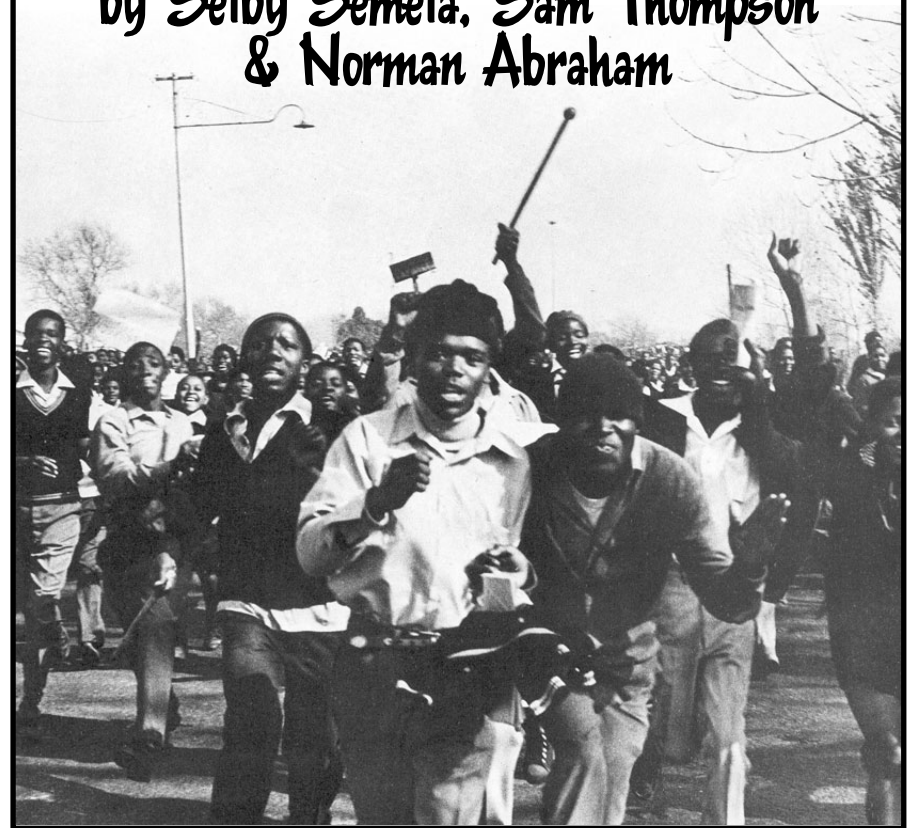


Reflections on the Black Consciousness Movement and the South African Revolution

by Selby Semela, Sam Thompson
& Norman Abraham



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The BCM never claimed to be a monolithic organisation; in actuality it was premised on the fact that it was not a monolithic organisation. The myth that Black Consciousness incorporated the activity of every rebellious black South African was exactly what became the semantic substitute for the monolithic organisation toward which the BCM logically tended, but whose inevitable symptoms of stultification the BCM leadership was sophisticated enough to want to avoid for as long as possible.

In mid-1979, however, the tireless bureaucratic work-mules in various BCM bureaucracies, realising that the ideology of mass support could no longer suffice now that the organisations were banned in South Africa and visibly decaying in exile, steered the BCM to its logical conclusion. The reality of organisation as a substitute for real struggle could no longer be diffused, and instead was affirmed openly. The BCM was made into an official liberation movement, with headquarters in Gaborone, and chapters in London, Bonn and New York. And the ideological *raison d'être* for its existence? To mediate, but not in a traditional Leninist style, but rather in the wishy-washy fashion of a UN peacekeeping force. To mediate not between theory and practice, or between the masses and power, but to mediate between the ANC and the PAC.

From the sublime to the most absolute form of cretinism! All the worms have crawled out of the corpse. The BCM's official proclamation as an organisation spells out unflinching that in its true colours and ideology and hierarchy, it is an enemy of real black proletarian struggle in South Africa.

