Staffrider

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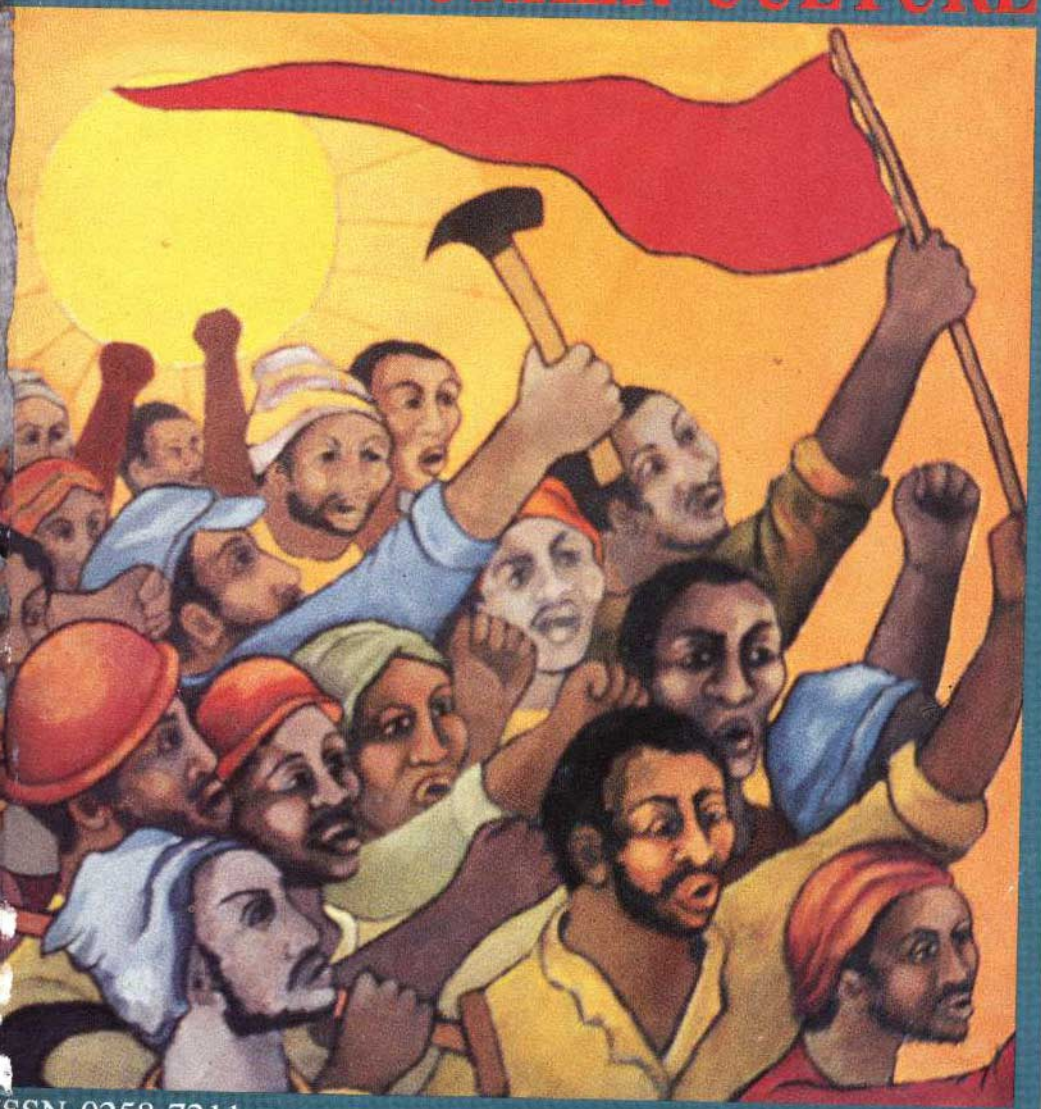
WORKER CULTURE



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Staffrider
Volume 8 Numbers 3 & 4
Worker Culture

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CONTENTS

COMMENT

In recent times, the militancy of the working class has made a powerful mark in the struggle against apartheid. This is especially so in the last five years when organized workers proved that their trade unions are a force to be reckoned with. The organization and actions of the unions have interacted dynamically with the uprising of the militant youth and powerful community-based organizations. The labour movement's structures have provided a home-base for the militancy; a place of consolidation, strengthening and deepening.

When we talk of resistance, we are at the same time talking about cultural expression: through collective action we turn away from fear and overcome the factors which bar us from the role of active human beings. We start to think again about all the ideas and the images that bind us to an oppressed position.

Mass resistance has opened the door to creativity; to speaking out about things which have for so long been smothered. The leading mass political organizations have taken note of this. They have set up special departments and structures to give support and attention to culture.

The labour movement has witnessed a particularly important burst of cultural activity. A key milestone has been the Durban Workers Cultural Local (DWCL), formed in 1984. After producing their first plays, they began agitating for a workers' cultural movement and demanded that culture be taken more seriously within democratic unions. Since then many victories have been scored for worker culture.

COSATU has a national culture department while in NACTU culture projects with striking workers are concrete steps to the ultimate goal of national cultural organizations. Worker culture has emerged as an important voice of the working class. Workers are acting, singing, performing and writing about their lives. They speak, not in the voice of protest 'senzenina', but with force and directness about the struggles in the workplace and the community. Through bold, dynamic images workers are asserting their own view of the world around them.

It's not just the content of worker culture that is important, but also the methods — the cultural forms — that are used to give life to the message. These are some examples of the various stylistic features that have emerged. First: workers have shown a freedom in the use of African languages — with their own richness of expression and sound — that is unrivalled in the world of progressive artistic expression. Second: the worker plays usually come out of collective work. This is building on the unions' anti-hierarchical position, thus recognizing the importance of every worker's experience. Third: the poets have revived the oral tradition. For example, they have harnessed Nguni symbols — which draw on the world of nature and animals — as well as repetition

and the chanting style of the *imbongi*. Fourth: music and drama groups have drawn on the *isicathamiya* music and dance forms which have developed out of the experience of migrant workers.

The message, the community style, the link with tradition — all this grows out of the political and cultural message of trade unions. That message is: that as workers our understanding of the world should start from our own experiences, feelings, needs and history; that the ruling class should not determine our thinking and actions.

This issue of *Staffrider* gives a special focus to worker culture. Many hundreds of cultural works have been produced in the last few years. There have been huge festivals of working class culture in almost every region. The writings of workers have been published in special collections, autobiographies and as part of broader collections. Yet much of this is not widely known because the mass media have a view of newsworthiness that sets high-profile events and sensation above ongoing dynamic processes taking place at grassroots level.

This edition is aimed at spotlighting the impact and assessing the growth this culture is making. Of course, this culture is not a city with walls around it. It is part of broader progressive culture. The anthology *Ten Years of Staffrider* has highlighted the important advances made in popular cultural struggle and its relationship to the resurgence of the national democratic movement. However, this issue acknowledges the special and specific contribution of worker culture. For us this revolves around two main issues. Worker culture has filled a vacuum in popular cultural struggle by sharply probing the reality of workers' experiences at the cutting edge of capitalist exploitation. It has also been instrumental in defining democratic organization as being part of the essence of progressive culture.

The broad popular cultural movement of the last fifteen years has addressed many dimensions of resistance and opposition. But it failed to sufficiently dissect the experience of women and workers. Worker culture focuses more keenly on the brutalities of capitalist exploitation and the struggles to overcome them. However, this is not at the expense of broader political and social themes such as the national liberation struggle, the pain of the migrant worker's family, the frustration of the city ghetto and the tension between traditional and modern values.

In this sense, working class culture emphasizes that the struggle against apartheid is unfolding in a class context. This is similar to the direction of other third world struggles, for example, in Chile, the Philippines and Grenada, where the working class has a strong voice in political and cultural struggle. In these countries, the struggle to end economic exploitation and imperialism is integrated into the struggle for national liberation.

Why is democratic organization important? Cultural workers in the labour

movement believe that artists individually cannot effectively challenge the power of oppressor culture. The apartheid state has vast resources including the state school system and a virtual monopoly on television and radio. And the capitalists have, in the words of DWCL, a 'cultural profit machine' that gives them control over the music, sport, information and films that are served up to the masses. Democratic structures will help us to co-ordinate, promote and develop our culture; they will also be a tool to help cultural workers (from the ranks of the people and the working class) to win back control over their work. Also, by working in this way we challenge the roots of apartheid culture, saying no to its elitism and its system of hierarchy. By stressing these things the worker culture movement has helped to put clearer signposts on the road to a dynamic and liberatory national culture.

Building worker culture, however, has not been a straight line leading from one success to another. The process has been a struggle — for every victory there were many barriers and obstacles to overcome.

Workers face the most crippling effects of economic exploitation: long work hours, long travel distances, low wages, poverty, and a serious lack of cultural resources in the bleak townships, settlements, compounds and hostels. These conditions make every cultural work an act of sacrifice as much as an act of creation and imagination.

It provokes anger in us the way big business spends on apartheid culture for a privileged few while the human needs of the working class go unmet. We are also constantly pressing our unions to take culture more seriously, although we know they are already in the thick of so many struggles. Our political leadership should be taking a greater interest, giving more time, participating in debates and giving more guidance.

Another major problem area for us is the lack of skills within our ranks. (This problem is linked to the education system which is harmful, inadequate and not meant to provide a proper education to the masses.) Our culture is dynamic, it is bursting with energy; but it needs to be sharpened into a more effective weapon. We need to be able to 'challenge' the power of commercial productions, to make greater inroads beyond the ranks of the converted. Presently, there are only a handful of people in the worker cultural movement who can play the part of facilitator, able to make basic skills available to local groups. One answer has been to create forums to share experiences and evaluate with a critical eye — using the 'each one teach one' approach. Another solution would be stronger interaction with cultural workers in other disciplines. Already, writers, performers and theatre people from other organizations have taken part in workshops.

The struggles and hardships of building worker culture can also be a strength. Union-based cultural workers, toughened by their own experiences, are in a good position to assist other cultural sectors in rural areas and regions starved

of cultural resources. Joint workshops and common platforms have helped to facilitate a two-way sharing of ideas and experiences.

Worker culture has also been linked into initiatives such as the Culture in Another South Africa (CASA) conference in 1987 which aimed to shape policy and priorities for people's culture. CASA formulated a strong way forward on people's culture. But the Gabarone initiative in 1982 taught us the bitter lesson that it takes much more than good resolutions to build a national cultural movement. Nearly two years after CASA, we again sense the dangers of stagnation. Unless cultural workers take urgent united action back home, the momentum and energy created will simply drift further into the past.

Workers' location at the point of production, their gruelling experiences in building unions out of virtually nothing, their stubborn determination in the field of culture — all of this makes them a crucial part in implementing these resolutions.

The most important objective is the need to build a national culture organization. This was the message of CASA. In this context, we take the opportunity of calling on all cultural workers to give priority to strengthen and consolidate unity against apartheid. This unity can best be expressed in democratic organization that is broad-based and accountable. The tasks of such an organization would be:

— to co-ordinate resources and direct assistance to areas of greatest need.
— to establish community-based arts projects.
— to co-ordinate action against apartheid, supplementing broader campaigns within the mass democratic movement.
— to co-ordinate the implementation of the cultural boycott.
— to deepen discussion and debate on building a 'humanist, internationalist, but distinctly South African character of people's culture which draws upon the culture heritage of all the people of the country', in the words of a CASA resolution.

We also want to use this opportunity to salute our cultural allies internationally. Many artists, writers, singers etc., have put moral principles before profits and refused to perform in apartheid land. They have suffered financial loss. Others have taken part directly in anti-apartheid activities. Many have donated works or the proceeds from their work to assist organizations in the struggle against apartheid. We also want to commend the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid for providing the international community with the means of expressing — through positive cultural action and boycott — its abhorrence of apartheid.

This issue of *Staffrider* carries some recent work by poets, story writers, drama groups, photographers and biographers as well as essays and interviews which give insight into the history, nature and aims of worker culture and its relation to the movement for a people's culture.

Contributors include not only those born into the working class, but also those who take up proletarian themes and see the significance of the working class role in historical process.

This special edition will by no means remedy the backlog of unpublished work from workers. It is merely an indication of the extent of worker cultural activity. This points to a need for more worker publications that can break the obscuring effects of the structures of apartheid capitalism.

Acknowledgement and thanks are due to the following people/groups for assistance with this project: Community Arts Project (CAP); Culture and Working Life Project (WLP); various cultural locals; Afrapix and everyone who contributed work for inclusion.

Frank Meintjies and Mi Hlatshwayo

Staffrider

ART & PHOTOGRAPHIC AWARDS 1989

The annual Staffrider exhibition of photography and art opened at the Market Gallery on Sunday 1 October and was on view until October 28, 1989. It displayed the work of a large number of photographers, painters, sculptors and graphic artists.

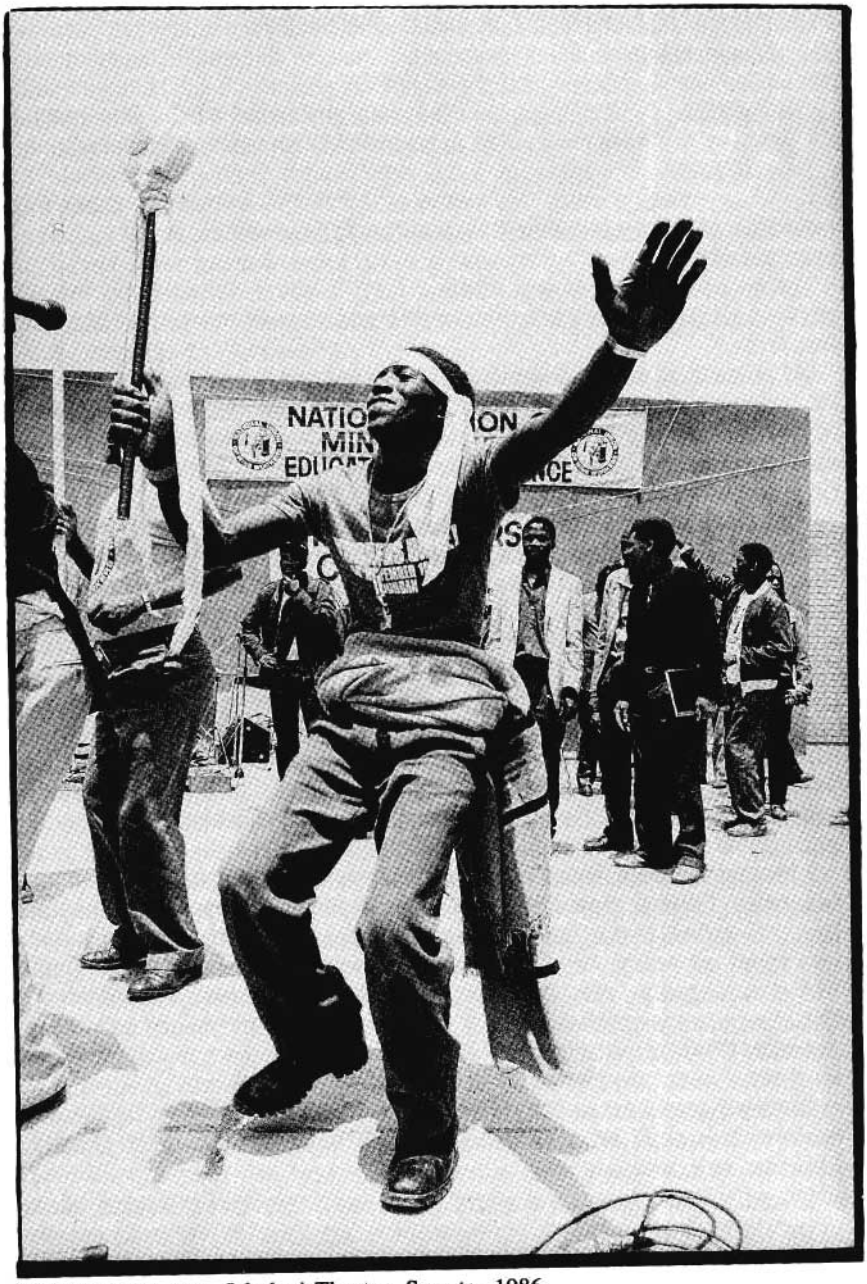
The total prize money for both sections was R4000. The adjudicators for the art section decided to distribute the prize money of R2000 over a number of merit awards, while the adjudicators for photography made one merit award of R500 and held over the remaining R1500 for next year's awards.

The merit awards made to the following painters and graphic artists by the adjudicators Bongi Dhlomo, Joyce Ozynski and David Koloane are:

1. **B. Nkosi, R500 for "Abaluki", "Hard Labour" and "Abazabalazi".**
2. **Israel Mashigo, R300 for "How long".**
3. **A.J. Paton, R300 for "Predators and Scavengers Private Pool Club".**
4. **F. More, R300 for "Mama Sitting".**
5. **S. Ainslie, R300 for "The Card Players" and "Park Games".**
6. **L. Jawahirilal, R200 for "A New Beginning".**
7. **G. Solomon, R200 for "Election Drawing".**

One merit award was made for photography by the adjudicators Lesley Lawson, Peter Magubane and David Goldblatt to:

8. **Steve Hilton-Barber, R500 for his colour essay "The Voëlvry Tour".**



NUM Cultural Day. Jabulani Theatre. Soweto. 1986.

(Photo: Sandy Smit)

Reminiscences of a Job Seeker

Jan Ceasar Mbele

'Hello . . .' a chilling voice at the other end of the line rang in my ears, '. . . this is the M&M Company, can I help you?'

'Yes,' I said. 'My name is John. I'm enquiring about the outcome of the application I submitted to your office and I . . .' I was cut short.

'What position have you applied for?' a voice asked amid the rustling of papers at the other end. I told myself that I'd at last run into luck.

At last I'll be able to wake up in the morning and head for work. I'll leave behind the cold, cracking old bed that for years has been my nest. A friend on which I cried out my frustrations. A reliable steel structure that withstood my massive weight. When I was in a drunken stupor, I would crash-land on it but leave it intact.

I told myself that before very long I would have some money in hand. I would be able to buy myself some shoes. My old reliable 'grasshoppers' were now semi-retired, with holes in them big enough for my toes to get fresh air without any trouble. The socks I bought some two years back — before I was retrenched — could only cover my legs from the heels up and I had nothing but tattered strings to balance under my ailing feet.

I looked at my lower limbs. What I saw made me blush. My trousers were long past their prime. Holes made them look like fishnet. My one knee protruded from a big hole and this together with patches of different colours and different materials was enough to make a spectacle of me.

I looked around. People passed, some minding their own business. Others glared at me. Some with pity, others with disgust. But that didn't make me worry, not even some of the remarks like: 'He must be crazy, how can a young man like him dress like that?' 'He is a disgrace, why can't he go to work, his peers are working?' Others were sympathetic: 'Just look what unemployment can do to a man', 'Poor chap! He must have been hunting for a job for a long time now,' and another added, 'Maybe for years.'

Somewhere in what they said the truth lay. Years had passed, months and days on end without me securing employment. Today, I told myself, was my day.

It had been a long time since I last said, 'My Baas, askies, ek is laat.' I'd long forgotten — in spite of a vigorous exercise to recall

— how to respond to a question such as, 'How much would you like to earn?' I braced myself. I'd answer it if it was asked. Say one hundred rands or one hundred and fifty rands. Sure that is not enough, but how would I answer without spoiling my prospects of employment.

'Hello! Are you still there?' the voice brought me back to the present.

I responded, 'Yyeesss I . . . ' then I remembered that it was a prospective employer and I quickly repeated, 'Yes, I'm still hanging on.'

'You'd better come at once, the manager would like to see you.' She hung up the phone.

'Peanuts, peanuts, peanuts, *madopi*, fifty cents, five bob,' a gentle voice was heard down the street next to the telephone booths where I stood after phoning. I looked around and saw where the voice originated from. A boy, barely out of the cradle, was negotiating his way among the multitude, selling his merchandise. Some bought, others didn't and some, seemingly wanting to buy only asked generously how much a packet cost. Perhaps they were discouraged from buying by the untidiness of the seller.

He was untidy. His once beautiful T-shirt, with a 'Sun City Bophuthatswana' logo on the back, was in tatters and hanging against his chapped skin. His unkempt bushy hair looked like balls of dirty wool with smaller, differently coloured, blanket fluff completing the adornment. He wore a pair of oversized trousers carelessly cut, apparently with the aid of a knife, to fit him. He occasionally put his hands in the side-pockets to prevent the falling trousers from sliding down over his buttocks.

Now he had only three packets of peanuts inside an apple box. He came towards me and put the box down next to me. He looked up at me and a set of yellowish teeth flashed between his dry lips. He grinned a greeting, I grinned back.

'Yes laity.' I was surprised that he enjoyed his selling activity. I couldn't help but curse the architects of the devilish laws and regulations that had forced this fragile boy to abandon the warmth of schooling and driven him into the streets.

I looked at him. He was still smiling. In him I saw the duplication of most of our generation. The tiredness in his eyes was that of a typical witness to the Nationalist Party's atrocities. In his eyes one could read the history of our time. When he smiled again the signs of absolute poverty and suffering were momentarily eclipsed by a

flame of gentleness. That there could still be smiles from this suffering soul, confounded me.

I was hurt, but not surprised, to notice that from such a rich and prosperous country like South Africa there could be these disadvantaged children who could not enjoy the fruits of their parents' toil. That in a country boasting of massive economic viability there could be those workers whose children could not enjoy the benefits of their labour.

I looked up at the skyscrapers, the blocks of flats, and saw small children on balconies playing joyfully with an assortment of toys. Along the street others of the same colour were pedalling their bicycles briskly between the people doing their day's shopping. The privileged colour.

I looked down at the boy again. Still smiling, he offered me a packet. I took one. I thanked him and went away after having told him of my business.

It did not take me long to reach the factory where I hoped to get a job. I stood at the entrance gate waiting for the *matjekelane* to open for me. There was no one. The gates were locked. I stood there hoping that someone would come to open the gate.

Suddenly, I heard singing voices full of African melody. Then around the corner people came out brandishing placards. Some pronounced: 'WE DEMAND A LIVING WAGE', 'BOSSES GIVE US A LIVING WAGE', 'FORWARD WITH THE STRUGGLE FOR A LIVING WAGE', 'DOWN WITH STARVATION WAGES'. Amid all these voices were heated shouts of 'AMANDLA! AWETHU! VIVA COSATU! VIVA ANC! PHANSI CAPITALISM!!'

The workers, I could see, were on strike and the bloody capitalists would not give in. Industries were doing well with massive profits. The workers were demanding a share from their toils and yet the Boers refused them their share.

My instincts told me to look around. What I saw nearly boiled my blood. Just behind me, along the street, milling towards me, were mellow-yellows and hippos. Suddenly the sound of gun-fire filled the air and teargas fumes burned my eyes. I couldn't breathe. I ran for my life. I ran away from the war zone, from the machinery of Apartheid, the grotesque abomination of racial capitalism which for years on end has been pursued with unparalleled brutality against the majority of South Africans, workers and students alike. I ran away to another war zone, the township. There, the might of the state was called in to crush the workers' legitimate actions.

On my way back to the township I avoided, to the best of my

ability, walking near the tarred road leading to the location lest I be seen by the green and brown camouflaged boys on the hippos and other hideous machineries of war. I suddenly remembered the night vigil and the advice of my elders not to attend it. I, however, felt an obligation to attend. Firstly, the deceased was a distant relative of ours. Secondly, he lived in the same street as ours. Thirdly, he happened to be my friend from school. Fourthly, he was a comrade who had been shot two weeks back during the police sweep against 'crime'. I heard later from his sister that he was wearing a COSATU Living Wage T-shirt. Perhaps that was his crime, but how he actually met his death, I didn't know. It appeared in the unrest report that a black man died in Thabong after throwing a stone at a police vehicle. That was all.

I reached the township well after five and smoke from makeshift stoves greeted me with a burning sensation in my eyes. All this awoke me to the reality that if I wanted to stay alive and endure the suffering further, I had to avoid these big waterlogged rundowns we call streets and go for narrow garbage-filled trenches planned to be stormwater drains.

I reached home and was greeted by a worn-out figure I call Mother. She informed me quietly that *'makgowa a ne a o batla'* (boers were looking for you). I nearly jumped into the sky with joy when I heard this good news. I thought I had at last found employment — that my dreams had come true, that God had answered our prayers. I didn't ask her for details lest I spoilt the occasion that needed celebration. I was only fantasizing about what I would do with all the money I would earn. I looked around the house and perceived that the *mkhukhu* needed some painting and the window panes, shattered a month ago by the impact of a rubber-bullet, needed replacements.

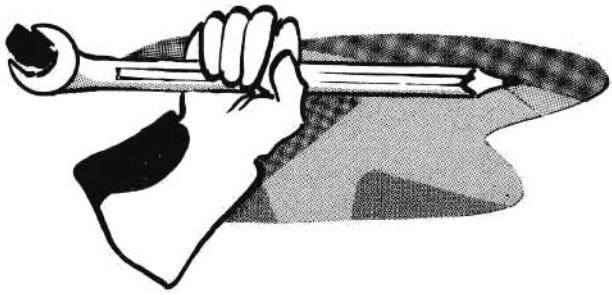
I looked at my mother and instantly I felt a pain running up my spine and a feeling of hurt eclipsed my joy. 'How can you look so sad when you should be ululating because soon I'll be working,' I asked, and added, 'And I will look after you?'

'You don't understand my child!' she responded. I was to learn later from her that the boers looking for me were in fact *Maponesa* in a mellow-yellow. Mind you, in a truck. Surely I wasn't that big to need a truck plus a contingent of despotic police. But that's how it is done.

I went into my bedroom. Were it not for a beam of light from outside, entering through an opening between the carelessly arranged and fastened corrugated sheets, I would have walked

right into the overturned bed. The wardrobe was empty. The contents, old clothing and much older blankets my mother received from my late grandmother, had been strewn on the floor forming a mat. The boxes into which I put books and some of my clothes were empty too, their contents thrown out into a heap. My COSATU diary and *COSATU News* were gone and so was my old COSAS T-shirt.

I went outside and teargas fumes blinded me and burned fiercely in my chest. I went back inside only to be forced out again, as the *mkhukhu* was shaking violently while a roaring engine threatened to run it down. Outside I was again greeted by teargas fumes. My God, I was going to choke in this. Next to the house a menacing hippo stood. My hour had arrived. If I could survive this I would go job-hunting and perhaps get one. But for now my hour for an encounter with the SB had arrived.



LANGUAGE AND LABOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA

Frank Meintjies

The title of this paper implies that the discussion is located within a discourse which highlights the class nature of our society. This means that an examination of language becomes an investigation also into the contradictions and conflict of interests between exploited labour and capital. In this paper I will look at the role of language as part of the ideological control which is indispensable to the subjugation of the working class.

The paper covers three broad areas: one, education and schooling and how these assist in the reproduction of an ultra-cheap, ultra-controlled labour force; two, the workplace, its power relations and its manifestation through language; three, the union movement and its impact, as well as the struggles it is waging around language.

Several of the terms used in the paper are used very broadly. The object is to describe broad trends and dynamics which illustrate the social forces and how they operate. Clearly, there are exceptions to every broad description and 'management' and 'workers' are not always rigidly monolithic.

Introduction: Language Tells Society Like It Is

Language reflects, entrenches and creates ideology, or the way in which individuals and social groups understand themselves and their relationship to the world. It is imbued with, and upholds values and world-views. In the words of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, language is 'a totality of a people's experience'.

A study of language reveals the power relations in the society in which that language operates. The predominance of words such as 'chairman' points to the dominant position of men in society. The use of words such as 'boy' and 'girl' to refer to black men and women emblematizes the relationship of dominance and disrespect upheld by white people in relation to black people.

Language, in South African society, participates in preserving and reproducing the political system conducive to the profitable operation of the market economy. This economy is defended by powerful law enforcement agencies which exert power through coercion. It is also upheld by social institutions such as the family, the state and education — all profoundly authoritarian — which naturalize inequality and validate the existing order through consent. Language therefore is both shaped by and perpetuates the authoritarian and stratified nature of industrial capitalist society.

The relationship of language to society and to the moulding of political, social and economic conditions is not a direct one; language is only one of a myriad social forces fulfilling the latter function. But the centrality of language — of shared systems of communication — to human society underpins the centrality of language to culture, self-definition, consciousness and to the definition of reality itself.

Language is not inherently oppressive: its role is defined by the people who wield it and the social forces which act upon it. And as dominated people become conscious of their power to change their environment and hence change themselves, they struggle to transform language into a weapon of liberation. They strive to create a means of communication that becomes a carrier of a new culture of confidence.

Education and Schooling: Producing Units of Labour

Through the struggle against oppression and exploitation, the oppressed people are in effect demanding: We want to define ourselves in our own terms and to name our experiences as we understand them.

Amilcar Cabral avers that national liberation is a cultural act and the liberation movement 'the organised political expression of the struggling people's culture'.

Ngugi in a paper 'Education for a National Culture' delivered in Zimbabwe in 1981 says: 'It's both an act of education and an education process to seize back the right and the initiative to make one's own history . . .'

This explains why education in our country has become such a hotly contested terrain of struggle. The liberation movement and the masses of our country have placed enormous focus on education, and education has repeatedly become a major flashpoint of resistance. In the early 1800s, explains Eric Molobe of the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), African chiefs refused to send their children to mission schools. Following the introduction of Bantu Education, we saw even more concerted and widespread resistance which led to the establishment of the African Education Movement. In both cases, the dominated sought to conduct education outside the orbit of the structures of oppression.

Today resistance to apartheid history and education continues in many forms, inside the classroom and outside: through student organizations, the radicalization of teacher bodies, the production of alternative textbooks, learning supplements that reflect a different history and resistance of individual teachers and students. People's education, which developed in the protracted aftermath of the 1976 uprising, represents a more systematic and programmatic attempt to formulate an education system which will unlock the potential and creativity of the people.

Formal language instruction for the working class takes place within the context of Christian National Education and its sub-component Bantu Education. This has been designed with specific political and social objectives — to entrench national oppression and reproduce capitalism.

In introducing Bantu Education, the government stated explicitly that its aim was, among others, to train blacks to be content with menial labour and poverty wages. Elaborating on this, the then Native Affairs Minister Dr H. Verwoerd said in 1954: 'There is no place for (the bantu) in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour . . . For that reason it is of no avail for him (sic) to receive a training which has as its aim the absorption in the European community where he (sic) cannot be absorbed.'

The underlying approach was that teaching, including the teaching of language, should be geared to perpetuate the dependence, subservience and national domination of black people.

The teaching of language and history provides the most overt examples of the intent of education prescribed for the oppressed. The teaching methods are generally expressive of a conservative world outlook, while literature prescribed ignores, belittles and/or denigrates black history, values and contribution to social development. The same is true for the representation of workers and the working class; workers' pivotal contribution to the development of South Africa and the world is either ignored or expressly denied.

The emphasis on formal education and certification functions to exclude workers' views and experiences from education, as well as to build prejudice against the knowledge possessed by the working class and its organic intellectuals.

Paulo Frere in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Ivan Illich in *Deschooling Society* have examined how literacy teaching and schooling based on acceptance of the dominator's world-view (without encouraging critical awareness) perpetuate subservience and lack of confidence. Frere uses the term 'banking' to describe the method in which learners are regarded as empty receptacles waiting to be filled with the knowledge of the teacher. Illich's view is that the organization of the school, the unquestioned authority of the teacher and principal, the emphasis on certification etc. all make up a 'hidden curriculum' which oppresses and stifles creativity. In both instances, learners are conditioned to see themselves as mere objects of history rather than subjects and agents of human development.

The Workplace: Profits Come from Power over Workers

Polarization and conflict of interests arising from class and race contradictions are the most acute in the workplace.

Industry and commerce are run by owners and management who are generally very conscious of their position at the top of SA's pyramid of wealth and power. Part of this consciousness includes the view that without maintaining the power equation in the workplace, the making of profits, and indeed 'progress', cannot be guaranteed.

The black workforce is disenfranchised, generally unskilled, destitute and occupies the lowest echelons of society. Workers' feelings range from complete powerlessness (particularly in the case of more isolated workers such as farm and domestic workers) through to expressions of concentrated anger and spontaneous militancy.

The order which prevails in the workplace has much in common with that prevailing in a prison or an army. Workers are the lowest stratum of a pecking order that is profoundly hierachical, authoritarian and sometimes even feudal. Metal sector unions report that in the early seventies labourers in that sector were whipped as part of employer discipline. In the agriculture sector, corporal punishment for black workers seems to be commonplace, while the domestic union deals with many cases of physical and sexual abuse. On the mines, 'law and order' is maintained by horse patrols, boom gates and room searches, all of which are executed by a *kragdadige* in-house security force accountable only to the bosses.

Control in the workplace is backed up by legal provisions which entrench the rights of employers. This provides management with the space to apply coercive measures to maintain a discipline and a climate of docility. Thus management has traditionally used victimization, dismissal and threat of dismissal against workers who challenge management authority. Black workers have been particularly vulnerable to these forms of coercion. The massive pool of millions of unemployed means it was easier to fire and replace workers than to put up with a challenge to management power. Until 1979 they were not covered by legislation and black trade unions did not have a legal right to collective bargaining. Today, the Labour Relations Amendment Act (LRAA) demands procedural and substantive fairness in any dismissal which has allowed workers some defence against arbitrary management actions. However, workers in the farm, forestry, domestic, state and parastate sectors are still not covered by law and are exposed to the most arbitrary and oppressive management actions.

The emergence of independent democratic trade unions with their emphasis on factory-based shop-steward leadership heralds a decisive shift in power relations in the workplace. Through building organization and militantly assert-

ing worker rights, trade unions have forced management to show greater respect for the dignity of workers.

Over the last ten years in various sectors of the economy, workers, through the unions, have challenged the prerogative of management through collective bargaining backed up by the willingness to take industrial action. By telescoping the views of workers and articulating them through organizational demands, the unions affirm and validate the experiences of workers. In this regard, the word of management is no longer treated with awe, and shop stewards and workers feel empowered to criticize management's views. And workers have declared disputes over the use of derogatory language against workers, demanding either an apology or dismissal of the offender.

However, although unions have made an impact in certain crucial sectors like mining, manufacturing and commerce, it must be remembered that only about fifteen percent of the South African workforce is unionized. This means that the vast majority of workers only share indirectly in the significant benefits brought about through mass organization of workers. In discussing language and labour, therefore, apart from specific reference to the influence or presence of unionization, I will be examining the experiences of the most vulnerable eighty-five percent.

Definitions: The Iron Hand of Discipline

The language of the workplace mirrors the dehumanization and humiliation of workers on the one hand, and the arrogance and high-handedness of management on the other.

Many standard employment contracts speak in terms of 'obedience' and 'discipline' in the workplace. The disciplinary code also takes up notions of misconduct and transgressions which cover a very wide field of behaviour and 'criminalize' practices such as latecoming and 'terugpraat', also known as insubordination.

It is interesting to note that while certain conduct is criminalized for the worker, similar behaviour for management is viewed as acceptable or excusable. If a worker consumes alcohol at work, she/he is accused of drunkenness, laziness, ill-discipline and of being a 'bad influence'. However, management escapes these labels regardless of the amount of company time spent boozing at the office bar or at business lunches.

Another example is the label 'thief' which is applied selectively, depending on your rank and position. Black labourers on building sites for example are often co-opted into stealthily delivering paint, old sinks, doors, tiles and other materials to the house of the foreman during worktime. Yet it is the same foreman who rules the construction site with an iron hand.

Workers also find it bitterly amusing that for employers and management, theft is described in more socially acceptable terms such as 'fraud', 'corruption', 'embezzlement' and 'improper conduct'.

The word 'intimidation' is another example of language double standards. 'Intimidation' is a favourite stick used by management to hit back in a range of situations involving union activity. It is not used to describe management attempts to persuade workers to work on May Day or to force mineworkers down a shaft.

Managements' almost obsessive use of the words 'intimidators' and 'instigators' during industrial disputes must be seen in two ways. On the one hand, management is attempting to maintain an image of harmony, of inclusion ('us', one happy company) and to conveniently construct an other ('them' against 'us') which is portrayed as the source of conflict. On the other hand, it could be viewed as management saying: 'We don't believe that you are able to speak for yourselves. We know you as docile and apathetic.' In this case management cannot see beyond the stereotype of the passive, obsequious black worker who never challenges management prerogative. In many a strike situation, management, propelled by paranoia and bewilderment, can think only of summoning the police to restore 'order'. According to Nic Wiehahn, whose proposals paved the way for the passing of the Labour Relations Act in 1979: 'Far too many employers see red when they hear the word "union" or "strike". There would be less need for police intervention if management showed greater maturity and accepted negotiation with unions.'

The Interpersonal: Language Knows Who's Boss

In any workplace there are conventions — spoken and unspoken traditions — which govern interaction between people of different race and class positions. These conventions differ from workplace to workplace and are shaped by the history of interaction, the personalities and the type of production being undertaken.

In the domestic work situation there is a rigid boundary which defines the worker's relationship with madam/master, where she may eat and how she interacts with visitors. In other workplaces canteens and toilets are either expressly segregated or alternatively the use of the same facilities is taboo. Many conventions, particularly in the multinationals, are changing and the white worker aristocracy on the shopfloor is having to adapt. However, just as in broader society where class discrimination is replacing race segregation, newer conventions take the place of the old and obsolete.

It is well known how conspicuously manner of address, names and titles function in the workplace to signify status. Unskilled workers are addressed

as 'boy' or 'girl', either by management or by white foremen and chargehands. A new worker giving his name is often told: 'No I mean your English name.' Many an employer takes the initiative to give a 'boss-name' to the worker.

Workers are expected to be formal when addressing not only management but all white staff. On many farms and in rural areas, employers even resent the term 'Meneer', preferring the unambiguous 'Baas'.

Assertiveness, articulateness and a critical approach among workers are viewed as hostility and insubordination and there are numerous cases where workers have been disciplined for being 'cheeky'. This amounts to suppression of workers' expression in the workplace. On the other hand, especially in workplaces with a high density of workers, workers develop their own set of shorthand terms and phrases which are used among themselves to describe their day to day reality. Frequently workers create (derogatory or comical) nicknames for foremen. If management ever watched a worker play in which bosses feature, they would certainly be taken aback at how workers perceive their words and actions.

English Is the Sceptre

The workplace is also affected by the lionization of English, and to a lesser extent Afrikaans, and the lack of respect for African languages which is ingrained by South Africa's racist education and social system. It is not unusual for management to equate inability to converse in the two official languages with illiteracy. This prejudice against African languages makes it easier for the construction of workers as the 'other', the outsiders indicated by the pronoun 'them'.

The problem of the language barrier for management has led to the evolution of *fanakalo*, mainly on the mines but also in other sectors. *Fanakalo* is a vulgarized form of an African language or languages based mainly on commands and instructions. It is also further tainted because it is usually coupled with the conservative attitudes and arrogant approach of white superiors.

In isolated cases managements have organized literacy schemes (which I will deal with in more detail later) in an attempt to surmount communication problems. Such schemes are often imposed without regard for what workers want and need in terms of literacy. Management's approach seems to be that the problem of communication lies with workers who allegedly lack the tools to fit into the white person's world.

The Written Word: Tackling Its Tyranny

The written word provides graphic illustration of the one-way nature of management/worker communication. The written word ranges from the more func-

tional uses, such as notices, instructions and warnings through to in-house magazines, either those concerned with communicating with salaried staff or the more glossy 'image-building' variety.

Most in-house publications do not have workers in mind. Workers' absence from the pages of such magazines is interrupted only by occasional references to workers receiving long-service awards. This exclusion functions ideologically: by effacing the image and voice of workers, workers and blacks are once again constructed as the 'other' in the eyes of the chosen few who subliminally find confirmation for their position of domination.

In recent years, we have seen the mushrooming of glossy magazines which symbolize the modern face of capital. A key function is to play down the division and obscure the gulf between workers and employers. They are also often a vehicle for the more co-optive approach that seeks to inculcate company loyalty which consultants predict will boost productivity. This same approach underlies other initiatives of capital such as share options and subsidy schemes which, although directed only at a small layer of workers, are aimed at obscuring the dividing line between management and workers.

All in-house media seek to rationalize management decisions and gloss over the contradictions between management and workers. They are more concerned with promoting company image than with carrying authentic images of workers.

The written word is one of the most powerful weapons in the arsenal of the ruling class, writes Njabulo Ndebele, president of the Congress of South African Writers:

> They know that there will be many people who will look at the . . . (written material) and doubt the evidence of their own experience. They know that these people, like the bewildered animals of *Animal Farm*, will look at the indisputable evidence of the written word, and agree that indeed, other animals have always been more equal.
> The power . . . lies in the seemingly infallible testimony of the written word. Its authority is potentially tyrannical. But then the source of this authority has a long history. It is a history that has surrounded the written word with awe, persuading us that what is written necessarily contains unalterable profound wisdom.

Capital has long realized this and through monopolies has annexed controlling stakes in the news media both 'white' and 'black'. The use of official printed management media on the shopfloor is not yet pervasive, but indications are that more and more managements are looking to the revolutionizing capabilities of desktop publishing.

At the same time, unofficial pro-management media are burgeoning: in the last two years we have seen the emergence of a new phenomenon — the anti-

union smear pamphlets. The smear pamphlets, apart from the regular *Trade Union Monthly Titbits*, appear almost weekly with distribution figures of tens of thousands. Almost all are imitations of trade union media, but the contents are falsified so as to sow mistrust, suspicion, confusion and division. We are convinced that many of these smear pamphlets emanate from employers. Furthermore, not a single employer has publicly expressed disquiet about or condemnation of this phenomenon which clearly serves management interests.

The conscientization involved in trade unionism has generated wide suspicion of certain forms of the written word among organized workers. In-house magazines are regarded as propaganda by workers who do not fail to notice the absence of issues such as the living wage campaign and worker demands in collective bargaining. All other publications without a union logo are immediately brought to the attention of the shop stewards and the union for scrutiny. This explains why certain employers and the state have turned to producing look-alike smear pamphlets in the hope of having greater success with their propaganda.

Union publications play an important role in building the confidence and affirming the humanity of the working class. This is described by unionist Zubeida Jaffa in the video *Spark*: she explains how about four years ago management at Cape Underwear had successfully threatened the confidence and unity of a strike by blaming agitators and threatening to take action against them. The next day the union published a leaflet accusing management by name of being the real instigators. The pamphlet compared low wage increases over the years with the luxury, wealth and arrogance of top employers who were amassing bigger and bigger profits. According to Jaffa, the leaflet had a dramatic effect: more workers came out on strike and management was eventually forced to negotiate. Workers explained that the leaflet had articulated what they felt, what needed to be said, but what they could not say. By confirming their sentiments, by setting it out in black and white, the leaflet had in one stroke eroded the moral basis for management intransigence and boosted worker determination to fight for what was 'right'.

Union media in the factory are a powerful lever against stereotypes: management are forced to confront workers' ideas and visions, as well as workers' own image of themselves. Unions openly admit that union media have the secondary role of sending a message to management.

Literacy, Orality: Tools of Confidence

In the early 1970s several unions began to introduce the idea of literacy training schemes. Participants in these schemes said they joined because they felt they needed English to respond and be more active agents in the workplace. In the workplace, lack of proficiency in the official languages means a lack

of control over situations of interaction. This compounded feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy. Those who participated wanted English proficiency to discuss work instructions, counter allegations and explain workers' needs and demands.

Today the state is not suppressing literacy work as much as it did in earlier times — possibly because the subsequent growth of organization has led to other security priorities. In the mid-1970s Judy Favish and Pat Horn were served with banning orders — an action apparently directly linked to their literacy work. At around the same time some company managements began to use literacy projects such as Operation Upgrade. Managements see literacy training as a means to facilitate necessary communication in the workplace; they seldom see it as a means for workers to discard the shackles of unconfidence and inferiority.

Certain unions are continuing to address the issue of literacy, although a more concerted effort involving greater resources and boldness is required. Literacy is essential because of continuing developments in production, in trade, in political organization, in technological skills, in means of transportation and community organization. It is also important in trade union work where written words are required for report-backs as well as the spread of information, both of which are crucial to the democratic process. At the same time, the trade union movement itself cannot properly subscribe to worker control nor represent the mass of workers without recognizing the power of orality. For millions of workers (if not for all of us), orality — which we are all born into — is the primary means of communication. Through our forums of education, culture and decision-making, we must build on the illumination and vibrancy that the power of speech brings.

Every mass organization has to wrestle with the problem of domination by the educated and more literate. In COSATU there is a conscious attempt to counter this. According to our constitution, workers should comprise the majority in every structure. In our recent Worker Summit, only worker delegates had speaking rights and the presence of officials was confined to a small secretariat.

With regard to education, COSATU has striven to avoid the 'classroom' approach in which high-powered educators 'teach' shop stewards and workers. In our view, educators should be facilitators and seminars should be forums for discussing and sharing experiences. Every shop steward should get an opportunity to speak and to report back.

Culture is also becoming a powerful weapon of rank and file expression and participation in the organization. Through culture, the working class affirms its identity and its interests, and rediscovers its history; it also unravels, in a dynamic and life-giving way, the hidden patterns and structures which underpin subjugation of the working class.

The surge of cultural activity in the labour movement has been acknowledged by COSATU through the establishment of a culture desk and through the organization of national and regional cultural festivals.

Through the use of workshopped plays, poetry, dance, as well as worker songs and slogans which emulate the war chants of the tribal past, workers are finding a potent and collective way of reflecting on their experiences and articulating their vision for the future.

A development which warrants special mention here is the emergence of worker poets, spearheaded by Mi Hlatshwayo and Alfred Temba Qabula. They stand within the oral tradition of the *mbongi* (praise poets), yet also locate themselves in the hub of the trade union struggle in the industrial heartlands of South Africa. The captivating performances of Qabula and Hlatshwayo at worker meetings in Natal in the early 1980s initiated a broader revival of *imbongi* poetry at worker gatherings in the province and, according to an introduction to *Black Mamba Rising* (which features Hlatshwayo, Qabula and another poet), 'this oral poetry, thought by many to be a dead tradition or the preserve of chiefly praises, resurfaced as the voice of ordinary black workers and their struggles'.

The worker poet thus serves as an oracle not for ancestors but for the new spirit and the vibrancy of the words that are born out of the relationship between people and the revolutionary process.

Different forms of culture are combining to give a new impetus to worker confidence and self-expression. They record, consolidate and give recognition to the changes to language that are taking place in the context of heightened working class struggle.

Conclusion: The Many Challenges

In South Africa the role of language as used by the ruling classes is to maintain and reproduce the existing order of apartheid and exploitation. It is also in and through language that the existing order is contested. But one cannot revolutionize the word without revolutionizing the world in which we live.

