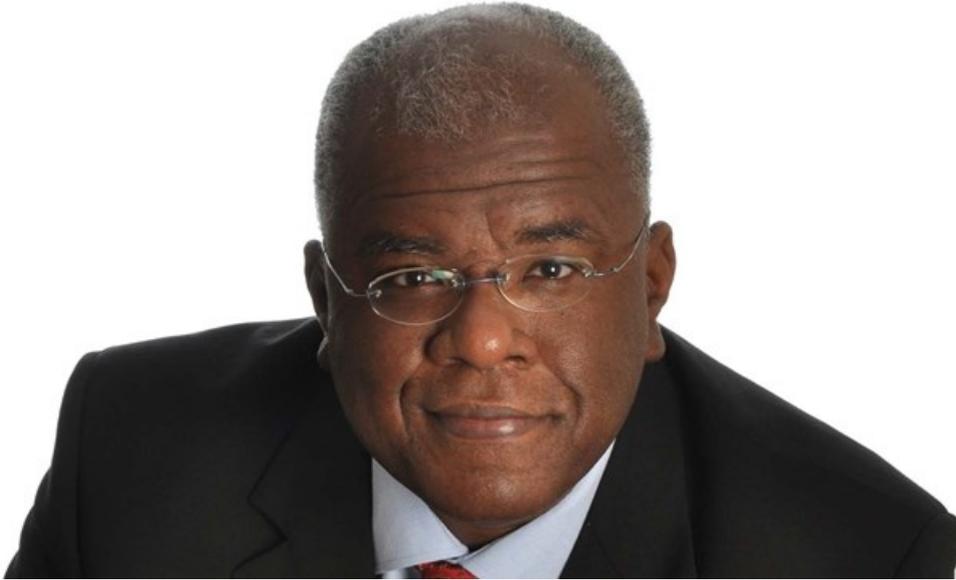


Transformation in an angry country

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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As many political commenters observed, the #feesmustfall campaign was far more than a protest about an increase in tuition fees. It highlighted a far greater dissatisfaction at lack of transformation in the country after 21 years of democracy.



Professor Jonathan Jansen, Vice-Chancellor and Rector of the University of Free State

Yet amid the mayhem on various campuses, the University of Free State didn't cause much of a blip on the radar and that's probably because they have a leader who engages with his students rather than benignly dictates from an ivory tower.

Meet Professor Jansen

To say that Professor Jonathan Jansen, Vice-Chancellor and Rector of the University of Free State, is larger than life is an understatement.

He is a showman of note, and it's easy to see why he is much loved by his students. His charisma - coupled with a wicked sense of humour - is immediately engaging, but he is certainly not afraid to speak his mind, or ruffle a few political feathers. He's a lot like the Arch in that way.

Walking the talk

But he's not all talk, Prof. Jansen lives by his words. He's a sleeves-rolled-up, shoulder-to-the-wheel kind of guy. Besides not taking bonuses, he is instrumental in initiating an array of programmes to improve the lot of students on his campus.

For example, one of the common complaints that emerged from students during the #feesmustfall campaign is that they often go hungry because they had no money for food. The University of the Free State is perhaps the only tertiary institution in South Africa that runs a feeding scheme for its students. The No Student Hungry programme was introduced by Prof. Jansen in 2011 to ensure that disadvantaged, but academically promising students eat.

He also regularly invites groups of students to breakfast to get their input on the state of the university.

What are we giving up?

"This is an angry country and we don't just protest, we destroy. I don't have anything against protesting against injustice, but it must be respectful."

Prof. Jansen says that it is endemic in our culture to be violent. But asks what are we giving up and what is the cost if we capitulate to it?

"We need to talk about it," he says.

"Transformation is a compromise between revolution and reform. We came to a compromise. There was no revolution, we negotiated a path to reform," he says, referring to the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa) talks in the early '90s.

"But I've also never liked the word 'reform', it smacks of superficiality," Prof. Jansen says.

Transformation vs social justice

"Transformation is about changing the understanding or mindset of ourselves and others," he says. He goes on to explain that people are hard-wired to see the world through the lens of their cultural bias, and naturally gravitate towards others like themselves.

Transformation is not social justice, the latter being setting right what was wrong such as:

- More black professors in former white universities
- More women in the boardroom
- More access for staff with disabilities
- Compensation for those who suffered losses under apartheid
- Returning the houses of those dispossessed
- Weighting budgets towards the poor

"You can have social justice and still have a vengeful, racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, angry, spiteful citizenry," says Prof. Jansen.

He uses the recent ANC Women's League statement that South Africa is ready for a woman president to illustrate this point.

"Huh...," Prof. Jansen huffs with indignation, pausing for dramatic effect. "We've always been ready. In fact, a woman would have done a far better job," he booms with fire and brimstone.

He pauses again - as if gathering his thoughts - before looking a woman in the audience directly in the eye and - almost whispering - says: "But we live in a patriarchal society, so we expect men to be the leaders."

No wonder Prof. Jansen is regarded as an inspirational teacher.

We don't need no education...

But he is not afraid to say what he thinks about the current state of the South African education system. He attributes the continuous drop in standards to political agendas and the fact that education is a state-run institution.

"For all its problems, the one thing Zimbabwe did right was not take education out of the hands of the churches and other parochial organisations," he says.

There was an audible collective intake of breath from the audience, when he says, in his straight-shooting style, he would far rather hire a Zimbabwean lecturer. He qualifies this by saying he considers them generally more hard-working and dedicated teachers than many of their South Africans counterparts.

"If we carry on like this, in 10 years' times, no parent will not want to send their child to a South African university."

Show me the money

Prof. Jansen doesn't see the government's moratorium on fees in 2016 as a victory, but rather as very short-sighted. Universities now face a shortfall of billions, which ultimately will affect the quality of education on offer.

"Don't celebrate things before thinking about it, where is the money going to come from? It's a recurrent expenditure. What's going to happen in 2017?" he asks.

On leadership

Prof. Jansen points to the lack of morals in leadership - as is evident with the widespread corruption and greed - as an indicator of why transformation is so slow in coming.

"As a leader you cannot presume to change others, unless you have changed yourself," says Prof. Jansen.

In other words, seven common mistakes leaders make:

- We start with others and not ourselves
- We do not put our flags in the sand
- We tend to hire people who look like us
- We are tone deaf to the concerns of the other side
- We focus on the apex rather than broadening the base
- We alienate rather than employ the skills we need
- We pursue displacement rather than diversity

"We got in this mess together, let us get out of the mess together," he ends.

Prof. Jansen was the guest speaker at the Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office's (CPLO) roundtable discussion held in Cape Town recently.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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