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DOMINATION BY CONSENT: ELECTIONS UNDER THE REPRESENTATION
OF NATIVES ACT, 1937-1948

by M. Roth

The elections which were held under the Representation of Natives Act in 1937, 1942 and 1948 warrant examination for two reasons. Firstly, because they were the only elections ever held in South Africa on a national level in which blacks took part. And secondly, because the holding of free elections in a country which denied the electorate many of the other basic freedoms such as freedom of movement, of speech and of assembly was an anomaly in itself and ought to be examined for this reason alone.

The first of these elections was held in 1937. The electorate were the male black tax payer over the age of eighteen who, by an elaborate voting system, were to elect their representatives to the three institutions where they could make their wishes known to the government. The Cape voters, who had been removed from the common roll, could now elect three white representatives to the House of Assembly. The whole of the black electorate could vote for the four senators, as they could for the members of the newly formed third body, the Natives Representative Council. Twelve of the sixteen black members of that Council could be elected (four were nominated by the government). The Council's purpose was to consider and to comment on all new legislation on black affairs before it was tabled in either the House of Assembly or the Senate.¹

The main emphasis of this paper will be on the elections to the Natives Representative Council (N.R.C.), because it was this aspect of the Representation of Natives Act which the Africans themselves emphasised, both in their newspapers and in their political organisations.

Roth.

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To understand the importance which the black electorate attached to the election of the N.R.C., it must be made clear that although the functions of the Council as laid down in the Act made it a totally advisory body, it was nevertheless felt to have the semblance of a third chamber of Parliament. This idea that the N.R.C. might one day assume the guise of a parliament for blacks was first postulated by Smuts (although this was later disputed by him) and assiduously repeated by both black and white politicians.² Newspapers published for black readers repeatedly referred to the Council as a "black parliament" throughout its fifteen years of existence. A National Party spokesman even gave as one of the reasons for the necessity for the Council's abolition that such a "parliament" would be a danger to white domination.³

An indication of the importance which councillors attached to their membership of the N.R.C. was the addition of the letters "M.R.C." behind their names in the same way that members of Parliament were "M.P.'s".⁴ Both Dr. Moroka, who was a councillor and African National Congress (A.N.C.) president, and A.P. Mda, who was Congress Youth League president in the 1940's, emphasised the status attached to being a member of the N.R.C. They held the opinion that far more status was attached by the blacks to the councillors than to the heads of any of the black organisations of that time, including the A.N.C.⁵

The electoral process itself was a very elaborate one, due mainly to the attempts by the authorities to circumvent the fact that the vast majority of the electorate was illiterate. No attempt has been made here to analyse the whole of this in detail which would entail a paper on its own; certain aspects of it only, when considered important, are however explained.

Voting was by a show of hands and the actual result of the vote was recorded presumably in writing and placed in a sealed envelope and handed to the relevant authorities, so that the vote was in effect a secret one. No whites were allowed to be present during the proceedings of the voting units.⁶ The results of the first election were published in detail in the Government Gazette. Unfortunately this procedure was not followed in the same detail in the 1942 and 1948 elections, and no accurate figures are accordingly available for these two elections, making statistical comparisons of any kind very difficult. Although many of the results were published in the newspapers, the figures given differed considerably from each other compounding the difficulties in this connection.

The elections had two separate stages: the first was what was called nomination day, when the electoral units nominated their candidates to the Council. These candidates were often local notables who, receiving no support from anyone else, would then withdraw. The advantage of nomination day for the more successful candidates lay in the fact that they could gauge their support well before the day of voting and also recognise who their most important opponents were. This was of importance because the size of the electoral areas made it difficult and expensive for candidates to canvass the whole of it unless compelled by reason of the paucity of their support. J.D. Rheinallt Jones was not considered as having canvassed unusually extensively in having travelled 8 000 kms. through the Transvaal and Orange Free State in March 1937 when standing as a senatorial candidate.⁷

Besides their largely having travelled through the electoral areas themselves, all the candidates appointed black political agents to canvass those rural areas which they themselves could not cover in an attempt to change the political outlook of the rural voting units.⁸ At times the N.R.C. candidates would align themselves with others (there were two rural seats for each of the four Provinces), or with the senatorial candidate for that area or his agent, and act as a team. This enabled them to interview and address a greater audience than would otherwise have been possible in the available time.⁹

The candidates who worked as a team were not necessarily both elected. In 1937, Dube, who was the most influential African in Natal at this time, stood with W.W. Ndhlovu as rural candidates and both succeeded. In 1942, however, Dube abandoned Ndhlovu and gave his support to Albert Lutuli. Dube retained his seat but Lutuli was defeated, as was Ndhlovu. The seat was won by George Champion. It was felt by the candidates that the support of a national figure like Dube was a distinct advantage in the elections but from results like those above it seems obvious that this alone did not ensure any candidate's election.¹⁰

Thomas Mapikela can be taken as an example of the type of candidate who successfully contested a seat in the 1937 election. His election manifesto was not based on any clear ideological or political outlook. The most that can be said for it was that it had a mildly liberal tone with an emphasis on matters of social welfare.¹¹ Mapikela was a founder of the A.N.C. and a leading politician in Bloemfontein; he had taken part in some of the fruitless attempts by blacks to interest the British government in their plight and had led the agitation against instituting passes for black women. At the time of his election he was prominent in the Advisory Boards Congress and above all he had been one of the leaders in the recent protest against the Hertzog legislation.¹²

Nearly all of the successful candidates at this election had been the leaders of the 1936 campaign against the abolition of the Cape franchise. Were they elected because of their prominence during the campaign? A puzzling feature of the black opposition to the 1936 legislation was the absence of any mass protests. Why were there no riots or strikes? A political organisation had after all been specifically formed for this purpose, namely, the All African Convention (A.A.C.). If the African masses had protested they would not have been leaderless but they did not protest. It may be concluded from this that only that small section of the black population that could have benefitted from the pre-1936 situation was prepared to protest against the change. Those who had no direct stake in the status quo, by far the greater part of the electorate, remained quiescent. If there was no mass support for this attitude then it must be concluded that it was their past record in general rather than their recent opposition to the 1936 legislation which was instrumental in these persons being elected. Godlo, in fact, did not believe that a recommendation by the A.A.C. would be of much value in the 1937 election and there is also some evidence that these candidates were unpopular in the Cape. It ought not to be overlooked that the A.A.C. had been singularly unsuccessful in its effort in 1936 and thus to have taken part in its campaign could hardly have been an advantage.

