

CONFESSIONS OF A TACTICAL VOTER

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It is now barely a week to the date on 8 May when South Africa goes to the polls for the sixth successive occasion, and I do not know which political party will benefit from my vote. The National and Provincial Elections have been dominated by splintering political parties – 48 political parties have been registered on the ballot paper! Besides, maybe as a result of there being so many political parties, one senses that there is a mood of uncertainty and doubt about preferred choices, or none of the choices are as obvious as has been the case previously. What complicates matters even more is the fact that the African National Congress, South Africa's undoubted political force since 1994, has become deeply factionalised such that in voting for the party one is no longer certain whether one can expect much the same as that which the President of the Party on the ballot paper represents.

I state for the record that many years ago while I served in the South African Human Rights Commission, I allowed my membership of the ANC to lapse. I did so because I was very conscious that in order to be credible, it was important that our capacity to exercise our duties without fear, favour or prejudice should not be compromised by any form of allegiance to a political party. And yet, I continued to vote for the ANC in large measure because I supported the programmes advanced by both Presidents Nelson Mandela and by Thabo Mbeki. I had a high regard for them as moral, upright leaders. Like many South Africans at the time, I had no doubt of their passion for development and change in the country. Although I have been a lifelong member and activist in the ANC, I never believed that I was voting merely out of an emotional allegiance to the organization or its leaders.

Then came Polokwane. Since then I have been convinced that the ANC did not deserve my vote. I could not accept that a party in government could so gratuitously trash our Constitution only so as to undermine everything that the Constitution stood for; to facilitate and to enable a criminal capture of the state, to undermine law and order, disable the criminal justice system and generally govern without the vision and idealism that had brought us the constitutional democracy in the first place. Jacob Zuma was never somebody who could be trusted with the fortunes of a nation that aspired to greatness. That was the last time I ever voted for the ANC.

In the elections that followed I did not belong to any political organization. That was a glorious space to be in. However, there was much that I did not share in their visions for South Africa that the political parties displayed for South Africa to sample. I had no reason to trust the capacity of the parties to bring about change in the country. It was then that I developed a toolkit for tactical voting.

As a tactical voter one accepts that there is no one political party that fully represents one's passion for the country. It also means that one understands that the party one votes for,

even if elected, does not render it immediately accountable to the voter. That means that the level of trust for the political party has to be very high indeed. That is because one does not have a voice in parliament that speaks on one's behalf, and that can be primed in the event matters of concern emerge. The problem is our electoral system. A tactical voter also accepts the limitations and the choices one has in making a credible decision but that one makes the best of the situation and as such to mitigate the ill-effects of a flawed system of democracy as best one can.

The electoral system is a Party List system. Members of the National Assembly are representatives of the party and not the voters. They are accountable to the party whips and the law allows the party to remove members who do not conform to party prescripts. Whatever advantages or disadvantages such a system may have it definitely creates a distance between the voter and the member who serves in parliament. The Nation needs to engage in a serious Dialogue as to whether this is the best system to ensure accountability, or whether a Constituency-based or hybrid system is an option.

I guess that I am a very difficult voter ever to satisfy. I am a very discerning and critical elector. I do not only concern myself with the glitz and bling that parties like the ANC flaunt. I also detest rhetoric and political platitudes. I hate empty promises and I detest lies. For me a political party is not and cannot be judged solely by its Manifesto, neither by those who lead it – though that is not unimportant. Yes, I attach a great deal of importance on who are the intended representatives of the party, what do they stand for, and what is their track record in public life, and what is their moral barometer.

This means that not only should those who have a criminal record not be considered, but others who do not live the values of our democracy – honesty, integrity, those who are on record as responsible for violence against women, and any whom the courts have pronounced upon. I hate it when politicians hide behind a fig leaf that says that one is *innocent until proved guilty in a court of law*. That becomes a license for strange behaviors that should have no place in our public representatives as it excludes the importance of ethical and moral behavior of those who exercise public power.

My final consideration about Manifestos is first to evaluate the record of the party in government, and to assess whether what the party offers as platform for government is more than theory but practical logic, that can be assessed, verified, executed and costed within a time-period of five years. In other words, it is important to test whether a party is not just offering a pipedream that will go nowhere. On this basis, there should be no reason to vote for the ANC which after all has been in government for 25 years, and in the last decade has destroyed the capacity of the state to govern, gutted out the economy, impoverished ordinary South Africans, multiplied unemployment, increased inequality. It is the government that brought us Nkandla, Marikana, Life eSidimani, State Capture, a bloated public service and erratic policy development in matters like fees for higher education, land restitution, even the nuclear build. The ANC cannot just rub its hands Pilate like off the catastrophe that was Zuma. It must take responsibility.

