

## **African National Congress (ANC): Attainment of Power, Post Liberation Phases and Current Crisis**

*Raymond Suttner\**

The ANC has emerged as the electorally overwhelmingly dominant force in South Africa, conforming to what is referred to as a “dominant party” although the organisation describes itself as a liberation movement rather than a political party. Successive elections have seen increase in that support and dissolution or decrease in the support for opposition parties, associated in varying degrees with apartheid, with the strongest party the Democratic Alliance (DA)<sup>1</sup> able to operate merely as an irritant with no prospect of ever attaining power. This is the focus of “dominant party” theorists who claim great dangers to democracy to lie in the electorally apparently unchallengeable situation. In earlier papers I have rejected the notion that the unlikelihood of ANC dominance being electorally challenged in the foreseeable future signifies the failure to consolidate democracy. I have argued that the need for a “circulation of elites” on a regular basis, as a condition for democracy, is nothing but a dogma emerging from people who claim expertise, but have no scientific basis for their argument.<sup>2</sup>

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\* Raymond Suttner is a Senior Researcher in the Walter and Albertina Sisulu Heritage and Knowledge Studies Unit, School of Graduate Studies and Research Fellow in the History Department, in the College of Human Sciences, at the University of South Africa, Pretoria. He is a former activist and political prisoner under apartheid. He has published widely in a number of disciplines, most recently *50 Years of the Freedom Charter* (with Jeremy Cronin, 2006). A work entitled *Rendering Visible* on underground organisation is currently under consideration for publication as a book. E-mail: [suttners@unisa.ac.za](mailto:suttners@unisa.ac.za).

1. While the Party originates from the Progressive Party, a breakaway from what had been J.C. Smuts’s United Party, it gradually moved to the right absorbing remnants of the United Party as it gradually eroded and later dissolved and in recent times it has also absorbed many former Nationalist Party politicians. While it calls itself a liberal party, it is more conservative than the earlier liberalism of the 1950s and it evokes considerable ambivalence in regard to transformational issues.
2. R. Suttner, “Democratic consolidation in South Africa: the advice of the ‘experts’”, *Current Sociology*, 52, 5, 2004, pp 755-774; R. Suttner, “Party Dominance ‘Theory’: of what value?”, *Politikon*, 33, December 2006, pp 277-298.

The focus in this article is on the conditions under which that dominance was established and the current crisis which may signify the long-term vulnerability of the ANC as an all-powerful unified organisational force. Neither the rise to dominance nor the threats to the organisation are treated as electoral phenomena in the main. They are analysed within the context of wider political factors which influenced the evolution of the organisation or internal dynamics which are threatening its very existence. Even if the current divisions were to lead to an implosion of the organisation, what would take its place and with what consequences for democracy is by no means clear.

The ANC's rise to being the dominant political force was by no means pre-ordained. For many periods of its history it was close to dormant and its existence was not manifested in patient organisation, as had been seen in the Communist and trade union movements.<sup>3</sup> The existence of the ANC as an organised force is a relatively late phenomenon, from the 1940s, just prior to the emergence of the ANC Youth League.<sup>4</sup> The ANC had a very short period as a legally structured and managed organisation due to the disruptions caused by the Treason Trial of 1956-1961<sup>5</sup> and its banning in 1960.

Prior to the ANC's unbanning in 1990, it now appears (though many activists and even leaders were not fully aware of this at the time) that there were divergent expectations about how the transition would unfold. Consequently while some may have been quite unprepared for the actual outcome, others may well have envisaged this for some time.

On the one hand from the mid 1980s the ANC called on the people of South Africa to "make apartheid unworkable and South Africa ungovernable".<sup>6</sup> They also called for the displacement of apartheid

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3. S. Dubow, *The African National Congress* (Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 2000), p xiv; R. Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting. Memoirs from a Life in South African Politics. 1938-1964* (Viking, London & New York, 1999).
  4. See P. Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa. The African National Congress, 1912-1952* (C. Hurst, London, 1970), pp 256-258, regarding the role of Canon James Calata and Doctor A.B. Xuma in creating an organisational base.
  5. This trial was mounted in response to the Congress of the People which adopted the Freedom Charter in 1955. Initially 156 people were charged and the numbers were later reduced to 30, all ultimately being acquitted.
  6. ANC [African National Congress], "Render South Africa Ungovernable! Message of the National Executive Committee of the African National

institutions by organs of popular power and indeed, such organs were established in many parts of the country.<sup>7</sup> The sense that the apartheid government was not able to re-establish governability, its own incapacity to successfully defeat or counter the forces of resistance, was coupled with encouragement from the ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP) to develop an insurrectionary climate. In fact, Operation Vula mounted in the mid 1980s was aimed at connecting internal and external forces more effectively than had been the case in the past and it was an underground operation with a degree of sophistication that had not previously been seen.<sup>8</sup>

The impact of the Vula operation was tangible. Until the late 1980s it was very difficult to obtain illegal literature, especially the much prized anniversary statement of the ANC. But Vula changed things, in that on 8 January 1989, many people received the ANC's annual anniversary statement on their doorstep side by side with the daily newspaper.

There was then within the country an insurrectionary mode of operation with mass activity of a variety of kinds, MK<sup>9</sup> activities and the building of underground machinery. This coexisted with legal activities of the United Democratic Front (UDF) facing increasing repression.<sup>10</sup>

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Congress on the 73rd Anniversary of the ANC. January 8 1985." <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/or/or85-1.html>, accessed on 16 July 2006.

7. ANC, "From Ungovernability to Peoples [sic] Power - 1986, ANC Call to the People." <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/ungovern.html>, accessed on 16 July 2006. See also M. Neocosmos, "From Peoples' Politics to State Politics: Aspects of National Liberation in South Africa", in A.O. Olukoshi (ed), *The Politics of Opposition in Contemporary Africa* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 1998), pp 195-241; R. Suttner, "The UDF Period and its Meaning for Contemporary South Africa: Review Article", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30, 3, 2004, pp 691-702; R. Suttner, "Legacies and Meanings of the United Democratic Front (UDF) Period for Contemporary South Africa", in C. Hendricks and L. Lushaba (eds), *From National Liberation to Democratic Renaissance in Southern Africa* (CODESRIA, Dakar, 2005), pp 59-81.
8. Interview: P. Gordhan, Pretoria, 2003, transcription and tape in possession of the author; C. Braam, *Operation Vula* (Jacana, Bellevue & Johannesburg, 2002).
9. MK is the abbreviation conventionally used to refer to the military wing of the ANC, *uMkhonto we Sizwe*, meaning the Spear of the Nation.
10. R.M. Price, *The Apartheid State in Crisis. Political Transformation in South Africa, 1975-1990* (Oxford University Press, New York & Oxford, 1991); S. Mufson, *Fighting Years. Black Resistance and the Struggle for a New South Africa* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1990).

At the end of the decade in 1989, the SACP adopted an insurrectionary programme at a congress held in Cuba, chaired by Thabo Mbeki.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the Communist delegates like many ANC soldiers in the camps and inside the country believed that the overall goal was to seize power by revolutionary means.

Yet at the same time, without the knowledge of most of these delegates and even some or most members of the leadership of the ANC<sup>12</sup>, negotiations were beginning, parallel processes between former President Mandela and his jailers inside and outside the country, through the facilitation of the intelligence services, meetings between certain government figures and ANC leaders like Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma.<sup>13</sup>

Why the involvement of the apartheid intelligence services? On the side of the apartheid regime, prior to the formation of the National Intelligence Service (NIS), post 1960 intelligence was mainly police-related. It was connected to securing convictions or capturing people who were seen as ringleaders in an attempt to undermine the apartheid system. The social order itself did not come into question. This was the case with Republican Intelligence, the predecessor to BOSS (the Bureau

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11. SACP [South African Communist Party], *The Path to Power. Programme of the South African Communist Party* (Inkululeko Publications, London, 1989).
  12. V. Shubin, *ANC. A view from Moscow* (Mayibuye Books, Bellville, 1999), for example at p 326 where he quotes Chris Hani raising his concern.
  13. A. Sparks, *Tomorrow is another country. The inside story of South Africa's negotiated settlement* (Arrow Books, London, 1997); P. Waldmeier, *Anatomy of a miracle. The end of apartheid and the birth of the new South Africa* (Penguin Books, London, 1997). See the recently published work, J. Sanders, *Apartheid's friends. The rise and fall of South Africa's secret service* (John Murray, London, 2006), chapter 14. Steven Friedman, in an e-mail on 4 August 2006 asks whether there was not greater awareness of the negotiations within the ANC than I suggest (and Rupert Taylor, in personal communication, made similar suggestions, though he appeared to relate this to phenomena like the visit of Afrikaner scholars to meet the ANC in Dakar, rather than formal talks). While Friedman understands my perspective from within the country, he recalls a visit to Lusaka where the impression was that many people they engaged with were aware that "something was up". He also refers to the 1987 ANC statement on negotiations. It is undoubtedly true that there was a circle of people who had more or less insight into these processes and they may have hinted something of it to these visitors. After all, some people from inside, like Professor Willie Esterhuyse, were involved in facilitating the talks, so that some others may also have been told that something was going on. At the same time, from what is cited in the text, there were many who had no idea that such developments were in motion.

of State Security) and BOSS itself, both headed by General Hendrik van den Bergh.

With the Muldergate Information scandal<sup>14</sup>, one of the casualties was BOSS and a new head of intelligence, Doctor L.D. Barnard, with no intelligence background was brought into the position and mandated to establish a new agency under the Prime Ministership and later Presidency of P.W. Botha. BOSS and Republican Intelligence had been directly connected to police operations, and they were modelled on the CIA, who offered some early assistance to Van den Bergh. The model, like that of Mossad was one where gathering of intelligence as well as operational activities, such as assassinations or leading roles in invasions, were part of the job description of an intelligence agency.

Barnard built the new agency on a completely different basis. Despite being conservative in orientation, he placed value on accurate evaluations and excluded operational activities. (It was not that he disapproved of them, but felt they were not within the ambit of the NIS). This value placed on analysis gradually led to the NIS having a predisposition towards negotiations. Unlike the police and military intelligence who thought that their action against “the enemy” would solve the problem, the NIS came to believe that the real enemy was not outside in Angola or anywhere else, but comprised the conditions of black people in South Africa. Over time the NIS argued that a sustainable solution could not be built without talking to the ANC. None of this was known outside of the inner circles, but it is confirmation of state theories which point to different orientations of different parts of the state and how this can come to have an important role in subsequent outcomes.<sup>15</sup>

That there had been these talks without the knowledge of the membership of the ANC and its allies resulted in a degree of disunity after 1990. Many people who had been preparing for an insurrectionary

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14. The Muldergate scandal arose from transfer of funds, with the consent of the then Prime Minister B.J. Vorster, to the then Minister of Information, Doctor Connie Mulder, some of which were used for illegal purposes, including the establishment of the *Citizen* newspaper.

