



THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM WAS ALWAYS ESKOM

“It’s even worse than you think” (Sunday Times 3.7.22)

While South Africans freeze in the dark and loadshedding (read blackouts) takes over the land’s conversation, President Ramaphosa swans around Europe with the rich and powerful of the G7 group. “The captain is away while the ship is sinking”, says Barney Mthombothi. (Sunday Times 3.7.22).

Sinking is the word! The chips are down, and the chickens have come home to roost now that the ANC government’s catastrophic rule over the past 28 years is under the microscope of virtually every citizen of this country. Where did it all go wrong? Surely the “Yes” vote in 1992 (artfully choreographed by a UK public relations company) set the stage for the eventual takeover of South Africa by the violent ANC revolutionaries who bombed and terrorised their way to power, while all collapsed before their onslaught. (Perhaps it’s time now to put the blame squarely where it belongs: ignoring the power of the “Yes” vote 30 years ago is denying cause and effect in history.)

For those who remember, it is salutary to go back to what South Africa used to be at its peak – a functioning first world country where even black citizens did not endure today’s filthy hospitals, the inadequate schooling, the rotten roads, the water pollution, the drastically high unemployment rate, and the swamping of their residential areas by millions of foreigners. This is today’s South Africa!

WHAT USED TO BE

To get everything in perspective and for those who were born after 1992, following is an extract from Eskom's 1988 Annual Report. It makes for sober reading, and one wonders why so many were sucked into allowing people like the ANC to take over this country lock, stock, and barrel. It's not as if there were no examples of what was to come, north of the Limpopo River. But as Oxford-educated writer R.W. Johnson so succinctly put it: the ANC stuck to the African script like glue. They behaved exactly as did their post-independence brothers up north. Why would they be different? Why did so many people think they would be different, given their track record?

ESKOM'S 1988 ANNUAL REPORT

"1882 - South Africa was one of the first countries in the world to use electricity on a commercial basis. The supply of electricity began with several municipalities. Kimberley was the first to introduce electric streetlights

in 1882, before London had electric lights. Kimberley's first reticulation system was commissioned in 1890, Johannesburg's in 1891, Pretoria in 1892, Cape Town in 1895, East London in 1899, Bloemfontein in 1900 and Port Elizabeth in 1906.

"In 1906 the Victoria Falls Power Co. Ltd. (VFP) was registered to harness the Victoria Falls and supply electricity to industries on the Witwatersrand and southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The VFP however concentrated on the exploitation of Transvaal coal. By 1916 it had four power stations and at one stage was the largest utility in the British Empire.

"The SA Electricity Act of 1922 led to the establishment of the Electricity Supply Commission in 1923. Eskom began generating power in 1925. In 1948 it took over the VFP, and by the end of 1988 Eskom was supplying more than 97% of SA's electricity to an area which is as large as the combined areas of West Germany, the

Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Italy. It now (in 1988 when the report was written) ranks among the largest electricity utilities in the world.

“By 1962, Eskom's first power stations were far advanced for their time. By 1973 an integrated transmission system linked all major cities in the country. With vast deposits of coal available, Eskom's base-load stations were mainly coal fired by 1984. During that year South Africa's first nuclear power station was operational. (In 1988, Eskom already had 27 power stations).

AFRICA'S SURFACE AREA

The 1988 Report continues: “Although SA is only 4% of the surface area of Africa, Eskom's generation represents about 60% of the electricity used on the entire African continent. It is the Western world's fifth largest utility in terms of installed electricity. Eskom's power stations have an installed capacity of 33 176 MW. These include 19 coal-fired, three gas-turbine, two hydro-electric, one nuclear power and two pumped-storage stations. The distribution system has more than 200 000 km of high-voltage power lines.

“Eskom is a leader in power station and transmission technology. It operates some of the world's largest coal-fired power stations and has recently commissioned the first sets of the world's largest direct and indirect dry-cooled stations. It is also a recognised authority on the use of coal of an extremely low grade for power generation and leads research into the effects of lightning on power supply systems.

“Eskom operates one of the most sophisticated distribution networks in the world, which now includes 765 kV lines, the first to operate successfully at this voltage at high altitude. Electricity can be distributed anywhere in South Africa and is exported to neighbouring countries. Eskom is an independent self-financing (*italics ours*) undertaking. It has no shareholders and is funded

entirely from debt and retained earnings. It is not a government corporation.

ESKOM CHAIRMAN DR. J.B. MAREE'S 1988 REVIEW

“The 1988 results show that Eskom is a professionally managed business undertaking. This year's results show the effects of an organisation which is customer driven, decentralised, leaner, more effective and which is operating under tight financial control. Eskom has managed to keep a tight grip on expenditure. Improved people productivity, money management, inventory control and standardisation have led to the more effective use of resources. Fuel costs were well contained, and we are burning less coal to generate more electricity at coal-fired stations.

