

INTRODUCTION OF DR ROB DAVIES

Graduation speaker, Rhodes University, 9 April 2010

By Professor Paul Maylam

Our speaker today, Dr Rob Davies, has long been steeped in what one can call political economy – in two senses of the term. First, as an academic writing about South Africa, analysing the interconnections between the country's economy and its political system. And, in a second sense, as an economist and a politician – formerly an activist, now a member of parliament and cabinet minister, Minister of Trade and Industry.

Some of the foundations of this dual career were laid here at Rhodes University where Dr Davies obtained his honours degree in Economics in 1969, and where he developed his activism as a student. As we have just heard, his honours degree was obtained under difficult circumstances. About two months before his final exams he engaged in a student action to protest against the university council's refusal to approve the senate-recommended appointment of a liberal theologian, Basil Moore, to a lectureship in the Rhodes divinity department. For this protest Rob Davies and a number of other students were rusticated from campus in the vital weeks leading up to exams. The Vice-Chancellor's apology to Dr Davies is a timely reminder that a critical self-examination of our institutional history is always a crucial aspect of renewal and transformation.

After Rhodes there followed for Rob Davies a doctorate in political studies at the University of Sussex; then eleven years in exile in Mozambique, attached to the Centre for African Studies at Edoardo Mondlane University in Maputo, working under the centre's director, Ruth First, until her assassination in 1982. There he authored books, articles and papers on the

political economy of South Africa, as well as assisting in the formulation of ANC economic policy.

He returned to South Africa from exile in 1990, proceeding to work in the ANC's department of economic policy, and taking up the post of professor and co-ordinator of the Centre for Southern African Studies at the University of the Western Cape – a post held until 1994 when he became an MP in the country's first democratically elected parliament.

For the past sixteen years Rob Davies has been deeply involved in economic policy-making – first as chairperson of the parliamentary portfolio committee on finance, trade and industry; then from 2005 as Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry; and since last year as full minister in the same department.

As a member, on several occasions, of South African ministerial delegations to the World Trade Organisation he has resolutely challenged that body's neo-liberal dictates – calling for the needs of developing countries to be prioritised, insisting on tariff protection for industry and agriculture in such countries, and opposing farm subsidies in the developed countries of the north.

As Minister of Trade and Industry Rob Davies is determined to promote policies that will generate employment, recognising that in recent years economic growth has not given rise to sufficient job creation. He recently presented to parliament an Industrial Policy Action Plan with the aim of boosting investment in various sectors so as to expand both productive activity and employment.

One of Rhodes University's most distinguished graduates – former activist, author of four books, economist, MP, cabinet minister – will now address the congregation – Dr Rob Davies.