15. These insights derive from an overall summary of what I have come to understand from discussions with former apartheid intelligence officials in the last few years. That there were such divisions within state institutions is something I was taught while trained as an underground operative, but I was never aware of its actually being the case. For a recent substantial account of apartheid intelligence, see Sanders, *Apartheid's Friends*.

seizure found themselves in a situation where the same leaders who had encouraged them to risk everything to overthrow the apartheid regime were talking to “the enemy”. In fact within a few months they were making concessions that rocked MK especially, when the ANC leadership unilaterally suspended armed action.<sup>16</sup>

There is no doubt that the conditions of the late 1980s created a situation which Gramsci describes as “reciprocal siege”<sup>17</sup> where one side could not contain resistance, but that resistance was insufficiently powerful to dislodge the incumbent government. Neither could defeat the other, no side was on their knees. That is a situation conducive to a negotiated settlement. Negotiations become possible where both parties recognise that they cannot impose their will on the other or can only do so at a cost that they are unwilling to bear.

No doubt, also, where one foresees this development which some but not all of the leadership did, one has to conduct one’s talks in secret and cannot consult in a conventional democratic way, insofar as it was widely practised in the UDF and to a lesser degree in exile. The success of the linking of the two parties if that were to be the route to resolving the apartheid situation required a degree of secrecy and dissimulation, even towards the ANC’s own membership and followers.<sup>18</sup>

Justifiable as it may have been within the pre-negotiations context, the steps taken to manage the transition after 1990 did not take sufficient account of the sense of betrayal and anger felt amongst many of the membership. Some of that bitterness continues.<sup>19</sup> There was in fact a

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16 Personal experience as a political actor in this period.

17. A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971), pp 238-239.

18. The constitutionality of withholding information from leadership, if valid, is a serious question that deserves investigation. Whether or not it was the case is hard to research because of the confidentiality of proceedings. My impression is that the office bearers of the ANC tended always to know some things that were not communicated to the whole leadership. This applied not only to negotiations but also to underground operations like Vula which may only have been known to President Oliver Tambo and then leader of the SACP, Joe Slovo, who were its joint commanders. When I was a member of the ANC national leadership between 1991 and 1997 I never heard any item from the intelligence services presented to the National Executive Committee (NEC). Undoubtedly there were reports, but these were provided, presumably, to the office bearers or the President alone.

19. Personal experience as a political actor at the time and from speaking to political figures from MK or from the ungovernability period within the country.

widespread, if misguided, belief that the liberation forces could have defeated the apartheid regime militarily and that the attempt to do so had been shut down prematurely. That ANC Deputy President Jacob Zuma can evoke great emotions when he sings the song “*Umshini Wam / Bring me my machine gun*” speaks to this sense of frustrated militarism, a sense that there could have been a different outcome.

Also it left many cadres with skills which had a few years earlier been valued, for example, that required to blow up SASOL,<sup>20</sup> feeling that they would soon be of little use in the type of society being negotiated. And indeed many of the people who are now without means of subsistence are those who sacrificed conventional educational opportunities to learn military skills.<sup>21</sup> There has not been a concerted programme to re-skill them in order to occupy a place where they can contribute and benefit in the current situation.<sup>22</sup> Those who made no such sacrifices and had the opportunity to acquire higher degrees, often joining the organisation in the 1990s or have not joined, are often better placed than many who sacrificed such opportunities to join MK. This may also be part of the process whose development is to be outlined later, where the ANC *as organisation* has seen its importance – uneven as it may have been historically – diminish.

In a sense, the decision that a few individuals should engage in talks with the other side, without keeping their comrades in leadership, let alone the organisation as a whole, abreast of exactly what was happening, may be the earliest signs of the diminution in power of the ANC as organisation.

#### **Reconstitution of the ANC as a legal organisation: simultaneous conjunctural change on both the national and international front**

The development of the ANC as an organisation from 1989 constituted its entry into a number of situations, which amounted to conjunctural changes of great significance. In the first place its legalisation occurred at the same time as the collapse of some and ultimately all of the Eastern

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20. The fuel from oil plants built by the apartheid regime in order to cope with potential oil sanctions, blown up by MK guerrillas in 1980.

21. See L. Mashike, “‘Some of us know nothing except military skills’: South Africa’s former guerrilla combatants”, in S. Buhlungu, J. Daniel, R. Southall and J. Lutchman (eds), *State of the Nation. South Africa 2007* (HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2007), pp 351-378.

22. Mashike, “South Africa’s former guerrilla combatants”, pp 352, 355-356, 357, 362-363.

European socialist states. Consequently, the entire edifice on which the ANC/SACP's international relations had been based and depended to a greater degree than most, was no more.

This also had a bearing on ANC conceptions of transformation where, as with many independent African states, expectations of support from the former Socialist states were harboured. Support for the USSR and its allies was not peculiar to the SACP. The ANC in fact issued its own statement supporting Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and provided other pro-Soviet statements.

The legalisation of 1990 was obviously a conjunctural change within the country with the organisation free to re-establish itself. This was not however unqualified in that the ANC operated subject to formal and informal repression that put it at a disadvantage compared with more conservative forces.

Consequently when we consider how events have unfolded, we need to take account of the complexity of suddenly operating under completely changed conditions, both internally and externally. On the one hand the internal situation created new openings, but on the other the external environment created obstacles precluding certain forms of development and removing certain bases of international support.

### **Organisational implications of reconstituting the ANC as a legal body**

The reconstitution of the ANC was a much more difficult task than was understood by its leadership at the time and some of the consequences of that process that were not adequately confronted may be part of the reason for divisions that are currently surfacing. In the first place, the organisation that constituted itself as the ANC, was not simply the re-establishment of what had existed in 1960. A number of different strands, some of which only came to exist in the period after 1960, were brought together, each embracing quite different cultures of political work, though there were also overlaps and continuities. I refer here to those from exile and MK<sup>23</sup>, underground within the country<sup>24</sup> (open

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23. R. Suttner, "Culture(s) of the ANC of South Africa: Imprint of exile experiences", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 21, 2, May 2003, pp 303-320.

24. R. Suttner, "Early history of the African National Congress (ANC) underground: From the M-Plan to Rivonia", *South African Historical Journal*, 49, 2003, pp 123-146; R. Suttner, "The Reconstitution of the South African



politics like the UDF)<sup>25</sup> and those from prison especially Robben Island.<sup>26</sup> Each of these strands brought distinct cultural influences into the organisation, ways of thinking, acting and relating to other comrades and these differences were a source of tension and often not seen as mutually enriching.<sup>27</sup> At the same time one can exaggerate the differences and underestimate the convergences, linkages and direct sharing of experiences, structures and ways of understanding.<sup>28</sup>

In a sense the UDF had always viewed itself as the “B team”, waiting for the arrival of the “A team, the real ANC” and retreated to the changing room to make way for the ANC NEC to lead the country. It dissolved itself, though certain internal leaders formed part of the ANC interim leadership core, which often met together with the NEC.<sup>29</sup> This was a facet of the UDF’s failure to understand that it was both a substitute for the ANC and simultaneously much more. It was doing things that the ANC could not and had never done and could often not imagine being done, since these could only be carried out “on the ground”.<sup>30</sup>

In its reconstitution, the ANC under-estimated the tasks entailed in re-establishment that would continue to be unsatisfactorily addressed right into the twenty-first century. It has been mentioned that the ANC had existed *as an organised force* for only a short period of its history, in the 1950s or at the earliest from the 1940s. Until the 1940s the organisation’s operations consisted mainly of annual conferences and it was only during the presidency of Doctor A.B. Xuma and Secretary General Reverend (later Canon) James Calata that the first attempts were made to establish the ANC as an organisation with functioning structures.<sup>31</sup> The late Communist veteran, Rusty Bernstein claimed that unlike the conventional belief that the Communist Party had a major influence on the ANC at an ideological level, his view was that Communist influence was mainly through teaching sound organisational

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Communist Party as an underground organisation”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 22, 1, January 2004, pp 43-68.

25. Suttner, “The UDF Period”; Suttner, “Legacies and Meanings of the UDF”; Neocosmos, “From Peoples’ Politics”.
26. F. Buntman, *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003).
27. J. Rantete, *The African National Congress and the negotiated settlement in South Africa* (J.L van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria, 1998), chapter 1.
28. See Suttner, “Early History”; Suttner, “The UDF Period”; Suttner, “Legacies and Meanings of the UDF”.
29. Rantete, *The African National Congress*, chapter 1.
30. Suttner, “The UDF Period”; Suttner, “Legacies and Meanings of the UDF”.
31. Walshe, *Rise of African Nationalism*, from p 256.

methods, which had been lacking in the ANC.<sup>32</sup> While making a valid point, Bernstein may be under-estimating the Communist ideological impact.<sup>33</sup> However the character and extent of that ideological influence varied over time.

At any rate not only Communists but the earlier work of non-Communists, like Calata, Xuma and increasingly close cooperation with the Communists and the Indian Congresses created conditions in the 1950s where the visions of the ANC Youth League, established in the 1940s, could be turned into more than radical slogans and become organisational programmes.

Thus when the ANC reconstituted itself in 1990 it was not continuing what had existed, because even the gains that had been made in the 1950s had been interrupted by the treason trial and 30 years of illegality. Prior to being banned, the ANC was an organisation which obviously embraced what must have been *relative* unity, in that there have always been tensions between regions, beliefs, sometimes ethnic and other tensions. That is why even in the twenty-first century, one can see in many of the provinces that the ANC has not yet found a formula for achieving sustainable unity and in the Free State and Western Cape, particularly, there is a continuing tension between sections of the organisation and in the case of the Free State between the popularly elected ANC leadership and the presidential appointment of premiers.<sup>34</sup> In a sense there is no way these and certain tensions in other regions are going to be resolved in the foreseeable future.

So these are indications of the tasks, not always recognised at the time, that faced the ANC at the time of legalisation. The opportunity was not simply what it appeared to be on paper, unification of an organisation as one, open to all that accepted its principles. It had to contain within this unity a variety of strands that continue to tear at one another or at the very least embrace conceptions of what the organisation is or should be that are at odds with one another.<sup>35</sup>

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32. Interview in P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle. Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal* (Heinemann, Ravan Press & James Currey, Portsmouth – New Haven, Johannesburg & Oxford, 1996), p 101.

33. Personal communication from Vladimir Shubin, 8 May 2006.

34. There is also a simmering tension in the Free State between Xhosa-speakers, colloquially referred to as “Matabele”, and Sotho-speakers.

35. See also Rantete, *The African National Congress*, pp 6-7.

The situation carried seeds of inbuilt tensions, due to the difference in background of those who came to be new members without any background in the organisation and those who had joined at a time when it was dangerous or left the country, sacrificing opportunities for education or security. Open membership means open to all and that was quite different to what had been the case for 30 years where members had generally been carefully screened.

At the same time the lessons absorbed through membership in the period preceding 1990 could not automatically be applied in the new situation. It is true that veterans could explain how they understood the meaning of ANC history. But the general lessons that Commissars had provided in the military camps and in the units scattered outside and inside the country, applied to a different conjuncture from that which had opened up. The cadres both inside and outside the country had been schooled in Soviet texts and ANC/SACP documentation which was orientated towards revolutionary seizure of power. It entailed a model of the organisation which was highly militarised and the language of the organisation remains so to this day, for example with use of words like “deployment” or groups in Soweto referring to themselves as the Diepkloof “detachment”.<sup>36</sup>

The external environment was obviously completely different, the world that the organisation inhabited changed almost overnight. The terrain on which it had to operate within the country immediately evoked much external Western advice on how to transform the organisation into a political party that could deal with modern politics. The collapse of Eastern European socialism left these advisers with more openings than they previously had imagined to be possible.

