

The EFF is Malema and Malema is the EFF — what happens when he falls?

Sello Lediga • 19 December 2019



Sello Lediga

Sello Lediga is a social commentator, author and CEO of the Patriotic Movement, a civil society organisation that promotes patriotism in SA.

Under Julius Malema, the EFF has turned into a pseudo-revolutionary religious cult. He has alienated many in the party, and with criminal and corruption charges looming, he is on shaky ground.

Like him or hate him, Sello Julius Malema is the most formidable politician post-apartheid South Africa has produced. Only eight years old when Nelson Mandela emerged from 27 years in prison, Malema was too young to vote in 1994 when for the first time South Africans voted for a democratic government, led by the African National Congress with Mandela as the first president.

In 2000 Malema rampaged through the streets of Johannesburg as president of the Congress of South African Students and eight years later claimed the mantle of president of the ANC Youth League after a boisterous and gruelling campaign in which he emerged partly bruised but victorious. In 2013, after his expulsion from the ANC, he founded the Economic Freedom Fighters and contested national elections a year later. Against all odds, in the first elections it contested, the EFF became the third largest parliamentary party with over a million votes and 25 seats in the National Assembly. Malema nearly doubled his presence in Parliament with nearly two million votes and 44 seats in Parliament in the 2019 general elections.

By any standards, the growth of the EFF has been impressive.

It is doubtful if the EFF would have achieved this without the domineering personality of Julius Malema. The party itself is fashioned around Malema's personality. He is like a Colossus in this new and young party. The decision to found the EFF was essentially his, with Floyd Shivambu playing second fiddle as was the case in the ANCYL. The way the EFF was formed, it is essentially a private company with two directors, Malema and Shivambu.

Not long before the EFF was formed, Malema had publicly declared he would not leave the ANC as his blood was "black, green and gold". In a dramatic turnaround his black, green and gold turned red. Why? Because Malema had no public service or business experience except using political power to extract money out of business. The only way he knows how to make money is through a political party. The shenanigans in the EFF that are being exposed by the media, including allegations that he benefited from the looting of VBS, bear testimony to this assertion.

The EFF was literally born in crime when it accepted money from an infamous self-confessed tobacco smuggler to register as a party to contest elections. So, the EFF was born into crime and immorality and nothing will change the image of a party that allowed itself to be sponsored by criminal syndicates. It is amazing that the EFF does not even hide the fact that Adriano Mazzotti was its midwife.

The EFF entered the national political stage with a bang, upsetting the status quo. In 2014, Malema's red army changed the optics and demeanour of Parliament as soon as they took their seats in the honourable House. South Africa watched in disbelief as the commander-in-chief led his forces into the House fully dressed in red overalls, aprons and hard hats. It was shocking, unprecedented and revolutionary. Parliament would never be the same again.

The changes were not only about the dress code – the character of debate would also not escape the red army's assault. Debate in Parliament acquired a rough, robust and entertaining character. The speaker of Parliament had her hands full with endless points of order, the shouting down of fellow members and the ridiculing of some carefully chosen ministers. Jacob Zuma was their primary target because Malema had a score to settle with the man he was once prepared to die for. It was personal.

The entire EFF detachment in Parliament had to learn to hate Zuma the way Malema did. To ingratiate themselves with the CiC, EFF members in the House outdid one another to impress their political god, Julius Malema. It was rough for Zuma; it was rough for speaker and ANC chair Baleka Mbete; it was rough for the ageing Mangosuthu Buthelezi; it was rough for Pastor Mmusi Maimane.

The red army was in the House.

Inside and outside of Parliament, the EFF took on the character of Malema. The objective was to harass the ANC and finally dispose of Jacob Zuma. Citizens waited with great anticipation to watch the theatrics at Zuma's State of the Nation address. Every SONA was a thriller watched by millions

as Parliament's security in white shirts went to battle with the red berets armed with their hard hats. The State of the Nation Address became a major television feature every calendar year. Apolitical South Africans who never watch boring parliamentary sessions made sure they had their popcorn and were seated every time Zuma took the SONA podium. It was rough, brutal and entertaining. A tragi-comedy.

