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**Title**

**Internal Democracy in the ANC or, did the Polokwane Revolt challenge Michels' "Iron Law of Oligarchy"?**

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### **Acronym List**

- AA – Affirmative Action
- ANC – African National Congress
- ANCYL – African National Congress Youth League
- BEE – Black Economic Empowerment
- COSATU – Congress of South African Trade Unions
- CPSA – Communist Party of South Africa
- CPSU – Communist Party of the Soviet Union
- FDI – Foreign Direct Investment
- GEAR – Growth, Employment and Redistribution
- HIV/AIDS – human immunodeficiency virus/ Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
- IFP – Inkatha Freedom Party
- ITU – International Trade Union
- MK – UmKhonto we Sizwe
- MP – Member of Parliament
- NDR – National Democratic Revolution
- NEDLAC – National Economic Development and Labour Council
- NEC – National Executive Committee
- NP – National Party
- NPA – National Prosecuting Authority
- NWC – National Working Committee
- PEC – Provincial Executive Committee
- RDP – Reconstruction and Development Programme
- SABC – South African Broadcasting Corporation
- SACP – South African Communist Party
- SDP – Social Democratic Party of Germany
- SANNC – South African Native National Congress
- SWAPO – South West Africa People's Organization
- UDF – United Democratic Front
- ZANU-PF – Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Aim

The aim of this dissertation is to look at internal democracy in political parties. I will be using the African National Congress (ANC) as my case study. My hunch is that Robert Michels is correct in thinking that elites dominate ostensibly democratic political parties. Accordingly, I hypothesise that the ANC has been elite-dominated since the advent of democracy in 1994. While the validation of this hypothesis cannot 'prove' the existence of an 'iron law of oligarchy', it can provide some support to that thesis, especially given that the ANC proclaims itself to be a democratic force. Power in the ANC lies in an elite located in the leadership organs of the party - the Executive, National Working Committee and National Executive Committee. This leadership is not democratic in the sense of being controlled by, or accountable to, branches and ordinary members. The Polokwane conference of December 2007 tests this hypothesis, since it ostensibly marked a reassertion of control by the ANC grassroots after years of domination by a centralizing and authoritarian Thabo Mbeki. If Polokwane re-established popular control over the ANC, the hypothesis is disproved. If, however, it was an elite-manipulated event or merely signalled a circulation of unaccountable elite groups, the hypothesis is, if not proven, at least supported. It is of course too early to grasp the full significance of Polokwane in ANC history, but we have enough distance and evidence to begin to form a picture.

My theoretical approach draws on elite theory in general and Robert Michels' book *Political Parties* (1959/originally 1915) in particular. Elite theorists like Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto and C. Wright Mills argue that states or particular states (like the US in the 1950s in the case of Mills) are dominated by closed, tightly-knit and

unaccountable elites, such that democratic processes are largely superficial or a sham. Conservative elite theorists like Mosca and Pareto thought elite domination is a good thing and inevitable, while Mills, and writers like Bachrach, Baratz and Stephen Lukes were radical democrats challenging elite domination in the West. Some elitist theorists, like Max Weber, Schumpeter and Truman, have tried to reconcile elitism with recognition of the reality and value of representative democracy as a means of keeping elites in check. Pluralists for their part have celebrated democracy as 'polyarchy', a process in which organised elites proliferate and check and balance each other, and ordinary citizens are liable to find organised interest groups to represent their concerns. Neo-pluralists (like Charles Lindblom) recognise the reality of elite competition, but tend to see it as playing out in a field of asymmetrical power where some elites are much more dominant than others in key areas, such as economic policymaking (see Bottomore 1964, Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987, Evans 1995). Michels advances a more conservative and pessimistic elitist view than the pluralists or neo-pluralists, and indeed than the democratic elitists.

### Conceptual Framework

As indicated, this research report draws on the elite theory tradition of political science.

Elite theory has a weak and strong hypothesis. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will primarily focus on the strong hypothesis. Conservative and radical elite theories (strong hypothesis) claim that the elite are small, closed and concentrated; it is unaccountable to its members/masses, the masses lack the capacity to influence the elite. A weak hypothesis (such as that adopted by pluralists and to a degree neo-pluralists and democratic elitists) entails that the elite are not small and that it is possible for non-elite citizens to join an elite. The masses also have some form of leverage and can

participate in policies and influence decision making. They gain leverage from competition amongst the elites.

### Hypothesis

In this research report I will be advancing and testing a strong hypothesis. It is a truism to say that the ANC is led by a small group of leaders; all organisations are. It is more challenging and interesting to hypothesise, as I do, that the leadership forms an unaccountable, tightly-knit, relatively closed elite. The Polokwane conference represented an elite-manipulated process and a circulation of unaccountable elite groups rather than a genuine or sustained assertion of grassroots power.

### Methodology

I will be using the qualitative method for my dissertation, reading and analysing books, articles and documents in search of evidence for and against my hypothesis, as well as for empirical information. I will use both secondary and primary material when conducting my research. I will use some of the academic literature from the libraries at the University of the Witwatersrand. I will also rely heavily on newspapers. Finally, I will also examine party documents available at the websites of the ANC and its alliance partners.

I will be using the ANC's website because it will provide me with important information about some of the party's policy documents, such as leadership and democratic centralism. I will be using secondary sources to see what has been written about the ANC and to compare what different scholars say about the ruling party. Newspaper articles and journals will be used because there have not been enough books published about the ruling party.

The focus will be on the post-1994 period, with special reference to the Mbeki presidency and Polokwane and its aftermath. I recognise, though, that the ANC's democratic traditions (or lack thereof) come out of a long history, including decades of clandestine struggle. Authoritarianism and secrecy did not emerge in 1994, though it is remarkable that it persisted and even deepened under post-1994 democratic conditions. At any rate, some historical background will be necessary.



## Chapter 2: Theoretical Overview

### Literature Review Part one: Michels' Iron law of oligarchy

Michels writes about how democracy is mainly about "oligarchs" who dominate political parties. Michels writes that when political parties are formed, they are democratic in their nature. As political parties evolve, they come to be dominated by oligarchs. Leaders become indispensable, or form alliances with one another primarily in order to safeguard their interests. Michels also sees the masses as contributing because they are unable to mobilise. In Mills' terms, the elites are unified whereas "mass society is fragmented and impotent" (Mills, 1956).

Michels (1958) believes that the masses are incapable of leading political parties. Michels justified his view by using the writings of Pareto and Mosca, who noted that there were differences between the elites and the masses. For Michels, the masses' incompetence gives leaders the foundation they need to ascend to powerful positions.

Since it is difficult for all members of political parties to participate in the processes or structures of the party, there is a "need for delegation, for the system in which delegates represent the mass and carry out its will" (Michels, 1958:27). Yet the introduction of delegates leads to specialists being created and for Michels, this leads to a wider division between the leaders and the masses.

Michels notes that the masses will find it difficult to ascend to leadership because they do not have the skills and dedication that their leaders have. Michels claimed that the masses were "weakly organized and hence politically immature and even incompetent" (Michels, 1958:53). With the masses being disorganized, they need leaders who will be able to organize their affairs and give them

guidance on their interests. Michels added that “the majority is really delighted to find persons who will take the trouble to look after its affairs. In the mass, and even in the organized mass of the labour parties, there is an immense need for direction and guidance” (Michels, 1958:53).

Is democracy though about the masses making a contribution to the political process or is democracy about the masses giving up some of their power to those elected because they are the ones who have the attributes or virtues to govern and lead effectively? If the latter turns out to be the case; then “democracy ends by undergoing transformation into a form of government by the best, into an aristocracy” (Michels, 1958:89).

Many of the masses lack the dedication that their leaders have. It is leaders who have made many sacrifices and who have dedicated their lives to the political parties. Because of the sacrifices they have made, these leaders assume the leadership positions in political parties. Once political parties assume power at the national level, it is the elites who are the dominant clique. This though can be dangerous. Leaders who have made sacrifices for their parties will feel that the parties ‘owe’ them. The masses require leadership and leaders know this and this creates an aura that leaders are indispensable, and most of the time they are not to be challenged. The people’s “gratitude is displayed in the continual re-election of the leaders who have served the party well, so that leadership becomes perpetual” (Michels, 1958:61-62). The masses see themselves in their leaders, the masses trust that their leaders will represent their interests. As Michels notes, “in the object of such adoration, megalomania is set to ensure” (Michels, 1958:68).

The other danger that can also occur is that leaders will see themselves as being indispensable. Michels notes that some leaders will resign if they feel that the party does not support their ideology

or if their leadership is constantly being criticised. Michels claims that leaders will resign because they aim to show how much value they add to the party, "their action is an oligarchical demonstration, the manifestation of a tendency to enfranchise themselves from the control of the rank and file" (Michels, 1958:49). By resigning, leaders want to demonstrate to the party that without their leadership, the party will not be as effective and efficient as it was under their leadership. Michels emphasises this by adding, "The leader's principle source of power is his indispensability" (Michels, 1958:86).

Michels argues that it is the 'oligarchs' who actually dominate political parties. When leaders are elected, they govern through a consensus, yet as they begin to consolidate control, decisions are made by a select few. These elites are a representation of the various factions in a political party, be it the educated, middle class, business, working class etc.

Michels writes that once political parties become organizations, they tend to become conservative once they become governing parties, which gives additional powers to the leaders of that organization. Once in power, parties will veer away from their "revolutionary principles" and adopt a more conservative approach; this can be attributed to the power of financial markets. Michels claims that once political parties become organizations, they become non-democratic; he claims that democracy cannot be achieved in a large scale organization. The reason for this is that decisions have to be made on a regular basis and because of this, it is impossible that all members can be consulted because it will cause logistical problems as well as delays. This is not necessarily true though, as Birch (1993) argues; democracy is still possible if its principles are adhered to. Some of these principles include; competition amongst the factions or elites in the party in order to win support from constituents. If the choice to elect leaders is still there, then one aspect of democracy is still maintained in political parties. Democracy will also

be maintained if there is still freedom to debate policies and raise objections within the party. Furthermore and more importantly, democracy will be sustained in political parties if the leaders themselves are accountable to their constituents.

Michels notes that some people become leaders because of their charisma or their ability to influence others. Leaders who have charisma and who possess oratory skills will find it easier to persuade the masses to believe in his leadership and ideology. The danger to this is that it can lead to leaders being unaccountable to the masses and that these leaders will rule by near authority.

Since political parties have many members, coordination is required so that they can function effectively. Coordination is also required because when it comes to decision-making, it is impossible for everyone to be involved, especially if the organization has a high membership. This is why bureaucracies are formed, so that large organizations (including political parties) can function effectively. For Kitschelt, this would fit the "weak theory of oligarchy", which for Kitschelt is "based on organizational efficiency" (Kitschelt, 1989:69-70).

Bureaucracies though (as Weber also stressed) emphasise a hierarchical system. One of the reasons for this is that decisions are made regularly and it thus becomes impossible for all members to be involved. Since all cannot be involved, few members are selected to make these decisions and for Michels this is how oligarchies are formed. Those who are put into positions of power will ensure that they remain there, one of the reasons being that they are able to accumulate personal wealth. Michels sees bureaucracy as creating dominant elites, one that is unaccountable to the masses. Kitschelt refers to this as "a strong theory based on elite domination" (1989:69-70).

By establishing a bureaucracy and having people in specialized positions, you begin to create elites that have resources (information, financial etc.) readily available to them. The masses thus find it difficult to challenge the elite because they lack the skills and resources that are available to those in power. Michels suggests that “organizational asymmetry between elites and masses is akin to a class struggle. With their monopoly over the means of production (organization), the elite are essentially able to extract surplus rents from the social movement”. Resources are not easily available to the masses as they are to the leaders and delegates of the party.

### Weber and bureaucracies

Max Weber is another thinker relevant to this research report, because he focuses on bureaucracies, of which modern mass parties constitute examples, at least in respect of their permanent secretariats. Weber saw bureaucracies as inevitable features of legal-rational modernity, and as characterised by hierarchy, specialisation, information-recording and secrecy. He noted that bureaucracies are essential; he saw bureaucracies as “the means of transforming social action into rationally organized action” (Weber, 1997:63), yet he warned against this structure, noting that “bureaucracy is among those social structures which are the hardest to destroy” (Weber, 1997:63). For Weber, power lies in the bureaucracy “since power is exercised through the routines of administration” (Weber, 1997:63). Weber challenged the notion that control in a democratic state lay in the executive. For Weber, authority was to be found in bureaucracies. As he further explains, “in a modern state the actual ruler is necessarily and unavoidably the bureaucracy, since power is exercised through the routines of administration” (Weber, 1997:65).

Weber goes on to emphasise that democracy could be hard to achieve because the bureaucracy is difficult to regulate. Weber then asks “how can there be any guarantee that any powers will remain which

can check and effectively control the tremendous influence of this stratum? How will democracy even in this limited sense be at all possible?" (Weber, 1997:6). In democracies, there are institutions that are created that ensure that the executive, parliament and civil servants are held accountable for their actions; yet, it seems that no institutions or any form of regulation has been created to ensure that bureaucracies are held accountable or that it is regulated.

Weber warns that whoever has control over the bureaucracy will have all powers vested in their hands and those of their own faction, "therefore, as an instrument of rationality organizing authority relations, bureaucracy was and is a power instrument of the first order for one who controls the bureaucratic apparatus" (Weber,1997:63). This can lead to oligarchies being formed and authoritarian leaders emerging.

In addition to the writing of Weber about bureaucracy, Pollitt described bureaucracies as a hierarchy of authority, with power and discretion being located at the top. He goes on to note that bureaucracies are characterised by secrecy "because this is a way of preserving one of the bureaucracy's major power resources – its command of specialized information, including information about its own, often very complex rules" (Pollitt, 1986:159).

