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OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION FOR SOUTH AFRICA

THE NATURE OF DEMOCRATIC DEBATE IN SOUTH AFRICA

* monograph 1

ISANDLA INSTITUTE / OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION

About Development Dialogues

Development Dialogues is a joint initiative of Isandla Institute and the Open Society Foundation – South Africa.

The aim of the public dialogue series is to create a space for critical reflection and dialogue among key development stakeholders in South Africa. In doing this, the organisers seek to make a (rather modest) contribution to enhancing the quality of debate in the development sector. Through *Development Dialogues*,

Isandla Institute and the Open Society Foundation intend to bring about creative and constructive multi-stakeholder meeting opportunities that push stakeholders to think beyond the confines of their immediate interests and theoretical paradigms.

This monograph captures the speakers' inputs and discussions of the first Development Dialogue, which took place on 23 June 2005 at the Centre for the Book in Cape Town.

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What I would like to talk about is the debate, discussion and ideological wrestling underway within the African National Congress and its broad alliance.

In January, President Mbeki was reported as having expressed concern that the ANC has become, as he put it, de-ideologised and had lost its ideological 'vooma'. I think there is much truth in this, and I would like to reflect on why that might be the case.

Before that, let us think a little bit about how the discourse and 'speak' about politics and about policy in South Africa has been shaped. My friend Howard Barrell, who went on to become the editor of the *Mail and Guardian*, in 1997 or 1998 wrote a two page piece called 'the idiot's guide to politics in South Africa' - telling the rest of us idiots how to get to grips with and understand South African politics. He organised his paper around what he said were three cardinal organising concepts: the economy, race and power.

Now on the economy - and he devoted most of his time to the economy - he said, since the triumph of a neo-liberal consensus which is capitalist, with an emphasis on prevailing western orthodoxies, the domain of economics is basically beyond politics. There is nothing to discuss, or debate, because ours is simply to play by the market rules. That is how he conceptualised the market economy as one key pillar of the political terrain in South Africa.

Ray Hartley, who writes for the *Sunday Times*, said something very similar. He praised comrade Trevor Manuel's genius strategy, 'to assemble a team of high-powered technocrats to crunch numbers and construct an intricate policy matrix.' He praised that and scoffed at the alternative - the belief that meetings of COSATU, the SACP and the ANC stand any chance of arriving at appropriate technical decisions about the economy - which at best, he said was 'painfully naïve and at worst evidence of a cynical belief in the virtues of political

compromise'. This is the very same journalist who praised the political compromise of the multi-party negotiations, but when it came to economics there was one route, one way, as given to us by Washington.

Both writers, and Howard Barrell in particular, said that there is no difference between what the ANC government does in practice on the economic front and what the DP, as it was then called, and the NNP preach and announce. But he conceded - and this is what he was trying to guide us idiots into a proper understanding of - was that in order for the ANC to hold together its fractious mass base, its alliance partners and so on, the ANC, while getting on with this hard-nosed, technocratic number-crunching economic policy, had to erect a veil of rhetoric. And essentially at the core of the veil of rhetoric was, he said, the concept of race. So for him race was not the reality of racialised poverty, unemployment, marginalisation, vulnerability to infectious diseases, or the racialised reality of pockets of huge power and privilege. For him, race has been the 'race card' as he would like to call it. And politics was one of the ideological factors, a politics of rhetoric, which was to play the race card, and pull together the ANC's fractious groupings.

But fundamentally, and this was his third concept, politics is ultimately power, he said. Now perhaps that is true, and perhaps my Leninist background would suggest that it is true. But this power was not about social forces, classes or national groups. Power was the politics of professional politicians. Not to democratise power, or develop programmatic perspectives on power, but to understand the personalities, cliques, and the politics of deployment.

Now I should say that Howard Barrell was not happy with this reality. Part of what he was trying to do was to say to us: 'this is grown-up politics'. This means, he said, that someone like Tony Leon cannot stand up in Orange Farm and speak with credibility to the inhabitants, while someone who holds the 'race





card' and is implementing technocratic economic policy can. This has allowed us to erect a rhetorical veil that that is what we need in order to hold our society together and get on with what we have to do.

