

# Daily Dispatch

OUR OPINION

## Clear value of quality

**T**HE merger of tertiary institutions that created the Walter Sisulu University may have been flawed in concept, but it is done and unlikely to be reversed.

The priority for our city and region must now be to make a success of the project even under the very difficult circumstances that have been created.

The package of stories reported about WSU yesterday paint a dismal picture of challenge and confusion and hint at a history of incompetence or corruption.

Nehawu, the union that represents most of the university staff, has lodged an application with the Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela, for an inquiry into the use of consultants in the current government-ordered rescue plan.

The application apparently has the support of the Department of Higher Education and Training.

On the face of it, Nehawu's claims are alarming. They include the alleged double-dip by several of the people brought in by the administrator, Professor Lourens van Staden. The union alleges that some of them are taking salaries from the university itself and consulting at the same time through companies that they own.

If these charges prove to be true then, even if the practice is legal, it must surely be unwise. The university needs an abundance of skills and ideas and the independence of outsiders who do not have even a temporary vested interest in the institution.

The authorities need to ensure that the WSU turnaround plan is executed with absolute transparency and in line with every relevant fiscal regulation.

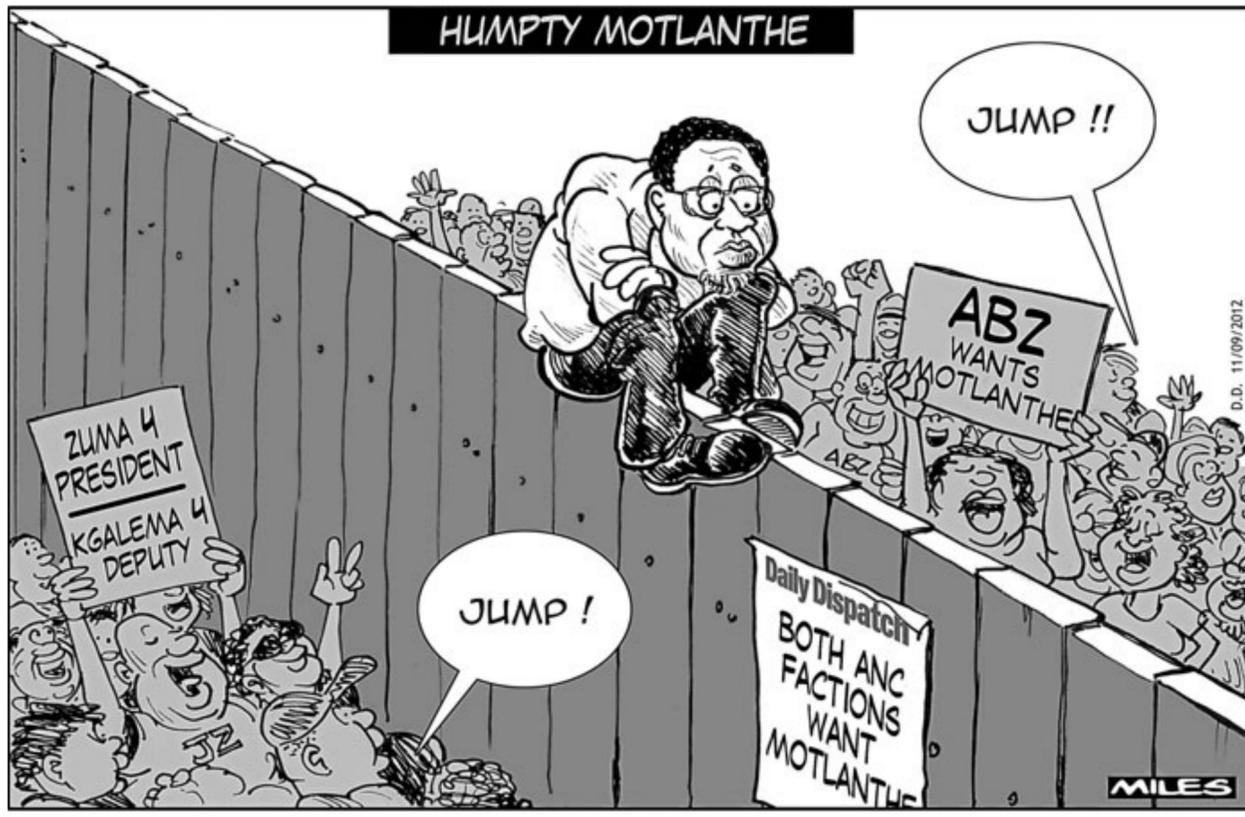
But in the longer term, they need also to look at the viability of the merger itself and begin to identify priorities for the development of the university as a coveted brand.

A balance needs to be struck between the need to share the benefits of hosting such an institution with the burden that the dispersal across several towns and campuses introduces.