Poulantzas saw bureaucracies as "ineluctably secretive, authoritarian and anti-participatory" (Pollitt, 1986). This would go against the some of the principles of democracy which include transparency, pluralism and debate amongst others. Poulantzas saw liberal democracies and political parties as representing a small minority (the elite), while limiting the influence of the masses.

One of the main criticisms of bureaucracies is that they are standardized. Bureaucracies tend to have a standardized routine or answers for any problems that arise, "the standardization of

problems, procedures and solutions” (Pollitt, 1986:166). This leaves little room for any innovation to take place, which could possibly lead to greater effectiveness and efficiency.

Scholars see bureaucracies as being anti-democratic because change rarely occurs. No one seems to raise questions or challenge the way issues are carried out. Burnheim also notes that bureaucracies contribute to the creation of oligarchies; he describes bureaucracies as “centralized, multifunctional authorities inherently oligarchic. Big centralized bureaucracy inhibits democratic creativity and participation” (Pollitt, 1986:166).

#### Elite theory and elite domination

As indicated, this research report draws on the elite theory tradition of political science.

As Mosca noted: “in all societies, two classes of people appear – a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all the political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings. Whereas the second; the more numerous class is directed and controlled by the first” (Halevy 1997:53).

Before I proceed, a distinction between the masses and the elites should be made. I will first look at the masses.

As already noted in this report, the masses have been described as “incompetent” and lacking dedication amongst other things. The masses are confined to the world they live in; they cannot or find it difficult to escape from the society they live in. The masses are bound by the rules and boundaries of society, which they had little influence in determining. Mills sums up the differences between the

masses and the elite by noting, "they are all that we are not" (Mills, 1956).

The elites on the other hand are different. Mills notes that the elite are not confined by the society they live in. It is the elite who construct the societies that the masses and they themselves live in. The elites are guided by a different set of principles. As Mills notes, they have their own rules, which bind all of them. One does not simply become a member of the elite, there are prerequisites that have to be met; some of these include wealth, aristocracy and level of position.

Halevy also made a distinction between the masses and the elite. She notes "the elites, differentiated from the public by the extent of their power and influence" (Halevy, 1997). For Halevy, access to resources (which should be readily available) is what separates the masses and the elite. Resources do not only include finances, it also includes organizational resources, (control of the party/state apparatus), political resources (public support), symbolic resources (knowledge and ability to manipulate symbols) and personal resources (charisma, time, motivation etc). With access to resources, the elites are able to maintain their domination over the masses, because the masses have limited or no access to resources.

In his writings, Mills argued that power in the United States (from the 1950s) was controlled by the elite of the "big three"; these being the corporations, the political class as well as the military. As the size of the "big three" has increased, it has become more centralized and more bureaucratic; this has allowed it to function more effectively and to consolidate power. He further states that "in each of these institutional areas, the means of power at the disposal of decision makers have increased enormously; their central executive powers have been enhanced; within each of them modern



administrative routines have been elaborated and tightened up” (Mills, 1956).

Bottomore (1964) made a distinction between a political elite and a political class. The political class is the governing elite; for Bottomore (1964) this includes the executive, government officials, bureaucrats as well as military leaders. The political class; “is therefore composed of a number of groups which may be engaged in varying degrees of co-operation, competition or conflict with each other” (Bottomore, 1964:9). The political elite are the ones who govern the country; they are the ones who have political power, as they are the ruling government. Halevy added, “the state elites include political leaders, whose power flows primarily from political and organizational resources, and the heads of large-scale state-based organizations” (Halevy, 1997).

The masses also have some form of leverage and can participate in policies and influence decision making. They gain leverage from competition amongst the elites. As Weber noted, “the demos itself, in the sense of a shapeless mass, never governs large associations, but rather is governed. What changes is only the way in which the executive leaders are selected and the measure of influence which the demos are able to exert upon the content and the direction of administrative activities by means of public opinion” (Weber, 1997:63).

For some theorists, for democracy to be sustained, there needs to be an “elite circulation” or circulation of elites. “Democratic elite theorists thus share the idea that the distinctiveness of democracy lies not only in free competitive elections, but also in the autonomy of elites from each other, which enables them to countervail each other’s power” (Halevy, 1997:46). The circulation of elites also ensures that the elites are held accountable for their decisions by their constituents. The existence of competing elites allows the

masses an opportunity to replace the ruling elite with other elites if the current elite do not carry out their mandate.

### Democracy and Democratic Centralism

The definition of democracy is “rule by the people”, the demos. Halevy defines one of the aspects of democracy as “the outcome of power struggles between holders of clashing interests, between proponents and opponents, and the various alliances they made with and against each other” (Halevy, 1997). Some of the principles of democracy include competition for office, tolerance and pluralism amongst others. No state can claim to be democratic when it does not recognise that all are members of society are equal; equality is built into democracy. Democracy talks about justice, that all individuals shall be treated as equals in the eyes of the law, irrespective of their class, race, gender and position. These are the intrinsic benefits of democracy. There are also instrumental benefits to democracy.

For the purpose of this research, I will primarily focus on democratic centralism, because this is the form of democracy that is evident in the ruling ANC. It is important to explain what democratic centralism entails. It includes the elections leaders, be it leaders in the top echelons or leaders at a lower level. Discipline within the party is to be upheld. Once a decision has been reached, it then binds all members of the party. Why is it called democratic centralism?

Democratic, because policies are debated by the members of the party and before policies are adopted, those who have grievances should state them. So there is room for debate within democratic centralism. This though should be done through party structures. Centralism, because once a decision is reached by the majority, it shall be binding to all members, even those who objected. As Lenin put it, “democratic centralism consisted of freedom of discussion,

unity of action” (Lenin, undated). Lenin noted that there should be a delicate balance between these two terms. For Lenin “unrestrained discussion, would produce intraparty disagreements and factions and prevent the party from acting effectively. On the other hand, absolute control by a centralized leadership would discourage new ideas” (Lenin). One can argue that under the Mbeki era, the latter occurred throughout Mbeki’s ten year reign of the ANC.

Democratic centralism is based on the needs and interests of the collective and it is opposed to the principles of liberal democracy, which puts the individual and his interests above those of the collective. Members who pursue their own interests above those of the collective will be reprimanded at the party’s next meeting.

Under Stalin’s reign, bureaucratic centralism was more evident than democratic centralism, “decisions were made at the top and handed down as orders for the membership to carry out” (Stalin, undated), without proper consultation with the party and with no debates being held. Later on, I will show how the Mbeki era can be classified under the term bureaucratic centralism.

### Political parties and democracy

The comparative political science of political parties is also of some relevance, with its classifications of parties and party systems (Ware 1996, Mair 1997). So is rational choice theory with its focus on the incentives faced by parties to behave in particular ways at election times. The type of party and electoral context is relevant to internal party democracy. For example, situations where parties have an incentive to win votes in the centre will favour party leaders, while situations where parties have a greater incentive to mobilise the base or to establish niche voter markets might favour party activists. Leaders are stronger in parties with large majorities and closed party list systems (like the ANC) than in parties with slender majorities and

pluralities and either primary elections or open electoral lists. There is however relatively little literature focusing specifically on internal democracy within parties (see e.g. Ware 1986).

Different factions and the elite have seen political parties as a means of achieving their aim of gaining access to the state and its resources. By controlling the political party, factions hope to gain control of the state in order to advance their ideology/needs and those of their constituents.

Dissatisfaction with political parties (primarily in the western Europe and the U.S.) has been evident since the 1850s. In the 1950s, studies and research (conducted primarily in the U.S.) were being carried out on political parties. One of the findings was that “members of the lower echelons of many parties had very limited influence over the policy goals and strategies pursued by political parties” (Ware, 1986:113).

Ware notes that people who want to transform old parties are the ones who have been marginalized or isolated from decision making processes or from positions of power. It rarely happens that the elite will want parties to be transformed, unless this will result in them obtaining more control of the party and further limiting the role played by the masses; “for most party elites, institutional arrangements which limit the participation and power of the mass membership are to be welcomed” (Ware, 1986:121); or allowing them (the elite) to accumulate more wealth.

Political parties have evolved over the last few decades. They have evolved into professional organizations. Katz and Mair (1994) used terms such as “cartel”, “business firm”, “corporatism”, “modern cadre” and “semi-state agencies” to describe modern political parties. Katz and Mair add; “much of the more important work of the party in central office is increasingly being carried out by

professionals and consultants, rather than traditional party bureaucrats" (Katz and Mair, 1994:13). Katz and Mair claim that the "party on the ground" is losing its influence, in part due to a decline in membership. The other reason is that resources have been monopolized by "parties in public office", thus limiting the role played by the "party on the ground" as they are unable to perform some of their functions (such as holding those in government accountable and ensuring that they deliver the mandate set out by the party) as they lack the financial and human resources to do so. This shift has harmed the "party on the ground" because the "party in public office" has been able to attract highly skilled personnel, primarily through patronage or through financial means. "In addition, analyses have shown that parties have simultaneously declined as channels for popular demands, thereby losing their legitimacy as representative organizations" (Katz and Mair, 1994:2).

Political analysts have also noted the increase of corporatism (businesses) on political parties. Therefore, an important question has to be asked of modern political parties: who has the 'ear' of the leadership; is it businesses that fund the party or is it the rank and file members? Some would argue that it is the former. As this transformation has occurred the party's rank and file as well as society have become disenchanted with their leaders and the political party. The gap that existed between the leaders and the led has widened with the introduction of modern political parties. As political parties have become more isolated from their members and society, the masses have been withdrawing from party activities and have become passive.

We have seen political parties in some countries (the United States and France in particular) using primaries as a means of electing party leaders as well as trying to attract new members to their parties. This gives the masses some form of power as it allows them an opportunity to have a say who will lead their parties in their

country's next general elections. Does this though mean that parties are democratic (internally); does this mean that voters actually have the authority to decide who their leaders will be?

### The 'Third Way'

The 'Third Way' is a new form of governance that emerged in the 1990s. The 'Third Way' has been used by political parties in the U.S., Britain, Germany as well as Australia. Under Thabo Mbeki, the ANC and government also used this method of governance.

Rose defines the 'Third Way' as "a certain way of visualizing political problems, a rationality for rendering them thinkable and manageable, and a set of moral principles by which solutions may be generated and legitimized" (Rose, 2001:1). The 'Third Way' is a new form of governance because it does not govern based on right (free market supporters) or left (state supporters) wing ideologies. The 'Third Way' is a form of governance that is based on the challenges of a changing society (economically, politically and socially/culturally), a society that is evolving constantly because of globalization and technology.

One can make a strong argument that the 'Third Way' is a new form of social democracy, one that is based on the challenges of a new society, a society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Leaders or political parties that have governed through the 'Third Way' have allowed markets an opportunity to operate freely and without interference from the state, so the 'Third Way' does cater for liberals. At the same time, those who govern through the 'Third Way' realise that inequality in society is unjust and they strive for social justice, which will be directed by the state. The following extract is taken from the BBC in 1999 regarding the 'Third Way': "something different and distinct from liberal capitalism with its unswerving belief in the merits of the free market and democratic socialism with its demand management

and obsession with the state. The Third Way is in favour of growth, entrepreneurship, enterprise and wealth creation but it is also in favour of greater social justice and it sees the state playing a major role in bringing this about. So in the words of... Anthony Giddens of the [LSE](#) the Third Way rejects top down socialism as it rejects traditional neo liberalism.” (BBC, 1999).

In theory, there should be greater decentralization under the ‘Third Way’. Local regions, provinces are given more authority and autonomy from the national government because of differences (in terms of resources, culture, needs etc) amongst the regions. Decentralization allows each region/province to implement policies based on what their own constituents/citizens need.

Parties and leaders that have come to power through the ‘Third Way’ and its policies have included the Democratic Party in the U.S. (under Bill Clinton) and the Labour Party in Britain (under Tony Blair). The reason for using these two parties as examples is because both parties were opposition parties in their respective countries for more than a decade; from 1980 till about 1992 when Bill Clinton won the U.S. elections in 1992 and when Tony Blair won the British elections in 1997. After their election victories both parties were described as ‘new parties’: New Democrats and New Labour. This is because both parties had moved away from their traditional ideologies (which they felt had been contributing to their time as opposition parties). By advocating the ‘Third Way’ and its policies, both parties adopted a modern approach which would allow them to govern in a globalized world as well incorporate new constituents; “in the process, they have spoken directly to the many people who embrace the modern world but are apprehensive about its effects on them: people who are torn between wanting the benefits of new technology, but fear its consequences, people who want more individual choice but regret the loss of community” (Blair, 2001)

Analysts though have been critical of the 'Third Way'. One of the criticisms is that there is an increase in authoritarian rule, where debate within the party has been stifled by the party's leadership. This is not only confined within the party, it is also evident in the public realm, where the executive (Britain in this case) is no longer or less accountable to the legislature.

Another critique of the 'Third Way' is that even though it aims to decentralize power to local regions/provinces, in practice, there is greater centralization. This is particularly true of countries that use a parliamentary system (e.g. Britain and Germany), where the party's leadership centralizes power within their offices and then uses patronage by appointing those loyal/aligned to them into key positions within the executive and the civil service.

#### Comparative analysis of the law of oligarchy

The ANC will be used as my primary case study to test Michels' iron law of oligarchy. Yet, I will briefly look at the Green Party of Germany as well as the German Social Democratic Party as my comparative analysis. This will allow me an opportunity to test Michels' iron law of oligarchy.

The SDP is the party that Michels used to base his theory of iron law of oligarchy. The SDP was formed in 1869. Even though the SDP was initially formed as a socialist party, in 1959, the party adopted a more conservative approach that was in line not only with the German people, but in line with other developed countries.

Even though elites dominate political parties, there will be instances where the masses are able to assert their influence. The SDP was removed from power from 1982 after its leaders had begun supporting policies that were opposed by the party's members. The party would not govern Germany until 1998.



