

The writer of this article puts forward his point of view regarding a cultural boycott of South Africa. Since this matter is arousing much discussion and interest, we invite any readers who would like to put forward a different point of view to write their views for "Liberation."

Towards A Cultural Boycott Of South Africa

By A. M. KATHRADA

THE progress towards maturity of a national movement brings with it new problems, new tasks and new issues, often requiring new policies, or rather, precise policies in ever-increasing spheres of life. Whereas a decade ago the national organisations could have been satisfied with a purely political programme, their development in recent years has had an increasing influence and effect on a wider strata of people.

Although there have been occasions in the past when the people's organisations have been called upon to declare their attitudes on questions not dealt with in their programmes, essentially their main interest was restricted to the political field. So that today they find themselves in the position where they have no clearly defined policies towards several important questions. Such a question for instance is the cultural relationship between South Africa and the outside world, a question which of late has evoked much interest and some spontaneous action abroad.

In the years since the end of the Second World War our country has been visited by scores of foreign artists—theatre groups, dance and cultural ensembles—and scores more are scheduled to come. While ninety-nine per cent of their performances have been restricted to European audiences, a few shows have been organised for the Non-White people. South African cultural groups also have visited foreign lands. There have also been a few token protests on the part of foreign artists against racialism in South Africa. Notable of these was the refusal of Jazz Band leader Ted Heath to come to South Africa and the resolution of the British Musicians' Union.

On both these actions of definite political significance, the national organisations in South Africa have remained silent. Naturally this gives rise to important questions. Should we continue to remain silent? Do we agree with Ted Heath's action, and if so should similar action not be encouraged? If foreign artists do come to South Africa should we not arrange for them to appear before Non-White audiences? Isn't a greater

cultural, sports and economic exchange in line with the international trend for peaceful co-existence?

On these questions three distinct schools of thought seem to be apparent in this country.

Firstly, there are those who are for maintaining the status quo: i.e. foreign artists should continue to come and it is immaterial whether they perform to Non-Whites or not.

Secondly, there are the people who would like to see more and more foreign artists visit this country provided they could be made to undertake to perform for Non-Whites as well. This group falls into line with the attitude taken by the British Musicians' Union, and also, the writer believes, by the Union of Southern African Artists.

The third school of thought maintains that it should be the policy of the progressive movement to work towards an international cultural boycott of South Africa as a protest against racialism.

We have to consider which one of these courses would most contribute towards the progress or enhance the cause of the oppressed people of South Africa.

The first course we could eliminate without any discussion.

Briefly the protagonists of the second course take the stand that:—

(a) With the very restricted opportunities open to Non-Whites in the field of culture, regular performances by overseas artists would go a long way towards filling the vacuum. "We would rather see Dame Sybil Thorndyke even if she appears at the Bantu Men's Social Centre than not see her at all."

(b) Politically, the movement could benefit immensely if artists of the stature of Sybil Thorndyke could after first-hand experience return to their countries and espouse the cause of oppressed South Africa.

(c) If artists such as Paul Robeson were to perform in this country it would help to explode the myth of race superiority, and finally

(d) Being believers in peaceful co-existence between peoples, cultural exchanges between countries would greatly enhance our cause.

The third school of thought, to which the writer subscribes, naturally dismisses the protagonists of the first course. As for the second school, the writer believes that while the arguments advanced are worthy of consideration, they have to be rejected in the light of the peculiar conditions existing in South Africa.

To obviate possible misunderstandings and unnecessary argument it should be clarified at the outset that the believers of the international boycott base their premise on the point of view that at this stage of development international pressure against South Africa's racial policies coupled with the local struggle, will greatly further the cause of freedom. This stand is not to be confused with local questions such as Non-Whites being forced to accept segregation in various walks of South African life. They base their stand primarily on the view that the perpetrators of racialism in this country derive strength and courage from the closeness that they (the racialists) feel to the outer world; indeed from the almost tacit consent and recognition that they receive from particularly the Western countries in the form of cultural and sports contact, economic and military association. The writer believes

that racist South Africans must be made to feel more and more that they stand alone in the whole world in their belief of racial superiority. They must be made to feel the pinch of isolation from the civilised world in the spheres of culture, sports, etc.

