

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS - AN APPRAISAL

By Henry E. Isaacs

A question which can be asked is whether the Black Consciousness Movement arose as a result of the influence of an ideology or as a reflection of the real needs and pre-occupations of the people. The ANC's Bill of Rights published in 1943 for instance undoubtedly reflects the influence of liberal whites and those Blacks whom they influenced. Similarly, Africanism can be seen to have been partially influenced by such ideologies as Garveyism and Pan-Africanism. Although liberal analysts go to great lengths to demonstrate that the Bill of Rights represents the mainstream of Black political awareness, this is doubtful. By 1943 the liberal multi-racialism of the ANC did not adequately represent the realities of the situation of the oppressed Black people in South Africa. This contention is related to the changing social situation.

By 1943 there was already a great deal of polarisation in South African society, which was reflected in the declining Black participation in such multi-racial bodies as the Joint Councils and the Institute of Race Relations, as also by the emergence of the Congress Youth League (CYL) which advocated a militant African nationalism and African self-reliance. To this end the Africanists rejected the idea of multi-racial co-operation arguing instead for African unity and organization. Co-operation with the three other racial groups was acceptable but only after unity of the African majority had been achieved. Although documents of the CYL contain frequent reference to the "whiteman" as the enemy, there is no suggestion of anti-whitism, but rather a rejection of white domination.

Numerous spontaneous actions by Blacks, including bus boycotts and workers' strikes, present further evidence of the polarisation and confrontation in the society at large. According to Karis and Carter:

"On December 28, 1942, 17 persons were killed and about 11 wounded in a riot in the Pretoria municipal compound after stones were thrown and a white soldier killed by an African crowd, angry about delays in carrying out promises to raise wages. In November 1944, scattered fighting between Africans and whites in Johannesburg was sparked when a trolley car ran over an African; about 100 Africans were injured and a white mob destroyed the Bantu World printing plant and back files of the Bantu World"

"During the war, tens of thousands of Africans in the Johannesburg area reacted to intolerable congestion by moving as squatters to vacant land, where they built and organised shanty towns. Other grass roots action, more in the form of confrontation than of self-help were the boycotts carried on by the workers of Alexandra, a suburb outside Johannesburg where about 60,000 Africans lived. In protest against fares there were brief bus boycotts in August 1940 and October 1942. In August 1943, thousands of Africans walked some 18 miles a day for 9 days. On November 4, 1944 they began to walk for a period of seven weeks" (1)

Although there had been strikes by Black workers during and immediately after the war the most significant strike was that by African mineworkers in 1946 when approximately 70,000 men, obeying a call by the African Mineworkers' Union, refused to enter the mines. The violent suppression of the strike by the police and army, aided by armed white civilians, resulted in the indefinite adjournment of the Natives' Representative Council.

World War II had stimulated the growth of secondary industries, which in turn had the effect of accelerating the urbanization and proletarianisation of the Black mass. According to Collins:

"The war increased the need for rapid import substitution; this increase in manufacturing needed more permanent labourers. Many white workers went to war and substitutes had to be found. Black workers were found easily, because of the continuing decline in conditions in the reserves. But little increase in wages took place and the Black workers were proletarianised in the labour coercive manner." (2)

The presence of large numbers of Blacks from different societies, subjected to similar living and working conditions created favourable conditions for the development and assertion of African nationalism as well as the establishment of a mass organization, while the enactment of discriminatory legislation directed at the Coloured and Indian minorities created favourable conditions for joint Black (i.e., African, Coloured and Indian) political action. In 1943 the Smuts Government established the Coloured Affairs Department, a purely advisory body consisting of twenty Coloured persons nominated by the government. Although initially set up on an experimental basis for two years the Department was to survive until 1949. Creation of the C.A.D. provoked bitter opposition from the Coloureds who saw the Department as being comparable to the "Native Affairs Department and the first step towards their removal from the common voters' roll and greater segregation". (3)

Meanwhile pressure from whites who feared competition from Indian merchants and traders forced the government to enact legislation in 1946 designed to curb the expansion of Indian trading and at the same time to prevent Indian trading in white residential areas. Karis and Carter state:

"(The Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act) dealt comprehensively with land ownership and occupancy and provided for the demarcation of Natal into exempted and unexempted areas. As partial compensation for new restrictions and as a gesture that might strengthen South Africa's case at the United Nations, the 1946 Act also provided for the first Indian representation in Parliament. Two whites were to be elected to the House of Assembly and one to Senate by Indian males in Natal and the Transvaal who met educational and economic qualifications. Indians were also allowed to elect two representatives in the Natal Provincial Council, and the representatives could themselves be Indians. At the same time, Indians who had qualified for the common voters' roll in Natal before 1896 - only one or two by 1946 - were removed from the common roll. Indians boycotted the communal vote, and it was repealed by the Nationalist government in 1948." (4)

The Indian minority reacted to the legislation with a campaign of passive resistance based on the Gandhian tactics of non-violence.

Intransigence of the government in its response to Black grievances created frustrations among Black leaders while simultaneously convincing sections of the leadership that the only language understood by the government was the language of confrontation. For instance the ANC leadership, inspired by the Atlantic Charter, formulated African Claims in 1943, a mild document outlining Black demands regarding land, taxes, education, inter alia: General Smuts the Prime Minister, agreed with Churchill - the Atlantic Charter was for civilised white men only and dismissed the African Claims accordingly.

