

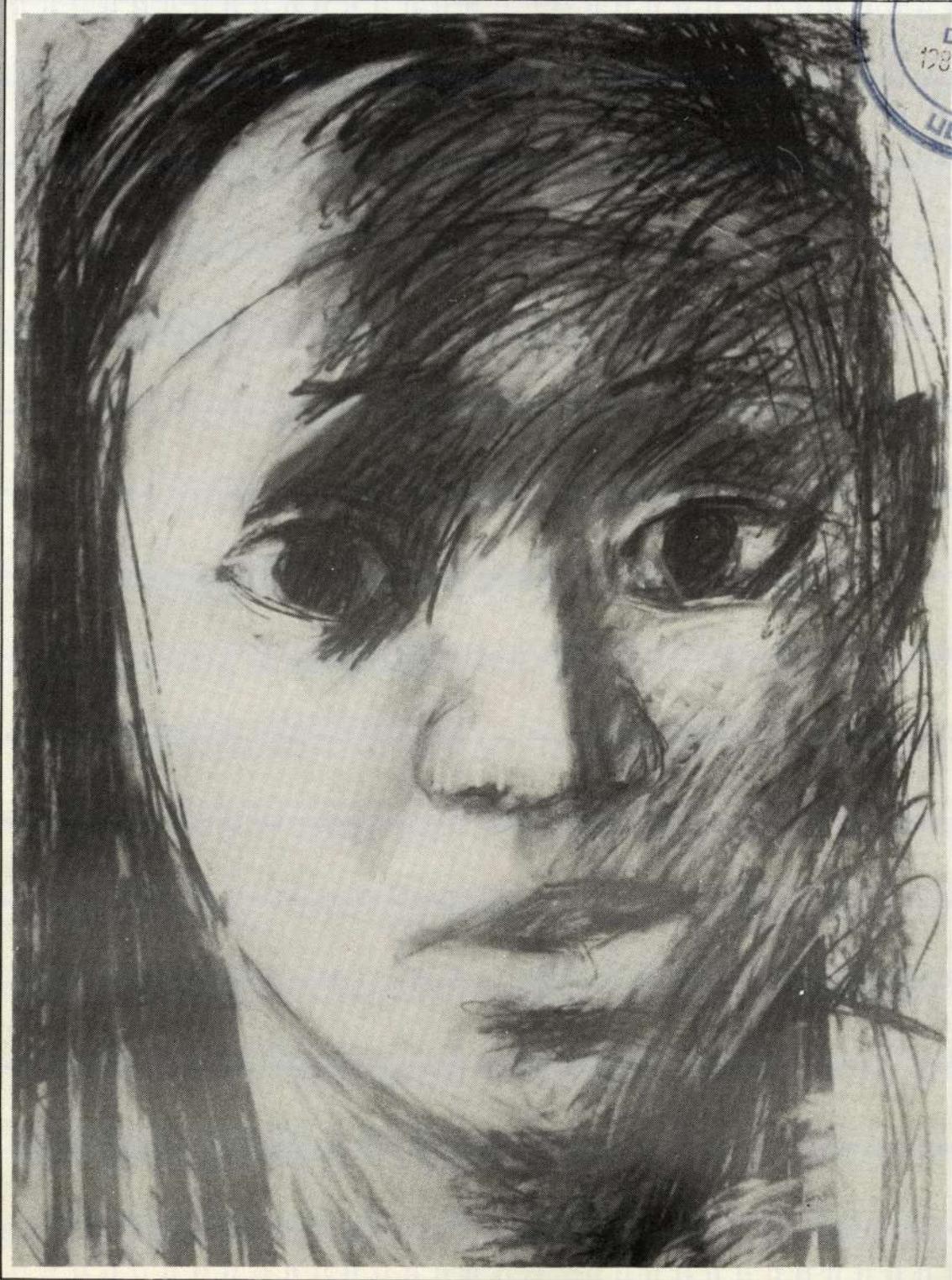
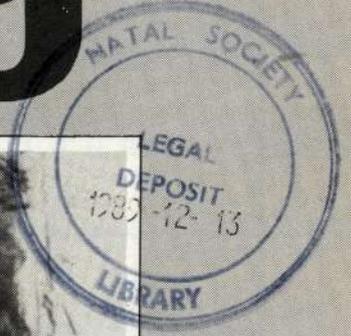
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# reality

NOVEMBER 1989

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ZINZI MANDELA by Bill Ainslie

A JOURNAL OF LIBERAL AND RADICAL OPINION

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# EDITORIALS

## 1. Beginning of the end of the Bantustans?

It is not often that a military coup brings much good to those upon whom it is inflicted, but it begins to look as if the Transkei might be different. Since General Holomisa took over that sad state he has had most of his time taken up with exposing and rooting out the corruption of the Matanzima's. Now he is moving on to much more controversial issues.

The body of Sabata Dalindyebo, former Paramount Chief of the Tembu nation, which Matanzima consigned to the equivalent of a pauper's grave, has been reinterred with honour. His son has been welcomed home from his Zambian exile with honour too. Now, most daring of all, General Holomisa has appointed a two-man team to report on the possibility of holding a referendum in the territory on the question of whether Transkei should renounce its independence and revert to its former status as part of a greater South Africa.

If the referendum is held and if the vote goes against continuing 'independence', as we suspect it will, Sabata's long fight against the Matanzima's and their Nationalist sponsors will finally have been rewarded. Perhaps we will

even discover what threats and what bribes those were that first brought the Matanzimas to power. For it could hardly be coincidence that, at the Transkei Legislative Assembly's first session, after Sabata's anti-independence Democratic Party had swept the board in all but two of the elected constituencies, and had secured its nominee the post of Assembly Chairman at the first election of office-bearers to the new TLA, a hastily-arranged adjournment at the behest of South African officials, should produce, when the session reconvened, a majority vote for Kaiser Matanzima as Chief Minister. The assumption has to be that some of the Chiefs, whose positions and salaries depended on Pretoria, had somehow been persuaded to change sides during that intermission.

Be that as it may, the spectre of an unpredictable referendum on the independence question in the flagship of the Bantustans must be causing anxious moments in Pretoria. It could be the first signal of the beginning of the end of that particular part of the Verwoerdian dream and the South African nightmare. □

## 2. De Klerk's first days.

Mr de Klerk has made as good a start to his Presidency as probably could be expected.

His decision to allow the protest marches to go ahead produced a remarkable and immediate change in the atmosphere in the country. The release of Walter Sisulu and the others, while clearly timed with an eye to the Commonwealth Conference, opens up the real possibility of the start of a negotiating process, however long-drawn-out that may be.

But if Mr de Klerk has established for himself a reservoir of goodwill which nobody could have expected three months ago, the other side of that coin is raised expectations. If the goodwill is to be retained he has to keep

doing good things.

How about starting off by getting rid of the 1913 Land Act?

Black land would almost certainly have to be protected from white purchase in the early stages but the step of throwing open the 80% plus of our white-designated land to purchase by anyone, three-quarters of a century after that iniquitous law was passed, would be a dramatically symbolic and profoundly significant step. It would also allow the redistribution of land, which whites fear so much, to start in an orderly and gradual manner immediately. □

## 3. Under the Red Flag.

The Red Flag has been much in evidence at recent protest marches.

Some church leaders involved in those marches have protested strongly about this, and understandably, given the experience of Christians and others under the Soviet system which that flag represents. Others seem not to have minded much.

For our part we would like to know what kind of a statement those who are insinuating the flag into the marches are trying to make. If they are paying tribute to the sustained fight the Communist Party has fought against apartheid in South Africa, fair enough. It was what

they were fighting **for** over all those years which worried us. Their unquestioning support of whatever the Moscow line of the day happened to be, whether it was being laid down by Stalin, Khrushchev, Beria or Brezhnev, is hardly a reassuring record on which to base our hopes for the future. Is that what the flag-bearers are asking us to do?

It would indeed be ironic if, having at last escaped from an ideological system based on racial shibboleths long since rejected by the rest of the world, we should now embrace one based on discredited slogans and economic shibboleths from which the Communist world itself is now frantically trying to cut loose. □

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# BILL AINSLIE.

Bill Ainslie was killed in a car crash in August, near Potgietersrust, returning from an international workshop at the Cyrene Mission in Zimbabwe, where he and his wife Fieka worked when first married. Of his funeral, Pat Williams, who pays one of the tributes we publish below, wrote "People who could meet no other way came from far and wide to his funeral; all races and colours, all religions, all conflicting political beliefs; the wealthy and desperately poor, the influential and the dispossessed. They came together with warmth and love – and that was Bill's dream for South Africa." Amongst them were Christopher Shabalala and Moses Kumalo, two Howick factory-workers recruited into the Liberal Party by Bill in the 1950s, who sat through the service with the tears running down their cheeks – two of the earliest examples of his extraordinary capacity to breach South Africa's colour barriers.

The two tributes which follow come from two very different sources, London's sophisticated Independent and Afrikanerdom's bumptious, radical upstart Die Vrye Weekblad. Bill would have liked that.

## ART AND CREATIVE ENERGY

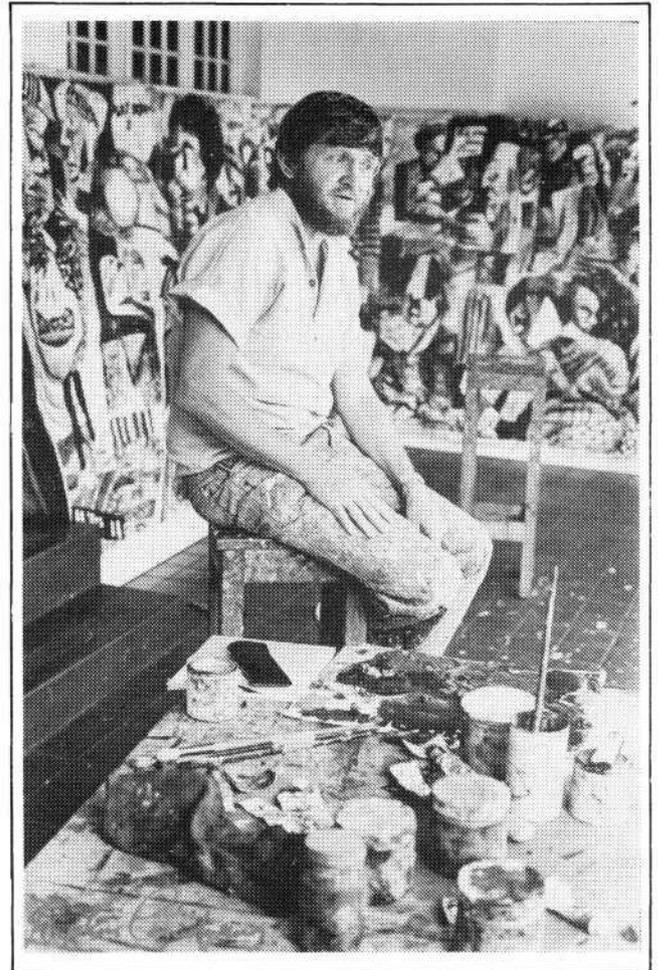
by PAT WILLIAMS (from *The Independent* 5/9/89)

BILL AINSLIE ran his extraordinary multi-racial art school in South Africa as a haven of sanity in that frequently mad country. The Johannesburg Art Foundation was a vision of south Africa's best future; the students' lives and creative work enriched by the differences, as much as the friendships, between the races.

