

42nd Alfred and Winifred Hoernlé Memorial Lecture

The Future of the Liberal Tradition in South Africa

R W Johnson

**Forty-Second
Alfred and Winifred Hoernlé
Memorial Lecture**

**The Future of the Liberal
Tradition in South Africa**

RW Johnson



**SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS
JOHANNESBURG
2011**

**The Future of the Liberal
Tradition in South Africa**

**Forty-Second
Alfred and Winifred Hoernlé
Memorial Lecture**

**The Future of the Liberal
Tradition in South Africa**

RW Johnson

*17th August 2011
Country Club Johannesburg*



**SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS
JOHANNESBURG
2011**

Published by the
South African Institute of Race Relations
2 Clamart Road
Richmond
2092 Johannesburg

PO Box 291722
2109 Melville
South Africa

Phone: (011) 482-7221

Fax: (011) 482-7690

Email: sairr@sairr.org.za

Website: www.sairr.org.za

© South African Institute of Race Relations
ISBN 978-1-86982-589-8

Members of the public are free to reprint or report information, either in whole or in part, contained in this publication on the strict understanding that the South African Institute of Race Relations is acknowledged. Otherwise no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electrical, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Printed by Intrepid Printers, Pietermaritzburg

Introduction

The Institute's Hoernlé lectures are designed to commemorate the work of two former presidents, Professor RF Alfred Hoernlé, and his wife, Agnes Winifred Hoernlé, nee Tucker. Born in Bonn, the former became a professor of philosophy at the age of 28 at what is now the University of Cape Town. He later joined the staff at Wits, serving from 1934 to 1943 as president of the Institute. His book *South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit* remains a classic. Mrs Hoernlé lectured at Wits in social anthropology and was president of the Institute three times in the 1940s. She also specialised in penal and prison reform, delivering a Hoernlé lecture on the topic in 1948.

The first Hoernlé Lecture was given in 1945 by one of Alfred Hoernlé's first students, Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr, at the time deputy prime minister to General Smuts. The second was delivered the following year by Dr Ernie Malherbe, later vice-chancellor of the University of Natal.

One of the things Alfred Hoernlé did during his Institute presidency was to persuade Smuts to set up the Army Education Service in 1941. This was designed to provide liberal political education for our troops during the war. Malherbe led the initiative up north while Hoernlé, with the honorary rank of colonel, organised lectures for the men before they went up north. In his biography of Hofmeyr, Alan Paton writes that the army education service... 'took the blinkers off white men's eyes... Many saw for the first time what white supremacy did to black men and their hopes and aspirations... It seemed as though, in fighting against evil, they could see more clearly the evil in themselves and their society'.

One striking result, according to Paton, was an upsurge of idealism. Though not powerful enough to withstand the apartheid onslaught launched by the National Party after it had won the 1948 election, that idealism persisted throughout the apartheid era. It manifested itself in the robustness of the South African liberal tradition - in particular the fact that no aspect of racial legislation, nor any assault upon the rule of law, nor yet any other violations of freedom went unchallenged.

Yet another manifestation of idealism was Professor RW Johnson's decision to return to South Africa in 1995 as the founding director of the Helen Suzman Foundation after his long career at Oxford, which he began as the 1964 Natal Rhodes Scholar, and where he not only taught politics, but was also responsible for several years for the entirety of the financial affairs of Magdalen College as its senior bursar.

Since returning home Bill Johnson has written two major books on the country, *South Africa: the First Man, The Last Nation* (2004), and *South Africa's Brave New World: the Beloved Country since the End of Apartheid* (2009). Earlier books include *How Long will South Africa Survive?* (1977), *The Long March of the French Left* (1981), and in 1986, *ShootDown: The verdict on KAL 007*, an account of the Boeing 747 shot down over Soviet territory en route from Anchorage to Korea.

Professor Johnson has also done a great deal of research on Zimbabwe. His opinion surveys there proved that the Mugabe government had lost the support of most voters at least 10 years ago. Recently, the Institute published his exposé of the massive, and often ludicrous, fraud used in the compilation of the latest voters' roll in that country. The South African government is well aware of this exposé. We must hope that they, and other governments in the SADC, will demand a new voters' roll before any referendum or election takes place in terms of the Global Political Agreement of September 2008.

John Kane-Berman
Chief Executive
South African Institute of Race Relations

The Future of the Liberal Tradition in South Africa

I am extremely grateful for this invitation to speak. The Institute's magnificent record of liberal-minded analysis and critique has made it a vital part of South African life and it is an honour to be associated with it. I discover that I am the first Hoernlé Lecturer since Count Otto Von Lambsdorff addressed the Institute in 2006. I am particularly honoured to be here, not only to be asked to give this lecture but to follow my dear friend Otto who was a very firm and steadfast supporter of the liberal cause in South Africa. No foreign institution has helped liberals here as much as the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, of which Otto was the world President. His death in 2010 was a great loss not just to Irina and myself but to anyone who upholds liberal values in our country. Many people, including people who never knew who he was, owe him a great deal.