The transformation of language is informed and shaped by mass democratic struggle as waged by the democratic movement in our country. The trade union movement as a key pillar of the broader working class is an important factor in the struggle for a complete transformation of our society. It has secured this position not merely through mass mobilization and protest action, but through building working class confidence, raising consciousness, developing grassroots leadership and mass education which form part of campaigns that fundamentally question the present organization of society.

In our struggle, the battle over language intrudes into every struggle, campaign and event. Daily we encounter the state's use of its powerful institu-

tions and vast resources to define crucial aspects of reality in such a way as to deny the experience and perspective of the masses. Examples of this are the creation of official terms such as 'unrest', 'bantustan', 'terrorist', 'enemy', 'law and order' etc.

On the other hand, through organizations the labour movement is forging a language of resistance that powerfully contests the language of domination and articulates the deepest aspirations of the people. The state has indirectly acknowledged the power of the democratic movement in this connection and has responded with a direct attack on our freedom of speech through:

★ the State of Emergency which is geared in large part to suppression of the media.
★ attacking newspapers e.g. *New Nation* and *South* which carry the voices of the majority.
★ confiscating COSATU'S newspaper, pamphlets and posters.
★ banning political organizations such as UDF and numerous community-based organizations.
★ calling journalists 'media terrorists'.
★ launching a programme of spreading disinformation e.g. the campaign against the End Conscription Campaign (ECC).

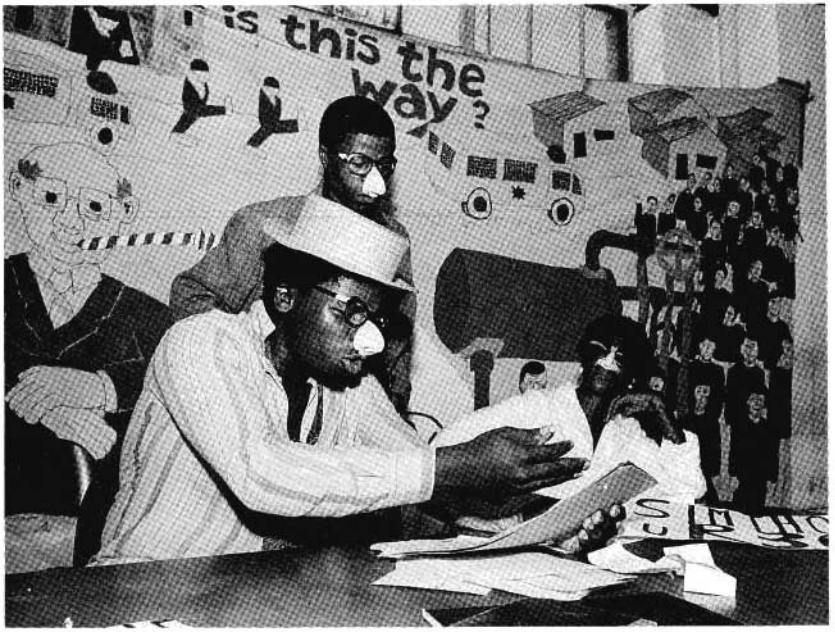
Language issues also confront us in our own forums, whether at small meetings and seminars, or congresses and mass rallies where ordinary workers are shaping a new eloquence and developing language skills that build the strength and confidence of the oppressed and exploited. Through organization workers are discovering the power to break out of ingrained complexes and intimidation and to take language from being a private means of communication between individuals to being a cohesive form of connection and synthesis of our class and our people.

The struggle of language is a crucial one posing numerous and complex questions which must be resolved through struggle and conscious intervention at various levels. The challenge is massive, calling for clear vision, a 'methodical programme' and a revolutionary determination in tackling the tasks that lie ahead. As Chris Searle writes in *Words Unchained, Language and Struggle in Grenada:*

> For setting language free from the complexities of the past means not only the possibility of creating a new personality, but the setting free of knowledge itself. Timidity with language, fear of language, alienation through language meant that knowledge itself and the power to assimilate and understand it, would also be the loser. Language is the carrier of knowledge. When language remains unclear or confused, knowledge stays obscure. Thus a clear methodical language policy for a people is an imperative step for an assault on backwardness and un-

derdevelopment, as well as being necessary to affirm cultural confidence. Revolution has a fundamental responsibility to bring knowledge to the people, to assist them to understand the world and to play a full and conscious part in the building of a new society, a society that will master science, build production and transform their lives.

★ This paper was first presented at the Language and Struggle Conference held at Natal University on 28/29 April 1989.



(Photo: Eric Miller)

Scene from *The Clover Workers' Play*. Pietermaritzburg. 1987.

(Photo: Eric Miller)

Witbank NUM Gumboot Dancers. Cosatu Cultural Day. Johannesburg. 1987

'WE ORGANIZE AND EDUCATE . . .': CULTURAL INTELLECTUALS WITHIN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Moses Ngoasheng

Introduction

Over the past fifteen years the democratic labour movement has consolidated itself centre-stage becoming one of the main protagonists for change in South Africa. In this period the movement has had three far-reaching effects on the South African social formation. 'For the ruling classes the impact of trade unions generated a series of reform measures guaranteeing the legality of such organization' (Sitas, 1986: 84). Secondly, in relation to the oppressed and exploited classes, the significance of the working class manifests itself by the fact that, in one way or another, the majority of political organizational initiatives have preserved a central place for this class in their programmes of mobilization.

The third impact of the labour movement on the social formation is described by Sitas (1986) as 'the most reverberating effect on working class cultures'. This particular development has accentuated new tensions in the cultural spaces of working class communities, and created new possibilities for cultural struggle, linking in unique ways the relationship between culture and production. Out of this development there emerged a sturdy cultural movement within the democratic labour movement. It is argued that the cultural movement that has emerged within the trade unions expresses an alternative oppositional culture to that of the dominant group, that is, a working class culture. The oppositional character of the emergent working class culture stems from, *inter alia*, its organic link with the militant trade unions that are at this point in time one of the main challengers of the prevailing capitalist power relations.

Left at this point, this may be interpreted to mean that working class culture can only emerge within the trade unions. It is argued here that factory-based struggles constitute the theme of cultural manifestation of working class culture that emerges within the unions but are at the same time informed by struggles in the communities. More so because struggles against removals, bantustans, high rents, education, townships and apartheid are no less working class. Hence plays like *The Long March* have scenes focussing on factory-based struggles as well as community-based struggles (e.g. the boycott of white shops in Pietermaritzburg). Similarly the *Dunlop Play* depicts community struggles like the potato boycott and the Durban beer boycott. In other words, culture linked to factory struggles within the trade unions must be understood as a movement in the embryonic working class culture.

Before proceeding it is necessary to pause and briefly look at what we mean by culture. It is argued that culture is 'the dynamic synthesis, at the level of individual or community consciousness, of the material and spiritual historical reality of a society or a human group, of relations existing between man and nature as well as among men and among social classes or sectors' (Cabral, 1972: 210). In other words, it is the way social groups or classes deal with their experience of living in a set of objective conditions. It refers to how people organize their daily lives to survive within a specific material environment and to the parallel development of corresponding values, symbols, attitudes and more. Working class culture therefore refers to the way the class creates, reproduces and develops its material and social existence at all levels.

In the process, the cultural movement in the unions has produced a central core of activists committed to cultural work alongside union work. The crucial point to note here is that this movement grew to what it is today because of this commitment on the part of the cultural activists. Their role has been, and is, crucial in the development and articulation of this culture. This paper argues that this central core of cultural activists has evolved and developed into the movement's 'organic intellectuals' in the cultural field.

It is important to note that the development of oppositional combative culture is not restricted to the labour movement. In the past few years one of the important developments of the political struggle is the enrichment of an oppositional or a popular culture of resistance by cultural manifestations in the communities, manifestations which express in a highly emotive and inspiring way, the meaning of that struggle. Freedom songs and slogans such as 'Boycott NCD Products', 'Organize or Starve', 'Unity in Action', 'Away with Bantu Education', 'Boycott Red Meat', 'Boycott Apartheid Elections' etc. are clear examples of this culture — an oppositional combative culture. This culture enhances our understanding of the nature of the political and economic struggle in South Africa. The degree of our understanding no doubt has a profound effect on how we further develop and elaborate cultural practices and initiatives as a force of opposition allied to the liberation forces in the struggle against cultural, ideological and political imposition of the dominant classes. In a word, there is an organic relationship between actual struggles and the development of oppositional culture. It is within class organizations and struggles that cultural expressions are thrown up.

This paper concentrates on the core cultural activists within the trade unions. The role and function of these activists can only be understood if looked at in the context of actual struggles and processes which shaped the cultural movement within the unions.

Class Relations and Culture in South Africa

South African society is economically dominated by the relations of exploitation based on machinofacture and relative surplus value extraction. This system of economic exploitation is reinforced by a complex system of national oppression. Both these elements, economic exploitation and political oppression, are inseparable components of working class experience. Within this framework of economic exploitation and political domination, the working class, in an attempt to control their conditions of life, form defensive combinations, normative communities and cultural formations. These can be in the form of moral economies of the English working class or the *stokvel/stokie* and *mohodisano/mogodisano* of the African working class in South Africa. The *stokvel* or *mogodisano* is a form of rotating credit where its members pool part of each person's wages which is then given to one of the members. Through these formations workers attempt to augment their meagre wage packets. It is argued that in a sense trade unions have historically emerged as the highest form of such defensive combinations.

The antagonistic relationship inherent in capitalist production produces men and women who invariably have to struggle against exploitation and oppression. Exposed to the harsh conditions of exploitation and alienation, these men and women form defensive combinations, associations, trade unions etc. In their attempt to control their lives, workers come into conflict with 'captains of industry'. The daily working class struggles around immediate issues like wages, working conditions, the right to organize, strike and picket, housing, affordable rents and bus/train fares, are the basis upon which worker plays are created.

It is argued that cultural work within trade unions is more often than not preceded by actual struggles between labour on the one hand, and state and capital on the other. Plays like the *Dunlop Play*, *Clover Workers' Play*, *The Long March* by Sarmcol workers etc. were created after actual struggles. One can therefore postulate that once people are brought together organizationally and engage in struggle they will bring forward cultural expressions.

It is argued that it is within workers' combinations, associations and/or organizations that working class culture proliferates. Medu (in *SALB* 1985: 24) puts this point succinctly: 'As the oppressed class begins to resist, as it begins to develop the organizations and institutions of struggle, it must find its own cultural position — remember its history, identify its heroes, write new songs and sing them, start newspapers, literary circles, theatre and discussion groups.' The material practices and forms of social organization whereby the dominated or subordinate classes cope with the stress of living under capitalism form the bedrock of this class culture (Koch, 1983: 155). Alternative culture of the working class arises as attempts to resolve collectively problems resulting from

contradictions in the social structure. Johnson (Clarke et al, 1979: 237) notes that it is a matter of historical reality that working class culture has been built around the task of making fundamentally punishing conditions more inhabitable.

The underlying argument here is that capitalism creates conditions of existence that are experienced along class lines. This means that the way the working class creates, reproduces and develops its material and social conditions at all levels will accordingly differ from that of the capitalist class and will exhibit a class orientation. The need to find physical and psychological ways of surviving under capitalism exerts a pressure on the working class and other subordinate classes that share the same conditions of exploitation and oppression to respond collectively and simultaneously to develop conceptions of the world that correspond to this collective activity. Through songs, poetry, dance and other cultural work, workers give creative expression to their conditions of life.

Cultural Organizations and Activists

As cultural work increases in scope and depth within the trade unions there emerges a core of cultural activists who, it is argued, in the process come to constitute a section of the working class 'organic intellectuals'. 'As the spontaneous rise of their movement becomes broader and deeper, the working class masses promote from their ranks not only an increasing number of talented agitators, but also talented organizers, propagandists, and "practical workers" in the best sense of the term' (Lenin, 1983: 37). These 'organic intellectuals' arising directly from the working class masses remain in permanent contact with the masses and perform crucial organizational functions.

Gramsci's conceptualization of the term 'organic intellectuals' is very crucial in understanding the role and function of the core cultural activists. For Gramsci the term 'intellectual' generally refers to the entire social stratum which exercises an organizational function in the broad sense — whether in the field of production, or in that of culture, or in that of political administration.

Gramsci (1986: 5) argues that 'every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of production creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political (and I would add, in the cultural ideological) fields'. Organic intellectuals are those whose origin coincides with that of the fundamental group they represent. Salamini (1981: 108) points out that they are defined in terms of the functions attributed to them by the fundamental social group from which they originate. It is important to emphasize that the intellectuals do not constitute a class, but 'strata' produced by each social group.

'Organic intellectuals' play an essential role in the organization of individuals into a homogeneous structure. Working class intellectuals help the cathartic transformation of the groups' economic corporate condition into a hegemonic one (Salamini, 1983: 108). They elaborate the consciousness of common economic and political interests as well as 'homogeneous and autonomous conceptions of the world which expand to include the entire society on the level of production and distribution of knowledge'. The working class as a group which aspires towards hegemony in the present conjuncture, needs to constantly throw up from its own ranks intellectuals with hegemonic functions. Furthermore it needs 'to assimilate and conquer ''ideologically'' the traditional intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1986).

Organic intellectuals, therefore, are not idealistic disinterested creators but are 'contaminated by social relations' (Buci-Glucksmann, 1980: 29). Their distinguishing features lie not in the intrinsic nature of their activities but in the fulfilment of their functions, that of 'directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong'.

Cultural Activists or Intellectuals?

It is argued that working class organizations create conditions which encourage cultural activity and cultural independence, in the sense of developing culture from the standpoint of the working class. The emphasis is on the development of culture from below; it is workers themselves who carry on cultural activity and who develop the necessary capacities for it. While this may be so, it is at the same time important to point out that it is not always possible to produce cultural activists who develop and articulate a culture which serves the interest of the exploited and oppressed outside working class and/or popular organizations and movements. A class organization, and in particular its political party, is nothing other than a specific way of elaborating that class's category of organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1986).

Drawing from Gramsci, it is argued that these cultural organic intellectuals perform certain fundamental organizational functions in the labour movement. Through cultural work, debates and discussions they

(a) arouse the masses of workers from passivity, i.e. to innovate,
(b) educate the masses to overcome contradictory consciousness, alienation, disunity, cultural chauvinism etc.,
(c) capture spontaneous cultural energies of the masses and direct them to serve the interest of the working class, and
(d) provide an alternative, new vision of society.

It is argued that once cultural activity comes to occupy an important space within a working class organization, within trade unions for example, such an organization has to evolve policies to nourish and develop the cultural

stirrings of the masses, to echo attempts which are already present, to diffuse them more widely, and to give encouragement in the knowledge that culture in this sense cannot be something coming from the centre but that it can only flourish as something diverse, something growing up from below, something to be supported. Cultural organic intellectuals of the organization help formulate a theoretical consciousness of culture which informs such policies and processes.

In interviews I had with the core cultural activists it became clear that they are aware that through their active intervention they are challenging a structural force. Increasingly they realized that culture is a struggle and a site of struggle in its own right. They argued that the struggle of the working class is not merely a struggle aimed at destroying institutions of exploitation and oppression, but is at the same time aimed at creating new structures embodying working class principles.

The knowledge acquired through active intervention, made cultural activists aware that the working class is capable of changing relations around it. On the basis of this knowledge, cultural activists set out to create and form new structures that will specifically deal with cultural issues within the trade unions. It is in this context that the cultural activists in Durban established the Durban Workers' Cultural Local (DWCL) to 'co-ordinate, encourage and redirect cultural work among workers in the unions' (Interview with M).

Cultural structures are perceived as relevant to the degree that they enable workers to intervene at the appropriate conjuncture. Such structures or formations would ensure that the cultural work that was mushrooming from the ranks of the workers is not lost to the labour movement. In an interview M argues that 'we realized that to effectively capture and make culture serve the interest of the struggle, we have to have structures that are democratically controlled by the workers'.

> A human mass does not 'distinguish' itself, does not become independent in its own right, without in the widest sense organizing itself; and there is no organization without intellectuals, that is without organizers and leaders, in other words, without the theoretical aspect of the theory practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of people 'specialized' in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas. (Gramsci, 1986: 334)

The DWCL emerged as such an organization. 'The Durban Workers' Cultural Local's aim is to unite the cultural workers, activists in order to share their experiences, their problems, in order to contribute to workers' struggle, the liberation struggle at large. In order that they as cultural workers strengthen and then promote our federation and our struggle. In order to record in

a cultural way our gains, our losses, our weaknesses and our strengths.' (Interview, M)

The core cultural activists who initiated the Cultural Local developed a document which set out the principles that informed and continue to inform the cultural movement's practice. The document makes the point that workers need to have control over their creative power.

> Because we have been singing, parading, boxing, acting and writing within a system we did not control. So far black workers have been feeding all their creativity into a culture machine to make profits for others. This makes us say that it is time to begin controlling our creativity: we must create space in our struggle — through our songs, our slogans, our own poems, our own art work, our own plays and dances. (DWCL document in Sitas, 1986: 69)

It is clear from the above that by creating a structure like DWCL and articulating culture from the standpoint of the working class, the core cultural activists were giving the movement an 'awareness of its own function' in the cultural field. They became organizers and educators of the movement.

Since the emergence of a cultural movement within the trade unions, almost all union meetings — local, regional and national — are punctuated by cultural performances. When the cultural movement was still in its infancy core activists like Alfred Qabula and Mi Hlatshwayo used to go from one union meeting to another to perform their praise poems and at the same time encourage workers to write about their lives and conditions. M (interview) said that: 'After seeing Qabula perform his praise poems I became inspired and gained the courage to perform my own.' One can therefore conclude that by urging workers to become involved in cultural work and through the example of his own work, Qabula was arousing workers from passivity to action in order to advance their cause.

Organization is the key to success in any class struggle. From its own experience the working class has learnt that it has no other weapon against the capitalists except its ability to organize. The workers' hopes and expectations are derived from systematic and organized action. All those interviewed are well aware of the importance of organization. Cultural work has to express the needs, desires and hopes of workers and at the same time show the way towards their realization. It has to depict the reality of exploitation and oppression in such a way that it is not merely seen but understood, not merely mirrored but penetrated and at the same time organize workers to fight their way out: 'In organizing workers we have to use all kinds of forces to strive towards uniting them in the union and culture is one of these forces' (M, interview). Culture, therefore, is seen as contributing to building organization

at the point of production and beyond, strengthening the workers' national organization, educating workers and uniting workers with other exploited and oppressed classes.

The exploited and oppressed classes of South Africa have a long tradition of resistance and struggle against economic and political domination. It is argued that historically the dominated classes handled and continue to handle the experiences of capitalist exploitation and national domination in cultural terms. Cultural struggle has always been an important element of the struggle against the 'fundamental' groups. The core cultural activists argue that while this is so, cultural work has another function, that of being a repository for popular memory and consciousness. Hence M (interview) argues that as cultural activists they want to record their own history — the history of workers' struggle. The relevance of such a history and the role of cultural work in diffusing such a history within the workers' and people's movements are captured by TQ (interview) thus:

> Like any other people we need to understand and know the history of our struggle. We have to know about the strategies and tactics applied in the past, to know about victories won and losses suffered. It is only by knowing that history that we can be in a position to draw lessons from previous struggles and avoid some of the mistakes committed in the past. Plays have an important role in bringing the history back to us in a cultural way. Like the Dunlop Play educates us about the Durban beer boycott, the potato boycott sparked off by events at Bethal, the floods and the 1974 Dunlop strike.

What emerges from the above is the view of core cultural activists as organizers and leaders of the working class in the cultural field. Closely related to this is their role as educators. M (interview) argues that 'culture educates people about our struggle and puts across a true picture of things — our picture'. Culture is seen as an essential medium to get across the message of the union and the struggle for liberation which people can easily relate to, 'because culture is more practical than anything else' (Interview, N).

From their actual experience in the process of struggle workers have learnt that 'unity is strength'. A song from the Durban bus drivers' choir expresses the need for unity succinctly thus:

> We call on you workers,
> Unite so we can conquer.

This is echoed by Mi Hlatshwayo in his poem, 'Workers' Lamentation for Ancient Africa', in Sitas (1986: 39):

Together we would
Stave-off Star Wars
Together we would
Build empires without
Bombs
Together we would
Put power in the maize field
Not missiles . . .

M (interview) points out that the importance of working class culture 'is to make the vision of a new South Africa which will not know oppression and exploitation. Through culture this world can be lived and seen. This is the challenge one must take with the vigour and power of a bull. We must make this vision a reality now. To the struggling masses, culture must be a mirror and a medium. It is from this mirror that we catch a glimpse of the new liberated society free from oppression and exploitation. A working class culture has to do with this vision.'

The main conclusion that emerges from this paper is that the way cultural work is being organized and utilized suggests that it is consciously employed to advance the interests of the subordinate classes in the struggle for economic and political emancipation. Despite the fact that this work is undertaken in a capitalist world where the dominant ethos is alienation, it has the power to break the socialized passivity of the exploited and oppressed and inspire them to challenge the fundamental classes. It engenders a sense of power among workers — a taking control of one's life — thus challenging bourgeois hegemony. Through the agency of the cultural activists — organic intellectuals of the working class — cultural responses are being shaped to recognize the working class's specific interests and inherent antagonisms to the dominant classes. As a result cultural responses have come to play an important role in facilitating the way workers organize themselves.

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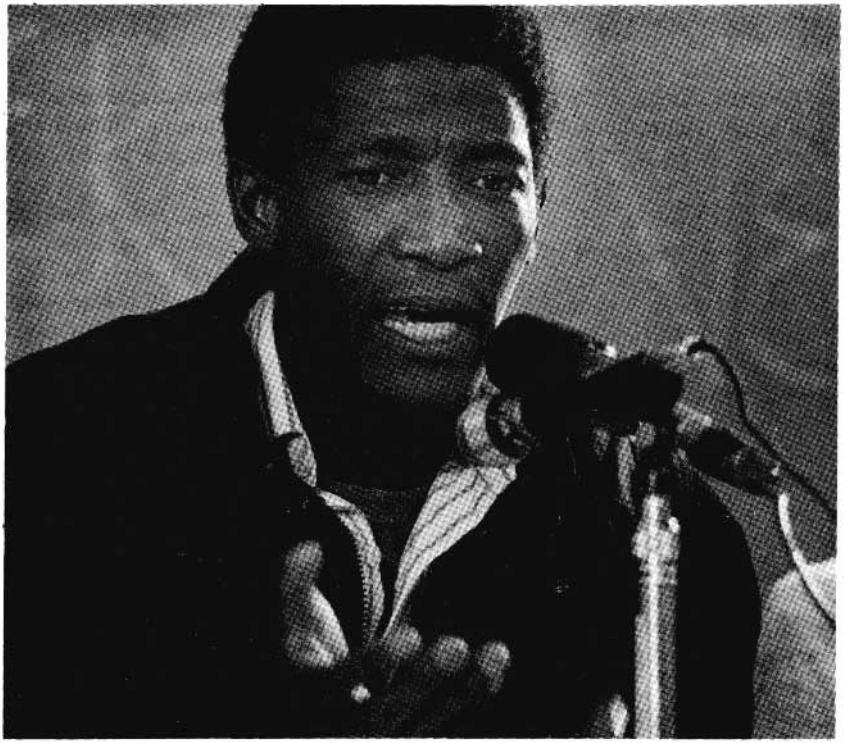


(Photo: Jeeva Rajgopaul)

MI HLATSHWAYO: CULTURE AND ORGANIZATION IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Mi Hlatshwayo is the National Cultural Co-ordinator of the Congress of South African Trade Unions. His poetry, which he performs at trade union meetings and other gatherings, was published in the anthology Black Mamba Rising in 1986. He spoke to Andries Walter Oliphant about his role in the organization of workers' culture and the importance of this movement in the struggle to establish a people's culture in South Africa.

STAFFRIDER: What does your role as national cultural co-ordinator of COSATU entail?
HLATSHWAYO: I co-ordinate the cultural events of COSATU at local, regional and national level. This involves assisting the various unions in establishing cultural projects as well as encouraging the creation of democratic cultural

structures. This, as you can imagine, involves extensive discussion and planning with the elected leadership at all levels of the worker movement.

The main aim is to provide the working class with suggestions and advice as to the most effective way of setting up democratic cultural structures which will serve the purpose of popularizing working class politics. Culture is a means whereby working class expression can be facilitated and the struggle for liberation advanced.

STAFFRIDER: Can you elaborate on the procedures you follow and the problems you encounter when setting up democratic cultural structures at various levels?

HLATSHWAYO: As you can imagine, there are a number of problems which present themselves in the process of trying to set up structures which will serve the cultural interests of workers. The principles of democracy require that these procedures be extended over a period of time to ensure that as many workers as possible are involved. The process of democratic consultation is central here. In the past, and for that matter today, outside the democratic movement, the method was, and still is, based on individual input and discretion. In our case, whether an idea comes from one person, or from one union there is a democratic process that has to be followed. The central principle, as I have stated, involves consultation with the relevant representative groups on local, regional and national level.

This consultation, which others might regard as a waste of time, is necessary to foster a spirit of democratic discussion. This is vital if one wishes to reach consensus and unity. Furthermore, it ensures that the collective interest of the labour movement is served and not contradicted. All projects have to be motivated and reasons have to be given which makes clear why a project is necessary. The gains which we as a labour movement make out of this are of great cultural and political significance. It serves to cultivate a culture which gives everybody an opportunity to have a say. This is the substance of democracy. It allows for the incorporation of many ideas and insights from which our struggle can only benefit.

STAFFRIDER: Once consensus has been reached on the merits of a particular project the same procedures are followed in the production of, say for instance, a play?

HLATSHWAYO: Cultural production, as you might imagine, has to be related to the political, economic and social struggles of workers and their organizations. In many cases a production, like a play, will be based on the facts surrounding a specific form of labour action, for instance a strike. The material for the play is drawn from the results of collective bargaining.

In the process of producing the play, the members of the union will discuss details, such as who wants to, and who will, participate in the play. The group which emerges from such a discussion is given the mandate to work out the

content and theme of the production. This is done in a workshop method which once again draws on the contribution of everyone in the group. As the production develops, progress reports are given to the rest of the union members who are not directly involved in the production. Problems are discussed and advice is given where necessary. Before the play is put on publicly, it is presented to everyone concerned, so that workers have the opportunity to decide whether the play represents their strike or not.

If it is found that the play does not represent the history and issues of the strike or other forms of labour action accurately, this is conveyed to the production group and the necessary corrections are made. This, I must stress, does not mean that when a person or group creates something, that it will be rejected out of hand. If the work represents the feelings of the majority, it is welcomed. If, however, the majority have a problem then discussion is initiated with the comrade or the group concerned. This happens when the feeling arises that a particular production is detrimental to the cause of the workers.

We recently had a case where a member from one of our unions presented a very exciting script for the May Day Celebrations. It was a two-person play which he wrote independently. Unfortunately, there were some things which contradicted the principles of COSATU and the Mass Democratic Movement. After the play was seen, he was called in by a group of shop stewards in his factory and they related this problem to him. He responded by saying that since he created the play independently, he wished to retain his freedom as a writer and dramatist.

The comrades responded by telling him they respected his position and perhaps he was right. They did not threaten him with expulsion from the union but tried to point out some of the dangers in his position, like the possibility of him ending up in isolation from other workers as well as the democratic movement and its allies.

STAFFRIDER: Could you give more background information regarding this case?

HLATSHWAYO: Certainly. As you know, the central principles and goals of COSATU and the Mass Democratic Movement are the creation of a united, democratic, non-racial society. Our cultural activities should embody these ideals. Regarding the case in question, the play contained strong racial and tribal elements. These were displayed in a rather crude, unanalytical and negative manner. The attitudes adopted towards other population groups were such that they tended to foster unacceptable forms of prejudice towards these groups. The workers pointed out to the comrade that while the culture of oppression in this country promotes notions of individualism, tribalism and racism, these ideas were not in accordance with the culture of liberation.

The comrade eventually came to understand this as well as the dangers it possesses. He decided to consider these objections and to rework his play.

This is not, as you can see, a form of censorship, or an example of someone being threatened. It is an educative process which takes place in an atmosphere of tolerant discussion from which all can benefit. It is also an example of the problem which often arises in the production of committed culture, namely how to balance the relationship between politics and the demands of a particular art form in terms of the freedom of the cultural worker to decide as he or she sees fit.

STAFFRIDER: It is also relevant to the question regarding the relationship between the personal and the social, or as in the case of workers, the relationship between the individual and the class. Can you perhaps give me an indication of how these forces shaped your own work?

HLATSHWAYO: It's rather difficult to speak about the topic since my role as national co-ordinator requires that I spend most of my time interacting with other people. In other words, I do not have much time to be self-concerned. My involvement with the struggle to build a democratic people's culture does not leave me with much time to be concerned about my personal development as a poet. This can be demanding and problematic, but it is also challenging and rewarding.

Being involved in and exposed to workers' and various community campaigns is a very enriching aspect of my work. The challenge to culture is to find the visual and literary forms which give adequate expression to the experiences of large numbers of people. At the same time, we are faced with the challenge to replace the racist culture of apartheid with a new democratic culture shaped by the people themselves. My role in this process is to assist with the formation of structures and the acquisition of skills that will facilitate this.

As for my own roots, they continue to form the basis of my involvement since they are also the roots of most workers in this country. I was born in a very poor family. I had to struggle to acquire the rudiments of education. I wrote while I was still at school but nothing came of it until I started working. This changed when I realized that workers and the workplace represented the context and the people for my writing. It was here, amid the spontaneous singing which marked all worker gatherings, that I saw the possibilities of refashioning the traditional oral praise poem to articulate the struggles of workers. I also came to understand that if a people's culture is to be shaped it had to emerge from the experiences of workers and had to be performed at workers' gatherings.

I say this because workers are both the most exploited and the majority in the country. If we forget this we will not succeed in building a true people's culture nor will we be able to establish a democratic society.

STAFFRIDER: How does the labour movement conceive of mass worker participation in culture? Does it involve all the workers producing and participat-

ing in it, or does it envisage some workers producing it while the majority are exposed to it?

HLATSHWAYO: These are crucial questions and there are many stages to the issues you raise. The first stage involves the creation of democratic cultural committees at local level throughout the country. These committees must serve as co-ordinating bodies which will facilitate culture at the local level and involve as many people as possible.

The second important stage involves upgrading cultural production. This may involve bringing in professionally trained progressive cultural activists to run workshops and to lecture with the aim of imparting knowledge and skills.

The third stage involves spreading this knowledge and involving everyone who is interested in producing culture. We would like to be in a position to provide this leadership and service in the field of culture.

STAFFRIDER: How do you deal with the problem of facilities?

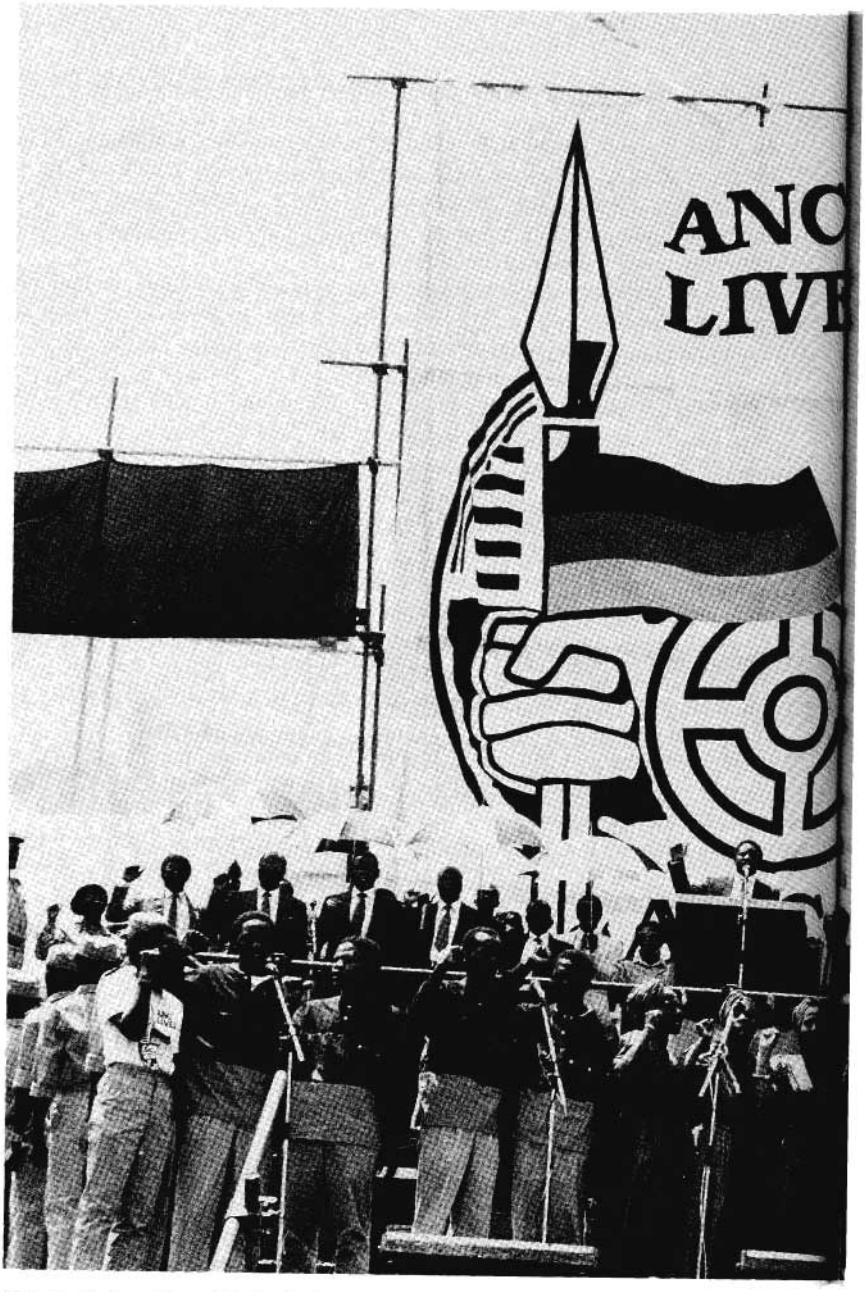
HLATSHWAYO: The shortage of facilities is indeed a problem. We need facilities which are adequate and conducive to cultural work. This is required both for rehearsals and performances. We invariably have to perform our work to large numbers of people under extremely bad conditions. We need to practise, but it is often difficult to secure venues for rehearsals. We have to travel long distances from the townships to reach venues in town. This is costly. Cultural work mostly takes place after six o'clock when everyone is exhausted after a day's work. Often workers have to walk long distances at night. This is risky.

The same applies for finished productions which we mostly perform for non-profit. Nonetheless, we still have to hire the halls and pay for transport, adverts and promoting. All this is costly.

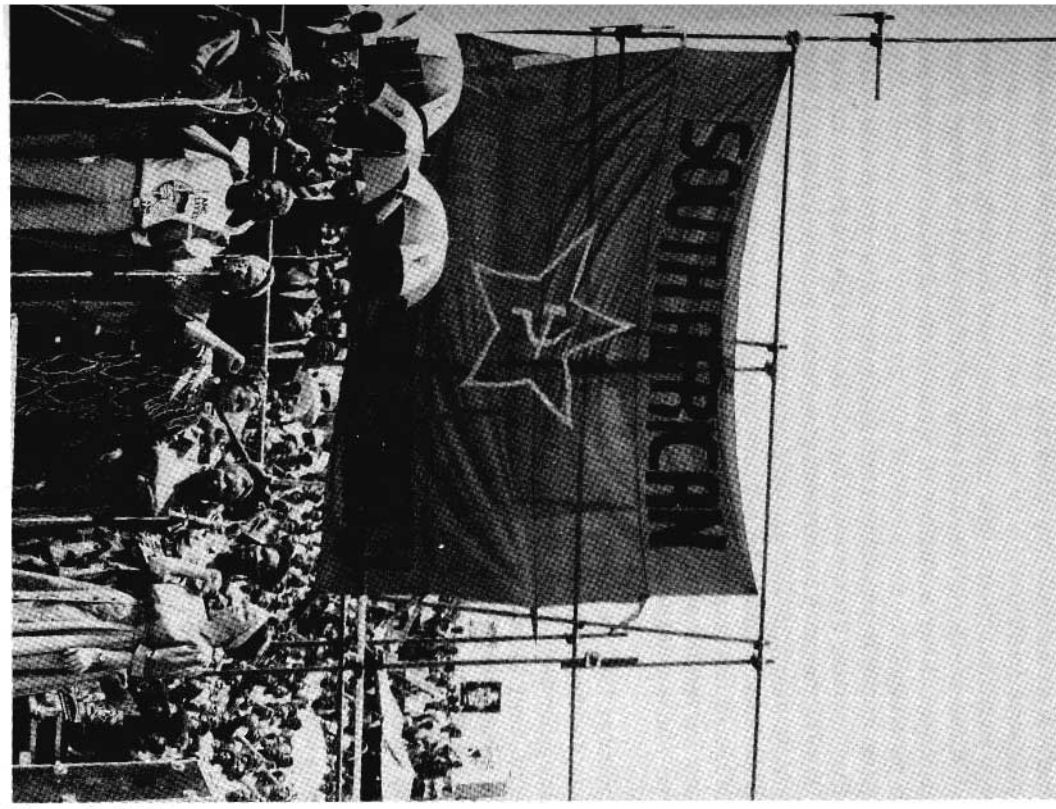
STAFFRIDER: It is ironic that those who are responsible for the exploitation of workers are in the habit of saying that culture is a luxury which workers can do without while the profits extracted from workers are used to finance the culture of an oppressive elite. How does the labour movement view this?

HLATSHWAYO: It is for this reason that we say: the more workers become involved in culture, the more difficult it will be for these capitalists you refer to, to argue quite falsely that culture is dispensable when it comes to workers. We create the wealth but we are prevented from sharing it. In fact, we are brutally stopped from deciding where this wealth should go.

We do know, however, that this wealth goes to promote apartheid culture. It goes to the SABC, State theatres, and racist sport organizations. By facilitating and organizing culture we complement and strengthen the struggle for liberation that will see to it that what belongs to the people is returned to them.



Cosatu Living Wage Choir. Welcome Back Rally for released ANC leaders. Johannesburg. 1989.



(Photo: Cecil Sols)

THE LIVING WAGE GROUP

This group was formed in 1987 after COSATU had seen a need that culture should be placed on its agenda. To implement the resolution a National Cultural Co-ordinator was employed. One of his tasks was to see to it that cultural units and groups were formed.

Through his tireless efforts and co-ordination in Johannesburg, the National Union of Mineworkers' staff members took an initiative and the Living Wage Group emerged. Later a number of workers and dedicated unemployed workers participated.

The group gradually grew in numbers as it sang slogans and revolutionary songs. Every evening it rehearsed at the now bombed Khotso House building.

Later in 1987, the group concentrated on a drama which was called 'A Living Wage'. At the time COSATU was nationally engaged in a Living Wage Campaign. This drama depicted the workers' struggle and the motivations for a Living Wage. At first the play was just like a sketch performed by school pupils. The group felt that the play needed some refinement and comrade Ramolao Makhene, who is well known in theatre, came to our rescue sharing his skills with us.

In November 1987 we received an invitation from Amsterdam to attend the Culture in Another South Africa (CASA) conference. Due to the limited size of the delegation from South Africa, not all of our members could attend this conference. Only those with key roles in the play went.

To the group's surprise, in Amsterdam we were not only asked to perform the play but also to sing. So, we sang our slogans and revolutionary songs at the Hague and other venues where we were scheduled. We need to say that the group became highly motivated by the Amandla Cultural Group and brought home what we learned from their performances.

After the CASA conference, the group experienced some problems. Rehearsals were suffering, the reasons being that almost all the members were engaged in their respective unions with other urgent commitments.

This problem was then reported to the COSATU Local Education Committee (LEDCOM) which is a substructure of the COSATU Local which the group is accountable to. Announcements were made on Tuesdays in the local and cultural workers were encouraged to launch a Cultural Unit in the Johannesburg area. This succeeded and the unit was launched with a variety of cultural disciplines.

For the first time, the group had someone who could play an instrument. This was a blessing on its own. With all the motivation they received from the Amandla Cultural Ensemble they were encouraged to start singing songs that are different from the usual slogans, using the instruments not only for

rhythm but for composing the songs as well. The guitarist would play a rhythm and ask the group to find suitable lyrics. Everyone enjoyed this since they became part of the creative work that would than be presented to the audience after it was put together. The guitarist happened to be a good composer as well, and has composed many of the songs. At times he would come for rehearsals and tell the group that, in a dream the night before, he heard some people singing this song i.e. the new one he had composed. The group would burst into laughter and then concentrate and start rehearsals.

The group has become popular with many organizations. We receive invitations almost every week. There are times when we leave the stage, and the audience request certain songs to be performed again. After we leave the stage, some people ask if we are selling cassettes, and to their disappointment they are told 'not yet'.

This encouraged the group to apply through the structures within COSATU for permission to make a recording. This has been approved. Unfortunately there was a minor problem with which studio to use, but hopefully that will be solved very soon and we can then record and satisfy our fans. The group has about twenty-five songs that have been composed by the twenty-one members.

THE K-TEAM AND RESISTANCE MUSIC
based on an interview
with
Chris Dhlamini

The composition and performance of songs which express the experiences and views of workers are important elements in contemporary worker culture. In 1984 the workers at Kellogs in Springs formed an *mbube* style choir which came to be known as the K-Team.

Chris Dhlamini who composes music for the choir recalled the circumstances which led to the formation of the group: 'During the uprisings of 1984 many students, workers and activists in Springs and the surrounding areas were detained and killed by the state and its agents of repression. I was also detained during this time and fellow-workers at Kellogs, like Agrippa Xaba, came together to form a choir. They composed a song which referred to my detention, and that of others, as a way of reminding the people of our fate. This ensured that no one in detention from our factory and community was forgotten despite the clampdown on information by the state.'

The impact of the K-Team, which draws its members from workers at Kellogs, from the unemployed and the youth in the Springs community, was so powerful that workers in other factories and communities began to follow their example. They began performing at general union meetings and rallies of what was then FOSATU. They also participated in community meetings and social occasions such as funerals and weddings. They were also invited to perform at the launch of COSATU in 1986.

According to Dhlamini, 'the diverse membership of the group ensures that a wide variety of interests are integrated into the music composed and performed by the group. This has enabled the K-Team to focus on the common struggle of workers, the unemployed, the youth and on community issues. It has enriched the content of our music and has ensured that it has a wide appeal. All our music is composed by taking into account the prevailing social and political situation and it aims to unify and mobilize the people into action.'

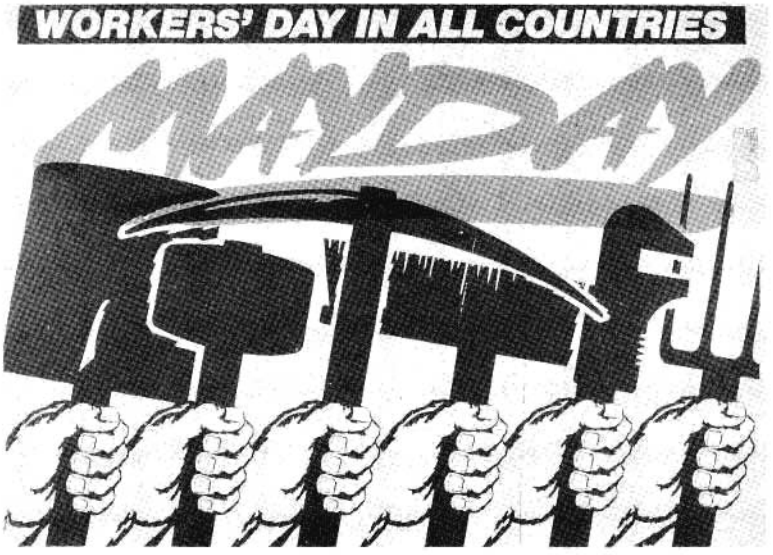
Despite the success and popularity of the group their main problem, Dhlamini says, remains financial: 'We need uniforms and have problems with transport. One of our aims is to provide an income to the unemployed through our activities but this has not been possible thus far because we do not charge a fee for our performances. The idea of a co-op which will sell T-shirts and music cassettes and various other cultural products is being investigated by the group with the assistance of the national cultural organizer of COSATU.'

The K-Team is part of a large number of cultural groups which have emerged on the East Rand recently. These include the Tsakane Drama Group, the LKB

(Photo: Cedric Nunn)

NUM Gumboot Dancers. Workers' Library launch. Johannesburg. 1988.

Group from Boksburg and many others. They view their cultural work not only as a means of recreation but also as a way of expressing the interests and aspirations of the working class and their communities. In this sense their music is a form of cultural resistance since it gives voice to the political and economic struggles of the oppressed.



THE COMMUNITY ARTS PROJECT: POSTERS AND THE PROLETARIAT

based on an interview with Lionel Davis

The Cape Town-based Community Arts Project (CAP) established in 1977 has been offering services and training to community organizations, student bodies, church groupings and labour organizations in a wide field of cultural production for almost twelve years. The services include popular forms of community theatre, pottery and ceramics, painting and graphic art, photography, print-making, poster, T-shirt and banner production. Lionel Davis who co-ordinates the broad area of media production speaks here about the development of the project, its democratic structure as well as its aims and functions.

According to Davis, when the project first started, over a decade ago, 'the idea of individual creativity, leadership and contribution was very strong. Individual input formed the basic mode of operation. Tuition and training were offered by individual tutors who volunteered to work in a community orientated project. The problem with this mode of operation was that it was dependent on the vagaries of individuals who had time and the preparedness to work in the project. This was an unsatisfactory situation. It led to instability and to an organization without a clear process of accountability.'

UNEMPLOYED WORKERS MOVEMENT
WORK FOR ALL
OR A WAGE
LIVING
ORGANISE OR STARVE

TRANSPORT AND
GENERAL WORKERS
UNION AID SERVICE
GUMBA
Reggae
African Pop
Mbhaqanga Soul
Funk
8pm JUNE
FRIDAY 5th
LANSDOWNE CIVIC
R3
Printed at CAP

RETAIL & ALLIED WORKERS' UNION
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
INTLANGANISO YONYAKA
SUNDAY 10 JUNE · 11 AM
ATHLONE CIVIC CENTRE
PRINTED AT SAP

LET'S FIGHT FOR OUR RIGHTS
FARMWORKERS!

ARE YOU UNEMPLOYED?
1 DID YOU KNOW THAT IF YOU WORKED FOR 3YEARS AND MORE, YOU CAN GET BENEFITS FOR 1YEAR?
2 DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU CAN APPEAL AGAINST DECISIONS?
3 DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU CAN GET DEATH BENEFITS?
4 GET YOUR BLUECARD WHEN YOU LEAVE YOUR JOB
WE DEMAND
JOBS FOR ALL AT A LIVING WAGE!

