

Thami Zami publicity secretary of the Black Peoples' Convention, outlines the history and philosophy of

## Black consciousness

From 1964 onwards, after the suppression of movements like the ANC and PAC through the Unlawful Organisations Act and Banning Act, there was a phenomenal growth of fear in the minds of black people, accompanied by the development of an equally strong resentment.

Open political activity died away and political discussions in buses and beerhalls became increasingly superficial, to avoid outright criticism of the status quo. In the lower yards, where thousands of people are slung, there was also a tendency for magistrates to be particularly severe on people charged with political offences.

At the same time new political impetus was given to the policy of separate development with the Trunkal Constitution Act of 1963. There was also a plethora of palliative concessions, like the establishment of the Urban Bantustan Councils and bachelors.

### Special Protection?

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Urgent changes need to be made in high priority areas and there is no need to defend the country against itself—to waste time, trying to identify those areas by now a large body of information has accumulated, based on research undertaken over the years in our universities and by market research organisations on papers delivered at conferences and on the work of the Institute.

It is not as though this administration is not determined; anyone wishing to obtain data on administrative aspects of life relating to any of the black communities would have no difficulty whatsoever.

Young blacks appear to have become increasingly politicised and therefore would probably get political rights as the first priority. But this cannot be achieved overnight—except by resorting to violence and the Institute has always been opposed to this. For constitutions to succeed it is better that they evolve by consensus—although in our case the evolution will have to be telescoped into a very short period. In the mean time attention will have to be devoted to the economic, educational and housing fronts.

Sadly we in South Africa have the human and intellectual resources, the creative ability and the courage to get together to plan for a future in which individual liberty will be respected and in which a balance will be struck between economic efficiency and equity—free enterprise (even if it is unacceptable to the state) and state enterprise (surely no group in our country is so weak that it needs special protection through segregation to maintain its identity).

It was clear that these were part of the National Party's answer to the problem of political accommodation of the black majority. These came at a time when black political activity was at its lowest ebb, and this did not meet with coherent criticism from black political leadership.

In the meantime, black political activists who had not left the country joined several liberal multiracial organisations which had taken up the rôle of speaking on behalf of the black man. Foremost amongst these was the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) which has strong leftist leadership in people like Adrian Ledwiche, Tony Davier, Ian Robertson, Margaret Marshall and John Daniel.

On the non-student front there was the Liberal Party under the leadership of Dr Alan Paton. Professor Edgar Brookes and others besides these two there was also the Progressive Party (which was very active, especially through its youth wing, the Young Progressives), the Christian Institute and the Civil Rights League.

During this period the tone of political opposition tended to take the form of liberal criticism of the unracialist aspect of the policy of the South African Government. This people spoke heavily in favour of 'The Rule of Law', 'Academic Freedom' and gained hearings with our trial. The rôle of blacks in it was gradually becoming secondary and there was a dearth of meaningful participation by blacks in the formation of opposition policies.

The only form of direct political expression was to be found in the several so-called university colleges which had been created as a result of the Extension of Universities Act of 1959. There were five such colleges—Fort Hare, Ngoye, Turfloop, Western Cape and Westville.

### Black movements

Besides NUSAS which was essentially active in all these campuses, there were the African Students' Association (ASA), formed in 1961 and the African Students' Union (ASU), formed in 1962 on the black campuses.

Attempts at uniting these student movements failed because of intense ideological debates that occurred among them—hence a potentially powerful expression could not emanate from these campuses.

Intimidation and victimisation of ASA and ASU leadership led to the collapse of both movements. With the death of Ernest Gole in 1963 nobody emerged to put ASA together and ASU leadership in people like Sibhaya was fazed out.

In 1967 the Terrorism Act was passed and in 1968 the Improper Interference Act was passed and this led to the end of the Liberal Party.

The Progressive Party started to go completely white earlier than the Liberal Party.

This then set the stage for the development of the now famous South African Students' Organisation (SASO). The interlocking rôles played by organisations like NUSAS and the Progressives was bound to irritate the blacks who felt they could speak more rationally for themselves.

SASO was formed at the 1968 Maxmillan conference of black student leaders and inaugurated at Turfloop University at the 1969 conference. With the advent of SASO the black students, for the first time, developed a political outlook of their own, grounded in the philosophy of black consciousness. This was articulated mainly by people like Steve Biko, the first president, Barney Pitsoa, Stuart Moolay, Harry Nengwenkulu, Thobisa Soke and others.

