

# Southern Africa REPORT

Vol. 4 No. 1

July 1988

## Culture & Struggle in South Africa



### SOUTH AFRICA

100 ARTISTS  
AGAINST  
DETENTION

LITERATURE  
BEYOND  
THE PLATITUDES

PLAYS  
OF WORKING  
LIFE

THE BLACK  
MAMBA  
RISES

### MOZAMBIQUE

A CROWDED  
CANVAS

### W O M E N

REPORT ON THE  
NATIONAL WORKSHOP

### D E B A T E

PRIORITIZING  
SANCTIONS

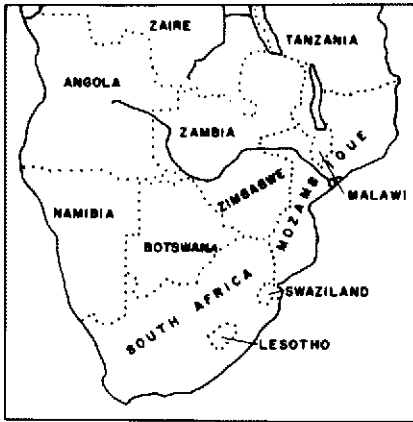
### S A N C T I O N S

THE ACADEMIC  
BOYCOTT  
KINGSTON, 1988

price: \$3.00

# Southern Africa REPORT

AF 154  
L320968  
S7272  
V. 4-5  
Vol. 4 No. 1  
July 1988



## Southern Africa REPORT

is produced 5 times a year by a volunteer collective of the Toronto Committee for the Liberation of Southern Africa (TCLSAC),

427 Bloor St. W.  
Toronto, M5S 1X7  
Tel. (416) 967-5562

Submissions, suggestions and help with production are welcome and invited.

SAR is a member of the Canadian Periodical Publisher's Association.

## Subscriptions

Annual TCLSAC membership and Southern Africa Report subscription rates are as follows:

### SUBSCRIPTION:

Individual (1 year) . . . \$15.00  
Individual (2 years) . . . \$30.00  
Institution . . . \$30.00

### MEMBERSHIP: (includes subscription)

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Student . . . \$15.00  
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Sustainer . . . to \$300.00

Overseas add \$5.00

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*COVER: Basil Coetzee, member of the Cape Town band Sabenza, playing at the CASA conference*

We would like to thank CUSO for the grant which made possible this culture issue of Southern Africa REPORT.

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Dave Hartman

On the Canadian front, Toronto's South African cultural group, Siyakha [we are building], commemorates June 16th with the cast of Bopha and Sophiatown

## The New Cultural Offensive

There have been small tastes of the proliferation and vitality of progressive cultural expression in and about South Africa here in Canada in recent years. And we're not talking about the cultish "Graceland" album or grand-scale movies such as "Cry Freedom" and "A World Apart" (although the exposure provided by, and the educative power of, such mass market depictions of the situation in South Africa are items which do warrant further critical consideration). We're referring rather to the rash of South African plays seen in Canada's larger cities, many of them, such as "Bopha!" and "Sophiatown", produced under the auspices of Johannesburg's Market Theatre; to the more modest

films and videos that find audiences at commemorative meetings and the occasional film festival, such as the video "Still on Strike" which highlights the SARMCOL workers' play, "The Long March"; to the political poster and photography exhibitions that have circulated across this country. Yet even these examples have merely hinted at the way in which community theatre, poetry, writing, poster-art and dance have become, as expressions of political resistance and as affirmations of the culture of the oppressed people in South Africa, not only integral to the current moment of liberation struggle in South Africa but actually make up its very texture.

This is not to deny the impact

of the state-imposed Emergency on the production of such a progressive culture. The very centrality and power of this latter has made inevitable attempts to repress it on the part of the South African government. A recent article in the *Weekly Mail* ("State vs Stage: Stoffel's New War," June 3, 1988), captures something of this reality: "There are those who are sceptical about the potential political effects of art and culture in South Africa. Minister of Home Affairs Stoffel Botha is not one of them. 'After certain theatrical performances', he recently told the house of representatives, 'the audience is so emotionally charged that they will not calm down before everything in the vicinity, from build-

ings to cars and even other people have been attacked.' The claim is extreme. Yet even if the vision of marauding bands of Market Theatre patrons may be cause for mirth, the minister's pronouncement is indicative of a new and ominous level of government concern about the 'subversive' power of the arts." Indeed many cultural activists already have been silenced; cultural events and products have been forbidden; and the banning of mass meetings has removed an important site of popular cultural dissemination which emphasizes performance and collective and interactive consumption.

Nor are we suggesting that the current upsurge of anti-apartheid cultural expression is an entirely new phenomenon. After the silence of the 1960s, it was the Black Consciousness Movement that fostered a creative burst of protest culture and this has continued through the 1970s and into the 1980s. But what distinguishes the current period is an important refining and reformulating of a number of the central issues and objectives in what is now widely referred to as the "cultural struggle." Of course, such debates and redefinitions in the cultural sphere reflect developments in the broader context of the liberation struggle, both organizationally (the formation of the mass-based UDF, the consolidation of the workers' movement under COSATU, the strengthening of the ANC) and ideologically (the distinctive shift in objective that is most often characterized as being a move "from Protest to Challenge"). The task today is the creation of an ever more assertive and self-confident "People's Culture", a broad, democratic culture that, through a variety of cultural forms and disciplines, gives voice to and creates a basis for unity among the different groups and communities that make up the progressive movement.

CASA, the Culture for Another South Africa Conference and Festival held in Amsterdam at the end

of last year, was clearly an important moment in this cultural struggle. Bringing together a wide range of South African cultural workers from within and without the country, CASA provided an opportunity for sharing and debating positions on both general and very specific issues and for linking together cultural workers from within the liberation movement and the democratic organizations. An earlier article on CASA in *Southern Africa REPORT* (vol. 3, no. 4) sought to convey to our readers something of the consolidation of a significant role for culture within the South African struggle which that conference exemplified. The articles in the current issue seek to carry our coverage of these matters further, even if they can broach only a few of the themes which inform the rich dialogue being carried on in South African cultural circles over the past few years. Moreover, we have tried to complement this analytical and descriptive material with just enough examples of contemporary South African cultural expression - both visual and verbal - to help readers begin to experience the reality of contemporary South African cultural creativity for themselves.

\* \* \*

The UDF and COSATU both have cultural desks, the ANC has a Department of Culture. Now, too, there is the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), a grouping referred to at CASA as being a kind of model for the organization of other cultural workers. Its formation is discussed in this issue in an interview with South African writer and activist Achmat Dangor, who also takes up, more generally, the whole question of the organization of cultural workers under the umbrella of the broad democratic movement. As Dangor shows, this project is not free of contradictions and deeply problematic issues. One of these, put crudely, is the possible tension between "artistic freedom" and "toeing the party

line." Dangor's comment on this was absolutely unequivocal: "Literature should not be a mirroring of your own ideology. That is a recipe for Stalinism"

Indeed, he bemoaned what he sees to be some tendency towards cultural intolerance at the present moment, the creation of a situation which can find writers politically polarized, tailoring their writing to satisfy a particular constituency. Dangor is not alone in the rejection of a "hack" culture. At CASA there was a strong condemnation of mere cultural sloganeering. Cultural expressions, it is being argued by Dangor and his peers, should not be designed to force a line down people's throats, but should represent the complexity and contradictions of people's lived experience in ways that promote reflection and debate. As South African critic Njabulo S. Ndebele has put a similar point: "The matter is simple: there is a difference between art that 'sells' ideas to the people, and art whose ideas are embraced by the people because they have been made to understand them through the evocation of lived experience in all its complexities." A related issue, all agree, is that of the link between artistic standards and "correct" politics. Should a cultural product be endorsed regardless of the quality of its craft, just because it appeals to a popular anti-apartheid sentiment? In this connection a number of South African cultural critics have condemned the patronizing adulation that some very poor products have received overseas!

But what of the democratization of culture, and the whole question of its class content? Several articles in this issue exemplify the development of cultural forms that do not rely on high rates of literacy, and also draw attention to the growing significance of a distinctively working-class culture in South Africa. Amongst workers, for example, there is developing a brand of oral poetry that draws on traditional

forms with which migrant workers are familiar, as well as a drama-form that is participatory in both its production and its performance. At the same time, the validation of non-literate forms of culture are not seen as justifying any downplaying of the importance of developing useful literary skills. A related debate arising in the context of a preoccupation with the democratization of culture is that around the question of language: what weight to give, in matters of cultural production, to English, to the various African languages, to Afrikaans (not merely the language of the Afrikaners but also of a substantial percentage of the black population in the western Cape)? Should there be one central language to unite the future South Africa as in the Portuguese-speaking ex-colonies, or should a multi-lingual situation prevail?

In this regard, the overview of Mozambican culture provided by Albie Sachs in this issue addresses, at least implicitly, the question of the role of culture in providing a basis for political unity in a post-liberation society. Just as this was a hotly debated issue in Mozambique before and after the achievement of independence, so it is today in South Africa. How to create a unitary "people's culture" that accommodates, embraces and validates the multiplicity of cultural traditions, forms and languages in South Africa — while simultaneously drawing out their full progressive potential? In his discussions with SAR, Dangor emphasized the complexity of the project of renewed cultural creativity on this and other fronts. But he also emphasized, over and over again, its crucial importance. He ar-

gued that the political victory which will bring an end to the apartheid regime will be both superficial and unstable unless there is a concomitant "cultural revolution", a cultural revolution not in the accelerated Maoist sense but in the sense of laying a firm cultural basis for the new political order. Unity amidst diversity, popular empowerment wedded to artistic integrity: such, he believes, will be the cultural components of the new South Africa.

\* \* \*  
Some field reports from the front-line of cultural struggle in

seen) a "definable, alternative democratic culture — a people's culture that gives expression to the aspirations of our people in struggle", said Wally Serote, ANC cultural representative in London at the time. A resolution of the UDF soon thereafter reflected a similar position but went further to outline criteria for selection. The essential premise: that cultural tours both to and from South Africa would be exempt from the boycott if they are supported by the democratic movement and "contribute to the advancement of the national democratic struggle and the building of a future South Africa."

In short, the basic principle of the continuing boycott (a principle which was also reaffirmed at CASA) is to intensify the isolation and undermining of apartheid culture while, at the same time, supporting and promoting the development of a progressive, democratic culture. Needless to say, this new flexibility by no means resolves the question of how the boycott is to be effected, and, indeed, adds a few new complexities to the matter. We hope, in future issues of SAR, to return to some



Alberto Mourato

Southern Africa: this is the main thrust of our current issue. But, of course, such struggles are not merely taking place so many miles away from Canada. For they are brought home to us most directly around the issue of the cultural boycott. The international debate on this issue was thrown open in a new way by Oliver Tambo in mid-1987 when, in the Canon Collins Memorial Lecture, he signalled an ANC reassessment of its previous blanket boycott position and the favouring of a selective and more flexible boycott. This shift in position was prompted by the development of (as we have

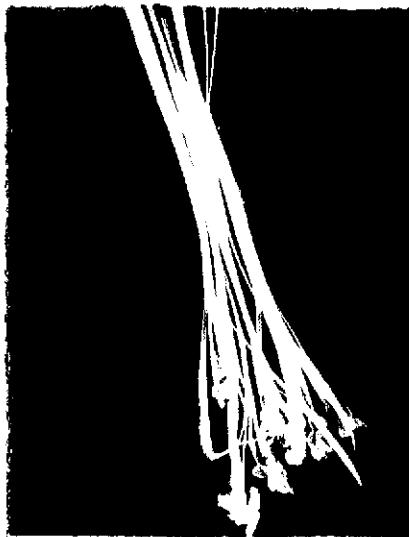
of these complexities for further discussion. In this issue readers must be satisfied with approaching them by indirection, through an exploration, in one of our articles, of some closely related considerations which have sprung up in Canada, around the question of the academic boycott. One thing, at least, this latter article does make clear: that the novel dimensions of the developing struggle in South Africa require as much hard thinking and as creative a response from the anti-apartheid forces in western countries as they do from those struggling on the ground inside South Africa.

# 100 Artists Against Detention

The following reflections of artists and organizers who participated in the exhibition were collected by Gail Behrmann.

The Detainees Parents Support Committee (DPSC) Exhibition, 100 Artists Protest Detention, was conceived in May 1987. Initially an invitation was extended to about 20 artists with an idea of producing a calendar at the end of it. The idea grew and developed over the following months to include the work of 100 artists to be shown over six weeks at the Market Gallery in Johannesburg.

