

https://dspace.org/

Coloureds and South Africa's first democratic elections

Nieftagodien, Noor

1994-07-13T07:53:15Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8040

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

DEMOCRACY



POPULAR
PRECEDENTS
PRACTICE
CULTURE

13 - 15 JULY 1994

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

HISTORY WORKSHOP

COLOUREDS AND SOUTH AFRICA'S FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

Noor Nieftagodien
History Department
University of the Witwatersrand

HVS 314

Coloureds and South Africa's first democratic elections.

Noor Nieftagodien

June 1994

South Africa's first democratic elections represented a turning point in the country's history: it heralded the end of white minority rule, and ushered in a majority black government. In certain respects the process which unfolded from February 1990 to April 1994 also represented this country's decolonisation. The achievement of a majority black government weighed most heavily on the consciousness of all classes and races as almost 20 million stood in the queues to cast their votes for the new South Africa.

The outcome of the election reflected this reality - a massive victory for the African National Congress (ANC), nationally and regionally. Only in Natal and the Western Cape was the ANC denied electoral victory and these regions are now referred to as the only "unliberated zones" of the country. Few people will dispute, despite all the official denials, that the final outcome in Natal was the result of a negotiated deal between the main parties. The Western Cape result, on the other hand, reflected the real political divisions in that region. The victory of the National Party(NP) was secured by the majority support it won from the Coloured population. In other regions, such as the Northern Cape and the PWV, the NP also won a substantial amount of the Coloured vote. So far there has not yet been a thorough analysis of the reasons behind the NP's success in winning Coloured votes, or to pose the issue slightly differently, why the ANC failed to win these votes. This paper aims to make some contribution to this discussion from the point of view of an ANC activist who worked in a Coloured constituency during the elections.

Coloured ANC members who have been active in the struggle since the early 1980s could not believe that after so many years of successfully campaigning for boycotts of "dummy elections" that Coloureds would now support the architects of apartheid. A Cosatu shop steward who played an active role in the ANC's election campaign in the Western Cape despaired, explaining that perhaps Coloureds "are just racist". Others have blamed the NP's racist campaign, the weaknesses of the ANC's campaign and some accused the ANC of having lost the support in the Coloured areas which the United Democratic Front(UDF) built in the 1980s. Undoubtedly, each of these factors played a role but they do not sufficiently explain the political reasons which influenced Coloured consciousness during the elections. It will be argued here that these are the factors which the movement must confront if it to prevent a recurrence of the NP's victory in the Western Cape in the future. At the same time a frank recognition of the shortcomings, political and organisational, is necessary to equip the movement to deal effectively with the NP's rule in the Western Cape.

This paper is divided into two sections: the first section deals with the actual election campaign in Newclare, a Coloured area lying west of Johannesburg; the second section will discuss some of the

issues which have been raised by ANC activists in their analysis of the outcome of the elections. The formulations and conclusions put forward here are of course my own.

A. THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN NEWCLARE

The first stage: October to December 1993

From the outset ANC activists recognised that the Coloured communities would be among the most hotly contested areas of the elections. The ANC and NP were assured of majority support from Africans and whites respectively. However, in order to prove their "multi-racial" character it was necessary for both parties to show substantial support in the Coloured and Indian communities. For the NP this was a matter of survival - in order to give any credence to its "new" image, support from non-whites was absolutely vital. Little wonder therefore that a large part of its election campaign concentrated on winning votes in these areas, primarily in the Western Cape. Its campaign was run largely via the media, in contrast to the ANC's campaign which had at its core regular door-to-door canvassing in the community. In this respect the election work in Newclare was typical of the ANC's election campaign in most other Coloured areas.

In this paper the Newclare area refers to those areas which are covered by the ANC Newclare branch. These are the Newclare, Waterval Flats (an estate built in the mid 1980s), Westbury, Coronationville, Bosmont and an African municipal hostel (Anthea) in Industria. Bosmont and Coronationville are the two middle class communities, the former being regarded as one of the main Coloured middle class areas in Johannesburg and the latter consisting largely of older people. Westbury and Newclare are predominantly working class areas, where overcrowding, unemployment and general poverty are all pervasive. Westbury is widely known as the drug centre of Johannesburg, with at least two major gangs operating there, much like the mafia. Over the last two years there has been a massive increase in gang-related crime and it was not unusual for us to come across youth brandishing weapons during our electioneering. These areas also formed part of the old Western Areas township. In fact Westbury is commonly referred to by its residents as "Western" and many take pride in calling it a township. Some older residents lived in the Western Areas township and many of them speak an African language. Some of them were ANC members in the 1950s and have clear recollections of the struggles against the removals. Most of our work was concentrated in the working class sections, primarily because this is where the majority of the people reside.

Our election campaign started off with a mass meeting at the beginning of October 1993. The work involved in preparing for this meeting set the tone for the next seven months, with activists campaigning every day for two to three weeks. Every household was covered at least twice with an assortment of ANC pamphlets being handed out. Our main drawcard was that Nelson Mandela was due to speak at the meeting, and as a result over 1000 attended. Very few activists could recall when last such a big political gathering took place in this area. Whilst some of those who attended did so out of curiosity, the overwhelming majority were clearly ANC supporters. This was at least shown by the fact that more than 100 people signed up to join the ANC that night. However, this success was dampened when we were informed, a few hours before the event, by Mandela himself that he would not be able to attend. Even though Walter Sisulu, Tokyo Sexwale and a host of other regional and national leaders attended, it did not make up for the absence of Mandela. For weeks we were accused of lying to the community, and even a personal letter of apology from Mandela, which was distributed to every household, did not take away the suspicions. Some activists reported that people were accusing Mandela of not caring about the Coloureds. It also dampened the spirit of activists, and for a while it was difficult to hold together the core who had campaigned so hard for the mass meeting. However, their enthusiasm was reignited when an NP public meeting, held three few weeks after ours, attracted no more than sixty people, twenty of whom were ANC members who went there to ask questions. Other than a continuous tirade against the ANC, Jac Rabie failed to enthuse the small gathering and was forced to entertain them with a rendition of *Daar kom die Alabama*. ANC activists were in high spirits again, confident that we would easily win in our area.

