

ANC elections manifesto is a decoy

The ANC's overwhelming victory was based on its election manifesto promise of 'Five years of accelerated change' on the basis of the RDP. While the RDP may be the ANC's stated programme, the ANC continues to implement GEAR.

A stark weakness of the left during the elections was not critically engaging with the ANC manifesto. When government unilaterally implemented GEAR in 1996 we were told that it is a vehicle through which the RDP will be implemented. We were not fooled. Workers officially rejected GEAR at the COSATU congress in 1997 and Central Committee (CC) in 1998. Workers rejected GEAR because they saw it as a policy that supports the interests of the rich. But the CC's resolutions, which outlined a programme of mass action to fight GEAR, were never implemented. COSATU leadership had by this time become soft on GEAR.

It was therefore very disappointing, although not surprising, that COSATU and the SACP leadership gave the ANC unconditional support based upon the so-called 'RDP manifesto'. This support was justified and based upon government's so-called shifts in GEAR that became known as the post-GEAR consensus. The ANC's 'RDP manifesto' is supposed to be a reflection of the new founded consensus. But the post-Gear consensus is not about changing or rejecting GEAR, but its

Edward Cottle argues that the ANC cannot deliver what it has promised in its elections manifesto.

endorsement. It is about dealing with the militancy of the working class and not the needs of the oppressed.

So-called post-GEAR consensus

We first heard about a post-GEAR consensus at the Jobs Summit in October 1998. We heard government had agreed the GEAR targets were not caste in stone. COSATU interpreted this to mean a shift away from the ANC's neo-liberal policies. Yet, after the Jobs Summit, Parliament passed Trevor Manuel's Adjustment Appropriation Bill. Major features of this bill are that in the next two years government will:

- ☐ cut the education budget by R300-million;
- ☐ cut the health budget by R100-million to R700-million;
- ☐ cut the welfare budget by R100-million to R200-million.

These cuts will result in major job losses. Besides proof that government had intended to cut social expenditure in the near future in line with GEAR, the ANC manifesto proclaimed otherwise. The

manifesto is dishonest as it pretends that government policy has changed.

Role of the state

The ANC's election manifesto claims the state will play an interventionist role. It says: 'the public sector will play a key developmental and enabling role' in 'achieving growth with equity'. According to Sally Timmel, director of Fair Share, government has cut every 'RDP ministry's' budget in real terms this year:

- ☐ education by 3,9%
- ☐ health by 0,8%
- ☐ welfare by 3,7%
- ☐ housing by 14,3%
- ☐ water by 21,6%
- ☐ transport by 3%
- ☐ land by 15,5%.

Government is privatising and has committed itself to retrenching between 50 000 and 100 000 civil servants. All evidence shows the state will be playing a less interventionist role than promised. The manifesto promise of speeding up delivery of basic needs cannot happen with a shrinking budget for social expenditure.

Housing

According to the manifesto, government will work with the private sector and trade unions to channel investments into people's housing and build rental stock. The housing project is to build between 50 000 and 150 000 houses (75% rental stock). The housing ministry's media announcement on 29 June 1999 reasserts government's partnership with the private sector and does not set any targets. How is housing going to be delivered with a budget reduction of 14,3%?

Education

The ANC promised free education. In reality, pressures to pay school fees are

enormous. Schools use the ability to pay school fees as a way of selecting and excluding students. While the Schools Act forbids the exclusion of students, the school can sue parents for non-payment. Furthermore, the education ministry's recent media release does not set targets for the number of schools to be built and the number of teachers to be trained or re-trained. The money allocated to education has declined in real terms over the last four years and will impact negatively on education delivery.

Welfare

The manifesto promises a social security system for the most vulnerable. While the finance department has cut the welfare ministry's budget, the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) states that the welfare budget will not increase until 2001/2, and then by a mere 0,3%.

Taxation

The ANC election manifesto commits itself to a 'progressive tax system' to reduce the burden on the poor. While middle income earners have benefited from tax relief this year, the poor have still not benefited, as there is no zero rating on necessities such as textbooks, medicine and school clothing.

