

Why did the African National Congress lose the election in the Western Cape? Were they caught napping by the National Party?  
**SOBANTU XAYIYA** speaks to disgruntled township dwellers.

# Cape of great gloom

**T**HE African townships of Cape Town remained gloomy while many took to the streets to celebrate the ANC victory in the country's first democratic elections. Still licking the wounds of the regional defeat, shocked residents wondered what went wrong.

Some blamed the coloured community, which constitutes a substantial majority in the region, for abandoning them and betraying their trust. Others put the blame squarely on the ANC, which they criticised both for the lack of a clear election strategy for addressing the concerns of the community in question, and for choosing Alan Boesak as its candidate for regional premier.

The views of the four people quoted in this article are heard from many disenchanted residents of Cape Town's townships.

Vuyani Boyce, 32, a teacher at Sithembale Mathiso Secondary School in New Cross-

roads, thinks it was obvious that the ANC would run a neck-and-neck race with the National Party and that it was possible that the NP "could take the coloureds". The NP exploited this situation; the ANC ignored it. The ANC was caught napping by the NP.

Boyce has no doubt that the ANC's choice of Boesak as candidate premier contributed to the party's defeat.

"The coloured community is deeply religious and probably didn't like the way the candidate premier conducted his personal life. I don't think they forgave him for abandoning his former wife, Dorothy, a devoted comrade. I think Boesak was the first factor that militated against the ANC's election campaign in the region."

Another mistake the ANC made, in his view, was to attempt to market Boesak to voters. The NP, by contrast, downplayed Hemus Kriel, now regional premier, because they knew he was unpopular.

Asked to comment on the fact that many people asked "who is this person?" and refused to accept badges showing Boesak's face when Mandela badges ran out temporarily, Boyce pointed to an emotional attachment to Mandela, particularly among older people.

"But Mandela was never too attractive to the conservative section of the coloured community. This section sees him as a leader of an African-led, black nationalist movement which is different from the UDF (United Democratic Front) that they were part of."

As far as Boyce is concerned, the coloured community never felt apartheid as harshly as their African counterparts, and this is one of the reasons why they voted for the NP.

"If you look at the people repairing telephones here, they are coloured. People holding managerial jobs, at supermarket tills, clothing factories, even students working part time at supermarkets are all coloured. The Africans have always observed this but, because of our sophisticated approach to politics, we have tried to ignore this

practice in the interests of avoiding the creation of rifts between African and coloured. Nevertheless, the coloureds have always rejected Africans, viewing them as third-class citizens."

Another factor that contributed to the ANC defeat in the region, according to Boyce, was the elitist image of regional office bearers.

ANC Western Cape deputy regional secretary Chris Nissen says the issues are more complicated. Unwilling to blame anyone for the ANC defeat, Nissen emphasises the logistical problems that were a feature of the whole election process. He also points out that statistics show that nearly half a million coloured people did vote for the ANC in the region.

Asked how his organisation was going to relate to the NP-dominated regional government, Nissen said the ANC did not see itself as the opposition but as an extension of the national government, and its duty was to build provisional unity in the region.

It may be a difficult duty to fulfil. Acrimony towards coloured people is widespread.

ANC regional office worker Thoko Ndlumbini, 25, of Old Location in Nyanga, believes that most coloured people gained security under the apartheid regime and identify with the National Party.

"Most don't see themselves as part of the oppressed. Even those not possessing the necessary qualifications are catered for – they work in factories. Others are too involved with their religion and refrain from being involved in politics."

Education, Resource and Information Project (Erip) worker Koki Dlabantu says the ANC should have concentrated on the coloured working class instead of expending effort on the middle class. He also worries about acrimony between African and coloured people.

He faults the ANC in the region for an undemocratic process of choosing a candidate premier: "I don't think the opinion of all the forces in the democratic movement was tested in regard to this question," he says.

Dlabantu believes that the major task of the government of national unity will be "to start a proactive programme to deal with the working class in these areas and address issues of racialism." ■

