

# **A DIFFERENT KIND OF ANC!**

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# **1. INTRODUCTION.**

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Every time we debate organizational renewal and review, we must always bear in mind that ANC must at all times be fit to the tasks of the day. As we said in 1997 that, "the character of the ANC must be determined by the nature of the care tasks that confront the National Democratic Revolutions (NDR) in our Country in any specific historical time" (ANC.1997). The ANC we have today is an heir and descendant of, but very different creature from the one founded by our forefathers in 1912. That ANC celebrates 100 years in 2010. What makes the ANC today different from the one our forbearers founded in 1912? The crucible of the struggle of the 1940s reshaped, refashioned and moulded the ANC into a giant national liberation movement responsible for the escalation of the freedom struggle into the era of defiance, mass campaigns, mass membership, alliance relations, pickets, boycotts, marches, stay-at-homes, azikhwelwa, strikes, rural uprisings and resistance which were unknown to the ANC in 1912.

It is decades of existence the ANC got shaped and reshaped by demands of the moment. Future generations and struggles would mould and remould an ANC fitting demands of the moment. When we do organisational renewal of the ANC, we must always bear that into account. The Polokwane conference articulated this matter eloquently, that, "over the 95 years of the existence of the ANC, the movement evolved into a force for mass mobilisation, a glue that held our people together and a trusted leader of the broadest range of social forces that share the vision of a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa. That historical evolution has been largely due to the movement's distinct character and unique features that have enabled it to overcome adversity and the daunting challenges it faced throughout its near-century of existence. The preservation of the movement's character, culture and values in a changing context and new conditions of struggle is the central focus of the organisational renewal effort in the run-up to the centenary of the ANC in 2012." (ANC.52<sup>nd</sup> conference Report.P9)

The growth, development and evolution of the ANC from its formation to old age and maturity has been the job of both its members, the conditions of struggle, the situation in the country and internationally to build a different kind of ANC at each stage. Every phase of the struggle throws up new challenges that have to be confronted head-on and defeated. This task is never finished. It must always be carried by each generation.

## **2. ANC FOUNDATION.**

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The ANC was founded on 08 January 1912, on the bedrock of uniting the African people against white-minority rule. It was established and led by early African Intellectuals whose methods of struggle were purely constitutional and legalistic. Its membership and leadership were composed almost entirely of intellectuals, teachers, priests, lawyers and chiefs. These categories of people constituted an elite of those days. Their approach to the fight for rights was therefore moderate and can be said to be also elitist. It was a body essentially of civilised men who fought for the right to a vote for civilised men. Their strategy and tactics included to fight for adult African male franchise through sending memoranda, petitions and deputations to both Pretoria and the Crown in England. They acted in the name of and on behalf of both themselves and the majority downtrodden, voteless, voiceless, African masses.

They were pioneers and pathfinders in a long and gargantuan struggle for liberation of Africans in particular and Blacks in general. Their words as true as when they were said that, "the demon of racialism, the aberrations of the Xhosa-fingo feud, the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongaas, between the Basutos and every other Native must be buried and forgotten; it has shed among us sufficient blood. We are one people. These divisions, these jealousies, are the cause of all our woes and of all our backwardness and ignorance today." (Unity in Action. P.11.)

Pixley Ka Isaka Seme, Sol Plaatjie, John Dube, Walter Rubusana, Sefako Makgatho, Thomas Maphikela, Alfred Mangena, John Tengo Jabavu, Meshack Pelem, Montsioa individually and collectively were a product of and contributed to the further evolution of embryonic African national consciousness. This evolution had originated in a previous decades because of the development of early independent African Churches, the emergence of early African intellectuals, the foundations of first African newspapers, the development of early African political organisation, the forced proletarianisation of Africans with the discovery of diamond in Kimberly and gold on the Reef, and the defeat in the wars of resistance.