Now I believe a lot of media comment (still today, although there's been some slippage, through the critical debate years of the mid-1990s to the early 2000s) was shaped by that set of assumptions. And so political commentary, for instance, became the commentary of personalities, how someone's business card reads, who they have access to and so on. Unfortunately a lot of ANC conferences have also degenerated into cliques, factions, without there being dramatic differences between them. So unfortunately a

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lot of what was being saluted by Howard Barrell and others like him has come somewhat to be the case, but I think not entirely.

Partly what Barrell, Hartley and others were trying to do was to read what we might describe – and I do not want to personalise it in any way – as 'the Mbeki Project'. They were trying to describe it, but also shape it in a particular way. And I think they were half getting it right, but not entirely. What I will move on to talk about was, what I think was for want of a better word 'the Mbeki project', in the periods 1994 to 1996 and into the beginnings of his presidency.

I do not like to personalise it because I do not think that he is a prisoner of the paradigm that I want to talk about. I think that our president is actively moving beyond and surpassing this paradigm. But essentially that paradigm, which I think became the dominant paradigm within the ANC, and which occupied centre stage within the politics and public debate in South Africa and became the dominant reality, was first and foremost a modernising project with regard to the South African economy – to reconnect the South African economy with a globalising economy through modernisation, through international best practice and so forth. And this indeed was conceptualised as largely a technical task and also a capitalist task, because this prevailing reality was of course capitalist.

The ideological dimension of it was a refashioning of the nationalism, a refashioning of the national revolutionary project of the ANC, but drawing on ANC traditions and particularly the early traditions of Pixley ka Seme and others like that, who had been modernisers at the beginning of the ANC's history, and this was enunciated as a version of an African renaissance both within South Africa, but also for our continent. An African renaissance is about allowing the continent to catch up with the globe that is advancing, modernising, developing. But we were getting left behind, so it is a catch-up modernising project. The project also involves



building a cadre that is capable of doing this. And that cadre consisted, I think, of an alliance of groupings. The one is a more technical modernising, managerial emerging group, but also an emerging capitalist sector. A cross-over, so often yesterday's DG becomes today's capitalist and so forth. And then there was also a major political organisational dimension to this project.

There was a lot of interest in the social democratic third way. Remember in the mid-1990s at the same time as this project was developing, Schroeder, Tony Blair and others were refashioning social democratic and labour parties along the line of some kind of vacuous third way idea. And that was many things, but it was also about parties breaking the alliance with the trade union movement, but continuing to appeal to workers as voters. So it was about turning the parties into electoral machines, displacing shop floor organisers and neighbourhood organisers with image consultants and spin doctors and so forth. And there was a lot of interest I think from within circles of ANC in these experiments, and attempts to shift the ANC in that direction as well, which also meant their taking on the alliance. I think a lot of the turbulence within the alliance is not just about policy but also about restructuring the character of the ANC. So you wanted to be an ANC that was modern, that was centre-leftish in character but that also was not encumbered by these anachronistic institutions like blue collar trade union federations and communist parties and so forth.

Now in the early 1990s someone wrote a book that was called *Paradigm Lost*. It was about my legacy going down the tubes with the Berlin Wall. And it was a lovely title and an appropriate title, but perhaps it should have been called *Paradigms Lost*, because as the communist legacy was going down in the 1980s and the 1990s, what was also going down was the social democratic legacy, in its original version, and indeed the progressive third world radical national

liberation tradition, whether it was Vietnam or Zimbabwe or Angola. It was paradigms being lost.

I think what needs to be written now, perhaps within the ANC, and discussed is the next paradigm along, that is also in the process of being lost. I think that certainly the socialist project needs renewal; certainly the communist project needs renewal; and, the radical third world tradition needs renewal. But renewal, not replacement, and I think that attempts to present a different model, which we could see in the leading project within the ANC is currently now indeed struggling, and the project of economic alignment of economic catch-up – that has happened, more than is required by Washington consensus standards, and it has produced some stabilisation, perhaps necessary stabilisation. But the crisis of unemployment, of underdevelopment of the so-called second economy, persists.

I think the dominant paradigm inside the ANC for the last several years is itself now being lost. Now that does not necessarily help to explain it. But it does offer the opportunity to rebuild a different paradigm, which is progressive, and to centre the debate away from personalities towards programmatic strategic perspectives approaching the challenges of underdevelopment and the national question with serious intent.





