



LEFT RHETORIC AND THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (ANC)

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Jacob Zuma was made presidential candidate by a sound majority of the ANC spearheaded by the SACP (South African Communist Party) and COSATU, the national trade union organisation. His supporters expect from him a policy more to the left and away from what they claim has been Mbeki's overly liberal economic policies. After one year in power, has Zuma met the expectations of his supporters and what is the meaning of a policy more to the left in the South African context?

Joel Netshitenzhe, the former Head of the Planning Unit in the Presidency defines the left position in the following: "There is agreement in the Tripartite Alliance (ANC, COSATU and SACP) that an approach based on speeding up economic growth, job creation, poverty reduction and building a capable state is the most appropriate and radical one in pursuit of social equity"¹ A few differences on economic policy have occurred so far but they are not of a fundamental nature. COSATU wants import tariffs on strategic products to be raised in order to protect domestic producers. They also call for deliberate undervaluation of the Rand to promote exports and to make imports more expensive. The South African Reserve Bank with the support of the President withstood such demands and the Treasury stuck to its policy of liberalisation in a global economy.

After his election in 2009 President Zuma formed a politically mixed cabinet which included former Mbeki ministers and members of the trade unions and the SACP. This was already a strong indication that he is not out for radical changes. He entrusted Trevor Manuel, who was for 13 years Mbeki's Minister of Finance and who is now Minister in the Presidency, of all cabinet members with the development of a national plan. With this President Zuma made it clear to the public that he intends to continue Mbeki's economic policies.

Why some ANC members thought Jacob Zuma would initiate a shift to the left is difficult to comprehend because he is neither a rightist nor a leftist but an African traditionalist (not just because he is a polygamist). He approaches policy decisions through mediation and consensus. To rule by consensus is time consuming and inclines a tendency to the centre of the political spectrum. Therefore, he is criticized for being indecisive and for not leading the nation. In frustration, a grassroots leader writes: "South Africa needs a leader prepared to ... take risks on behalf of the public, especially the poor." and "Zuma's focus on holding the centre makes him incapable of bold leadership."²

¹ Joel Netshitenzhe: *Alliance pact would help speed up transformation to sustainable social equity*, Cape Times 04.05.2010

² Fazila Farouk, Executive Director of the South African Civil Society Information Service, in Cape Times, 04.01.2010

The disappointment with Zuma's poor leadership is creating tensions in the Tripartite Alliance of ANC, COSATU and SACP. The ANC allows for a strange constellation, so that members of the SACP can also be members of the ANC. For example, the Secretary General of the ANC, Gwede Mantashe, is also Chairman of the SACP. The SACP is even registered with the Independent Electoral Commission and could go for elections on its own, something which some challenge them to do. The SACP knows that its chances at elections are limited and sees its role in spearheading change within the ANC. But the SACP is no longer known to be the vanguard of a left agenda. Gwede Mantashe has become the darling of business since he stood up against the demands of the ANC Youth League. Party member Mazibuko K Jara criticises the situation whereby the "SACP strategy is almost exclusively reflected through the prism of the ANC. This distances party strategy from grassroots organising..." The party should build a mass movement around basic demands such as a basic income grant, a public national health insurance, and a redistributive agrarian reform.³

The discussion on the call for the nationalisation of the mines which was brought forward this time by Julius Malema, the leader of the ANC Youth League, and propagated as a left project, highlights another dimension on left policies in South Africa. Nationalisation was an original aim of the ANC but was dropped after Nelson Mandela attended the World Economic Forum in Davos for the first time in 1992. Since then the ANC believes that state ownership should only focus on areas that provide public goods.⁴ Even the trade unions rebuked Malema stating that nationalisation is not an option and would not be of advantage to workers.

The nationalisation debate brings forward an old divide in the ANC, not between right and left, but between socialists and nationalists. "We have had 80 years of tension", said Steven Friedman from the Institute for Democracy.⁵ Originally the discussion was on whether South Africa should "belong to the blacks" alone (the nationalists) or whether it should be a society for all. The Freedom Charter of 1955 clearly states in the first sentence: "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black or white..." Today, it appears that the nationalists around the Black Management Forum and the ANC Youth League "favour the accumulation of state-linked assets for the purpose of maximising patronage and political power." "Linked to this *rentier* tendency is a growing problem of corruption and maladministration..."⁶

³ Mazibuko K Jara: *Communists need to take a sho't left*, in Mail and Guardian, December 4 to 10 2009, page 19

⁴ Joel Netshitenzhe: *Alliance pact would help speed up transformation to sustainable social equity*, Cape Times 04.05.2010

⁵ *Tripartite tensions stir talk*, Business Review, 15.12. 2009

⁶ Peter Draper and Nic Dawes: *Economic political battle lines drawn* in Mail and Guardian, April 9 to 15 2010

This author argued elsewhere that Zuma will not be able to fight corruption because of his involvement in a corruption case which was dropped on formal procedures.⁷ Zuma's first year in power confirmed this bleak outlook. "The Scorpions", the special unit that investigated Zuma's corruption case, was dissolved and Menzi Simelane made Head of the National Prosecution Authority who is in the view of the legal community unfit for this position but loyal to Zuma.

The Amnesty International Report 2010: State of the World's Human Rights says of South Africa "Corruption and nepotism impeded community access to housing and services, and led to the collapse of some municipal governments and to widespread protests among affected communities."⁸ The Special Investigation Unit told Parliament that 400,000 civil servants were receiving state benefits to which they were not entitled and 6,000 had failed to declare their private business interests.⁹ 15 of the 16 adults who are linked to Zuma (wives, lovers, and children) are in business of 134 companies of which 62% were registered after the Polokwane Congress when Zuma's future as State President was secured.¹⁰ Public tenders have to give priority to companies that are owned by blacks or to companies in which blacks hold 25% of the shares. This policy of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) has a laudable intention but has in part deteriorated in what SACP's Blade Nzimande (now Minister of Higher Education) describes as a project for "tenderpreneurs" and for the comprador class of BEE capitalists.

