

Tertiary funding crisis is political

ABOUT two weeks ago, the University of KwaZulu-Natal Foundation, in conjunction with Absa, hosted me in Durban at what was a strategic dialogue about the state of higher education in South Africa, and the funding crisis in particular.

To me, and I hope many of the participants, the participation of Absa was quite welcome, for what appears to be a collaborative effort between the private sector and our public institutions; indeed government.

On the day, Absa donated money to alleviate the plight of poor students at UKZN. But what was more striking was the fact that Absa appears to be acutely aware of the strategic crisis and opportunity that lack of funding presents for the country as a whole. That, for me, was quite marvellous music to my ears.

Often – with good reason – corporate South Africa is accused of ambivalence, social

distance and profiteering or merely feigning interest in corporate social responsibility. But here was Absa showing deep appreciation of the strategic issues plaguing our higher education system, and contributing ideas too.

However, throughout my presentation on the day, I argued that in order for Absa's and corporate South Africa's efforts to stick, something larger and more enduring was needed: a mini-social compact on education in South Africa.

Of course, it will have to be built on the basis of mutual trust and legitimacy on both sides.

The trust is threefold: first, the State must build trust with key players as well as with the people, with increasing levels of legitimacy.

Secondly, corporate South Africa must earn the trust of South Africans by investing in the economy and helping to reduce unemployment; and finally, both business and the State have to trust one another

Government institutions must eradicate poverty by allowing our children the right to free education, writes **David Maimela**

and must see each other as legitimate social partners for the country's long-term development.

Clarity

The current problem of funding in higher education must be viewed as a political crisis before it is seen as merely a financial or technical problem. If understood in this manner, it is easy to reach a consensus on the purpose and utility of education in society, and how we must fund it.

It should be possible to agree that education must be free for the poor and the working class.

If people went through primary and secondary education bare-foot and on hungry stom-

achs, what more payment do you need from them?

Secondly, it is possible to argue that basic education is a fundamental and sacrosanct right, and that higher education and training is both a private and a public good.

The skills and knowledge that our institutions produce benefit society, business and the individual.

So, the principle of shared costs must be articulated to mean that the State, business and the family should share the burden of funding; but for the working class and the poor, payment at the point of access must be waived and accumulation of student debt must be abolished.

It is usually forgotten that even the rich do not pay 100% of university fees due to the government subsidy. What this means is that the poor carry a double or even triple burden in terms of funding.

And the 'missing-middle' is somewhere in the middle, as the description suggests.

Thirdly, I also suggested, I believe, that there are three steps that may have to be undertaken in a phased manner.

In the short term, we need to get financial aid right in order to resolve the present stalemate. In the medium term, the TVET college system must be upgraded in every way so that we build prestige across the system and present young

people with options other than university, and thereby sway the demand towards the TVET sector.

Progress

In the long term, a lasting solution may actually come from technological advances, rather than money.

As we enter the fourth industrial revolution, the delivery of education will be altered.

The nature of learning and teaching, the traditional university as we know it, and even the entry academic programmes will change. Some of these changes are already under way.

But why do we have the crisis we have today?

It is easy to understand. For more than two decades, funding to higher education has been increasing nominally, but decreasing in real terms.

However, the numbers of especially poor students have been rising since 1994. We had 400 000 students in the system then, but in 2017 we have just above a million students in the university sector alone. That's more than double the increase, plus education inflation.

Effectively, the system could not catch up with runaway costs, as well as the changing socio-economic profile of students.

Politically, this means the success of government (opening the doors of learning) is in return a curse and a source of the crisis. And yet at the same time the system has been wasteful due to high drop-out rates, caused by a poor schooling system and other structural problems.

In other words, if you think the problem is just about money, you better think again.

The problems are deep, varied and interconnected.

You need student support to deal with the legacy of a poor schooling system; you need replenishing the ageing population of academics to maintain quality teaching, learning and success; you need economic restructuring to stimulate demand and avoid the problem of unemployed graduates from Tunisia in 2012.