The DPSC had expressed a wish for an educative exhibition about detention and repression, which called for realism. But as art is the texture of human emotions and experience, this applies to realism and the abstract. With this in mind, we simply broadened the parameter, and asked artists to depict detention and repression in any form, in any media. Thus a reservoir of artists, and different art forms, made up the exhibition. A theme, which at first appeared to be restrictive on one's cre-



Mark Wilby

**Detention Without Trial  
100 Artists Protest**

**31 JAN - 5 MARCH 1988**

*Andrew Verster, Untitled (1987)*

ativity, became a means of extending oneself.

Criticism was levelled at the relative lack of participation by black artists. It should be remembered

that life in the townships, and the pressure exerted on people who do make a stand, is heavy. The price to pay might not be worth the act of some heroic stand. Many people actually admitted fear, others were not prepared to associate with a UDF affiliate, and still more were tired of being called on to give. The notice period for artists was also very short. However, the general appreciation of the exhibition was heartening. The diverse political affiliations within the art world, might have given rise to an unspoken mistrust, part of which was certainly broken by the emotion elicited from an exhibition which genuinely displayed the magic conjured by the human spirit.

Making art is a process, and so is social and political change. It was the intention of the DPSC to educate and conscientize through the medium of fine art, and the organisation deserves credit for providing the nucleus which motivated artists to such eloquence.

**GAIL BEHRMANN** - Artist, DPSC worker, co-organizer.

The Detainees Parents Support Committee was founded in September 1981. It was a coming together of families and friends of people who were detained and was non-racial from its inception.

In the beginning the focus was to improve conditions for detainees who have no rights. The right to visits, lawyers, access to prison libraries and study is automatic for criminals but not for detainees.

Profiles of detainees were circulated, protest stands were mounted, and public meetings were held.

Very soon released detainees found their way to the Committee and details of torture and assault were documented. In 1982 a Mem-

orandum on Torture was taken to the Government and released to the press. This was the first time such a document had been written.

The parameters of the Committee widened as members became aware that detention could not be seen in isolation but rather as part of the system of maintaining power in an apartheid society. The Committee therefore became far more outspoken in their criticism of government policy. It began monitoring repression and detention and through monthly reports and frequent press statements exposed repression in the country.

In 1983 DPSC affiliated to the United Democratic Front, thus com-

mitting itself to the idea of universal franchise in a non-racial, unitary state.

From its advice offices operating in all the major centres and in several small towns, it worked very closely with lawyers, instructing them to act on behalf of detainees. It referred ex-detainees to a medical and counselling panel in the belief that all people released from detention need immediate care.

On 24 February 1988, the DPSC was one of the 17 organizations restricted from participating in "any actions whatsoever"

**AUDREY COLEMAN** - Founder DPSC member

Andrew Bannister



Penny Siopis, "Flesh and Blood" (1987), Collage & pastel on paper

It is ironic that in South Africa it is not easy to make credible 'political art' – art which protests against the oppressive regime. It is not easy because such efforts so often seem expedient and superficial – after all what does an artist in my position know of suffering that is largely hidden from my view, not part of my direct daily experience? How can one make 'aesthetic' objects that seem only to lift and exhibit the 'look' of that suffering? Yet one feels the need, of course, to use ones skills to illuminate the problems, the violence, to express the particular pain, not just the general pain of 'the human condition'.

I welcomed the DPSC show. I was glad to be given an opportunity to protest and the licence to make a specific work which is a clearer statement of resistance, of protest, than might usually be the case – clearer largely by virtue of the context of the exhibition. I found that no radical adjustment of my usual concerns in image-making was needed. This play of continuity of context heartens me. On seeing the exhibition I enjoyed the fact that other artists appeared to have enjoyed similar feelings to my own.

PENNY SIOPIS – Lecturer in Fine Arts, Artist

I think the DPSC exhibition contains many important lessons. It offered a rare opportunity for a broadly based collective expression of a particularly pointed message.

That it happened at all is a testament to the energy, good faith, courage and sheer determination of those who range themselves against the human obscenity we call apartheid. Such a collective effort is all the more remarkable for arising out of a community that, while joined by a general desire to see the end of racism and all it means, is itself bedeviled by almost intractable internal conflicts. This gives one hope.

One of the more conspicuous virtues of the show is that while the binding concern was "Detention", collectives and individuals were left to find their own ways to the "theme". We see images both critical and affirmative, deadpan and ironical, direct and allusive. Humour as a weapon was not ignored, taking its place beside the lyrical and the savage. This refreshing openness certainly gives a lie to those wardens of especially high culture who habitually charge "political" cultural production as mechanically "propagandistic", something which apparently robs it of any artistic merit. With no prescriptions or

proscriptions of either form or content there was no hint of the petty Stalinism they are so fond of painting into any picture involving openly collective, political affairs. It also reflects the variety of ordinary and extraordinary ways of registering both resistance and affirmation, criticism and solidarity. It also showed that many accept the unavoidable relation between art and politics, and reject the option of remaining isolated and aloof from the larger experience of the community. It shows that ordinary experiences in an extraordinary historical situation can still be shared. And that sharing can take multiple forms. Activists and



Charlotte Schaefer

Themba Modise, "The Man Who Arrested the Family" (1987/1988), Ceramic sculpture

cultural workers in sectors of society that do not always communicate have been given the opportunity of a new perception of each other. Without overrating the potency of these pointed demonstrations, the travails of the show after its opening provide an insight into its potential – a potential which threatens the ease with which those currently in power abuse that power.

**COLIN RICHARDS** – Lecturer in Fine Arts, Artist

It is generally accepted that beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of a society are reflected in its visual arts. In South African society there is an added dimension; that is the inter-relationship between politics and ev-

ery single facet of life. The oppression and suppression of human and political rights has a pervading influence on the every-day lives of all people, regardless of colour.

It is therefore symptomatic that this extends to other divisions, both political and cultural. There is still a very strong division in the visual arts between different perceptions of so-called "black art" produced in South Africa today.

Many art historians, critics, museum curators and gallery owners still differentiate between the skin colour of the producer of art and the art itself. In this exhibition, race, colour, sex and ethnicity were not considered in the selection process so that it was the rich visual communi-

cation of the abhorrence of the facts of detention that made this exhibition so valuable.

One Hundred Artists Protest Detention was important too, because there were one hundred people who, during the State of Emergency, were prepared to declare their views in an open, public forum irrespective of the possible repercussions. Given the political climate, this feeling that visual images could be used as a site of meaning, is particularly relevant.

In art historical terms it was interesting to see the various media; two-dimensional works ranged from oils to photographs and cartoons. The sculpture included bronze, wood, metal relief and ceramics. The mode in which the sub-



ject matter was portrayed presented a wide range of stylistic and iconographic elements. The result of all this was a most exciting and satisfying exhibition that deserved the high praise it received in both the art and anti-apartheid worlds.

**BARBARA I. BUNTMAN, BA** – MA student in History of Art, National executive member of Women for Peace and Vice-Chairperson of the Five Freedoms Forum in Johannesburg.

I have been in detention – not for long compared to many other people – but long enough to have a personal understanding of what detention means. It throws you back inward on yourself, and no one but yourself can sustain you. The manner in which the police and your jailers treat you makes you realise that you are seen as a creature apart, a social outcast, in their eyes. While I was inside, one of the memories that strengthened me was remembering all the other detainees, especially the children, that I had had contact with after their release. I had taken photographs of them, I had heard their stories, I had seen the injuries that could be seen visibly and had tried to feel some of the injuries that remained inside. Those memories gave me the strength to sustain myself during my isolation.

My contribution to the exhibition was a photograph of a boy who had been so determinedly beaten by the police, in one of the “homelands”, that both his arms were broken and he carried scars across his body from a sjambok ( a whip). The exhibition gave me and him a chance to show a wider audience the horror and the courage that detention combines. Detention is a way of life in South Africa which touches the lives of many thousands, it needs to be seen, brought into the open for those apart from it to understand what is being done in their name. The exhibition gave an insight into detention for those who were willing to look.

**GILL DE VLIET** – Photographer



Charlotte Schaefer

*Ilona Anderson (1987),  
Triptych-Acrylic on Fibre,  
Central panel*

The Nationalist government came to power in the year of my birth. It seems to me that my whole life has been lived in a very arid place.

As a white person, in a city like Johannesburg, one lives in this dry place sometimes touching the wonderful undercurrent of exuberant township life, but mostly feeling just the guilt and the burden and the rage. So little one does seem to change anything.

I am very much aware that as a white it is the tangible horror and not the brutal reality of this awful situation that one is experiencing. The pressure mounts, and one's political paintings are expected to become more explicit, and nothing changes except the pressure and the laws which are increasingly oppressive.

With this sense of burden I began my painting for the DPSC show. How does one express the outrage and horror one feels about detention without trial?

I began my powerfully expressive work around the central theme of the Pieta, to recall for people the universality of our relationship to our sons and our fathers – to awaken in them the real pain of this situation. Flanking the poignant image of a mother cradling her dead or dying son, are two heads of detainees undergoing torture. These somber images of men with wet sacks over their heads, and handcuffed arms, express the brooding horror of our society.

**ILONA ANDERSON** – Artist

**STATE RESPONSE TO THE 100 ARTISTS**

*Editors' note:* From the time the 7000 invitations to the '100 Artists Against Detentions' were sent out the organizers began to receive calls. Some were fearfully asking their names to be taken off the mailing list; others represented state instigated harassment. On January 24th, Sicelo Dlomo was murdered. As a DPSC worker and a person integrally connected to the realization of the exhibition, his death was a severe blow and not seen as unconnected to this work. The exhibition was dedicated to him. The show was duly visited by the security police and a photographer recorded all the work.

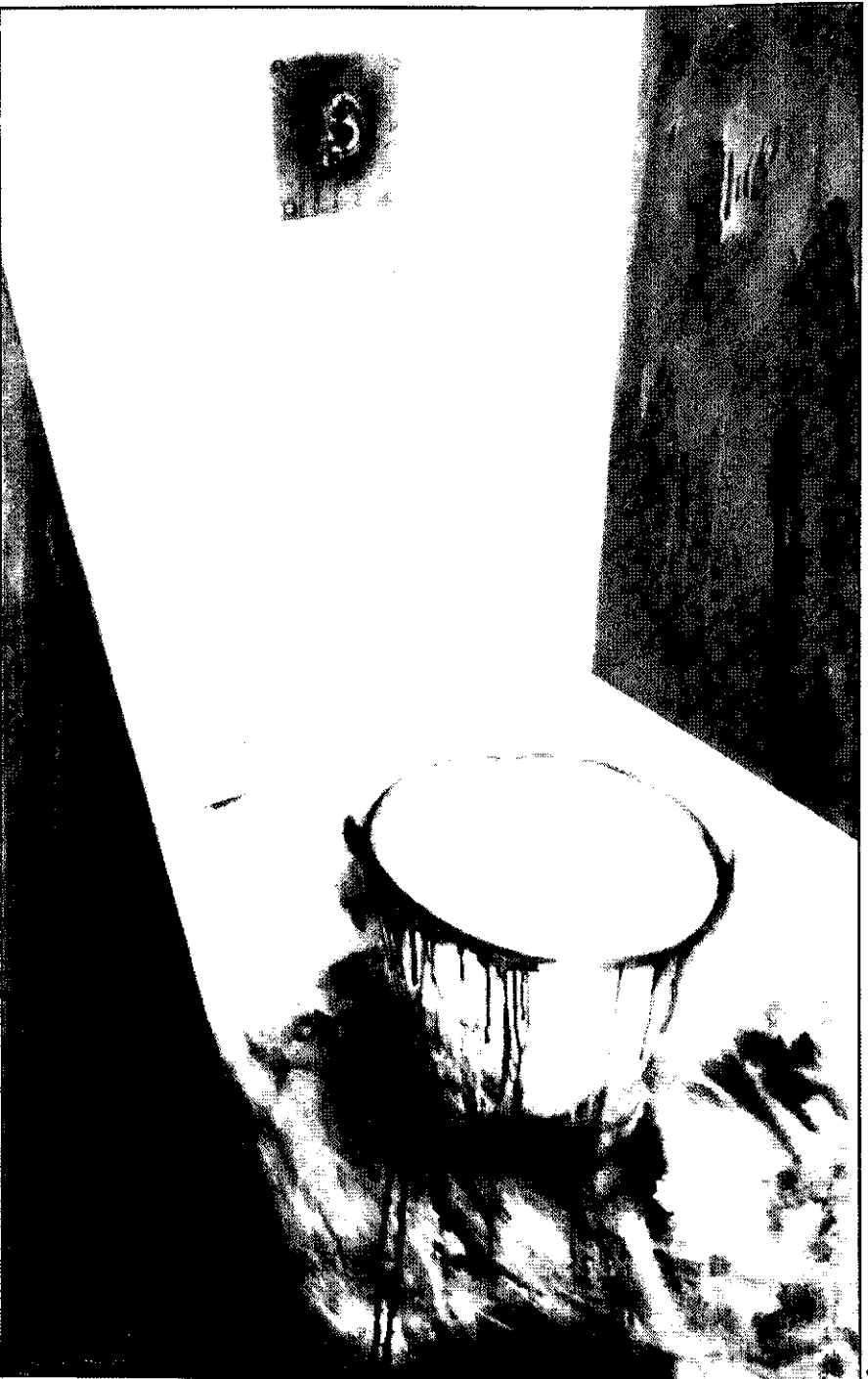
On January 24, when DPSC was restricted along with 17 other organizations, it was decided that in order to allow the show to continue and to protect the work, all references to the DPSC should be removed and the artists gave permission for it to continue as a group show under the auspices of the Market Gallery in Johannesburg where it was hanging.

