day. The regime also used television and radio extensively, planning for 33 spots on each of the TV stations and an untold number of radio adverts. It began its TV campaign on August 10. In line with its strategy to counter the so-called serious-mindedness of "radical groups" by making the campaign one of "fun and pleasure", Pretoria's propaganda machine introduced two conversing animated squirrels into its advertising material at about this time. Supposedly neutral and without political association, these carefully chosen propagandists most closely resembled the rats so familiar to black township dwellers and their impact was about as positive as that of their rodent cousins.

Pretoria extensively used the many radio stations at its disposal as well. In Khayelitsha, for instance, during the period of prior voting, residents were being promised "everything their hearts desire" if they voted, and some, especially the homeless, responded (South, 26.10.1988).

Apart from a direct and deliberate advertising campaign, by calling the elections in the first instance and their promotion as a vehicle of "reform" and an alleged "broadening of democracy", the state ensured that the campaign would "naturally" be promoted through the media as newsworthy- an indirect promotion of state policies.

Thus, the ruling Nationalist Party (NP) used the state apparatus, especially its repressive forces, and a huge sum of tax payers money to "make" (force) white power "happen" in conditions of mass democratic opposition and a severe multi-dimensional crisis. Its strategy of extensive intimidation was waged on a pretext of allegedly *preventing intimidation* of voters by the democratic forces and thus, once again, the source of violence in South Africa was the regime itself.

Whether it was successful or not is most vividly seen by the outcome of the elections themselves, which we will examine in Part 2. However, the resistance put up by the national liberation movement, despite extremely repressive and coercive conditions, is itself a measure of the relative failure of the regime's strategy. In other words, "who would make what happen" depended on the relative ability of the mass democratic movement to counter Pretoria's offensive. In the second part of this section we briefly look at the response of the NLM and the people to the election campaign prior to polling day.

2.2. The People Mobilise and Organise

Since the Nationalist Party government's first announcement of its intention of staging third-tier Municipal Elections, the National Liberation Movement clearly and unequivocally rejected this strategy of cooption. Despite an early clampdown on some of the countrys' most important popular legal organisations and activists, the gradual "taking out" of lower level leadership, and tight censorship of the press and general restriction on freedom of speech, individuals and organisations still able to work sought out every possible legal space to call on the South African democratic majority **to reject apartheid and to boycott the election!** Prominent churchmen and leading religious bodies, acting both in their individual capacities and on behalf of their organisations,

through to leading trade unionists, trade unions and South Africa's largest trade union centre, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) as well as democratic civic, womens', youth, student and cultural activists and bodies used every opportunity to call on the people to defy, not to vote for apartheid. This appeal extended across lines of class and colour and reached all regions of the country. Meetings and rallies were called, wherever possible, to discuss the elections. Although banned by the regime, the major Anti-Apartheid Conference called by COSATU for September to discuss ways of maintaining the momentum of resistance, had the municipal elections and universal suffrage (one person one vote) among the main items on its agenda. Election campaign meetings organised by prospective candidates -the only meetings which Pretoria did not restrict or prohibit during the pre-election period - were often transformed into protest gatherings where residents called on candidates to withdraw, categorically rejecting their self-arrogated "right" to represent them. At some schools where teachers stood as candidates pupils protested by boycotting their classes, demanding their withdrawal.

Taking advantage of the protection of parliamentary privilege, Independent MP, Jan Van Eck conveyed the call to boycott made by the democratic movement to parliament and the people of South Africa. He stated, after consultations with the people's organisations, that the democratic movement and its leadership throughout the SA *"are telling all voters not to participate in the apartheid regime's racist local government elections in October. They are telling them 'Do not vote and do not stand for Black town council and Coloured and Indian management committee elections. Boycott these elections. By participating in these elections you will not be working for the liberation of our people. Instead you will become the apartheid regime's partner in apartheid oppression"*. His statement was published as an advert in the democratic press to further ensure that these views would be heard and heeded (New Nation, 19.10.1988). Indeed, just as the regime was able to make use of advertising to project its views, so too organisations in the mass democratic movement used the little space available to them to mobilise popular resistance. Adverts ranged from explicit boycott calls to the more oblique "stand for the truth" fish placed in the press by the churches in the week before October 26. Journalists of any calibre and

commitment to democracy (and their profession) ensured that the issues at stake in the elections, including the attendant repression, corruption and fraud which was an integral part of the regime's campaign, were aired in public. Street writing - graffiti, home made posters and banners - also mobilised in the townships.