There is often confusion over the term "liberal". For Americans it effectively means "social democratic". However the South African liberal tradition is quite broad, containing both nineteenth century liberals (including free marketeers who would probably be Republicans in the USA) and others who would undoubtedly be social democrats in Europe. This inclusiveness has occurred because South African liberalism has been forced to focus on other things: on maintaining the crucial individual freedoms, on press freedom, and on creating equal opportunities accessible on the basis of merit, not race. This group certainly includes what the ANC and its allies would call "neo-liberals", though I have never known anyone describe themselves as a "neo-liberal" any more than I have heard anyone describe themselves as a pseudo-intellectual or a crypto-Communist. These are merely pejorative, not analytic terms.

If I were to summarise my thesis this evening, it is that this broad liberal tradition has passed the crucial test of political transition in South Africa; that it faces very difficult times; but that its long-term prospects are extremely good.

The Oldest Tradition

It is important to remind oneself that this is by some way South Africa's oldest political tradition, reaching back long before either Afrikaner or African nationalism or Communism existed. At the very least the liberal

tradition stretches back to the days of Andries Stockenström and Dr. John Philip. One can see the liberal impulse in the battle for a free press fought by Adam Tas and Fairbairn and later in the determination of the Colenso family to stand up for the Zulus unjustly provoked to war by the British. One can see it continue in much of the pro-Boer agitation during the Anglo-Boer War and thereafter in the Cape liberal tradition and the doctrine of "equal rights for all civilized men". Despite the strength of both British jingoism and Afrikaner nationalism, Jan Hofmeyr, Helen Suzman, the Progressive and Liberal Parties and, yes, a few key NGOs like the Institute of Race Relations kept the liberal flame alive.

Of course there were differences between such people: a tradition is far wider than a party programme. But in general they believed in the old liberal freedoms of the press, of religion, of association and so on; and believed that these were individual, not group rights. They believed in tolerance and compassion towards other groups – including groups very different from themselves, led by people as various as Cetewayo and Paul Kruger. They believed in education and human betterment. They were also not slaves to an idea but were pragmatic enough to believe in what worked. So one should be wary of those who dress liberalism up as, for example, a doctrinaire attachment to free markets. True, liberals believed in free choice and in the market in a general way but, for example, the New Deal liberals behind Franklin Roosevelt regarded the creation of the state-owned Tennessee Valley Authority as perhaps their finest achievement. After all, market forces had entirely failed to provide for the people of the Tennessee Valley so there was nothing untoward about the government stepping in to kick-start recovery there. Liberals can live with a mixed economy easily enough. They went with what worked. This is an important virtue anywhere but perhaps especially in South Africa where many completely crazy things have been done because our rulers were enslaved by the ideas of Christian Nationalism or Marxism-Leninism. South Africa is a very difficult country to govern and pragmatism is essential to success.

It has never been easy to be a liberal in South Africa. When the young Charles Darwin first came out to the Cape in 1836 he was appalled by the racial polarization produced by the frontier wars and the generally derogatory attitude towards the KhoiKhoi. Darwin was particularly revolted to see that a number of KhoiKhoi women's corpses had been taxidermically stuffed to make exhibits of the so-called "Hottentot Venus". As Adrian Desmond and James Moore show in their illuminating study, *Darwin's Sacred Cause. Race, Slavery and the Quest for Human Origins* (Penguin, 2010), Darwin's whole pursuit of evolutionary doctrine was fired by his

THE FUTURE OF THE LIBERAL TRADITION IN SOUTH AFRICA

passionate anti-slavery feelings and his belief in racial equality. Happily, he chanced upon Sir John Herschel, the astronomer, who was at the Cape to map the southern heavens, and who shared Darwin's liberal views. Herschel introduced him to Reverend John Philip, noting that "the Boers hate him cordially" for promoting an "ungodly equality between the races". Darwin spent much of his time in the company of Herschel and Philip but all three were viewed as racial extremists and outcasts because of their egalitarian views.

With only slight variations of circumstance, this was to prove the typical experience for the next 150 years. Herschel and Darwin were the two most educated men at the Cape and Philip was a missionary. It was in such milieux — that of well-educated whites and missionaries — that liberalism would thrive, inevitably a ghetto existence and it was always a creed which made its holders vilified outcasts within their own white community. But — and this too was to remain constant — the holders of such views would be continuously fortified by the knowledge that in Britain, Europe and America such views were more and more commonly held by men and women of intelligence.

Today, the ANC and more particularly the SACP have frequently spoken of the importance of "the battle of ideas" and they leave no doubt that liberalism is their main enemy. This is a challenge liberals should be happy to accept, for they should take confidence from the fact that ideas steadily fed into the nation's bloodstream, even by a minority, can have great effect. When the Progressive Party was formed in 1959, Harry Oppenheimer argued for this on the grounds that while the Progs might not win or gain seats, it was a vital thing for the entire political system to have a liberal force pumping out the message that racial discrimination was unacceptable and that merit, not race must be the key. In time, he felt, such ideas would enter the bloodstream of society and would exercise an influence far beyond the Progs' actual numbers, particularly since these ideas were reinforced by the Western world in general. This proved entirely true and it was noticeable that even the Nats soon began to avoid crude expressions of racism and tried to justify their policies on non-racist grounds, while Prog ideas soon captured hearts and minds in English-speaking universities and press rooms - and began to penetrate the Afrikaans world too. Thirty years after the Progs' formation South Africa enacted a liberal Constitution.

