



### **THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS OF OPPRESSION? REALLY MR. MBALULA!**

On 21 July this year, South Africa's transport minister Fikile Mbalula faced the BBC's Stephen Sackur of television's "Hardtalk" fame, for 24 minutes of grilling on whether South Africa's governing party the African National Congress (ANC) was "confronting its own failures". Continually on the defensive as are most ANC comrades, the minister was asked how, after 27 years, his party had such a woeful record of non-achievement, turmoil, unemployment, violence and corruption which had plunged South Africa into third world status.

Rummaging around in his head to find someone or something to blame, the minister reminded Sackur that "our people" had suffered more than 350 years of oppression in South Africa! This narrative, like so many other fairy stories repeated ad infinitum, has become something of a gospel, an historical "given" so uniformly unchallenged that this minister can use it with impunity on an international television show and not expect to be challenged.

It will be shown that the "350 years of oppression" tale can indeed be disputed, on empirical grounds. One must focus therefore on the minister's "our people" – black South Africans – to whom he alluded. What are the facts concerning this oppression for 350 years? What are the realities and truths that manifest themselves when humbug is challenged?

A further common narrative that is part of SA's lexicon is the term "previously disadvantaged", generally referring inter alia to the minister's "our people". We should thus examine the verifiable sources of these labels that have provided the ANC with the *raison d'être* for its affirmative action policies, the upshot of which gave credence and legitimacy to the takeover of South Africa's civil service by millions of ANC disciples, whether competent or not. This control coup called Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) was the beginning of the end of South Africa as a functioning state, with huge repercussions on the livelihoods of millions of people.

The Preamble to the SA Constitution (1996) declares that South Africa must "recognise the injustices of our past" and this usually implies reference to the apartheid years, from 1948 to 1994. It does not however specifically exclude the earlier 300 or so years of mostly British rule.

In 1652 the Dutch East India Company established a base at the Cape to render logistical support to its trade activities with territories in Asia. It has been empirically established that at that time, there was no structural or economic development either at the Cape or, later discovered, within the African hinterland. Writers and historians who visited South Africa during the 18th and 19th centuries at the behest of the British and French governments, as well as the numerous missionaries who arrived in South Africa during those years, recorded what they saw - a primitive environment and a rudimentary human existence, in many instances not far removed from the Stone Age.

These local inhabitants were revealed to have never built anything resembling the level of development that was occurring in most parts of the world at that time. Foreign observers in South Africa at the time found no written word, no infrastructure, no roads, hospitals, schools, towns, piped water, waste systems or sustainable agriculture.

Given this scenario, what then were the specific injustices of the past referred to by minister Mbalula during this period? What repressive actions were to be later "redressed" by white South Africans via affirmative action? During this pre-apartheid era, what did black South Africans not have that they were entitled to, based on what they had historically created and worked for? What was taken from them that they had generated and developed from their own culture? How were they oppressed when they came from a rudimentary existence and were lifted up by another culture and given access to the many accoutrements of that culture without contributing much except labour?

From whom did they learn to speak modern European languages? Who taught them to read and write? Who built them schools, gave them clothing and houses, provided them with modern medical care, transport, jobs? Who codified their languages which then became legitimate subjects at the universities the whites built for them? What did they contribute from their culture to the developing Western-style South Africa from which they were reaping benefits? The facts are that they became part and parcel of a civilization that was not theirs: they were indeed very much advantaged in this regard, not disadvantaged. What then gave them their arrogant sense of historical entitlement to not only take over the assets of a South Africa to which they contributed nothing except labour, but to further introduce a penalizing policy of affirmative action against the very group that gave them everything they now possessed? What then comprised the oppression they supposedly endured of which Mr. Mbalula speaks?

## **LAND**

The question of land will always be part of the dispossession debate. The fact is that before the coming of Europeans to South Africa, there was no such thing as recorded ownership of land, at least in the modern sense. There was indeed temporary occupation by various tribes. They used the land and moved on. They plundered other tribes and took land that didn't belong to the vanquished in the first place. Only

when the Western system of land titles and record-keeping was introduced was land considered "owned", not simply occupied. Clearly some order had to be brought into the land question at the time. To place this conundrum in perspective, this situation occurred right throughout the new world as settlers arrived and were "given" or "allocated" land by the colonial powers in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States of America and South America. Whether this activity was just or not is a moot point but it was part and parcel of a process that suited the time and the place in history. Private property had been the bedrock of European civilization for thousands of years and was the linchpin of modern new world development in South Africa and everywhere else.

Where would South Africans be today without private land ownership, and this includes minister Mbalula's "people" who own farms and properties throughout this country.

