

THE MERCURY
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Let Them Eat Sushi

THE clash between Cosatu boss Zwelinzima Vavi and tycoon Kenny Kunene has focused attention on the abyss between the earnings and lifestyles of the rich and the poor.

On one side we have Kunene, who, it appears, would be at home among the crassest of the world's capitalists. On the other we have Vavi, who may sound as if he is the standard-bearer for the poor, but really represents a largely poorly paid constituency whose members can count themselves lucky in that they at least have jobs.

"Mr Big Spender" Kunene drew Vavi's ire over his lavish 40th birthday party. Vavi believed such bashes were "corrupting morality" and amounted to "spitting in the face of the poor".

Lavish it was, although lavish does not quite cover some of the pleasures on offer for those celebrating Kunene's entry into his fifth decade, with Vavi taking particular exception to sushi being served off the bodies of "half-naked ladies" at a Sandton night spot. Pictures of the R700 000 party confirm this largesse, which Vavi condemned as serving to whet the appetites of public servants.

Corruption in South Africa is no laughing matter, and much of it comes from public servants gorging themselves, illegally or otherwise, on the public purse. But a tycoon throwing his own money around in his own club has nothing to do with government employees and politicians who cannot keep their fingers out of the till.

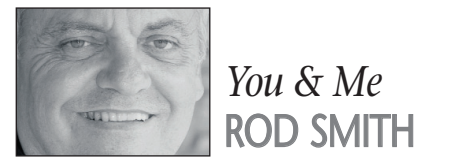
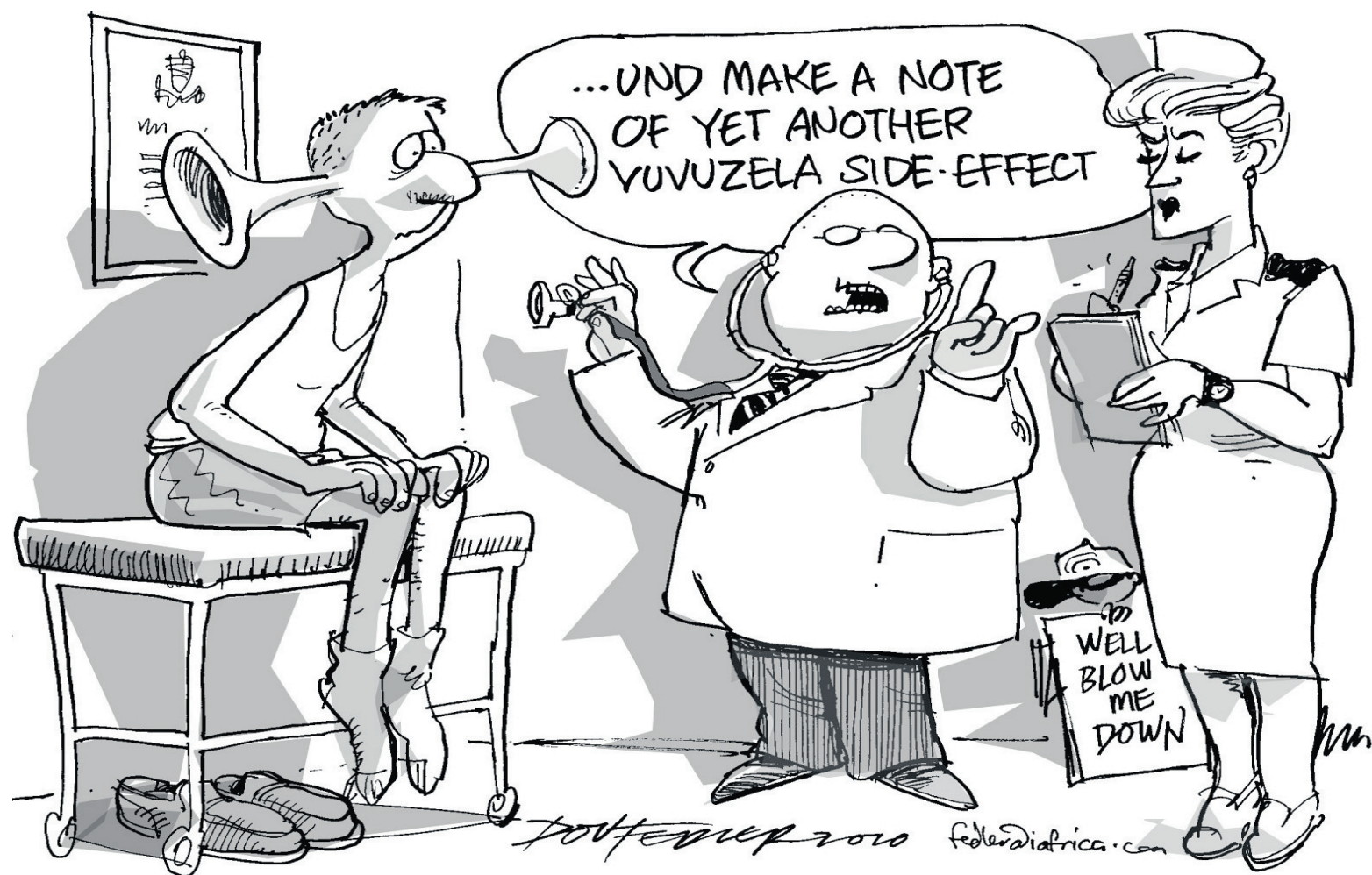
Kunene, responding to Vavi, correctly points out that his riches have nothing to do with getting business from the government. He does not live off tenders or political connections, but is filthy rich because of his business acumen. If Kunene or anyone else in such a position chooses to spend his fairly gotten wealth on sushi-clad hired help at his parties, that is his business. Vavi deserves all our support in his war on "hyenas" that loot the public purse, but while self-made show-offs will draw all sorts of reactions, they are not symbols of corruption.

