**Deelname aan begrotingsdebat 18 Mei 2021, Wetenskap en Innovasie (Begrotingspos 35)**

**WJ Boshoff**

Honourable House Chair

It has been said, maybe in jest, that science is the religion of the secular state and that scientists are the priests.

The things we don’t understand can be explained by science and if we still don’t understand, wê should just believe. Questioning scientists is not recommended. One could be wrong, but even worse, one can be ridiculed.

I have a few problems in this department which, in true religious spirit, I want to share. My enquiries revolve around the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research.

The first problem relates to the end of service of previous CEO, Dr. Sibisi. He declared in 2016 that the DG of Science and Technology approached him with a request to influence the tender for a super computer the CSIR was about to buy. He publicly refused to do so. Conveniently, allegations of maladministration were made against him by an ex-employee. According to media reports, the minister at the time viewed the allegations in a serious light and ordered an investigation.

Subsequently Dr. Sibisi’s contract term came to an end and he was not reappointed. He found new employment as head of the Wits Business School. My own Google search on the matter revealed no conclusion in the investigation against him and I asked a written question to the current minister. He answered that there was in fact no investigation.

Soon afterwards in 2017, the current CEO of the CSIR was appointed and, maybe unrelated, the CSIR turned its energy opinion away from renewables, towards the nuclear build programme of the time.

Another saga at the CSIR involves the highly regarded National Laser Centre. Technology to do 3D printing with titanium and other metals was developed here and South Africa became a world leader in the field. Its Aeroswift project was a partnership, to commercialise CSIR-developed technology in the aircraft industry. The largest 3D printing facility in Africa, possibly the world, would produce strong and stable, but lightweight components.

The technical lead of the project pointed towards irregularities and slow advancement. He was replaced in that position and subsequently forced to take retirement. On his last day at work, 30 May 2017, he was summoned by the head of the National Laser Centre and informed that he had to hand in his laptop immediately and vacate his office within 30 minutes. When he attempted to complete a discussion with an outside client, he was escorted out by security; 7 hours before retirement. In the aftermath he was prevented to work with any of the partners in the project, or to have contact with any employees of the CSIR, past or present.

Notwithstanding his departure, about a year later the board of the CSIR reacted on allegations of maladministration by appointing forensic investigators Fivaz and Associates. When I asked question about this matter and the Fivaz Report November last year, the current CEO of the CSIR assured me that all recommendations in the report were adhered to and that the institution acted decisively against those pointed out.

In December 2020, the minister kept a promise made during a question and answer session, and the Fivaz Report was sent to me.

This report clearly exposed the appointment of the current head of the NLC as irregular. It recommended that the Centre should be restructured and that he should not be part of the new structure. The CSIR should have entered into negotiations with him, regarding a new position. Action should have been taken against the person responsible for his appointment.

When I recently asked the CEO of the CSIR what had happened, he responded that the person is now, nearly three years down the line, still in his position and that no action can be taken against him, as he was not responsible for his own appointment. And the person who appointed him, has left the organisation for other reasons.

The report also indicated that this same person took the initiative in the forgery of time sheets, which led to the CSIR sourcing around R2 million illicitly from the Department of Science and Innovation. The CEO commented that these were only internal control measures and required no action – although the Fivaz Report differs.

There are more, but time is not on my side.

The Freedom Front Plus rejects the budget.