RE-INSTATE
CAPE GAS AND HOTEL
WORKERS
SMASH THE LABOUR BILL
A WORKING CLASS UNITED WILL NEVER BE DEFEATED

WORLD UNITE INTERNATIONAL
WORKERS DAY
WORKERS OF THE
MAYDAY

F.A.W.U.
FAWU
SPECIAL
GENERAL MEETING
COSATU
SUNDAY 16th AUGUST AT 10.30AM
DAIRYBELLE HOSTEL SECT.3 GUGS.
AGENDA
REPORT BACK FROM COSATU CONGRESS
PREPARATION FOR FAWU CONGRESS
•RESOLUTIONS •AMENDMENTS TO CONSTITUTION
•NOMINATIONS FOR OFFICE BEARERS
• ELECTIONS OF DELEGATES

Given the fact that the project was conceived as an alternative to existing state institutions and as a way of providing facilities to communities who were deprived of the most basic means for cultural production, the various people involved in the project felt that a more democratic and collective form of organization had to be created: 'We decided to restructure and democratize the entire project to include and involve students as well as the community in shaping the aims and functions of the organization. In the process we developed what we call a participatory democracy with various checks and balances to ensure that no single individual is placed in a position where he or she can make decisions affecting others and the life of the organization without consulting and involving everyone concerned.'

Davis explains further that all the activities and business of the cultural project are conducted in the open. Even the salaries of the various cultural workers employed on a full-time basis by the organization are made public. He also stresses that this process of democratization is an ongoing exercise: 'We monitor the situation regularly by conducting evaluations of all the departments and their work to ensure that nothing remains static or becomes a hindrance to the principle of democracy which requires that the demands of the community, worker organizations and students are adequately catered for in our programmes.'

These evaluations take place in the course of the year as well as on an annual basis when the members of the project spend a week away from the organization to discuss its internal structure, its relationship to the community and other organizations. Here, long-term plans are formulated and strategies are devised to overcome recurring problems. One such decision involved moving from Chapel Street in Woodstock, where the project was housed in relative isolation from other organizations, to Community House in Observatory, where it shares facilities with other organizations including the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). According to Davis, this move has had a tremendous effect on the work in the project.

He elaborates by pointing out how the move strengthened the project's links with the labour movement: 'We have always done work for labour oganizations. But when we moved to Community House our relationship with COSATU became very close. We were in touch with hundreds of workers on a daily basis. This brought about a very important extension in the democratic orientation of CAP. We were able to extend our facilities on a regular basis to various affiliates of COSATU. This enabled workers to develop the various media skills and to produce their own posters, T-shirts and banners. At workers' conferences and gatherings we participate in displays and the distribution of information.'

The course which the Community Arts Project followed to arrive at a stage where the organization was functioning democratically and the necessary skills

were being relayed to the larger community and other progressive organizations was determined by self-analysis and restructuring of its teaching methods. Davis retraces the origins of the media centre and explains the route they followed: 'At the Culture and Liberation Festival held in Botswana in 1982, it was established very clearly that cultural workers had a definite role to play in the struggle for liberation. We at CAP felt we could provide a service to the oppressed communities in relation to specific social and political campaigns by producing posters and other materials which served as a means to propagate the struggles of the communities. By implementing this, CAP became instrumental in facilitating the recent growth of poster production serving community struggles in the Western Cape.'

However, once the media section began production a new problem emerged: 'We realized that the cultural workers employed by CAP were mainly responsible for producing the posters and other material such as T-shirts without imparting these production skills to the organizations we served. It meant that the organizations kept returning with new requests and leaving with finished products without ever learning how to produce the materials themselves.' Davis mentions this by referring back to his remarks concerning the need for constant evaluation.

A solution was sought and found. It became clear that the emphasis had to be placed on programmes which would enable people to acquire skills in a relatively short time. It had to put them in the position to apply these skills by setting up the necessary printing facilities in their own organizations or by making use of the facilities at CAP to produce their own posters and T-shirts. The necessary changes were made to bring this about: 'Now, when people come with a request,' Davis says, 'they are introduced to very simple print-making techniques which are easy to learn, cheap to acquire and simple to manage. We service between six and ten people at a time with a specific end product in mind. In addition to this we have longer workshops conducted by Mike Rautenbach and Gaby Cheminais. These last for one month and involve the teaching of media and print-making skills to representatives from various organizations. A related area taught by John Berndt involves a full-time nine-month media course for six students: two from the United Women's Congress, two from the Cape Youth Congress and two from the Congress of South African Trade Unions. This is an intensive media course which strives to give people from organizations the skills necessary to facilitate media production within their organizations. The course is not designed to produce specialist media workers but is based on the barefoot-doctor principle. They are given a basic training which they can use to facilitate media production in their organization. In addition to the short service and training courses we also have one-year programmes conducted in six-week blocks for students from the various communities. The main aim of all these programmes is that the

participants return to their organizations and communities to apply and spread these skills.'

Probing Davis about the actual teaching methods they follow produces very important insights into how CAP succeeds in linking the production of media material with the politics of communication and the role of progressive media in the struggle for liberation in South Africa: 'We always begin with a discussion on the role of the media in the struggle. Here we seek answers to questions such as: ''Why is it necessary to produce a poster or banners?'' ''Why is it that the State has an almost complete monopoly over the communication media?'' ''What is the role of the State media and how can we counter it?'' In this way the group comes to define its own needs.'

After this the participants are, according to Davis, divided into production groups where 'they proceed to articulate their specific organizational needs, create images and design posters to match their needs. The emphasis throughout is on communication, collective effort and social relevance and not on high art or self-centred expression.'

Andries Walter Oliphant

REPORT ON CULTURE AND MEDIA: COSATU CONGRESS 1989

The past two years have seen a major cultural resurgence in the mass democratic movement. In COSATU it has been a struggle to keep up with this burst of cultural activity.

1. Structures

The cultural unit has concentrated on building and consolidating organization on the ground. We have created cultural structures at regional and local level. Already there are 15 local cultural units spread through four regions, namely, Western Cape, Southern Natal, Wits and Highveld.

This has been possible because of the emergence of cultural groups in various affiliates. There is no union which today can say that it does not have a cultural group in at least one of its locals or regions. The Cultural Department has been instrumental in setting up these groups.

Workers are also active in producing their own literature which speaks about our experiences and aspirations. In the Congress Cultural Festival we will be launching a novel by comrade Henry Zondi and an autobiography by comrade Alfred Qabula and others. There is much more material which needs to be published.

2. Within the MDM

We have strengthened links between COSATU cultural units and other sections of the mass democratic movement at all levels. Through active participation in the cultural activities of the mass democratic movement, we are presenting a united challenge to the culture of apartheid. We are centrally involved in initiatives to create other major cultural disciplines which will eventually be part of a proposed national co-ordinating structure.

3. Sport

We have begun to focus more on sport as an area of struggle. The sports struggle has been discussed in our seminars and tournaments. This demonstrates that we as workers are concerned with the way commercial sport is organized — to exploit and divert our attention from struggle — rather than to build a new society.

4. Challenges

While there have been many achievements, we need to do a lot more to effectively challenge ruling class culture. The challenges include:

- deepening the skills and upgrading the quality of our cultural activists
- seriously addressing the question of sport. Each union should have a sport representative
- getting all our affiliates actively involved in culture. Each affiliate should have a cultural representative. This will help counteract the centralization of cultural work in the cultural department

- more resources — seminars, workshops, performances, publications — are needed for cultural work.

5. **Media**

When COSATU's last Congress was held in 1987, COSATU's media were — like the federation as a whole — under ongoing attack.

During 1987 two issues of *COSATU News*, the *COSATU Executive Message* and numerous pamphlets and posters were seized in their entirety from the printers. In addition, two of our newspapers were banned — one for possession. Our 1987 diary was also banned for possession. Our media offices were regularly raided by the police, as were COSATU offices throughout the country where media were confiscated. Media workers in COSATU had their homes and cars petrol bombed. COSATU's printing unit in COSATU House was bombed to pieces. The printing unit in Durban was also petrol bombed.

In 1988 and 1989 this trend continued with newspapers, pamphlets and posters being seized by police under the Emergency regulations. The second issue of *COSATU News* in 1989 was seized all over the country while diaries, calendars, T-shirts and pamphlets have been regularly taken from certain areas this year.

Under the circumstances, especially in 1987, it did not seem possible that COSATU media would survive — particularly as it was concentrated in the Head-Office with only two full-time workers. Media work had to adapt to this situation. For this reason there was a greater emphasis on waging the media war with a variety of media weapons during 1988 — rather than just attempting the regular production of *COSATU News*. We also concentrated on grassroots media work with media training workshops being run throughout the country. Out of these workshops the seeds of media units in every COSATU local and region began to grow. Today there are functioning media units in the Witwatersrand, Natal and the Western Cape.

Some solidarity work has also been done with Namibian comrades on the media front. Comrades from Namibia attended media training workshops in South Africa. We have also tried to assist in organizing the production of buttons, T-shirts and caps with our Namibian comrades, as well as building a regular exchange of information between the two federations. A joint booklet on the Namibian trade union movement is being produced on behalf of NUNW/COSATU and a Special Edition of *COSATU News* on Namibia has been produced to coincide with the Consolidation Congress of the National Union of Namibian Workers.

Towards the end of 1988 it was decided to greatly expand the Media Department. There are now openings for full-time media workers for each language media are produced in — Zulu, Sotho, English, Afrikaans and Xhosa — as well as media workers for distribution, training, photography,

servicing of affiliates and for media production. *COSATU News* has begun to be produced on a more regular basis; many education booklets have been produced; posters, T-shirts, pamphlets and stickers are used to build every campaign and to strengthen struggles on the ground; and training in media work is becoming more systematic with the aim of consolidating media units all over the country.

A big problem remains the effective distribution of media — media are still being regularly seized by the police — as well as generating the financial support within the federation for media work. In addition, much work needs to be done on developing an understanding in COSATU of how to use media as a weapon of struggle and liberation. More and more affiliates are developing their own media which will help put more information into the hands of workers. Proper and sufficient information to workers is the only basis for building our principles of worker democracy and control in COSATU and in our society.

COSATU Media, together with media activists in the mass democratic movement, have taken the initiative to convene a Media Summit later this year. The Summit will try and bring together all sectors of anti-establishment media workers with a view to consolidating and co-ordinating our media interventions nationally. The Summit will be a big step forward in highlighting the critical role media can and must play in our liberation struggle.

'The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened'

This report was published in COSATU Bi-annual Report and distributed at COSATU Third Annual Congress held in Johannesburg from 12 to 16 July 1989

(Photo: Jeeva Rajgopaul)

ARI SITAS: THE PUBLICATION AND RECEPTION OF WORKER'S LITERATURE

An interview by Bruno van Dyk and Duncan Brown

STAFFRIDER: Black Mamba Rising was published by Worker Resistance and Culture Publications for COSATU Workers' Cultural Local. From whom did the initial impulse come?

SITAS: It came primarily from the Durban Workers' Cultural Local. That was the association of creative people in the labour movement at the time. But in 1984, when the decision was first made to put the poems into some publishable form, there was no formal recognition of cultural activity within the union, and what the project did was facilitate that process until structures were created in the labour movement. So that is why by 1985, when we finished gathering the material, Worker Resistance and Culture Publications was doing work for COSATU. By 1986 — I think the book came out finally in September or October — the structures within COSATU were not set up proper-

ly, or the structures were there by then, but in the meantime this project was a means of facilitating the process. There are a number of publications which are going to be coming out, not under Worker Resistance and Culture Publications — but Culture and Working Life Publications. You are going to see many of the thin red books coming from this project.

STAFFRIDER: What was the motivation behind producing *Black Mamba Rising*?

SITAS: The motivation was two-fold. Firstly, at the time many individual poems were appearing at the back of some of the worker newspapers. There was a lot of interest in back copies. And secondly, there was a realization by the poets that they were reaching an audience which they couldn't physically reach. Locked in factories, most of them couldn't go on tours and perform their poetry extensively to audiences that weren't based in the Nguni languages. So they thought that something in Nguni and English would reach a lot of people. We said, 'Let's have parallel texts', but we couldn't make the pages correspond. Then people argued that for the individual worker who wants to buy a Zulu version it's cheaper if it's thinner. So we published a Zulu and an English version.

STAFFRIDER: Did you experience problems in finding publishers for the work? Was Worker Resistance and Culture Publications set up specifically for that purpose?

SITAS: I think that the poets had a very ambiguous attitude to formal publishing because they didn't want any business negotiations at that stage. Our original mandate was to do it for them and with them so that they could learn about putting a book together. Whether that will work or not, the future will determine. But that was the idea, that this was going to be their output. There were no facilities in the union at the time, so we did it. Now the project has decided that it will not publish anybody a second time, otherwise it may become a closed shop. We feel that we are only going to assist new projects.

STAFFRIDER: How has the collection sold, and do you feel it has reached its intended audience?

SITAS: It's difficult to say because a lot of it has gone through the union channels — at least half of it has gone that way. The print-run was 2 000 per language. The rest has gone through the formal networks. After the review there were a lot of requests, and we sent off advertising things to the bookshops that ordered. Now after all those copies went through the unions, the constant demand here has been for the English volumes, and we've run out of copies. There are no English ones left. So it's difficult to say whether one is reaching one's audience. For us the crucial test is the Zulu version. Do workers prefer English or Zulu copies? There's no doubt they prefer the poetry in Zulu to listen to, but when it comes to buying a book that's the next step. No research has been done on that, nobody knows exactly how 'the market behaves'. We'd

hoped we'd have somebody from Wits doing research in this area. We are waiting to hear more because we would like a follow-up: Who reads it, and why? Is the book being read at all? Is it a memento? But it's early days, I think.

STAFFRIDER: Do you see the Zulu version, once it has been disseminated, being performed? For instance, one person acting for the others who cannot read, or is each person meant to have a copy of his or her own?

SITAS: I don't know. There have only been two instances where I have heard elements of this poetry performed by other people. That has happened. But I think what happens, in fact, is that it is taken and read, and some of the ideas are taken and used in other contexts. So it's used at one level like a story one hears and retells, better or worse, to somebody else. But I think it's also being used as a memento, more than anything else, which perhaps is not even read.

STAFFRIDER: In view of the fact that they are all oral poets, why did you choose the book format rather than audio or video cassette?

SITAS: Well, there has been some documentation of the poets performing on audio and video recordings, but the book format was chosen, I think, because of what I outlined at the beginning: the fact that there was a growing worker press, worker newspapers, and they were using some of these poems, and people were enjoying reading them as well. So what is happening is a simultaneous orality and literacy, people switch from one to the other. I feel that the poetry is most powerful in the oral mode, but still it needs print, and is beginning to live in print on its own terms as well. At the same time oral poetry is very specific to locality. You know the poets experience problems when they perform in Secunda, for example, where three quarters of the audience is Tswana. The people appreciate the movements, the sound and a lot of the words, but the poems don't receive the same appreciation that they do here, for instance. There are also many more influences creeping into this poetry from written texts. So I'm against, personally speaking, trying to keep some pristine, pure form which is artificially created. The poets themselves are able to read and write though their work is linked to the oral tradition.

STAFFRIDER: In what way is it true to say that these poets are 'worker *izimbongis*'?

SITAS: Well firstly they are, in a peculiar way, praise poets of the labour movement, praising and criticizing as the form demands. There is no traditional network that empowers them to be that, which would normally have been the case. Secondly, there is a homeland structure now that demands it, a need to re-invent it somehow. But it is almost a metonymic, to use the jargon, assumption of the role. It's also connecting with an echo, a creative echo, that's alive in quite a lot of people's memories. A lot of workers have heard this poetry being done this way, and have experienced its prowess. So one occupies a public platform and by pouring out these words in this way one cre-

ates a new kind of communal experience which is of the tradition but is transforming the tradition at the same time. If one becomes too literal, there are a lot of poetic devices that are taken away from the poetry or the traditional craft.

STAFFRIDER: This poetry is essentially kinetic, it sets out to mobilize people, and the whole context of performance is vital to this function. Don't you think that the book format tends to bracket it off, to make it safe?

SITAS: I think that if the desire was there to put it into print themselves, somehow it would have been printed. And had this project not facilitated it, somebody else would have done it. When one is involved, in a labour movement or a mass movement, the collective experience of mass meetings generates the impulse towards action or defiance. But it's also the photographs, the radio, the newspaper, this kind of book: you can show it to your children, and say, well this and that. It has a place provided it doesn't substitute other experiences and forms of communication.

STAFFRIDER: So it's not intended as any kind of replacement?

SITAS: No. It's another medium alongside the oral medium. It would have been problematic if it had been out of the workers' hands. But that oral life of theirs continues; it's got its own momentum and this makes it available to people.

STAFFRIDER: We were thinking of Mzwakhe Mbuli's *Change is Pain* which was done in both forms. The cassette was banned while some of the printed poems were not, which suggests that they are perceived to work in different ways.

SITAS: It was the lack of suitable sound equipment that has seen to it that the worker poets are not on record or cassette at the moment. It's going to happen. Now that the Music Department at the university of Natal has better equipment it will happen. We have had three or four recordings that weren't good. It needs a person who is interested in this area to get it going. But there are enough snippets now on video to use in new ways. A cassette would be fantastic. But it would need a bit of variation, a bit of music or something to vary it.

STAFFRIDER: Who had final choice in selecting the poems? What criteria were used in this choice?

SITAS: As editor, the choice of the three poets was finally mine. I felt that it would be sociologically better to capture those three poets who started from the Durban Workers' Cultural Local from its first impulse. Because by the time we decided to do the book there were many more poets. But it was not possible to include everyone. So we felt that we should go for something humble and something that looked nice. We've used all their poems, apart from, say, the ones that were lost, that they couldn't remember. So, in the final instance, I faithfully reproduced what was there from 1983 to the end of 1985, those two years of poetry.

STAFFRIDER: Were there definitive versions of each poem, or did they change with each performance?

SITAS: There were changes with each performance, but we finally agreed on a version. What people regard as the sloganeering of this poetry I kept in, very consciously, because it is an element of the oration, it gets the responses going. In a sense, of course it's propagandist, that's what it's all about. Now the Zulu version of the book was edited by Mi Hlatshwayo. All I did was try to standardize it because they had many translations, some of them having appeared in English in worker newspapers that came out in English and Zulu at the same time. I had to work with the poets quite closely. So that's why it was a slow process, it took over a year to put it together.

STAFFRIDER: How do you and the poets, if you can speak for them, feel about the fact that the volume has been taken up in academic circles? For instance, poems from the book are being studied in the English Department at the University of Natal, and papers have been delivered on the subject.

SITAS: What I can say is that the word 'humble' has been frustrated because that was our intention. But our agreement was that the book had to look good — not something that workers would take and mistake for a door-stopper — and be produced cheaply. I think it came out at a time of turbulence in the English Academy. There was that English Academy conference that happened then, and there were a lot of subtexts there. So Jeremy Cronin grabbed it and was appreciative of it, and put the review in the *Weekly Mail* and all hell broke loose. And before we knew it it was beyond our control. We didn't expect it to go that way. At some moments, you know, you felt like some kind of peculiar, weird entrepreneur: 'Just any comment, you know, when you see the kind of orders that are coming in. Yes criticize it by all means!' If you ask me now as an intellectual to respond to the debate, I can, and it's quite complex. The debate was quite simplistic really, because it was a very simplistic assertion of saying that there are standards in poetry, and these people don't meet those standards.

STAFFRIDER: That was Lionel Abrahams's approach.

SITAS: Yes, that good poetry's difficult and these pieces are minor achievements. And then Asvat made the next point, that there ought to be standards and these don't differ from the tribal praises of chiefs. And yet I think that both of them are wrong, that there ought to be criticism of this work, that it evokes certain standards of its own, as well, that relate to its performativity, its context, its usage of metaphor that is rooted in peculiar cultural formations. And once you've understood that and are into that discourse, then you would say that, right, there are problems with this poetry, it's not up to scratch. But there was no attempt at that. I also find it odd that whereas the struggle has been to make poetry, performance and culture important aspects of everybody's lives, there has still been a constant anti-egalitarianism in the last 80

years of our literary lives; the minute ordinary people attempt to enter the scene, they get clobbered over the head: 'The barbarians are knocking at the door!' I find these things worrying. Lionel Abrahams used to respond ten years ago, saying 'very interesting attempt, but look at this, look at that . . .' He didn't do that this time. The person who saved Modikwe Dikobe's *Marabi Dance* and fought to put it out when they were saying: 'It's not literature', is the same person that does it to the next generation. I find it odd, I find it out of character, and I can only interpret it in terms of debates that are happening now within the English Academy. I've read a few things about politics polluting art and art being above politics, but I think that these people still have to explain the incidence of the popular form, which is popular in 'the people' sense; they must give some sort of explanation of, let's say, Elvis Presley, the way he shakes his hips is what makes him popular, and so on . . . The response by Qabula wasn't published in the *Weekly Mail* finally, nor was the response by Mafika Gwala, or by Achmat Dangor. The debate closed, there were more pressing issues like the Pietermaritzburg violence to consider. But Qabula's response was kind of, 'I apologise for intruding in your space. You look after your space, we'll look after ours, but sorry for inconveniencing you. We know we were made to be shoeshine boys and for holding the plough. Sorry for transgressing our limits. But leave us alone then . . .'

STAFFRIDER: Do you see the debate as being finished then?

SITAS: No, the debate still has to start. There are critical attempts coming out, for example Kelwyn Sole's criticism of the book in the *South African Labour Bulletin*. He praised the book, but criticised a lot of the poetry at the same time, worried about some metaphors, about the implications, and about witch-craft, about this and that. So when the poets read it, they thought afterwards, 'What are we doing?' But this has happened above them. It was a debate in which they couldn't participate, in which they weren't asked to participate. The debate is going to continue for a long time. There is, I feel, an incredible poetic conservatism in Natal, especially held in reverence by an English intelligentsia that runs through high schools and so on, and it's out of sync with our environment. Michael Chapman mentions it in one of his introductions, that finally there is no urban poem coming out of this English poetry. Where do people live? There are also descriptions of trees that don't exist around here! So there is a refusal of that tradition to come to terms with living in Africa — the mosquitoes and the swamps, the slums — and a holding on to some aesthetic registers that are from another continent.

STAFFRIDER: So in a sense it's a healthy thing that these poems make their way into universities with their corresponding critical paradigms so as to challenge Eurocentric notions of the primacy of the literary artefact?

SITAS: Yes. I'm not saying that this poetry is good, I'm not pronouncing on its excellence or otherwise, but I'm saying it's happening, and it's interesting

that it's happening . . . The examination of what the standards ought to be in this kind of poetry hasn't appeared. I don't buy the one of 'popularity', because if the poets had cut down on a lot of the metaphors and had stuck with the slogans, they would have caught a bigger response in performance. The poetry's got its own dynamics that we need to understand.

STAFFRIDER: So there isn't a contradiction in the fact that they are worker poems that have now entered academic institutions?

SITAS: There is a hell of a contradiction! It doesn't tell anything about the poets. It might impact on them in the long term. But it's something about the institution, something is happening in the institution itself that we have to come to terms with.

STAFFRIDER: So it's happening at a remove from the poets, the poetry still has a life of its own which is not dictated by academic reception.

SITAS: Unless that happens, there are no problems. You know, there have been some of the poets who have been on too many political platforms, which already has made them available to the whole country. Some of them have been overseas and back again. They are being yanked out of their initial impulses. This might be good, it might be bad, one doesn't know yet. One has to see the next cycle of poems. I'm already noticing changes in the poetry, but it's difficult for me to speak as somebody who knows the poets, without those poems being available to a broader community so that we can discuss them.

STAFFRIDER: What changes are taking place?

SITAS: The more violent and endangered life has become, the more constricted the metaphors have become. For instance Qabula has moved towards using more biblical, messianic types of metaphors, as opposed to the broader traditional metaphors. A whole poem on the hostels and compounds is 'the small gateway to heaven' because there are two doors in heaven and in the compound itself, a small one through which the workers go, a big one through which all the goods go in and out. And through that metaphor he takes us inside the hostel compound where he spent some of his years to show the irony of the situation. Another metaphor is the dumping ground: even in a dumping ground there are trees growing which everyone is trying to chop down; the constant growing of these trees is a metaphor for a determination that they are going to win through, but a total naturalism prevails at the same time. So there have been shifts. But what's constant is death and the violent events engulfing everybody's lives.

STAFFRIDER: Is it possible to say whether the shifts in metaphor are a result of the political situation deteriorating or whether they are caused by the difference in status which the poets now enjoy? For example, Qabula is no longer working in factories, he is working here at the university.

SITAS: I think it's both factors acting at the same time. They have become

available to a whole range of influences that no one can fathom at the moment. But I think the primary one, the most worrying one, that worries them, that animates the poetry, is always violence. That's how I would understand their withdrawal, almost, to the more biblical metaphors, those metaphors that guarantee transcendence. Hlatshwayo, for example, is also the National Cultural Co-ordinator for COSATU. You see two kinds of poetry developing: a more acoustic one, trying almost to marry the *toyi-toyi* rhythms with the *imbongi* craft, to have a more chanted, moving poetry; at the same time a more formally simple, propagandist one like 'The Living Wage' where there are no metaphors — it's more a series of statements. That is what is happening to him. The point to make is that there is a dynamism there, there is a response to external stimuli, there is development. But to predict developments is impossible.

STAFFRIDER: What other publications will be coming out under the umbrella of the 'little red books'?

SITAS: There is a history of the workers' theatre movement, *Organize and Act*, for the worker audience, just to let people know how things were done here: what plays, contents, methods, workshops, things like that. It's a very short history. At the moment that's the only thing for sure. There are a lot of others in the offing. Qabula has a second book, *Cruel Beyond Belief*, which is much more of an autobiography and is going to be published by other people.

STAFFRIDER: Will you continue as a facilitator, or will you hand the project over to others?

SITAS: It will be handed over. I think that is the correct way. This project is not in competition with any publisher, but one realizes that publishers have their own vested interests, and one has to serve the grassroots movements in the best way one can. Next year recordings will be coming out of some of this poetry. COSATU is also going to be pushing some of its own materials. Already there are cassettes coming out: a choir from Springs will be released by Shifty Records for COSATU, and there is a lot of work coming from Hlatshwayo who is within COSATU. So in the long run this project will only become a service, and hand all those publications over to COSATU.

(Photo: Paul Weinberg)

VIDEO NEWS SERVICES: COLLECTIVE WORK AND THE MASS MEDIA

Frank Meintjies spoke to Lawrence Dworkin and Brian Tilley, members of the Video News Services (VNS) collective. The interview covers a wide range of issues, including the history, working methods and approach of the collective in relation to the labour movement and community struggles.

STAFFRIDER: Can you give some background to VNS?
DWORKIN: We only started officially in 1985 with the launch of COSATU. Before that our first real introduction to the trade union movement was with the launch of FOSATU when we were called in to do a video. From there we began to make contacts. We also covered the second conference of FOSATU. Thus when we started VNS, working with trade unions was in the forefront of our minds.
TILLEY: We were working together as a loose grouping in 1981/82 making two 16mm films, on anti-Republic and other activities in Soweto and Alex. As part of that we covered the Aggett funeral, the municipal workers' strike and MAWU. Our focus wasn't specifically the trade unions. We had some links with a range of unions, from general to industrial.

STAFFRIDER: Are you now doing work primarily for trade unions?
DWORKIN: After the COSATU launch, people were happy with our first video and requests began to come in from trade unions.
TILLEY: We always identified the worker movement as one of our main areas. But our orientation was to the mass movement as a whole. We started VNS in a period when there was a shift from community uprisings. Before that the main focus was the communities which we documented as part of foreign media. That is why we started VNS — we felt that most of the work done was not controlled by South Africans. It did not feed back into the community but was just seized and used by people. In the period 1986/87 there seemed to be a shift to action around industrial areas and worker struggles.
DWORKIN: The State of Emergency was declared and community and youth groups were the most severely affected. It was in that period when unions started to take the lead in the broader democratic struggle.
STAFFRIDER: Was your underlying approach more participation by organizations in the making of videos?
DWORKIN: That was very much a principle when we started. We didn't want to be people from the outside looking in. Unions and workers had to be determining the nature and content.
STAFFRIDER: Did you only deal with requests?
TILLEY: No, we would also initiate. This is what happened in the case of Haggie Rand. There was a sit-in. We linked that with wage negotiation and May Day 1986. MAWU was aware we were doing it, but all their resources were drawn into fighting various struggles. We did the video and gave it to them for use. There is also the completely different situation. Like when MAWU approached us to do a piece at Transvaal Alloys in the Eastern Transvaal. They literally arranged everything. Shop stewards decided exactly what we would film and which people would tell us about which sections of the strike. Sometimes we would initiate, at other times there would be specific requests.
DWORKIN: There were many requests around union congresses. Important decisions for workers are taken there and not every member can attend. People began to see the value of having congresses recorded as an educational mechanism. Also it was seen as important to record strikes and struggles from an historical perspective.
STAFFRIDER: Most of your work appears around mobilizing and secondly strengthening the democratic process. Have you done any 'specifically' educational work?
DWORKIN: We did an hour-long piece about NUM's education programme. But most of our work was geared to contemporary issues with news and historical value. Unions have approached us about strictly educational material for members. But it is obviously a very big area requiring a lot of work which we weren't able to do. Only now are we considering whether we should expand to include such a service.

TILLEY: It was a conscious choice to do information work. We felt because of the State of Emergency, ordinary workers and youth did not have information about other struggles in industrial areas just down the road or in another city. We wanted to open information channels.

STAFFRIDER: In what places or forums are the videos shown? Are there special union meetings called for viewing documentaries?

TILLEY: It varies a lot, from area to area and union to union. Distribution of videos is technically illegal. The State of Emergency closed grey areas as well. Our distribution had to suit conditions in the country. We did not go for mass duplication. We concentrated on key people — hoped they would use what they had effectively. In some regions, things were used very well. In one region, thanks to strong worker organization, a video was shown in locals or in factory canteens. It was also used in general meetings where it formed the basis for discussions. We also had contact with youth groups mainly on the Witwatersrand. Our videos have reached a much wider audience than has ever been reached before by this medium. But we feel it's not enough. One needs a full-time distributor who knows what factories have seen which videos and how they were received. Often unions and their structures, even their education structures, don't have the time to distribute videos.

DWORKIN: Videos distribute themselves as well. Although they are serious, they also have entertainment value. Workers enjoy watching videos during breaks in union work. It breaks the hard grind of seminars and workshops. It's an attraction to workers, and sometimes brings workers into meetings who might not have been there.

TILLEY: Many times we underestimate the effectiveness of distribution. For example, Pimville branch of SOSCO came in to ask for videos. We offered a few titles, but they responded that they had seen them all. They had probably received them via another branch or local, but we were not aware of it.

STAFFRIDER: Overall, what effects and impact have you seen after four years of producing videos for unions?

DWORKIN: The one positive thing has been an incredible rise in awareness and consciousness in the use of video. Every worker involved in a union expects a video or a camera to be around at some point. Many people come in to ask for videos. The demand for coverage has increased a thousand-fold since we started. We are at the point where we can't satisfy demands unless we expand seriously. As film and video makers, we have always been concerned to develop a progressive film and video culture. It seems like an enormous task. But workers have responded incredibly well to the introduction of the medium and its use. Interestingly, workers are now beginning to request videos on international struggles, mainly as a result of seeing their own struggles on film. The whole thing is taking on its own momentum.

TILLEY: One of the major developments has been the change in relationship

between us as producers and workers. For example, when we go to the East Rand, we find that once we are introduced as 'the comrades who made such and such a video', it immediately changes the relationship. In many cases they know us before we arrive. Workers and youth have seen for themselves how they are represented. They know the footage is not for a foreign audience or something that they would not see again. I feel they therefore show greater openness and enthusiasm in doing an interview and telling a story. When people are more open, you get a better insight. It's not just an interview, it's an interaction. It's not just making a film about or for workers, it's an interactive process. It's central to video making: to break down the barriers; to make video production part of the process of the broad working class struggle.

DWORKIN: Previously one got the impression that workers saw video and television as the medium and weapon of the bosses, as a means of control and domination. But once people see that they can use it as a weapon, they open themselves up to the medium a lot more. So the sense of intimidation and wariness of the medium becomes eroded.

STAFFRIDER: Your videos are mainly in the English medium. Doesn't this create communication difficulties among workers?

DWORKIN: Language is a bit of a problem. Fortunately many workers do have a good command of the English language. And although we use English, we sometimes use other languages where a worker is speaking in his/her home language. We would use a voice-over, but make sure those who speak that language can still hear the original words. We have always intended translating videos into other languages, but pressures on time and resources have prevented us from achieving this. I think we still need to do more investigation into the language issue.

TILLEY: I think language does present serious problems. Especially if we take workers who are more rurally based, like mineworkers or workers at Iscor. On the whole it seems that among retail and commercial, as well as catering workers, there's a higher level of English. To begin to produce in more than one language, we need more resources and more people. For example, it takes an edit suite to do a voice-over — and we've only got one. We face an incredible workload as the only unit trying to serve a federation of a million workers, apart from youth and community groups. We are trying to redress this in our planning for the next few years. There need to be more units like ourselves. The demands increase with every video you make.

STAFFRIDER: Some film makers counterpose consultation and accountability with a critical approach. What would your response be to that?

DWORKIN: We have found consultation very important. We situate ourselves within the liberation struggle. We have not found that our critical perspective is necessarily suppressed by being a part of that movement. I don't think COSATU themselves have ever told us not to take a critical perspective or

to give the 'party line'. I've never had to compromise my own principles and way of seeing things.

TILLEY: Generally, organizations have a political confidence in us. They don't see us as film makers only; they also see us as comrades. We see ourselves as people with both political and film skills. I feel we keep ourselves sharp politically through interaction with the rank and file of COSATU. We discuss things. Often the line which emerges in a video might not be an exact copy of the line taken by the leadership at a particular point. At the same time, we never adopt a position of being destructive toward the movement, we are always constructively critical. We are not here to interrupt the flow of events. There are cases of other units whose approach seems to be: they provide only film skills and organizations should supply the politics. That is a recipe for bad productions. If COSATU told us how to make a video, it would be a bad video.

DWORKIN: Even if one accepts the concept of propaganda, one still has to have credibility. If one is just being very rhetorical and pushing out the standard line, that film will lose its credibility. That credibility comes if there is a critical dynamic perspective within the film. A critical perspective is more effective.

STAFFRIDER: Wouldn't you agree that the vitality of VNS productions stems from your giving a voice to the grassroots. It may not be the same critical approach of the high-powered individual producer. But it is the grassroots reflecting on reality and social processes. This approach promotes critical thought and democracy.

DWORKIN: We have tried to do away with the authoritative voice of the narrator. In standard British documentaries, it is this voice which carries the ideological perspective. Allowing workers to speak for themselves becomes our narration. The degree of our intervention is limited mainly to tying up loose ends, but it is not the dominant voice in the film.

TILLEY: Where we do use strong narration like in the railway strike movie, it's to give information on developments rather than interpretation.

STAFFRIDER: It's also important that you've moved away from the leadership person as the main spokesman throughout. Rather views of top leadership are often supplementary to views of shop stewards and ordinary workers.

Many working class people and workers are victims of a degenerate film culture. Many movie houses and video outlets in the townships do business mainly in low-quality 'action' movies, usually liberally spiced with violence and negative social messages. What is the struggle involved in popularizing the kind of films and documentaries made by progressive film makers?

DWORKIN: The one is the need for increased production. We need more people to produce films directly relevant to the struggles of today. With more production, more films and videos will be in circulation. We need to expand and

develop our distribution networks. Today there are far more organizations than one has ever seen in South Africa and hopefully this trend will continue beyond the point of liberation. Surely we should tackle outlets like the SABC and film circles in the post-apartheid period, but distributing to organizations should still be a priority.

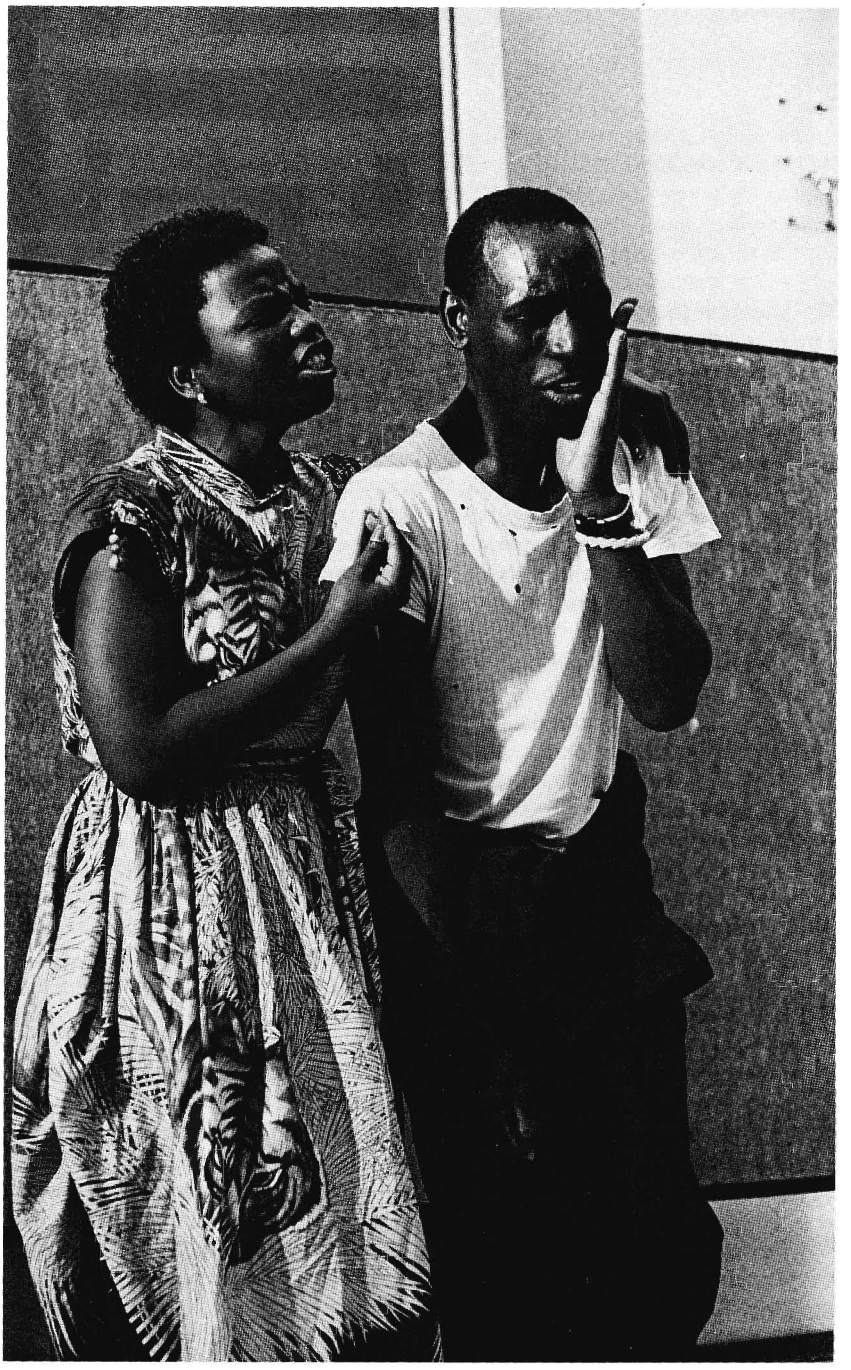
TILLEY: Increased production, but also greater variety. We are producing information pieces. We need more direct stuff for training and education for shop stewards etc. We also need fiction so that people don't only have the choice of Bruce Lee or Rambo. We need to start making stories — and they need to be working class stories. We could make a wonderful story around the 1987 railway workers' strike if we had the time and resources.

STAFFRIDER: Mapantsula seems to be an important movie. In following the township thriller format, it takes cognisance of present viewing patterns. But it also brings in the reality of mass resistance.

DWORKIN: I think it broke new ground. It showed one could base a good film on the everyday issues facing the broad working class constituency. There is definitely a problem of scriptwriters; in this regard we've got a long way to go. We hope that FAWO could contribute here by working with organizations like COSAW. Up to now those working in film have been a very exclusive cultural grouping. The value of the cultural movement that is growing today will give input to film makers. Film making is in fact linked to a range of other cultural workers: scriptwriters, actors, musicians as well as those with general organizational skills.

STAFFRIDER: Making film is skilled work. It is also very capital intensive. What ideas do you have on winning greater working class access to the power of film and video?

TILLEY: We must train people, but they should have the prospect or the means of production to be making films when they are finished. FAWO is trying to develop community-based units. It will involve basic skills, but from there trainees move into more complicated forms of video or film. FAWO needs to broaden its base — to create interaction between professionals and people who have so far been denied those skills. Many young people who have seen our videos have asked for training in video-making skills. It's a long process . . . It has to be done in a systematic way, the same as building a union.



(Photo: Gisele Wulfsohn)

Scene from a play from Cosatu Cultural Day. Johannesburg. 1987.

WOMEN WORKERS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Nise Malange

My intention in this essay is to address two issues. First my experience as a poet and the problems or support that I have received as a woman. The second issue is to give some outline of the kind of work that COSATU is doing to encourage worker writing and to look at whether COSATU is specifically encouraging women workers to write and if so, how.

I started writing when I was at primary school where everyone had to participate in 'composition writing' and 'imagination recitations'. I used to get frustrated when I was restricted on what to write and read. I won't go into the details of the rotten education I received. I followed my mother's advice 'take or copy the right things my girl and ignore the rest'. I did not have the opportunity of getting an alternative education because at that time there was nothing better.

My involvement was basically in plays, dance, singing, sports and writing. I did not give priority to any of these because each of them had its own time at school. In 1977 I started concentrating more on stage plays and writing poetry without any encouragement. All that work has disappeared now. When I began working with the trade unions in 1982, I was frustrated, lonely and miserable. I had to learn to be independent and I had to learn another Nguni language. That year I was in mist. The following year, 1983, I became involved in what today is the COSATU Cultural Unit. We were making and performing plays, writing poetry and songs. All our work today is portrayed in the book *Organize and Act*. The book is a collection of the plays we have done. The first collection of poems *Black Mamba Rising* was published in 1985. Hopefully mid-1989 or later I will come up with another collection that addresses women's hardship.

Generally, I have received support from comrades inside and outside. Before working for the Culture and Working Life Project I did not give my writing priority because of time constraints. I was a union organizer with no leisure time. Being in the transport and security industry means seven days of working. I've gained confidence over sexist management and sometimes workers, by proving that I could do my work. I mean, we are all aware that this society is male dominated. We are always attacked as women in any kind of work that we do. We therefore need to be brave in order to succeed. In Natal after the Women's Forum conference there were smear pamphlets attacking women. This sort of an attack makes women feel insecure and helpless. We have to come together regularly to build up strength and confidence.

We have to discuss and find practical ways of bringing women together on more common and open ground. Sharing of skills rather than frustration is perhaps the solution. I don't say let's ignore the problems that we've got now, but if we sit and cry and feel defeated we won't make a new society. We need to plan for our future — the future of women in a new South Africa. Writing about our experiences, culture and history is one of the important ways of sharing with other women and passing the message to other people.

COSATU's Women's Forum was one of the important events in our history as working women. There are many campaigns that we need to carry forward to make working women aware of all the developments, be it culture, writing, living wage campaigns or parental rights. The success of all those campaigns needs our full participation. It is very difficult to identify developments in the area of women, having hundred plus one problems myself. I would rather share with you the developments of the worker theatre movement in Natal. I will be very brief since more information can be obtained from *Organize and Act*.

Over the last five years workers in the trade union movement in Natal consolidated themselves into a strong Cultural Local. The members have made and performed plays, written and read their poetry, composed songs and responded creatively to all major campaigns and events. But the majority of people who have contributed to this process have been male workers. The presence of women has been sporadic rather than regular and strong. Few women have participated in the creative workshops and performances or in writing poetry.

This is not surprising and it reflects the general level of women's active involvement in organizations such as COSATU's unions. As COSATU has stated: 'The oppression of women is an immediate organizational issue for the democratic movement. Generally the broad issues raised with the rise of the women's liberation movement internationally have not taken root among the rank and file of progressive organizations.'

Women's issues were identified as a 'lack of women in leadership positions, lack of organizational skills to promote women's involvement in the trade unions, patriarchal attitudes, the special problems of women workers and the constraints placed on working class women which prevent them from being involved'. At the FOSATU Women's Congress in Johannesburg in 1983, four women shop stewards described their own lives as examples of the daily hardships they experienced as workers/worker leaders and as wives/mothers in the community. They gave accounts of their struggles in the home and how the decision to assume leadership roles clashed with the traditional patriarchal family.

After some debate a male shop steward responded with an enlightened appeal to his brothers. He asked them to work hand in hand with women, both

at the industrial site and in the home. 'Women are now doing a double job. We say we are an oppressed nation but women are more oppressed. They go to work and then start again at home. We should put aside the whisky and make the fire if the wife is not yet home. And also carry the child. After all it's the man's child also.' His plea generated cheers from women and jeering from men. Since then not much progress has been made. Women still suffer the triple oppression at the workplace, in the organizations and in the domestic sphere. They still have to confront the bosses at work and men who play bosses in organizations and at home.

This paper looks at one aspect of women's oppression which is often neglected: performance culture. Performance culture means the presentation in public of plays, music, dance and poetry. Participation in performances — both acting and the performance of poetry — is a powerful experience and these media are much more effective than pamphlets, speeches, posters or stickers. The absence of women in this field is therefore particularly distressing, because in performance culture they have a platform for expressing their anger, their perspective and an opportunity to conscientize their audience. Furthermore, it is important for women to realize their creative potential and extend their self-confidence as participants in the struggle for cultural transformations.

There is a long history of women's resistance against apartheid and capitalist exploitation. Increasingly working class women are becoming part of the organized labour force and are affecting changes within their communities. The struggle to change patriarchal attitudes, share the double shift, and achieve higher wages and better working conditions, is being forced onto the agendas of trade unions and popular organizations. As long as culture is not part of the same agenda women miss one of the most powerful tools for bringing about social transformations.

One of the main reasons for women's lack of participation in cultural activities is that there is little information available to women on the shopfloor and in the communities. Women have often complained that they are not getting the same amount of information as men, both on the shopfloor and in the community. Very often women do not even know about the existence of groupings, and have little knowledge of union campaigns and strategies. Some believe that it is the role of males to get involved in labour issues while women must participate in struggles in the townships.