One of the reasons why I do not believe in any South African "miracle" is that in the 1970s and 1980s I discovered that liberal views of a general kind were more and more commonly found in universities, NGOs, churches and other institutions in South Africa, and that liberal ideas were

no longer confined to academics but that it was perfectly normal to find secretaries, receptionists, administrators and students with such views. That is, the great change of 1990 was to some extent prepared in advance by this progressive change of heart among many ordinary white South Africans. More and more they sympathised with and fraternised with South Africans of colour, and the decaying apartheid regime found it impossible to police the growing breakdown of racial barriers in housing, cohabitation and in the workplace.

How the Transition Nearly Killed Liberalism

Nonetheless, the transition to democracy very nearly capsized the liberal tradition, and not only because it caused a strong polarization between the forces of Afrikaner and African nationalism, reducing the DP vote to just 1.7% in 1994. At least equally damaging was the silly and sometimes unscrupulous behaviour of many who called themselves liberals. Some merely played the role of useful idiots, in their enthusiasm for the cause of liberation ending up by turning a blind eye to violence and intimidation or assisting highly undemocratic movements or individuals. But there were also some ambitious whites who realised that the anti-apartheid cause was not only just but afforded career opportunities. They could hope to gain international support on the one hand and to play some sort of intermediary role for the incoming ANC. Many simply buckled under the pressure of the "liberation movement" and made excuses for all manner of odious behaviour if this was sanctioned by the UDF or ANC. This phenomenon was memorably chronicled by Jill Wentzel in her book, *The Liberal Slideaway* (SAIRR, 1995). The net result was that many people who called themselves liberals colluded with grossly illiberal practices, to a point where by the early 1990s the word liberal was often associated with unbridled opportunism.

Doubtless we all have our own memories of that period. I remember being in Namibia during the 1990 election when a number of former SWAPO detainees presented themselves, replete with terrible tales of how they had been imprisoned and tortured by SWAPO — at their press conferences they would roll up their shirts and show the terrible marks of their tortures. I wondered how Shaun Johnson, the *Weekly Mail* correspondent then in Namibia, would cover this embarrassing subject. He did so by sympathetically interviewing the man accused of being the chief torturer. It was as if one had covered the mistreatment of detainees in South Africa by getting the authoritative word on the subject from Major Theunis ("Rooi Rus") Swanepoel.

THE FUTURE OF THE LIBERAL TRADITION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Back on the campus of the University of Natal, where I was then teaching, there were numerous strikes, stayaways and lecture boycotts which gravely prejudiced the plight of students taking their exams. I would ask who had ordained these stayaways? "The movement has made a call for a stayaway", one would be told. If one asked precisely who had asked for what, one was told one was out of court. Finally, I said that since the students were to bear the brunt of such tactics, I would give them a free vote on the matter and do whatever they wanted. I was told that such a vote would be unpardonably undemocratic. In practice the students – African, Indian and white – were all too frightened to vote. It was rule by intimidation, pure and simple. But, a classic catch-22, just as it was politically incorrect to ask for a free vote, so it was also politically incorrect to tell the truth about intimidation. Quite literally, people were frightened to say they were frightened. And many who called themselves liberals were frightened and kow-towed to this new political correctness.

All the time sheer opportunism kept breaking through. Owing to the Inkatha vs UDF troubles, the rule on the Natal campus was that no politicians should be invited to speak there. During the 1994 election campaign, however, the Vice-Chancellor, Brenda Gourlay, invited Nelson Mandela to give a public lecture on campus. He, naturally, gave his standard campaign speech, sitting on the podium between Professor Gourlay on the one hand and Ian Phillips on the other. Ian was only a junior lecturer – but he was leader of the SACP on campus. The occasion was a quite open and flagrant abuse of the "no politicians on campus" rule. It naturally did Professor Gourlay no harm with the new men of power.

All these people described themselves as liberals and this did much to discredit the term. This was also the era of people who advertised themselves as "facilitators" and "conciliators", which generally meant leveraging situations in the general direction desired by the ANC. This was, one was told, all part of the great and necessary transformation. All one can say is that this period did a great deal of damage to the image of liberals but it is now largely over because the space available for manoeuvring of this kind has shrunk considerably. It will, nonetheless, be difficult to explain to future generations how much of the damage apparently done by African nationalism was actually done by whites – think of Di McIntyre pushing for a (completely impossible) National Health Insurance system. However, as the political space for these sorts of interventions has shrunk, liberalism has not retreated back into impotence, for the opposite is true; in the shape of the Democratic Alliance, whatever its warts and demerits, we now have a strong and vigorous liberal party which runs towns, cities and even a province.

Liberal Problems in the Present

However, many features of the new political landscape constitute great difficulties for liberals. First, our rulers have a cavalier attitude to the rule of law. This is apparent in a host of ways: in the way that Mbeki tried to use the law to bring down Zuma, which was reflected in an NPA briefing to the media about impending charges against Zuma on the eve of the Polokwane conference; in the corresponding way that Zuma and his backers treated legal proceedings as merely a complex game which had to be kept stalled long enough for Zuma to ascend to the presidency, after which all charges against him would be conveniently forgotten. In such hands, the law became merely a set of moves in a game of political Monopoly. If Mbeki wins, Selebi remains as police chief and Zuma goes straight to jail. If Zuma wins, he gets a Get Out of Jail Free card, Mbeki can't even appear on SABC and Selebi goes straight to jail.

