

ANC in crisis

Socialist mass workers party needed

The 3 August municipal elections and the student protests have confirmed our perspective following the Marikana massacre: "The battle lines [have been] drawn for colossal struggles to come ... the political reverberations will continue to rock the country like the aftershocks of an earthquake, and will alter the political landscape forever." (Izwi Labasebenzi 21/09/12)

Weizmann Hamilton Executive Committee

3 August – a decisive turning point

The local government elections have changed the political landscape almost beyond recognition. 3 August 2016 represents a decisive political turning point for post-apartheid SA. Despite remaining overwhelmingly dominant, the 8% decline in its vote, and the loss of Nelson Mandela Bay, Tshwane and Johannesburg hit the ANC like a defeat.

Working class voters left the ANC only 4% above the majority water-mark. The way has now been cleared, in only three years time, for the ANC to be unable to form a government on its own. Some form of the post local government elections coalitions would then most likely be repeated at a national level, ushering in a completely new political landscape.

The birth first in 2008, of the Congress of the People (Cope), and the formation, five years later, of the Economic Freedom Fighters represented different, successive stages in the confirmation of Izwi la Basebenzi's prognosis following Mbeki's ousting – that down this road lies the eventual break-up of the ANC. Cosatu's 2014 expulsion of the 300,000 strong Numsa, struck a crippling blow against the ANC's electoral mobilising capacity draining away the support of hundreds of thousands of workers and their families.

The divisions the ANC went into the 2016 local government elections with have now deepened to the point where a third major split cannot be ruled out should it fall below 50% in 2019. The current outbreak of hostilities has seen the Finance Minister threatened with arrest, Zuma contradicting Ramaphosa by denying the government was at war with itself, SACP ministers defiant about their possible dismissal from cabinet, the Communications Minister defying ANC NEC decisions in the courts etc.

ANC at war with itself

Nothing reveals the contemptible character of the Zuma administration more than the extraordinary power the Guptas have to appoint cabinet ministers – the complaints about which sparked the current factional conflict -- and the SABC board's brazen defiance of the courts on Hlaudi Motsoeneng's irregular appointment to senior positions. SA has become the banana republic the ANC elite – the stout defenders of "constitutional democracy" and the "rule of law" – always prided themselves the country would never degenerate into under them.

In less than a decade since the first serious cleavages in the post-apartheid ANC opened with Mbeki's recall, factional conflict has ceased to shock – it is now its political way of life. What is new is only the significant recasting of the factional line-ups in which former allies are now avowed enemies.



Cope died an early death, Zuma's "coalition of the wounded" has broken up and the Tripartite Alliance exists in name only. The Zuma faction is openly hostile to the SACP. Calls from within the SACP to divorce the ANC will grow louder before 2019.

The emasculated Cosatu's own implosion has not yet fully played itself out. After Numsa's expulsion and the Food and Allied Workers Union's departure, a damaging conflict over the presidential succession battle looms. When Cosatu's September Central Executive Committee failed to back Ramaphosa to succeed Zuma, the NUM broke ranks announcing its support for the 'butcher of Marikana' – a promise to continue as a politically irrelevant baas boy union.

Reduced to a cowardly political apologist for Zuma's faction, and with little credibility left amongst workers, the giant that was Cosatu founded in 1985 will be further diminished by these new strains.

Zuma faction's domination potentially fatal for ANC

Making full use of his authority and experience as ANC Head of Intelligence in exile, Zuma has systematically reengineered control of key organs of state – the police, intelligence and National Prosecuting Authority – installing his cronies to shield him from imprisonment. At the same time he has captured a number of state-owned enterprises and created an extensive patronage network that reaches into every corner of government.

The Zuma faction's rule over the ANC, until recently almost completely free of the intellectual pretensions that marked Mbeki's, has lately dressed itself up in the EFF's ideological language, noisily denouncing "white monopoly capital." The Black Business Council, nothing more than hyenas feeding at the state trough, held its September imbizo under the theme "economic freedom in our lifetime – aluta continua".

After Mbeki's ousting we pointed out that the Zuma and Mbeki factions were not involved in a clash of competing ideologies. In the final analysis, they are ideological peas-in-a-pod – you cannot tell them apart. (Izwi Labasebenzi 1/10/2008). In the latest factional conflict, nothing has changed.

Zuma's rule over the ANC, over whose structures he has until now had a vice-like grip which has been systematically tightened in the equivalent of a slow-motion organisational coup, has Bonapartist characteristics both internally to the ANC and in society. As its authority diminishes, it increasingly reacts to protests with state force. Utilising to the full the powers the very constitution his feeble opposition is rallying around, he ignores the very ANC NEC he dominates, the cabinet he has appointed and has reduced parliament to a stage on which he can laugh at the nation, as he runs the country with and for the Guptas.

Yet Zuma's power has begun to loosen as events outside the ANC reverberate inside it. The North West, Mpumalanga and KZN have turned into factional battle grounds. In KZN nearly 50% of the branches are challenging the ANC's provincial congress results in court.

The judiciary, acting as a check on Zuma's authoritarian instincts, has also inflicted blows on him and his faction. Zuma's strategy to subvert state institutions to avoid corruption charges has therefore not met with the same success. Apart from the Nkandla humiliation, his cronies – Mineral Resources Minister Zwane, his NPA fixers Jiba and Mrewbi and his SARS crony, Monyane – have all suffered serious reverses.

