



ANC CORRUPTION, FACTIONALISM AND RADICAL POLICIES LIKELY TO CONTINUE

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It was that 15th century master interpreter of political cunning and deception, Niccolò Machiavelli, who wrote: “Men will not look at things as they really are, but as they wish them to be - and are ruined”.

He may as well have written that as a warning to exasperated South Africans hoping for or believing we are at the start of a post-Zuma and Magashule era of new hope and prosperity that will be without corruption, minus the paralysis caused by factional fighting in the ANC, and rid of the spectre of radical populist policies.

Think again, and don't read too much into what you think you are seeing happening. I hate to be the bearer of bad tidings, but even if Jacob Zuma and Ace Magashule may be on their way to political oblivion or worse, nothing else is likely to change much for the better. Many commentators - mostly without any proof in my opinion - have, for instance, interpreted the fates of Zuma and Magashule as a major blow for the faction supposedly advancing radical economic transformation (RET).

What happens to RET?

It may be a setback for the concerned faction, yes, but not necessarily for RET. The truth is, the fight between the governing ANC factions aligned with either Cyril Ramaphosa or Zuma/Magashule had little to do with reform or renewal and taking South Africa to a better space. It had much more to do with who gets to hold the steering wheel on the drive down the road to ruin - but for different reasons.

With the demise of Zuma and Magashule, RET will not miraculously be off the table. In fact, as the central element of the second phase of the ANC's national democratic revolution - official ANC policy and strategy courtesy of the SACP - RET will rather be intensified and expanded. That much we have already seen, also coming from President Ramaphosa himself. And lest we forget, major elements of RET were adopted at the 2017 national conference as official ANC policy, with Ramaphosa bound to its implementation.

To have called one faction the RET faction is a misnomer. To both factions the official ANC policy of RET was/is simply a means to an end in the dynamics of the battle between them. For the Zuma/Magashule faction it was a populist, rhetorical slogan and thus a mobilising tool to regain power and the keys to the state's piggy bank and goody cupboards. For Ramaphosa and company it is a political and ideological strategy with which to strengthen the undisputed ruling - as opposed to governing - grip of the ANC for generations to come, and something in which his key backers, the SACP and COSATU, are heavily invested.

Can Ramaphosa redeem the ANC and himself?

There is still an outside chance that Ramaphosa may redeem himself (and the ANC) and wriggle his way out of this ideological straitjacket. But don't hold your breath as there's no concrete evidence of that at this stage. Nonetheless, it was Ramaphosa who, after ousting Zuma in 2017/18, played nice with international audiences as he sought much needed investment (and still does when the occasion demands).

He made all the right noises - promising to end corruption, end factionalism, implement economic reform, and return the economy onto an inclusive growth path. It was also Ramaphosa who displayed “strategic patience” to apparently slowly bring on board the factions and Alliance partners that were seen blocking any perceived moves towards a more dynamic, liberal economic strategy.

And it was Ramaphosa who always appeared to attach the sober moderating qualifier to the ANC’s wilder statements around expropriation without compensation (EWC) and other RET policies adopted in 2017. As a shrewd politician who keeps his cards close to his chest, Ramaphosa is something of a political artful dodger or chameleon. He has managed to put different spins on a wide range of issues, tailoring them for different audiences. The issues included RET, structural economic reforms, EWC, nationalising the Reserve Bank, and a new economic policy/strategy.

The audiences have been as diverse as the WEF crowd in Davos, to investment conferences in London and Johannesburg, the Central Committee and Politburo of the SACP, the ANC’s socialist labour ally COSATU, a land redistribution advisory panel, farmers’ representative organisations, the radical and moderate wings of his own ANC, and leaders within the business community, among others. None ever seemed overly disappointed with Ramaphosa or his message... because it was tailored to their expectations.

Economic blueprint for the future

RET is the ANC’s economic blueprint for the future. Nothing came of Ramaphosa’s promised structural reforms or new economic strategy. Finance Minister Tito Mboweni’s effort in this regard was quickly squashed and replaced with a gobbledygook strategy concocted by members of the NEC and advanced by Ace Magashule, only for it too to be replaced by the current economic reconstruction and recovery plan, necessitated by the devastation of Covid-19 and, like the subsequent state of the nation address, containing rehashed old ideas.

However, Ramaphosa himself set the precondition that a capable state - with an efficient and professional civil service - is an important enabling factor without which this plan will not succeed. And it was Ramaphosa himself who then placed that very obstacle in its way and contradicted himself when he later told the Zondo commission of inquiry into state capture that the ANC would not end its destructive policy of ‘cadre deployment’ - the key facilitator of inefficiency, non-delivery, patronage, and corruption.

Radicalisation

A number of factors support the fact that the ANC, and Ramaphosa, have since last year adopted an ever more radical stance fashioned around the implementation of RET central to the second phase of the national democratic revolution (NDR). For one, Ramaphosa’s own rhetoric has leaned that way with his statements increasingly couched in ‘transformation’ language designed to advance a more radical agenda with strong redistributive content. In turn this must strengthen and advance the NDR. The looming spectre of an upcoming National General Council (NGC), municipal elections and next year’s elective National Conference, may have played some part in this - but there’s more to it.

And in order to secure majority support on the NEC in his battle to be rid of Magashule, Ramaphosa is rumoured to have promised NEC sceptics (erstwhile opponents) increased radicalisation, specifically around expanding the terms of EWC, in return for their support.



In addition, a number of radical new legislative and other measures have recently been introduced by the ANC with Ramaphosa's support. These include various draft legislative and constitutional amendments pertaining to allowing for and widening the scope of EWC and zero compensation; the establishment of a race-based tourism equity fund while throwing established tourism businesses under the Covid bus; the setting of new binding racial quotas via employment equity legislation that could even affect things like attorney-client privilege; wide and ambiguous amendments to the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act; and the new centralised control and development model for municipalities, among others.

Meanwhile Ramaphosa also remains beholden to the SACP and COSATU who helped him come to power and with whom he historically has very close ties. He will again need their assistance to stave off any potential attacks at the pending NGC and at next year's elective conference. There's also no sign that the dictatorial reign of Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and her National Coronavirus Command Council - set up in terms of very weak state-of-disaster legislation that lacks proper checks and balances and time limits - will end soon.

Can the ANC reform itself post-Zuma/Magashule?

Despite the NEC having undertaken to deliberate 'ANC renewal', that's unlikely to be more than an unproductive talk shop. Factionalism and corruption will not be stamped out until the ANC acts like a real political party (it still refers to itself as a movement and views itself as the only legitimate representative of the people); rids itself of its liberation movement broad-church approach that facilitates competing groups and agendas; ends the ideological suffocation of its alliance with the SACP and COSATU; replaces cadre deployment with a professional and independent public service; and tackles all corruption even-handedly across the board without fear or favour.

And with municipal elections coming up, a whole new generation of ANC cadres with local and regional business/tenderpreneur/career ambitions are waiting in the wings.