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Black Consciousness theory was put into practice in the streets (and when the BCM organisations were left in the dust) - 1976/77 - the use of Black Consciousness as an apologia for specialists became the rule rather than the exception. The movement which claimed to have “analysed, assessed and defined the black community’s needs, aspirations, ideals and goals” was never so stagnant as in the period when the black South African community was starting to do these things for itself.

Certainly, the point is not - according to the faded Leninist dream - that the BCM was not there in 1976/77 to “lead” the struggle. Nor is the point that certain BCM members did not make important contributions to the struggle itself: some undeniably did (though one has seen in this and the preceding chapter the quality of the contributions made by others!). The point is rather that when it came to analysis, the remaining spokesmen of the BCM showed themselves capable of originality only in the sense of choosing which clichés most gloriously describe the struggle and their own participation in it. Nationalism re-emerged, less as a developed ideology, than out of wholesale approval of everything done by their black countrymen. Criticism of all but the most obvious targets - whites and sell-outs - became scarcer than three-legged dogs.

The conspicuous decline of the BCM into isolated groups of radical cheerleaders did not stem from a sudden eclipse of intelligence, and even less from the absence of things to criticise, analyse and precise. Rather it stemmed from the fact that a radical analysis of conditions by the black proletariat in action necessarily implied the correction of numerous aspects - theoretical as well as practical - of Black Consciousness itself; and it was precisely before the critique of its own house that Black Consciousness trembled.

With the visible return of open struggle to South Africa, Black Consciousness was confronted with the choice of either shattering its entire petrified organisational edifice or of denying that this organisational edifice was both an edifice and petrified. Faced with the amazing capacity of the masses for spontaneous organisation, the BCM chose the alternative of presenting the movement in the streets as though it were simply an adjunct to the Black Consciousness Movement, with a capital “M” for movement. The distinction between BCM leaders and the masses - a distinction made in practice by the BCM leaders - was concealed by pretending that everyone who acted intelligently in struggle was an honorary leader of a “movement” which had been left behind.

The real history made by the masses was hierarchically accorded a substitute history - the history of mass support for the BCM; and it was this substitute history that the partisans of BCM proclaimed as the black proletariat’s essence and truth. “Mass support,” the BCM’s own corrective to hierarchical leadership, in fact became a rubric by which the really hierarchical leaders of the BCM affirmed their success and their authority in just about everything. This “success” and “authority” became an abstract standard for measuring all struggle.

Thus the Black Consciousness Movement found a refuge in the myth of its power, which was inversely proportional to its practical effectiveness. The further it became separated from practical testation, the more important the myth became.

down. Everything was staked on the activity of the masses at the level of their everyday life. This was extremely ingenious and absolutely necessary; not only as a means of self-defence against the state, which would, as a matter of course, seek out and destroy the leadership of any “revolutionary” group, but for the advance of the struggle itself.

As an organisational framework, the BCM had only one practical goal: the popularisation of the philosophy of Black Consciousness, either by word or by practical example. What is the core of this philosophy? That the individual black man must recognise clearly his situation, overcome intimidation, and decide upon his own solution. That in other words he put himself in a position where he has no need for an organisation. No more than he has the need to hear from leaders of any organisation what society will look like after the revolution, since the struggle itself is going to resolve that in practice. The most ridiculous aspects of Black Consciousness writings consist in the quagmire of utopian speculation concerning the response to the question - a question which is always bourgeois - “What are you going to put in its place?”

The political groups that came into being out of Black Consciousness - most significantly the Black People’s Convention (BPC), South African Students Organisation (SASO), South African Students Movement (SASM), Black Allied Workers Union (BAWU), Black Community Programmes (BCP) - expressed the fundamental absurdity of vanguard organisation in South Africa - and in fact are a concrete case of the reality of avant-garde organisations in general. As organisations, these groups had no reason for existence other than to exist. They had no role to play as mediators between the masses and Power (the South African white rulers don’t negotiate with blacks), and in any case rejected that role. They had no role as mediators between theory and practice because they did not really have a theory - or, if you will, their theory was that the theory of struggle is made by those in struggle, not by a leadership elite. They took up the role of mediators against mediation.

