

THE MERCURY  
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Top-Class Teacher

IT IS not every day that school pupils feel so grateful to their teacher that they hoist him on their shoulders in a spontaneous gesture of appreciation, as we showed in The Mercury yesterday.

But Sifiso Kubeka is clearly not your regular teacher. Maths boffin Kubeka has built up a reputation for going well beyond the call of duty to give the pupils in his care the best possible chance to excel in their exams. And when the subject is mathematics – widely neglected or inadequately taught by many teachers and, as a result, the subject in which many pupils struggle – it is all the more significant.

On Monday, when matric pupils from Umlazi's Menzi High School finished writing their mathematics two (trigonometry and geometry) exam paper, they emerged from their classrooms beaming and confident. And, unanimously, their thanks went to Kubeka, who had ensured that his matric class studied on weekends and on holidays and spent time coaching them right up to a few hours before they sat for the exam.

This approach in previous years has seen Menzi High School pupils excel, especially in mathematics, notwithstanding their very limited resources.

As such, Kubeka knocks down the stereotype attached to many township teachers as lacking dedication to their pupils and subjects, and is proof again that ultimately – regardless of social or economic circumstances – a dedicated teacher can make all the difference.

There are undoubtedly many Kubekas in our schools, working quietly to make a difference to the young people who depend on them, but there are many more who do not put in even half of the effort required of them as teachers.

Let us hope that to the latter group, the likes of the Kubekas are the inspiration needed to jolt them into taking on their roles more seriously, and with more heart, so that more pupils get at least a decent chance in life.

Hooting Is Not Fine

FOR YEARS, it has been illegal in New York City to use “any claxon installed on a motor vehicle” except in an emergency or, unfortunately, as one of those irritating car alarms. The fine for unnecessary hooting is steep – \$350 (R3 000) per summons – although very few tickets are given out, which may explain the din.

In a bid for a bit more peace and quiet, David Yassky, the taxi commissioner, has now sent word by SMS to New York's 13 000 taxi drivers that they should “honk only in an emergency!” or risk getting a ticket.

Many taxi drivers were, how to say this, unimpressed. Fernando Mateo, head of the state's Federation of Taxi Drivers, spoke for many when he said: “Come on, David. You try driving a taxi for 10 hours a day in this city, hustling for the next fare.” We suspect it might take a few of these costly tickets to change minds and habits.

Cities around the world began outlawing excessive hooting as a safety measure as much as a way to improve quality of life. Officials found that too many drivers used hooters instead of brakes when they saw a car or a pedestrian in their way. Jeffrey Muttart, a crash safety expert at the University of Massachusetts, says that these days many drivers use their hooters to “chastise” others, and that soon hooting will be heard as an insult, not a warning of danger.

Yassky is right to remind his drivers of why they have a hooter in the first place. They should listen. So should the rest of the drivers out there. – The New York Times

A BETTER LIFE FOR SOME



You & Me  
 By Rod Smith

**A WORD for school principals:**  
 As a principal, I understand that schools are highly complex systems. I will become a student of systemic thinking and systemic principles. I know that decisions have multilevel ramifications. I will learn the principles of unintended consequence.

I will be alert to the multiplicative effect of decisions, the domino effect, and the generational pull felt in all organised groups. I know that some resistance comes from a legitimate source, and that sometimes the resistance is the system creaking at me from some obscure, disturbed grave.

Despite the authority given to me, I will live a yielded life. I'll give up being right in exchange for being kind. Thus, I will learn lessons born of love rather than lessons born of unnecessary conflict.

I will not confuse a yielded life with being weak or spineless. I will avoid yielding to manipulation, intimidation or domination from any source. Yet I will yield. I will yield from a spirit of humility, which will subsequently lead me down a path of powerful learning.

In so doing, I will be an example to my faculty, parents, and pupils.

□ Rod Smith is a family therapist who lives in the US. E-mail questions to Rod@DifficultRelationships.com.

Keeping the flame of critical scholarship alive

HERE is a danger that critical debate may soon be in short supply in South Africa given recent threats to the media and civil society. And Durban somehow lags behind when it comes to spaces for critical engagement.

So, a dialogue being hosted by the Democracy Development Programme on the publication of the second volume in Wits University Press's series on the *New South African Review 2* in Durban tomorrow needs to be welcomed.

Older readers will recall the original *South African Review* volumes which looked critically at the conduct and progress of the struggle to end apartheid. The *New South African Review* is designed to take an equally critical but committed look at the struggle to build a post-apartheid democracy which serves the needs of all South Africans, and not the lucky few in the new political economy.

