

ANC succession struggle brings party closer to the brink

The midnight cabinet reshuffle of 31 March represents an important turning point in the ANC's factional civil war – the point at which Zuma's pursuit of his personal interests have taken precedence over the fate of the ANC, hastening its demise. The scale, brutality and manner of execution of the 31 March 2017 cabinet purge was calculated to send a message that Zuma and his faction are still – despite numerous setbacks especially at the hands of the judiciary – fully in control of the ANC and of the country.

Weizmann Hamilton Executive Committee

The social and economic impact of the reshuffle

The effect of the reshuffle has been to take the ANC's internal conflict out of the party onto the streets sparking unprecedented protests. The 100,000+ countrywide and in Tshwane respectively on the 7 and 12 April 2017 were the biggest explicitly anti-government protests since those against apartheid in the early 1990s.

The middle class who predominated in the protests are driven by fears that the credit downgrade will drive them into the same destitution that blights the lives of the working class majority – of mass unemployment, poverty and inequality.

In a cynical attempt to present their plans to make looting official state policy as in the interests of the masses, the Zuma faction has dressed themselves up in the pink ideological costumes of “radical economic transformation” stolen from the EFF's wardrobe of revolutionary pretensions. The falsehood underpinning this position is that it implies that Pravin, like all his predecessors as finance minister, implemented anything other than the neo-liberal capitalist policies the ANC leadership, under the Mandela presidency, adopted in 1996 and imposed on the ANC and the country without debate.

Yet new Finance Minister Malusi Gigaba made it his first priority to assure rating agencies and US international investors there will be no departure from Pravin's fiscal consolidation strategy. Malusi has even made it a point of publicly distancing the Finance Ministry from his new economic policy advisor, Professor Chris Malikane's proposals to nationalise the mines, Reserve Bank, commercial banks, insurance companies and mines.

With only the debt held in foreign currency downgraded, there is worse to come. As economist Nazreema Moola points out, “If both S&P and Moody's ... move the local currency rating to sub-investment grade in the next 6-9 months, that would then result in forced selling of South African bonds of about R120-billion. In short, that would have catastrophic consequences.” (*Daily Maverick* 13/04/17) Gigaba has in effect assured the rating agencies that he is committed to even deeper social spending cuts than the savage ones Pravin implemented.



7 April march to Union Buildings

Political Costs for the ANC

The cabinet reshuffle will not only impact economically and socially but it has also been carried out at enormous political cost. The ANC's credibility has been dealt a debilitating blow. The factional fractures have become unbridgeable chasms. Zuma has ruthlessly exploited the ideological bankruptcy and spinelessness of the SACP, driven a further wedge into the divisions in the Cosatu leadership and left the Tripartite Alliance on life support. The chances of a split before the 2019 general elections have increased, moving an electoral defeat for the ANC from the realm of possibility to probability.

Therefore despite appearances to the contrary, the cabinet reshuffle has further undermined Zuma's position.

In the meantime, the euphoria sweeping through the Zuma camp will become intoxicating should the opposition parties' motion of no confidence fail, as is likely, regardless of whether there is a secret ballot. Constitutionally, a successful motion triggers the fall of the entire cabinet along with the president. Far too much is at stake for ANC MPs, ministers, deputies, and senior officials, a very significant number of whom owe their political and financial fortunes to Zuma through his patronage network. ANC MPs, moreover, would have to face the accusation that they betrayed their party, and colluded with the hated DA opposition to oust a democratically elected president.

With the divisions so deep, and the atmosphere of fear and loathing so toxic, the ANC's internal anti-Zuma opposition, whose most pronounced characteristic is its cowardice and disorganisation, would be too intimidated by threats of dismissal to take the risk of voting with the opposition and expose themselves to losing their positions at the hands of a vengeful Zuma should he survive.

The Constitutional Court would be very wary of ordering a secret ballot as it would be vulnerable to the accusation that the judiciary is a leading player in the ludicrous conspiracy theory that it is an agent of foreign governments with an agenda to effect “regime change” in SA. It is therefore likely to cite the doctrine of the separation of powers and refrain from making such an order.