Those strains that we see in the ANC, and which have played themselves out, perhaps not to over-elaborate – there are obviously personal, judicial and all kinds of issues at play as well. But the glue that held together a particular alliance of forces, which on the one hand was a technocratic managerial project but also linking up with emerging black economic empowerment players – I think that there are huge strains between those forces because the overlapping interest masks very significant and sharp differences between those that are serious about a modern, technical economy and those that are about boosting accumulation. Also between the more technocratic modernising elements within the party and those who have been useful to the party, regarding the race card, to use that horrible word, a kind of populism which holds together the mass base, but without much politics and without any discerning or clear strategies. A politics that is everything to everyone – to trade unionists, to traditional leaders, regionalists and so forth, a popular politics, but a politics without discernable ideological orientation. So I think that some of what is playing itself out now are those tensions as well, in addition to other things.

In conclusion, let no one doubt the ANC's huge support in our country. My critical comments are not casting doubt that our 70% electoral victory last year was accidental. Also I do not for a moment doubt the progressive character all of these different trends that I have been discussing, some of which I am critical of, but that all have a progressive content within the realities of South Africa and certainly strong progressive intent. But I think they are failing to deliver.

There has been real transformation in our country. But I think the dominant paradigm inside the ANC for the last several years is itself now being lost. Now that does not necessarily help to explain it, and it could result in confusion and provincial conferences like the one you saw here in the Western Cape. But it does offer the opportunity to rebuild a different paradigm, which is progressive, and to centre the debate away from personalities towards programmatic strategic perspectives approaching the challenges of underdevelopment and the national question, which is a real issue, with serious intent. And also to look at the challenges that the ANC faces organisationally. I have no doubt that that is the debate that will happen at the forthcoming ANC National General Council. ■



I want today to talk about talking and listening, about who talks, about how we talk, and the language in which we talk. There has been a lot of talk lately about the wonderful possibilities of new information technologies, like the internet, and how wonderful these are for democracies. I read a very interesting paper on this subject a short while ago, in which the author looked at how South African social movements employ what he called 'technologies of resistance' to become part of virtual global communities of resistance. He looked at two case studies in particular, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), and the Anti-Privatisation Forum, and argued that, following TAC's successful use of new media technologies, there is 'potential to broaden the public sphere'. This, he suggests, may be seen 'as a more realistic benefit posed by this medium'. New media technologies add another dimension to the public sphere since they enable people to say things that don't readily find their way into the mainstream media. The assumption is, of course, that if we can speak then we should be heard, meaning that voices and issues can enter into dialogue about the making of public policy – and particularly around issues that concern those who appear to be increasingly socially marginalised.

I do not necessarily want to disagree with this view about the potential of these technologies for democratic life, but I want to come at this discussion by posing the question differently. If we do not limit ourselves to the social movement's use of information and communication technology (ICT), we could include a range of movements and interests who also use them to construct communities and who speak to each other and others through them.

I am thinking of President Mbeki's weekly letter for example. Until the more recent swing back to more traditional forms of government communication, like a joint-sitting of parliament, and a press conference, the President's letter has become widely anticipated

in some circles, more so than the American president's weekly radio address (and it is curious that he uses radio, but that is another matter). Mr Mbeki's letter, which I receive by email each week by simply joining the online mailing list, is anticipated not least because we wait to see who our honourable president might possibly lambaste this week, or to find out where our President has travelled to this week. But to say it is a travelogue would be to trivialise it. The detail of the letter clearly displays a pedagogical desire to do some political education to the rank and file of the party, and perhaps the citizens in general about the policies and intentions of the ruling party.

Given the main historical constituency of the ANC, it is surely odd that the President chooses this medium to communicate most regularly and consistently to 'the nation', as it were. Or perhaps it is aptly symbolic, since I think it marks a change in the way we have to think about the practice of political and democratic life. And this might lead us to a slightly different conclusion about the character of the public sphere after apartheid.

One of the challenges we face in this time of the rule of experts, it seems to me, is how to put the politics back into the state because it seems to be floating out at sea.





A few processes are worth noting, I think: politics is becoming a technical matter. Grand narrative political horizons seem increasingly now displaced and nostalgic. Speaking to the state instils its own demands as opposed to speaking *past* the state to a historically transcendent Idea, like 'the seizure of state power' for example. Most political discontents today in South Africa are not calling for the overthrow, abolishment or withering away of the state. You may say those things within our liberal democracy, but you are likely to be ignored if you use that vocabulary, or charged with treason. So the demands and desires of our discontent have to be framed within the categories through which we take care of our well being, now in the hands of different ministers and ministries, who are responsible for making decisions about things like where we build hospitals, who gets a road and how we educate our children. And this is a change in the language with profound consequences, as the philosopher Wittgenstein knew, when he said that the limit of our language is the limit of our world.