The BMC did not really break with the logic of a hierarchical, avant-garde type organisation, but simply put off the question because of national circumstances. This is evident in the umbrella structure of the Black Consciousness Movement. While dealing with the “unorganised” blacks, the BCM heralded the individual; but when dealing in organisational terms, it put forward the ideology of the federation of autonomous organisations. A distinct hierarchy of those “organised” and those unorganised is implied. For those unorganised, the essential referent is “the system.” But when one becomes organised, the referent becomes a matter of building the organisation. The organisation does not spring from the determined agreement of individuals on common activity, from defining what is really organisable in their activity, but rather acts to publicise itself - the organisation.

Black Consciousness, defined in as really broad and really vague terms as it was, had run, from the start, the risk of becoming an apologist for all the actions taken by those who claimed to be a part of it: stooges like Ntatho Motlana and Gatsha Buthelezi still pose as Black Consciousness advocates to legitimise their campaigns for better scraps at the white man’s trough. At the time when the best of

★ Introduction: The Return of the ★ Red-headed Step-child

Selby Semela was an 18-year-old school pupil and treasurer of the Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC) on June 16, 1976. Forced into exile after being shot and wounded by a black policeman, he co-wrote this analysis aged about 21, and the strength of thought that shines through it shows him to have been an exceptional young man. He is believed to currently reside in New York City, but we have not been able to interview him, or to discover anything about his co-authors.

Nevertheless, what you hold in your hands is a unique slice of South African history: an analysis of the watershed ‘76 Revolt by a leading black participant in that insurrection - from a rare libertarian socialist perspective. The shotgun wedding in which South Africa was forcibly welded together out of two British colonies and two Boer republics in 1910 produced grimly racialised authoritarian political offspring: White Labourism and African Nationalism.

The real multiracial working class alternative of libertarian socialism (in its mass-based form, revolutionary unionism and parallel revolutionary neighbourhood organisations) was treated by both the Rand Lord oligarchy that grew rich off and the black chieftain / merchant class that founded the South African Native National Congress (SANNC, ancestor of the African National Congress, ANC) in 1912 as a red-headed step-child. From the founding of a local section of the revolutionary unionist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in 1910, to the establishment of the Industrial Workers of Africa (IWA) along similar lines in 1917, the step-child flexed its muscles and served notice on the old order.

But libertarian socialism was crushed in the 1920s in a vice between the devil of para-fascist Afrikaner nationalism, and the sea of “native republic” Stalinism. It fell into a coma from which it only surfaced briefly in the late 1950s / early 1960s with the establishment of a tiny libertarian Marxist current, the Movement for a Democracy of Content (MDC), which played a key role in the successful Alexandra bus boycott.

Then the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre and the subsequent banning of the nationalist “liberation” movements provided the pretext for the authoritarians of both camps to embark on a war with racist overtones that peaked in 1976/1977 and again in 1985-1987 (remember: the ANC only fully deracialised in 1985). While libertarian social-

ist tendencies were present in civic, street and trade union organising in the heat of the conflict, it was only in the dying days of racial-capitalist apartheid and its pseudo-opposition that a specific anarchist movement emerged from underground, culminating in the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation (ZACF) of today, a working class organisation that agitates among the poor for a rupture, a severance of ties between the exploited and the parasitic classes that rule us. The red-headed stepchild had awoken once more!

One of the pseudo-opposition's main aims in the war was to cynically use rank-and-file worker and poor community militancy to build the profile of what Semela and company call "the old spinster/huckster organisations: the African National Congress (ANC), the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC)."

Today, these hoary old pseudo-liberators have gone further than the old Afrikaner elite ever could to help the capitalist state overhaul its image, while maintaining iron discipline over the blood and bread of the working class. The "democratic" emperor and his phalanx of "corporate guerrillas" now wear Armani suits over their T-shirts of that dead Stalinist, *Ché Guevara*. Capitalist class rule, aided by reworked race classification, remains intact.

