



The ANC and the state apparatus

By Ben Turok

The Zondo and Nugent Commissions have opened a huge can of worms. If the original intention was to uncover how Zuma and the Guptas went about capturing the state, that has been well established. But, in the process, a number of other issues have emerged which deserve our attention. Among these is the relationship between the ANC and the state apparatus in a democratic system.

We recall how the liberation movement became the ruling party in 1994 and how so much was expected of it to transform the old apartheid system into a democratic order. Despite the continuing presence of the old regime in the government of national unity massive changes were indeed introduced. The Cabinet was largely new, Parliament reflected African majority rule, and there were substantial changes in the personnel who ran the public service.

Changes in the judiciary took a bit longer as did the Reserve Bank and the security forces. But in due course, these institutions also began to reflect the racial demographics of the country. So much for the form of the transition. But what about the content?

Here we come to some controversial

issues. There can be no doubt about the intentions of the ANC. In the minds of its members, the ANC was in charge of the whole state machine and it had to be transformed to serve all the people and not the white minority. This meant giving direction to all its institutions to conform to the new mandate. And so people deferred to the ANC and its government.

The relationship between party and state was institutionalised by the powers assumed by Luthuli House which seemed to be able to intervene in numerous ways to assert its authority. For instance, the ANC *lekgotla* preceded the Cabinet *lekgotla*, setting out the policy guidelines for government. The Deputy President was made head of the deployment committee which determined which individuals should take up which positions. A special political committee, headed by the Deputy President, was set up to oversee the ANC performance in Parliament which selected the MPs who would serve as whips and chairs of committees. The Chief Whip was regularly summoned to Luthuli House to report on what was going on in Parliament and to get direction. The President and Secretary General of the ANC addressed the weekly meetings of

the ANC Caucus, a forum that provided leadership on contentious issues.

Evidence has been led at the Zondo Commission that Luthuli House might summon ministers to influence them on matters arising in particular ministries. It is safe to assume that similar interventions took place in various other institutions though there were clearly limits with respect to the judiciary and certain other institutions. After all, the Constitution requires respect for the separation of powers between the Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary.

The question arises whether this system is good for democracy and effective government. There are now many voices about political interference in governance, including the metros being run by the DA. Here we must ask: where lies the line between a political party influencing policy as it is mandated to do by the electorate, and actually intervening in administration?

Perhaps the time has come for re-examining the functioning of the South African political system to ensure that democratic practices are not compromised, and that the interests of the people as a whole supersede all else. **NA**

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