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A F R I C A N S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

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TOWARDS RUPTURE OR STASIS? *An Analysis of the 1981 South African General Election*

by Craig R. Charney

The results of the 1981 white general election in South Africa seemed paradoxical to many observers. After three decades in which white politics appeared dominated by the unchallengeable hegemony of the ruling National Party, white party politics seemed to have taken on a new turbulence and uncertainty. The Sunday Times reported, "Nat Voters Bolt to the Right", while the Transvaler headlined a "Left-wards swing". Very few seats actually changed hands, yet many commentators sensed that the election was a watershed.

The confusing aspects of the election resulted from tne play of contradictory political and social forces. This paper contends that the old ethnic-based class alliances which formed the basis of the white South African party system are unravelling. Though power did not change hands, the 1981 election traced the outline of a possible class realignment of white political forces, with potentially far-reaching consequences. In the aftermath, nothing seemed to have changed, but nothing would ever be quite the same.

To illuminate the changes underway, we will begin with a discussion of the background to the election, then skip ahead to consider the patterns of change evident in the election results. This is followed by an examination of survey data to discern the emerging class division, and of how the strategy of the parties promoted or retarded its expression. The paper concludes with the implications of the new trends in the white electorate for the future of white politics in South Africa.

BACKGROUND TO THE ELECTION

In its first full year in office, 1979, Mr. P W Botha's government began to outline a programme of reforms aimed at winning black acquiescence at home and support for his regime

abroad. This programme was never spelt out in full, but it included acceptance of the Wiehahn Report on black trade unions, the Riekert recommendations on streamlining the pass laws, and hints that the Immorality Act could be changed. During the year, Mr Botha visited Soweto as a symbolic gesture of concern for urban blacks. He appointed commissions to study various contentious issues, and even declared at Upington that the National Party Programme of Principles--the holy of holies -- needed rewriting.

The goals of the reforms envisioned appeared to be:

1. removing barriers to social mobility for the black petit bourgeoisie;

2. the incorporation of a layer of skilled blacks into the labour aristocracy;

3. concentrating resources to modestly upgrade the lot or urban blacks, while sealing rural Africans out of the cities through tighter influx controls;

4. incorporating so-called Coloureds and Indians into the white political system ; and

5. eliminating many discriminatory laws which provoked opprobrium abroad while doing little to reinforce white privilege.

The symbolic high point of this reformist period was the Carlton Centre conference of November 1979. At this gathering, the Prime Minister met with English and Afrikaans-speaking businessmen for discussions where a large measure of consensus on social and political issues was expressed. The outlines of a new "free enterprise" government policy became sharper, in which primary responsibility for protecting white privilege and profits would rest with the market, rather than racial law.

While the gains such a policy would offer blacks were limited, someone would have to foot the bill. That someone increasingly appeared to be the beneficiaries of entrenched job discrimination and the other discriminatory practices singled out for elimination: the blue-collar whites and small farmers who provided the traditional backbone of NP voter support.

Taken together with the Information Scandal, whose explosion rocked public confidence in the NP during 1979, reaction to the proposed reforms produced phenomenal by-election swings against the NP. In Germiston, the far-right Herstigte Nasionale Party vote jumped to 24%; at Kodoespoort the swing to the HNP was 28%; and in Rustenberg a 35% swing left the HNP just a few hundred votes from capturing its first seat. At the same time, reformist noises were winning little credit on the left, as the erosion of NP support by the liberal Progressive

Federal Party in Edenvale made evident.

Losses of such magnitude were ominous to a Prime Minister who had merely hinted at reforms and barely begun them. Instead of forging ahead, he pulled back sharply in 1980. His caution was undoubtedly reinforced by a number of caucus battles early in the year, in which Mr Botha backed down rather than force his party to a split. His reformist initiatives also met unexpectedly strong resistance within all the major Afrikaans institutions, including the civil service, the churches, and the Broederbond. In response, he zig-zagged between vaguely reformist pronouncements and re-affirmations of old principles, hiding behind a "12-point plan" with as many interpretations as listeners.

As the Government eased off on the specifics of reform, and the memory of Info began to fade, the National Party began a recovery in the polls. Its support among the electorate, which had fallen from *65%* in the 1977 election to a low of *46%* in 1979, rose to 54% in 1980.[1] Still, ominous signs persisted. The HNP tide continued to flow in the Fauresmith by-election, albeit weaker, with a 21% swing. Nationally, a poll found support for the far right among Afrikaners up from 2% in late 1978 to 9% in April 1980.[2]

Against this background, the Prime Minister decided to abort the 1981 session of Parliament. In late January he announced the dissolution of Parliament, setting an election for 29 April.[3]

THE RESULTS

The campaign which followed was hard fought. The number of uncontested seats fell from *44* in 1977 to *14*. The HNP fielded *28* more candidates, for a total of *83*, while the PFP ran *73*, an increase of *16*.

The most important fact which stood out in the results was the 12% drop in the National Party vote, from 65% in 1977 to 53% in 1981, and the startling rise of the far right. Beyond that, they revealed modest gains for the Progressives in urban seats, and the continuing disintegration of the centrist New Republic Party. (See Table 1).

