

REFLECTIONS ON MEWA RAMGOBIN AND THE NIC.

1. MR resigns from NIC, without telling anybody. Meets NM at Royal Hotel. NM irritated. Question: What was the thinking at the highest level of the ANC, and particularly NM, as to how the elections were going to be fought? Was there going to be one ANC? A `non-racial` party/movement? Or could the NIC stay separate? The only other person at this meeting was Jeff Radebe. Will he speak?
 2. Likewise, NM is determined to see the NIC disband before the general election. Was this to force NM and the ANC's hand? (The analogy with Boris Johnson springs to mind)
 3. The Consulate issue. Who actually thought up that plan? Was it really MR? Even if he had the original idea, didn't wider structures take over? Trevor Manuel was sent up from CT to survey the Consulate precinct (He told me).
 4. The Robben Islanders letter, as read out by Jeff Radebe. What is the back story to this very harsh denunciation of UDF/NIC leaders? (The letter was not written by `Robben Islanders` but drafted by Ian Phillips, Radebe's side-kick)
 5. Jeff Radebe was very close to NM, who had the highest respect for Radebe.
 6. Ian Phillips kept a huge archive of private political papers. Just after his death I heard that the papers were with an advocate in CT. (Name? Old elite Cape Afrikaner family – Willie Hofmeyr – I think)
 7. The meeting at Dennis Shepstone on the Saturday afternoon. A moment of high drama when so many competing threads collide, including between MR and EG.
 8. MR and links to an Africanist group in Durban; all the while publicly being the face of Charterist politics. Nozizwe knows about this - it was she who told me.
 9. The British Archives, under their new 20 year rule, opened their voluminous collection on the Consulate Affair (`Durban Six') in mid-2015.
<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/results/r?q=The+Durban+Six&p=1950>
<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C14134740>
 The Thatcher government has long maintained that MT was crucial to the events leading up to February 1999 etc. I corresponded with the British National Archive asking them to copy the entire collection. Then stuff happened and a section of the previously open collection was re-sealed until 2051 (sic). If one could get access to the documents it would be relatively simple to see what the British PM really did think.
- There is a second reason to refer to these documents. Apparently the British Consular staff were following the conduct and relations within the Consulate 6 and had sent some MI5/6? Officers to chat to the men.
10. Mewa and Ela: political competitors or more? Check Mewa's letters from prison to Ela. Its explosive stuff.
 11. Fatima Meer. Where?
 12. Why was Gandhi treated as a `family affair`
 13. Why did the UDF not embrace *Satyagraha*? There would have been busloads of university students to induct into becoming involved. Or not?
 14. The IFP and peace seeking?
 15. In the COSATU Papers (Wits Historical Papers) there are plenty of documents from NIC/UDF officials (Mewa and Farook I remember) seeking FOSATU support etc. Why were relations so poor?
 16. On issues 1&2 Linda Zama might be a useful source as she was then very close to both NM and JR.
 17. Why was the Southern Natal ANC so anti Phoenix Settlement?
 18. The meeting at Lenasia. Extraordinary stuff. The only person who kept his dignity was (predictably) Walter Sisulu. Must be people around who will talk.
 19. MR and `PG`. `PG` really got under MR's skin.
 20. Ismail Meer writes his memoirs (completed by Shamim). MR and IM shared office space in Verulam. They spoke, argued, and lunched nearly every day, each on their side of a stable door, the top half open. Yet IM never mentions MR once in the book. There are lifelong enmities in this story. Why? What were the politics in NIC politics?
 21. I began work on the Babenia memoirs in the late 1980s and completed the Ramgobin memoir project in 2015. Both projects involved extensive oral interviews, including with

Babenia and Ramgobin, and often informal conversations with many others. On reflection a powerful strand within this work appears missing from academic and public discussions: sectarianism. Both the otherwise mild-mannered Nattoo, and Mewa, known for his divisive public and behind-the-scenes behaviour, would often say 'Don't talk to so and so, he's a ... sell-out, stooge ... can't be trusted is involved with'. I had (now at Wits Historical Papers) an extensive set of minutes of a Durban-based Trotskyite grouping, mainly students. These documents are replete with such negatively personalised dynamics, which lead, almost inevitably, to one person writing out a 'confession' for inappropriate revolutionary consciousness. As an outsider I can't help to wonder whether there is something deeply historical about this feature of politics. What are its roots? Why has it proved so enduring? Can no-one realise its destructive capacities?