The national liberation alliance, headed by the **African National Congress (ANC)**, gave clear leadership and direction from the underground. Using all media and fora available to it, the people were urged to actively reject the elections - to not participate in apartheid structures at any level and to fight for their democratic rights. This political mobilisation campaign was backed up by an unprecedented escalation of **Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK)** actions designed to support and reinforce popular resistance. The regime reported no fewer than 46 armed actions in September and 30 in October outside the bantustans (New Nation, 9.11.1988).!

Just as conditions of illegality were and have never been able to suppress people's organisations, so prison walls were broken by defiance and resistance. Ashley Forbes, when pleading against his conviction for terrorism, for example, used the occasion to call for an election boycott. When he was asked if he had the choice of participating in the elections or joining MK which would he choose, he replied he would join the ANC because the issues of the people were not being addressed and the elections were designed to destroy popular organisations! (New Nation, 22.9.1988) And in polling week itself, detainees at Pollsmoor and Victor Verster prisons in the Western Cape went on hunger strike for three and one days respectively (South, 2.11.1988).

Thus, despite the regime's concerted and multi-layered strategy to silence and suppress the NLM, the people fought relentlessly through their democratic organisations to prepare for the election onslaught. The results we see below were neither a product of black apathy, disinterest in democracy nor inexperience in voting, as the Pretoria regime alleges. On the contrary, they were a loud and clear statement of the popular will of the democratic majority in South Africa, a statement which is the outcome of a long, sustained and escalating challenge to white minority power. What then were the results?

Part 2: The Election Results and Their Implications

3. The Elections

At this stage it is only possible to indicate and illustrate general trends, as a more refined analysis requires more detailed data.

3.1. Constituencies and Candidates

• Nationally, there were 7 229 seats at stake in 1 071 local authorities. (Southscan, 26.10.1988).

Table 1. Number of Constituencies and Seats by Population Group

<u>Population Group</u>	<u>No of Local Authorities</u>	<u>No of Seats</u>
White	516	3 651
Coloured	276	1 321
Indian	74	370
African	260	1 851*

* Not in published table

(Weekly Mail, 8.9.1988 - Note: neither set of figures published in the paper add up to totals given)

Thus, the African majority had proportionately the least number of constituencies and the lowest representation, a fact consistent with apartheid policy that African political rights essentially remain confined to the bantustans, even under conditions of "reform".

• While all urban whites over 18 years of age had the right to vote, the same is not true for Africans. A substantial proportion of the African urban population were denied the right to vote, even had they wanted to. Only people who had been legally living in an African-designated area for three months or who owned (fixed immovable) property there were eligible. Thus, most "squatters" were disenfranchised, as were urban residents in the reserves and Africans living in 22 Trust Land townships in so-called "white South Africa". **Only 1,5 million of a total population of 26 million Africans were registered voters!**

A further anomaly between black and white was that whereas all whites could only vote once, as has become normal modern-day

democratic practice, the number of votes blacks could cast was determined by property qualifications¹. The more property an individual held the more votes s/he could cast, and these could be cast in the constituency where the property was located. Designed to boost the figure of black participation, the property franchise, characteristic of ruling class politics in the past, is consistent with South Africa's ruling class strategy to coopt the black middle class into apartheid rule - **where wealth rather than *just* colour, empowers!**

- The elections were strictly racially segregated so that each of the Pretoria-designated population groups who could vote², could only do so for a person of their own classification.

- In the white community where all adults are enfranchised, registration of voters was straightforward and automatic. This was not the case in the black community. Because of the complexity of determining who did and did not have the right to vote, as well as a deliberate political strategy to project black registration as black compliance and participation in the state's exercise in apartheid "democracy", the registration of black voters proceeded very haltingly. Few people came forward voluntarily. Lists were mostly compiled *by the authorities* from housing, hostel and pension registers without the knowledge or consent of tenants or old people. Both their lack of preparedness and the way they eventually compiled a voter's role for Africans further exposed their real contempt for Africans as an electorate - content that they could be bullied, swindled or bribed into going to the polls. This procedure was itself a cause of considerable grievance, especially given the use that was made of black registration by the state's propaganda machinery. **The low level of black registration can also be interpreted as an outcome of popular resistance.**

- Whereas in white constituencies all posts had candidates and almost all of these were contested, a substantial proportion of posts for African local authorities had no candidates or were

¹ Although it had fallen into disuse until the Botha "reform era", the class franchise or multiple votes for the propertied and educated has a long history in South Africa.

