

Institutionalised racism

In the past, it was difficult for a black person (African, coloured or Indian) to obtain employment with the Cape Town City Council. Things have changed since the 1994 elections. However, black people are still to be found in mostly subordinate positions. This is despite a much-vaunted 'restructuring' programme, which is supposed to address 'historical imbalances'.

The former, mostly white, functionaries of the apartheid regime are still entrenched in key positions in the council. They use the bureaucratic machinery to protect their interests. By means of dirty tricks, rumour-mongering, innuendo, red tape, and undue delays, amongst others, they sabotage the effective transformation of the council. They are determined to obstruct the advancement of competent, well-qualified black professionals.

The majority of black workers still have no clear job descriptions and thus no clear career paths. Most of the work entrusted to black workers has no connection with their formal education and training. It seems that black people are employed as mere tokens to soothe white guilt. In practice, very little has changed since 1994.

by John Williams

The statistics speak for themselves.

In 1993 whites constituted only 24,5% of the workforce in the council, yet they comprised 97,1% of top management. So-called 'coloureds' made up 73,4% of the workforce, but occupied only 1,4% of the posts in top management.

The statistics for mid-1997, which are shown below, indicate that whites continue to dominate the upper echelons of the council.

How does one explain this situation?

It has to be realized that centuries of racism and material exploitation cannot be wiped out by the mere stroke of the

Employment statistics Cape Town City Council – 30 June 1997

Employment category	White	Coloured*	African
Top Management	55 (84,6%)	10 (15,4%)	0 (0%)
Middle Management	484 (89,5%)	73 (12,5%)	17 (2,8%)
Professional	423 (88,1%)	177 (28,5%)	21 (3,4%)
Technical	842 (48,1%)	821 (47%)	88 (4,4%)
Semi-skilled	1 315 (18,8%)	5 349 (76,3%)	348 (4,9%)
Unskilled	21 (0,4%)	5 237 (92,4%)	408 (7,2%)
Total no of employees	3 260 (20,5%)	1 1787 (73,9%)	881 (5,6%)

*Source: Department of Human Resources, Cape Town Municipality, January 1998. *Note: 'Indians' are a very small percentage of the workforce in Cape Town and for practical reasons are included under 'coloured'.*

pen, nor can racist, oppressive, condescending, paternalistic, ethnocentric attitudes.

Racism is not a word, it is not merely an idea. It is a living experience for the majority of people in this country. It is woven into our daily lives. To suggest that one should not refer to the tenacious

Culprits

In September 1997 Peter Jones of Green Point wrote the following letter to the *Cape Argus*:

"The two biggest culprits who have ignored the [policy of affirmative action] are none other than city manager, Andrew Boraine, and executive director, Philip van Rhyneveld, who were both appointed in the first place because of their political allegiances.

Mr Boraine recently appointed two white liaison officers, while Mr van Rhyneveld's record was not much better, appointing eight white males out of nine senior management posts.

What makes matters worse is that all these positions came at exalted salaries. Needless to say, many candidates of colour with university education were overlooked for the posts. This begs the question: are the new directors still influenced by the 'old guard' who are in the main, English-speaking whites? If this is indeed the case, then transformation in the civic centre could be a pipe dream.

Needless to say, the morale of the staff is at an ebb lower than in the apartheid era, simply because the hopes and aspirations of empowerment have not been realised.

Ahmedi Vawda, executive director, has not been entirely blameless as he also has entrenched whites in [top] positions and ignored people of colour who have doctorates. As a citizen of Cape Town, I demand that the transformation be speeded up...otherwise the executive directors must do the honourable thing and resign."

effects of racism is to conceal, hide and purposefully distort the experiences of black people in South Africa.

Racism is well and alive even while some people are talking so glibly about the 'New South Africa'.

Central government must take immediate steps to remedy the situation. It should:

- appoint a Commission of Enquiry to investigate the effectiveness of existing transformation fora in the council;
- conduct a reliable skills audit in the council;
- scrutinize the current evaluation procedures used to screen candidates who apply for promotion. The present procedures appear to merely function as a smokescreen to affirm the appointment of pre-determined candidates;
- monitor black advancement on a regular basis and set targets and time-frames for concrete, visible change throughout the council;
- institute a rehabilitation programme to introduce and reorient management to the ethics and principles of non-racial, non-condescending humane employment practices.

Central government has an opportunity and, indeed, duty to act against all forms of racial exclusion, marginalisation and subordination. Black workers expect nothing less. ★

References

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