

ANC and its competitors stir up racialism in advance of South African elections

Thabo Seseane Jr
3 April 2014

Some 500 people joined an African National Congress (ANC) march in Cape Town, Western Cape province on March 26 to demand better sanitation, housing and land from the ruling Democratic Alliance (DA).

This is the only place where the ANC can call for such demands given that Western Cape is the only one of South Africa's nine provinces not under its rule. Everywhere else the ANC has imposed the dictates of the global banks and corporations, which have been ruinous for working people.

The protest was an attempt by the ANC to posture as a champion of "black rights" in advance of the general elections scheduled for May 7, which will elect a new National Assembly as well as new provincial legislatures in each province.

The march was organised in response to DA leader Helen Zille's comments on the draft of employment equity regulations published in the beginning of March. The Employment Equity Amendment Act, passed last October by the ANC national government, is supposed to provide a guide to employers on how to use demographic figures to set targets for the racial makeup of their workforces.

The ANC policy seeks to match the racial composition of all workplaces to national demographics. For instance, since blacks constitute about 80 percent of the overall population, black employees, according to the guidelines, should make up 80 percent of workers across all levels at places of employment everywhere in the country.

However, the ratio of blacks in the Western Cape is barely a third, while so-called coloured people—a heterogeneous ethnic group of around 4.5 million people who mostly reside in Cape Town and the Western Cape region—constitute 49 percent of the population. In this context the ANC march was a deliberate provocation designed to inflame racial tensions.

Zille, the premier of the Western Cape, denounced the

regulations as having a "profound impact on employment" in the province, denying coloureds access to jobs and promotion, should they be implemented.

One of the organisers of the march, ANC Western Cape Provincial Secretary Songezo Mjongile, accused the DA of "playing on the fears" of the coloured community in a ruse to win their votes. The ANC described Zille's comments as "mere electioneering and an attempt to divide black and coloured communities in the Western Cape."

In reality, the ANC itself has nothing other than identity politics to offer workers of the Western Cape and South Africa as a whole. In its policies of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), Affirmative Action (employment equity) and procurement favouring "historically disadvantaged" suppliers, the ANC from 1994 onwards cultivated a wealthy black capitalist class, while reinforcing the divisions in the working class, which the bourgeoisie first enshrined in the canon of "Grand Apartheid".

Apartheid as official policy emerged following the general election of 1948. With blacks then disenfranchised, victory went to the white supremacist National Party (NP) under D. F. Malan. NP legislation classified people into four racial groups—white, coloured, Indian and black, in order of preference—and residential areas were segregated accordingly. The ANC government requires to this day that citizens be classified in these categories for employment, census and other purposes.

Apartheid sought to cover over the class divisions in capitalist society with vicious racial segregation and discrimination. This included policies that reserved skilled and managerial posts for whites while restricting blacks to more menial work.

From the first democratic elections of 1994, ANC policy has sought to address economic underdevelopment through measures that are touted as favouring blacks.

Actually, these policies have showered obscene wealth on only a thin layer of individuals connected to the ANC. Since the election of the ANC and the end of de jure apartheid, poverty, unemployment, income inequality, life expectancy, land ownership and educational attainment have all worsened for blacks despite the country's rising GDP.

Nevertheless, the ANC doggedly perpetuates the lie that racial discrimination is the root of inequality in South Africa. They are joined in this mantra by all the other tools of the bourgeois establishment.

This explains the remarks of National Union of Metal workers of South Africa (NUMSA) General Secretary Irvin Jim during the one-day strike on March 19. Following a march in Johannesburg against proposed legislation, which offers more subsidies to employers of young workers, Jim claimed that “non-racialism” is not working for South Africa, as blacks still form the bulk of those in poverty.

The insinuation is clearly that the ANC's “empowerment” policies, which are predicated on the defense of capitalist property relations and therefore the further impoverishment of the working class, must continue. At the same time, NUMSA encourages illusions in its pseudo-leftist credentials, having announced its “investigation” into the feasibility of a coalition of forces to form a “socialist” political party.

The fake left provides additional cover for racialist politics promoted by NUMSA. Writing in *Business Day*, Sam Ashman and Nicolas Pons-Vignon enthuse that NUMSA's mooted political party is “the most promising development that progressives—those who support substantial economic and social change in favour of the disadvantaged—could have hoped for.” According to them, NUMSA “may well succeed in building... a credible socialist alternative.”

Ashman and Pons-Vignon are senior researchers in the Corporate Strategy and Industrial Development Research programme at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). According to his Wits profile, “Nicolas has edited two [International Labour Organisation]-published books which collect articles on trade union responses to the crisis and policy directions for post-crisis economic policy.”

Ashman, the Wits profile continues, “is involved in a project based at Rhodes University, funded by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and sponsored by NUMSA, which is examining the political economy of economic policy-making in South Africa since 1994 and developing

alternative policy proposals.” (The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation is affiliated with the Left Party in Germany, a party which has supported austerity, the attack on democratic rights and the remilitarization of German imperialism.)

The exploitation of racial differences among workers found expression last year in the establishment of the Patriotic Alliance, one of the parties contesting the May 7 elections. Oriented to the Western Cape, which more than any other province suffers from the scourge of criminal gangs, the Patriotic Alliance is the brainchild of ex-convicts Gayton McKenzie and Kenny Kunene. It aims to curry support from South Africa's 160,000 prison inmates—who have the right to vote in this year's election—whom it claims are ignored by mainstream parties.

“Back then during apartheid, coloured people weren't white enough,” McKenzie complained to *City Press* in December. “Now we're not black enough.”

The bourgeoisie continues to rely on racial differences to divide workers. Zille caused an uproar in 2012 when she applied the term “refugees” to those citizens of the impoverished, predominantly black Eastern Cape who move to the Western Cape in search of jobs.

Playing the same game but addressing a black audience, the ANC's Jimmy Manyi complained the year before of an “over-concentration of coloureds” in the Western Cape. Manyi, then head of government communications, crudely suggested that some of them be relocated so that the racial profile of the province could more closely match national demographics.

Such thinking is no different from that which led to the traumatic forced removals of people of the “wrong” colour from areas that the apartheid state deemed them unfit for.

Among the 29 parties contesting the elections, none offer a progressive programme to oppose the capitalist system, which is the cause of poverty, social inequality and all forms of discrimination.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact