

factor the tax into the cost of their service. The tax will not stop unsolicited communications, just as post charges limit, but do not kill, junk mail. An email tax would force senders to apply a simple test: is this message worth a penny to send?

Is there a downside? Like any excise tax, the move might be considered regressive. But for most users the cost would be offset by the ongoing falls in the price of broadband itself. The growth of blogs and social networks should head off claims that the tax would strangle internet freedom, as user-initiated website access will be unaffected. Above all, an email tax could safeguard the future of the internet itself. Peer-to-peer data transfers, video streaming and voice services like Skype demand ever greater bandwidth. When new capacity is needed, part of the tax proceeds could be used for investment. Best of all, the spam tax would remind us of a basic rule: pay for what you value. Email, like clean water and air, is not free. We may have a greater respect for our thoughts if we remember that sending them has a price.

Edward Gottesman is a lawyer and chairman of an international investment company

SOUTH AFRICA

Why I didn't vote ANC

Like many white liberals I loyally backed the party of Mandela.

But Jacob Zuma is a step too far

Mark Gevisser

On 27th April 1994, I stood with thousands of other South Africans for hours, in the great leveller of a long, snaking queue as we waited to vote in the country's first democratic elections. I was 30 years old, and although I am a white South African, I had never previously voted. Along with 63 per cent of my fellow voters, I put my cross next to the image of Nelson Mandela, and the African National Congress. Although I

have never been a member, being "ANC" has been central to my identity since my late teens. I not only subscribed to the liberation movement's values—I also thought it essential, for both my own healing and that of our brutally divided country, to cross the racial line and merge my aspirations with those of the majority. Most professionals and intellectuals in my multiracial world felt similarly. Many of us took jobs in the new government.

Now, 15 years later, barely anyone I know still works for the state. A significant number of us have left the country; those who remain have retreated into suburban comfort, finding more personal ways to remain engaged. Perhaps our utopian dreams have been shattered, as we have had to reckon with the reality of a dangerously restive society. Many of us have been victims of crime. I have been burgled twice while at home. In the subsequent trauma counselling, I grappled with feelings of powerlessness; my inability to protect myself and my family. It gave me insight into the damage that crime is doing to the national psyche.

But the violation of my personal hearth is nothing compared to the despondency I feel at the loss of a political home. When I went to the polls on 22nd April 2009, I found myself—for the first time—unable to vote for the ANC. I was not alone. Although the party retained its majority, not a single person in my world, black or white, put their cross easily next to the picture of Jacob Zuma, the party's presidential candidate. Most voted for an opposition party for the first time, spoiled their votes, or stayed away. A few people I know held their noses and voted ANC anyway, for want of a better alternative.

To an extent, this is a response to Zuma himself. His supporters would have it that middle-class elitists cannot countenance a polygamous traditional Zulu man with no formal education, from a poverty-stricken rural background. Certainly many South Africans feel this way. But for me and my friends the lack of education is irrelevant. Were we Brazilian, we would have voted for similarly self-taught Lula da Silva. In fact,

I see Zuma's connection to ordinary people as one of his few strengths.

No: our discomfort is based on his manipulative populism, and his lack of judgement. Zuma was acquitted of rape charges in 2006, but the case against him revealed shocking judgement. He had unprotected sex with an unstable HIV-positive woman, who regarded him as a "father." And he allowed a mob of misogynist supporters to wreak havoc outside the court. He had also often made statements—ranging from describing how he would beat up gay men as a youth, to how he would send pregnant schoolgirls to special schools—which suggest a return to a conservative patriarchy, at odds with the liberal democratic values of Mandela's ANC. As a gay man, now married to my life partner, I have been a beneficiary of the ANC's progressive social policies. I worry that Zuma's ANC might erode them.

Zuma talks tough on crime, certainly, but in a way that suggests the easy solutions of vigilantism. Just before this election he attacked judges of the constitutional court—the highest court in the land, which once ruled against him—suggesting that he planned to overlook the deputy chief justice for promotion, his crime being an admission that he served ▶



*The evolution of pole dancing
1962-66: the Corinthian era*

the people first, rather than the ANC.

Zuma has also spent a decade fighting charges of fraud linked to Schabir Shaik, an old ANC comrade and financial adviser, who went to jail for soliciting bribes on his behalf. Zuma claims the charges are a political conspiracy, trumped up by his predecessor and rival, Thabo Mbeki. Just before the elections he presented evidence of this political meddling to the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), who dropped the charges rather than test the evidence in court; an act of apparent political expediency by the supposedly-independent NPA. The evidence took the form of covert recordings, made by the National Intelligence Agency, South Africa's equivalent of the CIA. The recordings could only have been passed to Zuma illegally, suggesting an abuse of state power for political gain; the very fault he finds with Mbeki. Even if Zuma's rights were violated, the case reveals further poor judgement in his choice of benefactors. Zuma and Mbeki are thus both responsible for an unconscionable erosion of South Africa's security services, even as the country finds itself in a worsening crime epidemic.

