

Political ideologies essay sample



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Introduction

Ideology defined by Heywood would be: A set of more or less coherent ideas that provide bases for organized political actions. Its central features are an account of existing power relationships, a model of a desired future, and an outline of how political change can and should be brought about. (2007: 68)

This essays main focus will be discussing the main ideologies and focuses of the two leading political parties of South Africa. The African National Congress or ANC and the Democratic Alliance also known as DA. An important insight into both their ideology will be gained by analysing how both parties political powers are reflected in the economic sector and society and to which extend their ideologies effect both of these sectors.

This is particular important as a political parties ideology should always change society and with that change improve it. “ Political ideology is one of the most frequently used concepts in the social sciences, yet has a variety of meanings. Ideology is of course a theoretical construct. It only becomes meaningful when it is given an operational definition. For the purposes of this paper political ideology links beliefs about facts or values and attitudes about issues, positions, policies, and actions. A state’s political ideology is defined as the aggregation of the ideological preferences of a state’s voting population on a wide variety of issues (political, social, foreign, and economic).” 2 (Medoff, 1997: 1)

African National Congress (ANC)

Ever since the Apartheid era ended in 1994 the African National Congress or more commonly known as the ANC, has been the predominant party in South

Africa, winning all presidential elections ever since. Having 264 out of 400 national assembly seats and being the ruling party in eight out of the nine South African provinces. This quickly shows that the ANC is not only a very powerful South African political party, but also through its tremendous size the most influential one, which make its ideologies especially important to anyone trying to understand the South African political system. So let's take a look at the 2009 released national elections manifesto. Already on page 2 of the ANCs election manifesto we can find some of the ANCs principles and ideologies.

“ The ANC has always stood for basic democratic principles that include: A constitution which guarantees human rights for all, the right to a minimum standard of life, including access to education, social security, health care, food and water. The right to all people to elect a government of their choice in regular, free and fair elections...” (3) (National Elections Manifesto, 2009) Other points cover freedom of religion, a fair justice system, equality and freedom from discrimination on racial or sexual grounds, worker rights, and freedom of association and so on. As we can already see in the introduction the ANCs basic principles the ANC already calls itself indirectly a democratic orientated party (“ stood for basic democratic principles”).

Then in their actual principles many other idealistic beliefs can be found. Such as Liberalism which according to Heywood (2007: 45) can be seen a “ meta-ideology” meaning we will be able to find traces of liberalism in most other political parties as well. Within the ANCs basic democratic principles the following reflects a liberalistic orientated ideology: Equality, which according to Heywood (2007: 46) states that every human being is born

equally and therefore we all have equal rights and entitlements, legal quality and political quality. If we now take these points and compare them to the ANC's basic principles as stated above many are reflected in it.

Such as "A constitution which guarantees human rights for all"; "a fair justice system"; "The right to all people to elect a government". So already under Heywood's equality definition, many of the ANC's key principles find a reflection in. Under toleration also some principles are reflected. These are in my opinion very important ones considering South Africa's recent history and the apartheid era. In Heywood (Heywood, 2007: 46) toleration is defined as: "The willingness of people to allow others to think, speak and act in ways of which they disapprove. This is a guarantee of individual liberty and it allows moral, cultural and political diversity."

This in many ways again is what was stated in the ANC's democratic principles such as: "guarantees human rights for all; freedom of religion and again freedom from racial and or sexual discrimination". Another point would be constitutionalism which limits the government's power, enforces a written constitution and the bill of rights which according to Heywood (Heywood, 2007: 47) "defines the relationship between the state and the individual." Social Democracy is another big point of reflecting many of the ANC's aims and ideologies.

The introduction of an economic democracy and the social security benefits, laws to protect workers, maximum daily/weekly working hours and many other new regulations which come with it were mainly introduced during the past 18 years. By passing the progressive labour legislation the ANC

stepped forward to support and raise the work quality for many citizens in many different work sectors.

Another big part plays the development towards a welfare state. In welfare state the government uses a certain amount of money which it gained from taxes for example and re invests that money into society to raise the countries standard of living. Examples would be the extension of the public transport system; giving free HIV/AIDS tests, medications if the individual can't afford them and educating people about HIV/AIDS. Ensuring that every citizen has access to an affordable education system; to water and food and a safe place to sleep. But because this system is still very new, and with limited amounts of money available the development takes its time.

So in summery a welfare state is a “ concept of government in which the state plays a key role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of its citizens. It is based on the principles of equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life.”

(4) As we can see this explanation of a welfare state again reflects many of the ANC's key values and mission statements. Other Ideologies such as socialism also implementing their ideas into the current ANC principles and the way the ANC interacts with the community.