The most important factor has to be to build the value of a WSU degree or diploma. The quality of its qualifications must become a guarantee to employers that the person they hire will have the skills their qualifications imply.

We do not want a second-class university that pumps out high numbers of graduates whose skills are not trusted by business. We need a first-class university that reflects the Eastern Cape's reputation for excellence in education.

It is well within our reach to create an excellent Eastern Cape university that sends young people out into the world ready to make it a better place – for everyone.



# Long live EL city centre

**T**HE tide is turning. Slowly capital is coming back to our city centres. Significant investments and renewal are taking place in Johannesburg – and those who have visited Port Elizabeth recently will have seen the amazing things happening in the suburb, Central.

But while many city centres are starting to turn the corner, and are experiencing genuine “urban renewal”, the East London CBD is still in free-fall. It is looking worse than ever. It has been neglected for so long that few even know how bad things have become. Even fewer think that there is any way back from the abyss. I want to suggest that we should perhaps think again.

## Inside the Drop Zone

In the last few years, there has been a dramatic exodus of anchor tenants from the city centre, most notably car dealerships like Buffalo Toyota.

Other big retail interests have moved out, as well as the Amatole District Municipality, which is a big employer. The Daily Dispatch might follow soon, and it is said that the Buffalo City Metro is thinking of leaving its offices at the end of Oxford Street for a new civic centre. Most businesses in the CBD note that the city has a strong identity with mass market shoppers and retains a regional appeal with consumers coming in from smaller towns and rural areas. But it is also noted that regional malls like Mdantsane, Jumbo Bazaars in Duncan Village and changes to the pension payout system (where recipients do not have to come into the town's banks to draw their cash) are undermining consumer and cash flows into the city.

The only tenant that seems to be investing in the precinct is the University of Fort Hare, which is still building lecture theatres and renovating old warehouses, almost as if it was unaware that the world was crumbling around it.

The consequence for the university is that the environment detracts from the brand, which undermines the quality of the education offered and the staff who are prepared to work there.

## Arrested Development

Joseph Denfield's 1967 book, *Pioneer Port*,

## Insight LESLIE BANK

provides a pictorial history of the city at the turn of the century. He presents photographs of crowded scenes at the city hall, the buzz and bustle at old market square (at the end of Oxford Street) and the civility of public street life in the city. His is a colonial vision of a city where civic pride and development were concentrated in the city centre.

After World War 2, a second phase of modernisation occurred in the city, the onset of industrialisation. Tens of thousands of new jobs were created in East London, deleting youth unemployment, at least for whites. In those days, parents struggled to get their sons to university because there were so many work opportunities after school.

What is important is that a very large part of the new industrial wage bill in the city was spent on Oxford, Cambridge and Buffalo streets as consumerism gripped the city. This revolutionised the city centre. Many of the old Victorian buildings were swept aside to make way for the new high-rise buildings, including the 11-storey Trust Bank building. National chain stores, like Garlicks, Edgars, Lewis Stores, Bradlows and many others, were clamouring for a space on the high street.

The arrival of the Bantustan policy killed East London's CBD. It sent industry away to the homelands and pushed black workers out of the city, to places like Mdantsane or further. It also redefined the city centre as a place for “commuter shoppers” and encouraged white retail outlets, serving the middle classes, to move to the suburbs as part of plans for greater racial segregation.

The explosive redevelopment of the CBD in the 1940s and 1950s was thus stopped in its tracks by apartheid planning. The rest is history. From this time on there were no more new multi-storey modern buildings on Oxford Street, no spaghetti freeways into the city and no new theatres, cinemas

or hotels. In fact, by the 1970s there was a general exodus of quality stores, restaurants and cinemas out of the city. Who remembers the old Coliseum, the New Deals Hotel, or the Manhattan diner? They all contributed to the vibrant commercial and entertainment of yesteryear.

## The Big Freeze

In the 1950s, East London and Durban were neck-and-neck, competing to be coastal industrial and tourist hubs.

Well, there is no longer any comparison between the cities. Social engineering, lack of investment and homeland politics killed the golden geese – industrialisation and tourism – that were the life blood of modern East London. The flight of capital and the apartheid state's lack of interest in the city left the centre frozen in time, somewhere between its Victorian beginnings and its projected modernisation. By the 1970s, it was neither fish nor fowl. It did not have enough high rise buildings to earn the badge of modernity, nor did it have enough old buildings left to qualify as a genuine “heritage city”.

There was no capital left to transform old warehouses into modern office blocks, nor were national retail companies convinced of the potential of the place. Only the banks stayed on to support the struggling CBD after the 1960s.

