

POLITICAL SITUATION IN SOUTH AFRICA SINCE POLOKWANE – RELEVANCE FOR THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Prof Dirk Kotzé

Department of Political Sciences, Unisa

Current political dynamics in South Africa are determined by two overlapping centres of power between the ANC-in-government and the ANC-as-organisation. At the same time, within the ANC-as-organisation three spheres of power are also emerging. The “New ANC” leadership is concentrated in the National Executive Committee (NEC) and National Working Committee (NWC). Overlap between the two centres of power is in the form of the eleven Ministers and five Deputy Ministers, and some Directors General and provincial MECs in the NEC. Separation of the centres exists between the Mbeki circle and Premiers on the one hand, and the six New ANC office-bearers. The result is a government in stasis and with little energy. There is also a lack of clarity about policy directions: are the Government’s policies still in place or are they replaced by the Polokwane policies? Differences between the two are accentuated in the form of Eskom, the Scorpions and Zimbabwe. (The Nedlac meeting on electricity was a good example how the two sides manifest themselves.)

The three spheres within the ANC-as-organisation are complex and it is still very early to determine their significance. The first centre is Jacob Zuma, consisting of the persons who sympathise with his judicial problems, who has a long history with him in exile (like Lindiwe Sisulu), in intelligence and the related Operation Vula, and in the provinces of Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal. Blade Nzimande (SACP) and Fikile Mbalula (former Youth League President) are some of his staunchest supporters. Motlanthe, the second centre, is highly respected in the ANC, kept the Tripartite Alliance together during the difficult Mbeki era but does not have a separate constituency except some of his former colleagues in COSATU. The third centre is most elusive, namely Matthews Phosa and Tokyo Sexwale. They appear as a vibrant, younger and business-minded formation, with support in diverse sectors. Zuma and Motlanthe are not in competition with each other. Sexwale also appears in public to be close to Zuma (such as on his European visits), but he and Phosa appear to marginalise Motlanthe. (Their insistence that he should join Government is apparently

an attempt to compromise him with the current government woes.) Manifestations of these spheres are still tentative but include Phosa's call for an early election and Mbeki's resignation, which was opposed by Zuma and Motlanthe and portrayed as "his personal view". Phosa and Sexwale also accompanied Zuma on his visits while Motlanthe are kept out. Often Phosa acts as the ANC or NEC spokesperson though he is junior to Motlanthe and Secretary General Gwede Mantashe.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS

The internal dynamics in the ANC are also important for a better understanding of the ANC-Government interaction. Despite the dynamics before Polokwane, the Alliance did not take control of the ANC, though it enhanced its status in relation to the ANC. One indicator of their lack of control, the newly-elected NEC of 80 members consists of one COSATU leader, six SACP leaders and two ANC Youth League executive members. They played certainly a decisive role in Zuma's election, but failed to secure their own election. Outside the ANC, the Alliance is certainly more prominent than before. Since their marginalisation with GEAR in 1996, they have remained on the political periphery. Polokwane is hailed as their return to the political mainstream. However, at the Alliance Summit in May the SACP's proposal to form a Pact was rejected by the ANC leadership. The current situation resembles the period immediately before the 1994 election in many respects, including the Alliance dynamics. Two years later, they changed dramatically.

Another dimension of the dynamics is that there are much more interaction between Ministers and the ANC-as-organisation than in the past. Ministers are called to Luthuli House to account for developments such as the electricity crisis or the xenophobia violence. It implies that the NEC/NWC are more actively strengthening the ANC in policy matters. ANC study groups, NEC committees and the parliamentary caucus are examples of more activity. Whereas before Polokwane the Executive was in an uncontested position and Parliament in a subordinated role, thereafter a trilateral checks-and-balance situation is emerging between the Executive, Parliament and the ANC-as-organisation.

A third dimension of the dynamics is that Jacob Zuma is not interfering in government activities. The fear that he would micro-manage government as part of the 2-centres of power notion, did not materialise. He is developing a special niche for himself inside and outside South Africa. He and Motlanthe maintain a clear distance from Government, do not serve as a clearing-house for government activities, and prevent any initiatives to interfere in Government in the forms of motions of no confidence, early elections and government reshuffles. Motlanthe's deployment to Parliament (and government) is not his own choice. Though there is no direct interference in Government, the clear understanding is that Government cannot unilaterally change policies, and that all policy changes should be in line with the Polokwane decisions.

A fourth dimension of the internal dynamics is that the Mbeki/Zuma schism as part of the succession process has not narrowed after Polokwane. One can talk of a "ceasefire" between them but not of integration or an emerging harmony between the two groups. The result is an exodus of senior government members and officials without much succession planning. (It resembles almost a change in government.)

IMPACT ON POLICY MATTERS

Polokwane was not a radical break with the past in respect of the ANC's policy fundamentals. NEC member Joel Netshitenzhe describes the policy terrain as determined by "continuity of change", meaning that continuous change is the norm in the ANC. It suggests incremental changes which appear as continuity. The fact of the matter is that Polokwane does not represent a radical change with the past.

Two policy areas deserving special attention from an agricultural point of view, are the economic and social policy fundamentals. The macro-economic principles are continuing but with special emphasis on the "developmental state". The market remains the main instrument of supply/demand and distribution of wealth. Participation in the international market is a priority, though in solidarity with the South. The First/Second Economies are still used as a description of the South African economic inequalities. A more critical stance on the elitist nature of Black economic

empowerment is, however, a relatively new development. New questions are also raised about the effects of employment equity.

