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HISTORY WORKSHOP

CONTESTING SEGMENTED ELECTIONS:
COMMUNISTS AT THE POLLS IN THE '20S, 30S AND 40S

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CONTESTING SEGMENTED ELECTIONS: COMMUNISTS AT THE POLLS IN THE '20Ss 30s, AND 40s

Paper prepared for the History Workshop
University of the Witwatersrand, 13-15 July 1994

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> The party had a long electioneering tradition...[1]
>
> Research is needed to tell us why the CPSA was able to win elections...[2]

Tom Lodge's request for research-based explanations of the limited electoral successes of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) will not be adequately be addressed in this paper. Instead, this paper will consider elements of the "long electioneering tradition" of the CPSA, mostly its activities in campaigns which its candidates did not win. Its focus will be upon recently published information about the participation of the CPSA in diverse electoral arenas during its twenty nine year legal existence from 1921 to 1950. In conclusion, the usefulness and limitations of the recently published information will be assessed, suggesting directions for further research.

The CPSA and South Africa's Segmented Electoral System

Electoral activity was never a central focus of the CPSA. Its membership was more preoccupied with internal party activities, strengthening trade unions, and, from the 1930s onward, changing the stances of black national organizations in which it was active. The CPSA was well aware that an overwhelming majority of enfranchised voters were whites hostile to its goals of marxist socialism and radical restructuring of

race relations. It equally recognised that electoral opportunities for black voters were extremely limited and, where they existed, offered little purchase for changing government policies or practices.

As an electoral party the CPSA was unique among other pre-1950s South African political parties in many ways -- and not merely in its commitment to socialism, its identification with the Soviet Union, and its opposition to racial discrimination. It was the only political party open to all races, the only political party concerned to mobilize blacks, and the only political party whose prime focus was extra-parliamentary. It was convinced that it had a vast potential constituency, particularly among the unenfranchised majority of South Africans, yet its own membership never was more than several thousand. Nevertheless, the CPSA, like communist parties elsewhere in Western European, North American, and Australasian parliamentary systems, chose to utilize electoral channels to advance its cause.

Unlike communist parties in other parliamentary systems, the CPSA faced racially segmented electoral arenas. Both the right to run for office and the franchise at all levels were limited to whites in most areas of the country. Thus, in most elections only white party members could present themselves as candidates to predominantly white electorates. Blacks were either explicitly barred from running or represented a minority of the electorate. The notable exceptions were the segregated African-only electoral arenas created by the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 and the Native Representation Act of 1936 (see below).

At the national level only whites were eligible to run for parliament and, after 1936, for provincial legislatures. Except in urban municipalities in the Cape Province, only whites were eligible for election to city councils. The other pre-1936 exception to the rule that only whites could run for electoral office were the segregated Advisory Boards at the local level. They were established under the aegis of white municipal administrations in urban locations throughout the country recognized in accord with the provisions of the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923. The very small number of African males who had established residence and met property and tax requirements in these locations were eligible to stand for seats on the Advisory Boards.

Eligibility for the vote in national, provincial, and municipal elections, except in Cape Province, was restricted to whites of both sexes -- (white women being granted the franchise in 1930). In Cape Province only black males were eligible -- but then only if they met property, income, and literacy requirements which excluded the overwhelming majority. Africans never were more than a tiny minority of the Cape electorate. A slightly larger number of Coloureds, concentrated in western Cape Province, were registered. Asians, their population overwhelmingly outside Cape Province, constituted only several hundred of the voters' roll.

The passage of the Native Representation Act of 1936 was a turning point. It removed Africans from the common national and provincial voters' roll in Cape Province. Simultaneously, it created new and expanded opportunities for African electoral

participation, both to elect African representatives and to elect white representatives specifically designated to articulate African concerns. Four 'Native' Senate seats were created covering all provinces -- to be filled by whites only, elected under a complicated formula of indirect election by African males (see below). Nine Native Representative seats coverying all provinces were also created for the new Native Representative Council -- to be filled by Africans elected under the same complicated formula of indirect voting (and an additional three African representatives were to be chosen by the existing elected African body in the Transkei). Three 'Native' parliamentary seats and two 'Native' provincial seats were created in the Cape Province for which only white candidates were eligible -- to be elected by direct vote of African male electors on a separate roll who met the pre-1936 franchise requirements. These new segregated electoral arenas for Africans at the national and provincial level, mixing indirect and direct voting, complemented the existing segregated directly elected Advisory Boards arenas for Africans at the local level.

