

Local Government Policy

Civic Strategies Beyond The Single City Campaign

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Rent boycotts and civic protests have again come to the fore in townships throughout the country. There is a stormy transitional stalemate between the old and new orders - the status quo of segregated black local authorities (BLAs) is rejected while the post-apartheid alternative of non-racial metropolitan government is yet to be negotiated. Under pressure from various sources and ongoing developments, the ANC has been trying to forge a coherent local government policy.

Until recently, the ANC's efforts in policy-making largely focused on macro issues related to the nature of the post-apartheid state, national government and the economy. Policies affecting local government and other micro issues only received attention in so far as they impinged on the overall macro issues.

Although a coherent set of local and regional policies is yet to evolve, some important issues have emerged which are likely to provide a starting point for the ANC. A great deal of these issues are a reaction to current policies and developments which underpin apartheid local government.

Various civic associations in townships throughout the country are already involved in struggles which have a distinct policy component. The fashioning of the ANC's local government policies are considerably influenced by the accumulated experiences of the civics. The emerging relationship between the civics and the ANC will undoubtedly play a critical role in the making of ANC policy.

Some of the principles which have evolved in the course of the struggles of the civics are a single non-racial local government, a shared tax base, and democracy within local government structures as well as at the local level generally. It is these issues which are at the base of efforts by the ANC to formulate a local government policy.

Dual Strategies

The struggle for non-racial municipalities has its origins in the mid-1980s with the start of rent boycotts in townships nationwide. Although many of the rent boycotts started as protest actions, they soon provided bases which led civic associations to articulate alternative local government policies aimed at transforming the apartheid city. The underlying objective of the civics was to seek to disrupt apartheid local government.

Although some of the civics were starting to articulate an alternative vision of the cities, this was muted in favour of the view that victory at a local level was not possible unless tied to overall victory over apartheid. The dominant view in the radical anti-apartheid movement necessarily meant that the dictates of local and national struggles were locked into tension. Most civics resolved this by straddling both levels in their day to day programmes and demands, viz, reduce rents to affordable levels, councillors must resign, end the state of emergency and release detainees.

The transformative phase was characterised by the designing of alternative policies aimed at changing the basis of the apartheid local government structures. Once these policies had been devised, the civics sought to engage in negotiations for their implementation. This transformation stage implicitly accepted the possibility of

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effecting major changes to the apartheid city *without* first seeking to transform the state as a whole.

It was clear from the way the policy proposals of the Soweto People's Delegation (SPD) were couched that the organisation wanted to focus on local level issues, not on changes to the nature of the state. However, the difficulty of attempting to clinically separate the two sets of local and national issues is clear from the key policy alternative to have emerged - the creation of a single tax base for white towns and their neighbouring townships. Although this is a local issue, it also directly affects national politics.

Township Colonies

The underlying principle of the apartheid city is that the relationship between the white section of the town and its neighbouring township remains characterised by colonial features. The white section of the town was assigned the role of having all the investments, commercial and industrial, located within its boundaries. In sharp contrast, the townships played the role of providing shelter for the labour force employed in these industries and later, of providing a market for the country's burgeoning manufacturing sector.

The socio-economic development of the townships was deliberately frustrated because township communities were destined by apartheid planners to go back to the bantustans eventually. Whites created institutions of local government for their communities which afforded democratic expression. Councillors were voted in by the white electorate and could similarly be voted out of office. These were the normal trappings of local government in most democratic countries.

In contrast, local government for blacks, particularly for Africans, was devised essentially as a mechanism for control. African councillors, some of whom were government appointees, enjoyed limited control over matters related to their areas. Local government was a transmission belt for the implementation of oppressive government policies which denied African people permanency, property ownership and a range of other rights in the townships.

