

FROM THE FILES OF UMSA.

REVIEW OF NEVILLE ALEXANDER'S BOOK:

"ONE AZANIA ONE NATION"

by
I.B.TABATA

14th March, 1980.

My dear Th.,

Thank you for your letter and the material you sent me on the B.C.M. Somebody recently sent me a book: "One Azania One Nation" by No Sizwe. As I read I began jotting down some notes and comments which extended into what follows below. I have not finished reading the book. If I have cause to modify my opinion as a result of subsequent chapters I shall let you know. I'll be glad to hear from you again.

COMMENTS ON BOOK "ONE AZANIA ONE NATION" by No Sizwe.

1. The first part of the book dealing with Afrikaner Nationalism and its conception of the Nation is adequate and the conclusions justifiable.
2. The part dealing with the programme and philosophical positions of the various organisations engaged in the liberation struggle is scholarly and admirable in terms of what the writer himself sets as his compass.
3. But in the chapter dealing with the Black Consciousness Movement (B.C.M.), the writer loses his objectivity completely. He sacrifices his scholarly approach on the altar of political ambitions. His aim seems to be to gain the sympathy if not of the B.C.M., at least a section of it. Consequently he does violence to the principles which he himself earlier on had laid down as criteria for judgment and now extols the virtues of what he earlier had characterised as opportunism, conservatism and plainly reactionary.
4. The central theme of the book is the proposition that any national movement or struggle which bases itself on a wrong conception of who or what constitutes the Nation of South Africa, must of necessity flounder on the rock of opportunism. For him the crucial question facing all national organisations engaged in the struggle for liberation is: who and what constitutes the Nation of South Africa. On this basis he examines the political positions of all the organisations engaged in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. From the vast material at his disposal, collected through diligent and admirable research, he concludes that the Non European Unity Movement (N.E.U.M.), now known as the Unity Movement of South Africa (UMSA) since 1964, is the only Movement that has taken up a correct stand on this matter even though, as he says, it has not written a scientific thesis on this question. A correct position however in itself does not guarantee it against acts of opportunism, it nonetheless gives it the possibility of conducting a struggle which has a chance of being crowned with success for only a correct policy properly applied to the material conditions and in keeping with the subjective factors can lead to success. Implicit in his thesis is the conclusion that the Unity Movement of South Africa is, at the time of writing, the most progressive organisation in the country in

the sense that it has found the correct answer to the most crucial and burning question facing a national movement. This enables UMSA to place the struggle on the correct road. He condemns all organisations which fail to give the correct answer to this question.

THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT

In a later chapter, the author, using the same measuring rod, examines the political position of the B.C.M. Here he finds the same failure as with the African National Congress (ANC) and the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) to give the correct answer to the question: Who and What constitutes the Nation of South Africa. Without offering any other criteria he concludes, *mirabile dictu*, that the B.C.M. or at least, some section of it is progressive! With this he sheds his scholarly integrity, dons his political cloak and sets out to woo the friendship of, and gain a political following of some elements in the B.C.M.

Here the author bends his ideological measuring rod to suit his political aims. He writes:

"In this respect, therefore, Black Consciousness is an inevitable and historically progressive by-product of the anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist struggle of the 20th century. It is the revenge of the slave on the master. ."

Leaving aside vengeance in an historical process, the question to ask is what is this "respect" in which the B.C.M. is progressive? The answer is forthcoming:

(1) "Ideologically, Black Consciousness postulates that 'people of colour' . . . should liberate themselves psychologically by shedding the slave mentality."

(2) They must "discover or rediscover the values of Africa and other areas of the world outside Europe, be proud of their 'blackness', create a culture which does not depend on 'white values' and in general realise that 'black is beautiful' ".

Compounding mysticism with a mystical interpretation of history, the author continues:

(3) "Whatever the exact position of the B.C.M. theory on the national question, two points of a strategic-political character are indisputable. It is clear that. . . the ideology of Black Consciousness has brought about a radical change in South Africa".

Nobody disputes the process of change in South Africa as in the rest of the world. What, however, IS disputable is that it was brought about by the ideology of Black Consciousness. To buttress his point he advances the following arguments:

(a) "Increasingly all oppressed people, especially the urban youth are identifying themselves as 'black' and beginning to act as such consciously. Without this the phenomena associated with the 1976-77 uprising, in particular the fact that all blacks were simultaneously involved in almost all the major cities of South Africa, it would be incomprehensible." (our emphasis) "Black solidarity has come to mean, in practice, united action by all oppressed people that feels itself to be one because of common oppression and history".

