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THIS WEEK:

- \* Letter from the President: The voice of the ANC must be heard
- \* Polokwane Resolutions II: Creating decent work opportunities

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

The voice of the ANC must be heard

When this journal was first published seven years ago, in January 2001, we said that it would make an important contribution towards filling a void in South Africa's media landscape; a landscape in which the voices of the majority of our people remain largely unheard.

As we noted at the Polokwane conference in December, this situation has not changed much in the intervening period.

What we said in the launch edition of ANC Today remains true today: "We are faced with the virtually unique situation that, among the democracies, the overwhelmingly dominant tendency in South African politics, represented by the ANC, has no representation whatsoever in the mass media.

"We therefore have to contend with the situation that what masquerades as 'public opinion', as reflected in the bulk of our media, is in fact minority opinion informed by the historic social and political position occupied by this minority."

There are many examples we can cite to illustrate this point. Every day brings fresh instances of a media that, in general terms, is politically and ideologically out of synch with the society in which it exists.

This phenomenon is most starkly illustrated at those moments in our political cycle when the people of South Africa get an opportunity to elect parties and individuals they want to represent them in government.

In both the 2004 national and provincial elections and the 2006 local elections, the views of voters were shown to be sharply at odds with the 'views' emanating from most media.

To an uninformed reader, listener or viewer, following media coverage in the months and weeks leading up to these elections, it would have appeared patently

obvious that the leading party in government, the ANC, was heading for a hiding. Though unlikely to be defeated, most media commentators concurred, the ANC would see its support drop significantly in the face of an electorate that had become disenchanted. We were told that only the ANC's "struggle credentials" and the lack of a credible opposition would save it from outright defeat at the polls. The election results proved these reports wrong. In both 2004 and 2006, not only did the ANC's share of the vote increase, but also the actual numbers of people who voted for the organisation increased. Voters did not desert the ANC, and instead gave it a stunning 70% mandate!

The outcome of the 52nd national conference in Polokwane is a most recent example of the media yet again becoming a victim of its own propaganda and manipulation. Some are correctly asking themselves: "how did we get it so wrong?", while others now use every opportunity to "prove" that there is something that was seriously wrong with ANC delegates at Polokwane. Granted there are some journalists who report fairly and leave it to the readers to make their own judgements about issues and individuals, without pushing certain agendas. We must acknowledge and applaud their professionalism.

These are not merely examples of faulty analysis of public opinion surveys, or a simple misreading of the mood. They indicate a general trend within most mainstream media institutions to adopt positions, cloaked as sober and impartial observation, that are antagonistic to the democratic movement and its agenda for fundamental social, political and economic transformation.

To understand why this is the case, we need to consider the role of the media in society in general and the specific circumstances of the media in South Africa, both past and present.

In a discussion document entitled 'Transformation of the media', circulated as part of preparations for the ANC National Policy Conference in June last year, we said:

"The reality is that the media - in South Africa as in every other society - is a major arena in the battle of ideas. All social forces are therefore engaged, to varying degrees and with differing success, in efforts to ensure that the media advances their ideological, political, social, economic and cultural objectives.

"Throughout its history the ANC has engaged in the battle of ideas, understanding that the achievement of its objectives of a united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa is dependent on its capacity to convince the people of the correctness of its positions, policies and programmes.

"The media is consequently one of the sites of ideological struggle with which the ANC - like other social actors - has sought to engage."

Contrary to what some may claim, the media is not simply a product of the work of disinterested observers - professionals who are able to detach themselves from their personal views, interests, prejudices and social position and present the world as it objectively is.

It is instead a product of the various political, social, economic and cultural forces that exist within a society. It is a battle of ideas, and, as such, the media is part of the battle for power. Those with power, particularly economic power, are keen that the media serves to reinforce their privileged position, while those who seek a more equitable distribution of resources campaign for a

media that serves the cause of a more equitable society.

The media, viewed in its totality, should be as diverse as the society which it serves and reflects. This is clearly not the case in South Africa today. At times, the media functions as if they are an opposition party.

In part, this can be explained by the structure, culture and values of the media inherited from apartheid, and by the commercial forces that drive most media institutions.