The EFF in Parliament had become Malema and the two had become indistinguishable. Their war cry, "Pay back the money", turned into a national anthem. By the time Zuma resigned in February 2018, he had had enough. The red army had won. Malema was victorious.

Under Malema, the EFF became a parliamentary and non-parliamentary force. What they could not win in Parliament they took to the streets and their visibility rose beyond the narrow confines of Parliament. The EFF got the mileage other parliamentary parties could only dream of. The commander-in-chief led his ground forces against "enemies of the revolution" wherever they were. The JSE, the banks, companies and some shops were identified as "white monopoly capital" and targeted. All this happened within a legitimate democratic space created by the democratic Constitution.

The greatest victory for the EFF was the 2016 Constitutional Court ruling in which Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng ruled that Zuma had violated his oath of office over the Nkandla episode. It was the red berets who took Zuma to court, it must be remembered.

Last week, after five years in Parliament, the EFF was ready for its second conference, known as the National People's Assembly. Malema was riding high. His party had nearly doubled its support in the 2019 general election and 44 Fighters were now in Parliament – all credit to the commander-in-chief. It was time to renew the mandate after a job well done.

Before the conference, the CiC had warned that underperforming sluggards who slept on the job, like Secretary-General Godrich Gardee and National Chair Dali Mpofu would give way to real Fighters ready to lead the

revolution and die with their boots on. To tighten his grip on the young party, Malema understood that he had to predetermine the outcome of the conference.

With his training in the ANC, he crafted his own slate of loyal and hard-working Fighters to be part of his new leadership core. This led to the emergence of his internal faction “Matrokisi,” forcing his internal opponents to launch “Ama-Piano.” Malema crushed them and today Mpofo and Gardee are licking their wounds in the semi-wilderness, deployed to perform useless functions as a reward for their service.

But what Malema doesn't realise is that he has laid a foundation for the rise of internal opposition in the young party. The defeated Ama-Piano will temporarily go underground to organise. The student wing, Ama-Piano and higher-up internally defeated and humiliated people like Mandisa Mashego will rise in the near future. When the Hawks and the NPA pounce on Malema, as they inevitably will, his grip on the party will be loosened and Ama-Piano will rise from the ashes to challenge for power.

Like most dictators, Malema believes he will rule forever. History disagrees.

Hitherto the EFF is Malema and Malema is the EFF. He runs a tight ship in a young and immature political outfit masquerading as a socialist party with disastrous policies for South Africa – a socialist party led by pilfering, parasitic pseudo-revolutionaries addicted to the high life. Worse still, Malema is surrounded by yes-men and yes-women in the Top Six and Central Command Team. His fall will be the fall of the EFF.

With criminal and corruption charges hovering over his head, Malema's political future is uncertain, and thus that of his party. For now, the EFF is not viable without him. His success has run to his head and his arrogance and distaste for the judiciary and the media will cost him dearly in the future. He respects the judiciary only to the extent that it rules in his favour. He despises the media when they investigate him and his party.

He is making unnecessary enemies. He listens to no one inside and outside of the party. He is a political god whose subjects literally kneel at

his feet as they did at the conference. This is not a real political party. It is a religious cult.

What happens when the leader goes? DM

Reference:

Lediga, S. (2019). [The EFF is Malema and Malema is the EFF — what happens when he falls?](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2019-12-19-the-eff-is-malema-and-malema-is-the-eff-what-happens-when-he-falls/?tl) From the *Daily Maverick*, 19 December 2019 [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2019-12-19-the-eff-is-malema-and-malema-is-the-eff-what-happens-when-he-falls/?tl> . Accessed on 10 March 2020