



REPORT ON A JOINT ISS/UNISA SEMINAR

Theme: *'Debating the changing political landscape and its implications for democracy'*

Date: 28 October 2008 (09:00 – 13:00)

Place: Senate Hall, Theo van Wijk Building, University of South Africa (UNISA), Pretoria

Speakers

- Keynote address: **Mr Gwede Mantashe** (Secretary General of the African National Congress)
- Panel discussants:
 - **Prof Zodwa Motsa** (Department of English Studies, UNISA)
 - **Dr Somadoda Fikeni** (Walther Sisulu University Council Chairperson and member of the Human Science Research Council)
 - **Mr Aubrey Matshiqi** (Senior Associate, Centre for Policy Studies)

In the wake of recent dramatic developments within the African National Congress (ANC), the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and the University of South Africa (UNISA) agreed to co-host a seminar that would look at these changes and consider its possible implications for democracy in South Africa. To allow for a meaningful debate prominent figures (listed above) were invited to speak on the subject and to debate the relevant issues, and also to react to questions or comments from the audience. The seminar was attended by close to 400 people, including a strong media contingent.

In his address, **Mr Mantashe** focused primarily on the Lekota/Shilowa breakaway group and their stated five principles, which they claim, sets them apart from the ANC. He accused them of being driven by anger and the hunger for power rather than by ideology or principle. He was very disparaging in his comments on the viability of and the support for the breakaway group and cited a number of examples of past breakaway groups and how they failed. According to him the polarisation of the ANC, contrary to public perception, started long before the so-called Polokwane policy conference with the 'firing' of Mr Jacob Zuma as Deputy-President of the Republic of South Africa.

Mr Mantashe concluded by reiterating the revolutionary nature and programme of the ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance. The alliance will therefore campaign for the coming election on the basis of its Program of Action. This includes a new economic policy that would, amongst others, focus on job creation and poverty alleviation.

Dr Fikeni asked whether the Polokwane conference should be considered a 'change of guard' or a real shift in ideology? In this regard, he considers the changing political scene as a process 'on probation' and only time will provide the answer. In his opinion the breakaway appears to be motivated more by personalities than by substantive policy and structural issues. He also referred to a number of policy contradictions within the ANC (and the broader alliance). For example, while the ANC leadership is at pains to assure South Africans and the international community that policies will not change, the SACP and COSATU are stressing the fact that policies must change. However, he suggests that the realities of governance will force the alliance to find practical ways of managing these contradictions. The dangers are that these contradictions may deepen and become more complex.

He also asked whether the split in the ANC couldn't be attributed to what he refers to as a 'clash of political cultures'. In this regard, the alliance's predominantly external (in exile) role in the struggle and their centralised structure is directly opposed to the internal role and decentralised structure of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). This may create unforeseen opportunities for the breakaway group, on the basis of MDM strategies and tactics, to exploit discontent at the local level.

Finally, Dr Fikeni expressed concerns with what appears to be increasing levels of political intolerance, violence and the rhetoric of violence.

On her part, **Prof. Motsa** pointed out that South Africa was at war with itself even before 1976 and 1994. The youth played a major role in this conflict, but after 1994 they were left without a cause. The challenge now is to determine a new focus and vision for them in a post independent South Africa. She briefly referred to the examples of the United States of America after the First World War and Britain after the Second World War. According to her the youth have largely lost their identity and they have very few role models and mentors to look up to. She concluded her presentation by expressing her concerns to the apparent existence of a new class system in South Africa.

Mr Matshiqi also traced the split in the ANC back to 2005 when Mr Zuma was 'fired' as Deputy President of the country. The subsequent events finally culminated at the Polokwane conference in the election of a largely new leadership for the ANC. According to him an analysis of current events and developments in the ANC often leads one to findings and conclusions that are at variance with popular belief. In addition he questions the role of individual leaders, rogue intelligence operators and organised crime leaders.

He pointed out how difficult it was for many to imagine a future without the ANC and to accept that the ANC may not govern. He accused the leaders of the 'split' of being dishonest about their motivations, that speak to issues that had not been raised during their time in office. On the other hand, the ANC failed to provide adequate leadership in the face of developing divide within it and the consequent 'split'. He regards both sides as guilty of selective invocation of the ANC's history and claims that neither side wish to take responsibility for the 'divorce' that is currently tearing the organisation apart.

Question and answer session

The speeches were followed by two rounds of questions and all the speakers were allowed to respond before Mr Mantashe was given the opportunity for closing remarks.

Sponsor

Hanns Seidel Foundation financially supported the ISS's contribution to the seminar.

Compiled the Crime, Justice and Politics Programme of the ISS.