### **MUTUAL AGREEMENT**

In 1994, there should have at least been some sort of agreement between those who created and developed and built, and those who contributed labour and not much else. There could have at least been a nod to fairness in this political takeover. Labour entitles citizens to some reward, but by the same token so does creativity and achievements based on a well-spring of human resourcefulness and enterprise. Labour is anywhere and everywhere, but skills, enterprise and an innovative and productive DNA are rare personal attributes.

Where in the world has a labour contribution entitled a group to take over a country lock, stock and barrel? The fact that the SA labour component was within the same geographical and political land area as the skills component does not give the former the right to have their cake and eat it, while the latter component must hand over everything they created and be further penalised based on a fallacy about the former being "previously disadvantaged". In the development of Dubai, labourers were imported and then sent back to their countries after their work was done. There was no entitlement to either citizenship or rewards outside their salaries and bonuses. More importantly, they were never referred to as "disadvantaged". To the world market, they offered their labour, for which they were paid. Modern Dubai was the creation of visionaries who drew up a blueprint of what they wanted and then imported the people who would make this happen. These included the professionals and the labour. Although both parties (the creators and the labour entity) were not both citizens of Dubai, the principle itself applies in the case of South Africa.

### **APARTHEID**

South Africa's pre-1948 situation was politically fractious and unstable. The options available to the white voters (who were the engine of the SA economy and who paid most of the taxes) were not perfect – either one man one vote or apartheid (separate development). Had the first option prevailed in that year's election, we would have had a one man one vote "democratic" Kwame Nkrumah/Jacob Zuma shambles,

the likes of which we are now experiencing. As it happened, the period between 1948 and 1994 under apartheid (which the voters chose as their only option) saw South Africa flourish as it had never done so before. There were restrictions under this policy because had there not been, the situation we are now experiencing under the ANC would have been with us earlier. Apartheid may not have been everyone's cup of tea, but an ANC-type catastrophe was the only other option.

Those who felt oppressed by apartheid are now experiencing that other option – ANC rule. What are some of the hallmarks of that rule? We have a serious water crisis – villagers in KZN are still fetching water from a polluted river and it's been eight years since the taps ran dry. It is estimated that SA needs R1trillion to spend on water infrastructure. (Sunday Times 12.9.21). SA's municipal debt at the end of June 2021 was R73.7 billion. The government's cadre deployment has turned SA's once-functioning local government entities into arguably the most inefficient and corrupt in the developed world. One of the planet's best electricity suppliers – Eskom – struggles to extricate itself from a crushing debt which didn't exist under apartheid. This state-owned entity (SOE) is now managed by a special appointee outside the government because there was no one in the ANC who could be trusted to rescue this vital SOE from complete collapse.

The figure of 11.4 million unemployed is touted as official but other sources report the number as high as 70% of the work force. In 1994 the jobless statistic was 3.5 million. There is no money in the state's piggy bank, yet the new minister of Finance Enoch Godongwana needs to immediately find R19.6bn for state wage increases, R15bn to settle student debt, R5bn to rescue the Land Bank and R3,2bn to recapitalise Denel, the state-owned defence, security and related technology giant which was once a world leader in its field. Under ANC rule, there were times when it could not pay its staff.

The elephant in the room is the state wage bill: a “cash gratuity” for public servants will alone cost R19,6bn in 2021/2022. How's that for vote buying? Law and order is a thing of the past, well exemplified by July's anarchic swathe of destruction caused, in our president's words, by “our people”. One third of black South Africans go to bed hungry every night. The government of Mr. Mbalula has stolen the country blind: corruption is in their DNA. Crime is out of control: statistics supplied for the period 1 April to 30 June this year reveal 2,7 South Africans were murdered every hour, while there were 27.5 rapes and 10,8 house break-ins per day during the same three-month period. Millions of foreigners from as far away as Pakistan, Nigeria and the horn of Africa have illegally entered South Africa due to woeful border control. Squatter camps encircle our cities, while nobody knows what the population of South Africa really is. Human effluent drains into our agricultural soil, destroying farms that have been in families for hundreds of years.

Power stations blow up because of negligence, while witch doctors advertise in newspapers that they can obtain government tenders “for a fee”. Under Mr. Mbalula's government's 27 years of rule, we are left with one 80-year-old air force

plane to patrol our seas. South Africans are indeed oppressed under the yoke of ANC corruption, ineptness, cadre employment and a monumental sense of entitlement.

There is no historical justification whatsoever for the ANC's policy of affirmative action based on 350 years of so-called oppression of its people. The ANC itself did nothing for these people – it never built a school, it never started a farm as a party effort to provide a sustainable food supply, it never built a factory with its own money to create jobs. It cannot even pay employees at its own head office. It is a useless organisation that parasites on others, and it has done so since its inception. It cannot last. Soon we hope to be free of its own devastating oppression.