



TRANSFORM THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR? WHY?

The ANC's continuing obsession with transformation is bizarre when the results of their policies and actions so far are considered. There's not one section of the South African economy, social structures or any other element of South African life that has survived the ANC government's pernicious attempt at transforming what used to work and is now on its knees. Transformation ANC style has resulted in calamity across the board. There are no exceptions.

They can't let well alone. They are obsessed with control, whether it is ruinous or not. The only sector of the South African economy that has performed exceptionally well under all circumstances, Covid 19 included, is agriculture. Yet here they go again, ready with a plan to "transform" this vital sector. Their detailed blueprint, the Agriculture and Agro-Processing Master Plan (AAMP) concept document extols the advantages of yet another transformation of the South African way of life. The contents are couched in glowing terms, where paragraph after paragraph eulogizes on what will happen to agriculture when transformation takes hold. There are some practical aspects that make sense, but these are lost in the transformation blueprint which is highly dangerous. During the TLUSA congress of 6 September this year, this document's strategy was rejected unequivocally by TLUSA. Despite being a masterpiece of hyperbole, the document's fixation was on transformation. Only through this would the lofty goals enumerated in the document become a reality. TLU SA can never accept this new document's blueprint for the ANC's political interference in agriculture, given their abysmal record so far in virtually every sector of South African life.

With the country falling apart around them, the ANC's mental giants are prepared to destroy arguably the last sector of the economy that is successful and, incidentally, provides food for 60 million people.

Imagine any other government in the world even suggesting such an action? Whoever suggested such a proposal would be committed immediately.

In a written comment on the proposal submitted to the government, TLUSA declared that it as an organisation concentrating on food security and agricultural sustainability, differentiates between a commercial farmer and someone just living on a piece of agricultural land but not delivering products to the market place. The latter person depends on social grants to exist. The land on which he lives should be put to use in terms of food production. The primary goal of commercial farming is to produce food in excess of just subsistence living. Each farm must be a business entity in its own right, and it must make a profit. This is how commercial farming operates. Using land as a vote getter (because that's what this is all about!) is irresponsible and even dangerous to the future of the country's food sustainability. That every citizen must have a piece of land is physically and economically impossible. There is no country on earth where every citizen owns land. So trying to shoehorn non-productive people into today's commercial agricultural community is a non-starter.

During Covid 19, the government spent R1,2 billion to support black farmers. Where are the results? The government talks of partnership and inclusivity, their buzz words for parasitical policies where successful commercial farmers must absorb those who cannot make a living for themselves. They must therefore be piggy-backed on this productive sector of the population. This cannot happen. If farming collapses in South Africa, the masses will call upon the ANC, not the farmers. Will president Ramaphosa provide alternative sources of food for 60 million people?

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

There are thousands of examples of where transformation destroyed that which was transformed. Somehow the government feels it is their duty (and a pre-election must!) to provide employment for their incompetent and corrupt friends and supporters. Thus was born the policy of cadre deployment where party loyalists have been placed in important jobs for which they have no competence. The country has crumbled under a morass of ineptitude which can be laid at the door of our president, Cyril Ramaphosa who has chaired this deployment policy committee since 2013. In his recent Commission report, Judge Zondo declared that this policy was unlawful and unconstitutional.

The official opposition asked the court to see the records of the deployment committee and won. The ANC appealed and lost. It is now running to the Constitutional Court to prevent these records becoming public. It was this policy that was directly responsible for the collapse of virtually every state, provincial and municipal failure to date. TLU SA has been writing for years about the dangers and abysmal results of this deployment policy.

The story of tenders is one of the more glaring examples of the wholesale plunder of large amounts of money by friends of the ANC. Gangsters also saw the gap and have ridden the wave of the tender path to quick cash. It became so easy that witchdoctors were advertising their ability to “get tenders” among their other promises such as bringing back a lost lover, winning the lottery or cashing in at the casino. (See The Citizen Classifieds 13.11.20)

We concentrate on two wholesale disasters due to “transformation” which explains why TLUSA will never agree to the transformation of agriculture. (Why anyone would agree is a mystery!) These two examples are directly related to agriculture. The fact that more than 4,300 productive farms have been lost forever due to the government’s “land reform” policy of trying to transform agriculture should be a salutary lesson to people with at least some grey matter. Clearly, the loss of these farms has had no effect on those now proposing yet another policy assault on agriculture.

ZEBEDIELA CITRUS ESTATE

“Legendary Citrus Farm packhouse burned to the ground”. (Freight News 29.8.23) This is the story of the Zebediela citrus estate south of Polokwane in Limpopo province which was once the jewel in South Africa’s citrus crown, exporting about three million oranges per annum at the height of its 3000-hectare capacity. At one stage it was the largest citrus producer in the southern hemisphere, employing about 200 people.

In 1998, a communal property association (CPA) implemented a land claim representing a local black community. The ownership and operations of the estate were transferred to the Batladi Community Property Association (CPA) in 2003 at a cost of R61 million to the SA taxpayer.