Nevertheless, throughout October and November we canvassed the area on a regular basis, armed with street sheets and ANC propaganda material. Virtually every night and most weekends were taken up in this way. An analysis of street sheets revealed that approximately 40% of people canvassed indicated support for the ANC, less than 20% said they would vote NP and the rest were not prepared to commit themselves. The large percentage of undecided Coloured voters was confirmed by an analysis of street sheets in Eldorado Park, and other Coloured areas. Although one needs to take into account that some of the "undecided" group were NP supporters, unwilling to reveal their allegiance to ANC canvassers, the results of the street sheets were probably an accurate indication of Coloured consciousness at this stage. It also appeared then that many people in our area were simply not interested in the elections, as if they were uncertain whether it really affected their lives or not.

The uncertainty that pervaded the Coloured population was a reflection of the dilemma faced by them: *to vote for black majority rule or not.* Those who had made their minds up to vote ANC were prepared to declare this openly. Most NP supporters, and those among the undecided group who were

tending towards the NP, found it very difficult to justify their position at this stage. They understood that a vote for that party would mean supporting the people responsible for the miserable conditions which they live in. Support for the NP was not something to be proud of, at least not for the majority. An NP supporting woman was asked why she supported the party of apartheid and replied: "Ek weet van die NP se dade, maar ek het mos nie 'n keuse nie. Ek kan nie vir 'n swart mens stem nie." She did not have anything positive to say about the NP and expressed the hope that there would be peace between the people after the elections. One activist explained the attitude of those Coloureds who would vote NP as follows: "They know the NP is a stinking, rotten rat. The only reason why they are voting for the NP is their hatred for the ANC. But they will go to the polling booth with their noses closed as they vote NP."

Coloured people's opinions were strongly influenced by the media, especially television. In this respect the NP had the upperhand in the propaganda war to win Coloured voters. For many years people have been fed a strong anti-ANC diet over the airwaves and this carried on, albeit in more subtle ways, right up to the elections. Thus ordinary people invariably referred to things they had seen on television when we discussed with them. They were particularly influenced in this way on matters such as violence, religion, affirmative action and the "new" image of the NP and De Klerk. ANC activists found it extremely difficult to counter the propaganda churned out by the SABC.

A distinct group that we came across regularly during canvassing were those who insisted that they would note vote for any party but would only "vote for Jesus". These people could generally be divided into two groups: the first were those who genuinely believed that they should not partake in politics, and secondly there were those who were sympathetic to the NP and wanted to "catch out" ANC members on the question of religion. Initially we spent a considerable amount of time trying to persuade them of the necessity to "create paradise on earth", but the true-believers invariably used the opportunity to preach to our activists about the evils of politics. Rather than spend our time arguing with these people we made a conscious effort to win over the undecided voters, which meant in practice covering between 60-80% of the area.

It should be noted here that a frequent debate in the branch during this period was over the use of the term Coloured. Without wanting to oversimplify the division on this issue, it was interesting that middle class activists were far more concerned that we should reject the apartheid label of Coloured. Westbury and Newclare activists, on the other hand, whilst being conscious of the need to be politically correct (whatever it means on this issue) spoke of "ons mense" or "ons nasie" quite naturally. It was agreed by most that while we should reject racist labels, it was also the case that

many Coloured people, if not the majority, recognised themselves as a distinct group. Everyone also admitted that the election campaign in the Coloured areas could not merely be a replication of the campaign in the African townships. It was argued that "we have to understand the special conditions faced by our people, and address their specific fears." At a regional level the ANC attempted to do this with the formation of a "Special Task Force for minority areas".

This did of course not preclude the necessity of pointing out the common oppression and exploitation experienced by the majority of Coloureds and Africans. Indeed it was always regarded as absolutely vital that we should raise the common "class issues" and show to Coloured working people how their destiny was tied up with that of their African counterparts. Thus a significant part of our agitation and propaganda concentrated on highlighting the social issues, eg., housing, unemployment and low wages. During the course of 1993 the ANC branch also played an important role in the teacher strike and in an anti-crime campaign. These gave us ample opportunity to hammer the NP on the social issues with some measure of success.

The Newclare ANC branch ended its 1993 campaign with a fairly successful fete. Most of our members remained confident about our prospects in the elections. Up to that point there was little evidence that the NP was making much effort to campaign in the area. In November we had also set up an elections office and employed a full-time organiser. In the first few weeks after this more than one hundred people came to the office to sign up. However, we still found that in spite of all the work we had done since October the majority of people remained undecided. This only begun to change significantly two to three weeks before the elections.

The second phase: January to May 1994

The ANC branch started off its campaign in 1994 with a series of Peoples' Forums in the different areas. Our aims were to get Coloured people to put forward their demands to the ANC and to do some voter education. For six weeks we worked flat out campaigning for these forums with door-to-door visits and weekly sessions of covering the area with posters. Two of these forums, held in Westbury and Bosmont, were very poorly attended even though they were well canvassed for. The forum held at the Waterval Flats was attended by about 2-300 hundred people and was addressed by Tokyo Sexwale. However, most of those who attended were ANC supporters which meant that were not reaching those were still undecided, other than through house visits. The poor attendance at these forums gave us some indication that support for the ANC could no longer be taken for granted. From

the beginning of February we were constantly aware of the time constraints, and realised that we would not be able properly to cover the area with door-to-door canvassing. A proper house visit often took between 10 and 20 minutes.

