

# ICWA LETTERS

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young professionals to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. An exempt operating foundation endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

## TRUSTEES

Carole Beaulieu  
Bryn Barnard  
Richard Dudman  
Peter Geithner  
Kitty Hempstone  
Thomas Hughes  
William E. Knowland  
Samuel Levy  
Stephen Maly  
Mildred Marcy  
Peter Bird Martin  
Joel Millman  
Carol Rose  
John Spencer  
Edmund H. Sutton

## HONORARY TRUSTEES

A. Doak Barnett  
David Elliot  
David Hapgood  
Pat M. Holt  
Edwin S. Munger  
Richard H. Nolte  
Albert Ravenholt  
Phillips Talbot

**The Institute of Current World Affairs**  
THE CRANE-ROGERS FOUNDATION  
4 West Wheelock Street  
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755

TCY-6 1997  
SUBSAHARAN AFRICA

*Teresa Yates is a Fellow of the Institute studying land tenure and redistribution in South Africa.*

## Democracy Haunts the ANC

PIETERSBERG, South Africa

February 1997

By Teresa C. Yates

When I was eighteen I voted for the first time. It was the 1980 U.S. Presidential election and my candidate of choice was Jimmy Carter. When I voted for Jimmy Carter I was voting for the man and the political principles for which he stood. When I have voted in subsequent elections I have voted for candidates who I think are liberal, and in most cases those candidates were Democrats. My mindset when voting, however, whether in national, state, or local elections has always been one in which I was voting for an individual candidate rather than a political party.

When South Africans voted in their first democratic elections in 1994, they went to their polling places and voted for the African National Congress (ANC), the political party of their choice. The ANC was the party that represented the liberation of the country to most South Africans. In voting for the ANC, South Africans were giving the National Executive Committee of the Party (NEC) the authority to appoint the President, members of Parliament, Provincial Premiers and Provincial legislatures.

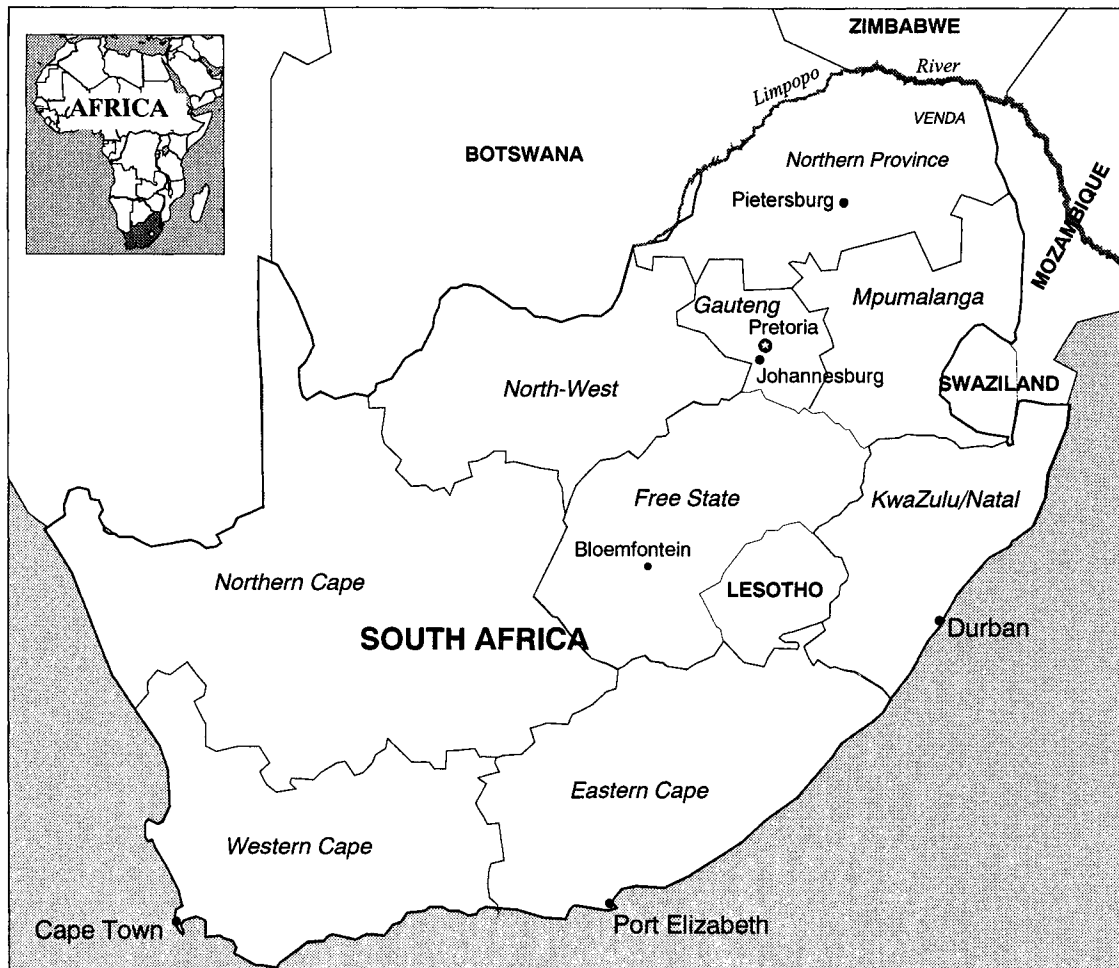
*"Recent events in South Africa illustrate that bringing democracy to the masses in the form of a national vote proved to be the easy part of transforming the South African political scene."*

