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iHE THNIC LOCAL ELECTIONS

ON OCTOBER 26

The ethnic local elections coming up on October 26 are important in Pretoria's eyes not only for their domestic value but for their external diplomatic value. The local authorities which will be voted in, together with the Regional Services Councils, are intended to be third tier structures of the town and in general affairs respectively.

First, Pretoria needs to demonstrate that it is back in full control of the black residential areas, and on its reform, strategy course. During the widespread rebellion of the past few years, grassroots democratic organisations had taken root in many urban and rural areas as the embryo of a new state structure was implanted. Pretoria has to demonstrate that this challenge to its authority has been beaten back.

Second, the government hopes the elections will provide diplomatic ammunition abroad, where sanctions pressures have grown to an unprecedented level, badly hurting the South African economy. It needs to show its friends abroad that it has regained the initiative and is on course with its project of stabilising apartheid. It needs, also, to give them an argument to use in international fora that in South Africa there is a separate but equal democracy. But despite the use of its full repressive apparatus, and a massive electioneering budget, it is unlikely that in the African, Coloured and Indian elections Pretoria will secure anything like the vote it needs to make its endeavours plausible.

BACKGROUND

The voteless mass of South African people were getting a taste of real democracy for the first time through the development of the United Democratic Front and countless grassroots organisations.

The states of emergency and the police and army repression that followed were aimed at crushing that aspiration, and the democratic organisations.

In their place a new structure of secretive JMCs (Joint Management Centres) was set up. Identifying through a network of informers the identity and location of the popular committees and the site of popular grievances. The JMCs have sought to replace the people's organisations. While police, army and kirkonstalwls have created a climate of fear and threat in their bid to prevent any resurgence of the street committees and Civic associations.

The Black local elections are intended to put the seal of success on this endeavour to demonstrate to South Africa and the world that Pretoria's policy is the only way ahead. and that the people are responding.

However. the organisations that will be voted in - by whatever proportion of the people in a particular area - will be charged with administering oppression. For instance. local authorities will have to control squatters and with new legislation now passing, through the triennial parliament. they will be engaged

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in knocking down shelters and evicting people. They decide on land use, but have no power to acquire more land outside their municipal area.

If the new extension of political participation bill becomes law the local authorities will be controlled by the black regional councils, pivots of reform strategy (but likely to meet resistance from Conservative Party-dominated white local authorities who will control spending).

PROPAGANDA

For the opponents of the election # it is illegal to promote a boycott _ and all detainees now being released are specifically warned against offending against this restriction on pain of re-detention.

The state, it seems, is also stepping up its level of detentions throughout the country to prevent any mobilisation against the elections, using - as opposed to its mass detentions of 1986 _ selective detentions of lower profile activists to disrupt campaigns around the elections.

The Church, one of the few oppositional centres with some protection through international pressures, has openly defied this edict, though here too Pretoria has hinted at severe counter-measures.

The election is thus taking place in absolutely controlled conditions, in which only Pretoria's propaganda is allowed. The state is spending lavishly on propaganda for the vote - R4.7m has up to now been admitted, and is likely to expand, but there is also a welter of accusations of bribery. In some areas squatters are being promised housing in return for registering a vote.

Despite this there is already evidence that the people are massively rejecting the upcoming elections. Illegal leaflets urging a boycott are being distributed at night; government posters are being ripped down; boycott slogans are being painted on walls.

REGISTRATION

It is important for the state to demonstrate that it has adequate support from the mass of the black population. When the registration of voters closed in early September, it was already claiming success in this preliminary round. In many cases registration has taken place against the will and without the knowledge of the people involved, there have been claims that lists of rent payers have been used. However, to achieve its allegedly high registration figure Pretoria has had to employ sleight of hand with the population figures.

Voters rolls are closed and the government is claiming that around 75% of blacks (Africans) countrywide have registered. The actual number of black voters is just over three million. As the estimated black population of the whole of South Africa is 30 million of which, conservatively, some 12 million should be eligible to vote, the number of blacks who have made their way on to the voters roll is clearly a minority. Millions have been excluded because they live in areas outside the borders of designated authorities.

HOMELAND RESIDENTS

The residents of the homeland towns and settlements are automatically excluded from the October elections. Government has been redrawing the map of South Africa for years. So among those left out are the residents of crowded urban areas such as KwaMashu and Umlazi in Durban (now part of KwaZulu) and Mdantsane in East London (now part of the Ciskei).

This also means that the residents of the dormitory suburbs north of Pretoria, such as the vast settlements in KwaNdebele will be excluded. By this count alone, 15 million blacks will not be part of the October 26 attempt to demonstrate that South Africa is a democracy, even if it is along ethnic lines. (The population of the homelands, both independent and self-governing is estimated at over 15 million by the Development Bank of South Africa).