It was also at this time that a statement by Mandela about Coloureds voting for the NP was widely interpreted as him calling all Coloureds traitors. For about two weeks we had to put out the flames of this issue with some people saying that this confirmed their fears that "when the blacks take over they will go for the Coloureds first".

It seemed around February/March that problems were mounting for the ANC. One aspect of this was the conflict between various ANC branches in Coloured areas and the national leadership over the alliance with the Labour Party (LP), and in particular the fact that at least three of their leaders were on our party list. The debate on this is issue had reared its head at the Annual Conference of the ANC's PWV region. The publication of the ANC's list, however, gave new life to the debate as numerous ANC supporters openly voiced their objection to the inclusion of LP candidates. The experience of our community with a leading LP member, Miley Richards, has been extremely acrimonious. Throughout the 1980s he was a prominent figure in the Tricameral system and there were many clashes between him and the various community organisations. Besides the political arguments against having such a questionable character on the ANC list, the majority of activists found it extremely difficult to come to terms with the idea of campaigning for the likes of Miley Richards to be elected to parliament. In fact, after the publication of the list the local ANC office was inundated with calls from people raising their objections and some even threatened to resign from the ANC, including executive members. We petitioned the Regional and National Executives on this issue to no avail. Although we were able to regroup activists, this matter came back to haunt us throughout the rest of the campaign.

The biggest shock experienced by the ANC branch was the success of the NP meeting held three weeks before the elections. An estimated 1200 people attended, and even though people were bussed in from other Coloured areas the majority came from Newclare, Westbury and Coronationville. It seemed as if politics was suddenly transformed in our area, as the confidence of NP members was bolstered. Overnight people put NP posters on their walls and proudly stated their intention to vote NP. The weekend after the NP meeting we canvassed the area for a public meeting in Westbury, and were shocked by the response. For the first time there was open antagonism towards us and it felt as if we had been thrown back into the 1980s when supporters of the tricameral parties threatened to beat up anti-election activists. Women and children were walking around with NP scarves and flags. One

old woman followed our canvassers shouting pro-NP slogans. Another said she would never vote for Mandela because "*hy het tronk toe gegaan vir so lank om van ons taxes te lewe*" (he went to prison for so long to live off our taxes) Two old men tore up our pamphlets and expressed the kind of open racism we had not experienced up to that point, saying they would never want to be ruled by "stupid kaffirs".

The extent of NP support became clearer in our canvassing in one section of Bosmont where, in a single night, we found 26 out of 30 households supporting the NP. A youth from this area said that he would vote for the NP because he supports segregation and "on top of it my family has lived a very comfortable life under the NP."

Attempts to convince people like this that voting for the NP would be wrong invariably failed, even though few of them could provide cogent reasons for supporting the NP. We found that most NP supporters expressed their political thoughts primarily by attacking the ANC, eg., "blacks can't rule, see how they messed up the rest of Africa", "since Mandela was released there has been a massive increase in crime and violence, so the ANC must be behind the violence", "if the blacks rule this country the violence between the Xhosa and Zulu will spread to the whole country". Violence and the fear of chaos were key factors in Coloured consciousness and explanations about state collusion with Inkatha or their direct involvement in violence did not have much impact with those who believed otherwise.

Many of the previously unspoken fears now came to the fore. Old people asked us whether it was true that the ANC would take away pensions. We only discovered a week before the elections that NP supporters responsible for pension pay-outs had been spreading this rumour, warning the aged that they would only keep their pensions if they voted for the NP. The unemployed suddenly discovered that as Coloureds they "will never get a job because of affirmative action". On the one hand the surfacing of these issues was positive as it allowed us to focus our political propaganda. But we found it extremely difficult to breakdown the fear which seemed to grip many people. Nevertheless, in the last two weeks we tried to cover the whole area again in a last attempt to secure votes for the ANC. Our election campaign was rounded off with a successful public meeting in the heart of Westbury, where a few hundred people openly declared their loyalty to the ANC.

Up to the time of the NP meeting it was difficult to assess how most people would vote. Whilst we knew that many people supported the NP, several leading activists were nevertheless shocked by the turnout at their meeting. From that point the majority of people we came across had made up their

minds who they would vote for. It seems that with NP supporters publicly declaring their allegiance, the rest of the community quickly identified themselves with their respective parties. There was also a growing feeling that Coloureds had to make it known where they stood, so that the situation changed very rapidly from one where most professed to be undecided to one where the community was split right down the middle. Cape Town activists report a similar development in their areas, with some believing that many people only decided on the day of the elections how they would vote. Bellville activists say that they know of people who attended the last ANC rally in Athlone, shouting pro-ANC slogans, and still voted NP. In those last three weeks ANC supporters came to our office saying they were shocked to discover that their neighbours supported the NP or they could not believe that a long-time friend could vote for the enemy.

Election Week

The week before the elections was marked by feverish activity to set into place the machinery to oversee the process. ANC members were required to monitor polling stations and to roam the area to check on the activity of other parties. Transport for ANC voters had to be organised. Security and catering for all members out in the field had to be provided. Lastly, about 10 people operated from the office, co-ordinating all the above activities, liaising with the sub-regional and regional offices, and attending to the numerous complaints about voting irregularities. On all three days of the elections we had people streaming into the office wanting voter's cards. Between 50 and 60 people were actively involved in some aspect of the elections. In addition a large percentage of IEC officials were also ANC members.