Despite the uniquely racially segmented nature of the diverse South African electoral arenas (which the CPSA did not cease to critique), the party eventually opted to utilize all of them -- albeit always in a limited number of selected constituencies. Irregularly from 1929 through the late 1930s, the CPSA tested its fortune with both white, Coloured, and African candidates in selected national and local elections, primarily in arenas where black voters comprised significant minorities or in African-only constituencies. After the Nazi

attack upon the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, and its shift to support for the war effort, the party significantly stepped up its electioneering. It did not abandon its previous activities centered on African electoral arenas. But it also embarked upon highly visible campaigns by white party members in white-only or overwhelmingly white urban constituencies. White communists ran unsuccessfully for parliament in the 1943 and 1948 general elections and in selected Cape provincial elections. Its unsuccessful national and provincial efforts were counterpointed by partially successful campaigns, primarily by white party members, for municipal council seats in Johannesburg, Cape Town, East London, and Port Elizabeth. The party's most dramatic successes came when it no longer held its few municipal seats in predominantly white local level constituences, but after the Nationalist Party parliamentary victory in May, 1948, when it presented white candidates to the small number of African electors in 'Native' seats in Western Cape. In November, 1948, Sam Kahn was elected to parliament as 'Native' representative for Western Cape and the following year Fred Carneson won a seat to the provincial council representing African voters in the Western Cape.

Recently Published Sources on CPSA Electioneering

In 1993 and 1994 four books have been published in South Africa which throw light on several dimensions of CPSA electoral activities from 1929 through the late 1940s. None of the books focus primarily upon electioneering, but in each of them there are sections devoted to campaigns and activities of communist seekers of electoral office. One is a biography of a onetime

party candidate. Two others are by former longtime party members, non-candidates, but directly involved in party parliamentary campaigns. The fourth volume is by a non-South African, never associated with the party.

One of these volumes has been published before; it is a reissue of Edward Roux's 1944 biography of Sidney Bunting.[3] Roux, a close associate of Roux at the time, devotes a full chapter to Bunting's pathbreaking 1929 parliamentary campaign in Tembuland in the Transkei. In the same chapter Roux also briefly considers the parallel party campaign of Douglas Wolton for the Cape Flats parliamentary seat.

The publication which contains the most information about party electioneering is a biography of Hyman Basner, authored by his second wife on the basis of an incomplete autobiography written by Basner himself before his death in 1977.[4] At various points in the text Basner discusses his unsuccessful 1937 campaign as party standard bearer for the Transvaal-Orange Free State 'Native' Senate seat (as well as his subsequent successful 1942 campaign for the same office). There also are numerous references to the parallel 1937 campaign of Edwin Mofutsanyana for the Native Representative Council. The utility of the Basner volume is further enhanced by the analytical introduction and footnotes contributed by Tom Lodge.

The third volume is a memoir written in the early 1990s by Pauline Podbrey, active in the party in Durban and Cape Town from the late 1930s (although in exile she subsequently broke with organized communism in the 1950s).[5] Podbrey was primarily a trade unionist, but her memoir provides a very brief vignette of

her experiences as a canvasser for Joey Faurie, who ran unsuccessfully for the Cape Flats parliamentary seat, one of the nine constituencies contested by the CPSA in the 1943 general election.

The final volume, by Joshua Lazerson, an American historian, provides information exclusively from a non-participant's perspective.[6] As part of a broadly canvassed portrayal of white anti-apartheid radicals, Lazerson considers the significance of white communists running for municipal office, focusing upon Hilda Watts Bernstein as a CPSA city councillor in Johannesburg in the mid-1940s and upon Sam Kahn, first elected as a Cape Town city councillor, and then subsequently as the first CPSA member of parliament.