(b) "The B.C.M. has also been opposed to collaboration in government-created institutions; they have applied in practice a non-collaboration strategy".

(c) "From the start organisations such as SASO realised that ' . . . not everybody who is not white is black' in a political sense".

The reasons given in (a), (b), (c) to prove the progressive nature of the B.C.M. ideology are a falsification of history.

It is very strange that all the above words do not ring a bell in the ears of the author, himself obviously a South African who must have lived through the decade beginning from 1943 when such policies were advocated in numerous meetings and circulated in leaflets and pamphlets throughout South Africa by none other than the Unity Movement and all the affiliated organisations; when such language as he himself uses (I might even say quotes) became common currency. All these ideas were not and could not have been derived from an utopian and mystical ideology such as that of the BCM. On the contrary it was the B.C.M. which imposed mysticism and utopianism on a perfectly sound programme and policy, scientifically drawn up to meet the living realities of the day-the objective and subjective conditions. The imposition of the B.C.M. ideology, far from being progressive was a retrograde step.

The author should know (whatever his aim) that when he mystifies and distorts history, he is doing great harm to the current generation of the youth and to the struggle they are engaged in. Of this later.

Let us return to those aspects that supposedly mark the ideology of Black Consciousness as progressive:

1. "Ideologically Black Consciousness postulates that people of colour should liberate themselves psychologically by shedding the slave mentality. . ." As has been noted above, this is no new discovery of the B.C.M. It is common knowledge that the Unity Movement from its inception set itself as one of its immediate tasks:

- (a) to smash the walls that divide the oppressed, African, Indian and Coloured people, in keeping with its belief in the concept that oppression is indivisible.
- (b) to fight against slave mentality.

The author must know that the literature of the Unity Movement is teeming with examples of such propaganda including fables told from platforms all conceived and directed at fighting this slave mentality.

2. Ideologically Black Consciousness postulates that "people of colour. . . should liberate themselves psychologically by shedding the slave mentality". And are enjoined to "... discover and rediscover the values of Africa. . . create a culture which does not depend on white values and in general realise that 'Black is beautiful'". This idealistic approach makes nonsense of the historical process, for it ignores the material base from which ideas, values and ideologies are born. To our knowledge there are in the 20th century, two main ideologies competing for supremacy. They are: capitalist ideology based on the philosophies of the bourgeoisie and socialist ideology based on Marxist philosophy. All the rest are variations, distortions and deformations of the two main streams.

To what stream· does the ideology of Black Consciousness belong? What are the material roots of this new "progressive" ideology which seeks to dethrone "White values" and establish that "black is beautiful"? In the first place what ARE white

values? And what are these "values of Africa" that they must "discover or rediscover", as distinct from capitalist values which have become as universal as capitalism itself? The proponents of Black Consciousness are enjoined to "create a culture which does not depend on 'White values' ". All this within a highly developed capitalist South Africa!

Is it possible to create a new culture which is at variance with the stage of economic development of a given country? Is it possible for instance to create a socialist culture on a capitalist base? Or are we by any chance, being exhorted to return to tribal culture which is deemed by some to be superior to capitalist culture inasmuch as it was based on communalism? Such ideas, far from being progressive are, to say the least, positively retrogressive.

The reactionary nature of the B.C.M. ideology should be patent even to the author who writes: "Politically, the organisations of the B.C.M. propagate 'black solidarity' and declare that '... in all matters relating to the struggle towards realising our aspirations, whites must be excluded' ". In other words, Whites do not belong to the nation of South Africa. The only difference that can be drawn between the Afrikaner racial exclusiveness and that propounded by the B.C.M. is not in principle but in motivation. In mitigation, it can be said that the latter is a defensive racism while the former is unmitigated and aggressive racism whose intent is to keep the Blacks in perpetual serfdom or slavery. But this by no means justifies the appellation, "progressive".

Implicit in what is called the "ideology" of the B.C.M. is the mistaken idea that social values, morality and culture came into being as a result of a command by some Being who resides somewhere in the rarefied stratosphere and that these can be altered at will by another command, perhaps by some charismatic figure who will arise from among the adherents of the B.C.M. A lot of time and energy are spent, not to mention ink and paper, discussing how to alter what they call White values or the immorality of Capitalism. One of these adherents once said: the communalism of the Africans is morally superior to capitalism. But social values (which are neither White nor Black) and morality are the product of given social relationships which are themselves determined by the mode of production of human necessities.