Indeed, within the organisation, there was clearly an uneven appreciation of what the future would hold. It may have been that those who foresaw the outcome that did emerge, running a semi-conventional parliamentary democracy and civil service, were less inclined to engage in mass struggle. They were obviously better prepared for what did emerge. Yet others who may not have had this vision of what was likely to lie ahead, some of whom still harboured insurrectionary tendencies, may have been more inclined to aggressive demonstrations of mass power. The marches on Bisho, capital of the Ciskei “independent” Bantustan, where troops killed over 30 people, also entailed elements of

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36. M. Marks, *Young Warriors. Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa* (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 2001).

insurrectionism. In fact some of the conduct of ANC cadres was aimed at the overthrow of the Bantustan.<sup>37</sup>

### **The ANC establishes structures<sup>38</sup>**

When an illegal organisation is allowed to operate legally, a totally different mindset comes into being, as it does when the movement moves from legal to illegal status. In both cases there is nevertheless a tendency to carry some of the habits of the earlier period over to the new one, continuing to keep minutes or similar symptoms of legality after the ANC was banned<sup>39</sup> or retaining conspiratorial habits from underground when entering a period of legality.

Whereas previously recruits had to be carefully screened and caution was exercised before enrolling members, once an organisation becomes legal it is hard to exclude anyone from membership where they offer the R12-00 joining fee. Consequently the mass membership of the ANC immediately had a different character from the smaller organisation prior to 1990. What those numbers were can only be quantified in a contested way. Insofar as no one within the country could carry an ANC card, membership inside the country was quite different from outside. In many cases, those who wanted to join were not in touch with anyone who could recruit them and acted out what they believed an ANC cadre should do, organising, and carrying out acts of various kinds against the regime. Sometimes these people learnt it from their parents while growing up. Sometimes they obtained illegal literature which explained how to do secret work and learnt underground techniques.

In some cases they may have been recruited by actual ANC cadres from outside, but would obviously not have been given a membership card in the conditions of the time. It is consequently not helpful to draw a rigid line between formal membership outside and *de facto* membership

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37. I must confess (as I did in written work at the time) to being one of the participants that had this in mind. Based on the earlier march, when they had not opened fire, we miscalculated. Also, some groupings that broke away from the main march may have provoked the shooting. At any rate, any idea of removing the "regime" evaporated under gunfire.

38. Much of this account is derived from my own personal experience when I was Head of Political Education in the ANC from 1990 to 1994 and was actively involved in establishing or observing the establishment of branches and other structures, as a member of the Interim Leadership Core in 1990 and the National Executive from 1991.

39. Suttner, "Early History".

inside. In reality, many of the self-initiated cadres inside were able to do much more than those card carrying members located in a place like Washington or Australia.

The level of understanding of broad political issues and in particular the politics of the organisation was in many cases very limited at the time of unbanning. Many people definitely joined for reasons other than political commitment, but a sense that the future lay with the ANC and association with the organisation could lead to economic benefits in terms of contracts and other benefits. These types of reasons were to become much more of a factor as elections drew closer and especially after electoral victory. It is now obvious that business people court ANC figures and this is most dramatically illustrated in the current process of dealing with the estate of assassinated business figure, Brett Kebble, who had carefully cultivated a wide range of ANC personnel and provided donations, from funds which appear to have been fraudulently acquired. This was not publicly known at the time of his death and ANC Youth League leaders were bearers of his coffin and many senior ANC leaders attended the funeral, describing Kebble as a hero.<sup>40</sup>

With the establishment of the ANC as a legal organisation a number of processes involving the creation of branch and other organisational structures at a number of levels were embarked upon.<sup>41</sup> On the surface this may appear to be of narrow practical concern. But how they were or are to be organised will in fact decide the extent to which the ANC remains a popular organisation or is converted into a conventional political party whose only reason for existence is elections.

In some cases the establishment of structures was undertaken hastily. A formula for sustaining branches had not yet been developed although at that stage there was a formal emphasis on political education at all levels. It was unevenly achieved, often being influenced by the size of branches, which varied greatly. It still remained somewhat unclear what activities these structures were to engage in. At that stage preparation for elections had not arisen as a major issue. Many branches in the urban areas combined a mixture ranging from professional strata to

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40. See R. Suttner, "Talking to the Ancestors: National Heritage, the Freedom Charter and nation-building in South Africa in 2005", *Development Southern Africa*, 23, 1, 2006, pp 3-27, at p 21, where this is cautiously and obliquely questioned, shortly after Kebble's death.

41. See Rantete, *The African National Congress*, chapter 1.

domestic workers (as they still do today).<sup>42</sup> Sometimes translation was provided, which proved tedious for sections of the branch, sometimes it was dispensed with, which excluded those not understanding from actual participation in the meetings they attended.

Given this difference in political awareness, it was hard to move political discussion from one level to the other. An announcement from a structure of a higher level could be communicated to the branch, but the branch was seldom able to debate the matter, even where asked to do so. If a debate was conducted, how did one ensure that all participated or felt empowered to speak? In the first place, reference has already been made to the need for translation which was not always met and if it were, created very lengthy announcements as the translations usually needed to be given in more than one alternative language, apart from English, and could generally not cover that of all the mother tongues that might have been spoken in an area like Johannesburg.

But even assuming that the process of translation could be smoothly implemented, a proper debate could not be conducted where some people were at the stage of *induction* into the ANC and its beliefs, sometimes with a very vague idea of what the organisation stood for and others were at varying levels of sophistication. The former wanted basic facts about the ANC and the latter were there to debate strategies and tactics. It should be borne in mind that national executive members were expected to attend meetings of their branches and they clearly could not discuss strategic issues that had often taken them decades to master without leaving many others out of their depth.

Immediately in writing a paragraph like this one needs to ask what was entailed by induction, given the changed conditions? Into what type of organisation, with what type of activities and duties expected of members and in what conditions were they to be introduced? Did the beliefs of the organisation and their interpretation remain unchanged, given the altered surroundings? What did sophistication mean? Did a seasoned commissar necessarily translate into a political educator of the 1990s, and what was required for this to happen? Also what did it mean

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42. I do not provide a first hand account of branch establishment and functioning in rural areas. My contact with these was mainly through their representatives at conferences electing regional and later provincial leadership or on occasions when sent down to provide inputs or to assist with internal leadership problems, mainly in the then Border (to which I was "deployed"), Transkei and Eastern Cape regions. On the other hand, my experience of branch activities in the urban areas is first hand, especially in the then Transvaal.

to provide basic facts of the ANC, as some booklets purported to do at the time? Were these not themselves subjects of contestation in the light of the changed environment?

Describing this situation of uneven political experience and maturity is not intended to suggest that there was a gap between literate and illiterate that was unbridgeable over time. Many of the top leaders of the ANC entered the liberation movement illiterate or with very little education and often learnt in Communist night schools, trade union classes or in prison. Some of these became top intellectuals of the liberation movement.<sup>43</sup> But it is clear that after unbanning, that process has not been completed nor embraced in a systematic way with a clear programme for implementation.

Quite difficult organisational conditions would emerge in the rural areas, often organising in the 1980s and 1990s in places where the ANC and UDF had previously penetrated in a very limited way. Documents were often in English only, but this could in some cases be overcome through translation by teachers and similar strata, that usually were part of branches, into the language of the area.<sup>44</sup> However distances between leadership of regional/provincial structures and these branches often meant that it was difficult for them to receive regular and intense political education and even reports.

It is not to suggest that none of these new members moved from induction to leadership in this period. There are cases where some people entered with broad understanding and developed a great deal of confidence and knowledge and became part of branch leadership. Some of these are today in local government or higher levels. But to what extent that process has continued is unclear.

### **Negotiations and the membership**

The moment of unbanning also revealed to members and followers a phenomenon of which all but a small section of the leadership had been fully aware. This, as indicated, was that talks had been conducted

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43. See R. Suttner, "The formation and functioning of intellectuals within the ANC-led liberation movement", in T. Mkandawire (ed), *African Intellectuals* (CODESRIA, Zed Press & UNISA Press, Dakar, London & Pretoria, 2005), pp 117-154.

44. Interview with Mrs. Y.M. Gasa, December 2002 in Johannesburg and subsequent discussions about the ANC in the Cofimvaba area especially on 18 July 2006. Transcription and tape in author's possession.

between the regime and the ANC from the early to mid 1980s, amidst great secrecy. The conditions of secrecy created a disjuncture between what people on the ground had been doing at great risk – often at the instigation of the ANC, and the secret talks. As indicated, this was a source of tension after it was publicly revealed.

With the onset of negotiations, the masses who had until recently been mobilised and organised to overthrow the regime or to establish their own popular structures became primarily spectators or at best recipients of complicated reports handed down from level to level with very little contribution going upwards and timeously to the highest structures where decisions were made. As the process of negotiations speeded up, even keeping the leadership up to speed required meetings at 06:00 to ratify proposals that would be put to negotiating forums later in the day.<sup>45</sup>

During this period the conception of the organisation as an active force, driving what continues to be described as the revolution, started to change. This is not to say that the masses were never involved. In fact there were many situations when the masses were involved and their activity broke log-jams in the negotiation process. But, as has been remarked, they were often treated like a tap to be turned on and off, as the leadership needed their activity or their passivity.

Thus conditions were set in place where the organisation – as the masses – rallied behind the ANC, started to see the membership cede its judgment or agency to its leaders. They were there to commend, or invited to criticise to some degree, what was done on their behalf. They were generally not to be self-acting on the political stage, as they had been in the 1980s.<sup>46</sup> *In a sense this was part of the process of movement*

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45. Personal experience, 1993.

46. A. Butler, “The State of the African National Congress” writes on p 39 that “many former exiles and communists idealise a participatory democracy”, citing Suttner “Democratic Consolidation” (no page reference given). In fact the issue is not *participatory* democracy, which is found, for example in various forms of interrelationship with authorities like NEDLAC and forums – like *izimbizo*-initiated by the state or government. I am and was referring to *popular power or direct democracy*, as is indicated in Suttner “The UDF period” and “Legacies and meanings of the UDF”. The issue is essentially derived from internal (not exile) experience and not specifically “idealised” by Communists, since the period was one where *whole communities took initiatives*. This concern is by no means “idealisation” peculiar to a few South African romantics, but preoccupies the entire work of A. Arblaster, *Democracy* (Open University Press, Buckingham, 2002).



*towards a new conjuncture, where the organisation was downgraded in importance, first in relation to those negotiating on its behalf and then later to its elected government.*

### **Elections and early “change management”**

In the period around 1993 it became clear that the ANC had to prepare itself for elections and at that stage in ANC HQ more and more people were moving from various departments towards the electoral centre, known as the Election Commission.

In some cases, this happened in an unofficial way where some officials charged with conventional political education or organisational work simply spent their days in electoral preparations. That became the central thrust of ANC activities and sometimes without permission of their heads of department, cadres drifted to the Election Commission.<sup>47</sup> There was a certain logic to this, in that if one is to fight and win elections one needs to concentrate in a single-minded manner on achieving this. Advisers of Clinton had been brought in to assist and many of the leadership were provided with a certain degree of training in order to equip them to perform adequately under TV gaze.

Now what happened as part of the logic of impending elections provided no answers for the continued role of political education of the previous kind, attempted immediately after unbanning, or for the activities of branches beyond elections. What had not been adequately addressed prior to elections, was simply swept aside in the pre-election process. It established patterns that tended to solidify a top down and centralising tendency, though the mass element has never been totally removed. In effect there was a *de facto* emphasis on the ANC as electoral machine. By default, without any formal definition, the character and role of the local organisation was being displaced by the ANC national political leadership. It was ceded to those charged with negotiations and later government leadership.

