

Anti-ANC vote campaign initiated in South African general election

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Anti-apartheid activist Desmond Tutu has added his voice to a campaign championed by senior members of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) to get the electorate to vote against the party in the May 7 general election.

In a media briefing in the run-up to the 20th anniversary on April 27 of South Africa's first fully democratic elections, the cleric said he would not vote for the ANC. The Anglican Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town intimated that people automatically voting for the ANC were behaving "like cattle".

"In the past the ANC stood for the society we wanted," he claimed, but the party's leaders had now "shot themselves in the foot."

Tutu's comments echo those of former Intelligence Minister Ronnie Kasrils and former Deputy Health Minister Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, who are drumming up support for an anti-ANC or spoilt vote through the "Sidikiwe! Vukani! [Enough! Wake up!] Vote No" campaign.

By rejecting the ruling party broadly and President Jacob Zuma in particular, Kasrils and Madlala-Routledge have alleged, South Africans can "take a stand against fraud and corruption". The Vote No campaign, formally launched at the University of the Witwatersrand on April 15, is gaining traction.

The call for spoilt votes followed comments by former President Thabo Mbeki, after months of silence, on Public Protector Thuli Madonsela's investigation into spending on Zuma's private home in rural Nkandla in KwaZulu-Natal province. Madonsela found in her report that Zuma and his family "unduly benefitted" from state expenditures in excess of US\$20 million for "security" upgrades to the compound. Mbeki said last month that the scandal was "very worrying about the quality of leadership that is required". The year before,

he spoke of "a dangerous and unacceptable situation of directionless and unguided national drift."

Planning Minister Trevor Manuel has also announced his intention not to serve in the next administration.

The Vote No campaign is cast in the interests of and broadly supported by this pro-Mbeki bloc, which is now scattered inside and outside the ANC. Mbeki was replaced by Zuma as ANC president at the party's December 2007 Polokwane conference. Then Mbeki was "recalled" as national president by the ANC in 2008. His removal from office led to the formation of the Congress of the People (COPE) by ex-ANC leaders Mosioua Lekota and Mbhazima Shilowa.

The strata loyal to Mbeki are socially rooted in the professional elite, which managed to obtain relative wealth and advancement even in the midst of apartheid. Within the ANC, these ranks identify with those who grew up and were educated in exile, as were many of the children of the older party stalwarts. Among the most influential of these "princes" are Pallo Jordan, former arts and culture minister and now a *Business Day* columnist, Joel Netshitenzhe, former Mbeki political strategist and now head of the Mapungubwe Institute, and Mbeki himself, an economics graduate of Sussex University.

This layer worked to ingratiate themselves with the imperialist powers and the South African bourgeoisie from the time of the multiparty negotiations for a transition from apartheid. Out of the hodgepodge of anti-apartheid guerrillas, civic leaders, Stalinists and union bureaucrats, they put themselves forward as the only credible partners in preserving and enhancing bourgeois wealth in the post-apartheid dispensation. Naturally, they shared in the Western triumphalism which followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the growth driven until 2008 by the

apparently insatiable appetite of China for raw materials.

The faction around Zuma set itself up as the antidote to these neo-liberal theorists. Zuma's backers purportedly spoke for those who remained in the country instead of fleeing abroad, and bore the brunt of reprisals from the apartheid regime. They were insulted when Mbeki sidelined their two strongest formations, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), openly daring them to leave the governing Tripartite Alliance if they did not approve of the ANC's seniority.

When Mbeki engineered the dismissal of Zuma, a former leader of the party's armed wing, from his post as deputy president in 2005, the latter was nominated by the SACP, COSATU, the ANC Youth League and other kingmakers as the head of an anti-Mbeki campaign leading up to the ANC's Polokwane conference.

Kasrils' complaints of corruption target an audience that ruefully contrast the present low tone of government business with the decorous larceny of the time of the Mbeki administrations, beginning with Nelson Mandela's largely ceremonial presidency. Today, R240 million is openly splurged on the home of the leader. Back then, billions of rand were anonymously split among the ringleaders of an infamous arms deal, with the party coffers also receiving a tidy sum. (See: "Arms corruption scandal erupts in South Africa" <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2001/03/arms-m20.html>.)

The real result after 20 years of supposed democracy and the much celebrated economic growth of the Mbeki presidency was increased social inequality, most markedly within the black population, which is never addressed. This is the direct result of the ANC policy of "black economic empowerment" (BEE). By seeking to change the racial profile of the "commanding heights" of the capitalist economy, BEE has created a narrow layer of exceedingly wealthy blacks whose parasitic existence depends on the redoubled exploitation of the working class.

The global capitalist breakdown beginning in 2008 portends ever-worsening assaults on workers' living standards. The Zuma ANC signalled with the police massacre of 34 striking miners at Marikana in August

2012 that it will not shirk its role as the junior partner of imperialism.

The ANC government's commitment to meeting the demands of global capital has provoked widespread opposition, leading to assaults on politicians campaigning for the ANC in these elections, the prolonged platinum miners' strike and the ubiquity of "service delivery protests". These genuine responses to working-class privation have found no legitimate political outlet as yet, but that is cold comfort to those at the top of society.

Tutu, Kasrils and Madlala-Routledge are alarmed that the ANC is about to reap the whirlwind. Explaining the anti-ANC drive, Madlala-Routledge asserted, "In the absence of a credible party in terms of addressing the core needs of our country and addressing the issues of inequality, poverty and unemployment, we're calling on people to either spoil the ballot or vote tactically."

She clarified that a "tactical vote is a vote for any one of the minority parties, with the aim to reduce the majority of the dominant party."

For Madlala-Routledge and other members of the elite, the alternative to the imploding ANC lies with other bourgeois nationalist parties like the Democratic Alliance and COPE, which form the two largest opposition parliamentary blocs. Of the smaller parties, the United Democratic Movement, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), the Pan Africanist Congress and the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) are also all offshoots of the ANC. The purpose of the Vote No campaign is to emasculate working-class anger by directing it into safe channels. By holding up smaller parties, including the fake-leftist EFF and the fake-socialist WASP, the ANC's pro-Mbeki faction seeks to halt the emergence of an independent movement of the working class, the only force which can pose a real challenge to the ANC's bourgeois nationalist rule.



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