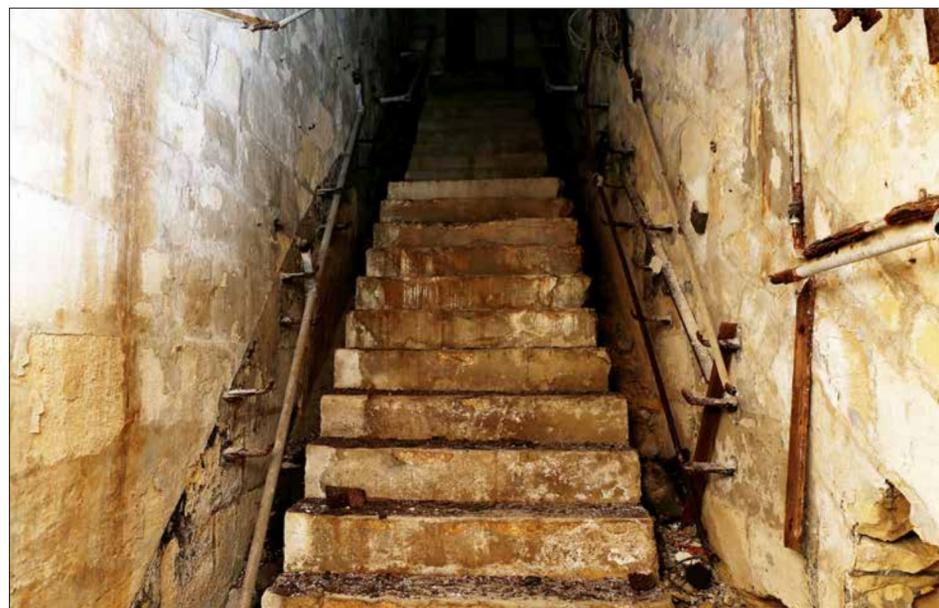
In the end, the argument must stand: all social partners need to put hands on the deck and begin the hard and long slog of building a mini-social compact for education so that we can create equal opportunities for accessing the economy for the thousands of youths who leave the schooling system annually.

So, let us not allow the crisis to go to waste; rather build on the one-mindedness we witnessed in 2010.

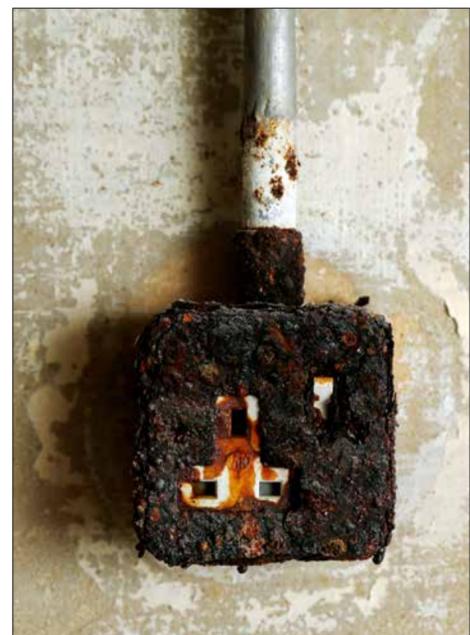
● *Maimela is researcher at the Mapungubwe Institute. He writes in his personal capacity.*



A lantern is seen in the Nato tunnels, dating back to World War II, in the war headquarters situated beneath Valletta, the capital of Malta. PICTURES: REUTERS



ABOVE: A staircase at the Nato tunnels.



A rust-covered electric socket.

New lease on life for Maltese tunnels

DARRIN ZAMMIT LUPI

VALLETTA, Malta: In a vast network of tunnels carved into the rocks under the Maltese capital Valletta, faded maps of the Mediterranean hint at the place's role in directing key battles in World War II.

Malta is now restoring the 28 000sqm of tunnels and planning to open a huge section to the public.

The compound, hidden under the picturesque port city perched on cliffs above the sea, was built by the British and served as the

staging ground for major naval operations. The British military withdrew in 1979 and the compound was abandoned for almost 40 years.

German and Italian forces bombarded Malta intensively between 1940 and 1942 to try to gain control of the Mediterranean, but did not manage to force the British out. During the Cold War the tunnels were used to track Soviet submarines.

Over the years, water and humidity have allowed rust and mould to spread.

Some rooms have been vandalised, but traces of the military apparatus that once occupied the complex still remain. Military cot beds, tangled cables and dust-covered rotary phones litter the rooms.

The Malta Heritage Trust, a non-governmental preservation group, began the multimillion dollar restoration of the site in 2009. – Reuters



LEFT: A rotary dial telephone set and clock.