The A.N.C. also endeavoured to get its candidates elected, although often the nominations were the same as those for the A.A.C. This was

probably due to the fact that neither of these organisations had clearly defined policies and that the prominent black politicians who were relatively well-known were limited to a small number of men. John Dube, R.V. Selope Thema and R.H. Godlo were all members of both the A.A.C. and the A.N.C. Godlo was, in addition, the head of the Advisory Boards Congress, which endeavoured to get its nominees elected to all the urban seats allocated to the Council. The disorganised state of both the A.N.C. and the A.A.C. makes the influence which these organisations had on these elections, even more difficult to ascertain. All that can be said with some certainty is that the Africans who were elected to the Council in 1937 were, on the whole, proven leaders of long standing. They were more probably elected on their own "track records" than because they were the chosen candidates of any political party. In any event those elected were regarded "as the accepted mouthpiece of Africans in their respective chambers" by both the A.A.C. and the A.N.C.¹⁴

The Communist Party had also put up candidates in the 1937 elections. They were Hyman Basner for the Senate and Edwin Mofutsanyana for the N.R.C. Unlike the other candidates, and parties, the Communist Party had a definite policy which it never attempted to disguise. It had little success in the elections. Basner attempted to get elected apparently without appealing to the chiefs in the rural units. His resultant massive defeat, polling only 66 234 votes against Rheinallt Jones' 404 447 can thus not necessarily be attributed to any lack of support for the Communist Party.¹⁵

Edwin Mofutsanyana, the other Communist candidate, was a fairly prominent black leader who at the time of these elections was also general secretary of the Communist Party. He was the only head of a political party ever to stand as a N.R.C. candidate. Mofutsanyana was not a dynamic leader and it was perhaps unfortunate that he was chosen to represent the Communist Party not only in these elections but also in the elections of 1942 and 1948.¹⁶

Mofutsanyana himself attributes at least part of his success at the polls to harassment at the hands of anti-Communist location super-intendants during his campaigns. At Reitz, for example, he was prevented from using a hall to address an election meeting and at Messina the police even prevented him from entering the black location. However, from his own account it seems that he generally found a way round these difficulties and succeeded in addressing a number of meetings.¹⁷ There were thus other factors which prevented Communist Party candidates from succeeding at the polls in 1937 although the extent to which their defeat can be attributed to them is uncertain.

Besides Basner and Mofutsanyana there were three candidates in the 1937 elections whose views at that time can be described as being more radical than those of the other candidates. They were George Champion, Josiah Gumede and W.G. Ballinger, the husband of the successful Cape Eastern candidate, Margaret Ballinger. Both Gumede and Champion played down these views in their manifestos. Champion stated that he was now "trying to act within the law and be respectable".¹⁸ Gumede mentioned neither socialism nor his visit to Russia in his manifesto, although he exaggerated the scope and importance of his other visits to Europe.¹⁹ Thus neither Champion nor Gumede, if one cares to judge from their election manifestoes, considered that an emphasis on radicalism would get them any votes. Both were defeated. Dube had 311 638 votes cast in his favour, W.W. Nhlovu got 161 647,

Champion 154 609, and Gumede trailed after Champion. William Ballinger found that his nomination for senator was so little supported that he withdrew his candidature.²⁰

Those successful in the 1937 elections of the parliamentary candidates were whites who professed liberal attitudes such as Rheinallt Jones, the director of the South African Institute of Race Relations and Margaret Ballinger. Among the blacks were many of the foundation members of the A.N.C. like W.W. Nhlovu, John Dube, Thomas Mapikela and R.V. Selope Thema. Both the founder of the Advisory Boards Congress, A.M. Jabavu, and the then president, R.H. Godlo, were chosen to represent the urban areas. The Transkei had chosen three of its most prominent members to represent it; Charles Sakwe, chairman of the Transkei Native Voters Conference and influential on the Cape Native Voters Association; Jeremiah Moshesh, a member of the Transkeian General Council since 1918, and Eleijah Qamata, who had gained more votes at the poll in the Transkei than any of the other candidates.

The two remaining members of the 1937 N.R.C. for rural areas were Richard Baloyi, a landlord and bus owner active in A.N.C. circles and Bertram Buxton Xiniwe, chairman of a large electoral committee in the Kingwilliamstown area and shortly to be Cape A.N.C. president. A.J. Sililo, the councillor for the urban Natal seat, was not elected until 1940, due to the anomolous position of the urban voting unit in that province.²¹

The electoral units responsible for the election of the three members of the Council who represented the urban areas were the advisory boards. The suspicion with which the Native Affairs Department tended to regard the urban Africans found expression in the unwillingness of its officers to approve the formation of these boards. However, not only was the Department tardy in this respect but the municipal authorities allowed only a very small number of blacks to register as urban dwellers.²² Some magisterial districts had only one taxpayer registered in a whole area.²³ Durban had twenty-seven voters from some 70 000 Africans, Johannesburg had 719 and Benoni 1 653.²⁴ The situation was absurd but in the case of the Transvaal and Cape elections not crucial because so long as the total number of voters for the urban seat was 2 000 Africans a candidate could still be chosen. It soon became apparent, however, that the whole of Natal did not contain 2 000 Africans who were registered in urban areas and thus no member of the N.R.C. for urban areas could be chosen until the Act had been amended.

