

THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE

TWO REVIEWS

In publishing these differing reactions to THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE by Richard Turner (a Spro-cas Publication: price R1-25) Reality does not necessarily identify itself with either.

TURNING OF THE EYE

by Pascal Gwala

Turner's book is not Turner's book. It is a plea for change. A plea from a man who is voicing great concern over the need for some change. It is a voice of millions the world over. So the book even suggests the type of change needed. Further, one or two "positive aspects" in separate development are pointed out.

The author certainly had a mastery over his subject matter, which cannot be ignored. Where does one go from here? This is the question in the minds of most of the people of every shade of opinion, of every colour of skin.

Nothing new. It has happened before. In every country that has had to undergo social and political change. Germany during the rise of Hitler: the "Night of the Long Knives" was concurrent with the "Moment of the Damned".

"The necessity of Utopian thinking" (page 3) is therefore, in view of the drawn-out distance of white thinking in general, desirable. A practical necessity. But it would have been very much more appropriate if Turner had defined what adaptability he would expect of the white who is striving to get himself a second car. That, milled out, would have got us somewhere.

And the author's failure to define the split-level — home and two-car-garage reality reveals how close to political impotence the intelligentsia of this part of the continent is. And also, it exposes the sycophancy in assessments by liberal academics; white or black.

The present social structure is not static. It is not orderly. Turner tends to view it as being such. His pointing out the advantages in separate education within the different "stans" grossly overlooks the social chaos that is highly possible within the "homelands" reality. The author treats

the Black as if they could never at a future time develop militant anti-South Africanism or parochial nationalism, or possibly — narrow tribal exclusiveness. The author's only worry, or fear, is the possible clash between the land-starved peasants and the Black "middle class". The "keep this house in order" ethic gets loose and runs right through the book. Was the author perhaps too sensitively aware of the anti-thesis "set this house on fire"?

The basic condition:

The basic condition is how objective can one be? . Can someone who supports the Vietnam war honestly claim to be against environmental and air pollution? That is, when one has to think of the tons and tons of bombs that U.S. bombers have dropped in that war; and the resultant "scorched earth" effect those bombings have had? . Or, how could one make a really objective appraisal of America's "Hell's Angels" without going into the negative heroism so often expressed by the marines and as expressed by the "Green Berets"? . The far-fetched examples here are a confirmation of "the necessity for Utopian thinking".

The author blames the root cause of conflict in this country on the "consumer human model" (page 31). This conclusion by the author is not entirely true. Only partly. By drawing his assessment upon this premise the author has attempted to dismiss the real basic cause of conflict: the land question and race privilege. The historic context of "the consumer human model" is one of manipulation and affluence. There are real cases in history in which conquest and political coercion have included the "consumer human model" — post-war Europe and post-war Japan being taken as examples. Hence the lack of historic validity within the South

African context and social structure. The author's connivance at the basic factors is like the economist tendency of most European Communist Parties before the emergency of a Soviet regime in China. Or, to extend the context — before Dien Bien Phu. The European C.P.'s rode the colonial issue their way far too long. Explaining the colonial situation in terms of their entrenched economism; never saying openly that it was not just class interests that decided the motives of the white colonists. At the same time selling out to the colonial middle class in the name of common racial situation. Until the colonial people eventually lost all confidence in the two-timing theories of European C.P.'s as far as the colonial issue was concerned.

Evolutionary Practicability.

The whole thesis of Turner's is suggestive of evolutionary practicability husked within revolutionary rhetoric. No one would really go against evolutionary progress and remain honest to his desires for change. But only if that evolutionary progress is real progress. That is, if its dynamic is genuine. Because the question is: is this evolutionary practical thinking, since it is progressive, worthy of genuine appreciation? Is it a smooth flow without counter-evolutionary hitbacks? Is its limited range beneficial to the unlimited humanistic interests of the Blacks? .

Evolution is ever limited. Since it closes in upon itself through its various stages.