But the disregard for the law goes much deeper: it is visible in the machinations of the Judicial Services Commission, in the low calibre of many of those appointed as judges, in diminishing confidence in the integrity of the courts and in the increasingly sleazy and dysfunctional conditions in which the law is actually administered. Since respect for the rule of law is one of the most sacred liberal canons, this inevitably leaves liberals in a state of anger, despair and protest.

Second, liberals look to a rational form of political authority, disciplined by accountability. They do not feel comfortable with African "big man" politics, nor with the intense factionalism which it inevitably breeds, as rival would-be big men jostle for control and patronage. But that is, of course, exactly what they have got. Mbeki was a classic African philosopher-king type, comparable with others of this genre who have done so much harm to Africa, insistent on their own genius and also, effectively, on their own right to rule beyond any normal set of constitutional safeguards. Despite the fact that he was guilty of one genocide against his own HIV sufferers and that he supported other African *genocidaires* in Zimbabwe, Sudan and elsewhere, he had many courtiers and praise-singers, including several absurdly obsequious biographers. The normal checks and balances of constitutional government were not enough to contain him and in the end he was brought down by his own arrogance and by another big man.

Zuma's South Africa is almost resplendent in its celebration of the big man. At its apex sits Zuma himself, now quite openly a traditional Zulu patriarch with many wives and fiancées, a special fiefdom of Nkandla which attracts all manner of state investment, and a spreading network of crony

business deals among his extended family. There is a sad irony in watching the likes of Jeremy Cronin and Ben Turok lending their ideological support to this phenomenon, for Zuma is quite clearly the Zulu peasant living his dream of becoming the Zulu king. More than anything he resembles Sixpens, the populist black leader in Arthur Keppel-Jones's *When Smuts Goes* (Gollancz, 1947). Almost equally striking is Blade Nzimande, flagrantly denying the rule that the SACP leader should not be a Minister, so that he too can have the big car, the big salary, and the big expense account that make a Big Man. The model is clearly that of the Zulu chieftaincy, which is what makes the SACP rationalizations for this behaviour so comic.

Other Big Men abound. Think of Khaya Ngqula as head of SAA, who had a major interest in the company which supplied the airline with jet fuel, its biggest single cost item, who spent millions of rands on sports stars of his choosing, who had himself helicoptered between Jo'burg and Pretoria, and who gave away endless free air tickets to friends. Even now Ngqula refuses to pay back any of the R50 million he irregularly spent. Or think of Bheki Cele, the national Police Commissioner, compromising the Dewani trial by referring to the accused as "a monkey" and presuming his guilt. One is reminded of how his predecessor, Jackie Selebi, stormed into a police station and referred to a black policewoman as a chimpanzee because she didn't recognise him. For the great cry of the Big Man, also found in the mouth of Julius Malema, is "Don't you know who I am?!" What have Selebi and Cele got in common apart from ready recourse to monkey talk? Well, mainly the fact that neither had the slightest police or legal experience before becoming national Police Commissioner; that both were given this job simply because the Big Man on top thought he could trust them – and so both of them became Big Men too, throwing their weight around. Moreover, a Big Man is expected to distribute patronage and spoils to his extended family and client network which, in liberal terms, is corruption pure and simple.

This "Big Man" phenomenon is very widely witnessed. It was only because the head of Athletics South Africa, Leonard Chuene, was caught out in public lies over the Caster Semenya affair that he was deposed, but it immediately emerged that Mr Chuene had run athletics as his own private fiefdom. After a forensic audit it was reported that he could face criminal charges for poor corporate governance, alleged misappropriation of funds and tax evasion. Perhaps the choicest item was that ASA had bought him a wonderful big Mercedes – and then sold it to him for R1, though ASA continued to pay for the car's maintenance and insurance of course. Similarly Mr Gerald Majola, the chief executive of Cricket South Africa, helped

himself and his family to extremely luxurious travel privileges, secretly appropriated large bonuses running into millions of rands, when discovered repaid some of these but throughout the ensuing fracas resisted all calls for an independent inquiry and managed to expel those who called for one. In the end Standard Bank resigned its sponsorship rather than be associated with such skulduggery but Mr Majola continues to preside lucratively over South African cricket. The fact that he has had the South African cricket schools week renamed after his own brother, Khaya Majola, is an authentic Big Man touch.

In politics the Big Man style is particularly noticeable in the way ministers spend millions on their cars, always travel first class and stay in the most expensive hotels, for it is understood that these are the essential trappings of a Big Man. To suggest that any Minister should forgo any of these perks is to suggest that he is not really a Big Man after all. Yet under Seretse Khama in Botswana, not only did cabinet ministers travel tourist class but so did the President himself. Similarly, when David Cameron came to power in the UK he immediately instructed that all ministers should travel only tourist class to show that they took the financial crisis seriously. Such an instruction is simply not thinkable in South Africa. And, of course the empowerment of women as interpreted at cabinet level means that any woman minister is also a Big Man.