Ainslie himself was one of those rare, irreplaceable men, a born leader, trusted by everyone, a humanitarian and master teacher. A fine painter himself, he was personally committed to abstract art, which he saw as the most rigorous and serious form of painting. To him, art was far more than making images or illustrating belief; it was where human creative energy found its touchstone. He believed that because art had been neglected in Southern Africa, much had been corrupted.

"What this meant," wrote his former student William Kentridge, "was running an art school open to all people at a time when all formal art institutions were racially restrictive; supporting, both spiritually and financially, many artists who would otherwise have had to abandon their activity; opening his school to students who, through inferior school education, would have been denied access to formal art training."

Ainslie started teaching in 1964 – privately, so he could enrol whom he pleased. Four years later he took on teachers and there was a "school". By 1971 it had a



noteworthy black presence and its first black teacher. That the school grew and flourished, sometimes in the teeth of hostility and suspicion, is a measure of the strength of both Ainslie and his Dutch wife Fieka, a brilliant organiser and inspiring presence who worked constantly at his side.

Few South Africans knew of the foundation but, from Robert Kennedy onwards, visitors of like mind beat a path to its door. Today, the school's lines of contact extend to New York and London, through scholarships and international workshops organised by Ainslie, Sir Anthony Caro and Robert Loder. In the 1970s Caro put together a permanent exhibition of modern work, to enable black artists to see what was going on, to show solidarity, and raise money.

## NETWORK

Ainslie's school extended beyond the Arts Foundation. To him school was a network of people, not necessarily in one place, growing and developing together as they moved to their goal; all contributing, all learning from each other. When it was still inconceivable, he worked towards a situation in which there could be arts centres throughout Southern Africa, linked nationally and internationally. Recently the time grew right; such centres are opening. Ainslie helped start FUBA (the Federated Union of Black Artists), FUNDA (which means learn in Xhosa) and the Alexandra Arts Centre.

Bill was capable of seemingly endless concern and

generosity. Because of his extraordinary capacity to communicate with people of any race, station, or political hue, he could, on behalf of student or friend, effectively cut through South Africa's bureaucracy or prejudice to find the place, even sometimes in bigots, where they were flexible, fair and humane. He was politically unclassifiable. Some labelled him a dangerous radical, yet he saw himself as conservative. He wholeheartedly supported the cause of black African liberation; at the same time, a U.S. state department official this week described him as 'a great man, who had helped America's image in Africa'. He was constantly stretched between finding time for his own radiant abstracts, work which was beginning to be recognised and sold internationally, and his vision of art as the means of growth and communication, ultimately of reconciliation, between the people of South Africa.

He was from an old Scottish family. His father's great-grandfather, an 1820 settler, married the sister of Thomas Pringle, the anti-slavery and freedom for the press campaigner. He had intended to become a priest, until art claimed his imagination when he was a student. In 1956, while still at Natal University, he met a black artist Selby Mvusi, 'who alerted me to the needs of the country. Through him I saw the crucial necessity for the development of black art', Bill told me recently. 'The work I have done in my life was a consequence of the period I spent with him'.



Figures in a landscape  
Oil 91 x 122  
Durban Art Gallery

Bill Ainslie

## MAKING IMAGES FOR A REBELLIOUS CONTINENT

**(This tribute to Ainslie by Elza Miles first appeared in Die Vrye Weekblad 8/9/1989 and has been translated by Marcelle Manley).**

Bill Ainslie did not turn his back on Africa when, in the seventies, his painting found connections with American abstract expressionism. On the contrary, his involvement in South African life never diminished for one moment. With the same conviction that expanded the vista of his paintings, shifting its focus, he bypassed the restrictions of statutory apartheid. Bill and Fieke's house was open to the homeless and in Bill's studio, and later at the Johannesburg Art Foundation, all students received equal attention.

In 1965 Bill Ainslie received the Cambridge Shirt Award for his entry "African Mother" at the Art South Africa Today exhibition in Durban. Today, in retrospect, one can see how natural his transition to abstract expressionism actually was. To local opponents of nonfigurative forms in plastic art this move was heresy, and to this day Ainslie is blamed in these art circles for freeing his art and his emphasis in art teaching from the narrative vantage point based on representation.

Bill Ainslie could have continued painting in the vein of his award-winning "African Mother". Even so, 21 years later, he preferred to use different artistic terms to depict the anxious mother and her defenceless child. Instead of the fears of the dark woman, an earthy passion for life emerges. The generalised reference to a mother makes way for the specific "Mooketsi I and II" near Soekmekaar in Lebowa. Now, one realises, Ainslie finds in abstract expressionism not a descriptive representation but his own image for this rebellious continent. Thus those paintings of his that bear the names of places in this country are the counterparts in paint of his friend Mongane Seroté's poem "The Long Road". In Ainslie's case this road was also the way of the Sufi.

David Rossouw, a former student at the Art Foundation, remembers that during workshops Ainslie read to them from Sufi wisdom. In view of the controversy surrounding Ainslie's espousal of abstract expressionism, one looks for an answer to his critics in Idries Shah's "Thinkers of the East". There one reads about Rumi who was accused of straying from the True Way by encouraging and permitting acting, song, music and other unconventional activities. Some say that he ignored the charges, others claim that he defended himself thus: "Let us see whether in time to come it is our *work* that is remembered, or the names of our critics."

# THE BATTLE FOR TUYNHUYNS AND ALL THAT

Latterly the South African body politic has exuded a pungent Muscovite smell. What a supreme irony. Has not the Nationalist ruling elite forever trumpeted its fears about communism, and gone to extraordinary lengths supposedly to prevent the citizenry, the disenfranchised masses especially, from being captivated by its heady fragrance? Instead, it is precisely the rulers themselves who have unwittingly fallen prey to it. How so, you rightly enquire? The answer lies in the character of authoritarian government, endured by South Africa and the Soviet Union alike. Let me dwell for the moment on several key aspects.

Since 1917, Soviet leaders upon taking office have savoured a rather daunting prospect: either die in harness, or be deposed by comrades. Actually Khrushchev alone experienced an enforced retirement. The rest withered away at the Kremlin. (In fact, a few remained General Secretary until several weeks after their demise.) South Africa's National Party has monopolised government these past forty years. And the infighting within the higher echelons is as telling as the CPSU has witnessed. For the Prime Ministers, death or defeat settled their fate, the plot or **die plaas**. The battle for Tuynhuys can be vicious and unrelenting. Ask Mr P.W. Botha, the creator of the all-powerful Presidency.

Botha, we learnt, suddenly fell ill this January. His condition was evidently serious. Attempts to maintain a Kremlesque public facade disguised little. The ageing, raging bull became fully exposed. His deteriorating political performance was instantly compounded by failing health. The combination proved irresistible. Cabinet colleagues materialised into rivals and heirs apparent – and leapt for the jugular. The embittered President lunged in retaliation. A bloody conflict ensued. Botha relinquished his leadership of the National Party, hoping that his apparently snap decision would open the way ahead for his anointed successor, Barend du Plessis. The strategy proved more successful than many pundits would have predicted. Still, it didn't quite work, and the obvious strongman in the wings, F.W. de Klerk, emerged victorious. Wounded, the vindictive Botha clung onto his executive position. As a last desperate wild gesture he entertained Nelson Mandela to tea at Tuynhuys. How incredible. Mandela, the perpetual ogre, vilified for his convictions, was used as the tangible instrument of Botha's revenge against his erstwhile henchmen. The manoeuvre confused everyone, appeased no-one. At a stroke the National Party was rocked back onto its heels, forced to defend the indefensible.

Estranged, the President was forced into calling an election. To the wilderness he would go – reluctantly – his political ego battered and bruised, his pride, his vanity, ignominiously and irredeemably stripped away. Brooding,

he watched from afar as his conqueror skipped hither and thither to capitals abroad, giving advance notice of the dawning era. Again Botha could not resist the impulse to strike out. Three weeks before polling day, he let word slip that he, the President, would decide whether to grant de Klerk permission or not to consort with Kenneth Kaunda in Lusaka. With that final, despairing idiosyncratic swipe at the Party that made him and broke him, Botha lurched off the political state, leaving an awkward legacy in his wake. Khrushchev would have commiserated.

Good fortune, Machiavelli reminded his Prince, is an indispensable commodity in political life. Mikhail Gorbachev has reaped its benefits. No incumbent at the helm of the Communist Party has consolidated his hold so swiftly, so surely. Rumours to the contrary are ill-founded, in my view. Within a year of assuming control in March, 1985, Gorbachev had imposed his stamp, because the conditions were right. The gerontocracy disappeared naturally with increasing rapidity, thus creating timely vacancies in the Politburo and the Central Committee. The next five yearly Party Congress was just around the corner, beginning in February, 1986, giving Gorbachev an immediate opportunity to impose his authority on CPSU ideology and policy. The outcome has reverberated worldwide. The overall policy is **perestroika**, 'restructuring'; the style of implementation is **glasnost**, or 'openness'. Here are two Russian terms already transformed miraculously into common transnational/coinage.

What price 'Pretoriastroika'? The parallels between de Klerk and Gorbachev are meaningful. Recall that the wily old bird, Andrei Gromyko, in officially proposing Gorbachev for the General Secretaryship, commended him with a truly Machiavellian sentiment, saying that he had a nice smile, but had 'teeth of steel'. I suspect that Mr de Klerk's dentures are equally pleasing – and equally formidable. **Fortuna** has gestured in his direction too. The enfranchised minority could pass their verdict immediately in the not so general election.

6th September was an unprecedented occasion in South African political history. Representatives were to be returned simultaneously to the three racially-based chambers of Parliament, with a separate voters roll for each. Because the course of political events is dictated by the House of Assembly, the preserve of 'Whites', media attention focused virtually exclusively on it. This was where the real scrap lay. The upshot? Voters deserted the National Party, either opting for the reactionary Conservative Party, or for the newly minted Democratic Party, the most liberal on offer. Still, the National Party retained an overall majority of seats in the House, though less commanding than previously, with 93 out of 165, and a by-election to follow. The Conservative Party consolidated

its hold on the runner-up spot, gaining 17 seats, amounting to 39 all in all. The Democratic Party, an amalgam of the Progressive Federal Party, the Independent Party, and the New Democratic Movement, improved on its collective showing, rising from 21 to 33 seats.

