

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LOCAL ISSUES IN THE SUCCESS OF BLACK POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE 1920-1950 PERIOD

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This article will make an attempt to explain the reasons why local and very often social rather than political issues, played such an important role in black South African politics in the period 1920-1950.

One of the reasons for the success of the South African government since Union, in suppressing the rights of the majority of its people, was that joint action among South African blacks against the government was so sporadic. The reason for the lack of joint action was a lack of unity. One of the hindrances to unity was the apparent emphasis that Africans placed on local conditions prevailing in their communities. A recognition of this fact forced black political organizations to uphold such issues because these were the ones that engendered the greatest support for them.

From 1910 until the Defiance Campaign of 1952, the opposition of blacks to the segregatory laws of the South African government was, as has been stated, sporadic. Joint action was almost non-existent and indeed was so rare, that the times when it occurred, in 1912 and in 1936, it in both cases led to the formation of political parties, namely the All African Convention (AAC) in 1936 and what later became the African National Congress (ANC) in 1912. It was the passing of the 1913 Lands Act and the abolition of the last vestiges of a common franchise which drew blacks together sufficiently to lead to such a response.

Such a situation did not again occur until the 1950s when the first apartheid legislation made its appearance. It was thus only at times which were perceived as crisis situations that Africans could be drawn together in common protest. From 1913 until 1936 and again from that date until the 1950s, grievances tended to be parochial.

Bradford in her work on the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union

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(ICU) maintains that struggles erupted because people's awareness of their poverty and persecution was sharpened when local issues appeared. The ICU had to make use of struggles which were already there and unless activists highlighted such issues, they would generally lose their supporters.<sup>2</sup> The organizations which were active between 1920 and 1950 were the ICU, the ANC, the AAC and the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). In addition there were the various offshoots of the ICU, like the Independent ICU and the ICU Yase Natal, also the Independent ANC which flourished for some time in the Cape. There were many activists who belonged to more than one of these organizations at the same time. This was particularly the case with the AAC, which embraced members of all the other organizations.<sup>3</sup>

The popularity of individuals was frequently based not on their stance vis-à-vis political matters of national importance but rather on their efforts in the communities in which they found themselves.

An example of this is George Champion, once a member of the ICU under Kadalie, then the founder of the ICU Yase Natal, and from 1945, head of the Natal ANC.<sup>4</sup>

Champion's popularity was largely the result of the notable victories he had won against both the Durban corporation and local employers. These included the successful boycott of the Durban municipal beerhalls, and the abolition of the nightly curfew in Durban. It was also due to his efforts that black women were exempted from having to carry night passes and that the compulsory disinfecting of Africans who entered Durban was stopped. Africans were now also permitted to carry on trade in Durban and were allowed to rent rooms.<sup>5</sup>

This is an impressive list of victories, but it will be noted that they were all localized and many reflected social rather than political issues.

Another example of pursuing these kinds of issues rather than concentrating on political rights were the activities of that long-standing ANC activist,

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2 H Bradford, *A taste of freedom, the ICU in rural South Africa, 1924-1930* (Johannesburg, 1987), pp. 13, 111.

3 M Roth, "The formation of the Natives Representative Council", in T Karis and G Carter, *From protest to challenge, vol. 2, Hope and challenge 1935-1952* (Stanford, 1977), p. 6.

4 T Karis and G Carter, *Political profiles 1882-1994*, (Stanford, 1977), pp. 17-8.

5 S Marks and A Atmore (eds), *Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa* (London, 1980), pp. 76-7.

Henry Selby Msimang in the 1930s. At this time he was holding meetings in the rural areas of Natal, at which he told the farmers about improvements which could be made in the way of the erection of bridges, improvement of stock, irrigation and soil erosion prevention. His participation in such issues led to his loss of popularity with the local chief, Kumalo, who felt threatened by the loss of income which would result if the people under his jurisdiction paid their dues into a committee fund, as Msimang suggested, rather than into the coffers of the chief. Msimang also addressed a meeting of about 150 teachers in Ladysmith who wanted to know how to go about farming and buying land. Msimang said they should take their example from Indians who have small but productive farming enterprises. The only even vaguely political comment he made was when he said that blacks on white farms were entitled to a better wage.<sup>6</sup>