The need for information on the role of performance culture and writing about your experience is great. Culture must be taken out of the framework of leisure time activities and put back into the working lives of the people who make and participate in it. The Durban Cultural Local and other cultural locals realized this. They embarked on a systematic campaign of producing plays, poems and songs on the lives of working class people. All these tell the stories of ordinary people's struggle. And importantly, they show that each person

has a story to tell, that you do not need to be well-educated or specially gifted to tell a story or to write.

There still remain a number of problems to overcome: with the double-shift for many women workers there seems to be no space and time to add another shift to the already over-full day. Many women drop out of workshops because they are too exhausted to cope.

Lack of child-care facilities. One of the women participants in the *Clover Play* decided that the play was too important to let child-care responsibilities interfere. She brought her grandson with her to rehearsals and carried him on her back when she performed. This was possible because other women in the group helped her.

There are other problems like jealousy and possessiveness from men rooted in patriarchal attitudes which regard women as minors. As a result, most women who participate in cultural projects are young and/or single women and thus free to move without accounting for each step outside the home. This carries other problems with it. Young women often do not have the same historical insights and life-experiences.

The socialized lack of self-confidence. Young women from traditional homes have been brought up in conditions where they must be noticed only through the products of their labour. They would be considered immodest and rude if they tried to make people aware of their presence otherwise. These women on the stage feel that they must not be noticed. This ambiguity of self-confidence is extraordinary when one looks at women in what are traditionally regarded as their areas of activity. Sometimes women do not come forward because they think that people will laugh at them if they act on stage. They have come to doubt their own ability to tell stories in exciting ways and they lack the self-confidence to appear in public.

There is a general need to realize the importance of performance culture and writing in the struggle for liberation as a whole. No amount of discussions, resolutions taken and points placed on agendas of meetings helps if the support is not also practical. This will mean breaking up the traditional role-division of labour. If we look at the Women's Forum Conference there was no item on culture, but at the Education Conference there was a cultural commission with a few women on it. If the women's forums are not taking up culture as part of the struggle and placing it on their agendas, and also giving it a place in their lives, no one will push forward for these. I'm saying this from a union point of view, seeing that the campaigns on women's issues that have succeeded were pushed by women themselves. Let's give ourselves time to develop our skills.

Women and their anger must be taken seriously. Cultural activity is one way of working through the problems, teaching each other and finding intentions. My time is devoted to all disciplines because I know that there is

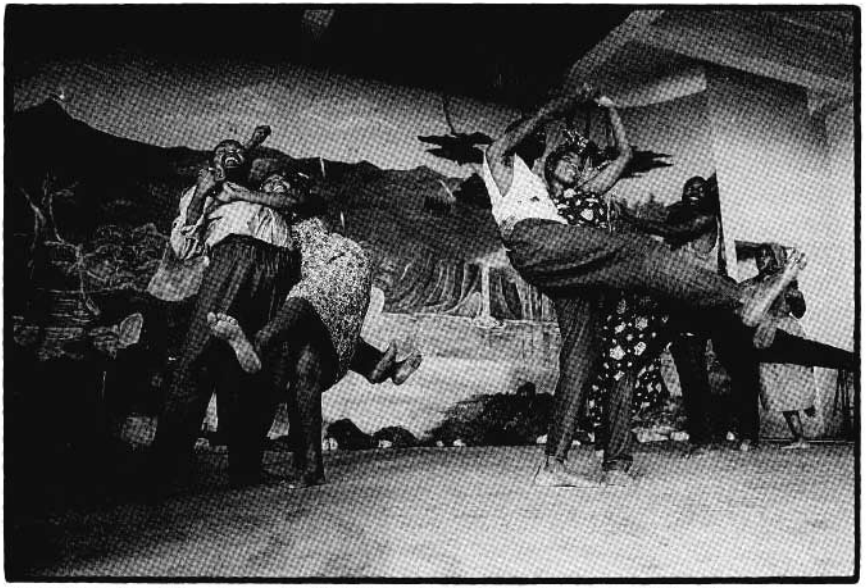
nothing impossible if one gives something a try. I know that there are women writers who are not confident enough to come forward with their work. Let's break the silence, let's write about our frustration, communicate with other women at home and outside. The ANC has included women in their constitutional guidelines which read as follows: '(W) Women: Women shall have equal rights in all spheres of public and private life and the state shall take affirmative action to eliminate inequalities and discrimination between sexes.' Self-confidence will enable us to challenge all these things if they are not done.

I want to conclude with some recommendations. Firstly, there is a general need to realize the importance of culture in the struggle for liberation as a whole. Discussions, resolutions taken and points placed on agendas for meetings can be a starting point in building up women and culture.

Progressive organizations must encourage participation in the cultural movement at every level. If it is to be successful this encouragement cannot just take the form of talk. Women representatives who have the political consciousness, the information and the awareness of the power of writing or performance culture must come forward and set an example. If women workers see their leaders participate they will feel encouraged to join.

Male comrades must make sure that they allow women enough time for cultural work and do not burden them with so-called 'more important' work.

COSATU and its affiliates must actively support culture and encourage the women in their households to participate and write.



(Photo: Cedric Nunn)

SAWCO play *Bhambaatha's Children*. FAWU Natal region AGM. Durban.

LIBERATION SONGS AND POPULAR CULTURE

Jessica Sherman

This is a short article based on a talk given to the Jodac Culture Forum in September 1989. The article looks at various aspects of 'Freedom Songs', where they come from and what role they play in the South African society. The writings of Amilcar Cabral are very pertinent to this form of culture. In his article entitled 'The Role of Culture in the Liberation Struggle' (1972), he pointed out that assimilation was used in colonial Africa to destroy the culture of the masses. It was, however, not very successful beyond the petty bourgeois elements in the urban centres. The culture of the masses remained intact.

Similarly, in the film *Night in Havana*, Dizzy Gillespie explains how the music of the slaves from Africa was suppressed when they worked on the plantations in America so that today, blacks in America have completely lost the ability to play African-style drumming. He said that drumming was always accepted in Cuba and thus they have managed to maintain some of their African roots.

In South Africa, a policy of assimilation was abhorrent to the authorities. The effect has been that the oppressed people have maintained close ties with

their cultural heritage. Studies have been done in Natal to see if one can make distinctions between the culture of the masses and the petty bourgeoisie but they were unable to come up with a clear distinction. According to Cabral, the attitude of the colonial power toward ethnic groups is hopelessly contradictory: On the one hand it encourages quarrels between ethnic groups which involves perpetuating different ethnic cultures. On the other hand, it needs to destroy the social fabric, the culture of these groups in order to perpetuate colonial rule.

This strategy is clearly being used in South Africa. The mines employ the first plan of provoking ethnic quarrels by relating to mineworkers in tribal terms. Zulus in one part of the hostel and Sothos in another, for example.

Cabral maintains that culture is the very foundation of the liberation movement, that the struggle can only be successfully waged by societies which have preserved their culture. He talks of the reciprocal relationship between culture and a developing struggle and also says that the 'struggle for liberation is above all else an ACT OF CULTURE'.

With this in mind we can look at resistance songs as a popular form of cultural expression. As a researcher in the field of musicology, I would like to make a few observations about these songs, sometimes called 'Freedom Songs' or 'Liberation Songs' as well as observations about the perceptions of various sectors of our society in relation to these songs.

Songs a Part of African Cultural Expression

Songs have always served a purpose in African tradition. They would be sung on special occasions when the community comes together. Songs would also be sung at home as a form of entertainment before technology provided forms of diversion such as radio and television.

Today people still sing at occasions although different groups will sing different types of songs for various occasions. For example, church songs for religious occasions, children's songs for play and 'freedom songs' for political funerals and rallies.

Workers Sing on the Trains

At the end of August 1989, over four hundred workers were arrested for singing political songs on the trains to and from work. Their charges were for disrupting the peace. However, singing on trains is not new. People have been singing on the trains and busses for years, but not freedom songs. Religious groups would dominate the trains with their rousing songs and movements. Even preachers would use the time to put their message across, taking advantage of the captive audience.

This has been going on for years, and never have there been any arrests for disturbing the peace. Clearly, this is an excuse to try and stop workers from singing songs of a political nature. Manual labour has always been accompanied by song, e.g. to synchronize the lifting of heavy items, working on the railways etc. Today workers sing about their hardships and victories as before. What is interesting is that workers, as members of the black community, sing all the same freedom songs as everyone else. They don't separate themselves by singing songs which are exclusive to workers. On the trains they do not sing factory-based songs but songs which express the desire for political freedom. So too, at COSATU cultural events, you will hear the same songs which you would hear at a UDF youth rally.

Songs — Not Serious Study Material

The study of 'freedom songs' has taken a back seat in academic circles. Ethnomusicologists such as the Traceys have collected hundreds of songs but amongst their collection one can't find 'freedom songs'. Social historians have studied a wide variety of topics but hardly ever political songs. The History Workshop has, to my knowledge, only presented two papers which touch on the topic. One is by Veit Ehrlman and the other by Patrick Harries, neither of which address the topic at any great length.

Despite its popularity amongst the masses, the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit in Durban which was set up to look into popular culture amongst other things, has not produced material on the subject. This gap in our knowledge is very unfortunate and needs to be addressed before the songs get lost as they lose relevance or are transformed.

Authorities Recognize Importance of 'Freedom Songs'

Over the last few decades, 'freedom songs' have been carefully avoided by the radio, television and record industry. Songs with political content have been banned from time to time.

In the trial of Albertina Sisulu and the Pietermaritzburg UDF Treason Trial, songs were referred to a number of times.

Who Writes the Songs?

For musicians brought up in the tradition of European music, the origin of a song is crucial. Who composed the song is a question that has to be answered. And yet, there seems to be no clear answer to this question in relation to 'freedom songs'. Old songs are adapted to new situations often using new words to old music which everyone already knows.

It's more fruitful to look at the origins of the music in terms of musical styles. There are a few notable musical styles which are used for 'freedom songs'.

1. Church style (hymns), for example, 'Somlandela'.
The original is as follows:

Somlandela, somlandel' uJesu
Somlandela, yonke indawo
Somlandela, somlandel' uJesu
Apho ayakhona somlandela.

(We will follow Jesus / to every place
Wherever he is / we will follow him.)

The words were changed replacing Jesu with Luthuli, but everything else remained the same.

Another example is 'Socialism ke thebe'.
The original is as follows:

Tumelo ke thebe
ketsamaya le Jesu

(If we are Christian, / we'll go to heaven.)

It was changed thus:

Socialism ke thebe
ketsamaya le SOSCO, UDF, SOYCO . . .

(Socialism, it's our freedom /
I go with SOSCO, UDF, SOYCO . . .)

2. Traditional style, for example, 'Tshayelan' Amabhala Zingane'.

This was originally a wedding song which said 'sweep the yard for the bride is coming' but has been changed to 'sweep the fields for Umkhonto is coming'.

Another example is 'Zungoyiki Msebenzi'.

This was also originally a wedding song telling the bride not to be afraid. It was transformed into a workers' song during the early 1980s in East London

to give courage to the striking SAAWU workers. Circumcision songs are often transformed.

3. *Mbube* style is the style of the music of Ladysmith Black Mambazo and has been successfully used by the K-Team workers' choir.

4. *Toyi-toyi* style has been popular since the early 1980s. It is said to be used to drill the soldiers of Umkhonto we Sizwe in the training camps. It came to be known when political prisoners were released from Robben Island in the 1980s. The accompanying chant is militaristic and very rousing.

These are the four main musical styles used for 'freedom songs'. They do not require any instrumental accompaniment and can be sung at any time or occasion, while running, walking or sitting in a hall. Occasionally, these songs have been recorded with instrumental backing.

The Role of 'Freedom Songs'

Freedom songs have an important role to play amongst the oppressed masses. They lift one's spirits, give courage for the tasks ahead as well as provide entertainment. They release the tension of a situation without causing chaos. They produce unity amongst a group of people. Some speakers use songs to break the monotony of their speeches and to revive interest. It is not uncommon for a speech to be interrupted by the audience standing up to sing a rousing 'freedom song'.

These songs provide a simple form of political education at a mass level. Historical moments such as the dates of the Sharpeville and Langa massacres are often referred to in songs. Names of leaders who are regarded as heroes and others who are regarded as sell-outs, can also be learned from the songs. In addition, the songs highlight the plight of the oppressed masses to the world. This has been done through the media but until the songs get translated at a public level, this remains an intention rather than a result.

Mirrors of Political Developments

Over the decades, the songs have changed. The most dramatic change occurred in the early eighties with the popularity of and support for the armed struggle being expressed through slogans and songs. The *toyi-toyi* is an example of this development. What is being expressed in many of the songs is the hunger for freedom, and the brutal repression of those engaged in peaceful protest which leads the masses to see armed struggle as a viable option.

The 1950s era is characterized by tuneful, slow songs relating topical issues such as the pass laws, denial of voting rights, poll tax, loss of land, defiance

of apartheid laws and women's songs. It was in this era that twenty thousand women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 9 August 1956 to deliver petitions to Strydom. Their song was: 'Wena Strydom, wathint' abafazi, wayithint' imbokhotho, uzakufa' meaning 'beware Strydom, you have tampered with the women, you have struck a rock, you will be destroyed'.

The Black Consciousness era of the 1970s produced songs such as 'Senzenina' which says 'what have we done, our sin is that we are black'. Many of these songs refer to Azania and to leaders such as Sobukwe and Steve Biko. A song from this era which has been criticized by the democratic movement is 'Uyinj' emnyama/uboshwa ngetyatanga/noma sekunjani/zonke izinja/ziyobulawa'. It refers to sell-outs in the black community such as informers who were beaten up in those days. The meaning is as follows: 'You are a black dog/on (your master's) leash,/no matter what/you are going to be killed.' The song was very popular in the 1970s and was taken up by hotheads in 1985/86 at the time of the necklacing of informers, but was regarded as distasteful by other comrades in various organizations.

A song from this era which was not necessarily a Black Consciousness song, but was very popular amongst the students was 'Lento andiqondi, uVorster ulwa ngezembe, yatsho lentwana iyo magwalandini. Mayivele indoda, mayivele sigoduke'. This is taken from a traditional song. It was sung in the Eastern Cape, especially during the strikes at Fort Hare and other campuses and boarding schools in the area. During strikes for better food or against the administration, it would be adapted by changing the 'Vorster' to the respective authority. The translation is as follows: 'This thing I don't understand, Vorster is fighting with an axe,' says the youngster, 'what cowards. Come men, let us go home.' In war there are particular rules. In a stick fight it is considered unacceptable to fight with an axe. This symbolizes the attitude of the masses to the balance of power in South Africa which was tilted in Vorster's favour.

Many songs were specific to particular campaigns e.g. bus boycott, potato boycott, defiance campaign ('Joinani iCongress nibengama volontia'). In Cape Town, Annie Silinga refused to carry a pass. A song emerged saying 'only when Malan's daughter carries a pass, will I be prepared to carry one'.

In the 1980s, a song with the words 'Ingwe mabalabal' i UWO' emerged in Cape Town. It refers to the tiger having many colours and symbolizes the fact that UWO, the United Women's Organization, was set up as a non-racial organization with branches in the 'African' and 'coloured' townships and in the white areas.

From as early as the 1920s the concept of anti-ethnicity has been stressed. This came out in a song 'Sikhalela, izwe lakithi, elathatwa ngalamakalakatyane. Zulu Mxhosa Sotho manyanane.' We are crying for our country which was taken from us by 'amakalakatyane' (colonizers). Zulus, Xhosas and Sothos let us unite.

To end, I'd like to pose a question. Why are most of the songs in Zulu and Xhosa? Is the Nguni culture more orientated towards singing than Sotho culture? Is it because the Nguni people resisted longer than any other groups and this tradition of war songs and chants became ingrained?

Perhaps in the next few years, researchers will take an interest in this topic and produce some answers which will improve our understanding of the culture of South Africa.

'WE ARE NOT ALONE' — THE MAKING OF A MASS MOVEMENT: 1950-1960

Luli Callinicos

> 'Nelson Mandela described a village delegate to a national conference in 1961. Wearing riding breeches, a khaki shirt, an old jacket, and barefooted, this delegate related how he ''was elected at a secret meeting held in the bushes far away from our kraals simply because in our village it is now a crime for us to hold meetings. I have listened most carefully to the speeches made here and they have given me strength and courage. I now realize we are not alone''.'[1]

The 1950s was a time when ordinary people began to realize how much they had in common with others. The decade came to be seen as the era of political mobilization, mass actions and resistance. It began, symbolically, with mass stayaways on May Day and June 26, 1950, and ended a decade later with mass killings in Sharpeville, and the mass march from Langa to Cape Town, in 1960.

Closely related to the political mobilization of the masses were the experiences of urbanization and capitalism, particularly in the towns. There were many differences and divisions among the working people in South Africa. Capitalism and apartheid divided the workers. But, in a contradictory way, these were also the forces that brought people together in large numbers, both in the new townships and at the workplace. The added oppression of apartheid mobilized thousands of ordinary people to resist through political organization and protest, particularly through the African National Congress.

But let us first put the dramatic events of the 1950s in their context, and examine the social background to the making of a mass culture and mass consciousness.

Mixing in the Towns

> 'Sothos used to sing in the *ingom'busuku* choirs, Sothos who could hardly speak Zulu clearly, but they'd join; they didn't have separate nights. And the Zulus were the people who were trying very hard to sing the Sotho songs as part of their programme. But of course this was because they used to be in love with the Free State (Sotho) girls.' — Drummer Dan Twala, about the 1930s.[2]

In Twala's comment a number of points emerge: town life drew together people of different ethnic origins — male migrants, who came to town without their women were, not surprisingly, attracted to women of other groups.

'Mixed' marriages and love affairs were common. These unions resulted in new generations of thoroughly urban children. Cultures and customs, too — food, music, dance, story-telling, clubs and societies — combined, taking what was useful for town life, dropping whatever did not fit in from the country life. In the 1950s, urbanization continued to increase, despite influx control.

> 'Tribalism was crumbling all over and Africans were fast becoming a race of city-dwellers, with snatched visits to the Reserves . . . Somewhere near this point, the authorities decided that the whole process of African urbanization should be repudiated as a policy if not altogether as a fact, let the skies crack! And the simple method projected was the retribalization of the people and the re-establishment of the authority of the chiefs — at least, that is, those chiefs who would keep their noses clean and obey the Government. And where tribal custom did not suit — for tribal custom chooses its own chiefs in its own way — well, who the hell is running the show, after all?'[3]

It was government policy to keep ethnic groups divided to encourage people to return to their original chiefdoms. But in the shebeens and the stokvels in the townships, in the mass transport to the new townships, and at the place of work, people were brought closer together. People began to lose their tribal ties. Those who adopted urban life had either to survive on their own, or to create new identities, relationships, and communities where they were allowed to live.

In the buses and trains people gave sermons, told stories and jokes, sold their wares, sang new songs and passed around political literature. The large numbers of people living crowded together made communication easier. Cultures were shared. By seeing how their neighbours lived and struggled, it was so much clearer to townspeople that they were not alone in the hardships they suffered. New customs developed, such as the Sunday mass political meeting, where black people learned to see themselves as sharing a common oppression, a common history. An example of this is Dr Moroka's scathing speech in 1952 to a crowd of five thousand people of all races in Freedom Square, Sophiatown, on the occasion of the three hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Dutch settlers at the Cape.[4] The vast numbers of people (both urban and migrant workers) who came to listen are an indication of a new, mass awareness that was steadily growing in the 1950s.

Capitalism and the Mass Media

The rapid industrialization of the 1940s began to bring together workers in larger numbers in the factories. They began to organize, in their communi-

ties, such as Alexandra Township, which ran successful bus boycotts in the early forties, or through their unions, which gained some real wage rises for black workers during the war years. But there was also another influence — the world of the black press — and through this medium, advertising became a new industry in a growing black market, poor as most blacks were.

Before the War, there had been a number of black-controlled newspapers with tiny circulations. Founded and edited by blacks, they addressed a small, serious and educated elite, dealing with black politics and cultural issues. Because they were undercapitalized, they could not afford to attract more readers with photographs and professional layout. There were very few advertisements in these papers.

But the black press was gradually taken over by big business and white finance. With the developing economy after World War Two black newspapers began to be seen in a new light. New investments, more machinery, more workers and mass production created a new challenge. The problem began to shift from producing goods, to finding buyers. Investors began to look for new markets to sell their products.

Clearly, the size of the market — the people who would buy the various goods — would be small if manufacturers relied only on the two-and-a-half million whites (in 1948). The advertising industry began to direct itself to black customers. Most blacks were very poor, but their sheer numbers attracted the advertising industry.

The dominant group of publishers was Bantu Press, which had the capital and the distribution network. New, mass market publications emerged. *Zonk*, the first black magazine to make profits, was bought up by an Afrikaans monopoly of publishers. Jim Bailey bought up *Drum* and *Golden City Post*. *Bantu World* became *World* and changed its style. The gradual takeover marked a switch from a political, black-owned press to a commercial, white-owned press. The new press aimed to broaden the readership. At the same time, the publishers campaigned manufacturers to attract advertising.

Hidden Messages in Advertising

In the apartheid society, advertising is often tied up with a message of *whiteness*, and therefore power, education and money.

The *hidden* message, then, was that blackness was undesirable, inferior. University research in the 1950s claimed that black store owners agreed:

> 'Mr Nabe (a shop owner) was emphatic that products made specially for the African marketed to him under an African brand name enjoy little demand . . . his customers desired more than anything else a European standard of living.'[5]

The urbanization of blacks was creating different life-styles. A new generation of young black townspeople began to demand new images, new excitements. The new editor of *Drum*, speaking to young townspeople about their preferences, reported one response:

> 'Ag, why do you dish out that stuff, man?' said a man with golliwog hair and a floppy American suit at the Bantu Men's Social Centre. 'Tribal music! Tribal history! Chiefs! We don't care about Chiefs! Give us jazz and film stars, man! We want Duke Ellington, Satchmo, and hot dames! Yes, brother, anything American. You can cut out this junk about kraals and folk-tales and Basutos in blankets — forget it! You're just trying to keep us backward, that's what! Tell us what's happening right here, man, on the Reef!'[6]

It was this growing group of urbanized youth with dreams of money and greater control over their lives that the market aimed to tap. Poor as most urban blacks were, like any other townspeople they had to buy their food, clothes and furniture. The growth of a town culture, with its own fashions, ideas, styles of language and entertainment, helped traders and the advertising industry to grow.

Commerce: 'The Great Educator'

> 'Advertising has been and is the single most important factor in influencing particularly our urban Bantu towards acceptance of at least the outward symbols of our Western Civilisation.' — President, Federated Chamber of Industries, 1959.[7]

For liberal big business, commerce was seen as the great educator, the new civilizer — if blacks bought consumer goods, they would be brought into the Western way of life, and in doing so, bring profits for industrialists:

> 'The buying habits and evolution of the Bantu have a direct bearing on the permanency of our civilization in South Africa. We are very truly serving South Africa by promoting racial harmony, without which there would be neither industrial peace nor commercial progress.'[8]

The reading habits of blacks were growing. *Bantu World* (later *The World*) was able to show an increase in circulation from 17 000 in 1946 to 33 647 only nine years later. And in six years, its advertising revenue nearly doubled, from £15 443 in 1949 to £29 974 in 1955.[9]

Zonk! and Drum

In 1949 a new type of magazine emerged for black readers — the glossy, picture-book style magazine named *Zonk!* It was apolitical in nature — apartheid did not exist in the pages of *Zonk!* Ironically it was financed by Afrikaans capital. By 1954 it had a circulation of 62 556.

Drum was another glossy magazine. But it began to change in certain ways when it began to include investigative journalism written by black journalists, and political campaigning in the early 1950s. By 1956 it had surged ahead with 75 000 readers, and nearly half of the pages with advertisements.

While the media helped to cultivate a mass culture of consumerism, the contradictions in apartheid capitalism made the path to consumerism not so straightforward — there was tension between the need for cheap labour and the desire to expand the internal market through black customers. The black press was constantly struggling financially because black wages were never high enough to interest enough advertisers.

But because of racial oppression and exploitation, many readers were not satisfied with only sex and sensation. The magazine with the highest circulation was the one that included serious articles and investigative journalism; *Drum's* exposés of prison conditions, farm labour and crude racial discrimination, as well as information on black politics proved that black readers wanted more thoughtful material. There was a hunger for knowledge that a few of the editors only dimly realized.

Politics and the Media

The political effects of the mass media on young people were not overlooked by the activists. A.P. Mda, member of the Youth League, and later an executive in the Pan African Congress, in 1955 wrote an article of approval of the new black magazines such as *Drum* and *Zonk!*, because they instilled a 'feeling among vast sections of our people . . . of self importance.'[10]

One newspaper which was not in the mainstream of the new black publications was *New Age*. Originally financed by the Communist Party, *New Age* supported and sympathized with black nationalist aspirations. The ANC, which did not have its own national publication, relied on *New Age* to put across publicity for its campaigns and comment from its leaders.

The distribution of *New Age* was also a source of politicization for youngsters hoping to earn some money on the commission. S. Chetty, in later years a political activist, recalled how the children in 'the Indian village down at the bottom end of town (Pietermaritzburg) . . . all used to sell *New Age* . . . Saturday afternoons it was part of our programme.'[11]

> 'After work each day I picked up a copy of *New Age* from the old man who sold them on a corner near our house. Sometimes we talked and soon I began helping him . . . standing at the corner shouting "*New Age!*" It was a good experience for me. The paper was popular and I met a lot of people who stopped to buy a copy and chat. It wasn't long before I was selling papers every day, getting them from the old man, who was an ANC leader in our location.'[12]

Apartheid Mobilizes the Masses

Urbanization and industrial capitalism helped to create mass cultures and mass consciousness. But people were also mobilized through the very aggressiveness of the apartheid policies. Oppression, dispossession and exploitation had been with black people for many generations. Now, added to these, Afrikaner nationalism, which sought to prevent African, as opposed to tribal, nationalism, had the opposite effect.

One of the most significant actors in political mobilization was the African National Congress. It was this organization that was able to capture the support of the mass of people in times of active protest and resistance.

Changes in the ANC

Until well into the 1940s, the ANC membership numbered three or four thousand. They came mostly from the educated, chiefly and land-owning sections of the African population. The middle-class, middle-aged, male, professional leadership was cautious and politically conservative. They tended to rely on petitions, letters and deputations to the government to make their opinions heard. Women, too, did not have equal representation in the ANC at that time — they were entitled to 'auxiliary membership' only.

But the more militant climate of the 1940s began to change the traditional, conservative character of the ANC. In 1944 a group of young intellectuals, including Walter Sisulu, Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela, founded the Congress Youth League (CYL).

In 1948 leading members of the CYL called for a Programme of Action. Although they supported the ANC as the only organization which could mobilize the African people, they also criticized it because it did not lead the masses into actively challenging racial injustice and exploitation. The CYL went on to outline a Programme of Action, which was adopted by the ANC in 1949.

The programme advocated strategies of 'immediate and active boycott, strike, civil disobedience, non-cooperation' and called for preparations and making of plans for a national stoppage of work for one day as a mark of protest against the reactionary policy of the Government.[13]

The ANC had hardly any time to try to work out more specific plans before the new government passed a series of aggressive laws which included race classification, the Group Areas Act and official apartheid.

The May Day Stayaway

Another law, the Suppression of Communism Act, quite clearly was not directed only against communists, but at virtually any extra-parliamentary opposition. The Suppression of Communism Act also aimed to crush black worker opposition. Under this Act, 56 trade unionists were banned, many of the members of the Communist Party. As soon as plans for the Act were announced, the Communist Party, more experienced, organized and militant than the ANC, swung into action. With the support of both the Indian Congress and the ANC president Dr Moroka, a May Day general stayaway was announced.

While the plan was generally well received, many of the CYL were not happy. Although their Programme had suggested a 'one day work stoppage as a mark of protest', they felt that the communists had taken over and were dominating the campaign before the ANC had had time to organize resistance in their own right, and on a day of the ANC's choosing.

But on May Day, 1950, workers responded to the call. They stayed away in their thousands, in Johannesburg and particularly in Port Elizabeth, where working-class traditions were strongest. There were major clashes between the police and demonstrators in Orlando, Sophiatown, Alexandra and Benoni. Nineteen people were killed and thirty seriously hurt.

After the strike was over, the ANC Working Committee called for an Emergency Conference of national and left-wing African leaders. The Conference agreed that there should be a 'National Day of Protest and Mourning' against the killings, as well as a protest against the planned Suppression of Communism Act and other discriminatory laws.

The Day of Protest (June 26) was a landmark because the ANC worked closely with the South African Indian Congress, which had had extensive experience in methods of non-violent, or 'passive' resistance to the successive governments' anti-Indian laws.

In terms of the fierce independence of the Youth League, this was a breakthrough. 'The Youth League stands solidly behind the decision taken by the Executive of the African National Congress,' wrote the CYL in support of the Day of Protest: 'For the first time since 1652 African National Leaders are going to stage SIMULTANEOUSLY a forceful opposition to our oppressors . . . The African people have pledged themselves to liberate South Africa — BLACK, WHITE and YELLOW, and to that end the impending national crisis presages the shape of things to come . . . Our cause is just, our aspirations noble; VICTORY CANNOT BUT BE OURS. UP YOU MIGHTY RACE! VUKA AFRIKA! TSOGA AFRIKA!'[14]

The Defiance Campaign

> 'In Zeerust, Natal, Sekhukhuniland, on the Reef, in the Free State, and elsewhere there have been upsurges of passive resistance, and the refusal to comply. To our surprise, many of these resisters called themselves "Congress" or "ANC" ' — Chief Albert Luthuli, Secretary of the ANC 1952-1956.[15]

The alliance of the ANC, the CYL, the SA Indian Congress and the Communist Party of South Africa paved the way for the biggest and most widespread passive resistance campaign against apartheid laws. The Defiance Campaign, in 1952, had an impact on hundreds of thousands of black South Africans, and began to turn the ANC into a mass organization. It provided many ANC members with their first experience of organizing, and gave them insight into the lives of many other people.

The target of the campaign was the battery of oppressive laws, some old, some new — 'diabolical laws which affect and restrict all the Non-Europeans together', said Professor Matthews, one of the leaders of the campaign.[16]

In particular, the Campaign aimed to defy 'Six Unjust Laws' by disobeying them publicly, and without violence. The six targeted laws were the Pass Laws, the Group Areas Act, Suppression of Communism Act, Separate Representation of Voters Act, the Bantu Authorities Act and Stock Limitation Regulations.

There was only one full-time organizer — Walter Sisulu, helped by the Campaign committee. Nelson Mandela, as Volunteer-in-Chief, Walter Sisulu and Maulvi Cachalia toured the country, addressing small meetings and explaining the principles of the Campaign. In breaking the law, they said, violence had to be avoided at all costs. Like the successful passive resistance campaigns of Gandhi in India, the idea was to maintain a moral superiority. Every volunteer had to accept a code of conduct, which stressed discipline and a commitment to non-violence.

The hard work of the committee drew a great response. Thousands volunteered, particularly on the Rand and in the Eastern Cape. New songs were composed, there was a new determination:

> 'Hey! Malan,
> Open the jail doors.
> We want to enter,
> We volunteers.'

As the Campaign got under way, leading figures were arrested and charged under the Suppression of Communism Act for defying their bannings. Their arrest was a spur for many volunteers.

The press gave the Campaign increasing attention. Nationalist Party newspapers 'sometimes verged on the hysteria', while the English press began to carry sympathetic reports. Overseas, the Campaign attracted attention as Arab and African delegations to the United Nations unanimously called for a debate on the South African state's flagrant violations of human rights involving the arrest of 4 000 people engaged in passive resistance against the segregation laws.

But towards the end of October, the number of volunteers dropped sharply. Tension reached a peak in the Eastern Cape, where unemployment was high. Working-class defiance took the form of strikes. Railway and municipal employers dismissed thousands of workers. In the townships, riots followed police shootings and the enforcement of pass laws.

In the several court cases that followed, magistrates were unable to find that the ANC had incited the riots. Indeed, the very opposite was the case. With the breakdown of the non-violent strategy, the Defiance Campaign was damaged. The government was able, with ease, to make harsher penalties for those who urged others to break any laws — up to R600 fine or three years' imprisonment. The Defiance Campaign died. There was to be a lull of many months before organized mass resistance started up again.

A Strategy for the Ordinary People

In 1953, ANC Transvaal President Nelson R. Mandela made a speech which reflected a turning point in the ANC programme. A new strategy was needed, he said, to reach the masses. The time for rhetoric and fiery speeches was over. Congress had to make more direct, wide-scale contact with working people and build up organizations to bring about mass participation.[17]

The speech was followed a few months later by a suggestion by the Cape ANC President, Prof. Z.K. Matthews, for a 'Congress of the People', whose aim would be to formulate 'a document to guide our future work, but will be written by the ordinary people themselves, through the demands that they themselves send in'.[18]

The Freedom Charter was more than a year in the making. For the ANC, the process of collecting its demands was as important as the finished document itself, for it was a means of mobilizing ordinary people. The Charter called for 50 000 volunteers — *ivolantiya* — 'to encourage (the people) to speak out, listen to their demands, and record their demands and send them in to the Congress of the People Committee'. And indeed, many hundreds took part in the gathering of demands — in the workplace, during lunch hours, in meetings of streets or blocks, in churches, in rural villages, 'organizing meetings, explaining, listening, recording'.[19]

Volunteers reached deep into the countryside. In the rural areas, 'the cattle

dipping issue came up'. People spoke up against prison labour, against Bantu Education; but the most deep-seated grievance was 'people not having land of their own — LAND for the peasants . . . land for their livestock'.[20]

In the urban areas, the demand was, 'housing, housing, housing'. People in Orlando shelters had by now been waiting more than ten years for permanent housing. Another 60 000 in the Moroka camp were squatting in the tiny square tin shanties, and had been waiting for eight years. There were also workplace demands. In the factories, according to SACTU organizer Billy Nair:

> 'The call was for a fully paid 40-hour week. You will find that demand in the Freedom Charter today. Another important demand that found its way into the Freedom Charter was that all who work should be free to form trade unions. That question was vital at the time for African workers — and, I should add, it still is.'[21]

In both the town and countryside, there was one, consistent demand — 'against the pass laws, to abolish the pass laws'. In the countryside, the urban labour preference policy was reducing the chances of migrant workers' getting passes. And in Johannesburg, plans to demolish black freehold areas such as Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare were under way. The preparations had begun with stepped up pass raids to find out who did not qualify to live in these areas. The sheer harassment and intense insecurity of these raids pushed many people towards political activity. The newly formed Federation of South African Women began active campaigning against the pass laws which were hounding the men, and depriving the household of additional income. It was to be, in a sense, a preparation and an education for their own sustained mass resistance against passes for themselves, starting a few months after the Congress of the People.

The demands, 'on sheets torn from school exercise books, on little dog-eared scraps of paper, on slips torn from Congress of the People leaflets', were passed from volunteers on to the organizers.[22] The National Action Council (consisting of ANC, SAIC, Coloured People's Congress and members of the white Congress of Democrats) then formulated the document that, after much discussion, was finally and officially accepted by the ANC in December 1956.

As a people's, or 'popular document', which is what the ANC aimed for, the Freedom Charter reflected the many different and even contradictory voices which went into the making up of the 'people' — the peasants, working men and women, and also the teachers, the professionals and the traders. Yet, as an ANC leader commented, the Freedom Charter was a revolutionary document insofar as the changes it envisaged could not be won without breaking up the political economy of South Africa.'[23]

It was also revolutionary in that it reflected people's participation and experiences. By asking the masses for a vision of a better future, by reflecting

their own aspirations back to them, the Freedom Charter was able to show ordinary men and women a way of organized, collective participation in shaping their lives. It was an imperfect document, and could be, and was, criticized for not having enough class content, for its compromises, and for leaving out many issues. But its message, of a vision of a non-racial, participatory democracy touched many thousands of people. It was to be the ANC's greatest organizational triumph — its first, protracted mass national campaign.

The Congress of the People

> 'The Congress of the People had far-reaching effects. Nothing in the history of the liberatory movement in South Africa caught the popular imagination as this did, not even the Defiance Campaign' — Chief Albert Luthuli.[24]

On 26 June 1955, up to 6 000 people assembled in Johannesburg's Kliptown Square to hear the Freedom Charter. It was a mass gathering, a 'Congress of the People', which in itself was to be passed on in popular culture.

People had come from all parts of the country — from the cities, the factories and small-town locations, some from the farms, from the reserves. Nearly 3 000 were delegates from different parts of South Africa. They came singing; they came bearing banners. Some banners announced the region of the delegates, others voiced demands or slogans — 'We Want Our Leaders', or 'Freedom in our Lifetime!' Many sported the black, green and gold ANC uniform. A popular political culture was being born.

Mobilizing Women: The Anti-Pass Campaign

Barely a year after the Congress of the People, there was another record-breaking show of mass resistance. On 9 August 1956, many thousands of women from all over South Africa converged on the grounds of Pretoria's Union Buildings, to protest against passes. Estimates of the size of the crowd varied between 6 000 and 20 000, depending on whether you were a sympathizer or not.[25] How did this largest-ever mass response come about?

For years, evictions, and the harassment of women hawkers, beer brewers and coffee-cart owners had caused family disruptions and deep economic insecurity, for the women's income supplemented the miserably low wages of the men. This constant persecution affected women and politicized them. In the 1940s, women had been at the forefront of many local movements — for example in the early 1940s Alexandra bus boycotts, in beer brewers' protests in Springs and Durban, and in the squatter camps of the East Rand and Orlando.[26] In the 1950s, the Defiance Campaign and the Congress of the

People further mobilized women. Protest meetings against pass laws, removals, bus prices, poor education and other oppressive conditions attracted more women than ever before. A number of the campaigns, like the resistance to the Sophiatown removals and the anti-Bantu Education protest, fizzled out. Yet, despite these failures, active participation in resistance itself fuelled the political consciousness of many women. They began to realize that it was necessary to see the issues of housing and education in a wider context. They began to see the close connection between these issues and the pass laws.

So when, in September 1955 the government announced that it was to issue passes to women starting from January 1956, there was an outburst of popular anger. They saw very clearly that their very economic independence as brewers, hawkers and traders, was in mortal danger.

'The laws of this country have now started pots and pans rattling in the kitchen and a number of things are on the boil. Passes for women, for instance, and the schooling of their children under Bantu Education are on their minds,' wrote *Drum*.

What followed was a militant and sustained campaign. In the cities, across the country, there were a number of meetings, attended by thousands. In Port Elizabeth, some 6 000 men and women attended an anti-pass meeting addressed by Lilian Ngoyi. In March 1956, close on 2 000 women attended the International Women's Day meeting in Johannesburg. There were similar, though smaller meetings in many centres — in Durban, East London, Germiston and Cape Town.

In the Free State town of Winburg, unsuspecting women had taken out passes from a government mobile unit. When two 'Johannesburg agitators' — Lilian Ngoyi and Elizabeth Motingoe — arrived to explain the significance of the pass laws, a large crowd of women marched to the Native Commissioner's office and before his eyes, burned their passes.

The dramatic story of Winburg, reported in *New Age*, soon spread all over the country. Everywhere, women were inspired to express their outrage at the pass system. In the months that followed, noisy protests and marches to Native Commissioners took place in dozens of towns.

Resistance spread to the rural areas, especially in areas servicing the white farms for labour. From Balfour and Bethlehem to Wakkerstroom and Zeerust, minor and major anti-pass clashes took place. In Lichtenburg, two African men tried to come to the aid of the women. They were shot dead, and six were wounded.

The Rise in Popular Militancy

The late 1950s saw a general increase in popular militancy. Locals became involved in militant resistance movements such as the Alexandra and Evaton

bus boycotts, with or without the support of the ANC leadership. Other forms of ANC-organized resistance met with varying degrees of success. While SACTU's Pound-a-day campaign was well supported and widespread, the 1958 'the Nats must go' anti-election stayaway was a flop — for voteless blacks, the opposition United Party was little better than the Nationalists. Sophiatown's resistance to the removal to Meadowlands also failed — for many desperately over-crowded sub-tenants, even the 'sub-economic', matchbox houses that they were moved to gave them a significant improvement in their living standards. And the ANC's 'people's schools', planned to be an alternative to Bantu Education, collapsed because of lack of resources.

Organized resistance had an uneven success rate. In the early 1950s, the ANC had the initiative, and did a great deal to awaken and mobilize large numbers of people. From 1956 onwards, there was evidence that the masses were becoming more militant than the leadership. ANC leaders, it seemed, were 'tail-ending' a number of local social movements.

Perhaps one reason for this set-back was the dangerous tendency to rely too much on the evils of apartheid to mobilize people. Not enough attention was paid to organization. Some leaders, like Mandela, saw the limitations of undirected mass mobilization, and urged the setting up of organized structures, such as street and factory committees — the 'M-plan'.[27]

As the 1950s wore on, apartheid policies were developing new levels of harsh repression. The government used all its powers to put down black opposition. These included bannings, banishments, the use of pass arrests, and all the repressive laws of the 1950s.

The Treason Trial, starting in 1956, put 156 leaders out of action for a number of years. The trial served to cut the leaders off from the communities in the late 1950s. Added to that, within the movement a fierce struggle was taking place between the Africanists and the 'multi-racialists', as they were then called. Africanists accused the ANC leadership of drawing away from the rank-and-file. They were losing touch with popular feelings, said the Africanists, because the Congress Alliance was drawing the ANC into negotiations with other race groups, who had other interests. In 1959, the Africanists broke away to form the Pan Africanist Congress. The following year, the PAC pre-empted the ANC by launching the anti-pass campaign which was to become scorched in the memory of all South Africans.

The End of the Mass Movement

The tragic events at Sharpeville, and the weeks that followed, saw a turning point. The style of political mobilization changed. For decades, political leaders had emphasized non-violence, both on moral and practical grounds. In all the campaigns in the 1950s, including the PAC anti-pass campaign, the leaders

urged people to remain orderly, dignified and non-violent. Yet the confrontation had become worse. The government, in its determination to impose apartheid, remained impervious to any peaceful attempts by blacks to communicate their opposition. The continued and thorough rooting out of both political and union activists cut away the base of the leadership in the townships.

When in 1961 the ANC and PAC were banned, both organizations turned to armed struggle. SACTU leaders, who had the most organized base, were also banned or jailed — hundreds of worker leaders had become political activists, and joined the underground movement. The era of mass mobilization had come to an end.

Conclusion

There were many ways in which people were mobilized politically, both through organizations and in informal ways. In the urban areas, mass meetings, the drive for members, volunteers and organizers in the Defiance Campaign, the Congress of the People, the Women's Anti-Pass Campaign and the PAC Anti-Pass Campaign — all these experiences politicized many thousands of townspeople, brought them together and helped to create a culture of resistance.

Mobilization of the youth, women, migrant and urban workers transformed the ANC from a middle-class elite party to a mass party in the 1950s. In doing so, it created new cultural symbols:

> 'We wore two uniforms. Black skirt, khaki shirt, black tie with green and yellow stripes, black bonnet. That's for Sundays. And a khaki shirt and skirt, black bonnet, not tie but shoulder badges — that's for weekdays . . . We bought the black tie, and bought green and yellow material and made those stripes ourselves.'[28]

Signs, protest songs and language created a sense of belonging to a wider community: 'The moment you give them the (thumbs-up) sign, you're a comrade. You say: "*Afrika!*" and they return it: "*Mayibuye!*" Straight away, you're a comrade.'[29]

During the 1950s, local movements such as bus boycotts and rural resistance were transformed into broader mobilization. The women's anti-pass campaign, for example, created new links between the towns and the countryside, between men and women. Rural resistance to cattle-culling, and to the Bantu Authorities' 'homelands' system created a tradition of resistance in the countryside. Publicity through the press, through organizational structures and through the very system of migrant labour itself, spread the news. Actions of solidarity could take place throughout the country, as they did during the 1957 bus boycott, and also in strikes and stayaways.

The contribution of the trade unions was also significant. Time and again, the areas which had the strongest worker organizations were able to deliver the highest numbers of passive resisters, delegations and strikers in stayaways. On the other hand, SACTU organizers insisted that their unions could not have grown or attracted the enthusiastic and committed organizers that they did, without the inspiration and the mass mobilization of Congress.[30]

Mass mobilization also brought with it new links, and new alliances. These led to ideological difficulties with both the left and the Africanists. The more left-wing Marxists criticized the communists within the Congress for putting the class struggle second to African nationalism. Africanists attacked the ANC for selling out their national heritage to non-Africans.

Yet both the ideologies of class and nationalism found a popular response in the ANC, and continued to live side by side. The ANC had a remarkable adaptability — that was both its strength and its weakness. It was able to absorb both class and nationalism, which kept it alive in the popular memory. Like the Freedom Charter, it allowed people to see the organization in whatever ways they wanted to see it. Over the years, in spite of, or because of, the changes, the contradictions, the disputes, the divisions and the different tendencies, the ANC developed an enduring tradition. It was vested with a rich sense of history. Even in the early 1940s, the militant Youth League, impatient with the plodding moderation of the *hamba kahle* leaders, agreed that there was no other organization that had the potential to mobilize the masses. The breakaway Pan Africanist Congress, too, claimed its heritage from the birth of the ANC in 1912.

In ten short years, the ANC became the fountainhead of a mass movement. In the context of rapid urbanization, grinding exploitation in a growing capitalist system, and the attempts of the apartheid policies to control black power, the ANC found a willing mass support. Then it was banned, losing its mass base.

But the masses would rise again in future generations, in precisely those areas where the state sought to control them — in the inferior Bantu Education for the masses; and in the mass, cheaply constructed townships, lacking in services, shops and adequate amenities because, according to apartheid policies, they were 'temporary'. These were the areas where the ANC had failed to mobilize the urban communities, partly because of lack of organization, partly because these particular structures of apartheid were not yet in place. Twenty or thirty years later, the re-emergence of organized resistance brought to the surface a popular memory of the 'decade of defiance', and a determination to learn from its lessons.

