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MaCheeky Diary

Manuel's imminent fall a long time in the making

IF YOU believe debates in the tripartite alliance about enhancing the planning capacity of the post-apartheid state started just before the April elections, you are mistaken. I first became aware of these discussions during the last quarter of 2006.

At the time, the allies of President Jacob Zuma, especially those in the Congress of South African Trade unions and the South African Communist Party, were acutely aware of the fact that some people were spreading the rumour that Zuma lacked the ability to govern a modern state and economy. The sceptics had, of course, conveniently forgotten about former US presidents George Bush and Ronald Reagan. So, in anticipation of Zuma's victory in Polokwane and his election as head of state, the left sought to convince doubting Thomases that Zuma would govern SA better than his predecessors.

They recognised that Zuma would need two things: first, he would have to surround himself with people who knew what he did not know (the left, of course) and, second, he would need a plan.

Therefore, the twis over Minister in the Presidency Trevor Manuel and his planning toy telephone has been coming since 2006.

The problem, however, is that our comrades have become adept at creating structures but are not as enthusiastic when it comes to accepting that planning is a skill, and it is a prerequisite (or is it a sine qua non?) for effective delivery.

In the three years prior to the April elections, Zuma's allies occasionally took breaks from factional battles in the African National Congress (ANC) to focus on the nature, orientation and functioning of the post-apartheid-post-1996 class project state. The result of these discussions looked nothing like the green paper of Trevor Manuel. Some were in favour of a super-presidency that would consist of two beefed-up deputy presidents who would head two super ministries.

In this model, planning would be the core function of either the office of the president or two super ministries that would report directly to the president.

The idea of a planning commission as a place to dump Manuel came much later, and was tainted by Zuma's appointment of Manuel to the position of planning czar without portfolio.

A "new" discussion document seeks to go back to a future when Manuel was not going to be as powerful as he might be if the planning commission takes off.

The new document proposes the setting up of a presidential planning commission (of the Polokwane class project) that will be chaired by either the president or the deputy president.

I think it's time for Manuel to realise that pride should come before a fall, unless he is not the author of the green paper in the first place.



ALAN BOESAK

No fatted calf for prodigal son

ASK anyone, T-shirts of the Congress of the People (COPE) are now as scarce as T-shirts of the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging and the Pan Africanist Congress.

This is quite disappointing given the fact that COPE was formed only last year.

This week Reverend Allan Boesak, after months of praying, got tired of waiting for his COPE T-shirt and announced that he was leaving the party. I don't remember what COPE said about Boesak in its statement since it seems party leaders could not remember the effect he had on their political fortunes either.

Singing the hymn, "I'm going home ... I'm going home ... to die no more," Boesak announced that, like any good prodigal son, he had requested a meeting with President Jacob Zuma. Zuma, who was busy freeing jailed mercenaries in Equatorial Guinea, had apparently forgotten that COPE existed and, therefore, saw no value in the decision by Boesak to leave what he probably sees as *inyok'efile* — a dead snake.

It is not clear whether the other priest, Myume Dandala, will be hanging up his COPE prayer mat anytime soon.

PAC may be the new land barons

THE decision of the global economic crisis and the Department of Rural Development and (lack of) Land Reform to extend the deadline for the transfer of land to victims of colonial and apartheid land theft to 2025, has given hope to the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC).

Sore Throat tells me the decision might unite the many splinters of the PAC. As you know, the PAC has spent the past 15 years looking for land. A few years ago, a former secretary-general of the party of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe was seen selling land for R25 in Ekurhuleni irrespective of size. It seems the darker you were in complexion, the more land you got for your R25.

Sore Throat is still very bitter that, because she is a disadvantaged white Afrikaner from Benoni, she was not allowed to use her credit card budget facility to buy herself several plots of land. She also tells me there is video footage of several splinters of the PAC loitering in the streets of the Zimbabwean capital, Harare.

The footage was taken this week and it seems the PAC envoys have been sent to Zimbabwe to persuade Robert Mugabe to emigrate to SA. Others have been seen distributing pamphlets at taxi ranks around the country. These pamphlets call on the poor to burn copies of the Freedom Charter to obviate the suffering that Eskom is going to inflict on all of us from next year.

