

AP 17

Book 2

'REACHING THE PEOPLE'

P C JONES

A. INTRODUCTION

Since its inception the Black Consciousness movement had been at the receiving end of scepticism and criticism from within some quarters of the liberation movement. Labels such as 'racists', 'racist reactions', reactionary tendency, etc, were freely and . . . and enthusiastically attached to the movement. Some of these negative reactions/ were the result of some very sterile and passive ideological positions of intellectuals, some of whom still today occupy an ineffective national political position, and there were also reactions from those who suffered from 'professional jealousies'. But the most emotional response to Black Consciousness came from those who, because of their explicit exclusions, were directly affected i.e. white liberals and the white left.

The various tags attached to Black Consciousness are certainly not of major concern to us, because looking at the extent to which our philosophies and policies have been misrepresented over the years, the only conclusion we can come to is that the motives of these various onlookers are both . . . dishonest and mischievous.

This Congress is historic in one sense that it is being observed by many, for political guidance. During this time of intense political debate and at times political actions and also whilst we observe once again, the epileptic rearing of the ugly head of white liberalism and white participation in popular struggles, the political options open to organisations of the oppressed people are limited to a choice between support for a workers united front and a popular front. I will in due course attempt to distinguish these two fronts. I suppose, in popular language, one could also refer to this as a choice between exclusivism and multi-racialism.

Because of what I have just said above, I think we may have to, on compassionate grounds, once again reiterate and explain, maybe for the last time, that the specific exclusions of whites is based on political strategy, not on colour, 'racial' grounds or any other factor.

Some people view and analyse Black Consciousness as if it just fell from the sky, a system of ideas that have just emerged from nowhere into the heads of Black students in the late 1960's and early 1970's, and that there were no material conditions which gave birth to this consciousness and that therefore it can now be simply shelved without regard to whether the historical-material conditions that spawned it still exist. This view is reactionary, because having identified a prevalent consciousness as a mere set of phrases or ideas it now places another set of phrases or ideas in opposition to it.

It is our view, to put it mildly, that Black Consciousness is the product of objective, accurate historical conditions in SA. Its form and content, ideologically and organisationally are, as it should be, determined by the historical social reality of oppression and exploitation in SA.

Black Consciousness definitely does not identify capitalism (class exploitation) as a separate dimension of our struggle distinct from Black oppression. Apartheid (racist oppression) and the many names and forms it had acquired over the years, had always been, from the time of conquest till today, and will always be, until liberation, an inseparable element of capitalist exploitation in SA. Racism is the soul force of capitalism. The one cannot survive without the other. The economic structures of SA cannot survive without the elaborate political administrative structures, to keep blacks in a subject position..

The struggle against capitalism and imperialism must simultaneously be a struggle against racism and discrimination of every other form. Black Consciousness is the only movement that has successfully fused the national and the social question.

The position of the movement on the dialectic between race and class is contained in the AZAPO Conference Papers of April 1981. In its hunt for superprofits imperialism dispossessed the aborigines as a people. The consequence, all over the third world, was to put black against white. Dispossession led to super-exploitation of black people, they became the underdogs, and for the colonial world 'race' determined class. In Azania British imperialism roped in the defeated White Afrikaner into the ruling class family and this partnership was sealed by the 1910 Act.

Settler-colonialism further extended the political consolidation to include Indians and what was hitherto a struggle between imperialism and the aborigines was formally extended to a struggle between settler-colonialism and black people. We therefore find that the settler-colonialists objectively behave as a bourgeoisie in relation to blacks who objectively behave as a revolutionary working class.

It is as a result hereof that it is difficult, if not just a futile intellectual debate, to attempt to classify blacks clinically into distinct economically defined groups or classes. The black students, women and petty-bourgeoisie in the town and rural areas, are inseparably connected with, and have the experiences of the black working class. The black student discovers, that because he emanates from a working class family and shares the experiences of working class conditions, he is 'black, before he is a student.'

This determines his social perspectives and values. Similarly even the richest and poised black cannot escape a system that regards him first as black before having regard to his privileged position.

B. LIBERALISM AND WHITE PARTICIPATION

When we refer to white participations, we are certainly not, because of its impossibility, referring to whites as group. We are referring to a handful of liberal and leftist elements. Seen politically, these are irreconcilable differences in the ideological positions of these elements and black consciousness.

Black Consciousness states unequivocally that the primary issue in Azania is the reconquest of the land and its restoration to its rightful owners, the Nguni. I have already shown how the Indian nationality had been placed in the same political category as those other groups. Thus, the driving force of the Azanian revolution is black nationalism, born of land dispossession. White liberals and others have never accepted, in fact they have rejected that the issue is self-determinative. The white liberal wishes for a multi-racial partnership whilst the white 'left' wishes for a colour-blind, class conscious black working class.

Over and above this, whites, with their natural European racist chauvionism observed by Lenin, cannot, even if they want to escape the racist structures of this society. They have to attend elitist schools that groom them for positions of dominance, who have at their disposal all the material resources, benefits and wealth that their privileged position in society bestows upon them.

An elementary understanding of the history of NUSAS, for example, shows that its political functions had always and consistently been, to provide a recruiting ground for capitalist business, social and political leaders, and its members work and oil the Apartheid War Machine (it is also very popular for training top-class security-policemen).

It has only vacillated to the extent of its tactics viz. the growth of the liberation movement. It now attempts to merge the interests of ruling class students, with those of the oppressed and exploited. Its current flirting with black student organisations and others of the oppressed represents schizophrenia in political practice by facing both ways at the same time.

