

SPORT AND CULTURE

Zanele Mbeki



Moses Kotane — one of the precursors of democratic sport

While we have scored significant victories in the isolation of the racist regime within the framework of culture — and while various Artists Against Apartheid formations are burgeoning the world over — we have never seriously addressed ourselves to the field of sport. This is lamentable in that South Africans, black and white, are people that are known for their love and consumption of this cultural activity.

Within the national liberation movement we cannot avoid viewing the subject of sport and culture in comparative terms. Sport and physical culture have become arenas of intricate ideological rivalry for the simple reason that they exert some influence on social production, on human behaviour patterns and on sociological relationships. They play an important role in ideological education as a means of social integration and in the rational utilisation of free time. In addition, sport and physical culture are an important area of peaceful competition in a spirit of friendship among nations.

The ideological struggle is conducted in both the cultural justifications (theory) and in the practice of sport. The rivalry is not of East against West, but that of socialism versus capitalism.

On one hand there is the bourgeois approach where sport is most often seen as a concern only of the individual; a feature of life which is not connected to class and social values nor to economics and politics.

Bourgeois culture tends to counterpose work and play. It presents work as a compulsory occupation and sport as voluntary play, however a sort of play which has certain compensatory attributes such as that:

- It is *revitalising* after physical exhaustion and other debilitating effects of the modern workplace. Sport acts as an elixir which heals people from physical fatigue associated with the workplace.
- It enriches the mind (psyche) against the monotony and boredom of the work process.
- It re-establishes *personal identity* against the depersonalising and dehumanising effects of modern social production.
- It is *socially integrating* where contemporary life emphasises anonymity, bureaucracy and intellectualisation.
- It is an outlet for subconscious instincts where there are no opportunities for *expressing aggression* or satisfying animal instincts in a civilised way.
- Proponents say that for civilised man, sport is a 'great and necessary cleansing for aggressive instincts'. If these are prevented from finding an outlet, they manifest themselves in a destructive manner. Hence, in their view, sport plays a social role as a *safety valve* for people's aggressive tendencies.

This 'compensatory' stance fragments and separates sport from its social context and gives the illusion that sport is somehow autonomous and unaffected by our daily living conditions and

therefore can be a way of escaping from social realities or unresolved social problems. It suggests that people should become reconciled to their problems through sport. Through engagement in sport, people are expected to ameliorate the deleterious effects of capitalist production processes.

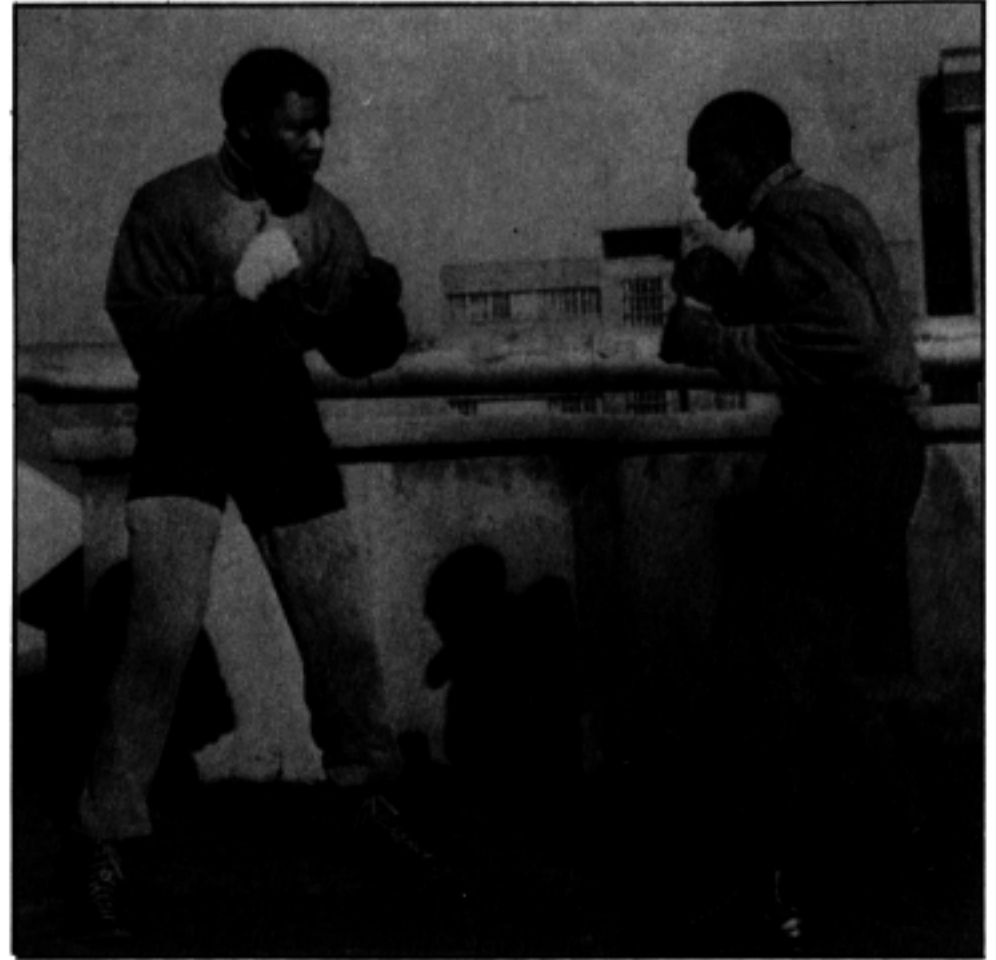
Other bourgeois cultural views are that sport and sporting spectacles have a *democratising influence* because sport improves social relations between classes and reinforces links between them. This process, it is said, encourages integrational forces which are important for maintaining the 'democratic way of life'. They argue that a person who is on the lowest rung of the economic and social ladder may take part in sport with equal benefit and satisfaction as those at the top. Similarly, 'sports grounds are equally hospitable to miners, politicians and bank presidents ...'