These PAC zealots are convinced that the Kliptown Congress of the People, which typed the Freedom Charter, was a gathering of liars who said SA "belongs to all who live in it". If this is true, they ask rather pointedly, why is it that land-hungry blacks must wait until 2025 for their land?

I must say, the campaign seems to be gaining momentum. The other day, I heard an angry caller during a radio talk show accusing the president of being a liar. He said the shoot-to-kill promise was not worth the cowboy hat on which it was written because our government wants to buy stolen property from white landowners.

A BEE airline will have the power to control the weather

LAST Friday, I took a flight from Durban to Johannesburg. Because of the inclement weather, we could not land at OR International and had to fly back to Durban.

This got me thinking about black economic empowerment (BEE). You see, this would never happen to a black-owned airline. This would not have happened if the ANC was serious about BEE. I hope things BEE will change when Julius Malema is elected president of the country. This comrade has demonstrated a willingness to tackle tough economic challenges.

His call for the nationalisation of mines is encouraging because it means we can count on him to re-nationalise SAA and turn it into a black-owned entity. This will come with many advantages.

We must not forget that black people started flying long before the coming of the white man and his airplanes. In many parts of the country people fly around on brooms and loaves of bread. This, however, is something they do only at night because they do not want white people to steal our technology. In addition, black people can make lightning, and they decide who and when it should strike. In short, black people have control over the weather. This is why I believe BEE policies should culminate in the creation of a black-owned airline — Ubuntu Airways. What? You want to know the name of the airline which could not control the weather last Friday? Well, I refuse to tell you. I still hold the British Empire in high esteem.



P.S. IT SEEMS the wishes of the rich always come true. Do you still remember how, earlier in the year, Human Settlements Minister Tokyo Sexwale spent a night in a shack. However, Sore Throat has reliably informed me that he got to his humble abode only at 3am because he had spent the night in meetings trying to avoid going "home". Now, the National Union of Metalworkers of SA says it will not rest until BEE is nationalised and Sexwale finds himself living in an informal settlement. It argues that the post-apartheid reality of black billionaires such as Sexwale offends those whose religion was founded on the principle of a classless society. It seems Sexwale's wealth amounts to too much class. You winners of the Lotto, consider yourselves warned!

Zille's diatribe does little to allay concerns



BRYAN ROSTROM

THE three main political parties in the Western Cape all displayed their least attractive profiles this week. Naturally I only mention this as an equal opportunities observer.

First Western Cape Premier Helen Zille cautioned her fellow Democratic Alliance (DA) office-holders to be constantly sensitive about race, in order not to alienate potential voters.

Then, promptly ignoring her own advice, she entered the ongoing "is Cape Town racist?" debate with all the subtlety of a Stormers prop. Or should that be Tony Leon?

In a beligerent article Zille dismissed the claims of those who believe Cape Town is not welcoming to black South Africans. She said this is merely a myth and mostly African National Congress (ANC) propaganda.

Of course it's a gross, ungrammatical generalisation to say a city is "racist". But her blanket denial simply insults the genuine feelings of many black Africans who do not abuse the R word, but still feel deeply uncomfortable in the fancier parts of this city.

Distinguished academic and writer Njabulo Ndebele, for example, suggested SA's black citizens may feel that they have woken in an enormous vacation house, now supposed to be theirs, but which they do not quite recognise — so that today, in their own home, many black people, "tiptoe for fear of offending the rightful owners".

Does Zille's harangue help such hesitant citizens feel any more at home? Hardly. Her aggressive stance is in direct contradiction to her request to DA underlings to be more responsive about racial sensitivities. That doesn't mean that she has to tip-toe round delicate subjects. But surely the first requirement is to listen to genuine concerns.

This feeling of being unwelcome is a historical inheritance, a social reality. After all, when the ANC came to both this city and province, such complaints were voiced as loudly and as often. This is not a party issue, and Zille shouldn't fall into that trap.

So what if the ANC tries to exploit this? A visionary politician will see past a desire to strike back at an opportunist opponent and instead try to hear what ordinary people are saying. That's the way to sway people, to get votes: the way, dare one suggest, that the DA might finally begin to persuade more black citizens that the party is not hostile to them.

