



Organisationally, Black Consciousness took the entire logic of Leninism – the “enlightened” party (“theory”) and the passive base (“practice”) – and turned it upside-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 at the core of this philosophy? That the individual black man must recognise clearly his situation, overcome his 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.

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 BCM did not really break with the logic of an 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 who are 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 a determined agreement of individuals on common activity, from defining what is really organizable in their activity, but rather acts to publicise itself—the organisation.