Politics is becoming a technical matter. Grand narrative political horizons seem increasingly now displaced and nostalgic. Speaking to the state instils its own demands as opposed to speaking *past* the state to a historically transcendent Idea, like 'the seizure of state power'.

Speaking to the state, the state increasingly seeks to remind us, is an apolitical activity since the state itself seeks to remove politics from the state in favour of the technical administration of life. What we call at our universities 'Public Administration'. Governing, we are told, is now (post-ideologically) a matter of *mere* administration. The economy, for example, works through mysterious rationalities intrinsic to its macroeconomic needs. And it is accountable to rationalities beyond the conventional but quaint idea of the consent of a sovereign people since 'the people' are increasingly not where sovereignty lies and perhaps something like 'the global market' is. Hence we are concerned about 'what the market will say'. Of course the market does 'speak', in that benign ticker tape that runs below the financial news that tells us about the changing values of shares, currencies and stocks. We know the financial indicators are important, but we do not quite know what they mean as they whisper to us through arrows that seem to point up and down beyond the control of people or human intervention, and captivates and at the same time holds us captive to 'how it will react'. It speaks to us, but most of us need a translator. The net effect, so to speak, is a democratic political framework which in some measure is curiously at odds with its own rationality: caught between the tension of rule *by* the people and rule *for* the people.

Burke and others who so feared the 'will of the people' as the tyranny of the majority, as the rule of the mob, need not have been so terrified by the modern state, which is supposed to embody the will of the people, but spends much of its time and money telling them what to do and trying to change the will of the people. Today we call it development. Even the die hard popular democrats amongst us flinch when we hear the editor of *Die Son* or *Voice* attribute that paper's phenomenal growth due to the fact that '*sex, skinner and skandaal*' [sex, gossip and scandal] is what the





people want. Somebody should have told *This Day* that.¹ The technical nature of governance, we are increasingly reminded, requires not rule by the people, but patience by the people while rule is left to experts. Policy-making therefore increasingly looks uncomfortable, irritated and impatient when put before the eye of public oversight, and public input in any substantive manner loses its efficacy and is reduced to the ritual of practice diluted of its foundational meaning. Decisions about public life, about the will of the people, are made behind closed doors; deals are struck in hotel lobbies, on golf courses, or, at the risk of appearing impolite to our hosts, 'think tanks'.

Let me turn now to how we speak our discontent. Many social movements today are extensions of, or in complex relations with, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which may be local, but often are international. These NGOs bring with them a particular kind of political practice since they are often driven not from the bottom up, by the mandate of 'the grassroots', but rather by the concerns of donors. NGOs are thus accountable, but not necessarily to the constituency they claim or seek to represent. Secondly, and this seems to follow from the first observation, they are largely driven by 'experts' in a particular field which roughly corresponds to spheres of governance, sometimes administered through that category of aid we call 'technical assistance'. And they are also experts in terms of skills and knowledge of the rules of judicialised political claims. The networks of communication thus seem increasingly to be between those situated along different nodes in this chain of expertise required for mobilisation – from academics to paid officials, to volun-

teers, to lawyers and advocates – with the 'masses' being brought in for those public symbolic rituals of a politics simultaneously both appropriate and yet strangely out of place; a kind of nostalgia for the future?

And here, we may ask, is the community which ICT constructs widening the public sphere, or is it actually narrowing into a more limited audience, for which and often against which Mr Mbeki writes his weekly address, and in which information circulates between the officials of the ANC and their constituency, or between the experts of TAC and their supporters. That is to say, a limited audience of both hegemonic and counter hegemonic experts in the *policy* spheres rather than the *public* spheres of our democratic life? This is not the mass based politics of old for sure, where notions of self-activity were crucial as the driving momentum of a movement which would find its own demands in the practice of struggle.

