

# How the EFF helps the media EFF itself, and other totalitarian holiday tales

By Richard Poplak • 20 December 2019

**Wow, so much screaming. Are the EFF simply a media-created shitstorm of no substance, the Twitterocracy want to know? Or would the red berets have gained influence and power even in the deathly silence of Stage 8 media load-shedding?**

Asked another way, if an authoritarian raises his fist in a forest, is anyone sent to a death camp?

As it happens, this is not an argument I find particularly interesting. Since his time in the ANC Youth League, Julius Malema has had the mother organisation by the gonads, largely because he spoke several fundamental truths: money and power resides with wealthy whites, rich Indians and Patrice Motsepe; the system doesn't work for the black majority; political

freedom is meaningless without economic freedom; and it's time to go to war with the elite.

That he said this while assembling a syndicate that funnelled money into various trusts and business ventures is not beside the point. It IS the point. That's how the ANC is supposed to provide for its higher-ranking members.

Malema is, and for many years has been, the prevailing story of South African democracy, a representative figure who has pulled our politics along with him as he has risen from child activist to mafia politician reminiscent of the Tammany Hall monsters who ran New York City in the mid-to-late 19th century.

I was not yet on the politics beat when Malema was president of the ANCYL, but I began covering him carefully following his expulsion from the Congress. Along with the editor of this publication, I believed that whatever he did after his excommunication would end up defining our politics. As it turned out, we were correct.

Not coincidentally, there exists a rather revolting symbiosis between the media and demagoguery — we know this, you know this, Malema knows this. Outrageous statements make headlines, the more bigoted, crass and idiotic, the better.

But it doesn't mean that we refuse to cover demagogues. It means that we cover them carefully, accurately, and without fear of deference. I agree with my Daily Maverick colleague Sikonathi Mantshantsha when he claims that local media has failed to call out Malema on some of his more egregious abuses with the correct amount of fervour.

But not covering him at all? That's just ridiculous.

Which brings us to the EFF banning Daily Maverick/Scorpio and amaBhungane from their second electoral conference, which took place at the Nasrec convention centre over the course of the past weekend.

Malema claims that the media is infiltrated by covert Stratcom what-whats who say terrible things about his organization. "South African journalism has to isolate itself and really enter a great introspection about how they think, feel and report about the EFF; the evidence of their disdain of us is everywhere, and each day it is mounting," he whined. And yet I've been on stage with Malema when he has agreed with me regarding the

overwhelmingly *positive* media coverage the party has enjoyed over the years, and especially during the Zuma era.

We can't blame Malema for wanting to have it both ways. But we can blame him for behaving like a terrified child when he doesn't have it entirely his way. After all, this is not the first time the EFF has selectively restricted media access. In 2016 they banned the Gupta family-owned ANN7 channel from covering their events—a move [that was hotly excoriated](#) in the editorial pages of this publication. We understood that the Gupta media ban was not just the start of a trend, but rather the articulation of an impulse: Malema is an [authoritarian who rules by decree](#).

That's just how it is, and we have to work around it intelligently. Not everyone in the industry appears to get this. Stupidly, the television network eNCA [pulled out of the EFF conference](#) without informing its experienced staff of the decision. They claimed solidarity with banned media outlets, but that's a bit rich given their lack of opprobrium during the Gupta media ban. Indeed, the move seems to have been entirely political. And nor was their help courted. In a statement published last week, Daily Maverick's editor-in-chief, Branko Brkic, wrote that we "firmly believe that our colleagues from other media houses should cover the EFF congress as vigorously as they can. It is, in our opinion, the media's role to shine a light on society, including the parts who openly [wish us harm and advocate for our demise](#)."

Instead, a few days later, eNCA now has a PR/HR-combo disaster on its hands. Head of news Kanthan Pillay appears to have pitted himself against his colleague, journalist Samkele Maseko after the latter was allegedly [escorted from the eNCA building "like a dog"](#) following his resignation. (In a since-deleted Tweet, Pillay seems to have referred to Maseko as a "rat", which is not super classy.) By failing to fulfil their journalistic mandate, eNCA's management have not only betrayed the ideals the company is supposed to stand for, but has diverted attention away from the real story: the EFF's evolving authoritarianism. In fact, the EFF has now "taken sides" in this debacle, coming out in favour of Maseko — a position that shouldn't be surprising given Pillay's recent history: he was the founder of the nascent right-wing freak show Capitalist Party of South Africa, which contested the 2019 national elections, [garnering a proportion of the vote so infinitesimal](#) that calculators exploded in Alaska. (Their short-lived but instantly infamous icon was a purple cow.) This

should have disqualified Pillay from participating in civilised life, never mind running a major South African newsroom.

Brilliant fucking work, all.

Here's what we learn when journalists do their jobs properly, over time: we're able to make links, to establish institutional memory that ballasts reporting and adds meaningfully to democratic life. For instance, at the first EFF electoral conference, which was held in Mangaung in December 2014, the Central Command Team (CCT) was assembled with nods and winks from Malema himself, and those who didn't abide were shunted into the cold with little ceremony. Out went Andile Mngxitama; out went a big contingent of Gauteng delegates. (Foreshadowing: On stage, Malema called out Daily Maverick for reporting on the subsequent discord outside the auditorium, [where EFF regalia was burned](#).)