D.L. Smit, the Secretary for Native Affairs, maintained that it was a simple matter to transfer a man's tax registration (which determined his voting area) from a rural to an urban area. But in actual practice this must have been difficult because in 1937, of a total of 1 408 362 voters, only 14 865 in the whole of the Union outside the Transkei were registered as urban taxpayers.²⁵

The black population which the authorities were so unwilling to acknowledge as urban voters had to be placed in another category for voting purposes and this resulted in large numbers of urban Africans being placed in the voting units known as electoral committees. These electoral committees consisted of large numbers of urban Africans, especially those centred in Johannesburg and the Witwatersrand area

generally, as well as those blacks who had been detribalised and lived outside small towns and on farms throughout the country. It is noteworthy that even in 1937, before the large-scale industrialization of the post-war years had taken place, that these detribalised blacks comprised nearly half of the total voting population outside the Transkei, namely 597 105 voters.²⁶

The electoral committees were thus filled on the one hand by the politically well-informed Africans of the urban areas (the Orlando Electoral Committee, for example, at one stage had Dr. Xuma as its chairman) and on the other hand by people who had never before participated in politics or elections, the blacks in the white farming areas. In those areas in which were the more politically aware blacks, the electoral committees became effectively mere extensions of the urban vote. Because such a great number of urban Africans were placed in these committees, it meant that the urban African had the greatest influence on the election. In this election it was not the number of units who voted for any candidate which mattered, but the actual number of voters.²⁷

The rural committees were quickly dominated by the only educated segment of the rural black population, the teachers. It was they who explained to the often illiterate voters the implications of the elections and guided them in their voting. The provincial educational authorities viewed this with some alarm; they threatened to dismiss all such teachers on the grounds of their participation in politics, and their attitude was fully endorsed by the Department of Native Affairs. This came too late to affect the 1937 election but the teachers were expressly forbidden from participating in any future elections, except as voters.²⁸

In 1940 the Representation of Natives Act was amended and the chairmen of the electoral committees could now be appointed by the local Native Commissioner; he could also explain to the voters the way these committees were meant to function. This was an attempt by the government to rid the electoral committees of the influence of the teachers who it presumably felt were partly to blame for the election of 1937 resulting in a black Council comprising all the better-known black politicians who had put themselves up for election. This amending legislation, however, still provided that no white person could be present at the actual voting. Since the vote was still secret, it is doubtful whether the government succeeded in this attempt at "guiding" the voters. The government on the one hand was intent upon ensuring that the politically aware section of the rural community was unable to dominate the electoral proceedings (that domination it wanted to preserve for itself) but on the other hand by preserving the secrecy of the voting procedure the government seemed to want to ensure that an element of consensus was preserved.²⁹

A cardinal event which took place during the tenure of the first Council was the outbreak of war in 1939. It led to the most important of the debates in which the councillors participated: the merits of black participation in the Defence Force. The N.R.C. was divided between those who asked for an amendment to the Defence Force Act to include black soldiers on terms of equality with whites, and those councillors who disagreed, contending either for unconditional participation or for complete non-participation. It became clear to

those who disagreed that the electorate was totally behind the motion of equality. The motion was proposed by R.H. Godlo and its main opponents were T. Mapikela, A.M. Jabavu and Elija Qamata. Godlo himself thought that public opinion would lead the opponents of his motion to lose the next election.³⁰

The outbreak of war had also led to a change of government in South Africa. Jan Smuts, who took over as Prime Minister from J.B.M. Hertzog, centred his policy to blacks on attempts to improve their social and economic conditions. He stated, however, that these improvements would be dependant on the country's financial situation. As his government was a war-time administration, there was not a great deal of money available and little was done during the war to provide social services for blacks. Politically Smuts was in favour of some liberalisation of the administration being carried on but at what he termed "a modest pace and determined by (white) public opinion".³¹

In January 1942 Smuts made a speech before the South African Institute of Race Relations. As van der Byl, the Minister of Native Affairs, later wrote, Smuts was in the habit of giving an audience what it wanted to hear and on this occasion said in his speech that in his opinion segregation had failed. He actually only meant that segregation as a policy had failed to keep Africans out of the cities and that perhaps another method ought to be tried to achieve this. However, the phrase "segregation has failed" was taken out of context and false hopes were raised that the segregation policy had breathed its last.³²

By 1942 the drive to the cities was already under way, mainly as a result of the economic plight of blacks in the rural areas.³³ Economic conditions in the urban areas, however, could by no means be regarded as satisfactory. In the latter months of 1942, thirty-four strikes involving black workers took place. In nearly every one of these strikes the workers were pressing for higher wages and an improvement in their working conditions. The dissatisfaction which the African worker was expressing was probably not only the product of war-time economics but also the result of the reformist ideas expressed at this time by the pronouncements of Allied statesmen and in documents like the Atlantic Charter.³⁴ Thema's statement in the N.R.C. that the men fighting up North did not expect to come back to the same conditions which had prevailed before they had left the country, was yet another expression of what, by 1942, seems to have been commonly felt among the blacks, namely that conditions must improve in the future.³⁵

It was probably against this background that it had become clear to William Ballinger that the limit of voluntary concessions had been reached and that in future Africans would have to fight and make sacrifices for what they wanted.³⁶ This seems also to have been clear to the electorate because the men returned in the 1942 elections were by and large of a more radical turn of mind than those of 1937. This applied, however, mainly to the blacks returned to the N.R.C. rather than to the Senators and black elected members of the House of Assembly.

