

**YESTERDAY'S POEMS AND THE POETS OF YESTERDAY'S SOUTH AFRICA,  
AND TOWARDS NEW POEMS AND POETS FOR THE UNFINISHED  
AND CONTINUING STRUGGLE FOR A NEW SOUTH AFRICA**

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**Keynote Address to the IMBIZO ON  
GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER:  
ITS LEGACY AND LESSONS**

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Chairperson, colleagues and comrades

It is a great honour and privilege to be invited to address you this evening. I wish to use the opportunity to speak in the first place on the theme of **Yesterday's Poems and the Poets of Yesterday's South Africa**. Thereafter, I want to address the theme of **Towards New Poems and Poets for the Unfinished and Continuing Struggle for a New South Africa**. I am not a literary critic and my address has nothing to do with poems or poetry. But for reasons that will become clear, the themes of poems and poetry are appropriate.

Twenty five years ago, in the turmoil of the 1979 consumer boycott of Fattis and Monis, the Golden Arrow bus boycott and the 1980 education boycott, prominent, far sighted and inspirational anti-apartheid political activists in the Western Cape launched a community newspaper. It was simply but aptly titled *Grassroots*. Despite struggle publications of decades prior to its own origins, *Grassroots* was an intellectual, media and organizational adventure the like of which was unknown previously. And nothing quite like *Grassroots*, as both an organisation and as a newspaper, has been seen since it closed in 1990.

Today, there is no shortage of what are called 'community newspapers'- the commercially produced, for profit, weekly wad of paper that is left on the stoep or in the postbox, whose content is difficult to describe, is of parochial and fleeting interest, and is eminently forgettable by bedtime, and which serves really as an medium for big and small business advertising. *Grassroots* as many of you know, and others will soon hear was a community newspaper of a quite different kind.

To begin with, it is important to settle the issue of precisely what kind of newspaper *Grassroots* was. *Grassroots*, and the other newspapers that it was to inspire or help launch within a few years of its own birth – *Ukusa* in Durban, *Speak* in Johannesburg, *The Eye* in Pretoria, *Umthonyama* in Port Elizabeth, *Saamstaan* in the South Cape and *Bricks* in Windhoek – are best understood as a particular species of media. In terms of their aspirations, goals and workings, **popular democratic struggle press** is perhaps the best way to define *Grassroots* and its contemporary brother/sister community newspapers.

The popular democratic struggle press had many distinctive features. In the first place, the names that the community newspapers took on - *Ukusa* (Awake!) *Speak*, *Saamstaan*, and *Grassroots* itself – were clear and unambiguous signals of the aspirations and intentions of these institutions and newspapers. Second, unlike the dominant South African media, which were largely under apartheid state or corporate capital control, the popular democratic struggle press was initiated and controlled, to greater or lesser extent, by anti-apartheid popular activists and organizations. Third, as opposed to the commercial media, the popular democratic struggle press was a not-for-profit enterprise, often distributed free, or sold at a small nominal price. Fourth, the popular democratic struggle press depended on local fundraising, international donor funding and revenue from limited advertising by small black businesses. Advertising revenue was more often financial contributions to the anti-apartheid struggle by progressive businesspersons than any serious marketing on the part of small black businesses.

Finally, unlike the commercial media with their professionally trained and salaried staff, the success of *Grassroots* and the other newspapers crucially depended on an altogether different

personpower base. On the one hand there was a small core of staff that was paid extremely modest 'struggle salaries' – the term 'struggle' being appropriate in all senses of the word. All staff, irrespective of position earned equal salaries, and positions were not so much of a hierarchy as a specialist division of labour for the effective operation of the newspaper. On the other hand there was a large committed and dedicated volunteer force without whom the newspaper would have been a good idea but little else. This volunteer force contributed ideas for articles, wrote articles, assisted with production, gathered together at Esquire Press in Athlone Industria to collate the newspaper as it came of the printing press, and bundled the newspaper. Above all, the volunteer force, alongside other activists of civic, youth, women's and student organisations and trade unions, distributed the newspaper door to door among township residents, and at bus and train stations and at factories, and at educational institutions.

