

## Redemption Song

WE HAVE taken our eye off the ball. As South Africans focused on the president's sex life, his many children, girlfriends and wives, the multimillion-dollar settlement between BAE Systems and Britain's Serious Fraud Office failed to have the impact it should have locally.

Writing in The Guardian, former ANC MP Andrew Feinstein and his co-author, Susan Hawley, described the settlement as a "travesty of justice".

"As recently as Friday, the Serious Fraud Office team was still taking formal witness statements in relation to a multibillion-pound deal in which BAE sold jets to South Africa that its air force didn't want and are hardly used. Over £100m in bribes was allegedly paid to agents, senior politicians, officials and political parties. The Serious Fraud Office felt it had a strong case..."

"Then out of the blue the Serious Fraud Office allowed BAE to plead guilty to a minor accounting offence in relation to Tanzania, and settled for £30m. It dropped its charges against individuals. There was no mention why the Serious Fraud Office dropped charges relating to the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and South Africa," they wrote.

Feinstein and Hawley argued that while there was nothing wrong with the Serious Fraud Office reaching a plea-bargain with BAE, "it is the terms that are wrong". "The lack of an admission of guilt means no details or evidence will emerge about the payments BAE allegedly made in Tanzania, South Africa, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania. The people of those countries deserve to know how much they were ripped off by BAE and which officials were being paid off."

They are right. We have left it to the usual suspects such as the ID's Patricia de Lille, former DA MP Raenette Taljaard and anti-arms campaigner Terry Crawford-Browne to rail against this, but we are now unlikely to ever know the real truth about the corruption involved in our arms deal. Unless of course, the president is a man of his word, prepared to fight corruption.

So today we say: do the right thing, Mr President, appoint that judicial commission of inquiry; we are owed the truth.

