



SA'S COMMERCIAL FARMING – A DIAMOND IN THE DUST!

The worst thing about an ANC government in South Africa is that it appears we are stuck with them! Their whole *raison d'être* is to remain in power, at whatever cost. Unity *uber alles*! President Cyril Ramaphosa said recently that he would rather be a weak president and hold the ANC together, than define himself the other way round! Is it any wonder then we are being called “a failed state” in some quarters? This declaration signifies there is no way out, no salvaging of what we had pre-1994, and that nothing will dislodge this huge mass of inefficiency, corruption and stupidity that is the ANC “government”. Or is there a way out? Surely a great country like South Africa with millions of clever people will not stand by and allow idiots and gangsters to destroy this country unhindered?

All is not lost! Unfortunately for the ANC there is one group more powerful than they are and that is SA's commercial farming sector. They produce the food upon which more than 55 million people depend for survival every day! The ANC cannot grow food, it cannot produce anything. They are consumers, not producers. Against this scenario, agriculture is the shining star in a miserable economic firmament, top heavy with state employees who are superlative under-achievers. The country's wage bill is 12% of GDP, and it is 38% of total government spending. These wages increase every year, whether the economy is struggling or not. We are in debt – it is 80% of GDP in 2020. Virtually every sector of the SA economy is either on its knees or has collapsed.

Who will save the day? South Africa's commercial agriculture is projected to attain a 15,1% growth for the second quarter of this year. Agriculture has been the only sector in the SA economy with a positive economic growth. Many factors have contributed to this: despite the lockdown, farming, food processing, distribution and exports continued undeterred. It is estimated that SA will export 2,7 million tons of corn (mielies) this year, 89% more than the previous year. The US Department of Agriculture expects that SA's total mielie export figure will reach 14 million tons in the 2020/21 season. Additional exports of citrus, wine, apples, pears, grapes, avocados, sugarcane and macadamia nuts have grown.

South Africa is the world's largest macadamia nut producer. Highly valued for its quality, this nut is an excellent foreign exchange earner for SA which has the largest crop in the world. In the province of Mpumalanga it is the highest contributor of forex towards the province's economy. (Tragically some macadamia farms were handed over to inexperienced beneficiaries under the government's land "reform" programme in the early 2000's. The trees were soon cut down and the ground was planted with cash crops such as cabbages.)

During the recent Covid 19 lockdown, there was no shortage of food to SA - the government's inability to efficiently distribute the millions of food parcels promised to the population, most of whom were out of work, left many people hungry. In addition, theft of this "food for the people" by ANC cadres and their friends was open and shameless, despite promises by president Cyril Ramaphosa that a beady eye would be focused on anyone trying to steal during the Covid crisis!

CANCER

The late Dave Dalling, an ex-ANC member of parliament, declared in an interview that "everything the ANC touches turns to dust". This is exemplified by the incremental ruination of our country since 1994. In his speech as outgoing president at TLU SA's recent national congress, Louis Meintjes declared that "the ANC is a cancer that is destroying South Africa. There is no future for South Africa under an ANC government. They actively propagate their socialism and communism and, true to the dictates of these stratagems, they have reduced the population to a state of poverty, thus rendering them dependent on ANC handouts while their own elite steal the country blind."

Continued Meintjes: "I have come to the conclusion that the ANC is now the greatest criminal syndicate not only in South Africa but in the whole of Africa. The ANC has robbed every citizen in the country of his human dignity. This dignity includes the right to have a job, to earn money to provide food for the family table, while not having to wait every day on the street corner or in a queue for a handout."

"The ANC has taken those dreams away not only from the country's young people in general, but specifically from millions of their own people."

BLACK ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Meintjes declared unequivocally that TLU SA has never helped to implement the ANC's policy of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), and so-called transformation. "We will never agree to those policies," he declared. "We have

followed the economic path – we support policies that contribute to what is needed to secure South Africa's economic future. We have promoted investor confidence in the country so that jobs can be created. Unfortunately too many SA businessmen have been complicit in helping the ANC to implement their destructive BEE policy. Many SA citizens somehow believed that by giving away part of their businesses, they would capture the ANC's goodwill. But twenty six years of living under the ANC has convinced me that this type of grovelling doesn't work. The ANC sees this approach as a weakness."

Another lesson I've learned," continued Meintjes, "is that the ANC reacts only to pressure." Some say that the art of negotiating with the ANC can result in a "win win" situation and that one can take this step without losing face. Says Meintjes: "The ANC has taught me that it does not support that principle. There is no such thing as a win-win result with the ANC. If you negotiate with the ANC, the result will always be an ANC win, and a loss for the other side. Thus there is no sense in negotiating with the ANC".

The ANC must hear what we have to say, and we must make sure they know what we are saying. There can be no political correctness when you are putting your case, says Meintjes. "The time has passed when we must ask the ANC about their plans. We don't need to know what they are busy with. We know what they are doing and we must shout it from the rooftops." The world must know what they are up to.

