



Sour Street



MOSHOESHOE MONARE

Opposition needs a dash of vigour

This nation is in a pensive mood, yearning for a cheerful political voice. Like the Batswana, and perhaps the Zimbabweans and the Mozambicans, we seem to be accepting a culture of one-party hegemony. Blaming the ANC or the electorate is pointlessly naive. And we certainly don't want what John Cam Hobhouse called Her Majesty's loyal opposition. The latest Markinor survey shows the ANC acquiring two-thirds and the opposition under 10 percent of votes next year.

The opposition must shoulder the blame for contributing to this depressing atmosphere. Its projected performance is inexcusable, given the opportunity, the vacuum, the bad vibes and instability within the ANC. The ANC is very nervous. Its leader Jacob Zuma could be jailed. Its deputy, Kgalema Motlanthe, is not particularly ready to govern.

The defeated in the ANC are still extremely bitter and demoralised. They feel closer to the Democratic Alliance's Helen Zille than to Zuma. The ANC is shifting leftward in character. The left has won the ANC, so forget about the ruling party breaking away with labour and communists forming their own party. The cacophonous anti-Mbeki group that was singing in concert before Polokwane is disintegrating. Surely this is a perfect time for the opposition to pounce?

The South African political dynamics and electoral landscape are changing, and very fast. It will take an opposition genius to unsettle the power grip of the ANC.

Tony Leon, the former DA leader, tried it, but he was shortsighted not to realise that it's mathematically limiting to rely on the white vote. This section of the population is not growing dramatically. Its political attitude has knotted the DA into the narrow politics of race. It's difficult to reverse this. Race politics works for the ANC - wrongly so - because blacks are a majority.

Therefore a drastic rebranding of the DA is urgently needed. Despite Zille's belief that hers is a non-racial party, the township perception should worry her. Instead of wasting energy on an opposition coalition and Cape Town politicking, Zille must return her own party.

Next year's elections are an opportunity to rattle ANC complacency.

Young urban black women do not necessarily share the same emotional or ideological hang-ups. They are therefore a threat or a worry to the ANC. Funnily, they are less likely to search for a new political home. They are highly likely to stay away from polling stations.

The ruling party must also heed civil society, the media and other opinion makers whose commentaries on the party influence perceptions - to a lesser degree, of course.

The reckless militancy and weird behaviour emanating from Luthuli House is perilous.

The party will certainly feel the pinch if it is perceived to be undermining democratic institutions, stifling dissenting voices and disrespecting the rule of law.

Unless the ANC becomes like Zanu-PF and intimidates the electorate into voting for it, these perceptions will have an effect on the voting psyche of its constituency. The lower the voter turnout, the higher the chances of opposition parties waging a vicious electoral fight, given the proportionality of the votes cast. But it needs a brilliant opposition. Yet the opposition's inability to transcend political bickering is not helping either.

There's nothing wrong with our opposition; it merely lacks innovative leadership and thinking energy.

The ANC's local government performance was appalling. But the ANC won by an even higher majority in the 2006 local polls. Why? The opposition did not offer any alternative besides its dissonant attack on the ruling party.

South Africans just need a sober voice of reason to calm agitated nerves and brighten up the nation's mood - a new evangelist in town.

We need someone to reassure us, who provides national leadership and not just political leadership.

It's unfortunate that such voices are at the political fringe and are confined to civil society.



Second Take



MAUREEN ISAACSON

Naledi's pipe dreams won't end illiteracy

Wanted by the Young Communist League: free sanitary towels, free education and a chastened education minister.

The sanitary towels come courtesy of a renewed interest in women's health and Naledi Pandor, the minister, should know better than to call the league's demand for free education "a pipe dream".

Pandor, with her plummy imported accent, surely knows why the youth movements are making education the focus of the future. She nonetheless stands accused of failing to end school violence or to cap ever increasing fees.

The allocation of free education to some of the poorest of the poor is negligible they say and it anyway excludes tertiary level study.

The stamping out of illiteracy, for which Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez have set an example, is top of their list. "Barbaric capitalism", consistent with the minister's attack on their struggles "to smash the colonial education system" is responsible for the failure to achieve free education.

But the day the government stops pumping money into the Gautrain, Coega and the Dube Trade port and chooses instead to bump up teachers' salaries will be the day that the guns will turn to butter.

That includes toy guns, such as the one Kabelo Thibedi used to hold a home affairs clerk hostage in 2005 when his identity document refused to turn up for two long years.

This earned him a five-year sentence and the support of the League, which has said it will be prepared to die for him, because they love him. They will turn out in their numbers to support him at the Johannesburg magistrate's court on Friday, when his final appeal is set to be heard.