Roux on the CPSA's 1929 Campaigns

The CPSA decision in early 1929 enter the parliamentary lists came at time of high visibility for the party. Through night schools for Africans, through trade union activity centered in Johannesburg, and through meetings in townships stretching from Potchefstroom to Vereeniging, the party's African membership was rapidly expanding to several thousand, far exceeding the white membership of several hundred. Although the party had bitterly divided over the slogan of 'an independent Native republic' imposed by the Comintern, the majority of the party (including Bunting who had publicly opposed the slogan at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in Moscow in mid-1928) agreed at its January, 1929, party conference to accept the slogan, with its implications for a further concentration of party activity on mobilization of support among Africans. The controversy over

the slogan had occasioned considerable publicity in the white mainstream press, giving the party a heightened visibility to the white public and government. In response to the government's fears that the CPSA (and the disintegrating ICU) were posing new threats to the established racial order, the government was moving to strengthen the existing Riotous Assemblies Act of 1927 to give it new powers to suppress 'agitation' among the 'natives'. It was in this setting that the CPSA decided to contest elections for the first time since its establishment in 1921.

Roux's account of the 1929 campaigns makes it clear that the CPSA carefully targeted the Tembuland and Cape Flats constituencies where black voters represented approximately half of the electorate. The Cape Flats constituency, including both African and Coloured voters (the latter much more numerous), was actually considered more promising by virtue of the existence of a party group in Ndabeni, a Cape Town African location within the constituency. Deferring to the wish of Douglas Wolton, his opponent in the intra-party struggle over the slogan of 'an independent Native Republic', to contest the Cape Flats seat, Bunting agreed to run in the vast Tembuland constituency.[7] It consisted of the rural reserve of the Transkei, without any significant urban centers and where the party had no presence. Bunting filed as an explicitly Communist Party candidate; Wolton filed as an Independent for the Cape Flats seat. Bunting had never visited the constituency which he contested and Wolton had not primarily been engaged in work on the Cape Flats.

Quotations from Bunting's own reports, written during the

campaign in the Transkei, and sent to Johannesburg for publication in the CPSA newspaper, South African Worker, provide the bulk of Roux's account of the campaign.[8] Bunting found the official harassment and hostility of white voters which he had anticipated. Five weeks of his three month stay in the Transkei were taken up with arrests, court imposed restrictions, and court appearances, but ultimately all charges were dropped on appeal. He apparently made no effort to seek white votes and reported that only two whites had behaved "decently" to him. He found the Christian clergy especially reactionary. Nevertheless, Roux, his wife, Rebecca, and Gana Makabeni, a Xhosa-speaking party member and translator, travelled widely and conducted numerous meetings for Africans. From the beginning Bunting was convinced that the majority of unenfranchised Africans identified with his campaign. He initially was hopeful that enfranchised Africans, consisting mostly of "lawyers' clerks, teachers, recruiting clerks, etc. and perhaps tend[ing] to consider themselves a superior caste" would respond to his urging that they had "the duty of using their 'privilege' in trust for the whole of their people, and this we hope most of them will do, secretly, though openly they may have to kow-tow to their bosses".[9] Towards the end of the campaign, however, he was more pessimistic, anticipating the outcome of the election, when he observed: "Most voters I fear are good boys, divorced from their people, so though the latter welcome us overwhelmingly everywhere, they are voteless; the voters may vote S.A.P. still".[10] He was correct, as the S.A.P. candidate garnered 1079 votes (46.2%), an Independent S.A.P. candidate attracted 934 votes (40.0%), and Bunting received 289 votes

(12.4%), sufficient for him to receive back his election deposit.[11] In Roux's 1944 assessment Bunting's defeat was nevertheless a personal victory, bringing the party for the first time away from "the large towns and the smaller urban locations" directly into the rural areas inhabited by the majority of Africans.[12]

In the Cape Flats contest Roux wrote that, "things looked well at first with Wolton leading a huge procession of residents of Ndabeni Location to demand reforms from the Cape Town city council, but on election day the promised votes were not forthcoming".[13] Wolton finished third with only 93 votes (3.0%), losing his election deposit as the S.A.P. candidate garnered 1719 votes (54.8%) and the Nationalist Party candidate 1186 votes (37.8%).[14]

Basner on the 1937 Native Representative Campaigns

By 1936 the CPSA had moved away from the ultra-left sectarianism induced by the Comintern intervention of the early 1930s which had reduced its membership to several hundred, primarily whites. It shifted to a united front policy which encouraged approaches to potential allies outside the ranks of the working class. While whites concentrated their extra-party activism on trade unions and anti-fascist organizations, Africans focused upon African national organizations.

