

CAPE TIMES
FOUNDED IN 1876

Fare well

HELEN SUZMAN'S death at the age of 91 yesterday was immediately followed by an outpouring of tributes.

It was clear from the comments that the former parliamentarian was a very special person indeed. Many reminded us of her fearlessness, integrity, work ethic, commitment and intellect. Those qualities she did indeed have in abundance.

Yet, perhaps more than anything else, what distinguished Suzman was her compassion for humanity. Even Nelson Mandela, whom she visited during his incarceration on Robben Island, was moved to describe her as "a remarkable South African woman".

That she certainly was. Suzman was ostracised in Parliament when she was the lone representative of the Progressive Party (a forerunner of what eventually became the Democratic Alliance) between 1961 and 1974.

That, in itself, must have demanded considerable courage and fortitude. But, over and above that, Suzman was also scorned by those on the left who regarded her as a collaborator with apartheid for participating in the National Party-dominated Parliament.

Yet today, with the wisdom of hindsight, there is a far more mature understanding of the role she played in South African politics – even though most of it was within the confines of a racially exclusive government institution.

Instead, she will be remembered for subverting Parliament, and regularly extracting information from it that exposed the inequities of apartheid and, even if indirectly, galvanised opposition to it.

Suzman also steadfastly used her position in Parliament to improve the plight of the growing number of prisoners on Robben Island.

Her passing will leave South Africa much the poorer. It is a supreme irony that the tragedy of apartheid brought out the very best in many South Africans.

The brightest and most brave stepped forward to do battle with the monster: Helen Suzman was one of them.

SECOND OPINION

Don't despair

THE new year dawns with no shortage of reasons for foreboding clustering on the horizon. The global economic downturn will continue throughout 2009.

In mature economies that will spell mass job losses and more misery, China and India will face a sharp slowdown too. Energy exporters, from the Gulf states to the former Soviet Union, will suffer as global demand for their wares declines. In fact, no country will be immune.

The global financial system remains in a fragile state. The banks will continue to cut back their lending and the shadow banking sector will continue to collapse.

Governments have thus far been haphazard in their response. If this lack of co-ordination continues, the results could be dire indeed. The biggest risk of all is an upsurge in beggar-thy-neighbour protectionism as nations seek to save domestic jobs and industries.

New barriers to trade would impoverish us all. It is no exaggeration to say that the global economy stands at its most perilous juncture since the 1930s.

There are, of course, also vast military perils ahead. The violence in Gaza is depressing. Pakistan is edging closer to the status of failed state. Afghanistan is on the verge of implosion and Iran continues its pursuit of nuclear technology.

Africa is suffering from resurgent civil strife in Congo, Sudan and Somalia. Then there is cholera-ridden Zimbabwe and the starving prison states of Myanmar and North Korea.

Some scientists fear that runaway climate change might already be irreversible. Doubts are growing as to whether conventional politics can provide a solution.

Yet a counsel of despair will not do. While colossal challenges lie ahead, the very scale of the potential disasters waiting in the wings could provide the impetus for action that has so far been missing. Chief among the reasons for hope is the identity of the new US president, Barack Obama. It does seem he will bring a much more multi-lateral approach to our many challenges. – The Independent

QUOTES

In the lower stages of human civilisation, there is always competition to lord it over material nature.
(Srimad Bhagavatam 1.1.2)

"So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"
(Bible, Luke 17: 10)

O you who believe! If you help (in the cause of) Allah, He will help you, and make your foothold firm.
(Qur'an, 47: 7)

The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?
(Hebrew Bible, Psalms 27: 1)

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More funding vital to break the back of housing backlog

IT WAS 60 years ago in 1948 that the Nationalist Party came to power. Its apartheid campaign had the electioneering slogan: "Die k***** op sy plek; die koelie uit die land!" ("put the k***** in his place, banish the coolie from the country!")

So respectable was white racism that it felt no embarrassment – still less shame – about using racist words.

Cabinet minister Blaar Coetzee said that one of their apartheid aims was that every "Bantu" (black African) should be endorsed out (banished) from the

Western Cape by 1968. They drew this zone of banishment as the "Eiselen Fish-Kat River line".