Expert opinion bandied about in the aftermath suggested that the Nationalists had lost face considerably. The NP loss **was** marked. It's undeniable. Nevertheless, a broader perspective lends a somewhat different insight, prompting me to conclude that the National Party performed very creditably in highly adverse circumstances. Allow me to elucidate. There was blood on the carpet. The battle for Tuynhuys threw into sharp relief enmities between political generations, the old and the new, and revived regional tensions between the North and the South. Secondly, the changing of the guard signalled a deeper irrevocable current that had now taken sway of the Party. The Nationalists are no longer embodied in a party of conviction, proclaiming indelible truths and committed to conveying the faithful to the promised land. Instead, the National Party idiom has become impeccably conservative. Afloat on the boundless ocean of politics the Party drifts with no end in mind or in sight, concentrating solely on keeping an even keel in the prevailing seas. Such uncertainty and calls for patience are hard messages to sell at the hustings.

Added to this, the National Party has forsaken the mantle of Afrikaner purity; its exclusivity has become the property of the Conservative Party, which is more reactionary in outlook than conservative. The perfidies of the wealthy and the corrupt provided ammunition for the Nationalists decades ago. Now it is the Conservatives who rail most effectively against these scourges. And who do they accuse? Why, the National Party of course. The fatcats in Pretoria have betrayed ordinary Afrikaner folk, so the forsaken have a new political umbrella under which to shelter. Giving substance to such misgivings is easy enough. Hitherto, **die volk** was told insistently, preserving so-called group rights entailed thwarting the black majority at home and maintaining a cordon sanitaire around South Africa's borders. But what is happening? The Nationalist government is entertaining Public Enemy Number One to rooibos tea and goodness knows what else, while at the same time helping the last domino of white rule to fall in the neighbouring states by **toenadering** with the United Nations in Windhoek. The National Party is soft on security! And whilst the corrupt line their pockets White salaried workers (and not they alone) have to contend with burgeoning prices and diminishing job opportunities. In short, the National Party had little to crow about at the polls.

Pushing the Nationalists even further on the defensive on the campaign trail was the reality of the opposition in full flight, outflanking it to the right as well as to the left. Not only could the Conservative Party feed off the weaknesses of the N.P., but it also had the whole revanchist turf to itself, dealing fairly cursorily with rival claimants, the Herstigte Nasionale Party, and the thuggish Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging. On the left, the Democratic Party had all the allure of novelty, a fresh image and fresh faces, presenting the 'rainbow coalition' of white South Africa in pragmatist mould.

Despite its own tangible vulnerabilities, despite the compelling opposition parties on both sides, the National Party triumphed, firmly ensconced, with exclusive power over the executive, and dominant in the tricameral parliament, the National government has the means to dictate its political future. Hapless, Conservatives and Democrats can only react to Nationalist initiatives. Extrapolating from the recent election results one cannot foresee the situation altering substantially next time round, unless, that is, the political climate is wholly different from how it appears at the moment. Translating votes into seats is always extremely taxing for weaker placed political parties in the simple plurality system practised here. Moreover, the delimitation of constituencies is another variable to be considered; ultimately, the decision to carry out redrawing the political map is in the government's hands, and thus, inevitably, is a further liability to be borne by the parties out of office. Putting all these imponderables aside, what can be discerned from the statistics revealed on 6th September?

The NP and the CP are in serious competition for approximately 21 seats, 13 of which are presently retained by the Conservatives. The Democratic Party scored exclusively in the metropolitan areas of the Cape, Transvaal and Natal. Possibly seven other NP seats are properly within reach, the bulk in the urban Eastern Cape. Were all this to come to pass, the worst case scenario for the National Party would be 78 seats; the CP, 48; and 40 for the Democrats. A hung parliament is, then, a slender prospect. And it's all very well arguing that the Nationalists and the Democrats together constitute a resounding majority for political reform, for the converse is as true. Recompose the National Party of old, today's NPs and the CP, and one soon reaches the sober understanding that there is a potential, and probably real, preponderance of political neanderthals among the White electorate.

Now that his party has maintained its parliamentary ascendancy and subsequently elevated him to the Presidency, Mr de Klerk has been able to sink his ISCOR teeth into the body politic. Like Gorbachev, de Klerk's image as leader marks a stark contrast with his grey, austere predecessors. Like the incoming Gorbachev, too, de Klerk is bald, fifty and self-assured. Representative of a younger generation of politicians, F.W. de Klerk is less shackled by the myths and folk memories that bound together Malan, Stijdom, Verwoerd, Vorster and Botha. The anglo-Boer War and the depression of the 1930s were before his time. But the rise of the National Party would surely have been central to family conversation, particularly as his father was a prominent Nationalist figure. Unlike Nationalists of yore, President de Klerk has embraced the world, not shrunk from it into a purely tribal preserve. By South African standards he appears cosmopolitan, certainly comfortable with the English language. All this is not to suggest, however, that he has deserted his Afrikaner roots. Not so. It's just that he is typical of the university educated, urban sophisticates that approach government in a visionary, quinessentially technocratic manner.

Able to make a modest quantum leap into the future the National Party under de Klerk's guidance is better prepared to compete for the middle-ground of White voters, although ever tenuously hamstrung by the right-

ward drift to the Conservative Party that this causes. The Democratic Party, in order always to surpass the threshold of credibility likewise has to garner support from the mass of the electorate located at the centre of the spectrum. Something akin to the United States phenomenon could emerge. Signs of this happening have occurred. Nationalists are in the Gobbledegook fold. You can't comprehend them in either tongue; Heunis-speak has proved pernicious and pervasive. The Democrats are the Gobblededumb Party. They're dangerously vacuous; the three co-leaders babble blandly and variously.

The Democratic Party is invidiously placed. Bereft of bargaining power it will have to behave like a pressure group in the parliamentary arena, forcing the government to account for its policies, and trying to goad it to pursue political reforms vigorously. The role is admittedly limited, yet cannot surely be forsaken, since Nationalist decision-makers are far too untrammelled as it is in wielding their authority. But the NP could readily nullify the effectiveness of the Democrats by slowly appropriating parts of its policy platform. The erstwhile United Party and its surviving rump, the New Republic Party, both suffered this fate, being consigned eventually to the political graveyard.

In holding out the prospect of a more inclusive polity the Democratic Party has striven to forge links with the extra-parliamentary opposition, notably the United Democratic Front, and then its reincarnation, the Mass Democratic Movement. Again the connection is important in that it undoubtedly helps to break down the political ghettos in which all South Africans hibernate. These good intentions have currently fallen on stony ground. Advocating non-racialism, the Democrats found themselves with aspiring candidates for the House of Delegates, the chamber destined for 'Asian' representation. However, the UDF and the MDM reject the tricameral configuration with undiluted contempt, especially the Houses of Delegates and Representatives, the latter being the sanctuary of supposed 'Coloureds'. So whichever way the Democratic Party turns some friends become foes.

My feeling is that the Democratic Party right now serves a valuable catalytic role, dancing between polar forces, and trying to keep valuable principles on the South African political agenda. But a healthy life looks remote. Either votes might be enticed elsewhere should there be the same kind of election in five years time, in which case the DP will slide downhill from an early, modest peak. Or if Afrikaner Nationalism and African Nationalism seek one another out, the small players might find themselves redundant. Were this so, the DP could foreseeably end up as no more than a marginal fringe grouping.

Reverting to the present, though, the newly sworn-in de Klerk has launched his Presidency with panache. His Cabinet appointments were shrewd. The powerful players, du Plessis at Finance, General Malan at Defence, and Pik Botha at Foreign Affairs, remain in place. Constitutional Development and Administration has gone to the intellectually inclined Dr Gerrit Viljoen, a highly significant office. The businessmen have joined the Cabinet ranks, as has the first woman, Dr Rina Venter, in charge of the Health and Population Development portfolio. A cautious note was struck in the redeployment of Adriaan Vlok, the

Minister of Law and Order, and Kobie Coetsee, heading Justice, the two who administer the persisting state of emergency. The overall blend of the Cabinet is a mixture of experience and promise.

De Klerk has operated speedily on both the foreign and the domestic fronts, treating them as one, in fact. Namibia edges towards independence. (With elections under United Nations scrutiny due to be staged this coming November.) South Africa's next batch of foreign debt has been renegotiated successfully, although the burden on the local citizenry will indeed be onerous.

The master stroke was unveiled on the night of 10th October, when six senior African National Congress political prisoners were released from incarceration. Walter Sisulu, Wilton Mkwayi, Raymond Mhlaba, Ahmed Kathrada and Andrew Mlangeni walked to freedom – relatively speaking. So did the Pan African Congress' Japhta Masemola. Thus the scene is set tentatively for Nelson Mandela's twenty-fifth year in prison to be his last.

This spectacular gesture allowed Mrs Thatcher to fight her fellow Commonwealth Prime Ministers doggedly in Kuala Lumpur, resisting their collective efforts to impose more stringent sanctions against South Africa. The political capital de Klerk has thereby accrued is telling. But it is at home where the onus is on his Presidency to meet the expectations generated by the manoeuvres carried out to date. Dr Viljoen's task is to hit on a mechanism for drawing the disenfranchised Blacks into a rapprochement with the ruling elite. A fourth parliamentary chamber? The idea is grotesque. The existing track-record hardly inspires confidence. The House of Representatives behaves erratically at best, sporadically combining business and pleasure on the beach. Seemingly, the House of Delegates is sprinkled with buffoons and rascals. What of the 'homelands'? What of local government in the racially confined Black townships? Any South African administration will ultimately be judged on how it grasps the nettle of participation by Blacks in the South African body politic.

The state in South Africa is far from weak; it is far from truly crisis-ridden. The regime is under constant strain, susceptible to pressures from within and without, but is far from collapse. Stories of its imminent demise can be attributed to the hyperbole of the moment. The initiative to promote structural change lies with the Nationalist government. Its control over the past twenty years or more has been increasingly corporatist in nature. Like Gorbachev's strategy, de Klerk can regulate pressure on the system by releasing pressure and thereafter accommodating its effects. The Brazilians have managed this **abertura democratica** with reasonable success during the last ten years. But what is unique about the South African case is the extreme exclusivity of its polity. It would be ludicrous to expect the Nationalist government to be altruistic; it will not abdicate its command. That option is precluded, although, of course, it is precisely this that the ANC and the MDM demand, and why they exert unrelenting pressure on the prevailing order. A corporatist grip permits the Nationalist government to clutch onto the reins of power, giving some slack when absolutely necessary, but never allowing the horses of opposition

sufficient leeway to wrest control out of the ruling Party's hands. As a matter of governance this entails firm executive control. The character may alter; econocrats may indeed replace securocrats in the inner sanctum. Whoever the functionaries may be, their master will perpetually be the President. Parliament's subordinate role is assured. Political power in the current circumstances rests with the President and the advisors and bodies with whom he chooses to deal.

