

## Yet another test of confidence

**P**arliamentary motions of no confidence in the president, while being full of sound and fury, have been largely predictable affairs in the past 23 years, with the governing ANC using its huge majorities over the years to carry the day against the opposition.

Of course, in the honeymoon days of the Nelson Mandela presidency, no such motions were found to be necessary. His successor, Thabo Mbeki, faced a handful of no-confidence motions, most notably on the energy crisis and rolling blackouts, which started on his watch. His HIV/AIDS denialism was also the subject of debate.

It has been very different for the Jacob Zuma presidency, with no-confidence motions coming thick and fast. These motions resulted from the swathe of scandals that have surrounded Zuma, not the least of them Nkandla, the firing of Nhlanhla Nene as finance minister and the president's relationship with the Gupta family.

In all the eight motions of no confidence that have gone before, the parliamentary caucus of the ANC closed ranks and supported Zuma. This happened despite numerous calls for secret ballots and for ANC MPs to vote with their consciences. All to no avail. It would have been unthinkable for ANC MPs to side with the opposition to get rid of their leader.

Zuma faces another no-confidence motion in a week's time. The indications are that this time could be different. This is because of the huge damage to the economy that followed his midnight cabinet reshuffle – when he fired then finance minister Pravin Gordhan and his deputy, Mcebisi Jonas – and the political fallout that resulted from the manner in which he did it. Due to these steps, two ratings agencies have

downgraded SA to junk status, meaning that tougher economic times will be with us for some time to come.

### **THE OLD WEAPON USED BY PARTY BOSSSES IN THE PAST MIGHT NOT WORK AS WELL AS IT ONCE DID**

The anti-Zuma mood in the country is at a crescendo. The old weapon used by party bosses in the past – vote against the motion or lose your seat in Parliament – might not work as well as it once did

because the ANC under Zuma is certain to lose swathes of support and MPs will lose their jobs anyway, come 2019.

A simple majority of MPs is required to approve the motion and force the president to resign. This means 50% plus one of all MPs seated in the house at the time must vote in favour.

What will be critical on April 18 will be the behaviour of the South African Communist Party (SACP) members, who were elected to Parliament on the ANC ticket.

The ANC holds 249 of the 400 National Assembly seats, meaning that more than 50 of them will have to support the no-confidence motion for it to succeed, assuming every opposition member is present to vote. There are about 15 to 20 SACP MPs in the house. Another 30 ANC MPs – at least – will have to support the motion for it to succeed.

Gordhan is expected to be in the house for the debate – as is Jeremy Cronin, who, in a fiery speech at an Ahmed Kathrada memorial service, came close to suggesting that SACP MPs would vote against Zuma. Will their presence in the house influence the way in which their colleagues vote? If that is the intention, then they will have to do some serious lobbying in the run-up to the vote.

ANC MPs will be told how to vote and the caucus has already issued a statement saying that it supports Zuma. But former president Kgalema Motlanthe has declared that ANC MPs cannot be punished for how they vote because they are elected public representatives and not branch members. This interpretation, of course, is disputed by the pro-Zuma lobby.

However, the biggest obstacle remains the deep aversion that ANC MPs feel about voting with the DA.

In the end, it is unlikely that the ANC will fire Zuma this time, but the chances of success are growing every day.