This did not stop the interest of the police however, and they continued to try and prove that it was still a DPSC exhibition and therefore 'an activity' forbidden under the new restrictions.

The harassment stepped up. A subpoena was issued to a staff person at the gallery under the ploy that the police were investigating the gallery under the restrictions. In fact, this was illegal as the gallery had never been listed as restricted.

Towards the end of the run the gallery was pushed into a state of panic, frantically trying to distance itself from the DPSC. The curator of the show, originally hired by the DPSC, was 'banned' from the premises.

These events give an indication of the lengths to which the state will go to prevent artists expressing their political concerns or reaching out to



*Judith Mason Attwood, Untitled, (1987), Oil on canvas*

a wider [mainly white] constituency. Also, sadly, it shows how effectively the state could confuse, manipulate

and frighten even those originally sympathetic to the concept of the project.

Mark Wilby

# Literature Beyond the Platitudes: An Interview with Achmat Dangor

*Achmat Dangor, South African writer, chairman of the Transvaal branch of the Congress of South African Writers and member of the cultural desk of the now restricted UDF, was in Toronto recently. Within the context of a wide-ranging discussion with members of the Southern Africa REPORT collective, he spoke about the formation of the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) and about the conditions of writing in South Africa at this time.*

The Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) was launched nationally in Johannesburg in July of 1987. Coalescing in its formation were a number of important developments in the political thinking and debate amongst progressive South African writers and cultural activists. Dangor discussed the most central of these.

## **Beyond literature of protest ...**

"The seed for the launching of COSAW" according to Dangor, "was the growing recognition amongst writers during the 1980s of the limitations and stagnation of the protest literature inherited from the 1970s. That literature, the product of Black Consciousness, was vibrant and creative, voicing our protest through poetry, plays. Some of it good, some of it bad. The importance of that era was that it did give an impetus to South African literature that carried into the 1980s. But now we had to look at it in a different light. Protest literature had not gone much beyond protest. It was not enough to have a culture of protest, of standing up and saying we protest against all the intellectual, cultural and physical atrocities that apartheid has imposed upon us. Apartheid was the only beacon of our literary horizons. We were actually allowing the state



*Achmat Dangor*

Dave Hartman

and the repressions of the apartheid system to create the circumstances within which we were functioning, to prescribe to us what we wrote about. We were not able to go beyond merely describing the agony of our people. We could so easily create a literature that was critical of apartheid but we did not write about what we stood for, what our aspirations were and what kind of culture we wanted to create. So much of our writing did not illuminate the struggle of the people, only highlighted their agony."

The theme of the conference which launched COSAW was "Literature beyond the platitudes" and the opening address, given by the important writer-critic Njabulo Ndebele spoke "against pamphleteering the future." The critique of protest literature and the quest to create a literature that was more constructive and prospective has, according to Dangor, been of major significance in progressive South African literature in recent years.

#### The political role of writers

The impetus for forming a writers' organization came also from a critical reassessment and redefinition of the role of intellectuals, artists and writers in the liberation struggle. "A number of writers came to see that the romanticized and privileged role of artists and writers in the political struggle was in complete contradiction to our belief that we are organically linked to the struggle, are integral to it and should not distance ourselves from it in 'an intellectual way'. In fact, historically, individual South African writers have often made important contributions - Alex la Guma, for example, who eventually died in exile in Cuba where he had been ANC representative, and Wally Serote, now in London.

"But what happened in the '70s with the bannings of the political organizations and the destruction of the last forms of opposition in the country, intellectuals found themselves inheriting the mantle of lead-



Dave Hartman

*Mzwakhe Mbuli, oral poet, detained since January 1988*

ership. They unfortunately took that to be their natural right after that. They felt that they could direct the political struggle from the ivory towers of universities and by writing books that merely examined the struggles of people without themselves becoming integrally involved at a very basic level.

"Intellectuals were remaining aloof at the time when grassroots communities were struggling to create for themselves political structures that could adequately represent them and advance their struggle. There were various writers and cultural groups that met to discuss these questions. But we always seemed to end with a kind of intellectual impotence. We would articulate the suffering of our people, but were unable to go beyond that.

"A group of us got together in 1982, which included a wider

cross-section of political viewpoints compared to the political organizations. It included people like Nadine Gordimer, Don Mattera, Farouk Assvat, Essop Patel, amongst others, people who did not find a home in the existing writers' organizations. There was the African Writers' Association, for instance, a legacy of the era of Black Consciousness, but it did not provide the basis of appeal for such a broad spectrum of our writers. So we formed the Writers' Forum, which was just that, a forum for writers, not a formal organization. What began to occur through the forum was the exposure of the latent issues. One of the things we grappled with was the role of the writer - the age-old story and we discussed it to death.

"What emerged from those many consultations and conferences was a definition of writers as cultural

workers. And the first Writers' Forum defined cultural workers as an integral force in the struggle of the oppressed people. Writers, cultural workers, did have special skills but all those skills should be used to serve the community. Many people saw this as an attempt to impose a social and political order on writers and their creativity. But that was not true. Writers had then and have now the freedom to write whatever they want to – and I hope they will have it in the future as well. The important point was that writers take responsibility for being located within the progressive movement, not as distanced commentators on the struggle.

“But ultimately what happened was that as the idea of a writers' organization caught on around the country. There was a great deal of demand from writers, particularly in the grassroots organizations and in the rural areas, for an organization that could represent them, give a voice to their political aspirations and also, in more practical terms, to help provide them with the kinds of resources needed to stimulate literature within the country.”

#### Organizing writers

The formation of the mass democratic organizations – the United Democratic Front and the Congress of South African Trade Unions – during the early 80s was another significant influence in the formation of COSAW.

“The development of these organizations demonstrated that the oppressed people were no longer merely lamenting their situation. They were actually giving organizational form to their resistance, and working out how to resolve their problems by actively providing solutions, providing new models for the future. And it introduced a whole kind of different thinking among writers.

“When Albertina Sisulu opened the launching conference of COSAW she issued a challenge to writers. She asked why, when all around us

people were organizing to overcome oppression, we could only sing about it. That hurt, but it had a lot of truth in it. Women, youth, domestic workers, were being organized, but we writers tended always to be fragmented, we were always arguing esoterically about minute and irrelevant points of difference in ideology, when what was needed was simply for people to come together to start creating at least a basis on which more constructive criticism could take place”

#### Centrality of workers' culture

Linked to the idea of writer as cultural worker was the concept of “worker-writer”, another central tenet of the founding philosophy of COSAW. In the creation of a new South African literature, the central role of the working class and the importance of the workers' culture was acknowledged. For as it was argued in the debates that informed the manifesto of the new organization, it was workers who were at the forefront of creating new forms of challenging the state.

“The role of workers within the South African community is so important that it cannot be ignored. The vast majority of people are workers. If we cannot create literature that not only appeals to workers but in many ways comes from workers, we are going to be guilty of creating or perpetuating the class differences that exist.

“This position on the centrality of workers' culture was the outcome of a long period of discussion and consultation with people across the country. COSATU and COSATU cultural workers themselves played an important part in this preparation period and the planning of the conference. They were the ones who wrote that manifesto. Mi Hlatswayo, director of COSATU's cultural desk and the Vice-President of COSAW, is a poet and a worker. The greatest constituency for culture is workers. The intellectuals, those who have the world's platforms at their disposal, were con-

fronted by the issues that the workers raised at this conference. What came out of there was the workers' assertion of the leadership. And recognizing the central role of working class literature forces us all, as writers, to confront the issues that confront workers. As Albertina Sisulu said to us ... if you cannot concern yourself with the fact that people cannot pay rents, that there are diseases, that there is illiteracy and that education is inadequate, you are going to be isolated from what should be your constituency.”

“The challenge to writers is to create, as cultural workers, new forms of writing that are accessible to people. This brought us back to the fundamental questions of why we write and how we write. Questions like who reads and who writes? And we have to consider the question of literacy. How can we talk about literature when almost 50% of the adult population cannot read what we write? One of the most popular and successful literatures is that of Mzwahke Mbali who has developed the tradition of the oral poet and performs and records rather than writes his poetry. We also have to reconsider the measure of success of our writing. Having our work read is so much more important than publishing a book every year and having it sit on bookshelves somewhere.”

But how, Dangor was asked, can the principles of the primacy of working class culture, of the importance of worker-writers and writers as cultural workers be asserted and realised in practice, given the reality of workers' lives and disadvantages, and the predominance of Western cultural forms and standards?

These are the very questions which COSAW is working to address in its projects and organization. And it involves breaking down class and language barriers, legitimating and valorizing workers' culture and providing skills, education and resources for writers.

One of the first steps taken by COSAW has been the formation of the Can Themba Institute, which comprises regional resource centres for workers and writers. There are to be libraries and reading rooms where people can have access to literature from all over the world, with an emphasis on Third World literature. "As it is, it is only the few privileged and world-travelled amongst us who have been exposed to cultural developments and influences from other parts of the world. Our literature lacks a universal dimension. The literature from situations similar to our own remains unheard of in our country.

"The resource centres will also come to serve as centres for training people in such techniques as story-writing and other such skills denied most South African writers. We are talking about translating literature into simple English for readers with limited English language skills. We already have some research projects underway. A student is presently studying the development of Third World literature and will come back to set up a methodology for teaching this. The other important focus of our attention is the language issue. We started a research project on vernacular writing: who writes it, who reads it, what are the barriers to its acceptance, how to disseminate it? All of these things have just been started and we will really see the fruits of it in a year or two, when the results of our research come home and are made accessible to people.

"The first resource centre is due to open in Johannesburg imminently, another in Durban in the near future, and interestingly, one in Newcastle, a rural town in Natal where there is a large group of writers. COSAW has been launched to date in three regions - the Transvaal, the Western Province and Natal.

"Politically, COSAW is closest to the Charterist organizations but is open to anybody who accepts the constitution. It includes essayists,

poets, writers, critics, literacy workers and anyone interested in writing. The Writer's Forum has now become the publishing arm of COSAW."

#### Writing in a state of siege

"The recognition by the writer, of him or herself as a political activist, as well as a writer, as well as the writing that is being produced in the country, has led to a situation of direct confrontation with the state. And we are indeed now writing in a state of siege.

"The physical manifestations of this state of siege are, as an example, the detention of writers such as Mzwakhe. Other writers have been detained, some of them charged, such as Jackie Seroke. And then there's the fact that many others have had to flee into exile, such as Jeremy Cronin. There is also the banning of books, the seizure of manuscripts and the raiding of homes. Those in effect are the physical manifestations of the state of siege for writers.