That is to say, they are determined by the relation of social classes to the means of production in any given social system. It is not possible to arbitrarily introduce tribal values and moral codes into a capitalist system; even more unthinkable to graft into a socialist system, a tribal mode life with its chieftains and all that goes with it. There is a direct correspondence between the economic base of any given society and the cultural and philosophical manifestation that cannot simply be wished away.

Indeed, the proponents of Black Consciousness are aware of the numerous and insuperable difficulties they run into, the moment they stop philosophising and start getting down to the serious business of organising the oppressed people for liberation. Standing before them are concrete human beings in a concrete situation. They are oppressed and subjected to super-exploitation in the country of their birth; denied the most elementary democratic rights so that they are politically defenceless; denied the right to own land or to till it as they choose, with the result that they have to work for employers for a pittance. Long ago Verwoerd, then Vorster and, now, Botha offered them land in the Bantustans to establish and re-establish their own African or Black values and create their own culture. They rejected the offer not merely because the land is too small but on principle, namely, that South Africa and all the material and

cultural wealth in it was created by the people of South Africa. It properly belongs to the Nation of South Africa and they are part of that Nation. When the activists of the B.C.M. talk to the oppressed Blacks about their disabilities, they do so in terms of capitalist values-lack of bourgeois democratic rights and all that it connotes. How then can they talk of a single nation and in the same breath say: "In all matters relating to the struggle towards realising our aspirations, whites must be excluded". No wonder then that when they start to engage in serious work they are forced to adopt the policy and programme which flow from a marxist analysis in spite of their utopian ideology.

Let it be categorically stated that the struggle in South Africa is NOT a colour-struggle between White and Black. It is a CLASS STRUGGLE. In the same way that it is now generally accepted by the Blacks that oppression is indivisible, and that not one section of the Blacks i.e. African, Coloured and Indian, can attain liberation without the other sections, likewise exploitation is indivisible, and no one section of the exploited i.e. black workers or white workers, can liberate itself without the other from oppression by capital.

This fundamental fact MUST determine the strategy of any movement or organisation that is fighting for freedom. Even the strategies of the National liberation Movements must be subordinated to the requirements of the supreme struggle-the class struggle. Racism, which is a function of super-exploitation, cannot be resolved within the framework of capitalism. The problem of national oppression in South Africa cannot be solved without the demolition of the whole economic, social and political structure of South Africa that has been built on Black slave labour. These are the ideas upon which the Unity Movement of South Africa was founded. They flow from a class analysis of an exploitative capitalist system in South Africa. It was the same class analysis that led the founders of the Unity Movement to the conclusion that, in the given conditions in our country, it was necessary to mobilise the oppressed people into a national movement which would serve as a vehicle that would carry the masses toward the higher, the more embracing and fundamental struggle, the class struggle.

In the national movement the two main classes among the oppressed, the workers and the peasants are brought together in a single federation through their respective organisations. At this stage they have common disabilities: lack of political rights which determine their condition of landlessness and pitifully low wages. From the beginning in their long and arduous struggle they learn to work together, and together, in the process of the struggle they begin to discern the real enemy (not the White man) but the exploiters who constitute a class which batters on them. The knowledge and experience thus gained, and the partnership forged in the heat of the struggle, will stand them in good stead when they finally reach the stage of an insurrection to determine the fate of the whole system of oppression and exploitation.

Finally, we must now fulfill our promise made above, namely to expand on the statement that: "The author should know that when he mystifies and distorts history, he is doing great harm to the current generation of the youth and to the struggle they are engaged in". To distort history is obviously misleading, but to mystify it, is to ensure that historical events are never properly understood. Surely, this is not the function of an author who speaks in the name of the oppressed people but that of the bourgeoisie who have a vital interest in ensuring that the exploited and oppressed are kept in ignorance of the true meaning of events. Mystification of history is a method of approach deliberately invented by the bourgeoisie for the purpose of deception; an instrument that is sometimes unconsciously employed by the scribes who belong to the camp of the hangers-on. The first task of the intellectuals within the liberation movement is to rid themselves of any of such methods. Theirs is to apply rigidly and rigorously the only scientific method of social analysis available today, namely the Marxist method. In this way they educate the working-class, the peasantry, and even

the petty bourgeoisie who are engaged in the struggle on how to interpret events correctly. This is a part, an essential part of the struggle for liberation.