Wolpe summarizes the polarisation that occurred between 1943 and 1948 to explain why Black demands were becoming increasingly radical, for which he sees as the necessary condition the basic process whereby the greatest sector of African society had entered into the capitalist mode of production and were now being oppressed within that mode:

"This system (centered on the cheap labour system) began long before 1948 ... but the particularly rapid urbanisation and industrialization fostered by the second world war sharpened and intensified the trends ... The 1940's were characterised by the variety and extent of the industrial and political conflicts, especially in the urban, but also in the rural areas. In the period 1940 - 1949, 1,684,915 (including the massive strike of African mineworkers in 1946) African man-hours were lost as compared with 171,088 in the period 1930 - 1939. Thousands of African workers participated in squatter movements and bus boycotts. In 1946 the first steps were taken towards an alliance of African, Coloured and Indian political movements and this was followed by mass political demonstrations. Towards the end of the 1940's a new force - militant African intellectuals - appeared on the scene. There were militant rural struggles at Witsieshoek and in the Transkei. These were some of the signs of the growing assault on the whole society (and the system of cheap labour which underpinned it) which confronted the capitalist state in 1948". (5)

In this situation the liberal ideology did not reflect the situation of the oppressed Black people. The Africanist position was more representative. The Africanists did not see liberation in terms of entry into a multi-racial common society but saw it in terms of a restructuring of society. Lembede spoke of national liberation as being the immediate goal to be followed by socialism. In the achievement of this goal the Africans should provide their own leadership and co-operation with the Coloured and Indian groups would take place with these two national minorities as single units.

Although at the outset the CYL exhibited ideological tensions between those who favored a racially exclusive African nationalism and those who favoured a broader nationalism encompassing the other national minorities by 1948 the tension had subsided and a broader "South African nationalism" had been favoured. Similarly by 1948 there was a greater tolerance of communism: the CYL was initially hostile to the communists of the SACP whom they felt were deflecting African attention from the main issue, which was national liberation. Commentators like Walshe attribute these changes to the accession to power of the Nationalist Party in 1948 which immediately began to systematically crush all opposition, communist as well as non-communist. (6)

The Africanist position recognised that the demands of the African majority would have to be achieved by confrontation, hence the emphasis on direct action which was finally adopted by the ANC in 1949.

All writers concerned with this period admit to the important role played by the CYL in the growth of a more radical black consciousness. Collins argues that there was a gradual evolution in black consciousness: "This progression was not merely a progression of the ANC from being an

elitist middle class organization to being a mass movement, although this dimension was present and played its part. More importantly, there was a progression in the questioning of the whole structure of society as the Black population became more proletarianised." (7)

But, this gradual evolution in consciousness had the effect of diluting or inhibiting African nationalism. The concept of African nationalism has always been a motivating force and unifying factor for all sections of the African people on the basis of their dispossession and their denial of political and economic rights by white colonialism and on the basis of their continued struggle for national independence and self-determination.

The militant African nationalism and self-reliance advocated by the CYL were abandoned in favour of liberal multi-racialism by the ANC. The Congress alliance had the effect of inhibiting African nationalism, thus blunting the militancy of the African masses, the largest section of the oppressed. As one Commentator points out: "These alliances obliged the ANC to avoid any direct appeals to African race consciousness." (8)

Formation of the Pan Africanist Congress in 1959 was thus an attempt to salvage African nationalism and self-reliance. To quote the same commentator:

"It seemed obvious to Sobukwe that the injustices suffered by Africans in South Africa could ultimately be overcome only by revolution, and that a successful revolution by Africans could in turn be fuelled only by the rawer emotions of a nationalism based on race. Strategies like the ANC's, which were based on sentimental assumptions about the desirable characteristics of a post-revolutionary society, were a luxury that the oppressed could not afford. To Sobukwe, creating the psychological pre-conditions of revolution, seemed a far more urgent task for African leadership. Like his ideological heirs in the Black

Consciousness Movement in the 70's Sobukwe believed that the answer to white supremacy lay in building up an assertive Black nationalist counterforce - not in building symbolic but ineffective inter-racial united fronts against apartheid." (9)

The Pan Africanist Congress had correctly read the mood of the masses, namely, that the masses were prepared for confrontation, hence the eclipse of the ANC by the PAC. But the PAC did not enjoy a sufficiently long overt legal existence for it to pursue its strategy of building group power to oppose white supremacy. PAC was banned less than a year after its formation. But by the time of the banning of PAC and ANC, Black political awareness had advanced to the stage where (the mass movements) were national liberation movements concerned about the restructuring of society. As the commentator points out:

"Sobukwe's own views on economic questions were distinctly socialist - he called for a planned economy and a radical equalisation of wealth - but given the choice between arousing African political consciousness around the issues of class or of race, he chose the latter as far more likely to achieve the desired effect." (10)

Ngubane) is also of the view that the formation of the PAC marked further progression in Black political awareness:

"Up to that time, African political organizations had not taken a clear stand on immediate participation. They had contented themselves merely with demanding participation, but enunciating an ideal of society it wanted to build. In this, the PAC went further than any other political group, for it was out to build an Africanist, socialist and non-racial nation." (11)

The PAC enjoyed too short an overt legal existence within the country to successfully smooth out the analytical weaknesses in its formulation, for example the class content of African nationalism was never seriously analysed.

Was it (a petit bourgeois nationalism) or revolutionary nationalism of a triply oppressed people (that is, oppressed on the basis of race, as a

nation and as workers) that could be harnessed to the struggle for proletarian socialism? Such an analysis is necessary because of the existence of a number of Blacks who, while they have an interest in conflict with the white ruling class (and can therefore be mobilised into the struggle) they do not have interests in the establishment of socialism.

In a more advanced stage of the struggle, when building socialism becomes the immediate goal, this "national bourgeois" will have to be tackled: The following assessment by IKWEZI is thus accurate:

"The PAC was correct in emphasising that South Africans of all races - in effect the minority groups - should overcome their own racial exclusiveness by regarding themselves as Africans and in understanding that their own liberation depended on the movement of this mass of semi-literate Africans. But this could only be the beginning of the national and class struggle in South Africa. A much sharper class analysis ... was needed to put the race/class perspective in proper focus." (12)

Writers like Wolpe and O'Meara argue that it is the Freedom Charter of 1955 which represents the radical strand of Black political awareness. O'Meara writes:

? "The rapid development of African trade unionism during the period (1930 - 1950), and particularly (during) the war, had created a reasonably high level of class consciousness among the proletariat, into which the ANC could drop roots, finally giving itself a secure political base. [The development of this class consciousness (was) propagated by the (Congress) Youth League raising it to a higher pitch]. The African Nationalism and the goals expressed in the Freedom Charter of 1955 were different in tone to those of the original Youth League Manifesto. Not only were they more radical, but showed an increased awareness of the role of the capitalist mode of production, in itself producing and reproducing the system of racial exploitation, and a greater concern with the material position of the African proletariat." (13)

ISAACS: → The Freedom Charter does not reflect the needs and pre-occupations of the oppressed Blacks, but the interests of its authors who were not

the Blacks but (the white liberals, of the South African "Communist Party". As Khophung points out, Dr. Wilson Conco, deputy President of the ANC who chaired the meeting in Kliptown, Johannesburg, in 1955, at which the "Freedom Charter", was presented saw the document for the first time at that meeting. (14) This contention is supported by Ngubane who states that Dr. Conco, "on his return (to Durban to report to Chief Luthuli, the ANC President), said he had seen the document for the first time at the conference. And Luthuli himself had not known who had drafted the charter.