What I have noted and the contrast with the commercial media provides a flavour of the organisational form and some of the aspirations of *Grassroots*. Its real nature, the rationale for its existence, and the principal ideas that animated it, however, are nicely captured by the word '**poems**'. Elaborating on each of the letters of the word 'poems' will help to convey the fundamental idea of *Grassroots* and the roles that *Grassroots* was intended to play in the South Africa and Western Cape of the 1980's.

The 'P' in 'poems' stood for **Popularization**. The role of *Grassroots* was to **popularize** – popularize the ideas of freedom, justice and democracy; the ideas of non-racialism, non-sexism; popularize the Freedom Charter and the United Democratic (UDF) Declaration; popularize the national, regional and grassroots civic, women's, youth and student organizations and trade unions; the victories, large and small, of workers, township residents and other social groups; popularize the heroes and heroines of past and present, whether national, regional or local grassroots political, civic and union leaders.

The 'O' in 'poems' symbolized **Organization**. *Grassroots* was to be a catalyst for **organizing** the disenfranchised and nationally oppressed who, a racist minority had decided, were to be denied the freedoms and rights that are normally accorded to citizens, and were to be subject to a battery of oppressive measures designed to maintain white supremacy and privilege while, in the parlance of segregation and apartheid discourse the 'kaffirs', 'natives', 'Bantu', 'plurals', 'hotnots' and 'coolies' pursued their fortunes in barren bantustans and separate development institutions under the rule of apartheid collaborators. *Grassroots* was to support the organizing of the exploited who, denied basic rights and valued only for their ability to labour and produce profits for the captains and robber barons of mining, industry and agriculture, were beginning to stir as workers and challenge their appalling wages and the working conditions. It was to help build powerful mass democratic organizations among township residents, women, youth, students and workers. It was to be used to enter the township home, to spread the gospel of building organisation and to facilitate organization building. The idea of the popular democratic struggle press as an organizer was, of course, not new. In the early 1900s, the great theorist and architect of the Russian revolution, Vladimir Illich Ulyanov, or Lenin, had written in *What Is To Be Done* about the potential of newspapers to function as a 'collective organizer'.

The 'E' in 'poems' represented **Education**. The role of *Grassroots* was to **educate** the oppressed and exploited about the historical and contemporary sources and the true nature of their oppression and exploitation, and why it was possible for a small minority to maintain and

reproduce its power. It was to educate about power and powerlessness and the reasons for wealth and poverty and prosperity and deprivation, about the state strategies of divide and rule, and of the velvet glove of reform and the iron fist of repression. At the same time, it was to also educate why it was necessary for the unity in action of exploited workers and oppressed township residents, of Africans, Coloureds, Indians and white democrats; about the weapons available for struggle against apartheid; and about the Freedom Charter and its promise of a new South Africa. *Grassroots* was to express and cultivate the desire for freedom, the idea that there was nothing wrong to dream dreams of a different South Africa in which the people governed.

The ‘M’ in ‘poems’ signaled **Mobilization**. The role of *Grassroots* was to be a detonator for **mobilizing** township residents, women, youth, students and workers in building mass democratic organizations. It was to facilitate mobilization against the deprivations of township conditions, the intolerable conditions on the factory floor, the harbours and railways, the oppressive conditions on the farms and the greed of the bosses. *Grassroots* was to be a weapon for mobilizing people to oppose oppression, exploitation and injustice in all areas, whether in the schools, universities and technikons, in religious institutions or sports fields, and in the domains of culture and leisure.

Finally, the ‘S’ in ‘poems’ stood, of course, for **Struggle**. *Grassroots* was to build the understanding and consciousness that nothing comes without struggle. It was to raise awareness of the targets of struggle and the goals of struggle. It was to be both an institution of struggle and a catalyst of struggle, and was to take its place in struggle, alongside the popular mass organizations. *Grassroots* was to express the historical and indomitable determination of the people to struggle, and to free themselves from the tyrannies of apartheid, colonialism and imperialism, and to uproot and destroy the old and build the new society.