The ANC they founded was not a mass movement both in its composition and its strategy and tactics at birth in 1912 and for many decades thereafter. And this is how the ANC itself explains why in its character and methods of struggles it was different in 1912 that in 1950s or 1960s: "In 1913 the enemy was different from our enemy today. Our forefathers were different from us. The conflicts between British and Boer and therefore between English-speaking and Afrikaans speaking Whites, were sharper than

they are today and this gave rise to a hope-real or unreal- that Britain might concede to the please of the Africans. The social composition of the ANC and its leadership, which consisted mainly of ministers of religion and lawyers, and less working-class, was another reason. The African working class was still very weak at that time and this led the ANC to lack the necessary strength to take the bull by the horns." (Unity in action.P.7)

That is why the ANC of those days was very surprised when its own president, Josiah Gumede returns from the tenth anniversary of the Red October Revolution in 1927 and says, "I have been to a new Jerusalem and I have seen the World that is to come where it has already begun." And that is why some unprophetic and myopic elements in the CPSA were able to say in 1929 that, "The ANC, which the resolution want us to boost up, "is a moribund body, it has had its day." (SACP.1928.)

That is why it is important that every time we do organisational renewal of the ANC we remember that, "the ANC emerged as a product of a historical moment in the evolution of resistance against colonialism, a subjective expression of an objective historical movement for change. At each stage of the development of this historical movement, the ANC's leadership and cadreship were able to adapt to the demands of the moment, mobilise the people and place the organization at the head of popular resistance. Thus the organisation developed as a people's movement in theory and in practice, recognising that a leadership role is earned, and not decreed." (Umrabulo.2000.P.24.)

There are certain fundamental questions that must be addressed for a successful renewal. Those include, "for how long will the anc survive as the leading force for progressive change in our Country and continent? What are the identifiable threats to the longevity and durability? What should be done by current generations to ensure that future generations inherit the type of ANC that continues to represent the interests of the majority in society? Addressing these long term concerns is the central focus of organisational renewal." (ANC 2010 NGC renewal document. P.47.) One of the central issues is that the ANC must transform or get rid of comrades who benefit from an ANC in crisis, turmoil and chaos, otherwise the turnaround may be either very difficult or impossible.

### **3. ANC MOULED BY THE 1940s.**

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The crucible of the struggle in the 1940s moulded, refashioned and reshaped the ANC to an extent where by the 1950s it was a totally different ANC in composition, posture and strategy and tactics. "The slow transformation of the ANC from a moderate, petty bourgeois pressure group into a mass national liberation movement began in the 1940s under the leadership of a new president-general, Dr. A.B. Xuma." (the struggle for South Africa.p.285.) This happened because, "no political movement or party is born with ready-made values, character, principles and culture. They are forged and tempered in the concrete conditions of struggle. A vibrant organisational culture and acceptable practices are also developed over time and tested in practice during the course of dealing with and resolving problems."(ANC. 2010 NGC renewal document.p.48.) Many factors collaborated in the redetermination of the ANC in the 1940s. Those included:-

(i) A World War.

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The Second World War was being fought between 1939-1945 in which the country took an active role and many recruits were inducted. Armament factories grew and there was mobilisation for people to take part in the war. As historians say, "The development of a mass, militant working class movement during the war pushed the African petty bourgeois into ever more radical positions." (the struggle for South Africa.p.285.)

(ii) The formation of ANC Womens' League in 1943 and the Youth League in 1944.

The establishment of the League added the necessary impetus and oomph to the freedom struggle. Their role thereafter is very significant and critical to the life of the ANC. "The Congress Youth League (CYL) stressed that white domination would only be overthrown by mass struggles and African self-assertion – a radical departure from the ANC's constitutionalism" (The struggle for South Africa.p.285.)

(iii) The restructuring of the ANC itself.

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President A.B. Xuma led a project to reorganise and restructure the ANC. The ANC established branches and had mass membership which were clearly emphasised. "A new democratic constitution was adopted in 1943, together with ANC's first comprehensive political programme. This demanded a redistribution of the land and 'full political rights' – the first time that the ANC had effectively demanded a universal, non-racial franchise." (the struggle for South Africa.p.285.)

(iv) Passive resistance campaign by Indians.

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Our Indian compatriots led by the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) and the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) conducted massive passive resistance campaigns. They involved ordinary working class Indian people in the struggle for their own liberation. After learning from the Indian congresses, in later years, "the ANC was to be transformed into a mass organisation through the example of passive resistance" (the struggle for South Africa.p.286.)