² The 10 000 strong Chinese population group were excluded from the elections.

uncontested. By the time nominations closed only 817, or *less than half the seats in African constituencies were contested*. A further 138 had no candidates and the remaining 796 seats were uncontested with only one person standing in each (New Nation, 9.11.1988).

The following table is an *incomplete breakdown* of the town councils to illustrate some townships where wards were uncontested or without candidates.

Table 2

Examples of Townships Where Wards were Uncontested or Had No Candidates at All.

<u>Town Council (No)</u>	<u>Contested</u>	<u>Uncontested</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>Candidates</u>			
Eastern Cape 22		all	
Lingelihle (Cradock)			all
Michausdal ¶(")		all	
Motherwell (PE)			all
KwaNobuhle (Uitenhage)		8	
	8		
Dobsonville (Soweto)	5	4	
Diepmeadow(Soweto)	9	8	
	3		
Rini (G'h'town)	9		
Alexandra (Jhb)		8	
	1		
Crossroads (CT)		all	
Sobantu (P'm'burg)			all
Klaarwater (Pinetown)			all
Lamontville (Durban)			all
Chesterville (Durban)			all

Natal 4 townships all
 Kagiso (Krugersdorp) 3 8
 ¶ Coloured
 (South, 28.9.1988; South, 12.10.1988; Southscan, 19.10.1988;)

In the Cape Province, taken as a whole, elections were held in less than half of local authorities designated for Africans (45/92); in Natal there were elections in 10 of 18 townships (Southscan, 19.10.1988). The following table from the Transvaal Provincial Administration gives a breakdown of uncontested wards in the Transvaal.

Table 3.
Uncontested Wards in African Designated Townships in the Transvaal

	<u>Total Wards</u>	<u>Uncontested Wards</u>
East Rand	138	47
West Rand	159	76
Central Transvaal	38	9
Far North Tvl	27	11
Eastern Tvl	85	27
Western Tvl	107	32
Total	554	202

(Weekly Mail, 27.10.1988)

Thus no elections took place in 36,4% of Transvaal wards.

Contrary to democratic practice, while some provincial administrations were considering holding by-elections, others were preparing to **appoint** councillors to unfilled posts. Such autocratic practice is consistent with the general powers vested in second-tier state administrative structures, (which are themselves appointed), which include removing councillors (elected or not) from their posts if they disagree with government policy.

The general unwillingness of people to even stand in the elections,

as the poor candidacy record underscores, belies Parkendorf's suggestion that the the call of the NLM for a boycott had little popular appeal. Nor does the racist explanation offered by the Transvaal electoral officer that "they (black people) have their own way of deciding. When someone is nominated, very often no-one stands against him" (Southscan, 2.11.1988) hold any weight. ***The difficulty the state faced in getting blacks to stand as candidates for cooption was a direct result of conscious and active popular opposition to the regime's election ploy.*** People did not want apartheid created councils imposed upon them. No black person with any credibility amongst the masses cared to participate, as a closer look at the candidates reveals.

- Although a full list is not at hand, it is clear that the majority of blacks willing to stand as candidates fell into three categories

- discredited individuals already cooperating in the system such as Mali Hoza, Tamsanqa Linda, Tom Boya, Steve Kgame, E.T Tshabala etc. Many of these men and women had participated in councils which had been rejected and destroyed in the struggles of 1984/86;

- businessmen and landlords wishing to reinforce and expand their base of power and patronage. Most candidates in Natal's black townships, for example, were landlords or people with apartheid-backed power (Southscan, 26.10.1988);

- corrupt and criminal elements, interested in the R1 000 a month salary and generous pension scheme paid councillors for their five year term of office as well as the power and privilege that participation in the local council system would bring. Most have little idea of or interest in the system they are to serve other than the material rewards they can win from participation.