The Far Right: The far right improved its share of the total vote from 3% in 1977 to 14% nationwide in 1981, garnering *almost* 200 000 votes. Most of this went to the HNP, but in a few seats there were significant turnouts for two smaller groups, Dr Connie Mulder's National Conservative Party and a group called Aksie-Eie Toekoms. The far right's new strength was greater than even those substantial gains would suggest, however. The HNP vote rose from a derisory 3% to 10% levels to a respectable 20% to 30% in scores of farming and mining seats. The party came within an ace of victory in several seats for the first time, threatening even Transvaal National Party leader Dr Andries Treurnicht.

TABLE 1

ELECTION RESULTS, 1981 AND 1977

	1981			1977		
	Votes	% of Vote	Seats	Votes	% of Vote	Seats
NP	778,371	53%	131	689,108	65%	134
SAP	-	-	-	17,915	2%	3
PFP	265,297	18%	26	177,705	17%	17
NRP	93,603	6%	8	123,245	12%	10
HNP	191,249	13%	-	34,161	3%	-
NCP	19,149	1%	-	-	-	-

Across broad swathes of the country, Nationalist majorities tumbled. In *each* of the 24 Transvaal platteland seats contested both times, there was a swing to the right. The *smallest* was 18%, and the average was 25%. In the rural Orange Free State, the smallest swing was 18% as well, with an average of 21%. In 8 mining seats, the swing to the HNP or NCP averaged 23%. Strikingly, the Herstigtes did almost as well in seats where they were only strong enough to stand for the first time as where they had stood before.

On the Rand and in Pretoria and Bloemfontein, substantial swings to the right were noticeable in constituencies with concentrations of white workers and lower-ranking civil servants. In Natal, the HNP made important gains in 4 rural seats. Even in the rural Cape, the Prime Minister's home turf, gains were evident for the HNP, but the party's weak organisation there and the powerful Cape NP machine combined to restrict them to the 6% to 20% range.

Nor was there evidence that the tide of support for the far right flowing in the 1979-80 by-elections had crested. In 5 of the 6 seats, the far right did as well as or better than in the preceding by-election in terms of total votes and in its share of the entire electorate. (In the sixth, Rustenberg, the fall-back was slight.) While the HNP percentage of votes cast fell in 3 cases, this appears to reflect the lower abstention rate among NP loyalists in general elections compared to by-elections. But the steady growth in the share of the constituencies' whole electorates willing to vote HNP is far more indicative of its growing support.

The most evident fact about the 1981 election is that it marked the point when it became respectable in the Afrikaans community to vote for the far right. The HNP lost its image as an oddball collection of ageing racist cranks. Indeed, one of the most striking things about the crowds who flocked to HNP election meetings was their very ordinariness. Some men had the long sideburns and slicked-down short hair favoured by Afrikaans Neanderthals, but there were also many well-dressed middle-aged men and youths.

The Progressive Federal Party: The PFP's share of the vote rose nationally from *17*% to *18*%. Its gains were slightly greater than would appear from that comparison, because it fought many previously uncontested seats, where its comparatively weak performance pushed down its average share of the vote. In 104 seats contested both times, the PFP vote went up from an average of 13,8% to 19,9%. (See Table 2)

The party made important gains in most major cities, except Durban. It is difficult to present meaningful statistics on its gains, due to the complex pattern of changes in NP and NRP candidacies between 1977 and 1981. However, it appears that in Johannesburg, the PFP squeezed the NP and NRP votes hard in the Northern suburbs, registering gains ranging from 9% and 10% in Bryanston and Bezuidenhout to 21% and 26% in Sandton and Edenvale. In Pretoria, it made gains in the more affluent constituencies, even though they were predominantly Afrikaans-speaking. Cape Town was consolidated as a

TABLE 2

SHARES OF THE VOTE IN SEATS CONTESTED BOTH IN 1977 AND 1981

	NP	PFP	NRP	HNP NCP AET
1981	54,4%	19,9%	10,5%	14,7%
		(--- 30,4% ---)		
1977	69%	13,8%	13,6%	4,1%
		(--- 26,4% ---)		

Source: Election results in 104 seats contested both times

PFP fief, with gains in every seat, ranging from 6% to 21%. The PFP also made significant gains in the two Port Elizabeth seats which it won, as well as in East London and Pietermaritzburg. Only in Durban was no clear pro-PFP trend evident, though its vote appears to have at least held steady.

However, from a national perspective the Progressives' gains appear relatively modest. In the main, they were winning back traditional opposition seats lost in three-cornered fights in 1977, such as Albany, Walmer, and Port Elizabeth Central. It is true that the party fought many rural constituencies for the first time, registering 10% to 20% of votes cast. But it failed to win a single seat outside the big cities, with the exception of Albany, which contains Rhodes University.

Moreover, the combined strength of the liberal opposition remains below even its emasculated level of the mid-1970s. The combined 26% of the vote reaped by the PFP and NRP together is well below the doddering United Party's 37% vote of 1974, though an improvement on their shattering defeat of 1977.[4] But as Table 2 shows, roughly one-half of the PFP's net 1981 gains in seats also contested in 1977 came from NRP losses, leaving a true swing from the ruling party to the Progressives of just 3%.

The New Republic Party: The 1981 election confirmed the collapse of the NRP outside Natal, as well as showing up its weakening in its home province. The NRP was dramatically overtaken by the HNP as the third most popular party, polling just *6%* of the vote. Outside Natal, its total number of candidatures fell from *28* in 1977 to *20*.