Many in the Tripartite Alliance are losing faith in the ability of President Zuma to lead the nation decisively and fear that he is not willing to stem the tide of growing corruption. Many regard ANC Secretary General and SACP Chairman Gwede Mantashe "as their saviour to free them from the grasp of the tenderpreneurs represented by the likes of Malema..."¹¹ The ANC National Congress in 2012 will give an indication of the direction in which the party is moving. If Gwede Mantashe keeps his job as Secretary General one can assume that the nationalists have not got the upper hand. They favour Deputy Police Minister Fikele Mbula for this post.

South Africa needs a developmental state to overcome the injustices of apartheid and to correct the imbalances which are developing in the course of the liberalisation and globalisation of the South African economy. This is basically the outset of a left agenda and is claimed to have been followed by Mandela, Mbeki and now Zuma. What has been achieved?

⁷ Arnold Wehmhoerner: *South Africa after the April 2009 Elections*, http://www.feps-europe.eu/fileadmin/downloads/thematic_studies/090602_FEPS_Wehmhoerner_EN.pdf

⁸ *Rights abuses continue amid poverty, corruption and crime in SA – Amnesty*, Cape Times, 28.05.2010

⁹ *A special report on South Africa*, The Economist, June 5th-11th 2010, page 10

¹⁰ *The Zuma Family's business empire*, Mail and Guardian, March 19 to 25 2010

¹¹ Rapule Tabane: *Why Zuma can't win on Malema*, Mail and Guardian, April 23 to 29 2010

The ANC inherited a bankrupt state in 1994. Since then the economy has grown continuously, nearly 5% in the five years before 2008. In 2009 the economy shrank by 1.8% for the first time. Exports account for 33% of GDP and public debt was halved to 23% of GDP in 2008. Growth of around 3% is predicted for 2010. A favourable stage has been set for job creation and government spending in housing, health and education, the strategic fields through which social justice can be achieved.

The official unemployment rate is at 25%. Even more disturbing is the fact that 30% of blacks are unemployed compared with just 6 % among whites. 50% of the age group 15 – 24 years are without a job. While wages are not high, taken together with productivity, they are not globally competitive.¹² The public health sector is in an appalling state. One doctor cares for 4,570 patients, while in the private sector the ratio is one doctor to 600 patients. Thousands of doctors and nurses have left the country because of poor pay and grim working conditions. While South Africa spends 8.6% of GDP on health, the public sector accounts for only 41% of that total compared with 82% in Britain, 79% in France and even 46% in the USA.¹³ Education policy expert Graeme Bloch states that 60-80% of South African schools are not functioning. They produce students who are barely literate and numerate and Bloch believes the country is headed for a national education crisis.¹⁴ South Africa ranks bottom (out of 133 countries) in both maths and science education in the latest Global Competitive Index.¹⁵ Despite heavy spending in social welfare South African society has remained one of the most unequal in the world and has overtaken Brazil. The Gini coefficient is at 0.679 in 2009 and is unacceptably high.¹⁶

On the positive side the ANC claims that it has done what was possible in such a short time. People who live in formal dwellings increased from 64% in 1996 to 75% in 2009. Access to running water has increased from 62% (1994) to 89%, and electricity for lighting from 51% (1994) to 83%.

The world just watched a well organised Football World Cup in South Africa. The country is acclaimed for having produced first world soccer facilities on time and for its ability to successfully host such a mega event. Why can a country with such a potential not do more for the poorer sections of its society, especially in the strategic sectors of health and education? It is obvious that the country has a capacity problem with implementation. There are several reasons for this, some are: the brain drain of mainly white professionals in the public sector which could not be replaced quickly enough

¹² *Diaspora could help growth*, Business Report 29.06.2010

¹³ *A special report on South Africa*, The Economist, June 5th-11th 2010, page 14

¹⁴ *The Toxic Mix: What's wrong with South Africa's schools and how to fix it* by Graeme Bloch,

¹⁵ *A special report on South Africa*, The Economist, June 5th-11th 2010, page 13

¹⁶ *South Africa has widest gap between rich and poo*, Business Report, 28.09.2009

by the new black elite which is inexperienced, as well as the badly functioning local governments. Growing corruption, however, cannot be excused with reference to the apartheid legacy.

The upcoming discussions in the ANC on policy direction and persons are already the first battle lines for the succession of President Zuma. Zuma will try to secure a second term for which he needs the support of the Tripartite Alliance. He will stay in the centre and remain indecisive when decisions could hurt either of them. The nationalists will use socialist terminology to gain the support of the public and will claim to be the true champions of the poor against the whites thereby endangering the sensitive fabric of the new multiracial society.

Although the ANC never labelled itself to be socialist or social-democratic, it has a left history committed to a developmental state which corrects and intervenes in order to achieve social justice. Nearly two decades after the liberation struggle personal gain as motivation has become as important or even more important to many politicians as their commitment to an ideology of justice and equality. One might call this the “normalisation” of a political system after the heroic Mandela years. At present the checks and balances of South Africa’s democracy are tested. Some developments are very disturbing like the unwillingness to fight corruption or the party politicisation of the legal system. The ANC’s constitutional obligation to care for the poor will then be lost, no matter what left rhetoric is used.