



THE CORONA VIRUS - DAY ZERO FOR FOOD ON THE TABLE

“Among the things we've learnt this week, perhaps we should add that South Africans love a good speech. The value of having an eloquent and assured leader in times of crisis cannot be overestimated.”(Business Day 23.4.2020).

Indeed! We are a nation of talkers: meetings, legothla's, bosberade, conventions, discussion groups, after-dinner speeches, endless parliamentary debates, press conferences, rallies, breakfast indaba's – the list is endless. “We can count ourselves lucky having Cyril Ramaphosa at the helm”, continues Business Day, “IF ONLY WE COULD SAY THE SAME ABOUT RAMAPHOSA'S SUPPORTING CAST”.

On 15 March 2020, President Ramaphosa declared a National State of Disaster in terms of the Disaster Management Act. The Corona Virus had reared its head in South Africa. In his speech the president outlined in impressive detail plans to combat the dreaded virus currently besieging the world – he set out an “extensive analysis” of the progression of the disease and what his government had decided to do in terms of appropriate measures. A lockdown was on the cards.

The goals of the president's speech were impressive and comprehensive. But commentary quickly emerged as to how to deliver on these worthy objectives. A pervasive constant within South Africa's political landscape has been the ANC government's inability to implement policy decisions in practice. This omnipresent conundrum, coupled with the party's endemic corruption, hardly engenders confidence in the president's declaration that “all the institutions of the state will be mobilised to lead this effort”. A certain cynicism can be justified when it is borne in mind that “all the institutions of the state” under South Africa's ANC government have been the very instruments of the debilitation of a once functioning country, since 1994.

The most vital element in this pandemic is food, its corollary hunger, and the funds needed to alleviate the latter by the purchase of the former. A country-wide lockdown closed factories, stores, restaurants, sports activities and numerous other economic activities. Only essential services were allowed.

Even before the lockdown, millions of South Africans went to bed hungry every night. Were it not for school feeding programmes (funded by the taxpayer) and various private sector charities, more children would not eat. In the current situation, South Africa's 40 000 odd commercial farmers are the most important people in the country, much more crucial to the country's survival than the profligate and incompetent ANC government. In his speech President Ramaphosa declared that "Cabinet is therefore in the process of finalising a comprehensive package of interventions to mitigate the expected impact of COVID-19 on our economy".

The first contradiction of that pledge came from the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Ms. Thoko Didiza, who announced on April 6 that her department had allocated aid in the amount of R1,2 billion to small scale farmers, women and young farmers, and farmers with disabilities! These farmers would be prioritised. This is totally irrational, given the government's fear of hunger stalking the land. These farmers generate only 1,9% of the country's agricultural production!

The second assault was on private farm safety and protection measures. Minister of Police Bheke Cele declared a ban on private farm patrols and farm security guards despite the fact that these groups have already been in existence for many years and have consistently worked with the police, to great effect. He opened the door to criminals and syndicates to help themselves to farm produce and cattle.

HUNGER AND ANARCHY

To tackle the anticipated spread of the virus, the lockdown was announced from midnight Thursday March 26th to April 16th. From Friday March 27, at one minute past midnight, millions were instantly out of work. South Africa's employment structure is unique – within a population of around 53 million, particularly within the youth, the percentage unemployment is around 50%.

The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign said estimates were that the number of "food-stressed people" had doubled from last year to 30 million. (Sunday Times 19.4.20). "This figure includes 4 million people in the informal sector who cannot work and 18 million on social grants who do not earn enough to buy increasingly expensive food. In addition there are one million domestic workers and nearly 50 000 waste pickers who don't have money to buy food. There are 3,5 million elderly people and 12 million children whose grants are not enough to buy food".

Millions thus live from hand to mouth, waiting at the curb every day for a job. If they don't get work, there's no food on the table that evening. Hunger's Grim Reaper had begun his hunt and, within a day or so, serious and often violent looting commenced. Liquor and food stores were bombarded and looted, and bread trucks were attacked. Food transport vehicles were hijacked and torched. Anarchy had broken out in pockets throughout South Africa. Security personnel were attacked, police vehicles were stoned, and army personnel refused to enter the dank interiors of the country's myriad squatter camps, referred to euphemistically as "informal settlements". According to an agricultural census, 70% of city residents depend on the commercial farming sector for their food survival.

Thus food availability was the only game in town. Wages had dried up because of across-the-board economic activity shut downs. Farmers blamed the government's over-strict and sometimes misdirected restrictions for the chaos and strife in rural farming areas. Throughout the country, take-away food outlets were forbidden, and warm food was unavailable to buy anywhere. Even soup kitchens and food feeding schemes for the homeless were shut down. Millions of citizens in poorer areas do not have adequate cooking facilities so they buy ready-cooked food.

