

## **Budget Debate: Parliament**

### **Speech by Siviwe Gwarube MP**

#### **Chief Whip of the Official Opposition**

##### ***The ANC has broken Parliament***

The doctrine of separation of powers is important in a constitutional democracy.

The idea that the legislature, the executive and the judiciary enjoy equal status before the law; stand alongside each other for effective checks and balances; is the hallmark of a healthy democracy.

It is a reassuring feature of our democracy because we come from a history where this very Parliament was used to pass legislation that would oppress an entire generation of South Africans.

And so, there ought to be a great appreciation of the power this institution has. To change lives for better or for worse.

When governments fail, a Parliament is meant to be the last line of defense of its people.

After all, it is the House which represents the true will of the people.

However, from the 1<sup>st</sup> Parliament to the 6<sup>th</sup> Parliament, the steady decline of this institution has been glaring.

It is as though the novelty of a hard-won democracy has worn off.

The ANC has developed an unhealthy obsession with the 'majority rules' notion even when that ruling is wrong.

You will often find the ruling party, arrogantly and glibly voting against anything – regardless of how important - simply because they have the numbers.

This is the kind of arrogance and disregard for the people which has preceded the fall of former liberation movements across the continent.

And the ANC will be no different.

The ANC has broken Parliament.

Over years.

For narrow political gain.

For self-preservation.  
At a great cost to this country.

The situation is so dire, former President Thabo Mbeki had to pen a letter to the Deputy President, Paul Mashatile lambasting him for the party's conduct in Parliament.

In this letter, he is particularly concerned that the ANC no longer understands the role of MPs as the representatives of the people.

He equates the conduct of ANC MPs during the Nkandla scandal, to the behavior this ANC caucus displayed during the Phala Phala debacle.

He does so to demonstrate that no lessons have been learnt during the time of the fire pool, and chicken coops that cost the people of South Africa millions of rands at Former President Zuma's home.

You did some clumsy moral footwork then, and you repeated these theatrics when the opposition wanted Parliament to investigate the serious allegations faced by President Ramaphosa.

You shut down accountability.

It was the same script; different cast.

The Jacob of Nkandla. And the Cyril of Phala Phala.

Deputy President Mashatile stood here, repeated your usual rhetoric about how the majority must have its way; even when it is clearly on the wrong side of the argument.

So shocking were his comments, President Mbeki says he hopes Honourable Mashatile reflects deeply on what he said because he finds his comments very embarrassing and deeply humiliating.

President Mbeki even reflects on the ANC's vote against an ad hoc committee that would investigate corruption at Eskom.

He says: *'It is very wrong that we took a decision to veto the initiation of a parliamentary process specifically focused on investigating the criminal activities at Eskom'*

He continues to say: *'It would come across to the public as very strange and disturbing that when a proposal was made that Parliament should undertake such a focused investigation into the alleged criminality at Eskom, we promptly voted against an eminently correct proposal'*.

And so, I have to agree with President Mbeki. The ANC of present day is embarrassing and humiliating.

It is an absolute tragedy that the work of the Zondo Commission will never find expression in Parliament.

Not a single recommendation has been adopted and implemented, a year after this report was tabled in Parliament.

The ANC has treated the commission's recommendations with disdain and hostility.

You have voted down:

- Having opposition parties chair committees for greater accountability;
- Reintroducing a much more rigorous way of questioning the decisions of the executive through interpellations;
- Dithered and delayed the introduction of a portfolio committee on the bloated presidency;

We know that a working Parliament is not in the interest of the ANC.

The greatest gift to the people of South Africa and to this institution, would be to relegate the ANC to the opposition benches in the elections next year.

That way we can rebuild Parliament to what it ought to be.

- We would build an institution founded on principles of accountability and transparency.
- We would rebuild a precinct that is accessible to the public so that they can hold their elected representatives to account.
- We would ensure that the issues facing South Africans such as the cost-of-living crisis, the electricity crisis, the jobs crisis and safety take up the lion's share of this House's time.
- We would reject budgets that do not prioritize the people and resolve their plight;
- We would ensure that those who steal from the people do not find a place of comfort in the benches of Parliament.
- And we would make this institution relevant to the man and woman on the street.

Parliament does not belong to politicians.

The 400 members of this House are meant to serve South Africans and protect our constitutional values.

We cannot do that as long as the ANC still occupies the majority of these seats.

The organization has shown itself to be beyond redemption.

The only way we can turn Parliament around is to cut your strangle-hold on the national legislature.

The day will come.

You have taken your oath of office and the people of this country for granted for way too long.

We look forward to when we hit the reset button.

Without you in the way.

So we can serve the millions who remain locked out economic opportunities and trapped in poverty.

They deserve a Parliament that will work for them.