

Ramaphosa's doggy-paddling SA is flagging and starting to go under – IOL 18 January 2020

South Africa has been doing the Cyril Ramaphosa doggy-paddle for two years. But now it's no longer keeping head above water. It has moved from floundering to drowning.

The danger with a drowning person is that in their panic they pull their rescuer down with them when they go under. The ANC, in its flailing to preserve itself, threatens to pull down with it the nation.

Ramaphosa's administration, instead of just concentrating on keeping its nose above water, is dragging down its well-intentioned rescuers. By latching on and attempting to exert control, it's moved South Africa from doggy-paddle to death spiral.

There's the matter of electricity. The mines and large industries stand ready to generate at least back-up power for when the national grid is down, but the ANC can't bring itself to give the go-ahead, since its union and Communist allies believe this will encourage privatisation by stealth.

Then there's sport. The government has just tabled an amendment bill that will see all sporting bodies, including your neighbourhood running club, brought under the control of the sports minister. International fixtures will be only at the consent of the minister and although federations can make recommendations, the awarding of national colours will be only on the say-so of the minister.

Sport, already dysfunctional and rotten with corruption, will be run from the top down, with the minister deploying his chosen people. It will destroy the structure of sport administration and is, quite likely, illegal in terms of international regulations that forbid political interference in sport.

But sport is frippery compared with the critical matters of private property and health provision, where the ANC's drowning-man syndrome is most obvious. Both are interventions into admittedly flawed existing arrangements which, if implemented, will widen the flaws to cracks and eventual collapse.

This week, Health Minister Zweli Mkhize bemoaned the "fear-mongering" critics of the National Health Insurance (NHI) system that is being hustled through the legislative process. The predictably bombastic Blade Nzimande, general-secretary of the SACP and Higher Education minister, says the party wanted the NHI to be implemented this year: "The alliance must unite to advance and defend the interests of our people and defeat all those forces opposed to the NHI."

Rather than "fear-mongering", most of the criticism has been evenhanded. The reservations expressed have been around the likelihood of the government being able to administer the enormous bureaucracy that the NHI entails, an issue that has made unlikely allies of the likes of the official opposition DA and the activist organisation, Section27.

There are two sets of evidence upon which to base one's assessment. At a macro-level, one can look at how the ANC administration has performed historically, and at a micro-level, one can look at how well the public health system is being administered.

Aside from keeping in mind incidents such as the deaths of at least 122 Life Esidemeni mental health patients, one should look at government attempts to prove its ability to administer an NHI. More than R1billion was spent on 10 NHI pilot projects, after which the outside assessors, trying hard to be charitable, concluded that "none was an outright failure".

But we shouldn't worry, says Mkhize. The NHI "will be run with the same efficiency and integrity" as the Road Accident Fund (RAF) and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). These have "set a precedent of good governance and accountability".

Let's get real. If this is what Mkhize thinks are confidence-inspiring good examples, God help us. The RAF has been technically bankrupt for years and owes injured motorists around R17bn. The NSFAS is also technically bankrupt with more than 52000 graduates owing R967million in unpaid bursaries in 2018, causing it to be placed under administration.

In case worst comes to worst, lifeguards are taught how to break a drowning person's death grip and break free. Sadly, ordinary South Africans lack that option.

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