Liberals feel a revulsion at such behaviour which is clearly derived ultimately from an African chiefly model of authority. Truth to tell, liberals have always felt a bit queasy, even under Mandela, about such chiefly trappings as praise-singers, though these could easily be dismissed as merely *folklorique*. For liberals look naturally towards a modern democratic polity. They would feel equally uncomfortable if they had to share political space with a feudal prince — and for the same reason, that the prince, like the chiefly model of authority, is pre-modern. Inevitably and indeed quite typically, we have seen liberals react against such displays of Big Man political style, most notably in Helen Zille's campaign against so-called "blue-light bullies", the ANC big men who push ordinary motorists off the roads as they hurtle along, ignoring speed limits. Similarly, ANC leaders since the 1950s — Luthuli, Mandela, Tambo and Mbeki — all carefully presented an educated, modern and monogamous image and most liberals feel a mixture of laughter and dismay at the speedy reversion to an uneducated, thuggish and polygamous Africa represented by Jacob Zuma and Julius Malema; again, what jars is the pre-modern.

It is important to say that many within the ANC are fully conscious of the importance of the rule of law and that by no means all Africans in

authority affect a “Big Man” style. Nonetheless, liberals find themselves in the situation of having endlessly to fight for the rule of law against all attempts to ignore and suborn it; to oppose corruption root and branch — which, very often, means corruption committed by Africans; and to oppose the Big Man style which is almost wholly African. So, while Helen Zille can dress up in African shirts, make speeches in isiXhosa and toyi-toyi all she likes, at the end of the day she will be denounced as unAfrican or even anti-African. There is no way out of this for liberals and the only consolation is that many Africans will quietly agree with them. It must be remembered, after all, that Albert Luthuli was a liberal through and through, who always lived a modest life. Although a real chief, he never attempted to insist on chiefly authority. So there are excellent African exemplars of liberal principle. In the long run standing up for these liberal values will have the same significance in post-apartheid South Africa that standing up for merit, not race, had in apartheid South Africa.

It will take courage to stand up for liberal values in the situation now developing, for we are in a position where the cumulative blunders of the ANC will interact with its own increasing corruption and factionalism to produce more and more situations which are beyond the government’s control. Put crudely, ANC government in its first decade and more was able to rely on the gradually wasting asset of systems, infrastructure and institutions inherited from the previous era. But the impact of ANC rule was to white-ant all these things so that they are now all ceasing to work. At the same time the country is running up against resource constraints in many directions, including water, electricity and food. Only good management will see us through — and good management is the thing in shortest supply. At the same time the internal struggles within the ANC over position, power and money are becoming rougher. Death-threats are now the ordinary currency of politics. We have had eleven assassinations over such issues in Mpumalanga province, several more in KwaZulu-Natal and probably more than we realise elsewhere. It is purely a matter of time before we have another major political assassination.

The prospect is thus of Big Man government throwing its weight about to less and less effect, a sort of Nigerianisation of South African life, and the threatening collapse not just of ANC government but of government altogether. Such a collapse has already occurred in many parts of the country. Municipal government disappeared years ago in towns like iDutywa and Butterworth. East London City Council has not met for two years now. Pietermaritzburg, which has had continuous municipal government since 1854, went bankrupt in 2009 and the council has been wound up. Many

other councils are on the brink, in the Free State, the North West and elsewhere. Inevitably, as local governance collapses, so does the rule of law in many cases, and there is already a visible ratepayers' revolt, often with the setting up of de facto alternative local authorities. In a situation of this kind authority will tend to gravitate to whoever can provide direction and efficacy. This gives a heightened significance to the DA's attempt to prove itself superior at the running of provincial and municipal government. Already the contrast between Cape Town and the Western Cape on the one hand and the rest of the country on the other has taken on the proportions one normally sees only in the contrast between one country and another.

Looking Abroad

In the period up until 1991 the SACP and to a considerable extent the ANC tended to look to Moscow. Thereafter, under Mbeki, the ANC tried to position itself as the leader of the radical Third World — the inspiration of the African Renaissance, the president of the African Union, the leader of the Non-Aligned Nations and so on. Rhetorically, at least, ANC spokesmen strove to imagine South Africa leading the South alongside Hugo Chavez, Luiz Inacio Lula, Evo Morales and whichever Castro brother seemed to be in charge of Cuba. This did not really work. The African Renaissance is no more; all mention of it is being removed from school textbooks. The AU has proved to be as hopeless as the old OAU. The Non-Aligned Summit exists only when it is called into conference, with South Africa paying all the bills. There have been no real benefits stemming from South-South meetings, apart from a lot of friendly rhetoric. Otherwise Mbeki's attempt at repositioning South Africa internationally was purely a matter of symbolism and gesture; which is to say, in the realpolitik world we live in, an inevitable failure.

The Zuma approach has been more grounded in realpolitik and for that reason is likely to be longer lasting. He is not interested in the African Renaissance or in mediating other people's wars and struggles. He is quite good at singing and dancing but not much good at speech-making, so he is not interested in symbolic politics or big public occasions such as the Non-Aligned Summit or the celebration of Haitian independence. What he is interested in is power and money, so he has quickly got over Mbeki's tiff with Angola because Angola is rich and fast-growing. He has campaigned hard to join the BRIC nations.

