

The good, the bad...

reply to 'How the West was won'

The outcome of the 2 June 1999 election in the Western Cape was a shock to many. The *Cape Argus* had predicted a week before that the ANC would not increase its share of the vote and would come second after the New National Party (NNP). In fact, the ANC significantly increased its support from 33% in 1994 to 42% in 1999. Since the election, little analysis has been made of the result and how it was achieved.

What is remarkable about the 1999 Western Cape election result, when compared with the 1994 election, is the significant drop in the number of NNP voters. NNP votes dropped 45.5% - from 1 119 908 to 609 612 in 1999. In the same period the ANC vote only dropped 4.2% from 697 694 to 668 106. Clearly, in a very difficult situation, the ANC was able to hold onto its absolute number of voters. This represented a substantial increase in the percentage of ANC votes in the province.

It is then surprising that Tony Ehrenreich in 'How the West was won' (*SA Labour Bulletin* vol 23 no 4) is so bold in his opposition to the very tactics which led to the ANC's becoming the single largest party in the province. We suspect that much of Ehrenreich's criticism is summed up in his words: 'COSATU should be recognised for having made a significant contribution to the ANC victory in 1999 - this recognition however was

by Max Ozinsky

not awarded! Indeed it is so often the case after elections that the new tasks confronting us mean that not everyone's contribution is sufficiently acknowledged. However, in numerous statements of the provincial leadership since the election, the contribution of COSATU to the campaign has always been praised and acknowledged.

Ehrenreich outlines the significant contribution COSATU made to the campaign. He correctly praises the contribution of over 500 shopstewards and officials and the massive organisational resources the federation used to convince workers to vote ANC. COSATU was also part of the provincial election team which co-ordinated and guided the election campaign. COSATU's leadership, including Ehrenreich, were part of all meetings and workshops where decisions were made about the strategies and tactics to be used in the campaign.

Ehrenreich's attack on the tactics successfully used by the ANC in the election shows a complete misunderstanding of the political situation and the political position of the majority of the working class in the province. Political tactics are derived from understanding the array of the political

forces in a given situation.

Misunderstanding the true position of the key actors in the situation can easily lead to over optimism and defeat.

Political landscape

The victory that the ANC achieved in the Western Cape is the result of a detailed political strategy adopted for the province at the ANC provincial conference of April 1998. Amongst the key elements of this strategy was an understanding that about 70% of the population of the province are concentrated in the Cape Metro Area, with 30% of the voters living in the rural towns and farm areas. Apartheid and the particular form of colonialism have fundamentally influenced the makeup of the province. Fifty-two percent of the population is coloured, 22% African and 25% white.

Due to the fact that the ANC has not yet won a majority of votes in the province, political power still remains in the hands of the old apartheid forces - a white colonial power bloc dominated by the NNP.

The NNP is made up of the remnants of the old white apartheid party (itself based largely on agricultural capital) and newer coloured political allies. The Democratic Party (DP) plays a secondary but important political role in the province, with its support being concentrated in parts of the metro area.

The political landscape of the province is also influenced by the historical divisions (inherited from colonialism and apartheid) amongst the oppressed. Under colonialism, the coloured section of the oppressed enjoyed advantages relative to the African people. One of the many elements of this was the Coloured Labour Preference Area. In the 1980s the National Party developed a strategy of alliance building in the coloured community. They

tried to build a white-coloured alliance as a bastion against national liberation, the ANC and, in their own racist language, against 'blacks'. They did this by intensifying divisions between Africans and coloureds using patronage from the state. They also used religion and the Afrikaans language and culture as cement to bind this white-coloured alliance. More than 90% of the African people in the Western Cape support the ANC.

The political strategy described the key strategic issue facing the ANC as being the building of solidarity between the African and coloured sections of the oppressed. In spite of the divisions created by apartheid, there exists an objective basis for this solidarity in the common experience of oppression and struggle against it. Social issues in these two communities are often similar, but experienced in different ways because of the separate and uneven development of apartheid colonialism.

Building non-racialism

The political strategy emphasised the need for the ANC to consciously develop and manage the building of non-racialism both inside and outside its structures. The Western Cape is a province that is renowned for the racist attitudes that still persist five years into the democratic South Africa.

The ANC remains the only political party with significant organisational structures in both the African and coloured areas and is a central catalyst for building non-racialism. The strategy correctly outlined the base support of the ANC as the African people across the province, a majority amongst coloured voters in the rural towns, farmworkers and sections of the coloured community in the metro - mainly middle class. There was a need to consolidate these bases of support for the ANC by mobilising around the key

material interests of these sectors.

This analysis of the electoral base of the ANC in the Western Cape does not ignore the large number of coloured workers who voted for the ANC. However, a majority within many working class coloured communities of the metro continues to support the NNP. Our experience of fighting elections in the province since the 1994 election showed that NNP voters were largely disillusioned with politics and apathetic. In fact, during the 1994 election, and to some extent during the later local government election, the ANC had played a large role in mobilising NNP voters to vote.