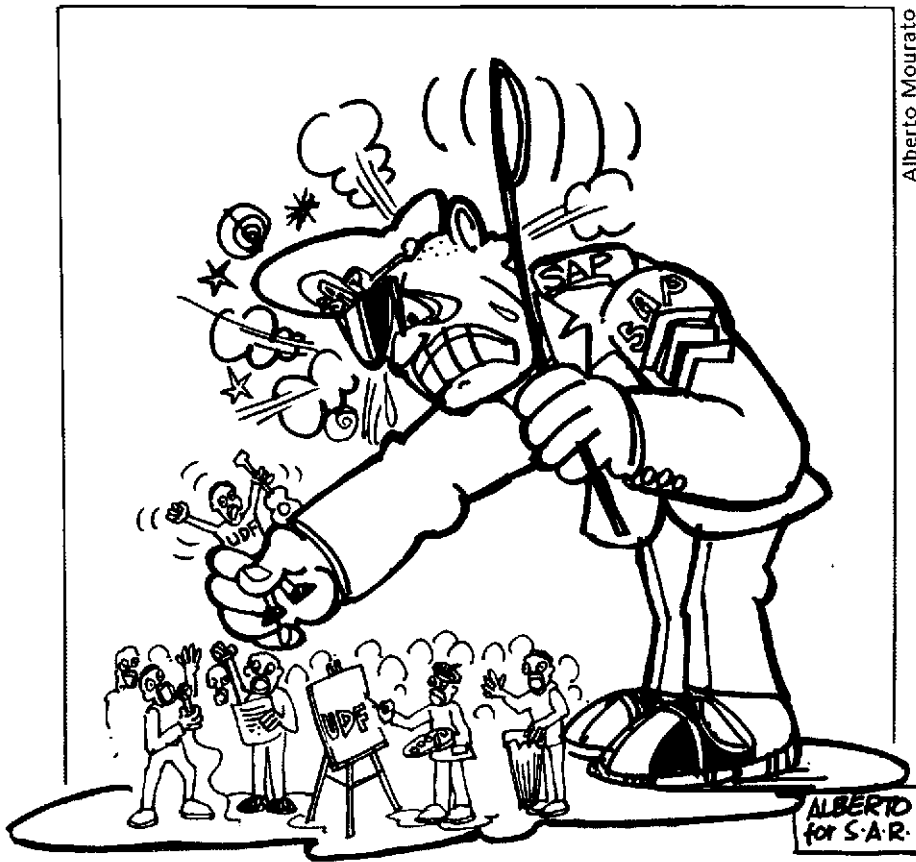
"I think far more insidious and with far more long-lasting effects is the siege mentality that is developing. We feel so often that we have to be "strategic" in what we write, and so we begin to cull things from our writing, unconsciously perhaps to ensure that it is not banned or repressed or at least that we can disseminate it in order to get our message across. It is an unconscious process and one that we have to guard against.

"Many writers in South Africa are astute enough not to call it self-censorship. But let's face it. What are the subjects they write about? People for example hesitate from exploring violence, why there is violent conflict in our country and what are the imperatives that drive people towards the armed struggle? On the other hand why is the state so violent? It is not a political analysis of these things, it is a realistic one. We have to look as artists at the truth of what it is that creates violence. But there is a great deal of shrink-

ing away from it, unconsciously, people want to say that I still believe in peace when in many ways, the term peaceful change, fundamental change in our country is a contradiction in our present circumstances.

"Let me say that this first kind of siege mentality is the one created by the state. It is designed to suppress any literature that creates or sustains long term resistance.

"The other state of siege is the one created by our fear of transgressing the delicate political and ideological lines that are being drawn. We shrink away from exploring things like racism, sexism, class differences. We sometimes feel that we should merely gloss over the political differences in our country, that we should not explore the undoubted debate that takes place in liberation movements about what direction and what future that liberation has, what shape it is going to take. How else are we going to debate it, except through our literature? And not in the mere academic debates where we talk about literature, but in the literature itself. Look at the historical precedents for that, Ngugi did that in Kenya, Ernesto Cardenal in Cuba, Costa Andrade in Angola. These people explored the realities of their situation in such a way that they sometimes, through fiction or poetry, made the issues a bit clearer for the politicians and leaders. And I fear that there is a great deal of shrinking away from this, even from talking about such issues as black racism. White racism is something that we experience in our daily life, but there is also the dimension of black racism, there is the dimension of tribalism; are we really looking at tribalism? How are we going to avoid the pitfalls that tribalism creates? The conditions of the rural people? The conditions in the rural areas at present are a mine-field for our present government. It is going to be a mine-field for our future government as well. How are they going to contend with the millions of people who have



Alberto Mourato

the world. This is undoubtedly a seducer and so many writers succumb to it by actually changing their writing to conform to the mass market, to what is acceptable in New York, in London to ensure that your book gets read in the outside world where there is a mass readership. In our country, to sell 5000 is a best seller. Whereas you need to sell five million in the States ... An American publishing house asked me if I would take some of my work and sanitize it, to remove some of the colloquial words and Afrikaans connotations in there, to make it saleable. I asked myself, what is the consequence of the saleability? It's emasculated art, it's emasculated literature.

"So those are the three facets of the state of siege that writers are being confronted by. The first one is the far more easily identifiable target, the South African government and its repression. And of course the most immediate task of our struggle is to remove the present government, and not to shrink away from writing about such things as violence, issues of political ideology, issues of why it is that some people seem to be more involved in the struggle than others. One of the things we need to look at very realistically in the country today is that when we talk about fighting apartheid, we must look at how many black people have become incorporated into the apartheid system - and those issues we have to confront.

"The other two issues need a lot more sensitivity, a lot more creativity if they're not going to tear the struggle apart and create a difference between what we write and what the political ideology can tell us. Because ultimately, as I say, we conform to it. But unless we force, or create a kind of pace that will force cultural workers, cultural development to keep up with political development, and in some ways even keep ahead of it, we will not be, as I really believe we should be, politicized."

been forcibly uprooted and dumped in different places? Is the future government going to introduce influx control? These are the questions that we must confront? How will we deal with the language issue? Which is going to be the official language of our country? In which language should the national anthem be sung?

"Writers tend to shrink away from these issues because, I fear, they don't want to offend the political ideology with which they identify. This may sound naive but I really have a great deal of faith in the political struggle and the maturity of the political leaders. I think they will understand this. They may even welcome some of these issues being brought into the open in a creative way. So that people can talk about them and ask: what is our litera-

ture in our country? When we talk about socialism, what do we mean by that in our context? You know - take the questions that are being asked - for example people ask me about the formation of the cultural desk of the UDF: Is this the basis of censorship of the future? After liberation will this become the precedent and basis for cultural censorship? I always say, I hope not. But we need to confront these issues now and incorporate them into our literature, and not in artificial ways. We should not be stripping the characters we create of the attributes in question - racism, sexism. Or of doubt. Why must our characters always be so zealous that they never doubt anything?

"A third and also insidious aspect of the siege mentality is the desire that writers have to be known in

# The Black Mamba Rises

BY MI S'DUMO HLATSHWAYO

"The poem[s] printed here in translation and outside their context suffer; 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. Despite that, the words are strong enough to communicate in their own right"

*Ari Sitas from the introduction to the book of trade union poetry Black Mamba Rising*

As Ari Sitas points out, the printed, English word is not the preferred medium of the oral poet. As well the tradition of praise poetry, from which it springs, may be somewhat rich for those raised on a cultural diet of a lean, terse style of poetry. It is however a centrally important form of expression in South Africa today. Any of our readers fortunate enough to have seen Mi Hlatshwayo perform live,

or seen Alfred Quabula or Mzwakhe Mbuli in the video 'A New Dawn: Culture in Another South Africa' will have witnessed the tremendous power of these poets and how deeply their words resonate in the culture of their audiences. The following poem is by Mi Hlatshwayo, now the director of COSATU's Cultural Desk. It was composed and delivered in praise of the Dunlop workers on strike in 1984.

The victors of wars  
But then retreat  
The Builders of nests,  
But then like an ant eater  
You then desert.  
Heavy are your blows,  
They leave the employers  
Unnerved

On your side are your  
Brothers even at the new  
Jerusalem  
Let it be workers! They say,  
The heaven above also  
Approves.

Ngudungudu, the woman  
Who married without any  
Lobolo,<sup>(1)</sup>  
Busy boiling foreigners'  
Pots  
Yet yours are lying cold.

The humble bride,  
Affianced without the  
Bridegroom's consent  
Yet others are affianced  
With their fathers' consent,  
Even the Japanese have now  
Come to be your bridegrooms,  
So! Bride why are you entwined by chains,  
Instead of being entwined  
With gold and silver like the others?

The Black mamba that shelters in the songs  
Yet others shelter in the trees!



Ancestors of Africa rejoice,  
Here are the workers coming like a flock of  
Locusts,  
On rising it was multi-headed,  
One of its heads was at Mobeni,  
Njakazi, the green calf of  
MAWU can bear me out  
Another of its heads was at baQulusi  
Land at Ladysmith,  
On rising it was burning like fire

Even Sikhumba<sup>(2)</sup> – the leather that  
Overcomes the tanners,  
Sikhumba who knows no race  
Who stabs an old man and  
A young man alike,  
Using the same spear  
Who stabs a man's bone,  
Inflicting pain in the heart

But he is now showing a  
Change of heart  
Here is the struggle,  
Sikhumba and Mgonothi are mesmerized,  
Asking what species of old mamba is this?

Dying and resurrecting like  
A dangabane flower.  
It was stabbed good and proper during the  
Day,  
At Sydney Road right on the premises,  
To the delight of the impimpis,<sup>(3)</sup>  
And the delight of the police



There were echoes of approval there on the  
TV at Auckland Park saying:  
Never again shall it move,  
Never again shall it revive  
Never again shall it return  
Yet it was beginning to tower with rage.

The old mamba that woke up early in the  
Morning at St. Anthony's  
Let's sit down and talk, he  
Now says

The spear that thundered at  
Dawn at St. Anthony's,  
The spear that devoured the father and the sons  
And the daughters  
Then the men came together,  
Devouring them whilst singing  
Yet the songs were just a decoy.

Rife are the rumors,  
That those who defied the  
Unity have sunk,  
To the throbbing hearts of the  
Employers

You black buffalo  
Black yet tasty meat,  
The buffalo that turns the  
Foreigners' language into  
Confusion,  
Today you're called a Bantu,  
Tomorrow you're called a Communist  
Sometimes you're called a Native.  
Today again you're called a Foreigner,  
Today again you're called a Terrorist,  
Sometimes you're called a Plural,  
Sometimes you're called an  
Urban PUR<sup>(4)</sup>

You powerful black buffalo,  
Powerful with slippery body  
The buffalo that pushed men  
Into the forest  
In bewilderment the police  
Stood with their mouths open



Rife are the rumors  
That those who defied  
Being pushed into the forest  
In exile they are,  
One Smit is in exile across  
At the Bluff,  
One Madinana is in exile across  
The Umgeni river,  
Both can bear me out.

Praise poets, messengers  
Observers,  
Run in all directions,  
Stand on top of the mountains,  
Report to Botha at Pretoria  
Report to our heroes on the  
Island,  
Report to the angels in your  
Prayers,  
Say unto them – here is a  
Flood of workers,  
The employers have done what  
Ought not to be.

Why tease the mamba in its  
Century-old sleep?  
The writing is on the wall,  
No stone shall stand on top  
Of the other till eternity,  
Tell them – the borrowed  
Must be given back  
Tell them – the chained  
Must be chained no more  
Tell them – these are the  
Dictates of the black mamba,  
The mamba that knows no  
Color,  
Tell them – these are the  
Workers' demands,  
By virtue of their birthright  
Dunlop workers I'm taking  
My hat off,  
I'm bowing to you with  
Respect.

(Dunlop Strike, St. Anthony's, November 9, 1984)

(1) lobolo: dowry furnished by bride's family

(3) impimpi: "sell-out", spy, traitor, etc.

(2) Sikhumba: name used metaphorically to designate the factory manager

(4) PUR: Permanent Urban Resident – term used in the Koornhof Bills

# Taking Control of Culture:



Impact Visuals

*"The Long March", a play by the members of Sarmcol Workers Cooperative about their strike*

## Plays of Working Life in the Union Movement

*This article draws on various accounts made available to SAR from South Africa, including notes for a book on workers' culture provided by its author, Astrid von Kotze, a cultural activist in Natal.*

### Working on a play

It is a Saturday afternoon. Not a good time for holding a play-workshop because many workers need to do their weekly shopping. Besides, township funerals take place on Saturdays and therefore some people are sure to be absent. Absenteeism and lateness are big problems for play projects. But

this is the only time when the Dunlop factory is closed and a lot of the participants work there.

Saturday afternoons are also the times for union meetings – and as always, it is difficult to find a space to work in. Today we are lucky – one of the union's offices is empty, and the room is quite spacious, so we can move around and not be too squashed and hot. But it is on street level and the windows face a busy and noisy road.

Some people are tired and hungry. They have arrived straight from

work. They know this is their only time off this weekend – tomorrow morning the next shift will start. We must not do too many exercises but rather warm up and switch in by singing. The young women are anxious because their parents are asking about money. But no one gets paid for this work. Shopstewards work on the weekends and they also do not get any money for this 'overtime'. The girls must explain this to their families. We do this work because we believe it is important.

Mbeki has brought his accordion and it does not take long

until the group of eight workers is swinging and into the rehearsal of the 'stokvel scene' of our new play, called MKUMBANE. Dumesani teaches some people traditional dance steps. Sipho is a skilled gumboot dance performer and trains his partners. Charles, as Mr. Smart, decides to show everyone that he is of a different class. He introduces some jitterbug to the party. Dumesani picks up his jacket and pretends that this is his lady. He dances behind Charles fooling around and making him look silly.