Another example of attempting to gain support from local communities, this time by a member of the Independent ANC, is that of John Tiger, who spoke in Middelburg in 1931 on the question of the rents charged to black tenants in Middelburg. Again the most political statement which he made was that Africans should not have to pay rent if they were unemployed.<sup>7</sup>

After the ANC's activities of 1918-1919, the advice of its president-general, SM Makgotho, to farm labourers on such national issues as the Land Act and the Bulhoek massacre were almost completely non-committal: "Congress does not say quit farms or refuse to quit. The farms belong to the owners ... If notice to quit is not obeyed, the police come ... In this matter many natives shelter behind Congress and this is wrong ... We must work under the law to which we are subject. It is a heavy law ... Many come to me to hear about Bulhoek. I will only say that trouble came and it is finished."<sup>8</sup>

All the above reports were taken down by police who attended these meetings. Because all such meetings were watched and reported on by the police it generally appears to have been safer for activists to discuss parochial issues rather than engage in political activities on a national level. The danger of

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6 Government Archives, Pretoria. NTS 7607, 64/328, Confidential report on Henry Selby Msimang, 24th January 1938, WS Long, Deputy Commissioner, commanding Natal Division to the Commissioner of the South African Police, Pretoria; NTS 7607, 69/328, Report of a meeting held by Msimang at a school in Ladysmith.

7 Government Archives, Pretoria. JUS 583 3288/31, Detective Sergeant GJ Verster, to the District Commandant, South African Police, Middelburg, CP, 27.7.1931.

8 Government Archives, Pretoria. NTS 1085211/12 IF 201, Report of a Native Congress Meeting, 19/6/1921; P Walshe, *The rise of African Nationalism* (Los Angeles, 1971), p. 228.

arrest was an ever present one and not even membership of such a statutory body as the Natives Representative Council would preclude arrest for the slightest infringement of a political nature.

RV Selope Thema, one of the founder members of the ANC and in 1943 president of the Transvaal ANC, was arrested in Cape Town when he presented a petition to Parliament in the course of the Anti-Pass Campaign. In 1944 Paul Mosaka, an erstwhile member of the ANC and the founder of the African Democratic Party (ADP), referred to the government as a "Nazi Government" at a meeting of the ADP in Kroonstad. The use of such language alone was enough to elicit an immediate warning that such subversive conduct would not be tolerated. Both Mosaka en Thema were also members of the statutory body, the Natives Representative Council.<sup>9</sup>

Another factor in pursuing local social issues was that the authorities would sometimes have difficulties in prosecuting such activists, due to the solidarity which their activities engendered in the local community. No one would be willing to give evidence against the activist involved.<sup>10</sup>

All in all it appeared to be much safer to stick to local issues.

This the ANC generally did. However in Brakpan in the early 1940s the ANC did not interest itself in local issues and this is why it lost out on the CPSA on the East Rand. After the failure of the 1946 gold miners strike, a national issue, the CPSA lost popularity on the East Rand and the ANC became the dominant political organization so that by the 1950s the Brakpan Advisory Board was dominated by them.<sup>11</sup>

This seems to indicate that large-scale failures impacted on areas which had embraced a political party due to its attention to their local problems. If the failure was big enough, it overshadowed any other successes.

The issues with which the ICU concerned itself were largely parochial. ICU activists understood the significance of local branch dynamics and made

9 M Roth, "Domination by consent" in T Lodge (ed.), *Resistance and ideology in settler societies* (Johannesburg, 1986), p. 154.

10 Government Archives, Pretoria. NTS 73/328, The Native Commissioner of Sekukuniland to Secretary of Native Affairs, 26.9.1944.