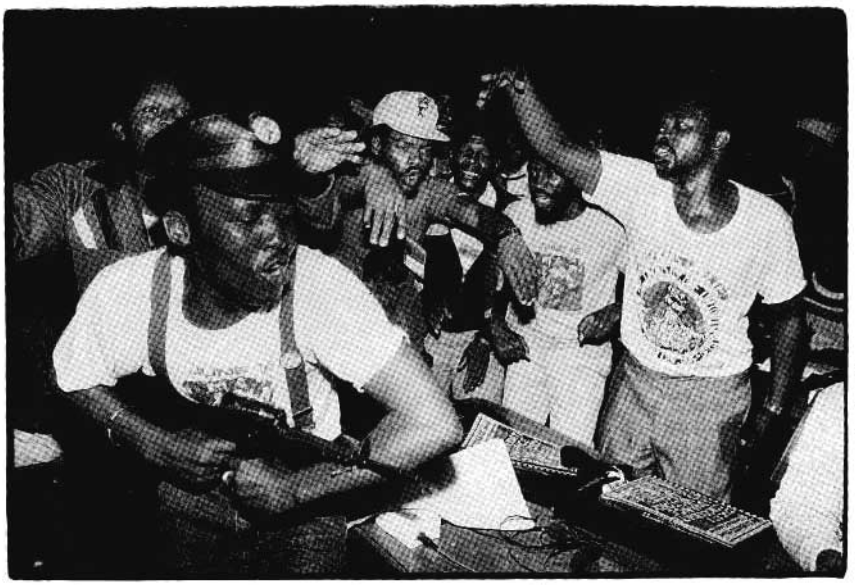
There was also to be another challenge, enduring and powerful. It was to come from the growing masses of workers, whose labour was so vital to the survival of the South African system, yet whose organizations, by giving direction to national and community-based action, had the potential to shake its very foundations.

NOTES

1. Mandela, *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, (New York, 1965), p. 90.
2. Coplan, *In Township Tonight!* (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1986), p. 134.
3. Can Themba, in Essop Patel (ed.), *The World of Can Themba*, 'From the House of Truth', (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1985), p. 235.
4. Cited in Luthuli, *Let My People Go*, (Fontana Books, 1962), p. 104.
5. From Irwin Stanley Manoim, 'The Black Press 1945-1963: the growth of the black mass media and their role as ideological disseminators', MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1983, p. 24.
6. From Anthony Sampson, *Drum: A Venture into the New Africa*, (Collins, London 1956), p. 20.
7. Manoim, as above, p. 9.
8. The Approach to Bantu Press Advertising, 1948. Cited by I.S. Manoim, as above, p. 7.
9. Manoim, as above, p. 9.
10. Quoted by Gail M. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology*, (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles), p. 129.
11. Suttner and Cronin, *Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter*, (Ravan, 1985), p. 49.
12. Norman Duka, *From Shanty Town to Forests*, (LSM Information Centre, Richmond, BC, 1974), p. 46.
13. From 'Programme of Action'. Statement of Policy adopted at the ANC Annual Conference, December 17, 1949. Quoted in Karis and Carter (eds.), *From Protest to Challenge*, Volume 2, (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1973), pp. 337-8.
14. Karis and Carter, as above.
15. Luthuli, *Let My People Go*, (Collins, Glasgow, 1978), p. 122.
16. Quoted in Karis and Carter, as above, p. 479.
17. Karis and Carter, as above, p. 106.
18. Presidential Address by Prof. Z.K. Matthews, ANC (Cape), June 18-19, 1953. Quoted by Karis and Carter, as above, p. 179.
19. Suttner and Cronin, as above, p. 18.
20. Suttner and Cronin, as above, p. 60.
21. Suttner and Cronin, as above, p. 146.
22. *New Age*, from Karis and Carter, Volume 3, as above.
23. *Liberation*, June 1956.
24. Albert Luthuli, as above, p. 142.
25. *Die Vaderland* put the number at between 6 000 and 10 000, the *Cape Times* at 10 000, while *Fedsaw* estimated that 20 000 women were present. Walker, as above, p. 195.
26. The social movements of the 1940s are discussed in Luli Callinicos's forthcoming book, Volume 3 of *A People's History of South Africa*.
27. The M stood for 'Mayibuye', after the ANC slogan, 'Mayibuye iAfrika!'.
28. Interview with member of the Defiance Campaign by Iona Mayer, quoted by Colin Bundy, *Re-Making the Past*, (University of Cape Town, 1986).

29. Quoted in Suttner and Cronin, as above, p. 48.
30. Interview with former general secretary of SACTU by Luli Callinicos, London, July 1987.

* This essay is an abridged version of a chapter from *A People's History of South Africa*, Volume 3 in the popular history series by Luli Callinicos.



(Photo: Anna Zieminski)

Scene from The Cosatu Congress. Johannesburg. 1989.

(Photo: Paul Weinberg)

Agitprop from the Tembisa cultural group. Cosatu Cultural Day. Johannesburg. 1987.

The Workers' Trail
(Tribute to the Dunlop Workers and their leadership)

I
There:
Follow the trail
that leads through the thicket
the trail
that has flummoxed
armed
columns of men

the trail
that has eluded
Botha on a Casspir
the trail
which baffled
Capitalists from England
but,
which also baffled
Sons and Daughters of this land
And has even confused sometimes
veterans of our political dreams.

II
Oh you Employers — you surely cannot be earnest!
And you Rulers?
are you for certain you are not playing games?
You fools! — you still insist that this trail starts up
from
Lusaka
And you add that the winds of change
start up from Moscow
or further afield!

And you Brothers and Sisters!
are you their conjured-up fools to believe
them?

III
Oh you Employers!
do you forget as a matter of course
that the trail starts up from your
very
own backyards and alleys?

Look, there:
Is this not the trail
hacked open in response to your wages of hell?
Is this not the pathway
sliced open by our millions dispossessed?

IV
There now:
the trail leads you on
leads you on Brothers and Sisters
right through the thicket.

V
Oh Brothers and Sisters,
— shout, speak out, let your dammed
voices be heard
Follow this trail
it leads you
through the Congella
its pathways speak of our vanguards
in struggle
and they echo slogans
of socialism arriving tomorrow

Beware —
people
are declaring your names from
the Congella
multitudes of them
are calling out your names
the moulders of iron are calling you
forward
the makers of rubber are urging you on:
Move on

VI
Can you hear them all chanting?:
'The whirlwind Inkhanyamba blows through this thicket
here: through it runs the true track
here: we quarry the granite
to find the South Africa of
tomorrow
A South Africa without exploitation
without oppression and fear for ever more . . .'

VII
Here leads the trail
hacked open by millions
its clearings opened
by our people's courage and

cut open by the ICU
- and then abandoned
hacked open by CNETU
- and then abandoned
hacked open by SACTU
- and then abandoned
hacked open by FOSATU
- and then abandoned
handed over to use to hack-on
to recreate our thoroughfares
and hideouts
hideouts for
our million-strong toilers
hideouts for our multi-million disposessed
hideouts with a mysterious spoor.

VIII
Sons and Daughters
forged and crafted in the struggle
follow the trail that leads through
the thicket
ride the whirlwind's crests
let them carry you home
to our long awaited homestead!
The homestead
- prophesied by Raditsela
the homestead
- prophesied by Biko
and then abandoned
the home
- prophesied by Mabheda
and then abandoned!
Here runs the mystery-trail towards home!
The trail
which baffled the employers and rulers!

And now they look at it and trace it
to Fidel Castro of Cuba
- the great revolutionary
and trace it to Karl Marx's scriptures

- for he wrote of the struggle of the rich
and the poor
as if our struggle
did not start from our hearts.

IX
Father Barayi hear us
Father Modise listen
Father Mlambo listen:
they are calling you
from the plains of the Congella
their voices bring new tidings
the voices say:
'take this machete we offer you
enter the thicket knowing
that this is the sharpest machete
crafted from the strength of our nations
poisoned with Africa's magical herbs
brutally hammered in Apartheid's smithy
shaped by the workers' exploitation
sharpened by Nyambose of Dingiswayo
across the Tugela
sharpened by Jiya of Makhonokhono
the tusk of the elephant
sharpened by Vezi Sithenjwa of Ngema
by Mkhungo of Ixopo
held high by Mthethwa the lion of Dunlop . . .

X
Silenced ones!
Men and Women!
Take heart and shout:
'the tiger shall roar
before the fountains
Africa's true rebel
Mandela the son of Mtivava
the tiger
shall roar before the forest
his roar shall echo
through the valleys and hills the name of
Bambatha of Nondaba
the fallen hero of our sacred Nkandla forests . . .

XI
Brave ones in our struggle
lift the machete
dyed red on its edges
oozing blood or oozing joy
beware and look after its lightning-like sharpness
it can strike enemies and aggressors swift blows
lift it and join the trail that leads through the thicket.

XII
From here then fans the whirlwind
There: look at how our very own trail leads on
On its left march triumphant our rebels

On the right people praising the rancour of our class
Join in:
here comes our tornado-snake Inkhanyamba
here leads the trail through the thicket
here march the visions of the homesteads of tomorrow
here come the workers from the Congella
from Dunlop
from Clover
from Bakers
here comes COSATU pouring into Sydney Road . . .*

Mi Hlatshwayo

* A poem like this can go on and on adding new names of leaders, past heroes' lineages, organizations and so on, weaving itself in and around the central metaphors and following its rythms.

Buya Mandela

Buya Mandela!
Izwelonke lililela wena
izingane emigwaqeni
omame abaedala
bahamba behla imihosha
ziyoduma mhlazane ibuya Mandela
u Botha uyotatazela,
mhlazane ubuya Mandela.
Igazi, logcwala umhlaba

Mhlazane ubuya izwe lobuya
Silindele iqhawe u Mandela
ngoba wadela unina
wahamba waya e Robben Island
lapho ehlale khona
nanamuhla bengamazi ngamehlo
Buya Mandela Buya

Izihosha nemifula yonke e South Africa
'yomemeza
La kokhala wena Botha
La kokhala wena Gatsha
La eyobaleka ephalamende
ebheke e Pitoli esebaleka
no Botha esebheke eNgilandi

Mandlinyoka Ntanzi

There Was a Time

I
He said:

There was a time
spinning with the rattle
of the inqola
to the fields and back
to the fields and back
- a time,
before Frame's time-machines.

And, there was a sun
before this photostat
this xeroxed copy
was pinned onto our dawns
and the moon
brassoed to promenade Marine Parade
and this jello-grey ukulala
was clouds
you could see them then
slithers of froth
rising from the back of waves
to pour down again paraffin-free and clear.
and the winds knew how to blast
to storm and hurricane
shaving your scalp
and the rain would lash hope across your face
and the rainbow would twist earrings
from the tip of your ears.

He told her:

Yes there was a time, when we could love
and run and flow without these fences
when we could love and run through days
and nights with colourful hats
and we could love
under the stars
wearing umthala as our ceiling
to awake with the flitter of isicelankobe.

II
He said:

Inside me was the origin of storms
in my lungs grew enormous pressure
words were gathering force to burst out
to decorate the world
developing great speeds
and dangers
for when my mouth dared open a trifle too slow
they would burst through
and shoot out my teeth
and my gums would be bleeding
or sometimes the words would ignite
coming out as arrows of flame raising the forests
and the trees would dance in their wigs of fire.

He told her:

But then I would see you again under the tree
we first met
and the flames would abate
and the tree would roll you
through the embers down to the river
and it would float away
carrying you down
in the company of monkeys and deer.

And I would run repainting the forests
in new bright colours
and I would spin tales of joy
and I would run to the river mouth
to greet you riding on the backs of chattering porpoises
and we would float up and down with the tides
to gaze at the beach sands
to stare at the snow-capped breasts of Quatalamba.

He said:

But then the floods
and our name was not Noah
and he did not know us by name
and down came the skies
raining bricks and dollars
railway sidings and fences
and our name was not Noah.

III
He told her:

And I searched for the feathers
  to decorate your crown again
    to decorate our love again
and I searched in the marshes and the mangrove swamps
  but I did not find the unongqanga
  I found it later at the municipal dump
and I searched for the black ilanda
  in all the lagoons
  and the umakholwase
and found them suspended in mid-air
  unsure to land
uncertain to take-off into the sun
and spiked through a thorn tree I found the secretary bird
  and I ran through the grassland to look for the gwala-gwala
in the forests of Nkandla
    to find it spray-painted the colour of pumpkins
but still shrieking
  and I lifted up high to caress the claws of
the warlike ukhozi
  to see it down there
  riding a sharkfin around a homeland minister's
  pale blue pool.

IV
He said:

And I said no,
I shall sting this world with my spear
But they laughed and called me 'mosquito'
and they teased the power of my sting
and I wandered over the fences and under the barriers
scraped around walls and over ditches
and scratched
the picture of spiders
of isicabu with its venom
on the walls of AECI at Umbogothwini
and I scratched the mamba uncoiling
on the face of Main Tin
and the form of unwabu
I shaped on the walls of
Bakers
and you could see the crocodile
on the chimneys of Lever

and the rhino stampeding at Bata's
the lion and elephant parading at Dunlop's
and a frog at Huletts and
they laughed and they called
me 'mosquito'
and I laughed at the sting of my spear.

He told her:

And I walked with you past these structures
and said to you that the walls are beginning to tremble
that they stood infected
and that the malaria epidemic was to start
no sooner than
tomorrow
and you didn't laugh
you cried
and said look you have become their mosquito
and this is your insect life
and you said that there was a time
spinning with the rattle of the inqola
but that time was gone.

V
And I saw you scything umoba
straining your back
and I saw you standing
and dreaming of mealiestalks
smoking away
and scratching for pumpkins
and I saw through the clouds of my dagga-stick
fences
and wattle plantations
and cotton plantations
and banana plantations
and umoba plantations
and we drank bitter brew
and we drank
and we drank
to the fences and back.

VI
And I walk now look at my shuffle
to the scratching of electric guitars
and I see people switched-off
and new ones switched-on

bewitched
and I can still hear some laughter

as people strut out with their armies
to the scratching of electric guitars
raising a forest of sticks
and I hear war cries
and look at the flags
and I am looking for you
knowing that I might find you carrying a bible to church
or your hide to the mill for its skinning
or then I might not just yet
but again I might
in the stadiums resounding
and I stalk through the streets look out for my shuffle
look out at me trying to break through the web
of my pantsula brain
to say there was a time
and there will be a time
for you and me.

Ari Sitas

This poem appeared in *Tropical Scars*, a collection of poetry by Ari Sitas published by the Congress of South African Writers, 1989.

A Fear, a Hope, a Dream

(Dedicated to loving and precious Comrades of PMB, Inchanga and Mpumalanga who passed away on to higher ground)

Deep within my brain,
In the depth of my inner being,
My sub-conscious mind reveals
Something that no other
Man has ever seen
A fear, a hope, and a dream
I capture all

That my soul can take
Grasping the mystery
Of a life that shares
The air that I breathe
And suddenly almost like a breeze
Of a powerful wind
Blowing out a flame from a candle
Comrades, like so many other comrades
I once knew
Reflecting a million stars
Before their feet, and today,
They are being crowned in glory
in heaven above

I did not say a last good-bye to you;
I did not throw petals into your grave
And I did not say a last prayer for you

But I grieved for you
For you were my fellow comrades
I stand shocked and alone
At the crossroads of my empty life
Wondering about my own life
And what your life contained

I questioned all of my inner self
So I have what you had
Live the way you lived
Love the way you loved
My tears, my fears, my hopes, my dreams
Will forever linger on
Treasured memories of you, Comrades
FAREWELL AND SHALOM!

J. Zondi

It's You, the People

It's you, the people, that make
The unions strong
And in meetings and gatherings
Is where you belong.

Some come and do their share
While others just sit and stare
No wonder the meetings are empty
That day they had to do plenty
On corners they sit, on pavements and in shops
Forgetting the fact, when in
Trouble it's us who do the job
How long comrades will you
Sit in the sun and wonder?
The bosses see it.
That's why their voices sound
Like thunder.
We need you comrades to mobilize
And organize
So that the bosses can see the union rise.

John
Fawu, Cape Town

Ubani Omemezayo

Ubani omemezayo
ememeza ezintabani zase Lusaka
uyamemeza ubabu'Tambo
uzwile bonke
sibabonile oCyril be NUM
sibabonile oCAWU sibabonile oFAWU
sibabonile oSADWU

Ubani omemezayo
uTambo u se Lusaka
uhlangene ne SA
yini eyenzekalayo
amabhunu amzile
viva UDF viva UDF
Siyibonile, UDF sungulwa
sibonile kunyakaza amabhunu e Pitoli
Kwanyakaza o Vlok no PW Botha
kwanyakaza o Reagan kanye
no Margaret Thatcher
kwanyakaza bonke abaphathi be SA
simbonile u Botha ephathwa
isifosohlangothi
viva ANC viva COSATU viva NUM

Ngiyakwesaba NUM
ngikubonile ngo 1987
Lapho ugogodla khona amandla akho
amane ehla amandla e Randi
wagumba umthetho wesimo esibucayi
u Botha ese Pitoli
Wagula u Botha ngikhuluma nje
Uyafa u Botha

Ngiyakwesaba SARHWU
ngoba amabhunu ase Pitoli
ayekhuluma ngawe
Ngiyakwesaba SARHWU
uthatha amabhunu
uwabeke etafuleni engafuni
viva SARHWU! viva SARHWU!

Ngimbonile u Frank Mdlalose
etatazela o Lundi
ngezwa nondunankulu uqobo

ethi uzoyiqeda, Nehawu
viva NEHAWU! viva NEHAWU!
viva SWAPO! viva SWAPO!
Phambili nomzabalazo wabasebenzi!

Ihaywa Imbongi: Dumisani Zungu

Marching to John Vorster Square

The sound of a falling building
The barking of dogs
The shouts of people
Woke me up with a start
The day had come

The streets in confusion
The traffic amazing
The sound of an AK 47
The praises of women
The day had come

Marching to Pretoria
Black, green, gold flags sky high
Chanting inspiring slogans
More unyielding than tigers
More brave than lions
The day had come

Loud 'Eina's' from Elize Botha, Malan, Vlok
That make soldiers
Run faster than lightning
Cry louder than newly born babies
The day had come

Chimbwidos sing as they cook
Mujibas praise on the trees
Selous sweat from fear
Policemen shake from fear
Botha critically ill from
a sudden heart attack

Marching to John Vorster Square
The sign of oppression
More angry than bulls
Ready to fight
The day had come

Lindy 'Day by Day'

Chimbwidos — Women who cook for guerrillas
Mujibas — Boys who sit in trees and watch out for police

Day of Reckoning

Spurred
by the piercing cries
of our children
we flood the streets
with songs and colours
of resistance
and liberation

but they cut us down with bullets

as the fingers
of our blood
clutched the earth
in tragic embrace

they beat their breasts
in hollow victory

but when our anger
bursts its banks
and our wrath
pours forth like summer rain
and when they see their powers
and their pleasures
prostrate
in the ashes of our vengeance
and the mothers
and the children
and the workers
call them to account

what will they do then?

Frank Meintjies

Ilanga Loduvuna

Lapho sihlatshwa isililo
sezingane zethu
njengamagagasi olwandle
sitheleka kwizitaladi zonkana
nemibala namaculo omzabalazo
nenkululeko

Isitha sisithela phansi ngembumbulu
lapho izandla zethu sezivuza igazi
zangana nenhlabathi yeAfrika

Bazishaye izifuba
bethi sebenqobile

Mhlazane intukuthelo yabagqilaziwe
idabula ugu lokubekezela
amagqubu ethu ebathela emakhanda
njengemvula yasehlobo
amandla nesasasa labo lishabalala
kumlotha wonya
lokuziphindiselela kwethu

Abazali
izingane
nabasebenzi

Sebebabizela esigcawini
kambe ngelanga lokuvuna
bayokwenzenjani na?

Frank Meintjies
Translated by Mi Hlatshwayo

You

you
you will have to take up the spear
you will be the one on whom unity depends

you will have to fight your tiredness at yet another meeting
you will have to fight for words that are yours
you will have to carve plans from the granite of suffering that keeps us in chains
you will have to try again when only few have come to join you
you will have to fight the bottle's false promises
you will have to argue till unity is achieved
you will have to agree with others what the aim of battle is

you will have to close factories down
you will have to close down many workshops like links in a chain
you will have to shake many bosses all at the same time
you will have to explain to them what is respect, the union, a living wage
you will have to be the commanders
AND AT THE END OF ALL WORDS
you will have to rise and strike

you will be the ones who will get the living wage
you will give your words the power of lightning
you will walk in dignity
you will bury the sorrow of the dead
you will learn the secrets of the bosses
you will drink at night in your own schools the knowledge that gives power to control
you will be your own managers
you will take and divide what is yours
you will build Namibia for those who work
you will take over factories and mines
you will speak in government
you will take over the big houses on the other side of town
you will take back the farms of your parents

you will not leave the dream of freedom in the land of sleep
you will carry at all times the spear

nobody will give you the things you want
nobody will provide good houses and a living wage
nobody will bring freedom to your shack
nobody will unite all those who are kicked
nobody will do what only you can do

only you can
you are your only hope

47 pick-and-shovel-unity-boy

Issued by COSATU News and Namibia Solidarity Community July 1989

Oh . . . You

Oh . . . concrete country
I am a beautiful tree of the people
Let me grow safe and healthy
Let the rain from North Africa water me
Let the people get my fruit

Oh . . . concrete country
Let my roots go freely
Let my green colour be seen by the people
People are heartless
Gold colours are needed by people

Oh . . . concrete kill me not
Concrete country give me fresh air
Oh . . . what a concrete country with concrete laws
My fruit are killed while still young

You concrete country with concrete laws
You are killing me while telling me you are helping me
Only a tense situation around me is called a help
Always my green leaves are turned off by bullets
My roots are cut off
Gold, green and black are no good to you
Because you know what you have done to them

William Mattala

CCAWUSA

1. CCAWUSA CCAWUSA
   Vuk'u zithathe CCAWUSA
   Ugadle maqede ulalele
   Ukugadla uphindelela
   Kukwenza ungalaleli
   Ukuqhuma kwesibhaxu

2. CCAWUSA CCAWUSA
   Inkunzi ebhanqule
   Eyabhonga maqede
   Yagudla izintaba
   Yalibhekisa emzansi
   Ne Natal ezinkwazini
   Zolwandle

3. Bathathe nkunzi ebhanqule
   Eyabhoka yakhahlela
   Bethi bayayibhulasha
   Bayi babaza ukulunga
   Ogalajana bakwa SPAR
   Mlungu wakwa SPAR
   Owa yihlomisa ekuseni

4. Ngoba ekhohliswe ngabakubo
   Bethi izophela lingakashoni
   Kanti sebethinte inkunzi
   Emanqindi. Eyabathatha
   Bengalindele yabaphosa olwandle
   Kulaphoke eyasala khona ikhonya.

5. Nkunzi ebhanqule
   Mbambi ka Pick 'n Pay
   Kushunq'u thuli olumnyama
   Mbambi wedla lephephetha
   Umhlaga usale umlomo
   Umbambi weqile
   Lingaphindilizibone ubuqili

6. Bathathe nkunzi kanti ulindeni
   Wena owa qhoqhobala
   Ngobhongwana uFoschini
   Akwabi ndaba zalutho
   Laphuma iQiniso konamanga
   Umceli wenselelo wazibona
   Ubulimi obungenanzuzo

7. Bathathe mduduli ka C.N.A.
   Ejame emgwaqeni ngoba
   Ethi inkunzi ebhanqule
   Ayinamgwaqo. La okwakikizela
   Owesifazane owabe eseyazi umphoso wayo.
   Okwathi kusashisa kwezwakala yena
   Uxamu omdala owu C.N.A.
   Esephonsa ithawula esethimaluju.

8. Inkunzi emdwayidwa
   Inkunzi eyangena ehlathini ngo December
   Kwa duma izulu kwa O.K.
   Undamiyalandwa ngoba ngisho
   Uqueen kweliphesheya uyilanda maqede abhidwe yisibibithwane
   Inkunzi eyakhonya ngo December
   Maqede lahwaqabala

9. CCAWUSA nkunzi ezwakale imemeza entilasifali ithi
   Sebetholakele kwa O.K. mbambi ka O.K. esenkanise
   Ngamasosha kulolonke elase mzansi Afrika.

10. Uyehlula CCAWUSA
    Ngoba wehlule izithunywa
    Zasepitoli ezifana no sithebe emnambithi ezangena

    Ngenhloso ka chief Gatsha Buthelezi
    Yokukhulisa ubuhlobo babo no nombulali omdala u P.W.

11. Uyehlula CCAWUSA
    Ngoba wehlule u O.K.
    Esededele amasosha
    Ukuba abophe, abulale
    Ashaye, adlwengule,
    __esabise adubule.

12. Uyehlula CCAWUSA
    Ngoba wehlula uo O.K.
    Esenkanise ngomthetho
    Wesimo esimanzonzo
    Kwelase South Africa
    Wona obulala izigidigidi ngelanga
    Wona obopha amakhulukhulu ngosuku.

Umbali : Obed Muzikayifani Shabangu
Inkampani : Checkers Richards Bay
Inyunyana : CCAWUSA
Igatsha : Northern Natal

Mandlinyoka Ntanzi

Fear Not Detention

Oppressed brothers and sisters,
Fear not detention,
For the sake of justice,
Forward we shall go . . .

Beloved brothers and sisters,
Fear not torturing,
For the sake of liberty,
Forward we shall go . . .

Beloved comrades,
Fear not detention without trial,
For the sake of freedom,
Forward we shall go . . .

Our tears spilt not for nothing,
Our martyrs did not die,
For what is believed to be false,
We shall be free from the chains of apartheid . . .

You, who are in detention,
For the sake of justice,
Know that Africa loves you,
Know that Africa is proud of you . . .

You, who are in detention,
For the sake of liberty,
Know that our souls and spirit are with you,
Therefore, fear not detention . . .

Stephen Rakgosi
National Union of Mineworkers, Welkom

Let Us Not forget

Dear fellow workers,
Let us step into the shoes
Of the families of our fellow workers,
Who have lost their lives in mining accidents,
Let us be part and parcel of them.

Dear brethren,
Let us wear the skins
Of the families of our brothers,
Who have been consumed by death,
Let us be part and parcel of them.

Dear comrades,
Let us see what
The families of our brothers
Are facing in this sick world,
Let us be part and parcel of them.

Dear Africans,
Let us feel
What the families of our brothers feel,
Then we will know
Who we are, what we are and why we are.

Dear Africans,
Let us not forget
Our brothers who became martyrs
For our liberty.
We shall rise from the forlorn,
And reign supreme among other nations.

Stephen Rakgosi
National Union of Mineworkers, Welkom

Aluta Continua!

The structure of our country is rough,
The land of our forefathers has been confiscated,
Don't quit young Africans,
The struggle continues.

Youth of Africa,
We have become strangers in the land of our birth,
Don't allow it to continue,
Don't retreat young Africans,
The struggle continues.

We are the backbone of this country's economy,
But in this country's wealth we share not,
Therefore, fight workers,
The struggle continues.

The heart of Africa is bleeding for our rights,
Our beloved country needs our valour,
The way to freedom bounds non-quitters,
Therefore, don't quit workers,
The struggle continues.

Edwin 'Mapata' Tekane
National Union of Mineworkers, Welkom

Kgoeletso ya ho tla Seobokeng SA Setjhaba

Re bitsa batho bohle ba Afrika babatsho le babasweu re re: ha re bueng mmoho ka tokoloho:-

Re bitsa balemi 'mahaeng' le diterateng
Ha re bueng ka lefatshe le sephara
le meedi e mesesane eo re fufulelwang ho yona.
Ha re bueng ka banabeso ba nang le lefatshe
le bana ba hlokang dikolo.
Ha re bueng ka makgetho, mehlape le sekoboto.
HA RE BUENG KA TOKOLOHO.

Re bitsa baepa mashaela, gauta le taemane
Ha re bureng ka ditjhafe tse lefifi le dikompone
tse batang hole le bamalapa a rona.
Ha re bueng ka mosebetsi o boima, dihora tse telele
le batho ba romellwang hae ho ya shwa
Ha re bueng ka babusi ba ruileng le meputso ya bofutsana
HA RE BUENG KA TOKOLOHO.

Re bitsa basebetsi ba mapolasi le temo ya meru
Ha re bueng ka dijo tse hlabosang tse re di
lemang le melao e re bolokang re futsanehile
Ha re bueng ka tshwaro e sehlooho ya bana
le basadi ba qobellwang ho sebetsa.
HA RE BUENG KA TOKOLOHO.

Re bitsa basebetsi ba polasi le temo ya meru
Ha re bueng ka ntho tse ntle tseo re die etsang
le maemo a nyarosang a tshebetso.
Ha re bue ka dipasa tse ngata le tlhokeho ya mesebetsi
Ha re bueng ka diforomane, transporoto
le ka mekgatlo ya basebetsi
Ha re bueng ka matlo le ka matsatsi a phomolo.
HA RE BUENG KA TOKOLOHO.

Re bitsa mesuwe, baithuti le baruti.
Ha re bueng ka lesedi le tliswang ke thuto
le mekgwa eo re bolokilweng lefifing ka yona
Ha re bueng ka tshebetso tse kgolo
tseo re tsebang ho fana ka tsona le
meedi e mesesane eo re e buletsweng.
Ha re bueng ka melao, mmuso le ditokelo.
HA RE BUENG KA TOKOLOHO.

Re bitsa mafumahadi le basadi bohle
Ha re bueng ka bana ba batle bao re b a belehang
le maphelo a bona a hlomolang.
Ha re bueng ka mahloko a mangata, le lefu
le ka dikliniki le dikolo tse mmalwa.
Ha re bueng ka ditheko tse hodimo le metse ya mekhukhu
HA RE BUENG KA TOKOLOHO.

Ha re bueng kaofela mmoho, kaofela hammoho-maAfrika,
maIndia
ba mmala le ba basweu, bakgethi le ba hlokang tokelo eo;
kaofela batho ba Afrika Borwa, ba metseng le metsaneng
HA RE BUENG MMOHO KA TOKOLOHO.
le ke thabo e fihlelang banna le basadi
ba phelang lefatsheng le lokolohileng.

HA RE BUENG KA TOKOLOHO LE HORE RE
KA IPHUMANELA YONA JWANG, RONA LE
BANA BA RONA.

Thamsanqa Phaliso

Victory is Certain

Mothers and fathers of Africa
Shall you prick your ears and listen
listen to the voice
Listen to the sound
bursting through the bullet-riddled walls of Luanda
Walls that gave refuge to PLAN combatants
Combatants who routed the racist battalions
in the valleys of Cuito Cuanavale.

Listen to this voice
bringing tides of joy
to the people
tides of liberation
to the nation

Sons and daughters of our Mother-soil
Shall you rise from your slumbers and listen
divorce your siestas
Listen to the voice
piercing through the billows of Walvis Bay
Billows that rejected the anchoring of racist colonial ships
Ships that brought war, injustice and famine
to the land of peace, hospitality and plenty

Listen to this great voice
making promises of a happy future
to Namibians
promises of Uhuru
to South Africans

Roar young lions of my country, roar
As we're listening to the voice of hope
thundering like a limpet-mine explosion
rumbling over the dusty streets of Katutura
Streets saturated with rivulets of blood
Blood swallowed over time immemorial
Blood that oozed from gaping wounds of innocent babies
Wounds inflicted by barbaric Koevoet cannibals
products of a racist womb

Students, teachers, parents and workers
hear this voice

Hear this sound
through the toyi-toyi stamping feet of the energetic youth
in the sharp ululation of a choking Namibian woman
under the tear-gas perfumed cloud of the slum and ghetto
Bidding welcome back home to the SWAPO exiles

We will hear this same voice
whispered on the desert-land of Namaqua
We will hear this same sound
rumbling on the banks of the famous Limpopo
We will hear this same voice
shouting in the dense bushes of Louis Trichardt
We will hear this same sound
roaring in the ever lively streets of Mamelodi
We will hear this same sound
clattering through Holiday Inns' sculleries
We will hear this same voice
announcing VICTORY to us

Ask Pee Wee about this voice
he'll tell you that it causes strokes
Ask F.W. about this voice
he'll tell you of how bald it makes one to be
Ask Terry about this voice
he'll tell you how good a music it is for laager

But remember
this is not a voice from a minuscule opera
for no racist violin can match its sound
But a voice from an overwhelming majority
A voice of citizens
united
A voice of patriots
determined
A voice of comrades
committed
A voice that knows only one truth
that Freedom or Death . . . VICTORY IS CERTAIN!

Buyisile Jonas

Jangeliswe
For Moss Jangeliswe Mayekiso

Jangeliswe —
the one who watches over the country
son of Sikhali
the father who knows that the promise of your name
was fulfilled at your birth
they named you the leader of the Israelites reborn
believing that you would lead this land today

Jangeliswe —
stare at this country around you
look at its people intimidated
look at this country
look at the crisis, look at the people and lead Jangeliswe
scour the country as it is smeared in blood
scour the rulers and their rules
know that the elephants will never be answered

Jangeliswe —
live up to your Israelite name
and lead
observe your birthplace
relive your school years
and listen afar to your schoolmates
asking you to lead them
Jangeliswe
son of Sikhali
help us become thorns
disturbing the rulers' sleep

Like Mandela
you pushed around the seat of their kingdom
and now you are thrown in kwanongqonqo
the sealed box of endless nights
trying to stop you in what you were up to
trying to erase you from popular memory
they put forward sell-outs and they prize people to praise them
but you resurface and they shout that 'it is getting hot at Alex
we can't stand all this pressure'
then they charge you
to put you away forever
but you look them in the face
and you speak out the truth
about how the people are crushed and exploited

and how they are to light fires to help see through the darkness
and how to choose stones to erect new bridges
to pass over the floods
and how to trail through the thornfields
how to care for each other on the road
with such heavy burdens
with your own life neglected
your own homestead in tatters
you move on and speak the truth

Now you emerge an African hero
loosening the bowels of the oppressors
winning the praise of the world at large
angering rulers for spoiling their hunts
infuriating the exploiters by removing the udders they sucked
Carry on Jangeliswe, son of Sikhali:
on hlahlindela yam Afrika

Alfred Qabula

Canto Fifteen
We Demand a Living Wage!

Comrades,
there is a hole in our pockets
and the wealth of the country is not there!
The price of bread goes up
and the price of labour goes down,
and we all know how it is
when children's bones stick out
and the sugar tin is empty,
and you can't afford mielies
let alone meat.

When we want to live,
I mean just live,
they tell us
that living is seditious
that living is revolutionary
that living is treason to the state
that living is bad for business

But **we say:**
We demand a living wage!
(We need to shout this all together
So that the bosses can hear us!)
But **we say:**
We demand a living wage!

Comrades,
the cost of living has made a hole in our pockets
and the wealth of the country is not there!
The rent goes up, and the landlord thrives,
and the pay-packet shrinks,
and we all know how it is
when the rain drips through the ceiling,
and the heater doesn't heat,
and you can't afford a simple chair,
not to talk about a couch.
And then the puppets come and put
your furniture on the cold road to nowhere.

When we want to live,
I mean just live,
they tell us
that living is seditious

that living is revolutionary
that living is treason to the state
that living is bad for business

But **we say:** (Let me hear you!)
We demand a living wage!

Comrades,
inflation has emptied our pockets
and the wealth of the country is not there!
And our dresses get old
and the jackets fall apart,
and to buy new ones is out,
if you don't want to fast for a month
and the children go naked,
and the shoes rot on our feet,
and we don't talk high fashion,
just an ordinary decent dress,
and trousers without holes
for the wind to go through.

When we want to live,
I mean just live,
they tell us
that living is seditious
that living is revolutionary
that living is treason to the state
that living is bad for business

But **we say:** (Let me hear you!)
We demand a living wage!

Comrades,
exploitation has put nothing into our pockets
and the wealth of the country is not there!
In the meantime the stock exchange thrives
and the profits roll in
and the gold heaps up in the bank vaults,
and our taxes feed the army
so that they can shoot us, when we strike,
and the boss lives on our labour,
and he buys a new Rolls Royce,
and he sends his profits to a Swiss bank
in case there is a South African revolution.

When we want to live,
I mean just live,
they tell us
that living is seditious
that living is revolutionary
that living is treason to the state
that living is bad for business

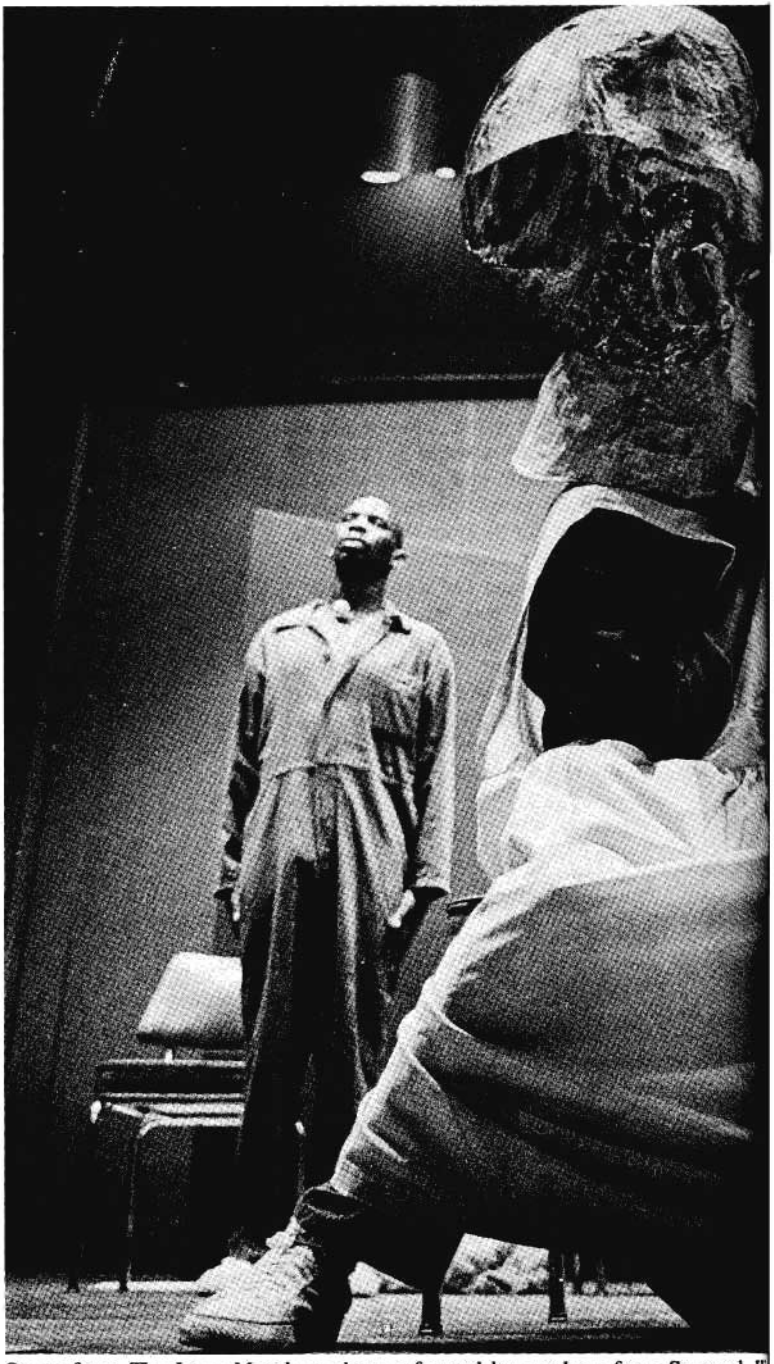
But **we say:** (Let me hear you!)
We demand a living wage!

Comrades,
oppression has torn a hole into our pockets
and the wealth of the country is not there!
Now I propose, there is a way to change this!
The bosses make their profits from our work
and our poverty comes from their profits;
so we want to have a say in this thing:
we want a living wage and secure jobs,
and time enough to relax in,
we want decent houses to live in,
we want them near our work,
we want medical care and maternity leave,
and schools which are fit for our children.
So let us get together, and you'll see,
that nothing on earth is unchangeable.

When we want to live,
I mean just live,
they tell us
that living is seditious
that living is revolutionary
that living is treason to the state
that living is bad for business

But **we say:** (Let me hear you!)
We demand a living wage!

Peter Horn
1st May 1989
Athlone Stadium



Scene from *The Long March,* a play performed by workers from Sarmcol. H
Workshop. Johannesburg. 1987.

Nithini na Basebenzi Ngelithala

Kwaxokozela izinqolamthi
ngaba konakele phi na?
Baxov'udak'onoonkala
Kuya kwakhiwa phina

Ooqongqothwane abangesilandiseli na
nje ngamagqirh'endlela?
Oophungu-phungu abangewalathi na
Aph'umhlola ungakhona

Ath'amanyang'alomzi
Masiwul and'esikhundleni
Umkhondo. Kulapho
Sakuwulandiswa khon'umhlo-o-ola

Boxuthelw'amalungel'ookhokho
Babaziimbacu neempula-zikalujaca
Ubukumkani nobumamhloba boobo
Basingelwa pha-a-antsi

Kulapho kulele khona
Inzibulo nengqalo yalomzabalazo
Kulo elihlabathi
A-A-Atshilw'a manyang'a sekhaya pha-a-a

Ba-a-nyanzelwa ngengxelengo
Abangozange bayibiza
Kub'umqulu neqhosh'elingenamthunja
Babe latam'emaphupheni

Elocekw 'ancamathela thina
Kuba sesinganzewa
nangoqingqo nzala
Kant'ingxelengo bayibuyisel'emuva

Khe namva na u Phezel-komkhone
Osisandulela sehlobo
Yintak'ekhumbus'abalimi
ngezixhobo zenkabi

Le nyanga i Dearha iza nethamsanqa
Kub'umhlal'iwukhombe kumbindi
Womzantsi-Afrika
Kwisazulu sesixeko se Rhawuti

Phakathi kweendunduma
Zamathumb'a lomhlaba
Phezu kwemibongo
Erhubuluz'abazabala-a-azi

Kulaph'umhlola ulele khona
Kulaph'abazabalazi bathe nqwadalala khone
Kulaph'abasebenzi balindel'ukutya kwendlebe khona
Kulaph'amaqabane akunikan'izimvo khona

Ni-i-i-ithini mathambo ndini
Alele phantsi kwalo mgangatho
Ni-i-iva njani na
Ngesisihika-hika setheko

Kulapho apho similisel'ithala leencwadi
Eliya kuba ngumkhombandlela
Kubasebenzi
Ikwa ngumongo-wolwazi kwabasakhulayo

Balel'aph'abazabalazi bamandulo
Kungoko ndithi
Lendawo ilel'iintsikelelo

Kuni mathambo ndini
Makube chosi kube hele
Sive ngokukhala kwebhokhwe
ub'icamagu livumile

Ha-a-ala Lulie ka Callinicos
Siwothulel'iminqwaz'umonde wakho
Ngokungafikelwa ndyamorha
Ngokuwezw'lizilwandle kuka John Lewis

Phants'e Gagasini yaqukez'into ka Champion
Kwatsho kwavulelek'ithala
Lokunced'abasebenzi
De kwahlaziyeka nezanyantya

Kweleentlanz'e Ntshona koloni
U Clement into ka Kadalie
Intsungulo yethala
Wayivusa khona

Ngamagorh'esikuyaleza kuwo
Nzwakaz'e nomsa
Xa ugilwa zindzingo
Zalo mzabalazo

Kuni bagcini balemizi
Nihlale nimaphuth'ahlathinye
nje ngezimbala mnye
zona ziphapha kunye

Nibe ngumzekelo kuba sebenzi
Khon'ukuze banik'inkxaso kulomzi
De bagilan'ukuwundwendwela
Ngenxa yothakazelelo lwenu kubo

Lo mzi yingxow'enemilenze
Yokugcin'imcuno zabasebenzi
Ikwa ngu vimb'ogad'usapho
Mhla kungendlala

Lomzi ubhonxe imibele
Okwentsengwanekazi
Ndiyekeni ndiyokhwezela
Iimbiza Iyatsh' eziko
Qo-o-ongqotolo

Mandel Mvunge
Iscor

Praise Poem of Cosatu

They fear an 80-year-old comrade
they fear a comrade without a leg
they fear comrade Oscar Mpetha
they fear comrade Ray Alexander
they fear comrade Liz Abrahams
even dead, they fear com Rev Marawu
even dead, they fear com Neil Aggett
even dead, they fear com Andries Raditsela
alive, they fear com Nic Henwood.

They shackled us with bantu amendment laws
now they try labour relations laws:
'you are not fired — you are freed from your contract.
'you are not fired — you are rationalized.'
'you are not fired — you are deregulated.'
'you are not fired — you are decentralized.'
'you are not fired — you dismissed yourself by striking.

By the tommy boydell gebou we sat down and wept.
You are no longer a man but manlike —

> 'MANLIKE A TOT L on 40%:
> Come on time! Sit quiet!
> Produce your identity!
> Kom! Sign! Voeeeeertsak!'

They fear the working class; they fear COSATU,
they steal our GST to print their 'Trade Union Titbits';
they call our shopstewards: Sedition, Hoogverraad,
they detain our union activists; they bomb COSATU House.
Their mellow-yellow prowls the sky, pretends it is god;
it fears Elijah and Moses speak the truth.

Comrades Elijah and Jay say:
'ORGANIZE!
Build our unions!
Build COSATU locals!
Build the strategic alliance COSATU-UDF!'

> 'AANDAG!
> Nademaal dit na my blyk,
> Dat omstandighede ontstaan,
> Kragtens die bevoegdheid aan my verleen,
> By artikel twee sit-in-hakies een sluit-hakies,

Verklaar ek derhalwe hierby,
Dat ek 'n noodtoestand toewy.

Gegee onder my Hand en die Seël van die Republiek,

I beg to remain,
Your obedient servant,

PW FW Magnus Kobie Adriaan Hennie Witter-dan-Wit
Assocom FCI Chamber of Mines. Punt. Volgende reel.'

KUYA KUBAKHO umsebenzi nokhuselo!
Bonke abasebenzayo bayakukhuleka ukuseka amaqumrhu ezorhwebo,
ukonyula abaphathi babo nokwenza
izivumelwano ngemivuzo nabaqeshi babo.

THERE SHALL be work and security!
All who work shall be free to form trade unions
to elect their officers and to make wage agreements.

ABANTU bayakuxhamla ubutyebi belizwe!
Ubutyebi belizwe lethu, ilifa lomntu wonke wase Mzantsi Afrika,
bayakububuyiselwa ebantwini.

THE PEOPLE shall share in the country's wealth!
The national wealth of our country, the heritage
of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people.

VIVA to the marriage of ACTWUSA & GAWU!
VIIIIIIIIVA to unity in CCAWUSA!
FAWU — grow stroooooooooong!
SADWU — grow stroooooooooong!
SARHWU — grow stroooooooooong!
T & G — grow stroooooooooong!
Phantsi ngeLabour Relations law!
Phambili ngeliving wage!
PHAMBIIIILI ngesocialism!
Amaaaaa andla kubazebenzi!
AMAAAAANDLA kuCOSATU!

ncincilili.