The Green Party of Germany tried to demonstrate that Michels' iron law of oligarchy could be challenged (from the period of 1970 till about the 1980s). Initially the party had some success in challenging the iron law of oligarchy. They did this by allowing all their members the opportunity to participate and vote in all decision making processes that the party was carrying out. The party allowed its members the opportunity to remove any official or to elect officials. The Green Party of Germany was able to challenge Michels' iron law of oligarchy because during this period (from the 1970s till about mid 1985) it had a small membership and they were not competitive in elections (they received 5.7% of the vote in the 1983 election). This was a party with a small constituency. Also the Green Party of Germany was also able to challenge Michels' iron law of oligarchy because as an organization, they are not as complex as the Social Democratic Party. The party's constituent is primarily made up of peace activists as well as environmentalists.

The Green Party of Germany was starting to grow in terms of membership and it was beginning to win more seats in parliament. In the 1987 election, the party received 8.7% of the vote. As a party increases its membership, as a party becomes more competitive in elections (where funds are needed and where rallies have to be held), there is a greater need for coordination in order for that success to be maintained. Also taking into context the history of politics in post war-Germany, where parties govern through coalitions, the party could not afford to have no proper structures in place. Thus the party adopted "more conventional structures and practices".

Yet, Michels' iron law of oligarchy was not applicable to the ITU. The theory did not apply to the ITU because the organization was largely made up of autonomous regional unions. These unions were independent, effective and efficient prior to them amalgamating to form the ITU. Even though the unions were part of the ITU, they still

regarded their individual autonomy as a priority because they had to safeguard their interests and represent the needs of their constituents.

The iron law of oligarchy was also not applicable to the ITU because, as Lipset notes, there were competing factions who “helped place a check on the oligarchic tendencies at the national headquarters” (Lipset, 1959). The fact that there was a strong faction that was part of the non-governing elite meant that the governing elite could be held accountable for their actions. If the governing elite were not accountable, then they would be replaced by another faction. “With a powerful out faction ready to expose profligacy, no leaders dared create sumptuous personal remuneration” (Lipset 1959). As Michels noted, one of the reasons why bureaucracies are formed is that the elites could accumulate personal wealth through the resources available to them. Yet, in this instance, we see the ITU ensuring that its leaders do not serve their own interests at the expense of their members.

### Literature Review Part Two: The African National Congress

In this section I am going to be analysing at what has been written about the African National Congress (ANC). Finding literature on the ruling party is difficult as not enough material is available. In this literature review I will be looking at the following: leadership issues within the party, the Mbeki era, power, patronage as well as organisational democracy and discipline within the ruling party.

## Elite Theory and the ANC

What is common amongst these elites in the case of the ANC is that they fall into two categories: they are either educated/intellectuals (Joel Netshitenzhe and Blade Nzimande) or were leaders in the struggle against apartheid. Some (e.g. R W Johnson) also argue that the ANC is dominated by a relatively small network of interconnected families, cemented by friendship and marriage (in Kagwanja, and Kondlo 2009). What we begin to see here is the emergence of political aristocrats – an intergenerationally self-reproducing group that dominates through warrior status, kinship connections and the service of organic intellectuals. Aristocrats emerge and dominate political parties because they have the virtues/attributes perceived as necessary to mobilise the masses and lead efficiently as well as access to the right connections and to financial, organisational and other resources. “[T]hus democracy ends up undergoing transformation into a form of government by the best, into an aristocracy” (Michels, 1959:89).

Elite domination of the ANC is facilitated by the poor education and disorganisation of its members. The majority of ANC members are uneducated (not only academically but also politically), as then Secretary-General of the party Kgalema Motlanthe noted in his reports at ANC Conferences in Stellenbosch (2002) and Polokwane (2007). Elite dominance also is facilitated by the fact that only about 60% of ANC branches are actually in good standing.

Under Mbeki, the party took steps towards modernisation. Mbeki tried to create a party that was a reflection of a new South Africa. After the elections in 1994, there were major doubts about the ANC and how it would govern the country. These doubts have continued and this is one of the reasons why the party took steps to make itself look modern. Modernisation implied a degree of centralisation,

professionalization and bureaucratisation. The 'Third Way' was how Mbeki governed.

Thabo Mbeki would fit the description of an individual who sacrificed his life for that of the party and the people. He also fits the description of being 'owed' by the ANC. Did Mbeki feel a sense of entitlement towards the leadership of the party? He gave his life to the struggle, he rose through the ranks of the party, he was Oliver Tambo's protégée and supposed heir to the ANC presidency. Was his destiny to become ANC president someday? The manner in which he was appointed as ANC president in 1997 seems to confirm all of this; it was his time. This though cannot be applicable to Mbeki only; most of the leaders of the ANC during apartheid have this sense of entitlement. As Gumede rightly notes, the ANC still does not have a policy on open democracy when it comes to electing leaders. The same sense of entitlement has been displayed by Jacob Zuma and those who wanted him in power. This though is not good for democracy in the country. As long as the ANC does not have a policy of open democracy when it comes to choosing its leaders, then democracy will not flourish in the party and ultimately in the country.

The ANC under Mbeki can be described as highly authoritarian. True, the ANC has always been a party that is intolerant of dissent. Under Mbeki, though, this was taken to new levels compared to the early to mid 1990s, and despite the advent of constitutional democracy. It started with minimising dissent in the party. This was done by awarding those who were loyal to Mbeki with positions in power in government. Loyalty to the leader mattered more than ability, e.g. Manto Tshabala-Msimang. Those who were critical of Mbeki were sidelined and excluded from positions of power, e.g. Phosa and Sexwale. By centralising power in the presidency, Mbeki had the authority to appoint members of the executive, premiers and officials at the local level. "Mbeki's plan of control was to be realised through

three simple devices. The first was to establish control over all political appointments. The second was to run any potential contenders for succession off the ranch. The third was to create a culture that would discourage dissidence or even debate” (Pottinger, 2008:29)

Why though was it difficult to remove tyrannical/authoritarian leaders from their position? One of the key reasons why Mbeki was not removed from power (pre-Polokwane) was that he had control over resources of patronage, primarily those derived from control of the state. One of the reasons why Mbeki ruled as an oligarch is because he persuaded many for a long time that his knowledge (and the masses lack thereof) qualified him to rule as a philosopher king. In reaction to Mbeki, the Polokwane rebellion acquired an anti-elite, even anti-intellectual character. The Zuma leadership is more populist and style, and has shifted influence from the party in government back to the party in the country, centered on Luthuli House. It is debatable, though, whether Polokwane overthrew elite rule.

Pottinger has used the terms ANC Lite and ANC Classic to describe the two factions in the ANC. ANC Lite are the new black elites in democratic South Africa. These elites were created by Mbeki and the transformation policies that were implemented by the government. Transformation policies like Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and Affirmative Action (AA) were the focal point of creating a black elite. This was also aided by the massive transformation that occurred in the public sector, thus leading to a new public sector based on loyalty to the ANC and Mbeki.

Pottinger describes ANC Classic as the soul of the ANC, it is supposedly the masses that are marginalised and poor, and post-apartheid South Africa has seen one class accumulate wealth while their plight has worsened. ANC Classic has been seen described as a

'coalition of the wounded', those who have suffered and were marginalised under the rule of Mbeki. ANC Classic is made up of various factions and has different ideologies which have caused divisions amongst them. What temporarily united them though was removing Mbeki from power.

In actual fact, there are no major differences between the elites of ANC Lite and Classic. Both ANC Classic and Lite feel that the ANC is the state and the contest between the two occurs to see which faction will control the party and ultimately the state. "Both ANC Classic and ANC Lite believe fervently that the party is the government, which is the state. The only major point of dispute is not whether the ANC is the state, but which ANC is the state" (Pottinger, 2008:17).

Pottinger illustrates how both these factions have little respect for the independence of the judiciary, parliament, media and the public sector. Pottinger illustrates this by showing how ANC Lite ended the Heath Commission into corruption, in particular the arms deal. He then shows how ANC Classic ended the reign of the Scorpions. What is common here is that both of these institutions were closed because they were investigating members of both factions.

The arms deal is an example how ANC Lite and Classic are no different. The arms deal has been the biggest blot in the country's democracy over the last 15 years. There have been allegations of high levels of corruption in the tendering process, where the hierarchy of the ANC has been implicated in the deal. Is this why the investigations into the arms deal have been stopped over the last 15 years, because the party had perhaps benefited from the deal financially. "Attempts to investigate this astonishing tale of malfeasance so early in the life of democracy resulted in a cover-up of epic proportions that drove the small band of pursuers of truth

from public office and, in some cases, into exile” (Pottinger, 2008:52).

If one is to find differences between ANC Classic and Lite, one has to look at main issues: leadership and resources, “the style of leadership and the mechanism for expropriating and transferring wealth from the historic wealth-owning classes to the wealth seeking classes” (Pottinger, 2008:15).

Evidence that Polokwane involved “elite circulation” is that the ANC still retains some of the policies from the Mbeki era. The only change was that Polokwane saw ANC Lite being replaced by ANC Classic. Post-Polokwane we saw Mbeki allies being purged from most spheres of governance; from the NEC/NWC, government (national, provincial and local), public sector and business. They were replaced by those who were loyal to Zuma or who those who supported him. Under Mbeki, the ANC was subordinate to the party leadership in the state. Post-Polokwane, it seems as if a shift has occurred where the ANC is beginning to play an influential role in government matters.

At the Polokwane Conference, the ANC took a decision that provinces would choose their own premiers. Yet, post-Polokwane, the ANC imposed four premiers on the provinces. This further illustrates that the major difference between Mbeki’s ANC and the Zuma led ANC is leadership and elite circulation.

Drawing on the available literature from Lodge and Southall and other scholars, I will challenge the notion that Polokwane challenged Michels’ ‘iron Law of oligarchy’.

### Democracy in the ANC

“The ANC is a democratic organisation whose policies are determined by the membership and whose leadership shall be accountable to the

membership in terms of the procedures laid down in the constitution" (ANC 2001).

"The ANC espouses a hierarchical and a highly institutionalised relationship between the rulers and the ruled ... the masses and the general ANC members are expected to toe the party line and not to be too critical of leadership and party decisions" (Sunday Times, 23 October 2008).

The ANC has been in power since the country's first democratic elections in 1994. It has ruled with a clear majority in the last 15 years, reaching the symbolic two-thirds majority after the 2004 elections. With the party ruling with a clear majority and opposition parties being unable to challenge the party's dominance, internal democracy within the ANC is required in order for democracy in the country to be consolidated. Gumede notes that "democratisation of a country, start with democratisation of its political parties. Democratising the internal organisation and functioning of the ANC and other political parties is an important step towards deepening and consolidating South Africa's infant democracy" (Gumede, 2002:17-18). Lodge notes that democracies become mature when those "in power are subsequently defeated in an election and allows the winners to take office" (Lodge, 2002:154).

Even though there are a number of organizations and factions which make up the ANC, the party follows the principles of democratic centralism. The party debates its policies through its various structures; from the NEC right down to the branches. These debates are open and any member of the party can raise their grievances through party structures. In Umrabulo the party states that once a decision or policy has been taken by the majority, it will be implemented once those decisions/policies are approved by the NEC. Once this process happens, all branches and members of the party are obliged to carry out the policies and decisions of the party.



Gumede though criticises democratic centralism by noting; “all too often, democratic centralism, or vanguardism – which the ANC has adopted as its operational model – serves only to perpetuate the notion of a small group of people operating in the name of democracy, but in fact taking decisions and enforcing them without a mandate from the electorate” (Gumede, 2005:305). Decisions are not only made by a select few, criticism and debates on policies are not tolerated within the party, especially under Mbeki’s administration. “They (Mbeki’s administration) have contributed to a culture of intolerance to diverse opinions, they have left us with authoritarian leadership structures that hide behind the notion of democratic centralism, which enables a few people to make decisions on behalf of everyone” (Sunday Times, 6 April 2008).

Southall adds that decisions taken by the party are not only binding to those on the “party on the ground”; they also bind those in all spheres of government. “In terms of the principle of democratic centralism, once the party leadership has issued a directive, ANC MPs are obliged to defend and implement that decision. They therefore cannot exercise their constitutional obligation to hold the executive to account” (Southall, 2001:173). This is where the danger for the country arises, when public officials do not account to public institutions (i.e. the constitution) that have been set up to hold officials accountable, instead public officials will account to the ruling party (which deploys these officials). Those who do not are likely to be rebuked and redeployed by the party.

The quality of leaders in a new democracy is of equal importance as internal democracy in political parties. As Lodge further explains “political leadership matters more than in established political systems, however carefully scripted the constitutional safeguards may be against the abuse of power ... institutions are still fluid and

susceptible to being shaped by dominant personalities” (Lodge, 2002:241).

One can argue that the party has been dominated by individuals since it was unbanned in 1990, with the likes of Nelson Mandela and Mbeki dominating the party. After 1990 “trade unionists complained of the commandist, top down fashion in which Nelson Mandela and the exiles managed the ANC’s affairs. Overbearing management seemed to be matched by intellectual insensitivity for the wider concerns of democracy” (Lodge, 1992:53).

### The ANC’s branches

“As a mass and democratic organisation, the policies of the ANC are determined by its membership, and its leadership is accountable to the membership in terms of procedures laid down in the constitution” (ANC 2001).

After the party was unbanned in 1990, it faced a number of challenges. One of the biggest challenges that the party faced was to rebuild its branches in the country. The branches are a key component of the party. It is the branches that elect the leadership of the party, it is the branches which are meant to hold the leaders accountable, it is at branch level where members can raise their grievances and it is at branch level where the party’s policies are meant to be discussed. The branches though have in most instances been the party’s weakest structure. In most cases the party’s branches are mainly utilised and active when elections (be it for ANC elections or government elections) are about to take place.

