

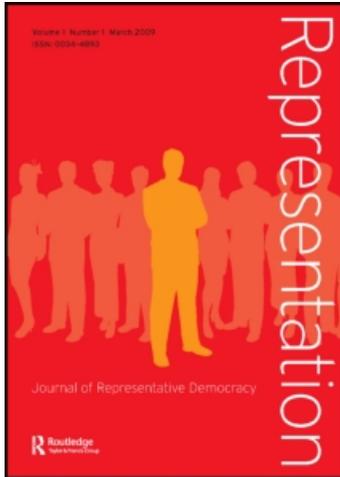
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THE CHALLENGE TO AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS DOMINANCE

Raymond Suttner

Recent developments in the African National Congress (ANC), especially the conflict over the key leadership positions, indicate a substantial crisis in South Africa's dominant party. Massive divisions have emerged and even led to a new breakaway party, Congress of the People (COPE). There is a lack of cohesion among party leadership, and many serious questions have been raised as to the enduring moral authority of the former liberation movement. Through an historical analysis stretching back to the formation of the SANNC in 1912, the article demonstrates that the emergence of the Zuma-led ANC represents a substantial rupture with ANC political history and culture. Further, this rupture is not ideological so much as tied to organisational practices of central control and patronage, and these practices could well become more entrenched, and even violent, into the future.

Introduction

In March 2009 every person following South African politics became aware that something new is happening in our history. It is also something new to the history of the ANC, the liberation movement that led the struggle for democratic rule, and it is potentially creating a new situation for the system of governance. But what exactly is it that is changing? This article sets out to engage this question, but without any pretence of providing a meaning and interpretation that is absolute, enduring and unassailable.

In politics, whether as a commentator or direct actor, one has to understand the character of relationships between forces, in our case, those forces within the ANC and its allies, or even its rivals like the recently formed Congress of the People (COPE). The formation of this breakaway from the ANC, of apparently sizeable numbers of the ANC's membership, is more than a dramatic event, but has to be assessed in terms of whether or not it potentially alters the overall political environment within which the prospects for continued ANC dominance will be acted out.

Hence, we need to understand whether or not the ANC is in crisis, as is widely claimed, and if so, what this means for understanding the present and the potential future(s) of the party, its allies and its rivals. This article holds that there is a crisis in the ANC because the level of division within the organisation is publicly evident as in the sharp disagreements between those who supported the elevation of Jacob Zuma to the presidency of the party, and others who supported Mbeki, or still others who are for other reasons seriously disaffected with ANC politics. There is a lack of coherence and cohesion in the ANC leadership and scepticism over its moral qualities amongst wide sections of the population.

Further, it will be argued that the ascendancy of the Zuma-led leadership is a rupture with the ANC past, its long debated and gradually constructed (albeit contested) legacies

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and traditions and this in itself poses critical questions for the organisation. These ruptures may also have systemic consequences.¹

The Legacies and Cultures of the ANC

The ANC is the oldest liberation movement on the African continent although the Natal Indian Congress, which does not currently exist, was formed by Mahatma Gandhi in 1894. The ANC was established as the South African Native National Congress in 1912, initially for African men only. In the decades preceding 1950 it mainly pursued the politics of petitioning and had very few organisational structures. It assembled once a year for annual conferences and its grievances were mainly channelled through delegations which sought meetings with the Imperial authorities and later that of the Union Government. Many have mocked these delegations as going 'cap in hand' to beg for concessions from their masters. It may be more accurate to read more than one meaning into such approaches. On the one hand they wore the apparel of their rulers and used the language of imperial loyalty, but in so doing they made claims as subjects of that empire to rights that they attributed to the beneficence of the King or Queen of the time (Suttner 2009a).

The ANC itself was established as a 'native union' two years after the establishment of the white dominated Union of South Africa. This phrase bears potentially revolutionary connotations in posing the idea of a counter union to that which had been established (Seme [1911] quoted in Johns 1972: 71–3; Jordan 1988: 113–14). Over time the ANC broadened its membership base from that which had been its initial core. By the 1930s its impact as a movement of petitioners had yielded few results and the organisation was practically dormant. Indeed, there were other organisations with more members and more political or worker activities. In the late 1930s a decision was taken to send the Secretary General Rev (later Canon) James Calata on a countrywide tour to assess organisation. That it took him three years to complete gives some indication of the harsh conditions of the time (Walshe 1970: 257).

In 1944 a committee was established to examine ways of reviving the ANC, and interestingly, one of its members had consulted Gandhi in India (Walshe 1970: 257, 259), one indication of the continued interaction between the Indian and South African liberation movements over the decades. In the late 1940s, with the ascendancy of Dr A.B. Xuma to the presidency of the ANC, the organisation was established with a working administrative and accounting system, forming the basis for later organisational development and its membership rose to near 5000 (Walshe 1970: 256–8). Also in the 1940s the ANC Youth League was formed under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Oliver Tambo, A.P. Mda and Anton Lembede. The Youth League operated on the basis of a programme of radical Africanism and active engagement in opposition to the apartheid government (Gerhart 1978). It is seldom acknowledged that this might have remained pure rhetoric had it not been preceded by the earlier, patient organisational work of Xuma and Calata.

