

Piet Coetzer (National Party) and Jan van Eck (ANC).

Dealing with the alternatives that were open to Afrikaners, Pieter Mulder said federalism was a viable possibility. Powersharing had not enjoyed much success around the world. "The ANC must convince me that they will sit on the opposition benches of parliament if they lose an election. I am not yet convinced that that climate is part of South Africa yet."

He said two realities had to be acknowledged: that regions existed and that ethnicity was a significant factor. "Ethnicity is strong enough to destroy economic pacts, we must not underestimate it."

Van Tonder (remarking that Idasa seemed too nice to be a leftwing organisation!) argued that South Africa was not one country but a sub-continent comprising 14 different peoples.

He said if a party stayed away from Codesa it could not be responsible for what took place there. Similarly, Afrikaners should have boycotted the 1908 national convention where just "three Boer leaders fought in vain for their language rights".

Continuing in rousing rhetoric which drew heavily on old antagonisms between Boer and Brit, Van Tonder said there was no such thing as an Afrikaner "volk", but there was a "Boerevolk" with its own political and legislative traditions.

"We want to restore the Boer republics. We are not Afrikaners, much less South Africans, there is no such thing as South Africanism."

Thoughts on the future of the Afrikaner from both Piet Coetzer and Jan van Eck had all the elements of political parties on the campaign trail. During question time later, political point-scoring was very much the order of the day.

Coetzer said the NP was striving towards a political environment in which the Afrikaner identity "in its full diversity could manifest itself and blossom". It was not enough just to create an environment that was democratic, it should also accommodate the needs of all aspects of society.

Van Eck said if the Afrikaner wanted to play the role of liberator rather than oppressor a number of changes were neces-



ANC Afrikaners: Jan van Eck and Cas Human

sary. These included a recognition that Afrikaner fears of fellow black South Africans were the consequence of decades of "cynical propaganda". Afrikaners should also stop seeing themselves as an embattled minority confronted by an antagonistic majority.

Reminding Afrikaners of the words of D F Malan (believe in your God, in your people and in yourself), Van Eck said it was a myth that Afrikaners could enjoy cultural and religious freedom only if they were politically dominant. It was just as important for Afrikaners to free themselves from being the oppressor as it was for black South Africans to be free.

"A democracy is coming, there will be majority rule... If this is so, then go and get involved in the process so that you can influence it," he urged.



Robert van Tonder: not a South African

Closing the day's discussion, Stellenbosch University philosopher Johan Degenaar said it was very important for Afrikaners to define what the term Afrikaner meant, but that such discussions should take place also in the presence of non-Afrikaners.

He encouraged everyone to become philosophers insofar as the precise meaning of words and concepts should be negotiated and defined.

"There is unfinished business in our history. We will get nowhere if we do not address those problems. But we cannot address them in isolation... We must find a definition of Afrikaner, but we must also find out what it means to be a fully-fledged citizen in South Africa, what it means to be a whole person at this time, in this society."

Sue Valentine is media co-ordinator with Idasa.

SOUTH African history, as determined by the Christian nationalist syllabus and textbooks writers and imposed on school pupils nationwide, has long been notorious for its careful selection of themes and sheer dullness in approach.

Their version of our past, together with a similarly slanted set of criteria for proclaiming national monuments, have served to preserve and present a heavily distorted view of the history of South Africa.

BY SUE VALENTINE

For these and other reasons, the Wits University History Workshop, as part of its ongoing efforts to re-examine history from the perspective of ordinary South Africans and to begin to engage with those in the "establishment" who maintain museums and historical sites, held its 1992 convention under the theme "Myths, Monuments and Museums: new premises?".

Asked to think of a prominent South African monument, many might name the Voortrekker monument - that solid, sombre symbol outside Pretoria which preserves one very particular perspective of South African history.

But in a paper on "Monuments and the monumentalisation of myths", Francis Frescura of the University of Port Elizabeth mentioned certain historical sites which have never been recognised and of which many South Africans consequently are ignorant.

These included Sol Plaatje's home, Freedom Square in Kliptown, the burial grounds of early leaders such as Nongqawase, Bambata, Sekhukhuni, Hintsa, Nxele, Sandile, Dingiswayo, Dinizulu among others. In addition, the site of the massacre at Bulhoek in 1920, the historical settlement at Mapungubwe near Messina which dates back to 1050 AD (which today is a shooting range occupied by the SA

Gold dust or

A POPULAR venue for tourists to Johannesburg, the city of gold, is, unsurprisingly, Gold Reef City. But while the venue makes no claims to be authentic, at the same it also hosts school tours for children studying the history of gold-mining and thus does present a very vivid picture of Johannesburg in the early days.

In a discussion of the way in which Gold Reef City presents Johannesburg's history, Wits University historian Cynthia Kros says that while it is a pleasant enough place for a day, the past it presents is "insidious - not just because we historians feel it lies about

Wanted: new premises for SA's real history

Defence Force) and the fortified villages of Mukumbani and Mutele in Venda?

By contrast, Frescura also listed some of the sites which have been proclaimed national monuments, including a now barren piece of ground where the house in which General Louis Botha once stood and Hendrik Verwoerd's house at Betty's Bay (known as "Blaas 'n Bietjie"), which, said Frescura "is reputed to have been designed in 1961 by a man better known as the 'architect of apartheid'".

But why all the fuss over historical sites and museums? According to the editor of the *Journal of American History*, David Thelen, it is because both memories and monuments are central to the way in which people make sense of the world.

"The process of remembering and the content of our memories are our ways of defining who we are in the present, of framing choices for the future, of finding solace from immediate troubles, of building competence

just cheap imitation?