According to the secretary-general’s (Kgalema Motlanthe from 1997-2007) reports at ANC conferences since 1997, the party had 385 778 members in 1997, 416 846 in 2002 and 621 237 in 2007. In 2000 the party had 5500 branches, “most of which were not in good standing and with little political life” (Motlanthe, ANC 2007). In addition, the

party has conceded that it has seen “a further decline in the growth and quality of our branches” (Motlanthe, 2007). The secretary-general (Motlanthe) has been highlighting the weaknesses of the branches and making recommendations on how to make them more efficient, yet, the branches are still inefficient. In 2007, the party’s branches had decreased to 3933, of these only 2926 (69%) branches were fully functional (Motlanthe, 2007). The other 31% are administered by a few members and those in poor and rural communities are the most ineffective. The party’s NEC has been blamed by the secretary-general for not providing enough leadership assistance to the branches. The party has also admitted that it has not provided enough expertise (education) to its branches and members.

#### Leadership of the ANC

The ANC’s leadership structure can be divided into three structures: the National Executive Committee (NEC) is the party’s highest decision making body; members of the NEC are elected at the party’s conferences by its branch members. Branch members elect the members of the NEC including the party’s top six positions which include; the president, deputy president, secretary general, deputy secretary general, chairperson and the treasurer. The National Working Committee (NWC) is made up of 15 members who are drawn from the NEC. The last decision making body of the party is the Provincial Executive Committee (PEC) which looks after the affairs of the provinces. The leader of the party cannot make decisions on his own or lead the party independently, “he does this collectively with the party’s structures” (ANC 2001) which are the NEC, NWC and the PEC.

Leaders of the party are to be elected by branches and branch members through a nomination process. As Gumede (2002) notes there are no “policy on competitive elections” within the party.

Becoming an ANC leader is not an entitlement, a leader must be win “genuine acceptance by the membership, not through suspensions, threats or patronage, but by being principled, firm, humble and considerate” (ANC 2001).

The role of the leaders has been defined in the party’s constitution as well as in discussion documents (Umrabulo) of the party. The party notes that “no single person is a leader unto himself or herself, but a member of the collective which should give considered, canvassed guidance to the membership and society as a whole” (ANC 2001).

ANC leaders should also maintain a relationship with their constituents and consult with branch members, “he should strive to be in touch with the people all the time, listen to their views and learn from them” (ANC 2001).

When decisions have been made by the leadership of the party “the leader should justify his decision and explain why he has made those decisions (ANC2001) even if those decisions are not supported by the majority of the party.

Since coming into power in 1994, the party has seen most of its leaders taking up positions in government structures (national, provincial as well as local). This has created a leadership vacuum within the party because the “party on the ground” has been unable to hold the “party in office” accountable, due to the fact that those in public office hold senior positions within the party. The majority of NEC members hold senior positions in government structures; this makes it difficult for the NEC to hold its government leaders accountable because most of them are also NEC members.

Gumede (2002) argues that under Thabo Mbeki’s leadership, leaders were not elected by the branches; elections were based on patronage and allegiance to Mbeki. Leaders who were elected under Mbeki’s

administration were accountable to him and for Gumede “appointees of the leadership became loyal to the leadership, rather than be principled, a sure step towards the formation of a leadership cult” (Gumede, 2002:14).

#### Discipline and criticism within the party

“The democratic culture of the ANC, and its organisational and political discipline, is central to the character of the ANC. The culture of democratic and open debate allows us to come up with the most progressive policies and to allow the organisation to correct itself from within”. (Motlanthe, 2007)

The party encourages its members to raise their grievances and criticism within the structures of the party, no one is exempt from being criticised and the party encourages its members to criticise its leaders as well as the party and this criticism must be accepted. As the party notes in one of its discussion documents; “we do not believe that any of our members are beyond criticism. Our movement and our strategies are also not beyond criticism. We must also have a cadreship and leadership who are humble and prepared to listen to constructive criticism”

Disciplinary measures are not only limited to the party’s members, it is also applicable to its leaders who do not account to the party. “No single individual must become irreplaceable ... elected leadership can be recalled before the end of their term of office if they are not disciplined(ANC 2001).

The ANC encourages its members to raise concerns and not fear that those raising criticism will result in them not being promoted. The onus is also on the party’s leaders to create an environment where debate takes place “and deal with victimisation should this arise” [www.anc.org](http://www.anc.org). Even though the party allows its members to raise

grievances, under the Mbeki regime (1997-2007), debate within the party was gradually reduced. The term “the Zanu-Fication of the ANC” (Gumede, 2002:3) was used to describe the lack of political debate and criticism under Mbeki’s leadership.

Democracy though, is not only about democratic practices and leadership. The masses also have to be included at certain points. As Giliomee, Myburgh and Schlemmer warn, “as long as the leadership embraces an elite-led, neo-liberal democracy that is not challenged fundamentally from within or outside the movement, there will be little chance for meaningful debate and opposition” (Giliomee, Myburgh and Schlemmer, 2001:202). Giliomee, Myburgh and Schlemmer also warn against a truncated democracy, which they further explain by noting; “this has engendered an elite transition where democratic processes become increasingly circumscribed as the preserve of political and economic power-holders, and the boundaries of opposition and debate (particularly within the alliance) progressively narrowed” (Giliomee, Myburgh and Schlemmer, 2001:18).

It seems that post-Polokwane, the party has seen an increase in violent behaviour from its members. This has occurred during ANC meetings to ANC conferences. Indiscipline within the party has resulted in a number of violent incidents including the stabbing of the Western Cape’s chairperson by another party member. With indiscipline increasing within the party, the party has formed a Veterans League. As president Zuma noted at the inauguration of the league on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December 2009: “There is a need for your guidance to inculcate utmost discipline. We have seen shocking occurrences where people come to ANC meetings carrying weapons. We really need discipline in our movement” (The Times, 4 December 2009)

Even though the party encourages debate and democratic practices amongst its members, in reality this has not been the case. The party still resembles the secret organisation it was during the exile years. "The ANC had military structures and this influenced their way of operating. They tended to centralise; there was no much internal democracy. When they came into power they could not break away from this culture, which undermined internal democratic processes" (Mail and Guardian, 6 March 2009).

### The Mafikeng Conference 1997

The Mafikeng Conference in 1997 was one of the most important conferences of the party, as a number of key resolutions were passed. Thabo Mbeki was elected president of the ANC in 1997 at the Mafikeng Conference. At the conference the ANC took a number of resolutions which would give Mbeki and the NEC more powers. One of the key resolutions taken at the conference was that the party's conferences would be held every five years, instead of the customary three, "effectively limiting the prospects for the organisations leadership to become more accountable to its membership and its more inchoate popular following" (Lodge, 2002:29). Even though the National General Council was created, decisions that were made there would not be binding unless they were approved by the NEC.

The branch system was also changed; this would allow branches to be in line with local government, to reduce costs and remove branches which were unsustainable, many of which were based in rural areas. This diminished the powers of the members, particularly with regards to debating party policies as well as electing leaders. The conference also allowed the NEC to "dissolve lower constitutional structures" (Gumede, 2009). This was done to ensure that branches that were subject to factionalism could be dissolved; yet, analysts have argued that Mbeki would use this as an excuse to dissolve branches that were critical of his leadership.

The conference also introduced new measures to modernise the party, a party which would be a representative of a democratic South Africa. The resolutions taken at the 1997 conference would be used by Mbeki to centralise power in the ANC as well as the government. This came with a warning from party activists who argued: “the ANC risks losing its soul in the drive to transform itself into a tightly centrally controlled governing political party. The party’s soul has always been seen as the ability of ordinary members through branches to influence party policy and direction, elect leaders of their choice and allowing the flourishing of internal debates” (Gumede, 2002:3-4).

#### The Mbeki presidency: 1997-2007

“Mbeki carefully and skilfully consolidated his power through the constitution and all the institutions of the state. His objective was control of the political process in South Africa, and he set out to eliminate or marginalise opposition. His was not a democratic project. It was a power grab” (Pottinger, 2008:13).

After Thabo Mbeki became president of the ANC, he set out to transform the party into a modernised political party. After his victory in Mafikeng, Mbeki surrounded himself with leaders who were either his confidants/allies or those who had no ambition of succeeding him as ANC president, hence his choice of Jacob Zuma as deputy president. “Mbeki did not want a deputy who might challenge him midway through his term” (Gumede, 2005:49). In order for Mbeki to implement his policies and create his own legacy, he surrounded himself with people who were more sympathetic to his rule. “His detractors complain that his inner circle is like a royal court, with his advisors telling him only what they know he wants to hear” (Gumede, 2005:60). This view supported by Suttner who also notes that Mbeki’s inner circle consisted of those who were not a threat to him. “There



was a perception that Mbeki operated with a tight circle of followers and the only outsiders were those who were in no sense personally threatening” (Suttner, 2009).

In 1998, the NEC and the president were given the authority to elect premiers, mayors as well as director-generals. This resolution gave Mbeki more powers, “he appeared to have been motivated in part by the fact that a number of ANC provincial premiers were critical of central government policy, often went against it and frequently built their own power bases and patronage systems” (Gumede, 2009:42).

How then did Mbeki govern? There was no doubt that Mbeki wanted his policies to be implemented quickly and with minimal debate. In order to achieve this, he had to be autocratic in his rule. Gumede (2005) used Przeworski’s term of “Mandatism” to describe Mbeki’s leadership style. The meaning of the term is that leaders tell their constituents what they intend doing once they have been elected. When they are elected into office, leaders implement policies and make decisions without any form of opposition or consultation. It is only during elections that people are able to decide or be consulted about the party’s policies. Mbeki won the 1999 and 2004 (with a two-thirds majority) and for him this confirmed that what he was doing was correct for the party and country, with decisive victories in both elections, Mbeki’s powers grew.

Przeworski adds a note of caution by stating that this kind of policy style characteristic of neo-liberal reforms tends to undermine representative institutions, to personalise politics. At the Mafikeng Conference (1997).

What then was Mbeki’s style of leadership? Lodge described it as “that of a political manager, not a charismatic populist. He works behind the scenes, patching together alliances of disparate ANC factions to produce a power base” (Lodge, 2002:247). Gumede’s description of the Mbeki’s presidency is that he sees Mbeki’s

“presidency as running a business, SA INC, of which he is CEO, strongly in control of Cabinet and the ANC’s NEC” (Gumede, 2002:51). He further explains the presidency “as the core and apex of South Africa’s infant democracy” (Gumede, 2002:51). The SACP described it as the “presidentialising of the ANC”, the reason being that “it replicated the state presidential centre within the ANC and reduced the secretary-general’s office and organising work to administrative tasks, while housing politics in a separate, more or less parallel ANC that the president dominated” (Gumede, 2009:44-45).

Mangcu supports Lodge’s view of Mbeki’s leadership style, by using the term “managerialism”, which for him “values stability and control and are infatuated with strategy ... loyalty, survival, formalism and not rocking the boat, take precedence over risk-taking, experimentation, and innovation and openness – the hallmark of leadership” (Mangcu, 2008:140). Thabo Mbeki is an intellectual, the question that has to be raised is can intellectuals be good presidents? As they (intellectuals) “engage in a severe and lonely quest for the absolute truth, and end up frustrated with those who do not want to think” (Mangcu, 2008:140-141). Also, can intellectuals see their own mistakes and rectify them? It seems that in Mbeki’s case, the answer is a definitive no. As Van Zyl Slabbert remarked; “one of the dilemmas of our very important, intellectual President is that he has what I call Andy Capps disease: he has many (faults) but being wrong is not one of them” (Van Zyl Slabbert, 2008:140). Presidents go through periods when those around them do not understand their thinking or policies. The key is what do presidents do when those around him do not understand him. Does he engage with those around him, or does he become “self-absorbed”. The latter explanation would be applicable to Mbeki. For Mangcu, the problem with Mbeki’s leadership is “the lone warrior model of leadership” (Mangcu, 2008:45) summed up as single men believing that they alone can lead the country into a new era of their own making, with party members supporting the leader. “The political

party was central to the implementation of their segregationist vision, and without fail they unquestionably followed their leaders” (Mangcu, 2008:148). Mangcu uses Jan Smuts, Hendrik Verwoerd and P.W. Botha as examples of the “lone warrior model”.

An important shift took place under the Mbeki presidency, where decision-making was shifted from the ANC NEC (“party on the ground”) to the executive; the Office of the Presidency as well as cabinet. One of the justifications for this shift was that power had to be vested in the executive because of the increasing expectations and pressure on Mbeki’s administration to start transforming the country and to redistribute its wealth to the previously disadvantaged. Unlike Mandela’s administration which was characterised as lacking any form of co-ordination in government structures, Mbeki’s administration was to be different, which is why the three Cs were introduced into the executive and the presidency, these being: “control, co-ordination and centralisation” (Gumede, 2002:52).

Effectively Mbeki was the centre, with those around him being his deployments. Whereas Mbeki had considerable powers when he was deputy president under Mandela’s leadership, his deputy had his powers limited and one of his duties was to ensure that ANC MPs in parliament were not critical of the executive. Power was to be centralised in the presidency. The Minister in the Office of the Presidency, which has been described as being a de-facto Prime Minister, was the manager of the cabinet. The responsibility of the director general in the Office of the Presidency was to co-ordinate policies implemented by the executive, the office of the director general was “Mbeki’s nerve centre ... this is a powerful centre, from where policy implementation is planned and policy obstacles cleared” (Gumede, 2002:57).

As already mentioned, Mbeki was a strategist and this was evident when he would appoint members of the alliance into key positions of the economy, such as labour. "If contentious policies must be explained to the masses, who better to do so than those with impeccable leftist credentials, who just happen to be managing the reforms?" (Gumede, 2005:293). This was important because it meant that if the left were opposed to the government's economic policies or labour laws, then the onus would be on leftist ministers to defend and explain government policies. "Through a combination of outright political intimidation, ideological mysticism and the cooption of key ANC 'trouble-makers' and COSATU/SACP leaders into his governmental inner circle, Mbeki had largely succeeded in quashing genuine opposition and controlling the boundaries of debate ... each of them would have to toe the party ANC line"(Southall, 2001:200).