The second elections were scheduled to take place on 4 November 1942. As has been mentioned, very little official information was

published on this election, the main sources being newspapers and some private correspondence. There is some doubt as to whether all the councillors even stood for re-election: according to William Ballinger, Mapikela did not seek re-election but (rather surprisingly, considering his former attitudes) urged his supporters to vote for the Communist Party candidate, Edwin Mofutsanyana.³⁷

The Communist Party in 1942 had originally put forward three candidates for the elections. They were E. Mofutsanyaya, A.M. Mabela and one Lekgetho, who toured the rural areas together in an attempt to gain the rural vote.³⁸ In an article in the Guardian mention is made of a pamphlet issued by a black organisation, the "African Election Committee", which urged blacks not to elect communists because the Communist Party was multi-racial and could thus never speak for black interests alone.³⁹ Although this article was addressed to the voters of advisory boards, this aspect of the election campaigns of the Communist Party candidates was an important one. It is evident from the campaigns of these candidates that racial divisions were ignored and that white communists campaigned on behalf of their black comrades. It is also evident that among some sections of black opinion, African communists were regarded as nothing more than puppets of Moscow.⁴⁰ The multi-racialism of the Communist Party and its known association with the U.S.S.R., as well as an impression that the Party was dominated by whites, probably contributed to its lack of success at the polls. As in 1937, electioneering by the communists was again accompanied by intimidation from the authorities. This time it was Moses Kotane who was arrested after making a speech on behalf of the Communist Party candidate.⁴¹

Although the communists were as unsuccessful in 1942 in the N.R.C. elections as they had been in 1937, their white senatorial candidate for that election, Hyman Basner, now won a decisive victory over the incumbent, J.D. Rheinalt Jones. Basner won by the large majority of 332 798 votes to 237 199. Only three of the Reef advisory board, not one local council and only eleven out of fifty-eight chiefs had voted for Rheinalt Jones. There were various contributory factors which may help in understanding his defeat. Rheinalt Jones had initially been uncertain whether he should seek re-election and entered the campaign at a relatively late stage. He had visited only seven districts and had spoken at only seven meetings during his entire campaign. Another possible reason for his poor showing in the rural areas was that during his five years as senator he had apparently told his black constituents that he was in favour of abolishing the black reserves. This was probably misunderstood by them to mean that he was in favour of their land being taken away from them and could not have increased his popularity among them.⁴²

Basner had left the Communist Party in 1939 over the war issue but was nonetheless considered to have taken a radical stance in his campaign. Lord Harlech, the British High Commissioner, gave it as his opinion that the election of Basner was a sign of impatience with the liberal outlook of Jones among a large section of black opinion, and that the authorities viewed it as a gesture of revolt and dissatisfaction.⁴³

It is difficult to see Basner in quite such a radical light

when taking into account his subsequent statements in the Senate. He stated, for example, that he was in favour only of a qualified franchise for blacks. His conduct in the Senate when he refused at times to follow parliamentary discipline seems not so much the result of his radical turn of mind as plain bad manners.⁴⁴ Basner was thus not as much the radical as he was pictured at the time of his election. That Rheinallt Jones lost the election was more due to slack campaigning than to the ideology of Hyman Basner, especially when one takes into account that all the other returned parliamentary candidates were of a liberal outlook. On the other hand it should be said that the area in which Basner was elected did include the Witwatersrand, which had a vast number of those very voters who were at the forefront of the industrial unrest of 1942; this may have been an important element in Basner's success. Without firm statistical evidence such conclusions can, however, only be tentative. Basner's view can, however, still be regarded a more militant one than the average liberal black elected politician.

The A.A.C. had also put up certain candidates at this election, all of whom apparently were defeated. Dr. Moroka, who won a seat in 1942 and was the A.A.C.'s treasurer, was not, it would seem, put forward by the A.A.C. as one of their official candidates. Joe Matthews was of the opinion that the defeat of their candidates turned the Convention against the N.R.C. and that this was the reason that that organisation, in 1943, adopted a resolution to boycott the Council. A.P. Mda disagreed with this view and said that the resolution was passed as a matter of principle rather than pique at the A.A.C.'s lack of success at the polls. He did, however, admit that the status of the members of the Council was resented by certain sections of black opinion and may have been the reason for the N.R.C. being singled out in this way.⁴⁵

The attitude of the A.N.C. to the 1942 elections was quite different to both the A.A.C. and the Communist Party. Before the holding of the 1941 annual conference at Bloemfontein, it appeared that Congress would put up its candidates as the other organisations were doing. James Calata, the secretary-general of Congress, had in fact already asked the various branches of Congress to submit nominations for the forthcoming elections.⁴⁶ At the conference itself, however, a decision was taken not to sponsor any candidates, although individual Congress members could vote for whom they liked.⁴⁷ This ruling was made at the suggestion of Xuma, at that time its present-general, who did not want the A.N.C. to publicly support candidates for the Council (in case of their defeat), but who would nevertheless privately have preferred that certain candidates succeed at the polls. Xuma felt that the election of both Moroka and Z.K. Matthews, in particular, would be of benefit to Congress. He thought that the election of these two candidates would enable Congress to guide the activities and attitudes of the Council. After the election he received a congratulatory letter from James Calata expressing his satisfaction that Congress had succeeded in placing its candidates on the Council without appearing to do so.⁴⁸ Xuma also made a personal appeal to members of the newly elected Council to take a more active interest in the A.N.C., an appeal to which Paul Mosaka initially responded, making it quite clear that he was receptive to influence by Xuma as to what was to be done in the N.R.C.⁴⁹

Other A.N.C. members who were elected in 1942 were the two most radical members of the first Council, and its leaders, R.V. Selope Thema and R.H. Godlo. Three of the councillors who had not supported Godlo's motion asking for equality in the Defence Force were defeated and replaced by more radical men, these being Thomas Mapikela, A.M. Jabavu and Elijah Qamata. Richard Baloyi was replaced by the more outspoken James Moroka. In Natal George Champion was elected, defeating W.W. Ndhlovu. As has been pointed out, Ndhlovu was now no longer supported by John Dube in his fight for election. It is not certain why this was so but Ndhlovu did display some racialistic attitudes in certain Council debates of which Dube clearly disapproved. In addition to this, Champion himself was now standing for a rural seat and not an urban one as had previously been the case. The rural seats, as has been noted, had a large number of urban workers amongst whom Champion had been carrying out extensive trade union work since the lifting of his banning order.⁵⁰