Keith Gottschalk
May Day Rally, Athlone Stadium, Cape Town, 1989

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I am Talking

My Africa, listen
your son is talking
I am talking
'cause I need no warrant for talking
For I know I am the warrant

I need no warrant of being
for I know I am a human being
I need no sanctioning for my thoughts
For Africa you are the sanctioning
I need no permission to think
For I know I am the thinking-tank
and the judgement of my thinking-tank
is the only verdict that is impartial

My Africa, listen your son is talking
I am talking because the idiots'
resurrection document is inhuman to my people
permanent-urgency I say is immoral
I am talking because repression and harassment
is all I reap from the new L.R.A.A.
Bull-shit the tongue of the employers
Fuck-all the tongue of the ignorant
Anna-Betty — 89 my slave name at work
For I am not aknowledged

My Africa, listen your son is talking
In kwa-Ndebele I talked about People's Movement
Imbokoto was the government in exile
I talked about housing problems in Winterveldt
family-planning was the answer
I talked about the death
of a Minister in Maputo
the Banda-Botha regime
celebrated never-mind the facts
My Africa I have talked

Thabadiawa

Victor Shingwenyana.

VICTOR SHINGWENYANA: THEATRE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR UNITY

Victor Shingwenyana has written and produced over twenty plays dealing with popular and worker themes. He spoke to Andries Walter Oliphant about his work which has been performed at various worker conferences and other cultural occasions throughout South Africa.

STAFFRIDER: How is your background related to your cultural work?
SHINGWENYANA: I was born in Tsakane location on the East Rand where I also schooled. I developed an early interest in writing plays. At that time there was hardly any support or interest in the wider community for my work. This made me feel very isolated.

My early work was mainly concerned with popular but apolitical themes such as love, courting, betrayals, moral issues and adventure. At that stage of my life this seemed very important to me. You see, I was not aware of what was going on in our country.

As I grew older, and especially when I started working at Brakpan Collieries, I began to focus on social and political issues. I came into contact with COSATU and the labour cultural movement. This consolidated the change in my writing.

My involvement with the labour movement helped me to understand the nature of culture in South Africa. I began to see that there is a culture of the ruling class and a culture of the oppressed people. I realized that as a worker I belonged to the oppressed and therefore had a responsibility to contribute to the culture of the majority in this country. I consider my efforts a means of contributing to the building of a people's culture in South Africa.

STAFFRIDER: What was the first play you wrote after you established contact with the cultural movement of COSATU?
SHINGWENYANA: I wrote a one-man play called *Workers' Struggle*. I performed the play at several meetings of the affiliates of COSATU as well as at meetings of the Tsakane Youth Congress. I explored some of the daily struggles of workers and found that people were very interested in this.

After this, I wrote another play which I called *People's Television* in which I expose the propaganda which the State media broadcast daily. By drawing on the information which is available in alternative publications such as *Cosatu News, Speak, Learn and Teach, New Nation* and *Grassroots*, I try, in an entertaining way, to make the audience aware of the facts in South Africa, Angola, Namibia and elsewhere.

These two scripts differed radically from my early writings which had nothing to do with the struggles of the majority of people in South Africa.

STAFFRIDER: At the COSATU cultural day in July you performed your play *Kwavezinyawo*. Could you tell me a bit about the origin of the title and its meaning as well as the social issues it addresses?
SHINGWENYANA: Kwavezinyawo is the name of a section in Tsakane location. When the town council moved the people from Brakpan location to Tsakane they promised to provide the people with decent housing and proper social facilities. When the people arrived in Kwavezinyawo they discovered that the council did not fulfill its promises. Kwavezinyawo is a small, untidy and overcrowded place. The name itself refers to the size of the houses which are so small that the people are fond of saying: when you sit in these houses your feet stick out of the doors.

The people, however, decided to come together to form a home-seekers' association. They united to fight the council and succeeded in improving their living conditions. In line with this, the play aims to show that when we come together and unite against exploitation and oppression we can achieve much in our struggles for change.
STAFFRIDER: The play consists of dramatic action and music. Is this the style of all your work?
SHINGWENYANA: When I write a play, I make sure that it is a musical play. Since the audience is made up of many types of people, I think it is necessary to cater for all. There are those who like music, those who like dramatic action and those who analyze the whole play and its message. I feel I have to satisfy everybody.
STAFFRIDER: What else do you keep in mind when you write a play?
SHINGWENYANA: I always have certain players in mind who are drawn from the workers in my union and from the youth organization with which I work. What worries me most when I write, are the problems around rehearsals. It is very difficult under the present State of Emergency.

It is hard enough to find time since most of the actors are either at work or at school during the week. Some workers do night shift and this means that we can only meet over weekends. I use the week to write.
STAFFRIDER: What are you working on at the moment?
SHINGWENYANA: I have just completed two plays. One is called *Amaloba*, which, as the title suggests, deals with the unemployed. The other is *Vukani Amakhosikazi*, which deals with the women's struggle against oppression by men.

In the first play, *Amaloba*, I try to point out that the tendency of some workers to work overtime in conditions where there is great unemployment leads to a situation where many people have to go hungry. The aim of the play is to persuade workers to work a maximum of forty hours and to demand proper payment for their work. If there are people with starving families then workers should refuse to work overtime.

In *Vukani Amakhosikazi*, I expose the evil of exploiting women. I try to show that women have to play a leading role in our struggle. I also criticize the tendency of some who do not regard women as equals.

STAFFRIDER: Once you have completed writing a play do you go directly into producing it or is there some other way you approach it?

SHINGWENYANA: First, I call people together and invite them to read and criticize the script. I listen very carefully to what everybody has to say regarding the issues addressed in the play. If there are problems or mistakes I rewrite the script and make the necessary corrections.

I find this a very acceptable way of working since I do not suffer from the illusion that my work is perfect. In fact, after making the corrections I feel free to take the play to the people.

STAFFRIDER: In producing your plays, do you also draw on the technical knowledge of others or not?

SHINGWENYANA: Where this is available, I do. Since I have had no training in drama, I appreciate the advice I get from other people involved in the theatre.

I also find the contact and feed-back I get from audiences all over the country very useful for my work. However, the greatest problem still remains the lack of time, facilities and funds.

STAFFRIDER: What language do you usually work in?

SHINGWENYANA: I use English since it enables me to reach a wider audience in the context of South Africa. It enables me to overcome some of the barriers of apartheid. I do, however, also use elements from Zulu, Sotho and Tsonga where characterization and context necessitate it.

My wish is that everybody should receive the message of the play. Although it is not a satisfactory state of affairs, I nevertheless feel that English is at this stage in a position to accommodate more people from all sectors of South Africa than any other language.

STAFFRIDER: How do you see the role of the cultural worker?

SHINGWENYANA: Cultural workers must realize that they have a role to play in the political and cultural struggles in South Africa. They must contribute to the struggle for liberation by educating the people and by passing on the message that they have to unite against all forms of oppression and exploitation. They must understand, that even in the field of culture, the profit motive serves individuals and not communities or the struggle of the workers.

Also, I think we in the workers' movement are now very clear about the fact that the struggle does not end at the factory floor. It is also in the communities where workers live that the struggle must be fought. We are oppressed in every respect in South Africa and workers know this. It is the task of cultural workers to advance the struggle for liberation.

(Photo: Cedric Nunn)

The Dunlop Workers Play. History Workshop, Wits.

THE SILENT UHURU

a play

by

Rankoa Molefe

(It is a hot summer afternoon. The territory of Ralawu is to be excised from the mainland at midnight the following day and afforded independence. The president is seated at the desk in his newly decorated office. A huge banner with the words 'WE DID IT', hangs on the wall behind him. He is awaiting a journalist from The Twilight *newspaper who has made an appointment to interview him on the future of the new Republic of Ralawu. There is a knock at the door. The messenger ushers in a journalist. He carries two huge bags and a camera hangs from his neck.)*

JOURNALIST: (*extending his hand to the president*) Good afternoon, Your Excellency. I am sorry for being late. I have been delayed by road-blocks on my way here. They had to go through all my belongings and it took thirty minutes to conclude the exercise.
PRESIDENT: (*speaking with a heavy accent and searching for words to express himself*) Good afternoon my son. I have just received a message from the intelligence unit of the Police Department. A fifth column has been formed in Ralawu to disrupt the celebrations tomorrow. I immediately summoned the chief of the army to my office and commissioned him to man road-blocks on all entrances to Ralawu. But I do assure you that the situation shall return to normal and that all law-abiding citizens will celebrate in peace.
JOURNALIST: Do you have any knowledge about the identities of the fifth columnists?
PRESIDENT: As you are aware, our intelligence unit is still fledgling. It was formed hurriedly and it is composed of senior policemen seconded to Ralawu by the government of the mainland. Most of the intelligence gathering is done on the mainland.
JOURNALIST: Now, do you call that independence when decisions are made in a foreign country?
PRESIDENT: Yes, but we have our own flag and national anthem . . . and a full cabinet.
JOURNALIST: Mr President, I understand that Ralawu has decided to cross the Rubicon and go it alone with effect from tomorrow.
PRESIDENT: That's correct.
JOURNALIST: What actually prompted the decision to opt for independence.
PRESIDENT: We got a mandate from the people. We were even urged by the population to speed up the process. When I announced our decisions through the radio early this year, I received accolades from a cross-section of the population. My office was inundated with congratulatory messages and approvals.
JOURNALIST: But we have information from impeccable sources to the

effect that many people who are opposed to independence have been locked up. A classical example is the detention of the leader of the opposition party, who is rumoured to have been severely tortured while in detention.

PRESIDENT: The declaration of independence, and what you refer to as the detention of the leader of the opposition party, are not related. They are two separate issues. The independence has nothing to do with the criminal acts committed by the leader of the opposition party. He is not detained, he has been arrested and charges against him have been formulated. He is scheduled to appear in court within three months.

JOURNALIST: But, isn't the three-month period, during which he is held prior to his appearance in court, in fact detention?

PRESIDENT: You are entitled to your views.

JOURNALIST: What charges have been formulated against this leader?

PRESIDENT: Large quantities of literature of communist origin have been found in his office. Books from America, Britain and West Germany were seized. They are now in the custody of the commissioner of police. They will be presented in court as evidence.

JOURNALIST: But the countries you have just mentioned are not communist.

PRESIDENT: We in Ralawu do refer to these countries as communist because they are opposed to our independence. They have even signed a declaration denouncing our move. We don't care about them. As long as we get support from the mainland, everything is okay.

JOURNALIST: Going back to the question of the detention of the leader of the opposition party, I understand there were quarrels between the two of you. What kind of differences do you have?

PRESIDENT: No . . . not quarrels. I cautioned him not to push us too far. He was urging the people to boycott the independence celebrations. I urged him to exercise maximum restraint. You see, I don't understand why he is interested in politics. I know of white people, who have Masters degrees in astronomy like him, going to the moon. He is only fomenting trouble in Ralawu.

(Tea is brought to the office by two ladies in white aprons. They smile reluctantly. They put the tray on the table. The president thanks them. The two ladies make a semi-bow and back-pedal. The two men enjoy the tea.)

PRESIDENT: The tea we are drinking right now is produced in Ralawu. It is grown and harvested by the sons and daughters of Ralawu.

JOURNALIST: Do you think that Ralawu will ever be economically viable.

PRESIDENT: Ye . . .s, why not? We have an atjar factory in the Lerua district. It employs 1 500 people.

JOURNALIST: But we have been informed recently that your territory is bankrupt and that the government of the mainland has decided not to bankroll you anymore. Your officials and even the ministers are said to be corrupt.
PRESIDENT: On the question of insolvency I concede the Republic of Ralawu was on the brink of collapse during the past three months. But the malady has been remedied; as you know, we have our own currency and I have directed the minister of finance and our central bank to print more money. (*As he speaks, he bends and opens the drawer. He takes out a bank note and holds it out to the journalist, smiling.*) Here is our currency. The finance committee appointed to look into the feasibility of going it alone has decided on the name 'Nkwe'. We have various bank notes ranging from 'two Nkwe' to 'fifty Nkwe'. Again it was decided that each note bear my head. The portrait you see on that bank note is mine. Isn't it interesting?
JOURNALIST: (*ignoring the note*) But your independence is based on tribal lines. The mainland government has balkanized a certain portion of barren land and reserved it for twelve or so tribes. Do you regard this as fair play.
PRESIDENT: This is not tribalism. The Kakwa population doesn't constitute a tribe. It is an identifiable nation with a rich culture and customs. It existed long before the arrival of the white man. The people of this nation have chosen to be like that and not to dilute themselves with foreign blood. How can you expect my daughter to be married by a Yoruba or a Masai for that matter.

(*The messenger enters with a white envelope in his hand. He hands it over to the president and awaits orders.*)

PRESIDENT: (*holds the letter in his hand before opening it and speaks to the messenger*) Have you seen to it that my new Mecedes Benz has been cleaned. I do not need to advise you every day that the car must be cleaned. You are big enough to think independently.
MESSENGER: My lord, everything is in order. Three prisoners from Lulapoo prison have washed all the ministerial cars. The only problem is that an open bottle of brandy found in the minister of health's car accidentally fell and the brandy stained the front seat of . . .
PRESIDENT: (*interjecting*) Okay . . . Okay . . . go and continue with your job.

(*The messenger leaves, closing the door*)

PRESIDENT: (*to the journalist, with the letter still in his hand*) Initially I told

you about our huge atjar factory in the Lerua district. One day I'll invite you to visit the factory and see for yourself how economically advanced Ralawu is. (*The journalist goes through his papers, uninterested about the atjar factory. The president opens the letter which is from the commissioner of police. He grins, gives the journalist a snap look and bows his head again.*)

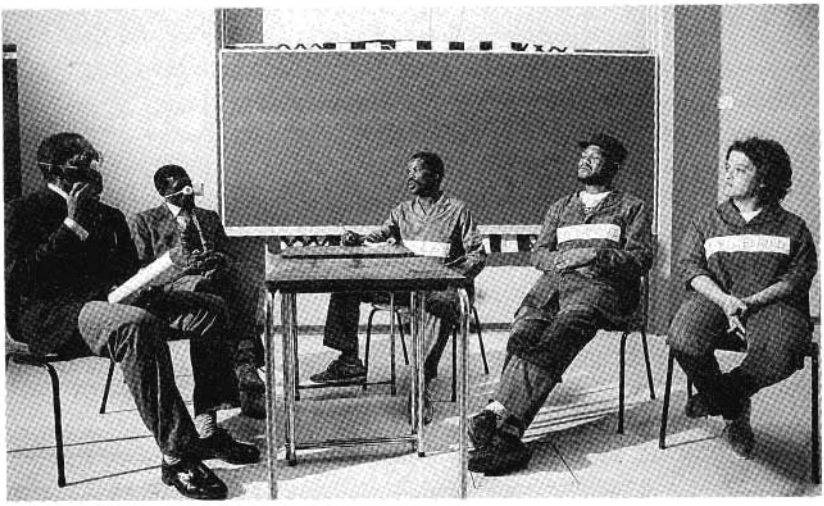
PRESIDENT: (*to the journalist*) My son, I have an appointment at two-thirty with agriculturalists from the University of York who were impressed by the fertility of our soil. I must prepare a memo which I want to present to them. Thanks for your interview and your patience. I hope I'll meet you again in future.

(*The president extends a hand to the journalist. The journalist prepares to leave. He packs his papers into one of his bags. A police contingent led by the commissioner of police storms into the office.*)

COMMISSIONER: Your Excellency, we apologize for this inconvenience. Your office has been belittled. (*He points a finger at the journalist*) This man is a media terrorist. He is a high-ranking member of the Communist League. He has openly agitated for the elimination of the entire cabinet of Ralawu.

(*The president nods his head. He utters no word. The commissioner moves towards the journalist.*)

COMMISSIONER: (*to the journalist*) In the name of the Republic of Ralawu, you are under arrest. Thorough and diligent investigations have proved that you are a dyed-in-the-wool communist. You have incited the students of Ralawu University to embark on an illegal strike to demand that the government of Ralawu rescind its decision of independence and abdicate. Hand over your belongings and follow us.
(*One of the policemen handcuffs the journalist. He is frogmarched out of the office.*)



(Photo: Gisele Wulfsohn)

Scene from a play performed by workers from General Motors. Cosatu Cultural Day. Johannesburg. 1987.

Gallows for Mr Scariot Mpimpi

a play

by

Mi Hlatshwayo and the Clairwood Trade Union and Cultural Centre

Enter Mr Mpimpi — an educated African gentleman, dressed smartly, carries a briefcase and plays with a bunch of keys. He walks around his car, greets it. Pride. Trick with keys to find the right one. About to stick his key into the lock — alarm goes off. Reaction. Opens car door. He notices bird droppings on the roof: alarm, anger. He swears at the birds, threatens them, explains, how much this car means to him. Winds handkerchief around his forefinger and carefully flicks the droppings off the car roof. It lands on his shoe. He dances around, trying to kick it off, finally wipes his shoe clean. Recomposes himself, looks at his reflection in the window. Opens door and gets in. Starts the engine. While it warms up he checks his face in the mirror — wipes his eyes, winds down the window. Greets his neighbour and drives off. Switches on radio, sings a popular tune. Robot turns red — he stops and notices a pretty lady; whistles, turns to shout at her. Hoots. The robot changes. Swears, drives off. Parks his car and walks to Mr Slaver's office. Enters walking like Mr Slaver, realizes his stage is not set: arranges a neat pile of papers on the table. Polishes the desk. Settles down as Mr Slaver. Becomes aware of the workers/audience. Gets up, shifts chair next to desk, approaches workers.

SCARIOT MPIMPI: Yini. Yini madoda umsindo wani? Basebenzi anisafuni ukusebenza? Heyi, heyi — Dlamini, wenzani, wenzani? Nxumalo ungazidaya kanjani izintambo zingakalukwa? Awulalanga noma uphethwe ibhabhala. Ramba uyogeza, musa ukuhleka. Hayi musa ukuwucima umshini. uDlamini akawubheke. Uphi? Iphi lenkuxa — Awumbheke — etoilet sonke lesikhathi? Lalelani, lalelani basebenzi. Akuthi nya lapho emuva. Madoda kusemsebenzini la. Angithi madoda? Akukhona ema khaya onyoko (*komalume*) Ningababazi futhi ningahleki. Nishiye abafazi nezingane ekuseni nathi nize emsebenzini. Ngakho-ke sebenzani, sebenzani. (*force*)

Ubani lo ovumanayo lapho emuva? Yimina engathi nisheshe niyeke isikole? Umbhedo loyo. Imali into ehlala ingekho. Thina safunda kanjani? Abazali bethu abayinyanga ihali yokusifundisa.

Sebenzani umlungu angaze anidilize nohke. Isimo somnotho asisihle niyazi. Awushe! Awushe umsebenzi — Niyangi qolozela, sebenzani demethi. (*responds to crowd*) Heyi, heyi. Ubani lo ethi imithetho ka Rulumeni iyayicindezela imfundo yomnyama. Lelela-ke mfowethu. Nami ngimnyama. Pho ngafunda kanjani. Uma niyizehlulekile musani ukusulela ngabaqashi noRulumeni. Sebenzani, sebenzani makhanda.

(As he speaks, Mr Slaver arrives. Stands at his desk, waiting for his jacket

to be taken off. Scariot helps Slaver to sit down. Lights up cigar. Slaver gets up abruptly.)

SLAVER: I want to inspect the factory.
SCARIOT MPIMPI: Yes, Sir. (*Gets two hard-hats. They fit them on. Scariot takes out two pairs of dark glasses, hands one to Slaver.*)
We must see them — not them see us. (*They fit on the glasses and both move to the front, Scariot following Slaver, mimicking his walk.*)
SCARIOT MPIMPI: (*points to sign*) No smoking in the factory, Sir.
SLAVER: (*Looks for ashtray. Finally extinguishes his cigar in Scariot's hat, places the hat back on Scariot's head. Sarcastic laughter. Points to workers.*)
Who's this?

(Interchange about the 'quality' of some of the workers.)

SLAVER: (*stretches out his hand to shake Scariot's*) Scariot, you are my hope. A cause of my belief that South Africa shall defeat the international strategists whose aim is to prop up marxist global dominance at the expense of our christian country. I admire you as a most responsible and educated African. If only our government could make one hundred of you out of these unproductive workers South Africa would indeed be able to defeat her enemies. (*Turns to walk back to the office. Scariot walks the other way. They bump into each other. Scariot starts, ready to fight — checks himself and apologizes. They take off hats and glasses. Slaver picks up papers and throws them randomly up in the air. Scariot scrambles to pick them up.*)
SLAVER: The 1985 financial report. (*Scariot hands him a paper. He looks at it.*) January profit margin? (*his finger moves down the page*) Scariot — is it going up or down?
SCARIOT MPIMPI: (*finger moves down*) It's going down Sir. We're losing, certainly, at ten percent a month.
SLAVER: What shall be our fate then in twelve months' time?
SCARIOT MPIMPI: We shall be forced to close down. Collapse. But Mr Slaver, I believe we can save the situation: I have a plan. We can stop overtime. We can introduce short time . . .
SLAVER: (*interrupts*) Theories, theories. You've forgotten Scariot — What did I tell you about theories when I employed you, here in this factory?
SCARIOT MPIMPI: You said this factory is a jungle. You said muscles rule here, not theories.
SLAVER: About the game?

SCARIOT MPIMPI: You said the game is not only to kick the weak but also to know when and how to kick.
SLAVER: Well, I'll teach you a practical lesson — Now! Now! (*kicks him*) Go and do some kicking. Move it, tell them a hundred of them are dismissed!
SCARIOT MPIMPI: (*Slowly starts to retrench. Returns to table.*)
SLAVER: February profit margin — going up or down?
SCARIOT MPIMPI: (*head-movement, down*) Going down, Sir.
SLAVER: Do you know who's behind this?
SCARIOT MPIMPI: Many factors such as . . .
SLAVER: I will tell you, Scariot. The ANC, the Communists, the OAU, the Cubans, the UDF, Azapo and the Tutus — your people's bloody friends! (*As he says this, he takes Scariot's tie and pulls it, so it gets longer and longer, until it forms a rope. Holding Scariot by the rope.*) And now, what will we do?
SCARIOT MPIMPI: Retrench?
SLAVER: Retrench.
BOTH: Retrench!
(*Scariot goes to retrench. Meanwhile Slaver looks at the financial report and becomes more and more gloomy — until he finally despairs.*)
SLAVER: March profit margin?
SCARIOT MPIMPI: Still going down, Sir.
SLAVER: Scariot. Do you know how many firms are collapsing in South Africa every day?
SCARIOT MPIMPI: About ten to fifteen per day, Sir.
SLAVER: Do you know what is happening to our Rand?
SCARIOT MPIMPI: Losing to the dollar, Sir.
SLAVER: Do you know what is happening to our exports?
SCARIOT MPIMPI: Boycotted, Sir.
SLAVER: And our sport?
SCARIOT MPIMPI: Isolated, Sir.
SLAVER: Certainly. (*despairingly*) What will happen to my Saturday afternoon. I am ruined. What will my family say? No more private schools for my children, people will start talking . . . It will be all over the papers — the scandal! I shan't be able to afford my club anymore, my wife's overseas holiday . . .
SCARIOT MPIMPI: (*moves to the front to retrench randomly*) Oh, I wish I could strangle all those Azapos, UDFs, ANCs with my own hands.
SLAVER: (*recomposed*) April, May, June profit margins — down! July, August, September . . . Scariot, we will have to retrench some more!

SCARIOT MPIMPI: We can't, Sir.
SLAVER: Why not?
SCARIOT MPIMPI: There's none left. Only me.
SLAVER: Well? (*smiles*)
SCARIOT MPIMPI: Mr Slaver?
SLAVER: (*smiles*) You're fired.
SCARIOT MPIMPI: No, you can't . . . You're not firing me Mr Slaver. (*begins to laugh*) You're just joking, Sir, haha! (*laughs*)
(*Slaver joins in laughing. Slaver stops abruptly. Turns away, makes to go.*)
SCARIOT MPIMPI: Mr Slaver, I risked my life for you. (*calmly*) I have double-crossed my nation: sold them, betrayed them and undermined them for you (*opening his hands*) for this firm: protecting your interests, your profits. Through thick and thin I stood by you, and now . . . (*threatening*) you don't mean it?
SLAVER: I mean it. You're fired. (*He bangs his fist on the table — the papers are scattered all over. They both kneel down to pick them up. They look at each other.*)
SCARIOT MPIMPI: Spare my job, spare my life. Can't you see what you are doing: you're sending me to the gallows. (*turns to show Slaver the workers*) Come here, look at them: their eyes are red with anger and hunger. Babuke balambile — balambile. Nilambile? Balambele umcebo inkululeko negazi lami nelakho. The spirit of vengeance has engulfed them, the savages. Savages! Do not throw me to them.

(*They fight until they collapse.*)

(Photo: Santu Mofokeng)

Scene from a play performed by the Tembisa cultural group. Cosatu Cultural Day. Johannesburg. 1987.

ISOLATE THE ENEMY

a play
by
Victor Shingwenyana

Characters
Holobye Swimoko
Garingani Swimoko — Holobye's father
Shibhiki Swimoko — Holobye's mother
Siyayinyova Vinka
Mjaji Nkondo
Mashangu Shilovekelo
Tananavona Khwatini
Tintswalo Tikweni

SCENE ONE

It's time now for everyone in South Africa, black and white, young and old to mobilize and fight for a non-racial and democratic nation.

(It was a splendid Sunday during the festive season when the students and workers were enjoying their holidays. Here we find the two lovers, Holobye and Tintswalo, resting under a tree.)

HOLOBYE: (*looking at Tintswalo with a smile*) At long last darling, we have passed this Bantu Education, with exemption. We are allowed to go to University but the only problem is who's going to help us because we are from poor families?
TINTSWALO: (*worried*) Yes, it's too tough. My parents are not working. They cannot afford to send me to University. My brother is a liquor slave. I will go and work, maybe then I can afford to go to University.
HOLOBYE: Where are you going to work because you have no profession and jobs are scarce nowadays?
TINTSWALO: I will seek a better life for my parents. They are depending on me with my matric.
HOLOBYE: (*surprised*) You do not talk like a comrade. You are talking like a reactionary.
TINTSWALO: (*angrily*) What do you mean by saying I'm a reactionary? He, ngiyabuza! I was in detention in 1985. For five months. Who took responsibility for my parents?
HOLOBYE: You were not alone in detention. I was in detention for sixteen months but I do not regret it. What I'm going to do now is to look for a scholarship.
TINTSWALO: Do not talk like a child. Don't talk as if you don't know what is happening in this country. Where are you going to get a scholarship because most South African companies are not prepared to help 'stone throwers'. The businessmen are not prepared to help us. Must we linger around the township with our matrics? I won't! Ngingeke!
HOLOBYE: I've been watching you for a long time. Since they released you from detention, you are not like before. Who's going to mobilize our female comrades if you retreat? Who's going to organize them if you stand aside? What impression are you giving the enemy?

TINTSWALO: Am I the only female comrade in the township? Do you want my home to be petrol bombed? Do you want me to be detained again? (*pause*) Do you still love me?
HOLOBYE: (*angry*) Don't ask me rubbish! Would I be with you for five years without loving you? Do you have a new lover from the enemy camp? If so, why don't you tell me?
TINTSWALO: No matter how angry you get, you won't change my mind. I'm tired of detention. I am prepared to work anywhere.
HOLOBYE: Stop it, you are now going too far. (*Mashangu, the daughter of Mr and Mrs Shilovekelo appears.*)
MASHANGU: (*greets with a smile*) Hay, comrades!
BOTH: Hay, Mashangu!
HOLOBYE: How are you, comrade?
MASHANGU: Alright comrade. (*looking at Tintswalo*) How are you, Tintswalo?
TINTSWALO: (*worried*) I'm not happy comrade.
MASHANGU: (*surprised*) Why are you not happy, you have passed the exams?
TINTSWALO: I hate any person who dictates to me.
MASHANGU: (*sits down surprised*) Fighting is not the solution. Why don't you sit down and solve your problems like comrades? Stop fighting. Talk about scholarships for the future of our country, not for the future of your families only.
HOLOBYE: She is not interested in the future of the country. She is only interested in her family. She told me that she will work anywhere.
TINTSWALO: I still say, no one will stop me.
MASHANGU: (*surprised*) I'm lost. Please give me clarity. (*pause*) What do you mean?
TINTSWALO: If you don't understand me, I do not know how to explain it.
MASHANGU: There's no spirit of brotherhood amongst us. There's no trust since the Government declared the State of Emergency.
HOLOBYE: Tell her Mashangu. It seems as if detention has changed her life.
MASHANGU: It is not her alone, many of our comrades are retreating. Many of them are now relaxed. When we ask them why, they say they are working underground.
HOLOBYE: Underground with whom? We know all those who say they are working underground are with the enemy.
TINTSWALO: (*angrily*) Do you mean I'm with the ene . . .
HOLOBYE: (*interrupting her*) Shut your mouth before I enlarge your lips. I hate comrades who do not have a backbone.

MASHANGU: It is our duty to educate our people about the history of our struggle. Right now we have to discuss the Freedom Charter. If we relax who will continue the struggle?
HOLOBYE: What happened to Siyayinyova Vinka?
MASHANGU: That's a good example. He was good in Operation Clean-Up and Targets. They have arrested him but what surprised me is that he didn't stay long in detention like other comrades. He came out and worked with the enemy, selling our people. A few months ago, he decided to expose himself to the people and join the police force.
TINTSWALO: Do not classify me under that category. I know my position. My only problem is to improve our standard of living at home.
MASHANGU: We are all suffering but we won't allow our comrades to join the enemy because of hunger and starvation.
HOLOBYE: They are joining the enemy because they want to see themselves comfortably in Long Homes and Schachat Homes. They can stay in luxury homes but they are not free.
MASHANGU: Sure com. As long as Nelson Mandela is in prison, and Oliver Tambo in exile, no one is free.
HOLOBYE: (*worried*) Tintswalo, do not leave me like this. Try to understand. The future is ours to shape. If you leave us who's going to take your place? I'm prepared to marry you. How can I take you while you are on the enemy's side?
TINTSWALO: The conditions force me to join the State. (*she cries*) It is painful to see my parents asking for sugar from the neighbours. It is painful to see them suffering every day. Iphenshini incane. I was willing to be a nurse but unfortunately there's no space. Teaching will take me many years. Kuyodliwani endlini? Law is going to take me years. Who will be responsible for my parents? (*crying*) Kill me then! I'm going to join the force next year for the sake of my parents. (*Everyone passing by was surprised to see the lady crying. Then Tananavona, Mashangu's boyfriend, appears.*)
TANANAVONA: What's wrong now Holobye?
HOLOBYE: (*worried*) I do not want her to join the force because I want her to be my wife forever.
TANANAVONA: (*angrily*) No, you are wrong. Do not make decisions for her. She is not your wife. She's your girlfriend. You have no right to dictate to her. We are not from the same family. You know very well that her parents are not working. Let her do what she thinks is right for herself.
HOLOBYE: (*angrily*) You are getting too big for your shoes. Do you hear me Tananavona? Tintswalo is mine not ours. Uyezwa?

MASHANGU: You are wrong Tananavona. You are misleading her. Siyacima uyabasa. No!
TANANAVONA: (*looking at Mashangu*) Shut your mouth, I'm not talking to you.
MASHANGU: I won't shut my mouth because I have no boss. If I dislike something, I have the right to condemn it. I say no!
TANANAVONA: (*taking a few steps towards Mashangu*) Say that again! Ngizokunyathela!
HOLOBYE: (*angrily*) This is my home. You can do that at your father's house. You are sell-outs! It shows that you were working underground with the enemy, now you have decided to expose yourself to the people like Siyayinyova Vinka! Nizokuvuna enikutshalile.
TINTSWALO: It's okay if we are sell-outs, do what you want. Sishiseni ke!
MASHANGU: Let them do what they want but tomorrow we will remind them.
TANANAVONA: You'll remind us what? He, ngiyabuza. Let's go, ngiyokubonisa amabele ezipori.
MASHANGU: I came here alone and I will go back home alone, angihambi nempimpi. (*Swimoko, father to Holobye, and Shibhiki, mother to Holobye appear*)
SWIMOKO: (*surprised*) We've been watching you through the window for a long time. What is happening?
HOLOBYE: (*worried*) Dad, you know very well that I'm committed to the struggle and I'm prepared to die for my country.
SWIMOKO: Yes, my son. You are right to die for your country. So, who's opposing you?
HOLOBYE: It's Tintswalo and Tananavona.
SHIBHIKI: They are right to oppose you because they love you. How can you fight without a gun? (*pause*) How many souls have we lost in South Africa because of your politics? There's no one who can liberate this country but you can liberate your family. Go and join them so that you can enjoy the fruits of your education.
TINTSWALO/TANANAVONA: Yes, you are right Mama!
SWIMOKO: If they join the enemy it means they wasted their time in detention. Comfort after the struggle and no easy walk to liberty. Retreat not my son. Remember when you were in detention, fighting for a new South Africa. Fight till your last drop of blood. FREEDOM OR DEATH! VICTORY IS CERTAIN. I'm a member of COSATU and I am prepared to support you in anything that will lead us to our freedom.
HOLOBYE/MASHANGU: Thanks Baba. We will fight till the exiles return home.

SHIBHIKI: You are wasting your time. Every year your comrades join the State. Hambani nabahambayo. For your bright future.
SWIMOKO: Comrades, our slogan says: ISOLATE THE ENEMY.
HOLOBYE: The gates are open for you Tananavona and Tintswalo. (*points to the gate*) Get out of my father's yard, I do not want to see you anymore. The Minister of Law and Order is waiting for you. The people of South Africa are waiting for us.
SHIBHIKI: Do not chase them out of my yard.
SWIMOKO: We say: ISOLATE THE ENEMY. Do you want to follow the uzobalandela! (*looking at his son*) ISOLATE THE ENEMY, my son.
HOLOBYE: Don't you hear what I'm saying? Kick the dust now. (*They go through the gate. Mashangu, Holobye and his parents go inside the house.*)

SCENE TWO

(Everyone in the township was surprised to always see Mashangu with Holobye and Tintswalo with Tananavona. Friends became enemies. Here we find Mashangu and Holobye in the sitting-room drinking cool drinks.)

HOLOBYE: My home is your home Mashangu. Don't be afraid. As long as my father supports us, no one will chase you away.
MASHANGU: Never mind com. We have to be patient with those who do not know the present situation and it's our task to open their eyes to the corruption in our beloved country. We have to isolate those who know the truth but tell our people lies. We have to educate your mother, comrade Holobye.
HOLOBYE: I promise you, com. I will educate her. (*looking at her with love*) I do not know where to start and where to end. I do not know how to explain this matter, Mashangu.
MASHANGU: Our grandfathers said, 'Ingane engakhali ifela embhelekweni'. Come with and we will discuss it until we find a solution.
HOLOBYE: I've been searching for someone who will fill Tintswalo's place but I can't get anyone. You are the only one who could be my future wife.
MASHANGU: The same applies to me. I've lost the guy of my dreams but that does not mean it is the end of the world. I like you, Holobye, but I don't love you. For the sake of my people. I always want to be an example in our struggle. I do not want to promote corruption in our struggle. Down with sexism, down! (*looking at Holobye smiling*) No hurry in South Africa. You'll get the right one and I'll get the guy of my dreams. Uyafana nomfowethu engilamana naye.

HOLOBYE: Hah! You know how to defend yourself com.
(*While he is talking Swimoko enters.*)
SWIMOKO: I'm sorry to interrupt you, my children. How was the day comrades?
HOLOBYE: (*smiling*) No problems, Dad!
MASHANGU: The only problem Baba is the police in the township.
SWIMOKO: Can you give me a few minutes my children?
BOTH: With pleasure Baba.
SWIMOKO: (*sitting down*) Now is the time for us to organize and mobilize our people but we have to be careful because it is too dangerous to operate under the State of Emergency. There are so many informers in every area here in South Africa and even outside the country. They are trying by all means to divide us with homelands, divide us with townships, divide us with sections. If they realize that you know how to win friends and influence people, they will try by all means to win you over.
HOLOBYE: We have experienced that Baba. In 1987 we had a brave young man. He was performing very well and we had confidence in him. (*pause*) The trouble started when they detained him. When he came back he decided to leave us.
MASHANGU: What surprises us is that he is not working but has everything he needs. Last time he told us that he will be taking a trip to Cape Town. You'll never know where he gets the money from.
SWIMOKO: (*taking out a cigarette*) Money is a source of evil. (*lighting it*) They are using money to destroy our progressive organizations. (*taking a deep puff*) You won't lead the people if you are looking at your own pocket. I'm talking from experience. In 1986, in our company, we had a powerful shop-steward who decided to become a supervisor. He is now opposing our struggle. In 1987 two of the shop stewards got promotion and one of them got money for his private studies but what surprised us is that management is refusing to give scholarships to any workers.
HOLOBYE: The workers have to stand up and fight for their rights. How can they achieve their goals while there are sell-outs on their committees?
SWIMOKO: In 1988 the chairman of the shop stewards re-elected the lazy former chairman of the shop-steward committee without consulting the workers. He is a supervisor today and the management gave him a loan. He is now building a house, but the company still fails to give the workers loans to build houses.
MASHANGU: Something must be done in your company, Dad. We as the students have to do something because your shop-steward committee is not

clear about their duties. We have to put pressure on them. If they do not change they will have to stand aside and give other workers a chance to lead.
HOLOBYE: Bahlambalaza uCOSATU. A shop steward becoming a supervisor is a disgrace. It must come to an end. We don't want such a culprit in our camp. Makuphele Baba! Tell them Dad, that they must not take our struggle for granted.
MASHANGU: They must not think that the struggle ends on the factory floor. They have to participate in the townships. Bayekelé ukuphuza imali etshwaleni nabafazi. They can't get freedom out of that, instead agony will be their daily bread.
SWIMOKO: (*looking at Mashangu smiling*) It is the first time to meet a girl like you. Look, think and do it practically, but be careful. Where's Victoria Mxenge? Where's Matthews Goniwe? Where's Sicelo Dlomo? Where is Fani Shabalala? Ayilungile iningizimu Afrika.
MASHANGU: My people must not worry if they kill me in the struggle because my blood will water the trees of our liberation. My body will die but my soul will live forever until we achieve our goal of freedom. Siyolandela ezinyathelweni zikaHintsa no Cetswayo. Bebulala amabhunu eSandlwana.
HOLOBYE: Harassing our people, arresting our people, restricting our organizations, detaining our people and killing our people won't solve the problems of this country. Instead things will become worse. IZOBUYA I-AFRIKA NGENKANI. MAYIBUYE!
BOTH: I-AFRIKA!
HOLOBYE: I-AFRIKA!
BOTH: IZWE LETHU! (*the door opens, Shibhiki enters*)
SHIBHIKI: Oh, God! There's a meeting in my house again. (*looking at Swimoko*) What is the agenda of this meeting? And who is the chairman?
HOLOBYE: Good afternoon Mama.
SHIBHIKI: Do not greet me. Have you got a job?
SWIMOKO: So many questions. Greetings first and questions afterwards.
SHIBHIKI: (*cross*) Eheh, Swimoko. Instead of showing your son the good way, you are busy telling him to go around the location writing slogans on the walls and bus-stops: DO NOT VOTE FOR CROOKS. DO NOT VOTE FOR PUPPETS. How can it be? Heh ngiyabuza! What kind of freedom do you want? Niyahlanya nina. We want councillors. How can we get money to improve our township? Is Mandela going to give us? Is Tambo going to give us?
HOLOBYE: Are you through Mama?
SHIBHIKI: Voetsek! You and your girlfriend. I'm going to tell the police that you want to disrupt the elections.

SWIMOKO: If they arrest my son you'll die screaming like a pig. (*pointing at Mashangu and Holobye*) They are true leaders of tomorrow. They will liberate me and you from our oppressors. Where were you in 1956 when Dorothy Nyembe, Lilian Ngoyi and other women were marching to Pretoria protesting against the pass laws?
SHIBHIKI: I have nothing to do with those women. I know their secrets and do not take me for a fool. Pretoria is paying them every month. (*they all laugh in the sitting-room*)
SWIMOKO: (*looking at Holobye*) Your mother is too clever my son. (*looking at his wife who is as angry as a lion*) An empty tin makes a lot of noise. Once you tell yourself that you are wise you must know that you are a fool and you'll remain a fool until you die.
SHIBHIKI: I'm a fool today but on the 26th of October we are moving to the community hall to vote for the councillors.
ALL OF THEM: We are not going there. Kuzoya wena.
MASHANGU: How can we elect people who are not in our camp?
HOLOBYE: How can we elect people while our organizations are restricted?
SWIMOKO: How can we elect people while our leaders are in prison and in exile?
THREE OF THEM: To hell with those who are employed by Pretoria.
SHIBHIKI: You'll say it on Robben Island, in Pollsmoor, John Vorster Square and Modderbee. This is South Africa. Kuseningizimu Afrika lapha nisenkathazweni. (*she turns to her bedroom*)
SWIMOKO: (*looking at Mashangu, smiling*) In the struggle we come across such problems but we must not be defeated and we must always fight to strengthen our struggle, for unity is strength. If we are united then we will achieve our goal. (*looking at his son*) South Africa belongs to us all. Blacks and whites. (*standing*) IZOBUYA I-AFRIKA NGENKANI. (*taking a few steps to his bedroom*) MAYIBUYE!
BOTH: I-AFRIKA!
SWIMOKO: I-AFRIKA!
BOTH: IZWE LETHU!
SWIMOKO: IZWE LETHU!
BOTH: I-AFRIKA!
SWIMOKO: AMANDLA!
BOTH: NGAWETHU!
SWIMOKO: (*looking at Mashangu*) Retreat not my girl, be a lady amongst all ladies. (*he turns and follows his wife*)

HOLOBYE: My father is my hero, he is my everything. The problem is my mother, but I still believe that she will realize sooner or later.
Bafika ngenkathi zokhokho
Babuyela emuva bayokhohlisana
Ngomnotho wezwe lakithi
Babuya ngobugebengu kokhokho
Bayithatha infuyo yokhokho
Balithatha idayimani negolide
Besebenzisa okhokho kanzima
Kwasuka uthuli kwafa, ofayo
Befikile ohitsa nogetswayo
Befuna ukuceda udlame ezweni
Inganono beyingekho kokhokho
Laguqubala kwaba mnyama
Wadela umakhasane we ma
Isikhona inganono manje
Sobashaya phansi naphezulu
Sithathe izwe lethu
MASHANGU: (*smiling*) You know the history of this country. Help your mother to understand the whole situation. We have to sweep our bedrooms before we can go outside. My parents know everything about our struggle. When I was in detention they were attending meetings for the detainees, they've learnt more about the history of our country. (*there is a knock at the door*)
HOLOBYE: Come in! (*Mjaji enters*)
MJAJI: (*she is surprised to see Mashangu and Holobye*) Hay, comrades!
BOTH: Hay, com!
HOLOBYE: How was the show at the State Theatre in Pretoria?
MJAJI: Oh, well the rhythm of the music was good, in acting they were good, even their dance was good, but I'm not happy with the script. It is not like his previous works. He was powerful before but now he is lacking somewhere.
MASHANGU: He has to be careful because he will lose support. Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu zidla zibuyele esibayeni yenjani engabuyi ekhaya?
MJAJI: I was so surprised to see Tananavona and Tintswalo in Pretoria. They told me stories which have no conclusion. (*pause*) Yes, they will end up sharing tears and agony. They are on the track of Siyayinyova Vinka.
HOLOBYE: Is it true that your friendship with Tintswalo is still continuing?
MJAJI: Sure com, she visits me at home and it's difficult to chase her away.
MASHANGU: Com, tell the truth. Are you not visiting her home?
MJAJI: Sometimes, com. I visit her home.

HOLOBYE: What are you discussing with the enemy? People say you meet every day?
MJAJI: We don't discuss politics because I know that she's no longer with the people.
MASHANGU: You are giving us a problem com, because the people are watching us. Our slogan says: ISOLATE THE ENEMY.
HOLOBYE: Sure it's a problem because when we organize meetings people fear to attend. I don't blame them because they think we are working hand in hand with the system. Just imagine a comrade moving around the township with the enemy. What impression are you giving the people? Lapho ekuphithizela khona yini yini. No, com. Isolate the enemy because tomorrow she will get promotion with your help.
MJAJI: I will try to isolate her even if it will be difficult. (*pause*) The problem is that she knows our secrets, she can cause us troubles.
MASHANGU: Everyone will know that it's her if she tries to do something bad to us. Isolate her. (*while they are talking Shibhiki appears looking angry*)
SHIBHIKI : What are you doing here? I told you that I don't want to see you anymore. My son has been detained because of you. Why do you point at others when they detain you? Why don't you stand firm like a comrade?
HOLOBYE: (*worried*) What's wrong with you Ma?
SHIBHIKI : I was alone when I travelled to Modderbee with my money. You shut your big mouth. (*pointing to the door*) Hamba ntombazane! (*Mjaji leaves*) What are you still waiting for? (*looks at Mashangu*) Ayigubae! (*Mashangu goes out and Holobye follows her*) I'm not a comrade Ngingu Shibhiki. Full stop. (*exits to the bedroom*)

SCENE THREE

(Siyayinyova Vinka was not afraid to carry a gun and go around the shebeens of the township. Most of the people were isolating him, but he was trying to make friends with the militant comrades by buying liquor for them. He was spending hundreds of rands. No one knows where he got the money from. Some of our comrades enjoyed his entertainment because they have no backbone. Here we find Siyayinyova under the influence of liquor.)