A passer-by from the street outside hears the noise and feels he does not want to miss out on the party. He enters and joins in the dancing. The group enjoys this game of deception. They play on until the end of the scene. The visitor is surprised because he cannot see any food and drink. Yet everyone seems to be very drunk. How can that be? The man leaves thinking that he has come too late. "I see you have finished everything already."

We start improvising a new scene. We have to work fast because time is getting on. There will be transport problems and the women participants especially cannot get home alone after dark. Some are also expected to do housework and cook when they get home. We are tired - but we made a new scene today and that makes us happy.

\* \* \*

### Plays from the working lives of people

As one union group has stated, "We are involved in this, however hard it is for us after work, because we believe that our struggle is not only there to destroy the oppressive powers that control us. It is there to also build a new world."

In the long history of working class struggle in South Africa, workers have only recently organized to fight their oppression through cultural expression. Their poems, songs and plays present their own

views of the world and how they would change it - "a true picture of things - our picture."

Workers describe their exploitation, their organizations and leaders, and their struggle against oppression. It is a step, said the above-mentioned cultural group, "towards pushing workers to start controlling their creative power. So far this power has been used by everybody in power and with money, for their own purposes."

Working for cultural transformation affects the stories of plays, the collective creativity of workshop productions, and the performance of plays, which is constrained by the very limited time and facilities for leisure and recreation in the townships. Most of the audience are people who work long shifts under very tough and often dangerous conditions. They recognize that the players are people like themselves, dealing with stories and dialogue that grow out of the experiences of ordinary men and women. "Our task is to take our rich or poor heritage and make it satisfy working people, their families and any other suffering people in South Africa." The result is that cultural work, say unionists, creates a better sense of unity amongst workers.

There is a directness and simplicity about plays. They have to be mobile, they lack props, they use the vernacular.

### Plays for mobilizing and educating

Two kinds of plays can be distinguished - mobilizing and educating. Plays for mobilizing arise out of specific workplaces. They aim to mobilize support for the workers and their struggle in the workplace. Strike plays are an example, intended to publicize the plight of workers on strike who have subsequently been dismissed.

Educational plays also draw on workers' own life experiences, such as realizing the way in which mi-

grant labour supplies capital with a cheap work force and low production costs. They may well contain a strong moral lesson, like warning of the disintegration of rural values, the dangers for young people new to the townships, or the sexual exploitation of women. They can also be part of regular education campaigns of a union, focusing on matters like retrenchment and unemployment. In the last two years, they have contributed to meetings of work leaders, shopstewards, and the shop floor. They also deal with divisions and criticism within unions, not in order to divide workers, say union spokespersons, but "to strengthen the unity of workers, and make the leadership accountable to us."

\* \* \*

### At the Clairwood Trade Union and Cultural Centre

The performance venue is a huge factory floor. Half of it is sub-divided into offices, the other half is a large empty space. At one end there is a tressle table, in front of it rows of chairs and benches. Behind it half-high walls hide the toilets. The windows on the sides are dirty. There is no ceiling and the neon lights are stuck onto the rafters of the tin roof. At night it is draughty and cold and during the day stuffy and hot.

From outside come sounds of trains and traffic. A few hundred tired people, mostly men, are slumped on chairs. They are addressed by office bearers who lead them into song. The meeting wakes up. There are salutes and shouts of 'amandla' and then more songs. Some people rise and stamp out the rhythm with their feet. The chairman has announced that members of the DWCL will now present a play and the play is introduced briefly.

At the back the players wait for the end of the song - but someone has just re-introduced a popular song and is leading it, adding new verses as he goes along. The performers join in the singing to warm

up. They announce their arrival by singing and the audience picks up the new tune and joins in. The performers move to the front where the tressle tables have been cleared. There are only a few chairs and a small table now. Someone in the audience insists on ending the song with a call-and-response chant. People sit down. The play begins.

The players are dressed in overalls and tennis shoes. They have brought a few small items with them, which they put on the floor. Their story will be told simply through their bodies and voices. A poster tells the audience that they are on a picket line, pamphlets being handed out indicate that they are campaigning. They address the audience inviting responses – and they reply spontaneously to any comments coming from the floor.

One of the actors puts on a ping-pong ball nose – he has become the white manager. He switches from

Zulu to English. His hands are folded behind his back, he struts up and down. The audience laughs – someone interjects and gives the manager a name. There is recognition and debate, someone shouts abuse. The “manager” turns to him because he must be disciplined: “All you lazy workers, why are you just sitting there!” The manager is a comic figure, a deliberate send-up with no attempt to make him seem real. When he calls his “impimpi,” the audience mocks him and insults him. Here is a chance to do what is often too dangerous in real-life situations. All the anger and frustration of factory-life is hurled at the two actors.

But the actors switch roles – they become workers again and part of the spirit of the audience. Another song unifies performers and people on the floor. The impimpi is defeated – there is instant and spontaneous applause. Someone requests a re-play of the scene in which the

traitor is mocked and put in his place and the actors play the scene again. The play comes to an end with a song celebrating the strength of unity in the union and the audience joins in.

The meeting adjourns briefly, and while the tressle table and chairs are set there is a chance for discussion. The actors re-join the general group of workers. Nothing but the experience of the past 10-20 minutes distinguishes them from the crowd. But something has changed – the general mood has been transformed. The issues of the day have come closer. People have made connections between their individual experiences and the collective struggle. Some questions have been answered, some asked so that people start thinking about issues. The audience is pleased that their struggle has gained importance by becoming a play. The general union meeting resumes with greater energy and spirit.

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## Postering Against Apartheid

One creative expression of the resurgence of trade union and community militancy in South Africa in the 70s and 80s, was the production of vibrant propaganda posters.

The Silk Screen Training Project in Johannesburg and the Community Arts Project in Cape Town were formed to meet the great demand to publicize campaigns, boycotts and rallies. Both these centres attempted to train activists themselves by bringing them together with artists to produce their posters, banners, T shirts and buttons collectively.

The striking workers from SARMCOL in Natal set up a printing co-operative as a skills training and income generating project and

supplied most of the T shirts for COSATU and the UDF campaigns.

The fresh bold posters reflect the scale and diversity of grass roots activity and trace the formation and development of the mass democratic organizations.

The medium of silk screening is direct and simple, requiring no special technical skill, electricity or running water. It is therefore ideally suited for putting the means of production right into the hands of activists. Media Units sprang up all over the country and the streets and events were plastered with colourful posters.

This emerging peoples culture was hard hit by the State of Emergency. The units were attacked and destroyed; many activists who used

them were detained and some were killed. The Silk Screen Training Project was raided and smashed up and forced to close down. Regulations under the State of Emergency make it an offence to wear political T shirts or carry banners, a further example of the threat which the state perceives in such popular expressions of resistance.

These posters have been recognized as significant political and cultural records. They not only represent what could be called an archive of the political actions of an era, but also, because of the democratic and integrated practice of their production, give an example of a phase in the building of Peoples Power and a glimpse into the possible future of a Peoples Art.

# EDUCATION IN CRISIS

## MEETING WITH

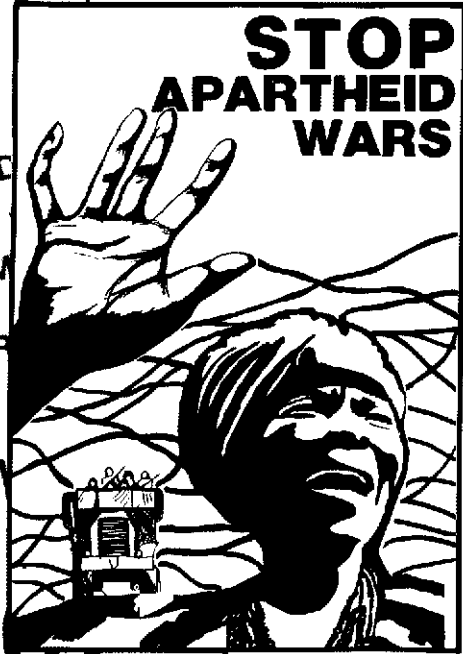
MICHAEL GARDINER (HEAD OF ENG.D)

SOWETO PARENTS CRISIS COMM

AN ALEXANDRA TEACHER



What can  
we do?



WED 19 MARCH 8 pm

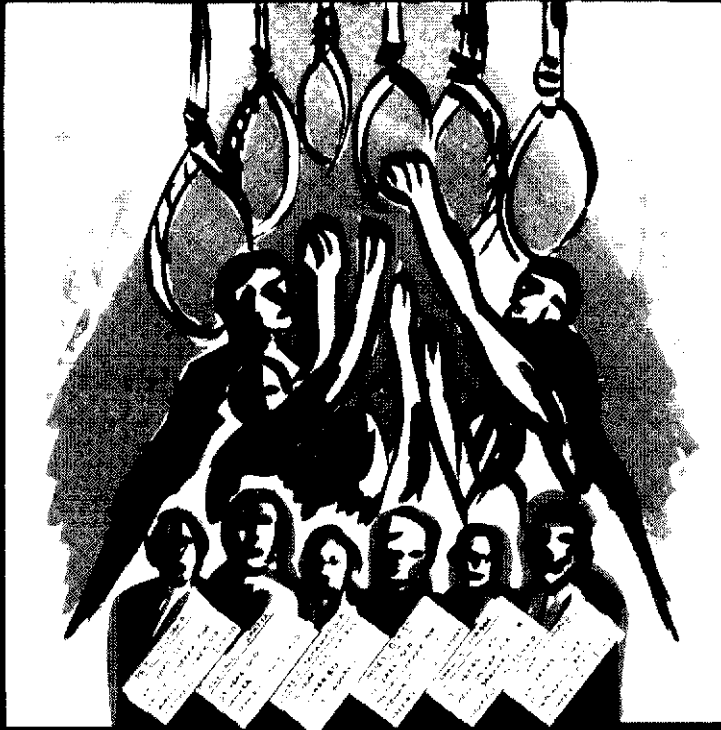
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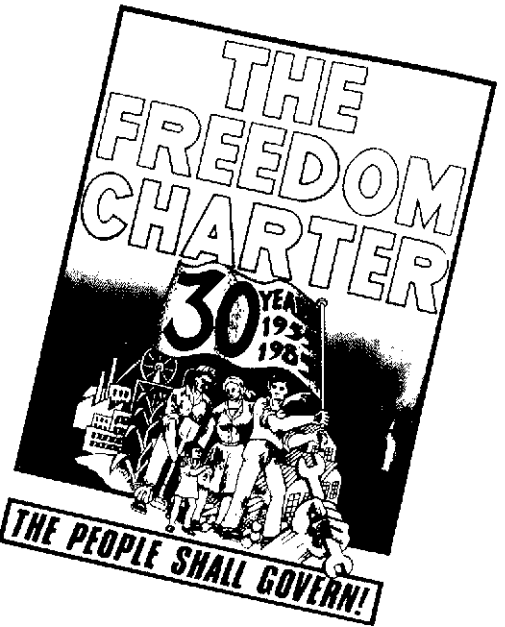
# SUPPORT SHARPVILLE SIX

WE WILL NOT ALLOW THEM  
TO HANG!



DOWN WITH PUPPETS  
AWAY WITH APARTHEID

FORWARD TO PEOPLES POWER



The samples of posters on these pages come from an exhibition collected for CUSO called *Too Many People Suffering* and are available for display. CUSO, 135 Rideau St, Ottawa, K1N 9K7.

# Mozambican Culture: A Crowded Canvas

BY ALBIE SACHS

Albie Sachs is a South African exile and an ANC member, living in Maputo and working for the Mozambique Justice Department. He is now recuperating from serious injuries sustained earlier this year in a bombing attack which was undoubtedly the work of the South African government.

What follows are excerpts from a background paper on culture included as part of a new education kit on Mozambique. The kit is being produced by Cooperation Canada Mozambique (COCAMO), a consortium of eighteen Canadian NGOs working together to implement recovery and development programmes in Nampula Province and education programmes in Canada. In addition to background papers on several aspects of the situation in Mozambique, the kit will contain brochures, a poster, a map, a user's guide and a resource list. The kit will be available in the Fall of 1988. For more information contact COCAMO c/o CCIC, 1 Nicholas St., Ottawa K1N 7B7, phone (613)236-6037.

In the section of the Museum of the Revolution where colonial times are portrayed, there is a photograph of black children dressed in Portuguese folk-costume doing a Portuguese folk dance. It is a striking example of the colonial policy of assimilation. Black Mozambicans, to be considered civilized and cultured, had to adopt without reserve the ways, ideas and culture of the colonizers. Traditional indigenous culture was regarded as barbarous – at best, to be recorded as fascinating savage customs; at worst, to be denounced by missionaries and administrators as heathenish and backward.

