

THE CULTURAL BOYCOTT - A TOOL OF LIBERATION OR A TOOL OF CENSOR- SHIP?

Speech given by Hazzie Sibanyoni at a seminar organised by COSAW (Tvl) at Wits University on 14 April 1988.

The cultural boycott against apartheid South Africa is but one front of the total struggle to free our country of all forms of racism and prejudice against the majority of the people. The apartheid regime - finding itself faced with a more powerful drive for disinvestment and sanctions than ever before internationally - endeavoured to maintain its contacts with the international community through cultural and academic exchanges.

Apartheid's Lies

Twenty years ago an international campaign was launched to isolate South Africa in the cultural and academic fields. The boycott was initiated in order to expose the facade behind which the apartheid

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The fruits borne out of this exercise were the formations which we have seen developing around the globe to take up this call, particularly the anti-apartheid movements.

The UN Blacklist

We have seen the United Nations developing a register of all individuals and groups who defy the call of the inter-

national community of making no contact with racist apartheid. We have also witnessed artists who have formed organisations like the AAA (Artists Against Apartheid) to pursue the goals and ideals of not entertaining apartheid.

Today we commend the stand taken by the IAAF (International Amateur Athletics Federation) against Zola Budd. It is the same Thatcher government which accords Zola a passport of convenience while it denied a similar right to Wally Serote in December to attend the CASA festival in Amsterdam.

While the Botha regime continues to avail large sums of money to lure renegades to visit this country, sportsmen and women, and cultural workers worthy of their salt are refusing to connive with racism. Today, undoubtedly South

Africa stands out in isolation like a sore thumb in the international arena.

APARTHEID AND CULTURE

Apartheid as a political system is based on certain norms and values. As such it has developed its own culture - an oppressive culture. This is the culture that is taught in our schools and universities.

Apartheid education and its culture is meant to reinforce both ethnic and racial differences among the people of our country.

Apartheid culture is aimed at reinforcing white superiority whilst at the same time destroying and distorting the values and norms of other races and classes - one reason why there are different educational systems for the different races in our country.

One will hear the Botha Malan regime talk about having achieved multiracialism in, for instance, sport. We all know how hollow that statement is - one can just take a look at soccer, rugby, golf, where only few people of different races mix at 'professional' level whilst downwards the racial structures stand as they were 40 years ago. Such sentiments have been echoed by PACT which claims to be multiracial because it has 4 black faces among the multitude of its exclusively white membership. It is our duty and responsibility to expose such lies and distortions.

The racist regime owns and controls all the means of production and the wealth of our country, accumulated through cheap labour, super-exploitation and the dehumanisation of the black majority. Apartheid uses these resources to train a few members of society in certain skills and then go about shouting to the whole world about what it has achieved over time.

Bribes and Black-mail

It is not surprising that the regime has paid large sums of money in bribes and blackmail in its efforts to maintain cultural links with the rest of the world. In the process we have just witnessed a number of attacks of people's values and proud history as portrayed in insulting productions like 'Shaka Zulu' portrayed by Henry Cele - much to the joy of many of our white counterparts.

The response from our people has been an out-of-hand rejection of all these ploys at manipulating minds with poison.

Together with the distortions of apartheid culture, we have and are witnessing the commercialisation of our culture. When people conceive of a cultural act, they have to think about how marketable it will be.

The second question is whether SABC will find it in good taste because such monopoly of the airwaves acts as determinant of what is produced. Stevie Wonder got banned by the SABC for com-

posing a song against apartheid, a number of other artist's works have been banned by SABC because, as in the case of Vusi Shange the song was 'not good for blacks' even though the lyrics had been altered a number of times.

PEOPLE'S CULTURE

Alongside the oppressive and manipulative culture of the minority regime, there is developing alternative culture - a people's culture.

People's culture is a culture of resistance against political oppression and economic exploitation. It evolves as part and parcel of the overall struggle for national democracy and socialism.

This is the culture that is aimed at finding and developing the untapped talents possessed by our people. It is a culture where the voice of the masses shall reign supreme. It is the people themselves. The world has seen noble contributions of cultural workers in the likes of Amilcar Cabral and Agostino Neto (to mention but a few) to this people's culture. The cultural contributions of these combatants was not in ivory towers but in the theatres of struggle.

Undoubtedly these comrades were part and parcel of the structures operative in the respective situations. That is why we believe that cultural workers, as oppressed and exploited members of our society, need to build their own democratic organisations.

A resolution adopted at the CASA conference last year, on structures read as follows: '...that a national democratic cultural organisation be formed to cater for the cultural, political, economic, social aspirations of cultural workers in the national democratic movement...'

It is in these trenches that 'professional' artists and developing cultural workers will work together and learn from one another. It is in such formations that issues like the cultural boycott can be debated and refined.

CENSORSHIP OR LIBERA- TION

In an endeavour to address the question of whether the boycott is a tool for censorship or liberation one point has to be made clear: The boycott has struck a mighty blow to the confidence of the racist minority. It is presented with an option that if it wants to be counted among the league of nations, it has to abandon apartheid and must, of necessity transform present-day South Africa into a united, democratic and non-racial country.

These sentiments were echoed by both the 2nd Congress of COSATU and the CASA festival in Amsterdam

- 'ISOLATE APARTHEID'.

For a very long time now there has been confusion among artists about the cultural boycott. This confusion has been compounded by the fact that the artists themselves have not been party to the making of such decisions. Opportunists have also ridden on the bandwagon to create more confu-

...the cultural and academic boycott by the international community must be continued and intensified with greater vigour.

sion and to try and break it.

In an effort to clear this confusion and to stop this opportunism our cultural workers are called upon to come forward and be party to the debate in trying to define the boycott for the benefit of all peace loving people of our land. This call is made in line with the resolutions adopted at CASA on structures and on the boycott itself where it was recognised that the boycott is '... a *tactic* that needs to be applied with a degree of *flexibility* which takes into account the developing situation within the country.'

As long as cultural workers and artists are not part of the democratic movement, the boycott will be understood as a censorship tool. As long as they allow themselves to be used as cannon fodder by SABC, being involved in projects like the *Info Song*, *King Africa*, *Shaka Zulu*, and con-

tinue to be involved in government funded organisations like PACT and everything that is designed to under mine the integrity of the majority and promote the ideology of apartheid, the call will be understood as censorship.

People's culture will develop side by side with other organs of people's power in the townships, schools, factories and mines. Central to this culture is the formation of national organisations for cultural workers. Such structures will debate and advance the interests of cultural workers. Artists will share their experiences and learn from one another - those with skills will educate grassroots cultural workers without such skills. Such exchanges serve the cause of liberation.

The total observance of the cultural boycott is, in our view, a knockout punch for white supremacy. The organisation of cultural workers into progressive structures will not only serve to guide their actions and decisions, but will confirm the bankruptcy of the Botha Malan regime and its cohorts and at the same time strengthen the voice of liberation and peace.

COSATU believes that our people must discuss, in an open and honest manner, how the cultural boycott can be intensified while everything is done to isolate oppression and exploitation of our people and cultural workers.

VOELVRY - Countrywide tour of the New Afrikaans Music. Begins 2nd April at the Market Warehouse and continues through April and May, taking in all the major campuses. UWC, UCT, Rhodes, Upe and U of Natal (Pmb and Durban campuses) will also be visited. The tour promises to be one of the more interesting cultural events of '89. On tour will be the Gereformeerde Blues Band, Andre Letoit and Bernoldus Niemand.