This is the process of deception, disintegration and decay the authors describe here with regard to Semela's own organisation back in the '70s, the SSRC - and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Both were, briefly, legitimately used by the oppressed to throw off their chains. Both are here castigated for their later pretensions to "leadership" of the struggle, for their "symbiotic" relationship with capitalist power, and for their substitution of the vanguard party-form for the masses themselves. That is the primary strength of this pamphlet.

Its main weakness is that while Semela & Co. make a distinctly libertarian socialist (albeit not anarchist communist) critique, they fail to suggest clear socio-organisational solutions to the problems they highlight. Hailing working class spontaneity, they are so shy of "bureaucracy", having had their fingers burnt by the BCM and SSRC, that they do not dare spell out what plural and organic forms working class organisation should take to ensure the continued political autonomy, self-sustainability and anti-capitalist content of that militancy.

The working class, peasantry and poor need to create their own organisations in their own image, completely divorced from the compromising models of both the ruling class and its pseudo-opposition.

These must be organs of decentralised power (not the refusal of power - or the concentration of power), run along direct-democratic lines in which every participant is a decision-maker, all empowered individuals strengthened by community.

These organs, as much as the "revolution" itself, are the "school of the oppressed" which train them to create egalitarian grassroots communism in the shell of capital, even as it is being gutted. These ideas, and not self-appointed leadership cadres, are what shall lead a future South(ern) African Revolution, the final overthrow of parasitic class rule and profiteering that our ANC/SACP/PAC/BCM "liberators" have forced to retreat far over our horizon.

★ *Black Consciousness and the* ★ *Black Consciousness Movement*

Ever since June 1976, much has been said of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). The more perceptive, less dogmatic cretins of the left, who ever-predictably impute vanguard explanations to every struggle, have used BCM as a surrogate vanguard to explain the events of 1976/77, seeing that there is not a single established party which could credibly fit the bill. Some even go so far as to blame the continued existence of the whole South African state on the fact that BCM was not sufficiently elitist, professional, organised: bureaucratic. Some take the opposite tack, and announce the BCM's vagueness as its greatest virtue: it is promoted in the image of a non-sectarian proletarian base up for grabs on the market of international constituencies.

It is high time that the miserable use to which BCM has been put ever since 1976/77 be put to an end, that justice be done to its achievements. Which is to say, the BCM's shortcomings must now be criticised pitilessly. Its principle contribution to the struggle in South Africa is, at this point in time, mere dead weight; the more it is eulogised, the more a critical analysis of an experience laden with revolutionary lessons is suppressed. It is not enough to heap shit on the self-serving actions of those who praise it and of the exiles who continue to act in its name: the ideas and the activities that gave Black Consciousness and the BCM their life must be held responsible for allowing room for all the post-1977 BCM bullshit.

The main accomplishment of Black Consciousness had very little to do with elaborating the necessary goals and methods of the South African revolution; its main accomplishment was much more to leave in the dust the false goals and methods of the struggles of the forties and fifties, and at the same time to expose the ineffectual strategies of the traditional "liberation" organisations.

Because of the conditions forced upon it by the state, Black Consciousness deliberately sidestepped the whole question of what in fact its goals were. Pronouncing itself as revolutionary could serve no purpose other than to bring down the wrath of the police. To openly favour violence, or to attempt to lead people into any direct confrontation with the state could have only lead to failure. On the other hand, although BCM claimed itself to be non-violent, it did not engage in the impotent acts of civil disobedience practiced in a previous generation by the ANC and PAC (as well as by the American civil rights movement). "Non-violence" was simply a means of self-defence; it certainly was not a strategy, as is shown by any perusal of Black Consciousness literature, which constantly stresses the absurdity of expecting any significant changes by the state in response to moral pressure.