If *Grassroots* the community newspaper was to be the medium of the beautiful ‘poems’ of liberation, the activists – the intellectuals, students, youth, workers, township residents, men and women, old, middle-aged and young, full-time paid staff and unpaid volunteers – that populated *Grassroots* and constituted its backbone were to be ‘poets’ of the national liberation struggle. The ‘poets’, however, were not to bamboozle the people with over-clever, self-indulgent jargon, long unintelligible esoteric essays and opaque and mystifying tracts. The ‘poetry’ of *Grassroots* was to be lucid, precise and simple, though never simplistic. Articles in *Grassroots* were to be short, written in simple English (and occasionally simple Afrikaans and Xhosa), so that they could be understood by people with limited literacy, and were to be accompanied by punchy headlines, photographs and/or graphics.

While ‘poems’ was its constant mission, the form and content *Grassroots* was not static. After initially concentrating almost exclusively on local social and economic issues, slowly more political and national and even international issues began to be featured. By 1983, *Grassroots* was in the forefront of popularizing the United Democratic Front and in mobilizing against the tricameral parliament. In that year too, and for the first time, *Grassroots* carried a feature on the United States invasion of Grenada, under the headline ‘Fighting against Freedom’.

Initially, distribution was largely door-to-door, through local civic, youth and women’s organizations and amongst factory workers through the emerging trade unions. With time, distribution was extended through centrally organized mass door-to door blitzes in targeted

townships and through distribution at railway stations, bus terminuses and schools and universities and technikons. There was also organizational innovation and expansion. By the mid-1980's, *Grassroots* the community newspaper was complemented by *Learning Roots* a newsletter aimed at students, a media education and training project for developing media activists, a rural project that helped to give birth to *Saamstaan* in the Southern Cape and a magazine called *New Era*.

*Grassroots* was a rich melting pot of activists with diverse political schooling – some activists were sometime Unity Movement, others were sometime Black Consciousness and yet others were groomed directly into the revitalized post 1976-African National Congress. This enriched *Grassroots*, and made it a crucible of concern with political and struggle theory – ‘race’ and ‘class’, ‘racial capitalism’ and ‘colonialism of a special type’, ‘national democratic revolution’ and ‘socialism’ ‘two-stage theory’ and ‘permanent revolution’ - and concern with unity in struggle and strategy and tactics. Infused into *Grassroots* was a healthy dose of fearless, militant and inspirational determination, to borrow Barney Pityana’s words, ‘to push to the limits the bounds of possibility’.

*Grassroots*, and the popular democratic struggle press in general, was of tremendous significance in the struggle for national liberation and democracy in South Africa. It was instrumental in helping to re-ignite a new era of political activism and mass popular resistance. It mobilized at the levels of consciousness and action against white domination and subverted the consolidation and modernization of apartheid rule. It served as a political formation school, produced cadres for the national liberation movement, and ‘helped ignite...a political conflagration which reshaped political relations in South Africa’ (Nolutshungu, 1982:200). The late Sam Nolutshungu, one of the most unacknowledged of our intellectuals, has written that being revolutionary has not only to do with ideology, aims and strategies. It also, and above all, has to do with the real and concrete effects that a movement or organisation has on the terrain on which it operates. In these terms *Grassroots* was indisputably a revolutionary institution.

It is not surprising that, today, from among the *Grassroots* activists of the 1980s can be counted a cabinet minister, a premier, members of parliament, members of provincial legislatures, mayors and local government leaders, higher education leaders, newspaper editors, communication specialists, writers, authors, film makers and captains of business. All who were associated with *Grassroots* will readily acknowledge its contribution to our political education, training and development, its role in enhancing our knowledge, communication competencies and organisational skills, and the wonderful solidarity and bonds it engendered.

It is not possible here to do justice to the *Grassroots* experience and legacy and provide anything but a truncated history. A detailed history of *Grassroots* and of the popular democratic struggle press must still be written. The researching and writing of this history must re-present with rigour, subtlety, nuance and imagination *Grassroots* in its full richness. It must excavate the relations between poets, poems, people and the apartheid state in the Western Cape of the 1980s. It must illuminate the character, role and significance of *Grassroots* by describing and analyzing its ideological and political roots and inclinations, its organisational structure and functioning and its myriad activities.

The purpose of history is to cultivate understanding. The research and writing on *Grassroots* must therefore be critical in perspective – a narrative that lauds its wonderful accomplishments and contribution but also does not shy away from laying bare its weaknesses, its shortcomings, its silences, and missed opportunities.