Polls had shown that the NRP lost support outside Natal between 1977 and 1980, despite the swing away from the NP, and this finding was confirmed by the 1981 result[5] In Cape Town, in the seats where the NRP had not bowed out, it was battered by the PFP. The same pattern was evident in Johannesburg's affluent Northern suburbs, though the NRP scored some gains from the National Party in the Southern suburbs. The party's vote collapsed when the Nats entered the fray in its only non-Natal seat, East London North, which it lost badly. (It did wrest King William's Town from the NP, maintaining a token presence outside its home province, but only because the HNP came in to split the Afrikaans vote.)

In Natal, the NRP's vote dropped sharply when the NP and PFP fought seats they had kept out of in 1977, and increased significantly only where one or the other withdrew. Where the pattern of candidatures was the same as before, there was no consistent evidence of NRP gains, despite the general pro-opposition trend in the election results.

The election results make it clear that the NRP survives only by the grace of the NP and the PFP. Thus, it was allowed a clear run in certain seats where one of the larger parties preferred the NRP in to the other. (By this means, it secured enough PFP withdrawals to retain control of the Natal Provincial

Council). But where the bigger parties decided to knock it out, as in East London North, it suffered big losses.

To judge by the results, the complete demise of the NRP would release flows of voters in two directions. In urban areas, the consequences of it withdrawal in Durban Pinetown suggest the majority of its supporters would go to the PFP. On the other hand, in the rural seat of Umhlatunza, the NRP lost ground before the NP and HNP, and in Umlazi, where it stood out this time, 21% of the vote went to the HNP.

AN EMERGENT CLASS CLEAVAGE?

An examination of the results of the 1981 election gives the unmistakeable impression that the ethnic alignment which dominated white South African electoral behaviour in the post-1948 era is breaking down. The old image which lines up all Afrikaners behind the National Party while dividing English-speakers behind the progeny of the United Party is no longer tenable. According to a plausible estimate by one political journalist, in 1981 some 38% of all Afrikaners voting did not choose the National Party.[6]

A study of the pattern of changes in different types of constituencies reinforces this impression. Constituencies with concentrations of Afrikaans farmers, workers, and civil servants saw heavy swings from the NP to the HNP. At the same time, the NP held onto the English seats it had captured in the Natal countryside and in the big cities. NRP voters bolted left and right when candidates of their party were not standing, while modest swings to the PFP occurred in some Afrikaans constituencies.

This picture suggests that class and status tensions now cut deeply across the old ethnic class alliances. The detailed analysis of survey data which follows supports this view and suggests the outlines of a possible realignment of the white electorate.

Class and the Vote: Survey results underline the fact that class is cutting strongly across the ethnic blocs. Ethnicity and traditional party loyalties still have an impressive hold, but the data suggest a strong pull on blue-collar and farming communities in a conservative direction, and movement among upper-status English and Afrikaans voters towards more liberal parties.

This picture is drawn from detailed analysis of data gathered in The Star's election poll, and is butressed by information from other surveys. The Star's Market Research Department conducted the newspaper's election survey, questioning 600 electors in the three constituencies of Kodoespoort, Waterkloof, and Durban Pinetown. While the resulting sample was obviously not perfectly representative of the entire country, the areas polled were diverse enough to contain representatives of most social strata and every political party.[7] The differences which showed up among these different

groups offer some indication of the differences more generally prevalent. (Due to legal requirements, the survey was taken before Nomination Day, six weeks before the poll, and therefore appears to have understated the movements of opinion which occurred during the campaign.) (See Table 3).

Comparison shows the PFP strongest (not surprisingly) among upper-class English speakers, trouncing the NP by a 52% to 27% margin. Among blue-collar English speakers, however, it is another story. The NP received a plurality of 42% to 36% for the PFP, despite the trend in favour of the Opposition in the electorate as a whole.

Similar though less pronounced cleavages were evident among Afrikaners as well. The PFP received the voting intentions of 24% of middleclass Afrikaners, compared to just 9% of working-class Afrikaners, though the NP maintained comfortable majorities in both groups. While the number of Afrikaans Progs was limited, it is worth noting that the overwhelming majority of them came from an upper-status background. On the other side of the fence, the HNP received 15% of the voting intentions of lower-status Afrikaners, compared to just 5% among the better-off.

Class, Ideology, and Party: On the basis of these figures, it is possible to see the outline of a potential class alignment in white politics.

On the right, such an alignment would imply a link-up between the HNP, the Nationalist right-wing (particularly in Transvaal), and the NRP's remaining rural constituency. Such an alignment would re-unite the "little men" who traditionally supported the National Party: the white workers, small farmers, and petty civil servants. (Already, as Harry Schwartz put it during the campaign, "The HNP is merely the NP seeing itself in yesterday's mirror.")[8]

The Government's timid moves towards reform--along with its hints of others to follow-- have threatened the fragile prosperity of these blue collar whites and smallholders. A freer labour market and better black training would erode the inflated wages of the white labour aristocracy. Many wage-earning whites see real wages falling already, as inflation sprints ahead while employers hold back on their increases to push up blacks' breadline wages. Over the period 1975-1979, real white wages fell on average of *9,7%*, while black wages rose *9,8%* (from a drastically lower base). Small farmers, threatened with being driven off the land, are worried about maize price increases and government policies which increasingly favour the big farmers. Farm incomes generally have not done too well in recent years, with the biggest losses sustained by the small farmers.