Thibedi's plight touched a chord. Although it is possible that no Marxist-Leninist thought had crossed his mind before encountering the comrades who changed his life, he is now the beneficiary of the Kabelo Thibedi fund. He bears the title of the League's national campaigning officer and the League's slogan, socialism in our lifetime, is never far from his lips.

This week at the Kabelo Thibedi ID trial campaign in the Ramotshana informal settlement in Rustenberg, Thibedi and comrades saw to it that home affairs got the community's documents sorted out big time.

The restoration of dignity is the cornerstone of the Young Communist League's philosophy. At its second Gauteng provincial conference this week it listed, among several critical social priorities, the plight of the victims of xenophobia violence.

Where have they been in the two months since the crisis erupted? "Commissioning a report on xenophobia" and "making decisions" is one answer.

The league loves to trot out a popular line. Both Zuma and Thibedi are victims of "justice delayed". Mazibuko Jara, the league's former deputy national secretary, was axed for daring to ask questions about Zuma.

Even as the league declares its undying support for Zuma, they say they will put him through his paces if, as president, he does not listen to their demands, in particular those about education.

The league supports Julius Malema in his "kill for Zuma" declaration. Also, Malema has warned that if compulsory education is not in place under the Zuma regime, parents and pupils will be "locked up".

The June 16 protests against schooling in Afrikaans is proof of how readily a revolution can turn on issues of education.

We should not be too busy fighting young lions such as Malema to heed their demands.

The league has warned that if Pandor does not stop treating the education department as an advanced English college, the beneficiaries of patronage will look out from the windows of their ivory towers to observe a sea of Reds on the streets.

This is not a bad starting point. But for this country to succeed, Malema and cronies must come to the party. Their own education - about civility and ubuntu - should begin now.

Pass the pipe, minister.

THE SUNDAY INDEPENDENT

The human cost of bungling

Though the constitutional court is expected to pronounce on the reintegration of the victims of xenophobic violence tomorrow, there is little hope of a resolution.

On Friday, the Gauteng government missed the deadline for the closure of the temporary shelters, which were set up two months ago. Gauteng is issuing warm, fuzzy messages about caring for the people, saying that it has no intention of throwing them on to the street.

It is projecting a compassion that is entirely at odds with the reality that the victims of the violence are facing.

The absence of clear communication about their predicament has caused untold trauma in the camps. It is one thing saying you are able to meet minimum international requirements for shelters and care for the nutrition and health of the victims. What is missing is an understanding of the psychological impact of the provincial government's dithering on the fate of these

people. It has emerged that, in Gauteng, many of the 2000 people who remain in the camps are suspected of not being in possession of the correct documentation, which is bizarre given the fact that they are all allegedly in possession of temporary identity documents. This is a fancy way of saying that reintegration, which is the final phase of the government plan for these people, might turn into deportation.

Once the camps have been dismantled, the fate of the people who have lived in them will be in the hands of the department of home affairs. This department is not entirely, but is largely, to blame for the mess we find ourselves in.

This is the department that its head, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Ngagula, the home affairs minister, and Pallo Jordan, the head of government communications, admit is a shambles. The absence of a clear refugee policy for the people who flee from trauma and war to our country is an indictment of this department. It succeeds in

shirking its responsibility by projecting the myth that most asylum seekers are economic migrants or criminals. Its attempts to turn around its incoherent systems have repeatedly come to naught.

One obvious example is the handling of the provision of all asylum seekers in shelters with identification documents valid for six months. It was not made clear to them that the temporary IDs would not invalidate any other documents they might have.

Another indictment of the provincial government's failure is the threat of Somalis, in possession of full refugee status, that they will kill themselves and their children if the government does not offer clear guidelines. They have asked to be referred to a third country, and the government has declared them to be "difficult". But, as long as they remain here, they are our responsibility.

We cannot wait for the new cabinet to take charge in April for home affairs to shape up.

The age-old art of political lying

The Long View



PATRICK LAURENCE

The accusation that Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of Zimbabwe's Movement for Democratic Change, solicited and received funding from South African donors, but publicly denied doing so, raises profound questions about political morality and whether politicians who lie harm themselves.

Tony Leon, the former leader of the Democratic Alliance, levels a charge of duplicity against Tsvangirai in that specific context in his newly published autobiography, *On the Contrary*. Leon ought to know, as Tsvangirai was poaching in a pond in which his party has a prior - if not proprietary - claim.

The answer to the question of whether Tsvangirai was harmed by perjuring himself on that issue in 2000 is simple: probably not, for several reasons.