In 1935-36 prominent African party members joined Africans of all political persuasions to oppose the Native Representation Act, proposed in 1935 and passed in 1936. Yet even before the Act was a fait accompli debate had begun among African politicians and non-African leftists and radicals about an issue

that would remain salient and contentious in black nationalist and leftist circles through the 1980s: should black and leftist candidates participate in segregated electoral institutions? Basner's book provides useful information about debate over boycott, both within the All-African Convention (AAC) and within the CPSA. It is well known that the newly-created (AAC) initially called for boycott, but reversed itself in mid-1936 to endorse participation, both by voters and by candidates. Basner claims that he urged participation already in 1935.[15] In 1936 he, in alliance with Edwin Mofutsanyana and J.B. Marks, persuaded the party to participate in the elections in Transvaal/Orange Free State constituencies. Mofutsanyana was nominated for one of the three Transvaal/Orange Free State Native Representative seats and Basner was nominated for the single Transvaal/Orange Free State 'Native' representative. According to Basner's biography it was he, not the party, who took the initiative in putting himself forward as a party candidate, overcoming internal party skepticism about his personal style and the vulnerability of his most prominent opponent, J.D. Rheinallt Jones.[16]

Unlike Bunting and Wolton, both Mofutsanyana and Basner had extensive experience in the constituencies where they were to campaign. Mofutsanyana, (like Marks, who accompanied him and Basner on a number of electioneering jaunts) had joined the party in the Transvaal in the late 1920s and as a party functionary had continued work in urban townships there and in the Orange Free State after his return from a training course in Moscow in the early 1930s. Unlike Mofutsanyana (and Bunting and Wolton) Basner was not primarily engaged with party work. Nevertheless, he had

uniquely appropriate qualifications as a white campaigning for African votes. Since 1930 (three years before he joined the party) the bulk of his legal practice had been in the black community, not only in Johannesburg, but throughout the small towns of Transvaal and Orange Free State. Among his clients were chiefs, independent black churches, African teachers' associations, traders, and burial societies, as well as clients who sought him out to fight criminal charges and petty offenses resulting under discriminatory legislation.[17] He was also one of the few party members who could meet the requirements for white 'Native' representative candidates set by the legislation: two year residency in the constituency and five hundred pounds of freehold property.

The electoral terrain which Mofutsanyana and Basner faced in their Transvaal/Orange Free State constitutencies was substantially different from that which Bunting and Wolton had faced eight years earlier. In 1929 the CPSA candidates were competing directly for single votes from black and white voters on a common roll in constituencies where black voters represented roughly half of the electorate. The elections were held in Cape Province with its tradition of African (and Coloured) voter participation dating back to the nineteenth century, whereas there was no African electoral tradition in Transvaal and Orange Free State (with the limited exception of Advisory Board elections in a limited number of urban locations after 1923). In 1937, Basner (a white) and Mofutsanyana (an African) were competing exclusively for African votes. Additionally, the elections were not direct, but indirect, with large bloc votes

controlled by chiefs and local African rural councils in which headmen played a prominent role, with the remaining small bloc determined by urban location Advisory Boards. It was the latter bloc which was crucial for Mofutsanyana, whose constituency included only Advisory Boards.

According to Basner, he and Mofutsanyana, working together with Marks, "knew how overwhelmingly the odds were against them", yet "they were together...in believing that they might act as a spur towards reviving the African National Congress, even if not a popular ardour for Communism".[18] Well aware that they faced active hostility from white officialdom, they were determined to utilise their official rights as candidates in order to reach African areas otherwised closed to communists. Basner asserts that they had a well calibrated strategy, which they adjusted in the course of their campaigns.[19] Initially they hoped to persuade chiefs and rural councillors who would cast the overwhelming majority of votes. They also targeted Advisory Board members, hoping to win majorities of Advisory Boards to cast their bloc votes, both for Mofutsanyana (whose only electors were Advisory Board members) and for Basner (for whom Advisory Board bloc votes were only a minority of those he needed to win). Basner describes how, when meetings with chiefs were unpromising, he revised his strategy to focus upon rural councillors and Advisory Board members. In his speeches he emphasized national issues, particularly land scarcity, while Mofutsanyana focused upon the grievances of location dwellers.

