

“Tolerable Compromises” in a Coalition Government

The election campaign is seven weeks old; only three weeks left to go. The polls show that the ANC is leading, as usual. But the polls also show that the only threat to the ANC is a Coalition of opposition parties. No single party can beat the ANC, but it could be unseated by a Coalition.

The problem is that such a Coalition is not campaigning per se. You have to read between the lines, so to speak. Although last week, both DA leader Maimane and EFF Chair Dali Mpofu had some optimistic things to say about Coalitions. In the case of EFF, this could signal an internal policy change?

The thing is that if the ANC tries to form a Minority government by counting on EFF backing, it will only ever be a junior partner to the ANC behemoth. Whereas in a true Coalition with the DA and other parties, the EFF would inter-act as a more-or-less equal partner.

Like joint ventures, Coalitions are distinct from their partners. The Law recognizes a new entity, whether or not it is registered and formalized. So a DA-led Coalition would not adopt the DA's manifesto as such, but it would become a blend of policies from all of its partners.

I have selected four of the major election issues, and tried to imagine what a “tolerable compromise” might look like. That is, a way forward that all Coalition partners might agree on.

First – Land Reform. You don't have to be a Marxist or even a Left-leaning social democrat to realize the opportunities that lie in Land Reform. Opportunities to populate the agricultural sector with more youth, to secure food security, and to address high youth unemployment. Centrist and even Right Coalition partners cannot deny that Land Reform is an imperative.

The difference is – HOW to make it happen. The EFF has been pressing for land expropriation without compensation, to be driven by an immediate constitutional amendment. The ANC seems to be on board with that approach, but a Coalition might want to take another road up the same mountain?

For example, government already has a LOT of land available that has not yet been allocated. Also, an event-based approach like the Year of Jubilee might be worth considering, instead of a policy-based approach that could land government in the courts indefinitely with defiant Afrikaners. Also, the extent to which land-hunger is about farming space, as distinct from urban building plots, needs to be determined. How many youth really want to go “back to the land”? Won't they see that as regress? Do they want to labour in the hot sun in a sector that is fraught with risks like drought and pestilence? Remembering that only three percent of university enrollment is in Agriculture. It does not seem to be the career path of choice.

Second – Job Creation. The ANC's 25-year record is abysmal. The truth is that the economy is still shedding jobs. Meanwhile the population has grown from 40 million in 1994 to 55 million in 2019. Many of these new citizens or residents are now entering the work force. Is there room for them in the job market? The average age of unionized workers is well above 35 years, whereas entry level is

well below that. The ANC has focused on factories, mines and infrastructure projects to shore up rampant unemployment. It is a failed strategy.

Even in terms of Land Reform, the majority of the BEE projects in Agriculture have been large-scale. The ANC has not taken the labour-intensive low end seriously. Just like the ANC's race to "go Nuclear" while by-passing the Renewable Energy sector, driven by relatively small private producers. Even in that sector, the ANC has preferred IPPs, namely large "solar farms" or "wind farms" when there is a huge untapped potential for private dwellings to self-generate power and also contribute surplus power into the grid. The ANC just doesn't think this way.

Whereas the DA and other opposition parties champion entrepreneurship and private-sector initiatives. They appreciate small business and small-scale producers, even in the Energy sector.

The Unions are opposed to sub-dividing Eskom, which was already dead and buried financially some years ago. It is a case of the walking dead. But Unions exist to protect workers, most of whom are over 35 years of age. The irony is that most of the Electorate is now under that age!

One example is domestic solar water heating. Not only is it best to "go green" and decommission electrical geysers, but there are still ten million homes in South Africa that have not done so. Only one million have been converted to Solar. This one opportunity can generate thousands of jobs for youth. But instead of a small bouquet of skills-training blended with entrepreneurship, to tap this opportunity to generate wealth, the SETAs prefer to fund full Qualifications (minimum one year of training). This solution actually suits government better than it suits the Youth. A Coalition government that has more young leaders will better represent the interests of Youth in its decision making.

Third – Law and Order. The testimony of Robert McBride looks like it is the proverbial clincher. No one was sure whether to believe the likes of Angelo Aggrizi of Bosasa infamy. *Aggrizi was sleazy; McBride is our pride.* The fact is that there was a "silent coup" happening in State Capture. McBride has been very convincing about this.

McBride's testimony also explains why the response has generally been so "soft" – because the structures were intentionally "softened up" to go easy on the perpetrators.

Well the IFP is calling for the death penalty back, and the DA manifesto calls for a 15-year prison sentence for anyone caught in corruption or patronage. Somehow, the partners in a Coalition will have to arrive at an agreement on how to deal with the perpetrators. The EFF did us proud in confronting Zuma, but seemed to reverse that trend by backing the likes of Moyane and Koko in recent months. Perhaps the losses that it has sustained have taught it a lesson? Namely, that Reform has passed the point of no return at this stage. There is no going back. For the EFF the choice is stark – a junior partner to the ANC in a Minority government, or a relatively equal partner to the DA in a Coalition. But we do remember the SONA rumbles-in-the-jungle and recognize a desire in the ranks of the EFF to confront the looting and plundering appropriately.

Fourth and last – Corporate Banking. Speaking of which, both ABSA and Standard Bank have announced massive lay-offs in the near future. More job-shedding. The EFF's Chivambo put forward a proposal to establish a State Bank. Soon after, he himself was implicated in the VBS scandal, which scorched his credibility on this platform.

However, in the search for “tolerable compromises”, as Coalition might agree to launch a major initiative to foster Credit Unions. In South Africa these are called credit cooperatives or stokvels, but they are local, not national entities. These can be networked, though, under a state umbrella.

Take, for example, the SPCA. Each and every local SPCA is a non-profit organization in its own right. These do local fundraising and mobilize volunteers who love animals. Credit Unions could do the same – and would bring Savers much closer to their Savings to avoid any future VBS-esque scandals.

But the umbrella over all SPCA is a National Council. It is constituted by legislation – the Societies for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals Act. You have to make the distinction between local, private NPOs and a national body that report to (read: belongs to) the Minister of Agriculture.

Enough said about the SPCA model – it is just an example of what could constitute a “tolerable compromise” in the context of Coalition government. Remembering what Mohammed Yunus said about his Grameen banks: *“The banks ask, Are the people credit-worthy? We ask, are the banks people-worthy?”*

These four examples illuminate the fact that for once, the National Assembly would start to act the way the Constitution envisaged the functioning of multi-party Democracy. Fact is that this has been hijacked by “vanguardism” – a genetic throwback to the days when the ANC was a liberation movement not a political party.

Coalition in fact would not just bring South Africa a new government – but *a new way of governing*.