

THIS BOOK PROVIDES THE NEXT GENERATION OF ACTIVISTS TOOK UP THE STRUGGLE AGAINST VERY DIFFICULT CONDITIONS, A STORY THAT HAS NOT OFTEN BEEN TOLD.  
— Ahmed 'Kathy' Kathrada



The “cover boys” then and now: (L-R) Glenn Moss, Charles Nupen, Eddie Webster, Cedric de Beer and Karel Tip

## Back to the uprooters

More than 170 alumni, activists and comrades attended the Johannesburg launch of Glenn Moss’s book, *The New Radicals: A Generational Memoir of the 1970s*, at the stylishly renovated Wits Club on West Campus on 27 May.

BY DEBORAH MINORS

The launch featured a panel discussion with Moss (BA 1974, BA Hons 1976, MA 1983), Eddie Webster (BA Hons 1964, PhD 1983), Achmat Dangor and Barbara Hogan (BA 1977, BA Hons 1979).

Moss says, “The book is about the development of a new political radicalism in the 1970s. It grew from the ashes of the historical defeats of the 1960s, when militant politics was destroyed, when a culture of fear came to dominate within the country, when an understandably cautious multi-racial liberalism occupied what little space there was for political opposition.”

Moss was SRC President at Wits in 1973/74. Detained and charged under security legislation in the mid-1970s, he was acquitted after a year-long trial. His book tells the story of a generation of activists who embraced new forms of opposition politics that would have profound consequences.

“The organisations of national liberation were struggling for survival in exile; leadership was banned and imprisoned. The progressive trade union movement had been decimated by state action and by the incorporation of many of its best leaders and organisers into the underground campaign of sabotage and armed struggle. From these ashes, a whole new generation of political activism arose – initially on the campuses, both black and white, and then within the broader society.”

Many of these activists attended the launch, notably the book’s “cover boys” themselves: Moss, Webster, Charles Nupen, Cedric de Beer and Karel Tip (LLB 1981). Moss said of the cover: “It is the Nusas trialists after a year-long ordeal under the Suppression of Communism Act. All five are here tonight. Thanks, guys, for providing an image for the cover – and, more importantly, for sharing some of those years of radicalism and commitment.”

## “...IT IS A BOOK ABOUT A GENERATION AND ITS POLITICS, ABOUT IDEAS AND CAMPAIGNS AND EVENTS”

Vice-Chancellor and Principal Adam Habib, who couldn't attend, wrote that publication of *The New Radicals* would probably generate mixed feelings:

“On the one hand, it is a celebration of the lives of a generation of intellectuals and academics who inhabited the corridors of our universities, including Wits, and changed our world. But for many the publication of this book will also be a poignant moment. Too many of this original cohort of scholars and intellectuals who ventured out to transform our world are no longer with us.

But perhaps today, through those who are still present, and through their memories, we can once again connect to those who are no longer in our midst. And as we connect with them, we celebrate their lives, their contributions to the creation of the world we now live in.”

Moss emphasises that *The New Radicals* is not an autobiography and not about individuals. Rather, it is a book about a generation and its politics, about ideas and campaigns and events.

The book takes its place in a growing initiative for “political internals” of the 1970s and 1980s to “take back their history”.

Moss concludes: “The project of re-balancing the history of how change came about in South Africa, of the contribution of individuals and organisations who have been air-brushed from that process, and of the lessons which this past can provide for understanding and engaging with the highly unsatisfactory present, is something with which I am proud to be associated.”

■ READ A REVIEW OF *THE NEW RADICALS* ON PAGE 56.

### FORTHCOMING EVENTS FEATURING *THE NEW RADICALS*

**22 July:** An evening over dinner with the author of *The New Radicals*, Troyeville Hotel, Johannesburg.

**28 July at 17:00:** A discussion on *The New Radicals* at the offices of Ndifuna Ukwazi, Cape Town.

Wits students hail the Republic at the Rand Stadium, May 1971.  
Image: Museum Africa PH2014-25