What is important, though, is that we need to know and become convinced that there are measures in place to mitigate the damage caused, steer the nation on a different course. It

is difficult to believe that when the executive that will manage the affairs of state is very much the same as the one that enabled Zuma and enforced the Zuma dictat, and more than half members of parliament are the same as those who doggedly defended Zumaism, or that more than two-thirds of the National Executive Committee of the ANC is the one that was hand-picked by Zuma. It is the ANC that has played fast and loose with the Constitution and showed no interest in abiding by court orders, allowed President Zuma to play hide and seek with the courts for more than ten years. The ANC faces a problem of credibility of enormous proportions. None of this is of Cyril Ramaphosa's own making. Based on the principle that governments are responsible for the acts of predecessors he too must take full responsibility for the Zuma nightmare. It does not help for various ANC spokespersons to now tell us that the Zuma years were not very bad after all. I beg to differ. Zuma was an unmitigated disaster!

A tactical voter, therefore, is one who recognizes that one has a dilemma. One is committed to exercising one's vote, and yet there is no single political party that reflects one's beliefs about the country and its aspirations. For those reasons one then has to find the most approximate or plausible reason for the vote one chooses. At this point in time that is where I am stuck. At the same time a tactical voter is not a missing voter, or a neutral or undecided voter. A tactical voter seeks to be free to make choices according to her/his judgment at the time, and choices that he/she can live with, however difficult the choices may be.

In previous elections, in the exercise of my tactical voting principle, I have voted for COPE, UDM, EFF. I have evaluated what strength each of the parties has and what difference it could make with my vote. I have recognized that different principles applied in my consideration of National and Provincial representatives. I brought local or regional dynamics into play in my decision-making. For a start there was no way that I could vote for a party that carried Jacob Zuma as a Leader, but I could vote for David Makhura as a prospective Provincial Premier. I could vote for the EFF because I believed that it brought dynamism and *chutzpah* to our national politics and I admired young people who believed passionately in what they were doing. For that EFF had my vote. I voted UDM because I believed, especially in the Eastern Cape, that General Bantu Holomisa had been consistent, principled, politically astute and a hard worker. I voted COPE in 2009 because COPE carried our hopes where ANC had failed us.

This time around, of course, I desire strongly to vote in support of Cyril Ramaphosa, just as I believe many South Africans would. I have no doubt that Ramaphosa is no Jacob Zuma and that he is not beholden to him or anyone else. I want to vote for Ramaphosa because in the 15 months that he has been Head of the Executive he has begun the difficult task of clearing out the Zuma cobwebs. He has established instruments for establishing good governance in state institutions. I share the hope that he could be allowed to continue to do so, and to hope for more.

But I am not so naïve as to fail to understand that Ramaphosa's capacity to undertake the task that he believes is necessary for the country is much constrained by the state of the party that he leads. For one thing one never knows any longer which ANC is represented by Ramaphosa, and which by Ace Magashule, so factionalised the ANC has been and continued to be since Zuma was removed from office. I know that when I put my vote against the ANC,

I do not buy the Ramaphosa ANC, but it could be anything else. Discerning voters like me are in a bind.

I do not have a sense that President Ramaphosa appreciates not just the extent to which the ANC as an organization is almost irreparably broken down, but also, he does not seem to understand that there are forces in the ANC led by Jacob Zuma who have been deeply involved in a counter-revolutionary strategy. Their task was not just confined to stealing public resources (which they did!), it was also designed to incapacitate and rubbish (or collapse) the functioning of the state. That is the reason SARS, PIC, ESKOM, NPA – that may well explain the mad rush to “nationalize” the South African Reserve Bank. The intention is to take charge of and then control the commanding heights of the economy and state craft. In the process much of these jewels of the South African economy have been destroyed. To then find a Secretary General of the ANC defending all that was done in the counter-revolutionary project of reversing and undermining systematically the gains of the national democratic revolution, can be nothing short of treason. Will the real ANC please stand!

To complicate matters further, while one may wish to vote for Ramaphosa, one must also realise that in the electoral system that we have a vote for Ramaphosa is a vote for the ANC. In the politics of the ANC it is either that Ramaphosa’s ideas have influence or that Magashule, a proxy for Jacob Zuma, will hold sway. It seems obvious to me that one should not cast one’s vote in such a reckless fashion.

My problems with Ramaphosa run even deeper. I believe that while his attention on the state is welcome, his capacity to reform the state is dependent on the exercise of his authority in the ANC. The slogan of unity and renewal does not promise to yield any results. It is clear to me that unity is unprincipled, and renewal is very much business as usual. ANC needs a surgical operation. It is outdated in its systems and in its assumptions. Its politics or ideology are fuzzy, perhaps much in keeping with its pretensions of being a “broad church”! It is very much a party of liberation (in the fraught conditions of exile) in a democratic environment. The progressive edge of the party is being swamped. The ANC is more comfortable in its descriptor as a party of liberation, long after “liberation” was achieved.

The *mantra*, ‘power is in the branches’ is an alibi for a Stalinist perversion of democracy where the most violent, most noisy, well known crooks and kleptocrats, and the most unthinking dominate local levels of the ANC with the result that local councilors are drawn from such an unlikely source with disastrous results. No wonder political murders are so significant among ANC political classes, and that explains that political intolerance has become the stock-in-trade of the new ANC.