The Youth League criticised the 'mother body' for its unwillingness to get its hands dirty (referring to the non-adversarial, petitioning of the early years) and called for a radical programme of action. At the 1949 ANC conference this programme was adopted and Walter Sisulu was elected Secretary General. Under Sisulu, the ANC, for the first time, operated with collective leadership instead of individual charismatic leaders (First 1982). This was the start of a process of establishing the ANC as an organisation drawing in people from all sectors of society, and gradually extending its alliances to other population groups. African women

had become eligible members in 1943, in a new constitution (Walshe 1970: 379–80). Membership remained for Africans only until 1969 when opened to all outside the country. At this time it remained an illegal organisation inside South Africa.

A notable development in this period is that the organisation moved, in line with its programme of action, from strict obedience of the law to confronting the law, most famously through a Defiance Campaign. In 1952–53, having set a deadline for the government, thousands of people of all population groups defied a series of laws that symbolised apartheid and went to jail. During this campaign, the organisation's paid-up membership rose from 7000 to 100,000 (Walshe 1970: 402–3). Sisulu (2001: 79) said, in contrast to the term used in the earlier Indian campaign of 1946–47 that they had specifically chosen the word 'defiance' rather than 'passive resistance'. They wanted to raise the level of intensity of struggle against apartheid. Thus volunteers who broke the law were known as 'defiers of death'.

Having crossed the line of legality, the ANC remained non-violent but there were murmurings all over the country about the ultimate and inevitable military collision with the apartheid government (Magubane et al. 2004: 53ff; Suttner 2008: Ch. 2). In fact, when Sisulu visited China in the early 1950s, without organisational sanction, he and Mandela agreed that he should raise the possibility of support for armed struggle. This was declined by the Chinese Communists as requiring more preparation by the movement (Mandela 1994; Magubane et al. 2004: 54).

Having successfully defied apartheid laws, the need was to go beyond reaction and spell out a vision of the South Africa of the future. This had been done before in the *African Claims*, written at the time of the *Atlantic Charter*, but that had emerged from a committee of intellectuals in 1944 (Walshe 1970: 271ff). The Freedom Charter campaign, would elicit demands from ordinary people throughout the country and these would be incorporated in a formal document, the Freedom Charter, which was later adopted at the Congress of the People in June 1955. The ANC itself officially adopted it as its own policy at a special conference held in 1956. The campaign was unique in that, allowing for possible exaggeration over its scope, there is archival evidence of people sending in their demands on scraps of paper, backs of cigarette packs, school exercise books and so on. These demands ranged over broad issues of freedom and narrower community or sectoral issues (Suttner and Cronin 2006a).

The demands were not themselves a document but fragments that had to be consolidated into a consensus document, reflecting the overwhelming sentiments and that was adopted as a charter at the congress. Proceedings were interrupted by the security police who seized a range of documents, many of which later formed the basis for the almost five-year-long Treason Trial. The trial was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it was a valuable opportunity for leadership to form lasting relationships of trust, one of the most intriguing being that between ANC President Chief Albert Luthuli and Communist leader Moses Kotane (see Bunting 1998). On the other hand, having many top leaders tied up in trials or detained during the state of emergency of 1960 undermined the organisational gains made by the ANC in the preceding years.

In the aftermath of the Defiance campaign and the banning of the Communist Party in 1950, the ANC made rudimentary plans, known as the 'M Plan', to establish itself as an underground organisation some time in the future. This entailed forming small cells that would learn how to operate in secrecy and also conduct political education in units throughout the country. It was hard to implement in a situation where potential illegality was not tangible and the plan was only put into practice at a later stage after banning, and often as late as the 1980s (Suttner 2008: Chs. 2, 4). In the meantime however, the South African Communist

Party (SACP) was constituted as an underground organisation in 1953 and operated without any losses until after 1960 (Suttner 2008: Ch. 3). It should be noted that, in the lectures used for political education in the ANC at this time, there was already a distinct Soviet Marxist inflection. In addition, the process of implementing the M-Plan was primarily, and perhaps necessarily, top-down. Both of these factors tend to be attributed almost exclusively to the period of exile, when they are in fact also found in these earlier experiences (Suttner 2008: Ch. 2).

