TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR KADER ASMAL

An outstanding fighter for our liberation and an architect of our democracy

In Professor Kader Asmal we celebrate the life of a comrade and friend whose adult life was marked by the pursuit of knowledge, in a commitment to lifelong learning, supported by evidence and in order to persuade.

Kader’s learning was not occasioned by the learning for examinations - he was long past that; and the evidence he sought was not required to win a court case, and the persuasion he indulged in was in order to convince.

Kader lived for politics, in the best sense of the concept - not the “I am bigger than you”, or the “we outnumber you, so your ideas don’t matter” style of politics, but politics writ large, where non-agreement required the opponent to be convinced of his/her own ideas, even where they were wrong.

Kader’s adult life was steered by ideas and he lived for the dialectic, the opportunity to have opposing views argued on the strength of their merits. It is these attributes that made Kader Asmal into a great parliamentarian and a formidable ally.

It is clear that in his life he shaped and was shaped by the people and circumstances around him. Thus when he was awarded the Legion D’Honneur by the French government he said, “I am the product of our struggle for freedom. Like my political movement, we have drawn inspiration from the intellectual and political pathway of humanity, which has shaped the contours of our Constitution.”

He said, “We have drawn inspiration from the intellectual and political pathway of humanity.” It is important that we understand that this was not some passive search for those pathways, that having been identified were then pursued. Our history is quite different from such passivity. One of the oft-quoted elements of the moral high-ground that anti-apartheid struggle occupied was that the United Nations declared apartheid a crime against humanity. This did not just happen - in fact the first attempt by the ANC for UN recognition was rebuffed.

It was Kader Asmal who ensured that the ANC used international law as it had never been used before to bring down apartheid. As the head of the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement he worked closely with the Special Committee against Apartheid to get the UN to recognise the principle of self-determination as a rule of international law and that therefore resistance to colonial, racist and alien regimes was legitimate. From there it was a small step for the UN to extend the protection of the Geneva Conventions to national liberation movements and their members. Once this edifice was in place, it became simple to add on sanctions, boycotts and embargoes.

WEEK IN REVIEW

Government makes good progress in delivery | Significant achievements have been made in implementing delivery agreements between ministers and President Jacob Zuma. These included progress in education, improvements in municipal audits and justice, according to an executive summary of the government’s 12 desired outcomes, distributed after Cabinet’s regular fortnightly meeting.

According to the summary on education, achievements included finalisation of the teacher development plan, standard workbooks in literacy and numeracy aimed at Grade 1 to 6 pupils, and the roll-out of annual national assessments.

IEC receives UN award

The Independent Electoral Commission announced its delight to be conferred with the United Nations Public Service Award (UNPSA) for preventing and combating corruption in the public service. The IEC Chairperson, Brigalia Bam and Chief Electoral Officer, Advocate Patsy Tlakula, received the award in the Tanzanian city of Dar Es Salaam.

South Africa is a first place winner in the competition for its innovative use of results slip scanning. A total of 36 public organisations worldwide will receive this award on United Nations Public Service Day.
At his suggestion, the ANC agreed go a step further to have the Geneva Conventions of 1977 extended to cover wars of national liberation. This, Kader knew would open the way for states subject to wars of liberation to similarly observe the Geneva Conventions when it came to the treatment of liberation fighters.

Professor Asmal truly treasured our Constitution. In one of the very last photographs published of him just last week, he has a dog-eared copy of the Constitution in his hand. I remember asking myself why he needed a copy, because he was entirely au fait with every line and verse of that document whose “contours” had been shaped by the “political pathway of humanity.” Unless, of course, as was his wont, he needed a prop in hand. He knew and loved the Constitution because of his intimate involvement in its genesis and negotiations.

Retired-Judge Albie Sachs writes of the process of Constitution-making in South Africa, as follows: “It was a grey drizzly day in Dublin - nothing unusual about that. I was in Kader and Louise Asmal's house - nothing special about that. Kader didn’t smoke indoors the whole weekend - that was unusual. On Friday evening, the whole of Saturday, Saturday evening and most of Sunday, Kader and I worked on the first draft of the Bill of Rights for a democratic South Africa to be proposed by the Constitutional Committee of the African National Congress (ANC) - that was unique.

It was on a kitchen table in a Dublin suburb that that draft was written. I wish I could say it was because of the great tradition of Irish freedom that we felt there was no other place in the world it could be done. The reality was that the Constitutional Committee had nominated Kader and me to do it and we had to come together either in London or in Dublin and because Kader couldn’t get away I came to Dublin. We were aware at the time of the momentous nature of what we were doing.

We divided the work. As I recollect, Kader did the first draft of some areas of special interest to him - the enforcement mechanisms and how the Bill of Rights would fit into the African constitutional structure. I dealt with the broad basic principles of a Bill of Rights. I can recall deliberately sitting down with a blank sheet of paper - no universal declaration, no international conventions, no constitution from any country - on the basis that a Bill of Rights should speak out from the soul the fundamental rights that belong to every human being and shouldn’t be a list of items gleaned from an encyclopedia or legal dictionary or textbook.”