They apparently wished to re-fight the Fourth Frontier War, and again drive the blacks to the east of that border.

All this is not mere ancient history – but has consequences that are very much with us right now.

When the apartheid regime failed to banish all Africans from the Western Cape by 1968, 40 years ago, it devised new cruelties.

From 1968 it banned any new housing

being built for, or rented to, Africans throughout Cape Town and the Western Cape, even for those black families already legally here.

The impact was that when an entire generation of children grew up and married, they had to continue living in their parents' house, one family per room.

This is the origin of the "backyarders" crisis, as the next generation could only build illegal shacks in the backyards of their parents' houses.

Also 40 years ago, proclamation 74 of 1968 decreed that all new workers seeking employment in the towns could only be accommodated without their spouse and children, in labour barracks euphemised as "hostels".

Today, both the ANC government and Democratic Alliance Metro have to battle to budget for both these historic backlogs in family housing, on top of our urbanisation revolution. Nowhere is the housing shortage worse than in Cape Town, for it was here that the pass laws were most harshly applied.

We now even see how new housing "invasions" sometimes become racialised conflicts, as scarcity keeps exploding at flashpoints.

The new year needs priority given to bigger budgets for housing in the Western Cape, and bigger budgets for job creation in public works in the Eastern Cape.

Such a twin-pronged strategy will enable us to tackle our housing shortage at both ends of the problem.

KEITH GOTTSCHALK
CLAREMONT

Health hazard

I SUSPECT John Phillips (December 30) would not be so aggrieved about illegal ice cream sellers if he had swallowed a dollop of bacteria-loaded gunge due to lack of health and safety procedures which would normally apply to properly certificated and authorised street vendors.

It's easy for Phillips to pontificate, but if he were commissioner of police, scrolling down his daily menu of whose ass to kick, he might also have a problem deciding between tik dealers, unlicensed taxi drivers, ice cream vendors, rapists, cash heisters and a multitude of other metropolitan offenders.

I am glad the law is flexing its muscle in every direction and so should he be.

KENNETH BATE
HOUT BAY

False optimism

I HAVE questions on two aspects of the Zimbabwean crisis to place before President Kgalema Motlanthe.

On December 18, you told the country that you were confident of a settlement in the negotiations on a unity government in Zimbabwe by the end of that week. It did not happen.

What gave rise to your optimism when the only things that are rising in that country are the inflation rate and the cholera deaths, which have now exceeded 1 500 and are expected to triple with the onset of the rainy season?

What is your current forecast on a date of settlement?

As Southern African Development Community chairperson you have, quite correctly, condemned the coup in Guinea, suggested that it posed a threat to peace, stability and democracy and called on the military to step down.

Why do you not issue identical statements on the Zimbabwean situation?

Given the fact that Zanu-PF lost the general election in March, the impasse in Zimbabwe is also a coup.

The security forces are as involved in the Zimbabwe coup as are those in Guinea.

Consider the complete disregard shown by the police for a High Court order to release into the care of a hospital the nine activists held in prison.

I can see only one major difference between these two situations – Guinea was not involved in helping the ANC in its liberation struggle.

When you were appointed president, we all had considerable hope that you and the ANC would start playing a much more decisive and influential role than had former president Thabo Mbeki, but four months down the line, it seems that this hope was misplaced.

Why? All that is happening in Zimbabwe is as great a "threat to peace, stability and democracy".

I invite you to set out arguments which will show South Africans that you are not applying double standards.

MAX LEIPOLD
HERMANS

Complicity

IDON'T want to get into a fracas with Ebrahim Harvey, who attempts to challenge my rebuttal of his call for imperialist aggression against Zimbabwe (December 31), but the United Nations Charter explicitly renounces and condemns such aggression; the UN has no armed forces of its own; and the UN Security Council is currently dominated by the United States.

Hence, when Harvey calls for the UN to endorse imperialist aggression, he is actually promoting American imperialism.

The US is indeed the only country capable of launching the kind of catastrophic bloodbath in Zimbabwe which Harvey desires.

However, it needs military bases in the region for the purpose. Mozambique would not endorse aggression against its neighbour; and Zambia and Botswana are landlocked.



DISTANT HORIZON: The N7 between Van Rhynsdorp and Calvinia.