SIYAYINYOVA: (*walking along the street*) I'm no longer a comrade. I'm prepared to smash them all. I want to start with Mashangu and Holobye. They think that they will liberate this country. They won't. I have to get someone

close to them and get information. This will get me promotion. They won't beat me, I know their methods because I was with them for a long time. (*he meets Tananavona*)
TANANAVONA: Why are you walking alone while under the influence of liquor?
SIYAYINYOVA: Never mind friend. I fear nobody, ngiyadubula. I will smash them all. Do you have your gun?
TANANAVONA: Yes, of course, because I know that we are enemies to the people. Oza kimi ngiyadubula. I'm no longer a comrade.
SIYAYINYOVA: How can we get information from Holobye and Mashangu? Because next month it's June Sixteen and I'm sure that they are planning something.
TANANAVONA: My suggestion is that we approach Mjaji because she's Mashangu and Tintswalo's best friend.
SIYAYINYOVA: Sure Tanana, that's a good suggestion. Tell me, what are the hobbies of that lady?
TANANAVONA: She likes luxuries. She is a comrade who believes in capitalism not socialism. We have to tell her straight that the State needs her to work underground and she will be paid for it.
SIYAYINYOVA: The more information we bring, the more we get paid. We want to smash all the MKs in our township because they are everywhere. We have to arrange a day to meet that lady and the day should be well organized.
TANANAVONA: I will tell Tintswalo, my girlfriend, to approach her.
SIYAYINYOVA: Try man, please! If we can use her, money will not be a problem to us. Singanamba ngezimoto zombuso. Oh God, that's luxury life.
TANANAVONA: It's through hard working and determination. I will organize the lady and as soon as I get her I will inform you. See you tomorrow!
SIYAYINYOVA: Why are you in such a hurry man? Let's go back and have two beers.
TANANAVONA: I'm having problems since I'm in love with Tintswalo.
SIYAYINYOVA: What kind of problems do you have?
TANANAVONA: Since my girlfriend joined the State the people are isolating her. She's got no friends except Mjaji, so she always wants to be next to me.
SIYAYINYOVA: (*laughing*) Hohayi, by the way, new love is burning fire. Go and touch her soft body and kiss her soft lips. Uphonse ijombolo. (*they both laugh*) See you tomorrow. (*They both depart.*)

(*On the way to Tintswalo, Tananavona meets Mjaji who is coming from a meeting carrying a paper bag.*)

TANANAVONA: (*smiling*) I'm very happy to meet you, Mjaji. By the way, how are you?
MJAJI: (*pretending to smile*) I'm alright Tanana, how are you?
TANANAVONA: No problem, everything is okay because tomorrow we will be moving to Long Homes.
MJAJI: Oh, Tintswalo is very lucky, she's going to enjoy luxury life.
TANANAVONA: (*smiling*) You can also enjoy it.
MJAJI: How can I enjoy it when there's no jobs. The economy is suffering. Inflation and sanctions are eating away the confidence of the employers. Growth has stopped. At the same time the masses are demanding housing, jobs and a living wage.
TANANAVONA: There are houses for us. Long Homes, Schachat Homes and so on.
MJAJI: How many people can afford to buy those expensive houses? Our people cannot afford to buy those houses because they are not earning a living wage, and millions are unemployed.
TANANAVONA: (*pretending to smile*) Everyone for himself. Isimo sibucayi. The State of Emergency. Siyadubula. That's why every year we get support from the same comrades.
MJAJI: The emergency has failed to crush the determination of the people. Many whites are breaking away from the Nats and are looking elsewhere for a solution to the crisis. Our task is to destroy these forces, because their future is inseparable from ours. Let me go home Tanana. See you when we meet.
TANANAVONA: I have a message for you, Mjaji, from Tintswalo. She wants to see you tomorrow at two o'clock in the afternoon.
MJAJI: (*pause*) There's no problem. I will see her tomorrow.
TANANAVONA: I will be very glad if you do so.
MJAJI: (*smiling*) I know that a promise is like an agreement. Bye! (*they depart*)
TANANAVONA: It's a tough time for Holobye and Mashangu because they are working for socialism. They will be a problem to us. They have changed Mjaji, she's got information but I have failed to crush her. We have to smash them before they kill us. They are too dangerous. They know how to win friends and influence people. Bazokufa!
(Arriving at Tintswalo's home, he finds her standing at the gate looking up and down the street, holding a pamphlet in her hand.)
TANANAVONA: (*surprised*) Why are you standing alone looking up and down the street as if you are an orphan, darling?
TINTSWALO: (*worried*) They have started again. They have distributed pamph-

lets for June Sixteen. The students are demanding June Sixteen as a holiday and the workers are demanding it as a paid public holiday.
TANANAVONA: Nobody else but Holobye and Mashangu are the perpetrators of this evil. They have revived the structures of Youth Congress, Women's Forum and Civic Association. The people are very militant.
TINTSWALO: We have to do something before June Sixteen. We will have to detain them to protect the community.
TANANAVONA: Detaining them will cause havoc because the people have confidence in them. Let's try to win them over; if we fail we can assassinate them. People will cry once and forget. It's more effective then detaining them.
TINTSWALO: How can we defeat them. They are as hard as stones.
TANANAVONA: We can use Mjaji and others to defeat them.
TINTSWALO: No, I don't trust her. She's my best friend but there was a meeting today and she was there. How can we trust such a person?
TANANAVONA: There are many ways to kill a cat. A wise man tries and fails but a fool even fails to try. I have invited her for tomorrow at two o'clock in the afternoon and Siyayinyova Vinka will be with us to convince her.
TINTSWALO: Let's try, but remember those people are trained underground.
TANANAVONA: Let's wait for tomorrow. Sibindi uyabulala futhi uyaphilisa.
(*They go into the house. It is 11.50.*)

(*During the night Holobye, Mashangu and Mjaji meet at Mashangu's home to go around the township and distribute pamphlets.*)
MJAJI: Experience is the best teacher. I have experienced today that I have to isolate the enemy.
HOLOBYE/MASHANGU: What has happened?
MJAJI: On my way back from the general meeting, I met Tananavona. They want to meet me tomorrow at two o'clock in the afternoon.
HOLOBYE: Do not be surprised, but you have to accept that the enemy is trying by all means to separate us. If you have no backbone they will get you and once they've got you, they will use you. After that they will expose you to the community. Once you are exposed to the people you should know that your days are numbered.
MASHANGU: If you don't bring information they suspect that you are working with the people: taking the information from the State to the people. They will kill you and accuse the Mass Democratic Movement.
MJAJI: After doing that we will start pointing fingers at each other. That's what they want. After doing that they will tell the world that we are not united and we keep on killing each other.

HOLOBYE: They forget that they are the forces who cause corruption in our country.
MJAJI/MASHANGU/HOLOBYE: Violence is not a policy to us but it's a tactic or a strategy. We don't kill innocent people.
MASHANGU: They are talking about negotiations. We can sit down and negotiate if only the exiles return home, prisoners are to be freed, the emergency is lifted and the political organizations are unbanned.
MJAJI: If not so, they won't be free as we are not free. Tell me comrades, what should I do about tomorrow's meeting with them?
HOLOBYE: My suggestion is, go and hear, but I'm sure they want information from you because you are always with us.
MASHANGU: I support you comrade. (*looking at Mjaji*) Meet them but before meeting them ask yourself if you want to liberate your family or the people of South Africa. When I talk of South Africans I mean the people living in this country, black and white.
MJAJI: Trust me, I'm working with the people and no one can change my ideology. I will tell them the truth and isolate them forever.
HOLOBYE: (*looking at the clock*) It's half past twelve in the morning comrades. Let's start our duty. (*They go out and distribute the pamphlets at the bus-stops, shopping centres and schools.*)

(*While the others are distributing the pamphlets Tananavona, Tintswalo and Siyayinyova plan to convince Mjaji at Tintswalo's home.*)
SIYAYINYOVA: (*sitting next to Tintswalo who is sitting next to Tananavona in the sitting-room*) We have to offer her about two hundred rand before starting our meeting.
TINTSWALO: If she asks us why we are offering her the money what will be our answer?
TANANAVONA: It is very simple to answer that question because we shall tell her that we sympathize with her because she's not working.
SIYAYINYOVA: In their struggle they don't care about their members. They just use them without financing them. In our camp we get money. It is very simple to win her over because she believes in capitalism.
TINTSWALO: If we get her, how are we going to use her to get information?
TANANAVONA/SIYAYINYOVA: We want the minutes of all meetings and the names of those who are active in their struggle. Once we get that we will be through with them. Imali iyoba ngeyethu.
TINTSWALO: Yes, life is tough in South Africa. Siphiliswa okwezinyoni.
TANANAVONA: Yes, it's tough because we don't have State cars, but if we

work very hard, life will be very easy for us. Asisebenzeni kusakhanya futhi nethuba lisekhona.
SIYAYINYOVA: (*looking at the time*) Half past two! Let me go home and have a rest.
TANANAVONA: It's too late, I won't go home. I'll sleep here. (*looking at Tintswalo smiling*) Uyangiqosha sithandwa?
TINTSWALO: (*smiling*) I won't do that love. Ungumduduzi wenhliziyo vami uyimbali yami ehlala iqhakazile nsuku zonke. You are everything that I need.
SIYAYINYOVA: (*smiling*) You are very lucky my friend. Jikijela isombolo. (*They all laugh in the sitting-room.*)

(*Siyayinyova is on his way to his home when he sees the pamphlets.*) Oh, God, June Sixteen! They have started again. Who are those fools who have distributed these pamphlets? (*He meets Mjaji, Holobye, and Mashangu going back to their homes. They are surprised to see Siyayinyova in the street, at quarter to three in the morning, and he is surprised to see them.*)
SIYAYINYOVA: (*holding up a pamphlet*) At this time where are you from and what are you doing?
MASHANGU: (*cross*) Wena! Where are you from and what do you want?
HOLOBYE: (*smiling*) He is distributing pamphlets. Siyabonga ngokubuya kwakho ebantwini.
SIYAYINYOVA: Holobye and Mashangu, you'll get what you want.
MASHANGU/HOLOBYE: Even if you kill us, our people will carry on doing their duty. We are not the only comrades here in our township. (*they leave him in a state of anger in the street*)
SIYAYINYOVA: We have to be quick because they are now using her. (*pause*) They are prepared to cause corruption in the township. (*he goes to his home, worried*)

SCENE FOUR

(It is two o'clock on Monday afternoon when Tananavona, Siyayinyova, Tintswalo and Mjaji meet at Tintswalo's home. The day was cool and it was well organized. There was meat, wine, beer, snacks and cool drinks.)

TINTSWALO: (*smiling*) What would you like Mjaji?
MJAJI: (*smiling*) What do you have?

TINTSWALO: We've got cool drinks, beer, wine, snacks and meat.
MJAJI: I want snacks, meat and a cool drink.
SIYAYINYOVA: What about wine?
MJAJI: (*smiling*) I won't drink wine today because I still have something to do.
TANANAVONA: Oh well, we can't be the same. (*They are sitting under the tree at the back door listening to music. "Too late for Mama" is heard. Tintswalo switches off the tape.*)
TINTSWALO: I think we can start our meeting now.
MJAJI: I was thinking of that because at half past three I have to be somewhere else.
SIYAYINYOVA: Oh well, we can start because time waits for no man.
MJAJI: Excuse me please, I'm going to the toilet. (*She goes to the toilet with her small tape recorder. The enemy is also using his tape recorder to get information. She switches on her tape and goes back to them. While she's in the toilet Siyayinyova switches on his tape.*)
MJAJI: (*smiling*) I'm sorry for being so long.
ALL: (*smiling*) Never mind, Mjaji!
SIYAYINYOVA: I'm very glad to have this opportunity to share some drinks with you, Tananavona, Tintswalo and especially you, Mjaji. This is a good chance to share some ideas concerning our country. (*pause*) This is a good chance for us to look at the disadvantages and advantages of the present political organizations here at home and abroad.
TANANAVONA: We are fighting a war without a future here at home because we've been losing many souls but winning no freedom. People are dying every day. What is the use of supporting the losers all the time?
TINTSWALO: How many members of Umkhonto we Sizwe have died here, and on the border? How many members of Umkhonto we Sizwe have been sentenced to death since we have started fighting for our liberation? How many members of the United Democratic Front have been imprisoned? How many political activists are in detention today? (*Mjaji looks down, listening very carefully*)
THREE OF THEM: Let us support the present government so that we can enjoy life.
SIYAYINYOVA: When you die at the hands of the State your family will suffer.
TANANAVONA: We won't nationalize anything here because the owners will take all that belongs to them and pack their bags and go back where they came from. Are Mandela and Tambo going to satisfy everyone? Do they have enough money to run the whole country?
TINTSWALO: What is happening in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Angola?

People are dying every day because of hunger and starvation and they keep on killing each other. In Mozambique it's Renamo, in Zimbabwe it's Edgar Tekere, in Angola it's Unita. It shows that we don't know what we want, so let's forget about change and support the people in power.

SIYAYINYOVA: Why should we suffer in our own country? You are unemployed because of sanctions. Sanctions are killing the majority of blacks here but we support it.

TINTSWALO: We call a spade a spade. We want you to work with us.

MJAJI: How can I work with you?

SIYAYINYOVA: (*giving her money*) We want to get information from your meetings. Here's two hundred rand for a start. The more information you bring, the more you will get paid.

TANANAVONA: You will work underground. As long as you bring the minutes and the names of the activists and their addresses, you'll get paid.

TINTSWALO: You won't expose yourself as we have done.

MJAJI: Keep your money, we are still talking. I have to differ with what you've been telling me. Let's go over everything. (*pause*) We are fighting a war with a future because we stay in a country where there's no future for the majority, only the minority have a future. (*pause*) Yes, we've lost many souls because of the supporters of apartheid. I mean those who believe in capitalism. (*pause*) Yes, there's a number of members of Umkhonto we Sizwe who have been killed but what surprises me is that the State doesn't tell us the truth. Are they telling us that their soldiers and police are also dying every day?

THREE OF THEM: There's no such thing. We are in power here at home.

MJAJI: You'll experience it one day. Uzongena umkhonto hem! We will nationalize everything that belongs to the people of this country. Anyone who wants to go, can go, we won't chase anyone away or stop anyone from leaving. One Country, One Vote! I don't say Mandela should be the Prime Minister of this country but the people will decide. Ukuthi ngubani omele isizwe. (*pause*) We have experienced in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Angola what our grandfathers said: Isina muva liyebukwa. We know the advantages and disadvantages of these three independent countries. We will try by all means to avoid the mistakes they have made. It's not only blacks who are suffering because of sanctions and disinvestments. Sanctions are also eating away the confidence of the employers and the Government. (*looks at them.*) Are there any questions? (*they keep quiet*)

SIYAYINYOVA: Here's your money. Please, work for us. If you want more we will give you.

MJAJI: Money is the source of evil. What does it mean to have money while millions have nothing? I won't take money which is stolen from my brothers and sisters. (*standing up*) You are sell-outs and you are enemies of the people. (*looking at Tintswalo*) You are in the wrong camp and you have to decide. You won't see me anymore, and don't visit me again. I fear the anger of the people, as you know that we have to isolate the enemy. (*she leaves*)
TINTSWALO: (*worried.*) I have told you that she won't support us. She is well-trained. Oh, God, the whole location will know that we were trying to win her over. Safa ngabantu!
TANANAVONA/SIYAYINYOVA: To hell with them! Siyadubula. (*They depart dejectedly.*)

(*Holobye and Mashangu play the cassette of the people's poet Mzwakhe Mbuli.*)
MASHANGU: (*worried*) Why are they taking such a long time? Ngiyamsola uMjaji.
HOLOBYE: (*smiling*) Don't accuse her, we have to hear the cassette first before we attack her. (*Mjaji enters*)
HOLOBYE/MASHANGU: (*surprised*) Aliphathwa elakho.
MJAJI: I would like to thank you, comrades for the caucus we had before meeting the enemy. The State is trying to protect apartheid. That's what I have experienced today. No matter how hard it may be, we have to isolate the enemy.
BOTH: That's what we want. (*Shibhiki enters*)
SHIBHIKI: Good afternoon my children.
THREE OF THEM: (*surprised*) Afternoon Ma!
HOLOBYE: (*with joy*) It's my first time to hear you greeting us ma. I'm very glad. What has happened today?
SHIBHIKI: We learn by mistakes my children. You'll forgive me for what I did to you. I was blind but now I see. (*pause*) I remember when your father told me that once you tell yourself that you are wise, you must know that you are a fool. (*Swimoko enters. He is surprised to see his wife talking nicely to Holobye and his friends.*)
SWIMOKO: (*smiling*) Good afternoon!
ALL OF THEM: (*smiling*) Afternoon Dad!
SWIMOKO: (*looks to his wife with joy*) My wife, this is the way to live. I'm very glad to see you are talking nicely to my children.
SHIBHIKI: Apartheid has changed my life in Boksburg today.
ALL OF THEM: What happened?
SHIBHIKI: It is my duty to go and fetch my employer's children after school.

I was very early today and I decided to have a rest under a tree at the park, waiting for the school to come out. While I was relaxing three white men came to me. They called me a kaffir. They even told me that I'm not allowed to be in the park. They chased me out like a dog forgetting that we are the people who made that park what it is today. It looks nice because of our work but today we are not allowed to have a rest there.

SWIMOKO: I'm very glad that you have experienced something today.

SHIBHIKI: When I went back to report it to my employers, they told me that I have to accept what the white man says to me. I told them that I won't accept rubbish from anyone. When I said this to them, their son, who is now a policeman and a member of the AWB, said to me: *Jy praat kak, kaffir!*

HOLOBYE: He forgot only one thing: that he is a man today because of you, Mama. You looked after him when his parents were on duty. Ezinyela nokuzinyela, umphipha. But today he says *Jy praat kak, kaffir*, when you stand up for your rights.

SHIBHIKI: I told them straight that ikhotha eyikhothayo, engayikhothi iyayikhahlela. Why should I love those who hate me?

ALL OF THEM: ISOLATE THE ENEMY!

SHIBHIKI: I told them: see me now, see me no more. They don't treat us like human beings.

ALL OF THEM: WE WILL ISOLATE THEM UNTIL THEY REALIZE THAT WE ARE ALL EQUAL.

Before Dawn by Mzwakhe Mbuli
Congress of South African Writers, 1989.
Price R6,50 excluding tax

Anybody who has seen and heard Mzwakhe Mbuli perform in a political meeting, at a funeral or in a concert, cannot but be overwhelmed by both his presence and his performance, and anyone who has experienced the reaction of his audience to his poetry will understand that at the moment he is the PEOPLE'S POET as the preface to this volume claims, he is the poet of the mass democratic movement, with an endorsement from Mandela himself, and acknowledged by all who have heard him. His charismatic presence shines through on his two tapes, the first of which was banned. The question which this reviewer has to answer is, do his poems survive the transposition into cold print?[1]

My answer would be — yes and no. Some of the energy and urgency which inspire the public performance vibrate in the words now separated from the voice and the person of the performer and from the circumstances of the performance: the insistent repetitions, the formulaic intensity of the biblical invocation and the *imbongi* incantation, the hammering refrains. But much is lost. Mzwakhe Mbuli's poetry is not literary, in the sense that its medium is not the written and printed word, is not the communication between the isolated poet in his room with the isolated reader in his room, depending on 'letters'. The printed word is no more than the libretto of a richly orchestrated performance, and like the libretto of an opera gives but a shadowy impression of what Mzwakhe Mbuli's art is about.

As such it can stand the cold and dispassionate scrutiny of the reviewer less well than the poetry of other performing poets like Sandile Dikeni and Keith Gottschalk. In the sense in which poetry has developed from functional verse to the sophisticated expression of experience and an art form of highly intricate verbal skills — not only in Europe and America - Mzwakhe Mbuli's book is not 'poetry'. Perhaps the word 'lyrics' would describe this verse-form more adequately. Mbuli's work is a healthy reminder that verse in the history of literature always had a much wider range than the narrow definition given to poetry in the period of the Romantics.

As a libretto, as a collection of lyrics, it is helpful and useful, making one aware of the many things which one misses on hearing Mzwakhe Mbuli only once. Of course, the guardians of the queen's English will have endless problems with the volume, because it constantly flouts 'correct' English usage, because it bends the language to the tongue, the ear and the thinking of the township, the mass democratic movement, the street committee,

the trade union meeting, rather than the polite syllables of the Houghton tea party, or the introspective discourse of *angst* and existential crisis cultivated at our universities. They will go through the volume with the *Oxford Dictionary* and a red pencil to castrate a language which has become an African language, a *lingua franca* of vivid communication in the townships, and to demonstrate its faults.

But this 'poetry' has a new self-assurance which does not politely ask the English masters whether it may use a word or phrase in this way or that. It just goes ahead anyway, the way in which the colonized of the Roman empire produced the 'barbaric' Romanic languages French, Spanish, Portuguese and Rumanian out of the language of the colonizers, changing meanings, grammar and pronunciation out of recognition over the centuries, paying little heed to the Quintillians and Ciceros of classic Latin. English, itself a barbarous mixture of Frisian, Saxon, Norse, French and Latin roots, with spicy bits of two dozen other languages mixed in, is well on the way to absorbing the inflections of the third world. Of course, there are shocks in store for those with an Oxbridge education: 'He is an African I exclaimed *editorially*', 'They left Europe *unchased*', 'Now is the time; *to edify authentic action*', 'To *disentangle vilification*'. One suspects that *massacre* here means the agents to killing rather than the killing itself. The fault here is not so much with the poet as it is with the reviewer who assumes that he understands and knows 'English', but has not noticed that this 'English' has been sliding all the time from the standard which was never more than a myth of the schoolmasters of Eton.

The re-making of English in the image of Africa is apparent also in the bold grammatical structures which are bound to give sleepless nights to purists. We are confronted with such dense statements, difficult to unravel, as: 'Personal ambition is holocaust' and 'Stifling man status to boy'. This presents a more serious problem, a problem of communication: Mbuli stretches the possibilities of English grammar beyond what is recognizable as an English sentence. But Chaucer's English is not readable without a Middle English grammar and dictionary, and neither does Mzwakhe Mbuli's Southern African variant communicate just naturally. It needs to be translated for the non-participant in his culture, his township abbreviations need the interpolation of commentary to make them mean to those outside. At the very least it needs a conscious effort to free oneself from the shackles of the standard.

There is a long list of such 'mistakes' to be found in Mzwakhe Mbuli's 'poetry', and it doesn't help that the editors were careless and inconsistent in details of spelling and punctuation, even if one

accepts e.g. the strange use of the semicolon as an indication of a breath unit. The hurried and careless preparation of the manuscript for publication and the lack of editorial advice have done Mzwakhe Mbuli, COSAW and his listeners and readers a disservice, because they throw in doubt his integrity as an artist, which is never in doubt in his performance.

Mbuli's performance, as that of other cultural workers, is a powerful tool for educating people, creating a sense of unity and enriching political struggles, and both the Mass Democratic Movement and the government have understood the potential of such art.[2] As a public and political poet, Mzwakhe Mbuli relies heavily on all the techniques of a rhetoric, which derives on the one hand from the African evangelical and revivalist churches, and on the other hand from the traditional *imbongi*, but to carry a message which, at least superficially, is neither revivalist nor traditional.

Rhetoric has become something of a swear-word in contemporary academic criticism, with implications of dishonesty, simplification, moralizing and politicking. Perhaps it is time to remind critics that from the Greeks to the Romans, from the Medieval poets to the Renaissance and far into the Age of Enlightenment rhetoric was the repertoire of skills and techniques which the poet (as well as the public speaker) would use to structure and embellish his or her communication.

The evangelical rhetoric relies strongly on a clear division between what is good and what is evil, and Mzwakhe Mbuli's 'poetry' reproduces this as an ethical consensus between himself and his listeners, a consensus which is nowhere thrown into doubt or even questioned. There is a strong reference to the 'multinational system of evil', to the 'devil philosophy', 'A philosophy of culture with roots of slavery', to a 'curse', to all kinds of dangerous -isms, some of which are reduced to mere shadows and tokens (e.g. 'animalism' = behaving like an animal?). Terms in this demonology are 'imperialism', 'fascism', 'colonial terrorism', 'nepotism'. There are 'hooligans of universal peace' and 'internal and foreign parasites'. The 'Apartheid heresy' appears, as it does in liberation theology, as one of the ultimate monsters of the devil incarnate.

Like the ageless mystic tradition this theological discourse understands the subversion of the evil as the immediate reinstatement of goodness, and knows the double negative, the negation of the negation, as the restitution of an original state of paradisical innocence, such innocence being located in a pristine Africa before the incursions of colonialism. Because of this, the subversion of apparent goodness (loyalty) into evil (vengeance) will, in an evil world, bring about the return of the paradise, just

as the upside-down world of the hanged man, the fool, and the carnival will in European emblematics bring about the destruction of an evil dominion and the rebirth of the just reign:

> Loyalty shall mean vengeance;
> Love shall mean hatred;
> Obedience shall mean rebellion;
> Conformity a bluff;
> Happiness a sign of danger;

The struggle against superhuman forces of evil demands such dissimulation and masking, just as it demands the fire of anger and vengeance to cleanse the corrupted earth, the

> burning voice of anger;
> Set to roast opposition alliance aflame;
> Like iron into the acid of time;
> Fire is ferociously necessary;
> To mutilate the bonds of hypocrisy;
> And paralyze pestilential plots;

Such a 'theology', one fears, supports not only the symbolic scorching of the enemy, but also his burning in necklace reality, in the same way as St Just justified the torrents of blood in the French Revolution as a necessary purging action of the diseased body politic. Only through these cleansing rituals of flame and blood, it seems, can the counter-world of a non-racial society be established. This obverse of the dehumanized apartheid society is again conceived in Christian terms as 'Human beings created by God' and symbolized in 'the dove of peace'. The work of the poet, like the work of the struggle, appears as the self-imposed task to attack the negative to bring about the positive:

> How hard and tormenting it is;
> To write about slavery and not freedom;
> How hard and tormenting it is;
> To write about pain and not joy;

Just as there is evil, there is, as in revivalist preaching, also the *inevitable victory of the good cause*: 'No oppressive Kingdom is eternal' (does the capital letter in Kingdom not indicate a metaphysical source of Apartheid, something more than the work of mere mortals?) and 'The people's patience is not endless;/Yes, victory is certain.'

Each term entails its opposite, but not in a dialectical relation as in Hegelian and Marxist philosophy or the Yin-Yang of the Chinese, which treat these pockets of otherness with tolerance,

but in a moralistic manner, which postulates the complete abolition of the present 'evil' system and its subversion into an entirely 'good' system of the future, clearly a theological, not a political utopia. This rhetorical division into goats and sheep produces strange valorizations, when e.g. in 'The voice of anger' the 'rebel' is paralleled to the negative 'coward', and thus loaded with negative emphasis, whereas one would expect the rebel as a positive figure in the revolutionary field.

A more interesting theology makes its appearance in 'Alone', where the prisoner in solitary confinement identifies simultaneously with God the Creator and the hunted animal in the cage:

> Perhaps like God on the day of creation;
> Alone all alone;
> Perhaps like an animal inside the cage;
> Alone all alone;

The poet, simultaneously godlike creator of a new world, who uses his imprisonment to refashion and rethink the world, and the animal in the cage, exposed to the cruelty of his keepers, oscillates between self-aggrandizement and self-abasement. Because of the parallelization of the two verses, neither is proposed as the true image, both sides of the coin have their validity. Perhaps it is the weakness of the poet which is at the same time his strength. Of course the solitude of solitary confinement has no relation whatever with the isolation of the white South African poet and his *angst*, even if there is a momentary echo in Mzwakhe Mbuli's poetry of the mirror theme of self-recognition. But it is a self-recognition of a different kind, active, creative, rather than passive and contemplative:

> No mirror permitted to create my twinself;
> And conquer the loneliness;
> Alone all alone.

The rhetoric of the *imbongi* makes its appearance in the traditional similes and metaphors of a rural community in close contact with an untamed nature, when the invincibility of the people is demonstrated with the following image:

> The people are like crocodiles in the river;
> and no one can fight crocodiles inside the river;
> South Africa why therefore buy time?
> When crocodiles are against you;
> Why give chase to lizards?

On the other hand, the isolation of the poet in jail is described in terms of banishment into the untamed wilderness with its dangerous beasts of prey and poisonous snakes:

> Cut-off from the world of human beings;
> And brought close to the world of lions and mambas.

Of course there is no clear dividing line between the *imbongi* and the evangelical rhetoric, since the African evangelical rhetoric draws heavily on traditional figures of speech, and since the rhetoric of the preacher has an underlying similarity to the rhetoric of the tribal sage. The use of the anaphora in 'Creative than Before' and many other poems is both biblical and indigenous. The *kenning*, a device known to most oral poetry including Anglo-Saxon, and other complex games of verbal repetition structure the flow of the sermon and *imbongi* alike. The poetics of the *imbongi* has not yet been written, despite some useful prolegomena, and this critic does not pretend that he is capable of this task.

Both the evangelical and the *imbongi* rhetorics do, however, create a problematic, of which many proponents of people's culture seem to be unaware or which they see as merely intellectual and academic nit-picking.

On the one hand Mzwakhe Mbuli's lyrics do contest a number of poetic and emotional spaces which in the past have been the exclusive territory of reactionary forces. Until the advent of black theology and liberation theology, revivalist and evangelical rhetoric essentially turned the mind of the listener away from his daily struggles and tried to locate him in relation to another world of just retribution which would make up for the hurts of this world. That is true even of those Zionist and Africanist movements which located their Christianity in open opposition to the apartheid system. But even liberation theology and its rhetoric do not abolish the ultimate authority to which people have to bow, even if that authority is portrayed as inimical to the existing political, social and ethical order.

Equally the recourse to traditional symbols and forms of discourse can be a powerful force both in the promotion of popular struggle and in the promotion of reactionary nationalisms and chauvinisms. Not to contest this area would be foolish.

On the other hand, all genres have a content. The rhetoric of salvation, while it assumes the individual efforts of the Christian, promises inevitable happiness and the final fulfillment in a utopia hereafter. It both creates expectations, which will be difficult to fulfill in a liberated South Africa, and attitudes amongst the listener of being the target of revelations by prophetic voices,

rather than the thinking subject, capable of deciding his/her own future.

Equally, while the *imbongi* has traditionally been used not only to praise the king, but to express criticism, the tendency of affirmative rather than critical thought in this type of poetry should be problematic in organizations which see themselves as democratic, i.e. that strive for the fullest development of all members to participate in the debate and the decision-making of the organization.[3] Even if the poet now attributes the symbols of authority to the people, their organizations and their leaders, the very act of attributing authority is problematic in the democratic field.

Most of the critics who write reviews of the new genres originating in the culture of the townships and the people do so with the self-assurance of those who have done an English major at university, and thus know all about poetry. They never ask themselves whether they have the tools to recognize the aesthetic devices employed by the *imbongi*, and whether they are not looking for something which is obviously not there while missing what is most decidedly there. Their blindness would be immediately revealed, if they were asked to account for the audience reaction to certain passages in a performance — which is not based merely on the recognition and affirmation of 'slogans' but on the artistic (poetic, musical, dramatic etc.) devices the poet employs.

In a letter to the *Weekly Mail* (3.4.87), Lionel Abrahams argues quite convincingly that to praise 'passages of very minor achievement' is harmful, 'not least to black poets, both accomplished and aspirant. Its main message to them is: the best is not for you'. One assumes that Lionel Abrahams, whose critical acumen I value highly in other contexts, has in mind a yardstick according to which he knows what the best is, not only in relation to his own cultural background, but in relation to the culture of an emerging democratic South Africa. What is the unreflected yardstick according to which he or others can be so sure they can measure oral poetry, especially if one assumes they have only seen it in translation and in print, not in performance?

In the same issue of the *Weekly Mail*, Farouk Asvat argues: 'But if Cronin, and many like him (both black and white) would lead us to believe that the mere mouthing of political slogans and rhetoric is sufficient to make anything written by blacks and workers poetry, then they must have a serious re-think, if they have the advancement of our people in mind (...) Slogan poetry[4] merely stunts the growth of our people.' It would be futile to argue all the preconceptions contained in such abbreviated statements: but, perhaps, some critic could unfold the concept of

poetry in such a manner that the ideological presuppositions contained in the evaluative concept 'poetry' would be made explicit. Asvat's stated criteria that poetry should make 'the complex humanity of people's emotions' visible and 'interpret people's lives so that they can have a better insight into themselves' seem to me to be met both by *Black Mamba Rising* and by *Before Dawn*, even if in a manner which some critics may not recognize as legitimate. But that is their fault.

Behind this kind of critical attitude is not only the implicit affirmation that the work of art could be and should be different from what it is, that the work of art is the possible form of a norm *given* to the critic. Criticism of this kind attempts to destroy that which resists its interrogation based on an aesthetic legality that is judicial rather than theoretical and to remake what the poet has made in its own image. The purpose of this kind of criticism is to measure conformities.[5] But is that which this kind of criticism demands all there is to 'poetry', or is it even the fundamental task of 'poetry', and if so what 'poetry'? Is English criticism not totally blinded by a very partisan 19th and 20th century conservative cultural clique and its dictatorship over the business of literature and criticism, unable to see the functions which poetry had at other times and in other places when it was not the handmaiden of a leisure class?

My advice to the prospective reader would be to buy the book together with the tapes from *Shifty Records*, because the one form of publication will enhance the other, and to judge Mzwakhe Mbuli's genius on that basis. Seen in this context, Mzwakhe Mbuli's 'lyrics' in performance are a phenomenon which instantly obliterates nine tenths of what counts as 'poetry' in South Africa, not only because it is 'irrelevant', but because it lacks both the brilliance and the energy which pervade these 'lyrics'.

Peter Horn

Notes:

1 Ari Sitas in his introduction to *Black Mamba Rising* (Durban 1986) was fully aware that the poems of Qabula, Hlatshwayo and Malange suffer outside their context: 'they lose much of their oral power: the songs, the chants, the ululations, their improvisatory nature and of course, the popular responses that accompany their oration'.

2 cf. Durban FOSATU Cultural Group, 'Culture and the Workers' Struggle'. *South African Labour Bulletin*. 10.8, 1985.

3 cf. Kelwyn Sole, 'New Words Rising'. *South African Labour Bulletin* 12.2,1987 points out that praise poetry is usually thought to be related to traditional and ethnic power (e.g. Matanzima and Inkatha). He does, however, also point to the use of praise poetry since the *Mfecane* to criticize

collaborators, as well as to the traditional *imbongi*, Hlongwe, who was active praising Champion and the ICU in the 1930s.

4 I would seriously encourage a prospective Ph.D student to write a thesis on *The use of slogans in poetry from Chaucer to T.S. Eliot* to lay to rest once and for all the myth that European bourgeois poetry is slogan-free!

5 Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*. London and New York 1986 (1978), p.15ff.

Tropical Scars by Ari Sitas

Congress of South African Writers, 1989.
Price R5,50 excluding tax

Poetry is about the time lost. The time to be recovered by a struggle, but also the time to be recovered by the word, so that the struggle knows what the struggle needs to recover. For if we don't know what we lost, then we don't know what we are fighting for. There was a time . . . before . . . 'there was a sun / before'. And the poem says what this time was, and it says what the other time is, the one in which we live, a bad copy, a photostat, a xeroxed copy of a real sun. There was a time when we were not separated from our desire by fences: 'yes there was a time, when we could love / and run and flow without these fences'.

Of course, this time lost is always a myth, whether it is called childhood or origin, pre-colonial society or primitive communism. If it were not, it were not truly lost. It is not accessible by any rational exercise, called science or knowledge, it has been repressed so severely that it now is locked away in what we call the unconscious, which of course is not just the negative of consciousness, but the place our body has reserved for the consciousness of what is not and what needs to be attained to still our needs to be human. Said differently, it is the absence of certain words in a text, the disavowal of the process of banning itself, the belief that there is no banning, no absence.

Poetry needs to make visible the absence, the process of banning, the process of suppression, it needs to talk about the 'hooks that we tear out of each other's hearts' without understanding what we are doing. Because the absence is not obvious: the discourse (there is always only one) parades its own fullness, it presents itself as having said it all. The discourse says: anything which you would attempt to say which has not been said and cannot be said in the discourse can only be madness. But poetic language always stirs up this filth, this madness, constantly puts the symbolic order of need and want at risk. Because this madness is an attempt to regain the time 'spinning with the rattle / of the inqola', a time which 'magically' provided for our needs.

But 'that time was gone', and the magic does not work

anymore. The poem may recall it, or recall the shadowy metaphor that remains of it, but it cannot recreate it. This time lost and invoked is the goal of the struggle. The struggle is the desire to recreate it. The poem in the struggle is an attempt to break through the wall and the fence which separates us from our desire. Not that it can ever attain its realization, because this time never was and can never be. Except in the experienced myth that 'the joining of ancestral shadows / would be part of the flood that breaks the dam's wall'. Even if this time lost could be again, the scar would remain, telling the story of the violation which terminated the mythical times. This is why the poem can only exist within the struggle, and why the struggle needs the poem.

But the will to be, and to be whole again, is not enough. The shout that WE ARE and that WE SHALL BE arouses those whose privilege and those whose borrowed second-hand privilege is in danger by this defiance. They answer with 'a time of grief and assassinations'. The violent struggle of the oppressors to regain what was lost by them and to retain what was won by them brings about 'nights of pain' for the oppressed in 'this laboratory of pain'. In order to be able to bear this pain the oppressed need pain-killers, morphine, doloxeine, alcohol, dope, amphetamine.

Like the Thebes of Oedipus, Sitas's Natal is a miasma, a defilement stopping life, a constant violation of what is human and what is according to nature. The creation of this here and now, this want and lack, this pseudo-world with its 'forced geometry of concrete boils', can be pinpointed in historical time, but that is not how it appears to the violated consciousness, for whom the arrival of the settlers is entirely mythical:

> here, there,
> confined
> where visions of heaven subsided long ago
> with the arrival of sails creaking
> under a hyperload of sparrows.

Myth is not an illusion. It is a way of dealing with a reality which is inaccessible, because the violence disrupted the lines between here now and then there. It is the way to deal with a rupture of time, the loss of historical progression, because there is no continuity between the before and the after, except the total inversion of all values and the destruction of all beauty. To the indigenous inhabitants this mythical rupture appears like a natural catastrophe controlled by an evil God to whom they have no access, and who did not know them personally, by name:

But then came the floods
and our name was not Noah
and he did not know us by name
and down came the skies
raining bricks and dollars
railway sidings and fences
and our name was not Noah

Myth is an attempt to understand what cannot be understood: the victory of an evil magic which made all courage powerless in the view of its power. The entry of sophisticated European weapons of war makes the simple weapons of the inhabitants 'ox-hide kites', playthings, unable to stem the tide of filth, rubbish, shacks, specification matchboxes, destruction and exploitation: the ugliness of a civilization built on greed and profit. With it the experience that the ego is the centre and 'origin of the storms' suddenly vanishes. People are switched off and the ego shuffles through a landscape dominated by the plantations of the conquerors. Any resistance has died. For a revolutionary climate to arise there needs to be *mnemosyne*, remembrance of this loss, because revolutions are made out of desire for that which is lost, not out of a sense of duty.[1]

The present time gapes with the wounds and scars, 'tropical scars' and 'bruise marks scars sensations / and feelings and stitches and eina . . .', the present time gapes with the loss of the past time, trying to fill that chasm is 'this expanse that claims me: my Hell'. Instead of a real sky 'there is a sky: yes /blue-like, grey-like, alien-like', instead of real love there are 'prerecorded love-sighs'.

The present time is before all else the devaluation of man. Man has become his market value, 'Life was a merchandise', and this value is low. The cost of staying alive is using that life up in the service of others, who make the profit. His labour is equivalent to a bag of mealies, barely sufficient to keep him alive:

'I am sixpence' he said
'that's all I am
My worth is sixpence
My wage is sixpence
I live on sixpence
I AM this sixpence.'

Man has to 'trade away his dreams for sixpence', his soul and his inside succumb to the attack of the machines. Which once more supports the world-famous formula money = shit. It is what we want and need to survive but not what we desire in order to live.

But the destruction and devaluation entails all of humanity's space: 'the houses we live in, the streets we walk on, the work we do',[2] even nature (most of which is re-made by man anyway). 'There was a time', one of the most haunting evocations of the mythical time lost and the mythical time present, of wholeness and destruction, describes how all the beauty of nature which the poet used to decorate his love and his art, has disappeared or landed on the rubbish heap. What remains is the beauty of their original Zulu names: *unongqanga, ilanda, umakholwase, gwala-gwala, ukhozi*. The beauty of nature itself is spiked through a thorntree, spray-painted and 'riding a sharkfin around a homeland minister's / pale blue pool'. Despite nature reserves, it cannot be retrieved, except as refuse. We do not desire death, but what we desire is dead: the time that was.

This time present is so out of joint that it can only be portrayed in surrealist images: 'and sometimes surfers emerge from the mouths / of microwave ovens'. Any attempt to subvert this new ugly reality appears to the onlookers like a childish joke:

> And I said no,
> I shall sting this world with my spear
> But they laughed and called me 'mosquito'
> and they teased the power of my sting

Even the freedom fighter is reduced to a mosquito, bringing an illness — malaria — reduced to an 'insect life' of apparently futile gestures, calling up the symbolic animals against the capitalists as signs on the wall which may forespell the doom of this society, but at present are merely ridiculed by those in power. No wonder that in a crazy world like this Archie has to become Siegmund: 'good morning how am I dear Zigmund Gumede'.

Ari Sitas's poetry is much more than another retelling of the horror: it knows about the pain and it knows about the pain-killers, but it also knows about the strength of the struggle and the imperative: 'go back two / from 25 / recapture the youth / of your 23 years / You must'. Without that youth the struggle is lost even if it is won. The victory would be an empty shell, a triumph without content. Because the poems know that, they become a healing incantation for those who have become numb in the horrors of our civil war:

> Do not stir the pot
> of bitterness now
> swallow your bitter tablets
> the doctor is right
> and sleep
> please try and sleep

The experience that 'we have been silenced / as tellers of tales / for only brief times' points to the fact that neither open repression nor banning orders, neither censorship nor confiscations have been able to interrupt the voice of the oppressed for any length of time effectively. The oppressed still say, and therefore the poem still says: 'Asinamali / and that I am hungry for the oorlam's / the skappie's / the slave's revenge'. The workers understand and therefore the poem understands the power of the switch that switches off the machine, the strike. But there has been a loss, the loss of innocence. In mythical times the poet was driven by a different force over which he had no control. Poetry burst out of him like a creative-destructive force:

> in my lungs grew enormous pressure
> words were gathering force to burst out
> to decorate the world
> developing great speeds
> and dangers
> for when my mouth dared to open a trifle too slow
> they would burst through
> and shoot out my teeth
> and my gums would be bleeding
> or sometimes the words would ignite
> coming out as arrows of flame raising the forests
> and the trees would dance in their wigs of fire

The experience of the civil war, that there are 'people / felled / the dawn's street cleaners sweeping leaves and dreams', has made this primeval force a psychopathological force. Its madness, however, is nothing but the obverse of the madness of this time, the 'ubuthi of tribalism / ubisi of hatred / fed to us by false inyangas'.

Ari Sitas's poems are at home in the defeats of the people, and in the lessons to be drawn from them. You must savour defeat if you want to understand the remedy: easy solutions are usually false trails into the thickets of confusion. The propaganda of Inkatha and its success, the question, why so many of those who have an objective revolutionary interest retain a cathexis of the reactionary type,[3] needs to be confronted and is confronted in the poem 'Cosatu - You Xhosas': 'What stokvel is this / with workers in giya / swaying pangas stained with the / class's own blood'. But there are some who benefit from it, and some whose paranoia sees foreigners and enemies in the members of their own class; and the paranoia is nothing but the fear to lose the last means of survival: 'you are foreigners / stealing our jobs and our money . . .' The solution follows well-known patterns. Like the

Jews who were gassed and burned to smoke to rise into the sky by the Nazis, the Zulu nationalists provide 'Tyre-necklaces for you for your exit / despatch: to Zulu upstairs'. The failure of earlier class struggles is demonstrated in 'The Origins of Today's Tribulations'. Kadalie, the leader of the ICU, 'changing colours by the hour', drinking away the money of his union in 'Da Pitch Black Follies', 'a people's hero at the square / behind a bottle / at ma-Monare's for solace' needs to be remembered. The question of leadership itself, the possibility of a 'personality cult' is dealt with, culminating in the insights of the 'Motto':

> Beware
> what you ascribe to leaders
> you take from the people.
> Take from the leaders
> give to the people
> for leaders are colourful flags.
> They wave and waver as the wind blows
> as people work the bellows
> and make the whirlwinds thunder.

'Unions emerged', not because there were leaders, 'agitators', but 'on the back / of a galloping grievance' of the people themselves. And that is the hope of these poems in all the defilement, horror and destruction. Those who have convinced themselves that this world is ugly beyond redemption will want to argue that Sitas's hope avoids the reality of their own pessimism:

> to say that there was a time
> and there will be a time
> for you and me.

But Sitas's poems show that a full awareness of the horrors of our civil war can co-exist with a belief in a different future which is far distant from any facile optimism about the imminence of utopia at the end of the struggle. The optimism originates in the reality of the struggle, but also in the creativeness and inventiveness of the text. It asserts that 'the Congress was the shield / to the workers' assegai'. It becomes credible in the text, because 'the text has a truth, which it alone can express'. While the poet has to 'stamp down (his) feet' and is attempting to outrhyme the darkness, skeptics may see no change in what they believe to be reality. The truth of (political?) poetry 'is problematical because the object we encounter in our reading is not the real one'.[4] That doesn't say that it is not real. It is real in that it writes the slime and the filth of this society, is itself part of

the excreta of an illness, catharsis. Beyond the corpses shot by the hippo, however, there is this real hope, the 'tin door' through which the fighter left and which now has gained a new significance 'awaiting the return / the return of a nation'.

But it does say that these poems are not really speaking to those who watch the class struggle from the hill. The truth of this poetry is in a life: if you live Keats and Shelley, Eliot or Auden their poetry makes sense. Their words seem to be just right. Ari Sitas lives elsewhere. So, forget about our common humanity, or remember it, when the class barriers have been finally abolished, the mythical times re-established. In the meantime to understand about the times past and the times future you have to 'flap off the precipice / in search of the swamps / down below / to gather mudwords / to mould again / dreams of slime'. The legal and illegal murders of our civil wars have separated us as securely as the words of our discourse from what now appears as slime, filth, defilement. Poetic language contrary to the univocity of our discourse of interdicts attempts a reconciliation with what we have excluded: pleasure, pain. Therefore, poetry represents the ultimate coding of our crisis, of our most intimate and most serious apocalypses. Hence its nocturnal power, its great darkness.

The working class deserves books as beautiful as those that celebrate the centuries of bourgeois culture. Ari Sitas's poetry is a product of the struggle of the working class in South Africa and one of its most beautiful fruits.[5] I am sure the time is now for the poetry of Ari Sitas: and I am sure there will be a time for these poems as long as the people of South Africa remember the mythical times before the conquest, the rape of Africa, the workers' struggle, the civil war, and the victory to come.

Peter Horn

Notes:

1 cf. Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Anti-Ödipus. Kapitalismus und Schizophrenie*. Frankfurt am Main 1981 (1974), p.446.

2 Frank Meintjies in his introduction.

3 cf. Deleuze / Guattari, op. cit., p.445.

4 Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*. London and New York 1986 (1978), p.47.

5 Unfortunately the typography and layout does not do justice to the contents of this volume. I don't see why workers should always be satisfied with the third-best, when a bit more care and expertise could have produced something which in its outer form equalled the contents. Aesthetics of poverty does not mean poor aesthetics!

Comrade Moss edited by Marc Suttner
Learn and Teach Publications in association with Labour and Community Resources Project. 1989.
Cruel Beyond Belief by Alfred Temba Qabula
National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa. 1989.

The publication of worker biographies is not a new phenomenon in South African writing. The biography of Bill Andrews, a member of the South African Communist Party and Secretary of the Trades and Labour Council, entitled *Comrade Bill*, along with the autobiography of Clements Kadalie who was President of the Industrial and Commercial Union, titled *My Life and the I.C.U.*, are but two examples of life stories specific to the South African working class, its organizations and history from previous decades. These, and other related life stories have, however, been submerged under the force of working class repression which followed the ascendency of racial capitalism in South Africa.