Many of the men elected in 1942 were to rise to positions of eminence in the A.N.C. Champion and Z.K. Matthews were to become provincial presidents of Natal and the Cape respectively and Moroka became president-general in 1949; others like Xiniwe, Godlo and Thema held office or were part of the national executive during the time they were members of the N.R.C.⁵¹ Thus the second N.R.C. consisted of a majority of A.N.C. members. It has been noted that Zuma's view was that the A.N.C. could now influence the views of the Council. This was indeed the case but Congress did not influence the Council in the way that a political party usually did, by guiding its members on policies they should pursue once they had been elected. The reason was because Congress was at all times reluctant to adopt any kind of firm ideology in case this should imperil its always shaky facade of unity. To continue to regard itself as the mouth-piece of all African opinion meant that it had to forego any definite political outlook. Inkundla Ya Bantu was of the view that the only reason the councillors did indeed look to the A.N.C. for advice was because it was the only completely African body of any standing.⁵²

The years between the holding of the second election in 1942 and the third in 1948 were the most crucial of the Council's history. As has been noted, the new members of the N.R.C. and those former members who had been returned were of a more militant turn of mind than those of 1937. They showed this not only in their speeches in the Council but also in their activities outside. It was in this period that it became apparent that although they were permitted to hold election meetings, political activities were not regarded with the same equanimity by the government once the elections had been held. Both Paul Mosaka and Thema were arrested in this way: Mosaka when he took an active part in the Alexandra bus boycott of 1943 and Thema in Cape Town during the Anti-Pass Campaign.⁵³ In addition, freedom of speech at political meetings outside the election period was frowned upon. In 1944 Mosaka had referred to the government as a "Nazi government" at a meeting of his African Democratic Party in Kroonstad. He was immediately warned by the authorities that such "subversive" conduct would not be tolerated.⁵⁴ Freedom of assembly was also at this time not permitted after the passing of Proclamation 131 of 1945 which prohibited black gatherings of more than ten people.⁵⁵

The only activities that the black councillors were permitted

to undertake as part of their duties was to act as liaison in some cases of dispute. Mosaka assumed this role in the case of the Orlando squatters when he negotiated on their behalf.⁵⁶ On no account, however, were the councillors permitted to act in this capacity in more explosive situations. In 1940 the councillors offered to reduce tension during riots in the Bethanie location by entering that location (for which they had to seek permission) and talking to the inhabitants, but the Native Affairs Department refused to allow them to do so.⁵⁷ There was a marked contrast between the freedom of speech and the freedom of movement granted the councillors during electioneering and during their term of office.

On Dube's death in 1946 a by-election was held in Natal and his seat was won by Albert Lutuli, the man whom Dube had supported in 1942 as a Natal rural candidate. Lutuli's chief opponent in this by-election was Henry Selby Msimang. Msimang was supported by George Champion, who was attempting to assume the Natal leadership left vacant by Dube's death. Lutuli, however, won by a massive majority of 132 808, gaining 231 926 votes to Msimang's 99 118.⁵⁸

The most far-reaching influence on the 1948 elections was the launching of the Anti-Pass Campaign by the Communist Party in November 1943. Xuma gave this campaign his support in 1944 and then became its conference chairman and president. In spite of a great deal of effort by Xuma, the campaign proved a failure. A number of councillors were also involved in the campaign, the most prominent among them being Thema, who was arrested for unlawful assembly when he led a procession in Cape Town. The final conference on the Anti-Pass Campaign was held in June 1946 at which it must have been obvious to all that the campaign had been a dismal failure.⁵⁹

The only possible source of influence left to the leaders of the Anti-Pass Campaign was the N.R.C., a meeting of which was scheduled for August 1946. Between June and August of that year a meeting of the national executive of Congress was held in Bloemfontein. It seems that Thema, a member of the A.N.C. executive who had recently been jailed for his efforts on behalf of the campaign, was understandably most adamant that the matter should be taken further through the offices of the N.R.C. As a leader of the campaign in Cape Town he must have been humiliated by the refusal of Hofmeyr, the Acting Prime Minister, and Piet van der Byl, the Minister of Native Affairs, to receive him or to even see the petition. By pursuing the matter through the Council he probably thought that the government would be compelled to take some notice of his efforts and not dismiss them in such a cavalier manner. It is not known exactly what was discussed at this meeting but the general opinion seems to have been that Thema was eager to take the matter further by somehow involving the N.R.C. It was probably here that it was decided to stage a formal protest at the next N.R.C. session.⁶⁰

Cyclostyled letters were then sent by Xuma informing the councillors of the A.N.C. decision to adjourn the next meeting of the Council as a form of protest.⁶¹ According to Dr. Bokwe, it took a great deal of persuasion before unanimity on this directive by the councillors was reached.⁶²

Secrecy concerning this decision was, of course, essential, but

if the Native Affairs Department had been more alert they would have realised that something unusual was afoot from the mere fact that whereas in previous years over one hundred separate motions were often received, for the opening of this ninth session of the Council only twenty-two were tabled.⁶³

At the caucus meeting held prior to the opening of the session, Matthews asked Dr. Moroka if he would present the motion for adjournment, thus catapulting Moroka into instant acclaim as the mover of what was later termed the "freedom resolution". It is surprising that Thema himself did not present the motion but from Moroka's remarks it seems as if the councillors were unsure as to what the government's reaction would be; perhaps Thema felt that as he had so recently been imprisoned for his activities, presenting such a motion would unnecessarily draw the authorities attention to him yet again.⁶⁴

On the 15 August the N.R.C. met for the opening of its ninth session. The adjournment motion was passed almost immediately. It was supposed by those who did not know the true state of affairs (which included all the parliamentary representatives of the blacks), that the adjournment was a spontaneous action prompted by the gold miners' strike which had coincidentally occurred at the same time.⁶⁵

This decision of the N.R.C. to suspend its operations indefinitely until the government decided to abolish its policy of discrimination was the way in which the adjournment resolution was couched and in this form received widespread support. In October 1946 Xuma called a special conference in Bloemfontein to discuss the N.R.C.'s action. Over four hundred people were said to have attended the meeting. The number present are attested by a number of sources and are of interest in that the annual conferences of Congress did not attract a quarter of this number. It seems that the action of the N.R.C. had a large measure of support and did give Xuma and the other black leaders some of that prestige which they may have lost through the failure of the Anti-Pass Campaign.⁶⁶