And so my loss of a political home is not just about Zuma; it is about a ruling party that has lost its moorings. The party could have walked away from Zuma and found someone else to replace Mbeki; instead, it joined its fortunes to him.

The ANC has subjugated the national interest to its own power struggle between Mbeki and Zuma, subjecting the whole country to what is, in essence, a family feud. Leading a de facto one-party state, the ANC has become fat and arrogant, too seduced by its own liberation mythologies, with an undue sense of ownership over the state and South Africa's destiny. (Zuma likes to talk about how it will rule until the messiah's coming.) Flowing out of this is a system of patronage and kickbacks that undermines the very "developmental state" it promises to establish.

The ANC election manifesto might be unrealistic—it promises 1m new jobs a year, despite the economic meltdown—but it has the right priorities: jobs, education, health, the fight against crime, and rural development. I would have liked to give them the benefit of the doubt—not least because their vision of social democracy is close to my own. As I stood in the voting booth I struggled with the fact that there were many very principled and experienced people on the ANC list; people I still revere as our country's liberators. I also don't for a moment believe that Zuma's ANC is going to turn into Robert Mugabe's Zanu-PF.

Still, I felt it my democratic duty to do what I could to check the ANC's arrogance and abuse of power. And so I voted strategically, for the opposition, even though none of the other parties felt remotely like home for me. The Congress of the People (COPE), a dissident ANC group that left the party after Mbeki was fired in 2008, seems interested only in protecting Mbeki's dubious legacy, while the Democratic Alliance (DA) remains a shrill redoubt for white and "coloured" minority interests. But perhaps my protest vote, and those of others like me, will help to build up the opposition to the point where they can provide more effective oversight of ANC excess, or even contribute to some new movement capable of reminding the ANC that its mandate is not divine.

One way or the other, it felt like a burdensome responsibility to vote this year. The worst part of my decision was the distance I felt from the others in the queue; the majority of South Africans for whom the ANC remains home. For the first time in my life, I voted with the minority. I take comfort, at least, that this minority is less racially-defined, now, than it was fifteen years ago: most of the black people I love or trust are also voting against the ANC for the first time. We might be statistically insignificant, but we represent a threshold: for all of us, voting with the minority seems to be as necessary a rite of passage in the maturation of our young democracy as voting with the majority was in 1994.

Mark Gevisser is a journalist and author of "A Legacy of Liberation: Thabo Mbeki and the Future of the South African Dream."



"I'm looking for a tie that says 'Cower before the architect of your destruction, pathetic earthling fools'"

HISTORY

Those were the days

The three 1970s governments are remembered as uniquely incompetent. They weren't
Andy Beckett

In 2005, when Tony Blair was still prime minister and people still believed he was presiding over a British economic miracle, his party conference speech made a pointed historical detour. Jim Callaghan, his predecessor as Labour premier, had died a few months earlier. Blair paid him, and other Labour politicians who ran Britain in the 1970s, a distinctly double-edged tribute: "they were great people. But [they] were not ready... to see change was coming."

Conservatives are less restrained about Britain's 1970s governments. The IMF crisis, the winter of discontent, overwhelmed ministers, Britain at a dead end—such bogeymen have sustained right-wing speeches and editorials for decades. Even now, with many of the economic and political orthodoxies of the last 30 years in doubt, the conviction endures that the regimes of Callaghan, Heath and Wilson were uniquely incompetent, short-sighted and obsolete in their thinking.

But how justified is this? It would take a bloody-minded revisionist to argue that the decade was a golden age. Footage of Wilson's return to Downing Street after the February 1974 election shows the mischievous ringmaster of postwar Labour politics looking worn out, slack-shouldered, and joyless. For my book on the 1970s I interviewed his chancellor, Dennis Healey. Faced with an oil crisis, inflation and out-of-control state spending, Healey cheerfully told me that for his first year in the job: "I knew bugger all about economics."

Yet the damaging phase of drift and panic lasted only about 18 months: from autumn 1973, when an overconfident Heath was ambushed by an approaching miners' strike, and responded heavy-handedly with the three-day week, to spring 1975, when Healey began curbing public spending and the economy haltingly began to pull back from the brink. "The bottomless slump had been something of an illusion," wrote historian Keith Middlemas in the 1991 volume of his trilogy, *Power, Competition and the State*, a rare book addressing the 1970s crisis without melodrama or exaggeration.