Most of all, Zuma has led the ANC in their consuming admiration, almost their adoration, of China. It is not just that Beijing easily replaced

Moscow as an ideological centre but, from almost a standing start, China has overtaken all others to become South Africa's biggest trading partner. And China has almost unlimited money to invest and needs precisely the sort of raw materials that South Africa produces. So ANC delegations, not just from government but from the party, from the provinces and from municipalities, from the parastatals and from ANC-aligned NGOs, continually make the pilgrimage to Beijing, hoping to discover how this country of the South — as the ANC would have it, although China is actually in the Northern hemisphere — managed to grow into a world power. They want to copy it not just economically but politically.

This ANC adoration of China is only likely to increase as Chinese power and wealth grows. Sadly, it seems unlikely that the ANC will learn anything very worthwhile from the Chinese model and even more unlikely that it will emulate China's growth. For the ANC focuses on China's continuing Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, instead of the fact that over 70% of the Chinese Communist Party's members now come from government officials, professionals and businessmen, with workers accounting for only 9%. The notion that there is something intrinsically good about South-South trade is also likely to be a disappointment. South Africa's textile workers, who have seen their jobs almost completely wiped out by cheap Chinese imports, already know that. At whatever moment the Chinese choose, they can clearly do the same in kitchen utensils, domestic appliances and, probably, cheap cars. In every sphere the Chinese will seek to extract raw materials from South Africa and in return overwhelm South Africa with a tide of cheap finished goods which will easily undercut whatever is produced here — for China does not burden itself with demanding trade unions, affirmative action, gender equity, black empowerment, minimum wage regimes, agitation against labour brokers or even quite basic regulations about health and safety at work.

Jim O'Neill, the man at Goldman Sachs who coined the BRIC acronym, has forecast 2027 as the year in which the Chinese economy will become the largest in the world, thus overtaking the USA. Although that event is actually quite consistent both with China still being a poor country (per capita income there is currently less than half South Africa's) and with continuing American technological and military predominance, it is clear that it will be imbued with huge symbolic significance as the date when the South finally overtakes the North. But with every year that passes and this date more nearly approaches, South Africans, like everyone else, will be faced with an agonising choice. It is to be expected that each new Chinese achievement — the arrival of a new Stealth fighter, the launch of the first

Chinese aircraft carrier or the burgeoning Chinese space effort – will produce new frissons of admiration and dismay.

The point is that once the USSR collapsed in 1990-91 we entered a period of sole superpower hegemony, something the world had not experienced since the mid-Victorian period of sole British hegemony. Balance of power theory suggests that such a period will result in a general ganging up against the sole hegemon – which was why the mid-Victorian period was the high age of “perfidious Albion” propaganda. In the same way, the period of sole American hegemony has been a happy hunting ground for anti-American and anti-Western populism so that the America of George Bush Jr. was opposed by a huge chorus of American liberals, European social democrats, Third World radicals, the few remaining Communists, liberal churchmen and even European Gaullists like Jacques Chirac. Ironically, even though Communism had largely died, the main available ideological critique of American capitalism still around was the Marxist-Leninist one, so this was given a fresh (though bowdlerized) lease of life by this populist anti-hegemonic groundswell. The ideologues of this movement could no longer idealize the Soviet bloc and did not feel on safe ground with China or even with North Korea and Cuba, so there was a great deal of puffing of “new social movements” which turned out to be a rickety collection of left NGOs rallying against the wickedness of the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO and so on.

All of this will fade away as it becomes increasingly clear that we are returning to the old scenario of a race between two competing superpowers. Instead of ganging up against the sole American hegemon, we will all have to choose sides again, just as we did in the Cold War. Given the ANC’s current predilections, one might imagine an easy plumping for the Chinese side. This could indeed happen but such a choice would pose considerable problems. The ANC says it is eager to learn from the Chinese not just economically but politically. But how to do this? China has no respect, after all, for what Cosatu calls “decent work”; indeed, it has little truck with workers’ rights of any kind. Its economic miracle has been based on low wages, long hours and sharp annual increases in productivity. China would simply laugh at notions of employment equity. Then again, in China one is free to practise any religion provided it is one of the seven religions prescribed by the state. Only one party is allowed, there is no free press or independent media or freedom of speech, dissidents are locked up and the Dui Hua Foundation estimates that between 5000 and 6000 people are executed annually. The death penalty is applied to no less than 68 crimes, including, for example, tax fraud and the killing of pandas. China does

not support any normal notions of human rights: there is no due process, no independent judiciary, no rule of law and the state decides how many children one may have and who may move where.

