

Where do we stand?

By **Ben Turok**

As we go to press two months before the general election, we will resist the temptation to predict percentages for different parties. Suffice it to say that the ANC will return to office with an adequate majority. More important than this kind of speculation is the content of what the government has done and intends to do.

While even *Business Day* confirms that South Africa has changed since the advent of democracy, we are still plagued by serious social and economic deficiencies, some of which are discussed in the first section of this issue. Joel Netshitenzhe gives an overview of inequality, which is among the most serious dangers, and the converse of the vision in the Freedom Charter and the ANC's intentions when coming to power. Unfortunately, inequality features globally and raises the most serious question of all: are we allowing global capitalism to penetrate everywhere without the mitigating features of earlier decades?

South Africa's present performance is also assessed in an interview with Deputy-President Kgalema Motlanthe that focuses on black economic empowerment. As is now widely recognised, the government's efforts to empower black business via handouts from state-owned enterprises and private corporations have distorted our social values. The encouragement of greed and undue expectations has led to negative social, political and economic costs in the country. Stuart Theobald reveals the consequences of these distortions for investment. Simphiwe Sesanti's essay on Marikana shows the consequences of failing to address inequality and the seemingly blind pursuit of economic gain with no attention to the cultural consequences.

Trade and Industry Minister Rob Davies talks with us about the government's new direction for BEE and Ian Goldman and his colleagues from the DPME round up this section with a useful overview of the government's emerging systems for performance monitoring and evaluation.

CHALLENGES FOR THE LEFT

In response to these socio-economic conditions, here and elsewhere, the second major topic in this issue is the organisational and ideological challenges facing political formations on the left.

The ANC has historically claimed to be "a disciplined force of the left", making its alliance with the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) a natural arrangement. There have also been complaints that, since coming to power, the ANC has absorbed, neutralised and diminished the SACP and the Party's role as the vanguard of the working class and the left generally. Whether this accusation holds water will emerge in the coming period, as new parties come onto the scene to stake their own claims as the true voice of the left.



At the end of 2013, we convened a small seminar to discuss the role of the left in South Africa. Here we publish two unvarnished articles to capture the essence of the discussion, one an overview of the contributions and the other featuring comments from COSATU's Zwelinzima Vavi. It is also our hope that these notes contain sufficient ideas and perspectives to inspire others to explore the role of the left in our complex political situation. We also include an essay on the origins of the Black Consciousness Movement, which arguably also holds a place in the broad category of the left.

One thing is clear: the legitimacy of any new parties claiming the mantle of the left tradition must come from their theoretical foundations and the policies they pursue. While populist sloganeering may win some votes, our electorate is far too sophisticated to be satisfied by slogans alone. If these parties are to gain a foothold in the working class and beyond, they must clearly state how their policies are different from those of the ANC and its alliance partners.

New Agenda is willing to provide space for considered articles on these new developments. 𠄎