From the time that the first polling station was set up on April 26 to the count of the last vote at Nasrec on May 2 many ANC activists worked between 12 and 20 hours a day. On the election days we had people guarding the ballot boxes at the police station, where they were kept overnight. It would require a whole book to do justice to the superhuman effort put in by activists and volunteers. Without their contribution in that week the ANC's election campaign was in danger of floundering. Their enthusiasm and commitment easily made up for the movement's inexperience in elections.

There was a massive turnout on April 27, and to our surprise there was little antagonism between ANC and NP supporters.

The excitement of election day has been covered adequately in the media. Suffice to say that every activist came back from the polling station with a heart-rendering story of what it was like to vote for the first time. Many tears of joy were shed openly by young and old. Ordinary people came to the

local ANC office throughout the day exclaiming their excitement. Others just drove past the office shouting "Amandla! We are free at last!"

From the April 29 to May 2, scores of ANC activists monitored the counting process at Nasrec for between 12 and 15 hours a day. From the time we arrived there it became apparent that the NP and DP were determined to stall the process, complaining about everything under the sun. Even white enumerators who admitted to voting NP were embarrassed by the arrogance and rudeness of these party official. Nonetheless, by the evening of May 2 everyone was ready to celebrate the ANC's victory. When Mandela made his victory speech there was tremendous jubilation as people partied and took to the streets. It seems that there was a collective sigh from activists that it was all over.

The figures below are the best estimates available for the outcome in our areas. They were compiled from the information received by ANC members who monitored at the counting centre.

	ANC	NP	Inkatha	Other
Hostel	85%	--	10%	5%
Bosmont	55%	40%	--	5%
Coronation	20%	75%	--	5%
Newclare	58%	40%	--	2%
Westbury	55%	45%	--	--

The category "other" includes the parties not mentioned above plus spoiled ballots. If one excludes the figures for the hostel then it is apparent that the Coloured community was polarised between support for the ANC and NP. Without the exact figures for the number of voters it is impossible to translate these percentages into actual numbers. However, based on the fact that Westbury and Newclare have the biggest populations, followed by Bosmont and then Coronationville, it is safe to conclude that the outcome was probably a tie between the ANC and NP. Riverlea, a Coloured area close to ours achieved a clear ANC majority, and in Eldorado Park it seems that the ANC managed a narrow victory. There are some Coloured areas in the Transvaal which would probably have been won by the NP. However, the outcome of the elections in Transvaal's Coloured areas has been overshadowed by the enormous support for the NP in the Western Cape. From the time that the first

results from the Western Cape were made public activists have been embroiled in debate to get to the bottom of the Coloured support for the NP. The next section of this paper will discuss some of these issues.

B. WHY DID COLOUREDS VOTE NP?

The significance of the elections

An analysis of the reasons behind the support of Coloureds for the NP must necessarily start from an understanding of the significance of the country's first democratic elections. April 27 was the day on which the political emancipation of the African majority was formally registered. The elections represented the gate through which the whole country had to pass, leaving behind it the abhorrent system of apartheid and bringing into being the country's first democratically elected government. Black majority rule was the inevitable consequence of the process unleashed by the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990. This transformation was managed from the top (primarily by the ANC and NP) over the last four years to avoid the perception among the masses that there was to be a rupture with the past. However, this was only partially successful because the shift from white minority rule to a majority black government has had a profound influence on the consciousness of the whole population.

The ANC leadership, especially Mandela, tried to make this reality as palatable as possible to the minorities. For the whites the elections meant not only the end of their political hegemony but they were also to be governed by the very people they had oppressed for so long. Nevertheless, the majority had reconciled themselves to these realities by the time of the elections, even if they were very apprehensive about it. Indians and Coloureds were also divided over their attitude to being ruled by Africans. A large section regarded the end of white rule as their liberation. They saw themselves as part of the oppressed and celebrated the victory of the ANC. But for others the spectre of black rule meant changing one form of domination for another. They chose not identify themselves with the liberation of the African majority.

Thus the fundamental question faced by the whole population on April 27 was "for or against black rule". Every other issue was secondary. For the African population this was the day of liberation and

voting for the ANC was their way of bringing about that reality. On the other hand the majority of whites, Coloureds and Indians decided to huddle together in an attempt to protect their privileges and minimise the power of the new government. The anti-black rule and anti-ANC sentiments among the Coloureds were therefore important in determining how they voted. The elections revealed clear racial divides: Africans voted overwhelmingly for the ANC, whereas a majority of Coloureds, whites and Indians voted for the NP. In Natal of course there was also to some extent an ethnic vote for the IFP. Thus racial identity, and to a much lesser extent ethnic identity, were important in the outcome of the elections.

Anti-ANC or pro-NP?

It would be a mistake to argue that the Coloured vote for the NP can only be described as an anti-ANC vote. Certainly as election day approached there was an increase in the anti-ANC, anti-African sentiments among sections of the Coloureds, and as will be shown below there was a resurfacing of racism. But many Coloureds also believed that the NP best represented their interests. In the two or three weeks before the elections NP supporters in our area spoke more confidently and positively about their support for that party. They referred most frequently to the integrity of De Klerk and the "new" image of the NP. It was not surprising that De Klerk outstripped all other political leaders in the popularity stakes in the Western Cape. Many people in our area said that they trusted him and believed that it was as a result of his goodwill that Mandela was released. The ANC's poster comparing De Klerk with previous NP rulers did not have a major impact because people believed that he was really different.

Similarly, the image of the "new National Party" was very attractive to Coloured people. It was this "purified" image of the leader and his party which convinced many Coloureds that they could feel good about voting for the NP. A vote for the "new National Party" became something to be proud of rather than an embarrassment as it was in the early parts of the campaign. Western Cape NP supporters proudly displayed their T-shirts with slogans such as "De Klerk is my Here". However, beyond this the key element in Coloured support for the NP was their belief that it would defend their interests and prevent the ANC from taking away their privileges. Few NP supporters could defend their party's policies, and when we challenged local NP leaders to debate these issues they flatly refused.

