

Article for F.M. on Electoral Reform

Although we have a democratic electoral system it is one of the worst instances of unaccountable politics as far as the ~~an~~ average voter is concerned. The current system, which is a closed list proportional system, does ^{not} give any voter access to a public representative accountable to the area where he or she lives. The party, as the ANC does, can allocate a representative to a particular area but that gives no binding influence on the part of the voter over such a public representative.

It is often forgotten that the current electoral system was seen a "transitional mechanism" by the Constitutional Court, to ~~the~~ help SA through the difficulties of a first, open general election ~~in~~ in 1994. It was specifically stated that by the 1999 general election the final electoral system had to be in place. It wasn't until an Electoral task team was appointed by Cabinet ~~in~~ in 2001 to investigate and propose a final electoral system I was appointed as coi

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Chair. We took evidence from a number of
NGO's and all the Political Parties in
Parliament. Whilst the E.T.T. was in Session
Parliament decided to introduce floor crossing.
This further eroded the principle of democratic
accountability. It was quite extraordinary but
almost all the leadership of political parties
favoured the current ~~political~~ electoral system
as well as floor crossing. Both mechanisms placed
enormous power in the hands of party bosses
to appoint public representatives. The average
voter had no say whatsoever.

My warning at the time was that such a situation
would lead to either voter apathy or aggressive
anarchy — both instances of voter powerlessness.
Since then we have had Ichintong, Orange Farm,
the burning of buses, Stone throwing at cops etc.
All signs that the current electoral system
makes it difficult, if not impossible, for voters
to confront public representatives about their
grievances.

More interesting, I have been approached by
old ANC members in good standing from Soweto. They
talk about forming a new political movement because

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the current ANC is corrupt and abuses patronage. They claim that their anger is widespread and not only confined to Soweto, However after some protracted discussion they discovered that they were largely ignorant of the problems that they would encounter with the current electoral system should the wish to contest the next ^{general} election. The now say their rallying cry is "Know your M.P.!" I have no idea how widespread their disillusionment is, but I do not think it is insignificant.

Another interesting development is COSATU and the SACP demand that there should be a turnover and equal discussion between themselves and the current ANC in appointing new members of Parliament for the next general election. This would seriously entrenched the unaccountable nature of the current electoral system and leave the average voter even more powerless in determining who the public representative should be.

The extra-ordinary irony is that the Polokwane election of Jacob Zuma was far more representative and democratic than any general election we have had since 1994. Every branch of the ANC elected a representative to go to Polokwane and vote for a new leader. Zuma won. One would

have thought that ^H Zuma would be far more outspoken for the need ~~to~~ to change the current electoral system based on his Polokwane experience. Not a word thus far.

The prospects of change in the current electoral system before the next General Election seem remote. Consequently dispensing patronage and co-opting elites will be the order of the day. South Africa has extra-ordinary space for civil society action and there is a depoliticised military security system. Consequently I do not see a violent upheaval and challenges to the incumbents in power. But there could be a proliferation of aggressive anarchy across the country which will have serious, if not, fatal consequences for the unity and cohesion of the ANC as the governing party.

Ly. Stalder