Farms were now in hungry people's crosshairs. Soon syndicates became involved -thieves with get-away vehicles invaded farms and stole huge quantities of maize and vegetables in broad daylight. Large animals were killed and the carcasses carved up in plain sight, while farmers could do nothing. Smaller farm animals were carried off. Police were outnumbered and outsmarted. Government in its wisdom had forbidden the utilisation of rural security patrols, most of which had been in place for years. As these groups were neutralised, so rural pillage increased. Cable theft expanded exponentially. The government had left the door wide open for the hungry and the criminals who took full advantage of this disastrous political decision.

THE STIMULUS PACKET

Government rushed to provide an economic "stimulus" packet to assuage a looming problem of liquidity. Millions had no money, and had no prospects of getting their hands on funds in the short and even medium term. Anarchy was looming and citizens were hungry and desperate. The president offered R500 billion to mitigate the effect of the Corona lockdown, a figure representing about 10% of the country's Gross Domestic Product. In effect this money was mainly increases in payout amounts to those already on welfare. A further list of new recipient categories was added. Not one penny of that money will "stimulate" South Africa's economy. Furthermore, calling these new payments

“temporary” is playing with fire. These amounts will be reduced after six months at the government’s peril. This sort of thing does not happen in Africa. It is too dangerous. As it is, around two thirds of this R500 billion must be borrowed from international institutions. It must be paid back, whatever the soft loan terms now offered.

Within hours of the so-called stimulus package being announced, the media press and the citizenry at large demanded to know who would disburse this money? Given the endemic corruption within the ruling ANC elite and their officials at every level of government, this worry was well justified. Besides the various allocations to pensioners and other welfare recipients, the R2 billion given to municipalities raised the red flags. SA’s municipalities are known throughout the world as dens of incompetence, thievery, nepotism and a cult of entitlement. In light of this parlous situation (about which president Ramaphosa neither apologises nor even mentions), SA’s Auditor General Kimi Makwetu took to the media and assured the country that he would “ensure honesty” in the disbursement of this precious R2 billion.

He has set himself an unenviable task. Ensuring honesty within the ruling corps is to reject the science of DNA. The ruling party’s intrinsic bent towards thievery and corruption is endemic – they simply cannot help themselves when opportunities arise to dip into the cookie jar. The AG has his work cut out for him.

THIEVERY FROM THE POOR

Already tales abound of ANC local councillors stealing food parcels destined for poor communities. Here the DNA works overtime. Of 800 food vouchers issued for a ward at Buffalo City municipality in the Eastern Cape, 250 vouchers were allegedly pocketed by a local councillor. Another councillor in Barkly East allegedly stole milk delivered by a local businessman for poor local residents. He threatened complainants with arrest. Officials in ANC T shirts brought food parcels to a small town in the North West and distributed them to black residents. White residents, of whom there are about 250 families, were left high and dry. When one lady complained, she was told her house would be burnt down and she would be killed. She then obtained a non-harassment restraining order from the police against these ANC thugs. The following day more ANC T-shirted men delivered food to another group of black residents, while white residents nearby were ignored.

It should be noted that the “aid” to small businesses came with a caveat. All recipient businesses in the SMME category must be Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) registered. When a white couple running a guesthouse in

Gauteng complained that their request for assistance had been refused, they were told by the Minister of Tourism spokesman that they should ask themselves why, in 2020, they had not “transformed”, an ANC euphemism for handing over part of your business to a black South African, free of charge, whether competent or not, purely on the basis of his colour. The fact that the guesthouse employed mostly black workers was ignored by the ministry.

Our country is overflowing with illegal aliens, courtesy of president Ramaphosa's government's total lack of border control. This incompetence is one of the main causes of South Africa's current chaos, overcrowding, lack of any system of personal identification for foreigners and, yes, crime! Much of the criminal activity against farmers, including murders and assaults, is committed by foreigners from the rest of Africa. A hasty attempt to build what was called a fence (at a price of R37 million!) was bedevilled by thousands of foreigners who simply cut through the wire and brought in their smuggled cigarettes. They told the media it was so easy, everyone was doing it.

FOOD ON THE TABLE.

This is the South Africa within which commercial agriculture must not only produce food but ensure that the country's structures are efficient enough to put this food on peoples' tables. These are the farmers who did not receive one penny from the government's R500 billion “stimulus” package, while subsistence farmers who only produce 1,9% of the country's food received the full R1,2 billion allocation! These are the farmers who themselves have donated tons of food to black communities. These are the people who are holding South Africa together in a time of great crisis without a word of acknowledgement or thanks from the SA government. On the contrary, the President laments South Africa's inequality and whines on ad infinitum about the legacy of apartheid and the “privileged” South African minorities. Who said life was fair?