

## **THE CRISIS DEEPENS: WHAT CAN THE ANC DO?**

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The consequences of the Cabinet changes announced last week are starting to play out: in society, in the economy and within the African National Congress (ANC) itself. Much has been said about the stirrings in society and the economic implications. A brief reflection on what the ANC leadership and membership can do may be of some use.

The ANC asserts that it is the strategic centre of power in relation to its members located in the state, the organisational terrain and other centres. Especially where its members are deployed by the organisation, it is critical for the ANC to provide the broad mandate within which they operate. It should be able to monitor and evaluate whether its policies are being implemented. While recognising that mistakes may be made from time to time, the ANC should be able to assess whether such failures are a consequence of poor implementation, inappropriate policies or leadership weaknesses. This should then guide the actions it takes.

How is this relevant to the latest developments? From communication by some of the ANC Officials (the so-called Top 6), after disquiet was expressed about Cabinet changes at last week's Monday meeting there was agreement to consult further.

When five of the Officials met last Thursday (with the Chairperson out of the country), the majority of them were against the proposed changes, especially in National Treasury. They also argued against the retention of poor performers, some of whom only recently attracted adverse comments from Parliament and the Courts. Treasurer-General Zweli Mkhize says he was left with "a distinct impression that the ANC is no longer the centre". Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa expressed the same sentiment, and also added that they had informed the President that they would express their misgivings in public.

A campaign has now started to label these Officials as ill-disciplined for the public statements they have made. This however sounds hollow, given the fact that the majority of the Officials at the Thursday meeting were against a list, to paraphrase Secretary-General Gwede Mantashe, that had been cobbled together elsewhere which they were required merely to legitimise. But the President defied the will of the majority at that meeting, falling back on his constitutional prerogative as head of state and government. And so, we are left to wonder, on whose head does the cap of ill-discipline fit!

What this demonstrates is a growing divergence of interests and approaches of an individual, from those of the ANC. This has been happening for some time now; and it is one of the reasons behind the discussion at last November's ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting regarding whether the President should not consider stepping down as the country's President. This was part of the ongoing introspection occasioned, among others, by research-based facts about the reasons for the organisation's poor performance in the August Local Government elections.

From that introspection, among the actions agreed upon were: firm action to stabilise the economy and move onto a higher growth path; speeding up job-creation and inclusion of the majority at all levels of economic activity; decisive interventions to stem the tide of corruption, including any

capture of state institutions for the benefit of connected individuals or families; and dealing with arrogance and divisions.

In recent pronouncements by some, fighting divisions has been extended to mean 'unity at any cost'! This ignores the fundamental principle that unity in any institution cannot be for its own sake. It cannot be unity of the kind where, in a family, a thief or a murderer is caught in the act; and the relatives elect to keep quiet for the sake of family unity. That, in simple terms, constitutes complicity and is itself a crime. Unity in the ANC should be based on principle, and it should be in pursuit of the strategies, policies and programmes of the organisation. Violation of what the ANC stands for, by any member at any level, should be combatted; and that cannot be interpreted as sowing disunity.

Former ANC President Oliver Tambo raised this question sharply in relation to the issue of peace. In the 1980s when the ANC was being put under pressure to abandon armed struggle and suspend the mass revolt as a precondition for negotiations, he retorted quite aptly that the ANC and the majority of South Africans would not support the peace of the graveside. Similarly, the call for unity cannot be used as a device to silence voices that seek to combat shameless violation of the ANC's policies and blatant disregard of the country's interests.

What has been the outcome of the introspection that the NEC had called for?

There had recently been hints of some commendable actions to clean up a sullied ANC brand, including the parliamentary hearings on the SABC. Efforts to improve the efficiency of the roll-out of infrastructure programmes were being intensified. Interactions between government, business and labour had improved. One of the outcomes of this was to stave off a ratings downgrade. Even more impressively, agreement had been reached on such issues as a fund to support small business, programmes to absorb young people into economic activity, the minimum wage, strike balloting and so on.

Unfortunately, as the Russians put it, Vashka the Cat continued eating.

With the Denel VR Laser Asia venture, there has been increasing pressure for permission to be granted. Some strange contortions on nuclear procurement have emerged, despite the draft Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) 2016 base case which pushes the need for the first small plant to 2037. Court challenges were lodged to prevent the release of the State of Capture Report. Legal action was initiated to force National Treasury and the Reserve Bank to grant a banking licence. An appeal is envisaged against the full bench unanimous High Court judgement on the appointment of the head of the Hawks.

The list goes on. And then there was the Cabinet reshuffle that even Officials of the ANC felt obliged publicly to disown – the bitter fruit of which South Africa has started to reap. All of this is in total and arrogant disregard of ANC policies and its electoral interests, let alone the cause of social transformation. These instances demonstrate a divergence between a strange coterie, on the one hand, and the ANC, on the other, which is meant to be the strategic centre of power for its members.

And so, what can be done?

- The ANC can call for a reversal of the more outrageous of the latest Cabinet changes.

- The NEC can reopen the debate on a resignation or recall, with public concern on the issue now truly deafening.
- Along with this, the Integrity Committee needs to be firm and decisive, given a situation in which an individual is running roughshod over not just the ANC's but also societal interests.
- If all this fails, and given the profundity of the implications on the movement's 2019 electoral prospects, the ANC may want to consider allowing its MPs to vote with their conscience in a Vote of No-Confidence.

The latter, uncomfortable as it may be, is about the ANC acting in its own profound self-interest. In the immediate, it may be career-limiting. But, as others have argued, there is nothing more career-limiting than losing an election! In fact, the question needs to be posed whether the Democratic Alliance (DA), for instance, genuinely wants a recall. Wouldn't this deprive them of a stick with which to beat the ANC? To them, the incumbent is a godsend and should stay on until 2019, so the ANC can haemorrhage even further. Provocations like the planned (and now cancelled) DA march on Luthuli House, seemed, at face value, to be aimed at mobilising the ANC into a laager.

Fundamental to all this is the need for societal mobilisation against corruption and state capture. Further, public servants in National Treasury and all other targeted institutions should stay in their posts and continue to do everything by the book. If instructed to flout the rules, they should resist and expose such instructions. The same applies to ethical members of the Executive.

South Africa and the ANC have in history gone through severe stresses. What they refused to do was to march like lemmings into a mass grave.

This too shall pass. But it requires activism by all who cherish the political freedom we enjoy, which should serve as a platform to speed up socio-economic transformation, at the centre of which should be inclusive economic growth.

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