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Stand up to the tyranny of political correctness, and tell the truth. **1**

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Stand up to the tyranny of political correctness, and tell the truth

On 15 June 1973 the *Financial Mail* published an article on mass population removals in pursuit of the apartheid policy of separate development. Written by John Kane-Berman, and based on IRR research, the article drew a direct connection between these removals and kwashiorkor and other diseases of deprivation. The article was illustrated by a colour photograph of a dying baby on the front cover. It was designed to shock and it did. The economic adviser to Prime Minister John Vorster wrote a letter accusing the *Financial Mail* of faking the photograph. But the photograph had been taken in the Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital near Nqutu, in what is now KwaZulu-Natal. An offer was made to take the economic adviser and relevant ministers and officials to see for themselves both the babies in the cots and the dumping grounds surrounding the hospital. The visit never materialised, and both the *Financial Mail* and the IRR continued to expose the consequences of forced removals until that policy was eventually abandoned.

Last week, the IRR again pointed to a connection between policies and dying children — that between race-based affirmative action and government incompetence. Again, demands were been made for 'evidence'. Some of the most compelling testimony comes from the Government and the ruling party.

In 2009 the then ANC treasurer general, Matthews Phosa, lamented that local government was 'now in ICU' because of the mistakes the Government had made on affirmative action. In 2011, the then minister of co-operative governance and traditional affairs, Sicelo Shiceka, said local authorities were widely seen as 'incompetent, disorganised, uninterested'. President Jacob Zuma has described the public service as 'lazy and incompetent'.

However, to say the Bloemhof babies died because of 'incompetence' is not enough. There is no doubt that the racist policies of apartheid require redress. Nor is there any doubt that black people suffered material disadvantage because of their race. However, race is a double-edged sword. The powerful emotions conjured up around race make it the perfect cover behind which to hide malfeasance. Hence, politicians abuse affirmative action policy to justify totally inappropriate appointments in the name of 'racial transformation'

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Our critics counter that the policy must simply be implemented properly. This is naïve. We have a very corrupt government — and if you give it the power to hide its malfeasance and damaging ideology behind 'racial transformation', it will do so. You cannot therefore divorce the policy from its consequences, even where these are unintentional or arise from abuse.

Proponents of the policy must also stop repeating the ill-informed assertion that South Africa's affirmative action policy is designed to pick the blacker of two equally qualified candidates. Rather, the current policy expressly envisages that officials should be appointed, not for their existing knowledge and experience, but rather for their potential to 'acquire the ability' to do their jobs in the fu-

ture. It thus explicitly allows the selection of unqualified people. This is simply not fair to the poor communities which pay the price for their shortcomings.

The extent of popular ignorance over the policy and its consequences was illustrated last week when a prominent journalist sketched the scenario of two equally qualified engineers competing for a job. One was private-school educated and the other township-school educated. The journalist said that, since they were equally qualified as engineers, the township educated engineer would get the job — and that this was a fair and good policy for South Africa. But this is to misunderstand the policy as it is applied in South Africa. It is also to ignore the fact that the Government will often leave a critical post unfilled rather than accept a white (or even a coloured or Indian) candidate. Such errors are compounded still further by assuming that all private school graduates are white, when this is incorrect. In fact, under the current law, a poor white student who manages to graduate as an engineer against great odds will be overlooked in favour of a black private-school educated engineer from a rich family. In any event, South Africa has such a great shortage of engineers, especially in the public sector, that any qualified engineer should be snapped up regardless of race. Finally, should a white private-school educated engineer want to apply his skills to the upliftment of a desperately poor rural municipality with failing infrastructure, it is not for the law — or media commentators — to decide that the people of that municipality are not entitled to have him.

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and on this we have been very clear. For the most part, white South Africans are doing quite well. Their unemployment rate sits at around 6%, making it nonsense to suggest that whites want to 'take our [ie black] jobs'. Ironically, the current model of affirmative action has proved particularly effective at empowering whites by pushing them into entrepreneurship (as the IRR has previously pointed out). In fact, if any people have been empowered by affirmative action since 1994, it has primarily been white South Africans.

Our critique of current affirmative action policy is built on examples where the victims of such policy are black. Accusations that the critique is racist ignore this. Just as erroneous is

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the idea that we are trying to stop black advancement — if nothing else, this would entirely undermine the model of a growth-led market economy which the IRR has been advocating for decades. Absurd too is the disingenuous suggestion that our critique of affirmative action is an attack on the competence of black people. The IRR's sustained and brave opposition to apartheid policy rested on the obvious point that there is nothing inherent in people's race that determines their abilities. Only our critics draw the offensive connection between race and competency. Nor does our critique seek to deny the so-

cio-economic progress that has been made since 1994. Rather, our concern is that too many people remain victims of a cruel and uncaring system — without which even more could have been achieved.