Compared to President Robert Mugabe's abuse of the human rights of Zimbabwean citizens and his ruthless political banditry, Tsvangirai's moral lapse is a relatively minor offence, the more so as he would have invited immediate condemnation as a puppet of foreign imperialists had he disclosed the identity of his South African funders.

As it happens, he was later depicted as Leon's marionette in advertisements placed in Zimbabwean newspapers by Zanu-PF. Tsvangirai can be forgiven, however, for thinking he might avoid that condemnation if his donors remained anonymous.

It is instructive to place Tsvangirai's denial in a broader context, starting in South Africa before going further afield.

Perhaps the best-known lie by a South African politician is the one told by Connie Mulder, who served as minister of information under Prime Minister BJ Vorster.

Mulder denied in parliament that *The Citizen* had been funded with public money entrusted to the government when the launching of the newspaper with money from a secret "slush fund"

was the biggest clandestine propaganda project conducted by the department of information in a vain bid to sanitise apartheid and win increased support for the National Party (NP) government.

Together with the general skulduggery of the department of information, Mulder's lie to parliament was a major factor in his failure to win the struggle to succeed Vorster after Vorster's resignation in September 1978. The desertion from the Mulder camp of some Transvaal NP parliamentary representatives opened the door for PW Botha, the NP defence minister, to succeed Vorster.

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela is another high-profile politician who was publicly proclaimed to be mendacious.

In her 1991 trial she was found guilty of kidnapping and of being an accessory after the fact to the assault of four young victims. Judge Michael Stegmann described her as "a calm, composed, deliberate and unblinking liar".

Though she failed to be re-elected as president of the ANC Women's League in 1991, her condemnation as a liar, like her conviction as a kidnapper, was a setback rather than a disaster.

Phoenix-like, Madikizela-Mandela rose again to recapture the presidency of the Women's League for a few years, became a deputy minister in Nelson Mandela's post-apartheid cabinet and, most recently, secure a place in the ANC national executive committee after the election of the office-bearing officials at the ANC's Polokwane conference last December.

Madikizela-Mandela's recoveries from personal disasters are probably attributable to her ability to present herself as the victim of prejudiced whites in the judicial system while simultaneously projecting herself as a champion of the poor.

Adolf Hitler, the corporal who rose to become Führer of the Third Reich, was a masterful protagonist of the "big lie".

Though a careful reading of *Mein Kampf* shows that he was actually accusing "Jews and Marxists" of propagating "the big lie", he became acutely adept at disseminating his own, one of which was to convince the German people that, as Aryans, they were *übermensch* (superior people) destined to rule over the *Untermenschen* (inferior people).

For the record: the "big lie" attributed to "Jews and Marxists" by Hitler was that Germany lost the First World War because its armed forces were defeated in battle by the numerically superior forces of Britain, France and, above all, the United States, while the "big lie" Hitler propagated was that Germany lost the war because its armed forces were "stabbed in the back" by treacherous civilians infected with the bacilli of bolshevism and pacifism.

The "big lie" of the "Jews and Marxists" is far closer to the historical truth than Hitler's "big lie", which excessively adulated the fighting prowess of German soldiers, many of whom, incidentally, were members of Germany's Jewish community.

To the extent that Hitler was deluded by his own "big lies" into thinking that

he could invade the Soviet Union before subduing Britain and declaring war on the US before conquering the Soviet Union, he was severely punished: he spent his last days cowering in a bunker before committing suicide.

Moving across the Atlantic Ocean to the US in the late 1990s and early 21st century, it is evident that the last two presidents of the world's sole remaining superpower, Bill Clinton and George Bush, lied to the nation.

Clinton did so when he stated at a media conference: "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss [Monica] Lewinsky." Later, however, he admitted to having an "improper physical relationship" with Lewinsky. It turned out that his definition of sexual relations excluded oral sex.

Clinton thus clearly lied about his relationship, as manifested by Lewinsky's semen-stained blue dress. But perhaps because of the major shifts in attitudes to sex during the past century, Clinton was not punished harshly. He was fined for giving false evidence and acquitted of impeachment charges.

Bush, who succeeded Clinton as president in 2000, lied to the American people when he told them that his government had definite evidence that Saddam Hussein's Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction to justify its decision to invade Iraq.

Although voters punished him in his second term by voting in large numbers for the opposition Democratic Party in the 2006 congressional elections, their main reason was that the war in Iraq had dragged on for too long and had already cost the lives of too many young Americans.

Compared to Mulder, Clinton and Bush escaped lightly but, some observers argue, not as lightly as Madikizela-Mandela.

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