Illegality and Armed Struggle

All African men (and from the late 1950s women as well) had to carry passes or 'reference books' in order to control their movement, primarily into the cities. Many individuals were imprisoned because their documents were not with them and this constituted a major grievance held by many against apartheid. In 1960 at least 69 were killed in Sharpeville protesting these pass laws. Shortly thereafter, ANC leaders publicly burnt their passes. The photographs of Luthuli, Sisulu and Mandela setting the documents alight symbolised the increased resort to dramatic illegal approaches. Notably, the symbolism of burning had long been a part of the Indian struggle and was dramatically marked by the burning, under Gandhi's leadership, of Indian registration certificates at Newtown, Johannesburg in 1908.

In 1960 the ANC and PAC² were banned but decided to operate underground. The ANC was not well prepared, though it drew on its previous limited application of the M-Plan, and more importantly, the years of underground experience of the small Communist Party. The difference between the Communists and the ANC however was that the ANC was a mass organisation and it was well nigh impossible to successfully transform a legal into an illegal structure overnight. As in much of ANC history, members had difficulty transforming from one mode or culture of organisation to another. The habits of legality and how to chair a meeting or take minutes had become firmly engrained in the minds of many members after much effort, and they were reluctant to abandon these and other formerly legal activities (Suttner 2008: Ch. 2).

This is part of a broader theme in ANC history, that is, of resistance within continuity and continuity within resistance. The embryos of new phases can be found in earlier and the aftermaths of earlier phases can be found in later ones. For example, in the case of the Defiance Campaign the uniform was akin to military attire, thus foreshadowing the establishment of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* or MK (literally 'the Spear of the Nation'). At the same time, the uniform included a Gandhian peasant cap associated with non-violent activities. So the ambiguous meanings of imagery often coexisted with or contradicted what was in fact happening politically. After some discussion, the ANC together with the SACP launched MK and engaged in limited acts of sabotage in South Africa. At this time most of the leaders had been arrested and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

ANC Underground, Exile Period

Most history books record the post-Rivonia trial period (which saw the jailing of Mandela and other major leaders) as one of almost complete inactivity until the 1976 rising (see Suttner 2008: Ch. 4). Many young men went into exile to join MK, expecting to return with training within six months. That was not to be, and many never returned while others sat impatiently in camps. Important joint campaigns with the Zimbabwean liberation

movement ZAPU³ were launched in 1967 and 1967–68 into then Rhodesia. While accounts differ as to the degree of success achieved by the liberation forces, the ANC found ZAPU ill-prepared, and the campaign was not a great success. Many MK soldiers retreated to Botswana and, like Chris Hani, spent some time in Botswanan jails. Others spent over a decade in Rhodesian jails. Some made their way to South Africa.

There is a tendency to assume that banning meant obliteration of the ANC inside the country, yet many ANC supporters and members remained behind and were not jailed, including stalwarts like Albertina Sisulu. Many of these formed underground units in urban and rural areas, some of these in very remote locations (Suttner 2008: Ch. 4). In some cases they helped send some men and women who were in danger or who required military training outside the country. In other situations, they conducted political education. In the meantime, the gap left by the ANC in the public domain was partially filled by the black consciousness movement and other organisations (Gerhart 1978). In many cases ANC underground figures entered a creative dialogue with some of the black consciousness figures, although the black consciousness organisations and ideological positions were important in their own right (Suttner 2008: Ch. 4).

A more conservative force, *Inkatha*, later renamed the *Inkatha* Freedom Party (IFP), was in an ambiguous relationship with the ANC in the 1970s. On the one hand, the organisation participated in the collaborationist Bantustan structures, but they refused to accept independence as was done by Transkei in 1976. The ANC initially appeared to adopt a conciliatory attitude, encouraging *Inkatha* to use the space in the Bantustan for creating nodes of opposition to apartheid. But a meeting with *Inkatha* in the late 1970s led to a breakdown in relations. Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi used the space initially to project *Inkatha* as the successor to the ANC, whose leadership and existence was depicted as purely in exile. At various points, in the absence of the ANC, it may be that *Inkatha* substituted itself successfully and enjoyed considerable support. In the mid-1970s until the end of the decade, many media surveys showed Buthelezi enjoying considerable support, while Mandela appeared forgotten, partly because his image could not be legally displayed (see also Dubow 2000).

The presence of ANC underground figures in townships meant that when the 1976 risings broke out, some of the stalwarts were in a position to offer guidance. However, many of the leading individuals from the rising were forced to leave the country and underground organisation often assisted their departure (Tshabalala 2003). In exile new recruits found the ANC better prepared to receive them, and their presence boosted morale, leading to some daring military attacks in the late 1970s, and ultimately the revival of popular struggle in South Africa. The same period, the 1976 risings, put paid to *Inkatha's* claim to be part of the liberation forces in that it sided with attempts to put down the student risings and created rifts with black consciousness groups and later also ANC-aligned groups.