(v) The 1946 Mineworkers strike.

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ANC also learned lessons from the powerful 1946 Mineworkers strike led by the African Mineworkers Union (AMU) of JB Marks. It was the first large scale workers revolt by Africans in the Country. The strike was so huge and successful that the regime had to use massive military force to stem it. As the ANC would say, "75000 African mineworkers in 21 Mines on the Witwatersrand came out on strike for higher wages. As in 1920s troops were called in to drive the miners back in the mines at bayonet point. Thirteen strikers were killed and 1200 injured. Fifty trade union officials were arrested and put on trial. (Unity in action. P.4.)

(vi) The reality of Urban Africans.

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The unintended consequence of forced proletarianisation of Africans was that by 1940s there was a reality of large numbers of Africans in Urban Centres staying in huge squatter settlement and townships. Also critical was that the rapid industrialisation of the 1920s and 1930s had brought big numbers of African workers into the urban areas into industrial plants, domestic work and service industries. That is why the ICU at its peak was able to represent a 100 000 workers. The initial idea was that Africans would only be in urban centres to work in white factories and mines, otherwise they are not needed there. These Africans were a political force in their own right and fought many political battles of the day.

(vii) Formation of African trade unions.

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By the 1940s there was a reality of African trade unions that organised African workers, like the AMU, the garment workers union (GWU), the food and canning workers union and others. Their existence and the work they did of conscientisation, mobilisation and organisation of African workers was very significant in the political milieu of the day.

(viii) The 1949 ANC National Conference.

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The ANC's 1949 National Conference in which Dr. J.S. Moroka was elected president and there was adoption of a militant programme of action sponsored by the Youth League is very significant to its own reshaping. It was a watershed conference in the evolution of the ANC and the shaping of a different kind of ANC.

(ix) The Dadoo-Xuma-Naicker Pack.

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As the Indian resistance intensified the ANC decided to work with them in a common struggle against a common oppressor. A meeting between ANC president Dr. Xuma, NIC president Dr. G.M. Naicker and TIC president Dr. Yusuf Dadoo was held in 1947, to look at areas of working together between compatriots. This historic meeting is also referred to as the Three Doctors Meeting. It is the real root of the revolutionary alliance that we have up to this day. It planted seeds of broad front politics in the ANC.

(x) The Atlantic Charter, the African claims and the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

The most direct consequence of the adoption of the Atlantic Charter by the Allies was the conception of the African claims document and its proclamation by ANC's Annual Conference in 1943. The document was the first document adopted by ANC to clearly articulate its demands for one-man-one-vote and the abolition of the colour bar. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1945 accelerated the freedom struggles all over the world, particularly in the colonies and semi colonies, including our own. It put foundation for the ultimate demands articulated in the Freedom Charter in 1955.

All these various and different factors both exogenous and endogenous, collaborated to create new conditions for the conduct of struggle. Change in the conditions of struggle itself contributed to the evolution of a new kind of ANC – an ANC that mobilised people to fight; that had a mass membership; that fight for a South Africa in which there is a universal adult suffrage; and struggle to establish a non-racial, non-sexist, united, democratic and prosperous South Africa. As a consequence of the change in conduct of struggle, there was a concomitant change in the nature of ANC and face of freedom struggle. It is these subjective and objective factors that contributed to the building, the evolution, and the emergence of a different kind of ANC. The 1950's are therefore referred as the roaring fifties in history of resistance.

## **4. THE 1950's CHANGES THE ANC.**

The creature we have today as an ANC was formed in 1912, but evolved out 1940s and got significantly shaped by the struggles of the 1950s. Those characteristic features it gained in the 1950s includes:-

(i) A mass organisation.

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The forces and the faces that moulded the ANC in 1950s turned it into a mass membership organisation. It became an ANC that truly and fully believed in the centrality of the people. Its central tenet became that the people are their own liberators. Mass conscientisation, mobilisation and organisation became the order of the day throughout the 1950s. ANC led the people in every democratic demand and campaign of the struggle.

(ii) Broad front politics – The Alliance.