22. 'The Hill Report'. On pp 93-94 of *Faith & Courage* are two letters, by Hill, concerning his report into the burning of Phoenix Settlement. On asked about the letters Mewa's only comment was a swift *ad hominem* denunciation of Hill and the elite who treated Phoenix Settlement as a weekend getaway. For a number of considered reasons, I saw matters differently, the documents drawing attention to the existence of an 'investigation' into the possibility that the burning of Phoenix Settlement may not have been as publicly reported. Would Paddy Kearney be able to assist?
23. In Ramgobin's account passages from, or at least words to the effect of supporting the then banned Freedom Charter were to be included in information created for the revival of the NIC. This seems to me an immensely courageous act. As to whether words to the effect of supporting the Freedom Charter were included in the first membership cards is correct, I have no way of knowing. When did the revived NIC first print membership cards? What is on them?

Yet this issue of the Freedom Charter carries on being an issue. *Vide* Ramgobin and other's correspondence with Prof Meer, and her, clearly well chosen, cautionary advice and offer of support. There is more to this issue, needing scrutiny.

24. In his letters post-Consulate and during the Treason Trial Mewa shows up, in compellingly powerful ways, the desire to continue being both husband and father and also breadwinner. These letters are the finest examples of what banning, house arrest etc. mean to the people involved. These should never be flattered into all-heroic chronicles of struggle.
25. One of the new features of anti-apartheid politics during the 1980s was the availability of quite substantial amounts of overseas funds: mainly the UK, Netherlands and Scandinavia. Much of that was directed to legal defence teams and funding requests for bail. In *Hope & Courage* are examples of how such funds were, most probably, being misused.
26. So much of the oral life history interviewing had to proceed without access to huge amounts of documentation: this is in the very nature of contemporary history. But, talking to other participants does help. Two brief examples, both based on oral interview work in *Prisms of Light*. First, on his Campaign for Clemency visit to Archbishop Selby Taylor Ramgobin had Geoff Budlender driving him to Bishopscourt and spoke of how in the meeting, exasperated, he scribbles words on a Mainstay Cane notepad asking Selby Taylor to sign it. Budlender told me that he was also in the meeting and that he doesn't remember Ramgobin doing any such thing. Second, after reforming the NIC Ramgobin tells of receiving a call from Nadine Gordimer, with the two of them meeting at the Edward Hotel, and Gordimer asking, concerned as to why the word 'Indian', and what about a more broadly conceived of movement? Gordimer was one of the distinguished guests (including Vikas Swarup, Trevor Manuel and Pravin Gordhan) at the Pretoria launch of *Prisms*. At a small dinner function at the Deputy High Commissioner's house that evening I asked Gordimer about that event. She confirmed the meeting and her concerns. Finally, the point in making the edited oral history interviews publicly available is to provide future contemporary historians with new primary sources.
27. At the outset of the research on what became known as the Ramgobin Memoir Project, Mewa and I agreed that a primary responsibility lay with Mewa to locate documents.

Without these there could be no oral life history interviews and no memoir. As matters turned out there was to be no memoir as such, but rather the volume of touchingly inspired *Prisms of life* and my edited collection from his private political papers and the oral life history interviews. Mewa quickly saw a link between the importance of the primary material he was finding and his life now, and in the past as having spent fifteen years been banned, house arrested, prevented from speaking and writing in public and having his material confiscated by the security police. The value of this growing collection was increased through the addition of material from Mewa's file of correspondence with the state over his treatment, and then the Directorate of Security Legislation personal file on Mewa, which Mewa had obtained from the then National Archivist, Graeme Dominy, in the aftermath of the Hefer Commission of Enquiry.

As I sorted through the incoming private papers Mewa and I agreed to restrict material to documents from his collection, including the state documents, which he considered 'his'. This expressly excluded the Phoenix Settlement archives, which would have been inappropriate to include as Mewa neither owned them nor had control over their publication. A second agreed to consideration was that for the integrity of the collection and Mewa's main desire (the 'Cabal'), documents on the internal dynamics of the NIC/UDF/ANC and Phoenix Settlement politics had, unless we found good reasons against, to be included in the published collection. There could be no selective editing out: what Mewa had, if important, must be published. So, for example, in went Mewa's private writings, of discovery and reflection, on the 'Cabal', the records of the various official investigations, and the 'Robben Islander's' letter. He agreed to that eagerly, indeed this is the very gist of his comments at the beginning of the book. Indeed these very principled positions were used when two South African publishers sought to raise up issues of contentious material, one from an ANC side and another from an IFP side. As dictated to me. Mewa's comments were in effect to stop censoring like the state of old, which he had personal experiences of.

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