The Constitutional Principles that Judge Albie Sachs refers to, that were drafted on that kitchen table in 1987, were done for the ANC and they appear, almost verbatim as the Preamble to our own Constitution 1996. So, it was never an alien document, forced down our throats, but a document born of the “political pathway of humanity, which has shaped the contours of our Constitution.”

Thomas Paine wrote, “My country is the world and my religion is to do good.” This is what Kader was about. The bequest from him is primarily a bequest of the values of humanity. Whether this was in the quest for water, education, information or just plain justice for all - Kader’s views were unequivocally strong, and grounded in the best intellectual traditions. This was his foundation for service.

Kader Asmal was tireless in the pursuit of justice and for human rights. Not even during his illness did he pause for breath. Sometimes, it was very tough being his friend! He continued arguing then against the government of which I am part, albeit on a few issues that he considered fundamental. Such has been our comradeship, premised on values that are far greater and bonds much stronger than the tactical issues about which we need to differ.

Tributes have poured in from many quarters. President Zuma said, “He will be remembered for his energy, forthrightness, efficiency and commitment to making the country a better place each day. He will also be remembered for his passion for human rights for all.”

**WEEK IN REVIEW**

**US first lady visits South Africa**

The US first lady, Michelle Obama, concluded her pilgrimage 4 day visit to South Africa. She kick started her assignment with a brief courtesy visit to former President Nelson Mandela at his home and a tour to the Nelson Mandela foundation. She addressed South Africa’s top women leaders packed inside Regina Mondi Church in Soweto. She paid tribute to ANC stalwart Mama Sisulu and the robust youth of June 16, 1976 in an emotional tone, and later proceeded to the June 16 Foundation at Hector Pietersen Square in Soweto, where she spent time with local heroes.

She travelled to Cape Town as part of the final leg of her visit to South Africa. She met with Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The apartheid regime bulldozed the area and forcibly segregated its residents, with non-whites banished to barren outlying regions. Her planned visit to the Robben Island was cancelled due to the bad weather conditions. The first lady was accompanied by her mother, Marian Robinson, her daughters, Malia and Sasha, and a niece and nephew.

**Swaziland requests SA for bailout**

The South African government received a loan request from the Swaziland government and is considering the request. Swaziland asked South Africa for an emergency bailout to patch over a chronic national cash crunch which has sparked rare political unrest against King Mswati III. The International Monetary Fund said last month the tiny southern African country was near financial collapse, with a budget deficit of 14.3% of GDP - similar to Greece - and an economy stuck in the doldrums. Swaziland's public wage bill amounts to 18% of GDP, more than any other country in Africa. The country's fiscal troubles stem from a sharp decline in revenues from the regional Southern African Customs Union (SACU), which has historically accounted for two-thirds of the government's budget. So far, the government has managed to keep its head above water by eating into central bank reserves and running up $180-million in domestic arrears.
Former President Thabo Mbeki said, “All of us who knew and worked with him, whether as a leader of the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement, as part of the leadership of the ANC, or as a Minister in our democratic governments, could always depend on him as a steadfast fighter for the liberation and advancement of the interests of all South Africans.”

Many people across the world have joined with us in celebration of the life of a true freedom fighter - one who had the courage to stand up against the apartheid regime, and as a disciplined cadre of the ANC, stand up against those within the movement who would appear to try and cut a path other than the “Intellectual pathway of humanity.”

As Shakespeare wrote in Hamlet, “To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, that thou canst not then be false to any man.”

Go well, true soldier. You have taught us much. You have set a wonderful example. You have a lifetime of true service to the people.

Hamba Kakuhle!

Qhawe lamaqhawe!

>> Trevor Manuel is an ANC NEC member and Minister in The Presidency: Planning Commission

---

**WEEK IN REVIEW**

**Tributes flow for Asmal |**

Tributes poured in for Professor Kader Asmal, a veteran ANC anti-apartheid struggle stalwart and an architect of our democracy. Kader passed away in Constantia hospital in Cape Town at the age of 76 after suffering a heart attack and slipping into a coma. Comrade Asmal served in former presidents Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki democratic governments and performed his duties with distinctions. He was the minister of water affairs and forestry from 1994, a member of the ANC’s national executive committee, and education minister from 1999. He left parliament in 2007 to take up a post at the University of the Western Cape, where he was professor extraordinary in the faculty of law. He was a founder member of both the British and Irish Anti-Apartheid Movements. He also served as vice-president of the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa from 1968 to 1982 and as president of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties between 1976 and 1990. President Jacob Zuma said, Asmal made a sterling contribution to the struggle for liberation and sacrificed a lot in his life to ensure the attainment of freedom and democracy. He granted Professor Kader Asmal an Official Funeral Category 1 and also declared a period of National Days of Mourning as from Friday, 24 June 2011 until the evening of cremation. All national flags will fly at half-mast at all flag stations in the country and in all South African foreign missions abroad from Friday, 24 June 2011 until the evening of cremation.
A youth generation with a mission – Reflections on the ANCYL 24th Congress

The ANC Youth League introduced its 24 National Congress in June 2011 with the statement that the theme ‘Youth action for economic freedom in our lifetime’ is more than just a congress theme; it is a generational clarion call.