#### Power and Patronage post-1994

Since coming into power in 1994, the ANC has had access to state power as well as its (state) vast resources. This though has altered the character of the party. In 2000, president Mbeki noted: "the ANC had attracted careerists and opportunists who join the party with the sole aim of furthering personal careers and using state power to enrich themselves" (Sunday Times, 6 December 2009).

The biggest challenge the party has faced post-1994 has been the competition for state resources amongst the different factions within the party. Corruption and competition for resources challenges the party because when it comes to electing party leaders, people vote based on who will reward them financially and not based on principles or on ideologies. As the party has noted; "factionalism and divisions centre less on ideological questions and more (on) the struggle for control of state and the organisation for self-gain and for dispensing patronage" (Sunday Times, 6 December 2009).

The result of all of this is the emergence of a “war economy”, with state resources being the ‘ultimate prize’. “The wars of the pursue are self-funding: warring factions ensure that stability – anathema to the profits of war – is prevented at all costs. In short, instability is profitable” (Sunday Times, 6 December 2009). In the latter period of 2009, service delivery protests in Gauteng and Mpumalanga have been seen by some as different factions fighting each other to access state resources and not improve service delivery, but to enrich themselves. Post-Polokwane a number of ANC provincial conferences have been marred by incidents of violence. As Gwede Mantashe notes; “current experiences shows that ambition for office is accompanied with unruly and violent behaviour, and ill conceived ways of campaigning and lobbying. Election has become a matter of life and death” (Sunday Times, 6 December 2009).

The ANC’s policy of “cadre-deployment” has had negative impacts for the country, amongst them being poor service delivery and an incompetent and unskilled public sector. Since 1994, the party has tried in vain to introduce new guidelines for its deployees, which it hoped would lead to the ‘creation’ of new deployees. “This new person would epitomise a “new morality” that abhorred and resisted corruption. The new being would be incorruptible, and accept public office with the sole purpose of serving others” (Sunday Times, 6 December 2009).

The party’s leaders should also take responsibility for the corruption and patronage that is threatening to divide the party and poses a serious threat to the country’s democracy. Redress policies such as Affirmative Action (AA) and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) are noble in their aim, but they pose a threat when they are used incorrectly. “The elite networks around the party have been the main beneficiaries of Affirmative Action and Black Economic Empowerment. Such policies allow the party leadership to place loyalists in key positions, and at the same time compensate those

who have lost out in internal power struggles” (Giliomee, Myburgh and Schlemmer, 2001:70). Patronage poses another danger in that the party’s leaders use patronage to ensure that dissent is minimised. Leaders who control the party and state apparatus can use patronage to discipline their members, as they can be demoted or excluded from financial gains. “Through the use of patronage and punishment, a higher premium has been placed on blind loyalty than principle, and some ANC members are skirting perilously close to cult worship” (Gumede, 2005:298).

### Chapter 3: The ANC from 1912 – 1989

One cannot understand the African National Congress unless you know the history of the party since its formation in 1912. For much of the party in its present form is largely based on its history, its leaders as well as its alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP).

As Suttner (2003) notes, the history of the ANC can be classified into three main periods. These being: firstly, the formation of the party in 1912 till about 1949. During this period, the ANC was primarily a party of the black elite; the educated, clergy, businessmen and of royalty. Up until 1943 (when women were allowed to join the party) the party was patriarchal. Secondly, the 1950s saw the ANC evolve into a mass movement and began implementing a few democratic principles. Thirdly; the banning of the party in April 1960 and the formation of UmKhonto we Sizwe (MK) which translated into “Spear of the Nation” in 1960. The importance of the third period cannot be underestimated, as this was the period when the ANC was not only banned; it was also the period when the party began building its exile branches and its bureaucracy, a period where “secrecy, as opposed to open discussion, became dominant” (Suttner, 2003:181). This was the period when the party became a hierarchy based on army structures and structures similar to those of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), some of which are still evident in the present ANC.

#### The formative years: 1912 - 1949

The ANC was formed in 1912, as the South African Native National Congress (SANNC). The party was formed by the black elite; these included tribal chiefs and the religious leaders (who were educated at missionary schools). Since its formation in 1912, the party has continually stressed the importance of unity. Pixley Seme, one of the

founders of the party; noted that African kingdoms and its people had been conquered because of factions amongst the different African cultures/ethnicities. He later proclaimed that unless “We are one” (Suttner, 2009), Africans could not challenge British hegemony and establish their own union, which he called a “native union of the African people” (Suttner, 2009). As already noted, in the period from 1912 – 1949 the ANC can be classified as a party of the black elite and a representation of their interests. The party was seen as being passive by some of its members, including the militant youth league, which was formed in 1944. Mandela noted that “the ANC as a whole had become the preserve of a tired unmilitant, privileged African elite more concerned with protecting their own rights than those of the masses” (Mandela, 1994:22). This though changed with the formation of the party’s youth league (originally the Congress Youth League) and its programme of action.

#### The party of the masses: 1950s

This was a key moment in the party’s history; this was the beginning of a more militant and radical ANC, one that began using strong tactics against the apartheid regime. This led to the Defiance Campaign in 1952. A campaign which continued till the party was banned in 1960. To stress the importance of this period, the ANC grew from “7000 to 100 000 paid up members” (Suttner, 2009). This culminated in the signing of the Freedom Charter in June 1955. In contrast to the previous decade, the ANC was younger, less affluent and more likely to have members from the legal fraternity, trade unions as well as non professional backgrounds. Suttner (2009) picks up on an important change that occurred after the formation of the ANCYL and with Albert Luthuli entering the political arena:

“What Luthuli brought to the fore, along with the youth leaders already mentioned, was the ethical canon that distinguished the best of the ANC. He represented the notion of a leader who sought nothing for him or herself, who was prepared to lose all, and prayed



that he would resist any temptation not to do what was his moral duty to his people. This is what he called 'the gospel of service'".

This was also the period when the SACP (previously the Communist Party of South Africa) began playing a more influential role in the party.

#### An alliance is born: the ANC and SACP

The ANC was formed in 1912, whilst the SACP was formed in 1921. Tensions existed amongst both organizations as they represented different constituents; the ANC, the black middle class and the SACP, the working class. As Ndumo notes, "the relationship between the CPSA and ANC was one of working against each other, than to corporate and strengthen each other" (Ndumo, 1999:16). This though changed in 1946 when four members of the SACP were elected into the NEC for the first time. What also emerges is that various factions within the party (e.g. ANCYL, SACP) try to influence the direction of the party into achieving their ideologies. The SACP would influence the policies of the ANC from this period onwards.

In 1969, at the Morogoro Conference, the ANC adopted a policy drafted by the SACP which was titled: "Colonialism of the Special Type". It was at this moment that the party firmly became a movement of the working class as well as the masses and there occurred "the complete fusion of the ANC with the SACP" (Ndumo, 1999:23). This would be followed by the drafting of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), which stated that the ANC would overthrow the apartheid regime and instil a new democracy (first phase of the NDR) which would be "neither capitalist nor socialist" (initially); it would be based on the will of the majority. Once democracy was achieved and sustained though, the second phase of the revolution would take place, "the revolution takes place under

the leadership of the vanguard party of the workers; that is the SACP” (Ndumo, 1999:24).

#### 1960 - 1989: The ANC in exile and formation of MK

The banning of the ANC as well as the formation of MK in 1960 is of significant importance. From this period onwards up until it was unbanned in 1990, the party was highly secretive, hierarchical and bureaucratic. In essence, the party had to follow this route in order to ensure its survival. As Gumede clarifies; “in exile the ANC had to conduct a struggle with clear divisions between us and them, military style loyalty to those in command was almost essential for survival” (Gumede, 2002:13). After the party was banned, many of its leaders were arrested and sent into prison. In order for the party to survive, the remaining leaders had to go into exile (or face arrest) and rebuild the party.

The party set up bureaus across the world, with their primary bureaus being in Lusaka and in London. In exile, the party had to rebuild its structures to ensure that the struggle against apartheid would not subside. The party had a two prong strategy against the apartheid regime; diplomatic and military. This is why it had a diplomatic arm that would put pressure on countries in the United Nations to condemn the apartheid government and impose sanctions on it. The party in exile was beginning to resemble a de facto state; the party was invited to the United Nations consistently, it had representatives in a number of countries and it received funding from many countries and international organizations. Also “the ANC in exile exercised many of the functions of a state in relation to its members. In many ways, the relationship between the National Executive Committee and membership had characteristics of dependency rather than active membership” (Suttner, 2003:180). The military arm (MK), which had its bases in Angola and other African countries would continue the armed resistance. Coupled with this,

many of those who were exiled were sent to the SU primarily to be educated academically as well as in armed combat.

The apartheid regime, though, continued to infiltrate MK on a number of occasions. With this fear, the party became more secretive and debate was stifled. Yet, the situation called for these kinds of measures to be taken. Suttner, though, raises an important question about the party in exile, specifically about the training the new recruits received (ideology as well as military). He further goes on to state that “if it was primarily a politics of hierarchy it is more likely that what leadership says is what is believed, and dissent and even healthy discussion may be discouraged” (Suttner, 2003:188).

#### The 1980s: The ANC and UDF

The 1980s were a turbulent period in South African history. With a resurgent ANC and its allies making the country ungovernable, “organized black resistance in the 1980s owed a measure of its inspiration to the reappearance of the African National Congress as potent force in South African politics” (Lodge, 1991:173). The NP government responded to this by declaring state of emergencies. The 1980s is of particular importance because it saw the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) on August 20 1983, as well as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985. Both of these organizations would play a leading role in making the country ungovernable.

Even though the UDF was an ally of the ANC, the two organizations were different in a number of aspects. The UDF was open (democratic) as an organization and there was collective decision-making because the various groups that made up the UDF were independent and were elected. The UDF consisted mainly of civil society; student/youth groups, trade unions, township civic organizations and religious groups amongst others. “The UDF was

concerned with achieving consensus, so all affiliates were represented equally, regardless of strength" (Lodge, 1991:53). Whereas the ANC was a highly centralized organization, the UDF's real power lay in local areas and street committees; the UDF was a decentralized organization. There was greater involvement at branch level in the UDF as compared to the ANC. The UDF was a movement where "ordinary men and women act to change their world" (Meller, 2003:14) and where there was greater emphasis on "the people" rather than on the leaders, where "the people" were expected to be active participants and not passive citizens. This is what characterised the 1980s, greater civil participation.

It was becoming evident during the 1980s that ANC could not defeat the apartheid regime militarily. On the other hand, the apartheid regime knew that the resistance movement led by the ANC could not be suppressed. So started a period when the ANC and the NP met secretly (most famously in Lusaka in 1985 between a few ANC leaders and white business and NP leaders) to end the conflict and begin negotiations between the two parties. These meetings were attended only by a few officials from both parties, with the majority of their constituents being kept in the dark. Even senior figures within the ANC and MK were not aware of talks between the two. This is because leaders feared that they would be forced to halt talks with NP officials. The ANC had to create a balance; on the one hand they had to show their constituents that they would defeat apartheid, whilst on the other they had to ease the fears of white business.

#### Chapter 4: The ANC from 1990 – 1997

The ANC as well as other liberation movements were unbanned in 1990. It had become evident towards the end of the 1980s that the NP and the ANC could not defeat each other. The ANC faced a number of challenges during this period. The organization had been unbanned; it therefore had to rebuild its branches in the country. This would prove to be a difficult task, because for more than 30 years the ANC was largely based on its bureaus in foreign countries. The local branches that were evident were those of the UDF and other organisations of civil society, some of which were independent of the ANC. Not only did the party have to rebuild its branches, it also had to deal with the facts that the world had changed. Their strongest ally during the exile years, the Soviet Union and communism had collapsed spectacularly. The ANC re-entered into a world where globalization was becoming the norm. This is an important point as it would play a role in negotiations and in future economic policies of the country.

#### Rebuilding the party

After it was unbanned in 1990, the party faced a great challenge of rebuilding itself; it had to incorporate different groups into the party. A task which was made more difficult by the fact that each of these groups had different ideologies and experiences, as Suttner noted:

“Put briefly, the process of legalisation created a mammoth task for the ANC. It could not simply pick up from 1960 and draw in new members on the same basis. It had to rethink its approach, as members flooded in, many knowing little about the organisation, speaking different languages, and without adequate organisational and political education structures in place.” (Suttner, 2009). Lodge (1992) further explains that after it was unbanned in 1990, the ANC had to unite and incorporate the three levels of leadership; “the

elderly veterans who emerged from decades of confinement on Robben Island; the middle-aged managers of an insurgent bureaucracy; and finally, the youthful architects of the most sustained and widespread rebellion in South African history” (Lodge, 1992:44).

After the party was unbanned, many members of the “inziles” joined the ANC. Some of these members included those from the UDF. Yet, there were differences amongst the “inziles” and the exiles. “The party (ANC) accepted that leaders decided alone, secretly if necessary. The open and critical style of the UDF was unattractive” (Melber, 2003:16). The “inziles” in turn were accustomed to an open organization, which was accountable to its members, where debate was welcome and where decisions were made collectively between the leaders and the masses. The ANC though did gain from the UDF being incorporated into the party. It gave the ANC access to established branches at local level, which were highly organized and efficient.

The ANC also had to build its branches at local level after it was unbanned in 1990. Added to this “there was a deeper difficulty arising from the lack of a clear vision of what branches should actually do once they existed” (Lodge, 1992:61). Lodge supports the argument made by Suttner when he mentioned that the branches would be used when the NP was not giving into the demands or making concessions to the ANC during negotiations. As Lodge points out, “from the perspective of the ANC’s national leadership, the main functions of the branches was to give substance to the ANC’s authority and leverage at the negotiation table” (Lodge, 19992:62).

