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Page: 4

How 'anti-GNU' group lost out at DA meeting

By THABO MOKONE and LIZEKA TANDWA

● DA leaders from Gauteng cut lonely figures at the party's federal council meeting this week after their proposal that its GNU ministers should account directly to the party on their government activities was rejected.

This is according to DA leaders who spoke to the Sunday Times on condition of anonymity after the meeting in Johannesburg on Monday.

Insiders said the Gauteng leaders, led by provincial chair Fred Nel, arrived at the meeting in "an anti-GNU" mood, asking what the party had gained from the GNU as it continued to be undermined by the ANC on policy issues such as the Bela and Expropriation Acts, among others.

Sources said that during the debate, Nel stunned the federal council when he proposed that the meeting should adopt a motion that all DA ministers and deputy ministers serving in the GNU should directly report and account to DA structures such as the federal executive and the federal council on their work in government. Other sources said Gauteng DA leaders also argued in favour of withdrawal from the GNU, claiming the party had dropped the ball on Bela.

But, according to those who were at the meeting, Nel's proposal was roundly rejected after DA leader John Steenhuisen, who is also the GNU's minister of agriculture, spoke against it.

Insiders said Steenhuisen told the meeting there were already enough measures to hold DA ministers accountable. He said they were accounting to him as party leader and he was leading them in cabinet meetings.

Nel on Thursday declined to comment on the motion he tabled at the meeting but denied he went as far as calling for a total withdrawal from the GNU.

"He [Nel] has been like that from the word go; the first GNU roadshow was in Gauteng, he was the one who mentioned issues around blue lights. We voted on Nel's motion and fortunately it did not go through," said one of the sources.

"It was a motion to say we must report to federal council about what we are doing. But John was at pains to say, 'I meet these guys every Friday, we constantly have meetings.' So I don't understand why he thinks we are not held accountable."

The Gauteng branch of the DA last year failed to strike a deal to form a provincial unity government with the ANC after negotiations about sharing positions collapsed.

Another top party leader from Gauteng argued that DA

messaging on GNU affairs was not casting the party in a positive light.

"The reality is that what we have done and how we have managed the GNU is not putting us in a good light with South Africans and our constituency. We keep putting red-line

items, and when the president disregards them we move from our position and pretend these are compromises that are reached.

"Look, Bela might not have been bad in terms of the way it ended, because compromise was reached, but there are other items which have been overlooked, including the bad faith with which Ramaphosa entered into this coalition. So we needed clarity on why we have to continue with this

GNU, what our ministers are doing to service our constituency and how we change the messaging and narrative to benefit us."

Last week, Steenhuisen announced that the DA was not ready to walk away from the GNU, despite its unhappiness over Ramaphosa's decision to sign the



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A Gauteng DA leader

Expropriation Act into law.

The legislation allows for the minister of public works – the DA's Dean MacPherson – to expropriate land and other property without compensation in the public interest, which is at odds with DA policies.

Steenhuisen said walking away from the GNU at this point would plunge the country into a governance crisis. However, he has declared a formal dispute with Ramaphosa over the

Expropriation Act and is seeking a "reset" in relations between the ANC and DA at the level of the GNU.

The DA leader held a "bilateral" with Ramaphosa this week on the sidelines of the cabinet lekgotla, as one of the first steps towards mending relations.

"It was a constructive and worthwhile engagement and commitments have been made on mechanisms to ensure more meaningful engagement, including regular meetings between us," Steenhuisen said.

DA leader John Steenhuisen
Picture: Freddy Mavunda



DA Gauteng chair
Fred Nel