A Liberal Way of Life

One simply has to look at that to realise that South Africans – of all races – have long ago crossed the frontier into what one might call a liberal way of life. Even the most loyal ANC activists assume they live in a country where consumer sovereignty prevails, where people are free to say what they want, move where they wish, practise the religion of their choice, read or watch the media of their choice and decide their own family size. After all, these rights were commonly enjoyed even under apartheid when most other rights were curtailed. These freedoms are very deeply ingrained into the everyday life and thought of all South Africans and they are simply not negotiable. They are just part and parcel of living in a consumer society and are thus, in that sense, “ordinary”. Similarly, we have a free press, a fact which was critical in Mbeki’s downfall. One is reminded of Jimmy Carter’s nostrum. Faced by advisers who wanted him to trumpet the advantages of capitalism over Communism, Carter said no: there are many valid criticisms of capitalism. The West’s real competitive edge lay in freedom: every opinion survey everywhere in the world shows that people spontaneously opt for the greater freedoms enjoyed in the West.

This is something which ought to give one enormous confidence in the future. The consumer society — if you like, the Coca-Cola society, with all its vulgarities, its materialism, its fetishisation of social achievement — can be a very ugly thing but it has the surpassing merit of treating every individual consumer as sovereign, as someone whose tastes and demands must be the starting point of every economic organization. It is but a tiny step from there to recognize that every individual has inalienable human rights, and that too is a step almost all South Africans have already made. In that sense, the Rubicon has already been crossed towards a liberal way of life.

In the darkest days of high apartheid I can remember how my generation was entranced by the wonderful rock music we heard on LM radio. If you think of it, the battle for apartheid was already lost through this. Nothing that apartheid offered, not even to young Afrikaners, could compete with the glamour, excitement and charm of that emerging youth culture, and it was pulling my generation on into admiring the Kennedys, into sympathizing with the US civil rights struggle, into liking short skirts on girls

and long hair on men, let alone loving the music of Chuck Berry, Little Richard and Tamla Motown, quite careless of the fact that they were black. If you think of it, the Calvinist ideology of apartheid had absolutely no chance in the struggle of ideas with that emergent youth culture. It is the same today. It is fashionable in ANC circles to posit Chris Hani as a sort of incorruptible Marxist saint who stood for the austere principles of struggle and who would have stood out against the fixation of the new black elite with Breitling watches, Mercedes cars and Johnny Walker Blue Label whisky. Yet where in the real world can one find any single member of the ANC elite who places ideology above the delights of consumer society? And yet ultimately the values of that consumer society will undermine the ideology of the ANC and SACP completely, indeed that process is happening before our eyes at breakneck speed.

A Liberal Future?

So, to conclude, these have been dark days for South African liberals. We face unmanageable corruption, a state which is both semi-criminalized and also failing. We are affronted at every turn by big-man displays of arrogance and self-aggrandizement. The state has unravelled so far that different parts of the country are increasingly seeking their own futures. It is not even certain that the national unity born in 1910 will be preserved. It is sad that these are the fruits of liberation but they should never make liberals regret having struggled so long and hard for non-racialism and equal rights. And it may well be, as that struggle continues, that liberals will often find themselves in positions which are not politically popular. No matter.

We are currently in a period similar to that endured by liberalism between 1959 and 1990 when liberals have to keep standing up for their ideas as they watch the fabric of a dominant nationalism erode. Nothing in this life is certain, but with even reasonable luck liberalism will simply be the last man still standing when that contest is finally over. We have, after all, had successive waves of jingo nationalism, Afrikaner nationalism and African nationalism; no further nationalist wave is possible. As the last of these waves fades away, only the liberal alternative will remain.

I am not sure I will be alive to see the final triumph of the liberal tradition in South Africa but I look forward to it nonetheless for it will mean a positive re-making of South African life in every sphere; indeed, it will be the re-birth that many hoped for in 1994 but didn't get. But this is a hard country and nothing comes easily. It will be important in that new dawn; indeed, it is already important now, to look back at the long, hard and dif-

ficult path that liberals have trodden. This is not a new thought, but it is the one I would like to leave you with. If you go to the Darwin Library section of Cambridge University Library and pick up Sir John Herschel's book, *An Introduction to the Study of Natural Philosophy*, you will find Darwin's excited scribbles in the margin, for he was most profoundly influenced by his friend's book.

"It is only", Darwin wrote, "by condensing, simplifying and arranging in the most lucid possible manner, the acquired knowledge of past generations, that those to come can be enabled to avail themselves to the full of the advanced point from which they start."

VOTE OF THANKS

In introducing Bill Johnson, I said that these lectures were designed to commemorate the Hoernlés. The second purpose is to provide platforms for liberal ideas.

The third is to honour those with the courage to speak their minds, as Bill Johnson has done over many years. More than once Helen Suzman — who could be quite intimidating in her own way — told me of how prominent South Africans visiting London or living there would phone her outraged by what Bill had written in the London *Sunday Times* or elsewhere. Could he not be stopped? they asked. One person who actually tried to stop him was Nelson Mandela's biographer, Anthony Sampson, who went around Fleet Street trying — supposedly in the name of Mandela but unsuccessfully — to persuade editors to blacklist Bill Johnson, or RW Johnson as his articles are bylined.

Winston Churchill once wrote, "The further backwards you look, the further forward you can see." We have seen the wisdom of that remark this evening. If one looks only at the short term, liberal prospects in South Africa do not seem that bright, partly for some of the reasons outlined to us this evening. The term "dark days" normally conjures up the racial policies of Hendrik Verwoerd, and the detention-without-trial laws of John Vorster, but this evening we've heard it applied to the present.