As we observed in the discussion document cited above:

"The freedom of the South African media is today undermined not by the state, but by various tendencies that arise from the commercial imperatives that drive the media. The concentration of ownership, particularly in the print sector, has a particularly restrictive effect on the freedom of the media. The process of consolidation and the drive to cut costs through, among other things, rationalisation of newsgathering operations, leads to homogenisation of content.

"Despite protestations to the contrary, there are an increasing number of instances where the supposedly-sacred separation between management and the newsroom is breached, where commercial considerations influence editorial content.

"This takes place in a media market in which there is fierce competition for a slice of the upper income market, where the most advertising revenue is to be found. Given that this end of the market represents very particular class interests (and is predominantly white) it stands to reason that media institutions will tend to reflect the preoccupations, values and world view of this small group of society. Even where management may adopt a hands-off approach to editorial matters, they would certainly step in to prevent their title from adopting an editorial stance that may antagonise their target market or alienate advertisers. Dedicated professionals that they may be, most editors still need to keep an eye on the bottom line."

This is one of the reasons why, though there may be plenty of newspapers and magazines on our news stands, and a multitude of radio and TV stations occupying our airwaves, the overall orientation of South African media is politically conservative. There are few, if any, mainstream media outlets that articulate a progressive left perspective - which is endorsed at each election by the majority of South Africans and represented by the ANC, its allies and the broader democratic movement.

It was to answer this deficiency that the 52nd National Conference called for the movement to develop its own media platforms, making use of available technology, to articulate its positions and perspectives directly to the people. This needs to take place alongside the effort to transform the South African media environment so that it becomes more representative of the diversity of views and interests in society, more accessible to the majority of the people, and less beholden to commercial interests.

During the course of the next five years, as has been mandated by Conference, we will pursue the development of these media platforms. We will also continue to develop ANC Today as a credible, popular and vibrant expression of the views and perspectives of the African National Congress. The journal will remain at the heart of the ANC's contribution to the battle of ideas.

Over the next few weeks and months, readers should expect to see a number of changes in ANC Today, all intended to improve the relevance, vibrancy and impact of this weekly read.

The Letter from the President will now be published on special occasions only, dealing with important themes and events during the course of the year. The intention is to open up the journal to a diversity of voices, articulating ANC positions. In this regard, there will be weekly contributions from ANC Officials and NEC members.

As we introduce these changes, we will continue to encourage and value the feedback we receive from readers, better to ensure that the voice of the ANC is heard.

ANC Today will be an authoritative online voice of the African National Congress and a platform for the accurate expression of the policies and views of our movement. We trust that the diversity of contributors will encourage more debate, and promote better understanding of the movement and its programmes and activities.

Jacob G Zuma

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## POLOKWANE RESOLUTIONS II

### Creating decent work opportunities

The creation of decent work opportunities will be the primary focus of the ANC's economic policies over the next five years. This was one of the decisions of the ANC 52nd National Conference held in Polokwane in December.

The conference also agreed on the need to build an effective, democratic and developmental state, which "whilst learning from the experiences of others, must be built on the solid foundation of South African realities." The resolution on economic transformation noted that the central and most pressing challenges the country faces are unemployment, poverty and inequality. This demanded that South Africa must simultaneously accelerate economic growth and transform the quality of that growth.

"The changes we seek will not emerge spontaneously from the 'invisible hand' of the market. People acting collectively in the spirit of human solidarity must shape the patterns of economic development. In this process the state must play a central and strategic role, by directly investing in underdeveloped areas and directing private sector investment," conference said.

It said that this should be state which leads and guides that economy and which intervenes in the interest of the people as a whole. While engaging private capital strategically, government must be rooted among the people and buttressed by a mass-based democratic liberation movement. While determining a clear and consistent path forward, it must also seek to build consensus on a democratic basis that builds national unity; and while acting to promote growth, efficiency and productivity, it must be equally effective in addressing the social conditions of the people and realising economic progress for the poor.