Picture: JEFFERY ABRAHAMS

WRITE TO US

The Editor, Cape Times, Box 11, Cape Town 8000. Fax: (021) 488-4744
e-mail: ctletters@nl.co.za. Please restrict letters to fewer than 300 words. We reserve the right to edit letters. Only letters providing a physical address and telephone contact number (neither for publication) will be considered. Pseudonyms are not accepted.

Hence, American imperialist aggression against Zimbabwe would only be practical with South African support.

Zimbabweans would certainly blame South Africa every bit as much as they would blame the US.

Harvey is mistaken to think that South Africa could evade responsibility for such an appalling global crime.

Before throwing his weight behind this contemplated massacre, Harvey ought to read up on the consequences of American imperialist aggression in Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo – not to speak of the current slaughter in Gaza happening with US weaponry and US political support – and ask whether he wishes to lend his talents to such catastrophic and squalid affairs.

If (having acquainted himself with the facts) he remains enthusiastic, he ought to go further and offer his personal services to the crusade.

MATHEW BLATCHFORD
UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE

Lost and found

I SEE Durban beaches are tagging the children coming to the beach this festive season. This is a good idea, as every year we have the scenario of hundreds of lost children.

Some are claimed the same day, but many are not claimed up to a week later. The mind boggles. You arrive on the beach with four children and go home with three without a worry in the world.

Where else in the world would you find that people can abandon their children on a beach at holiday time?

I am sure alcohol plays a big part and

once again it is a big job to try to monitor every cool drink bottle filled with alcohol that arrives on the beach. It is all down to responsibility.

Maybe that is what we need to have in our schools. Life skills and parenting classes, as clearly there are many out there who have no idea and rely on others such as the places of safety to collect and look after their children after a day on the beach.

We have a lot to learn still. I would have said any parent who only collects their child at the end of the day or a couple of days later should be heavily fined.

Maybe that would be some sort of a lesson.

It will be interesting to see now, with the tagging process, how long it takes to reunite child with parent.

BARBIE SANDLER
CLAREMONT

A long way to go

IT'S QUITE amazing how there is always someone somewhere in history who managed to predict the future.

As only the present prevails, old ideas with modern meanings continue to shape our understanding of what it all means in such a profound way that history cannot help but repeat itself even if everything is different and always somehow contextually unique.

A wise man once said evolution is the explanation to our past; an even wiser man suggested evolution is the fate of our future.

This was not an anthropological insight but rather a remarkable observation about the species' behaviour instead of its origin.

Our past behaviour as consumers when we had to pay homage to our lords, kings and queens eventually came to an end when we started acquiring our own capital, making room for feudalism to give way to capitalism.

Globalisation brings about the ultimate playground for capitalism to tie up its loose ends, culminating in crescendos of sub-prime lending disasters, credit crunches and financial crises of unprecedented scale,

complexity and proportion, paving the way for our global community to step into the ring and deliver a knock-out blow to Western ideology ... or was that a bail-out blow allowing capitalism to rise once again from its corner somewhere between the ninth and 10th count?

All this brings us to where we are today, with our maxed-out credit cards, ridiculously bonded houses and plummeting shares.

But don't despair, as Santa Claus, keeping in mind that Christmas does eventually come, brought us our long-awaited interest-rate cutting cycle, ensuring that our proudly South African economy can allow us to catch up with the rest of the world by nurturing our credit culture as best as it can, in the name of growth and future development prospects, with the ultimate aim of achieving First World status.

Yes, we too dream of being like a First World country one day which can print endless dollars, as money keeps the world going round.

With this type of greenback lubrication the world will surely start spinning ... eventually.

Now we are ready to take the next step into the year 2009, with the scene set for the rest of the world to catch up with our First World brethren, indulging in their credit addiction, with the only difference being that socialism has now entered the ring ... if anyone cares to take notice.

The wiser man mentioned earlier was none other than Karl Marx, who outlined the societal hierarchy of evolution as a four-stage cyclical process: With feudalism (stage 1); capitalism (stage 2), also being the current apex of our civilisation and showing its true colours, with expenditure-driven fundamentals, not allowing even the most primitive economies to escape and leaving us with still a few decades of catch-up global shenanigans and fancy footwork left before our stage 3 friend, socialism, devastates the world by sneaking in that bail-out blow when least expected and rising up as the new world champion of financial systems from underneath its political guise.