Distorting history may also be a crucial element in deception or self-deception. Examples are dealt with in the body of this article, where the author attributes to the B.C.M., concepts which are at variance with the conceptual framework of the B.C.M.; at variance with its stated "ideology". He justifies these intellectual acrobatics by citing some correct and admirable activities undertaken by the B.C.M. In other words, it does not matter that the philosophy or ideology is wrong, it may even be reactionary, so long as specific actions are correct. This is no way to advance the struggle. He himself knows this, and that is the reason why he spent a lot of time analysing the philosophical and ideological implications of the positions of the A.N.C. and the C.P.S.A. and correctly condemned them in no uncertain terms. If he had spent half the time patiently explaining to the youth, the dangers inherent in their ideology, he would have rendered an even greater service.

Lastly, we must take a leaf even from the book of the imperialist enemy. Throughout the world, wherever the armies of imperialism have conquered a nation or country and annexed it, the first thing they do is to enslave the mind of the population, particularly the youth. They must distort the history of a conquered people, wipe out its past with all its glories. Imperialism knows that all peoples and nations have what they regard as a glorious past. When in difficulties, it is to these glories and their heroes that they turn for sustenance, fortitude and the will to fight. It is this universal need that gave rise in olden times to the practice of poets haranguing the soldiers before the battle. For what man or woman would not like to be seen as belonging to a great heritage and worthy of it. This need of ancient man still dogs modern man and is felt in all fields of human activity, including politics.

People need to know they have a proud past. Quite apart from the emotional satisfaction, there is a more serious and basic need for such knowledge. In every branch of science a community or nation has within it a body of knowledge accumulated from the past. A condition for further development is that scientists must absorb this knowledge on the basis of which they make new discoveries. Thus each new invention is as a result of past discoveries. All great inventors tower above others because they stand on the shoulders of other great men or women, past or present.

Why go on with this "irrelevancy"? We want to say to the author: It does not detract from, nor diminish the achievements of the youth during the Soweto Rebellion, to tell them that they acted in accordance with the proud traditions of their past. The very slogans they used: Non-collaboration with the oppressor, Unity of the oppressed or as they themselves put it: "When we say Black, we mean all sections of the oppressed"; their denunciation of the Bantustans, of the quislings-all this is in the tradition of the struggle in South Africa as advocated by the Unity Movement over a period of years. The highest achievements (ideological, programmatic or organisational) by any movement in South Africa, are their heritage.

Like all scientists, the youth must absorb the body of knowledge within the community, sift it, throw out what is useless and build on its solid aspects, making it a platform from which to take a leap forward. Like everybody else the youth of South Africa need a past.

They have a proud past. The founders of the Unity Movement of South Africa, too, needed a past and they found it. Where? Realising that capitalism was a universal system, and that the struggle in South Africa was essentially the same as the struggles of other peoples of the world groaning under the yoke of capitalism-imperialism, they looked further afield for a common past with their brothers and sisters in oppression throughout the world and they found it. What a glorious past! It went back through the Russian Revolution, to the Paris Commune and the French Revolution. Their heroes they extend back to the founders of scientific socialism. This too is the glorious past of our youth inherited through the immediate achievements of the National struggle at home.

With warm regards,
from Uncle

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Note from the Administrator of the Apdusa Views
Website:www.Apdusaviews.co.za

On the 22nd July 2010, the Administrator of the above website received a written request from a struggle comrade now living in Canada (hereinafter referred to as “Th” for convenience) for a copy of a letter written by I.B.Tabata. The letter is in fact a review of a book written by Neville Alexander (using a pseudonym of “No Sizwe”) on the Black Consciousness Movement. The title of the book is “One Azania One Nation”.

We searched our files and found a photocopy of the “Apdusan” of 1980. This publication had included a copy of the famous letter written to “Th”. That copy was scanned and formatted into what appears above.

Tabata’s letter is a masterly analysis but also a strong and stimulating criticism of the position held by Neville Alexander on the BCM. Therefore, it is our view that a wider circulation of the letter will benefit debate and discussion on an important subject matter.