#### The Negotiations: 1990 - 1994

The ANC and the NP entered into formal negotiations with one another from 1990. This period was characterised by an increase in

political violence, not only between the ANC and the NP, but mainly between the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). The negotiations were led by a few ANC leaders, excluding leaders from MK, who were angered at the fact that the ANC called for the armed resistance without consulting the military wing. This set the tone for the negotiations, as leaders of the ANC would take decisions unilaterally without consulting their members. Suttner notes that the masses would be used strategically during the negotiation period: “The entire period of negotiations saw a leadership-driven process where the membership was only called on from time to time when it was necessary to break deadlocks. They would be used as a battering ram to break the resolve of the National Party –apartheid regime.” (Suttner, 2009)

It is important to state again that in the late 1980s, Mandela and other leaders of the ANC had been negotiating with the NP. These talks were held in secret and other groups within the ANC (such as MK) and the masses were not made aware of these talks; this is because the leaders feared that the people would persuade them to halt talks with the NP. The same situation occurs from 1990 in the negotiation period, when the party’s leaders did not consult with the other party leaders and the masses. Firstly, because it would prolong and cause negotiations to be delayed. Secondly, because most leaders and members would disapprove of the concessions the party was making to the NP. Suttner though feels that had the leadership consulted the members and had the leadership explained their stance to the party, then members would have accepted some of the decisions made and that it would not have left the majority of the members dissatisfied.

#### The ANC: 1994 – 1997

The ANC won the country’s first democratic elections in 1994 with a clear majority. The party also won seven of the nine provinces. The

ANC now faced many challenges as a ruling party, some of which were: how to transform itself from a liberation movement into a governing party; secondly, how would it allay the fears of investors (international and local) that the country would veer into a socialist path and, thirdly, the party's biggest challenge since the advent of democracy has been patronage. The biggest threat to the party since 1994 has been the fact that many members have joined the party partly to have access to state resources and to accumulate personal wealth.

### Democracy and patronage

One of the challenges the ANC has faced since 1994 has been patronage, not only in the NEC/NWC/PEC and local branches but also in government and for civil servants. With access to state resources and the opportunity to accumulate personal wealth, many have joined the ANC because they see the party was a way of enriching themselves.

The party's leaders have been the guilty parties in this regard. They have rewarded their supporters with positions in government, the party and with positions in state enterprises. "Each boss staffs his own section of the organisation with tried and trusted protégés; organisations' essential inner dynamics derive from webs of personal loyalties" (Lodge, 1992:47). After 1994, the party replaced experienced leaders with ones who were part of the leaders' inner circle, most of whom were with the leaders during the exile years. "As the ANC consolidated its bureaucracy, observers noted that the Mandela factor (was) crucial in the scramble for posts with the majority of them being filled by exiles or people close to the Robben Islanders – uncritical supporters of the old guard" (Lodge, 1992:53). As I will show later on, patronage within the ANC is the biggest threat the party faces, as it undermines democracy within the party and it leads to further divisions within the party.



## From RDP to GEAR

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was the ANC's economic policy when it came into power in 1994. The aim of the policy was to redistribute wealth to the previously disadvantaged black majority. The key with RDP was that there was wide consultation not only within the ANC, but also with its alliance partners, the SACP and COSATU (tripartite alliance). Was RDP feasible though? The apartheid regime collapsed because it could not sustain itself economically, the country's economy did not grow in the 1980s especially after U.S. banks began imposing sanctions on the government. When the ANC came into power it inherited the debt of the NP government. The country could not achieve its aims of rebuilding the economy and redistributing wealth amongst the black majority unless it attracted foreign direct investment (FDI). This is one of the reasons why RDP was hastily abandoned in 1996 in favour of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). The way that GEAR was implemented was one of the biggest controversies and a test for the party and its alliance partners.

The implementation of GEAR in 1996 set a precedent for the Mbeki regime from 1997 – 2007. It did this in two ways; first, the policy was a government policy. The ANC was not consulted and was excluded from making any contributions to the policy. More importantly, the policy was not debated by the party, not even by its highest decision making body, the NEC. Both Mandela and the finance minister (Trevor Manuel) insisted that GEAR would be implemented and this would be "non negotiable". Those who were critical of GEAR included members of the ANC, its alliance members and ANC MPs in parliament. Yet, ANC MPs or members of the party were not vocal of their dissatisfaction with the implementation of GEAR. "It was becoming clear that those who stepped out of line would be subject to intense pressure to conform, coupled to the threat of political and/or

material marginalization” (McKinley, 2001:191). The alliance too remained silent on the implementation of GEAR within ANC structures. The implementation of GEAR and the lack of debate that occurred around the implementation of the policy had significant results for the tripartite alliance. “One of the results of this was that base structures of all three alliance organizations were severely weakened, as disillusioned and critically minded cadres left, while other remained silent” (McKinley, 2001:192).

Secondly, GEAR as a policy was drawn up international consultants (mainly economists from international financial institutions, such as the World Bank). The danger with this is that it sidelines the ANC from coordinating key policies and they will not be consulted when the policies have been drawn up, as was the case with GEAR.

The implementation of GEAR was also important because this showed that the party in public office would direct policies without consulting the party on the ground. The ANC in government was largely made up of the exiled community, one which implemented decisions on its own, without consulting the masses. For most of the “inziles” this was a shock. A decade earlier, people were consulted about the direction of the UDF, a few years later they were excluded.

The implementation of GEAR also proves one of Michels’ theories; that once parties come into power they tend to abandon their revolutionary mandates/principles and adopt a more conservative approach. This is because countries that are recipients of FDI have conservative macro-economic policies. This is what the ANC did in 1996 when it implemented GEAR, in order for the country’s economy to grow; it had to follow micro-economic policies. Yet, the ANC is made up various groups, each of which has their own ideologies. Some would argue that the adoption of GEAR was a triumph for the conservatives in the party, “since the 1994 elections the conservative elements within the ANC in government have successfully managed to

concentrate power in their hands and effectively used it to subordinate their alliance partners, to their political objectives” (Ndumo, 1999:71).

### The tripartite alliance

After the ANC was unbanned in 1990, it assumed the senior role of the alliance. The relationship between the ANC and its two allies, the SACP and COSATU, began deteriorating when GEAR was introduced.

The ANC has limited the role of its alliance partners through its election victories, which has allowed the ANC to consolidate its hegemonic status within the alliance. “Mandela asserted that there would be occasions in which no agreement between allies would be possible and in such circumstance the ANC government’s view will hold sway” (Ndumo, 1999:73). The ANC and the SACP have been allies since the late 1940s when members of the latter were elected into former’s NEC. Yet, post 1994 “the SACP has been merely reduced or relegated to the level of being the ANC’s department, playing a role of providing a left ideological cover for the ANC’s right wing of politics” (Ndumo, 1999:58).

Under Mbeki’s leadership, the relationship between the ANC and its alliance partners was strained. Both the SACP and COSATU were excluded from making contributions to key government policies. When policies were announced the alliance partners would not criticise the party’s policies within ANC structures, they would do this within their own structures where they would roundly criticise the ANC policies. This was due to the fact that Mbeki had included members of the alliance within his government. “Through a combination of outright political intimidation, ideological mysticism and the cooption of key ANC ‘trouble-makers’ and COSATU/SACP leaders into his governmental inner circle, Mbeki had largely succeeded in quashing genuine opposition and controlling the

boundaries of debate...each of them knew that he would now have to toe the ANC line" (McKinley, 2001:200).

## Chapter 5: The Chief, 1997 – 2007

When Nelson Mandela stepped down as president of the ANC and of the country, there would be greater expectations and pressure on his successor. “His successor would have to be a tough minded pragmatist, who need to deal urgently with the numerous and daunting challenges confronting this newly liberated society with its many traditions, cultures and expectations. Mere patrician charm and the mantle of the struggle traditions were no longer enough” (Pottinger, 2008:1).

Thabo Mbeki came into power as president of the ANC in 1997 and two years later he would become the country’s second democratically elected president. When Mbeki was elected as president of the ANC and South Africa respectively, there were lots of expectations and pressures on him to start transforming the country.

Mbeki wanted to be a man of his own; he wanted to create his own legacy independent of Mandela’s legacy. Mbeki could create his own legacy by transforming the country (in particular its economy) and ensuring that the previously disadvantaged would prosper economically and socially.

Mbeki’s presidency of the ANC (1997-2007), and that of the country (1999-2008), has been seen as undemocratic, dictatorial and where power was centralised around his presidency. His presidency was also characterised by a lack of debate, the usage of state institutions to ‘silence’ his detractors as well as rivals for the presidency and his paranoia.

Was South Africa under Thabo Mbeki, a country that can be described as a “big man political culture”? Where the political and economic elite (loyal to Mbeki or sympathetic to him) govern, decide and implement policies. “It is these self-perpetuating ogas who call the

shots and operate with a combination of arrogance, guile, manipulation and ruthlessness” (Pottinger, 2008:6). As with the Mbeki administration, they ruled without being accountable to their party and constituents. They do not consult and do not govern with through consensus. Other examples include Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF allies and Sam Nujoma and his SWAPO allies.

This chapter will look at the Mbeki presidency; how he was able to accumulate so much power, how he centralised power, how he dealt with those he perceived to be a threat to his presidency and how he was able to shift power from the ANC into the Office of the Presidency (South Africa). I will also demonstrate how Mbeki’s leadership style was to be his downfall in 2007 when Jacob Zuma was elected as the party’s president at the Polokwane Conference.

#### Mbeki and Mandela: conflicting styles of leadership

The ANC’s policies have been consistent from the Mandela administration through to Mbeki’s administration. The main difference between Mbeki and Mandela has been their leadership style. Mandela preferred to consult with the NEC when he made decisions or when policies were being discussed. Mbeki, on the other hand, preferred to make decisions with his closest aides and in most cases did not consult the ANC’s NEC. Both men were educated, but Mbeki’s intellect was superior to that of Mandela, and because of this Mbeki felt that he could not delegate tasks to those around him. He felt that they would not deliver the same results without assistance from him.

One of the key differences between Mbeki and Mandela was that Mbeki was raised by an ANC in exile, a party that feared infiltration (as the NP government had successfully infiltrated the party on a number of occasions while in exile). For this reason, power and decision-making processes were vested in the party’s hierarchy

(primarily under Tambo and his closest aides), which made decisions without consent and in secret from the rest of the party. “Mbeki knew the ANC as an exile movement in which decisions were taken by the top coterie of leaders, and lower-level members were expected to accept and obey” (Gumede, 2005:57-58). Mbeki would rule the ANC as if it were a party that was still in exile and not in a democratic country.

### Centralising Power in the ANC and Government

“Mbeki’s plan of control was to be realised through three simple devices. The first was to establish control over all political appointments” (Pottinger, 2008:29).

When Mbeki was Mandela’s deputy, he was beginning to make decisions and policies that were not endorsed by the party’s NEC or its alliance partners. One of the ways that Mbeki centralised power was through the modernisation of the ANC. Mbeki began to sideline the ANC when he established the Consultative Council, which in effect replaced the presidential working groups and councils. The new council included professionals (such as economists) from the country as well as from abroad, including from world institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The aim of the council was to advise Mbeki on new policies that would be implemented in key sectors, such as the economy. This new council would also advise Mbeki on how to transform the party into a modern political party (one of the new measures that were introduced was the usage of smart cards for party members). The new councils replaced the NEC and forums formed by the ANC (i.e. NEDLAC) as arenas where policies were debated and approved. “Mbeki has opened the space for a lot of outsiders – outside the ANC, to influence government’s policies” (Gumede, 2002:63). This form of governance is in line with the ‘Third Way’ of governance. Parties like the Labour Party and the Democrats have introduced similar

measures, in a bid to transform their parties into new modern political parties in a globalized world.

One of the ways Mbeki centralised power was through the creation of the National Deployment Committee, under the leadership of his deputy Jacob Zuma. It was under this committee that the president and the NEC were allowed to elect the country's premiers, mayors, director-generals and MECs. "Through the deployment committee, Mbeki and the ANC national leadership can handpick those they want to be put in powerful positions" (Gumede, 2002:24). Even though provinces were allowed to select their own leaders, the electoral lists submitted by the provinces could only be ratified once they had been processed and approved by the NEC. Being the provinces' chairperson did not necessarily mean that one would automatically become the provinces premier (Ace Magashule is a case in point). Mbeki would install premiers who were not a threat to his plans. What has occurred is that branches have elected provincial chairs who have not been supported by the national leadership.

The deployment committee served another important purpose for Mbeki and other leaders. It could be used against deployed members who were critical of the party and Mbeki himself. "The deployment committee is also much feared for the fact that it can redeploy or demote anyone not toeing the party line to the political wilderness" (Gumede, 2002:25). The ANC has transformed the government and its (public) institutions, bar the judiciary, through transformation and cadre-deployment. Analysts have argued that the ANC has used this as a method of creating "a de facto one-party state" (Pottinger, 2008:38). Transforming the government has been made possible by the fact that the ANC governs with a clear majority in seven of the country's nine provinces. "When Mbeki spoke of the state, he actually meant the ANC. And when he referred to the government, he was talking about the ANC" (Pottinger, 2008:38), an ANC that was firmly under his control.



By deploying loyalists in most positions in government; from national to local government, as well as business through policies such as Affirmative Action and BEE. Mbeki administration had deployed in most sectors of public opinion. The only remaining sectors that were not under his control were the media as well as the judiciary.

The administration wanted to regulate the media because they saw the “fourth estate” as being highly critical of government policies and Mbeki’s leadership style. The administration tried to introduce a number of policies that would ensure “quality of reporting” (Pottinger, 2008). Pottinger and other analysts saw these as measures to try control the media. Other than the media, the ANC and Mbeki administration have tried to diminish the powers of the last bastion of constitutional power: the independence of the judiciary.

The Mbeki administration as well as the ANC in general had tried to diminish the powers of the judiciary, by effectively making the judiciary accountable to the justice minister (who would be an Mbeki loyalist). Even though transformation (that the judiciary should represent the demographics of the country) is required in the judiciary, as with other sectors, analysts have argued that transformation has been used to appoint pro-ANC judges. “The Mbeki administration had repeatedly expressed its unhappiness about the lack of transformation in the judiciary. Roughly translated, this meant irritation with independent judges who handed down rulings and orders against the government” (Pottinger, 2008:48).