We can speak. There are more channels than ever to do so. But the language of technocratic liberal constitutionalism both enables and disables us. It enables us by making talking, listening and being heard a right in a democracy. But it disables us by telling us how, where and when we should speak and in what conceptual language we can speak if we want our sounds to be heard and comprehended and not reduced to noise lost in the south-easter and swept out to sea. One of the challenges we face in this time of the rule of experts, it seems to me, is how to put the politics back into the state because it seems to be floating out at sea. ■





development dialogues

REFLECTIONS BY
AUBREY MATSHIQI

You have heard two very radical inputs; I am the voice of moderation. As you have heard, I am a former member of the South African Communist Party. And the reason why I am a former member of the South African Communist Party is that when I turned 40, a few years ago, I thought it would be indecent for a man of my age to be regarded as a communist.

I am known as a political analyst or so-called political analyst. Those who agree with my views regard me as a political analyst. Those who disagree with me call me a so-called political analyst.

Our topic is the nature of democratic debate in South Africa, but I also think this topic is about the nature of debate in a democratic South Africa. We must not forget where we come from: that we have not always been democratic and there has not always been a democratic space in which we can engage in these debates.

When one hears about debate in South Africa, especially since 1994, it is political debate. We seldom talk about debates in terms of arts or in terms of music. Also, we know one cannot talk about political debate in this country without talking about the ANC and the centrality of its president, Thabo Mbeki. This would be like talking about impressionism without talking about Monet.

To the extent that I am going to talk about groups, whether they are racially defined or they are defined in class terms, I make the assumption that when I talk about these I am also making the assumptions that there are some within those groups who are exceptions to the norm.

Debate – political debate in South Africa – is fraught with many a tension. Those who engage in these debates do so in order to achieve the following. There is an attempt to impose, what I call, a canon of rational debate or rational thought. Anything that falls outside that canon of rational thought is regarded as irrational. For instance, when we engage in the debate about Zimbabwe or the debate about transformation, the transformation of staff or the transformation of the judiciary, there is an attempt to impose a canon of rational thought on those issues so that everything that falls outside that canon is regarded as irrational or even nonsensical. In fact, an attempt is made by some to ensure that the position they stand for in any debate about politics in this country becomes commonsensical and anything else nonsensical and irrelevant.

Also, another problem I have identified with regard to political debate in this country is the extent to which we can talk about a core and a periphery. Most probably all of us here are part of the core as far as political debate is concerned. In other words, we are part of a privileged minority that has access to these debates and that shapes these debates. On the periphery you have the majority – they tend to be black, they tend to be poor, they tend to be women, they tend to be working class. They are not part of this debate. They are never, or seldom, part of these debates. To the extent that they sometimes become part of these debates, it is when people like you and me analyse their actions. It was very interesting to see that, when people in Harrismith and people in the townships of Port Elizabeth, in the squatter camps of Port Elizabeth, marched in the streets in protest against poor service delivery. But how many attempts were made to understand the

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crisis from their perspective? From the position of our ivory towers we analysed that and depending on our analyses, we then made decisions about their rationality or irrationality.

So you have this majority of South Africans who are not part of these debates. They are not excluded from these debates only because they are women or they are black or they are members of the working class. They are also excluded from these debates on the basis of language. I am a Xhosa man talking to you, engaging you in this debate in a fourth or fifth language. And that is the reality for the majority of South Africans. But these debates and all the debates we have about the nature of politics in this country, about the nature of our political culture, do not take place in languages that allow them access to these debates. And that denies them the opportunity to shape these debates. We have denied them access to these debates. But more importantly, we have denied them the opportunity to shape these debates. So to some extent the three of us can possibly represent a minority view in the views that we express about out the nature of debate in this country, because we are lucky that we speak the language through which we can access these debates. Yet, the majority of South Africans cannot.

Maybe we should ask the question whether there is a debate at all. Maybe we are fooling ourselves, and there is no debate. If the majority of South Africans are either not part of this debate or are debating elsewhere and the rest of us do not go to them to be part of those debates, we are fooling ourselves thinking we are part of the debate. Maybe we are not the core, maybe we are the periphery in relation to the majority of South Africans and how they engage in these things.

In addition to language, there is the issue of gender. Now this one is an interesting one for me. In addition to the sin of excluding women from these debates because the tone and content of these debates is predominantly male, there is a tendency to pretend that

women are the same, that there are no class divisions, there are no ideological divisions. To the extent that women themselves are able to access these debates, they do so because they tend to be middle class. And it is a middle class interests that they tend to push. In other words, to the extent that even black women engage in these debates, they do not do so to represent the majority view.

