

Pierre L van den Berghe
a Reply
to
Matthew Nkoana

Mr. Nkoana's searching critique of my book 'South Africa, A study in Conflict' deserves a considerate reply because of its refreshing intellectual honesty and absence of invective. These qualities are all too often lacking in the heat of political argument, especially when one deals with such a hot topic as South Africa. The fact that my book should still generate such critical fire four years after its original publication shows that it had more than ephemeral value, and I am very pleased that it should have proven so controversial.

Predictably, since I was trying not to write my book from the point of view of any current orthodoxy, I have been accused of almost every crime on the political spectrum. While in South Africa, I was taken for a Communist agitator, a Special Branch man and a CIA agent, in book reviews, I have been accused of being anti-white, anti-South African, Marxist, anti-Marxist, Western-oriented, Communist-oriented, an advocate of violence, an opponent of violence, a revolutionary, a liberal, and now a counter-revolutionary. At the same time, many of my critics, Mr. Nkoana included, paid me the compliment of saying that, as my work was disguised under fairly convincing trappings of scholarship, my attacks against their cherished position was all the more insidious and dangerous. To me, all of this seems to indicate that I must have been even more diabolically clever in hiding my devious intentions than I realised.

However, Mr. Nkoana has the unusual decency of not impugning my motives, and he does make a number of perceptive remarks about both my work and my ideological position. He is wrong that Segal was a major source of mine on the P. A. C., but he is right that I was influenced by Leo Kuper in whose Sociology Department I was a lecturer for two years when I taught at the University of Natal in Durban. It is also true that most of my closest associates and friends while I was in South Africa from February 1960 to December 1961 were members or followers of the Liberal Party, the A. N. C; the Indian Congress and the COD, and hence that these associations might have biased me against the PAC. At the time, however, there were several prominent members of the Liberal Party, especially in the Cape, who were strongly pro-PAC (notably Patrick Duncan) and I also came into contact with them.

Unfortunately, the South African government deprived me of the pleasure of meeting some of the top PAC leaders such as Sobukwe and Ngosana. Most of the PAC supporters I met and talked to were what I suppose could be called "second-echelon leaders", mostly students and teachers. My evidence for stating that the PAC was racist is based largely on these personal contacts, rather than a second-hand account by Segal or anybody else. Most people who claimed allegiance to the PAC exhibited a strong suspicion of all non-Africans, and often openly expressed feelings of racial hatred towards "Indians", "Europeans" and "Coloureds". The contrast with ANC followers was marked enough that I could predict with at least 70% reliability who leaned towards which group, on the basis of whether they openly expressed racist views or not.

To me, racism is the making of invidious distinctions between human groups which are socially defined on the basis of their physical appearance. For an African to say "Indians are greedy" is just as racist as for a European to say "Natives are lazy". Nkoana takes me to task for stating that racism is not limited to "whites" in South Africa. He writes: "racialism ... is not evident in any other group in the country, least of all the African group." Surely, it is a racist statement to suggest that a negative trait like racism is the exclusive monopoly of a "racial" group. Happily, Nkoana then proceeds to contradict himself and to state, quite correctly, in a self-quotation from another piece of his: "The racist philosophy has permeated all strata of society, and had its victims among both the rulers and the ruled". Here we are in complete agreement, but then why does Nkoana take me to task for stating precisely what he himself does. Could it be because I have the "wrong" skin colour?

Having agreed that racism is found in all strata and groups, the next question is whether the PAC is racist. The answer is also "yes", although, not having followed the latest political developments in the PAC and the ANC, I cannot say whether the former is now more so than the latter. Racialism being as ubiquitous as it is in South Africa, it almost inevitably follows that any political movement which wants to be successful must resort to racist appeals. The few that have tried not to do so, such as the Communist and Liberal Parties have condemned themselves to impotence, and, even in those groups, racism was not totally absent even though their organisation was structurally non-racial.