Critical scholarship was valued during apartheid and it needs to be seriously valued in the post-apartheid context. During the eighties and nineties, from 1983 to 1995 to

be exact, seven volumes of the Review were produced by that much-loved stalwart of anti-apartheid publishing in South Africa, Ravan Press. With the exception of the last in the series, Steven Friedman and Doreen Atkinson's study of the 1994 election and the transition, the others were products of a project driven by a small collective of progressive scholars operating under the rubric of the Southern African Research Services.

Ingredient

It also produced the bi-monthly magazine, Work in Progress, or WIP as it was known. Progressive scholarship was a critical ingredient in the all-encompassing fight against racial domination and capitalistic exploitation.

The “Old Review” became essential reading for all concerned with understanding South Africa in that dark era of the apartheid night and

became a severe irritant, a thorn in the side of the apartheid state.

It collectively provided a thematic examination of the then state of South African politics, economics, labour, education, society, foreign relations and so on. Collectively, they led to the development of a political and intellectual culture of progressive analysis, interpretation and research.

The new volume of *The New South African Review* (edited by John Daniel, Prishani Naidoo, Roger Southall and Devan Pillay, the latter three all members of Wits University's excellent Sociology Department) has a similar goal.

It reflects upon the problems and challenges confronting the new South Africa, its achievements and failures, and focuses around the questioning and probing theme of “New Paths, Old Compromises?” This new edition, all with challenging

section introductions, is clustered around the sub-themes of politics, economy and society; state, environment; and media.

The book offers rich insights into a country which, as they put it, is “proving not easy to govern”. Particularly interesting in this edition is a chapter on “The Zuma Presidency: The Politics of Paralysis” by John Daniel and Roger Southall.

They argue that while the South African public was led to believe at Polokwane and after, that Thabo Mbeki's conservative macroeconomic policies would give way to Zuma's more activist, interventionist “developmental state”, the reality has fallen short.

“Popular anger has been stirred by the personal extravagance of countless government officials, including members of the cabinet. Corruption appears rampant. Key agencies of the state, notably the police, seem unac-

countable if not out of control – an entity as in apartheid days, more to be feared than relied upon,” they write.

They end their chapter with a provocative observation: “While it was once fashionable to be optimistic about post-apartheid South Africa, the reality is that most South Africans are concerned, no longer believing in the inevitability of a happy ever after.”

Accountability

Paul Hoffman, rapidly emerging as a major thorn in the side of the Zuma regime, approaches the issue of accountability from a robustly liberal basis, arguing that true democracy or “people power” will flourish if constitutional gains (imposing limitations upon the government; enjoying domestic legitimacy; and protecting, promoting and enforcing human rights), were obtained.

Ultimately, Hoffman finds that the “crisis of social delivery” which has come to characterise so many departments and levels of the government results from a lack of accountability of officialdom to the demands of the constitution.

It is therefore up to civil society and ordinary people to keep the politicians in check.

At a time when there are serious concerns about the health of our democracy and spaces for critical thought and engagement are fast being compromised, *The New South African Review* can fill us with some confidence about the state of critical scholarship in this country.

The book has some fine voices and the editors have fulfilled a commitment to giving space and voice to some newer, more diverse and younger academics and critical activists.

This volume is a must read for all those concerned with South Africa's socio-political and economic pulse and trajectory. It is available at all good bookshops in Durban for R280.

● Imraan Buccus is an academic researcher.

forum

E-mail merletter@inl.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.

E-mailed letters should also include a physical address and telephone number. The editor reserves the right to edit or shorten letters. Letters with pseudonyms will only be published in exceptional circumstances.

Was Zuma's shake-up a wake-up call?

IT SEEMS amazing that President Jacob Zuma finally mustered sufficient political courage to abandon his political friends in the light of a never-ending controversy.

This may be a defining moment in his presidency, and to some extent, in terms of leadership may exceed that of his predecessor Thabo Mbeki.

The issue that remains is will Zuma begin seriously tackling provinces that are under-performing and institute similar measures?

The most glaring is the Education Department in the Eastern Cape where in all probability the missionary schools and even the Matanzima administration, for all its shortcomings, produced better results.

Ultimately Zuma faces his biggest opposition from the youth league which has come out in support of his deputy, Kgalema Motlanthe, and it remains to be seen whether this shake-up would have been a wake-up call to stop dithering and act, or is it a brief period of volatile activity in a rather somnolent presidency?

MUHAMMAD ISMAIL OMAR  
 Durban

STATE-CONTROLLED ECONOMY NOT SUSTAINABLE

AS THE ANC Youth League marches for the nationalisation of the economy, to take back the land, mines and banks, the question is: will they be able to improve on the lives of the young black people they say they are representing?