The co-ordinating committee of the (Congress) alliance, ^{as} was a matter of fact not the real originator of policy." (15) The unseen hand was that ~~of~~ the white liberals who after their voluntary dissolution of the South African Communist Party in 1950, strove to establish hegemony over the Black liberation movement. It was the land question which was the major bone of contention in the ideological disputes between the "multi-racialists" and "Africanists". The Freedom Charter states "The land belongs to ALL who live in it" (emphasis added). Does this reflect the reality of the situation of the oppressed, or the concerns of the white petty-bourgeois liberals? ← It is here contended that the Freedom Charter does not represent the reality of the situation of the oppressed, and this contention is supported by the historical perspective of the African liberation struggle.

Within the context of colonial relations, the concept of land represents not just an economic category, e.g. factor of production, or object of labor, but the physical (or tangible characteristics), the political, economic, cultural history and well-being of a people in a particular geographical area to which they have indigenous claim. The colonial mission of

expropriating land from its true owners represents the total political, cultural and economic castration of a people having indigenous claim to that land. It does not simply represent the relation of a particular class to the land as an economic category which takes place say in non-colonial capitalist relations. Within this level of argument the true meaning of the so-called frontier wars were not just wars on "Frontiers" based on the ownership of land as an economic category; they were a National Resistance Movement - and indeed the forerunner of the present National liberation movement. The concept of boundaries in this case (as represented by the fictitious frontier wars) does not apply. Even the uninhabited and un-inhabitable pieces of land belonged and still belongs to those with indigenous claim to it. The Freedom Charter by declaring that "the land belongs to ALL who live in it" legitimizes the dispossession of the indigenous owners of the land. The PAC stance on the land question is the ideologically correct position, namely that the long history of foreign occupation (or white settler colonialism) does not divest the indigenous owners of title to their land. Such an ideological stance facilitates the precise definition of responsibility of the revolutionary vanguard: that responsibility entails the conquest of white settler colonialism, destruction of its economic base which is private property in the means of production and re-possession of the land of the indigenous people for whom the revolutionary vanguard holds it in trust. This land will then be distributed for use under the socialist principles and morality. In short, the political task of the national democratic revolution is to terminate the colonial relations: the national democratic revolution does not represent an ideological objective, which is the creation of a socialist state based on Marxist-Leninist principles and morality, but a first step in the revolutionary process whose consummation will be represented or characterised by the creation

of the socialist state based on scientific socialist principles.

The Freedom Charter can be dismissed as being reflective of the concern of the petty-bourgeois liberals of the SACP for the material interests of the white minority in the post-revolutionary period. To the SACP, Black liberation was acceptable only so long as white minority rights were guaranteed.

The question being asked has to do with real and false consciousness, with whether Black consciousness as it emerged in the late 1960's was tailored to the needs of the people. In other words, does subjectivity and objectivity really harmonise? This question can only be answered by comparing the particulars of the Black consciousness "ideology" with the actual situation of the Black people in South Africa and seeing from this whether it represents (or conceals) the truth. This necessitates an examination of the nature of the South African society.

(i) Nature of South African Society

Apartheid is not simply a clinical division of South African society into Black and white, but is a carefully constructed system designed to use Blacks for the creation of wealth and then guarantee the exclusive benefits of that wealth to the white minority. Segregation and the exploitation of Black labour have always been inextricably linked. The plans for the system were drawn up even before the creation of a United South Africa in 1910, when British colonialism, through the South Africa Act of 1909, surrendered all power to the white settlers without reference to or consultation with the majority Black population.

The Pan Africanist Congress insists that South Africa has never been an independent state because the political, economic, social and legal position of the indigenous African majority (to whom the status of Independent South Africa has a meaning) has not changed since the first occupation of South Africa by colonial forces. In 1894 Cecil John Rhodes introduced into the Cape Parliament the Glen Grey Act, which set the pattern for the whole subsequent "Native Reserve" or Bantustan system, a system designed to permanently deprive Africans of their land and independence. Rhodes' words about Africans are still echoed regularly in South Africa today:

"We want to get hold of those young men and make them go out to work ... It must be brought home to them that in the future nine tenths of them will have to spend their lives in daily labour, in physical work, in manual labour" - Cecil John Rhodes, speech in Parliament, Cape Town, 1894.

"But we must accept the fact that the Bantu will always be here, representing the number of Bantu who can be engaged in our economy meaningfully."

"However, no individual person can claim the right to live here (in the urban White area) permanently. He is here exclusively on account of his labour and not in a permanent context which can give him access to rights which the Whites can have in labour, economic, political and other fields this is not discrimination, but differentiation between people of unequal status." - J. P. van Onselen, Secretary of Bantu Administration and Development, September, 1971.

Apartheid is the Whites' method of solving a dual problem: the desire to harness Blacks to the economic machine, while at the same time ensuring the continuance of white domination. Thus, they seek both to draw the Black majority into their industrial society and to shut it out. There is only one way this can be done - by stripping Blacks of their political rights, their power to organise, their ability to build their own bargaining strength.

This is the real meaning of apartheid - it is a whole system employed by a white minority to perpetuate its position of absolute power. It aims not at ending the interaction between Black and white, but at controlling the terms of that interaction for white benefit.