The Morogoro 1969 ANC Consultative Conference

To return to the aftermath of the Wankie campaign, many cadres were demoralised and angry over what they saw as reluctance of the leadership to return to South Africa and to wage the armed struggle more seriously. One of those who wrote a critical memorandum in this period, and was almost sentenced to death as a result, was Chris Hani, a leader of MK and the SACP, later assassinated in 1993 (Shubin 2008: 66ff). The Morogoro conference was a turning point in that, even without the prospect of the revival of popular struggle that

ensued after 1976, the liberation movement charted out a course for strategic development intended to lead to the overthrow of the regime. It was a document written for membership and followers who were on the brink of despair. The strategy and tactics document charted the strengths and weaknesses of the two sides to the apartheid conflict, indicating how the weaknesses of 'the enemy' could be exploited in order to gradually free the area (ANC 1969). Gramsci (1971: Ch. 1) defines an intellectual not by formal qualifications but by the role performed in relation to others. In this sense, the document was in the tradition of Gramsci's description of the party as an 'intellectual' or 'collective intellectual' giving strength and understanding of the course to be adopted (1971: Ch. 1). It provided insights beyond what was immediately before the activists of the time. In the years that followed, activity did not immediately pick up dramatically although there was some infiltration of cadres and also distribution of ANC and communist literature in South Africa, and periodic trials indicated activity in rural and urban areas.

1976 Rising and Popular Struggle

While the 1976 rising emanated in Soweto against the imposition of the Afrikaans language as the medium of instruction in schools, it soon transformed into an attack on the apartheid system generally and spread throughout the country. The conflict was uneven with students wielding stones against the heavy weaponry of the apartheid armed forces, leading to many deaths and the jailing of many youths. Large numbers of these young boys and men found themselves in prison in the company of seasoned cadres of the ANC, and while at first impatient with their apparently less militant approach to prison and organisation generally, the newcomers were gradually and mostly won over to the ANC (Buntman 2003). The rising also gave impetus and courage to others to establish or re-establish organisations amongst student, workers, civics, women's and other sectors, and there was a proliferation of anti-apartheid media like *Grassroots*, *Speak* and others. In a sense these operated on the margins of the law and forced the state to concede space for their open anti-apartheid activity.

Struggle on a Range of Fronts Escalated

The late 1970s to the mid to late 1980s saw a combination of heightened mass struggle within the country directly challenging government authority, the development of strong unions, an increase in MK activities, intense international isolation of the apartheid regime and a growing diplomatic offensive from a wide range of states and non-state anti-apartheid organisations. All this was alongside the continued existence of underground structures that provided a measure of continuity as bearer of the heritage of struggle (Suttner 2007, 2008). All of these factors, made South Africa increasingly ungovernable. At the same time the country witnessed the rise of organs of popular power where local organisation displaced that of government. These structures were based on street committees and sometimes drove police and collaborationist councillors out of the townships. In one of the most successful ventures, in Port Alfred, a state building was taken over and turned into a crèche. The imposition of a series of states of emergency locking away thousands appeared to temporarily halt, but not end this level of disaffection. By locking away mainly leadership figures, the level of discipline of these popular organs deteriorated and 'kangaroo courts' proliferated and the difference between gangsterism and activism became blurred (Suttner 2004).

Towards the end of the 1980s it became clear that there was a deadlock between the apartheid state and liberation movement, what Gramsci (1971: 238–9) calls a ‘reciprocal siege’, with neither side able to defeat the other on the battlefield. This created conditions where a negotiated settlement became possible. Initiated in secret by Mandela in prison, and by Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma in exile, negotiations proceeded with the consent of Oliver Tambo, ANC President, and the National Executive Committee (NEC), although some complained of not being properly informed (Sparks 1997; Waldmeir 1997; Shubin 2008: 283). The intelligence services on both sides played a key role in facilitating these engagements (Sanders 2006).

On 2 February 1990 President F.W. de Klerk unbanned all organisations, apparently demonstrating recognition on all sides that there was now a possibility of winning peace without the further loss of lives. At the same time, the apartheid regime sought to fight the battle towards elections on an unequal basis by strengthening its allies like the IFP and using violence either directly or through proxy forces, against the ANC (Sparks 1997, for example at 171, Waldmeir 1997:206).

The ANC and the National Liberation Movement Model

Throughout the African continent liberation movements depicted themselves as representing the nation as a whole, and countering the divide and rule tactics of colonial or apartheid rule. This is reflected in slogans like ‘ANC is the nation’ or ‘KANU is your mother and father’. This was a means of unifying followers and countering the divisiveness that had usually characterised the period of conquest and control before the formation of the particular liberation movement. While having this positive side, potentially drawing in everyone supporting democratic change, it was also essentially anti-pluralist, something that was not so serious a factor during the struggle because of the dangers of the time and the constraints that made unity at all costs often a military necessity.

