

BY  
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# New regions: give less say to politicians

The concept of regional government and a host of related questions came under the spotlight at an Idasa "think tank" held in Pretoria at the end of March.

One issue to evoke sharp debate was that of the nature of the relationship between regional and central government, a question which prompted a range of views from the different political opinions represented at the seminar.

In an address designed to provoke debate, University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) geographer Jeff McCarthy identified some of the issues confronting those involved in the development of regional government for a democratic South Africa.

The challenge, he said, was how political accommodation, national cohesion and economic reconstruction could be both sensitive to, and in harmony with the complexities of South Africa's regional diversity.

McCarthy said certain questions needed to be asked:

- Which powers and responsibilities should be assigned to what level of government in a future constitution?
- Which boundaries were suitable for local and regional tiers of government?
- What interim measures could be taken with regard to the reform of existing levels of local and regional government?

While regional diversity was a feature of every large state, the legacy of apartheid in South Africa meant that cities, towns, rural areas and regions were all defined, planned and administered as race zones rather than as regions with their own characteristics.

Despite the abolition of apartheid legislation, these apartheid-created zones would not disappear overnight and this would lead to "the temptation to formulate some new, central, post-apartheid planning orthodoxy, and to deploy national resources and decisions accordingly as part of some national effort at political and economic reconstruction", said McCarthy.

He said it was expected that a national effort be made to counteract the decades in



Chief Patekile Holomisa of Contralesa with Mr Alphius Mathebula of the Northern OFS Forum

which the full weight of national policy had been aimed at a racist division of the country. However, McCarthy cautioned against a political centralism that would pre-empt the development of "new, constructive, local diversity in South Africa".

Tackling the problem of the present highly "technicist" approach to demarcating regions in the country, McCarthy said the question of which regions would best suit a post-apartheid South Africa and how or whether they should be professionally or politically devised should be left open.

Throughout the world it was recognised that sound economic development should be based on local comparative advantage. In South Africa this meant that diverse political leadership should be engaged in forging developmental consensus in various areas.

"A programme of local economic reconstruction for the Western Cape, for example, would, of geographic necessity, look very different to one for the Witwatersrand or the Northern Cape. Yet *innovation* in reconstruction will only derive from localities where there is some local autonomy and, therefore, some *incentive* to become innovative."

McCarthy said a "bottom-up" approach to regional government was needed so that people living in the various regions were brought closer to government instead of being alienated from it. Yet the principal political parties were clearly resistant to the idea of allowing regions to identify them-

selves or for them to assert a degree of local autonomy.

The reasons for such resistance, said McCarthy, included a fear of loss of control/destruction of

the status quo; a fear of regional separation/regional racism; a fear of exacerbated core-peripheral differences.

In an attempt to address such reservations, McCarthy suggested that such fears could not logically be equated solely with opposition to high levels of regional autonomy.

Turning to the practical problem of defining regions and boundaries to enhance development and reconstruction in South Africa, McCarthy said it was important

that people in a region should identify themselves. The task should not be left to politicians or technocrats.

This might mean that "meaningful" regions, insofar as they meant something to the people living in them, were considerably smaller than those currently being toyed with by the major political parties. They could be the size of a metropolitan area, or the scale of an agricultural subregion of 100km to 150km which had some internal coherence of economic and land usage.

The thrust of regional tier government should be that it was best suited to meeting at least the developmental and environmental challenges of South Africa. Land and resource management were issues which could unite South Africans in a constructive way. However, to do this, regional government structures would need to feel fully responsible for local environmental and developmental management and they should have sufficient funding (possibly regional powers of taxation) to carry out these tasks.

Responses to McCarthy's paper came from Dr Ben Ngubane (Inkatha Freedom Party), Dr Chippy Olver (Corplan - a development group in the Border region), Dr Patrick Maduna (Inyandza National Party, KaNgwane), Mr Alphius Mathebula (northern OFS Forum and also a member of Azapo) and Chief Patekile Holomisa (presi-

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dent of Contralesa).

Dr Ngubane said while Inkatha believed in a single, united South Africa based on the 1910 borders, it also supported regionalism – historically, linguistically and economically.

Restructuring was desirable when addressing the inequalities of the past, but it might be politically and economically expedient to strengthen certain existing structures “to best suit the will of the people and the needs of time”.

The IFP believed in devolving power to local communities, but was also committed to integrating all the communities in South Africa “as much as possible”.