But things have changed for East London since then. It has become a boom town again. Consumer spending has skyrocketed with the arrival of big government offices in the city, and the retail and property sectors have exploded too. But capital has not flowed back into the city centre. Instead, it has poured into fragmentary, disjointed and scattered developments, like office blocks, malls and private hospitals, across the suburbs. The result is that the city has become like a headless hydra. The centre remains dead, dirty and deteriorating, dragging everything down with it, including the once fashionable esplanade and the beachfront.

When we think about it, East London is going in the opposite direction of everywhere else right now. It continues to want to expand ever outward, when every other major city in South Africa is rediscovering its centre and rejuvenating the core.

## What can be done?

TO put East London on the right track and give city and regional development a chance, I would recommend the following steps be taken soon:

- New incentives be made available to keep businesses in the city centre, especially the banks and the big retail interests;

- That the precinct be cleaned up, pedestrianised and upgraded with proper policing and urban management and marketed as the regional business centre it has always been;

- That the public sector be persuaded to adopt “crowds in” government investment in the CBD so that it can generate the necessary economic multiplier effect, where public sector investment and wages create jobs and renewal;

- That the universities in the city, especially Fort Hare, constitute themselves into a new metropolitan campus with a much wider range of faculties to kick-start intellectual and cultural regeneration in the city;

- That new cultural projects like galleries, museums, theatres, innovation centres as well as recreation centres be brought back into the city centre and the beachfront;

- That specific opportunities be found for industrialists in East London to develop downtown offices and research facilities as fronts for their production site activities; and

- That government and investors take a new look at the so-called “sleeper site” precinct in the city centre and think about it as the opportunity for the city.

Finally I think we should all agree that the Buffalo City Metro should be forced to stay put in their run-down downtown offices until such time as they can get a genuine urban renewal programme up and running in the city. Let the prospect of a new civic centre be the future reward for a job well done.

*Leslie Bank is professor and director of the Fort Hare Institute of Social and Economic Research. He is the author of two books, many development reports and academic articles on the Eastern Cape and East London.*

## THE CHIEL

### Bird book for the Amathole

**W**E ALL have problems with pests – from mice to moles to dassies, and the neighbour's cats.

Even bird lovers can have problems with birds. I'm one. Finding that cormorants, hadedas and Egyptian geese roosting on my jetty make an awful mess, I've rigged a bird chaser: tin cans attached to a long string, with stretch elastic at the end.

Whenever I see one on the jetty, I give the string, back at the house, a sharp tug. The tins rattle and the birds fly off. Smaller birds including gulls, kingfishers, wagtails and swallows are welcome to use my jet. The others are not.

Residents of Berea Gardens Valley and Parklands in East London are desperate. Feeding (now banned) has led to feral pigeons taking over verandas. They fly through windows and mess inside. Now residents have had enough and want to chase them away. Chris Warner, who manages the blocks, says he's struggling. He asks: Could you put me in touch with a falconry society?

I don't know of one in this area, but at a Birdlife Border meeting last week I raised the subject. The only suggestion was to hang plastic bags that flap in the wind around roosting spots. My own offering is compact disks hung up which reflect light and startle roosting birds. Both, apparently, have been tried, but the battle-hardened pigeons take no notice.

So readers, do you have any ideas? Let me know. Chris and residents would appreciate any input.



**COMPREHENSIVE:** Mike Mangold presents Pat Winch with copies of 'Birding Guide, Amathole District', edited by her late husband Graham

You're a resident in, or a visitor to, the Eastern Cape's Amathole district and you want to know what birds to look for and where to find them? You're in luck. *Birding Guide, Amathole District*, has just been released and it contains this information.

The high quality colour booklet was compiled and edited by Graham Winch, a past chairman and prominent member of Border Birders who sadly died last year before he could see the fruits of his work.

He was encouraged and supported throughout the project by Mike Mangold, who has seen it through to completion. It is produced by Birdlife Border and includes more than 530 species and a habitat coding system, as well as the status and locations of each bird. References are used from *Roberts VII and Sasol Birds of Southern Africa*.

Copies of this excellent publication are available for R100 each from Border Birders, all Amathole museums, publicity and tourism associations, provincial parks and commercial outlets. I bought one, and highly recommend it.

Chiel today is Robin Ross-Thompson; e-mail robinross@gmail.com

## FROM OUR FILES

**SEPTEMBER 11 1962:** A leading Chinese official has told Communist colleagues that the (American) U-2 spy plane over China was “brought down by unconventional means” reliable sources in Peking said last night.

Marshal Lin Piao, Defence Minister, has issued an order commending the unit which shot down the U-2.

**SEPTEMBER 11 1982:** A “unique, genuine whalebone” coffee table looked a good buy to an East London businessman, at only R200. But upon closer inspection, Max Shekter found that there was something decidedly fishy going on.

“I discovered the table was not whale bone. It was made of resin, from a cast. Further enquiries revealed it was worth about R15.”

