

RESIGNATION FROM THE DA

- *“an over-managed, proprietorial autocracy..... that needs to engage in some serious introspection.”*

“Effective 3 August 2016, I resigned from the DA having been a member since 29 November 2000. My decision to leave the DA was very much part of my decision not to stand for a fourth term as Bluff ward councillor.

That decision stemmed from my increasing frustration with and opposition to the way the DA has come to be managed over the past five years. Indeed, it has become an over-managed, proprietorial autocracy in which Parkinson’s law is rampant. As such, councillors have become hostages to its multi-layered management structure of bureaucrats whose requirements have no connection with service to ratepayers.

At the heart of that bureaucracy is a system called PDMS – Performance development management system. In its latest form, 99% of what it requires a DA councillor to do has NOTHING to do with serving the ratepayer. Councillors are seen as political functionaries of the DA first and foremost – in terms of fulfilling PDMS requirements. So when the DA talks about accountability, it refers to the PDMS requirements. As I once pointed out to the architect of PDMS, Greg Krumbock, it has produced a situation where a councillor who is conscientious in serving ratepayers and attending to ward work but who falls short on fulfilling PDMS requirements is actually labelled an under-performing councillor by the DA’s PDMS system.

That happened to me this year when in February I was served a letter by the DA bureaucracy informing me that I was “redflagged” in terms of not satisfying PDMS requirements and as a result was ineligible as councillor material in the event that I wished to be a candidate in the election. That letter simply reinforced my decision to leave the DA at the end of my term. After years of loyal service to the DA, including eleven years as Caucus secretary and having the most prolific media footprint in KZN, I regard such treatment as totally unjustified and reject it with contempt. The red-flagging letter which was initiated by Mr Greg Krumbock, was the last straw in what has been a toxic and torrid last five years in the DA outside of the Durban councillors’ caucus during which I have had to expend a great deal of time and energy defending myself against unfounded accusations and attempts to remove me as councillor.

In having permitted a profusion of management layers, the DA has unwittingly unleashed a scramble for positions and power. As a result a Big Brother situation has arisen in which councillors have to defer to officious holders of office who do not hesitate to deploy the party’s legal machinery in order to coerce compliance with their requirements. As I have encountered, the DA’s slogan of ‘fairness, freedom and opportunity’ is not what it practises internally. While it criticises the ANC for having a ‘one size-fits-all’ approach, the DA is no different in how it manages itself.

The PDMS system is bitterly resented by existing DA councillors and is the subject of deprecating in-house sentiments. It certainly does nothing for councillor morale whilst consuming a great deal of councillor time and energy in paperwork which has nothing to do with serving ratepayers and fighting for better governance.

A further fundamental reason for leaving the DA concerns its stance on affirmative action, employment equity and BEE. When he was leader, Tony Leon made it clear that there had to be a sunset clause on such racial parameters. But under the leadership since his time, the DA has become wedded to those measures. Not only are racial quotas completely at odds with claims to non-racialism but they are promoting mediocrity on the one hand and enriching an elite on the other. Despite occasional references to merit, nowhere in the DA's handbook on policy is merit espoused. Since I believe in merit, irrespective of race, as the logical way forward, I find myself at odds with that aspect of DA policy.

I also find the DA's stand on multi-party democracy hypocritical if not schizophrenic. It attempts to rubbish smaller parties claiming that votes for them are wasted. Yet without the support of smaller parties Helen Zille would never have become mayor of Cape Town in 2006. So when it comes to coalition politics the DA appears afflicted by political amnesia as well.

Locally, the DA faces internal problems with a cabal which vindictively resents Zwakele Mncwango's election as KZN leader. As a result Mncwango unfortunately finds himself having to fend off intrigue and disingenuousness which the cabal has since escalated into a disciplinary challenge. Zwakele has my sympathies as I found him to be an effective leader in confronting the ANC in the Council.

Of course, the DA will attempt to deny much of what I have stated. They are good at that especially since their 'Know your DA' campaign of 2013 in which they unforgivably airbrushed Tony Leon from their history. Yet if it was not for Tony Leon and his 'Fight back' campaign in the 1999 election which provided the platform for the emergence of the DA, the DA would never have materialised or earned the support of individuals like myself."

In conclusion, it is not my intention to attempt to denigrate or to rubbish the DA as a whole. It has many fine representatives whose efforts for their communities and for the country are admirable. The Durban DA Councillors Caucus has been my political home for 15 years in which I have enjoyed the best collegial relationships of my time in politics. However, in terms of certain of its policies and how it is managed, the DA needs to engage in some serious introspection.

Dr Duncan Du Bois [Ph.D. UKZN, 2014]

Author of:

Labourer of Settler? Colonial Natal's Indian Dilemma 1860-1897, (Durban, 2011);

Sugar and Settlers: A history of the Natal South Coast 1850-1910, (Bloemfontein, 2015).

Bluff ward councillor from December 5, 2000 to August 3, 2016.

Previously was one of four Bluff councillors on the Durban City Council from July 24, 1991 to June 30, 1996.