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WILL “REVOLUTIONARY MORALITY” HAMPER CORRUPTION AND STATE CAPTURE?

By Dr Theuns Eloff, Executive Director: FW de Klerk Foundation

It is finally clear after the NEC of the ANC's 8 January statement (which was, as usual, delivered by the current president) that there will be a new ANC president on 8 January, 2018. It is also clear that the groups within the NEC had to reach a compromise on the declaration, but that the group concerned about Zuma's leadership and negative example was slightly on the winning side.

A closer reading of the entire written speech (which was not delivered in full, due to the weather conditions) shows that this is a carefully balanced statement covering a wide range of issues. But it also covers issues that Zuma (or his supporters) would not have included. One of these is the assurance that the nuclear program will only be implemented at a pace and cost that the country can afford - the first time that something like this has been said publicly. The other issue is corruption (and with that factionalism, with money as undertone). Two other recent statements also referred to this.

Secretary-General Gwede Mantashe said during a speech in Evaton on 3 January that there are three things that the ANC will destroy “before we know it”: corruption, factionalism and “accidental leadership”. The latter is when people “buy” branches and members so they will vote for certain candidates - and then they get corrupt leaders. Money is in control, not the ANC.

Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa pointed out on 6 January, during the commemoration of Joe Slovo's death 22 years ago, that Slovo would not have tolerated factionalism, abuse of state power, patronage or corruption. The ANC is not for sale, and the decision to subject members to a lifestyle audit should also be applicable to the leaders of the organisation. This will help the ANC to deal with corruption decisively.

Both these statements came days before the 105-year celebrations and the NEC statement, and were not accidental.

Although Zuma (*a la* the NEC) speaks under duress, he was uncharacteristically tough on corruption. He called it one of the top three priorities of the people. It would “destroy our democracy” and he called on the ANC to unite to denounce “these criminals who undermine our freedom”. He quoted Oliver Tambo and called on members to adopt “revolutionary morality”, which does not allow personal ambition or conspiracy by factions (and which is apparently the ANC's unique morality, which presumes selfless service to the national democratic revolution). The ANC will eradicate corruption, factionalism, the sale of members and gatekeeping. The power of the ANC branches must not be undermined by voters' lists (“slates”) and pressure groups.

It sounds almost surreal hearing it from Zuma.



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Both Mantashe and Ramaphosa realise the danger corruption presents for the survival of the ANC. Not only when it occurs in the public service, but also within the ANC in the buying/ recruiting of members/ officials and the registration of new branches. It directly affects Ramaphosa's campaign to become president.

But the matter goes further. It seems as if Zuma is more “under the control” of the NEC, and as if the NEC at least has a more balanced view than what Zuma himself has had in his own speeches. However, Zuma will remain President of the country for a long while yet, and the system of patronage, state capture and the accompanying corruption is well established. Will the NEC (read: Ramaphosa and Gordhan) manage to stop this momentum? Or will the new President of the country, early in 2019, have to try and save a country bankrupted by theft?

The signs are not good. The new Public Protector has thus far not said or done anything that inspires confidence that she will be the knight in shining armour. Very few members of the ANC have been jailed for corruption - and those who were, were soon out on parole (such as Tony Yengeni). It seems that the ANC only pays lip service to the fight against corruption, and that it is endemic, especially in lower levels of the public service. Studies show that it stretches from fraudulent financial statements to misappropriation of assets, fraudulent disbursements, theft of inventory and other non-cash assets, fictitious invoices and tender fraud. As early as 2011, Willie Hofmeyr, former head of the Scorpions, reported to Parliament that between 25 and 30 billion rand had thus disappeared from the state's coffers. What that amount might be, five years later, leaves one cold.

Whether the mantra “revolutionary morality” will achieve something in this context, is doubtful. Someone said this only means to steal for the ‘right’ side! At the time, cadre deployment was adopted as ANC policy with the best intentions - to use the best cadres to perform certain tasks or to lead organisations. However, it was hopelessly distorted and has led to a paralysed public service - due to the appointment of cadres who are closest to Zuma or loyal to him. This was probably the beginning of widespread corruption in the public service.

It is praiseworthy (and smart) for Ramaphosa and Mantashe (and the NEC) to place the emphasis on corruption. But it will take much more than statements and revolutionary morality to eradicate this cancer. Surgery on a large scale is required for that. Independent lifestyle audits for the entire NEC and all DGs are a good start. And only a President with the political will and integrity, will succeed.

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