It is essential to stress that the conflict is not one of colour. It is one of how to live in peace and harmony. As long as there is the exploitation of one man by another there can be no harmony. The exploitative system is therefore the conflict and neither apartheid nor the expulsion of the whites can be the solution. Apartheid can only be a stop-gap measure, and in all fairness, even its most radical exponents regard it as such. They say they employ it to minimise race conflict, and not to end exploitation of one man by another. To suggest that colour is the cause and source of conflict is a blatant deception: It is only used cunningly to give that impression, and to blind people to the situation of class exploitation. As Kuper points out:

"Economic interests accentuate the racial divisions and reinforce the denial of a common humanity. Racial separation is not an end in itself, but a means for conserving and promoting racial privilege. Specific laws such as the Group Areas Act, and the reservation of certain types of employment for a particular racial group function to enrich the white man, while the whole structure of the apartheid laws serves to maintain his dominant position, both economically and politically." (16)

(a) Black Consciousness is not False Consciousness.

The dimension of race is, however, not one which can be ignored, because to be born white in South Africa is to be born into a position of power and privilege, while to be born Black is to be born into a situation of dispossession, disenfranchisement and deprivation, and to be subjected to all the discrimination and humiliation which are concomitant with apartheid. As one Black leader said, "South Africa is the land of milk and honey - if

you are white. For Blacks it is a land of bees' wax and cow dung." In comparison with the Africans the "Coloured" and Indian groups enjoy certain residential, occupational and commercial advantages but politically they are equally powerless and are exploited economically. Their hopes of eventual absorption into the white power structure have been dashed to pieces, as is evidenced by the whittling away of the meagre political rights once enjoyed by the Coloureds and the rejection by the Pretoria regime of the recommendations of the Erika Theron Commission of Enquiry into matters relating to the position of the Coloureds. The Commission recommended, inter alia, that Coloureds be granted direct representation in the Central parliament, that the Immorality Act which prohibits marriage and sexual intercourse between Black and white should be repealed insofar as the Coloureds are concerned, and that the Coloureds be admitted to "open" (white) universities. These recommendations were rejected in no uncertain terms by the Vorster regime. The idea that the Indians are an unassimilable group which should be repatriated to India has been abandoned, largely due to the refusal of the Indian Government to connive at the scheme, as also the opposition of Indians in South Africa themselves. But any suggestion that the Indians should be given any meaningful role in the body politic has been firmly rejected. Coloured and Indian youth reject apartheid and its institutions, and in recent years, particularly at the universities have shown where their loyalties lie. But there is evidence that there is an increasing alignment by the elder generation of Coloureds and Indians with the Africans as well. During the strikes that rocked the country in 1973 and 1974 Indian workers supported African workers, particularly in Durban and environs. During the 1976 uprising Coloureds in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape demonstrated that they see their

destiny as being inter-twined with that of the Africans.

While in the early years of the liberation struggle the Indians and Coloureds supported the Africans, in recent years the solidarity between the three groups has increased in depth and meaning. There are two possible reasons for this; first, the rigid enforcement and intensification of apartheid has underscored the fact that all three groups share a common oppression, and secondly, the fact that the present generation of Coloureds and Indians have grown up only under the system of apartheid, and known whites simply as oppressors.

Despite the long history of white settlement, social intercourse between Black and white is almost non-existent. A corrugated iron-curtain has been erected, legal prohibitions reinforcing social tradition. There is no real communication between Black and white outside a master-servant relationship.

While Blacks and whites are integrated into a modern industrial society, there is no single working class. (White workers) see themselves not in relation to the means of production, but in relation to Black workers, and the whole workers' movement has been poisoned by hostility. Witness for instance the opposition of white workers to any moves towards a repeal or relaxation of job colour bars or job reservation which restrict certain categories of skilled work for whites only. White workers are in such a privileged and pampered position as to make their class position almost irrelevant. Through their functions of supervision and control of the (Black) working class, white workers receive a share of the surplus value created by Blacks together with very strong interests in capitalism. Many capitalist countries have such classes with contradictory interests but whereas in other countries

this class is unreliable both from capital's and labour's point of view, in South Africa capital can rely on it. This is because it cannot be proletarianised in South African capitalism, whereas in times of crisis it is proletarianised in other countries.

The reactionary role of white workers is aptly described by Williams:

"Over the years there has been a growing tendency for white workers to move into job categories related more to the realisation and administration of surplus-value than to its actual production And even those white workers who are engaged in the direct process of production are not entirely divorced from supervisory work; there is hardly a white worker on the shop floor who does not keep a vigilant eye on Black workers for his capitalist mentors. Marx rightly called such workers the industrial non-commissioned officers of capitalism and explained that the need for this special class of workers - these sergeant majors who lord it over the proletariat with their swagger-sticks - arises from the antagonistic character of capitalist production. In South Africa the task of carrying out this necessary function for the capitalists has increasingly been assigned to the white workers, a task which has not entirely displeased them." (17)

It must be emphasized that within the white community there are many individuals without any means of production and whose basis for survival is the sale of their labour power to the capitalist class. But historically the white "aristocracy of labour" has attitudes, interests and consciousness at variance or in conflict with those of the Black workers whose political, social and economic status in South Africa are primarily defined and dictated by the colonial nature of the status quo: for the foreseeable future their political loyalties lie with the capitalist class.

Turok writes:

"The white workers in South Africa certainly do have class interests to defend against their employers as their history shows, but in so far as they seek to differentiate themselves structurally from African workers it could be argued that they behave as part of a colonial-type ruling minority, using a range of political, ideological and economic levers to maintain their privileges."

While many whites may not in fact be aware of Black deprivation (since it is possible for a white person in South Africa to spend an entire life-time there without ever entering a Black living area, let alone a Black home) very few Blacks are unaware of white affluence and opulence. Blacks outnumber whites in the so-called white areas by about two to one; almost every white family has one, two or more Black servants. Blacks are surrounded by luxury from a share of which they have been excluded, and there is an acute awareness among Blacks of their deprivation. In another context Turok has pointed out that integration into the modern industrial society has created among Blacks a desire for the fruits of that system, but it has also generated a deep bitterness against whites "for depriving them of the unfettered use of even those products that come their way." (19)

As the Survey "Quotso", conducted in Soweto in 1974 by Quadrant International, S.A., subsidiary of an international advertising group, on behalf of 29 major manufacturing companies in the country, showed: "The major complaint (among those questioned who were frustrated and unhappy with the present situation) is that Blacks are not given their fair share, either politically or economically. "Whites treat Blacks as inferior human beings, hamper their progress, and keep them on as low a level as possible". The survey found that depending on the mentality of the individual, this leads to apathy, frustration, resentment or even open hatred.