At this stage I think it is important for me to state that although AZAPO has clarified its own position on whites, and that it takes full responsibility for this position, for the purpose of co-operation with other organisations, it will co-operate with any organisation of the oppressed who have not as yet taken a clear policy stand on this question.

C. WORKERS UNITED FRONT/POPULAR FRONT

AZAPO states very clearly that black solidarity is an imperative element in its strategy and it is therefore committed to develop an even greater unity of the oppressed and exploited people than that which is represented by the National Forum in its present form.

During this time of offensive by the state and imperialism we must try to involve all the organisations claiming to be part of the workers movement, including the most moderate, and those with the most opportunistic and revisionist leadership. This unity must be effected at national, regional and local leadership level. The only condition is that we reject any alliances between the liberal bourgeoisie and the workers movement i.e. only organisations of the oppressed and exploited can be included.

The fundamental distinctions of this united front is that, through its class against class logic, 'it unleashes a dynamic which develops and sharpens the struggle of the workers against the bourgeoisie'. This united front | against the capitalist offensive contains no pre-conditions about the defence of bourgeois order and capitalistic property (no matter how much the reformist leaders are attached to this defence).

AZAPO will therefore be obliged to spell out a clear policy/guidelines on the questions of unity/alliances in order to guide our units and affiliates and also in order to enable other organisations to be clarified.

On the other hand, the Popular Front, through its collaborationist logic, 'it unleashes a dynamic which holds back the workers struggles and even represses the most radicalised layers of the workers'. It is explicitly based on the respect of bourgeois order and property and its whole logic tends to deflect, contain or break mass struggles.

On principled grounds therefore we must fight any political pact with bourgeois groups, even 'left wing' ones, which would challenge the political class-independence of black workers.

D. COLLABORATION

If we look at the history of liberation and resistance of countries all over the world, we will see that the development of the resistance movements is rooted in the history of oppression and exploitation characteristic of a particular region or country. Lybon Mabasa at the First National Forum said 'We believe that any ideology which will be acceptable to the masses has to be an ideology which emerges from the people as a result of their aggregate experience in concrete economic, political, cultural, and socio-psychological terms. It should originate and find its inspiration from concrete contradictions within our country'.

An example in point is the question of land. Black workers do ^{not} only see themselves as an exploited class, as non-owners of capital (means of production). They also, quite rightly, see themselves as a people, as temporary dispossessed owners of land. In reality the the question of land is a burning issue in the hearts and souls of Africans,

Great songs and poetry are sung in praise of those who defended the land against settler conquest, and envisioning a future where the land will once again be reconquered. This means that any liberation organisation that does not clearly address itself to the question of land and that the primary issue in Azania is the reconquest of land, is guaranteed a place in political limbo.

Similarly the principle of non-collaboration cannot just be regarded, in a sterile manner, as a healthy political strategy. Fanon says that 'the masses resist and fight in a thousand ways' which reflects the 'anonymous and innumerable ways in which the people seek to harass and liquidate the oppressor and refuse to collaborate with him'. From the earliest times of resistance in Azania, non-collaboration had been an ingrained instinct in black people. The chief who co-operated too much with the settlers was immediately regarded with hostility. In everyday life, if you are seen to be too friendly with the white foreman at the factory, people call you names. Or if the nice white priest visit your house too regularly, you are regarded in the same manner. On a political level we find that black people are instinctively hostile to any solution emanating from the rulers, and those who collaborate with the rulers, at any level, yet seen to be sell-outs, traitors, etc. It is because of this historical reality that people in Transkei, with the introduction of Native Education, and without a clear direction from the organisations then, decided to burn down community schools other than submit to the evil intent of the oppressor

It is our function as progressives to further develop the policy of non-collaboration and in practical ways guide our people and ensure that our liberation movement remains independent.

I have also said in another part of this paper that it is intellectual futility to apply prue economic criteria to identify particular groups in the black community.

Who is the black middle class, where does one see them, what is meant when we use the term? Are we referring to a class of persons who has hostile potential or are we merely referring to a group of people who occupy a more privileged position. If we are seeking to identify hostile elements within the ranks of the oppressed, we have to move away from using terms which we have not examined thoroughly.

I believe that we should rather identify co-optable elements within black society and examine ways and means of neutralising these.

One of these co-optables is the collaborationist, whom we have already catered for. Another is the liberal in the black community who because of his economic position and political confusion, could become a potential co-optable. I do not wish at this stage to make any suggestions beyond saying that my concern emanates from an appreciation that our struggle has become internationalised and will become more so in future. In such a situation superpowers are looking for allies and looking only at the role of imperialism in Africa, their sympathy originates from a desire to serve their own national interests. We must at all costs ensure that our liberation movement is and remains independent and indigenous.

E. DEMOCRATIZATION

This section I regard as one of the most important in this paper. One of the main aspects of mobilization of our people is the raising of their level of consciousness through the growth of their confidence in themselves. The question of strategy and tactics can only be liberatory if it liberates people - this may sound strange, but this simple truth is profound. We cannot have something against the wishes of the people, we can only have it if the people want it and bring it about. One writer states that 'Democratic assemblies and every similar mechanism in other forms of mass action, play a vital role in developing the self-organisation of the mass. In learning to conduct their own struggles, they learn to run the state and economy of tomorrow. This places the emphasis of struggle on the people of the country.

In conclusion, Comrades I am satisfied that I touched on a few most significant challenges that affect us daily- challenges that demand attention from us- that are basic. Let us, together, brothers and sisters put our shoulders to the wheel and tackle these challenges.

LONG LIVE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS!!!LONG LIVE AZAPO.

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