In the first round of the election in March, 1937, Basner finished second with 77,349 votes, sufficient to advance to the

final round. He was well ahead of William Ballinger who received only 4,757 votes, but a distant second behind J.D. Rheinhallt Jones, the liberal candidate backed by the Joint Council Movement and the Institute for Race Relations, who received 305,333 votes. In the second and final round Basner was resoundingly defeated, receiving 66,234 votes to 404,447 for Rheinallt Jones. Mofutsanyana received insufficient votes in first round to become one of the two finalists.

According to Basner, "the white Communist leadership was both delighted and surprised, although they agreed for once with the Trotskyists centred in the Cape, who ascribed the support for Basner to his popularity as a lawyer".[20] Five years later, running against an incumbent Rheinallt Jones, Basner was victorious. In 1942, however, Basner was not a party candidate, having resigned in fall, 1939, in protest against Soviet troops attacking Finland. In 1942 the CPSA did not contest any of the white 'Native' Senate or Cape 'Native' representative seats, thus Basner's less-focused account of his successful 1942 campaign cannot be utilized as an example of CPSA electioneering.

Podbrey as Canvasser in the 1943 Cape Flats Race

In 1943 the CPSA's fortune and acceptability had reached unprecedented heights. Abandoning the anti-war stance which it had adopted in September, 1939, after the June 22, 1941, Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, the party broadened its activities in all spheres. White and black party members stepped up trade union activity, black party members actively participated in efforts to make national organizations both more assertive and supportive of the war, and white party members worked to make

both trade unions and white political parties more open to postwar socio-economic reform and greater racial tolerance. The heroic Soviet war effort provoked both sympathy for the Soviet Union and a new respectability for communism. By early 1944 party membership numbered 1500, four times the membership of 1940. Its recruits were drawn from all sections of the population.

In an attempt to further capitalize on the rising wave of popularity, the CPSA decided to run parliamentary candidates in a general election for the first time since 1929. In 1943, however, in contrast to 1929, it concentrated on the white electorate. Ultimately the party nominated nine candidates, five in white-only constituencies (three in Johannesburg, one in Springs, and one in Durban), and four in Cape Province constituencies (three in Cape Town and one in East London) where Coloured males, still eligible to vote on the common parliamentary roll, comprised a minority of the voters. It carefully, however, avoided constituencies allocated to the Labour Party through its electoral pact with the United Party.

Cape Flats, where Douglas Wolton had run in 1929, was one of the constitutencies the party chose to contest. In 1943 the communist candidate was an Afrikaner woman trade unionist, Joey Fourie. Pauline Podbrey, a trade unionist of Jewish origin, and married to an Asian party member, served as one of her canvassers. Her brief account of some of her electioneering efforts conveys the hopes of the party and the challenges it faced among the white electorate.[21] Podbrey notes that both Coloured farm laborers and Afrikaner farmers were targets of

party canvassers like herself who "had no expectations of winning the white vote but it was considered a good oppportunity to bring our message to Afrikaners whom we would not otherwise meet". Met by indifference, hostility, and even threats of physical violence, she describes one encounter with an ailing Afrikaner farmer in his sickbed whom she informed that the party wanted a democratic republic free from foreign rule (without mentioning the CPSA's commitment to votes for all). When he responded that "'you Communists and we Afrikaners should join forces. Together we could drive the kaffirs and the coolies and the Jews into the sea'", Podbrey fled.[22] In sharp contrast she reports a sense of triumph after a well-attended election forum organized by the party in the main meeting hall of the primarily English-speaking upper middle class suburb of Pinelands. Joey Fourie spoke and Podbrey, in the chair, deftly fielded "relevant, intelligent and not unfriendly" questions. At the conclusion of the meeting a vote of confidence was carried by a large majority. Assessing the results of the party's efforts five decades later, Podbrey commented, "as expected, we lost the election, but the campaign had proved to be well worth the effort and the cost. We'd made some friends and unblocked some prejudices".[23]

