

Is there something more sinister behind the latest PPA delay?

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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The much-anticipated signing of South Africa's renewables power purchase agreements (PPAs) has once again been delayed. This time by an application for an interdict to prevent the contracts being concluded. However, the motives of one of the parties that lodged the application are questionable, especially given its previous support of former president, Jacob Zuma, and his henchmen.



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Last week, Energy Minister, Jeff Radebe, announced the agreements would be signed on 13 March 2018, but the evening prior, Transform RSA and the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) approached the High Court in Pretoria requesting a court interdict stopping Eskom from signing the 27 agreements with independent power producers.

However, after arguments were concluded, the court decided not to grant the interim interdict, but postponed the matter to 27 March 2018, giving the responding parties until 20 March 2018 to file their answering papers, and until 22 March 2018 for the applicants' parties to file their replying papers.

Theoretically, because the interdict was not granted, nothing prevented Eskom and IPPs from concluding the agreements. But, counsel for the minister told the court that in the spirit of constitutionalism and the rule of law, the signing will be postponed until 27 March 2018.

The applicants

It's understandable that a trade union such as Numsa, which represents thousands of workers, believes signing these contracts would ultimately result in job losses as Eskom becomes less dependent on coal-powered electricity, but who or what is Transform RSA?

Despite calling itself a non-governmental organisation, Transform RSA is not listed as a non-profit on the Department of Social Development website. Its president, Adil Nchabeleng, has appeared frequently on the Gupta-owned ANN7 sprouting former president, Jacob Zuma's line on white monopoly capital. Ironically, he's listed as a director of 33 companies and has a taste for designer suits.

In January, he threatened to take African National Congress' national executive committee to court, saying it had no mandate to recall Zuma.

"It is not the great time to create instability, the economy is at the most stable it has ever been. Why would they start again with insinuations of creating another havoc... where you could have a groundswell of violence and instability," Nchabeleng said.

Transform RSA also tried to oppose a court action by the Helen Suzman Foundation (HSF) and Freedom Under Law (FUL), about the appointment of National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) head, Shaun Abrahams. The organisation argued that the suspension of Abrahams would amount to political interference, and that the application brought by FUL and HSF were aimed at bringing the NPA into disrepute.

So what is Transform RSA's real agenda and who is behind it? Could this be another case of behind-the-scenes rabble rousing to undermine newly-elected president, Cyril Ramaphosa's effort to clean up state capture?

What the renewables sector has to say

"The delayed investment of over R59 billion, the creation of over 13,000 construction jobs and a further 2000 operations jobs was meant to be unlocked today," says Brenda Martin, CEO of the South African Wind Energy Association (Sawea).

"Instead, the coal lobby has sought an urgent interdict to delay the conclusion of power purchase agreements, citing already-debunked arguments relating to job losses, coal power station closures and rising electricity prices.

"The facts are clear: renewables already cost over 50% less than new coal-fired power, government policy has for years included the closure of coal-fired power stations, the associated job losses are being planned for through numerous processes currently underway – most notably processes being undertaken by the national planning commission, electricity price increases are directly related to the extended delays and rising costs associated with Eskom's coal build programme," Martin says.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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