That the accusation of racism has been thrown about so freely merely confirms our thesis that the racial basis of the policy is exploited to cover up its abuse. In many cases, probing questions should rather be asked about our critics' commitment to 'social justice' when they vilify policy alternatives while knowing full well the price poor people pay for the status quo. What sort of inhumanity causes a person to heap vile and racist abuse upon an idea to improve the lives of poor people? The extent of their vilification suggests they know we are right, but are struggling to make peace with this because they find it just too discomforting. Too often these critics are people whose own children are unlikely ever to be exposed to toxic water or incompetent public hospitals.

It was telling that the Government itself did not come after us last week, but felt able to leave that hatchet job to various people in civil society and the media. This is a bad omen in a country where the stranglehold of political correctness and strict self-censorship now poses a major threat to freedom. The American academic, Noam Chomsky, summed this up in saying, 'The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum....'. What was also particularly striking was how many of our critics relied on theoretical examples of what affirmative action 'should' achieve, while we relied on practical examples of what it is in fact achieving. A colleague remarked that, like many whites in decades past, the critics seemed to be in self-imposed denial that the stark image of dead babies conjured up

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by our critique could possibly be true.

It goes without saying that there are many instances where black people have forged ahead without affirmative action, or where the leg-up provided by affirmative action has worked well. But even those who have benefited from the policy must weigh their personal interest

We urge all South Africans to consider our alternative – Economic Empowerment for the Disadvantaged (EED) – a new policy being developed by the IRR. It is not race-based, but targets only the truly disadvantaged. It also focuses on providing the inputs necessary to empower poor people.

against the great price the majority of poor people pay at the hands of an increasingly inept civil service. That price lies not just in the deaths of babies. It is evident also in our pathetic rates of economic growth, our abysmal education system, and our crisis of unemployment. At the same time, the alternative we offer will benefit a far greater number of poor people than the current narrow band of empowerment and affirmative action beneficiaries. Why this more inclusive proposal has not been embraced by people who claim to seek a more just society is difficult to understand.

Based on our research, we disagree with the notion that the current policy can simply be fixed by applying it better. Instead, we urge all South Africans to consider our alternative — Economic Empowerment for the Disadvantaged (EED) — a new policy being developed within the IRR.

EED differs from affirmative action (and BEE) in two key respects. The first is that it is not race-based. Rather, it uses socio-economic circumstances to identify its beneficiaries. If your parents earn above a certain income threshold, you will not qualify under the policy. Hence, it targets only the truly disadvantaged and provides little scope to justify inappropriate appointments. Secondly, it focuses not on auditing the outcomes of transformation policy but rather on providing the inputs necessary to empower poor people. These include decent schooling, tertiary training opportunities, employment, and entrepreneurial incubation. On these building blocks, and against a background of rapid economic growth, millions can and will be liberated from poverty.

The evidence of the past week shows that many commentators still reject the need for better affirmative action policies. Yet whether race should remain the foundation for affirmative action is a question of profound importance, which will largely determine the success of all empowerment policies. Our aim has been to draw attention to the impact of current policy on poor and vulnerable communities — and to start a conversation on the need for change. Without real change, current levels of growth, investment, and employment are unlikely to improve. Corruption and maladministration will persist, if not increase. Examples such as Bloemhof will multiply. On this disturbing prognosis, the evidence will, regrettably, be entirely in our favour.

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Despite the abuse heaped on my IRR colleagues this week by a small number of prominent commentators, we will not shrink from the task of breaking the repressive death-grip on our

country of racial nationalism and crippling political correctness. If anything, the experience of the past week has strengthened our resolve.

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My sincere and grateful thanks are extended to the many people who contacted us with messages of support and encouragement. In the current repressive climate, they were all brave to have done so — and especially where they stood up in public. A common theme running through their messages is that the IRR has told an important, and previously unspeakable, truth that runs to the very heart of what is needed to turn our country around.

Their brave comments have helped create the space for others to stand up and join them. Together we can take back the public space from those who want to control the spectrum of acceptable opinion. Using that space

the IRR will continue to offer clear alternatives to the status quo in the expectation that, in time, these will help to build a better and far more prosperous South Africa.

— **Frans Cronje**

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