Given an African population of 26 million, (or even the 3 million "urbans" that it counts) the difficulty the regime had in finding a mere 1 851 African collaborators speaks for itself. Its capacity to mobilise support in the Indian and Coloured communities faired only relatively better!

- Whereas all white candidates stood on a party political platform, or at least on an explicitly political platform (in the case of independents), the same was not true for black political aspirants. In the Coloured and Indian communities the situation was more mixed, with people standing for parties already collaborating in

the tri-cameral system as well as independently. In African residential areas, candidates mostly stood in their own capacity. The few who stood on party platforms, with an exception or two such as the Sofasonke Party, represented hastily constituted "parties" or "committees" the membership, programmes and policies of which, if they existed at all, were either unknown or indistinguishable from the Nationalist Party's election strategy and were intimately tied to the particular and personal interests of candidates.

- The only political party to field black and white contestants was the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), although it decided against putting up candidates in Eastern Cape townships given the strength of popular feeling against the elections there.

- With the exception of the Five Freedoms Forum (FFF), the entire mass democratic movement responded unequivocally to the call to organise for a boycott. The FFF decision to call on whites to vote for candidates who took "a clear anti-apartheid stand" and supported the establishment of "an open city", was based on criticisms of the white left's strategy in last year's white parliamentary elections where the left boycott was seen as undermining support for the PFP in some of its marginal seats. It was hoped that this change in approach would strengthen alliances forged in the white community and bring more whites into the mass democratic movement. The FFF fielded no candidates itself, nor did it put its weight behind any particular party or candidate (Weekly Mail, 15.7.1988). This new tactic was strongly debated in the run up to the elections, but it was the election results which were to reveal its usefulness in strengthening the democratic forces in the white community.

- In some respects the challenge of the elections differed radically for black and white.

In the black community the local elections were a proving ground of the strength of black opposition to the regime,- a matter to be judged by how many blacks the regime could get to vote. They were a test of the legitimacy of white minority rule and the strength of the National Liberation Movement.

In the white community the test was of Nationalist Party support in its real constituency. What was in question was whether the NP

remained a legitimate representative of white minority rule. The contest therefore was drawn between the NP and the Conservative Party (CP), which since its inception in 1982 has enjoyed a meteoric rise especially among the whites in the countryside and the white working class. The CP used the October 26 elections to expand its base and thereby to strengthen its challenge to the ruling NP's authority. Of all contesting political parties, it fielded the largest number of candidates.

- The regime introduced a system of prior voting for the first time in local elections. It was especially targeted at the black "electorate". Unlike "special votes"³ prior voting, open to everybody, and allegedly designed to ensure "as many voters as possible of all population groups ... be entitled to record their votes impartially and without fear" (Citizen, 3.6.1988) took the violation of democratic polling procedure one step further. Prior voters could register their votes for 12 days before election day itself, without proof of identity⁴ and without any special reason! It proved to be little more than a corrupt device to get reluctant voters to the polls without incurring the anger of their communities. It also starkly revealed the depth of state insecurity about the strength of popular resistance, with the authorities anticipating that the prior voting system was absolutely vital if they were to register even a fractional black poll and that therefore most voting would have to take place before October 26. And this is, in fact, what happened.
- The law that introduced prior voting, also prohibited candidates from withdrawing from the elections once their nominations were accepted.

3.2. The Elections in Black and White

The Black Poll

- The regime's carefully contrived reform initiative of staging a third-tier election suffered a resounding defeat on October 26 (equal in significance to the popular *No Vote* in Chile). The overwhelming majority of black voters **did not vote**. On "election day" itself a national total of 84 979 Africans actually went to the polls and officially 282 499 African votes were registered prior to October 26.

³"Special votes" used during the tri-cameral elections were designed to enable people who would not be able to vote on election day to vote nevertheless. In the 1983 elections they were widely abused especially by Indian and Coloured parliamentary candidates.

• On the eve of the elections the state launched one the largest security operations the country has seen in months. All police leave was cancelled, security forces were stationed at every polling booth "to make polling stations safe for the public" (Weekly Mail, 3.11.1988), and operations were carried out "on every front" including intelligence gathering. Homes of activists were raided and participants in anti-election rallies were detained "temporarily" on various pretexts. On October 25, the Port Elizabeth Youth Congress (Peyco) and the Transvaal Students' Congress (Trasco) were banned.