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The ANC in the 1950s also accepted the correctness of working in Alliance with other forces in a common struggle. It led the Congress Alliance composed of the South African Indian Congress(SAIC), the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation(SACPO), later renamed the Coloured Peoples Congress(CPC), the Congress Of Democrats(COD), later joined by the South African Congress of Trade Unions(SACTU). These organisations led the struggles in the 1950s, including, the Defiance of Unjust Laws campaign and the Demand of the People campaign for the Freedom Charter. In fact that historic and heroic congress of the people held on 25 – 26 June 1955 was convened by the Congress Alliance. It is these broad front politics of 1950s

that led to a heightened intensity of the struggle. It proved that working together as various forces, from different angles strengthened our hand in the fight for a new South Africa.

(iii) The introduction of defiance.

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The 1950s also introduced something new and qualitatively different to the freedom struggle-defiance. In that way the struggle transcended from protest to challenge. Once introduced defiance brought in a new dimension in the general approach to the struggle. Defiance itself changed the ANC and tilted the power balance in favour of the revolutionary forces.

The 1952 Defiance campaign had, "aimed to clog the jails, bring the administration of unjust laws to a halt, and to demonstrate to the people the effectiveness of mass non-violent action. The campaign had a number of important political effects. Firstly, it did generate mass support for the ANC. Within a few months its membership rose from 7000 to nearly 100 000. Secondly, it saw the beginnings of organised joint actions with other political groupings. This eventually gave rise to the Congress Alliance under the leadership of the ANC. Thirdly, the Defiance campaign stimulated strategic rethinking by part of the ANC leadership, particularly the group around the president of the Transvaal ANC, Nelson Mandela. Mandela argued that the ANC must prepare the basis for semi-underground work and put forward the 'M-plan' for the reorganisation of the movement. And fourthly, the Defiance Campaign demonstrated the need for a new, popular programme of demands, which would go beyond the programme of action. The latter gave rise to the convening of the Congress of the People by the Congress Alliance in June 1955." (the struggle for South Africa.p.286.)

The introduction of defiance to the struggle was so revolutionary that even freedom songs of the day changed in both rhythm and words to proclaim the new situation that has evolved. Instead of singing *Senzeni naa*, you can now sing *Naants' Ndod emnyama Verwoerd!* Instead of just clapping hands you can now dance with our feet, fists in the air, in song! A new political climate had developed in the Country.

(iv) Clarity about the future.

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The adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955 brought about the necessary clarity in a future South Africa being fought for. The struggle is no longer just for a vote for civilised men, but the demands as enumerated in the

Freedom Charter. The Freedom Charter clearly articulated a type of South Africa to be established once white-minority rule is defeated. The Freedom Charter itself became a beacon of hope of the entire struggling people of South Africa. The ANC itself adopted the Freedom Charter in its conference in 1956. The strategic objective had evolved from 1912 to a qualitatively clearer and better one.

(v) Forms of struggle.

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The new forms of struggle introduced by the roaring fifties impacted on the character of the ANC. Those forms were to a large extent unknown to both the ANC and the struggle. Once the ANC tasted them it never looked back. Those forms included – Marches, pickets, boycotts, stay-at-homes, azikhwelwa, demonstrations, rural uprisings, defiance and protest.

(vi) ANC the movement.

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As a consequence of these struggles in the 1940's and 1950s the ANC evolved into a people's movements. It went beyond just being a political organisation to be an expression of the leadership of the struggling people as a whole. It led not just its membership but a variety of forces standing behind it. The ANC became a broad church leading all manner of forces in society.

All these factors collaborated to reshape ANC in the 1950s. As the ANC itself would say, "the organisation was therefore able to evolve with changing times, with drawn-out as well as sudden acts of internal renewal and redefinition when the situation so demanded."