The slogan on which the whole philosophy was based was 'black man, you are on your own', which was a call for the black man to 'own' himself in the true sense of the word, a rejection by the black man of being seen as an aberration of the normal which is white, and an assertion by blacks to the right to determine their own destiny.

Noises which had led to automatic acceptance by blacks of an inferior status in all facets of life, were challenged. Black consciousness was therefore a call to the black man to shed his self-imposed prison.

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ideological oppression through interlocking complex which had, until then, been approved by all the forces at play in the political arena. It was a call to the black man to take pride in himself and his cultural heritage and to rely on his own resources for political salvation.

It is not necessary to derive into the reactions both from the system and from liberal circles that the debut of black consciousness evoked, nor to elaborate the phases through which SASO went beyond black consciousness. Suffice it to say that from the birth of SASO and thus black consciousness, the proliferation of truly black consciousness organisations ensued.

With the formation of the Black People's Convention in 1971, the black consciousness movement crystallized itself in South African politics. In fact black consciousness has manifested itself in many facets of the black man's life. Many organisations have been set up to take care of the black man's business and the political mood of the people reflects many aspects of black consciousness thinking.

This mood is not confined to people who are actual members of any of the organisations, but in a sense it is an all-pervasive mood touching the hearts of black people throughout the country.

More black people are feeling that they are positive and they are responsible to this situation of oppression not in a defeatist way, but certainly looking for solutions to their problems.

Given any day of the 'noble savage' which were characteristic of the liberal trusteeship era. We should not turn our acceptance because we are noble (although we are savages).

We are human and we just in a primary recognition of that humanity.

That is the message of black consciousness to us.

From: *Daily Dispatch*, 14-3-77.



## Rôle of the Institute

I think it is essential to consider the rôle, or an aspect of the rôle, of the South African Institute of Race Relations and other similar organizations at the present time.

Standing in the shadow of Soweto and the urban disturbances we stand at a time of polarization. I have discussed this already and I need not repeat what I said. A critical issue for our short-term and medium-term future is what the relative size of the polar groups will be, both within the white community and the black community.

If the groups oriented towards constructive reform and judicious concessions inside the governing party, the electorate and opposition groups are relatively small and relatively powerless, then the chances of avoiding confrontation will be non-existent. If these groups are small and powerless the chances of black leadership remaining sufficiently patient to await the opportunity of negotiations will be very much reduced.

For these reasons I think it is particularly important at the present time for organizations like ours to redouble existing efforts at communicating a changed consciousness. I wholeheartedly support His Grace, Archbishop Hurley in his plea from the floor that there should be a concerted and focused effort to change the consciousness of whites.

I will readily concede that this is precisely what the Institute and other bodies have been attempting to do over the years. It would seem to me, however, that what has been lacking is a concerted effort in this direction which is the exclusive rôle of some structure or agency within the ambit of change-oriented organizations.

It is a particular kind of concentration of effort that I think His Grace, Archbishop Hurley had in mind and which I have in mind. It is not only a concentration of effort but also a concentration of a particular kind of effort which is based on a careful analysis of what has to be changed and how it should be changed. In the past, if I may say so, the Institute of Race Relations and other bodies have mounted eloquent protests about the present state of race relations in our society, have wanted equally eloquently about the consequences of failure to change, and otherwise have attempted to build bridges between the race groups.

All of these activities are valuable, but what has not been attempted is an approach while thinking at the level of the kind of misperceptions which make change virtually impossible: at the level of the basic assumptions which are huge impediments to a changed consciousness.

I would like to give one particular example. Some months ago before the disturbances in Soweto, the Anglo-American Corporation commissioned a very large study by

the reputable research firm of Praeger-BDDM of grievances among townships in Soweto. The results were very illuminating and if these results would have been conveyed effectively to the administrators of urban black areas at the time some of the bloodshed may have been avoided.

At the same time the research organization conducted a parallel study among whites in Johannesburg in which the white interviewees were asked what they thought major problems and grievances in Soweto were.

### Perception Barrier

The differences between the perception of Soweto on the part of the black residents of the township itself on the one hand and of whites living in Johannesburg on the other, were dramatic. While most of the upper-middle class whites in the white sample had a fair approximation of Soweto residents' grievances in their perceptions of the situation, the mass of rank-and-file whites had a totally different pattern of perception. Overwhelmingly, Soweto was seen as being plagued by social pathology and crippled by its moral weakness.

