



African Communist

First Quarter 2024

Issue 208



2024 ELECTIONS

29 MAY VOTE



LET'S DO MORE, TOGETHER

EDITORIAL NOTES

Why an ANC election victory is critical

It is now less than three months before the most challenging general election to have faced our ANC-Alliance in the three decades since the 1994 democratic breakthrough. While we should be cautious about opinion polls, it is significant that all available polls have the ANC's national vote coming in under 50 per cent for the first time. Some polls even suggest the ANC's vote could be in the low 40 per cents. It should immediately be noted that in all these polls the ANC remains, by a significant margin, the largest political party – so much for the commercial media's continued chorus that “the ANC is going to lose these elections”. Which is not to deny that there has been a steady decline in support for the ANC.

The reasons for the decline are well-known and openly acknowledged from within our Alliance. These include, most obviously, persisting crisis levels of unemployment, frustration with load-shedding, the cost of living, the drastic decline in municipal services, including water, and personal insecurity with rampant levels of crime, including gender-based violence, in many working-class communities. Despite some progress, there is also disappointment that during Ramaphosa's presidency the criminal justice system has been largely ineffective in dealing with the state capture networks. Above all, there is a general sense that there remain many bad apples in government and the ANC. The ANC's commitment to renewal still has a long way to travel.

We should not be in denial of these and other major challenges. But,

at the same time, we must not fall into the trap of demoralisation and demobilisation. Over the past three decades, our opponents have constantly sought to write off the ANC. They wishfully invoke a supposed “iron law of history” that incumbent liberation movements “always” lose power after “thirty years”. (A decade and a half ago we were told “twenty years”). As the massive popular turn-out at the ANC’s eThek-wini manifesto launch testified, the organisational and mobilising capacity of the ANC and its Alliance should never be under-rated.

The shock at this turnout was brazenly evident, by the way, in News24’s *City Press* front page the following day. The other mainstream commercial newspapers, no fans of the ANC, like the *Sunday Times*, at least had front-page photos and stories that gave a sense of the size of the attendance while providing a reasonable reflection of the main points of the manifesto. The *City Press* front-page story by contrast was, scandalously, a non-story, quoting extensively from an obscure MK Party official, playing the old Zumaist victimhood game, about the MK Party allegedly being attacked by the ANC and others.

While the ANC Alliance has seldom enjoyed balanced treatment from the mainstream commercial media, News24 outlets are now out-doing themselves in their anti-ANC (and anti-Ramaphosa) zealotry. In a replay of how the commercial media once flirted with the militarised proto-fascism of the EFF in the Zuma years (taking the dangerous “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” shortcut), the *City Press* is now flirting with the gangsterism of the ethno-nationalist MK Party. Opportunism and electoral desperation know no bounds.

The ANC-Alliance election manifesto

The priority areas clearly outlined in the manifesto reflect a significant impact that the SACP and the Alliance left more generally have had on the development of the document. This impact has not been achieved

simply through backroom lobbying and policy debates in bilaterals. It has also been achieved through active campaigning and through building alliances with trade unions, progressive policy institutions, economists and NGOs in line with the SACP's commitment to building a broad left progressive front.

Among key issues to be highlighted in the manifesto are its commitment to sustaining a major public employment programme involving 2,5 million work opportunities, advancing industrialisation, and using, in its words, "the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grants as a mechanism towards phasing in a basic income grant."

Additionally, and importantly, there is the manifesto's commitment to: "Align monetary, fiscal and trade policy, along with the transformation of the financial sector, to meet basic needs and support job creation and industrialisation." But this is precisely where we hit a major bump in the road. Put simply, instead of alignment we have a yawning non-alignment between most of the manifesto's key commitments and Treasury's February budget. The budget continues to lock us into punitive austerity with cuts to health, education, public employment programmes and much more. It's all very well to promise that there will be a phasing of SRD grants towards a basic income grant, when, in practice the budget allocation to the SRD grants has been reduced and there are fewer and fewer beneficiaries. The manifesto is travelling one way; the budget and national treasury are going in the opposite direction.

What does this all mean in practice? Why should the SACP even support the ANC in these elections? Is the ANC manifesto simply a list of progressive but empty promises? We must answer these questions as activists, not as academic observers. We need to treat the manifesto's key commitments and, indeed, the ANC and the present and future state as sites of important working class and popular struggles. The fact, for

instance, that the commitment to move towards a basic income grant (BIG) is even in the manifesto is because there is widespread support for it from within the ANC, from key government ministries and from within the presidency. This provides a relatively favourable terrain on which working class and popular struggles can and must exert continued pressure.

And, indeed, this is precisely why as the SACP and broad left in South Africa, we need to ensure a major ANC elections victory on 29 May. The more a future ANC-led national government is forced into compromising coalition arrangements with centre-right political parties, the less favourable, in principle, will this terrain become for the left.

As part of an electoral campaign for the ANC, and, indeed, after the elections, we need to mobilise and organise to ensure the BIG manifesto commitment, for instance, is not kicked endlessly down the road. We must not allow a timid implementation to be funded through cuts in other critical areas of social spending. We must not allow capitalist neoliberal think-tanks or National Treasury, or coalition partners (if there are to be) to make a BIG roll-out trickle-down dependant on private sector “growth first” (growth that never comes).

The redistributive impact of a universal BIG, coupled with major public employment programmes and public sector investment in social and economic infrastructure and re-industrialisation, are not subtractions from sustainable and equitable growth. In fact, they are the essential pillars for sustainable, equitable economic growth that overcomes the grave structural constraints of our political economy.

**Let us ensure a powerful ANC-Alliance election outcome on May 29!
Let us ensure the full implementation of the ANC's election manifesto commitments!**

Let us continue to build a left popular front within and beyond our Alliance!



Published by the South African Communist Party

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