The Blacks are not equal to the Whites in many ways. Therefore their developments are largely unequal. However, developments do become equal in many other ways. In the midst of poverty the Black townships are able to produce some extremely rich Blacks. And the whole world knows there's been a Kgotso. And the Black ghettos are able to produce artists of the calibre of Dunnile, Sekoto, Julian Mstau who rival the cream of white society's artists. One need not go into the world of sport.

It must have come as a great shock to many cultural apologists to realise that in a relatively short span of historic time the third world has been able to produce thinkers like Gandhi, Mao, Fanon, Nyerere. Whose ideas have helped changeworld thinking. The author of "Eye of the Needle" seems to have thought only of unequal development:- social, economic and political. This premise is false.

By even going to the extent of saying the Coloureds and Indians may because of their higher level of technical know-how go against the aspirations of the Africans (page 78) the author reveals publicly the often hidden truth. That it is the interest of White manipulation and the survival of White supremacy that Coloureds and Indians would be a little "higher" than Africans.

Feasibilities:

It serves very little if any purpose to analyze the feasibilities in the future of South African Society without making definite mention of to-day's capitalist and neofascist developments.

Israel's kibbutz is different from the communal development of Tanzania. Hitler's nationalization of services and industry in Germany was used with the directed aim of breaking the conscious will of the German working class. Not the case with say, Cuba's socialization process. So to lodge the two together would not only be

a violation of context but a grand slam intrusion of generalization upon historic situation. Israel's kibbutz is gearing towards a militarist societal context. Not the case with Tanzania's "commune"

Turner's logic is this: it doesn't matter within what context of White domination we find ourselves in. There can be room for progress. Brought to its simplest interpretation: it does not matter whether there are "stans" or no "stans"; there could still be progress, if the White could only drop his materialistic outlook.

What about the basic motive behind the concept of Bantustans? . Some Jews made the best of their lot in the ghettos. It still led them to the gas chambers. And somewhere. . . . the author finds justifiable the emergence of Black consciousness. (Page 76)

Participatory Democracy:

The theory of participatory democracy as expounded in "Eye of the Needle" is an opportunistic ideal. It seeks to accommodate the best in democracy with the most added in totalitarianism. Which overshadows the other? . Guns and police dogs argue better than the best of philosophical theories.

Can we imagine the affectation of the ideology of Separate Development without having to imagine South Africa's militarism that is continually being structured by the designers of Separate Development? . Such an imagination could only come from a crabbed orientation in political thinking. Albert Camus said , as an aftermath of a devastated Europe, that, "when one has no character one has to apply a method". And method, once it becomes a failure, must have to bend to objective laws.

White baaskap has lost its character. It is already on the prelude to its own destruction. Like a Godzilla it should have long gone extinct. It is extinct, basically. Yet it sticks in the minds of some die-hard Whites. And ironically Godzilla is now being matched against King Kong — the gigantic theme of Separate Development. It's a gamble. King Kong versus Godzilla. An insane prospect.

The virtue of liberal thinking at this historic juncture is that liberals are all too much aware of the fact that Separate Development is a gamble. A fascist gamble.

So that though "Utopian thinking", the author's notion is largely based in the status quo. The rehabilitation of people is to be developed — not within the negative realities of migratory labour, border industries and white economical aggression. "Not within" because the author ignores these factors. Although the truths of these realities are so obvious to any student of rural communities on Southern Africa.

Mention is made of "the possibility of a clash of interests between the peasants and a 'middle class' of traders, politicians and civil servants" (page 78). Of course one cannot really speak of peasant class in this country. There is no stable peasantry i.e. a class that lives off the land in the fullest sense; as can be found in other countries. The term rural worker is closer to the situation of the rural Black. More especially in those areas turned into rural ghettos by the rehabilitation schemes.

Liberal thinking in this country runs broadly along two lines of approach. The Utopian line and the line of what I shall term practical realism. In the former, the theorist

may set himself loose on the veld of the democratic imagination. He expounds theories that appear as the great answer to the "racial problem". In the latter the theorist wants to point out the impracticability of achieving equilibrium in a non-racial South Africa that has so small a White minority, which is the dominant sector.

