

the root of the matter

BLACK LIBERALS?

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Readers of *Pro Veritate* are perhaps the sort that followed the events of the recent Black Renaissance Convention at Hammanskraal. I wonder if they shared my lack of astonishment as they read of SASO and BPC militants taking over the Convention and having all "Government collaborators" expelled.

Subsequent conversations have convinced me that most people share the bewilderment of the Black reporter (all Whites were barred from the meeting) who recorded that "it is still not clear how the expulsion of the homeland leaders went through". The bewilderment exists apparently because it is difficult to understand how Blacks can be quite so demonstrably disunited in their opposition to racism.

But such disunity is perhaps understandable as long as the only Blacks really interested in creating the right atmosphere for united Black action are churchmen. For it seems that the latter are chronically incapable of evolving strong yet flexible policies and modes of action. For example, have they not learned that their procedural rules, designed to operate in an atmosphere of co-operation and goodwill, are easily exploited by those who have taken the trouble to discover how to do it? To have invited to the Convention people of such widely-differing policies and outlooks and to have failed to design an effective control of procedures smacks of downright irresponsibility. The Black leaders who were so rudely expelled may be forgiven if they suspect that they were invited in order to be expelled. And will it not be understandable if these men, having been publicly humiliated, will never again attend such a church-sponsored circus?

The unreal air of the Convention and much of the planning that went into it is, ironically, distilled in a fairytale sentence in the November issue of *Pro Veritate*. There the *ad hoc* organiser of the Convention,

Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, wrote: "There is nothing that dispels prejudice, tribalism and sectionalist tendencies more readily than knowing and discussing each other's point of view". What profoundly misguided words, especially in the light of subsequent events!

Much has been said lately of the miserable failings of the so-called White Liberal. He is supposed to have succeeded only in giving Blacks the illusion of hope in an oppressed situation. He may indeed be guilty of the charges against him. But can he also be blamed for the fact that there is abroad in our land a pathetic mutation of his species—the Black Liberal?

This poor creature suffers all the weaknesses of his ideological cousin. He believes that a rationally-based, optimistic approach to life's problems is the basis of all socio-political justice. But the White Liberal, for all his claims that such an approach is valid, could never claim even the potential for a broad power-base among South African Whites. This fatal weakness led to his eventual denigration by left and right alike. The "Black Liberal" has such a potential power base, though unless he sees that talk and polite words are neither the only nor the best way of overcoming divisions among his fellows, that potential will never be realised.

the need for black unity

The root of the matter is that no radical change in South Africa's racist policies will come about without a united Black front. Such a front need not be monolithic in its strength—but anything else (including the current heresy that white-anting is a potent force for change) will simply not do. To achieve that united front, a first step is the elimination as an effective force at the conference table of the ideologues whose primary talents are divisive. SASO and BPC do not enjoy a fraction of the political support of the homeland leaders they managed to eject from the Convention. Which is exactly why they had to resort to procedural violence!

In fact, as any political leader knows, divisive minorities can seldom be entirely eliminated. They can, however, be neutralised—as Mr Vorster has shown us in his determined and competent political sterilization of the Herstigte Nasionale Party.

What a pity that the organisers of the Convention were so naive in their approach! Their incompetence demonstrates that Christians are once again in danger of relinquishing their ministry for change in this country.

That having been said, let these churchmen at least learn from their experience. Let them drop the polite fantasy that getting people to talk is itself a cure. Talking does not necessarily move antagonists one centimetre from their prepared position. Let them instead steel themselves (if they mean business) to the systematic execution of a realistic course of action designed to unite Black opinion and power. It is no use allowing themselves to be manipulated by a crowd of support-starved youths.



Two further warnings need hardly be delivered. Well-meaning Blacks ought to give more thought than SASO appears to have done to the policy of complete divorce from all Whites. Secondly, any united front will be developed only here in South Africa—the utopian dream that liberation will come from outside the country and Hooray for Erelimo must not be heeded.

Truly radical change in South Africa will not come from a White power base—the very nature of White power makes that impossible. It will come only from a united Black front which is politically realistic, does not suffer from pettifogging scruples when it comes to blackmail by activist minorities, and is prepared to adjust its position for the sake of its overall aims (which is, by the way, a fair summary of Mr Vorster's pragmatic approach).

The political fact of the matter is that a majority of Blacks has not followed SASO and BPC into the ideological cul-de-sac which rejects contact with Whites. They have instead rightly seen that the only worthwhile Black consciousness is one which can stand up for itself in any arena—even in a White-dominated arena.

The calling of those dedicated to working for liberation is a high one indeed. If knock-kneed Black churchmen do not have the gumption to stand up for themselves in this struggle then let them cancel their exclusive conventions and go back to the chapel! *