In the post liberation period however, and almost universally, there has been a tendency for liberation movements, including the ANC, to be intolerant of opposition, especially when manifested in opposition parties or in the case of South Africa, in sectoral organisations concerned with everyday issues like electricity cut offs. The early years of independence in Africa saw the rise of many one-party states, usually overthrown by the military and ending democracy in general.

This National Liberation Movement (NLM) model tends to lead to formulaic thinking and resistance to critical thinking which could ‘divide the movement’. It has also tended to see the ceding of popular power to the liberation movement, which then becomes government, and which then is further centralised in the cabinet and ultimately the presidency (Suttner 2004b). In a sense, the manifestation of these tendencies have suppressed differences which may now be emerging in South Africa, though in the main this has related to sectoral organisation and identities, not political programmes.

Building the ANC as a Legal Organisation

Following unbanning in 1990 the ANC faced the task of (re)building its structures, often in places where there had not previously been any. It could not simply pick up where it had left off in 1960 and it had to bring under one fold a range of categories of established cadres and new members who knew little about the ANC. These were individuals whose

varied experience prior to, and inside of, the ANC predisposed them towards particular expectations from the organisation, as well as many others who had only vague ideas of what the ANC might mean. Indeed, the ANC had to think long and hard about what type of organisation it wanted to be, given the new conditions under which it worked, which also coincided with a changed international conjuncture through the collapse of Eastern European socialism.

While new members had limited political understanding, cadres who joined prior to 1990 had varied exposure to political education, mainly on ANC history and Marxism. In prison and more broadly in the 1950s there had always been a hierarchical element in political education, as well as in political activity and organisation, and clearly hierarchy is a very substantial obstacle in any emancipatory movement (Hoffman 2001: 6ff, 23–7). Yet we should be careful not to relate contemporary hierarchical practices in the ANC purely to exile or prison experiences.

The masses on the ground, always there, always organised in one or other form, sometimes sporadically, sometimes over a longer period, sometimes in a limited number of sectors, sometimes more broadly, were a crucial factor in the liberation struggle. While conservative literature dismisses them as a mob or rabble (Williams 1983: 298), left leaning literature often tends to romanticise the contribution of the ‘popular’, but even the use of that word may be contested.

The position adopted here is that action by the masses in the decisive period after 1976 was not always positive or emancipatory and often could be directed towards abuse. But there were significant moments where mass contribution led to opening spaces and played a significant role in future democratisation. The paradox is that having opened the door, the popular forces could not be present in the chambers of government to safeguard their gains, given the system of representative democracy. They became the support base ‘outside’ where it was happening. It is notable that neither the Zuma ANC nor COPE appears to address the relationship between representative and mass democracy today.

This mass element was present from the earliest days. One year after the ANC was formed, women marched on the conservative city of Bloemfontein to protest the pass laws under the banner ‘We have done with pleading, we now demand!’ (Wells 1991; Gasa 2007). In the 1950s there was a broad resurgence of mass activity around a range of organisations and again in the late 1970s and in the 1980s. The ANC itself helped coordinate these through its illegal radio station Radio Freedom, declaring each year in honour of one or other sector, for example, Year of the Women, Year of the Youth and many others. These declarations stimulated a proliferation of organisations.

Organisational development continued to broaden, representing millions of people under the ANC-aligned, but legal United Democratic Front (UDF), formed in 1983. Many of its members were simultaneously linked in one or other way with the ANC underground or other elements of its structures. Despite its more direct democratic character, it is a mistake to ignore the replication of many of the features of anti-pluralism and often authoritarianism found within internal structures (Suttner 2004). The 1980s saw a great deal of debate on the Freedom Charter and the nature of the struggle between various disputing groups, some being ANC aligned and others outside of that. The purpose of many of these debates was purely to win contests for support and not to develop critical consciousness of alternative visions that could be offered (Suttner and Cronin 2006b). There was also a tendency to use violence to ‘convert’ followers of other camps, though this was not officially approved.⁴ The ANC in exile and the UDF often coincided in modes of operation, though the UDF obviously

had a more popular base to which it was more immediately accountable as its leadership was present within the country. In sum though, organisation inside and outside read from the same texts and instilled similar values.

ANC as Government and Transformation of Organisational Character

The period of negotiations saw a growing gap between leaders conducting negotiations and their mass base. Ordinary ANC members were given periodic reports and were sporadically called upon to break deadlocks through mass action. In other respects however, they were transformed from direct actors to spectators. The ascendancy of the ANC to the leading and ultimately sole force in government after 1994 saw an increasing gap between the ANC as government and the ANC as organisation. The latter was increasingly demobilised. This was partially due to the anti-popular tendencies of particular individual leaders, like Thabo Mbeki, who did not favour independent popular action and preferred top-down delivery by government with the population receiving the results in their water supplies, electricity and other unprecedented but often unevenly delivered facilities

The centralised mode of government is, however, common throughout the world and it has been seen throughout the African continent where the victory of liberation movements tends to see increasing centralisation in government and the presidency (Suttner 2004b). At the same time, there is no firm international evidence or precedent of the continued coexistence of strong popular forces or organisation alongside representative government, whether or not it is more or less centralised.