This brings to mind the statement of Frantz Fanon that ‘every generation has to discover its mission… and either fulfil or betray it.’ Moses Kotane made a similar call in the South African context, when he said to the youth: ‘the future belongs to you… it will be what you make of it.’

The Youth League graciously called in the same statement for members of society, beyond its own membership (and presumably beyond its generation!) to engage with its Congress documents, and help shape this future. Now that the Congress has passed, one would imagine that the same call is extended to engage with resolutions from its 24th National Congress.

This commentary on the League’s Congress is therefore in that spirit. In particular, coming from a former Youth Leaguer, it will seek to interact with the concept of a generational mission, as well as respond to the calls for the ‘reining in’ of the ANC Youth League.

Missions of earlier generations

The call by the League for a generational mission is in line with previous generations of young South Africans, who looked at the conditions in the country, and on that basis defined their historic mission.

This started with the very founding of the ANC Youth League in 1944, when its mission became the struggle for the inclusion of the philosophy of African nationalism into the strategic and practical lexicon of the ANC and for a more militant programme of action against apartheid colonialism. The mission of the 1940s generation directly contributed to the organisational and ideological renewal of the ANC in the 1950s.

Following the repression of the 1960s, the youth of Umkhonto we Sizwe were prepared to take up arms in pursuit of freedom, and many, like Solomon Mahlangu, paid the ultimate price. At the same time, the ANC Youth Section made an important contribution by mobilising international youth and students into the anti-apartheid movement (ANCYL, 2000).

Twenty-five years later, Steven Bantu Biko and others defined their generational mission, when they walked out of the 1969 National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) Conference and declared that black man, you’re on your own. This generation laid the foundation for the Black Consciousness philosophy, with its emphasis on self-determination and the unity of the oppressed: that Africans, Coloureds and Indians are all blacks and oppressed and must therefore unite in struggle.
This generation’s mission not only sharpened our thinking about non-racialism and such clauses the in Freedom Charter as ‘South Africa belongs to all’, but also the clause that ‘All national groups shall have equal rights’ and what was seen as a ‘four nations approach’ to the national question (see for example Mzala, 1985). The mission of the Black Consciousness generation of the 1970s (along with developments in the labour movement) significantly contributed to the revival of an internal resistance movement, as witnessed by 1976 student and youth uprising.

And, after the repression that followed these events, this generation swelled the ranks of the exiled liberation movements and with their energy and militancy took the struggle to a higher level.

Following on the 1976 generation, the young lions of the 1980s picked up their spear. The 1980s generation in their mission took the ‘old’ slogan of freedom in our lifetime to a next level and imbued it with an unflinching determination and courage. Although known predominantly for their militancy, the student and youth movements of the time helped to shape the debates within the broader liberation movement.

Their contribution towards bringing about the conditions for change in 1990 remains undisputed.

Post-1994: a dearth of a mission?

There is much less consensus about the mission and contribution of the generation of 1990s. A discussion document for the ANCYL 21st National Congress (ANCYL, 2000) titled Coming of age: political positioning and organisational renewal of the ANCYL noted that young people too a backseat during the negotiations period, in part because, unlike the women’s movement, they failed to push for direct representation during the negotiations. Despite this, the ANC Youth League of that time was instrumental in the approach of combining mass action and negotiations and in the discussions on post-apartheid policies.

It was the ANCYL, for example, that led the approach to post-apartheid policing with its engagement of the then South African Police in a conference in Soweto in 1992, which emerged with the concept of community policing. Along with other youth organisations in the National Youth Development Forum, it helped challenge public perceptions of a ‘lost generation’ and put forward a vision of post-apartheid youth development that still forms the foundation of our youth policies and institutions.

And yet, Everatt (2000) called the 1990s ‘the dead decade’ for youth, citing that, despite their contribution and position in society, the 147-page Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) document dedicated one and a half pages to youth development and that not a single one of the Presidential Lead Projects announced by President Mandela in 1994 was aimed at young people.

The ANCYL 2000 Coming of Age document engages with these contradictions posing the problem thus:

“How did we get to a situation that, by the end of the 90s the youth known at the beginning of the decade as the young lions of the struggle - were now variously referred to as the ‘Boom Shaka’, ‘Yizo Yizo’ generation, the Born frees or spoken of in relation to apathy, disinterest in politics, HIV prevalence, crime, consumerism and poor examination results?”