Around the same time decisions seem to have been taken, it is not clear where because they did not emerge from the formal meetings of the national executive, to draw in a variety of organisational experts. The thrust of much of the advice was provided by people from institutions like business schools and it related to management. It seemed to assume that the ANC was entering a phase where it had to change its character in

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47. Personal experience as Head of Political Education at the time.

order to function effectively in the environment of which it would be a part. One of the changes that were assumed to be inevitable was that the ANC would become a conventional political party. William Mervyn Gumede appears to assume it has happened.<sup>48</sup>

This had implications for who would be going to the promised land – the jobs that would result from winning elections, seats in parliament and so on. It had implications for who would stay behind in ANC HQ and the need in this unstated model to slim down the organisation and reduce staff. People were offered retrenchment packages on the implicit assumption that the organisational tasks of the pre-election period, of building the organisation *as organisation* were no longer required or required less than previously. As far as I am aware there is no public documentation on this, but I know it happened, from my personal experience of how people were being made various retrenchment offers at the time.

### **ANC as government**

With the ANC becoming the leading force in government, yet another change of conjuncture occurred, with important but generally unstated implications for the ANC as organisation. Prior to 1994, I wrote a paper called “The ANC inside and outside parliament”.<sup>49</sup> It was criticised by one person, now a high official in cabinet for even suggesting that there could be “two ANCs”. There would always be one ANC, he said. It is fairly common in this writer’s experience to brush aside an issue or problem by branding it as unthinkable and then removing it from the agenda of discussion forever. This happened in the case of Jeremy Cronin, referring to the possible “Zanufication of the ANC”, that is the progressive degeneration of the organisation, in an Internet interview, leading to his being forced to apologise. The issue of Zanufication never came to be discussed.<sup>50</sup>

In fact when the ANC entered parliament and became the dominant force of the day a number of factors came into play with serious

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48. W.M. Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* (Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2005), p ix. Likewise, “The African National Congress” uses similar terminology, for example on p 38. For other examples, see Suttner, “Democratic Consolidation”.

49. Regrettably it cannot be located at present.

50. Compare R. Suttner, “Being a revolutionary: reincarnation or carrying over previous identities? A review article”, *Social Identities*, 10, 3, 2004, pp 415-431.

consequences not only for the ANC in government, its capacity to do what was required, but for the ANC that was outside government, where its future role was unclear.

In revolutionary theories it tends to be the organisation that is the driving force of the revolution and even where it enters or establishes institutions it drives the process in order to ensure that the revolutionary goals are realised.

A new situation was emerging where the ANC elected MPs and MPLs (Members of the Provincial Legislature) and the President selected a cabinet that appointed civil servants. In some respects the leadership of the country was not the ANC as organisation but the ANC through members who were cabinet ministers. Constitutional government created new organisational dynamics.

The shift carried a number of trends with organisational implications. In the first place, the conference which adopted the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the ANC's election platform in 1993 had decided that the constitutionally elected NEC would appoint the cabinet. In fact, the President announced his cabinet to the NEC. They were not formally involved in the selection, even though he conceded that this was contrary to the organisational decision. Nelson Mandela has admitted this publicly and justified departure from the RDP decision because he saw it as unworkable, even though it was a formal organisational decision. He repeated this, as televised, at the Stellenbosch ANC conference of 2002.

#### **Changed modes of leadership creation and blurring of distinction between ANC as organisation and ANC as government**

When someone is made a cabinet member, in effect that person is made a national leader through a different process from what had previously been required to attain organisational leadership. Whatever the limitations, it happened through ANC constitutional structures. In the new situation, someone was elevated to be a national figure and it was through a power whereby the President "made leaders". These appointed figures, where they were not already members of the NEC were allowed to attend those meetings *ex officio*, but also often appeared side by side with elected NEC members at ANC rallies and conferences. The distinction between who was an elected ANC NEC member and one appointed to an ANC-led government tended to become blurred. In a situation where public recognition is important in elections, this exposure became important in

future NEC elections where the average delegate was faced with having to fill in 60 names and not knowing 60, recognition of a figure from TV appearance helped turn the appointed person into an elected leader.

As this process developed, ANC spokespersons reoriented their roles. Whereas previously they would be spokespersons for the organisation, defending leaders from attack or advancing policies or goals of the organisation, they tended in the early years of government to see their role as that of defenders of the actions of an ANC-led *government*. (This has become less discernible in recent times possibly because extensive media sections have been established in various government departments).

In the public eye the ANC as organisation and ANC as leader of government became conflated.<sup>51</sup> The pronouncement of an ANC cabinet minister was treated as an ANC policy, even though such a policy may never have passed through any ANC structure. In some cases, this led to great controversy as for example in the announcement of the government's conservative macro-economic policy, Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) in 1996, where the policy was announced to the public without passing through constitutional structures of the organisation or in consultation with allied organisations. The policy remains very controversial. The potentiality of this shift from organisation as driving force to government clearly left many members feeling that what was being done in their name was not what they had any part in creating nor what they in fact wanted to see happen.<sup>52</sup>

At the same time, however, if it had been expected that the ANC membership would meekly accept such pronouncements, it is clear from various conferences that ANC members are "unruly" (as conservatives always point to as being characteristic of the masses)<sup>53</sup> and ready to "take on" the leadership on this and other issues.

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51. This does not confirm the "dominant party" theorists' fears because it is not the organisation/party that is dominating the government, but the other way round!
  52. See Congress of South African Trade Unions [COSATU] website at the time, [www.cosatu.org.za](http://www.cosatu.org.za), reflecting also the views of many ANC cadres, including some in leadership.
  53. See Arblaster, *Democracy*, pp 15, 16, 18, relating this to ambiguity in the Greek words for democracy; R. Williams, *Culture and Society. 1780-1950* (Columbia University, New York, 1983), pp 298-299; G. Rudé, *The Crowd in History* (John Wiley, New York, London & Sydney, 1964), from p 6.

In the same period, since adoption of GEAR, government has shifted backwards and forward on this particular question of macro-economic policies. This is partly related to opposition, but also the vicissitudes of the economy, failure of macro-economic policies to deliver much of what was promised has led to government's realisation that the policy paradigm cannot work without modifications.

### **Terrain of government**

The entire process of entering government and parliament was not something for which the ANC was adequately prepared. In parliament, discussion papers had prepared the organisation for transforming the institution and that did happen to some extent. There were changes in the committee system that has in fact led to far greater public access than before.<sup>54</sup> But the implications of such changes went beyond changes of rules of parliament and it may well be that those with greater power and resources and more access to skills accessed these parliamentary committees more easily where required. The poorest of the poor, especially where it entailed travelling to Cape Town, were simply not able to access it at all.

Initially business organisations paid considerable attention to these committees and established modes of influencing their direction from well-funded offices. But a counter-vailing process was also in motion, which parallels that found in most post-independence states. Power tended to pass from organisation to cabinet and from cabinet to the presidency. For purposes of influence it is access at the level of cabinet and the presidency that one has to achieve in order to succeed and consequently it may well be, despite all the concern about Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) that it is established white capital that has come to enjoy specially privileged access to the highest echelons.<sup>55</sup>

I am *not* thereby suggesting that the ANC-led government has been converted to the goals of capital or big capital. Whatever it may think, it

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54. See R. Calland, *Anatomy of South Africa. Who holds the power?* (Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2006), pp 88-94.

55. Rupert Taylor finds the term "white capital" problematic because capital is not susceptible to a racial label and it is not homogeneous. That there are sections of white capital where Afrikaans-speakers or English-speakers predominate, does not render the idea of their being a phenomenon that can be designated as "white capital". In South Africa, the established or overwhelming section of capital is that controlled and owned by whites. Even the most successful black capitalists, own or control a miniscule proportion of South Africa's wealth.

has to live with predominance of the capitalist mode of production. But white capital is an interest group with international connections and potential power that can harm the currency and other factors that a revolutionary organisation needs to take into account when it rules. While SACP/COSATU demonstrations and strikes may pose dangers to governmental stability, they are of a different order to the power that capital can wield in attacking the currency and “investment strikes”.

This raises complex issues, beyond the scope of this paper, relating to *who rules South Africa?* If the ruling bloc of the apartheid era was displaced, that is, an alliance of white capital, white petit-bourgeois and workers, together with black collaborators, what has taken its place?<sup>56</sup> We remain a capitalist state, yet there has been a shift of political power. Is there no significance in this shift in political power? What does it mean for the terrain on which the dominant ANC operates? But these are issues requiring distinct papers, beyond noting that *if the ANC has wanted to create a new ruling bloc, it has not displaced the importance of the most crucial element of the previous one, that is, white capital.* What it means is that there is a coexistence of political power, elected by mass support and economic power (except for a miniscule black bourgeoisie), which remains in the hands of forces of the past.

### **ANC as government and ANC as organisation**

As indicated, how things are supposed to happen in revolutionary textbooks is that when there is a “democratic breakthrough”<sup>57</sup> as occurred in 1994, the transformation process that follows is guided by the

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56. On the characterisation of the apartheid colonial bloc, see ANC and SACP versions: ANC, *Apartheid South Africa: Colonialism of a Special Type* (circa 1980); SACP, *The Path to Power*. Also see Z.P. Jordan, “Socialist Transformation and the Freedom Charter”, in B. Magubane and I. Mandaza, *Wither South Africa?* (Africa World Press, Trenton – New Jersey, 1988); Z.P. Jordan, “The South African Liberation Movement and the Making of a New Nation”, in M. van Diepen (ed), *The National Question in South Africa* (Zed Books Ltd, London & New Jersey, 1988), pp 10-124; J. Slovo, “South Africa – No Middle Road”, in B. Davidson, J. Slovo & A.R. Wilkinson, *Southern Africa: The New Politics of Revolution* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976). Obviously Calland, *Anatomy of South Africa*, asks the same question, but he has a quite different approach from that which I am adopting and for various reasons, beyond the scope of this paper, does not in my view, uncover various seats and relationships of power that I would consider crucial, before providing an answer.

57. This is the phrase initially used by the SACP and later by the whole alliance to characterise what occurred in 1994.

revolutionary organisation and in this case, in consultation with its allies. But it has not worked out that way. What has happened is that the ANC as organisation has been downgraded in importance in the process of transformation of South Africa. It has periodic conferences and meetings at the national level, but in between on a day-to-day basis, there is delivery of a better life by government. In many respects this is a much better life than before for very many people, but it is at best people-centred, not people-driven. The expert advisers provide advice to cabinet ministers and the civil service delivers. Sometimes there is consultation with local recipients of this “better life”, sometimes it just happens. Sometimes where the local people have been excluded from the process the result can be disastrous, with important innovations, for example, water supplies being placed in inappropriate places, like sacred locations where, according to local beliefs, women are not supposed to go.

But it should be remembered that the development of the democratisation process has instituted elected government at all levels including the local. Consequently, consultation is likely to involve the local level. But the capacity of the civil service to deliver is a problem with under-spending of resources that are much needed being a recurrent issue.

