Fashions come and go, but Style is forever

Recently the Constitutional Court announced that the government’s refusal to give a visa to the Dalai Lama (to come to Desmond Tutu’s 80th birthday last year) was unconstitutional. Was there ever any doubt that this was a quintessential case of Triumphalism? I mean, if there was ever a case of shooting Bambi, this was it! It was the ANC sucking up to China and nothing more. Hooray for the Constitutionalists who challenged it, and won!

The Arch joked that the Dalai Lama could now be invited back – for his 90th birthday party!

This reminded me of an old adage that politicians think of the next election, but statespersons think of the next generation. I have to say that in my view, too many politicians are mere triumphalists, whereas constitutuionalists tend to be statespersons.

We are on the ever of the ANC’s next leadership conference. The party has rejected efforts by both business leaders (from the private sectors) and church leaders (from the voluntary sector) to add value to the decisions that will be made. Nevertheless, many delegates are still people of faith and many of them also realize the supreme importance of public-private partnership. The composition of the conference delegates will be subjected to various kinds of analysis. In my case, I am still beating the drum that some of them will be triumphalists and others will be constitutionalists. But in what proportion?

One optimistic note is that perhaps the most triumphalist of all – the deposed leader of the ANC Youth League – has been sidelined. This bodes well for the outcomes.

Yesterday’s Business Day carried an article by Carol Paton called What has changed from Polokwane to Mangaung? (In other words, from the last leadership conference which led to the removal of then-President Thabo Mbeki, til this one.) It was very insightful…

“In essence, what the Polokwane leadership has achieved in the past five years is to stop the post-1994 trend towards modernization and return to a world in which it is believed that a command-driven approach works best – and one in which the liberation movement and its interests are paramount.

“At the most obvious level, this has meant a significant shift away from constitutionalism, at least ideologically, but also in practical ways, such as the party’s attitude to the judiciary, the criminal justice system, policing, state information and intelligence and, more recently, the economy. Many of these developments have been criticized and challenged by civil society organizations, intellectuals and the opposition.

“In a less obvious way, what the Polokwane leadership has also achieved is to refashion the party’s relationship with the government, making itself the more significant and important partner. So while, during the presidencies of Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, it was the government that took the lead in policy-making, drawing on the expertise and knowledge of public officials, ministerial advisers and experts in various fields, the ANC now has primacy in the making of policy.”
I found this to be very relevant. It illuminates how potent Triumphalism has become. Minister in the Presidency Trevor Manuel is quoted as saying: “The system as it is doesn’t work because it structures a relationship between people in the government and people in the ANC, but there is an asymmetry of information between them which is quite profound. For example, we will have people in government making proposals on nuclear energy and ordinary branch members (having) no idea of what they are talking about.”

The Grapes of Wrath

Triumphalism is rooted in the structural inequity that South Africa cannot seem to shake off.

This has been highlighted of late by striking farm-workers in the wine-growing region of the Cape. They want a 100% increase in pay from the R75 per day they earn now ($10). The estate owners say that they cannot sustain such an increase and remain profitable. This is a stand-off. You can’t run a business without a profit; but you just cannot live on R75 per day either.

There are still people around who are not fatalistic, who do not accept that “poverty is part of life”. And they/we are increasingly disappointed that the expectations that rose with the dawn of Democracy have not materialized. The gains to date are largely because of government largesse – with 15 million citizens now on some kind of direct government aid. (That is more people than there are in the work force – producing.) Not all of those who still envision and champion change are Triumphalists, who have a short-sighted tendency to think of the next election as opposed to the next generation.

If C4L wants to champion Constitutionalism during the next 2 years, in the run-up to the next elections – among those youth who have never voted before – then we cannot ignore these “grapes of wrath”. There is just no getting around the need to bridge this gap – to validate our message. But how? Corruption is but an economic way of looting and burning. It is not thinking of the next generation. It is becoming the fashion – but it is not Style.

This week, Desmond Tutu was speaking at the memorial service for Kader Asmal. Minister in the Presidency Trevor Manuel (quoted above) had also spoken. Tutu got quite animated and asked “What has happened to us? I mean, what has happened to us that we can just go on going on? What is the matter with us?” He said that he had spoken to Trevor Manuel earlier and said, “You don’t belong in this government”.

Then he said: “Trevor, you tell your boss, that this old man who said he was retired, I am going to come back. No, I am not going to come back… But there’s at least one thing that I can do which doesn’t need anybody’s permission – I am going to pray. You tell him that this old man is now going to pray, like he prayed for the Nats” (the apartheid regime).

