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1. By Michael Acott
hvmex Which Yes vote
vs whlchMNo9

THE constitutional referendum is not so much about "yes" and "no" votes as about what each will mean. . _

These two little words, supposedly so tinial, are becoming imbued with a multitude of often contradictory interpretations of the I proposed constitution. Both "yes" and "no" are being propagated by those standing for the implementation of apartheid and those desperate for real reform. The real debate is not which will win, but what the winning vote will herald.

Opposed reasons

Nationalist cabinet ministers are having a lot of fun with the diverse views of "no'l vote advocates. They point out that Dr Van Zyl Slabbert and Dr Andries Treurnicht are two learned scholars fighting the proposed constitution for diametrically opposed reasons. Dr Slabbert, on behalf of the Progressive Federal Party, calls it the entrenchment of apartheid. Dr Treurnicht, on behalf of the Conservative Party, says the new constitution is integration and multi-racial power-sharing.

The Prime Minister, Mr P W Botha, says he will not know that to make of a majority "no" vote. It will not give the indication of which direction voters wish it to take, he states.

But the "yes" vote is no more unified. Conservative Nationalists clinging to separate development are as much in favour of the new deal as reformists hoping it is the beginning of the end of apartheid.

Mr Botha, confident of a "yes" majority, might just as well ask himself what this will tell him.

What he and his cabinet are telling the country is that a "yes" vote will mean nothing more than the continued implementation of government policy.

As the referendum campaign winds up, the Nationalist emphasis is on placating worried conservatives, soothing white fears and pandering to white prejudices. Harsh statements about forcing coloured and Indian people in Johannesburg to "go back where they came from" are indicative of their mood. The message is that coloured and Indian people are being admitted to participation in the new constitution as long as they know their place.

Nationalist ministers tell conservative whites that their lives will hardly be affected under the new constitution. Discriminatory laws regarding residential and school segregation will continue. Above all, whites are told that the constitution is loaded in their favour and will remain so as long as they support the National Party. Vote "yes", they are urged, to preserve Nationalist laws and Nationalist policy. Vote "yes" to ensure a white Nationalist president, to preserve white exclusivity and to confine black political rights to the homelands under the continued implementation of separate development.

Much quieter

The campaign to "vote yes for reform" is much quieter. This says that discriminatory laws will go, that the three-chamber parliament is a first step towards real multi-racialism and that black people will eventually be included in Parliament.

It comes from the New Republic Party, from

businessmen and from PFP supporters who believe the new constitution will really be a step in the right direction. It is whispered by Nationalists in private meetings while another message comes from public Nationalist platforms. This reformist "yes" is contrary not only to the consistent dictates of Nationalist policy, but to firm pronouncements during the referendum campaign.

Its adherents are sincere. On the available evidence, however, the government does not want their views. Only their votes.