

The “left” posturing of South Africa’s Economic Freedom Fighters

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On March 6, South Africa’s Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party brought a North Gauteng High Court application for an urgent order to suspend the regulation requiring political parties to pay a R600,000 (US\$56,000) deposit to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) ahead of the May 7 general election.

On March 11 the court dismissed the application against the IEC deposit.

The EFF is led by expelled African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) President Julius Malema.

South African electoral law dictates that political parties pay the deposit to contest elections nationally and by province. The EFF asked that it and other newly registered parties be granted an order temporarily exempting them as they did not receive parliament’s party funding.

The application was meant to portray the party as a leftist underdog deserving sympathy from the poor as it takes the fight to the wealthy, powerful ANC, which has betrayed worker aspirations at every turn.

In reality, the EFF offers nothing to the working class. It is led by affluent upper middle class layers and minor capitalists like Malema himself, who wanted to use the ANCYL as a springboard into the ranks of the more established black bourgeoisie through the policy of black economic empowerment (BEE).

The EFF is in part a continuation of an ANC faction fight now taking place outside the ANC. It is a way for Malema to get back at President Jacob Zuma and his supporters for banishing him from the ANC and for Malema’s subsequent entanglements with the law and the tax authorities.

The South African Revenue Service (Sars) has brought an application for sequestration of Malema’s considerable assets on the grounds that he cannot pay

his outstanding taxes, because he is effectively bankrupt. An un-rehabilitated insolvent cannot serve as a Member of Parliament, as Malema has boasted he soon would be. After initially accepting liability for the R16 million (US\$1.48 million) debt during settlement talks with Sars, he has now initiated court proceedings to avoid being sequestrated, claiming Sars inflated the agreed amount.

EFF leaders churn out a steady stream of populist rhetoric in an attempt to whip up support among youth and the poor. They do this as a means of applying pressure on the faction of Zuma who, in Malema’s view, has refused to share the spoils the latter feels entitled to. The quid pro quo was Malema’s mobilisation of the ANCYL in the successful campaign to elect Zuma ANC president at the expense of Thabo Mbeki, at the party’s 2007 Polokwane conference.

Like so much else, the misappropriation of leftist slogans by the bourgeois EFF is a ruse inherited from the ANC. During the anti-Apartheid struggle, the ANC relied on a pseudo-Marxist vocabulary to mask its bourgeois nationalist identity from the masses. This lexicon was supplied by its partner and willing accomplice, the Stalinist South African Communist Party (SACP).

Last month the EFF launched its election manifesto at Mohlareng Stadium in Tembisa, Gauteng. Bourgeois commentators rushed to assign leftist colours to the EFF. In an interview with Malema, *Business Day* political editor Natasha Marrian declares that the EFF’s ideological stance is “socialism”.

The mainstream journalists do this because they calculate that Malema and the EFF can play a role on behalf of the ruling elite using bogus socialist credentials to contain the anger of the working class and its growing hostility to the ANC and its partners.

By holding up Malema as the great “socialist” hope, Marrian and her fellow scribes exert themselves against any further radicalisation of the masses.

In the *Business Day* interview, Malema indicates his willingness to serve as a political safety valve. Touting the EFF as “kingmaker” in the government to be formed after the general election, he “said he was willing to enter a coalition with any other party”, most obviously the ANC.

This is the same ANC that Malema this year lampooned as the “African National Criminals” in front of an audience of protestors.

The aptitude for horse-trading that Malema displays, the willingness to sit around a table and cut deals, is the hallmark of a member of the self-seeking elite. The working class must advance its own alternative to such deal making, from which it will be shut out as firmly as during the negotiations between the ANC and the Apartheid regime.

Back then, the ANC, the SACP and COSATU used socialist rhetoric to win the confidence of the poor, following working-class sacrifices over 50 years of struggle. The EFF is attempting to do the same today. But its ability to do so is far more constrained. Figures such as Nelson Mandela had the political and moral authority conferred by real struggles and real sacrifice, whereas Malema is merely a corrupt windbag.

In addition, the working class has learned lessons in the decades since the end of Apartheid about the true value of claims by black bourgeois politicians to speak on its behalf. It is not likely to transfer its allegiances to some version of the ANC Mark 2 after experiencing the role of the ANC as a defender of big business at its expense.

The EFF claims that should it come to power, it will nationalise a 60 percent share of the banks, manufacturers and giant retailers. If it was genuinely prepared to do this, then why not call for one hundred percent nationalization?

The EFF in reality has no intention of carrying out even a partial nationalisation. The figure of 60 percent is bandied about merely as an opening gambit in the negotiations that Malema anticipates will strengthen his and his cohorts’ position in negotiating some dirty BEE deal with the major corporations. He indicated as much in the remark that the EFF is “uncompromising on state ownership and participation. The percentages we are

prepared to discuss when we reach the appropriate point”.

This came in the context of his meeting with investors from the UK, US and South Africa in the Johannesburg township of Alexandra, where Malema took the opportunity to dispel the notion that he is hostile to international capital.

“Investors are not difficult people,” he told *Business Day*, “they want a very clear policy. If you say you are taking 60 percent, they go sit down and work on 40 percent and check if they will still make money, and if they can make money they will come”.



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