All these groups are bound together by the rigid racism often found by those directly in the path of black advance. When questioned about repeal of the Immorality Act in the Star poll, for instance, working-class English-speakers and Afrikaners were consistently more conservative than upper-class individuals. (See Table 4). It is thus no small

TABLE 3

ETHNICITY, SOCIAL STATUS, AND THE VOTE

	English-speakers		Afrikaners	
	AB	CD	AB	CD
NP	27%	42%	63%	70%
PFP	52%	36%	24%	9%
NRP	17%	18%	4%	7%
HNP	2%	2%	5%	14%

Source: *The Star* poll.

Note: In the status ranking used for *The Star* poll, Category A represented higher professional and managerial personnel, Category B included intermediate professional, managerial, and supervisory workers, and Categories C and D included lower supervisory, clerical, unskilled and artisan workers.

TABLE 4

ETHNICITY, SOCIAL STATUS, AND VIEWS ON THE IMMORALITY ACT

	English-speakers		Afrikaners	
	AB	CD	AB	CD
Repeal Act	47%	41%	47%	32%
Don't Repeal	31%	34%	40%	43%

Source: *The Star* poll.

wonder that miners and ticket-takers and many others who knew they owe their livelihood to the colour of their skins are drawn by the HNP's promise to go back to Verwoerd. The other half of this emergent lineup would involve the Progressives, the NRP's urban supporters, and verligte Nationalists (especially from the Cape). It would unite upper-income individuals whose attitudes and interests seem to be converging, whether they are English or Afrikaans-speaking. It is significant that exactly equal percentages of upper-class English-speakers and Afrikaners (47%) favoured the repeal of the Immorality Act in the Star poll.[9]

Such evidence is indicative of the increasing coalescence between the views of well-to-do Afrikaans and English-speakers. As they have climbed up the economic ladder, many Afrikaners have become less dependent on the artificial State support for their position provided by classical apartheid. At the same time, as they have acquired an increasing stake in South Africa's capitalist system, upper-class Afrikaners have become more interested in reaching a racial accommodation to prevent its violent overthrow.

A noteworthy fact, however, is that despite their agreement with English-speakers on many issues, upper-class Afrikaners remain overwhelmingly pro-NP at present. They appear reluctant to break with their traditional loyalties. Nevertheless , it should not be forgotten that the Star poll found that 24% of the upper-class Afrikaners in its sample had already done so and planned to vote PFP.

In this scheme, there is no place for the New Republic Party as it now exists. It is difficult to identify any coherent social group it can claim to represent. The party is deeply divided with some of its supporters a bit to the left of the NP, but with 52% of its Afrikaners and 18% of its English-speakers saying Mr Botha wants change too quickly![10]

Already, the *modus vivendi* which united the rural sugar barons with the white workers and industrialists of Durban appears to be decomposing, as each group searches for the party which serves its interests best. The Star poll found NRP supporters to have the weakest attachment to their party of any of the major parties, as well as being the readiest to switch their votes to other parties. If the process of realignment continues, the NRP can probably be expected to disappear, even if it does not formally merge with another party.

Factors promoting realignment: The primary factor impelling the process of realignment appears to be the changing economic and numerical weight of the social classes within Afrikanerdom. Thanks to the exercise of state power, the years since 1948 have seen the rise of a substantial Afrikaans bourgeoisie, carrying in its wake large numbers of professionals, managers, and university students. Between 1948 and 1975, Afrikaans control of non-agricultural production rose from 10% to 21%, and the Afrikaans share of the professions went up from 16% to 38%.[11] These changes brought into

the dominant Afrikaans circles the very arguments for liberalisation which had been ignored coming from English-speaking businessmen.

At the same time, there was a substantial decline in the proportion of the "little men" in the Afrikaans community. The proportion of Afrikaners working on the land or in blue collar jobs shrank from 71% in 1946 to just 35% in 1977.[12] The little men's loss of electoral power also substantially reduced their bargaining power within the National Party, which became increasingly attentive to the pleas of the "bigs" for racial reform.

The acceptance of the need for action has been heightened by the growing sense of urgency felt by whites in the wake of the Soweto uprising and the Zimbabwe war. Between 1977 and 1980, the need to establish racial justice became the Number One concern for party policy among both Afrikaans and English-speakers, according to survey findings.[13] The same results linked this increasing sense of urgency to the growth of verligte sentiment.

Concern at the increasing threats posed to white dominance may, however, have a double-edged political effect. It could be that the sense of an increasingly urgent threat to the material position and physical survival of the lower-status whites may well be hastening their movement to the political right. The darkening internal and external securing position, then, may well be another factor which is promoting political realignment in the white South African electorate.