The document in the main blamed the slowness of the League and the youth movement in general to adapt to the post-apartheid terrain for this situation. The 21st National Congress in 2000 took to heart the words of former Youth League President Peter Mokaba when handing over the reigns to a new generation at the 18th Congress in 1994, that the League must ‘adapt or die.’ In response, the League adopted Youth Vision 2000, and resolved among other things to modernise its organisation, adapt a more disaggregated approach towards organising different sectors of the youth and to form an Economic Commission that focuses on the issues of youth unemployment and economic transformation.
South Africa’s Generation Next and their mission of economic freedom

The 24th ANCYL National Congress in June 2011 boldly stated that the mission of the current generation of youth is economic freedom in their lifetime. It specifically interpreted the clause in the Freedom Charter that South Africa belongs to all as meaning not only politically, but also in terms of social and economic rights. This interpretation is in line with the Constitution of South Africa, which encompasses first generation human rights, as well as second and third generations socio-economic rights, in the context of historical injustices.

The Youth League 24th National Congress defines this mission of economic freedom in a document - A clarion call to economic freedom fighters: programme of action for economic freedom in our lifetime. The League analyses the present situation, drawing the conclusion that nearly two decades after the end of apartheid, the "vestiges of apartheid and economic patterns, ownership and control remain intact, despite the attainment of political freedom by the ANC-led liberation movement. Political freedom without economic emancipation is meaningless.”

Citing research from both the left and right, the document notes that “...South Africa’s unemployment levels are at critical levels, poverty massive, and that the country is the most unequal society in the world…”

The Youth League further draws attention to the fact that these schisms are still largely along racial (and we must add gender) lines, with the burden of unemployment disproportionately affecting young people. These, it concludes, are therefore the painful realities that define South Africa in 2011.

This analysis of post apartheid South Africa - and the concern about social and economic emancipation - is not unique to the Youth League. At the approach of the anniversary of our first decade of freedom in 2004, the South African government in Towards a Ten Year Review (2003) noted:

“The advances made in the First Decade by far superseded the weaknesses. Yet, if all indicators were to continue along the same trajectory, especially in respect of the dynamic of economic inclusion and exclusion, we could soon reach a point where the negatives start to overwhelm the positives.”

Five years later, in Towards a Fifteen Year Review (2008) government again warned:

“South Africa could continue along this path, barely denting structural ills such as massive unemployment among the youth and unskilled workers, the structure of the economy, poor quality in some social services and trends in violent crime. With this, society would plod along with occasional social instability and periodic spurts of growth.”

The National Planning Commission in its Diagnostic Report in 2011 noted some of the same realities as ‘nine critical challenges’ facing South Africa today:

- That too few South Africans are employed.
- That our education system delivers poor outcomes for most.
- That our country has a high disease burden.
- That South Africans continue to live in divided communities.
- That our public services are of uneven quality and performance.
- That spatial organisation (where people live and work) continues to marginalise the poor.
- That corruption levels are high.
- That our resource-intensive economy is unsustainable.
- That our infrastructure is inadequate and poorly maintained.

There is therefore no question that the national debate on the social and economic emancipation that the League delegates called for, is long overdue.
What does the Youth League propose?

The League calls for decisive steps to transform the economy, through what it calls “7 cardinal pillars for economic freedom in our lifetime.” These pillars are:

1. **Expropriation without compensation for equitable redistribution.**
2. **Nationalisation for industrialisation.**
3. **Inclusive and decentralised economic growth and development.**
4. **Land restitution and agrarian reform.**
5. **Building a strong developmental state and public service.**
6. **Massive investment in the development of the African economy.**
7. **Provision of education, skills and expertise to the people.**

Its 24th Congress document details the actions required in each of these pillars. For example, under pillar 1 it proposes an “amendment of the property clause to empower the state to expropriate for public purpose and in the public interest,” thus calling for a planned and legal process, rather than the ‘land-grab’ that some suggests.

Its pillar 2 calls for state ownership and control of strategic sectors of the economy as part of a broader industrialisation drive. The commanding sectors that should be behind such an industrialisation drive are minerals and metals, banks, energy production and telecommunications, as well as central transport and logistics. The League document does not suggest a ‘holus-bolus’ approach to nationalization, even in its proposals on the mines (discussed in Umrabulo 33, 2010). For example, on the banks it identifies as immediate tasks the creation of a State Bank (a position adopted by the ANC 3rd NGC in 2010) and the nationalisation of the Reserve Bank, accompanied by the transformation of the rest of the financial and banking sector.

Pillar 3 on inclusive and decentralised growth revives some of the debates of the early 1990s and raises new issues. The League echoes the earlier call for a ‘growth through redistribution approach’, focusing on labour-intensive growth, and redistribution through the provision of basic services such as water, sanitation, education, housing, health and subsidised transport. It calls for the decommodification of essential services, especially health, water, education and housing. Evidence, it argues, points towards a rise in labour participation when basic needs are met.

In the discussion on decentralised growth, the Youth League engages with the National Spatial Development Framework, agreeing with the focus on areas where growth and employment strategies will be effective and sustainable, but calls for more robust programmes of Industrial Development Zones (IDZs). It identifies nine areas (Sekhukhune, Welkom, Bojanala, Kuruman, Witbank, Overberg, East London, Coega and Far North KZN) where the state should actively intervene through a rural industrialisation and urbanisation programme, creating IDZs and planned new cities over the next decade.

