

N3.27

THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN OUR STRUGGLE

Jan
Mongisi

Comrades, I greet you all in the name of the Progressive Movement and its banished, banned, exiled and imprisoned leadership.

Amandla!

Our task here, is to look at the role the youth should play in our struggle for liberation. You will immediately realise from the topic, how much involved and broad the paper is going to be. In fact, it is an honour to be given the task to write a paper of this magnitude, to stand in front of the cream and pride of our country and read it before this youthful and respectable audience.

I sincerely believe that from this important gathering of youth from all corners of South Africa, we are all going to benefit from the resourceful experience of comrades from different places. It is true that we young people are ever thirsty and yearning to learn. Our progressive pool of knowledge is perpetually overflowing, and as long as it remains full the cadres shall - quench their thirst.

Our paper is not a lecture on the role of the youth in our struggle, it merely serves to introduce the topic for discussion by all comrades.

In order to understand our role in the struggle, we shall first have to understand the society we live in. Our society shall be dealt with at two levels :

- a) Firstly, society in its universal sense i.e. generally.
- b) and secondly, with regard to our particular situation in South Africa.

Society is a group of people with certain cultural and social practices engaged in the most important activity of production. We are saying that the most important activity that society is involved in, is the activity of production. Two questions immediately arise:

- a) What is production?
- b) Why is this production the most important activity in society?

Our response to the first question is that production is the process or activity of labour or work through which people acquire their basic needs. By basic needs we mean food, clothing and shelter.

This process

This process of labour takes place in the factory, big farms, mines, giant industries and so on. Not all members of the society are involved in the direct process of work, but however, the majority of the working people is. Only a minute section is totally uninvolved and does not participate in order to create the needs of society. Therefore this activity of work which is meant to create food to eat, clothes to put on and shelter or houses to live in is referred to as Production.

In response to our second question, we already see how important this process of labour is to society. In fact society cannot exist without this process of making its own means of subsistence. Production is compatible with society and indispensable if society is to maintain itself and further develop. There is no machine that can operate without energy, a car needs petrol as a source of energy to move and big machines in industry need electricity which is converted to utilisable forms of energy in order to perform their task. Similarly, for society to be sustained and maintained, production of the essentials of life is indispensable. That is why this activity is the most important in our lives.

Our society is not formed of individuals who merely interact with each other. It is a society of people who form certain mutual relationships with each other, and this relationship is referred to as social relations or relations of production. These relations are just not simple relations between people and objects, but they are relations between people themselves in their productive activity. Certain definite associations are formed among those who work, that is those who participate directly in the productive activity. As working people, they form working relations, and it is these relations that classify them as a group of its own, a force in itself. This group is in the majority and is referred to as the working class.

These are not the only relations which are formed around production. Other relations are formed with a minute section of our society. These are the relations between people who work i.e. those previously referred to as the working class and those who do not participate in production. This minority of individuals which does not engage itself in the process of labour, is referred to as the Capitalist class or Bourgeoisie. Their only role is to own the factories, big industries, the mines, big farms and so on. They decide by themselves how production which has been created by the labour of the working class should be controlled and distributed.

At this stage, we realise that the major disease of this social patient is the division into two main classes, those who HAVE and the HAVE-NOTS, i.e. the Capitalist and the Workers respectively.

These relations ...

These relations of production bring us to another step, that together with the forces of production (which are represented by the working class) form a particular mode of production. By this mode of production we refer to the social system or social order. In this case our operative social system is Capitalism. Capitalism provides for the exploitation of the massive and numerous labour force of workers which is in the service of the bourgeoisie. It is a system whereby man exploits man - in this way few people become richer and richer while the majority of the people in ~~xxx~~ society are subjected to poverty, disease and suffering.

This is the first level of our understanding of society and it is important for all of us to learn and understand it so as to be able to address ourselves to the second level of our particular situation in South Africa. Now the question to ask is how do we see ourselves as responding to this social disease, i.e. the ~~xxx~~ division of society into two conflicting classes? Secondly, what role can we, as the youth play in order to cure society of this serious disease?

We have got to consistently ~~xxx~~ develop the political understanding, the level of our cadres so that our position as a class, should be identified and our role in this society should be clear. Practically we should have to work with our own grass-roots organisations like the Civic Associations, Trade Union Movement, Student Organisations and so on. The advantage of this practical involvement is that it enhances and heightens our own political consciousness. There is definitely going to be danger if our theory ~~xxx~~ is not going to be put into practice - for theory without practice is sterile and practice without theory is blind.