The Mbeki administration was characterised by loyalists being rewarded and being kept in key government and public structures. It seems as though Mbeki emphasised loyalty over competency when appointing and retaining members of the executive and the public sector. An example of this would be the case of Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, who was seen as an incompetent health minister, yet, her

deputy minister was dismissed for criticising the government's policies on HIV/AIDS as well as the infant mortalities at a hospital which was collapsing and ineffectual. Dissidents and those from opposing factions (in particular the left and unionists) were either excluded from government and public structures or they were given junior positions in the government. "Independent and able party members were shunted aside or confined to technocratic roles or simply discredited" (Lodge, 2002:253).

South Africa uses the proportional representation system. This means that members of parliament and provincial legislatures are accountable to their political parties, as it is they who elect them and not their constituents. "This process places enormous power in the hands of the party bureaucrats and – inevitably – immeasurably strengthens the hand of a political leadership intent on consolidating its personal power" (Pottinger, 2008:43).

The ANC (especially Mbeki's opponents in the party) has tried to use its members in parliament to hold the government accountable for its policies and its failures. The party has tried to encourage its members in parliament to follow the country's constitution and critically debate government policies and call ministers and the president to account to parliament. Even though a resolution was passed by the party, which allowed its MPs to engage with government and the executive, the executive still does not account to parliament and the ANC caucus. In effect, under Mbeki's presidency, parliament was a rubberstamp for government policies; this was possible largely due to the fact that the ANC had a clear majority in parliament. In 2001, MPs who were criticising policy failures of the government were summoned to a meeting, here they were told to stop questioning the executive and that amendments would not be made to allow MPs to question the executive. Those MPs who continued to be militant were redeployed. Later on, Mbeki and the executive would establish the "political committee", which

would ensure that MPs would not criticise the executive and government policies. This committee was headed by Jacob Zuma.

### Remaining in Power

“Mbeki’s plan of control was to be realised through three simple devices... The second was to run away potential contenders for succession of the ranch” (Pottinger, 2008:29).

At the Mafikeng Conference in 1997, Mbeki and Cyril Ramaphosa were the leading candidates to succeed Mandela as ANC president. At the Stellenbosch Conference in 2002, the ANC presidency was uncontested because there were no rivals to the presidency of the ANC. How did Mbeki manage to ‘silence’ his rivals for the ANC presidency? What resources did he use to ensure that his rivals would not pose a threat to his presidency?

Some of Mbeki’s political rivals for the ANC presidency included Tokyo Sexwale, Matthews Phosa and Cyril Ramaphosa. All three were powerful members of the ANC and real contenders to the ANC presidency. Mbeki knew that all three had considerable support from disgruntled ANC leaders as well as the branches. In order to keep the trio and other rivals from the ANC presidency, Mbeki used state institutions and false accusations against his rivals to remain president of the ANC and therefore president of the country.

In 2001, Sexwale, Ramaphosa and Phosa were falsely implicated in organising a coup to oust Mbeki from power. It was not the first time that the three were falsely accused; prior to this Sexwale was accused of being a drug dealer and Phosa was accused of being an apartheid spy. The accusation of the three was well timed by the Mbeki administration. “Notably, rumours of impropriety, carefully timed to discredit political rivals, would become a familiar tactic of ANC leadership struggles ... by the time accusations had been

investigated and found baseless, the alleged offender would long since have been effectively neutralised as a political contender” (Gumede, 2005:49-50). The three were accused before the ANC’s national conference in Stellenbosch in 2002, when elections of the leadership of the party would be held. Not only would Mbeki use these tactics against his rivals for the party’s presidency, it would be also used against those who were in the running for positions in the NEC, which after the Stellenbosch Conference was largely dominated by Mbeki loyalists. In essence, Mbeki’s strategy not only worked because he remained president of the party and that the NEC was dominated by loyalists, it also worked because policies were implemented at the conference without any form of opposition.

The danger for the country’s democracy was that public institutions were used against Mbeki’s rivals, in order for Mbeki to achieve his goal of being president of the party, and therefore of the country three years later in 2004. The usage of institutions which are meant to be independent does not bode well for the country’s democracy. As Mark Gevisser added, “it’s about a ruling party that has subjected the national interest to its own internal power struggle, thus subjecting the whole country to what is, in essence, a family feud” (The Star, 21 April 2009). With the party ruling with a clear majority, it means that it has access to state resources and has members deployed in key state institutions such as the National Intelligence Agency.

Not only would Mbeki use state resources against his rivals, he would also use state resources to keep his allies from being prosecuted. A case in point is Jackie Selebi, who was being investigated by the Scorpions for allegedly aiding drug dealers and ‘covering up’ the murder of mining magnate Brett Kebble. Mbeki used his executive power to dismiss the head of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and reverse a warrant against the arrest of Selebi. In a country that is experiencing a crime epidemic, what message does it send

when the country's top cop is implicated in criminal activity and then receives protection from the head of state? It sends out a message that maintaining political power is more important than dealing with an issue that threatens to destabilise society. In 2005, Mbeki would once again use state resources to remove a political rival to his presidency.

Jacob Zuma was fired as the country's deputy president in 2005 after being implicated in a corruption case relating to the arms deal. Zuma was fired by Mbeki even though he was not charged with any crime. The general view is that Zuma was fired because he had his own ambitions of succeeding Mbeki as ANC president. "The reason for Zuma's dismissal was not because he was corrupt, but because he was beginning to threaten Mbeki's plans for an extended presidency" (Pottinger, 2008:65). Questions were asked as to why Mbeki stopped a probe by the Scorpions into the alleged criminal dealings of Jackie Selebi (who happened to be an Mbeki ally), and why the president did not offer the same protection to his deputy. The firing of Zuma in 2005 was the beginning of Mbeki's downfall.

#### "The Zanu-fication of the ANC"

"Mbeki's plan of control was to be realised through three simple devices... The third was to create a culture that would discourage disobedience or even debate" (Pottinger, 2008:29).

The term the "Zanu-fication of the ANC" (Mangcu, 2008:77) was used to describe the lack of political debate and criticism in the Mbeki administration. Mbeki's ANC was compared to Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF which too was highly intolerant of debate and criticism of its leaders and the party's policies. Both the ANC and ZANU-PF were liberation movements which came into power in South Africa and Zimbabwe respectively. With clear majorities as governing parties, both parties have failed to transform themselves from liberation

movements into modern governing parties, which adhere to democratic practices. "To varying degrees, these revolutionary liberation parties have transformed themselves into a new ruling conservative elite" (Suttner, 2003:201). The argument of both parties was that the liberation movement was now in power and that there was no need for the masses to involve themselves in issues of governance. They (the masses), should allow the party to implement policies. In essence the masses had to trust the government to do what was right for them (as government 'knew' what was best for them) and any interference from those outside of government and the party's leadership would be "counter-productive". Suttner notes that liberation movements face a number of challenges once they become governing parties, yet, they still aim to centralise power. "Confronted with the challenges of nation-building while at the same time consolidating their own power bases, national liberation parties have felt the need to centralise power and promote greater party and government autonomy" (Suttner, 2003:201)

Debate within the ANC under Mbeki's leadership was decreasing steadily. When policies were made by Mbeki and his inner circle, they were rarely debated by the ANC and when policies were debated, it was unlikely that the policies would be subject to any changes. With Mbeki being firmly in charge of the party's and state's resources, he governed by fear, excluding those who were critical of him and his policies from being deployed into positions of power and excluding them from lucrative government businesses. "The climate of fear instilled by the party bosses, and the self-censorship it breeds, spills into broader society, because the ANC is such a dominant party" (Gumede, 2005:148).

The Mbeki administration was one which was intolerant of criticism and debate; this would manifest itself in the public arena. An example of this was when the SABC blacklisted Mbeki's critics from being interviewed on the public broadcaster. For when the leaders

of a party do not encourage criticism of the party and of themselves, then it is difficult for those outside to practice tolerance. "Tolerance is an end in itself only when it is truly universal, practiced by the rulers as well as by the ruled" (Marcuse, 1997:19). When an individual(s) goes against one of the principles of democracy which is equality, and they feel that they are more equal than others, then they will be highly intolerant of those below them. "Adaptive leadership requires introspection, self-criticism and being open to criticism of others. It requires accepting the bona fides and integrity of those who criticise you, and at times questioning the comfortable assumptions and dogmas of your own history and of your own constituents" (Mangcu, 2008:133).

What aided Mbeki was that he was controlled most elements of the ANC and its resources, which included the control of information. This allowed him to control what information was available to members of the party and the public. When documents were written, they tend to exclude key information or the accusations that have been made. "In a democracy with a totalitarian organisation, objectivity may fulfil a very different function, namely, to foster a mental attitude which tends to obliterate the difference between true and false, information and indoctrination, right and wrong" (Marcuse, 1997:22).

As Gumede (2008) noted, internal democracy in the ANC was on the decrease and had been replaced by "groupthink", which "is the celebration of the individual above the collective in its naïve and unquestioning acceptance of the leader as infallible" (Gumede, 2008:306). This is what occurred in the ANC under Mbeki's leadership when those around him did not question him or the policies that were being implemented. By conforming to this notion ("groupthink"), debate is stifled and this impacts negatively on wider debates within the public arena and in society as a whole; "policy errors are most likely to occur when people are rewarded for

conformity” (Gumede, 2005:307). This has had a negative impact on society because opposing views or alternative policies (which may add greater value to society) are not heard or looked at. By limiting debate on policies (such as GEAR when Trevor Manuel said it was non-negotiable) it means that flaws in the policy cannot be exposed. As a policy, GEAR seemed to be a correct policy to grow the country’s economy, yet, because it was not debated in its entirety, key failures of the policy (which have had negative consequences for the country, i.e. an increase in unemployment and the lack of local investment) were not reviewed by those who implemented the policy.

COSATU added this critique of Mbeki and the way he handled debate: “he never debates on the strength of his argument. He always seeks to misrepresent people’s genuine concerns in order to ridicule those he disagrees with and question their integrity” (Mangcu, 2008) Mbeki’s critics shared similar views (such as the SACP), when they also noted that Mbeki would use his ‘superior’ intellect to ridicule those who opposed government policies and were critical of his leadership. Not only would Mbeki ridicule his critics within ANC structures, he would also ridicule them in the public arena. By criticising his opponents in the public arena, Mbeki would send out a strong message to his critics, inside the ANC, the Alliance and those in influential sectors (i.e. business, academia and the media). This public ridicule, which included critics being labelled racists, is characteristic of dictatorial regimes.

Once the NEC has passed a resolution it is binding on all ANC members. An argument can be made that at times policies may have to change if they do not benefit society. Under Mbeki’s leadership, the NEC was largely filled by loyalists, so passing resolutions did not prove troublesome. The ANC NEC under Mbeki was highly critical and some would say disrespectful towards those who opposed government policies. An example of this lack of tolerance and disrespect was when Nelson Mandela criticised the government’s



policies on HIV/AIDS, which was to result in thousands of deaths and an increase in the infection rate. Mandela was heavily criticised by Mbeki's NEC because he criticised the government in the public arena, something the ANC forbids its members from doing.

Some of the policies implemented under the Mbeki administration demonstrate that Mbeki was 'out of touch' with the society that he was governing. "I do not think that Mbeki has made an effort to understand this society in all its complexity, to press and feel its pulse. He leads the country with an exile mind-set" (Mangcu, 2008:139).

Mbeki's leadership style during his tenure as ANC president; the lack of debate and criticism within the party and government; lack of consultation with the Alliance and the branches; the usage of state resources to deal with critics within the party and in society and the dismissal of Jacob Zuma in 2005, would result in his defeat as president of the ANC at the party's next conference in Polokwane 2007, a defeat which Mbeki had brought upon himself. "While Mbeki tried faithfully to enforce the line when it suited his desire to come up with his own policies, he failed to appreciate that ultimately his authority came from the party" (Mangcu, 2008:178) a party which would reject its leader, primarily because he had forgotten that it was the party and its members that had elected him. He simply chose to ignore the party and its members and he had risen above them. The party elected him as president, now the party would hand his rival a decisive victory and deliver a crushing defeat to Mbeki.

## Chapter 6: The Polokwane Revolt

Thabo Mbeki announced that he would be availing himself for the presidency of the ANC for a third term. South Africa's constitution limits a president's term to two terms. The ANC though does not put a limit on how many terms a person can serve as its president.

When Mbeki announced his candidacy, some of the questions asked were: was he planning to change the country's constitution to allow him to serve a third term, which was possible considering the ANC had a two-thirds majority in parliament, or would Mbeki opt for the "Putin Way" (Pottinger, 2008) where he would become the country's Prime Minister. The other question being: did Mbeki want to be ANC president for a third term so that he could choose his successor, who would be a loyalist and continue with the policies of the implemented by his administration, which is the "Obasanjo Way" (Pottinger, 2008). What occurs here is that power is shifted from the Office of the Presidency at government level, to the Office of the Presidency at party level. In essence, the ANC would actually be in charge and government would be accountable to the party, a view that Suttner supports, who terms it the "Soviet option". He notes that Mbeki would "retire to the ANC presidency but declare that the revolution is led by the revolutionary organisation, and direct whoever succeeded him" (Suttner, 2009). Either way, it was clear that Mbeki wanted to maintain some level of power and complete his legacy.

Prior to the conference in Polokwane, Mbeki believed he could win a third term as president of the ANC, this, despite the fact that the odds were stacked against him. As analysts have noted, Mbeki was a man who was out of touch with the country's citizens, as well as members (the masses) of his own party. As Mangcu notes, "he acted like an oligarch in a country with strong democratic traditions. He took members of his own party for granted, and some might even say

he abused them. His stay in power is littered with all manner of political corpses” (Mangcu, 2008:157).