Of course, as a youth movement, the League should be concerned with education. Thus, it suggests in pillar 7 the alignment of skills development to industrialisation, expansion of post-secondary education and training, transformation of higher education and training, and introducing scholarships to allow for larger numbers of South African students to study overseas. This focus is important, given the fact that there are close to 800,000 vacancies in the high-skill categories, according to the Adcorp Employment Index.

Also, from a youth labour market perspective, providing post-secondary education opportunities to greater numbers of 19-24 year olds will not only keep them out of the unemployment statistics, but also address the shift from a low-skilled labour force towards a labour force with median and higher skills levels.

In similar vein, detailed approaches are suggested on the other cardinal pillars, including land and agrarian reforms. Contrary to the suggestions by some of ‘uneducated, populist sloganeering’, the Youth League seeks to engage the issues and sees itself as part of the process of proposing solutions to the very difficult and persistent challenges identified by the National Planning Commission.
Should the Youth League be reined in? Should the youth shut up and listen?

There has been a chorus of calls for the ANC to rein in the Youth League, because its statements are ‘divisive and irresponsible’. This brings to mind the lyrics of the song by Mike and the Mechanics that ‘every generation blames the one before’. Except in South Africa, we the older generations pride ourselves on blaming younger generations, with “all of our frustrations, come beating at their door”!

It shows a lack of appreciation for the role that young people play in the processes of social change. Imagine where South Africa would be today if not for the interventions of the generations of Mandela, Lembede, Tambo, Mda and Sisulu in the 1940s, Biko and others in the 1970s and the young lions of the 1980s. Imagine the anti-colonial movements in Africa, South America and Asia - without the bravery and, yes, quite often recklessness of the young people from these continents.

Imagine twentieth century history without the actions by the students and youth of France, Poland, the USA and other parts of Europe and South America in 1968. Or just imagine the intifada without the Palestinian youth; the anti-globalisation movement and the G20 without the actions of the youngsters in Seattle and Cancun, or, as recently as 2011, the Arab Spring without its generation of Tweeters and Facebookers?

These examples point towards some of the key features of being young: the spirit of idealism, inexperience, sense of adventure, the anti-establishment sentiments and rebelliousness. So do the slogans of these youth revolts: Demand the Impossible hailed a poster in Paris in 1968. Freedom or Death. Victory is Certain rang the battle cry of the young lions of the 1980s. Growth is madness acclaimed a poster by an anti-World Economic Forum protester in the 1990s.

Indeed these very characteristics that are associated with being young open young people up to make mistakes. However, a wise society does not, like the Gaullists did in 1968, tell the youth to Be young and shut up! It acknowledges that making mistakes and learning through experience is a critical part of the development of young people.

Thus, when our generation fought for the Youth League’s autonomy in 1991, we argued: “a profound appreciation by the youth of the democratic ideals we are fighting for is better consolidated if verified by their independent experience.” Similarly, 20 years later, if we want young people to appreciate the economic ideals we hold dear (whatever they are), it will be better consolidated if verified by their independent experience.

At the same time, the Youth League generation of the early 1990s argued that recognising the freedom of expression of the young, even things we deeply disagree with, does not mean that the older generations should abandon its responsibility of engaging with the youth. Instead, they should appreciate the social character of the youth and the nature of the Youth League, avoiding ‘stereotypes and uniformity rigidly imposed from above’.

Let me make a few examples of how this translates into practice. The ANC Youth League was vehemently opposed to the suspension of armed struggle even before negotiations started in 1990. We argued, in the context of the violence in KZN and the then PWV (now Gauteng), which we believed was sponsored by the apartheid government, that to leave our people defenceless while talking to the enemy is a mistake.

Instead of telling us to shut-up and listen to our elders, the ANC leadership of Mandela and Sisulu called in the League National Executive Committee and had a frank discussion: we explained our difficulty with their decision and they explained why we need to prevent the slide towards civil war. At the end of this meeting, we were still not happy with the decision, but we felt that our concerns were heard - later expressed in the call to form self-defence units.

Another example. One of the members of the ANC Youth League National Executive Committee, the late Derek Mosoe in 1992 wrote a discussion paper that caused quite an uproar in the ranks of the ANC leadership. It was titled “Insurrection - the forbidden discourse in the ANC,” arguing that in the context of the actions that lead to the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, we need to complement talks at the negotiations table with mass insurrectionary action.
The Youth League introduced this debate in the ANC, and engaged the leadership of the ANC on these matters. And, not a single meeting of the Youth League NEC took place without a member of the ANC NEC presenting a briefing on the negotiations process and engaging with the League on its concerns and suggestions.

Even when the League made statements that were clearly problematic, ANC leadership engaged with the youth. Such was the case when, in the midst of the violence that claimed over 10,000 lives, Youth League President Peter Mokaba vowed in 1993 that unless something is done to stop violence from the hostels, we will dismantle them ourselves, ‘brick by brick’; or when, in 1995, League President Mlungisi Johnson argued in a speech at Stellenbosch University that the Springbok emblem personifies the racist past of rugby and should be done away with.

