

# ANC 100 Years: Looking Ahead

Saturday 19 May 2012, by [JORDAN Pallo](#) (Date first published: 1 March 2012).

In 1956, in an article in the journal *Liberation*, Nelson Mandela explained aspects of the Freedom Charter:

*"The breaking up and democratisation of these monopolies will open up fresh fields for the development of a prosperous Non-European bourgeois class. For the first time in the history of this country the Non-European bourgeoisie will have the opportunity to own in their own name and right mills and factories, and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before."*

The monopolies targeted in the Freedom Charter remain largely unchanged. A policy paper for the 1997 National Conference said: '... the economic sphere [is] a critical centre of power. Its transformation, including through de-racialisation of ownership and control of wealth, is an important element of the process of social transformation.'

The 1994 democratic breakthrough radically changed every facet of South African life. Political freedom created opportunities for self-advancement and opened up careers in professions hitherto closed, especially to Africans. A new dynamic unfolded, not least in the ANC itself, as its leaders, members and supporters could now compete on more equal terms with their white counterparts – in the professions, in business and for state and government posts.

From among the ANC's support base, its membership and its leaders, a new black elite has taken shape, as captains of industry heading private and state-owned corporations, as judges, government ministers, well-paid professionals and high-ranking civil servants, etc.

Personal ambition and careerism inspire the actions of many. Some even descending to ethnic mobilisation. At the 1997 Mafeking Conference, for example, whispers about the need to resist domination of the ANC by the Xhosa ethnic group emanated from certain quarters.

Tensions, instability and conflict necessarily accompany the growth of any movement. The ANC was founded as a multi-class formation initially for African men, but in time it also admitted women. It sought and built cross-cutting alliances with Indian and coloured movements and activists, with white liberals, with communists, with international bodies and movements. The movement's history consequently abounds with the stresses intrinsic to growth and development.

During its history, the ANC made three significant strategic shifts, driven by disillusionment, failure and rising hope. Like every liberation movement in the colonies, it initially sought to reform the colonial state by making it more inclusive and incrementally integrating the Africans, coloureds and Indians into its institutions. By 1943 the scales had dropped from its eyes.

The first strategic shift occurred at the height of World War II. Disillusioned by the flabbiness of its white liberal allies and their deference to white racist opinion, the movement sought new alliances with the other oppressed black communities and with committed white democrats. A letter by Dr A. B. Xuma addressed to Professor R. F. A. Hoernle, head of the South African Institute of Race Relations, in 1942, captures his exasperation: 'One cannot wait for public opinion to be ready for reforms. One must lead public opinion to see the need for reforms by stating the case to its final and

logical conclusions no matter whose interests it affects.'

Under Xuma's stewardship the ANC adopted 'The Africans' Claims', a wide-ranging statement of its perspectives that anticipated many of the themes of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Smuts government's response to the 1946 African mineworkers' strike encapsulates the attitude South Africa's white rulers adopted towards all forms of black protest and resistance after 1945. The election of Malan's National Party in 1948 inaugurated a decade of repression, culminating in the massacre at Sharpeville on 21 March 1960. Eighteen days later, the apartheid regime banned the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), imposed a five-month State of Emergency and detained some 1 800 persons, black and white, occasioning a second strategic shift for the ANC.

In 1961, after the apartheid state suppressed a stay-at-home strike by mobilising its police, the defence force and military reservists, the ANC leadership took the decision to adopt armed struggle and create uMkhonto weSizwe (MK), the nucleus of a national liberation army.

MK's actions on 16 December 1961 were a declaration of war, but the movement was careful not to paint itself into a strategic corner. It pronounced its readiness to discontinue the war on condition that the regime demonstrated a willingness to negotiate a democratic constitution in earnest. Negotiations were an aspect of this new strategy from the outset.

After the Rivonia arrests and convictions, the movement suffered terrible reverses, compounded by the death in 1967 of its president, Chief A. J. Luthuli. Brutal repression dismembered the movement inside South Africa, and consequently a viable ANC organisation had to be initiated and implemented from outside. This resulted in serious tensions between the movement's leadership and the trained fighters of MK, eager to return home to confront the enemy. The 1969 Morogoro consultative conference was convened to resolve this friction. A second consultative conference at Kabwe, in 1985, grappled with similar problems.