At this meeting it was decided to allow the councillors to attend further meetings of the Council convened for the purpose of receiving the government's reply to the adjournment resolution but at the same time called upon the voters to embark upon a boycott of all elections under the Representation of Natives Act of 1936.⁶⁷ The decision to boycott the elections was achieved with some difficulty, nobody wanting an unconditional boycott except Lembede and the Congress Youth League and even they were not unanimous in their opinion on the matter.⁶⁸

The talk of boycotting the elections was nothing new. Besides the decision on the matter taken in 1943 by the A.A.C., the matter had also been discussed as early as 1936, when the legislation had originally been passed. What made the boycott so attractive to the Congress Youth League at this particular time was the impact created by the boycott by the Indian people of the Asiatic Land and Representation Act. The ultimate objective of the African boycott movement was full citizenship rights. As Matthews pointed out, for the committed boycotters the question of whether they would ultimately succeed or fail was irrelevant, it was an act of faith. On a more practical note it was hoped that if the boycott campaign grew it would eventually develop into a vast civil disobedience movement.⁶⁹

What had been overlooked by the boycotters, Paul Mosaka wrote, was that the struggle of the Indian people was not at all "passive". It was an active act of resistance by which they voluntarily undertook to show the government the hardships they were prepared to undergo in order to demonstrate the intensity of their hatred for this piece of legislation and the strength of their determination to resist it. Xuma and Thema had had to abandon the Anti-Pass Campaign because it had failed to elicit from the African the very qualities which made the Indian movement a success - organisation, a strength of will and the determination to undergo hardship for the sake of one's principles. There was no reason to believe that the boycott movement would be any more successful than the Anti-Pass Campaign had been, something which Xuma and most of the national executive (especially those who were also members of the Council), were quick to realise.⁷⁰

In 1947 Gordon Hemming, a black elected member for the Transkei of the House of Assembly, died and the boycott resolution was put to its first test. Douglas Buchanan, a liberal of similar outlook to Margaret Ballinger, stood unopposed for the seat. During his electoral campaign, Buchanan had been constantly heckled by his audience and after his election he decided to test the strength of the boycott movement and sent a voting paper to the 2 375 voters in his constituency. Only 144 of these papers were returned stating that they were in favour of the boycott.⁷¹ At the head of the boycott movement in the Transkei was Govan Mbeki, secretary of the Transkeian Organised Bodies, who had obviously found it an easy task to organise the Transkeian voters into a comparatively effective boycotting instrument but it was evident that even in the case of such a small number of voters sufficient unanimity could not be obtained to ensure that no-one at all voted for Buchanan, a step which alone would have made the boycott successful.⁷²

The representatives of the Africans in Parliament were not in favour of the boycott. Basner went so far as to state at a meeting of the Transvaal A.N.C. that he thought the boycott resolution "so silly" he did not think that grown men would waste a whole day discussing it. He added that if the boycott resolution was passed by the meeting, then he would not stand for re-election in 1948. Basner did not stand for re-election. It was at this meeting that William Ballinger was attacked by Ramohanoe, the president of the Transvaal A.N.C. for wishing to contest the Transkei seat vacated by the death of Hemming.⁷⁵ Ballinger withdrew his candidacy. Donald Molteno, the Cape Western representative of the Africans in the House of Assembly, had accompanied Buchanan on his tour during the latter's election campaign in the Transkei and had thus had first hand experience of the boycott. As a result both of this tour and of the heckling which Molteno himself experienced at election meetings, he began to voice some doubts on the suitability of whites representing blacks in Parliament and at one stage even contemplated resigning. He did not give this as a reason for his decision not to seek re-election, but it must have played some part.⁷⁴

Molteno's decision not to seek re-election disturbed the liberal representatives who felt that this vacancy might, given the climate of black opinion in his constituency, lead to the seat falling to a Communist Party candidate. This was the reason that Douglas Buchanan

who had won the Transkei seat in 1947, decided to contest the Cape Western seat in 1948 instead.⁷⁵

The boycott resolution of the A.N.C. had placed some of the blacks' parliamentary representatives in a quandary but did not have the same effect on the black members of the N.R.C. None of the incumbents of that body ever contemplated resigning before the election or not seeking re-election in 1948. This was the result not only of the lack of influence of the A.N.C. at this time on its members but also of the importance which the councillors attached to the N.R.C. as the only direct link between the government and the Africans.⁷⁶

At the A.N.C. conference in December 1947 the delegates voted sixty-seven against seven adopting the resolution of the national executive to intensify the boycott campaign.⁷⁷ But by January 1948 the A.N.C. had thought better of its boycott decision and had now decided to participate in the elections on a "boycott ticket", the basic reason being that the A.N.C. had found itself quite unable to carry out the boycott, even on a small scale like the advisory board elections. By "boycott ticket" was meant that the members of the N.R.C. should, as far as possible, be returned in the 1948 elections so that they could continue to discuss reform measures which the Smuts government was now proposing to introduce.⁷⁸

An added complication in the 1948 elections was that the white voters were also participating in an election in that year, an election which some influential blacks thought might well result in a change of government, and that this election was taking place before the elections under the Representation of Natives Act. It was felt that an aggressive boycott campaign would embarrass and weaken the present more liberal government and lead to its downfall thus helping the National Party into power.⁷⁹

The A.A.C. did not participate in the 1948 elections. The Trotskyite elements under Tabata and his followers who had taken over that organisation were advocating a total boycott and did not veer from their original 1943 decision. Furthermore, it was probably due to their influence that the total poll in the Cape Western constituency was only 53%. Tabata's followers would obviously have refrained from voting in spite of Sam Kahn's efforts to get his constituents to the polls.⁸⁰