Yet in a longer historical perspective, Bill Johnson's confidence that "with even reasonable luck, liberalism will simply be the last man standing", seems justified, for he has reminded us that liberalism is by some way South Africa's oldest political tradition, dating back long before Afrikaner and African nationalism, not to mention communism, and stretching back around 200 years to Andries Stockenström and John Philip.

Liberalism has suffered plenty of setbacks down the years — none greater than when the Union of South Africa was launched on the basis of constitutionally entrenched white supremacy in 1910. Yet despite the setbacks, the long-term trend has been one of gain for liberalism, not least our current constitution. Harry Oppenheimer spoke of liberal ideas being pumped into the nation's bloodstream. Perhaps I can reiterate the point by changing the metaphor and quoting a verse from "Say not the struggle naught availeth" by Arthur Hugh Clough, written at the height of Victorian optimism in the mid-19th century:

THE FUTURE OF THE LIBERAL TRADITION IN SOUTH AFRICA

“For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.”

In other words, liberal habits, assumptions, and ideas have flooded in to the extent that it is too late for anyone to flush them out. The Rubicon, as Bill Johnson says, has been crossed and there is no going back.

John Kane-Berman

PREVIOUS HOERNLÉ LECTURES

J H Hofmeyr	Christian principles and race problems (1945)
E G Malherbe	Race attitudes and education (1946)
I D MacCrone	Group conflicts and race prejudice (1947)
A W Hoernlé	Penal reform and race relations (1948)
W M Macmillan	Africa beyond the Union (1949)
E H Brookes	We come of age (1950)
H J van Eck	Some aspects of the South African industrial revolution (1951)
S Herbert Frankel	Some reflections on civilisation in Africa (1952)
A R Radcliffe Brown	Outlook for Africa (1953)
Emory Ross	Colour and Christian community (1954)
T B Davie	Education and race relations in South Africa (1955)
Gordon W Allport	Prejudice in modern perspective (1956)
B B Keet	The ethics of apartheid (1957)
David Thomson	The government of divided communities (1958)
Simon Biesheuvel	Race, culture and personality (1959)
C W de Kiewiet	Can Africa come of age? (1960)
D V Cowen	Liberty, equality, fraternity – today (1961)
Denis E Hurley	Apartheid: A crisis of the Christian conscience (1964)
Gwendolen Carter	Separate development: The challenge of the Transkei (1966)
Keith Hancock	Are there South Africans? (1966)
Meyer Fortes	The plural society in Africa (1968)
D Hobart Houghton	Enlightened self-interest and the liberal spirit (1970)
A S Mathews	Freedom and state security in the South African plural society (1971)
Philip Mayer	Urban Africans and the Bantustans (1972)
Alan Pifer	The higher education of blacks in the United States (1973)
M G Buthelezi	White and black nationalism, ethnicity and the future of the homelands (1974)
Monica Wilson	'...So truth be in the field...' (1975)
M W Murphree	Education, development and change in Africa (1976)
G R Bozzoli	Education is the key to change in South Africa (1977)
Hugh Ashton	Moral suasion (1978)
Alan Paton	Towards racial justice: Will there be a change of heart? (1979)
Leon Sullivan	The role of multinational corporations in South Africa (1980)
Alan Paton	Federation or desolation? (1985)
Charles Simkins	Liberalism and the problem of power (1986)
M M Corbett	Guaranteeing fundamental freedoms in a new South Africa (1990)
Richard Goldstone	Do judges speak out? (1993)

Lionel Abrahams	The democratic chorus and individual choice (1995)
Michael O'Dowd	Ideas have consequences (2000)
Carl Gershman	Aiding democracy around the world: the challenges after September 11 (2003)
Jonathan Jansen	When does a university cease to exist? (2004)
Otto Count Lambsdorff	The welfare state: poverty alleviation or poverty creation? (2006)

The Hoernlé Memorial Lectures

The IRR is republishing the text of the Hoernlé Memorial Lectures, a series of talks which started in 1945. The original introductory note to the lecture series reads as follows:

A lecture, entitled the Hoernlé Memorial Lecture (in memory of the late Professor R. F. Alfred Hoernle), President of the Institute from 1934—1943), will be delivered once a year under the auspices of the South African Institute of Race Relations. An invitation to deliver the lecture will be extended each year to some person having special knowledge and experience of racial problems in Africa or elsewhere.

It is hoped that the Hoernlé Memorial Lecture will provide a platform for constructive and helpful contributions to thought and action. While the lecturers will be entirely free to express their own views, which may not be those of the Institute as expressed in its formal decisions, it is hoped that lecturers will be guided by the Institute's declaration of policy that "scientific study and research must be allied with the fullest recognition of the human reactions to changing racial situations; that respectful regard must be paid to the traditions and usages of the various national, racial and tribal groups which comprise the population; and that due account must be taken of opposing views earnestly held."

About the IRR

Since 1929, the Institute of Race Relations has advocated for a free, fair, and prospering South Africa. At the heart of this vision lie the fundamental principles of liberty of the individual and equality before the law guaranteeing the freedom of all citizens. The IRR stands for the right of all people to make decisions about their lives without undue political or bureaucratic interference.