Ideas such as uniting people together through the ANC Youth League, Sport Clubs, Holiday camps and many other community building elements. Further on fraternity and social quality (as discussed above) feed into socialism and what comes with it. Another (from my point of view) big part in our current

government system plays communism. Where the large orientation seems to come from a mix of ideologies of orthodox Marxism infused with Leninism. Which should not be mistaken for the old USSR government system, which was ruled by a single dictator Joseph Stalin (1878- 1953).

In South Africa the South African communist party (SACP) gained power by joining the Tripartite Alliance with the ANC and the COSATU or congress of South African trade unions. Today's main aims of the SACP are to: “ Strengthen and support the working or labour class of society; building a communist society and educating, organising and mobilising the working class.” 5 (SACP Constitution, 2009) So in the bigger picture they seem to see themselves as the “ working class liberation party”, as they feel that many people of these classes are rather seen as objects in a bigger picture than actual individuals.

After all it is the working class which pays most of the taxes and keeps a countries economy alive. So overall we can say that the ANC likes the public to see it, as a mainly democratic orientated party. Nevertheless behind the main picture displayed to the general public, quite a big part of the ANC reflects communist ideologies and thoughts while being a political party which strongly reflects left wing politics. Democratic Alliance (DA)

Many people already consider the DA a political phenomenon. The current democratic alliance party was founded in the year 2000 and grew stronger and stronger ever since. Currently the DA holds 67 out of 400 national assembly seats and with that the DA is the second strongest political party in South Africa. Currently the DA is the governing party of the Western Cape

and with that the only party which controls another province, as the ANC controls eight out of the nine provinces. The DA is considered to be the direct counterpart to the ANC. But what makes the DA the direct opposing political party to the ANC? Lets again take a closer look at the 2009 election campaign manifesto.

Some of the key ideologies and future visions of the DA's manifesto include:

“ The Democratic Alliance believes in the open, opportunity society for all. It is a belief that shapes everything we say and do.” 6 (DA Manifesto, 2009)

The first paragraph in this manifesto already describes why the DA is called the opposing political party to the ANC. Unlike the ANC the DA believes in an opportunity society for all its citizens. While the ANC mostly promotes a system in which the economic system is controlled by a limited amount of people who therefore are going to get very rich. Other beliefs of the DA include: Gender and racial equality; religious freedom; reduce crime; improve the education system and reducing poverty by training people and giving them a fair chance to escape poverty by themselves then. So also in the DA and its ideologies Liberalism plays a key role.

The key points here which the DA addresses are equality (meritocracy), freedom, toleration constitutionalism and reason. Especially the term meritocracy reflects many of the DA's principles and ideologies, as it in theory should give all people the same chances to be successful and direct there life's in the direction in which they want to go without taking a persons religious beliefs, gender, race or skin colour in account. But as said this only works that way in theory. Already the kind and quality of education a young person gets during his or her childhood can make a vast difference in the

lifestyle he or she will later be able to afford, in most of the cases. Other differences are unfortunately often still created by the gender, his or her skin colour and political orientations.

This results in a lot of criticism as previously disadvantaged people often don't have the financial income or security to send their kids to expensive private schools and or universities. However the main orientation of the DA goes into conservatism. The DA sees authority as an important factor in creating a job creating economy, as it is important to have people working at the top of a company for example who have the knowledge, skills and experience to decide what is best for this company. These people should there for be respected as they did earn what they achieved through hard work. So therefore “ authority is exercised to provide leadership, guidance and support for those who lack the knowledge or experience”. (Heywood, 2007: 50)

Society also is seen as a connected organism where every individual has a specific role which he exercises and therefore which influences other individuals around him. Nevertheless according to Heywood this “ hierarchy and inequality does not give rise to conflict as people are bound together by mutual obligations and reciprocal duties” (Heywood, 2007: 50) and therefore depend on each other.

Other elements include tradition (If something worked out well in the past why not carry on using it); pragmatism which states that what we do shape us and where we go in our future; and property which “ gives security to people and a measure of independency from the government. However this

ownership involves duties as well as right and encourages people to respect the law and the property of others.” (Heywood, 2007: 50) Therefore we can say that the Democratic Alliance is a very right winged political party, as its main ideologies lie in liberalism, social order, authority, traditions and values, and hierarchy.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can now begin to see in how many ways the Democratic Alliance is very different to the African National Congress. While the ANC has some very strong almost extreme left wing orientated ideologies the DA opposes that as being a right wing orientated political party. The DA intensively focuses on building an opportunity society for all and strengthening medium businesses through lowering taxes which alternatively results in a lower unemployment rate and more money will be available to the state as these businesses now grow faster. While the ANC tries to focus more on supporting the underprivileged, the working class and investing money into the formation of a welfare state.

Over the next couple of years we should be able to see some interesting developments in South African politics as many South Africans are desperately looking for an alternative party to the ANC. Not only because the DA's political ideologies seem to focus more on building a strong economy but also because many people are getting very angry about corruption which often gets directly connected to the ANC. The DA on the other hand promises to take the fight against corruption in South Africa to an entire new level.

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