For all practical purposes the ANC has been run down as an organisation and its allies, the SACP and The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) complained of being treated as 'small boys' under the Mbeki presidency (Suttner 2007). In truth, some of these processes may already have been in motion during the presidency of Nelson Mandela, though some may argue that he had already delegated much to Mbeki. The period of post-1994 administration saw an ANC government in command of considerable largesse and patronage which was dispensed to loyalists either in terms of highly paid jobs or powerful positions. There had been patronage networks in exile and to a lesser extent within the country, but the resources that could be dispensed were not very plentiful.

Many of the processes for issuing of state contracts were questioned and corruption was alleged and often proved, as continues now on an almost daily basis. In one of these cases, Shabir Shaik, the then financial adviser of the ANC and State Deputy-President Jacob Zuma was implicated. Shaik was jailed on evidence that the court declared revealed a generally corrupt relationship between himself and Zuma. Although it was said by the prosecuting authorities that there was a prima facie case against Zuma he was not prosecuted at that stage.

After this judgement in mid-2005 however, Mbeki relieved Zuma of his duties as State Deputy president. This unleashed mass fury, with the repressed anger against the centralised form of government, excluding popular forces including the left allies, spilling over into a sense that Zuma was the victim of a conspiracy to prevent him from becoming the future president of the country. It should be noted however that there had never been any sign of ideological differences between Zuma and Mbeki over decades of close comradeship and that all that was objected to in Mbeki's style of rule. In this light, some of the presentations of Zuma as a popular leader who could be an ideological focal point for the left were clearly based on a rewriting of his political history by Zuma and the SACP leadership.

Towards the end of 2005, with the possibility of corruption charges hanging over Zuma, he was accused by a woman known as 'Khwezi' to allegedly have raped her in his home. A trial followed in 2006 and Zuma's lawyers, in line with international experience where rape complainants are 'put on trial' (Radford 1987), mounted a military style attack on the complainant aimed at discrediting her evidence and showing her to be mentally unstable (Suttner 2009a). The SACP, which had been particularly vocal in defence of gender rights when Chris Hani had been its leader, was complicit and silent in this process. Zuma was acquitted. The trial represented a setback for campaigners against gender violence and a climate of public debate, in that those who attacked the mode of defence were labelled or depicted as 'enemies'.

In the months that led up to the ANC conference in 2007 continual divisions within organisations emerged with many expulsions and allegations of corruption surfacing. What was significant is that the entire phenomenon of 'Zumafication' was 'de-ideologised'. It did not represent a political project that was any different from that of Mbeki, hence its first attraction was not to people with specific ideological goals but to those disaffected with Mbeki. The left claims of Zuma being more worker-friendly were incompatible with his previous record. The SACP and COSATU have various programmes, but these have been downgraded in favour of electing Zuma.

By de-ideologisation I am referring to a general phenomenon found in the post-Cold War world, with talk of the 'end of ideology', for slightly different reasons. The character of de-ideologisation in South Africa is that there is not a total absence of ideological input, but rather than it counts for little in the centre of politics. While hugging the left, Zuma and Matthews Phosa say one thing to workers and another to business. No South African government can afford to seriously alienate white capital, the most powerful economic force which has close contacts with overseas investors.

Consequently much of the Zuma constituency comprised individuals who had earlier enjoyed Mbeki patronage but had fallen out of favour, and found them out in the cold. Some others were emerging black business, who saw the turning of the tide and wanted to gain from this, others were disaffected on a personal level, with Mbeki, for reasons running back decades, and saw this as an opportunity to settle scores and most significantly there were the major allies, the SACP and COSATU. Both organisations did have significant and relatively independent pro-poor policies, but these were in fact devalued in the quest to adopt Zuma.

Mbeki Defeated in ANC Conference

At the national conference at Polokwane in November 2007, Thabo Mbeki was defeated by Zuma in an attempt to be re-elected President of the ANC. A substantial percentage of those elected to the new leadership have criminal records, have been under investigation or currently face charges or are under investigation for fresh charges. In short, the new 'elite' emerged with many warts, and little in the way of ideology. It is essential that it be stressed that this was not an ideological defeat or victory. The battle was for spoils, not policies.

While there is not space to delve into this, it may have been Mbeki's original plan, before his fortunes turned, to adopt the 'Soviet option', returning power to the party, and having the ANC headquarter (HQ) control a future government. In other words, he would be head of the 'engine of the revolution' the ANC HQ, giving direction to the incumbent state

president and government. In this regard, it should not be forgotten that Mbeki had been immersed in this Soviet-style political background.