TRIBAL TRUST TERRITORY

But this is not all. Residents of some 22 towns and settlements on Trust land will also not be going to the polls. Tribal Trust towns are controlled by the South African Development Trust, and administered by the Department of Development Aid.

They are destined for future incorporation into a homeland or provincial administration. They include the Natal townships of Inanda and Edendale as well as the Pretoria township of Soshanguve. _

Estimates of numbers living on Trust land are uncertain. as people are arriving daily. They continue to drift to Botshabelo whose estimated population of 400 000 will also not be voting. As Tribal Trust land a local authority was never established.

SQUATTERS

It is impossible to estimate how many people are living in illegal shack settlements. The government estimates that there are some 1.2 million squatters in white South Africa. As most of these are thought to live in shantytowns outside the borders of the designated local authorities, they will be voteless.

(In a new development. squatters living within designated areas who fulfil the other qualifications have been given the vote in terms of an amendment to the Black Local Authorities Act of 1982. The onus however. was on individuals to come forward and register and it is not clear how successful the local authorities were in attracting these new voters).

Many of these informal settlements now face removal under legislation under consideration. Only a few have ever gained official recognition # such as Crossroads and Khayelitsha, where formal local authorities are being established. The revamping of the former squatter camps, however, left an estimated 70 000 people homeless _ these refugees have not been included on any roll. Also out are the 10 000 residents of Oukasie, Brits - the township has been dis-established.

GREY AREAS

Another voteless group are those thousands who live in white suburbs. notably domestic workers. But it also excludes those who have moved into the grey areas such as Hillbrow in Johannesburg, where an estimated 40 000 African. Indian and Coloured South Africans have taken up illegal occupation in terms of the Group Areas Act.

Those eligible to vote must have lived in a designated black local authority area for three months. or own property in the area.

INDEPENDENT HOMELANDS

The status of TBVC (the independent homelands) of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei) Citizens remains undecided since the abolition of influx control in July 1986. They are supposed to fall under the Aliens Act and certain exemptions.

However. the Act is not being enforced pending negotiations on the question of dual citizenship. It is now more than two years and no announcement has been made. According to the regulations. however. those TBVC citizens who live within a local authority area and who fulfil the other qualifications will be eligible to vote. This is an example of how contorted the Botha regime's reform politics are - a South African citizen living in the Durban township of KwaMashu cannot vote because the township falls under KwaZulu. while a 'foreigner' from Bophuthatswana living in Soweto still has the choice.

THE VOTING

Dubious voting procedures are also being used; 'prior' voting has been instituted so that people can vote privately two weeks before the election - a system open to abuse and making the election process difficult to monitor. Prior voting is a new tactic. following on the special voting for the 1984 elections. The system allows people to vote without going to a polling station so that they will not be publicly identified.

Illiterate people claiming pensions are given pension forms to sign which turn out to be special prior-voting registers. According to a newspaper editor in Lenasia. The state meanwhile tells people it is compulsory to vote and seeks to give them the impression that because blacks and whites are voting on the same day they are both voting with one voice in the running of their communities.

WHITE ELECTIONS

Poll turnout for white local elections is usually very poor and it is expected that the government will be able to claim that a low black and Coloured turnout is quite normal. so undercutting any boycott effect.

One of the reasons for the states choosing to hold all ethnic elections on the same day is to show the world that separate and equal holds # and also to use the traditional low vote from white voters to force comparisons with the expected low turnout for the black elections.

The white elections will also show a strong swing to the Conservative Party, the official opposition in the white parliament. It is reckoned they could make wide-ranging gains in the Transvaal, and deal the single worst electoral blow to the ruling National Party.

In this situation - where its local authority system for whites is also threatened # there has been talk of the new CP councillors boycotting the government's reform strategy structures, including the Regional Services Councils (RSCs) whose function is in part to make available some white money for black areas - Pretoria is anxious to demonstrate its kragdadigheid. This has limited its options locally and in regional politics ; such as in its tactics for Namibian independence and in the talks around peace in Angola.

WHY A BOYCOTT?

The local authorities are part of a long strategy of developing co-optive structures - involving the Bantu Advisory Boards, the Coloured Representative Council and the South African Indian Council, all established on ethnic grounds. The boycott of the SAIC and Advisory Boards forced the state to develop the tricameral parliament and black local authorities. In response to the boycott strategy the state has come up with new constitutional schemes to ensure the maintenance of power and to attempt to divide the people.

If the local authorities had some support from the people, they would perhaps be vehicles for further democratisation, but they are not - they absolutely lacked legitimacy when they operated and they still do. They had, after all, no political power.

The figures likely to stand for election are often the same figures thrown out by mass action in recent years.

They were supposed to develop and administer black, poor areas, not using central state funds, but by taking and raising the rents of the local people themselves - and this was the spark that lit the rebellion in 1984.