Van Zyl Slabbert has usefully depicted South African politics under the state of emergency as being in unstable equilibrium. Nowadays, I would say it is in stable disequilibrium. There's always despair; but there's always laughter; and there are delicious moments of euphoria. Life is never, never dull. Untamed, South Africa is inherently ungovernable. That's really no bad thing. But many of us, it is true, would rather be ungoverned by someone else. □

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by DORIAN HAARHOFF

# THE METEORITE AT THE END OF THE LENS

**Future South African-Namibian Relationships as depicted in two drama scripts.**

DULLY: Well, I can't see this meteor  
 JITTERWIT: Have you looked through the telescope?  
 It's a blazing golden ball  
 With a fierce blue circle around it  
 And around that circle, a fierce red bigger circle,  
 And around that one, a fierce purple circle –  
 It's rushing to swallow us up, bigger every minute.  
 (Ted Hughes, **The Tiger's Bones**)

In Ted Hughes' **The Tiger's Bones** the Master and his entourage are convinced that the approaching meteorite seen through their telescope, is about to land on their heads. Dully unscrews the telescope to find a blob of growing penicillin on the lens. Perhaps this image offers an appropriate introduction to an article dealing with perceptions of an independent Namibia's future relationship with the former colonizing power, South Africa. There are many speculations as to the size of the South African meteorite in the Namibian imagination. To what extent will South Africa loom large on the Namibian lens? Will independence remove the fungus and prove its power and influence an illusion? An example of the removable fungus theory was recently reported in **The Namibian**. At an election rally Ms Maria Kapere, Deputy Head of Mobilization in the SWAPO Election Directorate, asserted that "the election in November is the first chance that Namibians have had in their history to rid themselves of South Africa forever" (5 Aug. 1989:5).

What follows is my personal version of a possible future scenario as depicted in two drama texts scripted by me and performed by University of Namibia students. Perceptions are of course by definition subjective and speculative. **Orange** was performed at the Grahamstown fringe and in Windhoek and Swakopmund in 1988; and

**Skeleton** in Pretoria, Grahamstown and Cape Town during 1989. The earlier play was directed by Aldo Behrens, Head of the Department of Drama at the University of Namibia and the latter one by Gerrit Schoonhoven, (**Piekniek by Dingaen**, et al) lecturing in a temporary capacity in the same Department. I am indebted to both these dramatic men for their structural insights.

In each case I produced a script which was discussed and workshopped with frequent consultations with director and cast. If one thinks of a continuum with a fixed, unalterable script at one end and a floating non-formed idea at the other, then the scripts I brought to the first rehearsal were placed thus:

FIXED	Orange	FLOATING
SCRIPT	Skeleton	IDEA

After shuffling sequences, crisping dialogue, attending to rhythms, I rescripted the production product where necessary.

### Issues

**Orange** and **Skeleton** both deal with a number of related issues, one of which is the South African-Namibian connection that I wish to explore. Both plays set in the future 1990's, deal with the colonial past and its present play-out. In the **Orange** scenario, Nango, a returned exile with a D.Cit (Dr. of Citrus), comes home to invent a machine, the **William of Orange**, which affects the current of the Lüderitz coast and produces a high rainfall area. What once was desert is now the fertile SWARANGE plantation, producing oranges juicier than Outspan. The oranges come in three sizes. The largest, the Loftus

Orange, is injected with oranje-wit-en-blou-blitz and exported to the rugby crowds down south. The medium is bound for Europe while the smallest, the Ovambo Orange, is kept for home consumption.

NOPU (Namibian Orange Pickers Union) lead by Witbooi (descendant of the famous fighting Hendrik Witbooi who led his white-head-band warriors against colonial forces) want the oranges for Namibia. They challenge management in the person of Mrs Ise Blom, the "citraholic capitalist" and "kind of Namibian Thatcher" who insists on paying off the national debt to RSA. Hedda, a white South African-born student from the University holiday-jobbing at Swarange, and Jonas, an old worker from Ovamboland, set out to help Ise Blom sort out her priorities. They also confront Nango who is compromised since he is part of management yet has roots in the worker movement.

Blom is further compromised by the arrival of the villain, van der Scrum from the RSA. He appears to have come to buy fertile land but is essentially a destabilizer. He promotes continued economic dependence of Namibia on South Africa.

Blom: You really are the old frontier type nê?

VDS: Ya. The frontier flows in the blood.

Chorus: Blood River in the blood stream.

Van der Scrum's bottom line ("You know orange is nogal my favourite colour. . . It makes me think of the Orange River, the Orange Express, the Oranje Vrystaat, the tail of the Boeing, the orange band in our flag") is to destroy the machine if necessary.

The final scene takes place around William of Orange and features a trial (NOPU vs van der Scrum) in which the South African is found guilty of collusion with white black men inside Namibia and expelled across the Orange. However his final "We'll trek back" hangs in the frontier air. The Namibians agree to try to solve their differences and in a final act, the machine is rechristened !Namseb (Hendrik Witbooi's Nama name).

### Skeleton

**Skeleton** is set in an Independent 1998 Namibia. As the country struggles with its W.D.I. (Watered Down Independence) skeletons abound from a violent pre-colonial and colonial past and the water levels drop. The Skeleton Coast has to be swept off the city streets. The new currency, the Kalkrand (a small Namibian village) is struggling against the Mark. The Usakos Kos Co, (Usakos is another village) a small co-op growing cucumbers and cabbages in the desert, is confronted by the small but powerful RSR (The Republic of Skeleton Republic) under its flag – "a white rhino horn crossed with a white powder horn on a white background". The RSR, "another Walvis Bay", led by the notorious van der Mentele, a biltongboer who hunts rhino horn, is tapping the water supply in the underground streams to use for nefarious purposes such as the green rugby field (Test matches against the WBTF – Walvis Bay Territorial Force).

The storyline concerns the dream journey of Unis from UNO who has come to Namibia to check on her skeleton staff. She encounters Nampa, the Namibian who floats between Europe and the Usakos Kos Co, and his daughter Dorsa, who works at Nambrew. Their beer

making at October Fest time is also affected by the sinking water table. They all meet at the Ipumbu-Strijdom Airport. (The possible future and the past name of the Airport. Ipumbu, the rebel Ovambo chief, fell foul of the South Africans in the early decades of the century). They agree to meet at the Independence Cafe the following day.

Unis, taking the bus down Jan Jonker Road into Windhoek, falls down excavations ("altyd a gat in die straat") into pre-colonial Eikhams (Windhoek), meaning the place of steaming water. There she encounters both neglect of the water supply in the great cattle raid days and the bones of Herero slaves. Back in the present, she meets up with Klaus ferreting around the excavation site. Enticing her with his private supply of well water (Unis is for ever thirsty, her bones drying up in such a land) they tour Klaus' Antique Shop brimming with colonial memorabilia such as the jawbone of von Trotha's horse (Von Trotha was the German commander involved in the near genocide of the Herero during the 1904-6 war).

At the Independence Cafe in Kaiser-Mandume Street (another hybrid of Ovambo protest and German past) Unis meets a friend of Nampa, Sonderwater from Water Affairs. She accompanies him down Dragon's Breath, the under-water system, to ascertain why the levels are dropping. In the Namibian underground they encounter a colonial ghost, a colonial addict, Meths (**M**issionary, **E**xplorer, **T**rader, **H**unter, **S**oldier) who inhabits a house of elephant bones and who will not let them pass until they guess his name. Unis and Sonderwater, spurted out atop a "moerse windpomp", encounter van der Mentele, are expelled from the RSR and end up at the Usakos Co-Op.

In the final scene the community, attempting to grapple with the water problem and the RSR's monopoly (endings are the difficult bit) realize their potential as water and dance the dance of Ezekiel in which bone is united with bone and flesh with flesh. Hopefully as Ernst Block asserts, "The true genesis is not at the beginning but at the end".

### Images

Perhaps this is where this article should end. Satire and symbols are self-evident. Briefly however I wish to review the reviews and reflect on some of these images. Interestingly none of the theatre critics of the two pieces focused on the Namibia/SA connection. Critics of **Orange** discussed the white African theme (Hedda) and structural events such as the chorus. A South African University Drama academic in a private letter also raised the issue of the chorus as a technique sustaining "tensions between individuals and a collective spirit" and the white African theme while alluding to the issue of "colonial stealth". Fanie Olivier (**Cue** 6 July 1988) felt the strength of the play was "not to be found in either the story or the ideology but in the structure of the presentation". **Skeleton** critics also responded to stylistic-structural elements. The **Star** critic, Andrea Vinassa (12 April 1989) commented positively. The "combination of satire, cabaret, popsci-fi film device, . . . effects a sort of political 'Back to the future'". In discussions with some students, liberation slogan euphoria did not countenance the possibility of such a RSA influenced scenario.

**Orange** was performed in the months before 435 became

a political reality. In this scenario at least, the destabilizer and cohort are identified and expelled, if only temporarily. Yet if the RSA, as frontline states assert, is capable of destabilization of independent states that have never been colonies, what of Namibia where conscripted manpower and army remnants exist in a former settler colony? Ironically SWAPO has itself contributed to the SA spy paranoia in asserting that dissidents held in camps were part of a sophisticated and tried front line infiltration.

**Skeleton** was written and first performed in April to the ironic accompaniment of SADF/Plan engagement along the border. In this play the RSA presence is extended into a state within a state – a white homeland in a compromised land. The idea is not as far fetched as it seems. Prominent Rehoboth politicians dream of an independent Rehoboth Republic with a corridor to Walvis Bay (some 300 kilometres away). Walvis Bay itself is the entrenched enclave landlocking Namibia as effectively as if it were an inland state. Richard Moorsom argues:

“Walvis Bay will continue to play an important part in South Africa’s strategy towards Namibia and neighbouring states to the east and north. Economically, Walvis Bay can be used as a powerful lever to coerce a Namibian government to maintain ‘friendly relations’ with South Africa, or in other words to remain subservient to the regime’s economic and military aims in the southern African subcontinent. It can also be used to deny to the black nations of central Africa an alternative to their present trade dependence on South African ports. Militarily, the massive build-up of South African armed might within the enclave represents a serious threat not only to the self-determination process in Namibia but also to the victims of South Africa’s repeated acts of military aggression beyond Namibia’s borders, particularly in southern Angola.”

(**Walvis Bay, Namibia’s Port**, 1984:70)

The brand of independence is the borderland as opposed

to the homeland model as Namibia joins those frontline states where customs are vulnerable to squeezes and where vocal protest is underscored by silent import. In such a situation words and deeds separate and as William Faulkner’s *Addie* of **As I Lay Dying** suggests, soon they are “too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other” (1983:138).

