

Who really knows how black rural masses and shanty dwellers will choose to vote?

THE SILENT MILLIONS

DESPITE all the speculation, claims, posturing and plain bluster, no one really knows what is going to happen in South Africa's first free election.

The fact is that the majority of eligible voters will be under the age of 30 — even under the age of 26, according to some reports — and the majority of the voters will be in the rural areas.

Some two to three million potential voters live in squatter camps in the urban areas of South Africa.

These are the poorest, most deprived and most marginalised people in the country. And if they cast their votes, they will have a decisive influence on the outcome of any election.

Yet, they are never canvassed in public opinion polls. Most South African pollsters rely on the telephone, but the vast majority do not have telephones and as a result they are simply not questioned.

All the opinion polls rely on people in the urban areas for the results, yet the Development Bank of Southern Africa estimates that 54,12 percent of people over the age of 18 do not live in the urban area.

The bank's figures include the four 'independent' homelands, which official figures typically ignore, even though just about everyone knows that these areas will be reincorporated into South Africa by the time a free election is held.

It estimates that 3 191 094 people over the age of 18 — 1,43 percent of the total — live in the TBVC 'states' and a further 4 753 151 — 27,45% of the total — live in the non-independent homelands. How will they vote? No one knows.

Altogether 9 374 870 of the estimated 17 319 120 people over the age of 18 reside outside the urban areas — beyond the reach of telephone canvassers, and usually beyond the reach of newspapers and television, but not the radio.

So, when the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Pik Botha, claims as he did in Parliament recently, that the National Party was on its way to becoming the most popular party in the country, it was at best an expression of hope.

He could be correct that the NP has the support of 70% of whites, the

BARRY STREEK, political writer for the Cape Times and other Morning Group newspapers, takes a hard look at those who could influence decisively the outcome of the first free election.

majority of 'coloureds' and Indians, and that it was making inroads into the black community, but he could well be very wrong.

The Conservative Party's foreign spokesperson, Thomas Langley, dubbed the loquacious Botha as "Madam Rose" for all his election predictions and reminded Parliament that he had once predicted that Jimmy Carter would win a second term of office, that Bishop Abel Muzorewa would win Zimbabwe's first election and that Swapo would not win an election in Namibia.

Botha was in fact echoing claims made last year by the NP's secretary-general, Dr Stoffel van der Merwe, that the party had now liberated itself because it could now win an election and did not have to rely on minority protection.

In the past, he told the NP's Cape congress in The Strand, the party was restricted to being a minority and it therefore did not have a future. Now, the NP could continue in government after winning a free election.

One might be tempted to dismiss this as wishful thinking, given the NP's history and reputation among the majority of South Africans, but ANC president Nelson Mandela clearly does not do so.

Only ten days before, Mandela told delegates to the ANC's Western Cape congress that they had to prepare for

elections within three years and warned them that the NP was better organised and had experience as well as resources. He also warned that it was making an impact among black people.

Indeed, the ANC's secretary-general, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, said at the end of last year that an election would be held in 1992, that the ANC had started preparing for an election "some time ago" and that: "The ANC's machinery for an election is already in place and the membership is conscientised."

What all this means, in essence, is that the NP and the ANC see themselves as serious contenders in an election and, in particular, are competing for the black vote. They are both actively preparing for the elections and, indeed, this is one of the factors influencing their positions and strategies at CODESA.

In short, the NP clearly wants to remain in power and it believes it can do so by winning a free election.

However, as far as the opinion polls have validity, they point to an ANC victory. A Human Sciences Research Council poll, conducted among 2 000 metropolitan residents in October and November last year found that the ANC would receive 37 percent of the total vote, including 67 percent of the black vote, and the NP 38 percent of the total but only 6 percent of the black vote.

A Markinor poll put black support for the ANC at 72 percent, while the University of Western Cape's Dr Vincent Maphai said the ANC was unlikely to capture more than 57% of the vote. He added that a landslide victory was not likely and, initially at least, the ANC would have to rely on alliances with both black and white parties.

Maphai, however, believes that the NP could never win a non-racial election although, as the strongest participants, the ANC and NP were both trying to

‘ PIK BOTHA'S CLAIM THAT THE NATIONAL PARTY IS ON ITS WAY TO BECOMING THE MOST POPULAR IN THE COUNTRY, IS AT BEST AN EXPRESSION OF HOPE. ’



rally the support of a broad spectrum of South Africans. "In fact, the ANC has embarked on a vigorous campaign to establish branches in the traditionally white liberal areas."

With most surveys showing the NP doing surprisingly well among 'coloured' and Indian people, the ANC will have to present a moderate image that recognises minority fears in order to win support from these voters. Its pragmatic approach to the five former Democratic Party MPs, who joined the ANC recently despite remaining members of the tricameral Parliament, reflects such an approach.

The NP, on the other hand, has to demonstrate to the majority that it is a party of the future and that it has really transformed itself from the bad old days of apartheid. Clearly, the highly marketable President FW de Klerk is a key element in this.

The disrupted rally in Mitchell's Plain and rallies in other 'coloured' areas, meetings in Indian areas, taking control of the House of Representatives and the recruitment of Sattie Naidoo, its first MP in the House of Delegates, are all part of the NP strategy to win and consolidate support among 'coloured' and Indian people.

What is less obvious is the overall NP strategy to win black support — particularly among the poor, marginalised and rural voters. It will certainly need a lot more than the 6 percent black support for the NP found in the HSRC poll if it is going to have any realistic chance of winning a free election.