Organisationally, Black Consciousness took the entire logic of Leninism - the "enlightened" party ("theory") and the passive base ("practice") - and turned it upside-

In acknowledging its authority, the police confirmed the SSRC's legitimacy. To be legitimised by one's immediate enemy is a sure sign of one's fundamental conciliation.

A look at the organisational structure of the SSRC is helpful in that it exposes with clarity the alienated and stultified social relations that characterised the "vanguard of Soweto." The self-appointed executive, dictatorially controlled by its chairman, deliberately distanced itself from its supporters until a group of several students under the chairman's direct control were elevated to the position of national leaders.

The more their reputation grew, even amongst the students themselves, the less they participated in the struggle. Their activities revolved around the traditional and banal specialisations of the administrative and the propagandistic, while the masses they pretended to lead were out on the streets in their thousands. Where the leadership avoids the line of battle, its claim as supreme leaders rebounds invariably upon itself in the form of ridicule at its own cowardice. Not surprising then that the great SSRC leadership steers its bastard "party" from the safe helm of the Nigerian state.

In exile there are a barrage of students who in many cases have fled hot from the struggle at home. Everywhere they are captives of the ideologies of the world their revolution had demanded they destroy. There are those who have joined the old liberation organisations and sit in army camps in Stalinist countries throughout the world, being fed the cynical lie of a victorious return. There are those who still pay obeisance to the superficial power of the SSRC. They are merely museum pieces in different museums, all marked "revolutionary." Everywhere revolutionaries, but what has happened to the revolution? Everywhere the same alienation is preponderate, everywhere the spectacular consumption of ideology, everywhere obedience to hierarchy and the veneration of the past. To hell with the ideological variations, and the different names and faces. Under all the rhetoric there is nothing.

For those students who have evaded the pitfalls of those of their peers who have made their unhappy ways into the voracious jaws of either ANC, PAC, or Third Force, there awaits another odious misconception - the pitiful glorification and mimicry of the defeated revolutionary projects of the past. Once courageous participants in their own revolutionary history, they now content themselves with being dazzled by the pseudo-revolutionary glitter of the revolutions that have been lost, invariably in dedication to the solid temple of names radical - Lenin, Trotsky, Mao, Guevara, Cabral and all the rest.

True communism is only possible from below, when the vast majority of the under-classes resolve en masse to end our slavery in our own right, in our own name and by our own organs of communal power. The social revolution will only be carried out by the "wretched of the earth". The time has come for the return of the red-headed step-child. With the hammer of revolutionary working class unity in her fist, she will smash capital and the state.

- Michael Schmidt,
Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation (ZACF),
Southern Africa, 2005

★ The 1976/77 Insurrection ★

“The school for the oppressed is a revolution.”

- Soweto pamphlet, 1976.

The manner in which the violent uprisings that swept South Africa in 1976/77 have been defined by the international spectacular society and its pseudo-opposition exposes their wilful determination to misinterpret, misrepresent, and misunderstand what was a decisive event in the history of proletarian struggle in that country. Everything emanating from established circles - from the Nat regime in South Africa, to the racist white man or woman on a Johannesburg street and from the African National Congress and Pan Africanist Congress (ANC and PAC), to pseudo-oppositional leftists the world over - has not only undermined but also distorted the events that occurred in South Africa.

For a start, what happened in South Africa cannot be encapsulated in alienated notions of time and space. It was not isolated to June of 1976. It was not restricted to Soweto. It was not merely the act of students. Nor was it simply a revolt, rebellion or unrest. It was creative revolution in the making, in the desperately clear moment of confrontation.

The events that shook the entire edifice of white South Africa, and threw into stark relief the notion of total revolution, began with relative inconspicuousness. A group of Soweto junior high school students at a single school protested the use of Afrikaans (the official language of the oppressors) as a medium of instruction. The revolt of high school students against the enforcement of learning in the Boer language was significant in itself. It marked, from the outset, a highly advanced struggle to the extent that it was a rejection of the colonisation of consciousness, which triggered off the insurrection, even when so many other material reasons for resistance existed.