The same question must be asked of Cosatu, the SACP, elements in the ANC itself, and supporting Marxist intellectuals. All these groupings believe that

state control of the “means of production” provides the solution. However, there is a mass of evidence to the contrary, showing that centralised, state-controlled economies are neither practical nor sustainable.

The article “Timber shortage to gnaw SA jobs” (Business Report, October 11) is illustrative of the reason why state-owned enterprises always fail to deliver, and reveals the dead

hand of government in business decision-making. A spokesman for Safcol, a forestry company owned by the Department of Public Enterprises, noted that it had reported a loss before tax of R103 million in 2011, and a loss of R589m in 2010.

During the same period, private sector companies in the industry underwent strategic changes to remain competitive/profitable. To quote: “Some (private sector)

companies have resorted to mechanisation with the possibility of losing manual jobs”. But Safcol “had made no serious changes because the government was the shareholder of the company”.

However, “a turnaround strategy had been approved and would be implemented”. This strategy was not explained, but presumably will differ from those applied by the private sector. Surely,

though, it can't be by way of ongoing bailouts using taxpayers' money.

This Safcol example is an indication of things to come if the government elects to nationalise key sectors of the economy. As state-owned enterprises fail to be productive, and run at a loss, where will the bailout come from?

A KRUGER  
 Durban

Wind turbines a batty idea

THE IDEA of installing two wind turbines (second-hand *nogal*) on the Bluff (The Mercury, October 31) is a waste of ratepayers' money.

Who do the council and electricity department think they are kidding with two 150-kilowatt machines? If they must put them up, and they are dangerous to the bats' breeding colony, then lock the blades so that they don't turn – losing 300KW is insignificant.

Anyway, will the bats, with their well-known senses, not fly above or below the blades?

CPD OGILVY  
 Durban

Sharks players are overpaid

WE COMPARE all the statistics of games except the stats of assets and fortune of the rugby players – but because money is part of the game, it cannot be ignored.

The reason the Sharks lost to the Lions are in these stats – wealth stats. The Springboks returned with millions in their pockets after endorsements and wages, and the Sharks who have been around for a while – they, too, are fat cats.

Let's do an audit of houses, cars, businesses and the lifestyle of both sides and you will find the answers. I estimate the Lions will be worth less than 10 percent of the Sharks players.

When someone says they do it for the love of it and the fans, it's actually all about money. The Sharks are overpaid, so there is no appetite, no yearning to win.

Reduce the money players earn and reduce the sponsorship and endorsements and charge less for public functions.

KARL DAUTH  
 Durban

Why I supported Trollip against Mazibuko

THE DA is not, as Allister Sparks thinks, “a party committed to non-racialism (which is understandably) reluctant to make appointments based on race” (The Mercury, October 26).

I am the author of the DA's policy on affirmative action, called Equality and Corrective Action, which Lindiwe Mazibuko frequently articulates with her customary eloquence. We are in favour of affirmative action, both in our society and in our

party, and our position is firmly rooted in the constitution's equality provision, Section 9.

The point of departure is that no South African may ever be excluded from eligibility for any post or position. Thereafter, all things being equal, it will often make sense to make a corrective appointment or selection.

Sparks' interpretation of my support for Athol Trollip as “an emphatic endorsement of the status quo” is just plain

wrong. It was an endorsement and a defence of democracy and of Athol's right and eligibility to run.

Trollip was asked by a party boss to withdraw because (repeat because) he would win. He refused. That is why I supported him.

Now, Allister, do you understand my “interesting analogy”: this is a contest between an untested sapling from the grow-your-own-timber nursery against a tree that has shown it does not

bend? Mazibuko has won. Whatever my preference was, she has my support as the first among equals in the parliamentary caucus.

But Sparks will agree that it was important that the race was in fact run. How could we pretend to advance democracy in South Africa if we extinguished it within? How could we call ourselves the Democratic Alliance?

DENE SMUTS  
 DA MP

Apply justice equally in the case of census issues

REPORTS have stated that people who refused to take part in the census will face the might of the law. That is acceptable.

But what about enumerators who did not do their work properly?

I live on the Bluff. I am a musician and work at night, so I am at home most days. No-one has called at my residence to do the necessary. I have seen enumerators

strolling the streets in groups of three and four, chatting, laughing, eating, fiddling with what I presume were census forms, and walking about in shopping malls.

It is reported that some enumerators are threatening to withhold completed forms because of a pay dispute. Surely this, too, is illegal.

ERROL FELLOWS  
 Durban