

ZUMA Victory a Call for the Left to Vuka

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An earthquake has hit the ANC. A new leadership has wiped out the Mbeki regime in the ANC leadership race. This is comparable to a landslide victory for an opposition party in a general election. Except in this case the opposition party was a broad coalition of disgruntled elements within the ANC. A period of political instability awaits. The 'dreaded' two centres of power has materialised and gives rise to a lame duck President.

ANC delegates to its 52nd Conference voted for a slate rather than for individuals and this is likely to be carried forward into the election for the 80 strong National Executive Committee. A chasm exists between the new ANC leadership and the Cabinet and the bitterness between the two "camps" will ensure that this is not going to be overcome easily any time soon. This bitterness can be traced back to the split of Mbeki and his coterie from the SACP in 1990.

Zuma's victory, which sees the Chairperson of the South African Communist Party become the General Secretary of the ANC, gives the sense that the militant version of the National Democratic Revolution and the 1980s Alliance of the ANC and Communist Party has been restored. However, this is just perception. The reality is different. Already new Deputy President of the ANC, Kgalema Motlanthe - possible next President of the country should Zuma be successfully charged with corruption - has made clear that there will be no change in economic policy.

And this is where the similarities with the 80s balance of forces in the ANC and Tripartite Alliance gives way to current realities. Most of those elected to the leadership of the ANC accept the logic that political and economic stability requires no confrontation with capital, the need to have policies that attract foreign investment, and thus, like in general elections in most parts of the world in the era of capitalist globalisation, the new party in power follows, in the main, the policies of the vanquished, only style and image change. The form may change but the content of class power will remain. Capital, over the last 13 years has consolidated its class rule winning legitimacy for the market, the protection of private property and of course existing property relations. The freedom of capital, its mobility, penetration into new areas, such as services, its influence on the state, profitability and its ability to co-opt leading sections of the former national liberation movement are all important elements of its consolidated position. And it is important to highlight that a considerable component of the Zuma coalition are aspirant members of the black young bourgeois anxious to widen access to the spoils of power, i.e. tenders, contracts and BEE deals. What has been playing itself out in the ANC over the last couple of years is an intra-class and intra-organisational fight for primitive accumulation.

The Zumaites were able to put themselves at the head of the disgruntlement that emerged in the ANC - which itself was only a reflection of wider anger and disappointment of working class and poor people in the broader society.

This has important implications for the left in South Africa; and the absence of independent political working class formations with a mass base is once again going to be a critical factor. Just as the victory of the ANC in the 1994 elections presented opportunities for shifting SA's political economy

to the left through militant mass campaigns, strikes, occupations and demonstrations around the expectations of a radical break with apartheid and its accumulation path, this earthquake that has struck the ANC presents opportunities to stake radical claims.

However, an analogy with the immediate years following the '94 elections gives a clue what is likely to transpire. The SACP leadership, which now has a considerable stake in the ANC leadership, will most likely caution against any act that undermines the ANC under its new leadership. Rather than depending on independent mass mobilisation, the road to radical transformation will be subordinated to the internal dynamics within the ANC. Criticisms of the ANC will be muted and the mass movement will be asked to exercise patience as "we gradually dismantle the Mbeki project". The probable co-option of leading SACP and COSATU members into the Zuma team will convey a new era of hope for the Tripartite Alliance.

While this is most probable, it does not have to be inevitable. If Zuma could tap into the anger of neoliberal class rule and manipulate it to his ends - within the ANC that is - the left can also mobilise this anger as well as the expectation that things will change under Zuma. However, this will require unprecedented unity in action amongst left forces in SA. The left needs to respond very quickly and put itself at the head of mass campaigns that can mobilise hundreds of thousands of people while appealing to militant sections of the ANC, SACP and COSATU. For example, a national campaign against Eskom's proposed tariff increases, imagined along the lines of the late 1980s Anti LRA (Labour Relations Act) which built unprecedented unity of the mass movement and led to the 1989 Workers Summit involving both COSATU and NACTU, would be a good starting point.

All the hated policies of the Mbeki government should be targeted. A largely symbolic campaign "GEAR must go" should be initiated alongside "bread and butter campaigns" for jobs, a decent supply of free water, electricity, housing, etc. where pressure is put on the "ZUMA Alliance" to show their difference to Mbeki by rejecting GEAR and indicating their alternative policy choices. In other words the strategy of the left should be, through mass campaigns and mobilisation to drive a wedge between COSATU, other components of the mass movement and the new leadership of the ANC under Zuma. In addition, a strong message should be sent to Zuma and co. the oppressed want change.

An underground pamphlet in the 1980s issued as part of the campaign to reject the Tricameral Parliament and was influential in the formation of the United Democratic Front issued a clarion call even more relevant today: "Let us unite in the year of the United Front". Lets make 2008 the year of the United Front and use the space that the divisions in the ANC has opened up to build a militant non-sectarian left.

P.S.

* From "Amandla!" website.