Initially, however, the Soweto student protest followed the traditional defeatist lines of oppositional politics: the students boycotted classes. But in a community such as Soweto, where any contestation immediately brings down on itself the entire repressive apparatus, symbolic protest cannot be contained to the symbol, but must overflow into the realm of real struggle. For a community that is all too well acquaint-

the June 16 demonstration, wanting to lend legitimacy to their claims of leadership, hijacked the controls of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) organisation, SASM, from its elected executives who were based in Cape Town.

How could an open struggle that raged for almost two years, and spread the length and breadth of the country, involving at least two hundred cities or towns and hundreds of thousands of active participants, have been under the control of an ad hoc committee that only emerged full-fledged in August, almost two months after June 16, and a fortnight or so before its first self-appointed leadership went into exile?

All revolutionary history shows the part played in the defeat of popular struggle by the appearance of an ideology advocating popular struggle. Within the BCM the ideology of “mass action” lay latent almost from the start. With the uprisings that began in Soweto, the ideology found the SSRC as its vehicle and came to the fore. The black proletariat’s spontaneous organisation of its struggle assured its early successes; but this gave way to a second phase in which the “fifth column” worked from the inside in the form of the SSRC as the vanguard movement. The mass movement sacrificed its reality for the shadow of its defeat.

Even though the SSRC did have widespread support amongst the Soweto high school students and gained international recognition, to justify it on the strength of its allegiance is to miss the point. Popularity of a hierarchical organisation does not condone the organisation, but exposes the degree to which the consciousness of its supporters has been colonised.

The most important point is to recognise that the SSRC owed its reputation to the very organisation of South African daily life, to institutions compatible with apartheid and the white state, which the proletariat in action was out to destroy. It was the press that gave it a name both literally and metaphorically. It was an intellectually intimidated community both at home and abroad which was highly susceptible to advertisable commodities that gave it pride of place on the stage of revolution.

Inside Soweto the SSRC’s ability to stabilise itself and to advance its vanguard aspirations at the very time that the struggle intensified, and when all other organisations were key Black Consciousness organisations (ANC and PAC having all but disappeared), is not testimony to its indispensability. On the contrary, in Soweto the SSRC enjoyed a deep degree of very bourgeois respectability, being recognised by moderates (who highly condemned the folly of struggle), as the only visible and legal organ still operable, and which seemed to be the only possible starting point for some sort of detente. High-ranking officials in the South African Police shared the same opinion.

A concrete example of the SSRC’s moderation is to be found in one of its press releases in October 1976. In this statement, the SSRC leadership condemned anonymous leaflets which had been circulated in Soweto and which incited people to violence. Small wonder that as a result senior police officers in Johannesburg as much as thanked the SSRC for its collaboration, when the police issued a press statement immediately afterwards, in which they said that they felt that the township would be peaceful and law-abiding because the SSRC had repudiated the leaflets.

★ The Soweto ★ Students Representative Council

“The repulsive absurdity of certain hierarchies and the fact that the whole strength of commodities is directed blindly and automatically towards their protection, leads us to see that ever hierarchy is absurd.”

**- Situationist International.
The Decline and Fall of the Spectacular
Commodity Economy (1965)**

If any organisation had grounds on which to ascribe to itself a vanguard role in the 1976/77 period of the struggle, it was the Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC). The SSRC, which emerged from the zealous superstar scouting of the South African press more than anything else, has since then laid firm claim to the dubious honour of the avant-garde party. Internationally this claim has been contested by the old spinster/huckster organisations: the African National Congress (ANC), the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). At home in South Africa, and among exiles in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, the bidding of the old-league nationalist-stalinists have largely fallen on deaf ears.

Unfortunately not so the pretensions of the careerists who were one-time leaders of the SSRC and who now parade under the title of the “Third Force.” There are many exiled students who seem quite contented to submit to the spectacle of their self-styled leadership and titillate themselves with the memory of past participation in the struggle. Too bad for those in search of a shepherd that the hunt for a vanguard party will only find a fleeting shadow.