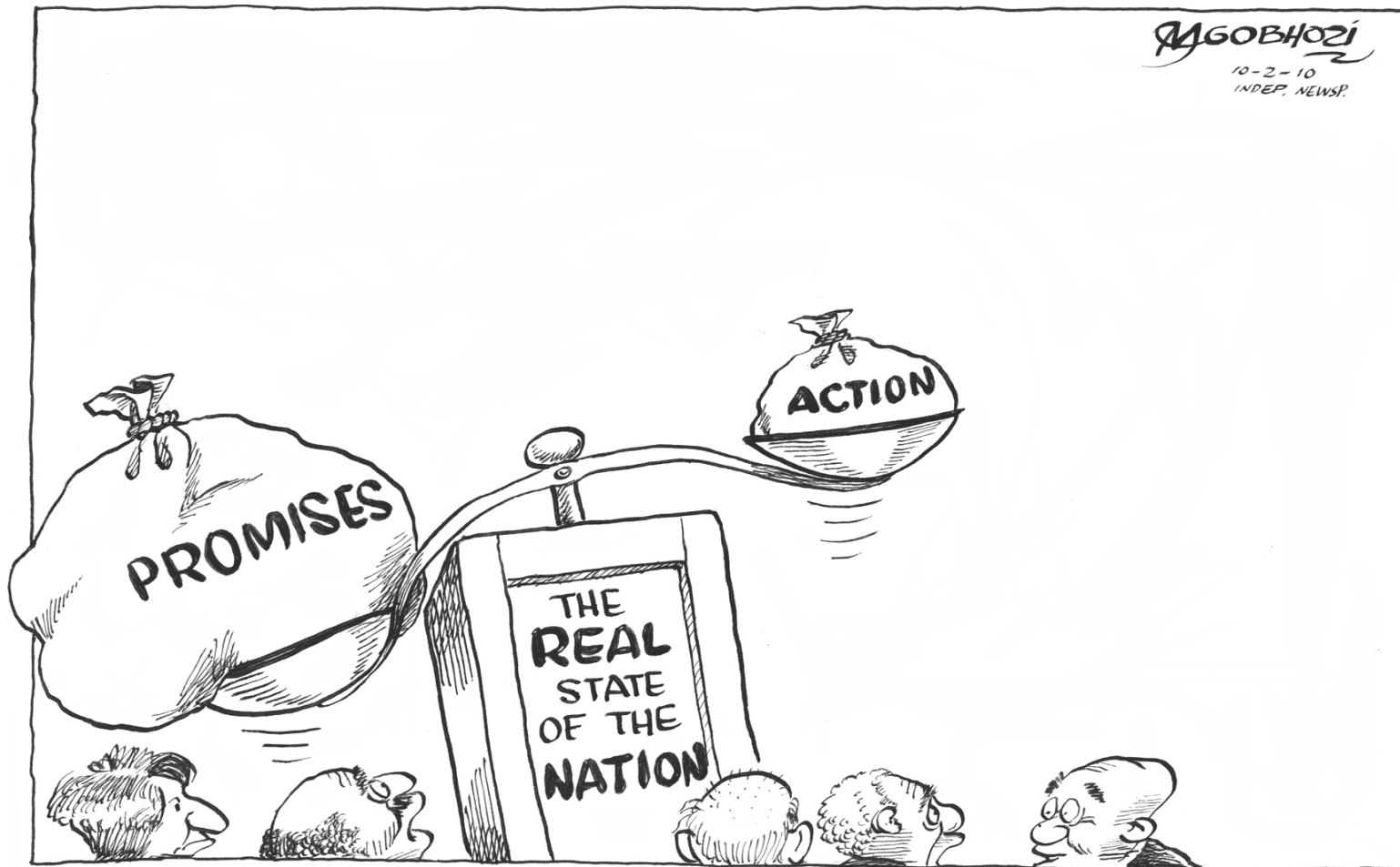
## Protecting Children

THE 10 American Baptist missionaries arrested on charges of abducting children from earthquake-ravaged Haiti had circulated fliers promising to give orphans "with no one to love or care for them" a better life in the Dominican Republic, and claiming to have government permission to do so.

In fact, they did not have the proper paperwork, authorities said, and the New Life Children's Refuge had yet to build its advertised orphanage. Many of the 33 supposed orphans turned out to have parents. And the group's leader faces multiple legal claims against her and her internet shopping business in Idaho, where the non-profit organisation is registered to the address of a home she lost to foreclosure in December.

Sound sinister? Yes, it does. Was it? The missionaries' supporters say no. Perhaps these men and women were motivated by the best of intentions. Perhaps the leader, Laura Silsby, has been unlucky in business during a bad economy, and perhaps that has no bearing on her Christian work. All we know for sure is that, at the very least, it was arrogant and irresponsible for the missionaries to think they could shepherd these two- to 12-year-olds out of the country without respect for the law or the most basic attention to detail.

Even in impoverished and frequently dysfunctional Haiti, there are laws protecting the rights of children and procedures for adoption. No one should try to impede justice in a country that has struggled to provide it even in the best of times. - Los Angeles Times



You & Me  
ROD SMITH

Q: MY IN-LAWS talk to my husband as if he is married to a complete loser. I paint a room and they comment on how beautiful his painting is, I choose furniture and they talk about his fine taste.

Sometimes I think I am invisible when they are around. He does correct them and he does stand up for me, but should I say something? We have only been married a few months.

A: I'd suggest you be as playful and accommodating as possible. Finding humour in their odd behaviour will be helpful to both you and your husband.

If it continues to disturb you, try to find out the reasons why their affirmation is important to you.

While I understand common recognition and appreciation is something most of us desire, your in-laws appear oblivious to such niceties. So I'd suggest you choose your battles.

I'd be much more concerned if your husband did not speak up for you.

□ Rod Smith is a family therapist who lives in the US. E-mail questions to [Rod@DifficultRelationships.com](mailto:Rod@DifficultRelationships.com)

# New Left would expand political debate in SA

There is no clear path yet, but an awareness is growing of the need to make politicians more accountable and the ANC less certain of victory

MUCH has been said in South Africa about the need for political pluralism and the creation of uncertainty so that no party is guaranteed a victory at the polls. Such a situation would mean that political parties and politicians would be more responsive to the electorate and there would therefore be greater accountability.

In recent times, Cope emerged on the political scene in South Africa with all kinds of drama and the party initially inspired real excitement in some quarters.

But fighting, the silly decision to appoint a relatively unknown cleric to head the party and the failure to hold a conference to elect its leadership have done serious damage to the party. It now seems highly unlikely that it will prosper on its own and the logical step is to amalgamate with the DA.

This is a logical move given that both parties are on the economic Centre-Right and committed to liberal democratic values in the political sphere.

Furthermore, uniting would give the new formation a sizeable presence in parliament and the DA would be able to begin to shed some of its racial baggage.

But given the deepening levels of inequality in the country - and the failure of both the ANC and its critics on the Right to address this -

it's quite clear that a healthy political system has to be one in which voters have a credible alternative to the Left of the ANC.