The NP's campaign in the main did not consist of convincing the electorate of its policies or programme. On the contrary it lacked a programme which could compare with the Reconstruction and

Development Programme (RDP) and focused its propaganda mainly on convincing the minorities to vote for it as the party best capable of being a counterweight to the ANC. Its success in this regard was a key factor in the failure of the Democratic Party.

This basic approach of the NP was also revealed in its attitude to the RDP. While forwarding its habitual criticisms against the "communist" aspects of the RDP and warning against raising expectations, the NP did not outrightly reject the ANC's programme. On the contrary, it indicated general support for the aims of the RDP, but insisted that the demands contained in it could only be met through its "free market policies". Its lack of a programme for social upliftment therefore did not make a significant difference in the elections. For the minorities it was the party which would defend their privileges. The NP also used certain aspects of the RDP to rouse the fears of the Coloured people. One of these was affirmative action.

For many Coloured people affirmative action meant, in the words of an unemployed woman from Waterval Flats, that "Die ANC gaan net agter hulle eie mense kyk. Ons Kleurlinge gaan weer onderdruk word, net hierdie keer gaan dit swaarder wees omdat hule ons *jobs* weg gaan neem. Dit gebeur al klaar oral. Jy apply vir 'n *job* dan vra hulle vir jou of jy African is." This notion was widespread and our ANC branch and regional executive had to deal with numerous complaints of racial discrimination by bosses against Coloureds seeking work, who claimed that the bosses told them that it was ANC policy to promote African people. ANC attempts to rectify this distortion had only a limited effect. Affirmative action was now blamed by some for the high unemployment rate in Coloured working class areas, and it appeared to them that the situation could only get worse with the ANC in government. Another woman summed up her feelings on this issue by arguing that "At least under the Nats we Coloureds could get jobs, now we are going to have nothing."

A similar attitude was expressed on the housing question. Over the last five years overcrowding has become a major problem in all working class areas, including Westbury, Newclare and Waterval. Some of the flats in these areas (consisting of one bedroom, kitchen, lounge and bathroom) have ten or more people living in them. Many of the flats have extended families because children have nowhere to move when they get married or have their own children. Two blocks of flats, built for pensioners, still has no hot water. Virtually every household has rent or electricity arrears, and many people have been threatened with evictions by the City Council and Management Committees. With these horrendous conditions experienced by the majority of the people in our area, it was felt that we would be able to convince them with the ANC's housing policy.
But the overwhelmingly positive response we expected did not materialise. Many of those who felt

that the RDP was a good idea were also sceptical about whether any government could fulfil the kind of promises made by the ANC. Others saw in this programme a confirmation that the ANC planned to "look after its people". An old woman from Newclare who shares a flat with her children and grandchildren told us, "I don't like it in my flat because it is cold and overcrowded. I pray all the time that one of my children can make money and buy a house. But now this is all we have and I am scared we are going to lose it. People say the ANC will come take our Coloured people's flats." This was a common fear expressed by many.

Rumours abounded about how Mrs so-and-so saw a group of Africans walking through the area pointing at the flats and houses which they wanted after the elections. In the middle class areas domestic workers were accused of making plans to occupy their employers' houses after the elections. The occupation of houses by African squatters in Cape Town and Durban only added fuel to fire on this issue. At a certain stage we did not want our African comrades to walk alone in the area fearing that they may be attacked by people. An old man, who said that he would vote NP but respected what we were doing, tried to explain to us how "my people think": "It is not that they dislike blacks. But you youngsters must understand we have dignity. Our places are small but we try to make it a home for us. We cannot live in shacks. The white man has done many wrong things but at least we have a roof over our heads."

Many activists were genuinely taken aback by the fact that Coloured people seemed satisfied with their miserable conditions. This was however far from the truth. Poor Coloured people despise their living conditions but many feared that they would lose what little they had to a black government. There was particularly a recognition that Coloureds had privileges which placed them in a better position in relation to the African majority, and these were granted to them by the white government. While virtually no one opposed the aims of the RDP, the question that arose in the minds of many Coloureds was not what they would gain from the RDP, but what they would have to give up for it. This made it difficult to convince people that a new government would mean "a better life for all". During our canvassing we distributed the ANC's *Election Manifesto* to every household and focused our discussions with people on its contents. While there were some people who told us that as far they were concerned "things can only get better", others said that they would not be convinced that Coloureds would benefit from the RDP.

During the course of the campaign these fears gave rise to racism and even hostility towards Africans. This was undoubtedly, enhanced by events such as the rape of Coloured woman by African youth in Cape Town. So too did the NP's suggestion that the notorious "station strangler" may speak an African

language and the police identikit (used in an NP pamphlet) made the killer look decidedly African. The NP used its "swart gevaar" ticket amongst Coloureds with its racist pamphlet. Terms such as "kaffir", "boetie" and "darkie" were openly used again. Activists found that the majority of those Coloureds who had turned to racism were people who could not otherwise defend their support for the NP.

The resurfacing of racism amongst sections of the Coloureds and their support for the architects of Apartheid appeared incongruous with the role that Coloured people played, especially in the Western Cape, in the uprisings of the 1980s. It must be remembered that in the 1989 election only about 1% of Mitchells Plain's residents voted. Indeed the boycott by the majority of Coloureds of the Tricameral elections was an important contributing factor in the downfall of P.W. Botha's schemes.

