

THE DEMON OF FACTIONALISM IN AN AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (ANC)-LED FREE STATE PROVINCE (1994-2004): A REALITY?

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the second five years of governance of the ANC in South Africa, almost all ANC-led provinces experienced leadership problems. There were escalating internal conflicts over the direct involvement of President Thabo Mbeki in the appointment of the provincial premiers; power struggles within the party; the role of ethnicity and culture; ideological differences within the party and the continuous transformation from a freedom movement towards a political party.¹

Without doubt, after the elections in 1994, the Free State cherished great hope. Not only had the African National Congress (ANC) secured a large victory in the province, but in Terror Lekota² as the first premier of the province, it had a man of special talent who started guiding the province towards political reconstruction and economic development. Over the next two years that vision came unstuck and political infighting derailed the development process in the province. The losers

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¹ A Duvenhage, "The post-election political environment: A critical assessment", *Journal for Contemporary History*, Vol. 29, No. 3, December 2004, p. 23.

² Mosioua 'Terror' Lekota was the first premier of the Free State Province and was appointed after the April 1994 general election. He served as premier from 1994 to 1996. After this two year term in office as premier, he was deployed as chairperson of the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) in the National Assembly. Lekota is currently (2005) serving as Minister of Defence and is also the National Chairperson of the ANC. The first Members of the Executive Council (MECs) who formed Lekota's cabinet in 1994 were the following: C Human for Agriculture and Environment; A Magashule for Economic Affairs; TS Belot for Education and Culture; T Makgoe for Finance and Expenditure; S Nthlabathi for Health and Welfare; V Mayekiso for Housing; O Motsumi for Local Government; L Kubushe for Police Services; G Nthatisi for Public Works and Roads; and L van der Watt for Public Transport.

were not only Lekota and his cabinet members, but the people of the Free State, particularly those in the underdeveloped areas.

Ten years in the democratic dispensation, the provincial government of the Free State is still counted among the troubled provinces because of the squabbles within its leadership, although Lekota is no more in charge of the province. This raised the following questions: will the ANC in the province ever get its house in order? Will there be peace and stability in the Free State Province after the change of leadership? Will the National Working Committee of the ANC (NWC) continue stepping in almost annually to solve the provincial leadership problems although it showed little success? Will the provincial government under the ANC be able to resolve the looming problems in the municipalities of the Eastern Free State where people are complaining about service delivery?

This article attempts to give a historical background of the existence of factionalism within the ANC leadership in the province and highlights the attempts made by the ANC's NWC in trying to resolve this problem. The emergence of the group calling itself 'the concerned group' in many of the Free State townships posed a threat of having another bloc namely the 'concerned group' bloc in the province and that the province should no more be divided in southern and northern regions. They demanded the betterment of service delivery from the local government structures. This article therefore looks at factionalism in the province during the first decade of democratization in South Africa, namely 1994 to 2004.

2. BACKGROUND TO FACTIONALISM IN THE FREE STATE ANCELED GOVERNMENT

Initially when this factionalism started in 1994 it was referred to as the Terror Lekota, Ace Magashule and Pat Matosa's affair. Before the 1994 election the ANC as a liberation movement in the Free State was led by powerful leaders from the southern and northern regions. However, the creation of provinces compelled all ANC structures to form united provincial leaderships. In fact this meant the dissolution of the southern and northern regions. From these two regions, Lekota was seen as a popular choice to lead the party in the province as the chairperson because he had been the ANC's chairperson in the northern region before the April 1994 election. Lekota was number 35 and Magashule number one on the ANC's provincial list. It was therefore clear that Magashule was the people's choice for premier. In 1993 the Free State ANC had nominated Magashule as premier candidate but he was asked to step down to make room for Lekota. Chairpersons of

the ANC in the provinces could become premiers in their respective provinces, thus Lekota, being the chairperson, qualified to be the premier.

During this period the ANC in the province was dominated by northerners because of the party's development in the north in as far as branches were concerned. The situation was expected to change after 1994, when the ANC was seen expanding its support in Thaba Nchu where it had little support. It had previously been under the Republic of Bophuthatswana and Qwaqwa where the ANC found it difficult to function because of the homeland system of governance. The balance of power in the province was thus tipped in favour of the southerners and those leaders who were able to establish followings in places such as Thaba Nchu and the rapidly expanding Botshabelo.

In 1994 Magashule and Matosa mounted a surprise challenge to Lekota in the party leadership election. Lekota, who had undertaken no lobbying beforehand, came third in the delegates' poll. Things became sour in this provincial conference when Lekota was trounced by Matosa in the election. The margin by which Lekota was beaten in the conference was so significant that he could not become the party's chairperson in the Free State. The winner, Matosa, received 263 votes to Lekota's 190. The deputy chairperson's position went to Lekota's MEC for Finance and Economic Affairs, Magashule. In terms of the branch votes, Matosa was backed by 33 branches, Magashule by 26 and Lekota by 22.³ Matosa hailed from the party's northern region, which was in the first place not quite happy with Lekota's appointment as premier.

The above victory by Magashule and Matosa intensified factionalism and animosity within the ANC in the province between the north and south which backed Lekota.⁴ Political analysts suggested various reasons underlying the failure of Lekota to be elected as the party's chairperson. Some of the reasons brought forward were that voting was conducted along tribal lines and that Lekota was accused of being more conciliatory to the whites⁵ at the expense of the ANC supporters in the Free State.

³ **Business Day**, 30 August 2000; **Weekly Mail and Guardian**, 28 June 1996 - 4 July 1996.

⁴ **Business Day**, 30 August 2000.