Since the 1970s the resurgence of the labour movement has, however, seen to it that the history of its organizations and the role played by ordinary workers and leaders were recorded and made available to its members and the larger public. This process of recording, printing and disseminating labour history as it becomes manifest in the actual lives of workers has recently been facilitated by progressive publishers, worker organizations and research institutions concerned with the struggles of workers. Recent examples of the recovery of worker experiences are Mandlenkosi Makhoba's *The Sun Shall Rise for the Workers* and Petrus Tom's *My Life Struggle* published by Ravan Press in 1984 and 1985 respectively.

This year has already seen the publication of two new books based on the lives of workers. A third biography announced by Buchu Books in Cape Town is also scheduled for publication this year. This flurry of activity is of course related to the growing impact of the labour movement and the leadership position it has begun to assume in the mass democratic struggle in South Africa. The two books, *Comrade Moss*, which chronicles the life of Moses Mayekiso, the General Secretary of the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa, and *A Working Life Cruel Beyond Belief*, which recounts the experiences of worker-poet Alfred Temba Qabula, capture some of the most salient features in the history of recent worker struggles.

Alfred Temba Qabula's book is an excellent example of how the autobiography can serve as a means of self-definition in relation to broader social, political and economic history. As such it succeeds in moving well beyond the petty bourgeois and bourgeois forms of autobiography practised in this society. While

emphasis in the latter forms is on the personalities of so-called outstanding individuals who are considered to have made some significant contribution to public life, Qabula's life story is in fact the story of millions of South African workers in a very literal sense.

His story, told in his own direct and unembellished but enchanting language which occasionally breaks into a poetry of extraordinary imaginative power, makes for a biography which is at once accessible and of value within and beyond the contingencies of present struggles. He tells the story of his childhood in Flagstaff, Transkei where he was born in 1942. His grandfather initially resisted absorption into the system of migrant labour:

> My grandfather refused to work on the mines and became transport rider to raise cash to pay his taxes: with his ox-wagon he footed the countryside from farm to farm, from the Transkei to Natal, from the Orange Free State and the Cape and back, carrying grain and other products. But he was destroyed by the arrival of the railways. He became a herbalist, and consistently refused to go and work for a wage. He sent my father and his brothers out to work on the mines or in the sugarfields. From then on migrancy invaded our homes. (p. 7)

He goes on to describe, in vivid detail, his experiences as a youth during the Pondoland rebellion in the early 1960s. He tells of the survival strategies adopted by his community in the face of state repression which enlisted anti-ANC elements from rural communities to suppress the uprising in the countryside. A large section of the first part is devoted to Qabula's childhood in the Transkei. He writes with candour about his unpredictable and cruel father, his caring mother, their deaths and his life of drudgery living with his paternal grandparents until he was offered a life of relative comfort by a family of mixed descent who enabled him to acquire some education and training as a plumber.

This led to his first job as a migrant plumber in Carletonville where he was initiated into the humiliations of the pass system and the violence of urban life. Longing to work closer to the Transkei he entered factory life at Dunlop during 1974 when the labour movement was experiencing a new upsurge. Employed as a scab, he quickly came to understand the imperatives of the labour movement and assisted in the process of unionizing the Dunlop workers under the Metal and Allied Workers' Union. This coincided with his emergence as one of the poets who reworked

the traditional praise poem to articulate proletarian issues. This served to launch a wide-ranging cultural movement among workers in Natal.

The autobiography, which opens and closes with two remarkable poems by Qabula, has the value of bringing the realities of both rural and urban life, which shape the lives of migrant workers, sharply into focus. It does not smooth over the persistence of traditional customs in the rural areas nor does it conceal the extent of the exploitation which workers are confronted with in the manufacturing industries of South Africa. Above all it demonstrates how the organized labour movement in its political, economic and cultural manifestations as embodied in COSATU, holds the key to the social transformation of South Africa.

The biography of Moses Mayekiso differs structurally from Qabula's autobiography by virtue of the difference between these two related forms of personal historiography. Whereas Qabula's account is a first-person narrative of which he is the central selective and organizing principle, *Comrade Moss* entails a more distant third-person account of the life of Mayekiso. It draws on the views of Mayekiso, as well as a wide range of other workers and historical sources.

In her preface to the book Coco Cachalia, a member of the Labour and Community Resources Project, which researched and wrote the biography, mentions that the main purpose of the book was to lend support to the 'Viva Moss Campaign' which was launched in 1987 by the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa. This was to secure local and international support for Moses Mayekiso, his brother Mzwanele Mayekiso, Obed Bapela, Richard Mdakane and Paul Tshabalala, all members of the Alexandra Action Committee charged with treason and subversion, but subsequently acquitted.

We are also informed that the book is a tribute to Mayekiso, as an outstanding trade unionist and community leader. According to Cachalia, it is further hoped that the book will serve to highlight the history of the recent working class struggles in South Africa and enable workers and their allies to come to understand some of the issues which shape the role of the labour movement.

To ensure that the story succeeds in these aims the life of Mayekiso is consistently placed in the context of the broader social history. The reader is repeatedly reminded of the fact that Mayekiso's experiences are representative of millions of workers in South Africa. At the same time, however, Mayekiso's leadership qualities and his role in the labour movement are foregrounded.

His story begins in the Cala District of the Transkei where he was born and raised as one of twelve children to Bethwell and Nokudamba Mayekiso. Like the majority of people in the Transkei his family was dependent for their survival on the wages earned through migrant labour in the metropolitan areas of South Africa. Like his grandfather and his father before him, Mayekiso left the Transkei in 1972 for the mines in Welkom. Here he came face to face with the exploitation and abuse which characterize the mining industry and the system of racial capitalism which has shaped the modern history of South Africa.

Because of the absence of labour organizations for black mineworkers at the time, and the appalling working conditions at Western Holdings, Mayekiso decided to leave the mine before his contract expired:

> Because of the living and working conditions underground, I decided that I should rather desert. But it was difficult to leave because I was under contract for twelve months. You cannot just fetch your luggage and leave the compound before the end of your contract. There are mine police who are always on guard. (p. 28)

He, however, managed to get a visitor's pass and left for Alexandra in Johannesburg where he worked for a variety of construction companies before he was employed by Toyota in Wynberg. Here he experienced the failure of the liaison committees and eventually came into contact with the trade union movement which was to determine his subsequent life.

His interest in the organization of workers soon led to his election as shop steward. In a strike during 1978, Mayekiso and other shop stewards were fired. This spurred him to greater involvement in the struggles of the then Metal and Allied Workers' Union. He became a tireless organizer who helped shape the course of the union. Consequently, he earned the respect of almost every worker with whom he came into contact. His understanding of the crucial difference between mobilization and worker organization, as well as its relationship to broader community and national struggles, saw to it that he played a role in all these spheres. The lessons in democratic organization developed in his union were later applied in Alexandra with great effect. It led to the formation of the Alexandra Action Committee whose office-bearers, including Mayekiso, were arrested after the conflict between the community and the State in 1986.

The story of Mayekiso is written in simple, jargon-free and accessible language. It foregrounds all the crucial issues which have dominated the struggle against apartheid in recent times. It

also carries an interview with Mayekiso after his release in which he stresses the fact that it has become time for the labour movement to start discussing the question of socialism. At the same time he stresses the need to work for the greatest possible unity within the working class movement and to strengthen its links with broader political organizations.

These two books represent literary high-points in recent working class culture. Reading these publications makes one aware that the transformation of South Africa and the creation of a viable democracy are virtually unattainable if the interests and values of the working class and its organizations are not at the centre of the political struggle. For these, and many other reasons, including the fact that both books are exceptionally well written and produced, they cannot be recommended highly enough. The voice they give to the role played by workers and their organizations in recent times makes them invaluable.

Andries Walter Oliphant

Organize and Act by Astrid von Kotze

Published by Culture and Working Life Project, University of Natal. 1989.

A growing awareness of the resilience and importance of black working class culture has come to mark the cultural scene in South Africa in the last decade. The cultural preferences of less-privileged black people in the country — expressed through a host of diverse forms of song, dance, music and (occasionally) writing — are increasingly being used and discussed.

Gone, hopefully, are the days when academics and political activists either dismissed culture as irrelevant, or tried to decide for workers whether the culture that emerged was 'suitable' or not, in an ideological or political sense. This arrogant view-point, based on ignorance and manipulation, is being replaced to some extent in contemporary South Africa by debate. What is becoming clear is how little was actually known in the past by middle-class activists and intellectuals alike about what black workers believe, want or perceive. It is also beginning to dawn on people that the many cultural forms of expression in existence among the black proletariat in South Africa are crucial constituents of any future political and cultural dispensation and cannot be denied.

The 1980s have made these cultural forms much more available outside of their immediate contexts. Groups such as Savuka and Abafana Bomoya have spread Zulu migrant music to a white and international audience; short stories, autobiographies and poems by black workers such as Bheki Maseko, Petrus Tom and

Makhulu wa Ledwaba have been published; choirs such as Ladysmith Black Mambazo, who have always had a big reputation, are increasing their following; and no longer are *mbaqanga* musicians, *isishameni* dance troupes, *isicathamiya* choirs and the like treated with the scorn they once were.

In this revival the culture of migrant and contract workers has been particularly forceful. These are the 'people between', who found historically little meaningful entertainment or means of expressing themselves in the cities and compounds. Consequently, out of what are often extremely impoverished circumstances, they have created a culture which uses traditional and rural forms as a basis and expands and changes these forms to fulfill new needs. They are uniquely situated to mould traditional and modern, rural and urban, ethnic and class identities into exciting new forms. Mandlenkosi Makhoba, foundry worker and actor, explains his experience and expressive urge:

> I work here in Boksburg but my spirit is in . . . the countryside. I was born there and my father was born there. But for twenty years now I have worked in the factories on the East Rand . . . I tell you this story to remind you of your life. I tell you this story so you will remember your struggle and the story of the struggle we fight. AMANDLA![1]

It can be seen through statements such as this that these writers and performers — many of whom use African languages out of preference and necessity — see their primary audience as other black workers. Furthermore, in this cultural upsurge the democratic organizations of the working class have been enormously important. It is difficult, indeed, to see how this spread of culture would have been possible outside the growth of the trade union movement over the last two decades. In the factory and workplace workers from different backgrounds and life experiences — among them migrants — can begin to build a common purpose and set of goals that stem from their class interests. The trade unions also provide a platform where workers engaged in economic and political struggles can tell the stories of their lives, depict the struggles taking place in their workplaces and communities and put forward their opinions about the prevailing political order through the medium of plays. For instance, in the words of one of the actors, Simon Ngubane, the play developed by striking Sarmcol workers in Mpophomeni (*The Long March*) had as its aim:

> to show the real struggle about what happened at Sarmcol. It makes a great difference if you see what's happening rather than just hear about it from other people. The play starts from when we began to organize inside the factory, then the strike, then how we organized in the community.[2]

Yet the price of cultural activism and change, like everything else in South Africa these days, is often high. Simon Ngubane, for one, was murdered by politically motivated assailants in 1986; a prominent COSATU activist, poet and actor, Alfred Temba Qabula, was forced to go into hiding during the ongoing UDF-Inkatha clashes in Natal after receiving death threats, and on one occasion a non-worker play about rent boycotts was attacked by vigilantes, its road manager killed and the costumes and props burnt.

Von Kotze's book traces the genesis and burgeoning of one of the most important constituent parts of this battle for working class culture: the theatre movement which arose out of the initiative of members of the trade union federation FOSATU (later COSATU) in its Natal region of operation. Beginning with its early, tentative steps as a means to build up support for union recognition at a conflict-torn Dunlop factory in 1983, the book traces the growth of trade union theatre and the changing concerns and increasing self-confidence of its participants. Important milestones along this road are documented: the decision after the success of the *Dunlop Play* that culture, indeed, was a vital means of operation for trade union members and not simply a useful occasional means of support for isolated union issues; the consequent formation of the Durban Workers' Cultural Local (DWCL) by a core group of cultural activists; the opening of the Clairwood Trade Union and Culture Centre in 1985, a venue which visibly provided an autonomous base and centre for trade union culture in its own rights; and a detailed examination of a number of plays either initiated or assisted by the DWCL and its support organization at Natal University, the Culture and Working Life Project, ending with the well-known and influential play by strikers from BTR Sarmcol, *The Long March*. The dynamism and responsiveness of cultural activists to political events in South Africa is also traced. For example, the formation of COSATU in 1985 seems to have gone hand in hand with a shift in theatrical concern from shopfloor-orientated to wider political issues, a radicalization sharpened by the declaration of a country-wide State of Emergency the same year.

As the black workers of South Africa live under conditions of extreme deprivation, the success and popularity this theatre has achieved in a relatively short space of time is striking. The actors usually have to perform in exceptionally crowded, improvised

conditions at union meetings and other gatherings, and the stage props they have to rely on are sometimes rudimentary in the extreme. Volunteers who have come forward to participate in these plays tend to come from a cultural background to which notions of 'theatre' — at least in its Western connotations — are alien. One reads again and again of actors whose previous performance experience before taking part in these plays was limited to sketches at school, participation in rural traditional oral forms, or other types of display such as boxing, soccer and gospel groups.

Trade union members are often not fully literate or proficient in English, and their resultant oral and vernacular predilections have allowed an immediate, wide-ranging response that not much other theatre in the country enjoys. Audience participation is desired and expected: in the singing of songs, the chanting of slogans and so on. At times the division between actors and audience is broken down by shrewd improvised means. Scabs on stage threaten to report the audience who boos them to the boss; or the audience is invited to submit demands for a fictional labour dispute taking place on stage.

The DWCL has relied on workshopping as a way of formulating and rehearsing plays, and Von Kotze goes into this process in some detail. She shows how a more democratic, flexible and representative product emerges from such a pooling of resources, skills and life experiences in making the plays. The book further points to the political, as well as the artistic, gains from this technique. A sense of unity, respect for collective procedures and a transformed understanding of the different experiences of oppression and their causes are some of the advantages the author notes. Moreover, this theatre is responsive and responsible to the views of its constituent trade union organizations. Often participants are elected to these plays by the trade union concerned. Shop-steward, union meeting and community responses and suggestions have shaped the ongoing additions and alterations that are made as the plays are performed over time.

Given the political profile of COSATU in South Africa at present, it comes as no surprise that this theatre is politically committed and takes up a combative anti-apartheid and pro-working class stance. Von Kotze isolates two main types of plays which have emerged over the first five years of the theatre movement. The first — which she calls 'plays for mobilization' — are propaganda tools used for publicizing areas of conflict, and are generally initiated by workers from within a workplace or factory to mobilize support for strike action or related campaigns such as consumer boycotts. The second type are 'educational

plays' which aim to deal with and facilitate discussions and debates, and widen understanding of working class or other issues. The concerns dealt with in this latter type of play are diverse, and include the disintegration of moral values caused by migrancy, the history and intertwinement of capitalism and apartheid in South Africa, the localized history of communities such as the now destroyed Mkhumbane (Cato Manor), generational conflict, the sexual exploitation of women and the problems caused by 'sell-outs' in the factories and right-wing vigilantes in the townships.

The gains of the cultural organization of workers have been many. 'Plays give a message to the people to think', notes Temba Qabula. Other activists point out that this theatre has helped forge links between workers and other township dwellers by reflecting worker concerns at home as well as in the factory. It has also strengthened worker unity and shown up divisions which do not assist the struggle for liberation, and has provided a platform for debate and a model of democratic, collective procedures of operation. Mi S'Dumo Hlatshwayo adds: 'We're talking about a whole new world with COSATU. It's our responsibility as cultural workers to broaden it. To extend it.' (p. 77)

The cultural activists here involved are aware that their world view has been downplayed in South African history. The need to begin creating the possibilities for workers to control their own creative power is an implicit theme throughout the book, as is the desire to put 'across a true picture of things — our picture' (p.65). It is interesting to note the overwhelming audience demand for realism in these plays: accuracy of presentation always, we are told, outweighs theatrical licence in evaluations by audiences. Thus, while various forms of stylization and symbolic and humorous depiction do occur (the appearance of a masked actor in a huge, grotesque likeness of Maggie Thatcher is one of the high points of *The Long March*), communication of working class experience and consciousness, and portrayal of the brutal realities of life for the vast majority of people in South Africa, is of paramount concern.

There are, however, a few weak areas to be found in this generally informative and fascinating work. While Von Kotze does touch on some of the problems that have accompanied the inception of this kind of theatre — in the productions and presentation of *The Long March*, for instance — a full discussion of problems this theatre (and, indeed, COSATU) have had in their attempts to forge a unified working class consciousness in the strife-torn regions of Natal still under Inkatha sway is rather lightly touched upon. The collapse of the KwaMashu Street Cleaners' Play, under the pressures of the divergent political

opinions of its members and worsening political situation, leaves the reader with several unanswered questions as to the extent of the political and ideological cleavages this theatre is faced with; as does the incident of the burning of *The Long March's* kombi in Soweto while on tour by a group of self-professed 'comrades'.

We are told early on that the book does not intend to take up the debate regarding 'working class culture' and 'popular culture' which has occurred spasmodically in various progressive and labour journals in South Africa over the past few years. There are seemingly good reasons for this, as we are told that *Organize and Act* must be seen as only an introduction to its subject matter. Nevertheless some of the consequences of this decision are to be regretted. There is no consistently precise overall sense as to what the boundaries of acceptability of working class definition and ideology might be, except in the most obvious sense of the division between the apartheid government and its allies on one side and the 'oppressed' on the other. This means in effect that the working class and its organizations blur too absolutely into the pan-class popular-democratic forces they are allied with at present, in the drive to end apartheid. The problematic areas of the interstices of racial, class, ethnic and gender identities consequently do not really begin to be explored in any useful manner. At times, attitudes which must appear controversial to any socialist are recorded uncritically in the course of the book (*vide* the ethnicist statement about Pondo-speakers on p. 57 and the patriarchal-incorporative message lurking behind at least one of the plays discussed (pp. 112-3)).

Furthermore, despite the disclaimer that 'there is no recipe for making plays' (p. 16), a strong identification of the author with certain practices and goals within the trade union movement becomes discernible as one reads. Again, this might not necessarily be a bad thing: but the practical and theoretical pros and cons of the 'true/false consciousness' discourse the book is implicitly steeped in need to be foregrounded and discussed. The early disclaimer does not fit very easily with the increasingly imperative and teleological tone of the book as a whole (cf., for instance, p.106).

Finally, Von Kotze describes herself as a 'participant observer' in some of the plays, and documents the interaction of militants from the unions with cultural activists such as herself who, from the springboard of extra-union and radical middle-class theatre groups, have become increasingly drawn into and identified with trade union culture. The commitment and inside insight she can therefore muster give this book a quality and interest that would probably be missing from a more distanced, academic study. I am less happy, however, with what seems to me a lack of critical

discussion of the exact (and shifting?) relationships between the cultural activists — even those who are shop stewards or strikers — and the class as a whole they speak for and to. The vision of a participatory and unified working class is ever present in the words of the cultural workers quoted in this book. Unfortunately, the complexities of interaction between self-conscious cultural purveyor and newly-elected actor or partly-conscientized community are sometimes blurred into a facile organic relationship as a result. This leads to one or two unconscious ironies, such as the rejoinder by actors in *The Long March* to advice from an audience that 'together as actors we decide not to change things without the advice of our organizers' (p. 97). This is coupled with a downplaying of the implications of the role of the core-group of activists within the DWCL in shaping the direction, form and ideology of many of the plays discussed here. Moreover, for some working class actors these plays seem to be perceived as in part an enabling device, allowing them to become more proficient in English or more 'professional' as actors (pp. 97-8). These gains are heartening, but there is no discussion of how such individual advancement accords with or contradicts the anti-specialist and anti-elitist thrust of this theatre as a whole. The book's lingering tendency to collapse activist into community (or, on a different level, performer into audience) is in my opinion too easily made.

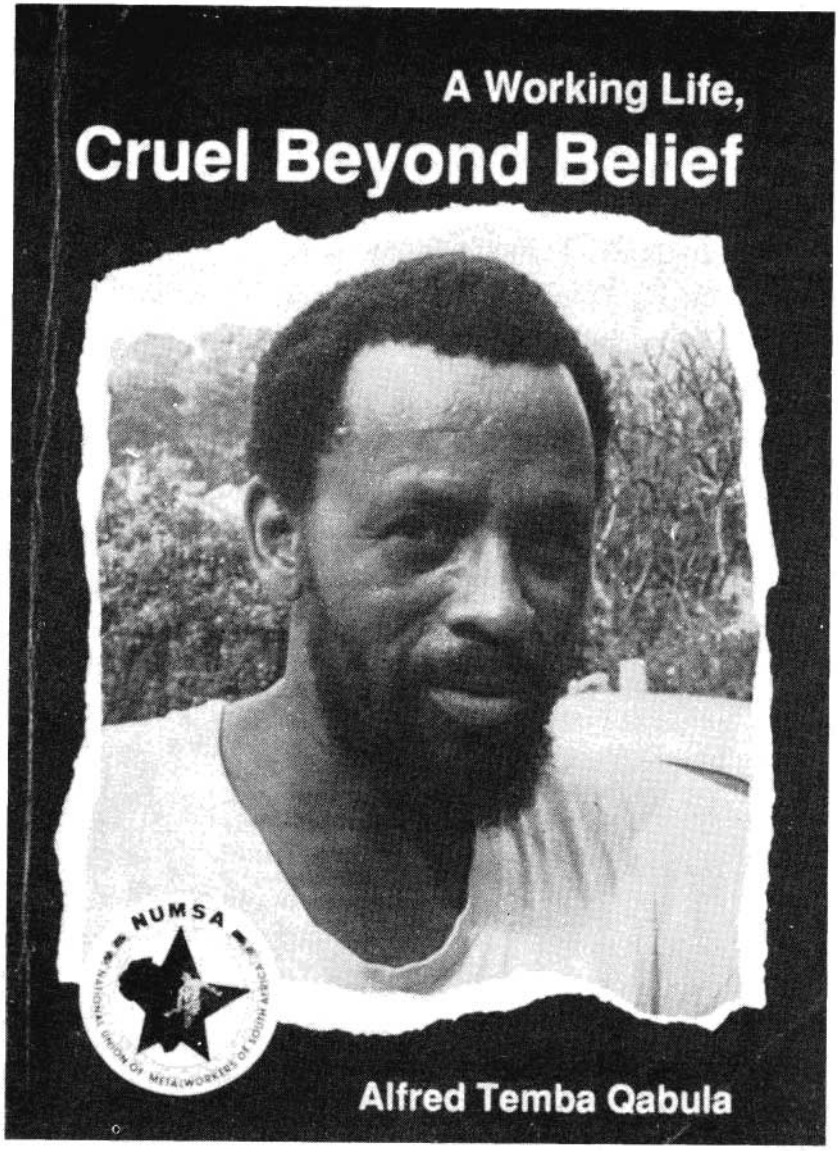
Nevertheless, this is a valuable book. Its author, and the tirelessly committed cultural workers she speaks of, are to be congratulated on their achievement. One comes away from *Organize and Act* with an overwhelming impression of the importance of what has been begun here. One of the members of the DWCL, Mi Hlatshwayo, has since been elected the first full-time cultural co-ordinator of COSATU, and has taken on the task of facilitating and consolidating culture on a national scale. Recognition that 'the struggle for cultural transformations must be central to the general struggle for liberation' (p. 78) seems to be forthcoming in progressive circles in South Africa now, in a way which must be satisfying and heartening for the activists who have been involved in this generative experience in Natal.

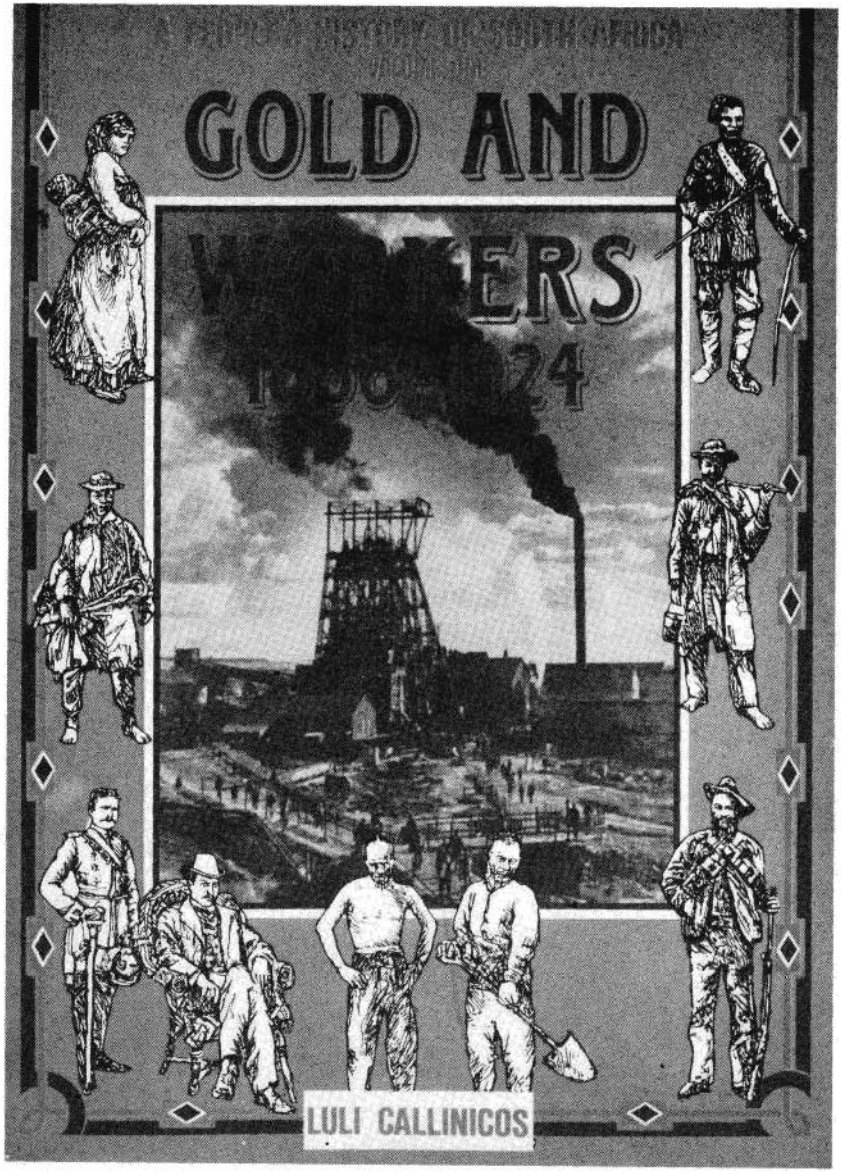
Kelwyn Sole

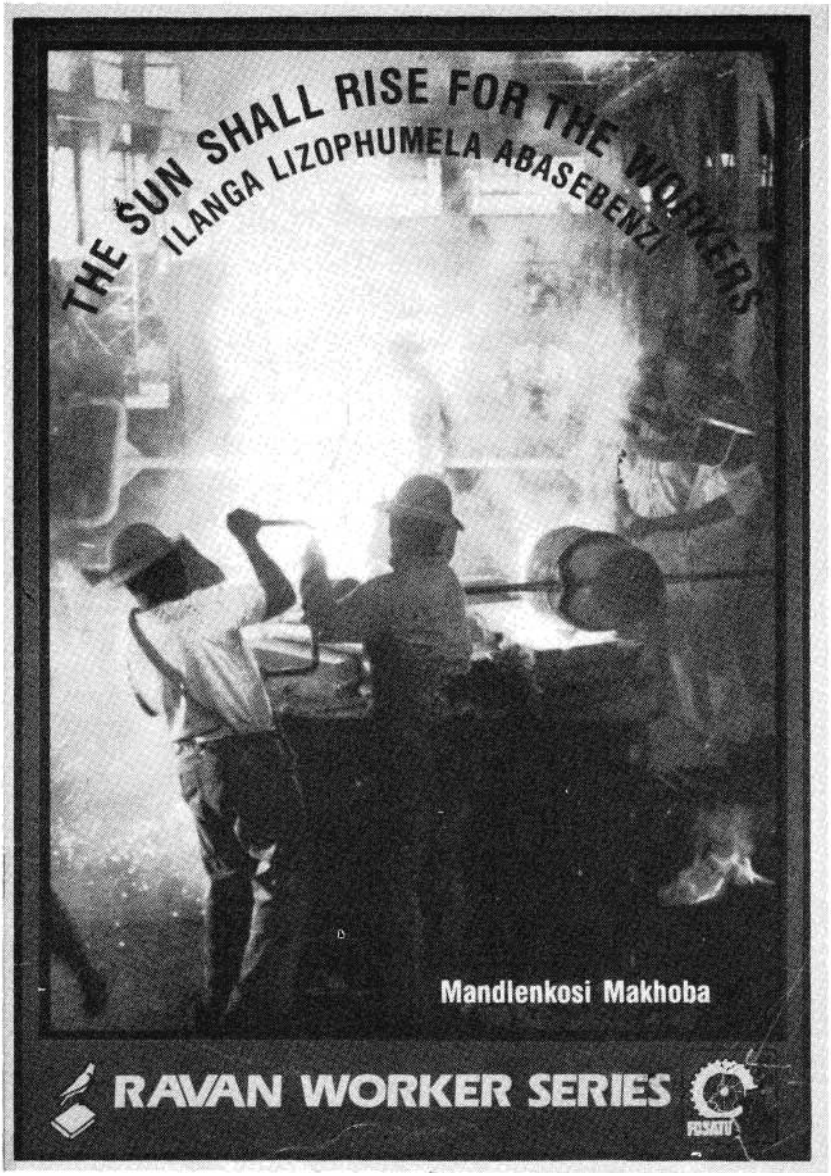
Notes:

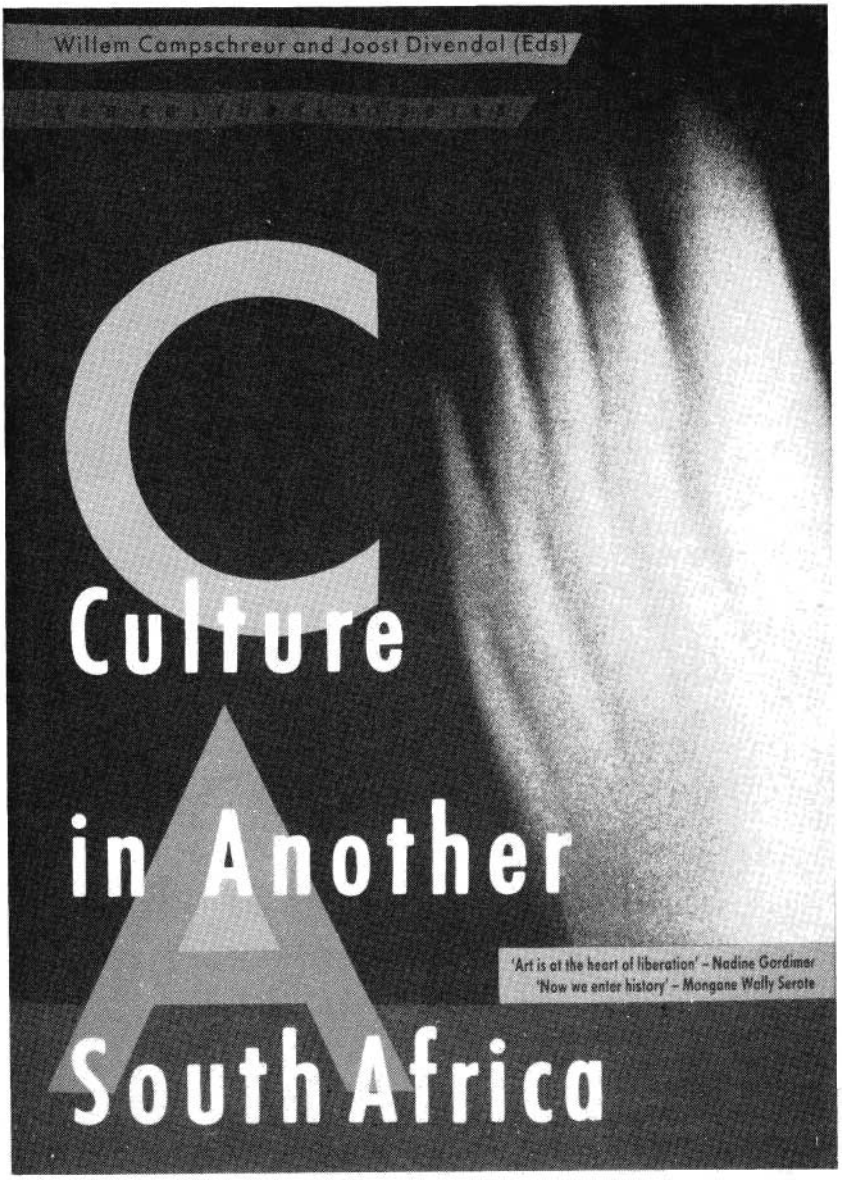
1. Mandlenkosi Makhoba *The Sun Shall Rise for the Workers* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press: 1984) p.1.
2. Pippa Green 'A Place to Work' *South African Labour Bulletin* (Johannesburg) 11.4.1986 p. 19.

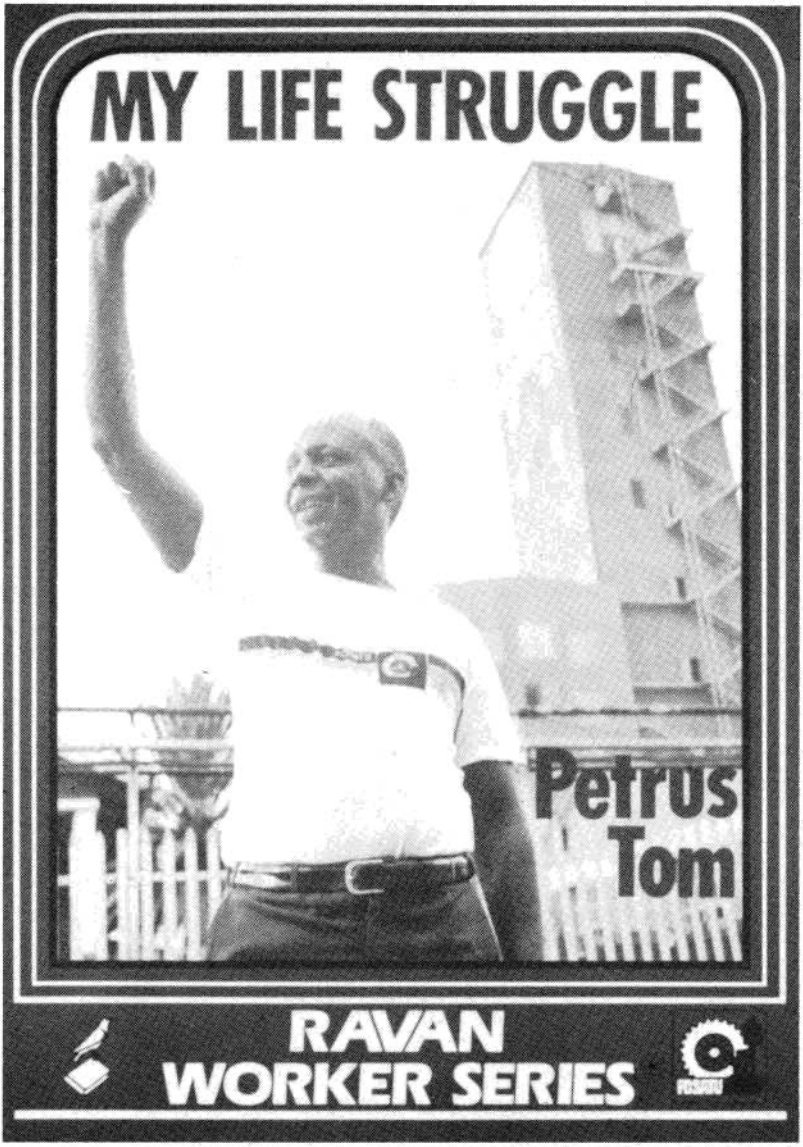

Volume Two
WORKING LIFE
Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand
1886-1940
WINNER
OF THE
NOMA AWARD
FOR PUBLISHING
IN AFRICA
Luli Callinicos

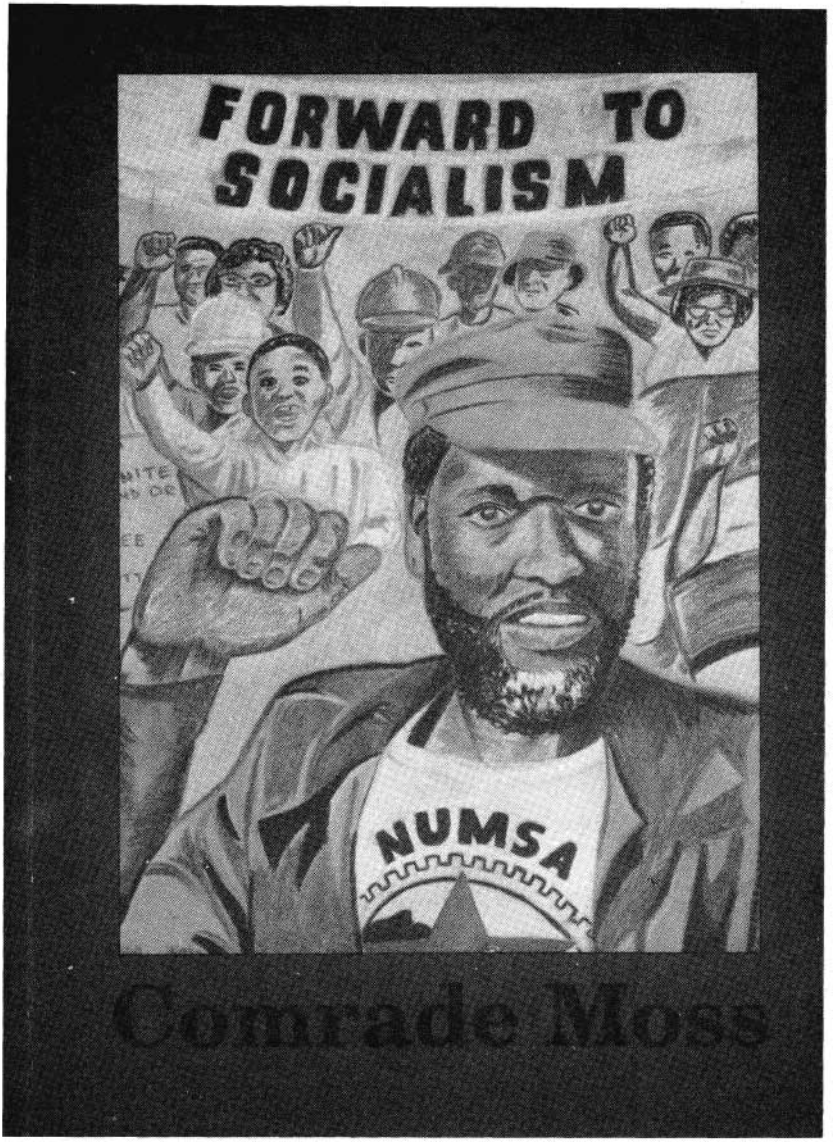

A Working Life,
Cruel Beyond Belief
NUMSA
NATIONAL UNION OF METALWORKERS OF SOUTH AFRICA
Alfred Temba Qabula

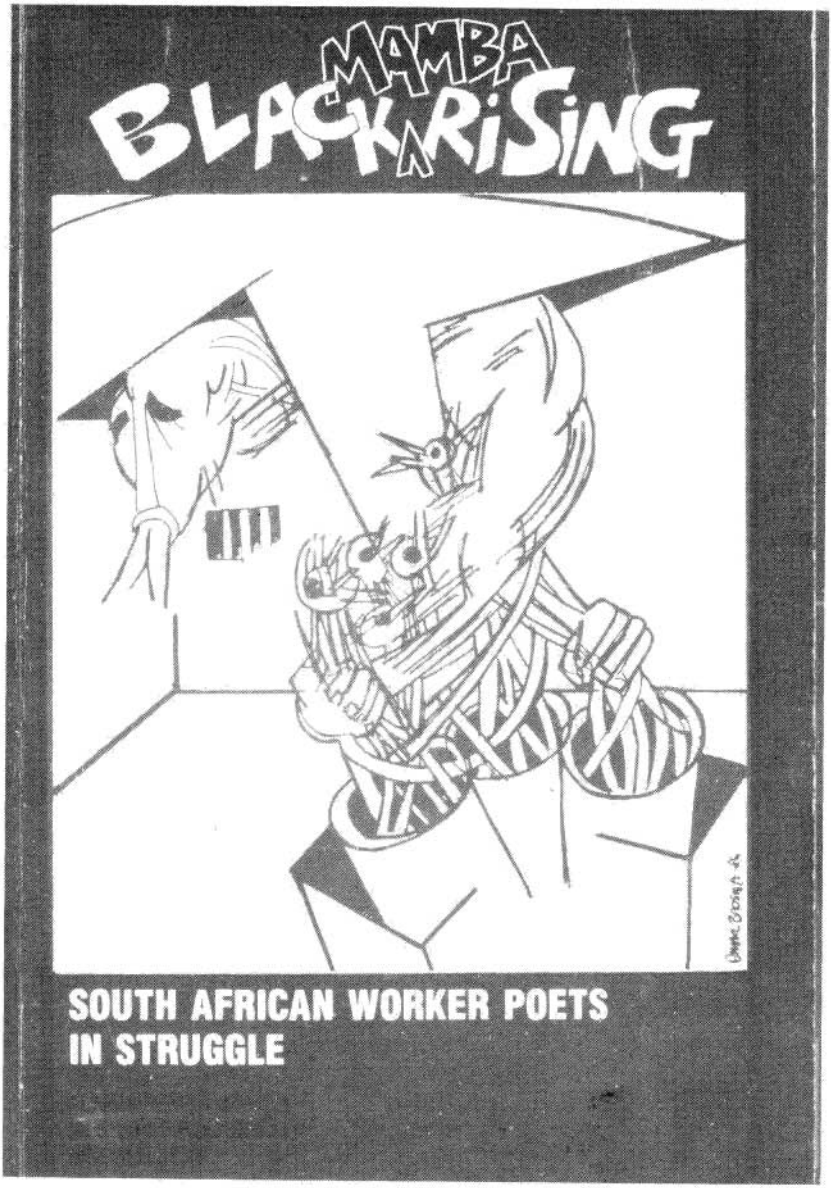

GOLD AND
LULI CALLINICOS


THE SUN SHALL RISE FOR THE WORKERS
ILANGA LIZOPHUMELA ABASEBENZI
Mandlenkosi Makhoba
RAVAN WORKER SERIES
FOSATU


Willem Campschreur and Joost Divendal (Eds)
Culture in Another South Africa
'Art is at the heart of liberation' – Nadine Gordimer
'Now we enter history' – Mongane Wally Serote

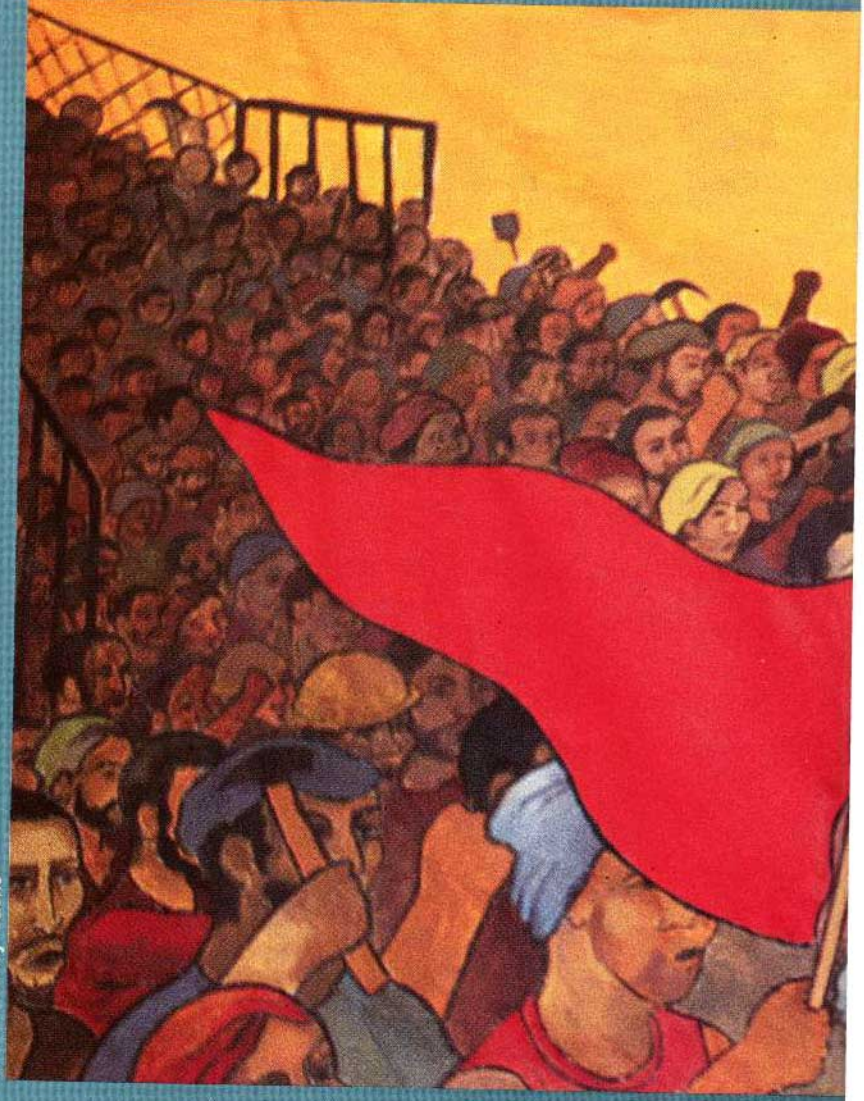

MY LIFE STRUGGLE
Petrus Tom
RAVAN
WORKER SERIES


FORWARD TO SOCIALISM
NUMSA
Comrade Moss


MAMBA
BLACK RISING
SOUTH AFRICAN WORKER POETS
IN STRUGGLE

This special edition is devoted to the reeent growth of workers' culture i the labour movement. By means of essays and interviews the history, nature and aims of workers' culture are examined. Its relationship to popula culture and the movement to establish a people's culture comes under the spotlight. The material, class, political and aesthetic challenges and problems that shape this culture are brought to the fore.

Recent work by poets, story writers, drama groups, photographers and biographers appears in this edition edited by Mi Hlatshwayo, the national cultural co-ordinator of the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and Frank Meintjies, a former publicity officer of the same labour federation.



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