Another characteristic of a colonial relationship is manifested in the routes followed by public transport in the

townships. This form of transport was designed essentially to carry large numbers of workers to and from work. It is, for example, easier to find public transportation from Soweto into Johannesburg in the morning than it is to find it from Naledi to Meadowlands (both townships are in Soweto). It is similarly difficult to find public transportation from Soweto to other townships like Kagiso, Mamelodi or Sebokeng, even though all are situated within the same region.

Transport routes between the townships and the apartheid city serve primarily to ensure the smooth transportation of labour. Leisure and other social activities are not specifically planned for in 'black' areas. This hiatus illustrates the views which informed the planners of apartheid cities. A further characteristic of the colonial relationship lies in the role the 'white' towns play as centres of control, both administrative and economic. The townships are the subject of that control.

Non-racial local government would provide the framework within which these colonial relationships could be broken down. There are large urban conurbations which may be difficult to govern effectively and efficiently, however, because of their high population but relatively low density. Single municipalities here may create a large bureaucratic government and run the risk of being unresponsive to local concerns. In such areas the ANC would, it asserts, opt for a metropolitan form of government which would not be a distinct tier of government but would operate at the local government level.

Economic Unity

ANC policymakers are committed to the unification of local government structures into non-racial entities. Unification in the sense of the creation of truly non-racial towns may take time to achieve, however, even in a post-apartheid scenario.

The civics' demand for a single tax base sought to unite the apartheid city at two levels, politically and economically. At a political level, their demand entailed the creation of single municipalities for functionally integrated areas. This posed a fundamental challenge to the racially based system of local government in South Africa.

When the civics began the process of devising alternative policies for local government, they proceeded cautiously.

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They were reluctant to engage in processes whose outcome could have a huge impact on the broad constitutional issues over which the national liberation movement had to play a leading role. Consequently, there was less emphasis on the actual creation of single municipalities as political units than on issues related to economic unification.

The divergent views held by various groups on local government, and specifically how to restructure it in South Africa are very disparate. In this context, it is probably wise for the civics to await the outcome of national negotiations in which it seems unlikely they will play a direct role.

The view of ANC policymakers is that until agreement is reached with the government in the negotiation process on the parameters within which democratic local government can be constructed, there is little point in civics pursuing the creation of unified cities. Instead, the civics are calling for the resignation of councillors serving on black local authorities and their replacement by administrators.

This position, however, leads to a number of problems. Negotiations involving the civics have picked up a momentum of their own which might be difficult to stall. Furthermore, the implementation of a single tax base will probably work best under a single political unity of cities/towns. Delaying the political aspect of the single city/town campaign might also delay resolution of the economic aspect.

Within these parameters and constraints, economic unity is being pursued with all the vigour imaginable at present. The broader set of issues includes:

- writing off the rent arrears arising from the boycotts;
- introducing affordable service charges;
- cross-subsidisation, making available the benefits of revenue from white CBD areas to townships; and
- amalgamating service provision between white and black areas.

The principle of affordability is seen as crucial. Otherwise, numerous people presently in the townships will be pushed out to the peripheries of the cities, as is already happening with those squatter communities forced to locate well beyond the city boundaries.

Redistributive Strategy

Democratically elected councils should be responsive to local needs and strive to empower local constituencies by involving the maximum number of people in the ongoing work of the council. Current local government, by being so closely tied to the central government, lacks the autonomy it needs to creatively involve people on the ground.

While the ANC would want to create as much autonomy as possible for local government in the post-apartheid future, there is concern that autonomy at these and other levels should not be turned into a vehicle for transforming the country into a *de facto* federal system.

The ANC proposes to use economic issues in local government to achieve a number of goals. Some form of redistribution of wealth will be effected through restructuring the economy of local governments. This strategy is in line with the ANC's well-known economic proposals. Redistribution will be effected through the principle of cross-subsidisation which is specifically designed to address historical inequalities.

