

Press Release

For immediate release

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South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas

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Destruction of books sets an ominous, dangerous and unacceptable precedent

Statement by Gareth van Onselen, Head of Politics and Governance at the IRR

There are key metaphors and litmus tests for the devolution of democracy and political power. One them is book burning. The ANC seems now to have sunk to that level, embracing, as its members have, a medieval impulse to physically destroy ideas and arguments it disagrees with. It is a mentality of the Dark Ages brutally inserted into the present by the ANC.

It is also a crime. The perpetrators should be arrested and prosecuted. The SAPS' failure to intervene as copies of Pieter-Louis Myburgh's book, *Gangster State: Unravelling Ace Magashule's Web of Capture*, were ripped apart and trampled upon at the publication's launch at Sandton City Mall last night is shameful. The ANC mob needs to be held to account. If they are not, a precedent is set. And as far as precedents go, few are more ominous than indulging this sort of violence and destruction. It is the very antithesis of freedom, tolerance and a civilized society.

A poster (see below) is now doing the rounds on social media, purportedly issued in the name of the ANC Youth League (ANCYL), the South African Students Congress and the Congress of South African Students, inviting members to bring copies of Myburgh's book to burn in Mangaung on 15 April. In a news report today, the ANCYL's Free State provincial secretary Reagan Booysen is quoted as saying: 'We are calling society and we have come out clearly as the ANC Youth League in the Free State [and saying] ours is a planned event and not a coincidence while saying that people must burn those books because there's no truth in that book.'

There have been book burnings before, by parties drunk on power and prejudice. The Nazis, for one, made a sport of it. For any person or political party to advocate such a thing is to embrace violence as the ultimate and necessary response to such things as reason, evidence and argument, and to criticism itself. Once that threshold has been crossed, the path leads straight to fascism and the blunt, brute attitude that "might is right".

It is absolutely unacceptable and needs not only to be condemned in the strongest terms, but met with swift and meaningful consequences. It is a direct threat to the rule of law.

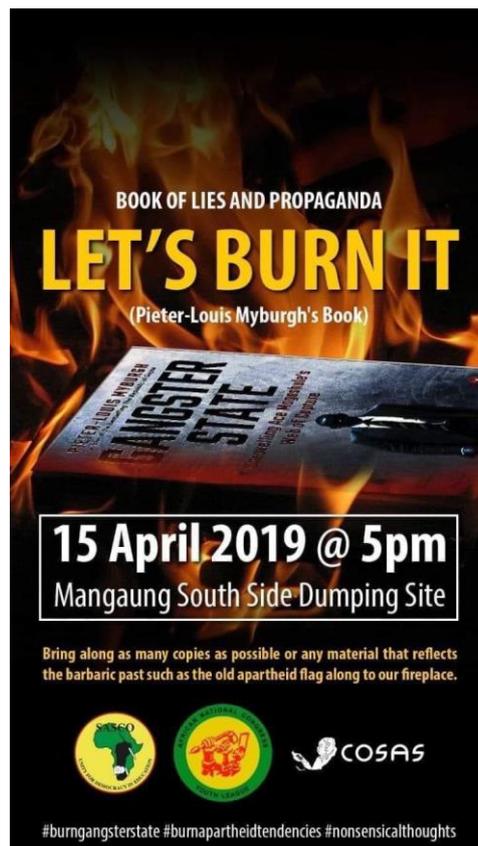
The South African environment is rife with intolerance. Billboards are destroyed, paintings vandalized, and libraries torched. Much of that intolerance is fuelled by the ANC. Every party needs to be held responsible for the behaviour of its structures. If the ANCYL in the Free State is not representative of the party's views on this matter, the party needs to act decisively and punitively against the individuals or formal structures responsible.

If it does not, the ANC's systematic degeneration will continue unabated. Every day, new evidence emerges of its decline. Unless quickly arrested, this will leave an indelible mark on a party that once was willing to die for what was true and right. Its moral compass will have completely reversed to the point where – as the country saw yesterday – it responds to disagreement with physical destruction.

At the end of his dystopian novel, *Fahrenheit 451* – about a world where there are no books, for all have been destroyed in the name of offence – Ray Bradbury writes:

‘We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy, for there are no mountains to make them cower, to judge themselves against. So! A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot from the weapon. Breach man’s mind.’

Science fiction has now arrived in South Africa; unaddressed, it will be judged to have been ushered in by the ANC. And Bradbury’s explanation rings all the truer. Only, the ANC will be breaching its own mind. Soon there will be nothing left of it but ignorance, intolerance and a hunger for power.



This poster, purportedly issued in the name of the ANC Youth League (ANCYL), the South African Students Congress and the Congress of South African Students, is doing the rounds on social media.

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