Instead, with the election of Zuma as ANC president and Mbeki remaining State President—at that point—until the elections in May 2009, there was talk of dual power and some moments of resistance from government to directives from the newly elected, mainly Zuma aligned NEC. Insofar as there were these ‘two centres’, it was essentially temporary, and most Mbeki-appointed incumbents had read the signs and started to jump ship.

In January 2009 the KwaZulu Natal (KZN) high court criticised the prosecuting authority and alleged interference in the process by Mbeki himself. The ANC NEC used this to force Mbeki out of office, four months before he would have left in any case. Because Zuma still faced potential charges, ANC Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe was made state president and appointed some new members of cabinet, while retaining all those of the old who were willing to serve under him. This was made easier because the process of changing sides continues, although many of the more loyal Mbeki leaders have resigned and joined COPE.

There is thus much policy continuity in government in that the policies of the Zuma leadership, despite the left protestations from the SACP and COSATU, are not more radical than Mbeki’s, and some may even be more conservative. Zuma’s statements on the death penalty and other issues run counter to the constitution and the findings of the Constitutional court. On economic policy he and Phosa have constantly wooed business with offers that go beyond that of Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR). It is likely that Mbeki’s economic platform will remain the ‘only show in town’. On gender, there is a silence and condoning of statements of Julius Malema that mocked the rape complainant in Zuma’s trial (La Grange 2009). There is rupture in that there is a very dangerous trend with threats of violence condoned and very limited attempts to contain the excesses of youth who clearly know little about the ANC and very much about looting and power. Some of these are extremely wealthy. The more seasoned amongst the Zuma leadership find the vulgarity of the ANC and Communist youth embarrassing, but the thought of apparently no political home is unthinkable, and indeed there may not have been until very recently.

The coalition behind Zuma may have ousted Mbeki, but that does not mean it can hold. The Zuma leadership represents a coalition that is inherently unstable and also shows signs of both continuity and rupture. It contains some of the more refined members as well as riff raff, those who do not hesitate to create a climate of fear through threats of violence and have little respect for freedom of speech and engage in dubious financial deals. There are more dangerous contradictions in that the backing for Zuma comes from sections of business who do not relish a partnership with a left which certainly in the case of COSATU may sometimes have to display more than rhetoric, given its trade union base. The Zuma alliance also contains disgruntled former leaders or holders of government positions in intelligence and other areas, whose place in the future order may not be conducive to stability. Their presence means that there is a potential capacity to make any threat to political freedom, beyond what has already been experienced, a reality.

It may be that the roots of the ANC are sufficiently deep to weather these upheavals and that a cyclical process may lead to a remedy emerging. There appears no internal organisational force intent on achieving this. The emergence of the new opposition party, COPE, drawn primarily from within the ANC sets out to achieve this, though as will be indicated it is unlikely that immediate and dramatic progress will be made through elections.

The Shikota Breakaway and the Formation of COPE

After the dismissal of Mbeki, some of his former Ministers did not make themselves available to serve under the Motlanthe government. One of these, Mosioua 'Terror' Lekota a former leader of the UDF, entered into continued conflict with the Zuma-led ANC, and moved towards establishing a new party. Joined by former premier of Gauteng, Mbhazima Shilowa, the grouping became known as 'Shikota' and a flood of others joined them.

Attempts to hold meetings of various kinds by COPE have been continually disrupted by officials or ANC supporters, as seen on television, providing the first serious signs that Zimbabwean-type interventions could hamper freedom of political organisation. The initial conferences of COPE appeared to attract large numbers of delegates, but not having had time to establish well-functioning branches; the process of policy development is akin to that of Mbeki, without much transparency and little indication of a fresh vision and membership involvement in creating that.

There have been continued defections of ANC leaders, close to Mbeki in the main, to COPE. Many meetings were violently disrupted and COPE members were described on television as dogs or snakes or cockroaches by various ANC leaders, including Zuma, implying or saying they should be killed. A range of threats were uttered which appeared to vindicate the COPE claim that the ANC of Zuma was destroying freedom of political debate and substituting violence.

The initial significance of COPE lay primarily in their puncturing the apparent invincibility of the Zuma-led ANC and presenting a credible opposition force. At this point it appears to be much more serious than any defection that has previously occurred. Furthermore, the rise of COPE has created an alternative home comprising people primarily with a liberation struggle background, unprecedented in opposition politics in South Africa and untainted in the way the Democratic Alliance (DA) and other parties are. That many of these are from the working classes could, depending on the level of debate that is encouraged, lead to pressure on COPE to adopt a more radical stance. This in turn could re-ideologise the ANC and also ensure more popular involvement.

Like the Zuma-ANC, COPE has thus far advanced little in the way of new policies, although there have been indications of possible centrist leanings and considerable support from sections of black business. At the same time, much of their support base as far as can be gauged from footage of who attends meetings, is the same as or similar to that of the ANC. Insofar as that is working class; it may be difficult to formulate policies that satisfy those who will finance the party (predominantly Black Economic Empowerment individuals or groupings, it appears) and those who are its rank and file membership. The outcome of this contestation will determine the type of impact that COPE has.