11 P Bonner, P Delius and D Posel (eds.), *Apartheid's genesis 1935-1962* (Johannesburg, 1993), pp. 259, 260 and 268.

use of struggles which were already there. It was clear to them that unless they highlighted such issues they would lose popularity in the areas in which they wished to operate.<sup>12</sup> This was not only true of ICU activities in the Eastern Cape but also in Natal. Shula Marks comments on the ICU's incorporation of local struggles and traditions in its modus operandi.<sup>13</sup>

Van Onselen writes about the ICU's victory in Bloemhof in the Transvaal. At one time, there was a practice of roping a prisoner arrested for some petty infringement of the laws and tying him to a white constable's horse where he would be made to "scramble and stumble to .. the Bloemhof police station". Through the efforts of the IGU, the practice was discontinued.<sup>14</sup>

There are many examples of these types of ICU involvements. In Schweizer-Reneke in 1932, HJ Maleke of the ICU had taken up cudgels on behalf of black tenants who had verbal sharecropping agreements with white farmers which were not being honoured and these activities had led to complaints from the farmers involved.<sup>15</sup>

As late as 1944 the Native Commissioner of Sekukuniland complained to the Secretary of Native Affairs about A Paile, who claimed to be a member of the ICU. He had been active in the area urging farm tenants not to pay dipping fees. Apparently dipping fees were charged even if one had no cattle and not unreasonably, the local populace was up in arms about this injustice. Paile was so successful that no money at all was coming into the coffers from this source. The Department of Native Affairs was keen to prosecute him and other ICU activists but found that no one was willing to give evidence for the Crown, which attests to Paile's popularity.<sup>16</sup>

The Communist Party had black activists amongst its ranks who were very much aware of the need to concentrate on local issues. Some, like Josie Mpama, held that blacks should be organized round their daily grievances.<sup>17</sup> Mpama was of the opinion that the popularity of the CPSA was not always due to any

12 Bradford, pp. 13 and 111.

13 S Marks, *The ambiguities of dependence in South Africa; class nationalism and the state in twentieth century South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1986), pp. 76ff and 112.

14 C van Onselen, *The seed is mine* (Cape Town, 1996), p. 151.

15 JUS 586 1188/32, Magistrate, Schweizer-Reneke to the Secretary of Justice, Pretoria, 26th April 1932.

16 NYS 73/328, 26.9.1944, The Native Commissioner of Sekukuniland to Secretary of Native Affairs.

17 Comintern Archives, Moscow. CA 459/1/149, Report on the Party.

understanding of its doctrines - it was often perceived simply as an organization that was helping people with their problems. Activists themselves stated that their groups were not communist meetings as such but simply black organizations which discussed bread and butter issues.<sup>18</sup>

This was advice that was not often followed by the Party but in two cases where it was, the results were quite remarkable and a substantial following resulted, albeit for a short period. In Potchefstroom in the early 1930s CPSA supported the residents in their fight to do away with lodgers' permits. An important aspect of this fight was the cases taken to court, which were fought by SP Bunting on behalf of the residents. The popularity of the Party became dependant on the success of Bunting's activities in the courts. Once their case was overturned and it was seen that the Party could do nothing practical for the people in the location, it lost support.<sup>19</sup>

The same situation occurred on the East Rand in the early 1940s when the CPSA gained popularity through its support of local causes. It managed to get its members elected to the Advisory Boards and also used the Vigilance Associations in the Brakpan location. As was the case in the 1930s in Potchefstroom, a significant factor in this support was the legal services provided by Lewis Baker, a local attorney. The CPSA's role appears to have been most substantive when parochial issues could be brought to court and the location residents could see that the CPSA would fight on their behalf. Both it and the ICU profited from situations where legal aid could be given to local residents to have their cases upheld in court.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, Moscow was not behind them in these endeavours, and thus the reluctance of members to involve themselves in such issues is understandable. Edwin Mofutsanyana, for example, maintained that the question of lodgers' permits in Potchefstroom had nothing to do with the CPSA, but was merely a local issue.

A good example of Moscow's attitude was the case of Ikaka. The CPSA

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18 Comintern Archives, Moscow. CA 459/1/349, meeting of the Commission on the South African Question, 13 March 1936; CA 495/14/129, meeting of the Commission on the SA question, p. 288.