Hence, again, through sport, oppressed people are expected to take flight from their working conditions and escape from the everyday world of social and political struggle into a 'world of play' where they experience a sense of freedom and responsibility in fruitful communion between people of different backgrounds! This is where class peace and reconciliation are supposed to be achieved through the society of play.

This credo is belied by everyday life experiences in bourgeois culture because the vast majority of working people cannot pursue the sport of their choice. Public sporting facilities are limited and sports clubs maintain exclusivity by charging extortionate membership fees in addition to demanding countersigned testimonials vouchsafing 'civilised' conduct. Sports clubs, by definition, discriminate in regard to membership on grounds of race, sex, nationality, income, occupation and social background. This reinforces class distinctions. In any case, most sports involve expensive equipment and mandatory 'proper' attire — all of which make sport and sporting activities inaccessible to everyone who shows ability, inclination or interest.

There is today a whole new industry which exploits the sphere of leisure through advertising and marketing of sports merchandise. Sports amenities have become a profit-maximising industry. Entrepreneurs invest in exactly those sports which possess the greatest spectator appeal — the real money spinners — to the total neglect and detriment of active mass participation and recreation. Bourgeois culture also tries to use sport as a means of social control. For example, on the eve of World War II, the ruling classes in certain western countries used sport as a means of diverting world opinion from vital political issues and events. Today sport often performs the same function by nurturing violence, selfishness, base feelings and a 'get-rich-quick' mentality. Clearly, bourgeois culture — sports and physical culture included — cannot satisfy genuine popular demands. It cannot be used as an antidote for social inequalities nor can it fill the void of declining moral values. Sport and physical culture must afford the har-

'The white people of South Africa are steeped in the "Herrenvolk" philosophy of the "Master race". In a multi-racial society, such as we find in South Africa, this sort of philosophical outlook breeds certain



monious development of people and their participation in social life generally.

In a revolutionary culture the function of sport and physical culture assumes different dimensions. The practice of sport and physical culture are predicated on the fact that all time is divided into working and non-working time.

A vital factor for the use of non-working time in socialist society is the equal right for all working people to the use of free time, *based on their equal relationship to the means of production, on equality at work and on equal pay for work done.*

In his *Theories of Surplus Value, Part III*, Karl Marx wrote that free time is for the full all-round development of human beings. This is the time a worker utilises to recreate and regenerate his energies and has a retroactive effect on the productive force of work. *Free time may be seen as production of basic capital: man himself is this capital.* Marx stresses the fact that free time is 'real wealth, time which will not be absorbed in direct productive labour, but will be available for enjoyment, for leisure, thus giving scope for free activity and development'.

It is not the amount of free time available which is the source of human creativity. The decisive factor is the content of free time. Thus social control is necessary to stimulate precisely those activities which correspond to the individual's development.

It should be noted that the use of free time is by personal choice

undesirable and even dangerous pathological attitudes and reactions. It breeds the myth of racial supremacy. It breeds the complex of individual superiority.'

