

The abandonment of Luthuli's vision of a social democratic welfare state begs a response after almost 20 years of post-apartheid democracy. Such a response seems to be emerging in the current debate on the need for a National Health Insurance (NHI) system, championed by the national department of health. The plan reconnects with the ANC's 'strategy of equality' in that it seeks to create a national health service that is universally available to all citizens regardless of class, race and colour; one that is based on cross-class social solidarity. The NHI would not be based on an insurance model; it will be predominately tax funded. The values and principles underpinning the NHI proposal – universalism and social solidarity – are those of the classic social democratic welfare state.

The gradual diminishing of fiscal containment as a primary imperative guiding government social policy is noteworthy. It means a greater range of policy possibilities and opportunities can be explored to establish a comprehensive system of social security. Whether these possibilities are best codified in the historical ideal of a social democratic welfare state is subject to contestation.

The battle of ideas looms large in the ANC. **LB**

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Social democracy and the ANC:

Back to the future?

The African National Congress (ANC) has historically supported ideas of social democracy as some of the ways to bring development to the country. **Robert van Niekerk** traces ideas of social democracy in the party's history as it is important to review what has influenced ANC thinking in the last 20 years of democracy.

Social democratic ideas and ideals have been articulated in the ANC policy frameworks since the 1940s. They included:

- State provision of universal and socially inclusive education; health, housing and welfare benefits to all citizens as a right of citizenship.
- Full employment as the state's goal.
- A social compact between labour, capital and government based on the maintenance of a welfare state and resolving industrial conflicts consensually.

These ideas stretch back to the ANC of Dr AB Xuma in the 1940s (in Africans' Claims), to Albert Luthuli in the 1950s/1960s (in The Freedom Charter), and to the pre-election 1990s (the Reconstruction and Development Programme's (RDP) 'base-document'). However, this social

democratic trajectory was severely undermined by the neo-liberal ideology that pervaded many ANC economic policies in the post-1994 election period.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC IDEAS

Between 1912 and 1952 the ANC attempted to secure citizen rights using non-violent strategies.

At the time the ANC did not have a mass popular base. But it did have support among the educated élite. The ANC was the most articulate advocate of the African middle classes' political aspirations at the time. Its language and strategy was of moderation and reform – appealing through constitutional routes such as petitions and deputations.

According to Gish when AB Xuma was voted president general in 1940, he brought with him the

political influences cultivated from his medical training at the African American Tuskegee Institute in the United States of America. It was a model of black advancement through self-reliance. It was not isolationist but engaged whites on the basis of independent black organisational and political strengths. Other ANC leaders, such as ZK Matthews, shared a similar political outlook.

Xuma was aware of the potential significance for African advancement in the global struggle against Nazism in Europe. Karis and Carter quote him as follows: 'South Africa has legislated and governed for the benefits of the Europeans, the privileged group and upper caste of South Africa. Because she claims to be fighting for the... [democratic]... ideals we have just mentioned... South Africa must begin now to legislate for the welfare and benefit of all South Africans irrespective of race, creed or colour but must be based on human worth. Thus and thus only may South Africa win peace. This is Congress Policy. This is the African charter in South Africa.'

Davenport and Lodge write that Xuma promoted his strategy through constitutional methods based on democratically accountable, mandated leadership and building support for political positions through properly constituted political organisation. A new ANC constitution was adopted that democratised the organisation across national, provincial and branch structures. It opened membership to women as equal members, established an administrative structure through subscriptions, and eliminated the House of Chiefs.

Xuma also attempted to create a mass campaigning movement of the ANC in favour of a universal franchise (but still within the bounds of constitutional politics).

According to Gish, Xuma had expectations that discriminatory legislation and bars on citizenship would be removed in return for black support for the Allied war effort. He was particularly interested in improving the livelihoods of Africans in urban areas and campaigned for egalitarian social policies in education, health, housing and welfare, as well as for a living wage. He was cautiously optimistic in the early war years because the anti-Nazi Allied world was receptive to ideas about a new democratic world order: a world that was pro-democracy and anti-racism, and one which would improve all citizens' welfare.

Xuma's presidency was strongly influenced by his work as a medical practitioner. This was reflected in concerns for public health and social policies. In 1941, he issued 'The Policy and Platform of the African National Congress'. Along with the demand for an extension of the franchise and political rights for Africans, it also demanded that the state provide citizens' rights to education, social welfare, pensions, and public health care.

The ANC demands for a preventive health service run by the state preceded the United Party's radical Gluckman Commission's proposals for a national health service in 1944. The Commission proposed a socialised and democratically accountable service run by the state and based on the rural preventive health model developed by Sydney Kark - a pioneering public health specialist. This shows a striking convergence in the war years between certain liberal parliamentary members and civil servants of the United Party such as Dr Henry Gluckman, and the policies that Xuma, acknowledged leader of African opinion, advocated.