19 J Wells, "The day the town stood still: women in resistance in Potchefstroom 1912-1930" in B Bozzoli (ed.), *Town and countryside in the Transvaal: capital penetration and popular response* (Johannesburg, 1983), pp. 286 and 298.

20 Wells, p. 286; Van Onselen, p. 151.

had started an organization in 1931, called Ikaka (Red Aid South Africa). It managed to get about 500 members by promising to fight the pick-up truck, passes and beer raids. It appeared to those who joined that the purpose of Ikaka was to provide them with legal aid. However, once it was made clear that this would not be forthcoming, the influx stopped. The Comintern criticized Ikaka on this account, maintaining that Ikaka had "committed a big deviation by promising to fight the pick-up, passes and beer raids both in the law courts and otherwise". It advised the CPSA that Ikaka must only defend political cases and not beer and theft cases - "it is not political to be arrested for beer brewing".<sup>21</sup>

This limited the party's efforts in supporting local issues, which by and large hinged on matters such as beer brewing. Admittedly, this was an economic and social concern, but in the South African context it was a mistake to separate such issues and to try to put them into neat pigeon holes. The criticism made to the Comintern in 1936, that all the CPSA was interested in was Fascism and that no time at all was devoted to the pick-up truck, sounds absurd when seen in historical perspective.<sup>22</sup> Surely the rise of Fascism was of greater importance in 1936 than such a minor matter as a pick-up truck? Obviously the answer as far as getting the support of the black masses was no.

Throughout this period the CPSA was the only party which could not devote its energies to local causes but with a few exceptions, had to concentrate on wider issues. It is thus instructive to compare its popularity with that of the other political parties of that time. Neither the ANC nor the AAC were bound to any specific ideology in the 1930s, other than one which wished for equality in the treatment of the people it represented.<sup>23</sup>

The ICU was by 1936 a spent force as a national organization, although as has been noted individuals claiming to be members of ICU still played a significant role in some rural protests well into the 1940s. The only political organization which had a specific ideology of that time and which did not generally rely on local issues to extend its popularity with the masses was the CPSA.

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21 Comintern Archives, Moscow. CA 495/14/151, Report on the work of the Red Aid Society South Africa to point 1 on the agenda, Closed meeting of the Secretariat, ECIRA, December 31, 1935, signed by R Gureleigh (pseudonym).

22 CA 495/1/349, Meeting of the Commission on the South African Question, 13 March 1936; CA 495/14/129, Meeting of the Commission on the SA question.

23 Walshe, pp. 44, 114ff.

Although Africans did not have the vote and from 1936 even those Africans who were part of the Cape franchise, were deprived of voting in the general elections, gauging the support generated by such political organisations is not as difficult as it first appears.

We have a certain amount of information of the electoral results of the urban Advisory Boards and the rural Local Councils from 1923, and most importantly, of the national elections under the 1936 Natives Representation Act which took place in 1937, 1942 and 1948 respectively. These elections, both local and national, were supported by all the above-mentioned parties except the AAC in the case of the 1948 elections.<sup>24</sup> One can gauge from their results the support the representatives of these various organisations enjoyed.

Advisory boards and local councils were formed from 1923, local councils in the rural areas and advisory boards in the urban areas. The local councils consisted of 6 elected and 3 nominated members. The Local Council elections took place with a show of hands, as the rural population of that time was mainly illiterate. In spite of this, there is evidence that these councils had the support of the local communities which they represented. This was also the case with the Advisory Boards.<sup>25</sup>

The frequent meetings of the latter, the fact that all their decisions were made in public and that their voting procedure for incumbents consisted of a secret ballot led to their having widespread support in the urban communities in which they operated. Many prominent members of the ANC and some CPSA members were elected to urban Advisory Boards. Both the Advisory Boards and the Local Councils were regarded with suspicion by the government of the day, perhaps an indication that they were indeed representative of the people.<sup>26</sup>

Farm labourers and migrant workers voted in electoral committees which were initially specially formulated for the purpose of the 1937 elections.

