

After the action

WE hear a great deal about 'affirmative action' - but do we ever look back after the action and judge the results thereof? For one thing is clear: It never stops increasing the number of employees and inventing new (often superfluous) functions in our civil service with little attention paid to qualities such as productivity and effectiveness of purpose. We seem to believe more and more in numbers and pay less and less attention to the functional and productive parts of the service.

Hail a free press! For, if I had to tell the relevant minister what I thought of the productivity of some of his staff members, he would surely have censored me if he had the power to do so. One thing is certain: no private business has a snowball's chance of survival in hell if it employs the number of ineffective and unproductive workers that the civil service appears to be content with. Any private business will go bust and have its doors closed even before it has a chance to present its Board with an 'additional budget' to conceal its mistakes.

We are now running at 25 to 1 - that is, for every 25 souls living in Namibia, from cradle to grave, there is one civil servant lurking in the dark. Perhaps the secret aim is to achieve a 20:1 or even a 10:1 situation when the entire country will be one big civil service, with no outsiders to tax for it.

Surely, the solution lies in productivity and effectiveness and not in numbers. Sheer numbers would tend to obstruct rather than streamline; lead to 'bureaucratic delegation' (that is passing the buck) rather than prompt execution; create red tape within red tape - a business to organise a business. Quickest way to solve that will surely be to reduce the numbers AND to improve the effectiveness of those who remain.

Who will be the judge of productivity or effectiveness? The relevant Minister or his Permanent Secretary? And are they qualified for the job?

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Who will be the judge of productivity or effectiveness? The relevant Minister or his Permanent Secretary? And are they qualified for the job?

Even so, I would still be inclined to take a chance with the Minister and his Permanent Secretary (particularly in the teeth of a conservative, granite, budget) than a starry-eyed follower of a political cry that leaves Namibia drained of cash when the adrenalin drops.

Does 'affirmative action' imply the replacement of one x with two y's? But then the x's linger on and on and don't get retired to the bush. Their numbers remain the same while the y's begin to proliferate. In

any case, as the y's multiply, the need for the x's rises again. They must after all organise the y's.

Far better for the country and for all its people will be the creation of worthwhile employment in the private sector, by 'affirmative action' in reducing taxes and creating attractive investment opportunities - with the least possible financial burden in a civil service reduced to a streamlined, highly effective, highly productive machine of government. For this job we need a competent, cold-blooded surgeon. The majority of those that will leave the service will then be accommodated in a thriving private sector.

The foregoing paragraph should be the real affirmative action: the better life for all. The short-term solution of increased numbers will reap the bitter harvest of discontent. For how long must we bluff ourselves that the future is prosperous, while stubbornly trying to win friends by dish-ing out jobs to nincompoops. That is not affirmative, but stupid - and time will be our witness.

JOHN VAN ZYL
WINDHOEK