

No Illusions

2016 Elections no Solution for the Masses

Warren McGregor

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Many in the working class hope the 2016 local government elections will prove a turning point. The ruling African National Congress (ANC) won the 2014 elections easily, but its grip is weakening. The ANC-allied Congress of SA Trade Unions (COSATU) has split, the radical metal union NUMSA expelled. The ANC could even lose control of at least one of giant “metro” municipality in 2016, possibly greater Johannesburg or Nelson Mandela Bay – probably to the moderate Democratic Alliance (DA), not the ANC breakaway, Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF).

The Vote Won’t Free You

We anarchists and anarchist sympathisers in the TAAC (and ZACF) have stated consistently our opposition to elections to state power. State institutions of political power are the graveyard of the struggles of the working class and poor. Elected representatives, no matter what party, are quickly co-opted into these wealthy halls of ruling class power, no matter their origins. There they wheel-and- deal with others in the ruling class, including full-time (and unelected) senior state managers, like the directors and generals, and the capitalists who spend time and money lobbying, bribing and striking business deals with the politicians.

All state policies are in in the interests of furthering exploitation and profit-making. The only exception is where mass power forces politicians and bosses to make changes – out of fear. The massive student struggles of 2015 forced a fee freeze in all universities, as well as an end to outsourcing (privatisation) in some – achieving more in 2 weeks than EFF actions in parliament did in 2 years. Struggle is how you win change, not dropping paper into a box every few years.

The Parties Are Run By Elites

The ANC rules, again, over a “better life” for the ruling class, the capitalists and state managers, with massive economic problems, unemployment and poverty for the rest of us. Its much-praised welfare system papers over the cracks, but does not come close to ending poverty and suffering with its tiny grants, and lack of assistance to the unemployed millions. Corruption by both politicians and capitalists, disastrous management by party “cadres” in SABC, ESKOM and other state enterprises, and neo- liberal policies are the sign of the dark times. New Finance Minister Nhlanhla Nene has repeatedly promoted austerity in his budgets and speeches. The ANC has meanwhile centralised executive power in the Presidency and Treasury, making parliament even more useless than normal.

But the problem is not just the ANC, let alone ANC leader President Jacob Zuma – as rival parties like to pretend. The state, by its very nature, ensures the exploitation and domination of the working class and poor, and it corrupts and co-opts all who sit at its head.

The EFF Is No Different

The EFF has proved no exception. EFF leaders signed a public pledge (the “Sankara Oath”) stating they and their families would use state facilities like schools and hospitals, consult the masses and build an honest state.

Within hours of taking office, EFF MPs broke this promise, and also added that they would be making full use of generous parliamentary salaries and perks, like free flights. As for honesty, Malema's expensive lawyers have spent the last few years helping him dodge jail time for corruption, racketeering and tax fraud, arising from extensive involvement in corrupt privatisation contracts.

And consultation? The EFF is top-down in character, held together by the expelled leadership of the ANC Youth League, notably Malema and Floyd Shivambu.

3 EFF MPs were expelled in 2015 after providing evidence Malema used EFF funds for personal expenses. The 2014 EFF national conference post-elections was also used to purge critics, and other heavy-handed interventions into branches and regions also helped centre power in the Malema group.

The EFF sees the gap in the voting market as African youth stuck in impoverished townships, as well as struggling workers battling vicious bosses. Like the ANC itself, the EFF knows the value of staying in the public eye, of grand promises, of a rhetoric continually referencing "revolutionary" slogans, yet devoid of any revolutionary action, of politics built around the uncritical support for charismatic leaders, and of using party funds to build a network of patronage to centralise power.

The Politics Of Publicity Stunts

The obsession of historically white-owned media with Malema, as "black bogeyman," provides free publicity. To access state office and benefits, it needs their votes; this is the aim of events like the "pay-back-the-money" shouting campaign in parliament. (Even so, EFF still secured only 6% of the vote in 2014 – more youth stayed away from voting than voted EFF).

Fundamentally, EFF is built on spectacular publicity stunts arranged from above, empty promises (like the 2015 land occupation campaign that was quietly cancelled), multi-million dollar rallies with free t-shirts, and so-called "socialist" catch-phrases to win poor black people's votes e.g. "nationalisation," "economic emancipation," "land reform." Its ideology is shifting, but has strong flavours of exclusivist Africanist (anti-minority) nationalism and Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, to brand it as radical and take the space the ANC seems to have vacated.

Real Change Comes From Us

This type of politics is no basis for revolutionary transformation. It keeps the system where the masses are spectators, not players, where freedom is seen as something brought from on high, by great leaders, where change comes through parties and elections – not from the people, themselves. And its nationalism, hiding class divisions, including between the (wealthy) ANC and EFF leaderships and their (poor) mass voting base, further confuses the issues.

The 2016 elections will simply repeat the politics of spectacles, of the circus of politics, based on the 3 main parties. Nothing will be achieved, hopes will be dashed, and at most some faces in the ruling class will change.

The State Is Your Enemy

We in the TAAC again declare that the state is in no way the avenue for working class struggle. It is a site of ruling class power – and no matter the colour of your beret, whether black (ANC), blue (DA) or red (EFF), you and your party cannot change this essential characteristic of state power – it will change your party.

By voting you give your right to create social change to a party, a bunch of people you don't know, to do as they wish. Real working class power lives in our organisations – trade unions and grassroots social movements, organised democratically – and in our spaces – the streets, the neighbourhoods, the shop-floor, the meetings. Here we must do the hard work of building a working class counterculture for revolutionary transformation, and through daily struggle, build counter-power against the ruling class and their institutions, the state and corporations, to create the change we want.

We continue the call:

DON'T VOTE! ORGANISE COUNTER- POWER!

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