As for the leadership of the “Third Force,” it is one of the most hideous hierarchical freaks ever spawned by revolutionary experience, and history has never been lacking in grotesque examples. Concocted in the fashion of a passively consumable item, at a time when its later consumers were far from idle, it had to wait for exile before it could raise its ugly head. From outside South Africa the “Third Force” has joined the ANC and PAC in perpetuating the self-same myths that have always crippled proletarian struggle, and even indulges in the same ruthless and coercive tactics when it comes to dealing with others who do not subscribe to its own stupidity, and when it comes to expanding its own tiny ranks.

The SSRC grew out of an organisation known as the South African Students Movement (SASM), although its relation to that organisation was extremely dubious. In the heat of the first week of the uprisings, a number of the earlier co-ordinators of

ed with lumpen criminality and with unrelenting brutality on a daily basis, violence is always a ready-at-hand implement to pit against the contradictions of daily life. The striking students were no exception. Nor for them the “ponderous” problem of morality and constraint. A teacher who ignored student demands was stabbed by screw-driver-wielding youths. Police were stoned. Two government officials were killed by a young man from Soweto.

In a matter of days the students had gained the support of their parents, and had coerced the teachers into backing their demands. The authorities still refused to concede. Afrikaans remained as a medium of instruction.

At this point the confrontation between the students and the state (in the institutional form of the school) was contained to, at the most, a handful of campuses. How was the transformation made so that these grievances ignited the fury of all black South Africa? Those who sought the answer in the form of an effective and extensive centralised organisation - be they the South African state on the search for scapegoats, or the international humanitarian conscience on the search for superstars - were in for a rude surprise. (Eventually the South African state was able to fabricate its scapegoats whom the international opposition were then able to turn into superstars. Thus symbiotically, the state and its pseudo-opposition succeeded in fooling themselves and almost everybody else except the real participants in the struggle, by recreating the events that began on June 16, in their own image.)

But there were no leaders - only a handful of militant individuals (prior to June 16), inspired by their frustration in the face of unyielding authority, who with the help of friends set out to organise something, the content of which, let alone the consequences, they were in no position to anticipate.

A group of students from Orlando West Junior High School - the first school to boycott classes - and some of their friends from other schools such as Morris Isaacson High School - as yet unaffected by the Afrikaans issue - arranged a general demonstration in protest of the state's design to use the language of the oppressor as a language of instruction.

Once again the tactics, the form of protest - a demonstration - was a symbolic one, albeit more dangerous, since demonstrations of any kind in South Africa are, by statute, punishable offences. The organisers of the demonstration - the embryo of a later-to-be self-proclaimed leadership - proceeded to visit all local schools to gather support.

The response of the Soweto students who attended that demonstration on June 16 far exceeded the expectations of the organisers. As opposed to the anticipated couple of thousand demonstrators expected by the organisers, about 30,000 students gathered at Orlando West High School.

The placards carried by those gathered already portended things to come. There were slogans not only denouncing Afrikaans and Bantu Education, but also such slogans as: “Power,” “Smash the system,” “Away with Vorster,” “We'll fight until total liberation.”

In festive mood the students took their protest to the streets. Inevitably they were confronted by the brute force of the South African state, who, by ruse of history,

understood the implications of the students' actions even more clearly than most of the students themselves were able to at that time. Without warning the police opened fire on the singing and marching students. The students at the front of the procession began to retreat, but their flight was halted by the act of one person. One young woman stood her ground, then defiantly walked towards the police shouting "Shoot me!" Inspired by this incredible act - so incredible that the police did not shoot - the students' retreat turned into a regroupment and frenzied counter-attack. Rocks were torn from the ground and hurled at the police. After a second volley of shots had left more students dead and wounded, the leadership suddenly reappeared, in the form of one Tsietsi Mashinini, who stood up on an overturned vehicle and exhorted his fellow students to disperse.