Both lines of approach have one thing in common. Both are of an abstracted form; merely conceptual. Nothing beyond the existence of the concept.

"There is no reason why they (the churches) should not invest some money in the workers' controlled enterprises in the homelands or in the urban areas". Typical of practical realism – inverted. The worker must only "control" (page 72) and not own these factories. Some outside investment in them will also to a large degree determine policy making. Investment coming from without. The same thing is happening to the former colonial countries, most of them. The investors have a strong say in the policy matters of these countries. Neo-colonialism. Turner's variation is the domestic one. Where will the Black "middle class" be? What of its negative wealth? Should that "middle class" invest in these so called workers' enterprises will there be no clash between it and the White churches? .

The inter-play of tendencies in the local spectrum wherever workers' control could be allowed to exist will obviate an open clash between the workers and the often so cosmopolitan "middle class". And middle class concepts, once they weaken, easily regress into fascism.

An interpretation of the author's thought suggests that the Black "middle class" may be overstepped or by-passed, with the outside investors dealing with the workers, in a homeland under whose political control? . Let us take Local Authority. Is the control of Local Authorities really, ever, sanctioned by the people involved: the workers (some of them bound to be migratory labour; or those mothers whose sons are in the towns (earning a low wage); or the religious leaders (whose spiritual folks have to endure the material debasements of labour regulations)? . What we find instead is a coercion implemented by the White ruling sector or – at times – manipulation by the Black "middle class". The author is dribbling the basic issue: self-determination.

How can anyone draw an objective assessment on the South African situation without going into the dialectics of self-determination? . The conspicuous disregard of

such factor in Turner's thesis has thus placed "Eye of the Needle" into and under the category of Thessianism, that ever inverted bowl in the cabinet of radical politics.

How do the White investors by-pass or overstep the Black "middle class" and get into a deal with worker controlled enterprises? . This is not only a remote possibility. It is a possibility that can only come through violent revolution within the homeland itself. Such upheaval would definitely upset the White sector. Even its own "stan"

Turner's choice of examples on communal development suggests that there is no monolithic solution to social problems, irrespective of common ideology. Which is quite true, somewhat. But going into the realities of the thesis does this conclusion not defeat the ends of man – ever seeking definite solution to his problems? . Contexts vary. So do the solutions.

But Turner goes on to say that those who do not really understand the socialist alternative base their "argument" on "the mistake" they make about "the nature of capitalist society and the mistake they make about the nature of power and constraint" (page 45) He goes on to call these mistakes illusions!

Power and the interests that are centred round it are a REALITY; and never an illusion. "Destroying these illusions will help us better to understand the politics of participatory democracy" (page 45). Context lost again.

And the underlying thought in Turner's thesis becomes clear. The White culturally, technologically and economically superior. But (according to Turner) the White's political outlook is outmoded; blunted by materialist greed. And therefore dangerous to his very survival. Why is he fearing the Black politically and making himself insecure when what he should do is to seek a better form of manipulation – even if that means socialist organisation of South African society? . Hence the varied socialist alternatives (page 37-40).

A "live on hay and you'll get pie in the sky" attitude is a thing the Black will no longer afford. As can be seen clearly in "Eye of the Needle". On the other hand it can be pointed out that for those who care to worry about immediate priorities, "Eye of the Needle" is a dangerously posed book. The ambiguous pose is typical of our very much ambiguous social structure. And of the ambiguous position many a person with radical inclination in political thinking has come to find himself in. □

IMAGINING A FUTURE

by Colin Gardner

The first and most important thing to be said about *The Eye of the Needle* is that it is certainly one of the most creative and fascinating books on South African society – and indeed on society in general – to have been published in this country in the last few years.

The book's primary aim is to provoke thought, or rather to provoke what is probably for many people a new mode of thinking:

"To understand a society, to understand what it is, where it is going, and where it could go, we cannot just