Article for EM. on Electoral Reform

Although we have a democratic electoral system, it is one of the worst instances of unaccountable politics as far as the average voter is concerned. The current system, which is a single, but 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 bonding 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 help SA through the difficulties of a first, open general election in 1994. It was specifically stated that by the 1999 general election the final electoral system had to be in place. I was appointed to head the Constitutional Court task team in 2001 to investigate and prepare a final electoral system.
Chart: he took evidence from a number of NGOs 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 that 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 vote apathy or aggression — both instances of voter powerlessness. Since then we have had Jehangir, 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
The current ANC is corrupt and abuses patronage. They claim that their anger is widespread and not only confined to Souths. How ever, 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 general election. The new phrase is 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 three-way and equal division between themselves and the current ANC in appointing new members of Parliament for the next General Election. This would seriously entrench 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 extraordinary 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 work for a new leader. Zuma won. One would
have thought that Siza would be far more outspoken for the need to change the current electoral system based on his "Pele"-wave 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 elders will be the order of the day. South Africa has extraordinary space for civil society action and there is no polarised military security system. Consequently I do not see 'violent' upheavals and challenges to the incumbent 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.

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