

ECC & Municipal Elections

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to generate discussion nationally about ECC's relationship to the municipal elections. It advocates a rather bold and perhaps controversial approach which would be something of a departure for ECC. Hopefully it will be received as a starting point for discussion rather than a "line" which the organisation is being asked to follow slavishly.

To effectively debate the proposals it would help to have prior discussion about the broader issues at stake in the elections, including; the state's strategy, the strategic response of the Democratic movement, and initiatives to build alliances amongst anti-apartheid groups within the white community.

ASSUMPTIONS

From the above issues the following assumptions inform the proposal for an EC approach to the elections:

1) Elections for all race groups have been called simultaneously and been politicised to demonstrate to the world that South Africa has a universal franchise within which blacks are enthusiastically participating. For this reason amongst others the Democratic Movement has maintained that the correct strategy is to boycott the elections, thereby denying credibility to the black local authorities and frustrating the state's aims.

2) In the white election the Nats aim to consolidate control at a municipal level on the basis of their party's proposed racial reforms, especially in respect of the group areas issue. Their opposition is the CP more than the PFP. However in the major cities the PFP/ anti-apartheid candidates have significant strength such that the white electorate is offered the option of pro- or anti-apartheid council and not just choices between interpretations of white power. For our constituency this is a real choice.

3) Since the 1987 general election there have been significant moves to look for complimentary ground between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary white anti-apartheid forces. The Democratic Movement sees this as a positive move which will benefit the overall struggle. Nevertheless resultant initiatives such as Five Freedoms in Jo'burg and similar moves elsewhere are not seen as part of the DM, but as distanced developments arising from the conditions of white politics. For members of the DM to find common ground with others in such initiatives they need to be strategically flexible. In respect of the elections this would mean that people can involve themselves more directly as individuals with the end of building alliances, taking stands which are not necessarily in line with the DM's boycott position.

4) ECC is not part of the DM, but reflects the cross-spectrum of opinions of the anti-apartheid "conscripted community". This means that our strategies must be derived from a reading of where our constituency is at, not what the UDF is saying. Nevertheless as democratic people and as anti-apartheid actors we are always mindful of the opinions of the DM and would probably back away from any action which will disorganise their anti-apartheid efforts.

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5) The flexibility referred to in (3), taking account of the cautionary note in (4), creates the space for ECC to look at using the elections as a platform in a way that we have not considered previously.

6) The attitude of the DM referred to above is the view of leadership people with a sophisticated strategic approach to politics. In the current repressive climate there will not have been opportunities for thorough grassroots discussion on this "white politics" issue. In the black community there will be substantial hostility to the idea of whites voting. If we participate in any way we would need to consult black organisations extensively and successfully convince their membership of our viewpoint.

7) Whether ECC, or the UDF for that matter, boycotts an election is a strategic decision to be taken on an assessment of all the relevant factors. Boycotting is never a principle. In other words it is not an automatic assumption that one boycotts elections under apartheid. Either a boycott or participation call has to be motivated on the grounds that IT IS A POSITIVE/ ASSERTIVE STRATEGY WHICH DOES MOST TO ACHIEVE THE ORGANISATIONS OBJECTIVES

ECC's APPROACH

ECC should commit maximum possible effort to campaigning around the elections. In WHITE POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS voting is how one effects political situations. People who are usually hostile to, or alienated from political matters will be thinking about the issues and organisations placed before them and preparing to do their political duty - voting.

As for the parties and candidates the election is important to ECC because the public will be more receptive than at any other time. We won't be trying to win votes but the election is also a PLATFORM for us. We should use it to its maximum potential

AIMS

1) By participating in the "legitimate" political process of an election at a high profile level and rubbing shoulders with other groups involved we will be moving ECC more towards the CENTRE OF WHITE POLITICS. We can destroy any vestiges of a "loony fringe" image and develop a healthier image as a solid, credible and important organisation.