Coming to our own South African situation we find the same contradiction prevalent i.e. that conflict between the warring classes, Capitalist and Workers. However the only peculiarity with the South African situation is that the fundamental contradictions in our country are clouded by the Apartheid system. Capitalism manifests itself in the form of race. It provides for the division of the working class along racial barriers, the white working class on the one hand and the black working class on the other. This imperialist strategy of co-optation of a section of the working class is not a new phenomenon, in Northern Ireland the workers are divided along religious lines, the Roman Catholics on the one hand and the Protestants who enjoy all political, economic, social, cultural privileges and so on, while the indigenous people of Catholic religion are made pariahs in the country of their birth.

These privileges make the bulk of the working force fully identify with the exploiters and oppressors of the majority. This should not however overlook the fact that in having been bought over the white workers are up against their own long term interests.

So Capitalism in South Africa, thrives on the backs of the cheap and massive Black labour force where super exploitation takes place. Some schools of thought cannot however see beyond the bounds of race, to them race is the class determining factor". This is another factor which we as youth must address ourselves to. If racial capitalism can cloud and blind our analysis of our society we live in, then shall fail in our attempt to understand the main conflict that goes on in our society.

However, the fact that "there are Indians, Africans, Coloureds and Whites in our country is a self evident and undeniable reality. It is a reality precisely because each of these national groups has its own roots and heritage and are maintained in differing conditions of reality by the oppressive and exploitative system. Although Africans, Indians and Coloured are all victims of the oppression and exploitation the different conditions applicable to each group cannot be ignored. Our task is to heighten the positive features of each national group and to weld these together so that there arises out of this process of this organisation single national consciousness."

The state through its system of Apartheid makes it difficult for a common national consciousness to be achieved. The Group Areas act forces the different national groups apart, given this situation :

- a. How do we as youth contribute in the achievement of a single national consciousness in our country?
- b. How do we see joint campaigns, joint workshops, joint cultural and social activities assisting towards the achievement of this objective?
- c. Have we as the progressive youth movement thought seriously of strengthening the non-racial sports groups in the country, are we in fact able to identify them?
- d. Have we ever given serious thought to concrete tactics which may be employed to destroy barriers created by the system in furtherance of its policy of divide and rule?

At this Stage ...

At this stage I would like us to focus at the youth. To try to understand what we understand by the word youth. When we look at nature and study it closely we observe that a raw fruit before it matures has a given colour, and that a calyx the outside circle of the flower is green, this is the phase before the flower blossoms.

The lesson we draw from nature through the colour green is that it represents the stage of immaturity and unripeness. We as youth too cannot claim at this stage of our political development that we have reached the peak of political understanding. Our task with regard to this is acquiring political direction and work towards developing our political understanding, by working within the progressive movement.

Furthermore when we refer to youth, do we mean a broad spectrum of youth in the country or a particular section? By youth we are actually referring to all young people irrespective of the fact that they may be students, workers, unemployed young people, and so on - all these form a broad spectrum of our youth.

Problems faced by our youth

- a. Separate amenities act. Budget does not ensure the harmonious social and cultural development of the entire youth in S.A., so as to enable the youth to take its rightful place alongside the other youth internationally.
- b. The education system, irrespective of which department it belongs to it serves to promote big business and to promote individual interest as well.

"In a recent speech Samora Machel stressed the role of education as a vital part of the continuing revolution in Mozambique in which the school was to be viewed as a base from which the people will cease power and from where the last remnants of colonialism and capitalism are to be exterminated and from where the new man, the homin-novo, is to emerge."

In his address to students Machel said "Your first duty is to study in order to better serve the people and not to use your knowledge for your personal benefit and against the peoples interests. You are in school to accomplish a task that the people have entrusted you with, and their sacrifices have not been made in order to allow you to fulfil your individual desires."

In addressing ourselves to the aspect of organising the youth we have to focus both the individual youth and existing youth structures. What do we observe as the objective reality on the individual youth front?

We observe that :

- a. The youth has diverse interests militating against ~~their~~ its long term interests, and harmful to them.

1. Imperialist strategy - Hippie, American, Lumpen, Yanks.
Divisive culture - clothes, songs, etc.
2. National Professional Soccer League - Discos.
 - b. Fear of involvement and lack of political awareness (lack inspiration - needs to be inspired)
 - c. Failure to study the conditions, application of wrong tactics (Dogmatism and Tradition) Darwin.

Furthermore, we have to address ourselves to organised group structures like eg.:

- a. The religious youth groups.
- b. Cultural youth clubs.
- c. and find out what stance we are going to adopt with regard to the notorious Inkatha Youth Brigade.

Our priority as the Progressive Youth Movement should be to strengthen our own local youth organisation. In previous discussions with other youth groups it became clear that there is still work to be done on this.