The movement's strategy aimed to achieve four inter-related goals:

- making the ANC an organised presence among the people of South Africa while generalising among them an appreciation that revolutionary violence was not only necessary but could be successfully deployed against what appeared to be a formidable enemy;
- inspiring self-organisation through every form of mass organisation for active engagement in the struggle to overthrow the apartheid regime;
- stimulating among them understanding that without their active support and protection the armed cadres of the movement could not hope to survive in the country; and
- creating secure lines of communication between units on the ground and the leadership for purposes of intelligence and counter-intelligence.

To succeed, the armed liberation struggle would have to be built on four interdependent pillars – the ANC underground; mass political mobilisation; armed struggle; and international solidarity.

For 30 years, between 1960 and 1990, the movement resisted pressure from the continent and other supporters in the world community to unite with the PAC. The ANC argued that meaningful unity could only grow in struggle among political forces actually engaging the enemy. It adopted the same attitude in discussions with dissidents from the Unity Movement and with representatives of the Black Consciousness Movement. The emergence of the mass democratic movement after 1984 made it possible to translate that principle into practice.

The terrain on which the ANC had to operate after it was un-banned was not all of its own making. The apartheid regime had devised a plethora of counter-insurgency strategies to defeat the liberation movement. Among the whites it presented itself as the champion of reform, eager to discover reasonable (as opposed to 'extremist') black leaders with whom it could negotiate. During the 1980s it excavated a ploy first devised, then discarded, by Hertzog in 1929, to co-opt the two black minority communities.

To the regime's right were die-hard racists and neo-fascist formations, intent on preserving undisguised white supremacy by force of arms. Amongst its securocrats, some hoped to defeat the liberation movement by stepped-up repression. Both groups threatened a negotiated settlement. In response, the ANC adopted tactics to keep the negotiations on course by strengthening the regime's hand against the far right and hardliners, but maintaining pressure to compel it to negotiate.

Thus during the 'whites only' referendum of 1992, though opposed to 'whites only' referenda in principle, the ANC encouraged whites to vote in support of keeping negotiations on track.

The movement also tried to define a common bottom-line on which liberation formations could agree, urging a 'Patriotic Front' to include the PAC, AZAPO, and various progressive homeland parties, such as Inyandza from kaNgwane and the military junta led by Holomisa in the Transkei. The upshot was that after agreeing to a Patriotic Front in 1992, both PAC and AZAPO later withdrew.

These events unfolded in the context of terrible violence, orchestrated by the Bittereinders in the security services, aimed at demoralising the ANC's supporters and disrupting its efforts to reconstitute itself organisationally. The movement responded by placing maximum pressure on De Klerk to clean out the hardliners, compelling the IFP leadership to commit themselves to peace, while organising effective self-defence among the affected communities.

Despite the tensions of 1990 to '94, the democratic elections took place in an atmosphere of peace. The ANC received the landslide majority it has since retained and constituted the core of the democratic government.

Judging by the 1994 elections, the ANC's constituency was disproportionately located in the urban areas and was overwhelmingly African working class. The elections brought to light the depth of support the ANC enjoyed among the rural African populations, outside KwaZulu-Natal, but the results also confirmed that the coloured and Indian working classes did not identify with the ANC, preferring to support the NP. Sections of the Indian middle strata supported the DP, while sections of the coloured professional classes supported the ANC.

The democratic elections imposed yet another strategic shift on the ANC. As government, it inherited a massive public debt incurred over decades by the apartheid regime. Governing a country recovering from mass struggles inspired and instigated by the ANC over the previous 15 years, it had to restore stability while delivering on election promises.

The ANC evolved as a revolutionary national movement because it had the courage to critically review its experience, retracing its steps when necessary and absorbing the bitter lessons of its defeat. A capacity for introspection, self-criticism and grasping the nettle of corrective action when necessary ensured that the ANC remained relevant while other movements withered.

The tensions afflicting ANC today are rooted in the changing material conditions of life of the various strata that make up its constituency. They reflect the recently acquired social mobility among black South Africans and the unscrupulous means some are prepared to employ in order to

rise.

Because the constituency of the SACP and COSATU is blue collar, there is continuing pressure that the ANC tilt in favour of the working class, generating tensions with its principal alliance partners.

An unfortunate reluctance to study of the outcomes of freedom make it less able to anticipate potential points of tension and conflict and to manage the contradictions produced by its own policies.

The ANC's capacity to lead will depend on how it addresses the societal changes its own policies have generated.

**Pallo Jordan**

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\* AMANDLA ISSUE 24 MARCH-APRIL 2012 :

<http://www.amandlapublishers.co.za/magazines/102/1101>

\* Pallo Jordan was the Minister of Arts and Culture of South Africa from 29 April 2004 to 10 May 2009.