The councillors were often corrupt, and involved in bribery, evictions and fraud. Participation in these organisations also meant participation in other allied organs of state control - such as the JMCs and the military and paramilitary apparatus. In this situation it is clear that the mass of the people are not represented by these structures, and see them as part of the enemy. In conditions dictated by Pretoria there can be no question of participation for Africans, Coloureds and Asians.

THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

All important international forums have spelled out clearly what the criteria for acceptable democratic processes in South Africa are: the Commonwealth sum-

mil in Nassau in 1985 stated in its final document that the only solution to the explosive situation in southern Africa was the eradication of apartheid and the establishment of majority rule on the basis of free and fair exercise of universal adult suffrage by all the people in a united and non-fragmented South Africa. And the UN said that: To secure a veneer of international credibility Pretoria has to demonstrate that its poll is a sufficient sample of the opinion of the voteless masses.

SUMMARY _ THE STATES THINKING

This is the states probable strategy:

1. The elections have been called on the same day for all national tethniel groups to confuse international opinion and to indicate that they are somehow equivalent _ separate but equal. If they can then show a high poll for each group. this will buttress this view.
2. For Africans the state wants to use the local elections to prepare the ground for its National Council, the advisory constitutional body which will allegedly bring Africans right into central government. The black councils selected 011 October 26 will choose an electoral college which will in turn elect nine black representatives to sit on the new National Forum. to make proposals for a new constitutional system for South Africa.
3. Pretoria hopes that by October 26 the mass democratic organisations will have been rendered helpless and unable to mobilise against the elections.
4. It wants the election to revive the local government structures which collapsed under the pressure of the rebellion which began in late 1984.
5. It is also possible that Pretoria is banking on its upgrading schemes in the townships being completed by October. giving its councillors some sort of platform to put before the people.

In this situation it is clear that the election represents in fact another turn to the screw of repression. The international community should see it simply as that. should reject it and its results. and should call for all South Africans to have the basic right of universal suffrage in a unitary state.

REPORT FROM THE HOME FRONT

Evidence of a 4.7 million rands (2.3 million US dollars) campaign by the South African government to promote the October municipal elections is everywhere. Huge billboards saying your vote can make it happen are up, and television. radio and newspapers extol the soon-to-be achievements of democratically-elected councillors.

Despite emergency regulations, however. the youth in Port Elizabeth and surrounding districts have managed to express their opposition to the elections. Pensioners and the more impoverished people are the most likely to be caught in the web of bribery and threats of candidates.

These people are often too busy getting through each day to study the meaning

of the elections.

Tamsanqa Linda, former mayor of Port Elizabeth in the eastern Cape, has promised housing to the unemployed and upgrading of facilities in hostels for the homeless and aged.

Linda organised a soup kitchen and served pensioners personally in order to obtain votes from them said Stebha Mbelwa, a tenant at a hostel.

A spokesperson for the civil rights Black Sash organisation said that some pensioners in Ibhayi, near here, and Middelburg in the Cape have been threatened that unless they vote, they will lose their pensions.

In the small outlying towns of the eastern Cape, residents stand unified against the elections.

In Lingelihle, residents have been given tarred roads and streetlights in what they say has been an attempt by the administration to buy them.

The residents say they are confident that no councillor will stand in Cradock.

In Klipplaat, the small hardworking community felt the payment of \$150 for a councillor to put his name forward was an amount out of reach for many unless they were helped.

In Bhongolethu township in Oudtshoorn, violence has broken out over the issue of municipal elections.

A meeting called by the Oudtshoorn town council was attended by a few old pensioners who put forward names of possible candidates. It is alleged that after these people agreed to stand for elections, Violence broke out.

Houses of the candidates were burnt down by an unidentified group of Icom-radesa _ militant youths _ and a car was smashed and burnt.

Three students were detained for campaigning against the elections and students at Fezekile secondary school in Oudtshoorn are not attending Classes.

The students allegedly requested the school staff to call a community meeting to resolve the issue of municipal elections and to call for the release of their fellow students.

Only one of the six major local authorities in the eastern Cape is being run by its own mayor and councillors.

Ibhayi City council in Port Elizabeth, Kwanobuhle in Uitenhage and Lingelihle in Cradock and Graaff Reinet all have white administrators.

In Uitenhage, its eight candidate seats have been taken by the extreme right wing Conservative Party.

Resistance to the elections has not occurred in the white areas of Port Elizabeth and surrounding districts.

Despite bans on opposition to the municipal elections, and on reporting on opposition, restricted organisations remain firm on the issue of non-participation, ignoring the barrage of government advertising and propaganda.

Progressive white organisations have adopted the attitude that what is strategic for black organisations is not necessarily for whites, who have a history of voting. Many whites, therefore, will support the more enlightened candidates.

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