Among rank and file whites there seemed to be very little awareness of the problems of housing, frustration with the Bantu Education system, transport difficulties, absence of facilities, and the social pre-conditions for crime. They saw Soweto residents' problems as being that of drunkenness, prostitution, crime, family disorganization, lawlessness, undisciplined behaviour, laziness, and the like.

In other words, Soweto residents saw themselves as victims of a structured situation, whereas the mass of rank and file whites tended to see them as victims of their own minor and major depravities. I would venture to suggest that the image of Soweto among rank and file whites in Johannesburg is probably an image deriving from the impressions people build up from the behaviour of their servants and from their own need for shut-off knowledge of the structural disadvantages under which black people labour.

The point I wish to make, however, is that there is absolutely no point in addressing oneself to the mass of rank and file whites in Johannesburg and to plead for a recognition that conditions and circumstances in Soweto must be improved. Their thought processes are such that an immediate response will be that improvements for a population living at the low level of materiality which they perceive to be the case would be largely wasted. It seems to me that what one needs to attempt, as a prior exercise, is to communicate an understanding of the situation of black people before trying to influence policy-oriented attitudes.

I am fairly certain that much the same kind of perception is typical of white people in the Western Cape with regard to coloureds, and with regard to Indians in the Durban area. In trying to influence the policy-oriented views we must avoid being discredited in the eyes of the audience before we start, and I must say that this has been the case to some extent all along in the work of bodies like the Institute.

One communication, no matter how scientifically based, has simply not appeared to be "believable" to the vast mass of rank and file whites. If I had time I could give many other examples of how perceptions are structured by basic assumptions — in the field of labour, in the field of employment traditions, in the field of husband development, and in many, many more areas.

### Increasing politicization

There is a very great urgency that attempts of this kind be made. I say this not only because of what I have said above in regard to the need for urgent and fundamental change in the thinking of whites, but also for some very specific reasons. If the urban disturbances among scholars and young people continue, then there is a very real danger that our system of administration and control will become so entangled to disturbances that a permanent super-rigidification of practices occurs in our central bureaucracies.

At this time in South Africa's history we need a radical, development-oriented bureaucracy, more than we have ever needed it before, and this is something which has to be encouraged as a very high priority. On the other hand if there is a fall in the distribution, then there is an equal danger that our white policy-makers and their supporters will return to the complacency of 1974 and 1975. This will be equally disastrous.

As our economy improves (as it hopefully will) black workers will once again become active in pursuing their interests and the effects of inflation on their domestic budgets will provide the fuel for discontent. The danger of widespread strikes will once again reappear under conditions of full employment. We have seen, since 1973, that there is a growing predisposition towards both economically-oriented and socially-oriented strikes among black workers. Under present economic conditions this predisposition is temporarily suppressed.

What our authorities must bear in mind is that if strike activity re-emerges among black workers it will very possibly have an additional content which was not present in 1973 — a political component. There is absolutely no way in which the black workers of South Africa could have avoided being influenced by the events in Southern Africa and also by the urban disturbances themselves. Today we live in the era of the politicization of social and economic life.

To my mind it will be politically suicidal for the authorities to run the risk of being in the same situation that we were in 1973 and 1976: of having no-one on the black

side with whom to negotiate when disturbances occur. I am afraid to say, as things are developing at the moment, there seems very little awareness among white policy-makers that an echelon of legitimate black leadership in an effective organization of this nature should not only be allowed but should be encouraged.

### Bureaucratic change

Lastly, there is another area of concern which seems to be of the utmost importance. The immediately restricting factors as the disturbances in Soweto appeared to illustrate how very dangerous the bureaucratic decision-making can be if it is insensitive to the particular problems and needs of the people affected by that decision-making. As I recall, even the Minister of Justice, in this very point, himself is criticising a statement by one of the senior officials of the West Rand Bantu Administration Board.

There may be some awareness in Government circles of the need to make the frighteningly bureaucratic administration of black lives more flexible and adaptive, but bureaucracies are notoriously difficult to change. They are, after all, bureaucracies, by virtue of the fact that they operate in terms of usually and inflexibly formulated rules and regulations, and they have certain inbuilt barriers to transmitting feedback from the sphere of implementation up to the level where rules and regulations are formulated. For all this, I am very worried that the necessary changes will not occur in time.