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- 24 M Roth, "The Natives Representative Council, 1937-1951". Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1987, p. 512.
- 25 M Roth, *The formation of the Natives Representative Council*. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Unisa, 1978, pp. 21 and 25-6; Government Archives, Pretoria, SC 19-37, p. 179; WT Welsh; Native Representative Council (NRC) Debates, 1 December 1941, p. 289; AJ Sililo; NRC Debates, 26 November 1940, p. 85; R Baloyi; NRC Debates, 29 November 1940, p. 130; DL Smit.
- 26 Bonner et al., pp. 257-8; Umlindi We Nyanga, 16 January 1937; Roth, "The formation ...", pp. 87, 121-2 and 127; South African Institute for Race Relations (SAIRR), *Political representation of Africans* (Johannesburg, 1942), p. 23.



However, many of them continued to function as spokesmen for the farm labourers even after the elections, due to the paucity of other available means of articulating their grievances, again indicative of the fact that they enjoyed some genuine support amongst the electorate.<sup>27</sup> Even the last of these electoral units under discussion, namely the unit which voted under a chief, was not prone to the whims of the individual. Rheinalt Jones (who won the senatorial seat in the Transvaal in 1937) comments that in the course of his election campaign it was clear that the chiefs were forced to listen to their people and could not vote for whom they liked.<sup>28</sup>

Efforts were made to ensure that the electoral system was efficient, even in the rural areas. In 1940 an amendment of the Act was passed to make sure that the electoral committees were not presided over by the Native Commissioners and that no person other than Africans were present at these meetings. Voting was by a show of hands, the decisions of the majority present being regarded as the decision of the body concerned. Minutes of the proceedings recording how each unit voted were to be kept and lodged with the magistrate of the district.<sup>29</sup>

In the elections under the Representation of Natives Act, candidates had to be nominated by sufficient electoral units to enter the election proper.<sup>30</sup>

Thus although it can be seen that the electoral system was a complex one, it was not inefficient and the men who were elected to represent blacks on the NRC were the leaders of the Africans at that time. Most of them were stalwarts of the ANC and had participated in the AAC. Some were or had been members of the ICU. But none were members of the CPSA.

The ANC, in spite of its disorganized state, won more seats on the NRC in 1937 than did any other political party. In 1942 it made a concerted and successful effort to see that its chosen candidates were elected to the council, and this recurred in 1948. This meant in effect that ANC views and decisions dominated proceedings in the NRC.<sup>31</sup>

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27 SAIRR, p. 4, JD Rheinalt Jones.

28 Roth, "The formation ...", pp. 61-3.

29 Roth, "The formation ...", pp. 88ff.

30 Roth, "The formation ...", pp. 100ff.

31 Roth, "The formation...", p. 112; Roth, "The Natives...", pp. 152, 170 and 173; University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Xuma Papers ABX421126b, J Calata to AB Xuma, 26 November 1942; Roth, "Domination...", pp. 146-61.

The question which must be asked is why the communists were so unsuccessful in getting their people elected to the NRC. In the 1937 elections, the Secretary-General of the CPSA, Edwin Mofutsanyana, stood for the Transvaal-OFS rural seat. His lack of popularity (he was nominated by a small unit representing 2000 voters only) led to his elimination in the nomination stage of the elections and he was not qualified to participate in the election itself.<sup>32</sup> At the next election in 1942, the CPSA originally put forward three candidates - Mofutsanyana, Alpheus Maliba and a certain Lekgetho, who toured the rural areas together in an attempt to get the rural vote. All were defeated. Alpheus Maliba was nominated by only one chief and as in the case of Mofutsanyana in 1937, had to withdraw when it became obvious what there was a lack of support for him from other electoral units.<sup>33</sup>

The importance that Delius and Hirson attached to Maliba's activities in the Zoutpansberg is not supported by Maliba's poor electoral results, both in 1942 and 1948. Only the immediate chief for whom Maliba worked as secretary cast his vote for him and while it is not disputed that this may very well have been a popular choice, it is nevertheless significant that he got no other votes in the Transvaal. In addition the influence of the CPSA on migrants in the Transvaal through the activities of Maliba is also not reflected in the election results.<sup>34</sup> Migrant voters would have been included in the electoral committees and these too did not vote for a Communist Party candidate.<sup>35</sup>