The tax reduction of 5% for corporations further shifts the tax burden to individuals. Individuals' contributions make up 42% of total tax revenue, while only 15% of tax revenue is made up of corporate contributions. This has changed dramatically from 1960 where 17% of the total tax revenue came from individuals and 43% from corporations.

Health

According to the manifesto, health care is to become more affordable and accessible. It is to be funded, in part, by a Social



How will the ANC government deliver, when the education budget has been cut?

Health Insurance programme. The ministry plans include:

- ☐ achieving efficiency;
- ☐ improving quality of care;
- ☐ speeding up transformation of training institutions;
- ☐ escalating the war on HIV-AIDS and TB;
- ☐ expanding public/private partnerships.

In the context of a shrinking health budget, I am concerned about the Social Health Insurance programme which pushes employed workers to support the unemployed (in terms of paying for health care) when this responsibility should fall on the government.

Worker rights

During the election campaign, COSATU and the SACP stressed that the ruling class parties supported labour flexibility. The ANC called for advancing worker rights by consolidating existing legislation. However, the labour ministry's recently announced 15-point programme says it must, 'consider appropriate modifications to accommodate, inter alia, the needs of small

enterprises, labour intensive industries, unemployed youth, and the unemployed generally'. This call seems to be in line with the Democratic Party's call for greater flexibility of the workforce. We can clearly see whose interest is being consolidated.

Job creation

In July 1999, the press announced that huge scale retrenchments were in the pipeline. It is estimated that over 50 000 jobs are to be lost in the near future.

The ANC manifesto refers to the Jobs Summit as key to unlocking the job crisis. Most of the programmes adopted in the Jobs Summit, such as the special employment programmes and youth brigades, were existing government programmes. Furthermore, all the jobs are temporary jobs. I agree with the recent editorial of the *Sowetan* (13/7/99) on the job losses: '...it demands that the country's three major social partners examine the reasons for the summit's failure to live up to expectations'.



The 'post-GEAR' consensus does not deal with the needs of the oppressed.

Privatisation

A key demand of the workers' movement was the halting of privatisation because it would lead to major job losses and increase the price of services. Parastals' intentions are in line with GEAR's policy of privatisation. For example, Spoornet intends retrenching 27 000 workers, Telkom intends retrenching 11 000 workers.

Why the RDP talk?

The ANC government's policies and programmes do not represent a shift from GEAR. GEAR is and remains the programme of the ANC. ANC deputy president, Jacob Zuma, said after the release of the ANC manifesto that COSATU and the SACP had been won over and that 'nothing was going to change in terms of government policy'. As we can see, the ANC's 'RDP manifesto' is a blatant lie.

While, plenty of evidence existed before the elections that the ANC was continuing to pursue GEAR, how could the alliance partners continue to give their unconditional support to the ANC on the basis of the ANC manifesto? Was it not surprising that this manifesto was more vague than the original RDP document, and that it largely left out targets for delivery? How else, is the electorate supposed to hold the ANC accountable, if not through targets? In order to understand these questions, one must recognise that the ANC has crossed the class line and that the alliance partners have drifted into neo-liberalism.

The ANC manifesto was used to link up with the memory of the masses about the RDP on the one hand, and to sow division amongst militants opposing GEAR, on the other hand. How else was the alliance going to ensure that the working class and middle class vote ANC in a context of a strong anti-GEAR sentiment? The alliance used the masses as voting cattle instead of exposing the ANC as a capitalist party implementing neo-liberal policy. The alliance partners could have called for a conditional vote for the ANC based on demands similar to the COSATU CC resolutions.

Instead of a shift in GEAR on the part of government, we witnessed a shift to GEAR by the alliance partners. So while the alliance partners trumpet delivery, the ANC continues to implement GEAR. This is why the ANC election's manifesto is a decoy and represents a real danger for the working class in South Africa. ★

Reference

Sally Timmel, 'Sizing up the Budget', published in NGO Matters, February 1999.

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