



ANC TODAY

ONLINE VOICE OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

POLICY DEBATE

In Defence of Affirmative Action

VIEWPOINT

M Nkomonde

A report from the Commission of Employment Equity (CEE) tells us that the White male still dominates the higher echelons of all professions, the boardrooms of South African corporations and all the senior management posts in

business.

A report from the UCT Law School in 1998 indicated that on average, the White law school graduate could find employment within the first three months of graduation, whereas Coloured and African graduates often had to seek suitable employment for a year or more.

At present, according to the CEEs figures, Africans account for +74% of the economically active population, yet they occupy a mere 13% of the senior management positions. Coloureds, who account for 10% of the economically active, account for a measly 3% of such posts.

There are few policies of the incumbent government that have caused as much confusion as Affirmative Action. This is not because the government and the Constitution supporting agencies have not explained it properly, but because of the organised resistance to these policies by the White-led political parties, like the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Freedom Front plus (FF+), and now, adding to the confusion, COPE!

Virtually without exception, all White editors, opinion-makers and editorial writers have sought to rubbish Affirmative Action. This, of course, is quite understandable. After all, before 1994 it was taken for granted that any White job seeker, other than one with a criminal record, would indeed find a job. Before 1994, no White expected to compete on equal terms with a black person i.e. African, coloured and Indian for a job! Now that they are obliged to, it is quite understandable that most Whites are angry about it and do not like it.

But the confusion is compounded when an African columnist, like Jacob Dlamini in The Weekender of Saturday, 24th January 2009, who opines that Affirmative Action suggests that Whiteness is a desirable norm. This betrays a shocking lack of knowledge about Affirmative Action and about Economic Empowerment.

Perhaps our learned columnist does not know that Affirmative Action has been and is still very much in practice in countries where Whites are not a factor in either the economy or in politics. Malaysia and Indonesia being good examples. The suggestion that it is a White/Black problem tells us more about the columnists ignorance than about Affirmative Action.

I have often tried to explain the policy to mass audiences in simple terms by using the analogy of a boat named opportunity. By past colonialist and racist policy only one race was allowed onto the boat, specifically the Whites. But surrounding the boat and stranded in the icy waters are thousands of others, who also would like to board the boat. While racist policies prevail, they are kept off by law and convention. Once the racist policies are scrapped, we need a policy to ensure that there is orderly boarding of the boat by those in the water. That policy is Affirmative Action.

WEEK IN REVIEW

ANC manifesto gets support | A number of organisations pledged their loyalty and support to the ANC and championed its manifesto. Sports organisations, business people, artists and faith-based organisations cited a long history with the ruling party and commended its manifesto for addressing the needs of all people.

ANC supporters come under fire in Nongoma | People were shot at, stones were thrown at buses, streets unlawful barricaded, cars hit with knobkerries, ANC posters ripped and defaced in the acts of intimidation and criminal behaviour unseen in recent times.

Loss to our revolution | The ANC has lost two of its outstanding cadres and stalwarts - Comrades Cassim Saloojee and John Schippers. Comrade Saloojee passed away after a long illness. Comrade John Schippers died in a car accident near Wolseley.

Jacob Zumas trial date set | ANC President Jacob Zumas criminal case was provisionally set down for August 25 after a brief hearing in the Pietermaritzburg High Court.

Reserve Bank lowers the interest rates | Reserve Bank Governor, Tito Mboweni, announced a one percentage point drop in the repo rate today following the first meeting this year of the Monetary Policy Committee.

The options that exist are threefold: Either those who want to board scramble on board haphazardly, which holds out the threat of the boat capsizing. Or those on the boat use the oars to beat off those in the water, creating a melee that also threatens to capsize the boat. The third option is a policy that creates an environment in which there can be the orderly and safe boarding, which keeps the boat of opportunity afloat and permits those previously excluded to board it safely.

Until now South Africa has experienced those on board desperately swinging the oars to keep those who were excluded exactly where they were, adrift in the icy waters, with few opportunities. These oars take the shape of the urban legend that talented Whites are leaving the country in droves because there are no opportunities for them. Any and every statistic one may care to examine indicates that while Whites might well be leaving in droves, that is not a function of lack of opportunity!

What is alarming is the number of Blacks, including the leading African academic, Dr Mampele Ramphela, who mouth these facts with such conviction!

To put it plainly, anyone, no matter what their motivation or reasoning, who opposes Affirmative Action is insisting that the situation the CEE statistics describe remains unchanged: That is, continued White domination of the economy with, at best, a feeble trickle-down at a pace acceptable to the dominant Whites. In effect, a practical denial of opportunity to Blacks, specifically Africans and Coloureds.

The evidence that Affirmative Action policies do in fact yield results comes from the experience of White women over the past 15 years. Such commendable advancement however betrays deliberate racial discrimination. The higher profile of White women in senior management is a post 94 development which is the result of women being designated a disadvantaged group and beneficiaries of Affirmative Action policies. A White corporate culture has advanced White women but continues to exclude all Blacks.

South Africa is no exception to the skills shortage found in every industrial economy today. Which is why countries like the UK recruit teachers, nurses, social workers and even doctors from developing countries, including South Africa. The suggestion that our skills shortage is the outcome of Affirmative Action is such evident nonsense, it is surprising its opponents even marshal it.

It is precisely by calling on the skills, actual, potential and latent, of every section of South Africa that we will address the skills shortage. The suggestion that by widening the entry gate and giving greater access to increasing numbers of our people to the skills required for economic growth somehow results in a skill deficit is absurd.