The solution to Namibian independence does not lie in Namibia but in the solution to the greater southern African problem. In 1915, General Smuts was involved in the conquest of German South West Africa. In a letter to J.X. Merriman, Smuts spoke of a greater South African political entity from the Kunene to the Zambezi, including the High Commission territories and southern Mozambique which was to be exchanged with Mozambiquan acquisition of territory in east Africa. The greater plan never materialized and instead of South Africans securing Bechuanaland, Swaziland, Southern Rhodesia, Basutoland, southern Mozambique and South West Africa, they secured only tentatively the latter state. South Africa’s wooden spoonist position on the Empire Log – Played 6, Lost 5, Won 1 – perhaps partly explains its emotional involvement in its only fifth province colony. While Smuts’ advocacy of a greater south Africa, with what he called natural borders, was a latter-day colonial anachronism, ironically there is a kind of sense in regarding Southern Africa as a unit. Nor can Kwacha come to one part while in another it is still night. I am reminded of Ezekiel Mphahlele’s **Chirundu** where the prison warden supervising detainees (possible South African spies), continually lauds the new dawn. I do not think that Namibia can be free until South Africa is.

The red, purple and blue circles of the **Tiger’s Bones** telescope might be removable fungus on the lens. But until the paradigm shift within South Africa itself, the orange, white and blue bands seen in the independent Namibian lens exist as an approaching meteorite.□

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**Editor’s Note:** The next issue of REALITY will be a double issue dealing with matters relating to land and urbanisation in South Africa. It will combine the January and March issues for 1990 and we hope to get it to subscribers during February.

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# POPULARISING THE PAST

A review of:

Robert Edgar; **Because they chose the plan of God  
The Story of the Bulhoek Massacre**

Ravan, Johannesburg, 1988

and

Leslie Witz; **Write your own history**

SACHED Trust/Ravan, Johannesburg, 1988

It is a truism that historians, whoever they are, are influenced by their times. They mirror prevailing views of their age in their work, or the kinds of issues they research, and the questions they ask arise out of the problems that permeate their worlds. In some degree, at least, "presentism" is an inherent part of the process of historical reconstruction.

Certainly "people's history" in South Africa was born in the highly charged atmosphere of the 1970s – a decade characterized by unprecedented widespread labour and political unrest, such as the Durban strikes of 1973, and the Soweto uprising of 1976. "Ordinary people", about whom South African historiography had hitherto largely been silent, were flexing their muscles and staking their claim to consideration, not only in the present, but also about their past.

These stirrings, in conjunction with trends in world historiography, most notably the theoretical input of neo-Marxism, which had been gaining ground in Western Europe and North America from the late 1960s, the pioneering work on "history from below" by the British historian, Eric Hobsbawm, and the total history approach of the French *Annales* historians, led to a dramatic and enriching increase in research and publication on South African History.

In order to promote the "history from below" approach, the History Workshop was established at the University of the Witwatersrand, and in 1978 initiated the first of a series of triennial conferences which sought to capture the experience of those ordinary people who had hitherto 'slipped through the net of history'. (1) Initially such work was in the main directed to a specialist academic readership, but there also followed attempts to popularise that history outside the universities. As part of this process, the History Workshop Topic Series was devised in conjunction with Ravan Press. The aim of the series is to make recent historical research accessible to a wide audience through short, lively and lavishly illustrated texts.

## BULHOEK

The story of the Bulhoek massacre is an appropriate choice to kick off the series. As one of the first post-Union cases of government using police and army troops to crush recalcitrant Africans, placing it on a par with subsequent tragedies like Sharpeville (1960) and Langa

(1985), the Bulhoek massacre has become, in the words of Z.K. Matthews, part of 'the political history of the people'. It is therefore essential to know how and why it happened. Edgar succeeds admirably in this task.

The booklet has been skilfully organised and vividly written so as simultaneously to tell a story, while providing a wider context in order to deepen understanding of the tragic happenings of 24 May 1921. On that day, which happened also to be Empire Day and Smuts's birthday, a force of 800 white policemen and army troops confronted an African prophet, Enoch Mgijima, and his religious followers, the Israelites, who had refused to leave their holy village, Ntabelanga, where they were awaiting the end of the world. The sticks and spears of the Israelites were no match for canons and machine guns, and the encounter left at least 183 dead and 90 wounded.

In order to understand how and why a disagreement between the government and a church group could have ended in such a tragedy, Edgar begins with a biographical account of Enoch Mgijima, the leading figure in the story. Through this technique he is able clearly to recreate the economic, social and political context without which the subsequent events cannot be fully understood. Enoch Mgijima's father, Jonas, was an Mfengu, who were a group of refugees thrown up during the turbulent Shakan wars of the early 19th century. As a reward for assisting British forces in the frontier wars of the Eastern Cape, the Mfengu were given land to occupy in the Ciskei so that they could simultaneously serve as a protective buffer and a source of labour for white farmers. In this way the Mgijima family came to be settled at Kamastone near Queenstown in 1856. They called their home Ntabelanga, "the mountain of the rising sun".

## STRUGGLE

While some Mfengu did well, others struggled, and with the passage of years, those who had done well began to struggle too in the face of drought, disease and government legislation, which restricted African access to land in order to obtain labour. Born in 1868, Enoch Mgijima grew up in this changing environment. In 1907, Mgijima had a vision that the end of the world was coming, and only those who worshipped God in the traditional manner would survive the holocaust. He broke away from the Wesleyan Methodist Church, of which he had been an active member, and joined the black American Church of God and Saints of Christ. He regarded himself as the

Church's prophet in Africa. Among the new religious practices he adopted was the annual observance of the Passover, when all church members were expected to come to a specific place to worship for a week. His refusal to give up his vision of the coming of the end of the world resulted in his expulsion from the American church. Mgijima's faction became known as the Israelites, because of his love of Old Testament stories.

In 1919, Mgijima called Israelites from all over South Africa to come to Ntabelanga to await the coming of the Lord. By 1921 their numbers had swelled to 3000. In a world that was being turned upside down by soaring inflation, the 'flu epidemic of 1918, drought in 1919, and increasing political impotence, Mgijima's prophecies offered attractive hope that outcasts would become chosen ones.

Passover gatherings had hitherto been temporary affairs, now Ntabelanga was acquiring the look of a permanent, well-developed settlement. Spurred on by complaints from surrounding white and African farmers, government authorities determined to deal with what they deemed to be a squatter problem. This determination was intensified by the humiliating retreat of a police force sent to disperse the Israelites in December 1920, after which Israelite resistance had extended to the point of refusing to pay taxes. The final outcome was the massacre at Bulhoek on 24 May 1921.

Edgar concludes his account with the meaning of Bulhoek down the years. While the range of viewpoints he considers varies, they all see the Israelite movement as more than a religious movement. It constituted a challenge to white political and economic control. In order to illustrate his point that millenarian movements are not uncommon in societies under extreme stress, he discusses the role of 19th century Xhosa prophets in a box separated from the text. A second box discusses the role of independent African churches which seek to transform the Christian religion from an instrument of conquest to one of resistance. This technique assists in creating a wider context for understanding Bulhoek without cluttering the main narrative. A well-chosen list of books for further reading concludes the booklet.

#### PEOPLE'S HISTORY

After 1985, "people's history" acquired a dimension beyond merely making sophisticated research accessible to a wider public. Here the initiative came primarily from black South Africans. Tired of the myths and distortions about the past which black children were expected to imbibe passively as facts in history classes, the National Education Crisis Committee set up a History Commission with the specific objective of providing material to rectify distortions, and to teach history in such a way as to promote a questioning and critical participation of pupils in the learning process. In 1987, a history pack entitled **What is History? A New Approach to History for Students, Workers and Communities** was produced to this end.

Leslie Witz's book, **Write your own history**, which was developed under the auspices of the History Workshop and the SACHED Trust, seeks to take this approach a step further by encouraging ordinary people to research and write history themselves. His exposition of the skills

necessary for such an undertaking is based on his own training as an historian, and on the problems and experience of three groups: workers from Kagiso on the West Rand who set out to write a history of the Young Christian Workers organisation; students at the Witwatersrand Council of Churches Project, who had been in matric during the Soweto uprisings and had chosen to write a history of Soweto '76 from a family perspective; and young residents of Driefontein in the south-eastern Transvaal, whose community had suffered the threat of removal and resettlement, as a "black spot" in a designated white area. Witz has also drawn on the experiences of other groups such as the Grahamstown and Swaziland Oral History Projects.

The practical value of writing history, in overcoming prevailing distortions and uncovering 'the hidden past', is stressed. History is empowerment – understanding the past helps to explain the present, and equips people to work towards change in the future. As Antonio Mussapi, involved in People's History Work in Nampula, Mozambique put it:

Time past  
Which lights up today  
And tomorrow  
Making it clear.

But amidst his very serious aim, Witz never loses sight of the sheer fun of writing history, and effectively conveys this.

#### DISCUSSION AND EXERCISES

The book begins with a discussion on how to choose a topic and the first questions to ask, both specific and contextual. Then follows a discussion of where to look for the answers (the section on where to get help at the end of the book is useful) and an exposition of the different kinds of sources which the writer of history needs. The discussion of each source is accompanied by a practical exercise on how to use it, with suggested answers at the end of the book. Of particular value is the excellent section on how to make notes from books (a skill which seems to evade even university students!), and the exposition of the techniques of collecting and evaluating oral history which is of fundamental importance to the history of people, whose lives and activities seldom find their way into written documents.

I talk,  
Talk with people,  
The people who speak to me  
Of time past  
Which falls and does not germinate  
If I don't talk.

Also valuable is the practical advice on how to construct a chronological table, where events specific to the subject being researched are placed in the wider context of national events. There is also practical advice on how to use a library, and the equipment needed for research.

Perhaps the most important part of the book is the discussion of bias. Recognising that all history is written from a point of view, and this involves not merely the activity of reconstructing history, but also the making of the sources themselves, the book provides activities for

detecting it and dealing with it. For instance, the evidence of different witnesses given at the trial of Constable Nienaber for fatally shooting the Driefontein community leader, Saul Mkhize, is juxtaposed, and the reader is asked to evaluate this conflicting evidence through a series of questions. The judgement of Justice P.O. de Villiers on 24 April 1984 is provided, and the reader is then asked to compare his/her conclusions with those of the Judge, and to consider to what extent point of view had influenced the respective evaluations of the evidence, and one might add, the evidence of the witnesses themselves.