• In response to the call by the mass democratic movement for a day of mass action cum national stay-away", aside from not voting, people took various popular initiatives including a stay-away by thousands of workers, especially in Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth. The stay-away call was most strongly heeded by students - affecting primary as well as secondary schools throughout the country. Students also held rallies at Wits and the University of the Western Cape where there was bitter confrontation with the security forces. There were also several incidents of armed action, including a guerrilla attack on a polling station outside Zola (Soweto), the fire bombing of the houses of two Mamelodi candidates and limpet mine explosions in various parts of the country, including in the OFS and the Eastern Cape (Weekly Mail, 3.11.1988) Detainees at Victor Verster and Pollsmoor prisons staged protest hunger strikes!

• To conceal the extent of its defeat the regime carefully packaged the results. After 13 days of voting, it claimed a 24% poll in African townships and a 30% black poll, supposed proof of its electoral success in the black community. However, it did not publish the number of votes recorded! Close study of the figures by Dr Michael Sutcliffe revealed that the state even used its figures selectively. Thus, for instance, the Bureau of Information claimed that of a total of 2,38 million eligible voters in the PWV, 20% or 154 092 votes were cast. However, simple calculation suggests that this proportion is not some 20% of the voters, but a mere 6,5% (New Nation 9.11.1988)! Sutcliffe went further to question how the state arrived at the numbers of registered voters on which it made its percentage calculations and argued that the problem of official figures was further compounded by the fact that the number of votes does not represent the number of voters,

given that property owners had multiple votes.

- Black polling was very slack throughout the country. At Manenburg (CT), for example, only 41 people had voted by 3.45 on October 26, at Itsokelele (Natal) 7 votes were cast and at Msingisi (Natal) there were 24 ballot papers. **Nationally polling stations in black areas averaged 418 votes** (New Nation, 9.11.1988) and at many police, SADF members, candidates and election officers outnumbered voters.
- There is a stark contrast between official figures and figures based on an electorate which presumes *universal adult suffrage*. A full breakdown of results has yet to be produced, but for example, while Pretoria claimed an 11,5% poll in Soweto the real figure was closer on 2,8%. Voting on the East Rand was very low even according to Bureau of Information (BI) figures. For example, Tembisa officially recorded a poll of 3,2% , Tsakane 8,2%, and Duduza 21%. However only 570 votes were cast in Duduza, which with an eligible adult population of more than 24 000 people means an actual vote of slightly more than 2%. Taking the PWV area as a whole, the authorities claim a turn out of over 20% where in fact a poll of only 6,5% was cast. Similarly, while the BI claimed a 30% turn out in Natal, voting in the 10 townships where posts were contested represented 8,4% of eligible voters, and if the number of potential voters is considered, the 30% poll is reduced to far less than 1%!. (City Press, 30.10.1988; Sowetan, 28.10.199; Southscan 2.11.1988; New Nation, 9.11.1988).
- Black candidates in various parts of the country, standing on PFP tickets, were elected into local authority structures.
- In general, percentage polls were higher in rural areas than in the main industrial centres
- Indian-designated areas also recorded general voter rejection of the Pretoria's cooption strategy. In Pietermaritzburg, for example, "prominent" sitting members of the Indian Local Affairs Committee standing in the October 26 elections polled derisory results, as the table below shows.

Table 4.

Votes Obtained by Some Candidates for the Indian Local Affairs

Committee- Pietermaritzburg.

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Ward</u>	<u>No of Votes</u>
Cheddie	12	1
Premrajh	13	4
Narayadu	8	4
Singh	15	10
Mahomed	4	21

(Swazi News, 29.10.1988)

Polls in the South Durban Indian LAC ranged from 6,32 to 18,73% and in the North Durban Indian LAC from 8-25%. In the Transvaal, the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) estimates that a maximum of 19% of the Indian adult electorate voted (Weekly Mail, 3.11.1988).