Thus, we cautioned in our autonomy document in 1991 that the older generations must never be afraid to allow young people their voice and the space to learn from their experiences, good and bad. The Youth League 24th Congress and its outcomes should therefore be seen as an opportunity to engage with the current generations of youth.

Post-script: a global phenomena

Anyone who listened to the messages of support of the international youth guests to the ANC Youth League 24th Congress (or the World Youth festival hosted by South Africa in December 2010) will realise that something is happening among young people on the continent and globally.

The Arab Spring was a youth-led revolution. In Portugal, Greece and Spain, it was young people who led the protests against ordinary citizens having to bear the brunt of the financial crisis, when European governments spent billions on bailing out those responsible. In November 2010, the British establishment was rocked when the ‘usually apathetic’ student and youth took to the streets to protest against tuition fee increases and the privatisation of higher education.

Many commentators talk about a growing ‘discontent’ among young people everywhere. Thus wrote Oliver Huitson in Global Research (18 March 2010) about this phenomenon among youth in the West:

“Generational politics is undoubtedly on the rise. This year has already seen the publication of two books on the subject: David Willett’s The Pinch... and the indispensable Jilted Generation by Ed Howker and Shiv Malik. Though both texts are cautious in directing blame, they set out solid and well-sourced arguments for a nation that has lost touch with generational obligations. From housing and PFI [Private Finance Initiative] to pensions and education, the picture that emerges is one of rampant asset stripping from both past and future. The primary losers, throughout, are young people.”

Globally, it is now an acceptable mantra that the youth unemployment rate is double the unemployment rate among adults. North Africa and the Middle East, according to the ILO’s Global Employment Trends for Youth, are the regions with the highest rate of youth unemployment, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa. The Youth League 24th Congress in their clarion call for economic freedom highlighted the fact that 70% of the unemployed in South Africa are young men and women.

Frank Meintjies on the eve of Youth Day 2011 (South African Civil Society Information Service 2011) drew the link between the challenges faced by South African youth and their counterparts on the continent, when he wrote:

“

“Youth in South Africa today face many similarities with the youth in the rest of the continent. While youth increase as a proportion of the population, their socio-economic position worsens. Although youth have better options compared to counterparts in many African countries, our challenge is more urgent due to higher levels of inequality.

In SA youth form a majority – youth under 30 years of age make up 30 million out of a population of about 50 million. Youth share in the problems of unemployment and are equally affected by poverty with its race, spatial and gender dimensions. They are in the direct firing line of problems of exclusion and marginalisation. They bear the brunt in a context where there is widespread wastage of human resources in an economy beset by low growth, capital intensity and limited employment creation.”

-9-
Again Huitson in the same article had this to say about the labour market situation of British youth today, with many of these issues confronting young South Africans as they enter the labour market as well:

“The move to a “flexible” labour market has also caused particular problems for young people. The term is a generous euphemism for depressed wages and low job security, facilitated by the globalised flow of labour and industry-friendly employment reforms. Consequently, there is little incentive to train staff or offer apprenticeships; these costs are instead offloaded onto employees themselves and the taxpayer in general. The number of apprenticeships available has duly plummeted. Earlier this year, a BT scheme received 24,000 applications for just 221 positions.

In this “so called” recession, job losses among young people have risen faster than any other age group leaving nearly a million 16-24 year olds currently unemployed (BBC). Swelling the bottom end of a labour market is undoubtedly good for both business and the well-off, who benefit from cheaper costs and prices, but it is the young and the low-waged who are hit hardest. The generational spread of wealth has grown increasingly lopsided: the baby boom generation now own a full half of the country’s property and assets; the under 45s own less than a tenth.”

As the ANC and other generations in our society more broadly, we should therefore heed the word of caution from the outgoing ANCYL Secretary General, Vuyiswa Tulelo, in her Organisational Report to the 24th Congress:

“We listened to the youth of Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen as they said: ‘to have a beautiful struggle history is not enough, to give us education and not use us in economic development is not on. Give us our voice, let us choose our own leaders and allow us to participate in the economy of the country.’

The ANCYL noted, and whispered to the ANC, ‘we hope you are listening to us’.

>> Fébé Potgieter-Gqubule is an ANC NEC member
READERS FORUM

Legitimising mediocre: A critical view of Prince Mashele’s book

Literary work is appreciated, and by its very nature it is a reflection of creativity in any society. Any writing that hits our bookshelf must be welcomed not only because it enriches our intellectual activity, but also because it inevitably provoke society into a dialogue.

Prince Mashele has hit us with “The Death of our Society”, which I find to be a pathetical poor workmanship that is lacking in prognosis and reflecting lazy intellectualism. The death of our society is a mere parroting of all that we have heard before without adding anything new in our discourse and it is just a regurgitation of the author’s tired collection of previously published newspaper articles.