As a party that claims it came into being to defend the Constitution, COPE has already demonstrated its hypocrisy by attacking Affirmative Action, which both it and the DA forget is a Constitutional obligation, not one of many options that a party might or might not choose.

The young Black professional, the soon to graduate student and the aspiring young Black business person would do well to consider what the implications of supporting COPE are for him or herself. To speak plainly, COPE want to restore the glass ceiling that held Black talent down and excluded Blacks from any sort of meaningful role in the higher echelons of business and the professions.

M. Nkomonde is the member of the ANC Sunnyside Branch in Tshwane.

2009 ANC ELECTIONS MANIFESTO

Everyone agrees the ANC's manifesto is pro-poor



In general major media sources and newspapers described the ANC's 2009 manifesto as being pro-poor. On the overall, the ANC has received very good coverage with the emphasis being that what makes its manifesto pro-poor is the focus on the creation of decent jobs, the rural economy, education and the introduction of the national health insurance scheme.

EVENTS IN HISTORY

7 February 1962 - Walter Sisulu and Duma Nokwe went from house to house in Orlando to rally support amongst residents against the apartheid government's policy of Bantu Urban Councils.

8 February 1981 - Mozambique stresses its continued support for the ANC in a statement made at the funeral of twelve ANC members killed in the South African Defence Force (SADF) raid on Matola, Maputo, on 30 January 1981.

10 February 1906 - Two policemen are killed in poll tax resistance near Richmond, Natal, following local resistance to the collection of poll tax. 12 were found guilty of the murders and subsequently executed which added to other grievances and caused sporadic uprisings that culminated in the Bhambatha rebellion in June 1906.

10 February 1991 - Minister of Law and Order Adriaan Vlok said that between 1921 and 1986 more than 1 million people had been arrested under pass laws in South Africa.

11 February 1990 - Nelson Mandela was released unconditionally from prison after 27 years. In Mdantsane, 10 people were killed when Ciskei soldiers used force against a group of revellers celebrating Mandela's release.

12 February 1989 - Vlakplaas Operatives ambush and kill 3 South African students in Swaziland. 17 policemen applied to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for amnesty for their part in the attack.

ELECTIONS 2009

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In the aftermath of the good coverage concerns emerged from economists about the affordability of the commitments in the manifesto. The concerns are on implementation and some of these are driven by perspectives on the management of the economy that are different to those prevalent currently within the ANC and its alliance partners.

Importantly too, the concerns ignore developments within the local economy that are due to the implementation of some very intelligent policies and strategies by the ANC over the past fifteen years.

The ANC does recognize that its objectives in the manifesto will be met only if there is continued economic growth. The past few years, since 1996 especially, did indeed provide this emphasis and basis for the management of the economy. What is new now is the emphasis - in line with adoption of the vision for the building of a developmental state - to link economic growth with the delivery of basic necessities and services. Growth is not for its own sake.

Projections are indeed that in line with the recession in the global economy growth in the local economy will average about 1% in 2009. Consideration, however, should not be lost of the fact that it is in the wake of the global financial crisis that there is currently in policy debates around the world an emphasis on the use of a variety of instruments to stabilize the economy and restore the trajectory of growth. Apart from the focus on the use of fiscal and monetary policies, it now is increasingly becoming accepted that what the International Monetary Fund terms 'fiscal stimulus', is part of the package. And that is in the manifesto.

Through planning and vision the ANC led government fought to have FIFAs 2010 World Cup hosted in South Africa. Fixed investment that related to construction increased subsequently at the rate of 32.3% in the first half of 2007. Thus, construction remained robust even in December 2008, increasing at an annualized rate of 15.0% compared to 9.1% in the second quarter of 2008. And as the South African Reserve Bank noted this was all due to the upgrading of existing infrastructure and large projects such as the Gautrain, power stations, roads, sports stadiums and related infrastructure developments.

In addition, investment driven by public enterprises, of over 30.7% in 2007, contributed to an increase in investment spending by government by 15.5% in the first half of 2007 compared with the first half of 2006. All of these are positive developments that are indicative of the capacity and the vision the ANC has to deliver on its 2009 election commitments.

On the extension of the child support grant to children aged 15 to 18, it will implement this provision in a phased manner. The expansion will be in the area of R6 billion at full implementation. Furthermore, the gains made in reversing the deficit that the Unemployment Insurance Fund had in 2001 to presently enable it to have a surplus of about R20 billion in total assets and R33 billion in reserves, makes possible already the promised bolder expansion.

The Fund has been so efficient that it obtained an unqualified audit report for a third consecutive year in the 2007/8 financial year. It reduced the period of handling claims from six to five weeks including its staff vacancy rate to 16%, providing further evidence on the rigor of work that the ANC is pursuing to realize a better life for all.

The idea that *Working together we can do more* finds its saliency against this background. It is a call to business, society and opposition parties to help realize more fundamental change through co-operation.

UPCOMING EVENTS

ANC President involved in Voter registration drive

Saturday, 07 February 2009
KwaZulu-Natal

ANC President visits Thabazimbi in Limpopo

Sunday, 8 February 2009
9am: Church service in Regorogile Township
11am: Door-to-door at Regorogile Township
2pm: Door-to-door at Smashablock
3pm: Meeting mine workers at a mine in Northam

Budget Speech in Parliament

Wednesday, 11 February 2009
Western Cape



Every voter needs to vote at the voting station closest to where they live, and where they are registered to vote.

If you have not registered, go to your nearest voting station over the weekend of **7- 8 February 2009**. Voting stations are open from 8am to 5pm.

To find out if you are registered to vote, SMS your ID number to 32810, visit the IEC website at www.elections.org.za or call 0800 11 8000 toll free from a landline.