The number of Parliamentary seats the party was allowed to fill was proportional to the overall percentage of national votes the party won. It was therefore the number of votes for the party, not for any individual candidate, that determined the makeup of the national legislature.

It is the system of proportional representation and the power it cedes to political parties that make it important that there be a system of democracy within political parties. Recent events in South Africa illustrate that bringing democracy to the masses in the form of a national vote proved to be the easy part of transforming the South African political scene. It is the debate as to whether democracy should be injected into the ANC at both the National and Provincial levels that is proving to be a more difficult task and causing dissension among grassroots ANC structures.

The recent election of George Mashamba as the Chairman of the Provincial Executive Committee in the Northern Province is an illustration of the rising tensions between the National Executive of the ANC and the party's grassroots membership over bringing democracy into the party.

In the Northern Province the ANC won over 90 percent of the provincial vote.



This meant that the National Executive Committee of the party had the power to place its members in 38 of the 40 seats in the provincial legislature and select the Premier of the province.<sup>1</sup>

The ANC constitution mandates that each of the nine provinces hold a Provincial Conference every two years. Delegates from around the province come to the conference to debate and set ANC policy and to elect the Provincial Executive Committee (PEC). The PEC is entrusted with interpreting and implementing that policy for its two-year term. It is, therefore, the most powerful ANC structure in the province. The Chairman of the PEC is the highest ranking ANC official in the Province.

The Northern Province ANC has twelve regional structures within the Province. The regional structures are further divided into ANC branches. The regions, along with

the youth league and the women's league, have the authority to submit nominations to the Conference for the PEC. This process of allowing the regions and the leagues to nominate the PEC is meant to inject some level of democracy into selecting party leadership.

The Northern Province held its first post-liberation Provincial Conference in 1994. The Premier, Ngoako Ramatlhodi (n-GWAH-ko rah-mah-KLO-dee), ran unopposed and was elected chairman of the PEC.

In December 1996 when the Provincial Conference met to elect the next PEC it turned out that Ramatlhodi was not the most popular candidate for Chairperson.

During the early nomination process, before the Conference began, it became clear that most regions were not going to nominate Ramatlhodi. Rumors began to spread

<sup>1</sup>The Premier of the Province is the political equivalent of a state governor in the U.S..

that the front runners for PEC Chair were Peter Mokaba, the Deputy Environmental Affairs Minister, and Joe Phaahla (PAH-*kl*a), Deputy Chairperson of the Provincial ANC.

Nelson Mandela, President of the ANC and of the country, reportedly summoned Mokaba and Phaahla, the deputy Chairperson of the Provincial ANC, to Johannesburg and instructed them not to stand against Ramatlhodi — for the sake of party unity. Both agreed.

Three days after this meeting the provincial conference nominated both Mokaba and Phaahla and both declined their previously accepted nominations. This paved the way for Ramatlhodi to run unopposed for the Chairperson seat. According to one of the delegates at the conference, on the night before the vote was to be taken one region had still not decided on its nominee. After intense lobbying the region nominated George Mashamba, a former philosophy professor and Senator. Mashamba accepted the nomination, he said, “for the sake of party unity.”

When all of the nominations had been submitted, four regions and the women’s league had nominated Mokaba, four regions and the youth league nominated Phaahla, two regions nominated Ramatlhodi, one region abstained, and one region nominated Mashamba.

