

Speech given by :

MR RANWEDZI NENGWEKHULU

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I do not really think that there is very much I can add to the film as the people who spoke there adequately represented us and I think I would have tried to explain the situation in the same way. I would just like to enlarge on a few points and will start with a point raised by one of the people interviewed. Although the Black Consciousness Movement is supposed to be responsible for what is going on in the country, it is not responsible in the sense that it organised the students to do what they have been doing. It has been responsible in the sense that it has popularized the whole idea of Black consciousness around the country, mainly through SASO, BPC and SASM. One could say that it started almost spontaneously in the sense that people have been fed up with the situation in the country for a long time but one thing we have always suffered from, being South African Blacks, is a lack of ideology around which people could rally in order to fight for some kind of ideals. I think another element, which has been emphasized just recently with these uprisings, is that the hero of Black politics is now to be found in the adult and youth level.

Since the inception of the ANC in 1914, and I believe even before, Blacks had always thought that because they are a product of an artificial society, created by the so-called multiracial universities and schools, that it was both possible, and perhaps even essential, to bring about change in South Africa by negotiating with a colonial power. Essentially, what we are dealing with in South Africa is a colonial situation although our colonialists are now resident which gives the impression to outsiders that we are dealing with people who are genuine South Africans. I think they are not - they might live in South Africa, but they are not South Africans. Between 1946 and 1960, the whole intention of Blacks was to drive some sense and logic into the Whites so that they would change their system and I think we were working on the assumption that the system was a product of a mistake on the part of the Whites rather than a deliberately formulated policy to keep us where we were and where we still are at the moment. We tried to drive some sense and logic into a system that has its own logic and therefore we achieved nothing. I think that the ANC Youth League pushed hard on the old leadership to convince them to understand that there was no sense in trying to reason with these people. Although not as radical as it is at the moment, the intention was to move away from the politics of negotiation with their old master from a position of powerlessness. With the arrival of the PAC the struggle was pushed ahead in terms of militancy but I think it was the birth of the Black Consciousness Movement which brought a really new political complexion to the whole scene because the point of departure was that you could not really talk about liberation with your own master.

Throughout history, I cannot think of a situation where a slave and his master sat around the same table and negotiated a change of status for the slave. Even if he had managed to talk, I am sure the discussion would have been one-sided in the sense that the master would always have the upper hand and the slave would be in a powerless position. The master could always decide to withdraw food or something essential so the slave would succumb to his master's wishes.

We do not doubt that there are sincere Whites in the White community who want to see change brought about by peaceful or any other means in South Africa but we doubt

whether it would be possible for us to try to seek out all those sincere Whites and to bring them into the fold. Our point of departure has been that we go it alone and we do not negotiate with anyone. We fight for liberation as the film is trying to illustrate and we do not expect to receive our liberation "on a silver plate". The new kind of perspective of politicized Blacks in South Africa is that we have nothing to do with the people who think they are a master race, who hold the monopoly on truth, who can decide on our future and our direction to the extent of deciding with whom we shall stay, with whom we shall have sex and how many children we shall have. We have decided to go it alone, to forget about them.

What has happened since June 16 this year is just an extension of the kind of philosophy we are trying to popularize. I think the significant aspect about what one can call the June 16 uprising is that it came not from the university students who could perhaps intellectualize, having read books about Marxism and Mao, but from high school and primary school children who since they were born have never known any other system - only the pretence that if you studied at Wits or Cape Town together with Whites, something would change, although when you left the University, you would have to go back to Soweto, so there was not really any change at all. They were the children who were brought up under a system which taught them the geography of their own Bantustans, the history of their own fore-fathers who were made out to be barbaric so they know no other kind of history or geography than the one they were supposed to be confined in. Furthermore, they are the ones who grew up at the time when the Black Consciousness Movement and its ideology almost pervaded the entire country, unlike my generation. For we were a kind of schizophrenic student body because our first political involvement was with non-racial organisations or racial organisations. I personally was involved with NUSAS until we realised that we were looking at the problem from different perspectives. When they were talking about book-shops, we were talking about liberation and when they were talking about limitation of movement, we could not even talk about that because we had no movement at all and when we talked about a pass, they could only intellectualize about it because they had never carried one. Therefore, although we are the fore-fathers of the Black Consciousness Movement, so to speak, at least part of our political development has derived from the kind of marginal approach to the whole situation in the country - that we have to sit down and negotiate and work together with those elements from the enemy camp who you think are on your side. The students who are coming up now, however, are the products of the Black Consciousness Movement for they have never known anything else, except perhaps what they have read in the newspapers, so their approach is so to speak completely Black. They are able to articulate the kind of political ideology that is being expressed because of the kind of indoctrination that we have tried to impose. Let me just elaborate a bit on this point.