Factors retarding realignment : Traditional party identifications appear to be the most powerful brake operating on the process of realignment. Party identification is the elector's sense of closeness or allegiance to a particular political party. It has been shown to have a strong and consistent effect upon the vote in a number of different countries, and the same studies have underlined that it changes slowly, if at all.[14] These changes reflect the long-term experience of party policy and its material consequences for the voter.[15]

In South Africa, the findings of the Star poll make the conserving role of party identification quite evident. Party loyalties have been built up over time, through life under the United and National Party governments, and they erode slowly. (See Tables 5 and 6)

Afrikaans electors manifested an overwhelming allegiance to the NP in the three constituencies polled. Some 63% of upper-class, and 59% of working-class Afrikaners said they normally thought of themselves as National Party supporters. Of these groups, "very strong" identification with the NP was reported by 59% of the working-class and 49% of the more affluent Afrikaners. Just 12% of working-class and 9% of middle -class Afrikaans NP identifiers said their allegiance was "not very strong".

TABLE 5

ETHNICITY, SOCIAL STATUS, AND PARTY ID

	English-speakers		Afrikaners	
	AB	CD	AB	CD
NP	18%	23%	63%	59%
PFP	28%	16%	11%	5%
NRP	16%	14%	3%	4%
HNP	1%	1%	4%	4%
None	37%	46%	19%	28%

Source: *The Star* poll.

TABLE 6

ETHNICITY, SOCIAL STATUS, AND STRENGTH OF PARTY IDENTITY

	English-speakers		Afrikaners	
	AB	CD	AB	CD
NP				
Very strong	16%	30%	49%	59%
Fairly strong	62%	45%	43%	26%
Not very strong	22%	24%	9%	12%
PFP				
Very strong	24%	14%	36%	33%
Fairly strong	45%	63%	41%	56%
Not very strong	7%	8%	1%	1%
NRP				
Very strong	37%	17%	0%	68%
Fairly strong	19%	40%	70%	12%
Not very strong	31%	39%	30%	12%

Too few HNP in sample for meaningful breakdowns.

Source: *The Star* poll.

Interestingly, only 11% of the more affluent Afrikaners said they normally identified with the PFP, even though 24% said they planned to vote Progressive in this election. It was also the case that a significant number of Afrikaans voters were without party identification altogether, with 19% of more affluent and 28% of blue-collar Afrikaners professing no regular party allegiance. Nevertheless, the figures suggest that a substantial further erosion of National Party loyalty-- or a split in the party-- is necessary before a really decisive realignment can take place.

The party loyalties of English-speaking voters are still very much in flux, according to the poll results. In the wake of the disintegration of the UP, a very large share appear to have no regular party loyalty. This is the case for 37% of upper-status English speakers, and for a startling 46% of the blue-collar ones. The class division noted in the voting intentions poll is reproduced here, with a PFP plurality among the well-to-do and an NP advantage among the worse off, but the pattern is much weaker. This suggests that the partisan moorings of many English-speaking voters are still weak, and that they are still drifting between partisan homes.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Election outcomes are, of course, more than a reflection of glacial change in social structure and political attitudes. They also reflect the strategies of the contending parties. As Alan Lichtman observed after an analysis of American election results,

> "Changes in voting are not the inevitable result of social and economic change ... (V)oting cycles do not ebb and flow with automatic tidal regularity. Historical events create opportunities that can be exploited by shrew political strategy and responsive policy, or squandered by blunders and unwise policy."[16]

To examine how the parties took advantage of the opportunities offered by the lay of the electorate in 1981, it is thus necessary to examine their respective strategies and impact.

The National Party: Confronted with growing opposition to his desired direction, since early 1980 Mr P W Botha's strategy has been to blur his plans as much as possible. This approach continued into the General Election campaign. As it unfolded, Willem Kleynhans was led to comment, "The Prime Minister is fighting this election on a platform which can be interpreted in 1001 ways--all of them conservative."[17]

The Nationalist campaign went through two phases. Initially, the stress was on the "total onslaught" against

white South Africa, evidently with a set-piece replay of the 1977 campaign in mind. Soon, however, it was clear that this approach was failing to stem the HNP tide.

For the first campaign in recent memory, the National Party was forced onto the defensive. The NP's response was to tack hard right, emphasising traditional themes and loyalties. Some idea of the flavour of this campaign can be garnered from a special advertising supplement the party inserted in all the major Afrikaans newspapers. Beginning by asking, "Is it true that the Government is selling out the white man?" it answered (in part):

> "The average expenditure per white child in South Africa is R810 a year against R91,29 per black child. There are good historical and other reasons for this, but does it look like discrimination against the whites?
>
> "Between 1970 and 1980, 317 000 people, or about 51 000 families, were moved out of wrongly situated areas and black spots and settled properly in their own homelands. Is this an example of a party striving for integration?
>
> "To speak of school integration is a malicious untruth.
>
> "There is no discussion of a new declaration of open beaches. It is not the Government's policy."[18]

Similar notes were struck by Nat speakers on the hustings. Thus, for instance, the Prime Minister slammed opponents of the Group Areas Act, and pledged not to grant freehold title of land to urban blacks, while only offering occasional nods in the direction of reform. To reinforce the message, the Government lashed out on a large round of salary increases for civil servants and policemen, two groups whose loyalty was feared to be wavering, in the week before the election.

However, it was clear that the leadership was preaching to an unenthusiastic audience. Some six weeks before the election, fully 21% of traditional NP identifiers in the three constituencies polled by The Star were uncommitted. Attendance at NP campaign meetings was also notably low, according to journalists covering them. The Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr Chris Heunis, was even forced to cancel a planned eve-of-poll meeting in Port Elizabeth when an embarassing handful of people turned out to hear him in a large hall.