⁵ Lekota was accused of having developed good relationships with members of the old regime, in particular with Dr L van der Watt, the former Free State administrator, whom Lekota appointed to his cabinet over the heads of the National Party hierarchy. To Lekota this came as a surprise because in 1994 he touched a raw nerve among the Free State rightwing movement when he unceremoniously removed Hendrik Verwoerd's statue from a public place in front of the building which was formally known as the Hendrik Verwoerd Building. Lekota berated Conservative Party supporters who demanded the restoration of Verwoerd's statue. Lekota denounced Verwoerd by saying: 'We have no education, we have no training, we have no homes. We have nothing. That's what Verwoerd did.' He also changed the name of that building from Verwoerd Building to Lebohang Building. The removal of Verwoerd's statue was however criticized by

This allegation came as a surprise to Lekota as he believed that reconciliation was part and parcel of the government's strategy for the building of the 'new South Africa'.⁶

Lekota's shock defeat was attributed to the fact that other leaders within the party thought that the provincial chairperson would ultimately become the provincial premier.⁷ The conference results did not auger well for Lekota and his supporters, to the extent that one branch from Kroonstad which was aligned to Lekota, tried to challenge the outcomes of the ballot, but in vain. Thus a sorry tale in the Free State Province unfolded that even affected Direko when she became the premier in 1999. Firstly, Lekota was not welcomed by some of the old guards in the Free State ANC leadership as he was viewed as an outsider who had only come to the province for the premiership position. The fact that he had been mostly outside the province during the 'struggle days' made this group to be suspicious of his leadership. Although it was known that he was born in the Free State, he completed his secondary education in the former Transkei homeland, matriculated in Natal and spent his career as an activist in Natal and Transvaal; therefore, he was relatively unknown in the Free State.⁸

The aggrieved northerners led by Matosa and Magashule made life difficult for Lekota and accused him of ruling the Free State illegitimately. As a form of compromise, they wanted him to consult them as the premier before taking any major decisions in the province, something that Lekota never understood. He defied Matosa and the provincial executive committee, invoking his constitutional powers to run the province in the manner he saw fit. Lekota's attitude enraged Matosa and his lieutenants, who saw themselves as the legitimate leaders of the province.

Matosa stated in the **New Nation** that the cause of the conflict in the province was around the question of power relations. According to him the ANC's provincial leadership as a collective political structure had more powers than the premier of the province. He indicated that the ANC as the government had the muscle to deploy its own members, from premier to cabinet members of the legislature,

former President Nelson Mandela who stated that cultural organizations should have been consulted in this regard as this was a sensitive issue.

⁶ P Laurence, "Premier Lekota silent about sacking", **Southern Africa Report**, Vol. 14, No. 45, 8 November 1996, pp. 3-4.

⁷ P Laurence, "Black blacks, still at the bottom of the pile, are asserting themselves in the ANC", **Southern Africa Report**, Vol. 12, No. 48, 2 December 1994, pp. 1-2.

⁸ **The Sunday Independent**, 4 August 1996; **The Natal Witness**, 5 August 1996.

therefore nobody could take that particular political power away from the ANC and there lay the point of difference between himself and Lekota.⁹

In April 1995, Lekota angered his critics by suspending Vax Mayekiso, the MEC for Housing, for alleged involvement in an unsavoury property deal in the province. Mayekiso was accused of having used his position as MEC to enrich himself after there had been a complaint from the Thabong branch of the South African National Civics Organization (SANCO) that he had become involved in a dispute between the African Black Taxi Operating Company of South Africa (ABTOCSA) and BP service station franchise holder JR Nkomo at Thabong near Welkom.¹⁰ Mayekiso was said to have taken sides in the matter and had a vested interest in the outcome of the dispute because a bank guarantee offered to the service station by ABTOCSA was in the name of Mayekiso's wife, Nondumiso.¹¹

Lekota suspended and later ousted Mayekiso from his cabinet while considering instituting an inquiry. In pursuing Mayekiso's case, Lekota presented two letters from a firm of attorneys to Nkomo inviting him to negotiate the sale of his business to ABTOCSA and another on an executive council letterhead inviting Nkomo to a meeting at the Welkom Inn on February 13. Lekota stated that Nkomo felt obliged to attend because Mayekiso was a high ranking government official. Nkomo confessed that he was placed under pressure to sell his business and as a result of alleged threats agreed to sell it to ABTOCSA.¹² Ten days later the Standard Bank issued a guarantee for R50 000 as surety and the co-principal debtor was Mayekiso's wife, Nondumiso, trading as Thabong Motors.¹³ According to Lekota this information was evidence enough to prove that Mayekiso had a personal interest in the matter and had used his office as the MEC to achieve that. One of Lekota's supporters indicated the following in support of the stance he had taken against Mayekiso: "...this was the only way the ANC leaders could restore our faith in their preaching about open and transparent government which the party was longing for".¹⁴

Lekota was seen to have been harsh to Mayekiso while there were also claims of corruption levelled against his MEC for Agriculture, Cas Human, involving a company called Agri-Eco where he had invested R19,5 million, taken from the

⁹ **The New Nation**, 28 June 1996.

¹⁰ P Laurence, "Firings precipitate first serious splits in ANC", **South Africa Report**, Vol. 13, No. 21, 26 May 1995, pp 5-6.

¹¹ **Ibid.**

¹² **Die Volksblad**, 30 May 1995.

¹³ **Die Afrikaanser**, 28 June 1996 - 4 July 1996.

¹⁴ Twala, personal collection. Interview with Mr JL Letuka, Bloemfontein, 15 February 2005.

government funds, and Lekota's alleged involvement in the transfer of state land to a Chinese businessman known as Van Chen.¹⁵ Instead of charging Human in the same way as Mayekiso, Lekota defended him and stated that Human had followed proper procedures and had consulted with the cabinet before depositing funds in the Agri-Eco account as a way of dealing with unbundling the former parastatal of Agri-Eco.¹⁶ It was argued that the treatment Lekota meted to Mayekiso should also have applied to Human. This worsened the rift between the northern group under Matosa and the southern group under Lekota.