It has been said that a people without an understanding of its history and past has no future. The great historian and scholar Eric Hobsbawm has recently written that

Political pressures on history...are greater than ever before...More history than ever is today being revised or invented by people who do not want the real past, but only a past that suits their purpose (*Times Higher Education Supplement*, 12 July 2002, p 18-19).

There is a growing selective amnesia and frightening disinterest in our history and ‘real past’. We must take care that we are not afflicted by invented political, economic, institutional, organisational and personal histories and biographies of the kind that make us wonder how it was possible that colonialism and apartheid were able to survive so long, if prior to 1994 there were no supporters of apartheid and there were no opponents of equality, no opponents of freedom, and no opponents of justice and democracy. If history and the past are the keys to the future, this is good reason to insist that a history of *Grassroots* indeed cultivates understanding of the ‘real past’ and is not a sanitized gloss of some assumed past.

*Grassroots* was closed in 1990, deemed to have served its purpose. It is some irony that it was closed in the very year that the late Joe Slovo published *Has Socialism Failed?*, which triggered considerable debate about the ‘lessons’ to be derived from the Soviet Union/ Eastern European, as well as post-independent Africa experiences with respect to state-civil society relations, ‘including fundamental questions such as the relationship between Party, State, people’s elected representatives (and) social organisations’ (Slovo, 1990:36). Slovo also posed the role of anti-apartheid social movements and mass organisations in the transition period and beyond. Concerns were raised about how to avoid a situation, as in the Soviet Union, where ‘in practice the majority of people had very few levers with which to determine the course of economic or social life’ (ibid:39); how to ensure that civics, trade unions, women’s, youth and student organisations did not become bureaucratised appendages of a future state – ‘support bases for the ongoing dictates of the state and party apparatus’, and what Slovo called ‘transmission belts for decisions taken elsewhere and the individual members...little more than cogs of the vast bureaucratic machine’ (ibid:39).

So much for **Yesterday’s Poems and the Poets of Yesterday’s South Africa!** I now want to fast forward to 2004 and in the remaining time turn to the theme of **Towards New Poems and Poets for the Unfinished and Continuing Struggle for a New South Africa.**

The great African revolutionary Amilcar Cabral cautioned that we should always proceed with our feet firmly on the ground, from what is, what exists. In other words, that in pursuing our visions and goals we should be deeply aware of our context. Of the contemporary context, two dimensions are especially relevant in relation to the theme of the unfinished and continuing struggle for a new South Africa.

The first dimension is beautifully captured by the following observation, which I paraphrase:

The advanced capitalist countries have through their exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. The advanced capitalist countries **create a world after their own image**. By the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, they draw all, even the most undeveloped or underdeveloped countries into the global economy. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish this epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. **All that is solid melts into air. All that is holy is profaned.** (Karl Marx, quoted in Wheen, 1999:121-2; emphasis added).

Although written over 150 years ago, in 1848, by one of the greatest thinkers of the last two centuries, this is a wonderful and brilliant description of globalisation, the defining feature of our epoch, of the compression of time and space resulting from the huge increase in speed of communication and contact made possible by information and communication technologies and air travel; of the rapid growth in trade; of the expanded and more rapid flows of capital, of the global organisation of production through transnational corporations and the development of a global materialistic culture symbolised by brand names like Coca Cola, Nike, Microsoft and McDonalds.

Under globalisation, ‘all that is solid (indeed) melts into air’. ‘All that is holy is (truly) profaned’. No wonder that so many today experience a profound crisis of identity and being and experience feelings of un-rootedness and powerlessness. No wonder too that there has been a turn to various kinds of fundamentalisms as part of the search for meaning in every day existence and in an attempt to regain control over destiny.

Jody Kollapen, the Chairperson of our Human Rights Commission eloquently captures the second dimension of our context when he observes that:

...the reality remains that for millions of people the promise of human rights and the vision of a just and caring world remains an illusion. Intolerance, war and impunity; starvation and greed; power and powerlessness all combine in a conspiracy of the powerful against the weak that invariably deepens the faultlines that exist in the world and within nations.