### **Failure to develop a democratic ethos for bureaucracy**

In addition, the ANC entered government with little conception of how bureaucracy under democracy should differ from apartheid or any other authoritarian bureaucracy. The ANC had its own bureaucratic experience though this was on a relatively small scale and the values may have been predominantly hierarchical rather than democratic.<sup>58</sup> Sometimes there is an assumption (much favoured by incumbents of the previous period) of continuity, the notion that civil servants serve the government of the day, no matter who that may be. This is part of the recipe for failure to problematise bureaucracy in a democratic South Africa.<sup>59</sup>

Although there are *ad hoc* interventions, there is not an overall guiding democratic bureaucratic ethos or notion of professionalism that is diffused amongst the civil service. This leads to implementation of important transformative processes often being in the hands of people

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58. See Suttner, “‘Cultures’ of the ANC”.

59. It may be surprising, but this is a view widely espoused amongst intelligence and other security officials, that they always have something in common by virtue of belonging to the same profession, with operatives from whatever country.

who believe that there is a professional continuity between the bureaucracy of the past and that of the present.<sup>60</sup> There may in fact be such continuity, but it surely should not be if democracy has been instituted? Also there is a tendency to regard professional practices as having a universal quality and to insufficiently explore what is specific to democratic South Africa and consequently required for an administration operating in this environment.

It must not be assumed that developments such as creation of a democratic professionalism within the administration are easy to achieve. But these need to be addressed. Questions that arise that are particularly important for democratic development relate to notions of professionalism within the security services. Insofar as bureaucracy entails hierarchies, does one not need to take special steps to mitigate this in the new situation? How, for example, does information from the bottom reach the top and what interaction can there be and to what extent should there be debate within such organisations? Ultimately in a security environment a decision must be taken and implemented, but the place for debate and discussion needs to be found if the culture of these organisations is to be changed.

Now it may be that much of this relates to whether or not the organisation, which is dominant, has a democratic culture and the extent to which it is able to insinuate that into the organs of government administration. Let us now turn to the organisation.

#### **ANC as organisation after 1994**

From the earliest days of reconstitution of the ANC after 1990, the role of structures of the organisation have always been a subject of controversy as well as a problem that has been difficult to resolve. If one wants to establish a functioning vibrant branch structure how does one do this? In the days before elections were on the horizon, as we have noted, it was difficult enough.

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60. This replicates the experience of the Bolsheviks who were forced to employ former Tsarist officials to perform certain tasks. In the Department of Foreign Affairs, at least in the early years after 1994, when I was an ambassador, my experience was one of continuity, the idea that there was a situation where people providing the same service to a democratic South Africa as they had done under apartheid, as if their purported skills were transportable anywhere and to any condition of government.



Now that periodic elections are a fact of life, the focus on and of branches tends to be most intense at election time. But that is not to say that other concerns are shut out. The South African people are not passive or easily containable, nor do they readily consent to passivity if they have their own ideas of what issues are important for an organisation.<sup>61</sup>

This can be seen in the grassroots rejection at the National General Council held in 2005 of top leadership ideas, which were interpreted, as an attempt to turn the organisation in a Blairite direction. That is why, whether or not some people may have intended to turn the ANC into an electoral machine and run down its popular aspects, the membership will not simply lie down and die. One repeatedly sees evidence of both an organisation which serves as an electoral machine and still does not know what to do with its branches, but also one where the grassroots members are determined to have their say, still feel that they are in a revolution in which they are the driving force, refuse to have policies forced down their throats or have the organisation turned into a transmission belt where members are merely recipients and executors of decisions decided

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61. Steven Friedman, in an e-mail dated 4 August 2006 asks whether the trend I describe from mass to elite politics was as great as suggested. He points to the level of repression setting limits on the extent to which there could be mass politics. This is true and with more space I would periodise the 1980s, prior to and after the State of Emergency or the last stages of the Emergency. The first period involved widespread popular power, but with the arrest of some 50 000 people, including many leaders, much of the efforts towards popular power became diverted into kangaroo courts and similar criminal activity. In the late 1980s when the Mass Democratic Movement was formed, with the unbanned COSATU taking the lead, the alliance of forces was essentially one at the top, because most of the activists were still in hiding or detention. The second question Friedman raises is whether the trends after 1990 were avoidable. Modes of action in a struggle period cannot necessarily be replicated in the post-apartheid period. This does not mean that popular politics cannot be appropriate after apartheid, but that different forms are needed now. I think Friedman is correct in questioning the viability of popular politics of the early 1980s in a situation of constitutional and representative government, with a whole lot of components of the earlier terrain removed. This is a question that I am not in a position to answer satisfactorily. It may be that the role of mass politics is inevitably limited where much of the basis for popular mobilisation is satisfied through a representative government. At the same time I am keen to see popular participation as opposed to spectatorship. Consequently I regard it as a problem whose answer needs to be sought, rather than asserting in a definitive way whether or not it can find a clear place in the contemporary situation. See Arblaster, *Democracy*, p 3, and generally where the need for multiple conceptions of democracy is a recurrent theme.

elsewhere. One also sees a variety of other conflicting trends, in particular, membership as a route to wealth or positions of authority.

### **ANC in crisis**

At the time of writing (January 2007) the ANC may be in the midst of its biggest crisis ever.<sup>62</sup> The Deputy President of the ANC, Jacob Zuma, was fired as Deputy President of the country in 2005, only to unleash popular anger that has at times appeared uncontrollable. It manifested itself in the burning of images of President Thabo Mbeki and in populist demagoguery, which depicted Zuma as the custodian of a radical socialist programme and Mbeki as symbolising reaction. In fact there is little political difference between the two and Zuma had not previously nor even clearly now indicated differences over macro-economic or other controversial policies. *This needs emphasis because there is much media analysis depicting divisions founded on clear ideological differences or style and other factors that are not as well defined and invariable as is suggested. It will be argued that none of these are crucial in explaining current divisions.*

But the crisis was at one stage escalating on a daily basis with new, real or alleged scandalous/criminal conduct attributed to Zuma, first corruption and later a trial for rape, on which he was acquitted amidst great controversy, (with a meeting of minds between judge and accused on stereotypes over how women should react to rape). At Zuma's appearances some of his supporters threatened to rape the complainant and her supporters and incited others to attack them.

At his trial Zuma defended himself on the basis of sexist stereotypes of women dressing in a manner "asking for rape" and invoked distorted versions of Zulu culture to defend his conduct and interpretations of the complainant's reactions.<sup>63</sup> The trial has left the organisation and the alliance divided. On the one hand, while the

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62. See statement of President Mbeki, *Sunday Times*, 30 July 2006, headlined "Zuma crisis has crippled us, says Mbeki".

63. Most of Zuma's sexist stereotypes regarding the expected behaviour of rape survivors/victims were repeated by the judge and the prosecution appeared ill-equipped and accepted his versions or was not equipped to contest his enunciation of what constituted applicable Zulu culture. See the forthcoming publication: R. Suttner, "Power and ANC masculinities: the Zuma rape trial", in C. Potgieter, P.Gqola and V. Reddy (eds), *Private transgressions, public tirades, national politics: the Jacob Zuma rape trial* (HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2007).

President, Thabo Mbeki, appeared relatively paralysed for much of the time, Zuma and his supporters used demagogic approaches to brush aside scrutiny of Zuma's fitness for office and have also alleged a conspiracy against him.

There are others outside of either camp, though sensing that plotting to avoid Zuma becoming President was a possibility, nevertheless believe that the ANC in particular faces a deep moral crisis which is exacerbated by the SACP and COSATU treatment of Zuma as a messianic figure.<sup>64</sup>

One has seen an apparently uncontrollable public division within the top leadership and a mass rising periodically appearing against the President and those seen to be close to him. This element that periodically erupts is not clearly an organised force, and its loyalties cannot be estimated with certainty, even though it may presently appear to support Zuma and oppose Mbeki. Raymond Williams has written about this notion of the masses and their being depicted by conservatives as unruly, herd like and other uncomplimentary adjectives.<sup>65</sup> Now what we are seeing is what is always part of mass activity, the unruly element – which tends to engage in excesses of a more or less serious kind. But the excesses are not the only or main meaning of mass activity, merely an unmandated offshoot.<sup>66</sup>

What is lacking is a leadership connection with this mass upsurge, which is able to turn it into a constructive force. It is not clear that any section of the leadership has a clear desire to invoke the masses to realise concrete programmes. Zuma and his supporters involve the masses for reasons of presidential succession, but there is no counter-force raising the RDP vision of a people-driven programme.

That is partly because the ANC organisational link has been run down and the top leadership has not always shown the degree of respect for the masses they deserve in an organisation whose rise to power has been dependent on popular support. Linked to this are the activities of some of the leadership of SACP and COSATU that do not always appear to help resolve the crisis, but instead exacerbate it. This should be seen in the context of the earlier contempt that they experienced, perceiving themselves as being treated as “small boys” by Mbeki or those associated with Mbeki.

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64. In the case of both of these organisations, major figures in leadership, especially in the SACP and Communist Youth League [CYL] have gone out of their way to defend every action of Zuma.

65. Williams, *Culture and Society*, pp 298-299.

66. Suttner, “Talking to the Ancestors”.

The allegation of a conspiracy may well have an element of truth and may have included some of the activities of the former head of the Scorpions, Bulelani Ngcuka, and others. Yet that conceded, this period has taken a toll on the moral stance of COSATU and SACP leadership figures, who by their uncritical association with Zuma have jettisoned well-established foundation stands of the alliance, especially on gender in favour of support for Zuma.

Also the sanctity of judicial utterances has recently become a virtue which cannot be contested in the eyes of certain leaders of the SACP. In fact, there are good reasons why the Zuma judgment may be found wanting after careful scrutiny.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, this sanctity was not the rhetoric used when Judge Hilary Squires convicted Shabir Shaik and described his relationship with Zuma as a basically corrupt one. Then, unlike the now esteemed Judge Van der Merwe, who acquitted Zuma, the past of Squires was given as the reason for his judgment.

At a leadership level there is also a generational gap, between the Mandelas, Sisulus and others some of whom are alive but not able to function energetically, and the Mbekis and Zumas. There is a problem where a highly intellectual leader is not able to reach out and interact with and compromise with opponents where required (which is too late now), something that characterised the leadership of the Sisulus and Mandelas.<sup>68</sup> There is also a problem when there is sometimes an apparently unbridgeable chasm between that ANC top leadership and the mass base.

### **The ANC and its alliance partners**

In the 1950s a degree of overlap started to develop between ANC and SACP membership and many of the leaders of SACTU (South African Congress of Trade Unions) were also leaders or members of both organisations. This tendency for the ANC and SACP to consolidate their

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67. Suttner, "Power and ANC masculinities".

68. I do not personally advocate compromise now in that the compromise would be between a president – whose mode of ruling (without close contact and involvement of the masses) – has proved unviable and a very tainted deputy president. The solution to the problem needs to be developed in some other way. What that entails depends on a close understanding of potential alliances and configurations of power *at all levels and geographical locations of the organisation*. That type of information or analysis is not attempted by contemporary commentators or analysts such as Calland, Butler or those who appear in our media.

unity intensified over the years of illegality, together with SACTU, though SACTU was very much a junior partner, being unable for most of the period of illegality to directly organise. With the emergence of COSATU, SACTU gradually disappeared from the scene, ultimately dissolving.