It clearly hopes that the homeland and traditional leaders will decide that an alliance with the NP will be in their interests rather than an alliance with the ANC — and that they will be able to deliver a sizeable portion of the rural vote.

Given the enormous amount of money and energy devoted to promoting tribal authorities and the blatant collaboration between the government and most chiefs in the homeland governments and parliaments over the last 40 years in the attempt to promote separate development, the NP may be justified in its hopes that most of the traditional leaders will support them.

If, however, most of the poor majority opt for the political party that offers them the best hope of real change and the prospects of greater economic advancement, the NP, with its track record, has a serious credibility problem.

The ANC, and the Inkatha Freedom Party and the PAC for that matter, will

not have this problem and they will at least be able to offer greater hope of change than the NP.

The NP also has proven organisation, resources and experience in elections, but whether this will count much amongst people in rural and deprived areas and among young unemployed black people is doubtful.

The ruling party has a proven record of apartheid and repression, and a leadership that remains all-white. The marketability of this image among the majority of the 17 million voters is almost certainly beyond the skills of even Saatchi and Saatchi.

At this stage, it retains control of most of the radio waves, particularly FM, and this will prove an enormous advantage until such time as the SABC is brought under all-party controls and stops being a propaganda service for the government. However, by the time the elections are held, the NP will have lost this advantage.

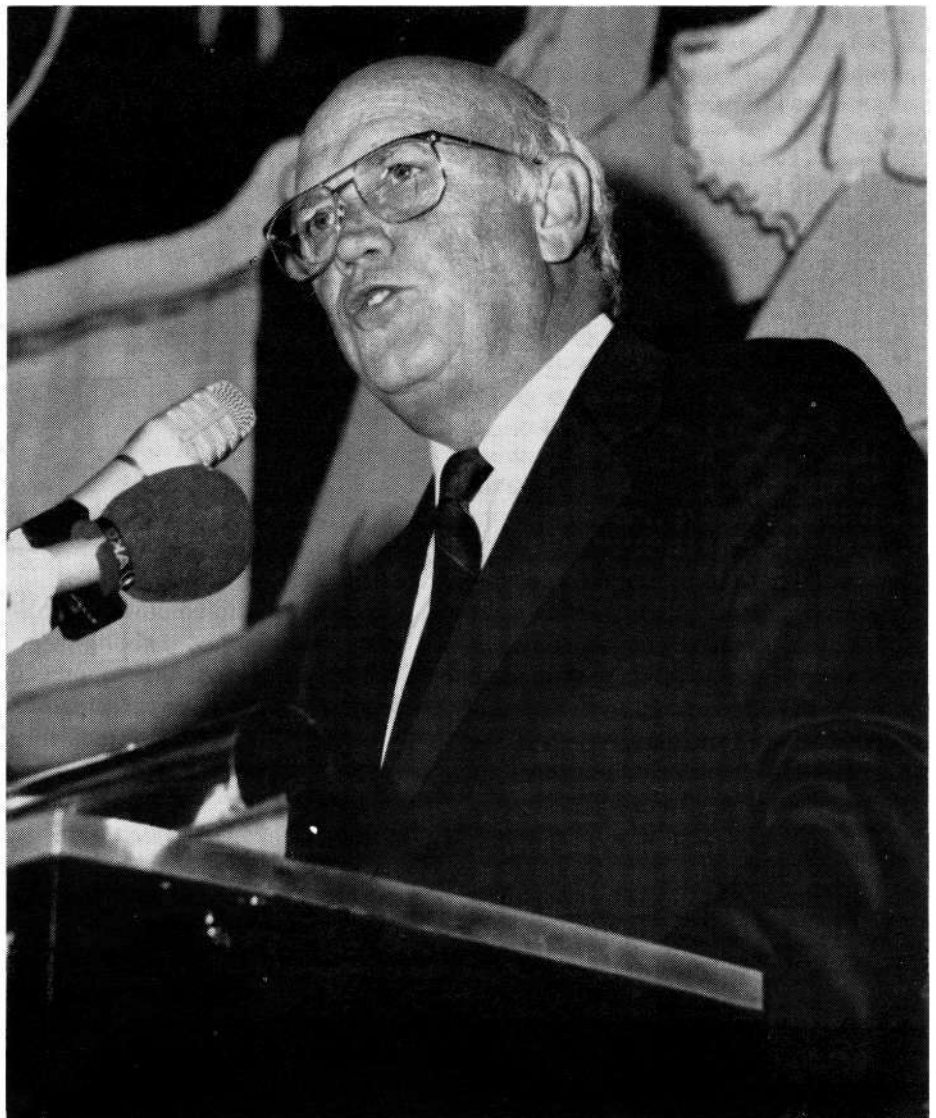
So, despite the public optimism of Pik Botha and Stoffel van der Merwe about the NP's prospects in a free election, the

reality is somewhat different and the party's chances of winning are not great at present.

In June last year, Drum conducted a survey of 100 people in Johannesburg, Springs, Vanderbijlpark and Pretoria. It found that 39 percent said they would vote for the ANC, 12 percent for the PAC, five percent for Azapo, four percent for Inkatha and two percent for the NP.

But a sizeable 24 percent were too afraid to make any kind of commitment, six percent did not know what all the fuss was about and eight percent said they couldn't care less. Drum said a number of people were terrified of voicing an opinion, felt there was no party addressing their particular needs, or were cynical about the maverick stance of present-day political parties.

If this trend is reflected nationally, as it well might, then there is a sizeable floating vote, but it is questionable whether the NP is a serious option for



F.W. de Klerk, rated by the Nationalists as their most marketable speaker, has begun campaigning for black support.