The recent announcement that a group of former SACP activists, together with key figures in the independent Left in the NGOs and universities, had called for a Conference for a Democratic Left is an encouraging step forward.

They are being a little cagey about whether or not the aim of their conference will be to form a political party but it seems clear enough that this is the direction in which they are headed.

### No total power

The group have circulated a document in which they indicate that their intention is to break with the authoritarian forms of leftism, so notoriously prevalent in South Africa - in both the ANC and the independent left in the NGOs.

This is extremely important. In most countries the Left went through a crisis after the crimes of Stalinism and especially after the Soviet tanks rolled into Hungary, and thus thought very seriously about democratising their practice. In South Africa the Left was too busy confronting



IMRAAN BUCCUS

the ogre of apartheid to have any self-doubt and it never went through this process.

In places like China and Bengal, leftist parties in power have been quite terrifying at times.

But the group are talking about learning from the experience in Kerala and, if they can add the Bolivian experience to the list of democratic Left projects that they aim to learn from, then we could be in for some exciting innovation.

It certainly is more than overdue for the South African Left to break with its tired and frankly dangerous fixation on the Russian Revolution and the assumption that the only choices are between the Stalinism of the Left in the SACP and the Trotskyism of much of the Left outside of the SACP. The world has moved on and so must the Left.

The group has attracted the support of some leading activists and academics.

There are some very high powered and impressive people involved - people of the calibre of Mazibuko Jara,

Vishwas Satgar and Martin Legassick. But the real question that must confront this potentially very exciting and important new project is where their mass support will come from. Most trade unions are firmly locked into the ANC, as is the Treatment Action Campaign.

The rest of the mass-based social movements and especially those affiliated to the Poor People's Alliance, take a strict position against party politics and even boycott elections.

They say that their strategy is to build their own power on the ground rather than to delegate power to representatives. As strange as these kinds of ideas may sound to some, they have in fact become fashionable internationally following the work of academics like John Holloway, who wrote the famous book *Change the World Without Taking Power*.

But while the grassroots movements that have taken a "no vote" position have taken their struggles forward with deeply impressive courage

and commitment, and while they have been startlingly successful in winning major victories at the local level, they are not able to achieve systemic reform of economic policy.

It is quite clear that to achieve this, one must, as Tariq Ali wrote in a pointed rejoinder to Holloway, change the world by taking power.

The wisdom of Ali's position has been borne out, as many have noted, by the inability of the Zapatistas in Mexico or the Piqueteros in Argentina, both of which opposed electoral politics, to really take on the power of the state.

### Worthy cause

But if the grassroots movements in South Africa are, despite the fate of the movements in Argentina, determined to stay away from party politics, then this new grouping will just have to look elsewhere for its support.

In fact they will have to create their support by conducting themselves in a democratic and principled fashion, keeping a clear and critical distance from the authoritarian Left, offering critical support to popular struggles and movements, and winning people over by the

logic and consistency of both their support for the self-activity of the oppressed and their critique of the status quo. They will also have to speak the language of ordinary people and to frame their ideas in a clear and accessible way.

All this will be a long-term project but one that will be well worth the effort and persistence needed to make it succeed.

Even for those who do not see themselves as being on the Left, a genuinely democratic and principled Left party would be a real boon.

A plurality of political parties is essential for the meaningful consolidation of democracy and a Left party is essential to balance the fact that the public debate in the country tends to, when it is not within the ANC, be between the ANC and the DA.

Even if a new Left party can't make significant immediate gains at the polls it can make a hugely important difference to the level of discussion and debate in the country.

That discussion certainly needs to move towards a genuine concern with the plight of the poor in our country - not to mention migrants and other oppressed groups.

● Imraan Buccus is Research Fellow at UKZN and DDP. He is also attached to Southern Insight, a group of research consultants.

E-mail [merletter@iml.co.za](mailto:merletter@iml.co.za), fax 031 308 2715, or post letters to: The Editor, PO Box 47549, Greyville 4023. Letters must carry the author's signature, name and address.

## forum

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## Demerits could cull taxi drivers

STEVEN Edwards of the Durban metro police states that there are 15 000 taxis operating in the greater Durban area and that during 2009 these taxis were charged with 164 268 traffic offences (The Mercury January 26).

This means that on average each taxi has been caught committing almost 11 traffic violations.

With the proposed demerit system this would mean we would very quickly be in need of 15 000 new taxi drivers.

RUSSELL VAN HEERDEN  
Durban

## LESS TALK, MORE ACTION ON MUNICIPALITIES

THE DISMAL state of most of South Africa's municipalities has been widely reported over the past few years "Municipality in a mess conks out" (The Mercury February 9).

