

# WE'RE PRO-BLACK, NOT ANTI-WHITE

RAPULE TABANE

rapule.tabane@citypress.co.za

**A**zanian People's Organisation (Azapo) president Strike Thokoane has an interesting analogy for explaining why many black people who supported the ANC for a long time are now turning to other parties 25 years since the dawn of democracy.

"I always liken this to a priest who tries to preach on Christmas Day or New Year's eve when people are enjoying themselves in a party. He tries to say, 'Jesus Christ saves' but the noise of the entertainment is drowning him out.

"But when they get sober, they want to go to the same person and say, 'By the way, what were you saying about Jesus?'"

He says that, for a long time after 1994, black people were very complacent about democracy, thinking they had "arrived".

"Our people were told that they have arrived and have nothing to do anymore. Everybody believed what they were told and promised. As a result, they were not even listening to the voice of Azapo. Others listened, but they thought we were rather too extreme and radical."

After losing the only seat it had in the 2014 elections, Azapo kept a low profile leading many to believe that it had disappeared from the radar of the political map. Of the three main liberation movements, the ANC prospered after 1994 while Azapo and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) of Azania have been in terminal decline. The PAC has one seat in parliament that is fiercely fought over by different factions.

The two parties have never recovered from their decision not to participate in the 1994 elections because they did not recognise the transitional arrangements made by the ANC and the National Party.

With barely any resources, Thokoane is fighting an uphill battle trying to reassert the relevance of Azapo in 2019, especially with young voters who do not know of or are not impressed by its struggle credentials.

Thokoane says, in getting through to young people, he

raises the following points: Do you know about June 16? Azapo was responsible for it. We know you know Steve Biko and we link Azapo with the values of Biko. People used to ridicule Azapo for talking about land, saying it was old fashioned, but look at the mood now.

"We tell them, 'Azapo stands for dignity of black people, hence its black consciousness roots. It is not anti white but it is pro black. We love black people more.'"

Azapo promises to make data more affordable and will enhance free education until graduate levels.

The former general secretary, deputy president and now president of the organisation says that they realise that this is a crucial election for their future. "For us, this is a make or break election. Should we not make it, we might not die, but it will be very difficult."

He asserts that the reason Azapo has stayed alive, even after losing a seat in parliament, is its principled ideology. "There have been other political parties that, when they lost an election, they went on to die. Thina sisayine ngegazi. Asiyeke. Asijindi (We don't give up). Because this thing that we are talking about is real. It is not opportunistic. We continue."

