

ARTICLE FOR WEEKLY MAIL

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For those allowed to participate in the forthcoming election for whites it will no doubt generate an urgency and compulsion of its own. This is to be expected and having participated in such elections myself, I can understand the extent to which one can become involved to improve your party's position, despite and whatever the constraints. But the constraints of 1987 as compared to those in 1981 when the last election for whites was held, must surely create the most extraordinary and paradoxical set of circumstances under which any kind of an election can take place.

Since 1981 we have had :-

A new constitution in which all the dice are loaded in favour of the dominant white party in the House of Assembly;

Sovereignty has been constitutionally transferred from Parliament to the discretion of the Executive President who is also the leader of the dominant white party;

The SADF has moved from the border into the townships and has become an established part of maintaining ordinary "law and order";

The style of government has changed from a Parliamentary Executive to a Presidential Military Executive Government where the State Security Council has adopted a strategic position in domestic and regional policy formulation;

A State of Emergency has been extended in which extraordinary powers are given to senior police officers to ban meetings, arrest and detain people and to control all information on how they manage unrest;

A massive clampdown on the press, such as this country has never known, where it is specifically stated that nothing may be said or reported which may present the major opponents of the government in a favourable light.

To the extent that an election in ordinary democratic terms is an occasion where the major political parties can compete for votes in the hope of unseating the government, and this is done through the maximum availability of information and exposure of the shortcomings of opponents, as well as presenting clear alternatives, the forthcoming election clearly qualifies as political farce. Why is it being called? Whatever the outcome, the State President is constitutionally bound to call a general election for all three houses in 1989, under presumably the same farcical circumstances.

I asked this question to a member of the Cabinet recently and with conviction and a straight face he said : "The problem with President Botha is that he is such a democrat. He cannot tolerate being jibed by his opponents in Parliament that he does not have a mandate to do a deal with the blacks." I suppose within the fishbowl world of Afrikaner Nationalist politics, this statement makes some weird kind of sense. But how does one respond to Wynand Malan, whose sincerity is not questioned even by his opponents, when part of the reason for his resignation is that there is "no deal on with the blacks" in any case.

Suppose P W Botha wants to do "a deal with the blacks" and he successfully rigs a white mandate to do so, with whom does he hope to do a deal? The ANC is banned and their leaders either in prison or in exile; most of the UDF leadership are either in prison, on the run or in hiding; the State will not allow any of the normal conditions to exist in any of the townships whereby people can express their preference

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for parties, organizations and leaders, and part of the mandate the government is seeking is the approval of whites to continue doing what they have done.

The only kind of deal in the offing, if one listens to what comes out of the Department of Constitutional Affairs, is what Peregrine Worsthorne has called "multi-racial facism" or what I have termed, an extension of a multi-racial autocracy. Those blacks who will participate in such an arrangement, have no legitimacy or credibility to strike a deal in any case, so what is the point of getting a rigged mandate to strike a rigged deal? As long as one does not ask for sense, the forthcoming election makes absolute sense.

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