A bathroom sink.



Graffiti left by vandals covers the walls in the Briefing Room at the Combined Operations Centre.



Part of a map showing the central Mediterranean is seen in the map room at the Combined Operations Centre.



Pigeon feathers lie on broken pieces of a wall map in the Briefing Room.

DUNCAN DU BOIS

HISTORY has a habit of repeating itself. The names and dates change, but themes are recurrent. Natal has often tended to be out of step with the rest of the country.

This is again apparent with the controversy surrounding President Jacob Zuma.

In 1909, Natal was the only colony to hold a referendum on whether or not to join the Union of South Africa. Although the result was decisive, up until the last week of the campaign, the outcome was in doubt, with many colonists wary of the prospects of Afrikaner domination.

In 1926-27, agitation in Natal reached fever-pitch over Prime Minister JBM Hertzog's pro-

KZN again Last Outpost, this time with Zuma diehards

posed introduction of a new flag in place of the British Union Jack. While the idea that South Africa should have its own flag in keeping with its new nationhood was a reasonable one, it provoked frenzied opposition in Natal.

As historian Paul Thompson stated, "probably no other issue set so many Britons against Afrikaners in the history of the Union".

Huge protest meetings were held across the province at which Empire loyalists affirmed their "unceasing devotion to the Union Jack".

The emotional political climate brought forth debate on

the idea of secession and separation from the Union.

The uproar led Hertzog to brand the province as "a hotbed of jingoism".

The flag controversy ended in October 1927 when it was revealed that the new Union flag incorporated the Union Jack.

Heresy

The year 1960 saw a resurgence of Last British Outpost emotions in Natal following Dr (Hendrik) Verwoerd's proposal of a referendum to determine whether South Africa should embrace republic status.

Again, a severe polarisation of opinions occurred. But in

Natal, anti-republic passions took on a degree of zeal that branded republicanism as heresy.

Heading the fight in the province was Natal United Party leader Douglas Mitchell. He addressed rallies of 40 000 in Durban and 25 000 in Pietermaritzburg. His punchline was: "I am not prepared to accept a decision for South Africa as far as Natal is concerned."

To frenzied applause he told Verwoerd, "go and be damned".

In the referendum held on October 5, 1960, Natal was the only province to reject the republic, recording 135 598 votes against to 42 299 in favour. But

overall, by a margin of 74 580 out of 1 626 336 votes cast, the republican vote triumphed.

Mitchell found himself in a bind: his feisty rhetoric had created expectations for Natal to break away from South Africa. Somewhat desperately, he had confidential meetings with Verwoerd and the British High Commissioner, Sir John Maud, on the possibility of Natal becoming a separate state. But Mitchell's efforts proved futile and, with docility, Natal accepted the republic.

An enduring feature of Natal's difference from the other three provinces was its resolute defence of the provin-

cial council system and the limited autonomy it afforded.

In all the years that the country was dominated by National Party government, the Natal provincial council was the only one which bucked the trend and was governed by the South African Party and its successors, the United Party and the New Republic Party.

In 1981, in what turned out to be the last provincial council elections of the pre-1994 order, Natal's white voters rallied behind the slogan "Natal stay free – vote NRP".

However, in 1986, the NP government scrapped the provincial system and replaced it

with an unelected bureaucracy.

In the 1980s, although violence was widespread, KwaZulu-Natal was the only province convulsed by a virtual civil war between ANC and IFP supporters, which claimed some 14 000 lives. So acute were the tensions in the province that the IFP very nearly abstained from the 1994 election.

In 2017, polarisation and severe tensions characterise the political atmosphere in the province, exacerbated this time by a war within the ANC and mounting calls, particularly from outside KZN, for Jacob

War

Zuma to resign as President. Of course, underpinning the situation is Zulu tribalism, and that KZN is Zuma's home province. Nonetheless, the stakes are high.

Political relegation, not just within the ANC, but along with the loss of power would have manifold costs.

Thus, it would seem, the stance of the ANC in KZN in support of Zuma is in conflict with the cycle of history as it has affected this province.

In other words, the KZN ANC will have to accept the opinion of the rest of the country that Zuma resign as president and see the futility of KZN being a Last Outpost for Zuma diehards.

● *Du Bois is an independent post-doctoral researcher.*