The final straw for Matosa's group came on 20 June 1996 when Lekota dropped Magashule, another leader from the northern camp, as MEC for Finance and Economic Affairs, from his reshuffled cabinet. Lekota accused Magashule of insubordination. The dismissal of Magashule provoked an immediate outcry within the ANC's provincial leadership. Matosa issued a harsh statement about Lekota during the press conference when he stated:

Lekota had gone too far. ANC officials will not, as they did in the past, stand in the way of angry ANC members this time if they want to bring a motion of no confidence against him. Lekota cannot challenge the ANC. He must understand that he is an ordinary member. The ANC has the power to withdraw any ANC member from the legislature. All ANC members must toe the line. Lekota insists on a literal interpretation of the country's constitution, that he has the sole prerogative to decide on any matter concerning the province. It is unfair to note that the premier always wants to use the constitution when it suits him. The premier is the source of all this tension. He is using the divide and rule strategy picking on certain individuals and embarking on a misinformation campaign.¹⁷

With the reshuffling of his cabinet, Lekota was accused of having bypassed the agreements of 29 May 1996 whereby it had been agreed on how the executive council should be structured. In this meeting it had been agreed that there was a need to reorganize the 'ministries' and that an announcement would be made in due course. It was also reiterated that the ANC's provincial structures should play a leading role in matters of governance in the province. It was agreed that the executive council should stay as it had been constituted in 1994 until the NWC of the ANC intervened to solve the problems in the provincial ANC leadership. The intervention of the NWC was scheduled for the 30th of June but Lekota convened an

¹⁵ **Weekly Mail and Guardian**, 25 October 1996 - 31 October 1996.

¹⁶ **Ibid.**

¹⁷ **City Press**, 23 June 1996; **The New Nation**, 28 June 1996.

urgent meeting on the 20th of June to announce the newly reshuffled executive council.¹⁸ Despite all that, Lekota was adamant that the final decision on the executive council's appointment rested with him as the premier and not with the party. On the surface there appeared to be two issues separating Lekota from his colleagues: firstly, the resentment of local notables and, secondly, a clash between Lekota's leadership style and the culture of accountability, as it was understood among many activists who had matured in the 1980s. Lekota had some support in the party leadership and alignments in the cabinet who suggested that a north-south rivalry helped to animate the quarrel.

Lekota's critics, like the late Kaiser Sebothelo, claimed that he had not adequately consulted the party's leadership before the dismissal. This led to repeated calls by Matosa for Lekota's resignation as the province's premier. Members who sided with Matosa threatened to declare a vote of no confidence in Lekota. A national government delegation led by the late Steve Tshwete, intervened to resolve this problem in the province. After lengthy deliberations with the two groups, a compromise was reached and Magashule was reinstated.¹⁹ As part of the agreement, an advisory committee was to be established to facilitate consultation between the premier and the ANC provincial leadership in the province. However, tensions continued and a meeting between Lekota and the provincial leadership on 26 July 1996 failed to resolve matters.²⁰ Accepting the recommendations of the NWC delegation, Lekota stated the following conciliatory statement in trying to set the province in motion again:

For the smooth running of the province, there is a need for all of us to catch a bus to town. But it appears the problem is how to drive that bus to town. There is also a need to have an in-depth discussion on the constitution. We must establish better clarity with regard to the implementation of the constitution in the province where we have different views on implementation; tensions arise from different styles of operation. We come from different cultures. Some are from jail, some from exile and others from the civic and trade union movement. So we need to smooth out our style of operation and merge them.²¹

¹⁸ **City Press**, 23 June 1996.

¹⁹ **The Cape Times**, 3 July 1996.

²⁰ **The Sunday Independent**, 4 August 1996.

²¹ **City Press**, 14 July 1996.

In the very same month of July, Lekota was again embroiled in another conflict with Magashule when he decided to suspend five senior officials from Magashule's Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism over the allegations of corruption. The claims stemmed from the alleged use of an estimated R7 million of government funds to set up a non-profit company, with an aim of promoting investment in the province. Lekota charged that the company, known as the Free State Investment and Promotion Agency, was set up without the authorization of the cabinet and that some transactions linked to it seemed irregular.²² Magashule was also accused of having approved loans to his associates²³ without requiring securities and their registration. This move by Lekota was regarded as a witch hunt of Magashule and it further reignited the battle over the premier's relationship with the provincial leadership and Lekota was accused of not having consulted the leadership on this matter.²⁴

Tom Letsoeny, who worked with Lekota in the United Democratic Front (UDF), stated that Lekota was afraid of consultative leadership. He indicated that Lekota was fond of giving directives and threw away any suggestions given to him.²⁵ Another former UDF activist, Lewele Modisanyane, worked with Lekota as an ANC organizer in the Free State after the organization's unbanning. He also concurred with Letsoeny that Lekota would often act without the authorization of the regional executive committee. When questioning Lekota about this, he was transferred to head office.²⁶ One ardent supporter of Lekota rejected this claim by Letsoeny and Modisanyane and stated that the problems in the province had not arisen because of Lekota's alleged lack of consultation with the provincial leadership but it was a direct challenge of the premier's position. The lack of consultation issue was a smoke-screen used by ambitious officials who wanted to use the organization for personal and selfish reasons.²⁷

In another attempt to resolve the problems in the province, the NWC felt obliged to disband the provincial leadership and redeploy Lekota to the Senate which later became the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) and he became the chairperson of that council. Magashule and Matosa were also redeployed to the National

²² **Sunday Times**, 21 July 1996.

²³ The following companies were granted loans approved by Magashule as the MEC for Economic Affairs and Tourism: Heidedal Pharmacy R118 000; Bendile and Associates R40 000; Kagisho Funeral Parlour R400 000; Twilight Funeral Parlour R1 096 532; Tlhakudi Brick Manufactures; R130 000; Morobane Motor Well R155 892.

²⁴ Twala, personal collection. Interview with Mr M Dukwana by M Makhubalo, Bloemfontein, 17 November 2004.

²⁵ **Sunday Times**, 21 July 1996.

²⁶ **Ibid.**

²⁷ Twala, personal collection. Interview with Mr Leslie Monnanyane, ANC veteran in the Free State, Bloemfontein, 4 June 2003.

Assembly in different portfolios.²⁸ One could argue that using redeployment to eradicate factionalism in the province did not yield the expected results as envisaged by the NWC. The following reasons could be cited as the recipe for its failure in the province: Firstly, it individualized organizational problems. The conflict between Lekota, Matosa and Magashule, for example, came about because of a lack of clarity on where real power lies, in the ANC structures outside of government or in the hands of the ANC representatives who had been deployed in the province.

Secondly, the above strategy by the NWC sent a message that people are not punished for their deeds, except for odd cases in which redeployment to the back benches of parliament was seen as punishment; in most instances the redeployment of a provincial official to national parliament or national office of the ANC was considered a promotion, creating the public impression that the ANC was soft on discipline. One may also think that being involved in factionalism in the province was the way of people to increase their political profiles and be kicked upstairs.