Targeted approach

Using by-elections as testing grounds, we were able to develop an understanding of the tactics required to win elections, even in situations where we did not have majority support. We learnt that in election organisation you should mobilise registered voters who support the ANC and concentrate all efforts on this task. This involved identifying, recording and targeting registered ANC voters. We introduced canvassing cards to keep an easy-to-use record of our voters. By testing and learning from the use of canvassing cards in by-elections, we were able to devise an organisational strategy for the election campaign that led to 2 June, election day. It is in this sense that we called this tactic the 'targeted approach'. We needed to target our voters and target our campaign on the identified ANC voters.

There have been times when this approach has been misrepresented to mean that certain areas would be



Tony Ehrenreich was part of the provincial election team.

excluded from our campaign. This is not the intention. In fact, because this tactic allows us to concentrate our energy and work as an organisation, we are able to do significantly better in areas where we are weak. An essential element of targeting is ignoring the voters of your opponents. As our analysis had shown that we had been assisting the NNP in their campaign, we coined the phrase 'Let sleeping dogs lie' in our training and strategy workshops. The use of the term was reinforced by the initial childish refusal of the NNP to register its voters, as they believed they would win their challenge to the constitutional court on the use of bar-coded ID books.

Ehrenreich is quite wrong in saying that this approach meant not mobilising new supporters to the ANC. In fact he answers himself on this question when he deals with the issue of 'Nat attack'. As outlined

above, the targeted approach did not ignore new ANC voters. What it does is record and target a campaign to make sure that they actually went to vote for the ANC. The ANC engaged in numerous campaigns, meetings and initiatives to attract new voters. These included a meeting in Mitchell's Plain for women with maintenance problems, meetings with Informal traders, Die Kaapse Ruk - a roadshow of music including hip-hop and kwaito, dance and poetry aimed at youth in working class areas of the metro, and many other events.

Divide the NNP

Another of our tactics was to divide the NNP and to win to the ANC's side as many former NNP supporters as possible. We developed 'Nat attack' to introduce a state of confusion and disorientation in the NNP. In the past, NNP supporters and leaders have not felt comfortable in joining the ANC. Of course, if the ANC is to increase its electoral support, it needs to win supporters and voters from the NNP. Since the first NNP councillor, Monica Sauls, joined the ANC in 1997, the ANC provincial leadership developed experience in winning NNP councillors. A highly successful pamphlet produced by the ANC Department of Information and Publicity showed a Zaplo cartoon of the NNP ship sinking and the survivors struggling to stay afloat. One of the NNP councillors who joined the ANC told us that this pamphlet was his passport into the ANC! This work of winning NNP leaders to the ANC was hastened from the beginning of 1999 when ANC national leadership began making in-roads amongst senior leaders of the NNP.

Ehrenreich's claim that: 'We should encourage people to come over to the ANC, but not necessarily in leadership positions, as they generally do not bring

members and it causes dissent within our ranks' is not only naive, but fails to understand the real dynamic of the situation.

In most cases, where NNP leaders joined the ANC, significant numbers of new voters were won for the ANC and the ANC achieved access to new groups within the community. However, the impact of former NNP leaders joining the ANC is not confined to the areas where they come from. It also reverberates through the ranks of the NNP and their voters in the rest of the province. This had a significant effect in consolidating the swing to the ANC in the rural areas.

Our experience of organisation shows that more people will come over if the leaders join. And our public campaign of 'Nat attack' made it acceptable for NNP supporters to join the ANC. We developed sufficient experience of winning NNP people to the ANC to be able to understand how to make a success of the situation. Of course there were those in our ranks who were threatened by this process, but this is something that the provincial leadership tried to manage.

Way forward

The tactics outlined above led to a significant improvement in the performance of the ANC in the election. But, as we have argued, particular tactics belong to certain situations. We need to assess the usefulness of these tactics in the future and the context in which they will succeed.

As we had predicted, the NNP was not able to convince one out of every two of the voters who had voted for them in 1994 to repeat their mistake. Many NNP voters are no longer prepared to vote for that party. But it is also true that many former NNP voters are disillusioned by politics and refuse to vote or even register



The ANC has built experience in mobilising support for elections.

to vote. The overwhelming majority of these citizens are to be found in the working class coloured areas of the Cape Town Metro.

Ehrenreich's claims that 'in 1994, people voted for the [then] NP as a result of their ignorance - not understanding the RDP. This ignorance had been fertile ground for the NP's racist campaign'. This assessment completely misunderstands the material position of many working class coloured people. While it is true that people may be ignorant about the ANC, it is also true for many people that their relative material conditions may have got worse in the past nine years and they blame this on the process of liberation and the ANC. As outlined above, there are also objective reasons why working class people may vote for the NP. This may be intensified by the current restructuring of the economy, which severely effects the traditional industries of the Cape Metro area.

While workers may support COSATU in order to defend their jobs, this is not necessarily directly translated into political support for the ANC. In fact, the reality of the urban coloured working class in the Western Cape is that the NNP has strong support amongst these voters, even amongst COSATU members. This of course sets a special challenge to COSATU in its support of the ANC as an alliance partner. Just as it is the duty of COSATU members to join and build the ANC as an organisation, the ANC and COSATU need to take forward the close working relationship built during the election and win these workers to the ANC. ★

Max Ozinsky was the provincial organising secretary of the ANC Western Cape from November 1994 to July 1999. He is now an ANC member of the Western Cape provincial legislature. This article is written in his personal capacity.