

## THE ELECTION OF A GOVERNMENT

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It would seem that the apartheid system, unable to cope with mass insurgency and international pressures had to go. But, as made clear in a referendum on negotiations with the African National Congress (ANC) and its ally, the South African Communist Party (SACP), conducted within the white community by the government, the future of capitalism was assured. That is, private property would be preserved and white privileges safeguarded. A page had been taken out of Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* – a story of Italian feudal society at the time of Garibaldi's campaign to unify Italy – where the statement: *for things to remain the same, things must change* provided the basis for talks between the government and the ANC/SACP.

Did matters really stay the same as a result of the negotiations, or were there basic changes? Before that can be answered it must be said that the scare stories that were current before the election in April 1994 proved to be unfounded. South Africa escaped the bloody turmoil that many commentators had predicted, at least for the present. But it would be foolhardy to believe that the threat of violence has disappeared: maverick elements can always wreak vengeance on a population that is not on its guard.

The despair before the elections was fuelled by the seemingly aimless killing of thousands of people. These have continue and, if frustration is added to whatever other grievances exist, nothing will stop grassroots disillusionment from turning to violence to challenge the new regime.

During the negotiations the ANC surrendered the call for a Constituent Assembly and by virtue of what was described as a Sunset Scenario, as suggested by the Communist Joe Slovo, settled for the parliamentary norms that forms the basis of bourgeois democracy. Consequently, on April 26-28, just over a year ago, the first non-racial election was conducted in South Africa. Viewed from the point of those who flocked to vote, this was an event that signalled a change in the country's history. In one step South Africa marked the end of a system in which whites had an exclusive and overarching control of the political system. Whether it led to significant changes in the country needs further discussion.

Correspondents, reporting in the press outside South Africa were most enthusiastic. Democracy, they declared had taken a giant step forward and, without questioning what this 'democracy' involved, they used the event to praise Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk. Three

cheers for Mandela and only two for de Klerk, but everyone could openly drink South African sherry and greet the new dawn.

Writing in the *Independent* on Boxing Day 1994 John Carlin went right over the top:

Centuries from now South Africans will commemorate 1994 as a year as rich in historical significance as 1776 for the Americans and 1789 for the French. It was that sort of year granted to nations — if they are lucky and deserving — once in a millennium.

This was the most enthusiastic statements I read and coming from Carlin I was not surprised. He, alongside the majority of correspondents, had always praised the African National Congress and its leaders. Now he could write in superlatives. The election in South Africa was compared by John Carlin with the war of American liberation (from British rule) and the beginning of the French revolution of 1789. These are exorbitant words of praise and his stock of superlatives could be employed to complete the picture. He continued.

The highlight of a year rich in extraordinary moments — of patience, generosity, forbearance and deliverance — was the spectacle of millions of black people waiting to vote. They waited in sacramental reverence . . . They had waited since 1652 for their first opportunity to vote since the arrival of the European settlers.

John Carlin seems to know very little about South African history. There was no vote for anyone in 1652, white or black, in South Africa and there were no Africans at the Cape in 1652. Furthermore, when representative government was granted in the Cape in 1872 Africans were given the vote, with property qualifications that were not dissimilar to that of the predominant white electorate. There were further restrictions in 1887 and 1892, when the qualifications for African voters were raised and no blacks were ever elected to parliament. It was an inequitable system but Africans in the Cape were only effectively disenfranchised in 1936. The Coloured people retained the vote until 1956. It was not a situation about which any democrat could rejoice, but it is just not true that the people waited for over 300 years. No matter, in his exhilaration John Carlin could avoid facts in order to stress the importance of the franchise given to a people denied the right to cast their vote for so very long.

Yes, the queues looked impressive, with the sun, as Mr Carlin said, beating down on the men and women waiting to vote. Ah! South Africa is unique. Do people who vote in other countries not have to stand in the sun? Not in India or any other country where millions have to be accommodated in just a few days? Before the election it was estimated that 22,709,152 people would be eligible to vote, 27 parties were listed as taking part in the election — by proportional representation — for the

400 seat national assembly, and also for nine regional assemblies. It would seem that numbers were underestimated, at least in some regions, and extra ballot papers had to be rushed to polling booths. That is understandable: there was no electoral roll and no registration of voters.