In order for democracy to be advanced within the ANC and ultimately within the country, Mbeki had to be defeated in a contested election. As Mangcu noted in an open letter to Mandela prior to the Polokwane Conference, on Mbeki he wrote: “he has single-handedly taken the country to its most dangerous and most perilous moment. He has become a god unto himself, unaccountable to nobody in particular but himself” (Business Day, 16 October 2007). One can argue that Mbeki was acting like a dictator when he was president of the ANC and of the country, at Polokwane; the dictatorship had to be ended in order for the country’s democracy to be stabilised. “Since the ANC is so dominant and the opposition parties are so weak, a lack of democracy within the ANC and weak democratic institutions outside it will put a break on future economic growth and reduce the quality of South Africa’s democracy” (Gumede, 2009:54).

#### The Polokwane Conference

The ANC’s conference in Polokwane (2007) was a watershed for democracy within the party as well as for the country. The ANC’s succession battle was playing out in the public arena and one can make a strong argument that, for the first time, we saw an open contest for leadership positions within the party. “The open competition and campaign for party leadership signified a break with ANC tradition, which had previously ensured the careful management of succession and the resolution of divisions out of the public view” (Fikeni, 2009:10). The succession battle would not only play itself out within ANC structures, but in the public arena, i.e. in strikes by COSATU and at government functions, where some of Mbeki’s allies were heckled by supporters of Jacob Zuma.

Throughout his reign as president of the ANC, Mbeki had alienated the very party and people he was meant to serve. Not only did Mbeki alienate the people he was serving, but he had also alienated a number of powerful individuals within the party. The party's elites who had been alienated by Mbeki as well as the party's members would form a coalition (which was dubbed as the "walking wounded" by analysts and the media) to oust Mbeki as the party's president. This coalition was made up of various factions, factions whom clashed with one another and some of whom share the same ideologies as Mbeki and had supported his economic policies. As Blade Nzimande noted, "the forces (which had) mobilised against Mbeki before the ANC's 2007 national conference included a diversity of tendencies – some of which did not have any principled or ideological difference with the 1996 class project" (The Times, 13 September 2009).

Knowing that the branches were dissatisfied with Mbeki's leadership style, the elites that opposed Mbeki energised the branches and vowed change if they were elected into office. Good terms this as "the manipulation of populism by elitism" (Good, 2003:1). Those who opposed Mbeki knew that they had little chance of ousting him if they did not involve the party's members because of the resources at Mbeki's disposal. Their main hope came from the party's branches, as they would be sending delegates to the conference to vote for a particular leader. It is important to note that once branch members endorse a particular candidate, their delegates must vote for that member, this is why Zuma's faction campaigned vigorously at branch level.

The party's conference was a tense affair, prior to the conference starting; some branches had indicated that they wanted Zuma as the party's next president. Prior to the conference it seemed clear that Mbeki was going to be ousted as the party's president with a humiliating defeat. Mbeki, though, thought he could still win the

party's presidency, further illustrating how out of touch he was with the dealings of the party and its members. "Zuma's grassroots popularity also reflected the inadequacies of Mbeki's loyalists – particularly at Polokwane, where they appeared so out of touch with grassroots sentiment that they believed until the 11<sup>th</sup> hour that they had done enough to win a third term for the 'Chief'" (Mail and Guardian, 3 March 2009).

As expected Zuma was elected president of the ANC and with a resounding win over Mbeki. Not only did Zuma win the party's presidency, his allies were elected into the party's top six positions and largely dominated the NEC, whose members were increased to 80. Polokwane was seen as not only a victory over Mbeki, but also a defeat for the exile faction, "a political culture that tended to emphasise centralisation of power, teamwork, secrecy and discipline, but also intellectualism" (Fikeni, 2009). One though has to ask the question: was Polokwane about leadership change and the circulation of elites, or was Polokwane about the masses taking charge once again? It seems that the former is applicable.

Analysts have noted that Polokwane was not about policy changes, but more about leadership changes. Polokwane was seen as a rebellion against president Mbeki. As Habib summaries, "it was around political management and style of leadership" (Sunday Times, 6 January 2008). Suttner notes that those who wanted Mbeki ousted from power "never had grievances against Mbeki until they fell out of favour and lost their jobs, or were disaffected for other non-political reasons" (Suttner, 2009). The ANC leadership post-Polokwane is fundamentally a coalition brought together by a sense of exclusion – from wealth and power ... they are united by a desire for wealth. "What seems clear is that the battle of Polokwane was for power and loot" (Suttner, 2009). It was about having access to distribute patronage and business deals. As Justice Malala asks; was Polokwane about "it's my turn to eat" (The Times, 13 September 2009) referring

to the new elite having access to the state's wealth? This again illustrates that being elected into a leadership position is seen as having access for one to accumulate wealth. As Gwede Mantashe warns; "if we do not succeed in fighting and defeating this tendency, we will continue to see bitter fighting for election to positions in the ANC because it will create opportunities to dispense patronage and accumulate at a personal level" (The Times, 13 September 2009).

There were no major shifts on policies at the conference, despite the fact that it is at conferences where policies are made and debated, where the branches can take part. "There was no fundamental departure from the ANC's policies, an emphasis was placed on more effective implementation of existing policies and better delivery mechanisms" (Fikeni, 2009:20). Some resolutions were taken at the conference, some of which were not different from previous conferences. An example of this would be that the NEC was to hold the executive accountable, that they (NEC) monitor the executive to ensure that their mandates were being carried out. What was different was that some members of the executive were not re-elected into the NEC and most members of the ANC NEC were not members of the executive yet. In addition, "it was proposed that the office of the ANC's general secretary should be expanded, while the office of the presidency reduced. This was an attempt to boost the party's veto over the presidency, the executive and the government" (Gumede, 2009:53). Another resolution that was taken was that the president and the NEC would not appoint premiers, but that this would be done by the branches.

## Chapter 7: What Has Changed? The ANC post-Polokwane

Would Polokwane bring changes to the ANC? How significant was the conference? Yes, for there was a contest for the presidency and top six positions of the party, but, as Mangcu notes: “that ultimate social quality called leadership has become a matter of inheritance. Thabo Mbeki writes about how a dying Oliver Tambo divined him with leadership of the ANC, and Jacob Zuma claims it was his turn” (Mangcu, 2008:181). The argument made by Zuma and his allies was that he was the ANC’s deputy president and that because of this he was Mbeki’s natural successor. There might have been a contest for the party’s presidency, yet, why was it frowned upon when Tokyo Sexwale availed himself for the presidency, as an alternative to both Mbeki and Zuma? Was it because he campaigned for the presidency publicly (which the party does not allow) or because it was not his turn?

Some analysts (Friedman, Coleman) thought that the ANC would be transformed into a new party post-Polokwane; a party that was more open, transparent, where debate would be encouraged amongst all the party’s members and where the party’s leaders would be held accountable to the party’s members who had elected them. Some thought that the branches would be active and play their role of holding the party’s leaders accountable. “The ruling party’s branches have been energised and know that they can remove those in power if they do not have confidence in them. They tasted power on the conference floor in Polokwane” (Sunday Times, 2009). There was a new vision for the branches. Sadly though, it seems as if this vision has not been materialised.

As already mentioned, the core of the Mbeki era policies were not changed by the new leadership. The party’s branches were still being used for the same purpose as was the case in the past under Mandela and Mbeki: to ensure victory for the ANC at the country’s general

elections. And as Suttner adds, in reference to the relationship between the leaders and the masses, “there is a continuation since 1994 in that the masses have always ceded power to the leaders” (Suttner, 2009).

At the Polokwane Conference, the party took a resolution that the provinces would elect their own premiers, yet, at the same time the party took a resolution that it would continue with gender equality, which meant that there would have to be a 50/50 (men and women) split of premiers after the country’s general elections. The problem arose when all nine provinces had their provincial conferences, to elect members of the PEC. In all nine provinces men were elected as the provinces’ chairs. This resulted in a dilemma for the party. The party chose to go with the 50/50 split of premiers, and four women were elected as premiers. It was the president and the NEC that chose the female premiers, despite the branches not electing them. As was the case under the Mbeki administration, we continue to have two centres of power in the provinces where the women were elected as premiers. As Dr Mohau Pheko pointed out on SABC news, “this creates (potentially) two centres of power and factions as well as the female premiers being undermined and as with Mbeki, factions and disunity could easily develop in these provinces” (Pheko, 2 May 2009).

Post-Polokwane we saw the purge of Mbeki allies not only from the party, but from the government, public sector as well as business. They were replaced by those who had aided Zuma in becoming president of the ANC. As the Star newspaper noted; “the Party strengthens itself by purging itself” (The Star, 13 September 2009). The purge of Mbeki loyalists within the ANC was easier to implement because Zuma controlled the party; however, the purges in government and the public sector proved more difficult as Mbeki controlled the government. What we had post-Polokwane were two centres of power; “one a president without power, the other a power without a presidency” (Pottinger, 2008:7). One centre of power



(Mbeki) was housed at the Union Building, whilst the other (Zuma) was housed at Luthuli House at ANC headquarters.

As the Mail and Guardian (9-16 April 2009) noted; in Zuma's victory over Mbeki we were simply exchanging one Mafia for another. The paper expanded on this by adding that public institutions were being used to achieve certain goals or leadership positions in the ruling party. A view supported by the Star, when (corruption) charges against Zuma were dropped because he had obtained tapes from National Intelligence Agency. "This suggests that he is guilty of the very sin he accuses Mbeki: the abuse of state organs to fight his own political battles" (The Star, 21 April 2009). Zuma has placed loyalists in key sectors in the country's public institutions. He has placed loyalists in areas like the security cluster (i.e. National Intelligence Agency). And if opposing factions within the ANC continue using state resources to achieve their aims, then the "effective functioning of the state" (Fikeni, 2009:9) will be affected negatively. As Suttner cautions, "the one person who cannot divorce his past from that of Mbeki is Zuma, and it is complete fabrication to now point him as always having been different, and with popular leanings" (Suttner, 2009). Suttner warns that a Zuma presidency of the party and of the country poses a threat as well. He adds that the "Zuma project is in fact not a political alternative; there has been a continuation in policy. War-lordism is the difference between Mbeki and Zuma" (Suttner, 2009). Under the Zuma presidency we see a more militant ANC and its associates, such as Military Veterans and the ANCYL using violent expressions against opponents of Zuma and of the ANC.

The ANC under Zuma faces a number of challenges. One of the challenges that he will face is keeping his coalition (which is divided ideologically) intact. Those who helped Zuma achieve victory at Polokwane will expect favours in return. The business interest will want economic policies to remain the same, the only difference being that Mbeki's allies must be replaced by those who aided Zuma. The left (SACP and COSATU) will want to see changes in economic

policies. As COSATU noted; “they played no small role in the ANC’s victory. Now we are mobilising for our own interests” (Sunday Times, 2009), the left will also want to be consulted when policies are made, because in the Mbeki they were rarely consulted. Zuma will also have to demonstrate that he is willing to consult widely when policies are being made, Zuma will have to prove that he can govern differently from Mbeki and tolerate diverse opinions within the party and from society as well. Should he be successful, then internal democracy within the party will be strengthened and this could only have a positive impact on the country and strengthening the country’s infant democracy.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

Can political parties be democratic? Yes, they can be democratic, if they adhere to their constitutions and follow due procedures. As Michels has noted, it is impossible for political parties to take into consideration the views of all their members. Hence, the need for delegates who will represent their respective constituents. The introduction of delegates leads to specialists being created and for Michels, this leads to a wider division between the leaders and the masses.

Michels writes about how democracy is mainly about “oligarchs” who dominate political parties. Michels writes that when political parties are formed, they are democratic in their nature. As political parties evolve, they come to be dominated by oligarchs. Leaders become indispensable, or form alliances with one another primarily in order to safeguard their interests. Michels also sees the masses as contributing because they are unable to mobilise.

Elite theory has a weak and strong hypothesis. This dissertation has focused primarily on the strong hypothesis. This sees the elite as small, closed and concentrated. Even though structures are put in place to hold the elite accountable, they (elites) still do not account to their party and its members. The members on the other hand, seem unable to hold the elite accountable because they lack the resources to do so and because it seems that members of political parties are becoming less active in their branches.

Political parties are dominated by elites, largely because they have resources, such as wealth and intellect amongst others. These resources are personal, public (from the party and the state). As long as the elites have access to resources, it will be difficult for the masses to challenge them. One of the ways that the masses can hold the elite accountable and assume some form of power is when there

are elections. It is during electoral processes that the party's members can exert their authority on the party's elites.

The African National Congress has been the focus of my dissertation. The ANC's elites seem to fit the description of a strong hypothesis of an elite theory, particularly under the rule of Thabo Mbeki, where the elite were small, closed and unaccountable to the party's members. Power in the ANC lies in an elite located in the leadership organs of the party - the Executive, National Working Committee and National Executive Committee. This leadership is not democratic in the sense of being controlled by, or accountable to, branches and ordinary members.

The Polokwane Conference seemed to test Michels' theory, yet, post-Polokwane we have not seen much change in terms of the relationship between the party's leaders and its members. This seems to demonstrate that Polokwane was about elite circulation, not the masses reasserting their authority. The party has also not changed many of the policies that were implemented under the Mbeki administration. It seems that Polokwane was about one set of elites manipulating the masses in order to achieve victory over another faction of elites (which was the governing elite).

The ANC has been the governing party in the country for the last 15 years, with a clear majority. The party has transformed the public sector to serve its own interests at the expense of the country's citizens. We have seen state institutions, which are meant to be independent, being used to settle internal feuds within the party. This does not bode well for the country's infant democracy, which can be influenced by its leaders. If democracy is to be consolidated in the country, then we will need an ANC that is democratic, open to criticism and have a policy on competitive elections within the party. Should this happen, then democracy in South Africa will be consolidated.

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