In its early days, the party could have been excused for being a one-man show. Five years later, its supporters can be excused for expecting an evolution.

But nope. As reported by Carien du Plessis [for this publication](#) (ha ha ban fail!), once again delegates were ushered into CCT Valhalla by nods from the Don himself, ratified by a show of hands in the crowd—a version of one-person-one-vote subject to obvious intimidation.

The EFF, sadly, remains a thugmocracy.

The party's top six were known by insiders months ago. Celebrity lawyer Dali Mpfu, who was never one of the boys and was treated more like a servant than an equal, is no longer National Chairperson. And hardworking Godrich Gardee was ousted as Secretary-General because 'he did not grow the EFF in other countries,' according to hilarious insider reports. (In truth, Gardee was not one of the larcenous ANCYL crew, and he failed to be as relentlessly obsequious as spokesperson Mbuyiseni Ndlozi.) Also out, due to apparent ill-health, was treasurer Leigh Mathys.

The most notable new ascendant is, of course, Marshall Dlamini, who will now 'serve' as Secretary-General. And it is in the person of Dlamini—a [dangerous, focussed mafia soldier](#)—that hints at why the Daily Maverick was likely banned from the EFF's big party.

The reporting of Pauli Van Wyk on [the VBS robbery](#) has made clear what the EFF has become: a weaponized, fleet and more tactical version of the

ANC looting machine. Our friends from amaBhungane have proven that Dlamini's ascension formalizes the relationship between the EFF and its growing patronage networks in Johannesburg, Tshwane and in smaller centres, where the party is alleged to run protection rackets, hustling small- and medium-sized [black business for contributions](#).

Dlamini is the muscle. And despite gender-washing the top six with three women leaders utterly loyal to Malema, this is a trio, and Julius is on vocals and lead guitar.

Why would any news outlet cover any of this horrible shit? Because Malema, Dlamini and EFF Deputy President Floyd Shivambu are three of the most important figures in South Africa's political universe. Their importance speaks not only to our strengths—that fledgeling political movements can emerge here—but also articulates our weaknesses—that our politics are synonymous with crime.

The EFF makes explicit where South Africa is headed: African nationalism tinged with faux-socialist rhetoric, linked to the [evangelical and charismatic churches](#) that run beneath the political mainstream like ocean currents. Populism and evangelism: the US Republican party's inviolable alliance. The major, ahem, revelation that Malema and his cronies have had is as follows: the churches remain an enormous and (largely) untapped recruiting pool.

The cult-like praise singing at the EFF conference presages the future of South African politics, where politician and pastor will merge into a single authoritarian figure, answerable only to the Lord Almighty. (Consider the new outfit that former DA leader Mmusi Maimane is starting with former Johannesburg mayor Herman Mashaba. Same deal, different end of the political spectrum.)

In short, South Africa is on its way to becoming a theocracy, an observation that should not be considered controversial, but one that is as obvious as it is true in many countries across the globe.

There are members of the ANC upper echelon who understand these trends. But the Congress sees *itself* as *the* church, and can't get out of its own way in order to exploit it. Moreover, it points to the fact that South African progressivism has stalled completely. Despite the fact that the EFF are profess to be socialist, they practice socialism with Malema-ish characteristics (to paraphrase what Deng Xiaoping is said to have said

about the Chinese.) Gucci and a national healthcare system must coexist on the same political platform. They do in Norway. Maybe Malema is onto something.

What does any of this have to do with the mini-media meltdown underway at eNCA right now? Well, this is the shit you miss when you're intentionally absent. You're also bowing to a nasty fact of modern life: populists are brilliant at fragmenting the media, largely because they've internalized how the media functions. They know exactly how/when to release a press statement, how to pit outlets against each other, how to divide the employees within outlets. We live and grow together, the press and the demagogues. But good, honest news outlets have one slight advantage: truth. Liars can only lie for so long before they end up living rent-free in a cell. (To be fair, Malema has almost always lived rent-free.)

Now is probably a bad time to install racist morons in positions of power in media institutions. Transformation of media ownership and newsroom representation advances by the day in South Africa—slower than it should, sure, but faster than many give it credit for. Still, it's probably a bad time to do anything but stick to the basics. And it's probably a good time to hire professional news people rather than spectacularly failed politicians. Despite what Malema and his PhD-grade ingrates say, the South African media isn't irredeemable. We'll end up helping to put them in jail, simply by doing our jobs.

But we won't do that by accepting unqualified assholes in our midst, or by banning ourselves. It's time to act like grown adults. Now go enjoy a boozy break. Next year is gonna be war. **DM**

#### **Reference:**

Poplak , R. (2019). [How the EFF helps the media EFF itself, and other totalitarian holiday tales](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-12-20-how-the-eff-helps-the-media-eff-itself-and-other-totalitarian-holiday-tales/) from the *Daily Maverick*, 20 December [online]. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-12-20-how-the-eff-helps-the-media-eff-itself-and-other-totalitarian-holiday-tales/> . Accessed on 10 March 2020