AFRICANS' CLAIMS IN THE NEW POST-WAR SOCIAL ORDER

The Atlantic Charter was an agreement between the two Allied war leaders, Winston Churchill (UK) and Franklin D Roosevelt (USA), on the need for post-war democratisation and improvement in welfare for societies living under Nazi and fascist occupation. Global democracy and welfare was thus to be the foundation of the new post-war social order. The impact of the international rights-based Atlantic Charter of 1941, which established the ideological foundations for a future post-war settlement, deeply influenced anti-colonial and South African opposition political movements.

The ANC applied the Atlantic Charter's vision of political and social citizenship to South Africa in 'Africans' Claims in South Africa'. ANC leaders such as Xuma and Matthews had already been exposed to a rights-based discourse through liberal universities in the USA and UK and in the 1930s. They were thus acutely interested in the implications for blacks in South Africa as the Allied leaders, and the USA particularly, advocated for global democratisation in opposition to fascism and Nazism.

Africans' Claims was the ANC's most significant statement on black enfranchisement in the war years. Its strategic genius was to explicitly apply the political, civil and social rights advocated in the Atlantic Charter of 1941, endorsed by Union of South Africa's Prime Minister Jan Smuts, to the disenfranchised position of Africans in his country. It was on this basis that the ANC argued for black participation in the Allied war effort. This was also a direct rejection of the principles of trusteeship and of colonial rule, which was the basis of Smuts' 'native policies'.

The section on a Bill of Rights in Africans' Claims, echoing the American Declaration of Independence, set out the most

direct and unequivocal statement of African expectations, write Karis and Carter: 'We, the African people in the Union of South Africa, urgently demand the granting of full citizenship rights such as are enjoyed by all Europeans in South Africa.'

The Bill of Rights stipulated what full citizenship meant; and called for state provided social rights, such as the: '... establishment of free medical and health services for all sections of the population; the right of every child to free and compulsory education and of admission to technical schools, universities and other institutions of higher education [and] equality of treatment with any other section of the population in the State social services, the inclusion on an equal basis with Europeans in any scheme of social security and the extension of all industrial welfare legislation to Africans engaged in Agriculture, Domestic Service and in Public institutions or bodies.'

The ANC's Bill of Rights of 1943 contained in Africans' Claims started from civil rights. These in turn led directly to political rights and finally to recognition of social rights.

The proposals in Africans' Claims were consistent with a social democratic approach that was championed in the 1940s in the UK by the socialist Labour Party. This was based on universalism and inter-class social solidarity.

It was also based on agreement that poverty and inequality needed to be eradicated – through central state intervention – so that the social needs of all citizens would be met through the universal provision of health, education and welfare as a right of citizenship.

Glennister writes that it also aimed to maintain 'full employment' as an explicit state objective; and to plan the economy based on Keynesian economic principles to prevent the cycle of 'boom and bust' associated with

pre-war laissez faire capitalism. In other words it sought to establish a state guaranteed 'welfare state' for the working class as the chief outcome and 'victory at home' for the Allied troops fighting abroad against global anti-welfare, represented by Nazism and fascism.

These social democratic proposals came to fruition with the landslide victory of the Labour Party on a working-class vote in the 1945 general election in the UK. The Labour Party then vigorously pursued its electoral mandate and established a welfare state comprising a free state-run national health service, a universal and comprehensive system of education for all children, comprehensive income maintenance for the non-employed, quality state housing for the working class, and full employment as a state economic goal. Had Africans' Claims been fully implemented it would have led to the establishment of the first social democratic welfare state in Africa.

However for the ANC, led by Xuma, the limits of liberalisation, and the possibilities of social reform suggested in the early war years, were reached with the publication of Africans' Claims and its Bill of Rights in 1943. Following repeated failed attempts to secure a meeting with Smuts to discuss the implications of the Atlantic Charter, Xuma sent him a copy of Africans' Claims and its Bill of Rights. After reading the document Smuts refused to meet Xuma. In 1944 he rejected the proposals of Africans' Claims.

By that time, the possibilities for developing and implementing progressive social policies was eclipsed by the right-wing drift of the white electorate, who voted the United Party back into power on a 110-seat majority in the July 1943 elections. The Herstigde Nationale Party of DF Malan won 43 seats in the election and significantly consolidated

its support amongst Afrikaners. Davenport writes that this made it the main opposition party and cut support the United Party had enjoyed from Afrikaner voters.