Regional political autonomy could only be effective if there was regional fiscal autonomy. At the same time, because of the uneven availability of resources, regional and local government would need to be subsidised by the national government.

Dr Maduna of Inyandza affirmed his commitment to a unitary state, but added that appropriate and representative forums at regional level should be developed to ensure thorough debate of issues affecting people in those areas.

Dr Olver argued firmly in favour of a strong central state to address the legacy of apartheid which had been imposed at a national level.

At the same time, however, he said the democratic movement did favour strong regions. There was a strong local and regional tradition throughout the country and political diversity needed to be accommodated in regions too.

Alphius Mathebula rejected the “accommodative approach” to issues which, through its willingness to accommodate all sides and thus dilute differences, left open the possibility that apartheid could re-emerge. Similarly, the “harmonising approach” was to be avoided because it attempted to reconcile the problems rather than eradicate them.

Contralesa president Chief Patekile Holomisa said that when debating possible new regions for South Africa, the homeland boundaries “should not even be considered”, although where present regional boundaries did accommodate a homogeneity of people this should not be ignored.

“Traditional leaders can be used constructively or destructively,” he said. “They could be employed to promote democracy and the well-being of the people. They should be above party politics, but not out of the political process altogether.”

Sue Valentine is Idasa's Media Co-ordinator.

# Dogmatic slumber on civil service

BY ALICE COETZEE

**T**he civil service is the machine that runs this country. Openly stating its task as serving the government of the day, it has been the prime administrator of apartheid for five decades.

Now, with the interim government and a new constitution on the horizon, the leopard is being asked to change its spots. Can it do it or must we look for another animal?

Being at the heart of South Africa's bureaucratic machine, Pretoria is also at the heart of the debate and realising this, Idasa's Pretoria office found itself strategically placed to facilitate a debate in March on the future of the civil service during and beyond the transition.

Hans Olivier, general manager of the Public Servants Association (PSA) said that while there was no sign of hysteria among public servants about their future it would be “less than honest” to say there was no concern at all.

He outlined the fears of civil servants, ranging from the fear of the unknown through to specific concerns such as the statement by a political organisation that at least 1 500 top public service posts would have to be carefully scrutinised. This statement, which implied the top echelon could face redundancy, had not been clarified.

“In the event of redundancy, the fear is whether the rights of those affected would be protected and how? I have in mind such issues as pensions, job security, leave credits and the merit principle,” he said.

Further, the impartiality of the public service had been attacked. Public servants had been accused of administering an unwanted regime and they feared “some sort of punishment” once a new constitution was in place.

Mr Olivier said he had no doubt that a “vast majority” of PSA members would have “no problem” with the issue of loyalty under an ANC government.

Responding to the fears of the civil servants, Patrick Fitzgerald of the New Public Administration Initiative said people feared the future when they were not part of building it. If public servants could become part of the building of a new South Africa they would cease to fear it, he said.

Stressing the importance of the civil service during the transition, he said the consti-

tution was drafted by lawyers, but operationalised – or not – by the civil service.

South Africa had inherited a caste civil service; white, male, Afrikaner, Christian Calvinists and NP-supporting in its upper echelons. It had suited this group to see the civil service as serving the government of the day and flying the flag of neutrality because it was the same group as the politicians in power.

International thinking about the public service was concerned with multiple accountability, a code of ethics and upholding human rights. South Africa needed to come out of its slumber over many issues and begin discussing the transformation of the civil service among all stakeholders.

Both Chris Fisser, NP MP for Rissik, and the ANC representative, Sindiso Mfenyana, co-ordinator in the secretary general's office, agreed that too little attention had been paid to the civil service.

While Mfenyana called for the restructuring of the civil service away from the “closed shop for whites”, he urged that the debate not be confrontational, but take the form of constructive dialogue.

Fisser said South Africa needed a neutral public service, free of discrimination, based on merit and with a commission of administration that would address historical imbalances. He linked affirmative action to enablement while not ignoring merit, competence and experience.

Dirk Mudge, leader of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, urged South Africans to learn from the Namibian experience and not compartmentalise its problems. He also warned against easy solutions being offered as election tactics.

“Not much has changed in Namibia, not because the government is unwilling, but because they are faced with the realities of ruling a country which is very different to the tactics used to win an election.”

In Namibia, Mudge said, an independent public service commission had been established to ensure a balanced structuring of the civil service. It was responsible for appointing people on merit, taking into account affirmative action for those who were discriminated against in the past. He stressed, however, the need for safeguards against nepotism.

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