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Zondo commission – Nothing wrong with cadre deployment, says Mantashe

The cadre deployment policy of the ANC came under scrutiny at the state capture commission on Wednesday, with Mineral Resources Minister Gwede Mantashe asserting that it is more about advancing the development agenda of the state with competent people, than placing individuals loyal to the party.

Mantashe is appearing under the parliamentary oversight stream of evidence, which seeks to uncover the role Parliament may have played in alleged state capture. The appearance was initially reserved for ANC secretary-general Ace Magashule, who had already submitted an affidavit on behalf of the party, but owing to developments that the commission did not divulge, arrangements were made for Mantashe to appear instead. Mantashe was himself secretary-general of the party between 2007 and 2017.

He told the commission that the ANC's deployment committee takes interest in those vacancies that it considers strategic for the developmental agenda of the state, and recommends that they be filled with people who realise the urgency of transforming government in that regard.

"In the ANC we don't have a policy called cadre deployment, we have a deployment policy. It makes a huge difference because it's not a cadre deployment. It is a deployment policy of the ANC," Mantashe said.

He acknowledged that the process has had undesirable results in the past, but it is grounded in the need to change the course of government so that it benefits the majority of South Africans.

The challenge, argued evidence leader Advocate Alec Freund, was that the process runs the risk of ensuring the appointment of people loyal to the ANC, who would, once in office as directors-general or CEOs of state owned entities, account to the ANC and not the departments that employ them.

But Mantashe disagreed. "That assumption is very abstract. It assumes that people who were in the apartheid system are not in the state, and people who were in exile and in the camps of the ANC are not in the state.

"The reality of the matter is that when you set up that kind of government, you also know that so and so, and so and so are trained to play a role in the public service, and you deploy them in the public service." If the ANC didn't actively do that, it would not have happened automatically, he added.

Mantashe said the ANC is always alive to the need for transforming key industries so as to include black leadership, given that black people are qualifying for leadership positions in growing numbers. A case in point is the time when the Gupta family arrived in South Africa in the early 2000s and the eldest brother Ajay was appointed to the economic advisors team of then president Thabo Mbeki. When later the family sought the audience of the ANC as they

wanted to venture into the media landscape, the ANC entertained their ideas, with the name of their newspaper – *The New Age* – even being suggested by ANC leaders.

“At this stage, the ANC had no other knowledge of the business interests of the Gupta family until much later. So what we know today, we did not know then.” Taking a stance against the family’s perceived influence in government was partly the reason for the removal of Jacob Zuma as president of the country, a move that has caused instability in the ANC since it happened, said Mantashe.

But the policy around deployment has remained in place because it is important. Mantashe used another example, that of the mining industry, where prior to 1994, black companies were not permitted to obtain blasting certificates.

“When the system is opened [up], it can’t be a mistake to deploy people who understand the urgency of change to allow that. That applies to all institutions in South Africa, because all of them were from an apartheid system which regarded people as less of humans.”

The problem, however, Freund pressed, is when ANC expects those deployed to be loyal to the ANC, as it is responsible for their placement. Mantashe retorted by saying the ANC cannot be expected to turn a blind eye to the government it contests to lead in elections.

“People expect the ANC to forego the responsibility of governing ... when you contest an election, you win majority, you must take responsibility of governing,” he said.

At this point commission chairperson Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo came in to say the reason that ANC policies are scrutinised by the commission is that certain wrongs have happened under the ANC’s watch. He added that he has to ask what should be done in future to minimise the prospects of these wrongs being repeated, and has to ask if he can do that without looking at the governing party.

“We have no problem with being looked at as a governing party,” Mantashe replied. “...it’s a different issue when you’re taking the policies of the governing party and [you] put them on trial. When you do that, objectivity disappears.”

That will culminate in a situation where misdemeanour by a deployee is attributed to the party, when in fact that individual chose to steal or lie to the state.

Freund argued however that the centre of power appears to reside not in government, but at Luthuli House, to which Mantashe replied that Luthuli House is separate from government, but for the ANC to govern well, the ANC itself must be healthy enough as an organisation.

“There’s no correlation between government and party. We are a governing party, we’re present in government, and for us to be effective, the party itself must be effective.”

Former cabinet minister Barbara Hogan, said Freund, told the commission in 2018 that, while there was an appropriate process of appointing CEOs of SOEs, the ANC seemed to have an expectation that it was entitled to deploy board members via the deployment committee. Mantashe’s reaction to this was that Hogan wanted to centralise the powers of appointment to herself, hence her unhappiness about the process.

“The beneficiary of the deployment process all of a sudden sees it as a behind-the-scenes process ... that deployment process deployed Barbara as a minister, now all of a sudden you want to appropriate that to herself as one. I think that is a distortion of policy, in my view.”

Mantashe continues to testify.

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