One also notes the most important shortcoming of the approach as it failed to deal with outsiders, particularly business people, who in one way or the other encouraged this factionalism. As the party in power, the ANC was seen by unscrupulous business people as a vehicle to access the wealth that came with tender contracts. According to Simon Zwane of **The Star**, the business people provide funds to buy people ANC membership cards and pay for their transport to congress venues to strengthen the hand of favoured candidates, who in return award tenders to these business people.²⁹

Another dispute between the north and the south group was over the issue of the provinces' capital town. A strongly committed pro-Welkom faction emerged, headed by Mayekiso, Magashule and Matosa, each of them being politicians whose support base was in the northern goldfields.³⁰ This group also tended to favour socialist rhetoric in contrast to the pragmatic approach Lekota preferred. The northerners perceived their home area as underdeveloped in comparison with Bloemfontein and its environment. These problems necessitated the NWC to install a caretaker leadership in the province constituting of Tito Mboweni and Limpho Hani.³¹

²⁸ **The Citizen**, 18 February 1997.

²⁹ **The Star**, 27 June 1996. See also T Lodge, ANC factionalism: curse or blessing?, **Focus**, Issue 29, 1st Quarter 2003, p. 27.

³⁰ **The Sunday Independent**, 4 August 1996.

³¹ P Laurence, "Lekota remains premier - Dipico is under attack", **Southern Africa Report**, Vol. 14, No. 32, 9 August 1996, p. 6.

Not only the ANC members were bothered by this infighting in the province. Political parties like the New National Party (NNP) and the Freedom Front (FF) were also concerned because this infighting delayed service delivery in the province. The former NNP leader in the province, Inus Aucamp, stated that the infighting was an embarrassment to the province. According to Aucamp the province had been paralyzed and thrown into uncertainty because the ANC placed its own interests before those of the province.³²

The above sentiments by Aucamp were also echoed by another NNP Member of the Legislature, L van der Watt, who stated the following on the infighting within the ANC in the province:

Before, the fights of the ANC were interesting, but later on it became boring, because it never came to an end. The voters of the Free State became tired of this quite a while now. It eventually became a circus. It was also boring, because this circus never came to an end and in the process the Free State was injured. Poor old Free State! This is how the Free State is now being mocked. There are, however, still two slogans: 'Two dogs fight over a bone and a third runs away with it.' This is what happened here. 'To be bitten by one's own dogs hurts most.' Neither the NP nor the FF drove the premier and some of the MECs out of this Legislature, but their own colleagues in the ANC.³³

Abrie Oosthuizen of the FF also echoed the same sentiments and stated that the province was in a poor state of governance because of this infighting and the categorization of the people in the province as the north and south groups.³⁴

On 17 December 1996, Lekota and other MECs³⁵ resigned and were thereafter redeployed. Lekota was then succeeded by Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri, who was viewed not be aligned to either the north or the south groups. She was then the head of the board of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Matsepe-Casaburri appeared to envisage a more collective style of leadership than Lekota,

³² Twala, personal collection. Interview with Mr Inus Aucamp, former leader of the New National Party (NNP) in the province, Bloemfontein, 14 May 2003.

³³ Debates of the Legislature of the Free State Province, **Hansard**, 5 December 1996, pp 2962-3.

³⁴ Twala, personal collection. Interview with Mr Abrie Oosthuizen, leader of the Freedom Front (FF) in the province, Bloemfontein, 4 June 2005.

³⁵ The following Members of the Executive Council were deployed to the National Assembly: TS Belot, ES Magashule and MS Nthatsi. From the National Assembly, the following members were redeployed to the Free State Legislature and inaugurated on 18 December 1996: IF Matsepe – Casaburri (Premier), ZA Dingani, SMA Malebo, MW Mfebe and BM Moadira.

and that could be used to avert the problems experienced by Lekota. The party leadership in the province warned her not to see the preservation of the party unity as her prime responsibility. The fact that Lekota's downfall was precipitated by his dismissal of a party colleague should not deflect her from strong and potentially divisive action which was needed to root out corruption or incompetence, Matsepe-Casaburri was warned in that regard.³⁶ The ANC national leadership advanced her name to take over as the provincial chairperson during the congress that was scheduled for 16 February 1997. The motive behind this was that for the sake of unity, the position of the ANC's chairperson and provincial premiership should be held by one person.

Although Matsepe-Casaburri's appointment was viewed as a compromise between the two rival groups, the fact that she was imposed on the province by the NWC made it difficult for her to function effectively in the premiership position. This clearly showed that the change and deployment of leaders was not a solution to the province's problems. The NWC's implementation of measures to crack down on factionalism in the province had little impact in solving the province's problems. Although she was seen as an efficient administrator from her SABC days, she did not last long as premier as a result of the tensions within the party in the province and the fact that she was imposed on the Free State citizens.³⁷ Matsepe-Casaburri might not have been a significant player on the political field but she certainly represented the future in terms of the new thinking within the ANC. Not only was she the sole female provincial head, a great achievement in terms of gender politics, but she was also the only premier by then appointed by the NWC. All other premiers had attained their positions while chairing the ANC in their respective provinces.

Her loss of the race to lead the province to Zingile Dingane during a special ANC congress in 1997 compounded Matsepe-Casaburri's problems as the premier of the province. Dingane defeated Matsepe-Casaburri by 218 votes to 189. Dingane came from the south, which won almost every seat contested during the congress. The victorious southerners wanted to use their position to influence governance. This response of the people in the congress was a clear indication to the NWC that it cannot dictate to the people who their leaders should be as it happened with the imposition of Matsepe-Casaburri on the Free State.

³⁶ **Business Day**, 20 December 1996.

³⁷ **The Star**, 23 January 1997.

Simon Zwane argues that in the province fraught with bitter factionalism and where conformity rather than quality determined political careers, Matsepe-Casaburri's non-election to the provincial leadership could not be seen as a vote of no confidence to her.³⁸ Zwane stated that the unique situation by which the NWC imposed Matsepe-Casaburri on the Free State Province, showed some of the difficulties that a premier appointed by Luthuli House could experience, particularly if the appointment was done without prior consultation with party leaders in the province.³⁹ Instead of providing support, Zwane contends that the people who put her in that position adopted a watchdog approach in their relations with her office, thus hindering her performance.⁴⁰ One may argue that the fact that she had not been involved in controversy of any nature with the provincial leadership counted in her favour because for the time being there was stability in the province. This approach and leadership style, however, dented her political profile to a certain extent. It was claimed that her indecisiveness was caused by the fact she had to look over her shoulder each time she had to make a decision to ensure that she would not offend any of the factions in her party.