All indications are that the split is not a tiff, but a permanent break and that it is not a splinter group, but that COPE may attract around 10% of the vote, although when this article appears, any such guess may prove completely wrong. There are certain judgments that COPE has made that narrow the difference between themselves and the present ANC. Former Western Cape Premier, Pieter Marais who has belonged to a range of collaborationist parties and been under clouds relating to alleged fraud and sexual harassment has been recruited and paraded to the media. Likewise, the COPE candidate for Western Cape Premier, Allan Boesak, is a convicted fraudster and thief.

In deciding on their candidate for President of the country, the Party's President, Lekota was overlooked in favour of Bishop Mvume Dandala, who was seen as clean and untainted

by political links. Initially this appeared a good choice, but his statements have tended to be bland and while his integrity may be unquestionable, he does not seem to offer much vision. On television, on 8 March 2009 he spoke of the need for 'values', without a sense that the word has a range of meanings. This points to the failure of COPE to define themselves and their visions in a manner that distinguishes them from the Zuma group, especially around issues like gender, about which they have said nothing, and in a broader sense how their politics differ from the organisation they have left. Its leaders are of varying credibility and the support that they purport to command may be illusory, confirmed by recent Eastern Cape by-elections.

Sustainable inroads cannot be made into ANC support by an organisation unless it establishes strong structures behind clear strategy and tactics. The needs of the time relate also to the programme of the organisation. Everything has moved very quickly for COPE and the Zuma-led ANC and it is too soon to make reliable predictions. Especially in the case of COPE, it is too soon to use an election as a basis for evaluating its potential strength, which may evolve, depending on how it positions itself. In both cases there is no sense of vision, there is primarily personalisation. It is not clear how strong organisation is in either case, beyond an election, especially in the case of COPE. There is no sense of political nuance in the way they project themselves and build their organisations, insofar as it has been done at all in the case of COPE and COPE is following the Zuma ANC in the path of de-ideologisation.

Conclusion

The last three years have seen a growing crisis within the ruling ANC as members rebel against successive leaderships, and both the Mbeki and Zuma leaderships have failed to secure a sustainable support base. Finally, it may be that the ANC crisis has heightened qualitatively from primarily a battle between individuals into a crisis that may affect the system, that is, the functioning of governance. The attacks by leading ANC officials on the judiciary as 'counter revolutionary' and the praise of a judgement in favour of Zuma as 'not counter revolutionary' indicates not only great immaturity of leadership but also a failure to respect the independent functioning of state institutions. Likewise, the physical attacks on COPE are not merely marks of political intolerance but demonstrate a dangerous disrespect for constitutional rights to freedom of speech, association and organisation. There is also instability in the repeated removal of political officials.

I have stressed similarities at an ideological level between the Mbeki period and that emerging under Zuma and also indicated rupture in the threats now posed to constitutionalism. But what is interesting is that both leaders rely on patronage networks. The cluster of leaders around Zuma are not as closely knit as those around Mbeki. But while Mbeki looked after his friends without violence, the Zuma period threatens to be patronage with elements of warlordism, a variant of the Zimbabwean situation. Much of this may always have been a potentiality of the NLM model. I do not see the dominance of the ANC as the cause, since that dominance has now been punctured and it is in the post-dominance period that the worst excesses are occurring (see also Suttner 2006).

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NOTES

1. In the South African general elections of April 2009, the ANC won 65.9% of the vote, followed by the Democratic Alliance which won 16.66% and COPE which won 7.42%. Shortly, before the elections, Jacob Zuma, who was then facing a number of serious charges of fraud, money laundering, bribery amongst others, had these withdrawn by the Acting Director of National Prosecuting Authority, Mr Mokededi Mpshe, on 6 April on the basis of intercepted telephone conversations, which allegedly demonstrated that the former Director, Bulelani Ngcuka and the chief investigator Mr Leonard McCarthy were involved in decisions to influence the timing of the charging of Zuma. The substance of the case against Zuma remained intact but he was free without the allegations being tested in court. See Statement by the National Director of Public Prosecutions, <http://www.politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page>, accessed 25 May 2009.
2. An offshoot of the ANC established in opposition to clauses of the Freedom Charter, concerning potential nationalisation and rights of white people as citizens.
3. Zimbabwe African People's Union, previously under various other names and led by Joshua Nkomo, becoming a minority section of the liberation movement, superseded by ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) breakaway led initially by Rev. Ndabaningi Sithole and later Robert Mugabe.
4. As a UDF leader of the time I was invited to the Soweto Youth Congress to speak on 'discipline' and to explain the undesirability of violence against opponents. This led to an article circulated in UDF affiliates.

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