The official statements of Mr. Sobukwe are not evidence of non-racialism, nor are Mr. Nkoana's denials. In fact, the very semantics of their statements prove my point. Sobukwe tells us: "politically we stand for government of the Africans for the Africans by the Africans, with everybody who owes his loyalty only to Africa ... being regarded as an African." This is patently not what Sobukwe means, because the Afrikaner Nationalists certainly claim exclusive loyalty to a government based on African soil. Thus, the statement is, at best, meaningless. Then we are told that "those non-Africans who accepted the "democratic rule of an African majority" would be regarded as Africans". This statement is internally inconsistent and logically confused. If ac-

ceptance of democratic rule is the test of being an African, then there can be no such thing as "non-Africans who accept democratic rule of an African majority". The same sentence uses both a racial and a non-racial definition of African. Elsewhere, Nkoana lapses into an entirely racial usage of the word "African". He speaks of "the severely depressed condition of the African people, who to the PAC include the so-called Coloureds". By implication, the PAC definition here excludes "Europeans" and "Indians". Thus Nkoana redefines "African" to include two of the South African government's racial categories, but to exclude two others. Thus, we have three definitions of "African": one is meaningless; the second is self-contradictory; and the third is racial. What am I to believe? Am I not entitled to conclude that by "Africans" Pan-Africanists really mean "black" or at least "non-white" and "non-Indian"? Is not this hopeless confusion a symptom of racism?

Let me try to accept at face value the often repeated statement of Pan-Africanists, namely that Pan Africanism means rule by Africans, and that being an African means identifying with the oppressed masses, irrespective of "race". I must have gone over this argument at least twenty times with PAC followers. When I told them: "OK, then you must accept me as an African" they replied almost to a man: "You cannot possibly identify with us because you are white". So there you are! And, in fact, predictably, Nkoana chants the same refrain: "Perhaps it is only those who have actually lived the life of inferiority who can fully comprehend the devastating effects of this kind of degradation on the broad mass of the people."

The great tragedy of the South African situation is that Nkoana's statement is, with very few excep-

TALKBACK II

DM ZWELONKE

if what Mr. Mathew Nkoana says in the No. 52 issue of the NEW AFRICAN is true, then we in the 'hot pan', that is South Africa, die.

We raise eye-brows in perplexed wonder at what is happening to our organisation, PAC; at what is eating our leaders, because we in jail are in the dungeon without windows (which is Robben Island) - we do not know what is happening in the outside world. Yet we breathe in relief, for those that mess us are not our leaders, they never were. Our leader is incarcerated with us here in the devil Island: the Prof. Sobukwe.

Nevertheless, we must gape at what is becoming of those men who were acting-leaders.

I speak from an ice-berg, which is Robben Island's winter. I speak next to the steel-work furnace, which is the Island's Summer. I speak from hadeswhere,

tions, psychologically correct. But if it is correct, then the adoption of a test of acceptance which can only be satisfied by black people is in fact a racial one, and reflects a racially exclusivistic mentality. This reminds me of another piece of double talk, namely Cecil Rhodes' "equal rights to all civilized men". "Civilization" was always redefined to mean "whites only." "After all, you can't expect raw Natives to become civilized in one generation when it took us 2000 years."

The end of white supremacy must come in South Africa, and it will come through revolution and violence. But the end of white supremacy will not mean the end of racism. I have little doubt that the first African government of South Africa will be better than the present government. It could scarcely be any worse. Unfortunately, I am not convinced that it will be enough of an improvement to want to fight for it. The Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto once said that history was a graveyard of aristocracies. Alas, it is also a hatchery of tyrannies. As an activist, Mr. Nkoana cannot afford to be a cynic. Cynicism is the luxury of scholars. Let him call me a counter-revolutionary if it serves his ends. Personally, I do not care and I wish him well. The present government has already done me the honour of banning my books; perhaps the next one will similarly oblige. All I can hope for is that in my next reincarnation I shall be reborn in a colour-blind society.

One final word of reassurance to Mr. Nkoana: My books are not nearly as "deadly" as he thinks. Not all that many people read them; fewer understand them; and virtually none are influenced by them one way or another. Scholars are no more deadly than gadflies. The politicians and activists are the tse-tse flies of this world.

through an error of history, saints have found themselves locked up. I say to everyone who betrays the struggle, let him pause for once to think of the Africans that languish in that Island, and the many banished cats scattered all over South Africa.

What's this Maoist muddle of P. K. Leballo and Makoti?