It appears that the common denominator is the sheer incompetence and criminal behaviour of those entrusted to manage these municipalities.

One of the key areas in which these delinquent

managers fail is their inability to introduce fiscal discipline coupled with the intent to enrich themselves and their cronies to the harm of their constituency.

The government has had enough time and has spent more than enough money and hours in an effort to resolve this crisis and yet once again we read a report detailing a litany of fraudulent transactions and a dereliction of duty.

Any private company would have fired those responsible immediately and probably laid criminal charges. Yet in the government we see little sign of either action taken against these criminals or any kind of improvement in service delivery.

All we hear is a lot of hot air emanating from ministers concerned and our president. Sicelo Shiceka, our local government

minister, has threatened to strip mayors of their executive powers and outlined his department's latest plan to solve these problems which involves the creation of this super-powerful central data base that his department will use to monitor all municipalities.

The theory sounds great but I question how this will resolve the problems of our municipalities. Until these criminals are

charged with theft, dereliction of duty and fraud, and until the government puts in place strict monitoring procedures as well as competent and qualified people to run these agencies the ANC will continue to frustrate their electorate and service delivery protests will continue.

PETER WORMAN  
Durban

## I'd prefer to drive to Joburg

THE RECENTLY grounded SA Airlink aircraft, and the report "It was my fault, says pilot" (The Mercury, February 3) now have me really worried.

At around 8pm on the evening of January 25 our SAA pilot had to circle Durban airport after a failed first attempt to land because "we were approaching the airfield

too high", according to the pilot. Pilot error? Pilot in training? Technical error? Who knows? But many of the passengers were paler than usual when we touched down.

Pity the toll fees on the highway to Joburg are so high.

JOHN KEYTEER  
Hillcrest

## Zuma slips up in the shower

JACOB Zuma is slipping up! He should have told Miss Sonono Khoza to take a shower after they had sex. In that way she

wouldn't have fallen pregnant.

W JARVIS  
Hillcrest

## Wildlife policy hits the little guy

THERE should be no licensing fees for recreational fisherman - they make no difference to the fish population (The Mercury, February 5).

Commercial fishing companies are the ones that need to be controlled, but as we know KZN Wildlife does not have the means to do this, so the next best thing is to harass the recreational fisherman on the beach who hardly ever catches a fish and merely ends up

feeding them sardines. And when there is a shad run, what difference does it make if the recreational fisherman catches them or sharks and other predators feast on them?

KZN Wildlife's conservation effort is misleading and their efforts are misdirected and a waste of time and money.

BOB WATSON  
Umdloti

## Forget the drawbacks - just relax and enjoy World Cup

I SAY that Warren Bradfield is letting his friend down "Am I letting my country down?" (The Mercury, February 5).

He is now going to stay in boring, cold Britain, watching soccer in a smoky pub, with dark wood and red smelly carpets, slowly sipping on draft beer and feeding his ever-growing beer boep.

So what if you have to lock your bags at the airport? I had

to do this in Switzerland and lost my bags at Heathrow.

Don't have anything to steal on you, make sure you have your wallet safely tucked away in deep pockets.

Respect police - in the UK they are treacherous too if treated with disrespect.

Why do you respect an English bobby who walks aimlessly in the street with his stick yet you don't respect a

policeman in SA who has to deal with all the violence of his daily job?

We need to respect them and don't react negatively and defensively.

Forget the roads and potholes, just drive slower. Have you travelled on those English country lanes where you can barely fit a Morris Minor and anxiously take each corner hoping that no one is

driving the other way?

And my electricity has been fine for a year now, and will be for the World Cup. And candles are romantic anyway.

Your friend won't worry about the name changes as all he has to do is follow the sight of the magnificent soccer stadium and he will find it.

You need to lighten up. Have a laugh and a beer with sunny skies and a temperate climate.

And please wave at the blue-light brigade and you will be surprised how friendly they are.

I am sure you would love to see your friend, have a braai, enjoy his friendship, go to a game and have a laugh together.

You will never have the chance again in your lifetime.

TRACEY HUDSON  
Kloof

## Pay it back loaf by loaf to poor

WHAT is going to happen to the R195 million fine that Pioneer has to pay?

What about suggesting to Pioneer that they can send out bread at discounted rates for the period of however long it takes to redistribute the R195m in bread form to the poor consumers.

FIONA DORSE  
Durban