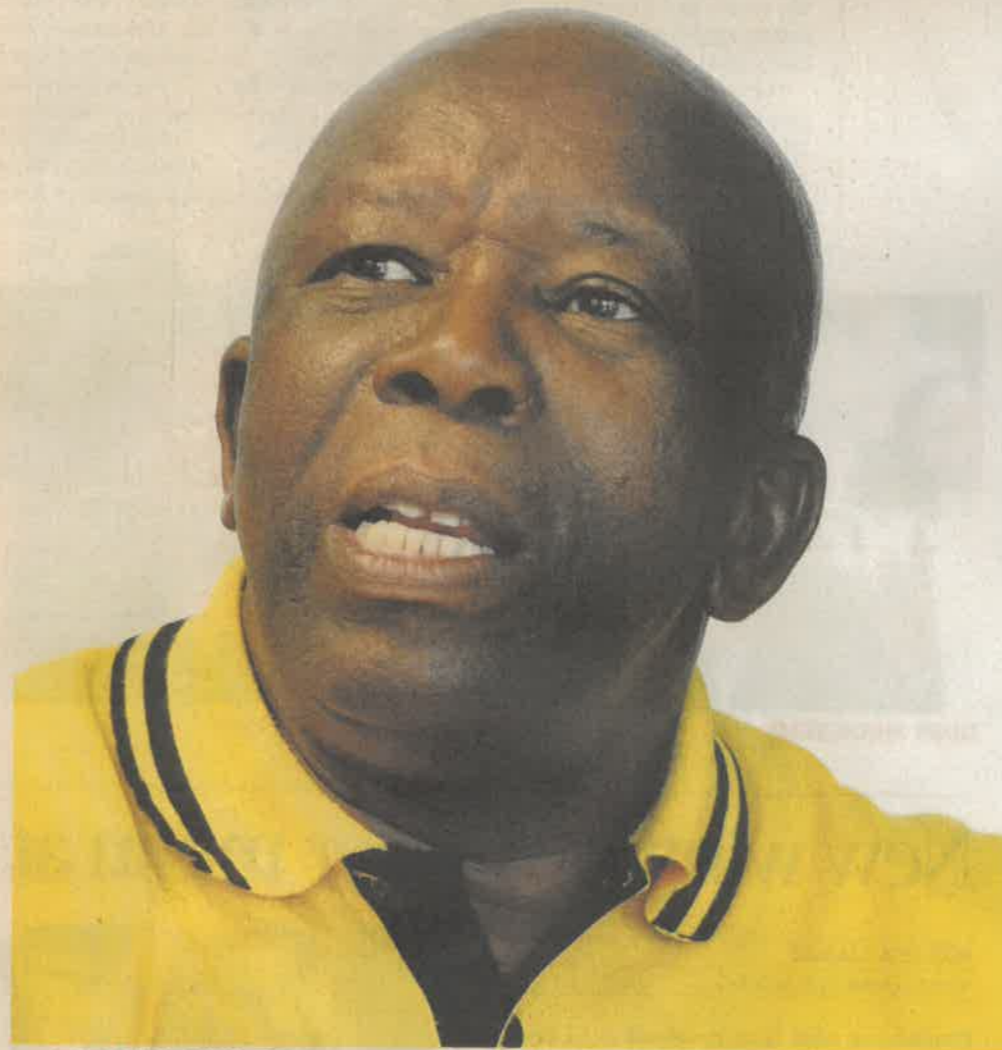
Thokoane said, as he was campaigning, some people said they knew about Azapo but asked where it has been. "We went to areas where we never thought we would be so well received. Like Xolobeni in the Eastern Cape where people said, 'We know what you stand for in terms of the land.'"

"We explained that we still continue with the values of Tsietshi Mashinini, Mapetla Mohapi, Muntu Myeza and Mme Kgoari.

"In a place called Lenyenye in Limpopo, this lady said, 'I have voted for the ANC for so many years but it has done nothing for me'. She said we must not encourage people not to vote, they must decide to vote the ANC out. She said, 'Block the ANC and vote for any other party.'"

Thokoane said they are chasing many seats because they want to play a meaningful role in a coalition government post the elections. "This is why we are not going for a seat. We want many seats in Parliament. We

CITY PRESS SUNDAY 21 APRIL 2019



ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL Azapo president Strike Thokoane

PHOTO: TEBOGO LETSIE

want to play a meaningful role in a coalition. There is a likelihood of a coalition in government."

He is confident of going back to parliament as well as gaining seats in Limpopo and Gauteng, among others.

"In Limpopo, it will take a miracle for us not to have a seat. We would want to know why. We are just everywhere there."

He said party veterans, such as party honorary president, Mosibudi Mangena, are assisting their premier candidate there to make a strong showing. In Gauteng, he has received support from his home region of Sedibeng where residents have promised to reward him for being the only leader of a political party who stays in the region.

Azapo will also campaign on the slogan of reversing the betrayal of promises to people

"The struggle has been sold. Black people have been sold for money and profit. Land has become fashionable but we have died for land. Our heroes have died for it. Land must be reconquered. So we must repossess it so that we can redistribute it.

"Unlike those who want to expropriate without compensation, we believe that, when you expropriate, you suggest it belongs to someone else and you are taking it by force. Repossession, however, means this belongs to us and we are taking it back."

"Land needs to be possessed by black people after it was unlawfully stolen. We must reconquer."

## TALK TO US

**How are you feeling about the coming elections? Do you think marginal parties have a chance? Do you think the elections will reflect what South Africans really want?**

SMS us on 35697 using the keyword VOTE and tell us what you think. Please include your name and province. SMSes cost R1.50. By participating, you agree to receive occasional marketing material.