Over the years of illegality the ANC/SACP alliance was an important factor in achieving the overall strategic goals of the ANC. While the SACP contributed the most important analytical framework for understanding the South African social formation – describing it as colonialism of a special type (CST), later adopted by the ANC, the degree of SACP influence may be exaggerated.<sup>69</sup>

Being a member of “the Party” (as the SACP is known within the ANC-led alliance) was prestigious. One became a member of an organisation within a broader organisation and this was seen as something of an elite. From the period of the 1950s onwards, selection of Party members was a careful process and some who may have wanted to be members were not asked. At the same time, it appears that membership of the Party in exile became a route to greatness, the way in which one could secure access to special training courses and ultimately rise to leadership positions *in the ANC*.<sup>70</sup> The Party was an important factor in that its discourse was the dominant one within the liberation movement as a whole, the alliance with the Soviet Union being both an ANC and SACP position, training being mainly in the Soviet bloc and so on.

Nevertheless, it is a paradox that all this influence appears to have been at the expense of the Party’s organisational independence. There were many situations where the Party was not allowed to organise as a party, for example in the MK camps or by decision on Robben Island. There were situations where students chosen for the Lenin Party school had to receive ANC President Oliver Tambo’s approval before being allowed to attend, situations where the Party’s choice for General Secretary needed Tambo’s approval before being released from ANC duties to enable the performance of Party duties.<sup>71</sup> This hardly conveys the image of an independent organisation. Even after 1990 the ANC

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69. CST is the mode of analysis, which characterised South Africa as bearing the features of a colonial situation in the relationship between the dominant oppressing whites and the oppressed black population. What made it a special type of colonialism was that coloniser and colonised occupied the same territory.

70. Suttner, “‘Cultures’ of the ANC”.

71. See Suttner, “Reconstitution of the SACP”.

barred the release of Chris Hani to become Deputy General Secretary of the SACP, though the Party took the matter into its own hands in December 1991, when it elected him as General Secretary.

Amongst the Party members there were major figures like Joe Slovo and Chris Hani. Unlike Communist Parties in other countries there was no question of abandoning the name Communist after the collapse of Eastern European socialism. The SACP enjoyed great prestige and had a mass following, whatever the extent of its membership. It had legendary martyrs to invoke, including Ruth First, Bram Fischer and later Hani himself and had had within its ranks some of the top liberation movement figures like Walter Sisulu (whose membership was revealed shortly before his death), Moses Kotane, J.B. Marks and others. It was known to have been in the forefront of battle.

While being a Party member was an asset for individuals outside (whatever this may have meant in terms of organisational independence) on arrival from exile after unbanning a number of Party members – some half of the Central Committee – allowed their membership to lapse. What had been an advantage was now a disability. In the period after 1990 a new leadership was elected and a paid up membership of about 10 000 to 20 000 emerged, as the Party evaluated the lessons of the collapse of the Soviet Union and rethought its concepts and route to socialism.<sup>72</sup>

COSATU joined the revolutionary alliance, later to be rechristened the tripartite alliance in the late 1980s. In the period prior to 1994 the organisations met as equals in fairly regular alliance meetings. The ANC may have led the negotiations but there was input from the partners.

In general the alliance acted as one, engaging together in mass campaigns, together acting as spectators at other times, though this was less the case with COSATU which had a direct support base to sustain it in the work place. The SACP did not engage in many campaigns during this period and primarily focused on rethinking its own role in the aftermath of the collapse of Eastern European socialism and the new terrain that had opened up after 1990. To cope with this and the changed

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72. It is now said to be 40 000 (or 32 000 according to a member of the Central Committee with whom I spoke recently). Unless there has been a change, it is likely that official claims are accurate and carefully audited.

domestic conjuncture the Party developed a modified strategic vision and the important slogan – “socialism is the future, build it now!”<sup>73</sup>

The significance of the slogan (which was not always emphasised in the same way by all members of the leadership), was that it recognised the reality of a *terrain of reform* and that socialism had to be built in the present, not purely after some distant moment of “transfer” or “seizure” of power. It should be noted, also, that many of the Party membership remained insurrectionist in orientation, believing that the regime could have been defeated on the battlefield and resisted engagement with reforms. The slogan was however based on recognition that a terrain of reform needed to distinguish that which was ameliorating minor grievances and what contributed towards a transformative programme – an approach that it has carried into the recent period, prior to the Zuma saga, with its successful campaigns around the financial sector and land.<sup>74</sup> Kagarlitsky’s use of the concept of structural reform as delineating something different from reformism aimed at palliatives that would preclude substantial transformation influenced some of the SACP policy documents of the time.<sup>75</sup> Kagarlitsky drew on Marx’s praise for British factory legislation as altering the situation of workers in a positive way, having an impact on their relationships that was advantageous to the working class.

The election of 1994 had considerable impact on the alliance. From the moment the ANC was established in government the notion of equality of the alliance partners became a fiction. At the same time as the ANC as government displaced the ANC as organisation, the alliance meetings tended to have less and less importance, often being cancelled at the last minute by the ANC, sometimes as partners were about to board aeroplanes to attend the meetings. Also, the main relationship became with ANC as government and in that regard it was not an inter-organisational relationship but one where the SACP and COSATU related as interest groups or even petitioners.

In short, the alliance as a thriving relationship between equal partners was no more and the SACP and COSATU were often treated as

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73. SACP, “Strategic Perspective. Socialism is the Future, Build it Now!”, [Http://www.sacp.org.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1365&Itemid](http://www.sacp.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1365&Itemid), accessed on 23 July 2006.

74. See also B. Kagarlitsky, *The Dialectics of Change* (Verso, London, 1989), who had some influence on this thinking (which is not the case with his later work).

75. SACP, “Strategic Perspective”.

problem children. In fact, certain ANC ministers and documents attacked them when they criticised GEAR, referring to its partners as “ultra left” and in the case of a then Communist minister commending them to read Lenin’s *Left Wing Communism - an infantile disorder*.<sup>76</sup> On another occasion, briefing notes were issued to branches attacking the alliance partners.

This is not the place to consider the successes and failures of the two allies of the ANC in establishing a role in this situation. This section has merely indicated that the alliance is partly or largely non-functional in an inter-organisational sense. The crisis around Jacob Zuma at the time of writing has however raised the organisational profile of the two partners. The popular anger that was unleashed was encouraged by both COSATU and SACP leaders (though this may not be a unified position in either leadership or organisation as a whole, with whatever dissidence there is being muted).<sup>77</sup> At the top leadership of both organisations there does not seem to be a clear attempt to resolve the ANC crisis in a mature manner. Instead, they may have exacerbated the ANC’s problems by depicting the Zuma/Mbeki tensions or alleged tensions as representing a conservative/left difference. This is without any factual basis. In addition, the fixation on the succession question and the projection of Zuma’s leadership has led to a diversion from the central transformational goals of the alliance and the SACP in particular.<sup>78</sup>

In the early years of ANC government, COSATU made many formidable economic interventions, primarily from its parliamentary office. The SACP, in its tradition of theoretical engagement, also probed the character of transition and transformation. While that is still

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76. It is an irony that some SACP members of the ANC government have driven some of the most unpopular programmes. Some of these are now less active or may have let their Party membership lapse. Some have failed to be re-elected to the Central Committee or have not stood for re-election.

77. The suppressed tensions can be seen in the SACP with the recent expulsion from the Young Communist League of Mazibuko Jara, formerly a Party spokesperson, after a disciplinary hearing where he was not able to be present nor provided with documentation that he sought. It is also seen in the disbanding of the Gauteng provincial structures and in the ANC in ongoing conflict between the ANC Youth League national leadership and certain provincial leadership which has been dissolved. All of this is related to the succession saga.

78. M. Jara, “What colour is our flag? Red or JZ? – A critique of the SACP approach on the JZ matter”, unpublished paper, 2005. “JZ” refers to Jacob Zuma. See also R. Suttner, “The SACP in 2006: how did it get where it is and how should it move forward?”, unpublished paper, 2006.



continuing, it is now overshadowed and displaced by SACP top leadership dogging the heels of Zuma and endorsing his every utterance. That Jacob Zuma should be the main speaker at the Party's July 2006 eighty-fifth anniversary is evidence of this trend.

### **Crisis of the ANC - will it be resolved?**

The previous section concluded by referring to the current crisis of the ANC arising from the dismissal of Jacob Zuma as State Deputy President and his trial for rape. The crisis is not yet contained. One thing is clear and that is that the capacity of the ANC to contain such crises is not what it used to be. Also, it does not seem that Mbeki is temperamentally inclined to engaging with opponents and finding a *modus vivendi* that does not erupt into public bloodletting. In any case, the level of enmity may now have reached such levels that engagement is no longer viable.

The character of the crisis and the forces ranged against one another involve some complexity and require some unpacking. There are not simply two camps, embracing people sharing a common vision. It appears that there are many people involved in *ad hoc* alliances for and against Mbeki or Zuma, operating with shared immediate common goals, which does not mean a common social vision or candidate for succession or that they share long-term objectives. The extent to which such alliances have an ideological basis is unclear and there is not much evidence to support that.

The ANC, at a national level, does not appear to have the mechanisms that it and the UDF used to have to relate to the masses when they are in the "unruly" mode. Leadership of mass organisations and movements includes the capacity to re-direct excesses towards constructive activities. The ANC used to be able to do this and the UDF could. Mbeki is not inclined to relate to the masses as an important force and this makes it difficult for him to channel their anger. Indeed his aloofness may fuel it. *But this is not really a question of one individual even if that person happens to be the President of the country, but what the organisation does.*

What this situation indicates may not bear on the overall functioning of the ANC as a dominant organisation in the widest sense. Insofar as dominance entails powers of patronage it may continue to exercise these. But what may have been inconceivable only a few months back, is now possible, that there are going to be difficult times ahead with rifts running very deep and perhaps irresolvable. How this impacts on the

organisation cannot now be predicted. The possibility of the ANC splitting in a big way or imploding is no longer unthinkable. The levels of enmity appear uncontrollable at the highest level, though it is not clear to what extent this is replicated at the grassroots in every area. At the highest level, the depth of divisions may be found in claims that control over ANC head office is contested between Zuma and Mbeki supporters.<sup>79</sup> If this is true, and my sources seem to indicate that it is so, it is unprecedented, that the President of the ANC cannot be sure that what he (for it has always been made up till now) wants executed, is carried out.

There are however indications that these divisions are not playing themselves out in the same divisive manner in most provinces, where there are divisions, but of a different kind (see below). It is also not clear what the actual organised support for Zuma may be and behind what programme it would be organised. Most commentators do not appear to visualise what is entailed in estimating the support required to become an ANC candidate. It is not possible to estimate organisational support on the basis of attendance at rallies and applause. Organisational support means activity that sustains allegiance over difficult times and feeds into an electoral machine, which advances a programme. This is the case with the ANC, though it is obviously less the case with some minority parties, which rally behind individuals like Patricia de Lille, without a clear programme. While emotions are high in support of and against Zuma, this is not the *evidence* required to form a judgment.

There have been public statements and meetings suggesting the possibility of COSATU and SACP fighting elections separately from the ANC and by implication in support of Zuma. It is not clear whether Zuma would join with SACP/COSATU in an election pact. Insofar as some groups may be “using” others, it is not clear who is using whom and what the ideological as opposed to personal implications in terms of future positions and other forms of patronage, may be. There are many disgruntled people expressing disillusionment with President Mbeki. To what extent this is ideological is not clear. Personally, I am sceptical and believe we may be witnessing a search for the person most likely to dispense patronage in the future. Insofar as it is still unclear who this will be, many of this grumbling is ambiguous.