Now we can of course say the same thing about blackness. Blackness has become a very important resource in political debate in this country. There are many of us – black people – who have become black recently: because of the economic opportunities that we can access by espousing our blackness, by all of a sudden celebrating your blackness. There are people who have become women recently too, because of the access to resources and economic opportunities they can get by moving forward with an agenda. And in many cases these agendas are not only individualistic, but are at the expense of the majority of women and black people.

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We need to ask the question that if the debate as we see it today in terms of content and form is so predominantly male, what does that tell us about the equality of this debate when the majority people in this country are women? The tool and content of that debate is male. So what does it tell us about the quality of the debate?

I think debates we tend to have in this country are important both because of what we debate, but also because of what we do not debate. To the extent that I say that the majority are in periphery and we are in the core, the majority of South Africans were not even asked whether we need a Constitution in this country. I know we even think it nonsensical to ask such questions. But they were not asked whether we need a Constitution. And secondly, they were on the periphery as far as the content of that Constitution was concerned. That is why there is some dissonance between

its content, its culture and that of the majority of South Africans, who remain alienated from this Constitution. Because not only were they not asked whether this Constitution is necessary, but they are told that there are certain amendments they must not make. They must vote 70% in favour of the ANC as long as they do not give the ANC a mandate to amend the Constitution.

In closing, let me close on this controversial note of the Constitution. Is it not possible that one of the reasons we needed a Constitution is that the minority, particularly white, was suspicious of a black government and they needed an instrument that would curtail its power? When we look at this Constitution, is it not a product of suspicions on the part of minorities? I am saying that these are some of the questions that we should debate, because these are important because of what we discuss, but also what we do not discuss. ■



AFTER THE INPUTS, THE FLOOR WAS OPEN FOR QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS. ISSUES RAISED INCLUDED:

- How a genuine debate on the new paradigms raised by Jeremy Cronin is going to take place in the parliamentary forum as opposed to the ANC General Council and the National Executive.
- Comments made by the Young Communists in the context of the controversies surrounding former Deputy President Jacob Zuma, and the politics of personality.
- The role of women in parliament who tend to talk about gender in terms of just equity, an equity which seems to be related to access to top jobs, top money and top positions, forgetting about women who are at the bottom of the pile. There is a need to look at both the practical and strategic needs of women, particularly when these are survivalist for many women.
- Whether moves by the ANC to ensure that 50% of local councillors are women would create space for more women to participate in debate.
- The need to debate issues of capitalism and consumption and the sustainability of this for society.

THE SPEAKERS MADE A ROUND OF CONCLUDING COMMENTS:

Jeremy Cronin

Obviously there is debate around developments in the Communist Party and the Young Communist League and that is a debate in itself. Personally I am optimistic about the maturation of that debate.

I will not get into a long debate about whether the SACP should be an independent electoral party; that is another debate that is going on inside the Communist Party itself. It is my view that it should not, partly because I am optimistic about the evolution and engagement within the broader ANC of policy. I am not one that makes the assumption that the ANC is stuck in a paradigm. I think it is moving beyond

the paradigm, not because we have criticised the paradigm.

I think that globalisation is deeply contradictory. We should not run away from a broad internationalism, but struggle to redefine the world that we are living in. Clearly, that is not an easy thing.

I think the sustainability issue is absolutely crucial and I think it is a key dimension in addressing what has been wrongly called the second economy. I think the acknowledgement of so-called second economy is that

there is this huge problem which Aubrey referred to in a different way. But it is not a second economy; it is part of the same economy. The problem is that the growing sector of the economy is reproducing the crisis, and the solutions are not more growth. How do we build sustainable communities? How do we build sustainable households? I think this lousy capitalist system is incapable of addressing the 40% unemployment rate that we will reach any time soon.

I was also talking about the technisation of power. We must be careful. I think that we do need technical competency. We want a Reserve Bank that knows what it is doing – clearly the Communist Party should not be allowed to decide on the repo rate; it would be a disaster, no doubt about that. So you need to have technically proficient people. But they must not be making the policy. They must be telling us what are the pros and cons of different choices. But the policies need to be opened up to public debate, to democratic discussion and debate.

