



Winning letter Flaws in the party list

In all the talk of the elections scheduled for next April I have seen little discussion of one central issue that seems to be taken for granted.

Everyone seems agreed that the elections should be conducted by proportional representation, with the party list system the most likely option for allocating seats. I accept that drawing up constituencies would be difficult given the geography of apartheid, which split towns and regions along ethnic lines. But has anyone given serious thought to the problems that are inherent in the party list system?

The system, as it is generally practised, allows parties to list their candidates in order of preference. For every so many thousand votes the party will receive one member of parliament. Since every party knows roughly how

many votes the party will receive, it puts its leading members at the top of the list. It then works downwards, until that unhappy region is reached where candidates know they have no realistic hope of getting elected.

Although there may be variations, such as regional lists, the systems all work roughly in the same way. All are a disaster, for they turn politics inwards instead of outward. By this I mean that the real political battle is no longer focused on voters, but on the dreaded party list. All potential candidates must do everything in their power to get as far up it as possible. To this end they engage in endless battles and factional activity designed to win a place for themselves and their friends.

Anyone who wants to see how this works needs look no further than

Is it any wonder that Italians have just decided to scrap exactly such a system — a system that is being held accountable for the rotten and corrupt state of Italian post-war politics? How can South Africans be contemplating adopting such a flawed system?

— Martin Plaut, London, England

Socialism's identity crisis

Part 2 of the Laclau debate (WIP91), which dealt with socialism's "identity crisis", really got me thinking.

It seems everybody has their own definition of what socialism is; even Marx in his day refused to give ready-made formulas. He said socialism has no blueprint, and that if society is to be truly socialist, its details should be determined by the working class. Therefore, genuine socialism is democratic, with democratic control and democratic decision-making in establishing production plans and setting goals.

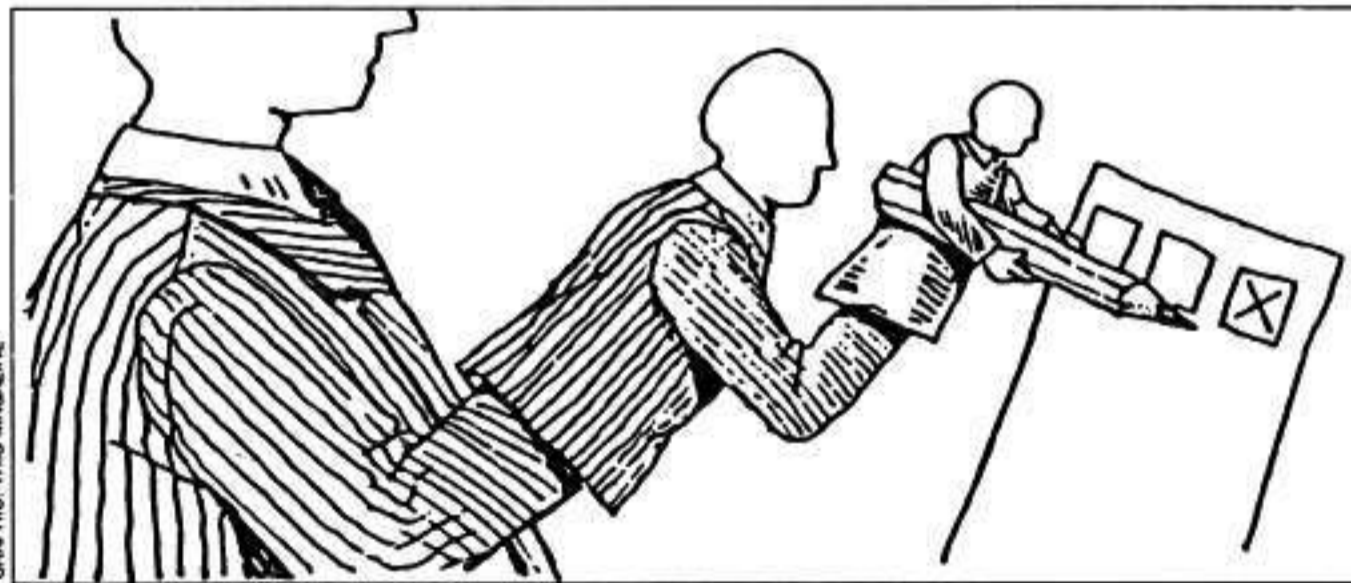
When we talk about socialism being in crisis, I think it is important that people don't confuse desire with reality. The crisis in Europe — particularly in what was the Soviet Union — is between the bureaucracy and the toiling masses, not between pro-capitalists and anti-capitalist forces.

Socialism is a science, and science is never complete. It is always open to new problems. And to advance socialism, we require practical experimentation and the confrontation of different interpretations of a constantly-changing reality.

Finally, there's the question of Stalinism. Stalinism is not communism or Marxism. Stalin and his successors used the words of Lenin and Marx, but that doesn't mean they were anything like Lenin or Marx. Just because Verwoerd, Vorster, Botha and De Klerk used the words of the bible to justify apartheid, doesn't mean that the people who wrote the bible are responsible for apartheid, does it?

— Thobile Maso, Transkei

(This letter has been edited)



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the Israeli Labour Party, where internal party battles are far more important than fighting the Right.

While it distorts inner party life, its effect on the public is even more negative. Instead of having an MP for a particular area, to whom they can go to with their problems, they are faced with a host of MPs — none of who has any real responsibility for their constituents. No voter can ever say in effect: "Help us get this road built, or more teachers for our school, or we will not vote for you again."

Since all votes are thrown into a central or regional pool, who can be held responsible?