The 1980s, and before

From the late 1970s large sections of Coloured workers and youth put their weight behind the liberation movement. The struggles of Western Cape students and youth from 1980 captured the imagination of the whole working class. Coloured communities in Cape Town played a pioneering role in the birth of the Civic movement and of course the United Democratic Front was launched in Mitchells Plain in 1984. An increasing number of Coloured workers also started joining the independent unions from the mid-1980s and this reached a high point with the amalgamation of the Garment and Allied Workers' Union and Actwusa to form Sactwu in 1989. This was undoubtedly a major advance in uniting African and Coloured workers on the shopfloor, and went some way in removing the suspicion by African workers that Coloured workers were sell-outs. The 1980s thus witnessed a greater unity between African and Coloured in their struggle against the white government and the bosses. The violent suppression of popular struggles, such as the Trojan Horse killing in Athlone, also made many Coloureds more sympathetic to the struggle. It seemed at the height of the uprising in the mid to late 1980s that the attempts by the white regime to entrench divisions between African and Coloured were being successfully thwarted.

But as any activists involved in these movements will attest it was never easy to mobilise the Coloured population at large into political activity. Even at the time when many Coloured areas were burning, many of them remained aloof and unwilling to throw their lot in with the movement. Nevertheless, the 1980s were extraordinary times and few were prepared to openly oppose the liberation movement and most were probably sympathetic to its aims. Those who sided with the regime were castigated and became outcasts in their communities. As long as the enemy was clearly identifiable in the form of

the white regime, the tendency towards greater unity amongst the oppressed predominated. However, the unbanning of the ANC and the release of Mandela changed all of that. As the negotiations process unfolded it dawned on an increasing number of people that the coming to power of a majority black government was inevitable. Once this fact started seeping into consciousness cracks started to re-emerge within the ranks of the oppressed, and a re-alignment of political allegiances started taking shape.

There are of course also historical precedents of Coloured support for white parties against Africans. In the 1920s the Nationalist under Hertzog campaigned for Coloured support by promising them a "New Deal" which would give them a share in some of the privileges legislated for white workers and exempt them from the restriction imposed on African workers.[1] Hertzog's appeal included the argument that Coloureds had more in common with whites than Africans and it appears that many Coloureds eligible to vote supported Hertzog's party. Similarly, in 1948 the NP appealed for Coloured support in the elections to stop the "swart gevaar". Again sections of the Coloured electorate supported this party. The fundamental basis of this support, in 1924 and 1948, was the idea that Coloured privileges, however limited in comparison with the whites, would be protected from the African majority by these white parties. For many Coloureds it was crucial not to be lumped with African, and thereby be stripped of their limited privileges which distinguished and placed them above the African population.

The Hertzog and Malan governments failed to fulfil their promises to the Coloureds. Hertzog broke his promise of the New Deal and the Malan regime applied its discriminatory laws against the Coloureds as well. They were removed from the common voters' roll and thousands of Coloured families suffered the indignity of forced removals from areas such as District Six, Claremont and Sophiatown. They were shoved into racially exclusive apartheid areas with generally bad living conditions. But Coloureds also derived some benefit from apartheid policies, primarily in the Western Cape.

The Coloured Labour Preference policy of the National Party protected Coloured workers from competition by lower paid African workers in the Western Cape. They occupied most of the artisan's posts, semi-skilled and unskilled jobs. Coloured workers have thus dominated the clothing, building and food industries. The majority of unskilled council workers are Coloured, and at companies like

[1] Lewis, G., Between the Wire and the Wall, David Philips, Cape Town, 1987

Sanlam there are only a handful of African employees. It was primarily this reason why it was so difficult to win Coloured workers to the independent unions until the mid-1980s. Privileges for Coloureds were not confined to employment. Their residential areas were in a generally better state than African townships, with brick houses, electricity and running water. Therefore, Coloureds in the Western Cape were relatively privileged in comparison to the African population. This is why it was not uncommon during the election campaign to find people saying that the privileges they have was given to them by the whites.

Regional differences

The overwhelming support won by the NP from Coloureds in the Western Cape was not replicated to the same extent in other regions. As mentioned above the figures available from the Transvaal indicate an even split between the NP and the ANC. In the Northern Cape, where Coloureds are also a majority, the ANC defeated the NP, and reports from the Eastern Cape suggest that a majority of Coloureds voted ANC. It is clear therefore that there were important regional differences which affected the Coloured vote.

In the Western Cape there is a deep-rooted feeling that things are very different for the Coloureds. They have enjoyed certain privileges, which separate them from the poorer African population, and there is a greater affinity with the whites. The latter factor is enhanced by the more liberal character of the white authorities in this region. White domination has not been as oppressive as in the Northern Cape for example. So while most Coloureds would undoubtedly want to improve their lives, many of them clearly expressed that they believed they would be better off under the whites than Africans. The fact that they are the majority in the Western Cape gave Coloureds the confidence that, together with the whites, they could prevent Africans from taking over there, and in this way protect their limited privileges. Some people also expressed the idea that the Western Cape "is our region".

A key difference between the Coloureds in the Northern and Western Cape is the different relationship they have with whites and Africans. The white authorities in the Northern Cape have been far more rightwing and oppressive. On the farms Coloured and African workers suffer the same intolerable conditions under the whip of rightwingers. Apartheid oppression has therefore been much starker there than in the Western Cape and many people's experience of land dispossession is relatively recent. These factors have created more favourable conditions for an alliance between Africans and Coloureds. ANC members in the Northern Cape report that the majority of Coloureds in Kimberley and Upington voted ANC, and that it is likely that this was repeated on the farms. The greater affinity between

Coloureds and Africans in this region is partly reflected in the fact that many Coloureds speak Tswana. In Cape Town Coloureds "share" Afrikaans with the whites, and the majority of them prefer reading *Die Burger* to the *Cape Times*. This was of course another factor in the shaping of political attitudes among Coloureds.