A critical question which the New ANC has not yet addressed but which is implicitly raised as a consequence of their effort to distinguish their approach from those of Mbeki, is whether development should be an economic or social priority? It is illustrated by the example of the new leadership's claim that they are "pro-poor". As an economic objective it implies a shift away from business and towards the Left. It would encapsulate redistribution, progressive taxation, state-led job creation, and more effective black economic empowerment at lower social levels. As a social objective it implies an emphasis on social grants (welfare policies) and not only poverty alleviation but also a reduction in inequality, in other words, structural changes in society such as more education and training, more social capital, more entrepreneurial development and more access to services such as health care. Many observers and foreign interested parties understand "pro-poor" as an economic statement, and therefore the New ANC's shift to the Left. Arguably the majority in the ANC understand it as a statement on social transformation and not a change in economic policy.

Polokwane is generally understood is a change in leadership. In respect of economic policies it is only partly true. The leading persons in its economic thinking in future appear to be Cyril Ramaphosa (especially on black economic empowerment), Pravin Gordhan, Tokyo Sexwale and Max Sisulu (the NEC coordinator on economic policy). Joel Netshitenzhe appears to provide continuity with the ANC thinking in more ideological terms. The future of Trevor Manuel and Tito Mboweni depends on their own choices, though Manuel might be better placed than Mboweni (who will have to take some blame for the tightening economic situation).

The social policy fundamentals seem to follow also the pattern of continuity except that the "developmental state" is presented as an alternative for a welfare state. Polokwane was critical of a situation in which the population becomes too dependent on welfare grants. The developmental state is understood as a vehicle for gradual empowerment of persons to migrate from the Second to the First Economy, and therefore to become economically active.

Relevant for the agricultural sector, land has been and still is considered a critical factor in social transformation. Poverty is seen as mainly a rural phenomenon and therefore poverty should be addressed through a rural development strategy. Urban poverty is an extension of rural poverty, which is one of the ANC's critical errors in dealing with land and poverty.

RELEVANCE FOR THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

The ANC in the past and at present looks at agriculture through the prism of land reform. Land is therefore critically important for social transformation and it is not understood in the context of economic reform or transformation. The Land and Agrarian Reform Project (LARP) is a response to Mbeki's quest for poverty eradication, job creation and economic growth. It is significant to note that nowhere in the Polokwane documents is there any reference to LARP. In the past the emphasis was not on increased production of agricultural goods, but primarily on transformation of land-ownership. In LARP there are indications of a change in direction. The overall philosophy in the past and at Polokwane was not to interfere in the (domestic) economics of agriculture. Internationally, participation in the Doha round of WTO negotiations and free trade agreements were meant to benefit agricultural economics.

The result has been ambivalence in the ANC's policy priorities: was the main goal to promote commercial production or small-scale farming? LARP is a preliminary indication that the scale is tilting towards the commercial end. Another error which the ANC has committed, is to rely on policy instruments instead of policy fundamentals for land reform. Expropriation is presented as the wonder solution instead of concentrating on different measures to identify appropriate farmers, their preparation and support. Again, LARP, provides early indicators of more sensitivity in this regard, though expropriation is promoted at the same time as the long-awaited panacea.

Regarding agricultural policy, the New ANC has not yet introduced any new policies. The priority issues and policy approaches remain the same. Part of its explanation is a serious paralysis in the Department of Land Affairs, especially in policy-making.

After the 2009 general election, the following four pointers will be relevant for the agricultural sector:

- 1) There will be a new Minister and Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs. Both of them are not part of the New ANC leadership, and will therefore disappear. A new Director General for Land Affairs will also be appointed after the demise of Glen Thomas.
- 2) A new provincial dispensation might emerge over time. The Department of Provincial and Local Government is preparing a White Paper on the provinces. It might change the concurrent relationship between the Departments of Land Affairs and Agriculture and their provincial counterparts. Many of the implementation problems are experienced with the provincial officials.
- 3) The ANC's NEC coordinators of policy in the areas of land and agriculture have also changed. It moved from Thoko Didiza to Lindiwe Sisulu. Other policy coordinators who will also be relevant in future are Max Sisulu (economic affairs) and Jeff Radebe (policy convenor).
- 4) The strategic significance of the evolving international food crisis. The Alliance Summit in May identified food security as a critical factor for the immediate future. The prominence of bio-fuel will also place agriculture in a strategic position. These developments emphasise the economic significance of agriculture, and will most probably enforce a compromise with land reform as the main priority. A trade-off between food security and land reform will demand a broadening of the agricultural sector in the long-term and also closer cooperation amongst South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and a post-Mugabe Zimbabwe in the ambit of SADC. Namibia and Botswana are already well-advanced in this respect. Essential for South Africa, is also access to water, and for that reason the current plans with the DRC have to develop further.

The future of agriculture in South Africa will therefore be determined by the success of regional cooperation, its ability to provide food security for the region, and for land reform in the region (especially South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe) to reach a

point of conclusion. This provides agriculture with a strategic value as opposed to a purely economic value. Its current contribution of 2.4% to the GDP (2007) cannot compete with the other economic sectors, and therefore it should rather concentrate on its strategic position.