



Response

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The Cabinet Reshuffle

In January 2018, shortly after he became president of the ANC, Cyril Ramaphosa addressed the party's 106th birthday celebrations in East London. Eagerly wielding a new broom, he said, "As you can see, this year we started on time. It's a clear signal that things are changing. The NEC meeting also started on time. Nelson Mandela would have been pleased... We want a new culture to spread. When we have a meeting, it should start on time."

Sadly, Mr Ramaphosa not only failed to ensure that his party adopted this discipline, he has been one of its worst transgressors. A number of his 'family talks' during the COVID-19 period were delayed and postponed, until it became a standing joke. He has taken inordinate amounts of time to decide on pressing matters such as the suspension of the Public Protector and of the Western-Cape Judge President; various pieces of legislation are sitting unsigned on his desk; and last night, after prevaricating over the reshuffling of his cabinet for more than two months, he found it necessary to delay the announcement by an hour. And then by another half hour.

His defenders argue that he is by nature a consultor and a seeker of consensus, and that this takes time. His detractors feel that he has elevated dithering and indecisiveness to an art form. Most likely, he combines both these aspects – but what matters most is the overall trajectory of his approach to governance: as the crises facing us have intensified – Eskom, Transnet, organised crime syndicates, collapsing public health facilities, international finance greylisting, failing municipalities, and so on – his apparent sense of engagement and urgency, his willingness to give leadership, have waned. Mr Ramaphosa comes across like a swimmer in handcuffs – all he can do is tread water.

The cabinet reshuffle represented an opportunity for him to seize the initiative, to dismiss the proverbial dead wood and to bring in new and enthusiastic ministers with fresh ideas and energy. Did he do so? To a very limited extent. Three ministers were dismissed: Nathi Mthethwa (Sports, Arts & Culture) and Maite Nkoana-Mashabane (Minister in the Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disability) have been serial underperformers; Lindiwe Sisulu, who has held no fewer than eight ministerial appointments in 22 years, finally burnt her bridges by siding openly with the anti-Ramaphosa faction in the ANC.

Other poorly performing ministers were left in place: Bheki Cele at Police and Gwede Mantashe at Minerals & Energy are perhaps the most obvious. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, who seems to have acquired the status of royal game, takes the place of Ms Maite-Mashabane.

Among the new blood, three appointments hold some promise: former KZN premier Sihle Zikalala becomes Minister of Public Works; and the former Johannesburg mayor, Parks Tau, gets a deputy-ministership in Co-operative Governance & Traditional Affairs, with emphasis on the first part of that pairing. Both of them bring reputations for diligence and commitment.

The new Minister in the Presidency for Electricity is Kgosientso Ramokgopa, who has had a career in local government in Tshwane and as head of the investment and infrastructure unit in the Presidency. Dr Ramokgopa has the hardest job of all – he is expected to "reduce load shedding and deal with the fragmentation of responsibilities" that has bedevilled Eskom and our national power supply. It is tempt-

ing to see his appointment as nothing more than a transparent attempt by the President to be seen to be doing something, but in fairness he should be given the opportunity to prove himself. It will not be easy – there are now six layers of responsibility for Eskom: its management; its board of directors; the ministry of minerals & energy; the ministry of public enterprises; the national energy crisis committee (a cabinet committee); and now the electricity ministry. And not all of these are, by any stretch of the imagination, pulling in the same direction.

The new Minister in the Presidency responsible for Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation is Maropene Ramakgopa, who was elected the ANC's second deputy secretary-general last December. This is a poor appointment, not because of anything to do with Ms Ramakgopa, but simply because she has a full-time party job in the ANC; she cannot possibly devote herself simultaneously to a highly technical, cross-cutting government job. This is yet another example of the governing party's tendency to treat executive posts as sinecures for its senior members and thus to blur the distinction between party and state.

Another disappointment is the President's failure to take the transport ministry seriously. Not only has he left it effectively without a minister since Fikile Mbalula became ANC secretary-general more than two months ago, he has now appointed as minister the incumbent deputy-minister, Sindisiwe Chikunga, whose work and achievements in that role have been inconspicuous, to put it charitably. Mr Ramaphosa seems not to have noticed that Transnet is in a state of collapse; that our national road system is under severe threat; that the ports are badly mismanaged; that the taxi industry is as anarchic as ever; that passenger rail is a mess; and that our annual road death-toll continues to grow.

The President noted at the beginning of his address that, with a general election just over a year away, this was merely the filling-in of certain vacancies, and not "a major overhaul". But many will feel that a major overhaul is just what his cabinet, and indeed his presidency, is in desperate need of, and that the country cannot afford to wait another year or 18 months for it. Despite our many crises there is, ultimately, still no real sense of urgency from Mr Ramaphosa.

Mike Pothier
Programme Manager
mike@cpl.org.za



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