### Future stability of state

It would seem to me to be very essential that bodies like the Institute redouble their efforts and find critical examples of overly-rigid and unsympathetic administration and its being thus forcibly to the attention of the authorities.

In conclusion, I can sum up by saying that I have suggested that there should be an urgent, concentrated and analytically-based attempt on the part of bodies like the Institute to encourage change in white social and political thinking. I have also asked that there be urgent steps taken to isolate and eliminate examples of inappropriate administrative practices, and perhaps most importantly, I have suggested that there is a great need for the recognition, encouragement, and co-operation with legitimate black leadership in legitimate black organizations for the sake of stability in the future.

This may sound very much what a radical critic would call a co-optive or manipulative strategy. Perhaps it is, but my own conscience is very clear in this regard. What I have suggested is, in many ways, no far advance of the present state of affairs, and the implications of the sort of changes suggested are so far-reaching that if anything along these lines is achieved it would represent a change of a very fundamental kind.

I am grateful to the Anglo-American Corporation for making the results of this study available to me.

## Auden Art:

### Through African Eyes



Following the example of the Art Centre in Durban, art is stocked and displayed at Auden House in Johannesburg.

Part of its motivation is to encourage new artists and provide them and established artists with another outlet. Many of the visitors to the Institute, both local and from overseas, spend half an hour or more browsing and a number of works have been taken for display and/or sale by overseas galleries.

Not only is there the real pleasure gained from the vital and dynamic reflections of the artists, the pictures often give a fresh insight into the quality of life. On the other hand Justice Mshlangu's *Godspira*, for example, has a timeless, delightful quality: a universal activity.

When you have some time to spare come up and browse: you won't be attracted by all the pictures but those that delight you will make it time well spent.



Above: *The Upside Down of Misty* by Vumokozi Zulu. Trained at Ruske's Drift, he taught there until January 1976. He now works as a freelance artist (woodcuts, etchings and woodcuts) using Johannesburg as his base.

Left: *Face Man*, *Wuyebao* by George Galathianos, a Soviet artist who does both woodcuts and painting. Self-taught (thus far, he has been sponsored this year to study at Ruske's Drift).

Below: *Three Men*, a charcoal by David Mshlangu, a self-taught artist who uses a variety of media for his pictures.





# Racial Equality in America

It is always interesting but often frustrating to see South Africans in rural works on the United States experience of the fight to achieve racial equality. One could perhaps add the adjective "harassing" as well some of the violence that occurred in America over the years would surely be the equal for their bastards of anything in the world.

Notwithstanding this, the frustration stems from the many similarities between what has happened in the field of race relations in the USA compared with South Africa. This in fact produces an awareness of one of the major differences between the two lands, namely the vital role that has been played in post-war years by the US Government in bringing about desegregation and asserting that as far as possible, all citizens receive equal treatment.

Few developments have affected the movement for racial equality more than the assumption of some responsibility by government itself. Within a decade after the Truman Commission on Civil Rights had completed its task, Congress had created the United States Commission on Civil Rights...

...which led to the enactment of legislation to protect citizens against discrimination in voting, education and the use of public facilities. While the United States is by no means a utopia, the present rights stance of recent governments contrasts markedly with the policies of the South African governments.

The United States still has its share of bigotry and examples of unequal treatment of people. The author makes reference to several recent examples of anti-black violence and to the wide support for certain public officials known to be anti-black. Nevertheless, it is a nation that has developed from slave-owning to a position where all citizens are regarded as equal, at least, before the law. Perhaps that is the main lesson that concerned South Africans could learn from this book: perseverance despite the seemingly overwhelming odds has resulted in a society that is just, even if it is not perfect.

The author, a distinguished black historian, has divided this work into three parts. In the first, 'The Dream Deferred', he describes the situation in the early days before the Revolution to 1820 and describes with notable irony, the attempt of men such as Jefferson to establish the basis of a nation on the belief that "... all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights - Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness..." while at the same time, allowing the continuation of slavery. Jefferson, in his draft, had included a clause in the draft of the Declaration of Independence which declared '...'

...enslaving the inhabitants of Africa to America' but this was deleted by Congress.