Jimmy Seepe wrote in the **New Nation** newspaper that Matsepe-Casaburri's defeat was seen as a vote for the democracy and transparency that the people of the province wanted. According to him the national leadership of the ANC made strategic errors in appointing Matsepe-Casaburri as premier because that was against the will of the majority of the Free Staters, particularly those who wanted Magashule as premier. Matsepe-Casaburri also did not have a long stay as the province's premier.⁴¹ One of the factors that led to her departure was factionalism that was rife in the province and she was to a certain extent unsuccessful in bringing unity and stability in the province. During her tenure as the premier, squabbles intensified within the provincial ANC leadership. Matsepe-Casaburri did not enjoy the support of the majority of the ANC members in the province and had taken a soft option of keeping a low profile, avoiding becoming embroiled in the factions that forced Lekota to vacate the premiership position.⁴² Together with her MEC for Finance, Expenditure and Economic Affairs, Zingile Dingane, she was once again attacked by the NNP leader Inus Aucamp in the provincial legislature over the weak financial status of the province. In highlighting the financial status of the province he indicated the following:

³⁸ **The Star**, 10 September 1998.

³⁹ **Ibid.**

⁴⁰ **Ibid.**

⁴¹ **The New Nation**, 21 February 1997.

⁴² Twala, personal collection. Interview with Professor DP Wessels, political scientist at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 15 February 2005.

The NNP finds it strange and unacceptable that the ANC Provincial Government did not see the need to inform the Legislature and its relevant Committee about the current financial position of the Free State; the causes of that; and what is being done to normalize the situation. I want to tell you, dark days have arrived in the Free State. It could just as well have been Zimbabwe or Lesotho we are talking about, because everywhere you go it is written: No Lesotho cheques accepted. Do you know the possibility increases by the day that it will be written: No cheques accepted from the Free State Provincial Government?⁴³

The above statement by Aucamp was clearly undermining Matsepe-Casaburri's leadership as the province's premier and declaring a vote of no confidence in her leadership. This statement had an impact on Matsepe-Casaburri's role as the premier of the province.

Above the noise from the townships' self-imposed political analysts, the question as to who would succeed Matsepe-Casaburri was widely asked because it was evident that she was not the correct choice for the premiership status in the province. A number of names circulated in the Free State townships as to who the successor would be, among which that of Ace Magashule and Pallo Jordan. The least that was anticipated was that Winkie Direko would be given the premiership position of the Free State Province. Partly this was because the potential contenders were making sure that they keep their heads way below the parapets. They realized that within the new culture of the ANC as government, to talk publicly of leadership ambitions, was almost immediately to sabotage their chances. To take a case in point, reverting to the media, savvy Magashule who was on top of the political game in 1994, 1996 and 1999, and was earmarked as the province's premier, failed to obtain that position.

The June 1999 election rescued Matsepe-Casaburri from the hot premiership position. After her deployment to the national parliament, it became clear that the Free State needed a politically strong candidate to steer the province forward. Due to factionalism, the province was by that time in decline, disintegrating, racked by financial and organizational problems and leadership disputes, hence the nomination and appointment of Direko as premier of the province in June 1999.

⁴³ Debates of the Legislature of the Free State Province, **Hansard**, Vol. 58, 25 January 1999, pp. 5331-2.

The ANC branches which had voted Ace Magashule to the top of the provincial list in the 1998 Welkom Congress became dissatisfied with Direko's nomination and later appointment and the perceived purge of Magashule's support from the party's provincial list.⁴⁴ Direko was seen as belonging to the 'Lekota faction', therefore her appointment was viewed as not going to resolve the looming factionalism that was in the province.⁴⁵ Direko came to the province as premier having had a spell in Cape Town as a member of the NCOP of which Lekota was the chairperson. Some members of the ANC in the province believed that Lekota had a role in the appointment of Direko as the province's premier, therefore her appointment was an extension of Lekota's group in governance.⁴⁶

To many people, particularly his supporters, Magashule was seen as the 'premier in waiting'. His supporters believed that Magashule, who had helped to mobilize the masses as a community activist in Parys in the 1980s, deserved the premiership position. To their dismay they realized that the president elect had different expectations as to the provincial premiership position. The conclusions of the Welkom ANC Provincial Congress therefore were not congruent with the president elect's ruling. It was after such a politically volatile period that Direko found herself appointed to lead the province. The fact that the premiers' appointments were then the prerogative of the president, it was clear that Direko had the support of Mbeki, hence some people referred to her as 'Mbeki's appointee'.⁴⁷

Muso Tsoametsi, presently the Deputy Director General in the office of Premier B Marshoff, proudly supported the appointment of Direko as the premier when he stated the following:

For me it was a moral call and also a pride that someone emerging from my own community was given this important task. Everybody was talking negatively about that announcement. Structures that were supposed to be supporting her were distancing themselves from her and she was left alone. When I was in the regional committee of the ANC together with other people like Bob Tladi and Mike Nthuping, as the leadership of the Central West Region, we took it upon ourselves that in no way could we allow this

⁴⁴ **Business Day**, 20 April 1999.

⁴⁵ C Twala and L Barnard, "Winkie Direko - a political leader in her own right?", **Journal for Contemporary History**, Vol. 28, No. 3, December 2003, pp. 138-9.

⁴⁶ C Twala and L Barnard, "The premier, politics and prejudice: Winkie Direko's rise from comparative obscurity in the 1970s to provincial prominence in the 1990s - a biographical overview", **Journal for Contemporary History**, Vol. 29, No. 2, September 2004, pp. 204-20.

⁴⁷ C Twala and L Barnard, Winkie Direko ...", p. 139.

type of a situation to continue without supporting this lady. We abided by the choice of the party in her appointment.⁴⁸

While there was a group who supported Direko, there were others who condemned her appointment as the province's premier. The group, including political commentators, politicians and the larger section of the media, who argued against her appointment was in the majority, concluded that because of her lack of political experience, she was bound to fail as premier. According to them, leading a politically divided Free State Province was certainly no easy task for a comparatively inexperienced Direko.