So let us sit back and enjoy the years of easy money and forced expenditure as

socialism is still a mere twinkle in mother earth's eye and keeping us from reaching our full genetic potential, with communism (stage 4) remaining well beyond our comprehension for some time still to come.

DAVID REDELINGHUIS
CAPE TOWN

Sounds splendid

ROBERT MACDONALD'S letter (December 29) says R40 million will be spent restoring the interior of the splendid City Hall.

This is both a commendable and long overdue project, particularly as the hall is used heavily and is in a poor state.

I am particularly interested in the organ, an outstanding example of Edwardian Town Hall organ building. It, too, is in a sad state of repair and some parts are unplayable. Surely the council has an obligation to maintain and repair and, if necessary, to rebuild such a historic asset? Can MacDonald say whether any funds are being earmarked to rebuild the instrument?

I was living in Johannesburg when its City Hall organ was rebuilt in 1976. Unfortunately that undertaking was a disaster and has resulted in the instrument having deteriorated from the international "magnam opus" it was of its builder, Norman & Beard, to an almost unplayable condition at present, with no hope that it will ever be restored (a sad state of affairs indeed).

The organ in the Town Hall in Wellington, New Zealand, is by the same builder, Norman & Beard, and of the same vintage and size as Cape Town's and it was restored in 1986 to its original state. It is now played by some of the world's leading recitalists and the same could happen in Cape Town given the will of the city council to make it happen.

I hope our instrument can be restored under the right supervision and again give pleasure to thousands of people who attend performances that make use of the splendid sounds of which this organ is capable.

PETER BEBINGTON
DIEP RIVER

More than a few hitches in many couples' bid to get hitched

DOMINIQUE HERMAN

"WEDDINGS: they're stressful, time-consuming and complicated. But at least they're hideously expensive." I read that on a greeting card recently. A wedding is also pretty much the only event where those involved hope it goes off both with and without a hitch.

For some of my friends, their recent nuptials have included a broken hand, two emergency operations in 24 hours to fix the broken hand, a gift registry declared insolvent before any of the ordered gifts had been delivered, and a rifled guest cottage on a wine estate

which was then set on fire with the wedding dress inside.

The business of getting married is not always moonlight and roses for the couple's friends either, who put up with a lot in anticipation of their mates' wedded bliss.

Having to script poetry about household utensils and being molested by a scary-looking drag queen, with the prospect of an encore at another hen night with the same performers a week later, are two of the duties sometimes associated with being a bachelorette party attendee. (I want to know what happened to good old-fashioned hen

party entertainment with scantily-clad men who are not wearing heels, make-up and checking each other out?)

On that subject, a tasty variation is the demi-apron wearing troupe of waiters called "Bare Butt Butlers". As my friend and fellow observer Mel put it, "it's a nod to debauchery without actively being debauched".

At one kitchen tea, with nary a bare butt in sight, I was assigned a toast cooler as my gift but ditched that idea and picked up an ice cream scoop instead, banking on my enthusiasm for ice cream over toast lending itself to more inspired verse. The bride received

three ice cream scoops that afternoon and not one toast cooler.

I've heard of pamper parties where female guests spend the day in a spa or at a cooking class. The latter may be construed as being as anti-feminist as sitting in a living room marvelling over appliances, but at least one can get a manicure or some much-needed culinary skills in the process (even bachelorettes could do with a night in once in a while).

The groom's friends spend drunken bonding sessions with strippers, around poker tables or in some weekend locale that usually involves braaing, some sort

of action-oriented activity and ample cases of lager. They don't have to buy their mates sexy-looking boxer briefs, wax lyrical about the virtues of power-saws or ward off the affections of individuals whose sexuality is in dispute.

However, while women may often have more sober and decidedly more domestic singleton send-offs than men, at least at a bride's bachelorette party it's never up for grabs that her friends might whip out a razor and put her, passed out, on a train to Bloemfontein with no money, no phone and no eyebrows.

• Herman is a freelance writer.