All of this would require a concerted effort to improve the capacity of government and all public institutions to undertake these tasks. Conference resolved to achieve this through:

- \* A strengthened role for the central organs of state, including through the creation of an institutional centre for government-wide economic planning;
- \* the alignment of planning and implementation across all three spheres of government, and with the development finance institutions and state-owned enterprises;
- \* building the human capacity of the state by establishing uniform entrance requirements and standards of employment in the public service;
- \* building the technical capacity of the state to lead the development of dynamic and globally integrated economic sectors;
- \* maintaining a strategic role in shaping the key sectors of the economy, including minerals and energy and the national transport and logistics system;
- \* ensuring that our national resources, including land, water, minerals and marine resources, are exploited to effectively maximise growth, development and employment potential;
- \* ensuring state owned enterprises respond to a clearly defined public mandate and an overarching industrial;
- \* strengthening development finance institutions that are able to channel financial and institutional resources towards a variety of economic transformation objectives.

Building on the improved rates of economic growth achieved over the last few years, the ANC will act decisively to address the most significant obstacles that limit the pace of economic growth and intervene in favour of a more equitable growth path. Many of these obstacles have already been identified as part of the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (ASGISA), and work has already begun to address these.

The ANC will also continue to roll out a massive state-led infrastructure investment programme that will significantly improve the country's logistics, energy and communications capacity. It will also promote strategic investments in productive activities, aimed at diversifying the economy and improving the ratio of investment to GDP.

#### Transforming the economy

The challenge facing South Africa is not only about the acceleration of economic growth. It is also about transforming the structures of production and ownership, which still exhibit the features of the apartheid era.

Among other things, this will require an active and well-resourced industrial and trade policy aimed at creating decent work through expansion of labour absorbing sectors, diversifying our industrial and services base, pursuing an active beneficiation strategy, building sustainable export industries, and expanding production for domestic and regional consumption. According to conference: "In general, industrial policy should lead our overall approach to

sector development, whilst trade policy should play a supporting role and be sensitive to employment outcomes."

The ANC should continue to pursue broad-based black economic empowerment, aimed at broadening and deracialising the ownership and control of productive assets by black people, women and youth; promoting new black enterprises which are engaged in the production of goods and services; building the skills required by the economy; and advancing employment equity in every area of work.

To broaden ownership and participation in the economy, and to overcome barriers to entry that inhibit the growth of small enterprises, the ANC will concentrate on implementing effective anti-monopoly and anti-concentration policy aimed at creating competitive markets. It will also pursue policies that promote and sustain small business, micro-enterprises, small scale agriculture and cooperative forms of ownership by providing financial and non-financial resources and building institutions that can effectively access and develop these sectors.

The work being done to deepen economic development and effect thorough transformation needs to be accompanied by measures to directly and immediately address the economic plight of the poor and unemployed. This must include expanding the opportunities for sustainable livelihoods and supporting the growth of second economy activities in urban centres through better access to the centres of economic growth and through financial and institutional support for cooperatives and micro-enterprise.

Critically, it must also address the poverty and underdevelopment that afflicts the rural areas of our country. The resolution therefore calls for a comprehensive and clear rural development strategy, which builds the potential for rural sustainable livelihoods, particularly for African women, as part of an overarching vision of rural development. "Strong interventions in the private land market combined with better use of state land for social and economic objectives, must transform the patterns of land ownership and agrarian production, with a view to restructuring and deracialising the agricultural sector," it says.

Measures to directly absorb the unemployed into economic activity will include labour intensive production methods and procurement policies; a significant expansion of public works programmes linked to the expansion of economic infrastructure and meeting social needs; a much larger national youth service, linking industrial strategy with key youth development programmes; and programmes that target the employment of women. This will happen alongside the expansion of the "social wage" by ensuring universal and subsidised access to basic services, health care, and affordable transport; free and compulsory education and ongoing campaigns for adult literacy; maintaining and, where appropriate, expanding the provision of social grants; and finding ways of alleviating the burden of low income earners.

The vision of the economic transformation articulated by the Polokwane conference takes as its starting point the Freedom Charter's clarion call that the people shall share in the country's wealth! It is a process of economic transformation which aims to realise a thriving and integrated economy, which draws on the creativity and skills that our whole population can offer, building on South Africa's economic endowments to create decent work for all and eliminate poverty.

**\*\* This is the second in a series of articles on the outcomes of the ANC's Polokwane Conference. The complete set of resolutions will be available on the ANC website within the next week.**

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