

YET ANOTHER MYTH: MBEKI AND THE MONOPOLISATION OF POWER.

By Thabo Mbeki.

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The December 17, 2007 website of the UK newspaper, "*The Guardian*", carried an article headed "*Mbeki's shock as ANC turns on him*", written by one Chris McGreal.

Among others McGreal said that as President of the ANC and South Africa, Thabo Mbeki had "*wielded power as if it was his due...The Union Buildings – the seat of the presidency – exuded arrogance and aloofness. Above all, the President treated his own party, the African National Congress, as if it were no more than a vehicle to get him where he deserved to be.*"

At the heart of all this is the thesis which succeeded to gain currency in some circles at home and abroad that during the years I served as President of the ANC and the Republic I made it a point to centralise political power in my hands.

It has therefore been stated as a fact that I centralised this power in the Government Presidency, the Union Buildings, and therefore Government in general, marginalised the ANC itself from discharging its responsibilities as a democratically mandated ruling party, and created the possibility for problems emanating from the phenomenon of '*two centres of power*'.

However, regardless of how strident and persistent the proffering of the views I have indicated, they had absolutely nothing to do with the truth about how the ANC discharged its responsibilities as the ruling party during the years I was President of the ANC and the Republic.

The broad policy perspective of the ANC during these years was encapsulated in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). While the RDP originated from the broad democratic movement, it was presented to and adopted by our National Parliament as Government policy after the formation of our first democratic government in 1994.

Later that perspective also included the provisions incorporated in the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) document, which was endorsed by the 1997 50th National Conference of the ANC.

The detailed initiatives taken by Government throughout the period from 1994 to 2008, when I served in the Government Presidency, fell within the broad ANC policy framework set by the RDP-GEAR. The Government did not elaborate or operate within any other broad policy framework.

Further, for all the National and Local Government Elections held during the years 1994 to 2008, the ANC canvassed for the support of the electorate on the basis of Election Manifestoes agreed by the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) and the ANC allies.

Being continuously concerned to honour the commitments it had made to the people in these Election Manifestoes, at all times the ANC sought to ensure that Government programmes were formulated and implemented to respect the commitments contained in the Manifestoes.

In January of every year, without fail, and after the ANC Anniversary January 8th Celebrations, a two/three day ANC NEC *Lekgotla* was convened. This *Lekgotla* involved all members of the NEC, ANC Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Premiers, including those who were not members of the NEC, as well as representatives of the Alliance partners.

Effectively the only matter on the Agenda and discussed at this *Lekgotla* was the Government Programme for the year, covering all sectors. Its outcome constituted the Mandate or Directive of the ANC as the ruling party to those of its members who were in Government.

About a week after this ANC NEC *Lekgotla*, again without fail, the National Government held its own *Lekgotla* to agree on the more detailed Programmes to implement the decisions taken at the ANC NEC *Lekgotla*.

The decisions taken at the January ANC NEC and Government *Makgotla* supplied the essential content for both the President's February *State of the Nation Address* and the later *Budget Speech* of the Minister of Finance.

A second Government *Lekgotla* would also be held in July, without fail, to review the progress made and the problems experienced in implementing the Programmes decided at the January Government *Lekgotla*. This would include estimating the consistency of progress achieved in the context of the broader perspective decided during the ANC NEC *Lekgotla*.

During the year and where necessary, the ANC NEC would discuss policy matters relating to Government when it considered the *Political Overview* at the beginning of each of its regular quarterly meetings.

The National Working Committee (NWC) of the NEC also had the possibility to consider any Government matter as might be necessary and did so, having invited the relevant Ministers and Deputy Ministers to attend and account at such meetings.

At any time during the year the different Government Ministries had the possibility and were free to interact on the relevant Government matters

with the various specialised ANC NEC Sub-Committees which covered all areas, including the economic, social, security and international.

To constitute the National Cabinet, including the Deputy Ministers, and appoint the Premiers as decided by the 1997 50th ANC National Conference, as President of the Republic I would prepare the list of persons I proposed should occupy these various positions.

I would then submit this written proposal to each of the other five (5) ANC National Office Bearers (NOBs) for them to consider my proposals, ahead of the collective NOBs meeting which then took the final decision about who would serve as Ministers and Deputy Ministers, including in which portfolios, and who would become Premiers.

Subsequently each of the Ministers and Deputy Ministers were individually informed of their appointment by me as the President of the Republic, sitting together with the Secretary General of the ANC.

The same procedure was followed in the event of any Cabinet reshuffle.