Thinking globally

Here is a thought from a recent article in TIME magazine called Africa Rising: “With a very few notable exceptions, our leaders are not part of accountable governments,” says Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, chairman of the international mediation body and rights watchdog the Elders. “It's still, if they perform abominably, so what?” The continent's leaders are, by one important measure, less accountable than they were in the past. Since it was set up in 2007 by a Sudanese telecom billionaire, the Mo Ibrahim Index of African
Governance has recorded a striking divergence: material improvement along with political deterioration. This year, for the third time, Mo Ibrahim's foundation declined to award its $5 million prize for African leaders who leave office peacefully and democratically. “We are not completely out of the past and into the future,” says Ibrahim.

Acting locally - charity begins at home

C4L cannot find this way through the gauntlet alone, and obviously it is not the only one looking for the way through! But a reliable road map has not been found. The Jobs Fund has been a huge disappointment and the Community Work Programme in C4L’s experience has been more of a spawning ground for corrupt triumphalists than anything.

My gauntlet metaphor may mean more to Canadians than Africans. As C4L runs down this metaphorical corridor, it has triumphalists pounding it on the Left and constitutionalists hammering it on the Right. They are both correct – the Left saying that the white right has become fatalistic and hardened its shell around its hold on Capital. The Right saying that there is no future for social justice if it means putting the rule of law on the altar and if South Africa going down the road of (God forbid) a president-for-life.

On the left, C4L’s Livelihood Security Unit has become the “centre of gravity” for 2013 programming. It continues to incubate enterprises run by youth in the “green occupations” (including solar but now broader). This includes entrepreneurship training. This is what C4L is doing about the glaring gap that has caused the “grapes of wrath” scenario to unfold. This unit is attracting some donor funding, but it only offers some of the ingredients for enterprise development. Others are micro-credit for the tools and equipment youth need, business mentoring, and linkages to market opportunities in the formal sector. Combined, these offer youth a hand up – not a hand-out.

On the right, C4L’s Opportunities for Youth Programme is positioning itself to influence youth who have never voted before, in the run-up to the next elections in 2014 (that is, youth who are 16 – 21 years of age today). But this voter education has to be delivered very judiciously and as inconspicuously as possible! Even though it is civic education, not politics. C4L will have to use tools like social networking, blogging and cellphone sites – where youth congregate virtually. This is not the kind of work that lends itself to grantseeking – few Donors will want to risk it. So we ask you to consider pledging support to this cause for the next 2 years, or to make a one-off donation to help get it going in early 2013. Please keep this in mind as you are closing your accounts for the year.

Remember that gifts in Canada can be sent through:

St Paul’s United Church
PO Box 88
Warkworth, ON
K0K 3K0

Please mark the gifts “for C4L outreach”.

TIME attributes Africa’s lift-off to four factors, nearly all of them occurring in the past 10 years:

1. Billions of dollars in aid, especially to fight HIV/AIDS and malaria
2. Tens of billions of dollars in foreign-debt cancellations
3. A concurrent interest in Africa's natural resources, led by China
4. The rapid spread of mobile phones, from a few million in 2000 to more than 750 million today. This speeds up technology transfer and promotes synergies.

Investment first outpaced aid in 2006 and now doubles it. Business increasingly dominates foreign interest in Africa.

Job creation

By 2020 a youth surge propelled by the world's highest birthrates, which will raise Africa's population from 1 billion in 2009 to 2 billion in 2050, will add a further 122 million Africans of working age. That would be a boon if they had work. But McKinsey calculates that in the same period, Africa will create just 54 million to 72 million more jobs. "If current trends continue, it's going to take Africa until 2066 before employment levels reach those of East Asia," says David Fine, one of the report's authors. "The next part [of Africa's development] is jobs," agrees Geldof. "What will it take to fill that void?"

A Wake-up Call

The ANC is reaping the reward for this sorry record. In mid-August, 3,000 miners at platinum producer Lonmin's Marikana mine in northern South Africa walked off the job, demanding a tripling of basic pay, from about $500 per month. On Aug. 16, after days of violence in which 10 people died, police shot dead 34 miners. The killings evoked the brutality of apartheid. Meanwhile, the militant antibusiness, antigovernment strikes that erupted at other mines, then in other industries, continue today. These have exposed as nothing more than a hollow fraud the claims by the ANC's ruling alliance that it represents the poor. With such a disconnect between government and people, Tutu says, the potential for upheaval in South Africa is "very great ... When the big eruption happens," he says, "it's going to be very, very disturbing."

The Second Scramble for Africa
That will inevitably change. Mozambique's offshore Rovuma-1 block has bigger natural gas reserves than all of Libya, while initial estimates are that Somalia has as much oil as Kuwait. The continent has 60% of the world's unused arable land. As Geldof says, "In the end, we all have to go to Africa. They have what we need." And it is in that second scramble for Africa that the continent's best hopes lie, because if the first scramble for Africa—as historians dubbed the period from the 1870s to 1900—was a European imperialist carve-up, the second should leave Africa as the big winner. "There is a new Great Game being played out in Africa," says Geldof. "Yet much of the West ignores this geostrategic giant."