The book at its best is a mediocre without any pretences to intellectual vigour. I know I am guilty of legitimising this mediocre and shoddy workmanship with this engagement. I have no choice but to engage as I am of the firm view that the South African society needs more rigorous intellectual engagement than what the author presents. Certainly, a proper prognosis of this society and its trajectory towards a national democratic society cannot be reduced to the comical and intellectual bankrupt manner of Mashele’s book and be left unchallenged.

Interestingly, he calls on society to join in what he refers as revolutionary liberalism. A new unscientific concept indeed, however, philosophy guides us that liberalism by its practice does not reflect progressiveness but hinges on the subtle preservation of privileges of the ruling class. How does liberalism gets to act in tandem with revolution defies logic. Philosophers have defined revolution as a process to effect fundamental material change in the organization of society. The two does not seem to mix and the author fails to show how and where the two come together.

South Africa, with her history of dispossession, poverty and inequalities does not need liberalism as a social construct to resolve the historical contradictions, but a progressive revolutionary process aimed at significantly altering the racial, class and gender contradictions that characterize this society. What it tells us is that the author has departed from the strategic objective of the national struggle. This departure accounts to the quicker conclusion he has made on the construction of a national democratic society, hence the publication of this book, we are actually told that we have arrived.

Like Francis Fukuyama in his book, The End of History and the Last Man, predicted an end of ideology and end of conflicts, Mashele predicts that liberalism would end our misery and bring satisfaction to this society. Contrary to Fukuyama’s prediction, the world today still exhibit conflicts and is afflicted with scourges of hunger, disease, ethnicity and religious fundamentalism, even in the so called free liberal societies these ills are found. Liberalism is dismally failing to resolve the challenges of humanity and its development.

Is the cartoon on the cover of the book a depiction of the contribution of those in ‘the death of our society’? It shows some as stoic and the last three as degeneration. The fearless and unapologetic stand that three have taken in echoing the views of the ANC Youth League is a problem to the white liberal establishment that Mashele is in bed with and sees the world through their eyes. They fail to enquire why and how do these leaders continue to remain popular amongst our people.

It is important to note that even those that are being celebrated today as heroes and icons of liberation were once regarded as populist. President Mandela, at his young and militant age, in one of his comments made a point that ‘the masses of the people are never wrong, and it is always important for leadership to follow what the masses are saying’.

-11-
If the majority raises questions about land redistribution, what kind of leader would you be if you do not engage their wishes. The three youth leaders captured in the cartoon have throughout expressed the wishes and aspirations of the youth constituency with the genre of radicalism and militancy. Only those who have always wished to abort the cause of revolution have found these to be irrelevant with society’s aspirations. Again, this is a reflection of the lack of intellectual vigour.

It must be appreciated that the author has taken a stand of being a blind oppositionist to the ruling party. His thesis is aimed at condemning the role of the ANC in society and proclaiming that its programme of action is abominable. He decries immorality in the society. The inherent conclusion he makes is that the ruling party has led this country into morass.

This is ahistorical because those who care about fixing these society’s challenges would investigate with objectivity the origins of the collapse of morality of this society. It is the apartheid system that deliberately destroyed the moral dignity of our society. It formed gangs and perpetuated crime, bribed the black people to serve the system and destroyed the family foundations. It further denied all but blacks in general opportunities and deprived them of the freedom from want.

The ANC has proven with time to be a living organism, capable of driving change within itself and in the society. When undemocratic tendencies and intolerance starts creeping in the organisation it rejects this and cleanse itself. All the same if the current leadership lacks morality as the author alleges and society rejects it, the ANC too would reject these. However, the overwhelming electoral support the ANC collective leadership enjoys prove otherwise. It is only the author that holds the ANC leadership in contempt whilst they are one with the overwhelming majority of our country.

Our society is relatively new and is still in its formative stages. It is way too early and probably even wrong to suggest that this society is morally bankrupt merely drawing conclusion on the basis of one individual or few individuals that are found wanting by any standard. The task of reconstruction, which cannot be and could never be an event, would ultimately allow this society an opportunity to define its moral value system in its evolution. That would be values that uphold our fundamental culture and traditions as Africans. The process would also tight these cultures to the modern elements of a democratic society i.e. rule of law, human rights and respect to each other.

We have very firm foundation and it must be borne by Mashele that the struggle to forge a new society in South Africa is guided by values of humanism anchored by solidarity, collectivism and oneness. These values stand in opposition to what Mashele is persuading our people to adopt, liberalism. For this society to prosper it has to strengthen solidarity bond aimed at assisting those in dire circumstances and are found at the lower rung to move beyond the status of inability but possibility.

We would never survive and prosper as people under the conditions of everyman or woman for themselves and God for us all. We defeated apartheid standing together in unity and we cannot move to a prosperous future individually. The highest level of morality in this society should be defined by solidarity and sense of community. It is running far ahead and being possessed with wild imaginations to picture ourselves in the value system of America or United Kingdom. Liberalism in any context would not assist us to resolve our challenges. This society is far from being at death, but it is in progression towards the better tomorrow. As it defines itself it would reject immorality in any form.