• Only in white and Coloured constituencies did polling top 30%, although a breakdown of the Coloured vote shows that there was a sharp urban/rural divide. In Cape Town, for example polls were uniformly less than 20%. In Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town's largest coloured area, there were no elections at all and in Schotschekloof and Wynberg the official polls were 18% and 19,8% respectively. (Weekly Mail, 3.11.1988)

• As many as 70-80% of black votes cast were prior votes. In contrast, next to no white voters used the prior voting system. Thus, for example, in Johannesburg, where it cost R1000 to keep each polling booth open, only 1% of white voters had cast a ballot by the third day of prior voting (Citizen, 14.10.1988)

• Assuming an estimated eligible adult African population of 10 million men and women, only 15% were registered to vote and of these fewer than a quarter of a million actually voted in the municipal elections. By its own, self-constructed test to measure black support, the ruling minority in Pretoria can claim the support of less than 2,5% of adult Africans⁴.

• Not only was there an extraordinary low poll, but voters also rejected some notorious individuals who had risen to prominence as favoured collaborators. Amongst these were Steve Kgame of

⁴ Dr Sutcliffe, for example, records that the number of registered voters represented only about 27% of potential African voters (New Nation, 7.11.1988), however, he points out that this the proportion is likely to be lower as the figure is based on an official underestimation of the African majority.

Dobsonville, Soweto. President of the Urban Councils Association of SA (Ucasa), who's defeat by a completely unknown contestant dealt a particularly harsh blow to Pretoria's National Council plans. Another apartheid partisan, Tamsanqa Linda, former mayor of Ibhayi, also failed to win a seat. In fact, according to the Cape Administrator, 16 former mayors in the province lost their seats, as did a number of former councillors in Soweto, including Nelson Botile. It is likely that with further analysis the results will reveal more such cases.

- At no stage in the period preceding the elections was Pretoria prepared to state what would represent a satisfactory poll. As things transpired, any poll, no matter how abysmal, was sufficient for it to proclaim victory, even when it is patently obvious that it has suffered a humiliating defeat. The depth of popular rejection was underlined by the fact that even those who voted against some of Pretoria's most favourite urban collaborators.

The White Poll

The October 26 election results underlined the continued drift to the right already evidenced in last years' parliamentary elections for the white chamber. This was clear not only from the further reduction of white support for the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), but perhaps more importantly from the huge inroads on Nationalist Party (NP) support made by the Conservative Party (CP).

- In acting swiftly to try and conceal the extent of popular democratic rejection of cooption into apartheid, the state propaganda machine tried to snatch victory on the white voting front. The manipulated respite it won was, however, only momentary, as it quickly became apparent that the regime's strategy had been rejected on all sides.

- The CP, the official opposition party in the white chamber, entered the elections with control of two municipalities and ended up controlling 80! It won 63 municipalities in the Transvaal and broke into the Cape Province and Natal for the first time,

establishing a foothold in dozens of municipalities throughout the country (Southscan,2.11.1988). Although it failed to take Pretoria, for example, it won 19 of the capital's 42 seats, making a clean sweep of the less prosperous northern and western suburbs and falling 3 seats short of winning outright control. And its poor showing in Johannesburg, used by the NP to underline its "victory", should be set in context, i.e. that on the one hand it was never expected to gain much ground there, and on the other, the CP won most of the surrounding councils on the East and West Rand and in the Vaal triangle (South,16.11.1988). No longer only rural-based, the CP established a major foothold in working and lower middle class suburbs of important urban centres, leaving the NP with little room for complacency.

- The Progressive Federal Party lost control of Johannesburg City Council to the NP which won by a majority of one seat. It was eliminated in Pretoria and suffered serious defeat in Pietermaritzburg. Together with moderate independents, its support base in the white community is now concentrated in the main cities, especially Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban (South 16.11.1988). The results of the October 26 elections mark a further setback for liberal participationist politics in South Africa and suggest the continued movement of PFP supporters into the ranks of the NP, already witnessed in the 1987 elections.

4. Implications

1. The ruling Nationalist Party's third-tier, "multi-racial" election ploy - based on repression, cooption and containment - failed on every count. Not only did the municipal elections serve to consolidate and accelerate white disunity, but more importantly, they failed miserably in their main task of countering the NLM and drawing the black majority into apartheid political structures.

2. Although determined to press ahead with its so-called reforms, despite the fact that it has no mandate to do so, the regime's chances of success have been reduced considerably by the outcome of the elections.