(T)hese millions... see a world where disparities in wealth, resources and opportunities have grown, where human rights norms and values seem invariably to yield to the dictates of the rich and powerful; which expresses shock and outrage at arbitrary killing but at the same time is complicit in the killing of many more thorough hunger and disease – which could have been avoided (Kollapen, 2003:26).

Nowhere are the platitudes of ‘shock and outrage’ and complicity more evident than, of course, in Iraq. In the aftermath of the graphic exposures of brutality and torture in Iraqi prisons under the United States and British occupation, George Bush laments that people ‘don’t understand the true nature and heart of America’ (*Saturday Star*, 8 May 2004). Perhaps! To be fair, there are good and progressive people in the United States, and in the history of the United States there have been radical, progressive and democratic impulses. But the ‘true nature and heart of America’ is also equally evident in the extermination of Native Americans, the slavery of African Americans, segregation and Ku Klux Klan lynchings, the harsh and barren inner city ghettos and the disproportionate number of African Americans in prison.

In many part of the underdeveloped world, and especially in Philippines, Vietnam, Chile, Nicaragua and Palestine, and now Iraq, the recent photograph of a naked Iraqi man tethered by a leash held by a female American soldier also captures all too well the ‘true nature and heart of America’. This is the dominant face of America, which in the name of ‘free enterprise’ and a peculiar brand of ‘freedom’ thinks nothing of toppling democratically elected governments as in Chile, of supporting murderous dictatorships such as those of Pinochet, Marcos and Somoza, of giving free reign to those, like Sharon, who have a history of butchering women and children in refugee camps, of perpetrating massacres such as at My Lai in Vietnam, and of waging cruel wars on people seeking self-determination and independence.

The photograph of the naked Iraqi on a leash is reminiscent of the barbarism of Belgian colonialism, of the German extermination of the Hereros, of British brutality and atrocities in India and elsewhere. It is a photograph that is so richly and powerfully symbolic that a million words cannot express better the American ‘true nature and heart’ as it has been and is lived and experienced in many parts of the world. If an evil stalks our world, it is the axis that has Bush, Rumsfeld and right wing fundamentalists as its lynchpin – an axis that is determined, under the guise of fighting ‘terrorism’, to trammel all those that dare to oppose its ruthless new imperialist order.

To shift to the more immediate South African context, we are currently commemorating the first decade of our freedom and democracy, which are the fruit of bitter struggles and many heroic sacrifices. This evening it is appropriate to remember Ashley Kriel, that spirited and vivacious militant with an insatiable appetite for revolutionary literature, who was so brutally murdered in the prime of his youth. To remember Matthew Goniwe, that inspirational, gentle and humble leader who distributed *Grassroots* in Cradock, and in whose home Bridget Pitt and I spent a night just weeks before he was brutally murdered. And to remember the dapper Siphon Hashe of the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation, whom we visited to pledge our commitment to revitalizing *Umthonyama*. Only, he too was to be brutally murdered, a few months later.

We have much to celebrate, to be proud of, for the achievements of the past ten years of democracy are real and considerable. As free South Africa we are not plagued by some of the realities that Kollapen so vividly describes. But, let us also be brutally honest, we are not entirely spared either from all of the realities that Kollapen describes.

We continue to be one of the most unequal societies on earth in terms of ‘disparities’ in wealth, income and living conditions. The ‘faultlines’ of race, class, gender and geography are still all

too evident. Hunger and disease, poverty and unemployment continue to be a blight on our democracy. This is a powerful indictment of the South Africa that we live in and it challenges us to action

This challenge to action, I wish to propose, needs **New Poems and Poets**, for the struggle for the New South Africa is all too clearly unfinished and continues.

There is today, much debate and contestation, as there should be, around the pace and nature of change since 1994. Some social actors, disappointed with the nature and pace of change over the past ten years, argue that government has embraced a conservative 'neo-liberalism' and that government policies are 'neo-liberal'. Others suggest that government thinking and policies express an unwavering adherence to the radical goals of the Freedom Charter and the 1994 reconstruction and development programme. I subscribe to neither of these analyses. One, with its indolent thinking substitutes slogan and labels for serious analysis. The other, with its rosy-eyed optimism presents the struggle as an unbroken long march to certain equality and freedom.

