

Joining the waBenzi

By **Ben Turok**



This issue opens with an important interview with Leslie Maasdorp, a former activist who is now a leading businessman. We appreciate his candour and his willingness to subject himself to public scrutiny. Regrettably, he is an exception to the rule. Too many of his peers have slipped quietly from a life dedicated to the struggle into the glitzy lifestyles of the waBenzi. A few retain a token place on a committee or two but are otherwise inactive. The pattern is repeated again and again, so that it no longer surprises us. One is tempted to ask whether deracialising the top echelons of capital in the name of black economic empowerment is not also legitimising the most unjust and unequal capitalism in the world. In any case, Deputy President Motlanthe has noted that BEE is unsatisfactory as it stands.

Looking back, we recall how the struggle against apartheid took ordinary young folk of all races, put them into a political pressure cooker where they rapidly developed organisational and communication skills, and then into the furnace of prison where they became outstanding and steeled cadres. In my own case, I emerged from university as an engineer with modest accomplishments, then entered the struggle where I had to make speeches, write press statements and reports, and think hard about my values – all of which changed my life forever.

The struggle was a tough school which moulded many remarkable personalities. Some went on to play leading parts in the movement and in government. They built the new democratic South Africa, and we shall always be grateful to them.

But after a few years of service in the movement, in government, or the public service, too many have disappeared into the world of business with its values of individualism, greed and conspicuous consumption. Fancy imported cars, Sandton parties and Chivas Regal are the flagships of that world. Some of their pranks are a huge embarrassment to the dedicated cadres and masses of our movement.

What a loss this represents to the ANC and to public life!

We ought to give serious thought to finding an alternative route for these distinguished products of our democracy. Let us give them serious tasks in the public domain where they can put their talents and vast experience to work for the public good. We all know that many important challenges await attention. Can we not place them in important commissions to guide and regulate our public life? Perhaps a senate is not such a bad idea? Anything to save us from the embarrassment of seeing giants of our struggle grubbing around on the margins of company boards! Let them rather follow the lead of Madiba. 🇿

**Yours in consistency,
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Editor**



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