When it began the struggle for Mozambican independence, the Mozambique Liberation Front, or Frelimo, recognized the important role which culture would play. One of Frelimo's strategies to break down tribalism within the liberation front was to learn and value the cultural forms of the diverse groupings throughout the country. Each locality had its own cultural forms and



*Traditional Mozambican Warrior Dance, Magude District*

Frelimo leaders saw the immense variety and vitality of a popular culture which, in the words of Samora Machel, had been buried but never destroyed.

Frelimo saw culture as an "instrument of struggle," a tool they could use to promote nation-

building and unify the country. But it was much more than that. Culture became a means whereby the nation discovered and expressed itself. People from the north did dances from the south and vice versa; people from zones with a strong Islamic influence learned songs from areas where the impact of the Christian Church had been great. Gradually the idea took hold that to be a Mozambican meant to break out of the narrow vision of the locality or tribe and to "take on the dimensions of the nation."

Culture continues to be deeply and directly integrated into the daily life of the community, and there is widespread popular participation in cultural activities. Although devastated by war, destabilization and hunger, Mozambique has managed to record outstanding achievements in dance, sculpture and painting and has produced music, theatre and literature of quality. The key problem now is how to develop a professional cultural sector without commercializing, destroying or making banal this popular base.

## Dance

The only indigenous form of dance that was promoted during colonial times was the nightclub *marrabenta*, a Europeanized version of a popular African dance. Its lively rhythms made it good for the tourist trade and helped propagate the idea that blacks in Mozambique were content with their lot and especially happy to be Portuguese.

As resistance to the Portuguese began to grow in the north of Mozambique, old dance forms began to re-emerge. When Frelimo troops established a presence in a village, they learned the local forms of

drumming and dancing, and passed on those from other regions. All political meetings were preceded and followed by drumming and dancing, which not only provided an entertaining counterpoint to the speeches, but allowed for extensive local participation in the proceedings and affirmed the African character of the Mozambican revolution.

When Independence was proclaimed in 1975, dance was already well established as an integral and creative part of the emerging national life. One of the first acts of the new government was to organize a National Dance Festival in which about half a million people from all over the country took part. In the first phase, competitions were held at local, district and provincial levels and eventually several hundred of the best dancers, grouped according to province, performed during an entire week at two stadiums in the capital city of Maputo. Nights were spent performing for the public in the stadiums; days included trips to factories, hospitals and schools, where the dancers were received with enormous enthusiasm.

The city buzzed with debate over the dance steps, groupings and music from the different areas. One hotly argued question was whether the dances should be adapted for the stage, with special costumes and lighting, or performed only in their "natural" state. The former position won out. As a result, a National Choral and Dance Company was formed, at first on a semi-professional basis, later as fully professional. The Company has toured extensively and generally has been warmly received. Its repertoire includes two full-length ballets created by its artistic director and based on traditional African myths, and new dances are being added.

More recently a National Dance School was started in an abandoned night club. It caters to school children, and in a few years has achieved a very high standard of performance.



Sérgio Santimano/AIM

The group, "Eyuphuru" from Nampula, performing in Maputo

The instructors give equal emphasis to ballet, modern dance and traditional Mozambican dance. And the students, who represent Mozambique's many ethnic and racial backgrounds, learn all the different types of dance.

What was to happen to the night-club *marrabenta*? This became the liveliest question on the agenda at the 1976 founding conference of the Organization of Mozambican Youth. Some people contended that it had to be suppressed because it was a decadent dance used by the Portuguese as a cover for prostitution and oppression. Others declared that it was a popular dance invented and much enjoyed by the people, and that the people had to reclaim it as their own. There was no rule, they added, that having fun was anti-revolutionary. The most effective proponent of the latter view was Joaquim Chissano (now President of Mozambique), who attended the conference as Frelimo's represen-

tative. Today the *marrabenta* is so popular in Mozambique that it is difficult to recall the atmosphere that made its future an issue.

### Music

Drumming and the *timbila* (a wooden xylophone, also known as the marimba) are the pride of Mozambican music. Every region of the country has its drums and drumming styles. In the south, the Xigubo warrior dance is accompanied by the powerful, heavy beat of giant drums; the sinuous dances of Ilha de Moçambique in Nampula province are helped along by a quietly hypnotic beat on smaller drums; the once-secret Mapiko dance of the north is animated by brilliant staccato tattoos quite different in character.

The *timbila* are instruments produced by the small Chopi-speaking group in Inhambane province. The best known *timbila* players are presently in Maputo, mostly garbage-collectors working for the



City Council (a job reserved for the Chopi in colonial times). Whole orchestras of *timbila* provide profoundly intricate patterns of polyphonic percussion that amaze musicologists and delight audiences.

One feature of the popular music tradition is that the musicians make and care for their own instruments. The immense variety of popularly made instruments became evident when a National Festival of Traditional Music was held shortly after the Dance Festival. Literally hundreds of different types of flutes, drums, horns and rattles, instruments to be bowed, plucked, beaten and shaken, emerged out of the music festival. Several old men sang in accompaniment to their own hand-made instruments. They made complicated abstract harmonies, sad in tone and sadly poignant for the listener because many of these unique styles will disappear as these old men die out.

Yet, much as this ancient traditional music is admired, the real energy in musical development comes from what is called light music; that is, music performed on a stage or for radio or television, usually with a strong electronic component. The musicians have, on the whole, attempted to base their compositions on traditional musical patterns rather than to copy their music from elsewhere. Gradually a distinctive Mozambican style of popular music is emerging. It lacks the extrovert bounce of neighbouring Zimbabwean music or the warmth and confidently repetitive melodies of West African music, but it has interesting and rich possibilities of its own, precisely because it is rooted in Mozambican popular music.

### Art

Carved in dark, ebony wood, the internationally famous Makonde sculpture from northern Mozambique has emerged in three principal forms. There is the compact *ujamaa*, the human family in close cluster, the open *ujamaa*, in which the

figures are more stylized, abstract and flowing, and the *shetani*, based on the devil, the spirit of mischief that can assume any form.

Makonde art was not always like this. Contrary to the idea that African art is primitive, anonymous and unchanging, the Makonde sculptors have totally transformed their "traditional" art from one generation to the next. Fifty years ago they were doing single-figured pieces and masks in white wood. All that remains of that style today is the spirit of satire; the actual appearance of the art has completely changed.

In the south, a completely different style of popular carving has emerged: animals, masks, reliefs, boxes - tourist art at its best (vivacious and portable) and its worst (mass-produced, without feeling or finish). At the same time, there is a strong movement of contemporary sculpture in Maputo. The leading figure is Alberto Chissano, who established a distinctive style of carving that has since been copied by dozens of others - vigorously worked wood, with the mark of the chisel still upon it, human faces and bodies projecting great sadness with great dignity. Chissano's works have achieved considerable international recognition. His house and studio on the outskirts of Maputo have become a gallery of contemporary Mozambican art. On more than one occasion, he has won prizes in international sculpture contests by going to the host city, buying a tree trunk on the spot, and in a few days of furious work, producing a piece of sculpture that became the winning entry.

A great friend and contemporary of Chissano's (in colonial times they worked together as cleaners in a club) is the painter Malangatana, whose Maputo home has also become a place of pilgrimage for art lovers. Malangatana, a cultural figure with great projection in Mozambique and abroad, was imprisoned by the Portuguese se-

cret police for belonging to Frelimo. He is presently a member of Mozambique's national parliament, the Popular Assembly. His distinctive style of painting and drawing has had a great impact on nearly all other Mozambican artists. His works feature a crowded canvas and strong colouring. Human and animal figures are mixed together in defiance of the laws of scale and perspective, their eyes looking back at the spectator. Malangatana's works have been exhibited on almost every continent.

Another proof of the vitality of Mozambican art can be found in the murals of Maputo. Large frescos executed in public places - notably at the Hero's Circle near the airport, at the Ministry of Agriculture and in the gardens of the Natural History Museum (where there is also a giant sculpture by Chissano carved from a whole tree) - testify to the importance that Mozambicans attach to art.

### Theatre

Immediately after Independence in 1975, a strong amateur theatre movement grew up in Mozambique. It emerged out of the struggle for independence and was based in the workplace. The themes and the styles of representation used became increasingly repetitive, however, and the groups began to die out. After a hiatus of several years, a new satirical/lyrical theatrical style is now emerging, with considerable movement and use of costume, lights and dance, to give it a popular character. Usually the scripts are prepared by the groups themselves. As an indication of the "popular" nature of these performances, sometimes pamphlets on health or education topics - like a how-to booklet on constructing latrines - are distributed to the audience.

### Radio, cinema and television

Radio is by far the most important medium of cultural transmission in Mozambique, reaching the whole country and using all the indigenous languages, as well as

Portuguese, the language of national unity. Apart from news and educational programmes, Radio Mozambique broadcasts a considerable amount of music. In fact, the appropriate mix between international pop music (often justified as having African roots), music from Africa and Mozambican music is a constant source of controversy, and each variety of music has its own strong supporters.

All Mozambican towns have at least one cinema, and given the extreme limits of foreign exchange available for importing films, those that circulate are of a relatively high standard. They are usually fairly old and come from all parts of the world (including Canada). Film festivals are held regularly in Maputo, consisting of half a dozen to a dozen recently made films from a particular country - India, Brazil, Italy, and nearly all the socialist countries have been the main contributors. Two highly successful festivals of films from the African continent have also been held.

Mozambique's National Cinema Institute produces a regular newsreel programme that is shown in cinema houses, but it has also been responsible for producing a number of documentaries and two feature films.

The Institute holds a vast library of raw film but lacks funds to edit and produce finished films. Canada's National Film Board has been involved in helping to train people at the National Cinema Institute.

Television is broadcast only in Maputo four nights a week and is still called Experimental Television, as it was when it first went on the air in the early 1980s. Its programmes have a relatively high local content (many having been made by the Bureau of Social Communication of the Ministry of Information). Good

quality films and serials and highly popular socio-satirical soap operas from Brazil are also broadcast.

## Literature

Given the strong cultural sensibility of the Mozambican leadership and the rich tradition of poetry writing in the period leading to Independence, the current state of literature in Mozambique is disappointing. The only major literary achievement

lished. The weekly magazine *Tempo* has a lively cultural section. The Writers' Association puts on regular debates. From time to time young writers get together to publish literary magazines, and Mozambique is one of the few African countries with a considerable output of original cartoon-strip stories.

Yet, without doubt, post-Independence literature has lagged

behind dance, sculpture and painting in terms of vigour, innovation and variety. Virtually nothing has been done to publish the extensive records made of oral tradition (tales, riddles and proverbs). Hardly any publishing has been done in the indigenous languages. The fine short stories of Luis Bernardo Honwana, first published in colonial times, are used over and over again, while very little new prose appears. Some powerful post-Independence poetry by Craveirinha remains unpublished, although it has been declaimed several times at the monthly public poetry sessions held in Maputo's Central Park.

Many factors have contributed to this situation: a lack of paper, the failure to develop a clear language policy, a tendency at a certain stage in the struggle for liberation and development

for some Mozambicans to choose anonymity and the collective and to repudiate individual authorship. But given that the public hunger for artistic expression exists and the printing capacity is there, the main reason would seem to be editorial timidity and a failure to encourage the discipline and strength of vision that, for example, good novel-writing requires. This would seem to be an area where, once clarity could be achieved on how to give writers their head, a major breakthrough could be made.



*The traditional instrument from Inhambane is made from a Kudu horn*

Sérgio Santimano/AIM

of the post-Independence period has been the publication of the works - hitherto suppressed by the censor - of pre-Independence poets. Notable among them is Jose Craveirinha, Mozambique's outstanding national poet, and Rui Nogar, both at one time imprisoned by the Portuguese secret police. Other prominent poets of the liberation struggle are Marcelino dos Santos, Jorge Rebelo, Armando Guebuza and Sergio Vieira - now all senior members of the Frelimo Party. Works of younger poets have also been pub-



Dave Hartman

*Anti-apartheid demonstrators in "Ride to Freedom" event, Ottawa, May 1988. Protestors took buses from Toronto to call for the expulsion of the South African ambassador.*

## Prioritizing Sanctions

BY GEOFFREY SPAULDING

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*In the previous issue of Southern Africa REPORT (vol. 3, no. 5, May 1988), Geoffrey Spaulding emphasized the need both to avoid abstract sloganeering on the subject of sanctions and to adapt strategizing on sanctions to the changing circumstances inside South Africa itself. It is precisely such an approach that Spaulding seeks to concretize in the present article. Spaulding's observations in both articles are, of course, highly controversial. Indeed, his own earlier article presented quite sharp*

*criticisms of yet another article on sanctions in SAR, that by our U.S. correspondents, Jim Cason and Mike Fleshman (SAR, vol. 3, no. 3, December 1987). We welcome further contributions to this important debate.*

As noted in my previous article ("Moving Forward on Sanctions: A View from Inside South Africa", SAR, vol. 3, no. 5, May 1988), a more nuanced approach to sanctions would locate them as one aspect of the wider struggle in South Africa, emphasizing, in particular, the links between shifts in the dynamics of that struggle and sanctions them-

selves. One of these links is self-evident: a rising tide of mass resistance, producing its counter in higher levels of overt repression, tends to provide the "steam in the kettle" - for campaigns for international economic pressure, so that the latter grow in strength as a consequence. This was the case in the 1976-77 "Soweto" period, as well as during 1985-86. In both instances, widespread public outrage in the West over South African government repression led to the imposition of significant new sanctions. The same process may well be seen in coming months in the wake of the South

African government's effective banning of 17 organizations, and severe restrictions on COSATU in February, together with the current all-out assault on the ANC in exile.

