

THE CONTEMPORARY BLACK MOVEMENT AS IT HAS DEVELOPED
FROM ITS FORERUNNERS -- STANLEY MAGOBA

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In terms of political epochs one can rightly speak of a generation-gap between our day and the roaring fifties and sixties. It is not uncommon to find many on our campuses who do not even know the name Luthuli or Moroko or Daidoo. The political giants of the fifties and sixties have passed into oblivion. The purpose of this paper is primarily to fill up the gaps and to spotlight certain tendencies in our racial situation which keep on appearing on the South African scene, in a wave like fashion.

The year 1955 held much hope for South Africa. The name Kliptown fills many with a sense of frustration. For it was at Kliptown in 1955 that the famous FREEDOM CHARTER was formulated and adopted. Here representatives of the Congress of Democrats, Indian Congress, A.N.C and Coloured Peoples Congress met and formulated a charter which sought to bring all the colour-groups in South Africa together in a struggle for common nationhood.

The extreme nationalist P.A.C., under Robert Sobukwe, significantly, rejected this Kliptown Charter on the grounds that whites and blacks did not have a common struggle and that the Whites, Indians and Coloureds were protected by the Status Quo and any protest they made could only be a token one; that the white liberal was at heart a moderate, whose role was that of pressing for moderate, delaying tactics!

It is now common history that the campaigns of this extremist group culminated in the Sharpsville campaign in 1960 and the violent clashes characterised by the Poqo uprisings in 1963.

It is also common history that the significance of the Kliptown Charter continued with the campaigns and culminated in the boycotts and sabotages with Bivonia trials as their high-water mark. What emerges clearly from the foregoing, is that as early as 1955 there was a rift in black-white movements, which rift was caused basically by the Africans questioning the political honesty and integrity of the white man.

It is also significant that although there are many whites who claim to be sincere and devoted in their beliefs, the general image of the white man was coloured by the harsh repression of all freedom movements with the result that nearly all the leaders landed on Robben Island, or went into exile. It should be manifestly clear that these leaders are not dead. Men such as Sobukwe, Mandela, Lelallo, Daidoo, Oliver Tambo, Robert Resha, Makiwane, Moses Ketene Mbeki, Sisulu are hanging ominously over the South African scene, presently inactive, but desperately waiting for an opportunity to return to the South African scene and tread over South Africa like a Colossus.

For nearly four years 1965-1969 political activity amongst the Blacks was frozen.

The black students who were forced out of NUSAS by government action and, left to themselves, they did a lot of soul-searching. Out of this has emerged a new dimension in political thinking. The black students have reverted to the fervour of nationalism they obtained in the fifties with this significant difference: Instead of being a force inclusive of all African and exclusive of all Coloureds, Indians and Whites, it has broadened to include all Coloureds and Indians and has become exclusive of all Whites. This new rationale has the immediate force because it is based on the lines of demarcation that have been drawn by political powers since the advent of the white man in South Africa. It also exploits the inherent feeling of hatred and contempt of, and discrimination against, the black people throughout the world. The immediate reaction of black students was negative: To reject the white man, however well-disposed he might appear to be: to assert that the black person is a non-white because this assertion is based on a system that has white as its basic norm and describes black people using white as a yardstick of

Blacks found a common denominator for their survival and they now wish to have nothing to do with whites; they suspect even the most liberal of whites. They charge the whites with political dishonesty; they are tired of receiving sympathies which cannot be translated into meaningful action. In fact the most recent trend is they believe the white student ought to pity the whites and not the blacks; that the whites are powerless and impotent because their strength and power in the past and present are completely irrelevant and unrelated to the future; they are aware that the standards of political thinking, far from being Christian, Western and Civilised, is rejected by the entire Christian world, and Western democracies, to say little of east and the entire Third World. They feel that the white student has a colossal task of liberating his fellow whites. This plank of thinking is bound to revolutionise the student-activities. No more can the white student look sympathetically at the blacks and be paternalistic. No more can white students do community-development projects among the backward and oppressed blacks. The feeling is that while black poverty can be eased by grants of money and creation of opportunities, whilst black illiteracy can be wiped off by literacy campaigns, the political myopia and the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of the whites cannot be put right by any simple conventional device. **THE TASK OF THE WHITE STUDENTS IS TO DO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AMONGST THE WHITES.**

The blacks feel that the whites should simply be ignored, and the stress is laid on black creativity and manifestation of blackness in every aspect of life. In black campuses the term 'black' has been changed from a swear word - 'black thing/swartgoed' and enhanced to a title of honour. You often hear the students ridicule those who are politically conservative and naive and label them as 'non-whites'. On the doors of some rooms you often find a notice reading, 'No non-whites allowed here.' Non-whitism is fast becoming the antithesis of 'blackness'. The black man is not a non-white; perhaps the whites may be non-black?

The ripple sent out by this new dimension has been felt far and wide. It is not only NUSAS that has been affected by this trend, but all integrated bodies. Even the UCM with integrated (black-white) leadership has failed to survive and however much the black students appreciated the theological soundness on UCM, it (UCM) is dying the death of a thousand qualifications. UCM would do well to concentrate on white campuses and revive and revitalise the white.

As good example of the product of our time is 'Black Theology'. This was first popularised in South Africa by UCM. This was an attempt by UCM to make Christianity real to the black people. The essence of the gospel was to bring good news to those who suffer (Luke 4:16ff). This means that the true gospel is one that respects human dignity and seeks to help project true humanity under the divinity. The whole thrust of black theology was to strip christianity of all the trappings that had been put on it as a result of centuries of white, western Christianity. The gospel is not a present or a gift or charity of the white man, even though it was brought by him to the black people. The gospel has relevance in those situations requiring liberation. Christ did not come to save the oppressor, but the oppressed.

Can the gospel be proclaimed to the blacks by white people with the type of image they have today? Never! UCM appointed a black director of Black Theology, but even he could not save the UCM. Black theology was embraced by SASO and the last thing was that an independent commission on Black Theology was to be established under the control of black theologians.

The Christian Church remains the only surviving black-white institution but even the church is faced with momentous decisions. Can blacks and whites worship apart? Can they worship together without first changing the conditions of living in this country? Should black and white ministers be given unequal stipends and conditions of service? Can the church criticise the state about migratory labour and other evils when these are found in the church? Should black and white ministers be trained in difference seminaries?

We as students are the future leaders of our country. How then can we be indifferent to the cross-current of thoughts which are destined to make or unmake our institutions and our future.