What happens at the National Congress of the ANC is a replica of what happens at local level. It is often suggested that the NGC and the National (Elective) Congress determine policy. However, even those outcomes are ill-informed and bulldozed under threats of violence as happened at NASREC in 2017. The patient, well- informed and judicious policy-formation of the past is no more. A President makes policy on the hoof without consultation, in the process undermines standing Party policy positions. Instead of being reprimanded, the supporters gallery, Stalin-like, breaks out into a rapturous applause. At this point nothing that the ANC says or does has any credibility as a result. Many would

welcome an ANC that is committed to young people and women, and where intellectual and ideological engagement is the basis of advancement and preferment. But with the Women's League and Youth League devoid of thought it is like waiting for Godot. A root and branch restructuring of the ANC is called for. Without that, many programmes of government do not have any chance of success - only to the extent that the public service is beholden to cadre deployment for its best skills and professionalism.

The Nkandla Judgment of the Constitutional Court delivered by Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng on behalf of a unanimous court outlines the responsibilities of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa. It states that "each member of Parliament makes a declaration of allegiance to the Republic, obedience, respect and vindication of the Constitution and all law of the Republic, to the best of their abilities..." It is of interest to note the point that Mogoeng CJ rightly emphasises that this allegiance is not to the Party but to the Republic, the law and to the Constitution. One wonders whether political parties did have this judgment in mind when they selected their Party Lists. I doubt it. It would also seem that the IEC also did not adjust its processes for the registration of members of parliament in the Party List with due regard to Mogoeng's prescripts.

The Chief Justice gave the nation a clear indication about the moral qualities necessary for one to be a member of parliament. If one has that in mind, the ANC for one, surely could not have presented in their Party List members who have been mentioned in an adverse manner in any court of law or enquiry as is the case with Malusi Gigaba, Bathabile Dlamini, Mdu Manana, or Mosebenzi Zwane, among many others. Equally those like Nomvula Mokonyane who are known to have destroyed a government department to the point of bankruptcy should not be public representatives. Indeed, the likes of Ace Magashule who have been named in numerous adverse reports ought not to be the face of the ANC. The Gupta cronies and the Bosasa beneficiaries ought to have been put out to pasture.

There are three matters that mitigate the disaster that Cyril Ramaphosa finds himself in, especially to discerning voters. It is the commitment to reduce the size of government, reducing ministries and departments and generally reducing the personnel cost of the Public Service. Indications are that the unions will resist this vigorously. The second matter that he deserves support for is the undertaking to professionalise the public service. In other words, South Africa deserves the service of the best skills and competences that South Africa can afford.

The third matter is The Economy. There is every reason to believe that the ANC under Ramaphosa will address the state of the economy. The problem, as far as I can see, is that the ANC does not seem to have any ideas about how to grow the economy within the ambit of a developmental state. There is the imperative to address the critical problem of inequality, and thereby to adjust fiscal policy to address social challenges that society faces. It does not seem to be understood that measures like social grants are not the ultimate in securing a better life for many people in the long term. Neither does it mean, in my humble opinion, that jobs in the traditional trade unionist way of thinking will ever address the problem of unemployment. It requires understanding clearly that employment patterns are changing, and different forms of human fulfillment are called for. That is why much work is now being done at the ILO to imagine The Future of Work afresh.

The truth is that South Africans, just like the state, live on excessive and unmanageable debt. Like Zuma South Africans live as if money grows on trees *a la* Shabir Shaik! The result is that far too many South Africans are in dire stress and not coping with life at all. Innovative ideas like a shorter working week and job-sharing are not even on the radar in thinking about how to put more people at work, or that young people should stay longer at school or attend compulsory training schemes, or established apprenticeships. The crumbling social fabric of society everywhere deserves a different kind of engagement than one that is merely ameliorative. We need a more developmental approach to matters social and economic. More work needs to be done to bring young people, graduates and women back onto productivity and entrepreneurship net. A massive programme of skilling young South Africa is called for. South Africans are looking for relief so that they could enjoy being South Africans once again.

Finally, this is a matter that concerns me most. It is a commitment to social cohesion. South Africa has become a very fractured nation. It is fair to say that in an environment where economic opportunities are scarce and competition for scarce resources is high, all forms of anti-social conduct are to be expected. Crime, racism, tribalism and xenophobia, domestic violence are products of a nation that has not been able to optimize fairness and equality. But that does not mean that any effort should be spared because the greatness of South Africa ultimately, I believe, does not depend on her wealth or material prosperity but in its ability to live as Africans from all cultures and backgrounds and together make South Africa a place they can call home.

I have analysed the ANC in particular because that is the party that I am inclined to cast my vote for. This analysis also indicates the thought processes that occupy my mind as I contemplate this patriotic duty. It is not a task that can be taken lightly. Do any of the other political parties contesting elections approximate the concerns raised here? That may not be so, but all politics is about making the best possible choices at the right time. That is the reason I am a tactical voter.

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