“The biggest contribution that Eskom can make to South Africa's economy is to keep electricity costs down. We need good people. Fortunately, Eskom has a pool of very good people. I am constantly surprised at the wealth of talent and potential that is being uncovered in the organisation. A top business undertaking is driven by managers and employees who have a common vision, common values, and the energy to turn their vision into reality.

“As far as our technical performance is concerned, Eskom has always been outstanding. The consistent efforts of employees over many years have contributed to our plant and distribution network being among the most effective in the world. Our power stations burn low-grade coal which would elsewhere in the world be regarded as useless.

“The organisation is a leader in dry-cooling, important in a country with limited water resources. We also operate a distribution system under some of the world's worst lightning conditions – and our expertise in this field is sought internationally. Eskom now has an installed capacity of 33 176 MW and 201 802 km of high voltage lines which serve the whole of South Africa and into neighbouring countries.

“According to Chief Executive Ian McRae, Eskom burnt 64,48 million tons of coal in 1988, about one million tons less than in 1987, even though coal-fired stations sent out 0.7% more energy. This is a clear indication of the need to shut down older, less efficient plant.

“Five power stations were completed or almost completed in 1988. These are Unit Five at Tutuka, Units 1 and 2 at Palmiet, Unit 3 at Matimba and Unit 1 at Kendal. The Matimba power station is the world’s largest direct dry-cooled station, with a total installed capacity of 3 990 MW. This is 11 times the size of the Wyodak in the United States which was previously the largest dry-cooled station. When completed, the Kendal power station will be the largest indirect dry-cooled power station in the world!”

WHAT HAVE WE NOW!

The African National Congress (ANC) has singlehandedly destroyed what was one of the finest electricity suppliers in the world. “Everything they touch turns to dust” declared former ANC MP Dave Dalling. Indeed! Destruction is their stock in trade. “Half of the generating units at 14 of Eskom’s coal-burning power stations break down again within nine months of being repaired”. (Sunday Times 3.7.22), “and the worst performers are out of service nearly 70% of the time they should be keeping SA’s lights on.” Long and costly blackouts are set to become the norm in future, potentially costing the economy up to FOUR BILLION RAND A DAY. “Among the worst performers was the Kusile power station, where unit 1 was out for 14 days from September 2021. After being repaired, however, it remained unavailable for 68% of the next nine months. Tutuka had two units out for an average of 57.4% of the time following repairs in November 2020 and March 2021.

A breakdown in wage talks following a strike closed three power stations. An Eskom spokesman said the ageing fleet was breaking down so often that it was impossible to properly implement repairs. Eskom is of course flogging a near-dead horse! If you don’t maintain machinery, it eventually collapses. But maintenance has never

been a priority in Africa. In the good old pre-colonial days, people just moved on after they had pillaged that village, or stolen someone's cattle, or disabled another's dam, or over-grazed a grassy area. Never mind, there was always more land over the hill!

Well not anymore, Mr. Ramaphosa. Where is your state of emergency to counter power sabotage? Where are the police? Rabble rousing strikers violently harassed those who wanted to work. Petrol bombs were thrown at the homes of non-striking employees, resulting in high incidences of absenteeism. There were "illegal activities" at company plants, including acts of sabotage. Will Eskom press criminal charges against the rampant unionists?

When Eskom implemented Stage 4 load shedding last week, SA's demand peaked at 34,416MW on Monday. (It is interesting to note that South Africa had an installed capacity of 33,176 MW in 1988. Thirty-five years later, we haven't moved on much regarding capacity!)

The ANC talks of renewing itself. You can't renew a defective DNA. But they cling to power like a leech to a blanket. They need their jobs because they are nothing without taxpayer funded employment. They don't see themselves as useless which is a strange human trait, not seen in most sane countries. They think it's normal to destroy. Columnist Peter Bruce of the Sunday Times, increasing disaffected as each Sunday comes around, says that "Eskom CEO Andre de Ruyter is finding out the hard way that when you run a state-owned company in SA, your ultimate employer is the ANC, destroyer of worlds, butcher of hope". Harsh words from someone who voted for President Ramaphosa!

There is no one at the of Minister Pravin Gordhan's Department of Public Enterprises who knows anything technical about electricity. Bruce quotes the president making flowery promises in parliament in March 2015, and again in 2020 about getting Eskom "right", after which nothing substantial happened. Andre de Ruyter is the 13th Eskom CEO in a decade. But he can't stop unions from rampaging

and petrol bombing. He can't appoint competent people to really fix the Eskom debacle because of the ANC's cadre deployment policy. He can't institute a State of Emergency which is sorely needed. He is working with his hands tied behind his back. Says Bruce: "The ANC has taken away our power" It has also taken away our country. How to wrest this from them needs clear heads and some real action. Who will take the lead?