Season of discontent

THE VANDALISING of UCT property this week – including historic paintings being ripped from the walls and set alight, and vehicles and buildings being damaged – cannot be condoned. Violence should not be adopted as an avenue when there are other means of negotiation available.

Last year’s student mobilisation started with the removal of colonial statues before the call for zero fee increases, an end to outsourcing of university workers and demands for transformation became a campaign on campuses around the country.

The year 2015 was characterised by a level of concern among the student body that had not been witnessed before in a democratic South Africa. It was a consciousness that saw UCT even change the tone of their annual satirical publication, SAX Appeal, to reflect the struggles of the contemporary South African student.

The so-called #Shackville protest, which started on the first day of the academic year to highlight the lack of student accommodation at UCT should then hardly have come as a surprise to the university’s leadership. It must be seen in a broader context of inequality on campuses and a failure of university leaderships to recognise the importance of transforming their institutions. It is something UCT has not even begun to address successfully but which other institutions, like Stellenbosch University, have readily embraced and are light years ahead.

The latest fight, over accommodation, is but a symptom of a larger malaise of inequality on campuses.

ONE OF the findings of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation’s South African Reconciliation Barometer, released yesterday, was that the majority of South Africans regard inequality as the primary source of social division.

One of the takeaway points in the report reads: “Our pursuit of a reconciled society will, therefore, remain a deferred dream for as long as inherited social inequities persist.”

The sentiments are echoed by universities as they are microcosms of our society. For as long as the status quo remains, there will be a long season of discontent.