(b) Race or Class: Significance for the Struggle.

One of the most intractable problems in South African writing centres around the issues of race and class, which has given rise to two approaches

to South African history - a liberal approach and a class approach. O'Meara describes the distinction between the two approaches:

"Firstly, liberal analysis focuses primarily on race and explains the existing system of discrimination in terms of the racial ideology of a specific group of whites - the Afrikaners. Secondly a smaller school argues that the system can only be fully comprehended if analysis is situated within the broad set of economic interests underlying the present structure, i.e., class analysis." (20)

He goes on to describe the characteristics of the liberal approach:

"The cornerstone of liberal analysis of South Africa is a distinction between "political" and "economic" subsystems as discrete, independent units. In Horwitz's phrase, racial oppression is a 'political factor' whose 'increasingly monolithic character justifies its description as an ideology.' This political factor 'became the determining agency of interaction and major theme in the country's economic history.' The key independent variable is thus the racial ideology of the state (the political factor) itself outside of, but productive of distortions within an otherwise rational colour-blind capitalist economy." (21)

Writers like Johnstone, Legassick and Wolpe have pleaded for class analysis and a move away from race domination in analyses of South African society. As Collins observes:

"Wolpe and others maintain that the real contradiction is not simply between white racists and the Black oppressed. The 1970 contradiction is between white capitalists and Black proletariat." (22)

Wolpe argues that the history of South Africa is better analysed in terms of a coercive labour-repressive form of economy:

"Since the establishment of the Union of South Africa (to go back no further) the State has been utilised at all times to serve and develop the capitalist mode of production. Viewed from this standpoint, racist ideology and policy and the state now only appear as the means for the reproduction of segregation and racial discrimination generally, but also as what they really are, the means for the reproduction of a particular mode of production." (23)

While recognising the economic and class exploitation in South Africa, it is submitted that the structural features of the system in which race assumes a cardinal importance cannot be ... ed as some dogmatic "class only" theorists would have it. Race and class coincide: racialism is the form that national oppression takes. Conflict must out of necessity work itself out along racial lines because of the racially structured system. This is well argued by Ben Turok in his brilliant critical analysis:

"It must be recognised that there is a deep and peculiar significance in the lot of Black workers. Indeed Blacks are exploited in a three-fold manner - on the basis of race, as workers and as people. In the South African case, therefore, the national question must be central both in our analysis and in the realm of praxis:...."

"Many socialists fear that emphasising the national aspect of the struggle will somehow admit a Black bourgeois solution or that the struggle will become so contaminated with racism that it will lose its direction, leading only to a race war. It cannot be denied that these dangers exist Here we are looking at the formation of Black consciousness, in particular among Black workers.

"Since most Africans and most Blacks are proletarians, and since almost all employers are white, conflict over wages, general conditions of work, as well as overt political activity takes on a colour aspect. That the African proletariat, being the most exploited and oppressed of all, should play the most prominent role in this struggle ought to be clear from the preceding argument. But their role will be played out in national (race) rather than in class terms since this is how the contradictions manifest themselves.

"But even outside the framework of industrial relations, Black and white earnings and prospects, and therefore loyalties, are wholly different. Black petty traders, professionals, businessmen and civil servants, are all clearly marked out by the stamp of colour which acts with rigorous consistency in determining the place of people in the system. The polarity of race ensures that the difference of income and status within the Black communities themselves tends to become diminished within a broader solidarity embracing a wider range of strata.

"Just as a clear conception of common interest has grown among whites who think only of defending their privileges, so there emerges a counter solidarity among Blacks, and both tendencies seem to lessen the foundation of class consciousness within the respective communities. For the Black proletariat there can be no thought of liberation without an alliance of Black people of the major strata. The abolition of the colour bar and of white privilege can only be achieved by an alliance of the Black disenfranchised directed at the destruction of the white state apparatus. But recognition of this imperative grew only slowly in the South African liberation movement and decades of appeals and protests had to work themselves out before the leap from reformism to revolution could be made consciously, deliberately and publicly." (24)

An examination of the particulars of Black consciousness would show that it reflects the reality of the total society and the situation of the oppressed Black majority within that society.

(c) Definition of Black Consciousness

SASO's definition of the Black Consciousness philosophy seems to be the working basis for all Black efforts in the country. This definition is contained in the SASO Policy Manifesto adopted at their 2nd General Students' Council in July 1971, which is here reproduced in part:

"SASO believes that:

3. (a) South Africa is a country in which both Black and white live and shall continue to live together;
- (b) that the white man must be made aware that one is either part of the solution or part of the problem;
- (c) that, in this context, because of the privileges accorded to them by legislation and because of their continual maintenance of an oppressive regime, whites have defined themselves as part of the problem;
- (d) that, therefore, we believe that in all matters relating to the struggle towards realising our aspirations, whites must be excluded;
- (e) that this attitude must not be interpreted by Blacks to imply "anti-whitism" but merely a more positive way of attaining a normal situation in South Africa;