Debates about the ANC and other problems have become an emotional point of discussion within the farming community, and within the broader South Africa. "What we should be discussing is solutions", says Meintjes. "If we can focus on solutions, then we can expect successful goals and plans. For example only 4% of our municipalities have returned a clean audit. As citizens and ratepayers we have the right to expect a functioning level of local service. In addition, we also have the right to protest at the lack of service delivery. We have the right to hold back on payments when those services are slack or don't occur at all. This creates an opportunity for us to place our municipal payments in a trust from where we can finance the delivery of necessary services ourselves."

For example, he declares, "we pay our electricity account to Eskom direct, not to the municipality. There it is stolen."

THE TIME HAS COME

The time has come to realign our priorities in terms of sustaining a functioning society. ANC promises are like the morning mist. They disappear when the sun

comes up. Already we get very little for our hard-earned taxes. Sixty eight percent of government spending goes towards social objectives. There is nothing produced, nothing earned and nothing returned from this funding. It is simply spent, and also used by the ANC as a vote catcher when election time comes around.

The private sector which pays most of the taxes and thus shoulders the burden of trying to sustain South Africa as a “going concern” comprises only 17% of the population. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has projected a minus 11.5% contraction in their economic forecast for the SA economy for 2020. Its fifty page report on South Africa is sobering reading – it is a moot point whether anyone in the SA cabinet has read it through because it is a less-than-flattering summary of how the SA government conducts itself. South Africa is at the near bottom of the Transparency International Index, and the Public Integrity and Government Control of Corruption lists. Only some really corrupt economic vagabond nations such as Russia, India, Colombia, China, Brazil and Mexico are below South Africa, scraping the bottom of this particular barrel.

DROUGHT

Many areas of SA have been stricken by drought, exacerbated by a pathetic (or wilful?) lack of support from the government. Some sectors of the country have been waiting for more than six months for promised drought funding: not one cent has been delivered to farmers in the Eastern Cape, Kwa Zulu Natal, Limpopo, North West, Mpumalanga and the Northern Cape. Private citizens have taken it upon themselves to assist drought-stricken farmers and their animals. Yet Dr. Nkozana Dlamini-Zuma blithely told parliament recently that drought relief money had been sent to the provinces for distribution to the farmers, but she “didn’t know why the provinces hadn’t delivered the funds to the farmers.” She declared that the government “must find a way to speed up these payments!” South Africa, don’t hold your breath!

South Africa is a dry land, and water is precious, especially to the country’s farmers. However the supply and provision of water is in a parlous state. “Corruption and maladministration have resulted in an already dry land’s network of water supply that will soon collapse” declares a recent Special Investigation (Beeld 7.9.20). Budgeted funds have been thrown down a rathole, as evidenced by a further report (16.9.20) “where the costs of corruption, poor administration and over-spending by the Department of Water Affairs and Sanitation over the past decade has resulted in a loss of R31 billion to South Africa”.

Despite these dramatic strictures including an increase in gruesome farm murders and attacks designed to drive farmers off their land, South African agriculture has triumphed under circumstances farmers in other parts of the world can only read about. Transport in South Africa is something of a travesty – 88% of South Africa's trade is transported by road, yet attacks on road transport trucks have cost South Africa more than R1,2 billion over the past three years. During that time 1200 heavy trucks and their loads were destroyed.

Much of this unrest has been blamed on the use of foreign drivers by SA truck owners who are tired of local truck drivers' continual strikes, protest stoppages and the relentless intimidation of staff by some unions within the SA trucking industry. Most of the unrest is violent, with roads blocked for sometimes days by recalcitrant SA truck drivers, while drivers who desire to proceed using side roads have been dragged from their vehicles and assaulted and/or killed. One driver was set alight. Trucking into the African interior is fraught with problems: numerous check points along the roads are there to extract money from the SA drivers. Unlawful stoppages are enforced to extract more money from the SA truck owners to avoid the spoilage of freight on its way to be sold north of the Limpopo river.

The once world-class South African railways network has been rendered almost useless, with sabotage, theft of equipment and the destruction of railway stations a new norm. Just seven of Metrorail's 34 commuter lines throughout SA are currently operating due to large-scale looting by cable thieves. The rail freight rot set in some time ago and farmers were forced to use road transport deliver their produce.

A R1,5 billion contract with a Spanish locomotive company saw 70 locomotives delivered to South Africa and banned soon after their arrival when it was discovered they were unsuitable for the SA rail network – the 4,140m high roofs could touch the overhead wires on the sectors of the SA rail network where 3,000 volt overhead power is used. Many of these controversial locomotives have been standing idle since 2015 because they need a "major service". The full story of this ludicrous purchase from a Spanish company is long and typically South African in its subterfuge and corruption.

Provision of electricity, security of water supply, dangerous road transport, non-existent rail freight capacity, the ever-constant problem of drought, threats by government to take farms without compensation, lack of border controls, millions of squatters around SA cities and towns without sanitation, pollution of the country's dams and municipal water, hopeless municipal service delivery and an economy being slowly strangled by a corrupt yet useless government would be enough to deter farmers anywhere in the world! But the SA farming

community rose to become the only sector in the SA economy to thrive and grow. Truly, they are diamonds in the African dust.