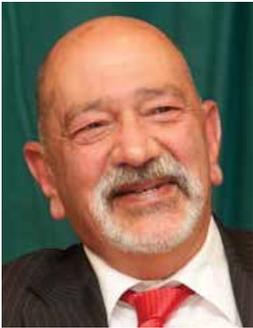


State and Nation



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This edition of Focus is the last for 2015 and, again, we try to provide an overview of State and Nation in South Africa. There is an emphasis this time on infrastructural concerns. Given the drought which is affecting South Africa, it is inevitable that water must feature prominently. But drought is not only a matter of lack of rain: it is also about planning, or the lack thereof. In South Africa this problem is compounded by policy choices, and how we deal with land for agricultural purposes.

We begin this *Focus* with **Mike Muller's** important but, no doubt, controversial piece on "Capturing the Narrative". Muller argues that in a number of areas critical to the welfare of South African society, debates have been hijacked by environmental and social advocates who, he maintains, abuse democratic processes to enforce their preferences. He argues that this constrains the ability of the state and private sector alike to take expedient action in support of national development goals. In their desire to "Capture the Narrative", activists promote approaches that are not technically feasible, thereby damaging both the wider community and environment that they claim to protect, as well as undermining the democracy that they exploit.

Anthony Turton argues that South Africa is facing a water crisis of unprecedented proportions. He argues that the crisis is different from the form which had been anticipated insofar as it is not about the volume of water that we have available, but rather about the architecture of governance and the role of water as a nation builder. That is the real crisis. He points out that the state is the biggest single polluter of all and in the process helps to erode the Rule of Law by entrenching the system of cadre deployment to the detriment of public health. He argues that this is simply unacceptable in a functioning democracy.

Michael Zingel and the Roman Catholic Justice and Peace Movement focus their attention on acid mine drainage. They highlight the problem of dangerously polluted water, especially in the Witwatersrand, and the confused policy and practice which apparently is in evidence. They do bring to the centre of the debate the involvement of communities which have been adversely affected by acid mine drainage.

An **Anonymous** contributor reviews the draft policy on the Preservation and Development of Agricultural Land. The particular Bill in question proposes to launch a project to classify all agricultural land throughout the country according to its production potential. This effectively means that the classification will have to be carried out hectare by hectare in order to be credible. This proposal is justified by the need to exercise greater control over the subdivision of agricultural land and to prevent agricultural land from being converted to non-agricultural usage. The Bill in fact will give the Minister absolute control over every farmer's farming methods. Farmers will be required to farm the land according to its optimum potential in terms of the classification, and the penalty for not complying may

result in expropriation at a lower than market price. The fact – that no one seriously believes that the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has the capacity to classify every available hectare in the country – need not detain us too long. What is alarming is the thought that this is the prelude to nationalization of agricultural land.

On a higher note, **Dr Keith Scott** and **Prof JJP de VVan Niekerk** tackle the problem of legalising illicit drugs. For some, including our Constitutional Court, this may very well be a bridge too far. But, by highlighting the terrible consequences of the war on drugs, they present a systematic and coherent argument in favour of the legal regulation of cannabis. Their argument, to put it bluntly, would have found great favour with the late Helen Suzman who had worked for many years with Prof. Frances Ames to decriminalize dagga, whose medical benefits are manifestly apparent to so many.

Keith Gottschalk reviews the case for non-nuclear power options. Whatever the merits and demerits of the nuclear option, Gottschalk's warning that government's nuclear ambitions will cost considerably more than the arms deal is an important one, in that the incentives around bribery and corruption will be considerably higher than in the arms deal.

Graham Dominy reviews disciplinary processes and actions in the public service. This is a sorry tale, more akin to the bad tempered Queen of Hearts in Alice in Wonderland than a democracy striving to address the social and developmental challenges which we face in South Africa. The Zapiro cartoons are not meant as a light hearted adjunct, but form an integral part of a very damning account of wide spread practice. These malpractices will continue for as long as the grey areas around the delineation between ministerial and administrative responsibilities and powers persist.

Gareth van Onselen's sober account of optimism, pessimism and nationalism is a searing reminder that with the death of South African optimism something else remains in its wake, a kind of prevalent fatalism. He points out that *Victimhood* is for many a way of life and that *Difficulty* is not something to be overcome but to be endured. **Matthew Kruger** is also concerned with similar themes and insofar as he offers a way of emancipation through agency, I would suggest that these two papers be read as companion pieces.

Kameel Premhid reflects on the recent work of the Helen Suzman Foundation in helping to create and defend independent institutions in South Africa. He considers the meaning of independence within the context of single party dominance and cadre deployment.

We end with two reviews: Richard Steyn's biography of Jan Smuts and Sello Mbatha's biography of Mmusi Maimane.