Nevertheless, Mr Botha kept most of the faithful loyal (if not necessarily happy) through the neat trick of convincing liberal voters he was a liberal, and conservatives he was conservative. According to the Star poll, some 71% of verligte voters thought Mr Botha was moving in the right direction, along with 68% of verkramptes. In other words, Mr Botha succeeded in keeping his aims so unclear that voters of every persuasion could see their own image in them.

The Herstigte Nasionale Party: The obvious response for the far right was to tell its potential electors that Mr Botha was not so conservative after all. The perception of Mr Botha as a liberal appears to have been the most important factor pushing verkrampte electors towards an HNP vote. In the Star poll, 35% of verkramptes who thought Mr Botha was going in the wrong direction indicated an intention to vote HNP, compared to just 16% of those who approved of his direction (though samples were small in each case).[19]

To sway as many voters as possible, the HNP tried to highlight all the NP's past statements and actions on reform, spelling out the implications (and exaggerating where necessary). Thus, the HNP campaign literature alleged that Mr Botha aimed at a multi-racial constitution for South Africa and planned the repeal of the Immorality Act. It also said he deliberately encouraged inflation to redistribute income from white to black, and was preparing for complete racial integration in the country. The party made a special effort in mining seats, intensively publicising the forthcoming recommendation from the Wiehahn Commission that mine blasting certificates should be awarded to blacks as well as whites. The party pushed its point so hard that former PFP MP Zac de Beer was moved to comment, "The voters have been led to believe the Nats are Progs in wolves' clothing."[20]

Where the message got through, right-wing voters swung to the HNP. A look at individual constituencies shows how HNP support solidified as the party hammered its ideas home. The Star found that in Kodoespoort, a constituency with many working-class and farming voters, 15% of those with a voting intention six weeks before polling day planned to vote HNP. Some 35% of the electorate was uncommitted. In the election, the HNP received 30% of the vote, while the NP vote fell from 67% in the survey to 60% in the ballot.

Parallel findings were reached by a Sunday Times poll, which surveyed Carletonville and Randfontein as well as Kodoespoort. Far right support in the three seats averaged 15% according to the Times poll, also taken before Nomination Day, while the HNP and NCP gained an average of 37% of the vote in the three seats.[21]

The Progressive Federal Party: The PFP, for its part, played down racial issues and fought a bread-and-butter campaign centred on economic and security issues. Its liberal image appeared something of a liability as it attempted to broaden its support. More than 40% of NP Afrikaners had seen its leader, Dr. Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, as too sympathetic to blacks and wanting change too quickly, an opinion shared by roughly similar or larger proportions of NP English-speakers and NRP supporters.[22] The party commissioned a voluminous private poll in late 1980, which repeated these findings but underscored the strength of discontent with the Government's performance on economic issues.

Those issues became the basis of the PFP campaign. While not walking away from its liberal race policies, the party did not stress them, except in vaguely worded calls for negotiation instead of confrontation. Indeed, the party never even issued a formal policy manifesto. Like the HNP, it slated the Government record on inflation and pensions. (It was aided in this respect by Health Minister Lapa Munnik's astounding blunder in saying pensioners could live on a R20-a-month diet a few days before the poll.) Besides playing on its attractive, Afrikaner leader, the party ran an increased number of Afrikaans candidates and made greater use of Afrikaans in its propaganda in an attempt to broaden its appeal across the ethnic divide.[23]

The rewards can be seen in the analysis of the Star data from Waterkloof, an affluent Afrikaans seat. PFP support increased from 31% to 38% in the six weeks to the poll, while NP strength slipped from 55% to 52%.

PROSPECTUS FOR THE FUTURE

The evidence presented above shows that Mr Botha commands his fractious majority on the basis of a successful appeal to both right and left. In his ability to persuade both liberals and conservatives he is one of them, his opinion profile is remarkably similar to that of Jimmy Carter in the 1976 election.[24] As Mr Carter learned, however, such a coalition is effective for winning elections, but useless for governing. A decisive move to one side loses support on the other. The Prime Minister's dilemma could be simply summed up in an old aphorism, as Tertius Myburgh noted soon after the election: "Those ahead of him cried "forward,"'while those behind cried 'back!'".[25]

Nevertheless, as H J Kotze put it, it was clear that "the Prime Minister will have to take note of the swing to the right, because these voters came from the NP. There is potential for a much bigger swing to the right."[26]

Despite the gradual rise of more liberal attitudes on race questions, particularly among the more affluent sectors of the electorate, a strong undertow of conservative sentiment still exists. (See Table 7). A 1980 poll found majorities of Afrikaners opposed to the repeal of the Immorality Act, cinema apartheid, or the Group Areas Act. More than 30% of the English-speaking population failed to indicate its acceptance of the same steps. (Doubtless far stronger opposition would be recorded to measures which actively aimed at redistributing opportunities and income to blacks).