When viewing the reasons advanced by the Second school against this background all the merit in their arguments falls away. No freedom loving South African can disagree that South African racialism must be isolated from the world. And the most effective way open at the present time is for the outside world to make known its antagonism to what is happening here.

Let us weigh the arguments of the Second school from the point of view of their political value to the freedom struggle. Foreign artists come to South Africa and perform to a few Non-White audiences. Good. Some of them go back to their countries and speak out against racial discrimination and for the people's struggle. Very valuable. But, what impact does all this have on the day-to-day struggle of our people? The few thousand Non-Whites who manage to attend performances rendered by Dame Sybil Thorndyke or Yehudi Menuhin are very impressed. For them it's been the opportunity of a lifetime—absolutely unforgettable. For them there will remain a lasting memory of great cultural figures of distant lands. But as far as the overwhelming majority of the people are concerned, they remain quite unaffected by the visit of these distinguished guests. All right, one in a hundred of these artists goes back and makes statements or appears on public platforms to condemn racial discrimination. This gives rise to a furore in the White press and accusations are levelled about abuse of hospitality, about incompetence to judge a country by a few weeks' visit, etc. etc. But all this is momentary. While they have a good effect, in a few days it is forgotten; life returns to normal and the plight of South Africa once again fades away from people's minds and press columns. All is quiet until there is a repetition and again the same process.

All this is becoming too monotonous. The time has come when we must move forward. The chain of criticism, the pinch to racist South Africa must become continuous, unending, until they are made to think; until they are made to realise that each unit in society has its responsibilities to the greater whole; until they are made to appreciate the indispensability of inter-dependence.

We are told that artists such as Paul Robeson, Ram Gopal and other Non-White cultural figures would help to explode the myth of racial superiority. We agree entirely. But in the conditions existing in our country such a possibility must remain a dream. Definitely not in the foreseeable future can one imagine Paul Robeson being allowed to come here, or to perform before audiences of Whites and Non-Whites.

Finally, there is the very important question of peaceful co-existence. Non-White South Africans, like the common peoples all over the world, want to live in peace and harmony with other peoples. But it is entirely erroneous to use the argument of peaceful co-existence to offset an international cultural boycott. One can talk of promoting co-existence when talking of the French and Russian people or the Chinese and Indian people or for that matter of any people in the world. But as far

as South Africa is concerned, here again we have our peculiar conditions. Peaceful co-existence between whom? Between the Soviet people and a minority of the people of South Africa who rule the country and who solely enjoy all the rights to culture, education, etc? What would be more beneficial politically? An artiste troupe coming to South Africa from the Soviet Union and leaving behind wonderful impressions among a tiny fraction who partake of the country's cultural life? Or the Soviet troupe refusing to come to this country and thereby winning the admiration and gratitude of the overwhelming majority of the peoples?

One cannot just pick on a popular demand of the time and apply it mechanically to any country and to any situation. Of course, everyone would love to see Madame Ulanova or the Janacek Quartet, Yehudi Menuhin and the other great artists of the world. But the times demand a sacrifice in favour of the greater long-term benefit to the cause of the people's struggle. The continued performances by international cultural figures in South Africa will leave behind fine memories for a comparatively few people. The greater majority of the people will remain indifferent. But, let the artists and actors of the world boycott South Africa and thus help further the cause of progress and freedom.

BANTU EDUCATION

A COMMUNICATION

SIR,—The Government of the day has repeatedly told us that Bantu Education is not inferior in standard to that of the European child in this country, and that this was merely different because a "Bantu child" was "a child trained and conditioned in Bantu culture, endowed with a knowledge of a Bantu language and imbued with values, interests and behaviour patterns learnt at the knee of a Bantu mother." The fallacy of this contention will at once dawn on the mind of the reader for it is axiomatic that education, like the breath we breathe and the sunshine that warms us alike irrespective of race, country or colour, is one and indivisible.

The type of education which is intended to "function only in South Africa because it exists and can function only in and for a particular social setting" is clearly a hideous thing, a hydra-headed gorgon aimed at destroying the child's instinct for self-respect and to leave it a submissive, cringing, fear-ridden creature. What in effect is the social setting Bantu Education is intended to serve? Let us see what the "Bantu Education Journal" March 1956 has to say on this question:

"... but it must be recognised that in areas which are the scene of the conflicting interests of different racial groups the opportunity for the Bantu for unfettered development is severely restricted." Hence the