Nelson Mandela



and voluntary participation. Nonetheless, it is still dependent on society. The possibility for organising and filling free time reflects opportunities presented by society. For instance, where living standards fall below a certain level, people tend to use their free time for supplementary income. This limits the enriching developmental potential for the use of free time. Because of improved conditions at work and at home, most socialist societies today boast of increased sporting recreation for both men and women. But while among *men* time is spent on active recreation and physical culture is increasing on *workdays*, with *women* it is due to free time on *off days*. This shows that family status has a very large influence on the opportunities for engaging in sport, in that it is dependent on the amount of housework that has to be done. On workdays women are held up by housework while men engage in physical culture.

The main source of time for engaging in physical culture *should be sought in reducing housework* for women in particular, through rationalisation, mechanisation — where this is possible — and a *better arrangement of housework as well as greater family co-operation in tackling housework*.

Physical culture is a requirement for all-round social development at the societal, familial and individual level. Education is a prime factor in shaping people's awareness and attitudes to the benefits of sport and physical culture.

The main function is to satisfy the need of society for training of people for *participation in production*. With physical culture

an all-round and harmoniously developed person emerges; an individual whose abilities and talents are proportionately developed.

For the group, the family and the work team, it is beneficial where the success and harmony of *team actions depend on physical preparedness of each member separately*.

From the individual point of view, physical culture offers all-round development and sustains personal vitality at a high level. Other overall attributes are that it increases efficiency in work activity and reduces the sickness rate. Writers of the Marxist tradition consider the basic functions of sport to be as follows:

1. Creation of the material and technological basis of socialism.

This encompasses the improvement of health, work capacity, labour productivity; the fighting capacity of the armed forces is enhanced because of increased productivity in mental labour. There is a reduction of illness with a subsequent improvement of co-ordination. There is an increase in training effectiveness and expansion of creative lifespan. These are just some of the points. There are many more.

2. Formation of socialist relations.

This presupposes the shaping of class relations by removing contradictions between physical and mental labour. It bespeaks forming social and political relations; it touches on forming national relationships, in the shaping of socialist relations and strengthening family relationships, and so on.

3. Educating a New Person.

Sport and physical culture go a long way as a medium for shaping socialist outlook. They contribute to morale, work consciousness, aesthetic and spiritual education.

The authors note that the function of physical culture is manifest in economic, socio-political and spiritual areas of life in society. Hence in socialist societies today, most town dwellers pursue the sport of their choice, using facilities largely free of charge through their trade unions and other structures of society. Unlike some western sports clubs, societies do not discriminate with regard to membership on the basis of sex, nationality, income, occupation or social background. Even expensive sports equipment is available to those who show ability and inclination. Finally, we make references to the role of physical culture and sport in the struggle for peace, progress and friendship among nations.

National relations are of fundamental importance in human development. Lenin once noted that only great attention to the interests of different nations can remove the grounds for conflicts, mutual distrust, all forms of intrigue and, 'Create that confidence, especially on the part of workers and peasants speaking different languages, without which there absolutely cannot be peaceful relations between people or anything like a successful

Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College

— *A future South Africa in action*



development of everything that is of value in present-day civilisation'.

Strident nationalism and racism are antithetical to this creative process. As a social and educational phenomenon, sport offers both national and international forms of development. The national form of sport depends on the particular mode of life and historical development of a society. It also manifests itself in traditional forms of recreation, in the use of native language and training of indigenous specialists. National sports are closely connected with the culture and way of life of the nationality.

Internationalism occurs through the convergence of national sports and various groups of countries. Nations and international sports supplement one another.

By maintaining international contacts with many countries, many more people of the world are brought closer together to exchange ideas and information. Through affiliation with other international associations, sportsmen and women get the opportunity of *working within these organisations to fight against racism and apartheid and to champion the democratisation of the international sports movement.*

Racism in sport hampers human relations. The fight against racism in the international sports movement is one of the most important aspects of the overall problem in democratising contemporary sport.

Under apartheid — which is a particularly vicious form of racism — there is inequality in social and economic relations between blacks and whites: whites who dominate and control sporting facilities; blacks who earn miserly wages, lack education, have no free time and are discriminated against. This hampers the development of sport and physical culture among blacks.

Thus, in 1968, the International Olympic Committee, as pressurised by Sanroc, took a decision to expel racist South Africa from the Olympic Games. Thus South Africa was not to be seen at the Games in Munich in 1972, Montreal (1976), Moscow (1980) and didn't participate in Los Angeles in 1984 either. The international sports movement is maintaining pressure for their exclusion.

The subject of war and peace being today's principal issue, sport as a social and educational medium cannot stand aside. Millions of people within the sports movement are active fighters for the cause of peace because, by its very nature, sport is only possible under conditions of peace. The nature of peace championed by the Olympic Movement is not merely the absence of war, nor a time used in preparation for fresh wars. It is a protracted state of normality, progress and social development.