### CRITICAL EVALUATION

If history is to throw light on the present then it must be critically reconstructed and considered, even though point of view is inescapable. Without this critical evaluation, the past can become a misleading source of darkness instead of light in the present. Witz quotes the words of Rosalee, a member of the Soweto '76 group:

We must include both the good and bad things if we want people to respect our work. They might not agree with our political aims but at least they will see we are not distorting our information just to further our line . . . We have to learn from history in order to develop our organisation.

The book ends with a discussion on how to present the findings of the research undertaking. This presentation need not necessarily take the form of a book, but could also be presented as a talk, a play, an exhibition, a video or a film among other things. For those unable to complete the task of writing, there are these comforting words:

Don't be discouraged if you have not had enough time to write up your history. The information you have collected is very valuable . . . Store your information in a safe place so that you or someone else can use it in the future.

This advice is particularly important as far as the collection of oral history is concerned, which could provide a valuable adjunct to the individual attempts of professional historians, and the systematic attempts of institutions, such as the University of the Witwatersrand, to collect and preserve such evidence, without which "history from below" cannot be adequately written, or a feel for it developed.

So sound is the exposition of historical method in Witz's book, and so effectively have the practical activities been devised and drawn up, that it has potential uses beyond its intended readership. For instance, with some adaptations it can be used to encourage the development of history essay-writing skills in undergraduate students, as well as to devise primary-research activities among them. One thing that is missing from the book, although it is there implicitly, is a discussion of the role of theory and hypothesis in historical reconstruction. It is difficult to see, though, how this could be done overtly within the scope of this particular book. But there is a useful section at the end with suggested readings 'about different points

of view' for those who wish to add a more sophisticated dimension to their analyses.

### "PRESENTISM"

In "presentism" lies both the use and abuse of history. The latter has been far too prevalent in South African historiography, causing Rodney Davenport to comment in a recent article that 'we South Africans are among the least historically-minded people on earth', meaning by historically-minded 'being curious to know what the past was really like, and being prepared to make a bit of an effort to find this out'. (2) Instead the past has been plundered to serve present political purposes. Without historical-mindedness the primary function of history as a means of understanding the present through an honest and critical attempt to understand the past (and thus of possibly acting wisely in the future) cannot be achieved – and historical-mindedness most usually proceeds from curiosity about present issues.

Developments in South African historiography since the early 1970s, not least the emergence of people's history, have greatly enlarged and enriched the understanding of the South African past, and promise to continue doing so. As Davenport himself has said of the exponents of people's history,

They have managed to change the agenda of historical studies in important respects, enabling us to get a better grasp of the inwardness of our own past.

Yet he goes on to argue that people's history, with its need for simplicity and bold lines of argument, rather than subtle qualification, constitutes an 'inferior, essentially secondary role for the history profession'.(3) The evidence of the value and potential of Edgar's and Witz's work suggests the contrary. While people's history should not be the only kind of history to be produced about South Africa, it constitutes an important part of the overall strategy to capture the South African past in its totality insofar as this can be done, so that the present can be better understood in all its complexity. While there will always be different points of view, the critical study of history can lead to understanding why this should be so. And the critical method, which is the basic technique of the discipline of history, provides common ground for all historians, whatever their ideological persuasion or nationality, so that they can at least engage in meaningful discussion, if not reach full mutual agreement. History, in its best sense, has a key role to play in this era of fundamental transition in South Africa if new myths about the past are not to succeed the old. As Willie Lee Rose has put it in the different context of slavery historiography in the United States, 'what long ago happened need not determine what will occur tomorrow'. (4) □

#### Notes:

1. Saunders, C., 'Towards understanding South Africa's past' in **South Africa International**, Vol. 19, No. 2, October 1988, P.67.
2. Davenport, R., 'History in South Africa in the 1980s: Why bother about it?' in **South Africa International**, Vol. 19, No. 2, October 1988, p.96.
3. *Ibid*, p.103.
4. Rose, Willie Lee, 'The New Slave Studies: An Old Reaction or a New Maturity?', in W.W. Freehling, ed, **Slavery and Freedom Willie Lee Rose**, Oxford, 1982, p.176.

# THE CURRENT MACROECONOMIC CRISIS

Reflections on some of its causes

## Introduction

This paper seeks to critically analyse the specific policy response of the South African state to a debt-imposed macroeconomic constraint on the rate of growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, this type of appraisal is necessarily tentative because of a current lack of systematic empirical research. Hence, the reflective nature of this paper. The paper also seeks to broaden an understanding of economic issues in South African social studies. It seems to me – although I may be wrong – that non-economists perceive that there is a barrier in the way of engaging economists. While this is not the fault of non-economists – the well known political economist Ezra Mishan has written about the ‘methodological technomania’ of economists – there is an intellectual gap between economics and the other humanities. I hope this will gradually be overcome through more frequent and serious multi-disciplinary exchange. This paper is explicitly written with this hope in mind.

The first section of the paper briefly outlines the current macroeconomic policy context in South Africa. The second section critically analyses current fiscal, exchange rate and monetary policies at two levels. Firstly, at the level of each policy and secondly, at the level of macroeconomic policy harmonisation. The third section concludes the paper with a suggestion for future research.

## The current South African Macroeconomic Policy Context.

It is widely accepted in capitalist economies that macroeconomic policy makers are faced with the task of prescribing a package of policies to solve one or more of the recurrent symptoms of economic instability in the form of unemployment, inflation and balance of payments (BOP) disequilibria. In the present South African economy, all three of these crisis manifestations are apparent. Notwithstanding the problems with the definition of unemployment, reliable estimates put this rate at between 20-30% of the labour force; the reported rate of inflation for this year is expected to be 16-17%; the exchange rate is weak and foreign currency reserves are very low. These conditions are hardly unique to South Africa and, indeed, by way of comparison to Latin American countries, South Africa's macroeconomic indices are not unimpressive. While there is undoubted academic value in comparative research, the extent of the current macroeconomic malaise in South Africa is either indirectly or directly linked to state policies.

It is instructive to analyse the annual budget at the beginning of the fiscal year to identify macroeconomic policy priorities. Since the debt-moratorium of August

1985, the most crucial economic policy concern has been the BOP and linked to it the rate of inflation. The BOP is under pressure primarily because large foreign exchange reserves are needed to pay back the economy's substantial short term foreign debt. This has crucial implications for the growth capacity of the economy. A typical means of preventing cyclical disturbances in a capitalist economy is to stimulate economic growth either through aggregate demand-management or through supply-side, usually tax, incentives. In South Africa an excess over the level of domestic savings and taxes has been historically required to sustain an upswing or avoid a downswing in the economy. This means that investment expenditure in the economy is typically partly financed by foreign investment and borrowing. As long as this condition exists, there is a strong positive relationship between both expansionary fiscal policy and GDP growth and a positive net capital inflow on the BOP and GDP growth. However since 1986, several constraints have imposed themselves scotching a growth orientated macroeconomic policy.

## Current Fiscal, Exchange Rate and Monetary Policies in South Africa.

### 1. Fiscal Policy

Regarding raising state spending, any mildly expansionary fiscal policy is expected to increase the level of national income. Fiscal policy is defined by the size of the budget as a proportion of GDP. Since not all state expenditure is met out of taxation revenue, fiscal policy incorporates a deficit before borrowing. This is simply the borrowing requirement to cover the deficit between current expenditure and current revenue. However, for both consumption and investment aggregates in the national income accounts, there exists a strong positive relationship between GDP growth and local import demand. Thus, as the economy grows, the demand for imports rises. This causes a deterioration on the trade account of the BOP as foreign exchange reserves dwindle to pay for the imports. Yet policy makers are intent on engineering the economy to generate a recurrent surplus on the trade account to pay for the deficit on the capital account. This deficit is largely caused by the amount of the country's external debt and the appalling extent of foreign and local corporate capital flight from the economy. By way of illustration, since August 1985, the US dollar value of net foreign and local capital flight is estimated at 25 billion while the US dollar value of the debt stands at just over 20 billion. Thus, a BOP equilibrium requires a near static rate of growth of aggregate output and employment creation. Indeed, economists put this constraint at a mere 2-3% of the value of GDP. Thus, as

economic expansion puts pressure on the BOP by way of falling foreign currency reserves, the economy's ability to pay back its external debt is jeopardized.

Specifically, there exists an inverse relationship between rising state expenditure and the BOP. It is for this reason that fiscal policy for the 1989/90 fiscal year has been described as "neutral" or even "contractionary". While the latter probably overstates the point, there are pressures on the state fiscus **not** to increase expenditure in real terms. This is reflected in the slightly reduced value of the deficit before borrowing and the intention, over the next 5 years, to reduce the ratio to 3% of the value of GDP. However, there is an international trend for the size of state expenditure as a proportion of GDP to increase over time and South Africa is no exception to this trend. Thus, there remains much scepticism on the part of the private sector that the state will cut back on its rate of growth of expenditure.

### **TAXATION**

It is for this reason that organized business is advocating a reduction in the level of direct and indirect taxation. This is, broadly speaking, the supply-side private sector's alternative to expanding fiscal policy. However, with the current BOP constraint, an increase in private sector spending is likely to have a similar negative impact on the trade balance as an expansionary fiscal policy. While the state has used this argument not to change the tax structure, there are more immediate issues which cause it to hedge against a reduction in the level and rate of taxation. These emerge directly from the co-optative basis of the political system. This view is well established in the relevant literature but it suffices to say that the internal logic of reformed or neo-apartheid is that vast public funds are required to pay for existing (repressive) state structures as well as any social infrastructural upgrading programmes that aim to extend the costly incorporation of urban blacks. While the undemocratic nature of infrastructural provision is generally considered to be politically unacceptable the physical provision of it is not. Under a tight fiscal policy stance, such social wage redistribution provision is under threat of being rationalized. This is especially the case where an incumbent state is highly unlikely to compromise on direct security related expenditure. It is in this sense that there is a direct tension or even contradiction between the state's political reform agenda and macroeconomic policy. Thus, given this strategic stalemate, one needs to look more closely at the reasons for the state accepting the primacy of open economy considerations in its currently chartered macroeconomic strategy

### **LOCAL CONDITIONS**

While the existence of the foreign debt burden is not a uniquely South African phenomenon, the adverse conditions of debt repayment can be related to local conditions. At the time of the 1985 moratorium, the structure of the national debt in short term maturities was typical of many countries' external debt portfolios. This switch reflected a rising risk associated with Less Developed Country (LDC) borrowing and was typically accompanied by rising interest rates in lender economies. For South Africa, not only had the economic risk and cost of indebtedness increased generally but the political risk of

association with apartheid had a ratchet effect on the access of the South African state and, to a lesser extent, private sector to overseas borrowing facilities. When the crunch came in the form of a refusal by the country's foreign commercial bank creditors to rollover outstanding debt, a staggering 35% of the value of GDP was bunched in short term debt. When that debt soon matured, the economy, predictably, defaulted. Unlike Latin American countries, where there exists a debtor cartel to attempt to countervail the multinational creditor cartel led by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and having already defaulted, South Africa was not in a strong bargaining position.