The claim by the CPSA paper, *Inkululeko*, that Maliba's organization had 3000 members, is most unlikely. As Delius states, this was more than the CPSA or the ANC at that time had in the whole of the Transvaal.<sup>36</sup>

In 1948 Communist Party members who tried to get elected to the NRC had no more support than in previous years. Mofutsanyana and AS Damane, both members of the Party's Central Committee, stood as candidates. Govan Mbeki stood as a candidate in the Transkei.<sup>37</sup> Maliba was again nominated by only one unit and Damane by none. Support for these candidates was so sparse that both of them withdrew from the election, as did Govan Mbeki. Accusations

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32 Roth, "The formation ...", pp. 102 and 106.

33 Roth, "The Natives ...", pp. 50-1 and 151; B Hirson, *Yours for the union, class and community struggles in South Africa, 1930-1947* (Johannesburg, 1990), p. 124.

34 Bonner et al., pp. 17, 144.

35 Roth, "Domination ...", p. 149; Hirson, pp. 128-34.

36 Bonner et al., pp. 157-8, ft. 85, 86.

37 *Guardian*, 15 January 1948; *Inkundla Ya Bantu*, 14 January 1948.

that Mofutsanyana only carried on in order to save face for the Communist Party, appear to be well founded.<sup>38</sup>

The odd aspect of these elections was that white CPSA members were far better supported than the Africans who stood for the NRC. Hyman Basner initially stood in opposition to Rheinalt Jones in the 1937 senatorial elections in the Transvaal-Orange Free State seat. He was defeated, gaining less than a quarter of the votes of Rheinalt Jones, a liberal and head of the Institute of Race Relations. However, in 1942 Basner won the seat. Rheinalt Jones's defeat was attributed to his late entry to the election and also that the war years had made the electorate more militant than formerly but if this was the reason for Basner's election then why were black members of the party so unsuccessful in the 1942 NRC elections?<sup>39</sup>

An example of the kind of programme put forward by the CPSA at the time can be found in a pamphlet issued by Maliba in an attempt to gain the support of the Venda. It is noteworthy in that some of its proposals are almost identical to those found in the Freedom Charter of the 1950s, yet appeared to have engendered only limited enthusiasm. Its principles were not as orthodox as in the Freedom Charter, for example, the pamphlet stated that the CP wanted individual land tenure to take the place of tribal tenure "so that competition will be encouraged, and the farm workers will have the incentive to improve their land". However, other clauses echoed the Freedom Charter, viz., "Land must be taken from the rich and be returned to the people" and "Mines must be taken from the mine owners and become the property of the people to use to their own advantage". In spite of the fact that this document also stated that the CPSA was in favour of the abolition of all taxation, it was not sufficient for this type of programme to gain national support.<sup>40</sup>

The CPSA hoped that it would be its policy, rather than its candidates, which would ensure an electoral victory. Its policy was, however, rarely a local one but always focused on national issues. And its candidates had no individual stature. None of them had risen to any prominence before becoming CPSA members and in the end they were just paid party functionaries with no individual standing among the masses.

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38 Roth, "The Natives ...", p. 497ff.

39 Roth, "The formation ...", p. 108; Roth, "The Natives ...", pp. 229-30.

40 SACP Serial Publication, *The conditions of the Venda people*, p. 8.

Basner resigned his seat but another white Communist Party candidate, Sam Kahn, was elected in 1948, this time to the House of Assembly. Again, the black members of the party who stood in the 1948 elections were defeated. However, there was an important difference between the electorate who voted for Kahn and those who voted for the members of the Representative Council. Those who voted for Kahn were the Africans who had the financial and educational advantages to qualify for the erstwhile Cape franchise. It was thus not the masses who voted for the communist candidate but the, by comparison, elite blacks of the Cape.<sup>41</sup>

As previously noted, George Champion, elected in 1942 and re-elected in 1948, was an example of a man who had risen to political prominence through his success at resolving local issues. Most of the members of the NRC were symbols of success to the black electorate through their own personal achievements. None of the CPSA black candidates were self-made men. They were paid functionaries of the CPSA and had acquired little personal stature in the way that Dr Moroka or ZK Matthews or newspaper editors like AM Jabavu or RV Selope Thema had managed to acquire.<sup>42</sup> This too may have affected their support at the polls.

