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EDITORIAL

1984

1984 ! George Orwell's year is here. What can South Africa expect from it? A further accretion to the dark forces of authoritarianism which he predicted, or the first stumbling steps towards a wider freedom for us all? In particular, what can she expect from Mr. Botha's massive 2 to 1 victory in the white referendum?

The people who gave him that great victory were, as far as we can judge, 1) supporters of the Nationalist Party who felt that the time for some controlled reform had come; 2) supporters of the Nationalist Party who had been assured that the new constitution wouldn't really change things at all; 3) non-Nationalists who voted "Yes", hoping for enough reform to ease present tensions, but not enough to change things much; 4) non-Nationalists who hoped that the new constitution would prove the first step in a process of reform which, once started, would take on a momentum of its own and, even if by a process of fits and starts, gradually lead us, even if in a rather messy manner, to a reasonably acceptably arranged society.

Reality, having advocated a "NO" vote, must now hope that this last is what will happen. But we should not expect too much. For, if it does happen, it will be in spite of and not because of the terms of the constitution, whose provisions will entrench apartheid in every field in which whites want it entrenched, and will exclude Africans from direct involvement where political power really resides.

What of the African political scene after the referendum? The only African voice to be raised in support of Mr. Botha's

proposals was that of Chief Lennox Sebe, whose terror-ridden, violence-racked Ciskei presents an increasingly embarrassing and horrific picture to South Africa and the world. Is this the direction in which Mr. Botha's constitution will, willy-nilly, lead all the black homelands? Or at least those which are close to white industrial South Africa, or involved with it on a commuting basis? We pose the question because, as far as one can understand it, the conflict in the Ciskei is essentially one between a rurally-based homeland authority and an increasingly radicalised workforce employed "across the border" in white South Africa? Is this conflict inevitable? And, if it is, will it not be extended further and further into the homelands with each extension of the Nationalists' grand commuter strategy, a plan apparently designed to provide express transport services carrying black workers to white industrial areas, from deeper and deeper in the homelands, until white South Africa is largely cleared of them?

The question is an urgent one because one of the most distressing developments to mark 1983 was the growing conflict between two groups which were very much at one in their rejection of Mr. Botha's constitution. These were Chief Buthelezi's Inkatha and the essentially urban-based supporters of the United Democratic Front. The killings at the University of Zululand at Ngoye at the end of October were only the most dramatic in a series of clashes over several years which have led to deaths on both sides. In the Durban township of Lamontville tension between them has run at a high rate throughout the year. It seems

likely to be increased by the recent proposal to incorporate Lamontville into Kwa-Zulu, which the township residents rightly see as a threat to their rights as South Africans, in defence of which they and Inkatha should surely be fighting together? In the meantime, as the conflict flourishes, one suspects there is a gleeful rubbing together of hands in Pretoria.

One of our most earnest hopes for 1984 therefore must be that this conflict will somehow be resolved and that the warring factions will be able to agree to put their ideological differences aside for the moment. Then they might together be able to work out a strategy which would force Pretoria, not in 1984 perhaps, but in the not-too-distant

future, to make accommodations in its constitutional thinking which could lead, however erratically, to the realisation of the publicly-stated aim of both groups – full African participation in a democratically based non-racial society. If, however, the wounds inflicted on black unity at Ngoye fester on unchecked, Kwa-Zulu could be set on a path which would lead it to where the Ciskei is now.

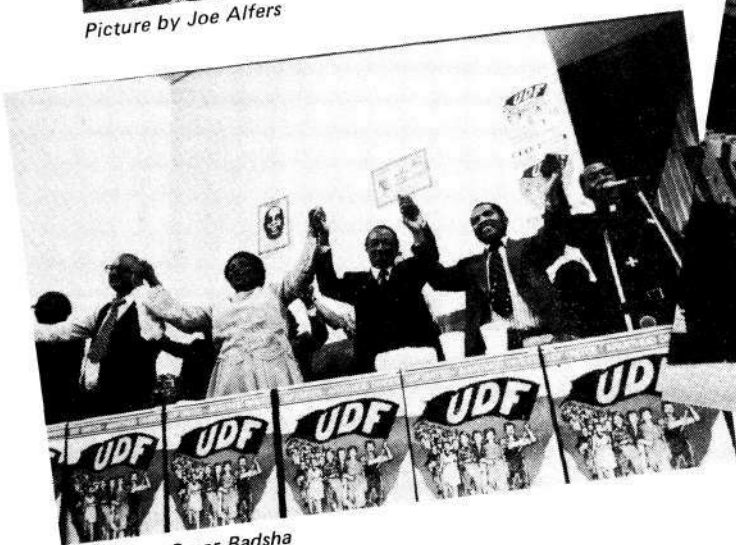
So our one hope for 1984 is that Inkatha and its opponents will manage to negotiate a truce, and agree to differ but not to fight. The other is that the combined political, economic and social forces for change in South Africa will begin to show that the new constitution could one day become something its sponsors never intended it to be. □



Picture by Joe Alferts



Picture by Paul Weinberg



Picture by Omar Badsha



Picture by Wendy Schwegmann

1984?