Fresh Thinking

NO WONDER they got rid of Professor David Nutt. The man who was the British government's chief adviser on narcotics – until sacked – has produced a guide to the relative harmfulness of drugs and it runs almost entirely counter to the official classification. Nutt and others have formed the breakthrough Independent Scientific Committee on Drugs, which produced the new study. Published by The Lancet, it suggests that alcohol is more dangerous – when the ill-effects to the user and wider society are added – than heroin, crack or crystal meth.

The results suggest that efforts are in the wrong areas. What is needed is exactly what Nutt has set out to provide: independent thinking based on scientific criteria. That suggests, he says, that alcohol is three times more harmful than cocaine or tobacco.

Nutt's conclusions are open to challenge, but he has rendered an important service by suggesting the drugs debate should be reorientated to focus on scientific evaluations rather than social preconceptions and political prejudice. – The Independent



- NEXT time you fall in love:
- His or her solvency and credit score is more important than if he sends you flowers or she showers you with gifts and compliments.
 - The state of his or her relationship with his or her parents is more important than how he or she dresses or what he or she drives.
 - How he or she treats and respects a former spouse will tell you exactly how he or she will one day treat you.
 - How he or she handles truth and matters of integrity are unlikely to change. If he or she lies or develops a "cover up" to be with you, the day will come when he or she is "ducking and diving" to get away from you.
 - How he or she behaves in heavy traffic, in a restaurant with poor service, how he or she handles credit, alcohol and illegal substances are windows that give glimpses into the "real" person.

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

Welcome contribution to critical debate

The New South African Review promises critical thought and lively debate on topics ranging from economy and education to ecology and crime

THERE is a danger that critical debate may soon be in short supply in South Africa. With the fiasco around the media tribunal recently we need to be alert and guard against the government closing down spaces for discussion and debate.

So, the launch of the publication *New South African Review One: Development or Delivery?* in Durban last week needs to be welcomed. Some will recall the (old) *South African Review* as a publication that looked critically at the conduct and progress of the struggle to end apartheid, while the *New South African Review* is designed to take a critical but committed look at the struggle to build a post-apartheid democracy that serves the needs of all South Africans and not just the lucky few in the new political economy. This kind of scholarly work by the academic press is needed more than ever. Critical scholarship was valued during apartheid and should be valued in the post-apartheid context also.

From 1983 to 1995, seven editions of the *South African 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 first six were products of a project driven by a small collective of progressive scholars operating under the rubric of the Southern African Research Services. It also produced the bi-monthly magazine, *Work in Progress*, or *WIP*, as it was fondly known.