In areas too big to unite, a form of metropolitan government would be put into place. It is in such urban conurbations that cross-subsidisation would be particularly desirable. This approach is based on the assumption that even in a post-apartheid South Africa, the racial composition of residential areas will take time to assume a thorough-going non-racial character. So too will the location of industry and commerce which account for a sound tax base within white municipalities.

The ANC's preference is to strengthen the role of the public sector, specifically local government, in the provision of collective consumption goods. In this regard, the organisation is opposed to the privatisation drive currently underway that is affecting the provision of essential services in some townships.

In the area of housing, the effect of the state's withdrawal and the almost exclusive private sector involvement has been devastating. This has worked to provide accommodation only to the tiny section of the township communities which can afford it, while neglecting the needs of the poor majority. The presence of significant numbers of people housed in privately owned houses may tone down the extent of

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In the interim, the civics are calling for the resignation of BLA councillors and their replacement by administrators

A redistribution of wealth could be effected through restructuring the economy of local government

grassroots opposition to privatisation. Overall, however, local government probably will be where widespread opposition to privatisation finds the most clear-cut expression.

Leaving land adjoining the 'white' towns of South Africa undeveloped and locating squatters far away from areas where they are likely to find employment, causes considerable anger. Tracts of unused land separating white towns and black townships are an eyesore, especially where there is overcrowding. This has been interpreted as a continued commitment to the idea of buffer strips between black townships and white towns. These pressures will exacerbate the drive within the ANC towards nationalisation of land, for settling the poor who are being located further and further away from the cities.

Another distinct objective for ANC policymakers is to spread investments throughout the unified city rather than concentrate them in one area of the city as occurs at present. While this makes a great deal of sense, it is not clear where new investment funds would be generated in view of the massive demands which are going to be placed on capital resources. Sources of capital funding may be generated from the 'growth through redistribution' strategy set out in the latest ANC discussion paper on economic policies.

The ANC views the civics as independent groups which will play a political role in a post-apartheid society

Independent Role

The worldwide drift towards democratisation processes has been embraced by the ANC. The tendency inherent in governments and states towards undemocratic practices have led to a rising interest in civil society as a possible countervailing force and a way of enhancing the quality of democracy in various societies.

As possibilities for a transition to a democratic order in South Africa increase, the ANC has also shown growing interest in issues related to achieving a post-apartheid democracy of enhanced quality. In local government this has taken the form of conceding that there will be politics outside of state structures. This concession is crucial, given the reluctance of governments generally and those of the

third world specifically to allow the expression of political views outside of the state, ruling party or government.

The seriousness of the ANC in this regard is underscored by its view that civic associations are not local governments in waiting. The ANC's view is that the civics are independent formations which represent the interests of people in their communities and strive for a better quality of life through struggles for affordable service charges and rates. The issues which have driven civics will not suddenly disappear in a post-apartheid South Africa, and people will have to continue to strive for a government at all levels which is more responsive to their needs.

While the ANC's view of the role of civil society in a future non-racial South Africa is laudable and in line with concerns all over the world, it is not sufficiently far-reaching. Civil society will not thrive in a post-apartheid future because one component of it is given independence. A more comprehensive understanding of the complex and varied nature of civil society should be taken into consideration.

In South Africa, where struggle has been intense and multifaceted, the difficulty of transforming organisations which have been essentially part of the national liberation effort is immense. Civics may not find it easy to transform themselves easily into organisations which are part of civil society, partly because of their role in the broad struggle for liberation and partly because of their political partisanship. In a changed political situation many current members of civics may become part of the state, thereby removing from the civics an important resource, viz, experienced personnel.

Civic associations in combination with other organisations like trade unions, churches, some newspapers, etc., do have the capacity to provide a base for a vibrant civil society in the future. They can, however, only do so if there exists an understanding of their role in civil society. Until now these institutions have played an oppositional role to the state which was essentially confrontational. To change from this mould to one which is engaging and seeks to enhance the quality of democracy may take more than merely asserting the independence of civics from on high. **IPQA**