The attitude of the Communist Party to the 1948 election was initially ambivalent. On the one hand it was clear that the most radical section of African opinion favoured the boycott but at the same time they did not want to pass up the opportunity of getting their own people elected to the N.R.C. and to Parliament.⁸¹ The Communist Party had certainly tried to implement the boycott resolution as far as it could do so but when this was seen to be impossible,⁸² they then put up their own candidates for the 1948 elections thus turning against the A.N.C. resolution, to which both Moses Kotane and J.B. Marks, as members of the national executive, had agreed, which had advocated the return of the 1942 elected councillors. In its arguments for this decision, the Guardian pointed out firstly, that the vote was a right which ought not to be voluntarily suspended and secondly, that the black voters must realise that at this juncture a boycott policy could only play into the hands of the National Party

(the white election had at this time been won by them). They could abolish the franchise by pointing out that the blacks themselves were advocating a boycott and therefore did not want it.⁸³

The Communist Party had put up three black candidates for the 1948 N.R.C. elections, Edwin Mofutsanyana, Alpheus Maleba and A.S. Damane. Both Damane and Mofutsanyana were members of the Party's central committee.⁸⁴ They were the same men who had been unsuccessful in 1942, while the second of these, Mofutsanyana, had been an unsuccessful candidate as far back as 1937. It seems that the Communist Party hoped that it was not its candidates as much as its policy which would ensure electoral victory.

The elections of 1948 were apparently as well supported (in spite of the boycott), as the other elections had been.⁸⁵ The Transvaal-O.F.S. seats, for example, had twenty candidates for the one urban seat and fifty-two for the two rural seats. Besides the incumbent members of the N.R.C., men like L.K. Nhlabati, a Bloemfontein Congress organiser, and J.S. Mpanza were nominated in this constituency. As in previous elections, the Communist Party again experienced difficulty during this one: Michael Harmel was assaulted by the location superintendent when he attempted to address a meeting in support of Edwin Mofutsanyana.⁸⁶

The policy of the A.N.C., together with the reputation and publicity that the members of the N.R.C. had got from their adjournment resolution of 1946, ensured the re-election of almost all of them in 1948. The only exception was Natal where Champion, by this time in firm control of the Natal A.N.C. presidency, succeeded in ousting L.P. Msomi from the urban seat and getting Henry Selby Msimang elected in his stead.⁸⁷ The 1948 election results indicated the confidence of the electorate in the retiring members of the Council and their support for the policy pursued by them.⁸⁸

The main interest in these elections lay in the fact that firstly, a Communist Party member, Sam Kahn, was standing for Molteno's seat and secondly, that all the other seats of the parliamentary representatives (including Molteno's seat) were being contested by National Party candidates. This situation had come about because the National Party majorities in the House of Assembly and the Senate were so small that it would have been useful to them to win additional seats, besides given them a mandate, if they had won, for their policy of apartheid.

The National Party secretary in Johannesburg, some would think perhaps a little optimistically, approached Xuma to gain his support for that Party's candidates for the 1948 election.⁸⁹ The National Party candidate in the Transvaal-O.F.S. was one van Rensburg who opposed William Ballinger. Xuma reacted to this request by writing a personal letter to all the electoral units asking them to vote for Ballinger and in addition reminding them that the ballot was secret.⁹⁰ Presumably this was because the black electorate probably did not feel at ease voting against a candidate openly sponsored by the white party in power. In spite of Xuma's efforts, fully twenty-five electoral units did vote for van Rensburg, including Alexandra Township.⁹¹

In Natal J.M. van Rooyen stood against Edgar Brookes. Van Rooyen had approached Champion and the Natal A.N.C. in an attempt to gain their support for his candidature. His political agent was a former member of the N.R.C., W.W. Nhlovu, who sat on the Council from 1937-1942. It seems that the National Party government even applied pressure to the Zulu chief, Cyprian, by making it clear to him that his paramountcy was dependant on him voting for van Rooyen rather than for Brookes.⁹² In a roneoed election newsheet signed by E.G. Jansen as leader of the National Party in Natal, it was stated that van Rooyen was the candidate who supported the government and that the government wanted the electorate to show that it approved of the government's plans for them and wanted to see them carried out.⁹³ They wanted the African voters consent to apartheid.

In the Transkei W.H. Stuart was opposed by J.D.L. Kruger, who stood for the National Party. The only three-cornered election was in the Cape Western constituency where D.M. Buchanan, a liberal, stood against Sam Kahn of the Communist Party and A.P. van der Merwe of the National Party. The Communist Party candidate won this seat by a comfortable majority - 3 780 for Kahn, 754 for Buchanan and 194 for van der Merwe, who lost his deposit.⁹⁴ Kahn was the first communist member of the House of Assembly, chosen by the blacks to represent them. This was a development of importance in that there was no doubt that in the one constituency where the electorate had been given a choice between a liberal, a member of the National Party and a member of the Communist Party, they chose the Communist Party member.

It is of some significance that whereas a white Communist Party member was acceptable as a parliamentary representative, no communist ever became a member of the Representative Council. The reason for this was most probably that the parliamentary representatives were chosen because of their ideology and what this represented to the voters, while the councillors were chosen for themselves. If J.B. Marks, the leader of the Gold Miners Union in the 1946 strike, had stood as a candidate in 1948 instead of Edwin Mofutsanyana, he might very well have been elected.

The government attempted to use both the parliamentary representatives and the N.R.C. to aid it in its domination of the black population. The parliamentary representatives themselves admitted that the only useful work they did in parliament was when they attempted to either postpone proclamations or to add some slight amendment to existing or new legislation.⁹⁵ The result of their efforts was that they used their expert knowledge of black affairs in indicating to the government by these means what would be tolerable to the people whom they represented and what would have to be revised in order to avert any possible black-white confrontations. This was probably also the purpose of giving all new legislation to the N.R.C. first, before it went to either the Senate or the House of Assembly. If the councillors vehemently protested against, then the government had an indication of the way it would be received by the black population.