There is neither an entirely neo-liberal inspired reform process and hegemonic neo-liberalism, nor a wholly revolutionary total and sweeping displacement of old social structures, institutions and policies and imminent dawn of an entirely new social order. Instead, there is a mixed picture and fluid situation; contesting social forces with competing goals, strategies and policy agendas; the resolution of profound economic and social paradoxes in differing ways; continuities and breaks; contradictions and ambiguities in policy and practice, and differing trajectories and trends. The new South African social order is not yet indelibly defined and continues to be uncertain. There is scope yet to shape the new South Africa.

I said earlier that it was an irony that *Grassroots* was closed in 1990, at the very moment that Slovo courageously raised the negative experiences of other post-liberation situations. I draw from Slovo the need for a vibrant civil society and the importance of mass democratic organisations continuing to articulate the aspirations of the people, to serve as instruments for helping to shape 'the course of economic or social life' (Slovo, 1990:39) and to build supportive yet critical relations with the new government and state. With hindsight - and hindsight is, of course, always a great vantage point from which to make judgments - the closure of *Grassroots* and the disappearance of the popular democratic struggle press was perhaps premature and a mistake.

We used to say *Aluta Continua* - the struggle continues. Victory is certain! It is time to change the formulation. It is the road to victory, which is long, unfinished, and full of twists, turns and obstacles, that continues. It is only the struggle that is certain! And this struggle, which must be waged on multiple fronts, through innovative new institutional forms and in creative and imaginative new ways, requires a new generation popular democratic struggle press and **New Poems and Poets**.

Like its predecessor, the new generation popular democratic struggle press will **popularize** - popularize the vision of a society without obscene inequities of wealth and privilege and poverty and deprivation and the core values of such a society; popularize the idea that South Africa must belong to all who live in it, the Bill of Rights and the need for its substantive realization. It will

popularize the idea that political rights alone are not enough and must over time be extended to meaningful economic and social rights, including substantive rights around reproduction. It will popularize the necessity for extending and deepening democracy, the right to challenge and rebel against slovenly public service and to dissent. It will also popularize the national, regional and local organizations and the past and present leaders committed to the realization of a fundamentally new social relations and the idea of the oneness of humanity.

The new generation popular democratic struggle press will serve as a catalyst for **organizing** those that continue to be economically and socially disadvantaged and marginalized – workers, rural poor, the unemployed and the disabled - for no other reason than the historical denial and continuing absence of rights and opportunities, of access to land, education and social services. It will support the organizing of those that are exploited, who are considered only in relation to the balance sheet and shareholder interests, and those who have legitimate claims to redress. It will spread the gospel of building organization, as an instrument of human solidarity and as a necessary weapon for real freedom.

The new generation popular democratic struggle press will **educate** about nature and pace of change and the reasons for these. It will **educate** about the visions that inspired the national liberation struggle, the desirability of creating a new social order in South Africa, the antagonists and protagonists of such an order, and what will be required to realize this order. It will educate about the reasons for continuing wealth and poverty and prosperity and deprivation, and pose questions about the nature and appropriateness of state strategies and policies. It will educate that malnutrition, infant mortality and disease continue to afflict along the unacceptable historical lines of race, class and geography, educate that HIV causes AIDS, and that whatever may be the virtues of spinach and beetroot they provide no relief for AIDS and that only anti-retrovirals currently offer any hope of arresting the horrific social consequences of non-treatment. It will above all educate that the real measure of democracy is not a vote every five years but the number of contexts outside politics where the right to (participate) is exercised'. That is to say, 'the criterion for judging the state of democratization achieved in a given country should no longer be 'who' votes, (and a vote every so many years) but 'where' (citizens) can (participate); how many more spaces there are where citizens can exercise the right to (participate)' (Bobbio, 1987:56).

