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INSIGHT 9

Alliance partners must take stand or risk being judged harshly by history

This is the title of a public discussion, taking place in Cape Town tomorrow, where Jeremy Cronin, Tony Elumeng and Floyd Shivambu will debate the political crisis precipitated about the ANC's state.
By Dominic Brown

THE question of where the ANC is going began as a whisper. It is now a roar. Lost in the noise is a significant silence: we are still waiting to hear from either of the ANC's two alliance partners, the SACP and Cosatu, about the leadership – and, more pertinently, the policies – to replace President Jacob Zuma, should the ANC heed their demand for his head.

In 1994 the ANC promised South Africans a "better life for all" and said "Democracy must be measured by the quality of life of ordinary people". The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was to achieve this, by among other things, addressing what was then the relatively small – though still important – triple evils of unequal

ity, unemployment and poverty. By 1998, however, the RDP was on the scrap heap, replaced by a new policy, Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy (GEAR).

GEAR heralded a clear shift in the ANC governments focus from a more people-centred approach to one focused on pleasing "the market" – mainly international investors but not excluding local capital ready to gamble on anything likely to maximise profit. The primacy of an export-oriented economy was part of this shift. Above all, the GEARchange came with the promise that wealth would trickle down from the elite to the poor. By deregulating state-owned enterprises, introducing self-serving procurement policies designed to transfer wealth and create business-friendly public-private partnerships, the ANC became the essential link for an emerging black elite.

An unintended consequence of the link between the ANC and the promotion of a black elite has been the formation of warring factions within the ANC competing for the

economic spoils of political power. In this respect, the ANC is no different from the post-independence, mainly African, leaderships of the 1950s and early '60s that Franz Fanon subjected to such insightful and withering critique. Fanon, the highly influential Martinique-born, French psychiatrist, observes, in his 1961 book, *The Wretched of the Earth*: "The party becomes a means of private advancement. Privileges multiply and corruption triumphs, while morality declines."

Through this process, we see the transformation of the ANC from being a national liberation movement based on the mobilised mass support of mostly the urban working class and poor rural people to a party dominated by an impatient and frustrated aspirant petit, comprador bourgeoisie. The *Wretched of the Earth* was first published in English in 1963. The tragedy for South Africa is that the post-1994 ANC did not learn from Fanon.

The 2008/09 global economic crisis has constrained the space for patronage used to appease the dif-



PROTEST: A low-cost house owner in Olivefontein, Gauteng, protests from angry residents who claim that the property was sold to her by a corrupt ward councillor.
Picture: OUPA MOKOENA

ferent factions within the alliance. As Fanon rightly predicted "such a dictatorship (by the victorious post-independence party) does not

go very far. It cannot halt the processes of its own contradictions". Twenty-three years into the new South Africa, and the honeymoon

period of the 1994 project is gone and forgotten. The ANC created the conditions for its own failures. The contradictions of what the SACP chose to call the "1996 class project" are culminating in the unravelling of the ANC, with a divorce with its alliance partners no longer being contemporaneously unthinkable.

The ANC is eager to claim that external factors such as global markets and "white monopoly capital" have been responsible for its failure to provide jobs, land transformation and education. It remains unable to acknowledge that its policies have exacerbated the capitalist norm of unemployment, land grabbing and inequality.

Zuma has, indeed, dramatically accelerated the decline of the ANC. His presidency, characterised by crude corruption and cronyism, makes him seem to be the chief protagonist in the ANC's moral decay.

This makes it convenient to say that Zuma is the primary reason for the ANC's decline. However, if that were the case, the ANC would simply have rid itself of him long

ago and with the same disdain it did with Thabo Mbeki. Freedom from Zuma, alas, means a thorough renewal of the ANC. And, even if such a resurrection was possible, it is unlikely to be any time soon.

Do the SACP and Cosatu think that the ANC can self-correct? If not, do they have the courage to stand up against Zuma and the beneficiaries of his patronage and culture of corruption without consequences who are still unconditionally committed to Zuma? If they do take a stand, it may lead to another split in the ANC and it may be much bigger than the ones seen before. And what will the ETP be doing, while all this is happening, or failing to happen? The one certainty is that it will not be passive onlookers.

Some of the answers are expected at the meeting tomorrow at the Cape Town High School at 6pm. We should be there in numbers to challenge any of the speakers who seek to duck and dive.

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