DP Wessels, a political scientist from the University of the Free State, observed and came to the conclusion that Direko was to a certain extent faced with a political leadership crisis which emanated from a confrontation of personalities. Wessels argued that the fact that Direko had no glorious political background did not deter Mbeki from appointing her as the province's premier.⁴⁹ From Wessels's view, it became clear to the NEC that the Free State needed a leader irrespective of political credentials. In view of that, while most of the political leaders were trapped in the north and south divide, Direko appeared to be neutral and well-known for community-based activities and therefore suited to become the premier.⁵⁰ Wessels was also optimistic that the way Direko conducted herself in many community organizations as a leader would establish her as the province's political leader.⁵¹

This argument of Wessels was negated by J Letuka, who critically doubted the ANC's intelligence in the appointment of Direko as leader with a dubious track record in as far as political activity was concerned. Letuka was of the opinion that Direko was just a compromise leader, appointed by the NEC in an attempt to unite the fighting ANC in the province, and not on the basis that she was a capable politician or political leader.⁵² Simon Zwane contended that Direko's nomination had been influenced by her role in community development. He also acknowledged that Direko enjoyed a measure of respect by the NEC of the ANC, but the fact that she lacked political charisma was regarded a barrier on her side to lead the province. According to Zwane, this could accelerate hostilities between the conflicting groups in the Free State.⁵³ This argument raised by Zwane was denounced by some as a ploy to belittle Direko's past contributions in the community which were

⁴⁸ Twala, personal collection. Interview with Mr M Tsoametsi, Bloemfontein, 2 June 2005.

⁴⁹ Twala, personal collection. Interview with DP Wessels, Bloemfontein, 14 April 2003.

⁵⁰ **Ibid.**

⁵¹ **Ibid.**

⁵² Twala, personal collection. Interview with Mr LJ Letuka, Bloemfontein, 15 February 2005.

⁵³ **The Star**, 14 May 1999.

politically motivated. They believed that she would bring sound and smooth administration to the province.⁵⁴

As the province's newly appointed premier, as stated before, she was faced with problems of leadership squabbles within the ANC. The NEC expected her to remedy the situation.⁵⁵ It is therefore important when one assesses Direko's role in bringing about stability in the province to take cognizance of the fact that she inherited a province which had been riddled by problems.

Direko was optimistic that she would be able to heal the wounds of a divided ANC in the Free State. She was aware that as the premier she had to unite the ANC in the province and avoid the looming 'two centres of power' within the ANC where some people paid allegiance to the province's chairperson and others to her as the premier. It was therefore her responsibility to forge for unity in the province, something that was not easy to achieve. To deal with this factionalism, she had to encourage diversity of views as that was not only fundamental to ensuring a democratic culture within the ANC, but would also enrich the organization with the multiplicity of ideas which emanated from the diverse and at times contradictory perspectives of the organization's membership and structures.⁵⁶

The 'two centres of power'⁵⁷ in the province, as this article suggests, would lead to the sacrifice of the effective translation of the ANC policies into government programmes, and that would require a rather strange relationship between the premier being Direko and the ANC's chairperson in the province who was Magashule. Without doubt, that kind of a relationship in the province appeared to be idealistic because Magashule's supporters had wanted him to be the premier. Although these two parties might be from the same ANC organization, but because of internal conflicts, ANC policies were sacrificed. One might conclude that the issue of having the ANC provincial chairperson not being the same person as the premier, created problems in many of the ANC-led provinces, including the Free State Province. One other view held by the ANC members was that when people vote for the ANC, they do not vote for the person leading it, but for the policies and the agenda of the organization. All people appointed by the president like the

⁵⁴ **Ibid.**

⁵⁵ Twala, personal collection. Interview with Professor A Duvenhage, political scientist at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 10 February 2005.

⁵⁶ **Ibid.**

⁵⁷ The 'two centres of power' theory existed where the chairperson of the ANC in the province was not the province's premier. This became evident in the province where Direko became the premier while the people's choice, Magashule, remained only the chairperson. This created a problem as the person appointed by the President was at the helm of the government and not the person chosen by the constituencies in the provincial conference of the ANC.

premiers therefore, are deployees of the organization and accountable to the electorate on the mandate given to them to govern.⁵⁸

While acknowledged by Mbeki and the NEC as a capable person to lead the province, Direko's attempts to revive the ANC in the province and maintain stability was sometimes bedevilled by her tactless and insensitive approach in dealing with the ANC's affairs. This in itself never healed the wounds of division in the province but at some points aggravated strains within the party and resulted in the resurrection of clashes with some party members. At times Direko tended to overlook the fact that, despite its problems, the ANC's provincial leadership under the chair of Magashule represented a considerable achievement in as far as the electorate and ANC branch membership were concerned.

In the midst of the above highlighted simmering tensions, Direko had to select MECs to serve in her administration. The provincial leadership felt that it was entitled to contribute to the choice of the MECs. They believed that the provincial list should also be used in determining who becomes MECs and that should not be the prerogative of the Premier only. Her appointment of the new MECs led to resentment and her sometimes moderate political approach aroused suspicion that she was Mbeki's political tool, hence her controversial appointment as the province's premier.⁵⁹

Under Direko as the leader of the provincial government, there existed little co-operation between the party leadership under Magashule and the government and this continued until the NWC decided on dissolving the ANC provincial leadership and installing the interim structure. The ANC's leadership justified the dissolution of the provincial leadership in 2000 by referring to factional strife that led to rival personalities and their followers jockeying for party positions and public office. It argued that deployment of the ANC provincial personnel was needed not only to quell factionalism within the province but also to counter the influence of the former ruling class that still predominated in the civil service, in the economic sector and in the media. This heroic projection by the ANC was however artificial because factionalism continued, not only in the Free State but also in other provinces led by the ANC. This was a new culture within the ANC as a political party. According to Tom Lodge the ANC's analysts argue that factionalism is "wholly and singularly caused by corruption...the scramble for power, state

⁵⁸ Twala, personal collection. Interview with Mr M Tsoametsi, Bloemfontein, 2 June 2005.

