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ELIMINATE THE IMPRESSION OF WRONGDOING, MR PRESIDENT

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The relentless saga surrounding the CR17 presidential campaign's funding is still in full swing. For ordinary South Africans, it is clear that the Public Protector (PP) has it in for President Ramaphosa and some of his supporters, especially Pravin Gordhan and Derek Hanekom. And the leaked information about the donors and recipients of some of these funds raises quite a few questions.

The President's Office (and the ANC) insists that there was nothing wrong with the campaign and its funding, that the receipts and expenses were properly audited and that no law, parliamentary regulation or code was violated. And technically they are right, and a number of commentators and legal experts have already confirmed that. In addition, it is clear that the PP's investigative mandate only applies to public funds and that she therefore had no right to investigate the CR17 campaign's fundraising - despite her argument that in the case of "money laundering" she does have investigative power. It's also as clear as daylight that, to say the least, the PP is extremely selective in her investigations, focusing almost exclusively on the ANC's Ramaphosa side and leaving the Zuptas in peace.

One could add that the PP maintains that the information about the donors and beneficiaries obtained from the Financial Intelligence Center (FICA) was legitimate and that it did not leak it to the media. But the question is, how does FICA get hold of email correspondence? At least FICA does not seem to be the only source, which highlights the PP's previous connection with the State Security Agency. Another interesting question is what would happen if a court found that she had no power to investigate CR17 (because it was not about public funds) and the court therefore found her report invalid. Then that information is already in the public domain - and therefore illegally obtained. It is likely that for this reason that the Court granted the Ramaphosa application to seal the information until the case on the legality of obtaining the information comes before the court.

Unfortunately, this is not where the importance of the matter ends. Experienced and honest SACP leader Jeremy Cronin (also a Ramaphosa supporter) recently wrote that it is a "matter of grave concern" that DA leader Mmusi Maimane's campaign raised R100 million and that it is "highly problematic" that the CR17 campaign raised almost half a billion rand. According to him, however, this "business money" in party political campaigns is something quite different from stripping government of billions of rand.

Acclaimed political commentator and author Ralph Mathekga writes in the same week that "we were recently stunned" by the amount of money raised for CR17 and wondered what was paid for with it, and what the expected return was for donors.

The point these commentators and many South Africans make is that if one is the president of a country tasked with leading that country out of the swamp of state capture and corruption (and where the expectation is that you must almost solve the problems on your own) then other factors outweigh legal arguments. Then it's about honesty and openness and integrity. Then the (valid) argument that no law or regulation was violated is deficient.



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One could go on to say that if you are an ANC supporter and you have a president who has built his entire campaign on being different from the State capturers and the corrupt, then you expect more than legal arguments. Then, what you said as presidential candidate, weighs more.

Most donors would have donated money to CR17 for two reasons: they trusted Cyril Ramaphosa to be a good president, and they realised that it was in South Africa's interest to break the Zupta's hold on State capture. Most of them probably felt (and still feel) that they received value for their donation. They probably regret that the confidentiality of the donation has been broken, but they have no sleepless nights over it.

As for the expenses, as revealed in the leaked information, it is clear that a whole slew of individuals and organisations received money. Some of the individuals were simply employed as full-time campaign managers. One also saw the numerous advertisements about the CR17 campaign on TV and in the newspapers. The original *Sunday Times* article claims that some donations were made only after the Nasrec conference and that not all the funds were spent. The rest is already invested in a series of accounts, probably for use in future campaigns. However, the specific purpose of each issue is not clear, and this is one of the concerns among ordinary South Africans.

The question is: did CR17 also do what the Zupta side did at Mangaung and Nasrec, namely to buy votes of the delegates with brown envelopes in car boots? This may sound unlikely, but ordinary South Africans' hopes for Cyril Ramaphosa make it imperative to clear any doubts about this and other issues.

President Ramaphosa, therefore, owes his donors and internal ANC supporters - but more importantly, all well-meaning South Africans - more than merely insisting that he did nothing illegal. We know that. But in these circumstances, he must be more transparent, more honest and more open than expected by law and the rules. He has to publish the audit report of CR17, but he also has to disclose other details, especially for what most of the expenditure was used. Such transparency will do no harm to donors - their names are already in the public domain. It will also do no harm to legitimate recipients who have worked hard on the campaign. Their names have also been disclosed, and they may well feel that their hard work was successful.

Eliminating the impression of wrongdoing in this way will have immeasurable benefits for the country and President Ramaphosa. Well-meaning South Africans (also outside the ANC) will again have greater hope that a new dawn will come. It will motivate them to do more to make the country work and succeed - despite the negatives and efforts of the Zuptas to undermine it.

President Cyril Ramaphosa has a scheduled Question Time session in Parliament on 22 August. Let's hope he uses it to address the issue.

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