“What was set in motion thereafter resulted in a slow period of decay marked by mismanagement, malfeasance, in-fighting, fat-cat

interference, court cases, High Court liquidation orders and the looming threat of the farm's closure." (Freight News 29.8.23) Over the years the estate was managed by various entities with varying degrees of success, but there was very limited investment in orchards and infrastructure. This has been a pattern right throughout South Africa as people who could not farm were given highly productive farms dependent upon highly sophisticated farming techniques. Most of the beneficiaries of these farms were set up to fail, which they did, spectacularly. Limited investment during the last two decades resulted in more than 80% of Zebediela's orchards being older than 30 years.

A revitalization programme was put into place, but Zebediela was on its knees, on a path to extinction like so many other farm handovers. (See "The Great South African Land Scandal", Legacy Publications, January 2004). In 2020, the ANC government News Agency bragged in a press release that the Zebediela citrus farm was "the pride of Limpopo". The chairperson of the CPA told SA News that the farm was doing "very well" but the main challenge (a word always used by the ANC when something is failing!) was that they were experiencing problems with water and electricity. (They were running out of money!). A white farmer was brought in to run the farm, but water and electricity remained a serious stumbling block. According to the press release, a "recovery pledge" of R500 million was promised by the government, which money, according to Freight News, "never materialised".

In their anger, the CPA beneficiaries allegedly burnt the 50-year-old packhouse "to the ground" at the end of August this year. They weren't paid they said! They were facing a liquidation debt of more than R170 million! (Freight News 29.8.23). It's the same old story as 90% of other handover farms, where "transformation" to new owners under the government's so-called reform policy ended up in failure.

(Another productive farming entity that collapsed under the land "reform" policy of the government's transformation goals was the Estina Dairy Farm in the Free State. Funds for this farm were pilfered by ANC bigwigs, with a court case going on for years while the farm turned into a ruin. The Sepeko tea plantation in Magoebaskloof was started in the mid seventies. It originally employed 6 000 people. After the ANC government handed it over to a claimant, within three years it was no longer operating as irrigation pipes, pumps and tractors were stolen, and the plantation was in ruins. 6500 jobs were lost.)

TRANSNET

According to William Gumede, Associate Professor, School of Governance, University of the Witwatersrand, Transnet is likely to be the next Eskom, crashing South Africa's economy. The state-owned rail and ports company is on life support. (Sunday Times 24.9.23). In 2020, this company was already deep into the clutches of state capture. New CEO's were brought in to "clean up" – the last one being Ms. Portia Derby – who immediately proceeded to "offer voluntary severance packages to highly experienced and skilled employees, including rail engineers, mechanics, train drivers and management experts. These skills were lost to Transnet overnight, and the result has been gross dysfunction of an entity that is the lifeblood to the economy." (Sunday Times 24.9.23) These skills were replaced by ANC loyalists under the cadre deployment policy of president Ramaphosa, and the rot set in.

This report however is contradicted by a letter of the same date to the same newspaper from an ex-Transnet employee who says "Well done Pravin Gordhan (Public enterprises minister), your cadres have instigated yet more calamitous destruction." He declares in his letter that the arrogant and abrasive management style of the new ANC-appointed CEO Ms. Portia Derby (salary R8.5 million per annum) "forced 500 senior managers who understood and knew Transnet's business, to take redundancy packages". So they didn't leave voluntarily. They were kicked out and replaced with ANC incompetents. Transformation in this instance has almost crashed our country, and Professor William Gumede nailed it when he wrote: "The company (Transnet) needs employees with technical skills, capable contractors and policies which are evidence-based, not motivated by ideological or wishful thinking. Merit has to be at the heart of all appointments and contracts, not party patronage, race patronage or transformation formulas." (ST 24.9.23)

The Transnet story is an example of the depths to which South Africa has sunk since the ANC took power. The criminal actions involving Transnet are mind-boggling in their brazen arrogance and complete disregard for anything other than self-enrichment. Forget about South Africa and its peoples. Forget about our exports, our farmers who produce world-class citrus and cannot get the fruit to overseas markets. Forget about the mining companies and their overseas orders biting the dust. The loss of Transnet capacity in rail and port operations cost the mining industry R50 billion in 2022.

Twenty-five ghost trains were operated on the Transnet Freight Rail (TFR) network between December 2022 and February 2023, netting corrupt employees millions in illicit kickbacks. The theft of trains in broad daylight is something that has arguably not occurred this century in any other part of the world! Transnet posted a R5,7 billion loss for the year ending March 2023, while the company's debt has ballooned to R130 billion on which it is paying R1 billion in interest every month. And the loss to South Africa's citrus industry is ongoing.

EMPTY COFFERS – THERE'S NO MORE MONEY

Can South Africa afford any further transformations? Apart from our infrastructure, the sewage in our streets, the water crisis all over the country and the lack of electricity, any further transformation fiasco's are out of the question. We cannot afford it, never mind the concomitant damage to the country that accompanies this lunatic policy. SA's budget deficit is around R144 billion. (Vryeweekblad 22.9.23) Tax revenue for the first five months of the fiscal year is already R22 billion lower than budgeted, meaning a deficit of R53 billion by year-end. In the same period, overspending stands at R15,3 billion.

Transformation has already crippled and/or destroyed South African Airways, Denel, Eskom, the Post Office, the Land Bank, Prasa, the Road Accident Fund, SABC, the SA Police Service, the SA Defence Force, state hospitals, our water systems, our roads, railways and the majority of the country's municipalities. Who would think to even sign off on further transformation, especially within the agricultural sector? It cannot happen. Citizens must ensure it will not happen.