It is not clear to what extent support for Zuma is fuelled by animosity towards Mbeki and whether this support, such as it is, would be

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79. Personal communication from a figure in ANC leadership, August 2006.

sustained against a new Presidential candidate. It is also not formally tested whether the membership of the SACP and COSATU would want to split the alliance or fight separate elections. It is by no means clear that ANC membership would support Zuma if it meant splitting the ANC, unity being highly valued by seasoned members.<sup>80</sup>

The whole period is one of *de-ideologisation* and that strengthens the belief that it will not be programmatic questions that ultimately lead to one or other decision, but questions of top jobs and patronage. That one should speak of an absence of ideological orientation or focus within the ANC-led alliance constitutes a substantial shift from the character of the organisation before unbanning or since 1994. It would bring it closer in character to politics of a conventional kind in parts of Western Europe and the United States.

If going separately may lead some SACP members to fear losing parliamentary seats or other positions, it may be that their enthusiasm for leaving the ANC will wane. That is the period in which we are living. It is no longer one of pure sacrifice or facing dangers. The fears that are uppermost in many peoples' minds are financial loss, or possibly loss of prestige attaching to one or other position if they take the wrong move.

Paradoxically, while much of this division is manifested at the top leadership level the major part of the organisation may be much less affected, notwithstanding the demonstrations burning Mbeki T-shirts. That much cannot be confirmed with solid empirical evidence at this stage.

I know, thus far from a limited range of sources, that certain levels and certain areas remain unaffected or react to the Zuma/Mbeki issue in a manner different from what one has read in the newspapers. At a provincial level, it was recently reported that Zuma visited and wooed the Eastern Cape. It is significant, however, that no official of the provincial government or provincial ANC was involved in his programme. Also, it is said that while some chiefs eagerly responded to his invitation to meet, others who normally "jump" at such invitations, claimed that "proper protocol" was not followed. Furthermore, while it may be that branches, regional and provincial structures are split on this issue many areas, including parts of the Eastern Cape, remain unaffected and divisions continue to relate to age-old questions concerning such issues as election lists.<sup>81</sup>

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80. Also based on personal discussions with some of these from more than one province.

81. Interview ANC Councillor Mrs Y.M. Gasa of Cofimvaba.

The manifestation of de-ideologisation as one of the features of the current crisis, is not something to be welcomed by those who wish to see South Africa transformed into a more equitable society. It plays into the hands of those who wish to blur issues, reducing politics to questions of personality and displacing programmatic questions of transformation and democratisation.<sup>82</sup>

As indicated, the SACP is also responsible or even more responsible for this de-ideologisation through the amount of energy devoted to Zuma's presidential ambitions, whatever the organisational and moral cost to the Party.<sup>83</sup>

### **The route to restoration of the ANC as viable organisation**

The ANC was unbanned and elected on a wave of moral support for those who had at great personal cost brought liberty to this country. Over the years that followed scandals and financial hand-outs have dented this image. It is a daily phenomenon to read of someone being handed R2 million in shares, for some inexplicable reason, which can only be supposed influence on or entry to ANC-decision makers. Why that person? Is this what attaches to ANC membership and leadership? There may be nothing illegal, but it creates an impression that liberation has come to mean enrichment for the few, in the eyes of those who are reading such news.

People who have been convicted of fraud in the recent Travelgate scandal, where MPs used parliamentary travel facilities to enrich themselves, have in some cases been restored to high positions of various kinds in the organisation.<sup>84</sup> This is said to be related to the ANC's never casting people into the outer darkness, even if they have done wrong. But the speed with which the rehabilitation process is completed seems to cast doubt on the seriousness with which fraud is understood. We are talking about individuals enriching themselves from public money, that is, money contributed by all the citizens, including the poorest of the poor, who are said to be the base of the ANC.

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82. See same report in *Sunday Times*, where Mbeki also refers to the sidelining of most other issues.

83. See Suttner, "The SACP in 2006".

84. Contrary to this tendency, Tony Yengeni, former Chief Whip of the ANC in parliament, is serving a sentence after conviction for fraud, but in line with the overall tendency he was given a hero's send off by leading ANC figures.

Also scandals, especially the association of the ANCYL and many leaders with the late Brett Kebble has tarnished the organisation's image and this is but one such case.

The ANC needs to find a way of re-establishing itself as the occupant of the moral high ground. In order to do that it will have to be ruthless in the face of corruption. The impression that one has is that it is ruthless on a selective basis and this reinforces a sense of widespread exercise of patronage.

That needs to be remedied before the ANC and its allies can have the standing they used to have in the eyes of the masses and their members. A positive sign indicating some degree of regeneration is the recent expulsion of Mbulelo Goniwe, former Chief Whip on grounds of sexual harassment. As far as I am aware and significantly, the SACP has issued no statement in support of this decision. It is an important silence because the SACP at one point emphasised its commitment to gender equality very vociferously.

### **Rebuilding the ANC as an organisational force**

One thing that is resented by ANC members is advice on organisation deriving from someone who is not "on the ground". Yet I am just about to do just that. I am doing so because I cannot avoid raising organisational questions and how they have been dealt with or avoided in order to address the question of the rebuilding of the ANC. In fact, even if we consider the moral questions to which I have referred one needs an organisational basis in order to remedy these.

I have repeatedly referred to the Mbeki/Zuma relationship and the way it has been played out to inflame passions and lead to excesses. Now the way the ANC has related to this is part of the key to what is currently in need of remedial action. In the past, when the organisation confronted issues such as necklacing<sup>85</sup>, cadres would sit down and talk to the perpetrators and argue with them about the best way of realising the goals of the struggle. Sometimes they agreed and followed the organisation's advice, sometimes they did not, but the organisation went to them and tried to explain its reasoning. It was part of an organisational strategy where one did not just treat a problem as happening "out there" but tried to intervene, albeit with varying degrees of success.

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85. A practice that emerged during the 1980s where tyres were placed around the neck of suspected informers and set alight.

Also in the 1980s the UDF tried to combat the atmosphere of intolerance that led to the beating up of supporters of the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) or the Azanian Student Movement (AZASM),<sup>86</sup> arguing that the job of UDF supporters was to convince people of the correctness of its position not to coerce them, against their convictions to do this or that.

Now it does not seem that there are interventions of that kind taking place from the top leadership, nor in many cases from the organisation as a whole.

On the one side Mbeki is disinclined to engage the masses in general. He is aloof and intellectual and prefers to meet the masses in stage managed visits to formal gatherings or state-sponsored *izimbizos*.<sup>87</sup> While I am not in favour of the apparent aversion to mass organisation, there is something to be said for the President not directly encountering those who are slandering him and his office. In this particular case it may be that aloofness and lack of engagement is a correct approach and that it is not engagement that is really sought, but *individual* confrontation. But the emphasis on programme should be far outweighing the concentration on one individual contrasted with another. That is an organisational question, which needs to be addressed not by the President on his own, but by the ANC and its allies as organisations.

I am referring here to interventions, the need for the ANC to be seen and recognised as listening to those who have grievances, however unjustified these may be. To organise entails taking someone from where they are into your embrace, that is the embrace of the organisation. Now one has the impression that the ANC and its allies are so consumed by succession battles that ideological and programmatic issues have taken a back seat and are merely raised decoratively, while the real battle is for leadership and the consequences that one or other leader will have for the personal fortunes of members of the organisation.

In such an atmosphere, "the masses out there" are not enjoying the benefits of leadership which helps them understand an organisation and how it implements its programmes. They are not being taught as activists used to say, "how we do things and what we do not do". Very dogmatic that may sound but that type of phraseology is understood by many

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86. Organisations supporting the black consciousness tendency.

87. See below. An *imbizo* traditionally is a gathering in a meeting, one of a series of words like *lekgotla* which are in current use, replacing or sometimes used interchangeably with the Afrikaans word *bosberaad*.

cadres to refer to the way the ANC organises, the slow and patient task of building structures

Related to these issues is that the current battles are not only doing damage to the organisation but to democracy as a whole. The culture of patronage which is there for the public to see is interpreted as evidence of the ANC being a route to wealth. The intolerance displayed in recent demonstrations and the way debate is shut down, found in the alliance as a whole, is not conducive to building a culture of democracy. The lessons of the Zuma rape trial relate not only to the uneven diffusion of values relating to gender equality amongst leadership and membership. The trial also shows that a culture of democracy and debate is not rooted in our country. The behaviour of the crowd that were thanked on a daily basis by Young Communist League leadership, amongst others, displayed levels of intolerance, threats of violence and sexism that run counter to principles for which many have struggled long and hard.<sup>88</sup> These cannot be given up because of the utterances of some who provide slogans instead of analysis and sexism instead of gender equality. This is not purely a question for the ANC and its allies to consider, but a concern of all who cherish democracy in this country.

### **Personalisation and de-ideologisation – the challenge resulting from post- 1994 choices**

There is also a paradigmatic context that is part of the current crisis of the ANC, where it is depicted as a situation of paralysis of head office, confusion and irreparable divisions within the organisation. Much of this relates to personal questions, but one also needs to appreciate the political agendas that are in conflict. I have referred to de-ideologisation. That these divisions are being played out in a particular way, that they appear incapable of resolution is related to the trajectories chosen by Mbeki and his followers, who control the ANC leadership or did so with solid support at the top. Now we know that his supporters may have diminished, with the apparent loss of grip as well as impending end of his term as State President. For those who are driven by a desire to secure a position in the post Mbeki era it is not totally clear whether supporting or denouncing Mbeki is most likely to secure their future. Likewise premature denunciation as opposed to quiet dissociation and linking with other camps may be wiser since Mbeki's term still has two years to run. He is also likely to remain President of the ANC, where more than two

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88. See Suttner, "Power and ANC masculinities".

terms of office are permissible. If the State President is a close ally of his, it is likely that he will exercise influence on that office.

Leaving aside the personal, once the dust has settled, what are the issues? Unpacking the ideological programmes and where they conflict and how they impact on this crisis is difficult because all parties speak in a similar language, that was learnt in the time of revolutionary struggle, when all used Soviet textbooks and spoke the language of orthodox Marxism-Leninism. Thus, both opponents and supporters of GEAR, when they contest, use this discourse.

Underneath this language, certain general trends can be discerned:

- **Trimming down the ANC as organisation.** At the level of the state and top echelons of the ANC, especially those closest to Mbeki there has been a definite desire to trim down the mass character of the ANC and channel mass action in general along lines that are staid and institutionalised in a way that serves a broad programme, akin to that of a conventional social democratic party. The state will deliver a better life, but it will be the state sometimes consulting or calling *izimbizo*, but ultimately it is the state that is the actor to look to for resolution of problems and realisation of democratic goals.
- **Managing the popular.** What this means at the level of the popular and this will not be spelt out is that the state through structures like the *imbizo* seeks to channel mass activity and in fact co-own it with the masses. There the masses are called and they are heard and the state is to resolve what they raise in the *imbizo* and the masses are not intended to raise the issues independently as self-acting popular actors.<sup>89</sup> Their popular activity is to be state sponsored and under state direction, more or less discreet, but definitely with that state overseeing their involvement in the public domain.
- **SACP/COSATU fail to appreciate terrain.** On the side of the SACP and COSATU, and many members of the ANC who do not like this “domestication” of their mass role, there is a failure to acknowledge fully the terrain under which politics is currently

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89. See Arblaster, *Democracy*, for example pp 9 and 11, where independent popular activity is treated as a core meaning of democracy, despite its having been supplanted in much political discourse in recent times.



conducted. The state was not smashed and capitalism was not destroyed. Consequently the terrain has become one of constitutional government as well as reform. The language of the alliance partners often looks back to days of revolutionary struggle, but much of their practice conforms to the recognition that this is a terrain of reform. Thus the SACP land and banks campaigns are classical movements to achieve fundamental reforms and it is in such activities that they have been most successful, leading a broad coalition of forces, including the churches, without confronting the government. This helped to free government's hands to act against certain interests, should they have been willing. For the moment, the current leadership, with its fixation on Zuma, appears to have turned its back on such an approach.