He was promptly forced to scuttle when the students turned their rocks on him. While the leadership was thus "left in the bush," so was their newfound style of contestation - demonstration; for the students did not disperse, not to seek refuge at home from "inevitable" suicide, as the self-proclaimed leadership had urged, but to rampage through the streets of Soweto in a potlatch of destruction.

Within days spontaneous rioting had broken out in every major area of the country. The South African blacks launched a vicious attack on apartheid, commodities and state power. The original grievance was quickly superseded, not because it was insignificant, but because the extremity of the insurrection put everything else in question along with it.

By August 1976, the white state was being forced to retreat on all fronts.

- ★ Almost all schools had been attacked and many had been burnt down. The students were in almost daily confrontation with the police.
- ★ Almost every beer hall in the black townships had been razed to the ground.
- ★ Collaborators within the townships had been severely attacked. Not a single "respectable" black community figure was able to come forwards as a mediator.
- ★ High school students and young "ex-thugs" prevented workers from going to work in Johannesburg, threatening taxi-drivers, blocking trains and sabotaging railroads. Workers quickly responded, and even after coercion had abated, strikes in Johannesburg and in Cape Town were 80-100% effective. Some of the workers who went to work went, not because they were intimidated by the system, but in order to sabotage white-owned technology and commodities.

The heeding of the call for a general strike marked a qualitative leap in the struggle, not because the workers became the vanguard of the revolt, but because strike action had as its target not only direct oppressors, but the whole commodity system. Most left-wing specialists draw attention to the percentage of worker participation, which was always high. This draws attention away from what in fact people were striking for. Not a single economic demand was enunciated. The strikers had nothing to ask of their masters and they knew it.

- ★ Coloureds and Indians had been drawn into the struggle, thus bridging a historical

gap among the oppressed that had existed for generations.

★ The Bophuthatswana (a government-created black "homeland") houses of parliament had been razed to the ground. All government appointed black leaders were in danger of losing their lives. Many lost their houses.

★ Numerous black policemen had fled the townships. Several were killed. After nightfall one-time "lumpen criminals" joined with students and workers to attend to community needs.

★ The worker stay-aways drew the adult population into the struggle. Before then they would leave for work in the white cities in the early morning and return after nightfall, while the students squared off against the state. During the stay-aways, the workers were drawn into the confrontation, being forced by the sheer magnitude of the bitter struggle to join the youth in their battle against the system.

For the remainder of 1976 and through to June of 1977, violence continued across the country. Within four months of June 16, about two hundred black communities had been swept along by the tide of revolution. Major areas like Soweto, Guguletu, New Brighton, etc, are still shaken at times by new revolts.

Let the moralists and the humanitarians pretend the students were always peace-loving, and mere victims of violence. The events in South Africa have exploded that insipid myth. In a situation in which state violence is institutionalised on such an overwhelming scale, one affirms one's humanity not by "turning the other cheek" and suffering with dignity, but by wilfully and consciously accepting one's share of violence and by understanding that brute systematic force can only be destroyed by the creative violence of the masses.

In June 1977 the executive of a student organisation, whose credibility as a vanguard emerged out of the hero and/or agitator seeking of the South African press, was detained by the South African police. The recent trial of these individuals along with a great many others of the same type are important to note, for by means of these sham efforts of justice the South African state has attempted to delineate in time a quasi-official ending to the period of open class struggle in South Africa. The logic is: arrest the leaders, arrest the revolution.

This official self-delusion of the state is mimicked by many of its opponents in exile. The exile's lament, in spite of his real anguish and homesickness, his glum belief that "the revolution has been suppressed again," is pitifully vacuous. It is designed only to convince his listeners that despite his present passivity he remains committed to the struggle in which his past participation is often very dubious anyway.

But the struggle has not been suppressed as is witnessed by the consistent reports of unrest and sporadic violence in the South African press. Such events underline the ongoing ferment that sustains the revolutionary spirit from day to day throughout South Africa.