We thought men have gone to negotiate for a deal of arms, yet they went for books and books of Mao's thoughts. We thought that the leadership will bring guns to us, instead they bring us some idealogical balderdash. While PAC inside SA waits, some element outside SA have torn it asunder in idealogical confusion.

It's high time that PAC inside SA starts talking. I say for my brothers' sake, those banished to some awesome mountain to perish unknown, or one house-arrested in some hovel in a location, stripped of all the means to earn his living, knowing that for supper it's going to be cold porridge and salted water; for a brother of mine thrown from pillar to post at the whim of the SB's and the labour-bureau despots; a young man just released from jail to meet with hardship; I say for all those of us who are left in the lurch - then we die.

What's the use of going up North for guerrilla training when one is going to be wasted in idealogical prattle.

As I write here I know and can see with the eyes of my mind, my friends left in the Island - condemned to a 20 year term. I can see them pushing the wheel-barrow up the steep of a quarry. I can see them required to work with the strength of a zombie, crushing the quarry stone with giant hammers; and the ceaseless yells of white-rule drunk warders blasting their ears. I can feel the pains while I see the iron-tipped boot swung against a political prisoner's stomach, and the baton crashing on his head. I can see the kind of food he is going to have for supper: which is virus for scurvy (lacking vegetables) and which is evidence for a starting of kwashiorka (lacking milk) as though they were babies. A malnutrition-causing recipe as a special diet. Young men with loads of life-sentences on their heads, hoping for the day of liberation. Yet!

To our horror, some Makoti kind of species is busy dreaming about a queer cultural revolution before he has conquered; busy swilling Mao thoughts in that dream, wanting to convert the whole of SA. to something Mao style before he has even shot a single Boer soldier. He is dreaming to see Red Guards in the vanguard of an absurd revolution; but then his Red Guards would be blackguards, because the colour of their skin is black, (taking it as a literal fact.)

Sobukwe should be crying tears now to see what has become of his organisation, PAC, and the men he has trusted, P.K. among them, a sinister double-cross on principle.

Alarm clocks should have started ringing when ZANU, an ally of PAC called freedom fighters mercenaries in Rhodesia. Be the fighters PAC or ANC or ZAPU or ZANU, the cause is one: African liberation. We want freedom, and we don't care who chance to free us, if we can't ourselves; and it must be freedom, not a change of foreign rulers. Or we fight on. Is ZANU ready to refuse volunteers from OAU? Will they dub such volunteers mercenaries should ZAPU call them in, or OAU to send them on her own? We have mad men in the struggle, indeed. It is the whine of a bedridden invalid, refusing to be helped out of bed because of irrational shame - claiming he can help himself. Because as a fact, ZAPU is doing more fighting in Rhodesia than ZANU. No, ZANU is not fighting, because she is still busy swilling Mao thoughts, not about guerrilla strategy but cultural revolution.

I thought communism has become old fashion; I'm amazed when to some it's still a novelty.

Africans in SA want freedom; they want to live; not to be disorganised into a foreign way of living. They want political power and economic growth; and economic power can come without some funny Red Guard revolution unsuitable to this environment.

The men in Robben Island would not refuse to come out of jail if the doors are opened by victorious Egyptians or Israelis, by American or Russians. It's to feel stupid pride to want to be liberated by a blackman in Transkei, when you know he can't liberate you. It is a living pipe-dream brought to us clearly, like the one of expecting for Jesus Christ's second coming to free us. I'm not implying that Africans in SA are not making an effort to free themselves, but that they won't spit at freedom if it doesn't come by their hands.

Or do you think that the men in jail are enjoying

to be there? You are the men who regard suffering as a test of virtue. Suffering is suffering and evil. That's why no one wants to suffer. No one of you exiled-cats would want to come back and suffer so that you would be virtuous. You waste time prattling over ideology, because you think the men in jail have chosen suffering as an ideal. You are mistaken. They have chosen freedom. And to get freedom, they know they have to fight and land in jail; and that involves suffering - it can't be avoided. Unless when you understand this simple explanation about suffering, you won't understand the evil of the concept of Selflessness.