As has been noted, the black elected parliamentary representatives were all of them staunchly liberal in 1937. By 1942, with the election of Hyman Basner, although by no means a radical, his election

can certainly be seen as a swing to the left, at least in the Witwatersrand area. The uncertainty concerning their attitudes towards the blacks was emphasised in the wavering views expressed by these representatives during the 1947 boycott campaign. The election of William Ballinger (who held similar views to Basner) in the Transvaal-O.F.S. seat in 1948, and finally in that same election the victory of Sam Kahn, a member of the Communist Party, saw the final repudiation of liberalism by the black electorate. It is true that parliamentary representatives like Margaret Ballinger and Edgar Brookes, who held liberal views, were never defeated but on the other hand they were never opposed by candidates of more militant views. The aspect of consent to domination which these elections represented reached its culmination in the 1948 election which saw the National Party put forward candidates who espoused the policy of apartheid. They all lost their deposits.

The members of the N.R.C. were, in 1937, the representatives of the politically unsuccessful method of pleading with the authorities to ameliorate the conditions under which the black electorate lived, rather than asking for any specific political rights.

From 1939 demands for equality began to be heard and the 1942 election results clearly indicated that the black electorate was now repudiating the politicians who held the traditional view for more militant representatives who openly asked for political equality. Their demands culminated in the showdown of 1946 when equality was no longer asked for but demanded. The stand of the Council was fully endorsed in 1948 when nearly all of them were returned by the black electorate.

To the National Party government, which came into power in 1948, the views of the Council proved to be of inestimable value because through their attitudes they were able to gauge with great accuracy the temper of the black people over whom they were to govern.⁹⁶ The elections had shown that the blacks had categorically rejected the policy of apartheid, were demanding equality and were a clear presage of the turbulent black-white confrontations of the years to come.

NOTES

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2. Ibid., p.60.
3. Senate Debates, 6 September 1948, cols. 300, 304, J.M. Le Roux; Umlindi We Nyanga, 16 December 1940; Imvo Zabandsundu, 11 July 1942; Umteteli Wa Bantu, 16 December 1939.
4. An examination of the A.N.C. letterheads of the period shows the members of the N.R.C. who were also on the Congress national executive.
5. Interview with J.S. Moroka, November 1980.
6. M. Roth, p.100.
7. Umteteli Wa Bantu, 3 April 1937.
8. Ibid., 17 April 1937.
9. F.B. Bridgman, "The Native Franchise in the Union of South Africa" (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Yale University, 1939), 420.
10. Forman Papers, Bc 581 A1.188, Champion to Msimang, 17 August 1942.
11. Umlindi We Nyanga, 15 March 1937; Ibid., 16 August 1937; Imvo Zabandsundu, 16 October 1937.
12. Ibid.
13. M. Roth, p.97.
14. Ibid., pp. 94-99.
15. Ibid., p.173.
16. Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, v.4, 92.
17. Interview by Bob Edgar with Edwin Mofutsanyana, Lesotho, 1981.
18. Ilanga Lase Natal, 20 March 1937.
19. Ibid., 13 March 1937.
20. Umteteli Wa Bantu, 3 April 1937; Ilanga Lase Natal, 3 July 1937.
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22. Ibid., pp. 25-27.

23. Smuts Papers, v.127(7), 'Opmerking oor die Wysginge wat deur die Naturelleverteenwoordigende Wetsortwerp beoog is'.
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25. Ibid., pp. 242-255; Natives Representative Council Debates, 24 November 1938, 401-403; Umlindi We Nyanga, 15 July 1937.
26. M. Roth, p.88.
27. Ibid., pp. 88-89.
28. Ibid.
29. Prime Minister's Papers, URU 1910, Minute 19 October 1940.
30. Natives Representative Council Debates, 8 December 1939, 577-597; Ibid., Report of the Committee Proceedings War Issue, 5 December 1940, 17; Xuma Papers, ABX400119, Godlo to Xuma, 19 January 1940.
31. Hofmeyr Papers, A1 DB, Smuts to Hofmeyr, 29 September 1946.
32. Smuts Papers, 229(310), cutting from the "Evening Standard", 16 March 1943; Ibid., 235(131), Smuts to Hofmeyr, 29 September 1946; Piet van der Byl, From Tophat to Velskeon, 216.
33. Senate Debates, 1942, col. 442, C.H. Malcomess.
34. D.O 116/8, Despatch no. 19, 15 February 1943, Lord Harlech, High Commissioner to the Union of South Africa to the Dominion Office.
35. Natives Representative Council Debates, 29 November 1941, 269.
36. S.A.I.R.R. Papers, Lynn Saffrey Correspondence, W. Ballinger to Lynn Saffrey, 1 December 1942.
37. Ibid.; Guardian, 8 October 1942.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., 29 October 1942.
40. Indululeko, February 1948; Transkeian General Council Debates, 19 April 1947, 60, Gordon Dana asked Govan Mbeki whether he was expecting a reply from Marshal Stalin in Moscow.
41. Guardian, 5 December 1942.
42. D.O. 35/588/444, Lord Harlech, South African High Commissioner to C.P. Atlee, 18 November 1942; Molteno Papers, Bc 579 A54.49, "An Open Letter to Rheinalt Jones by H.M. Basner", 10 September 1942. This gives the polling results as 309 274 for Basner and 205 716 for Rheinalt Jones; Senate Debates, 14 February 1950, cols. 42-1422, G. Heaton Nicholls.

43. D.O.35/588/44, Lord Harlech, South African High Commissioner to C.P. Atlee, 18 November 1942.
44. Senate Debates, 16 May 1945, col. 1849, Basner; Ibid., 8 January 1945, cols. 3033-4.
45. Interview with A.P. Mda by S. Buthelezi, Botswana, February 1982; Ballinger Papers (U.C.T.), M. Ballinger to D.D.T. Jabavu, 4 December 1943.
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49. Ibid., ABX 421111a, Xuma to R.T. (Bokwe?), 11 November 1942; Ibid., ABX 421116b, Mosaka to Xuma, 16 November 1942.
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51. T. Karis and G. Carter, v.4, 19, 81, 156, 32; Xuma Papers, ABX 401001, official A.N.C. letterhead, 10 October, 1940.
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69. Inkundla Ya Bantu, 12 May 1948.
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73. Guardian, 12 June 1947.
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93. Ibid., 14, "To the Native People of Natal".
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96. Senate Debates, 7 June 1951, col. 5562, H.F. Verwoerd.