Since the majority of Afrikaners stuck by the National Party despite the numerous defections in this campaign, it seems safe to say that many NP supporters have attitudes more like HNP members. The threads of loyalty still binding them

TABLE 7

WHITE ATTITUDES ON RACIAL ISSUES

	Per cent accepting -			
	English-speakers		Afrikaners	
	1977	1980	1977	1980
blacks at white sports clubs	81%	82%	40%	46%
blacks at white cinemas	66%	70%	28%	37%
repeal of immorality act	53%	64%	23%	28%
blacks in some white schools	69%	68%	19%	23%
some blacks in white residential areas	53%	58%	18%	23%
blacks in white recreational areas	53%	55%	19%	23%

Source: Schlemmer, *Sunday Tribune*, 11 May 1980.

to the party threaten to fray if it moves to implement reform. Moreover, the Star poll found that of those electors with no party identification in the three seats it polled, 64% were considered verkramp. These voters could be easily pushed onto the far right by a reformist NP regime.

Consequently, the right-wing threat to the dominance of the verligte Nationalists is very real. Had the NP not previously enjoyed near unanimous support in farming and mining seats, the 20% swings recorded would have produced a slaughter of 1948 dimensions.

If Mr Botha took his courage in his hands and split his party, as urged by some, the resulting upheaval would be enormous. Consider:

-- A mere 5% further swing would yield the HNP 2 seats.

-- A uniform nationwide swing of 10% would give the far right 9 seats.

-- A 20% nationwide swing to the far right-- perhaps the smallest the Prime Minister could expect in case of a split, since it implies he keeps two-thirds of the NP vote -would yield 40 seats for the far right. It would also render 14 more seats marginal on a 5% swing.

Since the NP has only 48 seats more than a majority in Parliament, a split could thus make possible the unthinkable: electoral defeat for the National Party. Moreover, these predictions of far right gains in such an event have been based on the highly conservative premise of a uniform national swing. If the concentration of HNP support observed in the 1981 election were repeated in the next, with HNP gains in its strong farming and mining seats running at twice the average national anti-NP swing, it might take 30 or more seats from the NP on just a 10% national swing.

In the event of a split, the far right would be very strong in Transvaal and Free State country, mining, and working-class seats, though it would be weak in Natal and very weak in the Cape. The position of the right in such a case would be strengthened by two peculiarities of the South African political system. First, because the National Party is federal in structure, the Transvaal NP would be likely to secede, taking the party's proven election-fighting machine out of the hands of P W Botha. Second, the platteland enjoys disproportionately large weight in Parliament, due to the constitutional provision for the under-loading rural seats.

At this stage, the far right appears to have one Achilles Heel: its virtual absence of English-speaking support. (Indeed, the Herstigte Nasionale Party does not even have an English name.) As the surveys cited above showed, so far the working-class English speakers have stayed with the NP, and

to a lesser degree the PFP and NRP. For its part, the HNP has repelled English voters with its call for Afrikaans as the only official language. Without them, a split in the NP might allow the far right to form an opposition bloc of 40 to 60 seats in favourable circumstances, but not to form a government on its own.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the working-class English vote is "up for grabs". The group's allegiance to the NP is new, and its proportion of members without party identification (46%) is the highest of any of the ethnic or class groups in the Star poll. If the HNP relaxed its language policy,and Mr Botha embarked on reforms which threatened English-speaking workers and drove figures they respect onto the far right, an alternative Parliamentary majority could be in the making.

The problem of the PFP, like that of the HNP, also lies in its limited social base. As long as it remains the party of affluent urban English-speakers, and to a lesser degree affluent Afrikaners, the 40 to 50 seats held by the old United Party in its declining years would appear to be its ceiling. It is clearly consolidating its position as the leading Parliamentary Opposition party, but by itself it, too appears unlikely to be able to command sufficient support to win a Parliamentary majority.

However, the Progressives would be in a strong position to act as a partner for the Prime Minister if he decided to implement reform. It is already evident that the present social base of the National Party is unable to support even the timid programme of reform outlined by the Prime Minister. It is equally clear, however, that a merger or coalition with the PFP in the wake of a showdown with his right wing would-- by nature of the new class alliance-- commit Mr Botha to much more far-reaching change than he has ever publicly hinted he is willing to accept.

Such an alliance would replace the ethnic Afrikaner Nationalist alliance with a purely bourgeois ruling party. (In some respects, it would be similar to the old UP linkup of English-speakers and well-to-do Afrikaners.) The new party would hardly be radical; indeed, it might split the difference between the current stands of the verligte Nats and the PFP. It could be expected to be firm in its support for capitalism and its opposition to simple majority rule. Nevertheless, it would probably be willing to attempt some form of power sharing, re-institute some civil liberties, and offer blacks drastically more (at the expense of the Afrikaans workers, small farmers and petit bourgeoisie) in a bid to avert an anti-capitalist revolution.

For the National Party, the only alternative to this linkup in the continuation of its present paralysis, with support crumbling steadily on both sides and the spread of revolutionary sentiment among blacks.[27] It is not now

clear whether the Prime Minister is dithering between the possibilities, or whether he is waiting for the verlig tide to rise further before he sets off on an uncharted course. The 1981 election posed the question which he and his party must confront: rupture or stasis? Only history will be able to give the answer.

