

# ABUSIVE RESEARCH

Saths Cooper (an ex-radical of the '70s) and Fatima Meer (a liberal sociologist who recently called upon liberatory organisations to work with homeland leaders and other collaborators) conducted a survey under the auspices of the Institute of Black Research. The IBR is funded by the Ford Foundation (whose directors are, amongst others, Robert McNamara and Dean Rusk) and also receives moneys from other imperialist sources.

Besides assisting imperialism and the local ruling class in serving their interest, the survey can be castigated at a fundamental level as being a dangerous tool of research. We are not saying that surveys must not be conducted. What we are saying is that one must inform the oppressed of the shortcomings of such a method of research and of the ways it can be used to sell out the people. Surveys can be superficial reflections of the people's sentiment. Seldom can researchers take the time to obtain in-depth information about personal opinions and attitudes. Surveys, particularly political surveys, are unstable reflection of population characteristics, especially due to fluctuations of opinions of the people.

The researcher can use "loaded" questions in a survey. By doing this, he/she can manipulate the subject's responses and unwittingly cause the subject to answer the question to suit his/her interest. What sample did the researcher use? Was this representative of the oppressed? How many people refused to answer the question? This we do not know!

According to an article in the *Weekly Mail* (September 14-20, 1990), 3 275 South Africans out of a population of some 32-million were interviewed in respect of a survey on "negotiation and change". Less than 1% of the population were interviewed. In other words, the opinions of 99% of the population were not canvassed.

The "survey" came to the earth-shattering conclusion that the people "wants stability, peace and prosperity". Do we need a survey to inform us of this obvious desire of the oppressed?

One of the findings of the survey is that the "average South African" supports negotiation. How does one become an "average South African"? What yardstick is used to measure the "average South African"? Who is the average South African? Is it the workers, the rural poor, the landless peasants, the students? Or is the average South African your *petit bourgeoisie*? We do not know! The survey does not tell us who our average South African is.

The IBR says that “the survey is skewed in favour of the urban groups with higher income and higher education”.

This confession means that the wishes, the aspirations of the unemployed, the illiterate, the landless peasants and rural poor — the exploited and the oppressed masses — “the wretched of the earth” — were not considered to be important.

The dictionary defines “skew” as meaning slanting sideways, distorted, crooked, lopsided. In mathematics skewed means “lying in three dimensions”.

According to the IBR, the respondents to the survey were given “mainly open-ended questions”. This means that the 3 375 people questioned were asked sweeping, wide, general, unqualified, arguable, debatable, up-in-the-air questions which were deliberately designed to produce favourable answers.

The question we pose is this: *Why did “yesterday’s rebel” knowing that the questions were “open-ended” and that the questions were “skewed” publish its findings?* Those who conducted the survey are aware that through the passage of time the conclusion of this distorted, prejudiced and biased IBR survey will be used by the imperialist and their agents without any qualifications. The imperialist paymasters crack their whips. Their agents paid for and trained at their universities must obediently jump to conclusions to suit their masters.

APDUSA is on record as having said that imperialism first entices and then ensnares sections of the oppressed to do their bidding and their dirty work. Yesterday’s rebels who do not engage in principled programmatic struggle become the tool and servile agents of imperialism.

The conclusions of the survey give the impression that they are the absolute truth reflecting the people’s opinions when this is patently not so. Surveys are dangerous. Beware of abusive research.