The new generation popular democratic struggle press will seek to **mobilize** township residents, women, youth, students and workers in building mass democratic organizations. It will mobilize against tardy civil servants who oblige citizens to resort to class action suits to secure pensions and social grants to which they have inalienable rights. It will mobilize against the fraud and corruption, which undermines the morality and values of the new society that must be built and denies services and opportunities to those most in need. It will mobilize against any attempt to degrade the goal of broad based black economic empowerment to the creation of a few score multi-millionaires instead of the economic empowerment of the masses of our people. It will mobilize to ensure that the African renaissance is not limited to a renaissance of the already rich and powerful and new elites but is a renaissance foremost of Fanon's wretched of this earth. It will especially mobilize against the pernicious and all too often self-serving dogma of TINA - there is no alternative – insisting that to be a free people is to take responsibility for making

difficult choices<sup>2</sup>, and that there is no reason that today's necessary compromises and necessities must become virtues.

Finally, the new generation popular democratic struggle press will continue to build the understanding and consciousness that nothing comes without struggle. It will raise awareness of the new targets and goals of struggle. It will be an institution and catalyst of struggle, that cultivates 'prophetic memory', remembrance, critique, consciousness, imagination and desire (Kaye, 1996) – the desire to govern, to shape our destiny, to uproot the legacy of our traumatic past and build a society that is our due.

Quentin Hoare, who did so much to popularize the writings of the little hunchback Italian giant Antonio Gramsci, has written that ideas are utopian not because of the goals they seek to achieve but when they are conceived outside of human beings to realize them. If the new generation popular democratic struggle press is not to be a utopian dream, the questions must arise: who will be its new 'poets'? And what resources will sustain this press?

As for the 'poets', I believe that there are is no shortage of past activists and intellectuals that could be captivated by the idea of a new generation popular democratic struggle press, and that would not be open to the rekindling of consciousness, imagination and desire towards the building of the kind of social order that animated them during the struggle against oppression and exploitation. Acting in unity with contemporary activists in various organizations and movements, and infused with emerging intellectuals and students and youth that are instinctively disinclined to the character of our contemporary society and seek to reshape it on a foundation of more humane values, we could have the backbone of a new truly community newspaper.

As for resources, these will represent a major challenge but should not be an insurmountable obstacle. We can assume that our empowerment captains of industry, agriculture, forestry, fishing and financial and other services will be philanthropic in the understanding that the freedom from want and the happiness of our people are the preconditions for the genuine enrichment of their own lives. In any case, who has said that anything of value comes without struggle. Bertolt Brecht writes of the 'struggle of the mountain's and the 'struggle of the plains'. If the vote and citizenship are the mountains, they have been won. It is now the infinitely more arduous and protracted 'struggle of the plains' that must be joined and won.

A confident political party and government, of the kind that has just been returned to power with the overwhelming support of our people should not fear a new generation popular democratic struggle press. To the extent that this party and government pursues vigorously the 'people's contract' and its commitment to create a better life for all, there should be a strong identity of interests between it and the new generation popular democratic struggle press.

I don't subscribe to the quaint but infantile view of 'good' non-government organisations and civil society and 'demon' state. The state is a crucial vehicle for social transformation in South Africa, is a site of struggle and like the rest of society must itself be democratized. A sophisticated new generation popular democratic struggle press will seek to build an empathetic yet critical relationship between itself and the state – supporting the state where warranted, but

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<sup>2</sup> I thank Prof. Brian O'Connell for educating me on this issue.

fiercely maintaining its independence and unsparingly critiquing it when necessary. On its part, the political party and government will not attempt to control the new generation popular democratic struggle press, or treat it like the crowd in a Shakespearean drama - to be used at opportune moments - or to use Jeremy Cronin's metaphor, as 'essentially a tap to be turned off and on' (1992:43). Instead, it would value its role, respect its autonomy and would seek to hear its 'messages and translate these messages into political decision making' (Melucci, 1985:815).

Chairperson, colleagues, comrades

I have provided a glimpse of the poems and poets that were associated with Grassroots.

I have suggested that the struggle for a New South Africa is Unfinished and Continuing and requires new poems and poets.

I close with the idea that there is great value in cultivating among our people a 'prophetic memory' - that our history teaches that nothing is gained without struggle, that it in our power, individually and collectively, to reshape and remake our country, and that real equality, freedom and democracy requires that they be unbound and extended from the political sphere to all spheres of our society.

I end by recalling the words of the Jewish sage, Hillel:

If I am not for myself, who will be? But if I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?

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