We deliberately included the ANC Secretary General at these appointment sessions precisely to communicate the message to the individuals concerned that they were being deployed in their positions by the ruling Party, the ANC.

The Political Year of the ANC began with the holding of the January 8th Celebrations and therefore the presentation to the nation of the important NEC January 8th Statement which explained the year's ANC perspectives.

Though it was delivered by the ANC President, the January 8th Statement was produced by an ANC collective and finalised by the President. It would be based on discussions and decisions taken at ANC NEC meetings during the year, including the last meeting of the year which would finalise the matters relevant to the January 8th Rally and Celebrations.

The second important event on the Annual Programme of the ANC would be the convening of the ANC NEC *Lekgotla* I have mentioned, at which the ANC members in Government and the various NEC Sub-Committees would, among others, present their reports on progress made on the decisions taken at the preceding year's NEC *Lekgotla*.

Throughout the years I served in the ANC and State Presidencies the ANC was very careful to avoid conflating the ruling Party and the State. This was exactly because, as we had helped to prescribe in the National Constitution, the State and all its institutions had to operate within the legal confines set down in the Constitution and in Statutes.

Further and obviously, the ruling party, the ANC, did not and could not have the capacity that the State has to generate and consider the kind of enormous details which Government had to deal with as it translated broad policies into specific programmes relating to more than thirty (30) Government Departments.

Fully understanding this, the ANC Headquarters and the NEC, for instance, never intervened in Government work pretending that they could have the same capacity with regard to matters of detail as would the Ministers and Deputy Ministers and the National Cabinet.

However, as I have explained, they had no need to try to do the impossible as they had full confidence in the ANC members deployed in Government and had put in place the necessary processes to ensure the proper accountability of those so deployed in Government.

Logic and respect for the truth therefore dictate that others will have to provide the details about how, as alleged by McGreal, and in the context of all the foregoing, it was possible that I centralised political power in the Union Buildings and marginalised the ANC in terms of the exercise of its responsibilities as the ruling party democratically mandated by the South African people.

This false accusation was born and sustained as part of a deliberate and purposeful campaign.

In his book, *Eight Days in September*, Rev Frank Chikane gave an insight into how disinformation processes were put in place to discredit the leadership of the ANC, akin to the so-called Stratcom Operation of the apartheid regime.

In this regard, correctly reflecting what happened, he writes:

"By the middle of the decade (2000-2010), many ANC leaders and members had begun to operate as if they were different parties, within the same party. Some were scheming against each other. They were strategising.

"Others were ready to lie or distort facts as long as this advanced their (cause) or objective.

"One of the greatest lies apparently (unfolded) behind the scenes at the July 2005 (National) General Council meeting of the ANC. What the public was made to believe was that the General Council had reinstated the party's Deputy President, Jacob Zuma, against a decision of the National Executive Committee (NEC), (which had allegedly suspended him as ANC Deputy President.)

"This in itself had been dramatic. There was intense controversy. This event was of course rolling out at a time when Zuma was under tremendous pressure because of the legal action being taken or threatened against him. Yet the reality, as it was presented to me, is not quite the same as that (public) report.

"The truth, as I can recollect, is that Comrade Zuma had decided to stand down as Deputy President of the ANC – at least for a while – to give him(self) a chance to focus on the case against him. And the NEC had reluctantly accepted his chosen path after a long meeting which went into the early hours.

"One comrade who attended one of the group discussions at the (National) General Council came to me during one of the breaks. He was disgusted. He said he could not believe the level to which comrades had lowered themselves.

"Apparently another meeting had been held at which it was agreed to reinforce a lie that the NEC had suspended or removed Zuma from his (ANC) position. Meanwhile, they knew very well that this was not the case.

"And so it happened that, also by agreement, one of (the delegates) would take the platform and call for Zuma's reinstatement. The expectation was that he would then be asked to respond and accept their plea.

"My comrade said to me: "Watch it and you will see this being played out."

"And it did. It was like a choreographed show, and regrettably not a single member of the NEC was bold enough to stand up and stop the lie. It felt as if everyone froze on stage."

Thus, as planned for a purpose, was born the complete fabrication that the NGC - the delegates representing the branches of the ANC - had defeated a decision born of the "political conspiracy" of the NEC against then ANC Deputy President, Jacob Zuma, to remove him from his position as ANC Deputy President, as I had removed him from his position as Deputy President of the Republic!

At the end of all such machinations, including the sustained propagation of blatant untruths, stood the fabrication about personal "*monopolisation of power*", regardless of whether this could be factually substantiated or not.