- (f) that on pursuit of this direction, therefore, personal contact with whites, though it should not be legislated against, must be discouraged, especially where it tends to militate against the beliefs we hold dear.
4. (a) SASO upholds the concept of Black Consciousness and the drive towards Black awareness as the most logical and significant means of ridding ourselves of the shackles that bind us to perpetual servitude.
- (b) SASO defines Black Consciousness as follows:
- (i) Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind, a way of life;
 - (ii) The basic tenet of Black Consciousness is that the Black man must reject all value systems that seek to make him a foreigner in the land of his birth and reduce his basic human dignity;
 - (iii) The Black man must build up his own value systems, see himself as self-defined and not defined by others;
 - (iv) The concept of Black Consciousness implies the awareness by the Black people of the power they wield as a group;
 - (v) Black Consciousness will always be enhanced by the totality of involvement of the oppressed people, hence the message of Black Consciousness has to be spread to reach all sections of the Black community.
- (c) SASO accepts the premises that before the Black people should join the open society, they should first close their ranks, to form themselves into a solid group to oppose the definite racism that is meted out by white society, to work out their direction clearly and bargain from a position of strength. SASO believes that a truly open society can only be achieved by Blacks.
5. SASO believes that the concept of integration cannot be realised in an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust. Integration does not mean assimilation of Blacks into an already established set of norms drawn up and motivated by white society. Integration implies free participation by individuals in a given society and proportionate contribution to the joint culture of the society by all constituent groups. Following this definition, therefore, SASO believes that integration does not need to be enforced or worked for. Integration follows automatically when the doors to prejudice are closed through the attainment of a just and free society.
6. SASO believes that all groups allegedly working for "integration" in South Africa ... and here we note in particular the Progressive Party and other liberal institutions ... are not working for the kind of integration which would be acceptable to the Black man. Their attempts are directed merely at relaxing certain oppressive legislations and to allow Blacks into a white-type society.

7. SASO, while upholding these beliefs, nevertheless wishes to state that Black Consciousness should not be associated with any particular party or slogan.

(d) Black Consciousness not Racism

Black Consciousness is not the denial of a common humanity or of a common society. That is an important fact to note in answering the charge that like Afrikaner nationalism, the Black Consciousness Movement is racist. It is not, and the differences are these:

- (i) The Afrikaners are committed to separation as a principle. Blacks are forced to accept separation as a legal fact.
- (ii) Whites are committed to separation as a permanent goal; Blacks have decided on separation as a means to an end.
- (iii) Whites have chosen white freely and by choice as a criterion whereby others are defined negatively; Blacks are forced to accept blackness as a legal fact.

An illuminating examination of the concepts of "integration" and "separation" was made by Ben Khoapa, the banned Director of Black Community Programmes during an address at the University of Cape Town:

"Very often it is assumed that if a person is not an "integrationist" in South Africa he is therefore a "separatist", and that because an increasing number of Black people are rejecting "integration" as a national goal, they are therefore "separatist", that is, they make the permanent separation of races a national goal. This is nonsense. The Black people who have been accused of being "separatists" are in fact not "separatists" but liberationists. Central to both separation and integration is the white man. Blacks must either move towards or away from him. But his presence is not nearly so crucial for those who pursue a course of "liberation". Ideally they do whatever they conceive they must do as if whites did not exist at all. At the very least the minds of the "new Black" are liberated from the patterns programmed there by a society built on the alleged aesthetic, moral and intellectual superiority of the white man.

Liberationists contend that integration is irrelevant to people who are powerless. For them the equitable distribution of decision-making power is far more important than physical proximity to white people.

This means complete emancipation of Blacks from white oppression by whatever means Blacks deem necessary, including, when expedient, integration or separation. What the new Black man is talking about is liberation by all means necessary and this does not depend on whether Blacks should integrate or separate. The fundamental issue is not separation or integration. The either/or question does not therefore talk to the point that the new Black is making. We will use the word re-groupment to refer to that necessary process of development every oppressed group must travel en route to emancipation." (25)

Moreover, Blacks have for so long been the object of white racism that they have no desire to reverse the tables. The Black renaissance Convention held at Hammanskraal in December, 1974 was attended by 300 delegates ranging from apolitical priests to radical youth, and was the most representative conference to be held in South Africa for a long time. The convention paid tribute to all those who had taken part in the struggle by acknowledging "that is not the first to convene a meeting of Black people and states firmly that it wishes to continue in the efforts that have taken place in the past". The delegates then made the following Declaration:

"We the Black people of South Africa ... declare that:

- (i) We condemn and so reject the policy of separate development and all its institutions;
- (ii) We reject all forms of racism and discrimination.

We dedicate ourselves towards striving for:

- (i) A totally united and democratic South Africa, free from all forms of oppression and exploitation;
- (ii) A society in which all people participate fully in the government of the country through the medium of one man, one vote;
- (iii) A society in which there will be an equitable distribution of wealth;
- (iv) An anti-racist society.

In recognising the history of white settlement, Black consciousness is compatible with the liberal and Africanist strands of Black political awareness. Both the liberal and Africanist ideologies accepted the fact of white participation in the total society, although the Africanist ideology made such participation conditional upon acceptance of rule by the majority.

In rejecting contact or political cooperation with whites, Black consciousness echoed the stance of the Africanists. But whereas Africanism stressed the need for African unity and envisaged cooperation with the oppressed national minorities, only after the achievement of such unity, Black Consciousness from the outset emphasized the need for and strove to achieve unity among the oppressed. For this reason the term Blacks was defined as all those persons who by law or tradition are discriminated against socially, politically and economically and who struggle as a unit in their aspirations towards a just society. Moreover, Black Consciousness demonstrated that Black unity is an achievable goal.

Ideologically Black Consciousness is closer to the P.A.C. than to the A.N.C. The Black Consciousness Movement rejected the multi-racialism of the A.N.C. position on the land question, particularly as formulated in the Freedom Charter. At the fourth annual conference in Hammanskraal in 1973 SASO stated positively that South Africa is not a multi-racial country but a Black country belonging to the Black people alone and whites would live in the country on conditions laid down by the Blacks. Addressing himself to this question the late Onkgopotse Tiro said:

"This should not be construed as anti-white. It only means that in as much as Black people live in Europe on terms laid down by whites, whites should be subjected to the same conditions."

This formulation by the Black Consciousness Movement, like the P.A.C. position

on the land question, accords with the Black Republic Thesis put forward by the Executive Committee of the Communist International in 1928. In calling for the adoption of the slogan of an independent Black republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' republic with full equal rights for all races, the Executive Committee stated:

"South Africa is a Black country, the majority of its population is Black and so is the majority of workers and peasants. The bulk of the South African population is the Black peasantry, whose land has been expropriated by the white minority. Seven-eighths of the land is owned by the whites. Hence the national question which is based upon the agrarian question, lies at the foundation of the revolution in South Africa. The Black peasantry constitutes the basic moving force of the revolution in alliance with and under the leadership of the working class."