There was some shock and surprise at Mashamba’s willingness to stand against Ramatlhodi and the will of the National Executive Committee (NEC). Another delegate said that it was a very brave move on Mashamba’s part, “one that could have ended his political career. By running he had everything to lose, and everything to gain.”<sup>2</sup>

Ramatlhodi left the conference after the nominating process was finished. Many delegates were surprised that he did not stay at the conference to lobby for votes, or to vote for himself. At the end of the day when the final votes were counted it was Ramatlhodi 350,

Mashamba 352. In many respects the vote for Mashamba was a vote against NEC interference in Provincial affairs.

The Northern Province thus became the second province in the country to have elected a PEC Chairperson who was not the Premier.<sup>3</sup> In so doing it also became the first province to have directly defied a directive from Mandela and the NEC.

One of the delegates to the Conference believed that the vote for Mashamba “was a vote for democracy, a clear indication that grassroots ANC leadership was not willing to be dictated to by the National Committee and was not happy with the autocratic tendencies of National.” He also believes that “now is the time for the ANC to work at increasing democratization within the party, because the party is never going to be in a stronger political position. If they don’t democratize the party while we are strong, then the party will only become more autocratic as leaders try to hold onto power.”

“In many respects the vote for Mashamba was a vote against NEC interference in Provincial affairs.”

Others see the issue of party democracy differently. One senior official in the Provincial Government says that the party cannot afford democracy, that the priorities have to be implementing policies that promote economic growth, and that these are policies that will not always be popular with the masses. The National ANC, therefore, has to be certain that there people in place at the Provincial level who will be willing to implement those policies.

George Mashamba says that people have to remember that the ANC is a “party of a special type, born out of a liberation struggle with its own traditions.” He does not see himself in opposition to the Premier or ANC National, but as someone who was elected at the conference to “carry out the party’s policies, within the demographics of the province.”

The issue of democratizing the ANC is likely to become more contentious as the end of this year approaches. In December the NEC will hold its conference, at which

<sup>2</sup> This was not the first time, however, that George Mashamba had openly disagreed with Mandela and the ANC leadership. When Mashamba was in prison on Robben Island with many other political prisoners, including Mandela, he openly disagreed with the ANC leadership on the Island and was expelled from the party for one year, leaving him completely isolated on the island prison.

<sup>3</sup> The Free State had a different Premier, Terror Lekota, and PEC Chairperson, Pat Matosa. When power struggles erupted between the two, they both resigned under pressure from the NEC. The NEC replaced Lekota with Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri, the former chairperson of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Many in the Free State viewed Matsepe-Casaburri as an outsider because she was out of the country in exile for many years. When she returned to South Africa, she did not return to the Free State. When the Free State held its Provincial Conference last weekend members of the NEC including Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, showed up to exert pressure on the Conference to elect Matsepe-Casaburri as the Chairperson of the PEC. As in the Northern Province, the Conference delegates found the interference from National to be unacceptable and they elected Zingile Dingane as the Chairperson of their PEC.

Nelson Mandela is expected to step down as President of the ANC and a new President will be elected. The President of the ANC will become the next president of South Africa when the next national elections are held in 1999.

It is expected that the candidate who is favored by Mandela, Deputy President, Thabo Mbeki, will win the election. But there is also the possibility that the Provincial grassroots structures will send their leaders to the conference with a mandate to place names other than Mbeki's into nomination for the Presidency of the party.

The question then arises, if not Mandela's hand-picked choice for successor, then who will be the second post-apartheid president? Some names that have been mentioned by ANC members in Pietersburg are: Tokyo Sexwale, the current Premier of Gauteng; Jacob Zuma, the National Chairperson of the ANC and the Kwa-Zulu Natal chairperson, (Zuma is also favored as deputy president of the NEC); Matthew

Phosa, PEC Chairperson and Premier of Mpumalanga (the former Eastern Transvaal); and finally Cyril Ramaphosa, the former National Secretary of the NEC who is now in private business. All of the above are popular leaders, and any current suggestion that any of them will be willing to defy the direction of the NEC and stand against Mbeki is based on pure speculation.

There are many people within the ANC who do not like Mbeki. The grassroots structures in two of the nine Provinces have shown that they are not willing to have the National ANC dictate who their leaders will be. These structures see a vote for Mbeki as a vote for a move toward more autocracy in the party.

The NEC Conference will be haunted by the dissension in the Northern Province and the Free State. No one yet knows whether the party will choose a democratic or autocratic path into the 1999 national elections. □