

SECRECY AND CORRUPTION IN SOCIETY

28 September 2012

Hope is a dwindling resource in South Africa. The euphoria of 1994 and the long queues that wound round the places are a thing of the past. The African national Congress-led government is taking the country down a precipice of uncertainty spiced with corruption.

President Zuma like P W Botha has the country in a deadly vice grip of the security forces and continues to strengthen the forces by bringing in legislation that is reminiscent of the PW days. Internal party democracy of the ruling party is thrown out of the window as it is with democracy in the country. We are all being subjected to laws, legislated and otherwise that are meant to enhance domination of some over others.

The benign state of emergency introduced in September to December last year and this year too is a clear indication that democracy, transparency and accountability are headed for the scrap heap in this government.

The Protection of State and Information Bill takes us back to the days of pre 1994 when the regime was maintained by brutality, guns, violence, restrictive laws and all these were upheld by extensive silencing of freedom of expression. This piece of legislation takes us back there. We should blow the whistle and rule government offside!

That regime saw books banned. In this category you have books by Todd Matshikiza, Bloke Modisane Andre Brink, and E'skia Mphahlele that could not be read openly. With this bill, if allowed in its present form, more works of art will never see light of day. This cannot be allowed to prevail.

The tightening of laws to muzzle people and stop them from speaking out is contrary to democracy. We in the UCDP call on all South Africans of goodwill to stand up and speak out against secrecy and corruption even if it means taking risks. We should decry a police state.

We have to be on the lookout and fight against the secrecy bill as it will allow government officials to classify significant parts of their work as secret. This bill offends the constitutional presumption of innocence and has to be opposed with all our might.

As opposition parties, we serve as the conscience of government if the government has any conscience. We have to be heard in season and out of season because we live among the people we are not hiding behind high security walls and fences where people cannot have access to us. We hear them complain and we know their labours.

South Africans must insist that the right to vote must be accompanied by the right to know. That organizations such as the Nelson Mandela Foundation, COSATU, the Legal Resources Centre and a legal luminary like George Bizos have made their voices heard about the unacceptability of the bill should be proof enough that the bill is no good for South Africa.

Cosatu laments the introduction of the bill as follows:

“The Secrecy bill is merely one of a much bigger and problematic effort to centralize power in the security cluster of government”.

On the other hand Advocate George Bizos who defended Nelson Mandela during his apartheid treason trial in 1963 had this to say:

“If this bill is passed in its present form there will be a long queue of advocates to take

the president and minister of state security to court. And it will be a never-ending queue”.

Will the government ever listen and hear. We note even the concessions that were sort of made have once again been done away with.

President Zuma and his cabinet must realize that we live in a constitutional state. They should bear in mind that on accepting democracy they bid farewell to unfettered obsession with power similar to that of Juan Fernandez who said his

right there is none to dispute. Brains and not brawn should run the affairs of state. This government should not be allowed to divorce constitutional democracy and remarry parliamentary sovereignty.

The Secrecy Bill continues to be seen as an obvious means of concealing the corruption that has become a way of life for many, from high-placed members of the government down to menial officials. Tenders have become the currency of much of this corruption. People who have not held jobs or new comers to the world o work are obscenely rich yet we are being, legally *nogal*, that they have to decide which issues have to be made public otherwise they will lock us up. We dare them to. We will speak out against any questionable largesse they have.

The secrecy bill wants to turn the public of South Africa into dumb driven cattle. We must refuse and remain heroes in the strife.

If the bill had become already nobody would be held accountable for the lack of delivery of books in Limpopo and other provinces. What is debilitating even then is that government still ducks and dives trying to blame others.

This bill if accepted will come at a price. Investors will be hard put to invest as some clause refers to information being shared with non nationals may be construed as subversive by some officials. With corruption running through the roof in this country, it may be more costly to invest.

We have to look out passing the bill into law will make it easier for the ANC to conceal graft because of the rampant cronyism in government ranks.

Let us stand up and speak out against corruption, secrecy and domination. Let us blow our whistles against these threats to democracy and accountability.

(Presented to the joint-rally of opposition parties at the Pinetown Civic Centre)

Sipho Mfundisi

President: UCDP

Cell: 083 469 3473