Zuma faction in the ascendancy... for now

The recall motion at the last National Executive Committee marked the first breach of Zuma's defences within the ANC's highest decision making body in between conferences - a structure previously firmly under his control. The NEC itself took place against the background of the first open parliamentary rebellion by ANC MPs against Zuma's stooges during the Ad Hoc Committee inquiry into the SABC.

After the NEC Zuma moved swiftly to fortify his factional position by ensuring an extended National Working Committee – a body subordinate to the NEC – was convened (irregularly according to former Zuma supporter Mathole Motshekga) and opened to selected provincial chairs and secretaries after the Pravin reshuffle. Three of the top six who had spoken out against the reshuffle, secretary general Gwede Mantashe, deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa and treasurer Zweli Mkhize were forced into a humiliating climb down and apologies for “washing the ANC's dirty linen in public”.

By retaining senior SACP members in cabinet, Zuma has exposed its spinelessness by calling its bluff over the threat of resignations should Gordhan be removed. With his factional opponents in such disarray, Zuma has reason to be confident of his chances of surviving another attempt to recall him at the next NEC.

...but overall position weakened

Despite this Zuma's overall position has been weakened. It cannot be ruled out that another attempt at a recall at the NEC could succeed. Even if it failed, the very attempt would show his position remains vulnerable.

Zuma has been further weakened by a number of blows by the judiciary as his cronies have been forced out of their positions one after the other – the SABC Board and COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng; former Eskom CEO Brian Molefe following former public protector Thuli Madonsela's state capture report, the NPA's Mrwebi and Jiba, and now former Hawks head Berning Ntlembeza. Zuma may also now be charged with perjury in the termination of former NPA head Mxolisi Nxasana's contract.

The Premier League's power has been undermined by a combination of their competing political ambitions, its corrupt nexus with the Guptas, and the increasing desperation of a lame-duck president producing disagreements over Nkosazana's candidacy. As his second term as both ANC and the country's president approaches, his allies in the leadership structures are preparing for a future without him.

The Gauteng province is in virtual open revolt against the Zuma faction. Zuma's KZN base is split down the middle with over 40% challenging the last provincial elections in court. The Eastern Cape is deeply divided and the Western Cape ANC provincial executive

committee has called for an urgent special NEC to discuss Zuma's position.

The Umkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans Association (MKVA) and the MK Military Council are in public conflict with the latter questioning the credentials of the former. The formation of Save SA and the 101 Stalwarts of ANC veterans have served to underline Zuma's growing isolation.

What should be of far greater concern for Zuma is that the divisions he has sown in the ANC have undermined his presidential succession strategy – the central aim of which is to ensure he does not face jail for corruption.

Zuma succession strategy

Zuma's succession strategy entails Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma replacing him as ANC president and giving him amnesty as the country's president. But Zuma's factionalism has inflicted such damage on the ANC Women's League that it has lost all credibility within the ANC itself. Both Speaker of Parliament, Baleka Mbete, and Human Settlements Minister, Lindiwe Sisulu, have refused to rule themselves out of the succession contest. This could split the ‘women's vote’ dealing a potentially fatal blow to Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma's prospects.

Worse, it could clear the way for Zuma's nemesis, Ramaphosa to succeed him at the ANC's December 2017 elective conference. In the circumstances, Zuma's worst nightmare, that Ramaphosa will throw him to the wolves of the justice system, may become reality.

As the ANC's electoral stocks decline with each successive scandal, and the fear of losing its parliamentary majority in 2019 mounting, Dlamini-Zuma's supporters could demand that Zuma step down not only as the ANC president but of the country if the ANC is to stand any chance of winning the 2019 elections.

A mass socialist workers party needed

The working class will have no alternative but to fight back against the coming offensive. As Trotsky pointed out, the bending of the tops of the tree are the signs of coming storms – that is what the movement of the middle class signifies.

It is clear from the EFF's tactical positioning, especially since the local government elections, that it is preparing to enter into a pro-capitalist coalition with the DA, a section of the ANC and other parties post 2019.

There is no solution within the framework of capitalism. We call upon Saftu, Numsa, all workers, youth and communities to join forces in calling an Assembly for Working Class Unity to work out a road map towards forming a mass socialist workers party.