Although the total nationwide vote for the nine communist candidates in the 1943 general election was 6808, merely 0.8% of the total, in the Cape Flats constituency Joey Fourie captured 1165 votes (16.5%) against the winning United Party candidate who received 4559 (65.5%) and an independent who received 1174 (16.9%). Her vote total and percentage were second among the communist candidates, topped only by lawyer Harry Snitcher who

received 1818 (27.7%) of the votes cast in the Woodstock constituency. George Sachs won 11.4% of the vote in Salt River, the remaining Cape Town constituency contested by the CPSA. Communist candidates in the other six races received from 4.4% to 10.8% of the votes cast in their constituencies.[24] The average percentage of communist votes in the nine constituences where they ran was 11.0%. The more than 10% difference between the national percentage of 0.8% and the constituency average of 11.0% argues that the CPSA was successful in targeting constituencies where its prospects were deemed reasonable. That party candidates did best in the three Cape Town constituencies where Coloured voters were a significant minority of the electorate suggests that the party may well have captured a good proportion of their votes.

Lazerson on Communist Candidates in the 1940s

Like all of the four recent publications Lazerson's volume is not primarily concerned with electoral politics. Whereas the electioneering sections of the other three volumes primarily consider electoral campaigns of unsuccessful communist candidates running for office on the national level, Lazerson's nine page section primarily considers the electioneering of communist candidates for municipal office and then the performance of two of the few victorious candidates. He devotes particular attention to a consideration of how white communists, running in white-only elections in Johannesburg, viewed the possibilities of representation of African interests, both in their appeals to the electorate and then, in the case of the successful candidates, in their legislative activity.

In assessing the main thrust of the discourse of the communist candidates for the Johannesburg City Council, Lazerson focuses upon the ambiguity of a non-racial socialist party concentrating "the bulk of party energies and party press attention on the arenas (Parliament, City Councils) that whites alone contested".[25] Drawing the bulk of his evidence from party statements and reports of candidates in The Guardian, he characterises the party's utilization of elections as a platform "to publicize the party's existence, ideals and platform; to propagandize for the Soviet Union, which many believed had achieved a higher form of political, social, and economic organization; and, of equal if not greater importance, to speak for Africans and other disenfranchised blacks where they had no voice of their own". He concludes that "there was a sense within the party in the mid-1940s that the white public could be swayed toward providing a more favorable dispensation for Africans".[26]

Lazerson continues his discussion by considering the role of Hilda Watts Bernstein, who had joined the party in the late 1930s, during her three year term as Johannesburg's lone communist city councillor from 1943 to 1947, a period covering further Alexandra bus boycotts, vigorous squatter movements, and various removal and influx control schemes supported by a majority of the city council. In Lazerson's view, "the Africans of Moroka and other Johannesburg townships would have been hard pressed to find among any racial or ethnic group another spokesperson as forthright and driven as Hilda Watts. Yet the fact remained that she was not an elected African representative, and as a white communist woman, she was anomaly in Johannesburg

city government in the 1940s".[27]

He ends his assessment of communists involved in electoral politics with an evaluation of Sam Kahn, a lawyer and party member since 1932, who served both on the Cape Town City Council and then, in 1948, became the party's first parliamentarian when he won election as 'Native' Representative in the Western Cape constituency. Lazerson asserts that "if the Cape Town branch of the Communist Party had a counterpart to Hilda Watts, Sam Kahn was that person".[28]

In his overall assessment of the white communist candidates and elected officials Lazerson finds that the white communist role of 'speaking for' was "problematic, particularly given that whites were in visible and vocal roles" which made them "vulnerable to charges of piracy, of attempting to take control of, and direct, African and other nationally based organizations".[29] Notwithstanding, he concludes that the result was a greatly changed communist party, whose white members remained marginal in the larger white society, but, "as proponents of equal rights, universal democracy, and integration, communists were dangerous heretics who might well find a place alongside or within the national organizations and so pose a serious threat to the state".[30]

Common Themes and Questions

The assessments of CPSA electioneering offered in these four recent publications, not surprisingly, agree that the enterprise, whether in the 1920s, 1930s, or 1940s, was conducted against great odds. They are also in agreement that, despite the few electoral victories, the campaigns were worthwhile. The

information presented has different, but overlapping, emphases.

