

Things are much better than we think, yet our tendency is to propagate a denialist mindset that skews our perception of reality. – Daily Maverick 4 September 2019

Just over a year has passed since the Zondo Commission heard its first witness. Since then, so much evidence has been gathered to strongly implicate the architects and masters of State Capture and yet not one has been arrested. General sentiment and public opinion suggest this commission is a waste of time and at R200-million (and counting), an expensive one at that.

While we understand why people feel this way, I disagree with this view and believe that sufficient progress is happening within the corridors of the “Rule of Law”. It’s just taking longer than we would like and we are being distracted by the many other pressing challenges confronting us.

Unlike the commissions of yesteryear, the Zondo commission is very effective in its ability to unearth meaningful evidence and witness testimony. We have recently read the judgment that Seriti’s Arms Deal Commission was a waste of time, and Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo will be taking note of that. Justice Zondo is diligent and serious about exposing those implicated in corruption and the significant evidence being injected into the process is adding colour and clarity to the picture between the dots and lines that we are all aware of.

However, we cannot overlook the fact that our levels of public frustration continue to rise at the lack of action by our national leadership, as the looting continues, the economy stutters and the rand weakens. Frustration and depression understandably set in as joblessness grows and a lack of investment in our economy takes root, while SOE bailouts mount and the “junk status” cloud grows darker. The sad and most pressing problem unfolding in this milieu is that too many talented citizens are taking their much-needed skills to other lands. And who can blame them?

Ours is a nation of seemingly endless challenges, but that was always a given, taking our history and cultural dynamics into account. We’ve been here before and have navigated higher mountains in our journey to democracy and beyond, the most recent being the extrication of a profoundly corrupt president and his cohorts from significant leadership positions in government.

It’s normal to be daunted and overwhelmed by wave after wave of issues that come at us: the vague NHI plan; urban mob lootings; truck stoppages fuelled by a xenophobic dynamic; inhumane gender-based atrocities; fuel price hikes; SOE bailouts; and looming tax increases. The wave of damning issues cannot be ignored or flippantly wished away. Each one needs to be given the necessary attention and action to rectify through a multitude of mechanisms employed by the likes of Outa and other civil society groups.

Right now though, it feels as if a tsunami of challenges is bearing down on the nation and our confidence to surmount this is being tested. Evidence from many interactions we at Outa have with our supporters suggests that South Africans’ collective state of mind is wavering as we doubt our ability to cope, let alone fix and overcome these challenges.

My worry is that we are talking ourselves into decay and demise that isn't yet there. This is tantamount to giving up before it's happened and this "woe are we" attitude will become a self-fulfilling prophecy that will surely drown us as a nation. We can't allow this to happen.

Our national potential is well above our current output and we all have to dig deeper and go further to improve our national account and turn our trajectory upward. For starters and without sticking our collective head in the sand, we must step back for a moment and take stock of the many positive developments that have happened and continue to happen.

A [recent article](#) by Discovery's leader, Adrian Gore, gives a great overview of the many economic signals and elements that depict why things are not as bad as we believe they are. In fact, things are much better than we think, yet our tendency is to propagate a denialist mindset that skews our perception of reality.

Adding to the madness and frustration is our president's attention being distracted away from the myriad socio-economic challenges we face, while he deals with a pathetic internal party faction that seeks to remove him. I don't want to come across as fighting in Ramaphosa's corner or to suggest he's getting it right all the time, but I do believe that right now he's the best person for the job. He needs all the support he can get, while at the same time we must hold his feet to the fire on the many pressing issues that require attention.

With SARS on the mend, former National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) officials Nomgcobo Jiba and Lawrence Mrwebi now fired and various law-enforcement agencies being strengthened to tackle corruption, plus e-Thekwini mayor Zandile Gumede and other municipal and metro leaders being attended to (although far from enough), the signs of correction and positive change are here. Add to this the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) being ordered by the president to probe corruption-linked losses at Transnet and Eskom, and the NPA/Asset Forfeiture Unit repair underway – these are the things that mean more than we realise.

Confidence is also growing that the exit of our inept public protector, Busisiwe Mkhwebane, is not too far away. As for the day in court that many politicians and other capturers of the state have evaded, our conclusion from various developments is that the noose is tightening and their future looks bleak. The fact that it hasn't happened yet, doesn't mean it won't.

My worry is, if all we talk about and focus on are our problems, then our demise will be our reality. It's time to invest in our collective psyche and ability to dig deeper and work harder to overcome our challenges. In addition, big business needs to extricate itself from its "profits at all cost" approach by starting to invest in those efforts and entities that enable the government to be more transparent and accountable for the mismanagement of our economy, basic human rights and the growing inequality that plagues us. **DM**