As it is, I'll bet many black citizens of Cape Town were alienated, even infuriated, by her diatribe. Being defensive is only going to fuel the perception that the DA is an exclusive club.

Helen Zille has many good qualities. Trying to sound like Tony Leon isn't one of them.

SIMULTANEOUSLY, it was revealed that former ANC premier Ebrahim Rasool ignored legal advice (of 16 lawyers and special advisers!) in order to set up a commission to try to smear the DA. He elevated his own squalid political manoeuvring above the law.

Rasool forced senior local officials to compromise themselves, telling them "sometimes the political has to prevail". He is now an ANC MP — so being cynically cavalier with legal niceties is unlikely to present a problem.

FINALLY, to cap an unappetising political week in the Cape, Allan Boesak announced that he is resigning as the face of Cope in the province. He says he plans to return to "doing God's work". Until the ANC makes an offer he can't refuse?

Kamfers Dam bungling is a triple tragedy

THREE forms of income keep the dorp where I live afloat — government grants, farming and the tourism-based hospitality industry. Pull out any one of these three blocks and the place would collapse. It's a critically important interface, and no one who lives here can fail to be aware of it.

Actually it's the same with rural towns of any size, and Kimberley is no exception. Despite its cathedral and status as provincial capital, it's really not more than a large dorp. That's why I'm astounded Kimberley's Sol Plaatje Municipality and the Northern Cape government have been so cavalier about the Kamfers Dam project.

This scheme, almost miraculously successful despite the best efforts of the province to wreck it, involved the construction of an artificial breeding island for the Lesser Flamingo. The birds already had a presence in the area but weren't particularly successful at breeding: this was a cause for concern because there are just six breeding grounds in the world.



CARMEL RICKARD

"The birds would have somewhere to raise their families, and the people of Kimberley would have a new kind of diamond on which to help rest the municipal economy"

And even the other five aren't always able to provide the right conditions. At Etosha Pan, for example, the birds breed successfully only every 10 or 11 years, and climate change is reducing the success rate at the other sites too.

So here was a fantastic opportunity to combine assistance to the birds with assistance to the people of Kimberley: the birds would have somewhere to raise their families, and the people of Kimberley would have a new kind of diamond on which to help rest their municipal economy.

The flashy pink, red and white diamond of the Lesser Flamingo would supplement the carbon diamond that led to the dorp being established in the first place.

With the Kamfers Dam breeding island, the local and provincial tourism industry was given an incredible resource. At virtually no cost to themselves, they were handed the kind of attraction tourism people elsewhere could only long for.

The best that we can do in my dorp is to market our local sheep

industry, but you have to work incredibly hard to sell a "Bibberchill" in the middle of a Free State winter.

Nothing very romantic or picturesque about standing shivering around a penned group of "four horn" sheep, or cheering on the world champion shearing team.

Kimberley, by contrast, would have had tourists falling over themselves to get good flamingo photo opportunities and great sightings. No doubt Sol Plaatje and the Northern Cape would even have been in line for some kind of eco-friendly tourism award. Hell, it makes my mouth water just thinking about it.

But instead of doing everything it can to take care of this invaluable gift, the province has approved a housing estate on the edge of the dam. The implications for the island project are potentially devastating. I know people also need somewhere to raise their families, but while there are alternative sites for Kimberley residents, the dam is the only possible place for the flamingos.

And there's more: the municipality has been grossly negligent in dealing with several crucial management problems in relation to the dam, to the detriment of the birds and the local people, as well as the loss of possibly a third of all Kimberley's water.

That negligence has caused a crisis. Storms over the past fortnight have caused serious flooding in the dam area, threatening the nearby railway line with collapse. And the flamingo island is in danger of being washed away. Thousands of chicks have drowned, and nests and eggs been deluged, and one of the world's ecological wonders looks as though it's about to become mere sewage.

The flooding needn't have happened, though, if the municipality had shown the slightest regard for the treasure in its hands, if its members had done their duty by sorting out the water problems. Now, far from earning an eco-friendly tourism award, Sol Plaatje and the Northern Cape should get a dunce's cap. Bottom of the class for you, fellas.