



Bitch's Brew

Cut the bread - the time has come for us peasants to eat cake again. Read Kuli Roberts' latest column.

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You hoaxer! Mbeki book 'custom-designed to Pahad's whims'

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Celebrated biographer Ronald Suresh Roberts is not only a loudmouth but a hoaxer as well!

This is the essence of fresh claims by erstwhile buddy Anthony Brink, who in November published a 376-page exposé detailing Roberts' plagiarising, fabrication and falsification of Brink's work.

Brink says he has in his possession information that proves minister in the presidency Essop Pahad actually ordered Roberts to custom-design his book *Fit to Govern – The Native Intelligence of Thabo Mbeki to Pahad's whims*.

Sunday World has a copy of the list of instructions. Among other things, Roberts was told to "delete Oppenheimer quote" on pages 26 and 27.

On page 37, the orders go, "delete reference to Helen Suzman eight lines from the bottom. Page 151, delete the reference to De Beers and just keep Lumumba quote".

In the copy of the book Sunday World has, the instructions were followed.

Contacted for comment, Roberts would later say: "Brink is again flat wrong because Pahad never ordered me to chop and change any part of my book. He has been circulating an e-mail he claims is from Pahad to me. It is not.

"In fact, I had never seen that e-mail before yesterday when a journalist sent it to me. It is simply false to suggest that I ever received any instructions of any kind from Pahad and ... had I received them I would have rejected them."

Roberts, a champion of freedom of speech in his many newspaper articles, is on record as having objected to writer Nadine Gordimer's attempt at muzzling him in *No Cold Kitchen*, his biography on her.

He allegedly said of the 80-year-old Gordimer to an overseas audience: "She is supposed to represent freedom of speech but she wanted complete control, Tsar-like, which would have turned the manuscript into pious crap."

In an about-turn, Brink says, the supposedly erudite Roberts conformed like a sheep when Pahad did the same.

The sleeve of the book says: "With his wide knowledge of history, politics, literature and debates in South Africa's media – and having had unprecedented access to the President himself – Roberts is uniquely placed to write with authority about the President."

Having had access to the President, my foot, cries Brink!

“Mbeki never granted Roberts an interview,” he says . He adds: “Replying to a post on his blog on November 23 last year that he’d never even interviewed Mbeki for his book, Roberts – trying to be clever, and pretending to be familiar with Mbeki – lamely deprecated the value of interviewing his subject, and confirmed: “When we had chats I didn’t pretend they were about work.”

Though he’d suggested in his letter to Mbeki on February 22 2006 that an interview by e-mail – in what he said was JM Coetzee’s preferred style – would be useful, none took place.

This is unlike Mark Gevisser, another Mbeki biographer, who has also not escaped Roberts’ acidic tongue.

For his *The Dream Deferred*, Gevisser writes that Mbeki has “given me unprecedented cooperation and access: I have had nearly 20 hours of one-on-one interview time with him, over seven sessions, between 1999 and 2007”.

Roberts comes out with guns blazing: “President Mbeki not only gave me all the interview time I requested, he also allowed me to follow him in his itinerary to any extent I wanted.” He adds: “As the work progressed I realised that it was more authoritative to have the president write instead of chat to me. This he agreed to do. ”

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