He reported the incident to the police.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

# Congrats, Dispatch, and here's to another great 140 years

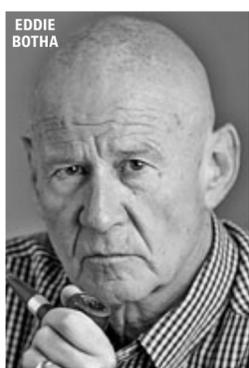
**I** WISH the Daily Dispatch and everyone there a happy birthday.

In the past 140 years the Daily Dispatch has established itself – under brave editors and staff – as one of the leading opinion-forming publications in this country.

I am proud that I had the privilege to work at the Daily Dispatch for my last 14 years before retirement in January last year.

This newspaper contributed largely to the changes that took place in 1994. And, importantly, it still performs that function today as a major protector of the constitution.

And let us not forget the important function the Dispatch also plays in training young journalists to one day take up their positions behind an editor's desk, in the newsroom, in the photographic department, at the sub editors' tables, in the newspaper's library and in all the other departments that play a part in producing an award-winning paper such as the Daily



**EDDIE BOTHA**

Dispatch. Personally, the Dispatch gave me a wonderful 14-year sendoff to cap my career.

I will always treasure my years there as well as the memories of working with great journalists and other wonderful staff members.

Here's to another great 140 years. — Eddie Botha, Strand

## No to BCM

A POSSIBLE merger of Buffalo City Metro and Great Kei refers.

To the BCM council, kindly keep your money-

grabbing paws off of the East Coast Resorts areas.

We do not want your brand of incompetent mismanagement here, thank you.

Your readiness to raise rates to satisfy your personal incomes, your inability to deliver adequate services and your inability to prevent your own turf from disintegrating into one of the filthiest cities in the province are all points that are on public

display. Yes, we have our own problems to deal with and we are dealing with them.

To let your mob loose on our area will have consequences too ghastly to contemplate. — Alan Scott, Chintsa East

## Payback time

FURTHER to the matter of Buffalo City Metro councillors having been overpaid in error, to date the public have not yet been informed how the overpayment is going to be refunded to BCM.

Can we please have a response. — Name supplied, Beacon Bay

## Heroic stance on Blair

ARCHBISHOP Desmond Tutu took the perfect decision.

This time around, we need to applaud the honourable former Archbishop of Cape Town for the firm position he took of not sharing a stage with the bloodstained Tony Blair, the former Prime Minister of Britain.

No defence mechanism will cleanse Blair from his poisonous past.

His hands, together with those of George Bush, remain soaked in the blood of Iraqi

people. Rational leaders of society and opinion-makers need to isolate these men for their atrocious acts.

Blood continues to flow in the streets and villages of Iraq while Blair tours the world to plant seeds of propaganda to justify his error of judgment in attacking Iraq.

Never were there any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Only oil, their natural resource, has been and remains a sin of the Iraqi people.

We agree with you on this one and give all honour to you, Archbishop Tutu.

You have shown the world that money should never be allowed to steal away reason. In fact, your decision not to take part in the event with Blair shifted the focus from what he came to do here to do to what he did in the past.

That man is a danger to society, together with that Bush. We thank you, servant of God. — Mbululo Qotoyi, Ngcobo

## Danger lights flashing

SOUTH Africa is in a mess both politically and economically and many of us are tired of reading and hearing daily of corruption, protests over services, poverty, lobbying for positions to be near the honey pot, price increases such as petrol and food, Man-



**STEVE BIKO**

gaung, Marikana mine, you name it. If it is bad, we have it.

When is this country going to get rid of black economic empowerment and affirmative action, which are not solving backlogs but creating further rifts and adding to our brain drain? Surely 18 years of rule is enough to bring about equality and if not, why not?

People need to stop blaming everything on apartheid and forge ahead.

Our leaders of today use the past to cover up for their failure to move forward.

They love saying there are too many poor people in this country but fail to actually do something about this serious situation.

South Africa needs leaders of the calibre of Dr Mamphele Ramphele and Dr Barney Pitso.

Both of these people were followers of Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement and if Biko was still around he would have filled the position admirably.

But he was never a member of the ANC. One wonders whether the ANC would love him if he was still alive.

Let's hope that the above will prick the minds of many so as to get people thinking about our dark future if we don't make drastic changes now.

Surely Mangaung is already flashing danger lights for further conflict. — Donald Card, Gonubie

## NOTE TO WRITERS

Write to the Editor at 35 Caxton Street, East London 5201. Fax: (043) 743 5155. Email: letters@dispatch.co.za

Please include your name, telephone number and address. Letters should not exceed 200 words. The Editor reserves the right to edit or reject letters. Preference will be given to readers writing under their own full name.