FOOTNOTES

1. Lawrence Schlemmer, 'South Africans are going to the poles', *Sunday Tribune*, 18 May 1980.

2. Lawrence Schlemmer, 'No more than 15% of Nat Afrikaners would quit', *Sunday Tribune*, 11 May 1980.

3. The reason why Mr Botha called the election remains something of a mystery. Officially he did so to ask for a mandate for reform, but this is belied by the NP's behaviour during the campaign. Another theory suggests he wanted the election out of the way before making concessions on Namibia. Perhaps the most plausible suggestion is that any later election would have been fought on less favourable ground. The glow of the 1980 boom was fading, and the passage of time would have forced a choice between alienating some supporters or seeming indecisive to all.

4. The combined PFP-NRP vote fell from 29% in 1977 to 26% in 1981, but this was because the PFP fought many more seats in 1981 than in 1977. The new, weaker constituencies depressed its average share of the vote. Considering only seats contested both times, as Table 2 does, shows the two parties together scored a 3% gain.

5. Schlemmer, 'South Africans are going'.

6. Louis Oosthuizen, *Rapport*, 3 May 1981. Incidentally, this refutes Lawrence Schlemmer's 1980 estimate that only 15% of Afrikaner Nationalists would ever leave the party, since Oosthuizen says that roughly 31% did. For the Schlemmer estimate, see Schlemmer, 'No more than 15%'.

7. Waterkloof is an upper-income Pretoria suburb, mostly Afrikaans but with a significant number of English speakers and a healthy PFP vote. Koedoespoort is a Transvaal constituency with a mixture of rural and urban Afrikaans voters, and was one of the seats where the HNP scored a by-election breakthrough during the 1977-81 Parliament. Durban Pinetown is an English-speaking urban Natal seat where the PFP, NRP and NP all command significant followings.

8. *The Star*, 23 April 1981.

9. As university students tend to come from better-off and more secure Afrikaans families, an interesting straw in the wind is the increase of support for the PFP at Stellenbosch, home of all but one NP Prime Minister. PFP officials claimed one-third of the student vote there in 1981. Hermann Giliomee, while thinking this exaggerated,

thought that the PFP vote had doubled, and that 25-30% of the student body was "alienated" from the NP. See 'Radical students lose ground on Afrikaans campus', *Times Higher Education Supplement* (London), 29 May 1981.

10. Lawrence Schlemmer, 'No. 1 on the charts', *Sunday Tribune*, 11 May 1980.

11. H. Adam and H. Giliomee, *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power* (Cape Town, 1979), 170-71.

12. Ibid, 169.

13. Schlemmer, 'South Africans are going'.

14. The concept of party identification is set out in A. Campbell et al., *The American Voter* (New York, 1960). Change over time in party identification is traced for the US in N. Nie et al., *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), and in France in B. Campbell and J. Paidoleau, 'L'Electorat sous la V^{e} République: Premiers résultats d'un modèle', *Révue Française de Sociologie*, Vol. 15 (1974).

15. On this point see the sources in the preceding footnote, and more generally C. Charney, 'The Dynamics of Electoral Choice: A Reassessment of the Voting Studies', M. Phil., University of Oxford, 1979, 22-34.

16. A. Lichtman, 'Critical Election Theory and the Reality of American Presidential Politics, 1916-1940', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 81 (1976), 323.

17. *The Star*, 21 April 1981.

18. Special supplement, run in *Die Beeld* and all other major Afrikaans newspapers, late March, 1981.

19. This finding raises doubt as to whether one can presume the continuing validity of the conclusion of the Freiburg survey (taken five years ago) that 60% of Afrikaners would follow their leaders even if these acted in ways of which they disapproved or did not understand. (Cited in Adam and Giliomee, *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power*, 214). That kind of loyalty may persist for some time, but it is likely to erode if government action is consistently perceived as wrong. Such was the case with support for the war in Vietnam among the US public, which began at equally high levels under equally trusted leaders. See the comments in L. Harris, *The Anguish of Change* (New York, 1974).

20. *The Star*, 23 April 1981.

21. Based on computations from data in 'The Wilderness Vote', *Sunday Times*, 22 March 1981. The differences between the early polls and the final HNP vote are parallel to those recorded for the Liberals in the British General Elections of 1974 and 1979. In each case, the parties involved appear to have rallied many wavering potential supporters only during the intense publicity of the late campaign. This suggests that by-election results will prove a more accurate gauge of HNP strength during the next Parliament than will national opinion polls.

22. Schlemmer, 'No. 1'.

23. Ironically, there appears to have been something of a tacit alliance between the far right and the Progressives. The PFP owes a few seats, such as Albany, to Nationalist votes siphoned off by the HNP. Likewise, the English Oppostion press, strongly pro-PFP, gave prominence to the right wingers, all but ignored in the pro-government Afrikaans press. (One liberal English-speaking journalist even phoned to alert the HNP immediately on receiving a tip that a snap election would be called.)

24. G. Orren, 'Candidate Sytle and Voter Alignment in 1976', in S.M. Lipset, (ed.), *Emerging Coalitions in American Politics* (San Francisco, 1978).

25. Tertius Myburgh, *Sunday Times*, 3 May 1981.

26. *Sunday Express*, 3 May 1981.

27. A NP alliance with the NRP (which the latter's Parliamentary caucus devoutly wishes) would at best prove a temporary expedient for Mr Botha. The NRP is weak and already crumbling. If called in to support reform, it would experience a further haemorrhage of support onto the far right.

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