2) Boost the PROFILE of ECC

3) Raise the profile of ISSUES we identify as important.

4) BUILD RELATIONSHIPS with other groups and individual candidates which may benefit our campaign in the long term.

5) Add our resources and energies towards ELECTING relatively more anti-apartheid city councils. Despite the obvious limits of their power this has many practical benefits like getting poster permits, bookings for city halls etc.

OUR ELECTION ISSUES

1) JMC'S

We regard it as important to expose and thereby limit the extent of the military's control over South African politics. Through the NSMS the military establishment aims to harness all available resources towards the maintainanc of apartheid. If we are opposed to the role of troops in the townships defending apartheid, how much more important is it to challenge the hand that places them there.

Despite its importance the JMC issue has received little public attention. It operations are difficult to pin down and in themselves might even look positive. The critique of their mixture of reform and repression to maintain the system is unavoidably complex and intellectual. White people also do not have direct negative experiences of the JMC's operations.

The election is perhaps the only enviroment, and platform from which these structures can be effectively challenged. The JMC's are unelected, unrepresentative structures of local government. They directly effect the domain of the municipality and almost certainly undermine its authority.

In the context of a municipal election the following critique/ message to voters may be relevant.

"The Nats have imposed secret alternative local government structures composed of unelected bureaucrats and security force personel. These JMC's override the powers of the elected local government in the interests of Nationalist power. The Nats have undermined the power of the voters over our own communities and the authority of our town councils. Their candidates cannot be trusted because they represent a party which do not respect the voters democratic rights, and under party discipline they will be forced betray the council to the dictates of the secret JMC's".

2) ALTERNATIVE SERVICE

This issue is perhaps less directly relevant can be effectively raised as local government is presently an institution through which community service happens. Any extention of AS would affect the councils. We could urge candidates to support the extention of AS, lobby central government and to be willing to accomodate servers.

MESSAGE

To avoid the contentious issue of urging a vote it may be suugested that we raise these issues but leave whether people vote or not up to them as with the 1987 election. The problem is that as in 1987 this will be interpreted as a boycott call, which is alienating to our constituency

On the JMC issue we need not call on people to vote FOR candidates but following the anti-Nat critique above we could call on people, "not to vote for the Nats" which could be interpreted as a call not to vote, or to vote for anti-apartheid candidates. The call would also allow us not to directly associate with any particular anti-Nat groups in the election. It also fits into a political approach of "isolating the Nats".

With AS one would need to call on people to vote directly. This means that either we either take a pro vote position overall or we leave aside the AS issue.

SLOGANS

DON'T VOTE NAT
DON'T VOTE JMC
DEFEND CIVILIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT - DONT VOTE NAT
PROTECT OUR COUNCIL - DON'T VOTE NAT
ETC, ETC, ETC

CAMPAIGN PACKAGE

- 1) A POLICY BROCHURE outlining:
 - the importance of these elections
 - how the JMC's work, their intention and powers
 - why we oppose JMC's and how they affect the council and voters
 - our call to voters
 - other info about ECC, our policy, AS etc
- 2) A national poster and leaflet
- 3) Holding public and house meetings in specific wards to adress voters
- 4) Attending candidates meetings and questioning them. Especially Nats in marginal wards
- 5) Possibly limited door-to -door campaigning in specific areas on an experimental basis
- 6) With particular candidates we may even wish to help directly as individuals (or as ECC) if s/he explicitly supports our views.

Conclusion

Whatever approach ECC takes to the election in debating the matter the following points should always be kept in mind.

- It is not a principle matter to boycott
- Whatever our view it must have a strategic rationale which outways other options
- the election is primarily a platform to speak to the public
- the issues we want to project are more important than the voting question
- whatever our stand it must be thoroughly discussed with organisations of the DM
- If we want to look serious, professional and make an impact we need to move fast. Feedback on this proposal by NC is desireable

Love and best wishes
Gary

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END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

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