

ANC democrats face choice of allegiance

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It took a decade to entrench the coup in the ANC. While notable opposition has finally roused itself in the party,

it is too little, too late. This captured organisation is now the African National Zuma (ANZ). The president's goons dominate the party's leadership structures, not to mention the police and spy apparatus. The governing party is headed for a new split.

South Africans have taken to the streets, putting ANZ on notice. How did it get here?

In 2007, after I was elected secretary of an ANC branch in Cape Town and a colleague was elected deputy secretary, a branch meeting descended into chaos. A gun was pointed at the colleague, chairs were thrown and there was mayhem. I had to ask a provincial ANC official, who had brought bodyguards, to help me leave the building.

What sparked this violence? Supporters of Jacob Zuma had just lost an election. Similar scenes were repeated



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in many ANC branches. Internal democracy and contestation of ideas were not part of their DNA.

Shortly before the ANC's Polokwane conference in 2007, our branch met to elect delegates to the conference. Before the vote, the branch had to declare its leadership preference. It became obvious the majority preferred then-president Thabo Mbeki to Zuma. Enter the South African Communist Party (SACP). In a sleight of hand, the party proposed Kgalema Motlanthe, knowing very well that splitting the Mbeki vote would favour Zuma, which is exactly what happened. At Polokwane, Zuma became president amid chaos and

intimidation. This state of affairs prevails at all events where his faction is challenged. The thuggish behaviour of the ANC Youth League at Ahmed Kathrada's Durban memorial on Sunday fits into this category.

Reflecting on this follows the SACP's latest stance on Zuma. Its leaders say Zuma should step down. Better late than never. But why now, when Zuma has been a serial offender of human decency and the law?

The SACP engineered Zuma's victory, its leaders have been his most vociferous defenders and they continue to serve in his Cabinet. When Zuma confirmed in court he had unprotected sex with a friend's daughter, the SACP gave him quiet support. The same was true when he fathered a child out of wedlock with a daughter of yet another friend. When the Guptas landed an aircraft full of friends at a national key point for a family wedding, the party's first deputy general

secretary general, Jeremy Cronin, reportedly said "lowly officials should not get the blame if they were instructed by someone higher up." Lowly officials got the blame and he stayed quiet.

Cronin has served as deputy public works minister since June 2012. A prolific poet, his verse was remarkably spare when it came to discussing the Nkandla crookery. He squirmed out of it by complaining of "anomalies" and "overcharging".

When former public protector Thuli Madonsela began looking into Zuma's Nkandla palace, SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande said reporting on Nkandla was "white people's lies". In 2014, he wrote: "Nowhere in both the ministers' and the public protector's report does it say the president's homestead was built by the state. Nor had the president asked for any security upgrades at his house. Nowhere has the president also been found to

have misled Parliament. In fact, the biggest hole in the public protector's report might well be that there is a serious disjuncture between her findings and the conclusions."

It did not end well for Zuma and the SACP on Nkandla as the Constitutional Court ruled the president failed to uphold, defend and respect the Constitution.

Now, Zuma does as he pleases. He listens to no one. He fires ministers and demands that everyone toe the line. Old men and women in the ANC are paralysed. Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa, ANC secretary-general Gwede

Mantashe and treasurer-general Zweli Mkhize were forced into an embarrassing public retreat after they dared utter a few critical words.

Jackson Mthembu, the ANC's chief whip in Parliament, freezes at the mere thought of marshaling his forces to vote against Zuma in the motion of no confidence called for next week. The integrity committee has collapsed. ANC stalwarts are toyed with at every turn.

Will the SACP instruct its MPs to vote with the motion or will they continue to dance to the Zuma shuffle?

SA is no longer hostage to the notion the ANC is the "leader of society". Tens of thousands are out in the streets, and it is only the beginning; this genie is not going back into the bottle. Or choice remains for the few democrats in the ANC: Are you with Zuma or the people

● Morudu writes from Cape Town.

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