However, the vote in itself was rendered nugatory by the juggling of figures to give Inkatha control of KwaZulu/Natal and ultimately to give the swashbuckling Gatsha Buthelezi the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the new South African cabinet. The shortage of ballot papers was due not only to a miscalculation of the number of voters, but to the fraudulent return of falsely filled ballot papers in KwaZulu

That was not the only misuse of the vote. Smaller groups like the Workers' List Party found that their vote had shrunk when the final figures were announced while other insignificant lists seem to have been grossly inflated.

Yet, without denying the importance of the vote, there is another issue that needs debate. We do not know whether the South African public are well versed in political tactics but it is certain that many, and the peasants in particular, are illiterate and could not read ANC or indeed other documents. Dr Verwoerd, architect of apartheid, had succeeded in restricting education and ensured that most Africans would remain illiterate. The African electorate knew that their candidates would be the followers of Nelson Mandela and that was what they wanted. Having cast their vote they returned home and would not be required to vote for parliament again for at least another five years.

The illusions spread by the leaders of all parties were, naturally, to be expected. They did not explain what the vote meant, nor did they pause to suggest that parliament might not be the place to rectify the wrongs of the past. Other assemblies, summoned to work out changes and composed largely of the people concerned, are needed if the disastrous policy moulded by colonialism is to be righted and if the people are to learn to shape their own destiny. Instead the message transmitted was over simple and crude: the vote had arrived! The future was assured! It was only necessary to put an X against the ANC's logo. Very few dared to say what should have been the most obvious of all observations: that there is no magic in the ballot box and the vote has no supernatural powers.

As constituted inside a parliament that is designed to uphold the existing system (that is, a capitalist economy with a ruling class that controls the economy) the people and the parties elected to power are there to maintain and reinforce the system.

The vote was farcical for another reason. The agreement that preceded the election ensured that the National Party, the former architects of apartheid, would form part of the government, at least until the turn of the century. This was the so-called 'Rainbow Coalition'. And

written into the draft constitution is a clause which unseated any member of parliament who wished to leave the party for which he or she were elected. That is, there could be no open dissention in parliament and those elected were prisoners to the party leaders and what was said in parliament was irrelevant to the way the country was run because the government could not be changed during the five year life of parliament. The only alteration permissible was for a party with members in the cabinet to sack such representatives after consulting all the other parties in the government.

Was it any surprise then that many parliamentary sessions had to be cancelled because there was no quorum in the house? Why should those fat cats, drawing a princely salary, bother to arrive for a debate which had a pre-determined result? Provided only that they would not lose their monthly cheques, the members of parliament could go about their other business.

### *Lives at the Top*

Members of the cabinet live a new life of luxury. I have no information on the number putting their hands in the pork barrel and drawing out substantial sums of money to which they were not entitled? How many have followed the example of Winnie Mandela (discussed elsewhere in this issue), or Peter Mokaba MP, former ANC Youth League President who, as supremo of the National Tourism Forum, paid himself an annual salary of R250,000 (\$71,000) over and above his salary as an MP although this contravened the ANC code of conduct which demanded from the outset public disclosure of extra earnings. The NTF also lost a further R1,250,000, misappropriated by its officials.

The sleaze factor rises everywhere. General Bantu Holomisa MP, former President of the 'independent' Transkei covered up for his police when they were accused by President Mandela of defrauding taxpayers of millions of Rand by tampering with the computer system controlling their salaries.

The case of Dr Allan Boesak is now obscure. Designated South Africa's representative at the UN, he was forced to withdraw when Danish donors claimed that he had substantially enriched himself with funds they had donated through charities he controlled. He was subsequently cleared of the misappropriation in an internal ANC inquiry but this has not satisfied the Danes.

