

SUSTAINABILITY IN POLITICS

14 OCTOBER 2014

In the Northern Cape the EFF provincial leadership has resigned from the party and gone back to the ANC.

In the Free State a regional co-ordinator of the EFF broke away from the party to form “The New EFF”, claiming that he is receiving support from many unhappy EFF members. Mr Wonder Sentimile is upset that the EFF Leaders are taking their Parliamentary benefits (medical aid, salary, air tickets) whilst there was a decision before the election not to do so.

Let's not get carried away. The party's heartland is North West and Limpopo, but the two provinces where people broke away did produce 13% of the EFF's vote in the 2014 elections. If a party is at risk with 13% of its vote, it does bring to the fore THE critical test for opposition parties – do they have the staying power to remain sustainable and grow in subsequent elections?

ONLY ONE MADE IT

Since 1994 several opposition parties started off with fanfare, only to effectively disappear in subsequent elections. Patricia de Lille broke away from the PAC to form the Independent Democrats who disappeared into the DA; the UDM started parliamentary life in 1999 with 14 seats, now they are down to 4; in 2009 COPE got more votes than the EFF this year, but it collapsed spectacularly in the 2014 elections. Agang was launched with big fanfare but imploded even before it got to Parliament.

Those opposition parties that did manage to survive all shrank in subsequent elections (with the exception of the ACDP that went from 2 seats in 1994 to 3 seats now....).

The only exception to this general decline is the DA, itself an amalgamation of several parties of which the DP and NP were the most important ones. In 1994 the DP (as it then was) got 1.7% of the vote, in 1999 the DA got 9.56% and in 2014 it got 22.2%. It is the only opposition party so far that has met the test of sustainability.

SPACE ON THE LEFT

I remain of the opinion, stated in the July Newsletter, that the real space in our politics is to the left of the ANC. That is where the party-political action will be over the next few years. This may help Mr Malema, but it can also bring him competitors.

The trade union NUMSA is systematically moving ahead with plans to establish itself outside Cosatu and the ANC. It has re-affirmed its intention to launch a workers movement in 2015. They deny that it will be a political party, but of course a “movement” can easily morph into a political party.

NUMSA is also in the process of changing its constitution to recruit members outside its traditional domain of the steel and engineering industries. In industrial relations terms this is tantamount to a declaration of war against other (Cosatu) unions and will certainly ramp up tension between NUMSA and COSATU/ANC. The downside of this development is that employers may get caught in the cross fire between NUMSA and other unions, adding to SA's image of unstable labour relations, but let's not “extrapolate to catastrophe”.

STRIKE BALLOT THROUGH THE BACK DOOR

In the meantime NUMSA and the Department of Labour are in dispute because the department does not want to approve NUMSA's new constitution (allowing it to move into other unions' territories) because it does not provide for a strike ballot by NUMSA members before a strike is embarked upon.

The issue is not academic. Registration by the department grants union members protection against dismissal during a protected strike.

Clearly, strike ballots are coming in through the back door of administrative action, rather than through the front door of legislation. Strike ballots are not the panacea that many make them out to be, but they can only be good for more sustainable industrial relations.

POLICY IN THE MIDDLE

October brought evidence that government policy is being consolidated in the middle, indicating more sustainability.

In the August Newsletter I analysed the ANC's "radical economic transformation" agenda and came to the conclusion that it "refers more to a desire to radically change the realities of SA, than a desire to introduce radical left- (or right-) wing policies".

This conclusion has been confirmed by ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe in a speech to the Black Management Forum in October. He stated that the ANC's radical economic transformation "would not be adventurous and (was) in line with policies adopted over the last twenty years." He referred to the 16 million people on social grants and 7 million people who got electricity as examples of radical action over the last 20 years. Significantly, he then said "(radical economic transformation) needed the private sector to come on board". This implies more co-operation between government and the private sector, rather than the state going it alone, which has been the thinking of the Zuma administration so far.

The appointment of Lesetja Kganyago as the new Governor of the SA Reserve Bank is also an indication of a steady-as-she-goes approach. If anything, Mr Kganyago is a determined monetary hawk and a fiscal conservative – no yielding to the left there.

I did point out in the August analysis that more opportunities for Black advancement would certainly be part of the "radical economic transformation". That too was confirmed in the last while, with new BEE codes and demands from the Gauteng ANC for more black economic empowerment.

E-TOLLS

On the theme of sustainability, the Gauteng ANC has asked for e-tolls to be scrapped and replaced with a petrol levy. Gwede Mantashe hung the Gauteng ANC out to dry when he said in an interview that "they (Gauteng ANC leaders) must own up" to the fact they were part of the planning for e-tolls. He expressed himself in favour of user-must-pay. In the meantime the Transport MECs from the 8 other provinces, including the DA-controlled Western Cape, have expressed their opposition to a fuel levy in their provinces to pay for Gauteng roads.

Also, a Treasury official and SANRAL director published an interesting piece in the Business Times stating that the collection cost for the e-toll system is 17c in R1 – considerably less than some of the other numbers being bandied around.

The battle for the most sustainable system continues.

SO WHAT?

- The EFF has had a good run but has also seen some people leaving. It will increasingly be under pressure to show that it can hold on to its 6.35% of the vote; and, if it wants to be a future player, that it can actually grow that number.
- NUMSA is proceeding with actions that will move it out of the Cosatu/ANC alliance and that may very well spill over into the party-political arena with a new party of the left before the next election.
- There is further evidence that the ANC's "radical economic transformation" policy, except for more BEE, is consolidating in the middle, not on the left.
- While the party-political action is on the left, the policy action is in the middle.
- It is too early to predict whether e-tolls will go or survive – but the national ANC does not seem to be charging to the rescue of the Gauteng ANC.

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