What is crucial is that this fueling of the sanctions campaigns is not the latter's only link with changing internal political developments. When "key moments" force a shift in transitional strategy, a re-evaluation of the effects of sanctions must also occur, at least if there is some concern that sanctions should have some genuine impact in South Africa itself. Without such a re-evaluation, one is forced back to the view that all sanctions "work" by definition. Of course, the inadequacy of this latter view, its failure to take account of the complex patterns of South African politics, has not diminished its popularity. This is not the point, however.

Looking back at the history of sanctions against South Africa, the attributes of an approach sensitive to South African realities can be further fleshed out. The initial appeals for sanctions preceded the adoption of armed guerrilla struggle as the pivotal oppositional strategy in 1960. But as sanctions campaigns developed, they came to focus on the undermining of the apartheid state's military capability, via arms embargoes and disinvestment efforts. The latter were to prevent direct foreign investment from boosting South Africa's industrial growth, which clearly has a strong correlation with military power.

In the very healthy international economic conditions prevailing during the 1960s, these tactics were not too successful. But what is important here is that they were consistent with the long-term perspective necessary for guerrilla struggle: sanctions were not seen as an alternative with a possibly dramatic short-term effect (as was the case in the early years of Rhodesian UDI). Furthermore, the potentially negative impact of sanctions/disinvestment on blacks had to be considered only

in relation to economic hardship, which was seen to be a tolerable price for the perceived political gain. Given the dormancy of mass opposition, the very different question of possible damage to black political organizations and unions did not need to be seriously examined.

The re-emergence of mass protest from the mid-1970s – the key "moment" here being Soweto 1976 – culminated in the 1984-86 period when a different transitional strategy was operative: "ungovernability". While armed guerrilla struggle remained an element, the main driving force now was popular insurrection. This was aimed initially at the weakest links in the state's network of coercion and control, the intention being to move gradually inwards to the central core of power. But to succeed, progress had to be relatively rapid – that is the nature of insurrection. Given the unequal access to arms and the high cost in social disruption, popular uprisings inevitably cannot sustain themselves indefinitely.

This factor made a difference to sanctions. The only sensible perspective now was that they should quickly have a significant impact on the state's capacity to defend itself. In this context, forms of economic pressure which might (arguably) have a long-term effect simply make no sense – by the time this effect is felt, the political conjuncture will have long since changed and the political impact might well be the opposite of what was intended. So it is not true that all sanctions "work"; nor is it true that an incremental process – adding new sanctions one by one – will shorten the process of struggle, "hasten the day".

Of course, comprehensive mandatory sanctions remain a worthy goal in relation to an insurrectionary strategy – they would work, if they could be implemented by the major trading partners over a short period of time. But the circumstances necessary for this did not ex-

ist in Western countries at the time, despite the temporary congruence of interests between pro-liberation forces and some forward-looking elements amongst Western business and governments. There was however a brief flurry of interest in complicated schemes to sanction South Africa's gold exports, which would undoubtedly have increased pressure on the state. Much more significant was the implementation of financial "sanctions" by (mainly) US banks refusing to extend further credit to South Africa in mid-1985. This is possibly the one measure implemented thus far which could be said to have "worked", in this instance by forcing a major, though temporary, rethink amongst important elements of South African capitalism.

Part of the reason that it "worked" lies in the changing structure of South Africa's economy during the past decade and a half of economic crisis. During this period, capital flows from this economy to the rest of the world have become a crucial factor, as export earnings from gold and other minerals have fluctuated widely. In addition, the nature of capital flows has changed, the bulk being indirect investment (loans) rather than direct (establishment of subsidiaries by multinationals). Hence the economy's increased vulnerability to the actions of international banks.

Conversely, it can be noted here, the importance of "easily sanctioned" items – agricultural goods – has diminished in South Africa's trade since the early 1970s. Of the goods which are subject to "serious" bans, only coal and iron/steel are really major trade items (and a future shift in world market conditions for these from oversupply to shortage may well alter sanctions sentiment). These and other related structural shifts in the South African economy and society over the past quarter century need to be considered in formulating strategy on sanctions, as in any other aspect of the liberation struggle. However, one unexpected

consequence of the August 1985 financial crisis was that it contributed – albeit as one factor among many – to the shift in state policy, apparent from early 1986, that involved a much tougher approach to crushing the insurrection and restoring overall stability.

After the “bannings” this past February, it can no longer be denied that the state’s new approach has been effective: the struggle has entered into an “ebb” phase as mass mobilization dissipates. With insurrection now ruled out, a new theory of transition needs to be devel-

oped. And moving forward on sanctions means adapting them to this new theory.

The contours of this new phase are being shaped by state strategy, given that the balance of forces has shifted back in its favour. This strategy can be expressed very simply: – in the short-run, pacify the townships and emasculate progressive political leadership by all means available via Emergency powers and vigilante and similar groupings; – in the longer run, alleviate, if only partially, the material grievances un-

derlying the generalized militancy amongst the black population which fueled the insurrection.

The most urgent need at this stage should be very obvious – to try to keep intact as far as possible what remains of the mass organizations after the state’s assault. This implied a tactical retreat from the stance of an all-out offensive by the insurrection. This was recognised by political leaders, as is evident from the slogan – “Defend, Consolidate, Advance” – adopted as the theme at the secret UDF conference in May 1987. At that time, the UDF itself was already in extremely poor shape. Moreover, the attack on the trade unions was also beginning to come to a head with management starting to take a very tough line in negotiations, the government introducing new labour legislation, and physical attacks on union offices becoming commonplace. Under these circumstances, it should not be surprising nor disturbing, that the unions would, in formulating positions on international economic pressure, choose to place the protection of their members’ jobs and the preservation of their organizational survival ahead of “political gains” whose precise scope and substance are in any case somewhat uncertain under present circumstances.

The next phase of reconstruction/consolidation will likely be long and slow, with the emphasis on establishing more robust structures down to the local level. One of the weaknesses of community-based organizations during the 1980s was their failure to establish solid internal structures and practices for decisions, for strategizing and for the execution of tactics. They relied instead on more spontaneous organizational forms. This might have been adequate if the state had been weaker and its ties with the society less multi-faceted and complex (as appears to have been true in Nicaragua, for example). As it was, there was not enough time to begin to take any steps towards the fur-



Dave Hartman

Protester outside Paul Simon concert, Royal Albert Hall, London, 1987

ther consolidation of the movement before the state's counter-attack was launched.

International strategy at this stage therefore demands supporting the rebuilding of organizations inside South Africa, not helping to undermine them (as sanctions on most trade items would appear to do). This may require a basic re-orientation on the part of sanctions campaigns towards a "two-track" policy including, in addition to sanctions, more "positive" measures to assist the rebuilding process. This approach fits well with the spirit of the Front Line States' arguments at last October's Commonwealth meeting. Of course, "positive measures" are also increasingly being adopted by foreign corporations still in South Africa (e.g. the Ford/Samcor stock deal with the NUMSA union referred to in my previous article). Yet even the fact of corporate sponsorship need not necessarily be an argument for opposing such measures. Organizations inside South Africa are forced to confront these measures; similarly, sympathizers outside may have to engage with them more positively in an effort to ensure that corporate actions are as appropriately oriented as possible. (It can be noted here, that policies such as closing diplomatic missions which provide support to local organizations runs counter to overall strategic needs. Instead, these representatives could be encouraged to be even more active.)

What of sanctions themselves? The longer-term strategy of the state may well improve living conditions for many blacks. There could even be some opportunities for some of the promised "reconstruction" to be carried out under the auspices of the opposition itself - given the focus on local level "redistribution" with regards to housing and other forms of community development. But it will be carried out under the close supervision of the shadowy Joint Management Committees which are, in turn, the local expres-

sion of the National Security Management System (NSMS). It is this set of institutions which is responsible for both legs of state strategy during the Emergency - repression and stabilization. As the state moves from the former to an increasing concern with the latter, its most pressing need is for money - to pay for houses, streets and lighting, and to create jobs for blacks.

Although the government and South African companies have been able to obtain trade credit from foreign lenders (including loans to replenish oil stocks), few other loans - for 'development capital' - have been available since August 1985. In this respect, the financial "sanctions" imposed then continue to work. Partly as a result of this (together with its difficulty in cutting spending in other areas), the government is presently short of funds to carry out its stabilization strategy. The main thrust of its present fiscal policy is to capture for its own use the massive cash flows which have been dammed up due to the lack of incentives to invest in production.

This is what privatization aims to do in South Africa (a very different purpose to Thatcherism), and this is the intent behind changes to insurance company taxation as well. Similarly, the intended freeze on public sector salary increases would help to limit existing state spending commitments. Substantially more analysis is necessary to assess fully the government's financial requirements; nevertheless, it is reasonable to argue that the limited foreign capital inflows are a major obstacle in the way of longer-term political stabilization.

The implications for sanctions should not need to be spelled out. In April 1990, the South African government's 3-year partial moratorium agreement with its foreign creditors expires. It is not impossible that, at that time, foreign credit will once again be extended. Approximately one-seventh of the foreign debt outstanding in 1985 will

have been repaid, as well as interest, as the South African government has made restoring its creditworthiness a top priority. Also, by 1990, the political events of 1984-86 may well be no more than a fading memory (nightmare?) for international bankers, whose interest in politics is not great.

Influencing the activities of international financial institutions is not very easy, of course - even the most powerful of Western governments have severe problems implementing economic policy as a result of multinational bank lending. They have had to co-ordinate their actions to try to impose some control, which provides one lesson. The complexities of the international financial system may well make it impossible to prevent capital flows to a country, just as it seems impossible to prevent completely flows of low-volume high-value commodities like those which comprise South Africa's most important exports. But a partial stoppage of these loans could still have severe implications for government financing.

In any event, what is clear, from inside South Africa at least, is that we are now into a new period. What was true during the years of optimism - 1984-86 - no longer holds. It does not help to seek absolution for failures by blaming those on the same side (as Cason and Fleshman appear eager to do in *SAR*, vol. 3, no. 3, December 1987). Nor does it help to remain trapped in the past. What are needed are fresh ideas, fresh directions. The urgency of this is of course, far greater inside the country, but the responsibility to facilitate it no less for sympathizers outside. But unless we can develop more realistic analyses of our current situation than that put forward by Cason and Fleshman, and unless we can engage in more constructive debate over differences which are, after all, limited if real, then we may be doomed, both inside and outside South Africa, to remain in our current impasse.



Art Work

## Women, Solidarity & Southern Africa: Report of the National Workshop

About seventy women from across Canada – from Terrace, B.C. to St. John's, Newfoundland – came to the June weekend workshop entitled Women, Solidarity and Southern Africa. They met at a conference centre outside Toronto to plan ways of making solidarity work with the women of southern Africa more effective.

The national workshop was a follow-up to two previous southern African conferences – Montreal's Taking Sides in February 1987 and the Vancouver Parallel Commonwealth Conference in October. At both those events, women had been frustrated by the lack of attention paid to gender issues in the southern African solidarity network.

Women also wanted to broaden the solidarity network – to draw in more women from different Canadian communities, in particular the native, black and immigrant communities.

The organization of the workshop – taken on by a group of Toronto women – began with a series of planning consultations with sol-

idity activists in Canada's different regions. The goals of the workshop were refined to address the concerns already raised and others that emerged from the regional meetings.

The goals included not only the ones expected for such a meeting - an evaluation of existing solidarity work and resources; an increased understanding of the situation of women in southern Africa; the coordination of national campaigns around issues for women. There was also the goal (as the workshop proposal put it) of "exploring and developing a participatory approach to solidarity work that makes conceptual and practical links between women's lives and struggles in Canada and southern Africa."

The idea was to use this participatory approach in the planning process and in the workshop itself. Organizers hoped the workshops would encourage participants to identify the resonances and links between political issues they are involved with here in Canada and those in southern Africa, to see how these connections might form the basis for solidarity action.