No doubt progressive scholarship was a necessary 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 it became a severe



IMRAAN BUCCUS

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

Many names, some now forgotten, played a role in ensuring critical thought during apartheid. The early co-ordinators of the *South African Review* would today constitute a distinguished honour roll of contributors to South African academic and political life.

Two of those sadly had their lives cut short either by assassination, David Webster, or illness, Marion Lacey. Three others went on to build wonderful careers as academics and activists at Wits – Jacky Cock, Eddie Webster and Peter Hudson – while two have followed two very different but significant political trajectories post-1994.

Alan Hirsch has spent the best part of the last 15 years as an economic adviser in the Presidency, while Helen Zille is arguably the most powerful political woman in South African politics today.

So, it's important to note that the publication re-launched in Durban last week was first produced during a very difficult time in South African history.

In the struggle years of the 1980s and early 1990s, the *South African Review* provided a thematic examination of the then state of South African politics, economics, labour, education, society, foreign relations and so on.

It led to the development of a political and intellectual culture of progressive analysis,

interpretation and research. South Africa continues to be one of the most unequal societies in the world, and it faces a plethora of socio-political and developmental challenges.

Quite appropriately the first volume of the *New South African Review*, edited by John Daniel, Prishani Naidoo, Roger Southall and Devan Pillay and published by Wits University Press, reflects upon the problems and challenges confronting the new South Africa, its achievements and failings and focuses around the theme of "development or decline?"

This theme is further elaborated in Roger Southall's overarching introductory essay which, unsurprisingly, presents a mixed picture. Southall argues that we are not near "apocalyptic decline" but are headed towards mediocrity in South Africa.

The rest of the contributions – 20 in all along with sec-

tion introductions – are clustered around the sub-themes of economy, ecology and sustainability; state, politics and policy; education, health and land; and crime and sex.

The book offers a set of rich insights into a country which, to put it mildly, is not proving easy to govern. At a time when there are serious concerns about the health of our democracy, spaces for critical thought and engagement are fast being compromised.

The *New South African Review* fills us with some confidence about the state of critical scholarship in our country. The book has some fine voices and the editors are committed to continue giving space to newer, more diverse and younger academic voices in forthcoming editions. This surely is a must read for all those concerned with South Africa's socio-political and economic pulse and trajectory.

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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.

MUSIC CONCERT AT THE ICC A NIGHTMARE

MY FAMILY of four were one of the group of displaced people at the Crowded House concert at the Durban ICC on October 28 who were under the impression (falsely) of having our tickets at the side of the stage, upgraded to Gold Circle in the front of the stage.

We had paid R466 a ticket to sit on the side of the stage, as we had experienced Gold Circle mayhem at the Deep Purple concert, where even the cheaper seats behind Gold Circle

just moved the barriers to the side and surged forward to get front row (standing) space in front of the stage.

Our side-seats meant we were about 10 or 11 rows from the front.

When, upon instruction via e-mail, the day prior to the concert, we exchanged our tickets, we were told it was a first-come-first-served experience and we ended up sitting 25 rows back with no visibility – unless we stood up – which defeats the entire purpose of specifically

purchasing "seated" bookings.

Then, the circus really begins if one wants to have a drink.

There is the snaking queue where one stands to buy the tickets for the drinks – we waited for 15 minutes.

Then another queue to actually get the drinks.

This is a free-for-all with no systems in place, no overseers, and inexperienced waiters who have not been trained to serve quickly

and efficiently. Every person I know who had attended that (and other) concerts has expressed similar anger over the shambles at this magnificent venue.

I am sorry to say we have already booked for the Beach Boys in December however it is a nightmare I really would rather not relive.

MANDY ANTHONY

Empangeni

Skilled officials can help stop the rot

RECENTLY numerous new cases of graft, fraud and corruption have been made public by the Special Investigation Unit or have been uncovered by the media.

The sums involved have been exorbitant and very little – if anything – has been done about officials who committed these crimes. It's obvious that the government is not serious about fraud and corruption. Is it because many of the guilty parties are card-carrying party members?

Anyone found guilty of graft, fraud or corruption

should be dismissed and charged with treason. In my book, theft and abuse of public funds is a crime against the state, and its own citizens.

