



Patricia de Lille: in the spotlight

The Mayor of the DA's only majority-run metro, Cape Town, Patricia de Lille had a trying few days last week after an ugly public spat with her MMC for Safety, Security and Social Services, J.P. Smith, unearthed allegations that she had unduly benefitted from upgrades to her private home. But De Lille, even though she is on "special leave" from DA processes, is not a politician who is easily intimidated. This Briefing considers her background and what her leadership of Cape Town means for the City's residents.

Are the knives out for the unconventional DA politician?

The ANC's Dullah Omar branch in Cape Town has announced that it plans to lay criminal charges against De Lille, while provincial ANC structures want the Public Protector to investigate claims that De Lille used public money for building renovations - a charge she has denied, with the City's Speaker arguing that the Council only paid for security upgrades at her home, based on a risk assessment by the police (ewn.co.za). Making political capital of the allegations, several ANC members clambered on a vehicle to survey De Lille's Pinelands home last week, in search of a "fire pool" or similar forms of embarrassment (ewn.co.za).

The upgrade controversy erupted after corruption (as a result of failure to follow procurement processes) was insinuated during a fall-out between De Lille and Smith, who heads Cape Town's special investigations unit (SIU), which De Lille would like to shut down (www.news24.com, www.news24.com). Newly-elected DA Western Cape leader, Bonginkosi Madikizela, has expressed plans to repair the rift between his predecessor (De Lille resigned as provincial leader in January, www.702.co.za), with a special task team investigating the allegations (www.iol.co.za).

The graft allegations are clearly harmful to both the DA, as well as De Lille, who came to the party with her reputation as the arms deal whistleblower. But the implications for her leadership may also compromise Cape Town, after De Lille resigned as DA provincial leader with the undertaking to focus on the City's inequitable apartheid form (www.702.co.za, www.iol.co.za).

It is pertinent to note that, since the DA took over, De Lille is Cape Town's only mayor to serve a full term and that for all of its successes in financial management (such as a series of clean audits), the City (like other metros) continues to face massive delivery challenges in its deeply polarised outlying, crime-ridden informal settlements (consider the recent mass shootings in Marikana informal settlement, for instance, ewn.co.za). Arguably a politician of De Lille's stature is required for legitimacy in addressing such systemic problems. And there is, of course, the not inconsiderable matter of the looming water calamity facing the City - its estimated that Cape Town will run out of water by March next year - a situation that requires considerable leadership.

De Lille's roots go about as far away from the centrist DA as is possible - to the trade union movement in the 1980s and the PAC in the 1990s, before she launched the Independent Democrats (ID) in 2003 which was eventually incorporated into the DA in 2010 (en.wikipedia.org).

A number of commentators have noted that the animosity between De Lille and Smith goes back to DA-ID tensions (www.news24.com, www.timeslive.co.za) perhaps suggesting that De Lille, who has been needed to expand the DA's support base and image of diversity, is not fully accepted within the inner-sanctum of the Party (www.news24.com).

The question for Capetonians is whether De Lille's pledge to focus on addressing the challenges of a deeply unequal city will be addressed more sensitively by her than by others within the DA, in which case they can only hope that the various processes at play will vindicate her and lead to her endorsement within the DA.

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