Mashele engulfs in the public service and the rot that characterize it. Here we need to focus on the economics of public infrastructure if there is any justice we want to achieve. First instance is to understand what does it takes to transform the state, and secondly, what are the required resources to achieve this goal.

Firstly, our public service is largely a reflection of the apartheid legacy. Public servants require nurturing and continuous training to understand the concept of best practice and quality service to the citizens. The best that this country possesses cannot be everywhere, and some have tested it and moved out. Let the best minds volunteer to steer the public service to the good, if all of us belief we not doing it for one individual. Selfishness and individualism is what has driven majority of them out and robbed the public of their skills. Lest we forget that some milk the state to pay for their advanced training in MBA etc and at their completion jump out and join the private sector.
Secondly, in several occasion we have been told that the public infrastructure in this country is old and dilapidated. How much does Mashele wants this to be repeated. We have witnessed massive infrastructure investment on roads, schools, airports, hospitals and rehabilitations of townships into better and modern inhabitable settlements. Mashele, is blinded by his liberalism ideology and the rush to be recognised and defined as the brave lone voice that dishes vitriolic attacks to the ruling party, that he is deliberately turning a blind eye to the progress our country is making.

We must forgive him, he does not recognize the insult and humiliation that apartheid has visited on our people. Apartheid built infrastructure to serve the white minority, and once this infrastructure is required to service many it evidently becomes insufficient and collapses.

Investment programme continue to be undertaken by the democratic state to put South Africa at a global competitive level. And in all intense and purpose, these are done in partnership with the private sector because they too have come to understand that it takes all of us to build the capacity of our nation. Lamentations and being armchair critic that only sees worse in the doer of deeds as Mashele does would not take this great nation forward.

Prince Mashele spew out an insult to black people. He denounces them as a lazy folk that can do only one thing ‘drink to be drunk’. PW Botha, in his strategy put it clear that black men must be given alcohol so that they loose the sight of their civic duty. By then the civic duty that they could have undertaken was the struggle for liberation. The aim was ‘the few involved confirms the illegitimacy of the struggle’.

Added to this, the apartheid system and its persistent legacy only produce cheap labourers, who wait for a boss to create jobs. It is going to take us sometime to undo this culture. But Mashele believes he is a paragon of excellence in a perfect society. However, majority of us understand these conditions and the amount of work involved to reverse them. Expediency would not be our virtue here.

Racism here was deliberate policy architecture, and it was meant to permeate society, and it did. The psychological trauma and physical gulf it created does not require a scientific microscope to detect. The racial and ethnic groups in this country distrust each other. This is further exacerbated by the infrastructure and material conditions that define each group, black and poor versus white and rich.

The process to change this malady is viewed by each group with suspicion and the fear to be dominated. This is the reality of our society, for Mashele to hope that this gulf could be addressed in this short period, is a figment of active imagination of a paranoid mind.

Society and its people to remedy this require meaningful engagement, not false pretensions. If we lie to ourselves that we could have build false bridges of successful harmony and reconciliation, we would also not have been scientific and historical in our approach. Society requires confidence building and little interaction as building blocks. However, it must be understood that for this to succeed it must be coupled with a systematic process to address the national grievances.

It took the old democracies a generation more than twenty years to realize common identity and achieve a consolidated nation-state. Despite their democracy and established value system and norms, America still struggle with racism that displays white on black brutalism than we normally evidence here.

Our society has the possibility to leapfrog to the higher levels of development. This would happen with the willingness of all in an inclusive agenda of change. South Africa must address herself to the following, and hope that Mashele and his ilk would agree and not regard this as radical, racist and careless adventures.

The Constitution has to be amended to resolve once and for all the issue of property relations, primarily to deal with the emotive matters of access to land and its ownership. This must be dealt with the hard way, as President Oliver Tambo once said “the land question must be resolved, if needs be, the hard way”. There is nothing that our people can claim rightful ownership to than their land. It must be remembered that the principal grievance of the struggles of our forefathers was about land dispossession and the right over the use of land.
Secondly, economic transformation would not yield any progress achieve if we neglect the discussion on the mineral resources and ownership thereof. Every economic sector in our country was built at the back of the mining industry, and it has a long life. The challenges of resources to address the social ills and realise developmental goals could be addressed if there is an optimal consideration of choices to ensure that all benefit from this wealth.

Unapologetically deal with the matter of the role of the state without confusing each other, because history bears testimony that those societies that have made high levels of return in development, the state played a massive and decisive role. The state must intervene and lead sustainable programmes of land redistribution and agrarian reforms, mining and development of beneficial capacity, education and skills development, build new settlement in the center of the cities and deliver affordable accessible health system.

It is common cause that all these would not happen in a liberal inspired democracy. These cannot assume the posture of an event but deliberate and sustainable programmes over a period of time with calculated and envisioned outcomes. This country does not require the pussyfooting liberal excuse. Our people are yearning for real change.

>> Doctor Tswale is an ANC member from Ward 59, Tshwane Inner City Zone