

Patel's failures are personal for millions of South Africans

By Dean Macpherson MP – DA Shadow Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition

House Chairperson, at every engagement or budget debate we have, Minister Patel's standard, and somewhat predictable response in his sweep against the DA, is that we are grandstanding and being personal.

He believes that pointing out the economic failures of the government he serves in and economic policies that he champions, is somehow an attack on his dignity and character.

I want to assure him from the outset of this debate today, we will be no different.

Because the truth of the matter is, that what he does or doesn't do is deeply personal for 60 million people in South Africa.

The choices he makes, the battles he chooses, or the sides he takes, is the difference between putting food on the table or entrenching poverty, and at time, the difference between life and death. It is the choice between entrenching State-sponsored anti-competitiveness and lowering costs for consumers.

Sadly, Minister Patel, given the choice, will almost always pick the side which most harms our country and the people who live in it. Because being a trade unionist, his natural instinct is always to gravitate towards and align himself with the "insiders" and to do everything possible to shut out those on the "outside".

Take for example the debate around poultry prices and the effects that tariffs have on it.

Millions of South Africans rely on poultry as the cheapest form of protein. However, over the last few years, prices have steadily increased because multi-billion Rand, JSE listed businesses have been given State-sponsored protection from imports.

This was in reaction to the very same companies who were selling seawater for the price of chicken by brining products with up to 80% water. So they needed a miracle to save their businesses and found it in the form of tariffs championed by the DTI. While they have swelled their profits on the back of South Africans, ordinary people are required to pay more.

The DA has warned the Minister and the Department this day was coming, yet they have not listened. They have hidden behind all sorts of excuses about protecting industry, but they in truth don't care about protecting working class South Africans.

If the Minister and his Department really cared, they would immediately heed our call and drop all duties on imported chicken for at least 6 months to allow consumers to source the cheapest source of protein in these most trying of times.

Minister, are you prepared to work with the DA to achieve this, and if not, you should tell us today why you don't want to?

Being the internationalist you would like to portray yourself as, I am sure you will know that Mexico has done exactly this, starting immediately.

Minister, for far too long, ordinary South Africans have been locked out of being a part of the R1 trillion in government procurement each year because of Broad Based Economic Empowerment (BBBEE). It has become the ultimate system of ANC political patronage where value for money and social responsibility is not the main driver for delivery. BBBEE is the enabler of this grand rip-off and I think that government is finally waking up to this reality. And I know this to be true because the tender documents for the port operator of Durban harbour and Coega exclude BBBEE as a requirement. This is a major step and one the DA fully supports.

This “new dawn” in thinking by government has encouraged the DA to finalise our Social Impact Bill which will leverage state procurement to benefit communities through Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and not through patronage and corruption.

Ordinary South African’s, particularly low-income black South Africans, will finally have the opportunity to benefit from government procurement, which will drive economic growth and create jobs.

The DA is encouraged by a letter from The Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU) that supports the DA’s inclusion of SDGs as a form of redress through government procurement in our bill. They are half way down the road to supporting this historic piece of legislation.

Minister, the DA is personal with you about issues of the economy and your record in government because it is so personal for millions of people.

In KwaZulu-Natal, children are eating sand to keep hunger at bay. This is no accident either. It is the result of nearly three decades of failed economic policy.

You have been involved in this for 10 years, or nearly a third of it. This is why we cannot be nice about these issues. There are no pleasantries to be passed around when nearly 200 children under the age of 5 have died of hunger in January and February of this year. There are no handshakes and backslapping to be had when 40% of our country is unemployed.

You and your ANC colleagues must account for these failures. Stop blaming everyone else and take the bold decisions now.

If you want the so called grandstanding and personal attacks to stop, then put something on the table for us to support.

You can start by halting tariffs on chicken and food imports for 6 months and support our bill to end BBBEE.