

GOING TO THE VIDEO FESTIVAL

VIDEO IS INCREASINGLY BECOMING A VERY IMPORTANT AUDIO-VISUAL AID OF COMMUNICATION: THIS ARTICLE DEALS WITH A VIDEO FESTIVAL OF THE ANC THAT WAS HELD IN LUSAKA TOWARDS THE END OF LAST YEAR WHERE THE FERMENT CURRENTLY TAKING PLACE INSIDE SOUTH AFRICA WAS ON EXHIBIT.

"WHAT have you done for the people of Africa?" Pik Botha, the racist Minister of Foreign Affairs asks, the cigarette nearly dropping from fingers which certainly itch to throttle the neck of the BBC interviewer. "What do you know about the struggle of African people?" he glowers, his face technicolour red. "Look at your Ghana!" Pik Botha roars. "What gives you the right to be intellectually dishonest?" He rants and raves, bullying; his shameful performance bespeaks the confusion that rages in the minds of people who have held onto power for such a long time, people who are sparring with shadows now it is increasingly clear that power is slowly but irrevocably being wrested away.

It was not in London or — more bizarre still — in South Africa that we watched the video which had been made inside the country by the BBC: *To The Last Drop of Blood*. It was in Lusaka, on a balmy Sunday afternoon. And the date was December 16.

Some of us had been away from South Africa for more than two decades; most had left the country after the convulsions that had gripped the urban areas of South Africa in June 1976. Others had just returned from inside the belly of the beast two weeks before; intrepid fighters would be launching an attack, assault rifles in hand, before the night of the following day.

December 16 had once been called Dingaan's Day, a long hour of gloating by the sons and daughters of the Voortrekkers who had won a battle against Dingaan's armies at eNcome, the river that turned red with blood. Our blood. But then something must have rankled in the collective sensibility of the rulers of the land: *Are the kaffirs celebrating this day, mouthing the phrase with tongue in cheek. Are they with us or are they planning something?* (Interestingly enough, very few racists are asking this question as the phrase *a luta continua* increasingly becomes the parlance of the hour). So what seemed to upset the computers of the racist word-people had to be excised from our national consciousness. Thus the birth of the Day of the Covenant, something inane that has nothing to do with blood, gore and gristle. They could just as well as named it the Day of the Turkey. Beleaguered and fighting people of South Africa know December 16 to be Heroes Day, the hour of the gladiator. The racists and their "defence" force of death have their Neros, but on countless occasions our guerrillas — with unprecedented mass upsurges inside the country — have reduced the predatory lions to the level of stuck pigs.

This day begins for us with multitudes treading on mud under a driving rain. A roll call is made of all the comrades, young and old, who have passed away. This is a yearly tradition of the African National Congress. Moving from grave to grave, the concourse hears the names of the dead. Drenched flowers and nameless shrubs garland the graves of soldiers lying still, listening in silence to the roaring shower from above.

DIPLOMATIC CORPS

In the evening of the day, ANC and SWAPO comrades, Zambian people — our hosts — and the members of the diplomatic corps get together in the hall to watch videos that comment on the struggle of the people of South Africa. What no-one knows is that members of the Department of Arts and Culture together with SWAPO technicians are really sweating it out trying to kill the voice of Dennis Luwewe as he comments on Zambian TV on a soccer match between a local team and visitors from some other African state. It is a trying time, really: at the trial run of the videos, we were surprised to see the image and sub-headings on the monitor accompanied by this discombobulating voice from the ZTV studios. One technician almost had a heart attack when he realised that he had brought a wrong feeder cord. While Sindiso Mfenyana who is chairing the whole festival greets the audience, we are praying that the monitor, at least, doesn't let us down. He introduces the people who would be making brief remarks on the importance of the day, on the video festival — of the need for information to be perpetually at the fingertips of all the cadres of the movement.

