

Shrink the Vote and Save the ANC – from Itself

Raymond Suttner waxed eloquent recently in the Daily Maverick – Restoring Ethics, Trust and Compassion into South African Politics. He concludes with this appeal:

“Our politics must be rebuilt on new foundations that draw on principles that were held dear in earlier periods. That means that we need the input of people from a range of sectors, beyond the party political, especially faith-based institutions and organisations, educators, students, workers, the poor, the marginalised and the homeless. All these people must fill the gap left by party politics and restore a sense of pride in standing for beliefs that respect all human beings.”

It sounds like he has given up on the ANC being able to fix the country - largely because it cannot fix itself. So instead of looking to other political parties, he turns to other stakeholders.

Recently I watched Ronnie Kasrils being interviewed by Tim Modise. It was soon after the report to parliament about SSA shenanigans was released. Kasrils shrugged and said “I told you so”.

Then I saw the author of Gangster State being interviewed, also by Tim Modise. It had come as no surprise to Pieter-Louis Myburgh or his publisher that Ace Magashule was on the warpath, in a frenzy of denialism.

South Africans seem to be very good at diagnostics. They are able to identify and analyse the Problem Statement. This is a huge first step.

But they seem to be missing the forest because of the trees.

Why not just “park” the ANC for five years, to let it sort out its raging identity crisis? Give it time to heal. Let someone else rule for a term-of-office. Humility is a good medicine for healing.

The polls show that the ANC is out in front, but barely past the 50 percent post. No other single party can muster as many seats in the National Assembly, but one fact tends to be overlooked. The contender in the 2019 elections is not another Party – it is a Coalition of opposition parties.

Known as the “Clean Coalition”, there are senior people who could form a competent and capable caretaker government for five years. So why doesn’t the ANC just take a sabbatical? Names come to mind like Holomisa, Lekota, de Lille, Buthelezi - that could anchor a reputable “All-Star Coalition”. Which could create space for the best of new ideas emerging in the 2019 election – from young bulls like Maimane, Msimanga, Mashaba, Malema, Ndlozi and Mpofu.

At the last election in 2014, the ANC’s identity crisis was already starting. Madlala-Routlege and Kasrils were recommending a boycott – that would effectively shrink the ANC vote.

Boycotting is lazy. It is more democratic to get out to vote – and then to spoil your ballot. This sends a discernible message to your party, because those votes are counted in the election results. Absenteeism cannot be counted.

Erstwhile ANC supporters who cannot bring themselves to vote for another political brand, are beginning to realize that if they vote for Ramaphosa they are also voting for Magashule and Mabuza. It's a package deal.

This is often called "unity" but what that really means is "gridlock".

Some are saying that the two ANC factions are just biding their time until May 9th, the day after the elections. Then all hell will break loose between the two factions, and there is no guarantee that Ramaphosa won't be recalled – like Mbeki and Zuma were. This could explain the rush to get witnesses testifying at the various Commissions – right in the midst of election campaigning? This could be an attempt by one faction to weaken the other? Or it can be seen as a decoy – full of allegations but no arrests or convictions, because after the elections the scores will be settled in more sinister hostilities.

Do voters really want to live in a country to be ruled by a party at war with itself?

Loyalty to the ANC could cause voters to abstain. Spoiling a ballot is an abstention. You can't put an "X" beside an abstention, the IEC does not offer one. You can only put an "X" beside one of the 48 registered parties!

Or you can put a huge "X" across the whole ballot, and spoil it. This is not un-democratic. It sends a message that you were not given a real choice, you reject the whole approach to a multi-party democracy in which one party dominates. Its list determines who will sit in parliament, not those ballots. The party is more powerful than the people. That is not democracy, that is party-ocracy.

This is a patronage system. That kick-starts corruption, which opens the door to State Capture.

A lot of spoiled ballots by disgruntled ANC supporters would have the overall effect of shrinking its support base. That gives an opportunity to the "Clean Coalition" to step into the gap. Let others rule for five years. We have seen one province and three major cities run by non-ANC governments. They don't fall apart, they keep running.

I agree with Raymond Suttner that "*Our politics must be rebuilt on new foundations that draw on principles that were held dear in earlier periods*".

That starts with re-building the ANC; put it into intensive care for five years.

I don't agree with Suttner that at election season this suddenly means that all those other stakeholders should come to the rescue. That is intellectually dishonest – perennially in favour of the ANC hanging on to power. Face the music. Man up and move over.

Suttner, Kasrils, Madala-Routlege and other ANC stalwarts should be encouraging loyal ANC voters to abstain. To spoil their ballots. To shrink the ANC vote.

Move over, ANC, and make room for a Clean Coalition, composed of other parties and led by the opposition All-Stars. Do us proud, and walk the talk of rebuilding those new foundations. Go down into opposition mode, and start re-building the ANC into something worth keeping.