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DIE SUID-AFRIKAANRESTRUCTURING THE CIVIL SERVICE

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South Africa is trapped in developmental stagnation. This is symptomatic of the kind of transition we are experiencing. Development, i.e. the improvement of the mental/material quality of life of the citizens of a country, is the consequence of a careful balance between economic growth and policies of redistribution. Both growth and redistribution are the hostage of the politics of negotiation, hence the National Economic Forum (Growth), National Housing Forum (Redistribution), National Electricity Forum (Redistribution), National Forum for Local Government (Redistribution), etc. Because development is seen as an instrument of political mobilisation, opponents will not allow each other the slightest possibility to claim credit for improving the lot of the citizens. If it cannot be done under some new body, claiming some new kind of fragile legitimacy, (e.g. Transitional Executive Council or Government of National Unity), it is not going to be done at all. This explains the fierce arguments surrounding the rent boycott in townships, lifting sanctions, raising international loans, or simply

agreeing on priorities for socio-economic development. Arguments around political legitimacy cascade onto problems of 'unilateral restructuring' and so postpone concrete solutions to social misery.

We run the dangerous risk of consolidating the myth that political legitimacy is both a necessary and sufficient condition to address problems of development and delivery. It is neither. In the South African context, it may be necessary but it certainly will prove not to be sufficient.

Let us assume we have a legitimate constitution and government, i.e. both enjoy the demonstrable consent of the majority of citizens; let us further assume development capital from donor countries and institutions begins to flow into South Africa and let us also assume that politicians have a workable consensus on the priorities of development whether it be educational reform, housing, rural agrarian development, the emancipation of women, upgrading urban communities etc. These are all assumptions which lie unresolved in the current passion and heat of negotiations. That is why we have developmental paralysis. But let us assume these things in any case for the sake of argument :

Who is going to deliver and administer on the aspirations that accompany transition? In this regard, it is useful to distinguish between an incumbent government or executive and the civil service or the state. It is very important not to assume a simple correspondence of interest between the government and

the civil service. In fact, the state/civil service may have a diversity of interests within its ranks which may even conflict with each other and also with the declared interests of the government of the day. What exactly the interests of government of the day and the interests of the civil service may be it is a matter of factual analysis not theoretical conjecture alone.

One simply has to reflect on recent and current debates surrounding the role of the SADF, SAP, the Educational Crisis, renegotiating South Africa's debt to realise that we have a civil service experiencing a severe case of goal displacement as it battles to adjust to the pressures and direction of transition. How does a civil service which had been meticulously crafted to pursue Apartheid and Separate Development, reconstruct to become serviceable to (at this stage at least), an uncertain democratic outcome? This is the central theme which this edition of Die Suid-Afrikaan attempts to explore. Some statements that are made in the following articles illustrate the problems:

"Assuming the retention of current civil servants, one cannot underestimate the ability of top civil servants to manipulate and destruct the new policy orientations and implementation objectives."

"The main problem is that in the absence of clear political guidelines and instructions by political decisionmakers on this topic, the public service does not have clarity on exactly what it should change into, and in addition, it does

not have the guts to take the initiative in this process. The Commission of Administration ... which is supposed to be the policy making head of the public service ... is currently a totally reactive body which prides itself on this fact."

"There is a popular perception that the massive apartheid bureaucracy will somehow be streamlined and that vast saving by the so-called "Apartheid dividend" will be effected. Recent events had demonstrated that, left to their own devices, bureaucrats will 'rationalise' a system to protect their interests."

There is a post-colonial saying which says : "Old bureaucrats teach new bureaucrats bad old habits." It would be an irony beyond contemplation if, after the blood, sweat and tears of transition, South Africa manages to solve the problem of political legitimacy, unfreezes the paralysis of development only to shipwreck itself on the incapacity to administer and deliver on social policy. A new government (of even 'national unity') will very soon find itself embroiled in far more urgent and intractable problems of legitimacy and development under these circumstances. It is the peculiar characteristic of the negotiated transition in South Africa that four basic problems have to be confronted concurrently : stability, growth, redistribution and legitimacy. We have to set new goals on all four if we are to negotiate transition successfully. However, a critical set of means to achieve goals in all four is the

current civil service. If it cannot be reconstructed to at least be in line with those goals, South Africans can begin to budget generously for disillusionment in their future.