The author considers that Jefferson - himself a large slaveowner - was probably of the opinion that blacks were basically inferior to whites anyway and remarks that he was '... more certain than many of his spiritual descendants some two hundred years later, in 1976, that the social order should accommodate itself to the complex or even substantial equality of blacks and whites'.

So the new republic was born with a blind spot that was to affect the lives of its black citizens for generations. Not even free blacks had all the rights of white citizens, Franklin describes the stance of the (black) Cuffie brothers who refused to pay taxes from 1778 to 1780 on the grounds that they had 'no vote or influence in the election with those that tax us'. They lost their fight and eventually agreed to pay taxes but the significance of their defeat is considerable.

'What they gave up had been a central issue in the war for independence. The claim of no taxation without representation clearly did not extend to those'

in the second section. The Old Order Changed Not', Franklin devotes some space to an account of the lengthy efforts that were made by many people to abolish slavery and to some of the attempts made to justify it. He comments that the remarkable thing about the problem of racial equality is the way it has remained topical. He could have added Universal too.

Statements such as the one made by a certain Dr Thomas Cooper to the effect that emancipated Negroes would become "... idle, delinquent, thievish and insolent ..." sound all too familiar. So does that of the man who said he would just the day when blacks could receive equal rights, although he hastened to add that this was just a 'wild dream of philanthropy which can never be fulfilled...' (They're still not ready for it, you know... ) On the other hand, Lydia Maria Child said in 1834 - "... even if it could be proved that negro blood inevitably produces stupidity in the brain, who would be absurd enough to say that the civil and social rights of mankind must be regulated according to the measure of genius?'. Which, Franklin feels, should give food for thought to all whites below the level of genius!

Another interesting observation is that the period from about 1875 to the early part of this century as described in the nadir for the Negro, when the federal government abandoned its feeble attempt to protect the rights of blacks. The result was bloody race riots and 'the most remarkable and incredible display of racial intolerance, bigotry and inequality this country has ever wit-



Talk of the dead horse by Nat Mokgosi who uses a variety of media in his pictures. This one is in ink and water colour. Nat, a self-taught artist, lives in Soweto and teaches in the Open School run by the Youth Department in Johannesburg.

nessed'. These were the years of mass European immigration and while the immigrants are not blamed for the riots, the author states that 'many of them joined in, if for no other reason than to deflect attention from themselves'. There too, a sensitive chord may be touched for some South Africans.

The third section, 'Equality Indivisible', deals with more recent times. Attempts to get equality in education, in the armed services, in transport, voting and a host of other activities were fought long and bitterly. A pre-War Mississippi Senator's outraged warning that 'education is ruining our Negroes. They're demanding equality!' gives some idea of the problems faced. So do the accounts of the lynching of black servicemen during and after the war and - believe it or not - the slow rearing of blacks by white mothers that included women and children.

And yet, despite the enormous difficulties, there have been marked changes. The result, the author speculates, of the very white intransigence that sought to prevent equality. White attitudes were such that blacks refused that they had to vote and to hold public office, that they had to have black bus drivers and desegregated buses. But when, he conjectures, would have happened if those who had wanted to vote back in the nineteen fifties had been allowed to do so and not obstructed? Or if those who wanted to hold were allowed to sit in vacant 'white' seats on buses? Possibly they would have been more willing to trust whites and to vote for them and might have settled for much less than the

absolute equality that they now demand.

The only specific reference to South Africa in this book, a part of a period describing the involvement of whites in the civil rights movement over the years. Many of those who shared the struggle with blacks did so as they saw "... the absence of freedom in those communities where racial orthodoxy demanded that all whites stand together against all blacks (i.e. South Africa) ... as a frightening spectacle ... What good would equal rights be in a country where apartheid prevailed and where even those who enjoyed a semblance of equal rights were not free even to discuss the matter?'

In conclusion, Franklin states that all Americans have to realise that freedom is indivisible. For the entire life of this nation an effort has been made to divide equality - to create a social order in which equality was to be enjoyed by some on the basis of race and denied to others; because they did not belong to that race - and it has not worked. So the choice is either to declare that 'equality has no place in our society...', or concede that equality is a principle so essential to ... the future of any civilized community that we must abandon the futile policy of seeking to divide it and adhere to the principle of sharing it.

And that too gives food for thought to South Africa.

Racial Equality in America by John Hope Franklin, University of Chicago Press, 1976. (The 1976 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities).

Jef Wollman.

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