



CULTURAL ORGANISATION - WHAT IS IT AND WHY?

By Mzwakhe Mbuli

The most important issue in South Africa today is to work towards the destruction of apartheid and its culture, and the creation of a new, alternative, non-racial, united and democratic society. In order to bring about a new, just order, cultural workers, like other groupings, need to be organised, to come together in a cohesive way.

What do we mean when we talk about being organised? The first thing we think of is how workers are organised in a factory, into a union. In the same way, cultural workers must become organised within their disciplines.

But it is not enough just to claim membership of an or-

ganisation. It is the duty of every member of an organisation to promote the organisation, to talk at every opportunity about the aims and objectives of that organisation. Without every individual member playing an active role, the aims and objectives of an organisation can never be implemented.

When I talk about cultural workers, I mean all writers, film-makers, photographers, sculptors, poets, musicians,

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playwrights, actors, athletes and those involved in other art forms.

All these people have a special duty to struggle in the field of ideas and to become more inventive. Part of the development of ideas involves attending regular meetings and workshops to see whether one's ideas are valid or not. It is very important to share one's insights with one's fellow cultural workers.

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This applies to both individuals and organisations. Links must be created between progressive cultural organisations and other forces around the country. Cultural organi-

sations must also clarify where they stand in relation to the mass democratic movement.

Cultural organisation has a greater role than just in the cultural world - it has a political role as well. There are two

cultures in this country as a result of the apartheid policy - the dominant culture and the culture of the oppressed. The imbalance of the sharing of the cultural means of production and of cultural resources is a political issue and cultural workers cannot escape this.

Cultural imperialism has also been a bitter experience throughout our history. When people take what belongs to us and make it their possession, when people turn our culture into a commodity and market it without our permission, that is cultural imperialism. For example, one person went to a recording studio with some material. When the recording was completed that person was murdered and their work sent overseas. So someone else took that material through criminal means.

Another side of cultural imperialism was to be seen at the NUM Kinross Day at the City Hall. There were huge TV crews standing right in front of everyone so that we could not see the beautiful plays and dances that were being performed. And these people were not even filming for community videos, they were filming for overseas TV news, for shows that will never be seen here. Our culture has been projected as being improved by the apparatus of western culture.

We believe that we must set up alternatives to these things that we are criticising. We are not going to wait until we are free. We have started this already. I am a living example of creating an alternative. I

grew up listening to poetry and songs which I did not like and I decided to create something different. I am the living opposite to bubblegum music!

people. They must be prepared to make sacrifices like benefit concerts too, so that there is a whole stadium full of people, while you, the artist, are getting nothing.

Every day people are suffering and the cultural workers must be prepared to put their energy into relieving this.

Organisations must set up ways of publishing and disseminating culture that do not exploit the cultural workers. Two leading publishing houses in South Africa have turned down my poetry for publication, but now, thanks to cultural organisation, it will be published. We need these alternative structures for the stuff that mainstream companies won't take.

We are members of our communities before we are members of an organisation. We are part of the struggling masses - rent in creases, education issues, these affect us as well, and we must be there with the community to protest these things through a poem or a skit or whatever.

Just as there are armchair politicians, so there are armchair cultural workers who can only communicate with the masses through the newspapers, TV, or through books bought in bookshops. This is not what it should be. Every day people are suffering and the cultural workers must be prepared to put their energy into relieving this.

They must not wait for something big like Mpho and Mphonyane, but they must be there everyday with the

I feel very strongly that culture must be used both as a weapon and a vehicle to raise the awareness of people

about their living conditions and the reasons for their suffering. Particularly since avenues of freedom of expression have been affected by the state of emergency. It is our duty to turn the people's anger into progressive action.

To be progressively equipped we need to change the way that we have been operating in the past. We need to find new ways of working. We have to mix with other cultural workers for criticism of our work. Failing to accept criticism is the opposite of progressive.

If people had not been forced into exile we would be far along this path, but as it is, the people who were left behind who were active in the cultural field were the proponents of "Black Art". Not one of these black consciousness people who is highly involved in art ever helped me. I have been self-struggling, self-taught. Now it is for us to help other struggling cultural workers.

We must hold workshops that generate enthusiasm and upgrade the political consciousness of cultural workers. The Info Song was both a disaster and a lesson to many of us. And then two months ago young and old athletes partici-

pated in a fun run, not knowing they were celebrating the 75th anniversary of the SAP.

I want to believe that when all these people are exposed to regular workshops such controversies and problems can be avoided far in advance. We also need to hold workshops to educate cultural workers on issues like copyright, royalties, contracts, sponsorship and promotion etc.

Cultural workers must be prepared to make sacrifices. In South Africa we are in a war situation and one can't always avoid the consequences of one's actions. In any struggle, there are those cultural workers who are prepared to make sacrifices and who suffer the worst and there are those cultural workers who play "safe politics" and who get away unscathed.

I am not prepared to censor myself. This means that I am prepared to make sacrifices. It is incredible that some people are scared to write about the wrongs of this country when others are prepared to take up arms against these wrongs.

Victor Jara didn't compromise, he sacrificed.

Michael Smith didn't compromise, he sacrificed.

Like Bob Marley, Pablo Neruda.

People are in exile because they were not prepared to compromise, but to sacrifice.

I am one of them. I am not prepared to compromise, but to sacrifice.

COSAW

The Congress of South African Writers

'The making of death among the oppressed is the only solution the present regime has for its inability to relinquish power and to scrap apartheid.

'The Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), is an organisation whose aim is to become part and parcel of the "struggle for liberation", an organisation to defend the principles of non-racialism and democracy.

'The writers (who formed COSAW) located themselves within the life and death struggle for freedom. It is within this struggle that the role of South African writers, black and white, is located and defined.

'By being in the present, part and parcel of the struggle for liberation, South African writers shall also have been part and parcel of the past collective experience of masters and servants in our apartheid history, and they shall enter collectively into the future of a united South Africa, as equal men and women, black and white.

tion. Now it needs to be defended by writers, through their writing.'

'This process remains a possibility, it has been set in motion. Now it needs to be defended by writers, through their writing.'

(Mongane Wally Serote)