This is the root of our failure in the struggle. Sending men to battle as if they are horses of war which have no interest in that war, and nothing to gain from it. When such a horse sees that it'll lose its life for the sake of the men who are fighting, it tips the man who rode it, and bolts. But as soon as a man has an interest in a battle, he makes that battle his own, just as he rises to protect his wife from thugs; he has a selfish interest in that battle. I don't know by what philosophical misconception or christian precept or altruistic motivation is the concept of selflessness sprung.

A struggle is never selfless. Or if it is, it's evil; just like the battle in Vietnam. The American soldiers are clearly fighting a selfless battle, because they were sent there by martial law of conscription; they certainly have no interest in that battle, they don't care who wins or loses; they're just in a hurry to finish their term over there, and come back home to live. To lose your life for what you have no interest in is the base kind of selflessness. But the American soldiers are no more selfish in a way you can never imagine when you are drunk of socialist dogma. When I stand up to die in battle, there's a strong selfish motive that has goaded me - something belonging to me has been wronged, and I seek to make redress. When a Cuban comes to die in my struggle (not like the American soldier in Vietnam, but as a volunteer), it is like when I rise to chase a thief who has stolen from my neighbour; I'm not offering myself to suicide, but my intention is to dispossess the thief, and in the act, my motivation is not love of my neighbour, but a principle that I'll leave no thieves unturned. If that is my attitude, should I die, I won't cry that I've died for some one instead of saving my life. I'll say I died for a principle. (That is if I would have the chance to think when I'm dead). To hold a principle, never to surrender it, but to die for it in the face of beggars crying that you should forsake, is a selfish attitude. To cling to a principle is as selfish an attitude as to cling to a wife when relatives cry that you should drop her because they don't like her. But a principle is more than that, because a wife you can kick out sometime.

My interest has been roused in this point by Mathew Nkoana when he referred to freedom fighters in Rhodesia as selfless, though he said it in good intention.

I say this is the root of our failure because it has turned many of us into traitors and state-witnesses in court, revealing all secrets. I have seen it. A man somersault in court like a horse of war to save his skin, because he thought he was fighting for the masses, not for himself; that he was freeing the masses,

not himself, and the thought of dying for someone, for the masses, when others are not, becomes too acid to swallow - he turns traitor. But if he was fighting for a principle, he had no one to betray, but himself; if he had made the struggle a personal one, he had no one to blame, (if blame was called for).

In the same way you think that a person is suffering altruistically. How absurd. You are turning the whole concept of liberation into self-immolation for the sake of others, like a Buddhist burning himself alive in Burma. This battle is not a battle to die, but to live. Or let us all take poison and die the easier way. When one goes to battle he goes with the aim to kill, and with the knowledge that he might be killed.

This is the root of confusion in PAC. Because some men think that as long as there are Poqos in Robben Island, suffering and sacrificed, then PAC

is in the lime-light of the struggle; and as long as they remain in the Island, the better, for it boosts their prestige. You can't gain prestige by sending men, like goats, to the altar for slaughter, and claim that they are selfless.

The three S's in PAC have been misunderstood by many, and gravely. Service, Sacrifice and Suffering. That is why most of Nkoana's group of 1960, and many of us of 1963 went under table after having suffered, as we believe that contribution has been enough when one has gone through all the S's. They take the suffering as a virtue, instead of regarding it as a monster one must meet in the struggle.

The three S's are in order if well conceived.

And now while PAC waits and suffers in SA some men are busy planning a confused cultural revolution.

I say to them: WATCH!

MATTHEW NKOANA TO PIERRE L VAN DEN BERGHE

I must confess to being extremely bored with the subject matter of Dr. van den Berghe's article, besides being even more disappointed now over the quality of his scholarship that I was when I read his book. I suppose I ought to be pleased with the compliment he pays me about intellectual honesty, but how can I be when he himself is so guilty of the reverse?

Dr. van den Berghe admits to have been influenced by Leo Kuper, but although my article referred readers to my critiques on the latter's work as complementaries, van den Berghe has quite obviously never bothered to look them up. It is a cardinal failure of scholarship to ignore reference material. Such a failure, when dealing with an explosive issue such as the South African race question and making charges, borders on criminal negligence. Can it all be due to what van den Berghe calls the cynicism of scholars?