Even if the economy did not have the current BOP constraint to GDP growth, a denied access to foreign credit, in terms of its historic cyclical significance, would be worse than no access at all. For precisely this reason the state has been politically pressured into a macro-economically onerous repayment schedule in order to preserve its survival. This point is equally understood by the anti-apartheid opposition both inside and outside South Africa and, as a strategic opportunity, explains their specific pressure for financial sanctions. While it remains to be seen how this pressure influences further debt-repayment negotiations, the politicization of the South African debt issue does reinforce the degree of risk associated with the country. It is in this environment of creditor imposed austerity that an exchange rate policy is being linked to the tight fiscal policy stance.

### **EXCHANGE RATE POLICY**

Under a (managed) floating exchange rate system, a trade deficit would lead to a depreciation of the rand. A low rand is argued to be necessary and indeed, the logic of the exchange rate policy is self-perpetuating – at least until the economy has met its negotiated foreign debt obligations. A depreciating rand encourages the sale of exports and this would, under less indebted circumstances, lead to an expansion of the level of economic activity and national income. But the economy is currently not able to absorb all of this foreign exchange since the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) must hoard a substantial part of it to meet creditor obligations in their currency units. This necessity has the effect of suppressing an import bill that would otherwise be financed out of earnings from exports. Since South Africa is a developing country, the economy, and particularly the manufacturing sector, requires access to imported capital or investment goods to produce consumer goods. This is another way in which economic growth is being constrained by the BOP constraint.

The low rate of economic growth has a reinforcing effect on the exchange rate. If the economy is not growing, then it is not an attractive investment prospect for foreign investors. This pressure on the exchange rate cannot be compounded by a rising import demand. As long as macroeconomic policy remains committed to servicing and repaying external debt obligations, the exchange rate is not likely to improve. However, if there is a recurrent net export surplus with which to meet foreign debt requirements, the exchange rate is expected to be relatively stable. This is important for at least two reasons; firstly, to anticipate a stable rate of cost inflation in the relatively import dependent sectors of the economy by

knowing an approximate value of the exchange rate and secondly, since the external debt is denominated in foreign exchange, if the rate worsens, the cost of the debt burden is made more onerous. Thus, the earlier conclusion of the inverse relationship between the level of national income and the BOP is qualified if the basis of GDP growth is export-generated. This is a very significant qualification because it adds macroeconomic weight to the insistence of organized business and the state that South Africa must follow the development path of the high export-performing East Asian Newly Industrialised Countries (NIC's). It is not insignificant that such a strategy forms the backbone of a typical IMF "structural adjustment programme" (SAP) for indebted LDC's. Indeed, the IMF is not only one of South Africa's major creditors but, through access to the Special Drawing Rights (SDR) facility, it is the country's current source of bridging finance. This source of finance appears necessary for the economy to meet current short term debt obligations. In fact, the macroeconomic constraints defined by both South Africa and its creditors could be seen as facilitating the export drive route as a strategy to overcome **both** the macroeconomic and structural crisis in the economy.

### **POLITICALLY ABSURD**

While a full appreciation of this structural policy falls outside the ambit of this paper, it is worth mentioning that this strategy seems politically absurd in the context of a sanctions hostile international economic environment. To date, there is insufficient evidence on the "success" of the trade sanctions campaign. Indeed, to the extent that it has not realised the objective of isolating South Africa economically, this may indicate that there is a high foreign demand for South African exports at their relatively low prices. Again, while the exchange rate contributes to this, the nature of South Africa's foreign trade is highly unequal in value added terms. As the terms of trade have moved against LDC's, particularly in the 1980's, this has contributed to depressed exchange rates and a situation where an increased volume of exports can purchase the same value of imports. In fact, manufactured goods, as a proportion of South Africa's exports, have increased substantially. However, as semi-processed raw materials, the increase in value-added and thus export price is hardly significant, especially against a background of a depreciated exchange rate.

As a result, the export performance of the economy remains contingent on the dollar price of gold. Any fall in this pivotal price has immediate exchange rate and foreign currency reserve implications for the economy. Thus, a sustained fall in the world price of gold, principally because of an absence of inflationary expectations in the Developed Countries (DC) and an excess world supply of gold, is reflected in a rising dollar and falling rand exchange rate. That is, a fall in the price of gold leads to an increase in the economy's foreign debt burden through its impact on foreign reserves. Again, by way of illustration, it is estimated that the fall in the dollar price of gold to 370 US dollars per fine ounce has reduced foreign exchange earnings by 1.2 billion US dollars. While the SARB has permitted gold-debt swaps, this runs the risk of creating an excess supply in the world gold market should the debt-settlement supply be resold. This principle may be extended to include debt-equity swaps. This essentially involves giving local private sector or public

sector assets to foreign commercial bank creditors in exchange for external debt redemption. Again, while this is yet to happen, this is a structural policy quite consistent with the rest of a SAP package. In spite of these problems, a stable if weak exchange rate and a tight fiscal policy are also being accommodated by a strict monetary policy.

### **MONETARY POLICY**

A restrictive monetary policy seeks to reduce the rate of growth of the money supply below the current inflation rate. For monetarists, this is a possible policy intervention because, subject to certain behavioural assumptions about market participants' responses, the money supply is considered to be controlled by the SARB. Particularly if a strong transmission mechanism is evident, as monetarists would argue, a fall in the rate of real growth of the money supply would lead to an increase in real interest rates. The typical effect of a restrictive transmission mechanism is as follows. A fall in the rate of real money growth would create an excess demand for money at the established market interest rates. This would allow interest rates to rise to clear the money market. A rise in interest rates would induce a shift into financial assets as institutional investors take advantage of the relatively higher rates of return on stocks and bonds. On the other hand, the cost of borrowing investment capital and consumer credit rises; investment in productive capacity falls and aggregate output and employment also contract. Once again, the intended effect is to dampen economic growth.

It is particularly in this sense that monetarists associate a strict monetary policy with controlling the rate of inflation. Typically, if the rate of growth of the real money supply is growing less slowly than the rate of growth of real expenditure, there will not be enough money in circulation to purchase the available aggregate output. The resulting excess demand for money will increase the opportunity cost of spending as market interest rates rise. As far as the BOP is concerned, it is necessary to control inflation because of its undermining effect on the exchange rate. Simply, if the local inflation rate is higher than those in other countries, the price competitiveness of South African exports can only be compensated for by a further depreciation of the exchange rate. The macroeconomic imperative to prevent this, in the current policy context, is by now self-evident.

Furthermore, a rise in interest rates can also have the effect of priming the exchange rate through attracting financial inflows on the capital account of the BOP. This in itself would reduce the rand value of the present capital account deficit but the primed exchange rate would also have the effect of cheapening the foreign exchange value of the external debt as explained earlier. This was the major reason for the re-introduction of the dual exchange rate system where the financial rand is explicitly designed to attract large foreign capital inflows for investment purposes by being cheaper than the commercial rand.

### **PROBLEMS**

There are, however, a number of problems that can emerge from rising interest rates. The low level of business confidence in the economy only allows for short term prospects. This accounts for the excessive speculation in the financial market and a propensity for volatility

on the stock exchange. In this sense, rising interest rates tend to support speculative rather than productive activity. In the capital market, short term loans maturing earlier typically carry higher interest rates, while some firms, especially those without access to own capital funds, and those who have been negatively affected by the cost implications of a low exchange rate, including the mining houses, have sought bridging finance to meet committed capital outlay costs. Far more noticeably has been the soaring demand for credit as consumers hedge against inflation; as households compensate for higher taxation to maintain a particular standard of living; because of expected high lifetime income earnings or because many home buyers have committed themselves to service and repay mortgage bonds. This also means that the personal savings rate of the economy is declining at a time when high interest rates should be facilitating a rise in this rate. This fact coupled with almost no access to foreign borrowing and, indeed, where the economy is likely to remain a net exporter of capital for some time, has negative implications for long term productive investment and employment creation prospects. Clearly, what this means is that monetary policy does not seem to be able to control inflation.

Indeed, a fusion of money and capital markets seems to be emerging. Specifically, any excess supply of loanable funds in the financial sector will be made available if the demand exists. Indeed, given the high interest rates, it is in the commercial interests of the large banks to lend at these rates irrespective of the intentions of current monetary policy. Since this demand does exist, especially from consumers, the monetary targeting of the SARB is consistently out of line with the actual rate of real growth of the money supply. Thus, some proportion of the money supply can be argued to be non-responsive to a monetary transmission mechanism.

### **DEMANDS**

This continually higher than expected rate of real monetary growth has also been laid at the door of the SARB itself. While the state intends to maintain its deficit before borrowing at an annually declining proportion of GDP, the demands on the state fiscus identified earlier create a tension that could forfeit austerity. To the extent that the size of the deficit before borrowing has become an important index of expected future inflation, any increase in its relative size leads to resistance from an inflation-sensitive private sector. In particular, a market sensitivity to the size of the deficit before borrowing makes the marketing of public debt in the economy more difficult. This expectation is given weight by the seeming incapacity of the state to redeem any of its recent past loans on time. Coupled with the current cost of foreign debt servicing, this accounts for the large slice of the fiscal budget that must now be allocated to interest payments. The opportunity cost of this lost revenue is, again, self evident. If the state wants and is able to deficit finance by borrowing on the local capital markets, the high interest rates, which it has partly engineered, would simply add to the current cost of the debt burden. In the context of fiscal restraint, this strategy would be contradictory. The crucial point now is that in the absence of access to foreign borrowing, a declining domestic personal savings rate and a market sensitivity to the size of the deficit before borrowing means that the state may

resort to the printing press if it cannot maintain its fiscal discipline. The immediate effect of this is inflation. There are suggestions that the state benefits from inflation via the effects of fiscal drag or bracket creep. While there is a popular resonance in this argument, it is structurally weak in terms of the imperative of a capitalist state to attempt to maintain the relative stability of the economy. This is especially the case where the degree of openness of the economy makes the country highly sensitive to changes in the global economy. Hence the political acquiescence of so many LDC economies to managed intervention by the IMF and other external institutions in the 1980's.