## **5. 1990 ANC RE-ESTABLISHES ITSELF.**

In 1990 when the ANC was unbanned it re-established its existence in the country. It reawakened its structural presence across the length and breadth of South Africa. It rebuilt itself as it was in 1950s. As the ANC itself would say, that, "since the unbanning of the ANC in 1990, a great deal of effort and energy has been put into re-establishing the movement as a mass legal formation, restructuring and reorganising the structures of the ANC, changes to the duties and powers of organisational structures, the main streaming of gender in ANC structures, ensuring more effective disciplinary procedures and structures, strengthening and clarifying the role of branches, cadre

development and defining the relationship between organisational and governance structures. (52<sup>nd</sup> Conference Report.p.9)

After 1990 it built campaigning branches on the ground, directly connected to the people. It also re-established the organisational presence of the women's League and the Youth League. This was because, "the 1991 Durban Conference had to grapple with major strategic and organisational questions that arose from the unbanning of the movement and release of political prisoners in the context of negotiations. The movement needed to integrate all its cadres –from the mass movement, and cohesive ground structures, prison and exile – into one coherent and cohesive organisation, with common strategic and tactical perspective on negotiations."(ANC 2010.NGC document on renewal.p.52.)

It shaped itself as a movement based on mass mobilisation for negotiations, peace, elections, and freedom. "In brief, the ANC seeks to be more than a party of mass support, and more than an electoral machine. It also seeks to be a movement of mass participation. The movement character of the ANC also relates to our long established traditions of building a "broad church", an "hegemonic" organisation that does not seek to define itself in exclusivist, or narrow ideological terms. The ANC has been, and necessarily remains, home to a variety of progressive ideological currents-nationalist, Africanist, socialist- and of a variety of different classes and strata, all united behind a common commitment to national democratic transformation. The multi-class, multi-strata character of the ANC does not, however, mean that the ANC neglects the significance of class. More broadly the ANC, from its base amongst the historically oppressed, seeks to provide a broad leadership over the great majority of South Africans." ( Character of ANC. 1997.p.2.)

It also re-emphasised the centrality of the Alliance as an organ that touches every South African in all spheres. It revived the Congress Alliance, now called Tripartite Alliance with COSATU and the SACP. The various community organisations that sprang up in struggle in the 1980s were recognised by the evolution of SANCO as a partner in the Alliance. This is because, "our movement character also refers to the style in which, for many decades, the ANC has functioned. We have attempted to be a force for cohesion in the centre of a broad range of allied organisations, mass democratic and community based structures. We have, as the ANC, not undermined the ideological and organisational independence or autonomy of these organisations, but rather to interact with them, and fuse or combine their energies, constituencies and diverse capacities into a common national democratic purpose." ( Character of ANC.1997.p.2)

It reconfirmed the movement character of the ANC. That the ANC is not just its organisational structural arrangements, but a leader of a variety of forces of all kind. It is important that in discussing organisational renewal of the ANC we must always strive to “involve the membership in the resolution of critical questions facing the organisation! In instance where decisive action is required to introduce new approaches, or to deal with such problems as divisions, opportunism, corruption and soon, members should be involved in finding solutions – this is critical not only in terms of democratic principles, but it is an, important instrument of practical political education.” (Umrabulo. No.8.200.p.30)

## **6. CONCLUSION.**

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It is even true today that, “the many years that have passed since the democratic breakthrough of April 1994 have confirmed that the ANC must constantly adapt and renew its character. The character of our organisation is not some timeless reality. But these past years have also confirmed that the ANC, in assuming new responsibilities, must do so with a sense of the relevance of our historical and organisational reality that may well be an important model for progressive political organisation in the coming century.” (Character of ANC. 1997.p.7)

In thinking about organisational review and renewal cadres of the movement must always bear into account that, “the ANC has evolved and developed into a people’s movement and agent for change over many years of struggle and sacrifice. It had to overcome serious obstacles and set backs in the long road to freedom and democracy. Our movement has a track record of being a trusted leader and loyal servant of the people. Its strength lies in its ability to renew itself ideologically and organisationally, to take account of new developments and new challenges. However, this ability for self-renewal cannot be taken for granted. It is a task that every generation has to grapple with and accomplish, based on the requirement and tasks of each situation. Any organisational review and renewal proposals for the ANC have to pass one test: to what extent do they enhance the capacity of the movement to remain a trusted leader, loyal servant of the people and an agent for change! This is the main challenge.” (52<sup>nd</sup> Conference Organisational Review document.2007.)

And that is the main challenge! The building of a different kind of ANC fit to conditions of the moment and the future. And that is the task that is never finished.

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