On the one hand, the fact that the CP has made huge gains on a platform of *no reform* and *old-style apartheid* serves as a major brake on the NP's capacity to carry out even minor structural and

ameliorative reforms. In the Transvaal the CP now has a veto on six or seven of the province's Regional Services Councils and already we see a conservative offensive in CP controlled councils aimed at undoing even minor, "petty apartheid" reforms. The ruling NP will be especially constrained by the threat the CP poses to its position in the next general election, because even though it does not seem likely that it would lose power to the ultra-right, it is expected that the official opposition's parliamentary position will be considerably strengthened.

On the other hand, its failure to win even fractional credibility in the black community puts pay to the regime's capacity to break the deepening legitimacy, security and political crisis it faces **other than through intensified repression**. The importance of regaining control over the townships and generally breaking the back of the mass democratic movement through the creation of third tier structures was such that leading apartheid bureaucrats expressed despair of ever getting a hold on the situation if they did not succeed (New Nation, 7.11.1988). This explains their victory claim that "the people of South Africa have voted for peaceful development" and that "democracy and black participation in decision making on the local level is a reality in 248 black local authorities" (Weekly Mail, 3.11.1988). **The regime is determined to try and make its cooption strategy work as the only effective way of countering the rising revolutionary tide. Above all else this means more direct and indirect repression by the state and its surrogate forces, which will be accompanied by new reform measures.** Already Heunis (Star, 8.11.1988) is talking about a new constitution to provide for the "appointment of black leaders" and FW de Klerk is raising the question of powersharing on the basis of "non-domination" of one group by another! (Star, 5.11.1988)

3. The Municipal Elections answered an unasked question - namely, "How strong is opposition organisation and what is its capacity to draw the masses into action?" (Southscan, 9.11.1988) The answer was clear. Despite an almost continuous state of emergency for over 3 years and a massively repressive offensive by the South African military industrial complex the National Liberation Movement, eventhough weakened by unprecedented repression, has been able to withstand the onslaught and even defeat the enemy.

The measure of this victory is not simply the fractional black voting response but that this response was achieved despite a concerted, strategically planned security and propaganda offensive!

4. The PFP entered the black election arena for the first time. Consistent with its commitment to participation in apartheid political structures, it fielded candidates in several wards throughout the country, many of whom have now become councillors. This action, together with the decision by the FFF to call on whites to vote for anti-apartheid candidates needs to be seriously scrutinised. In general, it would seem that neither of these actions **meaningfully alters** the standing of the left in parliamentary politics or the position of blacks in puppet local structures, which raises the critical question of the usefulness of this approach. Neither at the level of white politics, where the vote carries political weight, nor at the level of black politics, where it does not, does participation in minority power initiatives yield fruitful results. Rather, it tends to foster an illusion that things can be changed from within the system, when it is patently clear to the overwhelming majority of South Africans that the system must be destroyed and the democratic majority must be fully empowered for there to be a meaningful solution to South Africa's problems.

5. Attention has to be given to the implications of the general right-ward shift in white parliamentary politics and their import for mass popular action. Their empowerment through the minority electoral system poses both dangers and new challenges to the national liberation movement which need to be given serious and urgent consideration.

6. The NLM faces the ongoing challenge of ensuring that no puppet structures are able to work until such a time as the regime is forced to accept ***universal adult suffrage in a unitary, democratic and non-racial South Africa***. Although the reforms Pretoria has offered to date are unacceptable because they fail to address the people's basic demands, they have been conceded ***only because of the strength of popular mass resistance***. ***It is therefore vital to maintain and extend the momentum of struggle!***

7. Given the resilience the National Liberation Movement has

shown in the face of the October 26 onslaught, it is clear that the attack from the regime, its surrogate forces and the ultra-right will intensify. While the state will continue to use its security forces as the main instrument of imposing its authority, the ultra-right will subject the people to constant provocations. This will mean that the conflict between the forces of democracy and repression is likely to escalate markedly in the next period. ***The NLM has the urgent task of ensuring that organisationally the people not only are able to withstand this offensive but also are able to take the struggle beyond its current level towards the seizure of people's power!***

Although the circumstances and the terrain of struggle are different, ***the defeat of the ruling minority regime on October 26 is as significant to our struggle as the defeat and forced retreat of the SADF at Cuito Cuanavale!*** By their actions the racists have further cut the political ground from under their own feet, reducing the options open to them. What is necessary is to ensure , through organisation ,that the victory gained on one battle field reinforces and develops the other, thus forcing the minority regime into permanent retreat and inevitable defeat.