While the state is hedging against a reduction in the rate and level of taxation in the economy, it is neither politically or structurally expedient for it to increase the level of taxation. It has already been identified that a possible cause for the high demand for credit is to hedge against the decline in real disposable income. Indeed, the average per capita real disposable income is now at the same level as in 1970. Indeed, to the extent that higher tax revenues are sought, this can only really occur through indirect means. Not surprisingly, the proportion of indirect taxes, and thus the proportion of taxes falling on poorer income groups, has increased substantially over the past decade. The perceived high corporate tax rates have obviously also contributed to what some economists see as a capital strike. The state has effectively abrogated responsibility for job creation and, from the point of view of organized business, it must appear that macroeconomic policy is facilitating the structural conditions for the private sector to be able to do this. This is the broader context of the deregulation and privatisation initiative as the state envisages a retreat from the economy. That is, as this retreat occurs, the taxation burden can be relieved. Again, like the export initiative, this is a logical structural spin-off of a monetarist policy project. Thus, the state realises that if this strategy is going to succeed, any further increases in taxation would be a macroeconomic contradiction of structural policy.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper has reflected on the macroeconomic policy response of the state to an externally imposed GDP growth constraint. The sensitivity of the BOP and the requisite need to control inflation has induced the state to opt for a "neutral" fiscal policy being tied to a strict monetary policy and stable exchange rate. In addition, some reference has been made to the links between this strategy and structural policy. However, as this paper has contended, the degree of policy harmonisation is somewhat tenuous. This is because of a lack of control of the SARB over monetary growth; the fiscal requirements of current political policy and the potential volatility of the exchange rate. That this policy has been imposed by external agents and carried through by an undemocratic state is a political problem in itself. Even the country's top economic managers have publicly stated that a political solution is a precondition to restore both domestic and international confidence in the economy. By implication, this would mean a relaxation of debt repayment conditions by foreign creditors. The long term effects of the current constraint on economic growth are not encouraging. For this economy to sustain a broad based prosperity, it has been estimated that an average GDP growth rate of 7.5% over the next decade is needed. By contrast, the

GDP growth rate for 1989 so far has been less than 1%. While the current policy package is under stress, this is also a reflection of the extreme pressure on the South African state. For the progressive opposition, this cannot of itself allow political solace because of its real effect on masses of people. Therefore, the research agenda beyond these reflections is that there is a need to investigate alternative macroeconomic intervention based on national and democratic prioritisation.

Note: This paper is a revised version of a paper presented to the Critical Studies Group Seminar Series at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 3 October 1989. I would like to thank Norman Bromberger for helpful comments on the economics and Prakash Naidoo for help on minimising the jargon. All remaining errors remain solely my responsibility.

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by MARTIN PROZESKY

# CAN THE TRUE EXODUS STOP AT DAMASCUS?

Review of **THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS : KAIROS AND CONVERSION**. Johannesburg : Skotaville Publishers, 1989. 36 pages.

The most important development in modern Christianity has nothing to do with Darwin, obdurate popes, wayward evangelists or what has become known as "the secular challenge". It is the discovery that large and influential sections of the Christian church, especially in first-world countries, are not only a serious distortion of the central message and example of Jesus of Nazareth and the Exodus tradition of faith which he inherited and helped broaden and spread, but also fall well short of universal goodness.

**The Road to Damascus**, despite its modest size and generally unpretentious style, belongs in the ranks of and is a means of furthering that great discovery, which is its main significance, along with the novel phenomenon of being a joint statement by Christians in seven conflict-ridden countries stretching in a broad sweep from South Korea through South Africa to Central America. The local edition includes ten pages of Southern African signatories from most denominations at the end. Many of them are prominent church and academic figures, an endorsement which will doubtless help the message of the book make an impact among the lay people it is evidently intended to guide, encourage and convince.

What we are given in this document is an analysis of the scandal of Christians on both sides of the bitter conflict in these countries; a condemnation of all right-wing Christians as heretical and concluding call on them to undergo conversion, Saul-like, from being persecutors of Christ to being supporters of the Christianity represented by the standpoint of this little book. That kind of Christianity is portrayed as an active faith which sides

with and stands by the poor and oppressed, drawing on what is seen as the central biblical heritage going back to the Exodus faith. Nothing could be more alien to it than the kind of church that aids and abets imperialist-type domination of the world's marginalized people.

This amounts to the recognition that ruthless exploitative forces have succeeded in appropriating important sections of Christianity into their service. So successful has this tactic been that many whose values haven't much in common with Jesus of Nazareth sincerely think they are his true followers, for example by striving to keep the world safe from communists and their like. Naturally enough, such a travesty of the gospel, thus understood, must be unmasked and denounced, so that a key section of **The Road to Damascus** is the critique of right-wing society and its attendant form of Christianity in the chapter called "Our Prophetic Mission." This is done in terms of five traditional theological evils—idolatry, heresy, apostasy, hypocrisy and blasphemy—whose relevance to present-day political, economic and military forces is interestingly but briefly indicated.

Critics of the now-famous Kairos Document made much of its alleged lack of theological finesse. They could doubtless do the same to this successor. So far as I am concerned, that kind of objection is irrelevant for documents which are designed for a mass readership. It is much more appropriate to perceive that an important and justified ethic of compassion governs **The Road to Damascus**, and then to concentrate on main themes, not doctrinal niceties. If we do that, we can then move to the question whether there is anything substantially new

here. I have already indicated that I see this publication as part of a much larger Christian discovery of a Jesus and indeed a Bible which are in some crucial respects a far cry from conventional, churchly forms of Christianity. To that extent there is not much here that is new; significance, instead, lies in the propagating potential of a readable, inexpensive and easily distributed form of expression – effectiveness of medium rather than novelty of message, one might say.

But despite this reading, there is nonetheless a contention in the book which is both new and controversial. This is the bold assertion by those who composed and signed it that they “denounce all forms of right-wing christianity as heretical.” (p.13) As one who identifies with the ethics behind this book (though not with its theology), and in the interests of real liberation, I would say that such a sweeping rejection carries with it an obligation to provide substantiation : right-wing Christianity must be defined so that we can identify it and convincing reasons must be given to justify the denunciation.

Are we given the necessary definition and justification? Despite the undertaking in the preamble to “spell out exactly” which groups of Christians are being pilloried, none are actually named and instead the buck is passed to Paul Gifford’s book **The Religious Right in Southern Africa**. Rather, the present book characterizes right wing Christianity as something that denies Christian freedom by insisting on blind obedience to authority, fosters spiritual slavery by means of an uncritical use of the bible, creates illicitly antagonistic dualisms between body and soul, politics and religion, etc, and is fanatically anti-communist. Readers are left to figure out for themselves exactly who fits this bill, but at least the necessary hallmarks of heresy are provided.

Where **Damascus** is seriously open to question is its patchy attempt at justifying the charge of heresy against this species of Christianity, and I say this as one who rejects that species even more vehemently than the Damascus Readers. Their view seems to be that right-wing Christianity is heretical because it **chooses** to distort true Christianity, as though history (or divine revelation) had yielded a tolerably clear-cut and above all authentic original Christianity which right-wing leaders then deliberately distorted into the spiritual lackey of imperialism and inculcated into the unthinking crowds whose faith they control.

Liberative Christianity deserves better than this. Right-wing religion is indeed a dangerous evil and needs to be unmasked. But would-be unmaskers themselves must above all be realists; they must learn to look more soberly at the mixed bag that is historic Christianity; they must learn to see that the rot goes back far beyond Constantine into the ecclesiastical and biblical tradition itself, which harbours its own spiritual and moral problems – like the themes of election, predestination, salvific exclusivism, gross patriarchy and even violence – alongside the undoubtedly noble parts which I myself fully agree are normative, but normative **in our present judgement** rather than historically normative. “True” Christianity – caring, compassionate, open to all truth, active and self-critical to a fault – is a creation produced by those who live by such values, fashioned out of an historico-biblical hodge-podge of resources, deeply attuned to Amos or Nathan but not to Psalm 137 or Esther. Those resources are its raw-materials; they are not the finished product of true Christianity. Cotrary to this book’s implication, there is a path from them to **both** right-wing and liberative Christianity, and therefore the historically correct aetiology of heresy is much more subtle and challenging than the Damascus Readers seem to think, though I certainly agree with them that a major part of the aetiology is to be found in the consumerist materialism which they see as the basic idolatry or false god of our time.

I must also discuss a further, related problem, which I shall introduce in the form of a question : when is the penny going to drop in “progressive” Christian circles, at least in pluralistic countries like South Africa, that there is something gravely imperialistic about the idea that Christianity owns the concept and content of “divine revelation”? In **The Road to Damascus** we are told that right-wing Christianity “is a way of believing that rejects or ignores parts of God’s revelation. . .” (p. 13). But throughout this little volume God’s revelation is obviously assumed to be something we find in or through the bible – not the Qur’an, the Gita or any of the other texts (written or oral) that also claim to be channels of divine revelation. Why ignore them? Doesn’t this make the Damascus Readers’ form of religion just as much “a way of believing that rejects or ignores parts of God’s revelation” as the right-wing religion they justifiably castigate?

Writing this review on the Hindu festival of Divali and having marched in the streets against apartheid side-by-side with Muslims, Jews, Hindus and secularists are experiences which make me specially aware of the offence under discussion; they make me deeply wary of the kind of standpoint that attacks socio-political apartheid but perpetuates spiritual apartheid. It is therefore dismaying to see this problem subtly undermining the excellent socio-ethical values of this book, for how credible is a purported liberative Christianity which remains blind to its own form of imprisonment in the structures of imperialism and exclusivism? In this important but neglected sense, true Christianity continues to be an unrealized possibility, a datum of the future rather than of the present or past.

So I conclude by agreeing that there is a need for massive conversion, but more Christians need to undergo it than just right-wingers. Whether the Damascus Road is a suitable metaphor for that greater transformation I personally doubt, because it builds an element of exclusion into the very foundations of what purports to be Freedom City. Jonah might thus be a better biblical symbol. In the end, then, I suspect that the Damascus Readers, or at least those who wielded their collective pen in formulating this document, have yet to discover the real heretical extent of what they call right-wing Christianity, or their own captivity to its dominationist character. Schubert Ogden was right when he said that liberation theology is as ethically important as it is theologically incomplete and even, in the present instance, I would add, inconsistent, and therefore I end by quoting his own great mentor A.N. Whitehead, who memorably summarized what I have seen in this review as the context of ideas to which both the strengths and the shortcomings of **The Road to Damascus** belong :

“When the western world accepted christianity, Caesar conquered, and the received text of western theology was edited by his lawyers . . . The brief Galilean vision of humility flickered throughout the ages, uncertainly . . . But the deeper idolatry, of the fashioning of God in the image of the Egyptian, Persian, and Roman imperial rulers, was retained. The Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar.”

The root of the heresy in modern Christianity is thus a corruption of the religion of one who could wash the feet of his friends into structures of domination and hence oppression, symbolized by Caesar. But Caesar’s domination operates in many ways. One of them is at the expense of the poor. Another is at the expense of marginalized religions. The road to Damascus is a welcome exodus message for the former but offers nothing and probably can offer nothing except more marginalization to the latter. I for one deeply regret that a chance to articulate a more complete theology of holistic liberation has again been lost, but I nonetheless applaud the emancipatory direction in which the present document moves. □