



WORKS

3. 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 the 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 criticized pitilessly. Its principal 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 side-stepped 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 only have led to failure. On the other hand, although BCM claimed itself to be nonviolent, 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.