According to the media, 96 000 government officials have been found guilty of theft of state funds.

Many were also found to have used fraudulent documents, lied and cheated and bribed fellow public servants. As a result, funds destined for the poor and needy have been wasted – possibly a matter of life or death for some. Altogether, 35 national

departments and 110 provincial departments were found to have lost R100 million, and this does not include wasteful expenditure due to gross incompetence or ineptitude.

Former public servants, with vast knowledge, would only be too happy to help bring government departments back on track. All the government has to do is ask them to come forward and offer their help, no matter their colour or political affiliations.

NICK McCONNELL
Howick

Tutu slips up on opera's Israel visit

OF COURSE we all love him. He laughs infectiously; has these endearingly comic features; and cried at a session of the TRC hearings: all in all a special human being.

Every now and then he even says something sensible; condemning Robert Mugabe, denouncing corruption and calling for moral upliftment within our decadent society. He is the "Arch"; the beacon of light, the winner of a Nobel Prize for Peace.

So was Yasser Arafat. How can one take issue with a man with such impeccable credentials? I do. When it comes to his pronouncements on Israel and Jews he lets his slip show and we catch a glimpse of a

rather inelegant ankle. Desmond Tutu couldn't resist a call to the Cape Town Opera asking them to cancel their trip to Israel, a country with a "fallacious claim to being a civilised democracy". The purpose of the visit is to stage the opera, *Porgy & Bess*, "with its universal message of non-discrimination".

Only the very obtuse would label Israel as anything but a "civilised democracy". A country with regular elections, ridiculously free press, free speech, a polyglot of minorities, all of which enjoy political representation in the Knesset (including Arabs), Arab Supreme Court judges, freedom of movement and so on, can

hardly be viewed as anything but civilised and democratic.

No other state in the region comes remotely close with freedoms such as these. Is it possible that an intellectual like Tutu cannot know this?

Sadly, over the past decades, Tutu's questionable pronouncements about Israel and Jews have been tinged with a level of bigotry that is impossible to ignore. Thankfully, the Cape Town Opera Company have minds of their own and have ignored this interference. May their heavenly voices breach the barriers of bigotry.

VICTOR GORDON
Cape Town

KZN can save the rhino as it did before

MERCURY writer Tony Carnie recently did an excellent article on the poaching of rhino.

It highlighted the seriousness of the problem facing conservation authorities and private game ranches, and there is now a united effort to combat this scourge.

In his article he mentioned the early days of Operation Rhino. The first rhino capture team consisted of Dr Tony Harthorn, Magqubu Ntombele, Nick Steele, John Clark, Owen Letley and I had the privilege of being the leader in the field.

There were many others

who were intimately connected with this incredible success story.

In my book *The White Rhino Saga* I pay tribute to them all because it was a magnificent team effort. The history of it all began in the 1890s with the early conservators, Vaughan Kirby and Captain H B Potter and Mali Mdhletshe.

KZN can be very proud that it was the men and women of this province that saved the rhino. We cannot allow the poachers to win the final battle.

IAN PLAYER
Durban

Not a question of reshuffling only

THE report "Hogan resigns seat" (The Mercury November 2) highlights the sad fact that the government will never be able to achieve service delivery simply by shuffling cabinets.

The problem is not who the cabinet ministers are, but how much they are taking for

themselves. (Salaries of R1.7 million and car allowances of up to 70% of that again).

The package needs to be instantly halved. We will then have a self-selecting process.

Those ministers who are in it to serve their country will remain. Those who are in it to

serve themselves by exploiting their country, will leave.

The money saved can immediately go into poverty alleviation, so the poor can get richer, rather than the ministers.

RICK O'BRIEN
Howick

Mr Komphela, I'm a white African. Period

HOW can Butana Komphela make a statement like "Are they not South African?" (The Mercury, October 27).

Are all South Africans supposed to be black? I am a white African and

have lived in Africa my whole life, as have my parents and grandparents; we are all African no matter what colour.

Hopefully all the athletes at Commonwealth Games were chosen for their capabilities,

not their colour: So Mr Komphela, wake up; there are white Africans... and many of them are very good at sport.

SARAH STOTT
Durban