



## WORKS

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 Nthatho 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 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 in 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 criticize, 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 was 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 was 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

