

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE WEEK OF MAYHEM

By the FW de Klerk Foundation

Now that the dust has begun to settle after the mayhem that convulsed much of KwaZulu-Natal – and parts of Gauteng - last week, we can start to pick our way through the debris and try to assess what actually happened.

Perhaps the main conclusion centres not so much on the rioting and looting - but on the degree to which the rioting and the looting exposed the woeful incapacity of the ANC to carry the basic functions of government. The state's security services were not able to foresee or make contingency plans for unrest on this scale; the SAPS were simply incapable of carrying out their basic duty to maintain law and order and to protect the lives and property of citizens. TV coverage often showed them standing helplessly by, while looters casually ransacked shops and walked away with TV, sets, fridges and cases of beer.

Behind all this was the government's underlying incapacity to address the causes of poverty, unemployment and hopelessness that provided the tinder for the mayhem. Even before COVID, the South African economy had been in the doldrums, with negative per capita growth since 2011 and real unemployment levels that exceed 40%. This was compounded by a failed education system which, despite massive state expenditure, has produced education outcomes that are amongst the poorest in the world.

The spark that ignited the looting was political. It was set off by supporters of former President Jacob Zuma who were infuriated by his recent imprisonment for defying orders of the Constitutional Court to appear before the Zondo Commission. Those responsible for the unrest were, in effect, pushing back against President Ramaphosa's efforts to combat the unrestrained corruption and that had characterized Jacob Zuma's presidency – and as we saw in the recent COVID procurement scandal – continue to permeate state contracts.

President Ramaphosa has acknowledged the problems of state incapacity and corruption in statement after statement and in the government's newest economic programme, the "Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan" (ERRP). It is the latest of the nostrums that policy makers have cobbled together to achieve rapid economic growth. However, the document simply rehashes the wish-lists of previous plans – including the 2012 National Development Plan. They have all called for an end to corruption, for the appointment of people on merit and for the removal of cumbersome regulations. But nothing has happened.

South Africans should support the President's efforts to combat corruption and to build a capable state. He remains the best option within the ANC leadership to steer the movement back to the course it was on between 1996 and 2007 when its pragmatic GEAR policies achieved 5%+ growth rates and started to create jobs. However, his ANC government will not succeed in turning the economy around and in assuring sustained growth and effective service delivery while it continues to cling to its National Democratic Revolution ideology:

- The government will not attract the investment that the country desperately needs while, at the same time, it eviscerates property rights by amending the constitution to make expropriation without compensation possible.
- Small and medium size companies cannot grow, prosper and create jobs while they are being throttled by the progressive imposition of race quotas inherent in the

Employment Equity Amendment Act – or while they are subject to unachievable requirements of the PEPUDA Amendment Act – in terms of which they must, among other things, achieve equality of outcomes for all their employees.

- The government will not be able to conclude the social compacts called for in the ERRP while it continues to limit the economic space within which minorities are forced to operate because of the progressive imposition of demographic representivity – and while it continues to excise minority cultures from the national identity.
- It cannot create jobs for millions of South Africans who are prepared to work – while it continues to lock them out of employment by the imposition of high minimum wages and by the restrictions of its rigid labour policies.
- It will not be able to address its looming debt crisis while it continues to bail out failing state owned enterprises and while it rushes headlong toward the implementation of its catastrophically unaffordable NHI scheme.
- Neither will it make progress in addressing South Africa's skills deficit while its racial and economic policies increasingly alarm skilled people from all our communities and drive them overseas to pursue their careers.

The other factor that emerged from last week's mayhem was the resilience of civil society and the private sector. The manner in which South Africans from all our communities banded together to defend their neighbourhoods; the determination with which they began to clean up the detritus left by the looters and to repair the damage done to shops and malls – provides a beacon of hope for the future.

IRR polls have repeatedly shown that the great majority of South Africans from all our communities want the same things: 26% want more jobs; 14% want to fight corruption; 11% want better education; 10% see crime and poor housing as the main problems; 9% want to fight drug abuse; 7% are worried about illegal immigration; 4% want better health care and 3% want better service delivery; only 2% see racism and land reform as problems; and just 1% want to speed up affirmative action. The survey reveals the degree to which a great majority of South Africans from all our communities support the central goals of the ANC's own National Development Plan – and how very few are interested in the its NDR agenda.

Perhaps the starkest conclusion that emerges from last week's traumatic events is that the government has gone AWOL. South Africans can no longer rely on it to carry out its basic tasks of defending their lives and property; of providing proper municipal services and decent education; of creating an environment in which economic growth can take place and jobs can become created. Perhaps the time has come for these South Africans to come together to coordinate their activities – possibly through the convening of a national convention, possibly by resuscitating something like the National Peace Accord that did so much between 1991 and 1994 to bring communities throughout South Africa together.