And yes, in my view the president should be a female. In my constituency, which is a poor working class constituency on the Cape Flats they get hold of the President's letter. They do not have access to the Internet, but it circulates through a thousand ways and it is a discussion.

I also think there are countervailing things in the ANC and in the history of struggle. There is the imbizo, raw rough engagement with the President, Deputy president, Ministers and so forth up and down our country and there is door-to-door work, with the President going into squatter camps and engaging with ordinary people. In my area there are neighbourhood watches, there are community policing





forums, and so on, and it is poor black women who are running these things; they are running the communities. I agree with Aubrey, that all of us, the chattering classes, especially those of us who are professional politicians, with all of our tendencies towards careerism, gate-keeping and technocratic arrogance, need to constantly be taking the reality check that Aubrey is calling on us to do. But on the other hand we must be careful of not being patronising. Let us not forget that those rural women you were referring to, that cannot speak English, were the backbone of a struggle against the most reprehensible but entrenched form of colonialism on the African continent. It was not professional politicians, it was them, there was a battle waged. And that remains a resource. It bursts out in Uitenhage and Port Elizabeth and the townships and so on. The traditions are not lost. But do not underestimate them. I think none of us should do that. There is a debate. It is going on and our job is not to be embarrassed, and whilst we should be careful, I think the job of intellectuals is to empower those processes. To be humble before them but also to realise we have got responsibilities as well to organise, to engage in campaigns, to listen. Because we are not going to do the things we want to do – the projects that we have of transformation, of overcoming the huge underdevelopment crisis and so on – unless we listen to their aspirations and unless we engage them, unless we help them to organise themselves. But they are not going to wait for us if we do not do it. They will organise themselves as they are in townships throughout South Africa.

So let us be careful of technocracy, the government and the politics of politicians. And at the same time we should not despair. In my view, politicians, professional politicians, should have a responsibility. We need to try to develop a different kind of policy, including the debates here. These forums are so important because we can either help to shut off from the sources or we can help to empower them. That is the challenge that we face.

Suren Pillay

I think the point is that there is a feeling that at some point we lose sight of the assumptions. It is important that the assumptions guide technicians and not the other way round. In some ways it reinforces the point that Aubrey raised about language, that this is what language is about. I think it is a hugely important thing for us to confront. It is not only about our ability to communicate, but it is also about the conceptual languages that we allow in our democratic space.

Aubrey Matshiqi

I lied - Jeremy is the voice of moderation. I think that the language debate needs to continue. The ANC has passed many resolutions with regard to enhancing the economic literacy of its members. You have a discussion paper now on the table, on development and underdevelopment, and one of the things coming to the fore very strongly is an old thing. One of the things that must be done is to convince delegates that they are illiterate when it comes to economic issues, then you exclude them from the debate, then you force them to pass resolutions that advance your own vision. I think this is something that needs to be addressed.

On the issue of women and quotas, this is a very difficult one for me. I must caution against parachuting women into senior positions, whether in government or in political parties, because that can have the effect of disempowerment, in the same way that certain forms of affirmative action disempower black people and confirm the prejudices of some. So we must be very careful about how we engage with this. Quotas must be used as part of the programme of empowering women in a strategic way to play a leadership role, not only in government, but also in political parties. ■

¹ *Die Son* and *Voice* are tabloid newspapers that have recently gone into circulation in Cape Town. *This Day* was a daily national newspaper that had to close down due to lack of funds.





THE NATURE OF DEMOCRATIC DEBATE IN SOUTH AFRICA

23 JUNE 2005

CENTRE FOR THE BOOK, CAPE TOWN

ABOUT THE PANEL:

JEREMY CRONIN is a member of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and Member of Parliament, representing the ANC. He chairs Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Transport. Jeremy Cronin is also a celebrated poet.

SUREN PILLAY is a Lecturer in the Department of Political Studies at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) where he teaches political theory and political philosophy. His published work has gathered the relationship between political identities and cultural identities and citizenship in democratisation. Suren Pillay is currently a doctoral candidate at Columbia University in New York.

AUBREY MATSHIQI is a former maths and science teacher, former spokesperson for the Education Department in Gauteng and former strategist for Premier Mbazima Shilowa. He was in the ANC military and political underground and is a former member of the SACP. He describes himself as an English and History major who is struggling to finish a Masters degree. Aubrey Matshiqi is now an independent political analyst who writes for a wide range of publications.



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