In the Eastern Cape the combination of being a very small minority of the population and a relatively high percentage of unionisation among Coloured workers combined to ensure a majority Coloured support for the ANC. This would probably also have been affected by the Labour Party's support for the ANC, because this region has traditionally been a stronghold of the former.

The Alliance's campaign

Taking the above factors into account was it at all possible for the ANC and its allies to win the majority of Coloured support, and thereby avert the defeat in the Western Cape? The ANC's campaign undoubtedly suffered from a number of shortcomings brought about both by inexperience and complacency on the one hand, and an often flawed political approach on the other. Our inexperience in running election campaigns was not debilitating as it was more than made up for by the enthusiasm of activists. However, the complacency which pervaded the whole movement was more of an obstacle. Mandela's warning against complacency was not well heeded as everyone realised that a victory for the ANC was a foregone conclusion. This was reinforced by opinion polls supporting the idea of a massive victory for the ANC, with some predicting more than 70% support for the organisation. In our area activists often complained that there was not sufficient urgency from the leadership in their running of the campaign.

There has developed a feeling among some Coloured activists that the ANC leadership did not concentrate a sufficient amount of attention on the Coloured electorate compared to what the NP did. They argue that the leadership spent too much time preaching to the converted. There have also been accusations that the influence which the UDF or Mass Democratic Movement commanded among the Coloured population was squandered by the new, exile-dominated leadership. There may be some truth in these but they fail to confront the real political weaknesses of the ANC in the election campaign. These stem from the continuing "toenadering" between the ANC leadership and the NP on the one hand, and between the ANC leadership and the big bosses on the other.

Undoubtedly the negotiated agreement to form a Government of National Unity, irrespective of the outcome of the elections, inhibited the ANCs campaign. There was for example unhappiness with the

television debate between Thabo Mbeki and Pik Botha, as activists felt that the former was "too nice" and mostly indistinguishable from the deputy leader of the NP. The ANC's campaign against the NP was generally tame and over-accommodating, whereas the NP went all out in raising the spectre of the "swart gevaar". Little was done by the ANC to remind the Coloured population of all the wrongdoings of the NP, something which would have been very easy to do. In Hernus Kriel there was an easy target. As Minister of Police he was in charge at the time of the Umtata massacre and the Goldstone revelations of gun-running. His department was also deeply involved in stoking violence in Natal and the East Rand. In the four years since 1990 there have been numerous revelations of corruption, involvement in murders and massive squandering of money at the highest level of government. These were not taken advantage of by the ANC.

Instead it concentrated its campaign on convincing Coloureds that it was a "decent and peaceful" party. This was partly necessary to counter decades of NP propaganda that the ANC was a bloodthirsty organisation. But in doing this the ANC seemed to forget that an important part of any election campaign is to politically demolish opposition parties in front of the electorate. The ANC thus failed effectively to counter a crucial component of the NP campaign viz., that it was a "new" party, which had apologised for its past sins and had embarked on a new road. The NP very cleverly pushed Kriel into the background and let De Klerk be the frontrunner in the Western Cape and the ANC did little to change this.

The republishing of a Vrye Weekblad article which quoted racist remarks by Marike de Klerk about Coloureds had only a limited effect on Coloureds. Similarly, imaginative slogans such as "Vote NP en bly 'n Hotnot" did not effectively counter the NP's racist campaign. Coloureds believed that De Klerk was a changed man. After all, Mandela had consistently praised him as "a man of integrity". The rapprochement between the ANC and NP made the former's campaign too accommodating and stripped it of the political militancy required to tackle the NP.

In the same vein the ANC did not hammer the alliance between the bosses and the NP, which has been responsible for the miserable conditions experienced by the Coloured working class. Coloured workers, especially those organised in trade unions, are acutely aware of their exploitation by the bosses. In the Western Cape thousands of clothing and textile workers have been retrenched over the past three or four years, and farm workers on the outskirts of Cape Town continue to live under terrible conditions. The rule of the bosses have been defended, very often with guns, by the NP. A political attack on this alliance would have strengthened the ANC's campaign against the NP. However, the leadership's accommodating stance towards the bosses made this virtually impossible.

It has become apparent the important sections of the ANC leadership are unwilling to antagonise the capitalists, and have quickly learnt the art of defending their economic interests.

"Cosatu the workers' voice, ANC the workers' choice" or "Your vote, your choice"?

From the start of the election campaign it was recognised in the Triple Alliance that Cosatu would play a key role. With more than 1 million members, a strong organisation based on democratic factory organisation, hundreds of experienced shop stewards and financial resources, it was bound to be an important pillar in the campaign. This was indeed proven all over the country, including the Western Cape, where Cosatu shop stewards organised weekly "blitzes" of the main Coloured residential areas.

This brilliant effort was partly undermined by the political approach taken by the Sactwu leadership in the Western Cape. As the biggest union in the region, with the largest number of Coloured members, this union had a pivotal role in influencing Coloured opinion. However, it chose to run its election campaign under the slogan "your vote, your choice" and failed to challenge the political affiliation of those workers who supported the NP. When questioned by shop stewards on this issue the leadership argued that many members were NP supporters, and the union could therefore not openly campaign for the ANC. While the union organised good voter education programmes it generally steered clear of campaigning openly for the ANC, in spite of a Cosatu decision to do so. One organiser said that the union's campaign had five stages, and only in the last of these would they urge workers to vote ANC. There was a great deal of unhappiness among shop stewards who believed that the union should have strongly advocated for an ANC vote. They also complained that in spite of a verbal commitment to support the ANC's campaign the union did little at a factory level to put this into practice.