Olley Maruma arrived from the airport two or three days before the festival started. When we saw him sitting with his bags in the front office of the department, looking at the posters on the wall, I suddenly remembered that we had sent an invitation to the film-makers of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture. Olley came in at a time when we were having problems with transport. There was even talk at that time that we could use a 26 seater Coaster, that would have been truly side-splittingly funny for three cultural organisers zooming through the streets of Lusaka in the people's bus; subsequently, we were loaned a small kombi by the Regional Political Committee (yellow in colour, but certainly didn't need anyone with a yellow flag on the back because something was wrong with the brakes, and Comrade Patrick had to honk the horn or four times before the vehicle would start).

was made even more hair-raising by the fact that we had just stumbled into the famous Zambian rainy season and this country, perhaps third behind Cairo and Lagos, has some drivers who believe that stop streets, intersections and traffic lights are minor inconveniences that should be ignored at best.

bought for our video festival a film *Mbuya Nehanda* which dramatised the beginnings of the Chimurenga wars in Zimbabwe long before the country was given its new name. Unarguably a craftsman of great skill, Olley gave us fresh insights into the cultural life in his country and, together, we dreamt and planned further co-operations on cultural projects.



Olley came in as a representative and Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Film Association and as an official emissary of the Zimbabwe Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture. Some of us had met him at the Regional Film Workshop that had taken place in Harare in August to September 1984. He

We had him ensconced in one of the more well-known motels on the outskirts of the city where the man fought his own battles with bureaucracy that is the warp and woof of struggling establishments, razor-sharp salespeople peddling flesh and futile dreams, waiters and service people

who still cannot get over the fact that tipping has long been outlawed in this country. We were honoured to have Olley in our midst.

ANC/SWAPO COLLABORATION

You learn a lot about equipment when you involve yourself in the organisation of a video festival. You learn, also, not to trust the signs you see emblazoned on panel vans, awnings of shops in the city centre: most of all, you learn that there is a lot of legwork involved there, children. There are many shops that shout the promise of video hire, but you learn soon enough that they deal with *television* hire or video *cassette* hire. The practice of video cassette recorder hire died with the death of foreign exchange. We saw, for instance, how expensive video equipment is: K4 000 for the VCR. The monitors can be hired, but most of them are not that wide and would have resulted with a lot of the members of the audience suffering from perpetual eyestrain.

SWAPO has a very well-put-together video centre. After we had gone almost everywhere in search of equipment — one jester suggested that we launch an operation inside South Africa purely for video equipment — it took a telephone call from our Administrative Secretary to secure us equipment, technicians and the kind of warmth that one can only get from people who are seriously waging war against the apartheid colonialist regime.

On entering their video centre, you are struck by all this activity, people on the editing board, others dubbing from U-Matic or Betamax to VHS and thrice vice versa. Peter Nangolo expressionlessly tells you that the technicians are going to "make sure that you'll have everything you want before Sunday, December 16." Well. Aren't you afraid, we ask, that the everyday carting of sensitive equipment to and fro will result in it becoming defective? You ask a question like that because you've heard from some reputedly knowledgeable source that this is what happens. Peter merely looks at you, lights a cigarette and says nothing. You feel infinitely stupid. On the evening of the video festival, Peter makes a short impromptu speech — he has been caught by surprise by the Chairperson! — and he outlines the nature of ANC/SWAPO collaboration. The audience cheers because his speech is short: no-one wants to hear a long speech in a video festival; and because he puts his words together with the type of finesse that matches his consummate skill as director of the video centre. As he speaks, Vickie and Sammy, the SWAPO technicians are getting back to their seats after putting their paraphernalia together.

The posters on the walls speak of struggle. All the walls are full of posters, some come from the graphic arts unit of MEDU ARTS ENSEMBLE in Gaborone. Others are from all over the world: Lenin gives an avuncular smile as he salutes from a daguerrotype, the ubiquitous cap perched jauntily on his head; a young Nicaraguan soldier, what we would call a Babyface at home, reads the Spanish version of *What is to be Done?* beneath an inscription commemorating Karl Marx's centenary, *Seine Ideen eroben die Welt*; Vietnamese kids walking in Indian file on a pavement of a wide boulevard: they are all carrying flags with a yellow star in a field of red. Two spread-out

palm trees lean into the double blueness of the sea that merges with the sky, *Vietnam — glückliche Kinder im sozialistischem Land*; a smiling Dorothy Nyembe is hugged as she returns in triumph from fifteen years in prison. *Support Umkhonto We Sizwe!* There are many more. On the blackboard there are flags of the liberation of the people of South Africa: black, green and gold; there are the Namibian colours of liberation and the Zambian flag of national unity.