Yet so firm is Zuma's grip on ANC structures and so compromised the opposition – driven by the same objectives to protect their access to state resources for self-enrichment – that they are unlikely to stop Zuma's plan to ensure he is succeeded by his ex-wife, Nkosazana Zuma as president. Ramaphosa's support in the ANC is limited to an isolated Gauteng and sections of a politically crippled Cosatu.

Amnesty for Zuma?

The deeply hostile Polokwane factions found a way to reconcile, renewing their marriage vows in a shared belief that the ANC's unity took precedence over everything. This enabled the ANC to present at least a semblance of unity in 2009 and 2012. United with the sincerity of the best of enemies, the ANC's victories have been accompanied by diminishing electoral support. It therefore prepares for 2019 impaled on the horns of a serious dilemma.

A third split would see the ANC entering 2019 as rival blocs forced into previously unthinkable electoral alliances, leaving it perched on the edge of the sinkhole of oblivion. On the other hand, if it reconciles, it will have to do so on terms acceptable to the dominant Zuma faction. This will mean contesting the elections with Zuma effectively assured of an amnesty, virtually ensuring defeat.

To escape this dilemma the option of rigging the elections as insurance for the "right" outcome will undoubtedly be discussed in the 'smoke filled rooms' of Luthuli House. The logic of Gwede Mantashe and Jesse Duarte's unprecedented attacks on the IEC as the ANC's enemy after the municipal elections are not many steps away from demanding the election outcome they prefer. The ANC presidency was prepared to rubber stamp Zimbabwe's fraudulent elections and to sit on its own judicial report confirming it. Why would they not do it here? The only thing holding them back is the combativity of the working class and youth reflected in the high levels of protests in the workplace, the communities and on the campuses. Electoral fraud against this background could possibly set-off a 'South African spring' threatening the end of the ANC itself.

Unity post Polokwane proved to be an investment with rapidly diminishing electoral returns that may now turn negative. Zuma thus has become an inoperable brain tumour for the ANC. Any attempt to perform surgery through a recall would be potentially fatal. If, however, Zuma is not removed the ANC is threatened with electoral defeat in any case. Therefore a deal between both factions such as the one proposed by UDM leader, Bantu Holomisa, to give Zuma immunity in exchange for him stepping down as head of

state at the ANC conference in 2017, seems the only way to avoid an all-out factional war that would destroy the ANC. The ANC's convulsions are the symptoms of a party now in the throes of a death agony.

Workers party needed

As possible alternatives, the splits that have so far occurred in the ANC – Cope to its right, and the EFF to its left – have both proven to be a mirage for the masses. In the cold light of day the EFF's parliamentary theatrics and its Nkandla victory were unable to lend credibility to its claim to be a "government-in-waiting" ready to oust the ANC in 2019. The 3 August message is abundantly clear: a resounding rejection of the ANC, a death certificate for Cope and the EFF stamped as "not to be trusted as an alternative".

Malema's offer to merge with the ANC should it fall below 50% in 2019, marks the completion of the EFF's retreat to the right. The local government engagement with the DA is clearly preparation for marriage with its ideological twin, the ANC. Malema claims the merger would entail the burial of the ANC. In fact, just as the EFF helped to impose DA on electorates that did not give them outright majorities in the metros they now control, it now wants to foist the ANC on an electorate that would have rejected it. Having discarded nationalisation of the economy's commanding heights, and dropped socialism from its local government manifesto, what is abundantly clear is that this is a proposal for a pro-capitalist bloc. This places the EFF on the opposite side of the barricades to the proletariat in the class struggle.

The mole of revolution has been burrowing away beneath the surface over a considerable period of time. Numsa has unfortunately spurned the historical opportunities of both the 2014 and 2016 elections. The United Front and the Movement for Socialism have both been aborted. The promised revolutionary socialist workers party is being prepared deep inside the bowels of Numsa's internal structures, insulated from the daily struggles of the working class – an SACP Mark II.

With their main instrument imploding, the strategists of capital have been preparing with far greater urgency to protect their class interests in a post-ANC scenario. After Agang's spectacular failure and with the DA's limitations exposed, they have been courting the EFF in admiring tones over its "political maturity".

The late Allister Spark suggested, "whoever emerges as our post-Zuma president should consider declaring a state of economic emergency and forming a government of national unity... invite any opposition members of the National Assembly, as well as two from civil society, to join his Cabinet — plus two deputy ministers from outside the assembly." (Business Day 16/03/16)

The working class must match the urgency of the capitalist class by creating a mass workers party on a socialist programme. In the three main theatres of the class struggle – in communities, amongst students and in the workplace – WASP's call for unity corresponds to working class experience and the call for a nationwide socialist civic is finding support. The Socialist Youth Movement's call for a nationwide Free Education Movement is beginning to bring students together across organisational affiliations.

The Committee for a New Trade Union Federation affiliates must note #OutsourcingMustFall's successes amongst the 76% unorganised, marginalised sectors it has itself drawn attention to and actively orient towards them.

WASP fully supports the need, given the Tripartite Alliance experience, to defend the new federation's independence without being apolitical. The best insurance for class and political independence is for the new federation to play an active role in building a mass workers party on a socialist programme.