Karel Swarts, a leading Sactwu shop steward in Bellville, explained how he and his fellow comrades spent many hours openly campaigning for the ANC on the factory floor. As a result they succeeded in convincing the majority of workers at their plant to vote ANC. He is convinced that if the union did the same throughout the region that it would have made an important difference in the elections. For him a key issue should have been the NP's opposition to strikes. Since 1989 many Coloured workers have engaged in strike action to defend their rights. During the course of the elections clothing workers were discussing strike action in support of their wage demand, creating an ideal opportunity for the union to expose the position of the NP. Unfortunately, this was not done.

The role of the union leadership was particularly important because of the "dual consciousness" of many organised Coloured workers, i.e. of support for Cosatu and the NP. An important example of this was of a group of textile workers who faced retrenchment a few months ago because the bosses thought that they were too militant. The ANC branch in Bellville played a crucial role in mobilising a successful campaign to defend their jobs. Yet, just before the elections some of them said that they would vote NP. One of them explained that, "I will vote for the NP because it will look after the Coloureds, but this is not going to stop from fighting the exploitation of the bosses." Many union activists in Sactwu feel that a bold pro-ANC campaign by the union could have convinced workers like this that the bosses who they were prepared to fight against have been the main backers of the NP, and the latter their main defenders. The union leadership could have used their authority to convince workers like this not to vote NP.

This is not to argue that the ANC would easily have won the majority of Coloured voters to its side. The nature of the elections made this extremely difficult. However, by addressing some of the political shortcomings of the election campaign it will be possible to undermine the NP's base among the Coloured population.

Coloured party

At the beginning of 1993 a number of activists in the Western Cape raised the idea of launching a Coloured party to attract Coloured voters away from the NP. Although this proposal did not gain much support at the time, some activists have again raised whether such a tactic would not have prevented an NP victory in the Western Cape. It must be remembered that this idea was mooted by Coloured activists who felt that the ANC had sidelined many of the leading UDF activists and consequently lost the support base which they had built in the Coloured communities. It was also argued by some of them that a more radical party was needed to win Coloured support.

A shortcoming in the debate on this issue was that the proponents of a Coloured party did not clarify what the *programme* of such a party should be. How different would its programme be from that of the ANC? Unless such a party adopted a radically different programme from that of the ANC, and this would be very unlikely, it would have been indistinguishable from the ANC in the eyes of the electorate. It would have been regarded as a ruse to con Coloured voters, and from that point of view alone would have further alienated Coloured voters from the ANC. Furthermore, when faced with two parties which hold similar political positions voters invariably choose the stronger party. This would particularly have been the case in the first all race elections which showed that smaller parties,

appealing to particular constituencies, could not attract many voters. This was the fate of the different Muslim parties in the Western Cape for example. Similarly, the formation of Malcolm Lupton's National Liberation Front only succeeded in gathering a handful of rabidly racists behind it banner.

The other danger of such a formation is that it would have been viewed as a Coloured breakaway from the ANC, thereby giving credence to the NP's propaganda that the ANC cannot address the needs of the Coloured people. In this case the NP would have been the main beneficiary of such a move.

However, the main problem with the proposal for a separate Coloured party is that it would have reinforced the racial propaganda of the NP that Coloureds have interests separate from the rest of the oppressed and exploited. The majority of Coloureds are working class, experiencing exploitation in much the same way as the rest of the working class. It is primarily on the basis of a *class* appeal that Coloureds should be won over to the liberation movement. Any other approach, especially one based on a racial appeal, would have entrenched racial divisions in the working class and only benefit the ruling class. What may therefore have appeared as an advantageous short term tactic would have had serious negative effects on the movement in the long term. The only effective way to overcome the racial divisions in our society is by building on the non-racial working class unity which was forged in the struggles of the 1980s.

Conclusion

The elections was a victory for the whole movement. The country has been rid of the shackles of white oppression. For many Coloured activists this historic victory has been tainted by the victory of the NP in the Western Cape. However, it would be wrong to jump to quick conclusions about the Coloured people. The fact remains that a significant section did vote for the ANC and consciously identified with the national liberation of the African majority. This is the foundation which needs to be built on to secure non-racial unity.

In order to do this the liberation movement (however this may be defined in the future) must necessarily confront the issues underlying the Coloured support for the NP in the elections. A key question that needs to be addressed is whether it is possible for the NP to become the "traditional" party of the Coloureds. It has undoubtedly built a base amongst Coloureds and will be determined to hold onto this, and specifically secure its control of the Western Cape. If the ANC continues to be perceived as the party for Africans, can the NP become the party of the minorities? Its performance

in the elections suggests that there is some basis for this. If the NP succeeds the danger exists that the racial divisions revealed in the elections could be entrenched. This must be prevented.

In the new South Africa racial domination has been removed, revealing more starkly the underlying class divisions pervading our society. In future class struggles will come to play an even more prominent role in the shaping of politics in the country. An early sign of the changes which are taking place is the affiliation of 60 000 white workers to Cosatu.

It is hoped that this paper has given some insight to the consciousness of Coloureds during the elections and in so doing have revealed the important aspects which influenced the way they voted. Coloureds are not a homogeneous group, even though at times there appears to be a "common identity". Class and political divisions run deep through their ranks. It is therefore important that they are not all lumped together one side of the political divide. The elections represented, in a certain sense, a snapshot of Coloured consciousness. Their future political allegiances are still to be determined. The movement can prevent the majority of Coloureds from choosing the blind alley of the NP. In the final analysis this can only be done through building working class unity across the racial divide. The fears of black domination and losing privileges can in reality only be countered successfully if the living standards of the all the people is raised. The full implementation of the RDP can go a long way in ensuring this.

[ends]