In calling for Black self-reliance the Black Consciousness Movement was echoing a call made by the P.A.C. Similarly, whereas P.A.C. launched its status campaign with the avowed aim of ridding Blacks of their feelings of inferiority and to exorcise their slave mentality, the Black Consciousness Movement spoke of the need to free Blacks from psychological oppression. The Black Consciousness Movement went further than the P.A.C., however, and actually succeeded in giving to Blacks pride and dignity. Black Consciousness has been a philosophy of national pride and assertiveness contributing to the psychological liberation of the oppressed masses. The success achieved by the Black Consciousness Movement in this regard can be attributed to the fact that unlike the P.A.C. the B.C.M. had an overt legal existence of almost a decade during which time considerable politicisation and conscientisation were successfully accomplished.

In the tribute to Sobukwe the commentator observed:

"It must have been gratifying for Sobukwe to observe the rapid spread of the Black Consciousness Movement and its culmination in the Black uprising of 1976, for the Movement represented a flowering of the strategy pursued with so little success by the Africanists and the P.A.C. a decade and a half earlier. Indeed, some of the founders of the Black Consciousness Movement had first entered politics via the student ranks of the P.A.C. around the time of Sharpeville." (26)

To what extent the Black Consciousness Movement was influenced by these ideologies, whether it is tailored to the needs of people, are questions which require further research. Within the confines of this evaluation a limited answer can be given by asking a third question, namely whether the Black Consciousness Movement marked further progression in Black political awareness. Here the answer must be in the affirmative. Collins uses the Paulo Freire model of conscientisation to isolate three stages in awareness as criteria. (27) The first is the ability to identify the items of oppression and the oppressed; the second, to perceive correlations in the state of oppression and the third, the ability to totalise. By use of these criteria Collins has demonstrated a progression in Black awareness from the ANC Bill of Rights to the CYL Basic Policy to the Freedom Charter. In the same way it can be demonstrated that the later formulations of SASO and the 30-point programme formulated by the Black People's Convention (BPC) in 1976 mark further progression in Black awareness. These latter formulations recognise the need for a radical restructuring of society, for an equitable redistribution of wealth which could only be achieved through socialism. By 1976 there had emerged a sharper class analysis in the writings of the Black Consciousness Movement, and in his address to the 8th General Students' Council the President of SASO called for such class analysis;

"...The need is therefore to look at our struggle not only in terms of colour interests but also in terms of class interest, skin colour has in fact become a class criterion in South Africa It Black Consciousness must survive as a viable philosophy and continue to articulate the aspirations of the masses of the people, it must start interpreting our situation from an economic class point of view."

As Collins points out:

"The historical evidence in South Africa suggests the greater accuracy of the third position, namely that the role of the oppressors is better explained in terms of economic rather than of racial factors. Liberals have collaborated economically with Afrikaner political power exercised against the Black people since the beginning of South African colonial history. It should be pointed out, however, that economic interests by no means exclude racial factors; on the contrary, race is frequently used as a rationalisation for economic privilege."

There is evidence that in the latter part of its legal existence the Black Consciousness Movement was grappling with the race/class analysis. This is evidenced for instance in the formulation of its programme by the BPC which, although couched in such terms as "communalism", clearly envisages a system of socialism. As Nami Zanj, publicity secretary of BPC outlined:

"The economic system will not countenance exploitation The practice whereby the wealth of the country is locked in the hands of a greedy though enterprising minority will receive attention.

The days of unbridled capitalism are numbered throughout the world. Azania will be no exception.

There will be a redistribution of wealth. This implies that those who have been living at an artificially high standard because of their privileges must be prepared to suffer setbacks in the interests of the national good." (28)

The call by white businessmen, industrialists and even government spokesmen for the creation of a Black middle class was provoked in part by the realisation that Blacks were increasingly equating racism with capitalism.

Opening the Institute of Race Relations Conference in Durban in January 1977 Dr. C. van der Pol, group managing director of Huletts, said Blacks rejected the free enterprise system because they believed it was only for the rich, only for the whites. (29) He said Blacks would use political freedom to promote the Marxist system, which was preoccupied with the distribution, not the creation of wealth:

"Black townships are full of people prepared to use violence and revolution to destroy a system in which there appears to be no place for them."

"Blacks in Kwa Mashu and Soweto are right: the free enterprise system is only for the whites in this country."

At the outset the Black Consciousness Movement emphasised the racial, political and educational reasons for oppression, but by 1976 the argument suggested the economic reasons for oppression being paramount. Collins sees the economic (class) analysis as the radical viewpoint and argues that the superiority of the radical view becomes evident in the more totalised vision of society as incorporated in the different views:

"The liberal view advocates, for example, equality of opportunity, but without suggesting how this can be accomplished in a society where gross economic inequalities exist. On the political level, the liberal (view) suggests the vote as a means of political participation ..."

The Black Consciousness Movement, particularly the programme formulated by the Black Peoples' Convention, suggests the establishment of democratic organs of government at all levels. Further examples of increased totalisation could be taken from all spheres in the BPC programme such as the need for equalisation of land ownership and for collective bargaining for Black workers.

But perhaps the greatest demonstration of the reality of the consciousness of oppression is shown in the attitude of the Black Consciousness Movement to the possibilities of change of the state of oppression.