The ANC underwent a radicalisation after the July 1943 general election. There was a confluence of developments: a new militant Africanist nationalism under the stewardship of Anton Lembede, an increase in the influence of trade unionism, and the rise of civil disobedience through squatter movements and bus boycotts.

FREEDOM CHARTER, THE ANC AND APARTHEID

To what degree did the idea of a classical welfare state as exemplified in Britain in the mid-1940s, underpinned by a universal franchise and government intervention to secure social rights of citizenship, continue to influence ANC thinking after 1948 when the apartheid regime under the National Party (NP) came to power?

The effects of NP rule were immediately evident. There was deterioration in the well-being of Africans and increased political repression. This contributed significantly to the political polarisation between extra-parliamentary opposition groups and the government.

In the climate of state repression, signalled by the draconian Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, social policy became increasingly subordinated to the ANC's political objective of achieving an unqualified franchise. The period of heightened resistance to apartheid led to a campaign to gather proposals on the form of state that could overcome the legacy of apartheid. This process, in which the ANC was instrumental, culminated in the Congress of the People at Kliptown in 1955 where the Freedom Charter was unveiled and adopted.

The Freedom Charter contained a series of 'demands' framed by the primary citizenship demand that the 'People shall govern'. In addition to civil and political rights, it contained demands for social rights, including rights related to income maintenance, state-provided free and universal education, rights to housing and rights to free, and state-provided medical care.

The Freedom Charter also contained demands on the control of wealth through public ownership and assumed nationalisation as the mechanism to achieve it.

'The national wealth of our country, the heritage of South Africans, shall be restored to the people.

The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole...'

The Freedom Charter represented a programme for a post-apartheid society. Its goals could not be achieved without an interventionist state which could redistribute wealth and resources between the white minority and the black majority. ANC president general Chief Albert Luthuli argued that the Freedom Charter should be ratified at the 44th annual meeting in December 1955, and it was.

Said Luthuli: 'The charter definitely and unequivocally visualises the establishment of a socialistic state. It therefore brings up sharply the ideological question of the kind of state the African National Congress would like to see established in the Union of South Africa.

My own personal leanings are towards the modified socialistic state, patterned on the present-day Great Britain, a middle-of-the-road state between the extreme ultra-capitalistic state as we see it in the United States, and the ultra-

socialistic state as we see it in Communist Russia...'

The charter's strong advocacy of social rights and the necessity for state intervention to achieve them made it compatible with the development of a Keynesian welfare state based on the social rights of citizenship. In 1955 the welfare state was still part of a golden era of state intervention to secure social rights in health, education and welfare.

The ruling NP – now under HF Verwoerd – saw the charter as a direct challenge to state authority. The government arrested the leadership of all the major political groups that had campaigned for it. Over a period of four years it attempted to prove that the Freedom Charter's citizenship demands could only be achieved by a violent overthrow of the government. But it failed to prove this and the leadership was released in 1960.

The ANC committed itself to a civil disobedience campaign to force the NP government to agree to a national convention.

The NP, having substantially increased its parliamentary majority amongst the white electorate in the 1958 elections, rejected this proposal. It resorted to increased violent repression of political protests, which culminated in the indiscriminate shooting of unarmed anti-pass law protesters in Sharpeville on 21 March 1960.

The government declared a State of Emergency on 30 March 1960 and effectively outlawed all opposition political activity. It introduced the Unlawful Organisations Act 34 of 1960 which outlawed the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC).

END OF DIALOGUE

The banning of the ANC ended all bases for dialogue with the government. It now focused its energies on overthrowing

white minority rule – including through armed struggle. In 1962 Luthuli reiterated the ANC's primary objective to establish a democratic state based on a universal franchise. He continued, however, to reiterate that post-apartheid South Africa would be based on social democratic ideas.

In 1962, Luthuli included nationalisation as a mechanism for the state to achieve its social goals, and the extension of state control 'to cover the nationalisation of some sectors of what at present is private enterprise. It will embrace specifically monopoly industries, the mines and banks, but excluding such institutions as building societies'.

He said: 'I realize that a state such as I visualise – a democratic social welfare state – cannot be born in one day. But it will be the paramount task of the government to bring it about and advance it without crippling industry, commerce, farming and education.

Discussions within the ANC between 1940 and 1962 on a future state that could overcome the legacies of segregation and apartheid was premised on a democracy that would intervene in the economy to secure re-distributive social policies in health, education and welfare. This was largely the classic 'welfare state' – a state which was interventionist and used the powers of government to ensure full employment. Timmins writes that such a state would give effect to post-war social policies for a national health service, free comprehensive education and a non-stigmatising system of social security. ¹⁸

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