Editorial

New Agenda: Where scholarship and public life meet

By Martin Nicol

"Academic work has greater impact when it remains connected to the social world around it."
Professor Robert Balfour, UWC Vice Chancellor

Prof Balfour addresses the event to mark 25 years of publishing *New Agenda: South African Journal on Social and Economic Policy*.

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The celebration of 25 years of *New Agenda: South African Journal of Social and Economic Policy* is a symbol of the long-standing partnership between the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and civil society. UWC's Vice-Chancellor and Rector Professor Robert Balfour elaborated on this at an event in Cape Town in May to celebrate the publication of the 100th issue of *New Agenda*: "The partnership between UWC, IFAA [the Institute for African Alternatives], and *New Agenda*, sustained through UWC's Institute for Social Development, forms part of a longer intellectual project.

"*New Agenda* has provided an important platform for progressive public debate in South Africa. UWC's own history belongs to that same tradition of intellectual resistance and critical scholarship. This partnership rests on a shared view that knowledge must be publicly relevant and socially accountable. The 100th edition is significant because it shows *New Agenda* as a space where scholarship stays connected to public life."

All 100 past issues of *New Agenda* are now available as an historical archive[1] on the redesigned IFAA website. The magic of modern technology allows a reader to browse through each issue, page by page, without having to download huge files.

On perusing the new archive, it is clear that IFAA has been intent on fueling progressive public debate; *New Agenda*'s concerns have been overwhelmingly focused on post-apartheid South Africa. The content of the journal is looking forwards from 1994 − with the transition to democracy as the reference point. The commentary and debate have been on the shape and effectiveness of present politics − how these impact South Africa's relationship with the rest of Africa and its standing in international geo-politics − and increasingly on the slow and

disappointing progress with development plans and practice, amid corruption and scandal.

New Agenda's archive is not a comprehensive record of momentum and missteps since 2000 − but it does provide an instructive and now accessible source for historians and analysts.

This editorial was written as we marked the 50th anniversary of the Soweto uprising in South Africa. What has changed − and of course, what has not changed − in South African education over the past 50 years is exactly the kind of progressive public debate *New Agenda* is committed to.

In this issue of *New Agenda,* we focus on the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), which was formed in response to the crisis in education that emerged after the historic 1976 uprising. We publish a review of a new book, titled *From education crisis to organisation: Reflections on the NECC (1985-1995)*. Launched timeously in June at the University of Cape Town, the review was written by former Dean of Education at Stellenbosch University, and prior to that at the Cape Technical College of Education, Professor Maureen Robinson. We also publish selected excerpts from this important book.

Another book review in this issue is written by Bruce Kadalie on Palestine and its historical relationship with Africa. *Rising for Palestine: Africans in solidarity for decolonisation & liberation,* edited by Raouf Farrah & Suraya Dadoo, links the current narrative on the genocide in Gaza with the first genocide of the 20th century − by Germany in Namibia.

Also in this issue, Andrea Pietrafesa and Anne Schroeter highlight how unresolved controversies on land theft and colonial oppression impact today on a planned project by German and Namibian investors to generate green hydrogen in the desert close to Lüderitz.

The 'just transition', a backdrop to the article on Namibia, is also the focus of the academic article in this issue. Katrina Lehmann-Grube, Julia Taylor, and Khwezi Mabasa examine the concept of social ownership and how it has re-emerged in recent years in South Africa within the context of the just transition − a move to sustainable energy provision which does not destroy communities that presently depend on fossil fuels. They argue that interventions must extend beyond the renewable energy sector and require an economy-wide transition which addresses inequality, poverty, and unemployment.

On a lighter note, your editor was approached by a thoughtful older friend who suggested he might put his name forward as a possible candidate for the local government elections due in Cape Town later this year. This would be in one of the wards for which *New Agenda*'s founding editor, the late Prof Ben Turok, served as an elected Member of Parliament for the ANC. The reply was an immediate, but grateful, negative. The ANC has reportedly completed its (still confidential) selection of its mayoral candidates for the upcoming elections. In an unusual move, candidate selection was not restricted to paid-up ANC members with unbroken membership histories (as was the case in the past). In April 2026, the ANC unrolled a new process to headhunt "capable mayoral candidates from across society".

ENDNOTES

[1] The complete *New Agenda* archive is now available online at https://ifaaza.org/new-agenda-publications/. A separate index of article authors, titles, and page numbers from *New Agenda* 1 to *New Agenda* 100 is available on request from production@ifaaza.org. Following an agreement with the University of the Western Cape (UWC) to co-publish *New Agenda* in 2023, and starting with the publication of New Agenda 92 at the end of the first quarter in 2024, the online home of the journal is on UWC's publishing domain at https://epubs.ac.za/index.php/newagenda

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