Roux's account of Bunting's 1929 campaign and Basner's account of his (and Mofutsanyana's) 1937 campaigns convey the particular formidible obstacles which confronted party candidates seeking African votes in overwhelmingly rural constituencies. Both faced hostile white officials who challenged their right to hold meetings. In both instances, they invoked electoral regulations which permitted them as candidates to conduct meetings which otherwise would have been illegal in African areas under the control of white administrators.

Yet Roux's and Basner's accounts also reveal the slightly different nature of the electoral arenas within which Bunting and Basner were campaigning. They show how each tailored their tactics accordingly and in keeping with their own distinctive political resources.

Bunting ran for parliament in Cape Province before 1936 when whites and Africans voted together directly for candidates. He ran in an area where he had no previous experience. His account highlights his conviction that he could expect no votes from whites who comprised approximately half of the electorate and that he became skeptical whether the other half of the electorate, slightly more than one thousand African voters, comprised of clerks, teachers, and low level government employees, would vote for him. Nevertheless, he focused his electioneering on meetings with the voteless African majority, hoping that the African voters would cast their votes for him on behalf of the unenfranchised (and utilizing the opportunity to spread the party's message). Bunting's low vote total confirmed

his assessment about the stance of the African voters in his constituency.

Basner ran in an arena with only African voters, but under a system of indirect voting dominated by chiefs and rural councillors. Unlike Bunting, he brought to his campaign a rich network of connections with traditional leaders and local traders and teachers. He spent considerable effort initially courting chiefs and rural councillors in direct meetings. Finding little positive response, he shifted to meetings with the inhabitants of locations in small dorps and with residents of urban locations. He hoped that the former would influence the rural councillors to cast their vote for him and that the latter would persuade Advisory Board members to vote for him. Basner's tactics produced sufficient votes to get him nominated in 1937, but fell far short in the final election. Nevertheless, he had devised tactics which paid off in 1942 when he won by attracting sufficient votes from chiefs and others who had supported his opponent in 1937. His campaign argued that well cultivated networks among the African petty bourgeois could be translated into an effective political resource even (or perhaps, particularly) in a system of indirect voting.

Like Bunting and Basner, subsequent white CPSA campaigners in overwhelmingly white rather than African or substantially African constituences, also faced an uphill battle, of which they readily recognized. Yet the contours of the electoral terrain were different. Podbrey's antagonistic encounters with Afrikaner farmers underlined the party's difficulties of penetrating the electoral strongholds of Afrikaner nationalism. The accounts of

Johannesburg candidates for city council in Lazerson's book convey their strong belief that they had to deal with important bread-and-butter local issues in the white urban constituences where they ran. The accounts also indicate that the party was well aware that popular white perceptions about the party's stance on racial questions posed major obstacles to expanding its electoral base, not only among Afrikaner farmers, but among English-speaking city dwellers as well. Lazerson's accounts also indicate how the party believed that in the wartime setting its invocation of the Soviet Union could attract support. Podbrey's warm memory of her apparently successful election meeting in Pinelands suggests how the wartime party was able to gain entry to middle class voters who previously might have been hostile. It also illustrates how party members could interpret such encounters as harbingers of potential future support.

Unfortunately, neither Podbrey's nor Lazerson's accounts provide information analogous to that available in Roux's and Basner's accounts about the tactics which the party pursued in its campaigns in white urban areas in contests for parliament and city council. Lazerson provides information about the discourse of party literature, but this is not the same as the information about on-the-ground tactics presented in Roux's book, and much more vividly and extensively, in Basner's account.

Only in the 1940s, and then as an exception rather than as a rule, was the party victorious in elections. Defeats were the common outcome of CPSA electioneering. Yet Roux, (writing in 1944), Basner (writing in the 1970s), and Podbrey and Lazerson (writing in the 1990s), all agree that the unsuccessful campaigns

were beneficial to the party. In Roux's view Bunting's campaign was not not only a personal triumph, but it brought the party directly into African reserves for the first time. In Basner's view the campaigns which he and Mofutsanyana conducted contributed to efforts to revive the African National Congress. Podbrey and Lazerson assess the unsuccessful campaigns in white constituencies in terms of expanding the number of sympathizers and carrying the party's message on democracy and equality to new audiences in the white community. Lazerson also believes that the white candidates, and particularly successful candidates such as Hilda Watts Bernstein and Sam Kahn, "acting as spokespersons for blacks in the institutions of the dominant white culture, gained near heroic status among Africans".[31]

The Utility of the Newly Published Sources

It is beyond the scope of this paper to assess the claims made in the four recently published books. They do, however, suggest that it is appropriate to consider further and more systematically the electoral activity of the CPSA, particularly from the late 1930s through the late 1940s when party candidates were competing regularly in all the types of electoral arenas which were open.