Debates of the Natives Representative Council centered on similar issues to those which had been highlighted by councillors such as Champion and Msimang before their election and which were also similar to the type of issues adopted by the ICU. In the fourteen year existence of the NRC, these were the types of issues which were granted by the government. An example of the type of measure asked for and adopted was the request leading to the establishment of a medical service in Peddie in the Transkei in 1940. Another resolution which was adopted was that which asked for the free distribution of milk, butter and cheese to black children in state run schools. In 1941, for example, out of 98 motions presented, 35 were resolutions of this kind. Basically they realized that issues on social welfare in specific localities were more likely to gain the support of the Department of Native Affairs and get positive results than their political resolutions.<sup>43</sup>

This trend was, not unexpectedly, encouraged by the Department of Native Affairs. The Department arranged for councillors to meet once every three

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41 Roth, "The Natives ...", pp. 522-3.

42 Roth, "Domination ...", p. 146.

43 Roth, "The Natives ...", pp. 341-2.

months with the native commissioners from the areas which had elected them in order to discuss local problems.<sup>44</sup>

The NRC did of course also take up national political issues in its debates and it was this which caused the adjournment of the Council in 1946. But such issues had very little success.<sup>45</sup>

It was not only councillors in the NRC who found that their successes were limited to matters of this kind. The Native Representatives in Parliament also found that their successes were confined to such issues. One of the few successful motions of Edgar Brookes who represented Natal Africans in the Senate, was in lifting the restrictions on gathering wood in government forests.<sup>46</sup>

In conclusion it seems that local conditions, often social rather than political, were the means that the ANC and the ICU used to get political support.

There were a number of reasons why it was preferable to pursue such issues. The first was that, if there was some recourse to legal aid, then such situations might well be rectified in the local magistrate's court. Another factor was that whereas political issues would quickly bring down the wrath of the police and the Native Affairs Department, on the people and activists concerned, local issues did not have the same effect. The Department of Native Affairs might well support measures which might improve the lives of members of the community and at the same time enhance the status of the activist who had brought the matter to the attention of the Department. Last but not least it appears that communal action was difficult to achieve for most of the period under discussion.

All this made it imperative for political parties in those years to support local issues. The only party which did not do so was the CPSA which can be said to have been in a kind of ideological straitjacket for most of the time and which paid for this with a loss of popularity. It would be too much of a simplification to state that this was the only reason for the unpopularity of the CPSA. The calibre of its candidates and their stature or lack of it among the masses are also factors which must be taken into account.

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44 Government Archives, Pretoria. NTS 1794 89/276(3), "Meetings with Chief Native Commissioners and Native members of the Representative Council".

45 M Roth, "The adjournment of the Natives Representative Council", in *Historia*, Vol. 41, No. 2, November 1996, pp. 61-73.

46 Roth, "Domination ...", pp. 153-4.

It is clear from the pamphlet issued by the CPSA in 1938 on behalf of Maliba's efforts in the rural areas which was in many respects similar to the Freedom Charter that they had the vision to see what the masses wanted on a national level. However, they could only succeed at that time if they addressed specific local issues, something which they did all too rarely.

The pamphlet asked for unity "between the Venda people and all other African tribes, so that they must struggle together against restrictions which affect them all equally". It appears that they were not interested in standing together against restrictions which affected them all equally until the 1950s, and could with rare exceptions only be aroused if their own particular interests were being threatened at any one time.<sup>47</sup>

This inability to perceive a wider common interest may also have been as a result of the lack of communication, and the illiteracy of the populace in general and also the Cape Franchise which set some of the Cape Africans apart. Although this article focuses on such issues between 1920 and 1950, there is much evidence to suggest that issues of this nature were of relevance in local protests well into the 1980s. The importance of issues of a local and social nature appears to be a topic worthy of further investigation.<sup>48</sup>

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47 SACP, p. 8.

48 Walshe, p. 224.