⁵⁹ C Twala and L Barnard, "Winkie Direko", p. 146.

resources and a tendency for comrades to regard local structures as their own fiefdoms".⁶⁰

The dissolution of the provincial executive committee was also welcomed by the opposition parties in the Free State. The then Democratic Party's (DP) chief whip, Darryl Worth, stated that this would end the internal battles which had "created an unstable climate in the province and affected the legislature". He further indicated that the factions were concentrating on internal battles rather than on running the province effectively. According to Worth this was a nightmare for Direko as the province's premier. He viewed Direko as being powerless to deal with that problem, hence the involvement of the NWC in trying to resolve this issue.⁶¹ Showing support to Direko as premier he stated that there were people within the ANC in the province who would like to see Direko replaced and that would perpetuate the infighting within the party.⁶²

Inus Aucamp of the NNP in the province also welcomed the decision of the NWC to disband the provincial structure because tensions within the ANC had a negative effect on the governing of the Free State. Aucamp said: "We have consistently asked them to sort out their differences because there can never be stability in the province if the governing party is unstable."⁶³ The ANC was adamant that the dissolution of the provincial executive committee was an internal measure which would not affect the running of the provincial government and legislature.⁶⁴ Coming harshly on the fighting groups in the province, Mbeki gave them a tongue-lashing accusing them of allowing personal differences to filter down to the membership, leaving the party in disarray.⁶⁵

3. THE ROLE OF THE INTERIM STRUCTURE AGAINST PATRONAGE AND FACTIONALISM IN THE PROVINCE

An interim leadership core⁶⁶ which replaced the fired provincial executive council committee was also tasked to monitor the November 2000 local government elections. Other mandates of this 15 member interim body were to heal rifts that

⁶⁰ T Lodge, "ANC factionalism: curse or blessing?", **Focus**, Issue 29, 1st Quarter 2003, p. 26.

⁶¹ **Sowetan**, 9 May 2000; **Business Day**, 8 May 2000.

⁶² **Ibid.**

⁶³ **Ibid.**

⁶⁴ **Ibid.**

⁶⁵ **Business Day**, 8 May 2000.

⁶⁶ Members of the Interim Structure were Godfrey Mosala (Interim Chairperson), Noby Ngombane (Co-ordinator), Lewele Dicks Modisenyane, Hans Nketu, Steve Tshabalala, Sizwe Mbalu, Madala Ntombela, Stuurman Mokoena, Sekete Chakela, Thethane Mofokeng, Malitthlare Molete and Clara Mazibuko.

had paralyzed the party since 1994 and to prepare the ground for the new leadership that was to be chosen. That meant that they had to rehabilitate and re-organize ANC branches away from the factionalism that had torn the province apart.

Interim leadership co-ordinator Noby Ngombane,⁶⁷ indicated that the firing of the provincial executive committee which was accused of promoting factionalism within the party, resulted in the rebirth of the Free State ANC.⁶⁸ Ngombane was confident that the new executive committee would work together with Direko as the premier. According to him, the problems of factionalism at the provincial level tended to filter down to regions and branches, leaving the party in disarray.⁶⁹ It was the role of the interim leadership, with the help of Direko as premier, to visit ANC branches in the province, to identify their problems, revive activity and help devise recruitment programmes ahead of the local government elections.⁷⁰

It was surprising to find Ngombane heading the interim structure which replaced the fired provincial executive committee because at one stage he denied the existence of factionalism in the province when he attacked Wally Mbele who had written an article in the **Mail and Guardian** entitled "Fresh splits in the Free State ANC", which discredited Direko for being divisive in the province. Direko was accused of having written a letter to Mbeki requesting him to effect some changes in the provincial ANC list.⁷¹ Mbele also stated that Direko was supposed to be marginalized by the provincial leadership for that act. In response to that, Ngombane stated that there was no bad blood between the ANC provincial leadership and Direko on that issue. Lambasting Mbele, he indicated that Magashule and the provincial executive committee had pledged their support to the premier candidate which was Direko. Finding himself after a year heading the interim structure, confirmed Mbele's political status although Ngombane questioned Mbele's underlying political issues that made him to write an article in the **Mail and Guardian**.⁷² He further accused Mbele of being a political opportunist who was

⁶⁷ Noby Ngombane, aged 38, was assassinated outside his home in Bloemfontein on 22 March 2005. He was the Superintendent-General in the office of the current Free State Premier, Beatrice Marshoff. Political analysts believe that his assassination was politically motivated as he was one of the influential politicians in the Free State. This proves that the political intolerance within the province which started after 1994 was continuing although both premier Marshoff and the ANC provincial leadership denied that his assassination was politically motivated. Ngombane was once Matsepe-Casaburri's and Direko's political advisor.

⁶⁸ **The Citizen**, 5 February 2001.

⁶⁹ **Business Day**, 30 August 2000.

⁷⁰ **Ibid.**

⁷¹ **Mail and Guardian**, 21-27 May 1999.

⁷² **Mail and Guardian**, 4-10 June 1999.

trying to enrich his journalistic profile by demonizing Direko in the media as a factionalist even before she assumed her position.⁷³

The interim leadership was aware that it was expected to solve a problem that had a long history in the province and which had left the membership of the ANC divided. It was also the responsibility of this leadership to try and recruit those supporters of the party who had abandoned the party because of disillusionment. The problem facing this leadership was whether they had the capacity to promote the needed unity among the party structures in the province.⁷⁴ DP Wessels was of the opinion that the introduction of the interim leadership in the province and the removal of the provincial executive council brought about stability and that would help Direko to run the province smoothly. He contended that from the onset the tensions in the party were not related to policy matters but it was because of the power struggle among the party's leadership.⁷⁵

While many people welcomed the establishment of the interim structure, there were some doubts cast on the wisdom of the move by the national leadership to fire the provincial executive committee. Some disgruntled ANC members in the province rejected the establishment of the interim structure and perceived it as a "third party pushing its own agenda". It was accused of starting new problems within the party and turning the party into a "job for pals" scheme. The appointment of some members of the interim structure as mayors of major towns such as Bloemfontein, Welkom, Maseru and Sasolburg in the province was a source for concern among the membership.⁷⁶ The move was largely interpreted as an abuse of power by those members and it damaged the credibility of the structure. Members accused the leadership of having placed themselves at the top of the electoral lists of the party during the November 2000 local government elections and Direko did nothing to correct the situation which was seen to be destabilizing the province.⁷⁷