These books are particularly useful for information about the two pre-1936 campaigns when communists competed for white and African votes in the same arena (Roux), about the 1937 Native Representative campaigns in segregated elections for Africans alone (Basner), and about municipal elections for whites in Johannesburg (Lazerson). But they provide only limited information about two poles of major activity in the 1940s.

Both the Podbrey and Lazerson volumes give some information about 1940s parliamentary electioneering in western Cape Province. Yet there was more CPSA electioneering from the late 1930s onward in Cape Town than anywhere else, both in parliamentary and provincial constituencies. New information about it would be particularly welcome, particularly since it is in the Cape Town area that the question of boycotts and electoral participation became especially contentious. Also missing, and more difficult to obtain, is additional information about the remaining segmented electoral arena, that of the Advisory Boards, in which communists competed. In the four recent publications this topic is only discussed in passing, albeit very suggestively by Lodge in the Basner book.[32] The CPSA considered participation in Advisory Boards useful.[33] Party candidates did compete, and often successfully, for Advisory Board seats in a number of locations, particularly on the Witwatersrand. One of the most useful sources about party activity in this electoral arena, as well as the other electoral arenas in which the party competed from the late 1930s onward, are the pages of Inkululeko and The Guardian. It is time to return to them, and to other party publications, including Freedom and party pamphlets, for more systematic research. Yet new secondary sources, particularly memoirs and studies like the four recently published in South Africa, can also provide useful information. More of them would be welcome.

ENDNOTES

1. H.J. and R.E. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 580.

2. Tom Lodge, "Class Conflict, Communal Struggle and Patriotic Unity: the Communist Party of South Africa during the Second World War", African Studies Seminar Paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 7 October 1985, p. 6.

3. Edward Roux, S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography, (Bellville: Mayibuye Books, 1993). New edition introduced and edited by Brian Bunting.

4. Miriam Basner, Am I An African?: The Political Memoirs of H.M. Basner, (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993). With foreward and notes by Tom Lodge.

5. Pauline Podbrey, White Girl in Search of the Party, (Pietermaritzburg: Hadeda Books, 1993).

6. Joshua N. Lazerson, Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle Against Apartheid, (Bellville: Mayibuye Books, 1994).

7. Roux, S.P. Bunting, p. 135.

8. ibid, pp. 134-140.

9. ibid, p.136.

10. ibid, p. 138.

11. Vote tally and percentages from B.M. Schoeman, Parlementere Verkiesings in Suid-Afrika 1910-1976, (Pretoria: Aktuele Publikasies, 1977), p. 170.

12. Roux, S.P. Bunting, p. 135.

13. ibid, p. 139.

14. Vote tally and percentages from Schoeman, Parlementere Verkiesings, p. 169.

15. Basner, Am I An African?, p. 64.

16. ibid, pp. 71, 77.

17. ibid, pp. 49-51, 71.

18. ibid, p. 81.

19. ibid, pp. 80-84, 89-91.

20. ibid, p. 92.

21. Podbrey, White Girl, p. 135-136.

22. ibid, pp. 135-136.

23. ibid, p. 136.

24. The vote tallies and the percentages are taken from Schoeman, Parlementare Verkiesings, pp. 254, 257-258, 262, 265-267, 269-270.

25. Lazerson, Against the Tide, p. 34.

26. ibid, p. 36.

27. ibid, pp. 39-40.

28. ibid, p. 40.

29. ibid, p. 41.

30. ibid, p. 42.

31. ibid, p. 34.

32. Basner, Am I An African?, pp. xii, 200 (n. 7), 210 (n. 5).

33. For example, see the views of Moses Kotane as cited in Brian Bunting, Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary, (London: Inkululeko Publications, 1975), p. 139-140.