Racism, the situation of native people, the exclusion of Franco-phone people, class and gender divisions - all of these, which are issues in Canada, came up at the workshop as ones which inform, or should inform, our solidarity work. However, people also agreed that the apparent similarities of some of these issues for Canadian and southern African women should not be taken as implying that they are indeed the same. For although comparisons are useful and instructive, struggles take place in, and are structured by, very different political contexts.

There was a degree of consensus about the most effective approach to solidarity work with women. Many participants argued for a grassroots solidarity that builds mutual support and understanding between women who struggle against oppression in different parts of the

world. In trying to build support for the anti-apartheid struggle amongst women in different communities, they said, it's important to go to those communities, to support their struggles, to develop trust and mutual respect. Work with native women was strongly emphasized by a number of groups. Others stressed that it was necessary to continue working to influence those who had power - local, provincial and federal government officials.

The attempts to organize a workshop process that was more participatory and educationally innovative produced mixed results. Despite what had seemed like an enormous amount of discussion about the process beforehand - in the planning committee and in preparatory regional meetings - participants arrived with varying expectations of the workshop. Some felt the "community-building" exercises were time-wasting or detracted from the task at hand. Others felt that the different techniques for getting at the issues really helped to draw new connections and insights. People's experiences in the different workshop sessions were clearly somewhat uneven.

The input of Firoza Adam from the Federation of Transvaal Women, Susan Mnumzana from the ANC and Monica Nashandi from SWAPO, was energizing and educative. Indeed, for some participants, their 'information sessions' were the most important aspect of the weekend. Hearing about the struggles of women in South Africa and Namibia, their priorities and their perceptions of the role of solidarity work, inspired us and helped to define directions for our work here. Their contributions helped to define some of the proposals that were endorsed on the weekend: to continue to focus attention on the plight of women and children political prisoners; to use the World Council of Churches' Decade on Women to mobilize Canadian churchwomen; to link up with international solidarity

campaigns; to put pressure on our own government to impose sanctions on the apartheid regime and give support to the Front Line States.

The workshop also illuminated another important point in terms of how to organize concrete or financial support for women's organizations in South Africa and Namibia. It was agreed that there must be consultation with the liberation movements. Funding should go to organizations that are working towards building democratic organizations rather than merely generating income for a select group of women.

Perhaps the most successful aspect of the workshop was the strengthening of the national network of women in solidarity work. The feedback from regional group meetings during the weekend revealed the very uneven capacities and resources for anti-apartheid work in different parts of Canada. Those regions with limited resources stressed how important it was for them to be able to link up with national campaigns, to share materials and visiting resource people with the regions with a stronger organizational base. Contact groups were identified for each region to provide for more coordinated campaigns and actions in the future.

The connections amongst women participating in the workshop were achieved not just through the discussions, and the exchanges of addresses and work plans. The moments of shared fun and hilarity which interlaced the weekend played its own part - sweaty and enthusiastic toyi-toyi-ing with the cultural group, Siyakha, "TV commentaries" on workshop events which demonstrated a willingness to try and breach language barriers, the South African contingent's display of subversive misappropriation of Afrikaner culture. As one woman put it: first there was the women's caucus in Montreal, the workshop in Vancouver and now this weekend. Something is building ...



# The Academic Boycott: Kingston, May 1988



Anti-apartheid protester outside Paul Simon concert, London, 1987

The occasion: the annual meeting of the Canadian Association of African Studies (CAAS), held at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario in May. The issue: the academic boycott of South Africa.

But this was not, in the first instance, an issue posed in merely general terms. A specific case had placed it on the Association's agenda. Paul Lovejoy, professor

of early West African history at Toronto's York University, Vice-President in charge of research there and also, as it happened, Vice-President of CAAS, had, earlier this year, accepted an invitation to visit South Africa and give a series of lectures on his specialty at various universities. In any event, he was denied a visa by the South African government. Taking his case to the rest of the CAAS executive, Lovejoy con-

vinced them to write letters, over the signature of the Association's President, Bogumil Jewsiewicki, to both the South African Ambassador to Canada and to Secretary of State for External Affairs, Joe Clark, protesting his exclusion. The grounds: that the South African government's exclusion was "clearly an *infringement of academic freedom* and an outrage to the Canadian scholarly community" (emphasis added)!

The Association's move was not greeted enthusiastically in many quarters. What about the academic boycott of South Africa, asked a group of Africanists from Dalhousie University in a letter, citing Canadian Association of University Teachers' (CAUT) guidelines to support their case. "Surprised and dismayed" to learn of Lovejoy's visit, they professed themselves to be "even more amazed to discover that the CAAS Executive, rather than opposing such a visit, was to protest the regime's denial of a visa for Professor Lovejoy!" At Lovejoy's own university the York African Studies Programme, after some initial confusion, expressed reluctance to support his case without also giving due weight to the claims of the academic boycott.

The issue was thus very much in the air in the run-up to the Conference; it would have to be dealt with at the membership business meeting and conference organizers also scheduled a panel session at the conference to further explore it. Many academics felt - and subsequent debate at the conference was to confirm them in such an opinion - that the issue was not one to be resolved by appeal to fixed and rigid principle, either that of "academic freedom" on the one hand or that of blanket boycott on the other. Aware of the strong feeling in many quarters that Jewsiewicki's original letters were ill-advised, the CAAS Executive proposed to the business meeting that an *ad hoc* committee be established to explore the issue and advise the Association as to how

to deal with such cases in future. In consequence, substantive consideration of the merits of the case took place only in the subsequent panel discussion.

Fortunately the discussion was a good one and, with any luck, will have some impact on the *ad hoc* committee's deliberations. Chaired by Professor Linda Freeman of Carleton University, the panel members were Neo Mnumzana, head of the ANC's delegation to the United Nations, Mike Morris of South Africa's Natal University, an academic with a long record of involvement in the struggle in South Africa and John Saul who, like Paul Lovejoy, is from York University. The key contribution was made by Neo Mnumzana. He suggested that the emergence, in recent years, of a strong popular democratic movement above ground inside South Africa had made the notion of an absolute academic boycott increasingly less appropriate – and one no longer unequivocally advocated by the ANC itself. The movement inside needed its own direct contacts with the outside world and, alongside the ANC, could best judge who might appropriately go abroad to speak and who might visit South Africa.

Not, as will be obvious, that this much more nuanced position regarding the boycott has *anything* to do with a presumed absolute right to academic freedom. Clearly the ANC continues to urge that any “free” movement of academics in or out of South Africa which services the maintenance of apartheid should be considered unacceptable. Of course, the ANC representative was well aware that in some ways this new flexibility posed even more complex challenges both for South African academics and for supportive academics abroad. For once the absolutist answers (on both wings of the debate) have been qualified as the terrain of boycott becomes even more intensely and complexly political than ever before. The actual process to be followed in de-

cidng on the *bona fides* of itinerant academics is by no means a clear one, referring the matter to the judgement of the popular movement inside South Africa or to the anti-apartheid movement outside the country not being any very straightforward exercise.

Mike Morris underscored the value to progressive South African academics of maintaining contacts with sympathetic international intellectual currents, noting the irony that it was often only the progressive international academic community that denied itself such interchange since the more right-wing elements came and went from South Africa with relative impunity in any case. He therefore agreed wholeheartedly with the ANC representative on the need to flexibly interpret the boycott imperative, but he also carried forward the discussion of the complexities involved. He pointed out the impossibility for many academics outside the social sciences to demonstrate the anti-apartheid credentials of their substantive work, for example. He emphasized instead the efforts inside the country to provide an *organizational* rather than a merely individual response to the issue, and the efforts to establish academic bodies inside South Africa with a clear democratic thrust to which academics could attach themselves. Morris noted that his own faculty/staff association of the University of Natal had aligned itself with the UDF and he discussed the steps being taken to establish a new, nation-wide grouping of democratically-inclined academics. The existence of such a body with a clearly-defined membership could make it easier for those outside the country to make relevant judgements about the credentials of those coming from inside. However, Morris reminded the gathering of the harsh fact that, to a considerable degree, it was still the South African state that would be making many of the operative decisions, precisely by denying or granting passports and entry visas!

John Saul recalled to the audience that the CAAS had already established a precedent for flexible response to visiting South African academics many years earlier. Thus, at the 1976 meetings in Victoria the credentials of Professor J. Moolman, a South African academic deeply implicated in the apartheid apparatus, were queried at the business meeting and his invitation to speak at the conference withdrawn. Any abstract application of an “academic freedom” principle was quite self-consciously over-ridden by the vote; at the same time the *bona fides* of other South African academics at the conference of very different (but still quite diverse) political credentials from Moolman's were, equally self-consciously, not so questioned. The current debate seemed to confirm the wisdom of this earlier stance.

Saul saw the case of Canadian academics proposing to go to South Africa to be rather more complicated. Certainly, there was not likely to emerge a Canadian organization with anything like the equivalent role Morris hoped the group-in-the-making of which he had spoken might come to play in South Africa (although the establishment of a clearer set of guidelines on the issue by the CAAS might be a step in the right direction here in Canada). In theory, Saul suggested, the onus of proof should still fall upon the scholar concerned to establish the legitimacy of any given trip, even if it did remain difficult to imagine precisely how this might be monitored. In the end, perhaps, it would have to come down to a judgement call on the part of the scholar *and his or her peers*, one made in the context of an on-going (and inevitably political) discussion regarding the appropriateness of various quite concrete kinds of linkages established with South Africa. But such a scholar should also feel constrained to touch base broadly with relevant bodies inside South Africa. This would be most straightforward approach *vis-à-vis* a university like the Univer-

sity of the Western Cape where there exist both Senate regulations governing academic exchanges, regulations designed to permit only those exchanges which, in broad terms, further the anti-apartheid struggle and a Senate International Relations Committee established precisely to monitor these regulations. (Significantly, UWC also has a faculty-based Association for Democratic Education which plays an active role around these questions.) At other universities such an attempt to institutionalize the means both to take seriously the academic boycott and to render it acceptably and usefully flexible have not been developed to this kind of level. But staff associations do exist at many of them which do take the issue seriously and these might fruitfully be consulted, for example.

But what of the specific case of Paul Lovejoy? Here, there did seem to be some agreement amongst participants in the seminar. Lovejoy

himself is no apologist for apartheid and, indeed, had earned his visa rejection by virtue of certain critical remarks he had made in the media regarding the activities of the South African government. Moreover, presentation of his work on Nigeria could provide for an enlightening scholarly exchange, even if the various African Studies Centres he proposed to visit cannot readily be seen as central to the popular movement and even if his topic is not particularly central to advancing the anti-apartheid cause. At the same time, unfortunately, it was not clear just how actively he had pursued relevant opinion inside South Africa itself regarding the likely utility of his visit; it was also apparent that many progressive academics, under a similar set of circumstances, might choose not to go – even if they were to obtain a visa. Still, on the merits of the case, most felt it would not be easy to deny Lovejoy leave to follow his own conscience in this regard.

It bears noting, however, that in the lively discussion which followed the presentations by the panelists no-one seemed inclined to support Lovejoy on his own chosen grounds, on the basis, that is, of any claimed *right* – cast in terms of the importance of academic freedom and transcending political considerations – to go there! Rejection of this kind of argument seemed to be demanded by the continuing strength of the logic of the academic boycott, however flexibly it is now to be interpreted. There remains the need to cut off links with the apartheid system (although not with the movement of democratic opposition) and continued merit in refusing to yield the high ground of principle from which to critique, embarrass and counteract those academics – South African or Canadian – whose activities and movements place them unequivocally on the wrong side of the struggle for a democratic South Africa.

## Readers' Forum . . . .

### MAGAIA BOOK AVAILABLE

19 May 1988

It was good to see your report on Lina Magaia's tour promoting her book, *Dumba Nengue: Run For Your Life*. It will be useful for your readers to mention that this book is published by Africa World Press Inc. and that our distributor in Canada is the Development Education Centre, 229 College St., Toronto, M5T 1R4.

Congratulations for producing an excellent and consistent source of information and analysis on Southern Africa.

Kassahun Checole, Publisher  
Africa World Press Inc.  
Box 1892, Trenton, NJ, USA

### BRUCE PATON PHOTOS

11 May 1988

A brief note to say how much I enjoyed your February issue on "The Frontline" – an excellent review of crucial regional topics, and one that I hope will get the broad readership it deserves.

It was also interesting to be confronted with ... Bruce's co-op photos; it's a real credit to him that they don't pale even for those of us [here] who feel as if we've lived with them for years!

Best for the future,  
Yours sincerely,  
Murray McCartney  
Director, CUSO Zimbabwe





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