In 1971 we realised that our main-stay was not in the Constitution nor in trying to increase the number of members on the Student Body but trying to teach the children the history of South Africa factually and otherwise. We tried to make them understand that it makes no sense to pretend that you can actually bring about effective coalition between elements from the enemy camp and Black people simply because of the degree of racial polarisation in South Africa. I do not think it has ever been the experience anywhere that one could sit down, whether you are Black or White, to talk about politics

with anybody who doesn't conform to your own colour pigmentation. You become very suspicious that if a White person comes to you, he might be trying to fish out information. The same applies to a White if a Black person goes to him who does not know him. He will never be free to talk about politics because there are so many laws which at times discriminate between Black and White. We decided that we had to start programmes, and I think one of the first programmes we submitted was to the IUEF. It was a very expensive programme and I seem to remember that it was for more than $\$ 200,000$. This was used to create what we called orientation courses. Before going to University, where students might develop an attachment to the attainment of a degree, we tried to help them to see that it is necessary to have a political orientation even if this might deny you the kind of education that you want. We organized leadership programmes throughout the whole country, the last one being held in February 1973, two days before we were banned. As Deborah said, it was already too late for the Government because we had ensured that when they went to University, they had already acquired some sense about the politics of the country.

Perhaps one could come back to Soweto. Why did the uprisings start in Soweto and not in Cape Town or in Durban, as happened in 1970 when the workers in Durban struck? Why not in the rural areas? The head office of SASO is in Durban, so that in 1970 they were able to keep in touch with the workers quite easily. It started in Soweto this time because that is where SASM has its head office. SASM has been in existence for almost three years now and is predominantly centred in Soweto. The kind of leadership which is running it there is more radical than the leadership throughout the whole country. After 1973 we tried to organize a national organisation of high school pupils and primary school pupils which would cover all their needs but by the time it tried to get into operation, the regime pounced on certain leaders who were very prominent. They were therefore prevented from achieving the same kind of vitality that SASM was able to achieve. The uprising started in Soweto, not because those pupils were more oppressed there but because SASM was centred there. The BPC head office is also in Soweto and could provide the kind of information there that they could not provide us with in the rest of country. They could meet people and address meetings, so it was easier for them to communicate to the people. I think that is essentially why it started in Soweto. The question of Afrikaans was not very significant. If so, it would have started in Durban where Afrikaans is hated more than in the Transvaal and in Cape Town..The reverse was the case because of the political awareness.

One must also remember that the Black Consciousness Movement had managed to raise the degree of political awareness even if, in some cases, it was the kind of political awareness we do not want in the sense that people might be involved in Bantustan politics. But today it is no longer as it was when we started. After Sharpeville, nobody wanted to talk about politics because people were afraid of Robben Island to the extent that police needed to do very little to intimidate people. When you talked about politics, your parents would say that you would finish up on Robben Island - forget about politics and get a degree from University, so that you can get more money than the other natives. So that the intention of the regime at that time was to try to perpetuate this fear that pervaded the whole country so that there were no politics at all between 1960 and 1968 when we started. We had a very difficult time convincing people that there was nothing wrong in forming organisations which opposed the Bantustans. They were afraid.

Now, after June 16, the degree of political awareness has developed to such an extent that even the 8 year olds that Mashinini was talking about do understand what you mean by politics. I think one thing that would surprise you is that 6 or 8 year old children in South Africa appreciate the meaning of the word "system" when it is used to describe the whole range of the White oppressive system, with immediate reference to the police. A child will run away when he knows what you are talking about. Adults who were afraid to participate in politics in Soweto because of the number of people who have been killed have now realised that it does not really matter whether you fight or not, the regime still kills you. They accept that it is better to die fighting than just to be killed in your own house.

There are a number of examples which can be used to illustrate that at least people do understand now. One of the things that used to worry us for quite a long time was the number of bottle stores in Soweto. You have more bottle stores than clinics and more police stations than clinics. Every railway station, and in Soweto you have more than 20 railway stations, has a bottle store. When our parents leave work with their pay, which is very meager, they immediately buy liquor and then they go home without money. The father leaves for work at 4 in the morning without having seen his family and the following day he is afraid to face the family because he has left nothing in the house. He then goes to the bottle store. Evading your family becomes a perennial problem and that has been a part of the regime's strategy. Up to 1962 Africans were not allowed to buy European liquor. You could only buy it if you had passed Standard 6 or if you had a license to buy liquor. Then they realised that they were not destroying us very effectively so they opened the gates so that we could drink. If you go to Soweto you will find that every small location has a bottle store and a big beer hall. But since the 16th of June bottle stores no longer function because the first targets were bottle stores. Even the people who were alcoholics found the courage to destroy the institution they knew was destroying them.

Then, there are the places we call "shebeens" where they illegally sell liquor. The Government has been trying for the past 50 years to stamp them out but they could not succeed. Now nobody sells liquor because the students have appealed to them, not because they have the power to intimidate them - there has never been any intimidation - but because of the realisation that these children have attacked the real problem that they too had realised but had not had the courage to express.

