

## THE ANC'S ELECTORAL MAJORITY IN A DEMOCRATIC PERSPECTIVE

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The ANC attained almost 70% of the vote in the election. While the bonfires are still burning high in ANC circles, it is necessary to put the election result in its proper electoral, democratic and governance perspective.

Was the ANC support large enough to satisfy the wish of the ANC that a new “contract with the people” should be forged? Was the campaign conducted in a manner typical of mature multi-party democracy? Will the increased percentage attained by the ANC makes it more or less likely that the government will address the unemployment and poverty problems with greater zeal and forcefulness?

The participation of the electorate in the election was markedly smaller than during previous elections. In 1999 89% of registered voters voted, while only 76% voted this time. What is perhaps more disquieting, is that only 75% of the potential electorate, took the trouble to register for the election. The end result is that only 38% of the potential electorate of 27,5 million voted for the ANC. This percentage is too low to satisfy the ANC's request that the people must give it a new “contract”.

Increased voters' apathy – and even alienation – was evident during both the registration process and the election. Voters' apathy is stronger in the ranks of those that previously voted for opposition parties, but it is also visible in ANC circles. A growing disillusionment with politics and politicians can become much stronger during future elections.

The two most outstanding characteristics of the ANC's election campaign were, firstly, its inclination to claim more progress in solving South Africa's serious socio-economic problems than was actually accomplished, and secondly, the hyperbolic and unrealistic promises it made about what will be attained in the next ten years.

In its eagerness to demonstrate progress in poverty alleviation the ANC overemphasised what was achieved in the supply of water, electricity, housing, etc. and underplayed the huge shortfall that still exists in supplying these services. It is estimated that 37,7% of all households (or more than 40 million people) are still deprived of “good” access to four to six of the following seven

basic services: health, energy, sanitation, education, communication, housing and clean drinking water.

The ANC was unfortunately not prepared to acknowledge during the campaign that the poverty problem has become more severe over the past ten years. More than 48% of the population – or 22 million – live under the poverty line. The depth of poverty has increased, the human development index of the poor has declined quite alarmingly and income has become more unequally distributed. **(Statistics from the South Human Development Report, 2003, UNDP). (Not to include before 5 May 2004)**

The danger is that the ANC might be inclined to believe its own propaganda that it is winning the war on poverty. The opposite is true, in spite of the increased spending on the poor. For the sake of good governance the ANC should have acknowledged not only the comprehensiveness of the poverty problem, but also its endogenous dynamic character that perpetuated and intensified poverty in alarming ways.

In its Election Manifesto the ANC promised the electorate that both poverty and unemployment will be cut by half over the next ten years. This implies that only 24% of the population will live below the poverty line in 2014 and that unemployment will be cut from 42% of the labour force to 21%. Both these promises are completely unattainable – especially if the government is to stick to its economic approach of neo-liberalism, free marketeering and globalisation.

Due to the sharp increase in the population over the past 20 years, the potential labour force will be 3 million larger in 2014 than presently. To cut unemployment to 21% will necessitate the creation of almost 7 million new jobs in the formal and informal sector. That is impossible.

One can ask why the ANC is making such hyperbolic and unattainable promises. Although all political parties are inclined to this kind of electioneering, the ANC is still acting like a liberation organisation and not like a party in a mature multi-party democracy. It presents itself as the party that will liberate the lower half of the population from poverty and unemployment in the same way as it liberated the blacks from apartheid. This is an unjust comparison – especially for a government that has over the past ten years pampered the new black middle class (± 10 million people) in lucrative ways – through black economic empowerment and affirmative action – while it has neglected the poor (22 million) rather conspicuously.

The ANC is from a party political point of view in an even stronger position than before the election. The critical question is now whether its increased party political power will, over the next five years, translate into a government powerful enough to address the poverty problem in a proper way even if it necessitates the implementation of measures that will be against the preference of the powerful corporate sector.

Over the past ten years the ANC was, from a government point of view, rather weak. Its policy approach was prescribed to a large extent by the pressure groups in the English and Afrikaner business sectors, by the new black elite and the emerging black middle class and by global corporatism in Washington, New York, London and Frankfurt.

Although it sounds paradoxically it would have been to the advantage of the poor if the ANC had attained only 55% of the vote instead of 69%. With a vote of 69% the ANC is very much entrenched in a cosy comfort zone. Consequently it will be inclined to proceed with the policy approach of the past ten years.

Experience in other countries demonstrates that a multi-party democracy functions only effectively when the government of the day realises that it may lose the next election if it does not deliver to a satisfactory degree to its main constituency.

Ben Turok, a senior ANC member of Parliament, told a meeting that we addressed jointly in 1999, that the ANC as government takes a position on the ideological spectrum right of centre, while the ANC as political party stands left of centre. As long as this ideological fault line is maintained under the influence of the powerful pressure groups, the ANC government will not be powerful enough to conduct an effective war on poverty.

We, therefore, must consider the possibility that poverty and unemployment would not be cut by half in 2014, but may become worse over the next 10 years.