



Thoko Didiza: Parachuted-in compromise candidate

It is ironic to highlight a (brand) new-comer to local government as Personality of the Month, but there could be no single individual who has been more spoken about in local government in the past 24 hours than veteran ANC cadre, Thoko Didiza. Didiza was affirmed yesterday as a compromise candidate for Tshwane's Mayoral post and faces a Herculean challenge to bring stability to the politically fraught region, never mind secure a victory for the ANC in the Metro.

Veteran handed a poisoned chalice

Thoko Didiza, former national Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs, and then Public Works, was announced by the ANC as its candidate for Tshwane's Mayoral position and is known for her work on land expropriation, overseeing the Land Bank at a time of instability, as well as supporting the empowerment of women and children (www.bdlive.co.za).

Didiza was born in Durban but lives with her husband and five children in Pretoria, where she was a member of an ANC branch executive committee. She holds a BA in Sociology and Politics, as well as an Honours degree and diplomas in personnel management, journalism and business, with her early career beginning in church and non-governmental organisations (www.bdlive.co.za, www.news24.com).

There is little doubt that Didiza has exhibited an impressive political trajectory; beginning as a Deputy Minister of Agriculture in 1994 at the age of 29 (www.bdlive.co.za), but her links to local government are tenuous, and perhaps more worryingly is the issue of her acceptability to Tshwane communities.

It is widely accepted that her gravitas as a national politician is intended to calm significant tensions in the Metro, which saw the shooting and killing of an ANC member over the weekend and since her announcement yesterday has resulted in a rash of protests in Atteridgeville and Mamelodi, questioning the validity of the ANC's campaign #PeoplesMayors.

Didiza' tweeted yesterday "I am ready" - words that perhaps suggest more stoic loyalty than enthusiasm for a battle for acceptance within ANC regional structures (torn between supporters for incumbent Mayor Kgositso

Ramokgopa and regional deputy, Mapiti Matsena), as well as for securing an ANC victory in Tshwane where support for the Party dropped under 50% in 2014's provincial elections.

But Didiza is also known for her ability to stage a comeback - after resigning in the wake of Thabo Mbeki's recall in 2008 she was re-elected to the NEC in 2012 and was one of the top 20 candidate MPs on the ANC's list for Parliament in 2014 where she is House chairperson in the National Assembly - interestingly a better paid position than that of Tshwane's Mayor (www.news24.com), as well as the ANC's representative on the Judicial Service Commission (www.bdlive.co.za). In 2005, Didiza was selected by the World Economic Forum's Forum as one of its Young Global Leaders(www.news24.com).

There is little doubt that every resource available to Didiza is likely to be sternly tested in the next couple of months, and if successful in winning Tshwane, the next term to come. Only time will tell whether the DA's Mayoral candidate Solly Msimanga was correct in asserting yesterday "With her nomination, today the ANC in Tshwane is more divided than ever" (www.bdlive.co.za).

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