- **Reform not theorised.** The notion of reform, because it is denied, is not adequately theorised so that there can be a distinction between reforms that are structural and empower workers and the poor and those that are a substitute for more substantial transformation that is both necessary and possible in the current conjuncture.<sup>90</sup> The period when the SACP developed the slogan "Socialism is the future – build it now!", through the last three words recognised that while socialism might be their long term goal (as it was for many ANC figures in a period that is not mentioned in polite circles)<sup>91</sup> there were gains that could be made before then, on a terrain that was obviously pre-socialist.

Indeed, COSATU has long practised the politics of structural reform, essentially that is its basis of existence on the shop floor. This mode of operation should have been quite familiar to that organisation even if it used a different discourse at the political level.

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90. See Kagarlitsky, *Dialectics of Change*.

91. See ANC, *The Green Book. Report of the Politico-Military Strategy Commission to the ANC National Executive Committee, August 1979*, where a committee including Oliver Tambo, Thabo Mbeki, Joe Modise, Moses Mabhida and Joe Slovo agree that socialism is the long-term goal, but that tactically it was unwise to foreground it. Callinicos, author of a biography on Tambo, misreads the significance of this document when she says it had no sub-text. The commitment to socialism was precisely that – unstated publicly but there. See L. Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo. Beyond the Engeli Mountains* (David Philip, Claremont, 2004), p 526. The actual name of the mountains is Engeleneni.

- SACP/COSATU try to drive the state.** However, the way in which politics is being played out at present, including but going beyond the treatment of the crisis is that the SACP/COSATU are trying to drive the state and determine policy as part of an alliance. Now it is part of doctrine of most revolutionary movements that the revolutionary movement, that is in this case including the ANC, drives the revolution, so that the ANC as government takes its cue from its mass following in the organisation and beyond. We have seen that the Mbeki government has in a sense tried to reconfigure its mass base, both by directing it to *izimbizo*, rather than having it act as an independent mass actor on the political stage. It has also sometimes indicated that it is not there as the ANC alone but represents the people of South Africa as a whole. So while the government, as a state constitutional structure has tried to sever the link with its followers as “drivers” of what they do, the SACP and COSATU have insisted that they can direct certain matters in which they have no status within the constitution of the country<sup>92</sup>. For example, calls for reinstatement of Zuma as Deputy State President or removal of charges and similar matters, while within the realm of a model of driving the revolution from the mass organisation, is in conflict with the state constitutional structures now in operation.
- No monolithic faction.** Neither side is monolithic and (this is strengthened by the de-ideologising tendency), neither is able to implement its programmes without hitches. Mbeki, before the current crisis weakened his position, nevertheless had great difficulty in how to “manage” the ANC membership and cadres. They have had expectations that cannot be embraced within the model he is using and consequently there have been periodic outbreaks of resistance, as indicated dramatically at the 2005 National General Council (NGC).
- Variety of tendencies within SACP/COSATU.** Likewise on the side of the SACP and COSATU, there are a variety of tendencies. They are in the main supporting Zuma’s candidacy, though certain figures at leadership and lower levels of the SACP and to some extent COSATU have deep reservations, reservations about which they are often forced to keep silent because of the principle of collective leadership and dealing with disputes internally. That one wants to elevate the popular element is in my view important. The

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92. Unlike the Communist Party of China and that in the former USSR.

question is how it is combined with a terrain of reform and representative democracy. Personally I would contest that it should be restricted to *izimbizo* and indeed the earlier SACP land and financial campaigns are not connected with the state. But little of this is theorised within an acknowledgement of the terrain as being one of reform, the existence of constitutional government not revolutionary seizure and consequent modalities, different from that envisaged in 1989. Instead, there is a very mixed message, many anti-capitalist slogans and very limited analysis.

### **Looking forward and looking back**

As this paper is being revised for publication at the beginning of 2007, events are continually unfolding, throwing up new questions and different ways of interpreting what has been happening. Too many people are making predictions about how events will unfold, when there is insufficient information about organisational dynamics and personal support or political orientation, in particular whether the former has supplanted the latter. Much of the commentary is based purely on public utterances at a national level. In reality we are told little about internal dynamics at any level, nor especially of specific dynamics outside of the national leadership.

But what needs remedying is a tendency that is partly present in the account I have provided. That is a focus on Mbeki as having provided the space for the crisis that has unfolded. Had Mbeki not run a tight ship and centralised so much in himself, it may well be that the opportunity for demagoguery and displacing of the political would have been narrowed.

But it is not correct to place the blame for this development at the door of any one individual, even if he happens to be the current President of the ANC and the country. We need to ask whether the Mandela presidency did not contain within its practices modes of operating that created opportunities for his successor to centralise authority and thus create a sense of grievances amongst those who felt excluded. How many people were able to stand up and contradict Nelson Mandela as President? Why was this? Did people all share the same ideas, automatically?

But even Oliver Tambo's leadership must come under scrutiny. He is presented by Luli Callinicos as the bearer of a consensus, much like that attributed to pre-colonial African societies, where after democratic debate the leader welds a consensus out of the different perspectives that

have been presented.<sup>93</sup> Even in pre-colonial societies there is some element of mythology in this notion of consensus, as indicated by some of the most eminent African philosophers.<sup>94</sup> But a consensus is not the same as agreement, and what space did those who represented trends slightly different from that of the consensus have for advancing their position. The Tambo presidency was during a period of militarisation and threat and while he may have been benign, we should not romanticise the space that may have been allowed. Pluralism was never entertained in the fullest sense. There were good reasons for stressing unity, and these perhaps created a sense of duty to defer to hierarchies. Also we should ask whether this all embracing unity is not partly responsible for the organisation retaining within its ranks many who committed and have never had to account for abuses of various kinds.

That brings us to those who were activists inside South Africa, members of organisations, people like myself. Were we not in some ways responsible for the creation of these trends? Did we not by our loyalty, well-intended as it may have been also help instil a sense that to raise certain questions would disrupt the unity of the struggle? Again, this was in the context of great danger, but the consequences may have been to narrow the space for debate and to lead many to exaggerate the extent to which the ANC and its internal support base were rooted in a culture of debate.

Finally, it is possible to read the expulsion of ANC chief whip, Mbulelo Goniwe as an embryonic sign of the organisation attempting to reverse some of the setbacks suffered by the principles of gender equality and also to regain its moral stature. Whether this is a beginning of a wider process remains to be seen. Also, great weight needs to be given to the importance placed on retaining organisational unity. It is illustrated by conduct around recent Eastern Cape elections, depicted as a victory for a Mbeki supporter and defeat for a person seen, according to the media, as a Zuma supporter (though Mcebisi Jonas, is definitely not a follower of Zuma, illustrating again the shallowness of media commentary). It is my understanding that some regions which campaigned against the victor, Stone Sizane, who only won by 100 votes, have indicated that despite this, they will support him as elected leader.<sup>95</sup> This is merely an

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93. See Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo*, pp 34-35, though it is a recurrent theme in the book.

94. See P. Hountondji, *African Philosophy, myth and Reality* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1996), in his critique of "ethnophilosophy".

95. Personal communication with individuals who attended provincial conference and are conversant with subsequent developments.

illustration of a wider commitment, whose extent and depth is hard to estimate, to holding the organisation together, something which Zuma's conduct is seen as putting in jeopardy.<sup>96</sup>

### **Abstract**

For much of 2005 and 2006 the ANC appeared to be tearing itself apart and was rocked by scandals and court cases affecting its Deputy President, Jacob Zuma, whose supporters rose in open defiance of the leadership of President Thabo Mbeki. This article traces the background to the current battle for succession to the presidency of the ANC and the country, and the consequent capacity to dispense patronage. It traces the process whereby the ANC transformed itself from an organisation engaged in insurrection to one where it is simultaneously mobilising and organising supporters and acting as the government of a conventional state. This dual status as organisation and government is seen as one of the key factors giving rise to centralisation in the presidency and conflict with the ANC mass membership and its allies, COSATU and SACP. There are nevertheless signs that what happens at the centre and the top may not be typical of the whole organisation. Unfortunately the range of experiences and understandings, in the various rural provinces have not yet been adequately recorded.

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96. I thank Peter Hudson, Steven Friedman, Judy Seidman, Rupert Taylor and anonymous readers for careful reading and helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I am also indebted to Michael Sachs for insightful discussions on the organisational character of the ANC since 1994. They have not seen this version so they bear little responsibility. It was not possible to implement a suggestion of an anonymous reader to conduct interviews with others who had been or are in leadership since they are bound by rules of discipline which would mean that they cannot now speak as I do. This paper has been prepared as part of a Friedrich Ebert Stiftung project, based in Mozambique, on "dominant parties". A similar view is expressed in an opinion piece by Nomboniso Gasa, "ANC crisis of leadership reflects a broader malaise", *Sunday Independent*, 22 October 2006, and I have benefited from continual discussions with her.

## **Opsomming**

### **Die African National Congress (ANC): Magsverkryging, Na-Bevrydingsfases en Huidige Krisis**

Vir die grootste gedeelte van 2005 en 2006 het dit gelyk asof die ANC homself uitmekaarskeur en is dit geskud deur skandale en hofsake rakende die adjunk-president, Jacob Zuma, wie se ondersteuners openlik in opstand teen die leierskap van president Thabo Mbeki gekom het. Hierdie artikel ondersoek die agtergrond van die huidige opvolgingstryd betreffende die presidentskap van die ANC en die land, asook die gevolglike vermoë om begunstiging te verleen. Dit speur die proses waardeur die ANC homself van 'n organisasie betrokke by oproer tot een wat tegelyk ondersteuners mobiliseer en organiseer, asook optree as die regering van 'n konvensionele staat, omskep het. Hierdie tweevoudige status as beide organisasie en regering word beskou as een van die sleutelfaktore wat veroorsaak het dat sentralisering in die presidentskap plaasgevind het en vir konflik met die ANC se massa lidmaatskap en sy bondgenote, COSATU en die SAKP verantwoordelik was. Daar is nogtans tekens dat wat op die middel- en topvlak gebeur, nie noodwendig tipies van die hele organisasie is nie. Ongelukkig is die omvang van beleving en begrip in die onderskeie plattelandse provinsies nog nie na behore aangeteken nie.

#### **Key words**

African National Congress (ANC); alliance; bureaucracy; centralization; Communists; corruption; crisis; democracy; government; leadership battle; liberation movement; negotiations; popular involvement; state and political organisation; trade unions; transformation.

#### **Sleutelwoorde**

African National Congress (ANC); alliansie; bevrydingsbeweging; burokrasie; demokrasie; Kommuniste; korrupsie; krisis; leierskapstryd; onderhandelings; populêre betrokkenheid; regering; sentralisasie; staats- en politieke organisasie; transformasie; vakbonde.