Another scandal, one of many that seem to have condoned, concerned the fraudulent activities of the Agricultural minister of the North-West Executive Council, Rocky Malebane-Metsing. He won popularity in the 1988 attempted coup to remove Lucas Mangope of

Bophutatswana and was implicated in the issue by the Bophutatswana Agricultural Bank of R16,600,0000 (\$4.75 million) to help an illegal immigrant set up a food company. Although Malebane-Metsing was sacked by the regional Premier, Popo Molefe, the ANC leadership, led by Defence Minister Joe Modise, brought pressure to bear to have him reinstated as special adviser. In this case it did not work. Malebane-Metsing was eventually suspended by the ANC. He then said that he was forming a new party.

If the acts of corruption are not speedily eradicated, South Africa will go down the slippery slope of other cowboy states. Yes, the people had the vote. But they have lost all control of a small elite who were installed for five years in parliament. What then was the function of parliament? Although the MPs could raise issues in the house they certainly could not act as a check to government policy, nor could they determine what legislation should be passed. All power had shifted to the executive (that is the cabinet) and the coalition of ANC/SACP/Cosatu together with the National Party and Inkatha has left almost no opposition group.

If the vast majority of the population are alienated from the parliamentary process, and if no organisation emerges to offer a new leadership, the far right might find it opportune to resume their violence. This will become even more possible if they find allies among discontented elements in the country: among Coloureds who demand autonomy; from a section of Inkatha which claims that they are denied their rightful independence inside a greater Southern Africa; or with members of the police force and army who want to destabilise the existing government.

There are many other factors that weaken the new parliament and make it ineffectual. The new parliament was elected by proportional representation. That is, no Member of Parliament was responsible to a particular constituency and nobody had access to a particular MP who would look after his or her interest. This allowed MPs with a populist policy to move from township to township, wherever there were difficulties, excessive violence or conflict with the police. Winnie Mandela was particularly good at this. Instead of sitting on her bottom cut off from the population, she appeared tirelessly at trouble-spots where there was a perceived possibility of championing the population, young or old or both. This boosted her popularity and secured her a devoted following.

### *The Fruits of Victory*

In his valedictory speech Mandela congratulated former President FW de Klerk on the strong showing of the National Party and held out the hand of friendship to his opponents. This was a speech of victory and

Mandela paused to speak about the importance of the Reconstruction and Development Programme and his plans that the lives of blacks be improved by providing houses and electricity, jobs, ten years free and compulsory school education and redistributing a third of South Africa's agricultural land in five years.

He said that he would not tolerate any attempt to reduce his partners in the ANC-led government to mere ciphers and, addressing the workers, he urged them to return to their work places and boost productivity and economic growth. This was to be the prelude to his later condemnation of all those who backed their demands for better pay and work conditions by striking.

Nelson Mandela, leader of the majority party became President, Thabo Mbeki, Mandela's protege, became Vice-President, and de Klerk, the National Party leader became the second Vice-President. Cyril Ramaphosa, the one-time leader of the Mine Workers Union, passed over for vice-presidency, refused any other office and declared that he would devote his energies to organising the ANC. And then it was left to Mandela to choose his cabinet. He gave Gatsha Buthelezi, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Alfred Nzo, the Foreign Ministry, Joe Modise, the man who helped destroy the mutineers in Umkhonto we Sizwe in 1984, became Minister of Defence but the Finance ministry was left in the hands of the National Party. Other appointees were a mix of MPs who deserved office and those who came in because they had helped reorganise the unbanned ANC, or were owed office in the old, old style, known as nepotism including Winnie Mandela who was appointed deputy minister of Arts and Technology. Her ability to contribute to this area is suspect and her departure, after clashing with her estranged husband, will not weaken this lame-duck ministry.

There were also elections for the nine regions and these generally followed the parliamentary pattern with two significant differences: the National Party won the western Cape after winning majority support from the Coloured population while the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) took control of the Natal region after winning a majority in a vote that was rigged. This gave them an inflated representation in Parliament, entitlement to a cabinet post and control of KwaZulu/Natal. The overall consequences for the country lies in the establishment of two foci of discontent from which calls for independence or autonomy can be pressed.