One could sum up by saying that it is not so much the oppression which led to the present uprising - it has always been with us since 1652 when the first colonialists landed in South Africa - what led to the uprising is the level of political awareness which has been reached, mainly by the children. I think the activities in the surrounding countries particularly in Angola and Mozambique had a very great influence. South Africa was engaged with UNITA and when they lost the Blacks felt that it was their victory together with MPLA, so that if you talk about the enemies of the MPLA to anybody in South Africa, they think that you are talking about Vorster and his regime and they reject that.

Again, the prospect of Zimbabwe becoming free has tended to increase the hopes of the people, be they false hopes or not, that we too can become free. Mozambique

becoming independent through the determination of the people has also given the people added incentive. I would like to say at this stage, that the present crisis has become almost permanent. One can no longer foresee a situation where things will be normal as in the pre-June period; there will never again be a situation where Whites can arrogantly go into Black areas and intimidate them. I think that they can go in with guns but they will never be able to round up 200 natives in one go as has been done before. I think that the people realise that it is no longer advisable to pick up stones and throw them - it will now need some kind of planning. Hence the campaign to try to stop Blacks from celebrating Christmas and sending cards. This I think will be very effective. A whole year of mourning will be declared, with shops closing at twelve mid-day. We will also try to plan an effective system of "stay-at-home". The children have realised that one should not stay at home permanently - staying at home for three days as a start was just a way to determine the sort of support they could raise. Previously, when it was suggested to stay at home for the whole week, nobody did so but now when the students say that one must stay at home, all are obliged to do so because they literally make their own road blocks and the police know that it is impossible to cross these road blocks. It has become very difficult for a parent to argue with a child who comes to him saying, "please stay at home for three days in sympathy with my friend who has been killed, or my brother who died today". This was a very important element in convincing the people to stay at home. As I have said, I think that this situation is going to be permanent with the regime becoming evermore vicious and at the same time giving concessions because they admit that even the Transkei has been a failure. At the time when they said they were giving independence, people were moving to what it called "Siskei" as they were afraid of staying under the regime. As there are no examinations taking place, there will be problems again next year as once you take a decision not to participate in the education provided, you miss the examinations and then you are forced to miss a year. Therefore, after this year, children will see no reason to continue with their education because of the year they will have missed.

Another element that has now entered South Africa is the realisation of the Blacks that they have to get up and fight. It may not be possible to do so because they cannot obtain arms in the country but I think the regime now knows that these feelings exist. We will not obtain our freedom on a silver plate but people have decided that we have to fight for our rights. We will not negotiate any more and I cannot see the Government being able to negotiate any more with people from the Black Consciousness Movement because they will refuse to do so - unless another Kissinger comes to force people to do so but I cannot see any prospects of that happening. Even if there are negotiations, I cannot foresee a situation that will normalize because of the level of racial polarisation. Even if the Blacks are given independence, they are going to want to turn the tables up-side-down and this will very likely happen. It is only the Whites who can redeem the situation by voting themselves out of power, which is very unlikely. Even if armed struggle results, we see the prospect of the West coming in, because we suspect that there is a deal between Vorster and Kissinger on the situation. Hence Vorster was prepared to encourage Smith to negotiate but I think that there must be some kind of a deal to try to stabilize the matter. Whether that will completely destroy all channels of obtaining independence is another question for the people are determined to attain it.

Finally, I would like to touch on the chances of SASO, BPC and SASM to continue to exist. The regime is not likely to ban them because they are afraid of the reaction.

I do not think it would make any difference now anyway if they did ban them. I do not think we would stand to lose anything. We can form another SASO tomorrow - it is easy to do and we have done this in the past. The likelihood is that they will not ban the organisations but they will continue to ban and detain its leadership, hoping that in the long run the movements will just die out. I think that approach might be wrong because it is no longer, as it was in the past when a person had been banned, a question of asking someone to come forward to offer themselves for the leadership. Now, when someone is banned, another person is prepared to stand up and take over the same position. The only problem we face at the moment is to train experienced leadership for administration. The prospect for movements continuing to exist are very bright. They are still functioning now, although in a very difficult situation, because the authorities keep on pouncing on everybody who comes up - but I think they will continue to exist. If they ban organisations, we might form another one or we might decide not to form it because I think SASO and BPC have achieved what we set out to achieve within the framework of the South African situation. We can go beyond the ideology. If we want to take up arms, we will have to decide to opt out of the legal system within which we are now operating. I think our idea is that we should continue as we are because even if we have armed struggle, we would need a viable movement within the country. The question of politicising the people and trying to orient them will not end with the armed struggle - nor will it end after the armed struggle. The liberation movement will continue and so we have to maintain as far as possible the existing organisations and promote them and reinforce them.

Thank you.