This unity is stressed by Comrade Thabo Mbeki, the Director of the ANC Department of Information and Publicity, as he proceeds to make the official opening remarks. Talking to the hushed audience, he emphasises the fact that the united resolve of the fighting people of South Africa has brought forth unprecedented returns. These are gains which people fighting for freedom cannot ignore. At this moment we hear the hum of the lazy Sunday afternoon traffic filtering into the hall. Comrade Thabo tells us that the fighting people inside the belly of the racist beast have gone very far in proving to the racists that they are no longer willing to be ruled in the old way. People — South African fighters are now ungovernable. The country was transformed into a burnt-out landscape when people went up in arms, no longer ready to countenance carnage helplessly, and fought against the farcical Constitutional Proposal "elections". Our fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers on the frontline made their NO so resoundingly loud that the racists saw it wise to send occupation armies into our townships. In the spring of our rage the regime found itself dealing with a season of fire as multitudes went forth and said NO to rents, to bus fare hikes. They said *no!* We are told here of a story of young people who were seen pursuing an armoured personnel carrier that had killed a woman. When asked what they were doing, these young men in such a hurry, said that they were going to "get that hippo!" A battle of stones, rage, petrol bombs and more rage against the racists bullets and tear-gas ensued. Some of the young warriors fell mortally wounded. We wonder what happens in the minds of the soldiers of death who were in that vehicle. What stories did they tell their loved ones at home after mowing down helpless people, children, the old and the infirm? Did they tell their wives about the unequalled bravery of the throwers of the rocks, the singers of the revolutionary songs who stood there and raised their fists as death whistled past at 1 000 kilometres an hour? Did they see that there was a qualitative change in the choice of weapons? that the people had organised themselves in such a way that mere regular police forces wouldn't be able to quell them? that the only thing they could do was call the fascist army, 7 000 strong? The occupation army came, set up barricades and check-points: they goose-stepped in their jackboots, swastikas tattooed on their forearms, marching past our houses to the beat of *Deutschland über Alles*, Hitler's soldiers of today. The people favoured them with the cold withering look of utter contempt. The people's song will not be stilled!

You hear this singing which becomes part of our consciousness as people go down the steps that lead to the street where a *kwela-kwela* stands in readiness to take trialists back to prison. A

woman leads them, waving her fist at the camera. It's just too much. During the funeral procession of Dr Neil Aggett, people are running and singing, the marchers in front holding aloft the black-green-gold flag of our liberation: it is a motley crowd, a splash of colour, encompassing all the colours of the South African racial spectrum. Camouflaged police are there, armed to the teeth. The people sing them dizzy. We all look at central Johannesburg, recognising certain parts which are now vehicles to our collective nostalgia, our anguish. At the SAAWU conference, workers sing songs that bring a palpable hush into the hall. The thought that turns like a turbine in our heads is, South Africa is our country, and we need to be in there to see to the freeing of the

land. Many videos were seen by a vast majority of our membership in Lusaka. Theatre plays which had been taped by various media showed us the contribution of the artists inside the country. In this field, we were able to measure the distances the people had taken — and we were pleased to find that the language we use is the same language of the people inside. There were some moments of laughter as we identified all the things that had made us at home: we saw pieces of ourselves in all the images, all the frames on the small screen.

We feel that we need many such festivals. With them, we end up knowing and understanding the nature of our revolution more. We end up having a deeper understanding of ourselves.



The National Cultural Ensemble, of the African National Congress, AMANDLA, in action. Recently returned from their sensation-creating showing at the KIZOMBA festival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, AMANDLA cu CULTURAL ENSEMBLE begin their 1985 season in Zambia. They continue to West Africa and then on to Moscow for the Youth Festival. After that, a trip to European countries seems on the cards.