

THE SOURCE OF OUR SURPLUS WEALTH

A few months ago, South Africa and the world were treated to a spectacular *tamasha* [performance] in our parliament, and the central actor, our illustrious Minister of Finance, in a powder blue suit, carefully choreographed to tone in with his stupendous budget surplus for 2006/07 of R5 billion.

He created the myth that South Africa was one of the richest countries in the world. Prospective overseas investors, in search of more wealth, may have been fooled, but South Africans remained unconvinced.

How could there be so much wealth while our people remained condemned to poverty and under-serviced in terms of basic resources?

Where did this surplus come from?

The mystery was easily explained. It came from the poverty, misery and deprivation suffered by 55% of South Africans who live below the Minimum Living Level [MLL] and on whose behalf monies were not spent and who were left without sanitation, adequate school buildings, electricity, deplorable housing and the constant threat of evictions from such housing, of millions of children who remained malnourished and as many left without the dignity of work.

Diseases that we thought we had wiped out, like TB, are re-emerging and the nation is subject to threats of new diseases that had been unknown before. In 2004, there were 2,780 cholera infections and between 2000 and 2004, there were 77,000 reported incidences of malarial infection in the country.

Practically every municipality presents a picture of maladministration, of people's needs being ignored and their protests disregarded.

Poor and inadequate infrastructures are among the major factors that hinder South Africa's development. In the Limpopo Province, for instance, 1400 schools still do not have access to water. In the Free State, 168 330 households still use the bucket system as toilets.

One-fifth of South Africa's population still lack access to safe water and 33 percent lack basic sanitation services. 59 percent of all schools and clinics lack access to acceptable sanitation facilities, while 27 percent of all schools and 48 percent of all clinics lack access to a safe water supply.

The people, however, cannot be fooled and so there is the rising tide of civil protest. There are clear signs that this dissatisfaction is growing and is on the brink of exploding both nationally and internationally.

Of course we are aware of the fact that South Africa is not unique in its two world reality. The division of people into rich and poor is a world phenomenon but it is a phenomenon that has to be eliminated and equality established. We cannot boast a democracy with such raging inequalities.

Democracy does not work for the people in South Africa today. The people do not own democracy. Democracy evades the people. For decades the disenfranchised of South Africa struggled for liberation, the pivotal factor being access to franchise. They have that franchise today but they still remain powerless. Their destiny is not in their hands. Whereas in the past, a racial minority usurped it, today a neo-capitalist minority usurps it. The people are expected to be content with going to the polls and to accept that as their fulfillment of the democracy they aspired to.

Bloated with such manipulated power, the governing Party considers itself invincible as reflected in the words of Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Minister of Public Service and Administration, commenting on the results of the 2004 elections, declared "*that no amount of sophistication or camouflage by the opposition can make them [the masses] lose sight of their liberators*". [Sunday Times, 2 May 2004]

The ruling party has usurped the peoples' role in the liberation of the country as its own and thereby appointed itself as the valid liberator and therefore owner of the non-racial democracy and thereby they legitimate their dictatorial role.

The people, however, see themselves as their liberators.

During their century long struggle against racism, they had aspired towards a socialist state. Since having suffered poverty and deprivation through inequality, they saw their liberation in equality and democracy. They expected an equitable redistribution of the wealth, rights to dignity and opportunity to achieve and design the shape of their society. This is implicit in the Freedom Charter which they adopted in June 1955. The Charter was and continues to be the will of the people – a will the apartheid regime tried to crush and a will that continues to be ignored by the ANC government despite our Bill of Rights.

Our constitution is flawed to the extent that it is Party-centered and not people-centered. Today, it is extremely difficult to manifest power beyond the Party. Promising leadership emerges at the community level all the time but they have no opportunity to express their leadership regardless of their support from the community, if they are outside the Party system.

Instead of serving the peoples interest, the government and people are in conflict today and civil society organisations critical of the government are seen as hostile third forces or militants, reminiscent of the rhetoric of the National Party government. People are not seen as the heirs to the liberation struggle they won, but recipients of handouts from the ANC liberators.

The ANC government has become increasingly capitalist in nature. There was more socialism in the apartheid state even though that socialism was earmarked exclusively for the white race. There were aspects of it which filtered through to the disenfranchised. The ANC-led government retains all the capitalist elements of the apartheid state. Its Black Economic Empowerment policy merely creates black capitalists and co-opts them into the former white capitalist class. Democracy in South Africa serves government officials, particularly former ministers, as a conduit to super capitalism. Instead of empowering the former disenfranchised,

the ANC has actively disempowered them by unloading some of its assets to privatisation and thereby creating massive unemployment.

The ANC initiated or gave lip service to the Reconstruction and Development Policy [RDP] but apart from providing some housing in this context, it prematurely abandoned the RDP and replaced it with the Growth, Employment and Redistribution [GEAR] policy. To keep pace with new international capitalism – globalisation – instead of providing for the poor, it provides for the international neo-capitalist and the *nevo richie* Black capitalists at home.

Though domestic capitalism is no longer exclusively white, as it was in the apartheid state, the poor are almost exclusively black, as they were in the apartheid state. There is thus equality today between black and white capitalists but the right to equality and dignity continues to evade the masses in South Africa, mainly in the rural areas. The problem remains how the people of South Africa can be integrated into this non-racial democracy that they struggled for.

Who is going to deliver this democracy to them? Just as in the past it was the people of South Africa who liberated the country from apartheid, it will be the people themselves who will restructure the existing pseudo-democracy and transform it into reality.

What is happening is that dormant, impoverished and intimidated communities are regaining their voice. The people understand their rights and are uniting to realise them. Democracy is at work, and a government that claims to be committed to implementing democracy, should welcome this and support the process and not appear to be suppressing it.

So instead of government announcing a surplus in our budget let it announce plans of action to alleviate the oppressive poverty faced by the majority of South Africans.

That is what government is all about!

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