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THE ANC GOVERNMENT IS PLAYING TRANSFORMATION GAMES WHILE Eskom AND SOUTH AFRICA ARE LIGHTS OUT

By Theuns Eloff: Executive Director, FW de Klerk Foundation

Recently, Minister Pravin Gordhan said that former Eskom engineers who are now working abroad should be recalled to South Africa to help solve the crisis. Most of them are probably white.

In the same week, *Rapport* quoted Eskom's own affirmative action plan, which outlines that by March 2020, there should be 1 308 fewer white employees (who are qualified) in its service. This includes 336 engineers and many middle managers - working where the essential maintenance work needs to be done.

Huh?

Minister Gordhan says that good white and black employees and managers were forced out of Eskom by State capture, because they no longer wanted to work in that toxic environment. Some of them left the country, because there is a huge demand for their expertise overseas. This might be true, but State capture is not the root of Eskom's management and operational problems. Eskom has been struggling for far longer than the "lost nine years..."

Whether it's Eskom, Life Esidimeni, the lack of land reform, bankrupt municipalities or pollution in the Vaal River, the answer to the question of why it happened has always been: "we have a lack of capacity". In other words, "we don't have the people to do the job and do it right".

If you then ask another question, namely why there is no capacity, the answer is either evasive, or that it is the result of "State capture and corruption". Sometimes, Zuma's cadre deployment is also added to the mix. But Eskom's problems did not begin six or seven years ago; much in the same way that State capture did not cause the condition that the many dysfunctional municipalities (some say 70%) find themselves in.

In the search for the causes of a "lack of capacity", racial transformation - as implemented according to affirmative action, employment equity (which lately has become more of a perfect oxymoron) and Black Economic Empowerment - is conveniently forgotten. It is well-known that Eskom has for years boasted of being a leader in racial transformation - so it is perhaps not just the Zupta's that brought Eskom to its knees. It is also the many incompetent employees that have been appointed over the past 20 years. And it is not to say that no good and capable black people were appointed, but they were and are clearly in the minority. Most of them have left as a result of State capture and a dysfunctional system. The same is true of many municipalities.



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The fact that Eskom itself - under pressure from the Department of Labour - still continues with plans to reduce numbers of white engineers further, paints a picture of the ANC government playing transformation games while Eskom and South Africa are lights out!

Let's confront the elephant in the room. Or rather, let's openly admit that there is another elephant in the room, in addition to State capture. It's the elephant of badly-applied affirmative action and Black Economic Empowerment. It's the elephant that is fed by the ANC government's obsession with race, and the ideology of racial transformation. It's the elephant that is fed a diet of 80:9:9:2. All State institutions (and increasingly, the private sector), should fully and in each and every department, reflect the nation's race demographics of 80% African, 9% white, 9% colored and 2% Indian. And this applies whether there is capacity or not. And the feeding of the elephant is exacerbated by the abysmal failure of the country's education and training system. There are simply not enough well-qualified black South Africans to fill all the posts.

The same issue of *Rapport* quoted Senzo Mchunu, a Ramaphosa confidant: "*We will regret labelling some of our black managers as people of superior quality. What happened in most parastatals is that the people we trusted, were indeed black managers, but they were incompetent. They excelled in failure and theft*". Harsh words, but finally someone inside the kraal unmasking the ANC government's obsession with race.

In addition, the 80:9:9:2 formula works like a quota system: court cases confirm it, as do Eskom's plans. The quota of 9% must be achieved, and therefore come hell or high water the number of white employees needs to be reduced by March 2020 - even if the resulting lack of management, maintenance and technical knowledge leave Eskom, the country and the economy in great trouble. Racial transformation comes first!

The system says: if you cannot appoint a black candidate (or if your common sense won't allow you to appoint an incompetent or totally inexperienced person), allow the post to remain vacant ... or appoint an unsuitable and incompetent person, the point is, after all, to implement affirmative action, rather than effective performance and service delivery.

The infamous Renate Barnard judgment of 2014, despite a highly questionable outcome, contains some interesting warnings about affirmative action:

- *Affirmative action, in terms of the Constitution, is not a goal in itself.* However, this is clearly what is happening at Eskom, many municipalities and large parts of the public service. And there is thus far no deadline. Over time, as minorities comprise a smaller percentage of the population, they will continue to be pushed out of the public service and the corporate sector.
- *Such measures may not be punitive or retaliatory;* explain that to the people who will be laid off at Eskom before March 2020 - regardless of their competence and experience.
- *Such measures should be implemented in such a way that people who experienced discrimination in the past, will now benefit.* However, disadvantage is no longer the



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benchmark, but race (because many appointments were more privileged than most of their peers).

The next one is priceless: *The requirement is that the beneficiaries of affirmative action must be up to their task. They must be appropriately qualified so that “effectiveness and competence are not sacrificed on the altar of affirmative action”.* That's exactly what has happened in almost the entire public service. Eskom, which for many years has been held up as the proud example of successful racial transformation, sacrificed their efficiency and effectiveness on the altar of racial transformation. State capture was not responsible, it just made things worse.

Of course, we as a country and nation now need to come together to help save Eskom and other State institutions (including dysfunctional municipalities). Solidarity's knowledge bank is an excellent idea.

But the question has to be asked: is it not time to stop affirmative action, employment equity and Black Economic Empowerment in their racial tracks? Can the effectiveness of the State afford such racially-obsessed and futile measures? Can our country afford to lose knowledgeable people from minority groups to foreign countries or early retirement?

Mr President, for the sake of our country and its people, please strongly consider putting an end to these race-based measures. The minorities in the country would like to help, they want to be sent, they want to serve... but they are considered unfit and incompetent on the basis of their skin color. There are too few of them to keep any well-qualified black South African out of a job in the medium term. As less than 20% of the population, they can't possibly pose a threat? Use them and build one nation. And then the lights will come back on again!

***First published on www.maroelamedia.co.za in Afrikaans**