"This is where perception and action meet. This is also where a totalised view can be tested against reality in terms of effectiveness (weighing up means in relation to ends)"

says Collins. (30) [The majority of Blacks do not see liberation in terms of entry into a common multi-racial society, neither can Black demands be achieved through constitutional means. Confrontation is the only means to achieve Black demands, a fact recognised by most Blacks. To the Black Consciousness Movement (confrontation) was considered a more meaningful component of action than discussion and negotiation. The strength of the Black Consciousness Movement has been seen on the action dimension:

"It uses very visible symbols, as for example, blackness to identify the position of the Blacks and move them powerfully forward with action. (Black Consciousness) enables people to move rapidly from the perceptual into the action dimension. It's strength in a polarised situation where confrontational action is needed is evident." (31)

CONCLUSION

An attempt has here been made to demonstrate that Black Consciousness as it emerged in the late 1960's with the birth of the South African Students' Organization (SASO) arose as a result of the needs and preoccupation of the Black people. When viewed in the light of the reality of the South African society, where there is a high degree of polarisation between Black and white, the particulars of the Black Consciousness Movement reflect

the realities of the situation of the oppressed masses. That Black Consciousness was tailored to the needs of the oppressed could be seen in its success, particularly at the level of action: not only did it give pride and dignity to Blacks but moved them forward in action. The popular uprisings which began in June 1976 testify to the fact that Black Consciousness has been one of the most important developments to emanate from the Black community for a long time. While the success of armed liberation movements in Mozambique and Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe served to boost the morale of Blacks in South Africa, and while the intensification of repression in recent years has had the effect of increasing resistance, all of which contributed to the mood of militancy, the crucial variable has been the change in Blacks' perception of themselves and their situation. What Blacks demonstrated was their rejection of things which they appeared meekly to accept for so long -- paternalism, lack of consultation, treatment as undifferentiated units of labour, etc. Black Consciousness became a powerful vehicle for the struggle against white oppression. The phenomenal response of the Black community evidenced in part by the emergence of numerous organizations showed the change in attitude among Blacks -- away from an acceptance of white trusteeship and guidance, and in the direction of self-help and self-reliance.

But the Black Consciousness Movement as a manifestation of Black political thought has to be viewed within an historical perspective to show to what extent it represented anything new, and how it compares with earlier initiatives. In this respect it has been suggested that on the level of ideology the Black Consciousness Movement has more in common with the Africanism of the P.A.C. than the liberalism of the A.N.C. Carter contends that

"In some ways they (the Black Consciousness Movement) were echoing the Africanism of the Pan Africanist Congress, but with the longer aim of uniting Blacks as a whole, all of whom shared a common experience of oppression." (32)

In this regard, the Black Consciousness Movement not only provided a social basis for unity but actually achieved unity among Africans, Coloureds and Indians.

To a large extent the national uprisings which began in Soweto in June 1976 represented a culmination of the work of the Black Consciousness Movement. The uprisings are, however, part of the pattern of resistance to national oppression. The student strikes, strikes by Black workers, all form part of this pattern and together with the national uprisings demonstrate a remarkable degree of organization as well as a realisation by Blacks of the power they wield as a group. More importantly they demonstrate an awareness by Blacks that liberation is an achievable goal and that it would have to be achieved by confrontation.

As an inevitable reaction to national oppression the Black Consciousness Movement had played an important role in the reconstruction after Sharpeville. By 1976 the brutal campaign of repression mounted against the Black Movements had failed to achieve the desired result. Instead the national mood was one of defiance and combativeness. The fear which had so immobilised Blacks in the post-Sharpeville era had been superseded by assertiveness. Moreover, there was a significantly high level of politicisation and conscientisation to which the Black Consciousness Movement had contributed in no small measure. All these aspects would be highlighted during the Soweto and subsequent uprisings.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Karis, T. and Carter, G.: From Protest to Challenge Documents of African Politics in South Africa, 1882 - 1964, Vol. 2, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, California, 1973, p. 80.
- (2) Collins, C. B.: Race and Class in South Africa: A Comparative Examination of Black Political Movements in the Republic of South Africa, 1943 - 1955, (unpublished) Jan. 1977.
I am indebted to Colin Collins for making this valuable paper available to me.
- (3) Karis and Carter, supra., p. 77.
- (4) Karis and Carter, supra., p. 78.
- (5) Wolpe, H., Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power, From Segregation to Apartheid, Economy and Society Vol. 1, No. 4. p. 425
- (6) Walshe, P., African Nationalism: The African National Congress, 1912 - 1952, C. Hurst, London, 1970, pp. 358 - 359.
- (7) Collins, supra. p. 27.
- (8) "Tribute to Sobukwe," The Weekly Review 6 March 1978.
- (9) Ibid.
- (10) Ibid.
- (11) Ngubane, J. K., "An African Explains Apartheid" Praeger, New York, 1963, p. 102.
- (12) "Black Revolutionary Nationalism and the Struggle in South Africa", IKWEZI, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 1975, p. 16.
- (13) O'Meara, Class and Nationalism, unpublished M.A. Thesis, Sussex University 1975, p. 66.
- (14) Khopung E. Apartheid: The Story of a Dispossessed People, Sharpeville Day Association, Mbizana, 1972, p. 62.
- (15) Ngubane, J.K., supra, p. 164.
- (16) Kuper, L.: An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class and Politics in South Africa, p. 34. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965).
- (17) Williams, M., "An Analysis of South African Capitalism - New Ricardianism or Marxism?" in Bulletin of Conference of Socialist Economists, February 1975, p. 13.

- (18) Turok, B., Inequality of Nations: The South Africa Case, published by The Open University, London, 1975, p. 71.
- (19) Turok, B., Strategic Problems in South Africa's Liberation Struggle: A Critical Analysis (LSM Information Centre, Canada, 1974) p. 11. The author makes the important point that a distinction between race and race attitudes in any analysis of South Africa will show that Black Consciousness is a reality, and is a matter of structure.
- (20) O'Meara, D., Class and Nationalism (unpublished M.A. Thesis, Sussex University, 1973), p. iv.
- (21) Ibid., p. v.
- (22) Collins, C.B., Race and Class in South Africa: A Comparative Examination of Black Political Movements in the Period 1943 - 1955, p.4.
- (23) Wolpe, H., "Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid" Economy and Society, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 426.
- (24) Turok, supra. pp. 12-13.
- (25) Khoapa, B., "The New Black," This address was delivered before his banning under the Suppression of Communism Act in 1973.
- (26) "Tribute to Sobukwe ", The Weekly Review, 6 March 1978.
- (27) Collins, C. B.: "Black Consciousness in South Africa: A Case Study", p. 15.
- (28) Week-end World, 12 June 1977.
- (29) Rand Daily Mail, 12 January 1977.
- (30) Collins, supra. p. 16.
- (31) Ibid. p. 17.
- (32) Gwendolyn M. Carter and Patrick O'Meara, (eds.) Southern Africa in Crisis, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1977, p. 126.