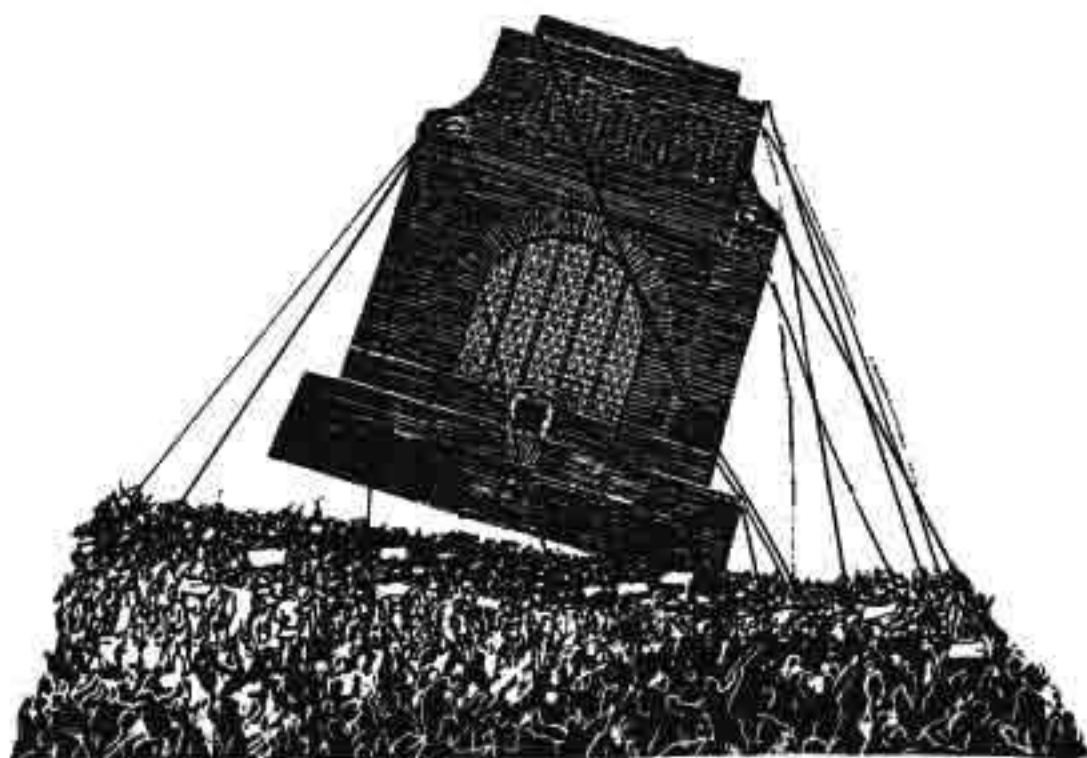
the past – but also because it encourages passivity". She says Gold Reef City's past is "a past without compounds or segregation". The role played by blacks in the gold mining industry is little more than hinted at and the blacks at Gold Reef City are mostly "happy songsters, music-makers and dancers". The version of history presented makes no mention of the restriction of movement on black miners, no hint of repression, exploitation, loneliness, fear or mutilation.

However, says Kros, visitors to Gold Reef City do show an interest in the past and how the living conditions have changed and appear to want to learn more about how life

If memories are important and help us to define who we are and where we come from, how should history be remembered by South Africans and just whose stories should be told?

and confidence as interpreters and participants in our everyday relationships," he said.

Thelen argued that monuments could be used in various ways – to show how different people or groups remember the same event differently or to show how the construction of memories have



changed over time. For example, the battle of Little Big Horn in the United States should be shown from the perspective of both the cavalry and the Sioux, or a monument at the battle of Blood River should show how the trekkers and the Zulus experienced the battle differently.

At all times when remembering and reconstructing the past, said Thelen, questions must be asked such as what is being retained and what is being forgotten, what is not included and what is not explained.

used to be a century ago.

But for those actively seeking to understand more about how Johannesburg was shaped Gold Reef City is "too insubstantial".

According to Kros its past is "soothing but unhelpful – pleasant but irrelevant... Gold Reef City allows us to relax in the village square, but it doesn't explain to us how we lost our real square in the real city it claims to represent. "Its duplicity game with history and authenticity arouses our initial interest but it patronises us – offering us trinkets and curios and whimsical glimpses into an anonymous, monochrome past, edged with broekie lace."

For many at the conference a burning question was how South African museums would present the realities of policies implemented by the South African state. How to confront white, museum-going audiences with the (previously untold) stories of the past, and how to make museums accessible and meaningful for all South African?

Another American delegate, Lonnie Bunch of the Smithsonian Institute, suggested that museums could play an important role in society as a "moral educator".

He said museums should be places that allowed diverse people to interact and engage with each other and their history. "There aren't many places in society that allow people to do that; museums can be forums for dialogue and vehicles for empowerment."

He said if South African museum curators and historians embraced the black African past, it would provide a means to illuminate "all the dark corners of the South African past".

Museums needed to change their approach and to build up relationships with the people and groups they wanted to study.

"Museums must enter into collaborative relationships with communities over the long term. Communities must recognise that their opinions are valued and that they are participants in history," said Bunch.

Sue Valentine is media co-ordinator with Idasa.

Challenge to heritage industry

SOME might say it's history up for sale, others might be more accommodating and suggest that at least it is making people think about their past even if it's not entirely accurate, but whatever way you look at it, the "heritage industry" is big business.

In South Africa a prime example is the rapidly developing and highly successful Victoria and Alfred Waterfront (which has enjoyed an estimated six million visitors in the last two years). But just what picture of