Although this structure was not elected through a normal democratic process, it was accepted and enjoyed the trust and support of Direko's government and other party members who longed for stability in the province. Doubts became evident when some of these members failed to resist the temptation of being power crazy and became mayors. Despite their involvement in the interim structure, one could also argue that they deserved full rights to represent their constituencies at any level, although in this case it appeared as if they were in the limelight because they were

⁷³**Ibid.**⁷⁴ **Sowetan**, 5 June 2000.⁷⁵ Twala, personal collection. Interview with DP Wessels, 15 February 2005.⁷⁶ **Sunday Times**, 25 March 2001.⁷⁷ **Business Day**, 10 April 2001.

in the party's leadership; therefore they exploited the opportunity. They were accused of using their involvement in the interim structure for upward mobility.

In the process of trying to root out problems of factionalism that had filtered down to regions and branches of the party, the interim leadership was believed to have antagonized many dedicated people. This made people to revert to their support bases and regroup their camps in preparation for the provincial conference where the new provincial executive would be elected. They were also accused of having lobbied through some of the organizers at branch and regional levels to mobilize support for them to ensure that they would make it into the new provincial executive committee. These allegations were, however, rejected by the interim leadership's convener, Godfrey Mosala.⁷⁸ The interim structure was also accused of having allowed the reshuffling of the executive members by Direko in February 2001 because some of the members of the interim structure wanted to position themselves as Members of the Executive Council.⁷⁹ The structure was accused of having failed to reconcile the structures and members of the party who were behind the crisis in the province and accused of having allowed the political cliques that existed in the province to regroup and entrench themselves.⁸⁰ According to Teboho Ntethe, an ANC member in the Northern Free State, it was too much of a coincidence that all officials who were removed as MECs by Direko were from the northern region. It was even more bizarre that all their replacements were from the southern region. Ntethe viewed this as a means to punish the Magashule and Matosa faction, and only those loyal to Lekota were rewarded.⁸¹

In June 2002, while the interim structure members were accused of positioning themselves for nomination in the new executive committee, cracks within the Free State ANC structures were beginning to surface ahead of the provincial conference. It was reported that members of the former provincial executive committee, which had been dissolved by the ANC headquarters, had begun a strong campaign for re-election. This was strongly denied by the ANC provincial spokesperson, Spirit Monyobo, when he told Mpumelelo Mkhabela of **City Press** that he was not aware of any secret groupings lobbying for positions within the ANC. In reality, there was lobbying taking place within the province.⁸² The province was then divided into two rival groups, namely, one which supported Premier Direko for the party's chairpersonship and another which supported former chairperson Matosa and

⁷⁸ **Business Day**, 10 April 2001.

⁷⁹ **City Press**, 10 June 2001.

⁸⁰ **Ibid.**

⁸¹ Twala, personal collection. Interview with Mr T Ntetha, an ANC member in the Northern Free State, Kroonstad, 29 January 2005.

⁸² **City Press**, 9 July 2002.

Magashule. The latter two were believed to be working out a strategy, especially in the northern areas, to re-emerge as strong candidates in the conference which was scheduled for July. For this conference Direko had the support of the ANC National Executive Council (NEC) and it envisaged her victory. However, other ANC members in the province and the NWC feared that the re-election of Matosa and Magashule would unleash another power struggle in the province. It was believed that if they win, they would seek revenge against people whom they believed had victimized them when they were sacked and factions would continue.

In October 2003, Charles Molele of **This Day** wrote an article titled "North-south factionalism splits party in Free State" in which he stated that the ANC branches in the Free State had effectively passed a vote of no-confidence led by Direko. From the provincial list Direko managed only to be nominated at number 52. Only one of seven serving MECs made it on to the main provincial list of ANC candidates. This was interpreted as the beginning of the demise of Direko's government. Ouma Tsopo, the former health MEC, who also had premiership ambitions, made it at number 29 on the provincial list conference in Welkom.⁸³

On their national list, delegates nominated Jacob Zuma, the Deputy President, to head government and Thabo Mbeki was placed fourth, preceded by Foreign Affairs Minister, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma in second place, and former Public Enterprises Minister Jeff Radebe in third.⁸⁴ Magashule, the ANC Free State's provincial chairperson, again proved a popular choice among branches in the province which started to be torn apart by leadership battles between so-called northerners and southerners. C Mokitlane, Magashule's deputy, received the highest number of votes for the provincial list, followed by M Dukwana and C Lobe, other members of the party's provincial Executive Council.⁸⁵

ANC officials topping the provincial list came from the northern Free State, but the seven MECs were from the south. The southern faction was said to be favoured by the ANC's national leadership. The two regions had been involved in a fierce competition for power that had twice forced the ANC's national leaders to intervene to prevent destabilizing the party and provincial governance. One could conclude that the fact that serving MECs could not make the list was a clear indication of vote of no-confidence in the provincial government and in Direko's authority.⁸⁶ This indicated that all ANC Provincial Executive Council (PEC) officials were in

⁸³ **This Day**, 20 October 2003.

⁸⁴ **Citizen**, 21 October 2003.

⁸⁵ **This Day**, 20 October 2003.

⁸⁶ Twala, personal collection. Interview with Mr T Ntetha, Kroonstad, 29 January 2005.

and all MECs were out because the branches thought the best leadership for the province lied in the ANC PEC, the leadership of the province did not listen to the instructions of the ANC's executive council in the region.

4. CONCLUSION

Although some people underestimated the existence of the north and south faction groups in the Free State, in reality they did exist. These groupings became rife after 1994 when Lekota was appointed the first premier of the province and this factionalism filtered through to Matsepe-Casaburri's reign as Lekota's successor. Matsepe-Casaburri tried her level best to stabilize the faction groups but with little success. This could have been the reason for her replacement by Direko in June 1999. Direko managed to a certain extent to attain political stability in the province as she completed her five year term. There are some perceptions that she managed to complete her five year term because she was assisted by the ANC provincial leadership in normalizing the situation in the province.