The salaries given to cabinet members and MPs drew strong condemnation from Archbishop Desmond Tutu who observed that the government had missed a golden opportunity to stop the gravy train. He added that the poor and disadvantaged could only be alienated from a wealthy elite in parliament and the government could not ask the unions to moderate the trade union's demands for higher pay when they accepted

such high salaries. The President received R784,356 (\$220,000), Deputy Presidents R681,600 (\$192,000), Cabinet Ministers R470,000 (\$132,000) and MPs R161,000 (\$45,000). As a result of the criticisms the salaries were decreased.

### *What then of the ANC?*

In June 1994 Cyril Ramaphosa, the man who had set himself the task of organising the ANC, announced changes in the movement's structure which included retrenchment of head office staff, the opening of a Cape Town headquarters (which was indeed opened but never staffed) and of restructuring to prepare the ANC to play a role in the implementation of the RDP. He also said that the ANC wanted to ensure that its representatives remained dynamically linked to the masses. Representatives would be deployed to do organizational work. His task, as he said, was to prepare for local elections in 1995 and national elections in 1999. The task was apparently beyond his resources. In August 1994 Mandela said at a public meeting that the ANC was in tatters. He had decided, he said, personally to take charge of rebuilding the party and would spend every Monday at the Johannesburg headquarters to address the movement's affairs.

But Mandela was apparently no more successful than Ramaphosa. According to Karl Meier, in the *Independent*, on 19 December 1994:

The ANC is increasingly out of touch with the mass of black voters who gave it a landslide victory in April's general election. Top ANC officials were saying, according to Meier, that so far the ANC had failed to begin clearing up the mess left by the white minority government. Meier quoted Ramaphosa as saying that the party lacked decisive leadership, had a serious shortage of funds and was out of touch with its supporters. He then appealed for an end to 'cliques, factions, tensions and squabbles.' The ANC senior ranks, he said, had been depleted by their election to parliament and the party relied too heavily on Mandela. ANC branches and membership lists were in disarray.

Mandela, who painted a gloomy picture, said at the ANC conference that the problems in the country included corruption, unemployment at 40 per cent, seven million people without proper housing and an economy growing at only two per cent — less than the growth of population. He added that what was needed was efficient government spending and management, a disciplined labour force and a stable investment climate to ensure a smooth transition and an end to pandering to white fears.

This then was the 'great historic event' of 1994. New men were in power and it was obvious that apartheid was officially dead. But every-

thing else was still in place. This change, heralded in the western press, was closer to George Orwell's *Animal Farm* where the pigs who led the revolution, and took complete control, were indistinguishable from the farmers they had replaced. Any semblance of stability in South Africa is still an illusion and observers will no doubt throw up their hands in horror when the new government calls in the troops and the police to subdue dissident elements. Then, short-sighted as they are, they will say: 'this is only Africa, what else can one expect'. But by that time the press correspondents, the television commentators and the political pundits will have turned elsewhere to find comparisons with the American and French revolutions. Maybe, or perhaps by then the workers will have found their way to independent organisation and will challenge the 'pigs' who have taken control.

*Footnote: The Buthelezi Factor*

The IFP was the last to enter the election, and did so with great reluctance. Gatsha Buthelezi laid down conditions for participation: he demanded and was promised that international mediators would be summoned to arbitrate on his demand for greater autonomy for Kwa-Zulu. The Transitional Executive Council agreed to this and, on that promise, the IFP list was entered on the electoral roll at the very last minute.

That promise should not have been given but, having been solemnly pledged, it had to be honoured. Yet, after the election, declaring that the issue was no longer relevant, the ANC-led government has refused to appoint mediators. As I go to press there have been a set of dictatorial demands that Buthelezi abandon mediation with threats that the Constitution will be altered to allow Mandela to cut off finances for Kwa-Zulu/Natal.

Whatever one thinks of Buthelezi — and this journal has not been sympathetic to the IFP — the renegeing on the promise and the threats made by Mandela bodes ill for the future. The Constitution, faulty as it is, is not the plaything of an irate President.