Van den Berghe resorts to hair-splitting and deliberate distortion -- by no means the hallmark of intellectual honesty. He quotes me out of context to make me look like contradicting myself and agreeing with him in spite of myself. His half-quotation: "The racist philosophy has permeated all strata of society, and had its victims among both the rulers and the ruled." What I said, which was also a quotation from a previous article of mine, was as follows:

"The racist philosophy had permeated all strata of society, and had its victims among both the rulers and the ruled. . . . Through both subtle indoctrination and rigid enforcement, the idea had come to be accepted even by Africans, willynilly or unconsciously, that the white man was a superior being with a right conferred from on high to lord it over all others." The dots in this quotation represent the words in the original passage, "a classic example of the truism that 'the ruling ideas of any age are the ideas of its ruling class,'" which did not have to be included because of what had preceded the quotation.

Indeed, the discussion on this issue in my article on van den Berghe's book, taking up eight paragraphs was so crucial to my argument that I took particular pains to elucidate the point. Any intelligent reader (and I think van den Berghe is an intelligent reader) could not possibly have misunderstood it. That is why I am so terribly bored, and in despair about the quality of intellectual honesty to which van den Berghe

pays lip-service.

Van den Berghe accuses me of making "a racist statement to suggest that a negative trait like racism is the exclusive monopoly of a 'racial' group, 'the whites'". I made no such statement! The relevant passage, which van den Berghe again conveniently distorts and which begins by approvingly quoting him said:

"At the level of values and ideology, the European settlers developed an elaborate racial mythology to rationalise their rule. . . . This is what came to be known as racialism, the ideology of racial superiority and exclusiveness, which is not evident in any other group in the country, least of all the African group. Cultural and religious differences remain among the groups, but these constitute an obstacle to political unity only insofar as political consciousness remains low or nil, though they inhibit social intercourse.

If the above statement is not true, the worst that van den Berghe can accuse me of is failure of observation. Failure to see evidence that a crime is being committed does not make one guilty of a crime, or the crime. Or is van den Berghe accusing me of concealment? As for my theoretical position in regard to the question of racialism, my article on his book only touches briefly on that, but it is not too late for van den Berghe to make up for his past failures by looking up the articles on Dr. Kuper's work to which I referred him.

In my article I accused van den Berghe of a serious lapse of scholarship, in that he made a grave charge against the Pan Africanist Congress (by the way, he calls it the Pan African Congress, which does not help me) without adducing any evidence for it. Apparently to make up for that failure, he now produces what is patently heresay evidence picked up from "what I suppose could be called 'second-echelon' leaders" of the PAC.

Van den Berghe was in South Africa between February 1960 and December 1961, at a time when all the three leadership layers of the PAC were in prison. With a few individual exceptions, mainly in the Transvaal (and they were neither students nor teachers), all the leaders and active supporters went to prison as from March 1960. So the students and teachers met by van den Berghe could not be leaders of the PAC, "second or third echelon".

In any case, no serious scholar writes books about the ideologies and policies of national movements without any reference to their policy pronouncements and basic policy documents. Van den Berghe says: "Most people who claimed allegiance to the PAC exhibited a strong suspicion of all non-Africans, and often openly expressed feelings of racial hatred towards 'Indians', 'Europeans' and 'coloureds'."

Granted this was so, a scholar's first duty would be to find out why and I cannot think of any way of doing this other than delving into literature, history and other political activities of their organisation. Such widespread racial hatred as van den Berghe claims to have found among Africans, should challenge the scholarly talents of a holistic sociologist van den Berghe produces generalisations: "To me, racism is the making of invidious distinctions between human groups which are socially defined on the basis of their physical appearance. For an African to say 'Indians are greedy' is just as racist as for a 'European' to say 'Natives are lazy'". I do not exactly know what is meant by 'socially defined', but I am afraid there is here a tendency to juggle with a burning social question.

What are our terms? Are we looking for evidence that, in van den Berghe's own words, "at the level of values and ideology" the Pan-Africanists are developing "an elaborate racial mythology", or merely for signs of group prejudice? Suppose I, an African, said that 'Indians are not greedy' and van den Berghe, a white, that 'Natives are not lazy' -- would these be profound non-racist statements? My wife says that Xhosas are 'cunning cheats' -- but among her best friends are Xhosa-speaking people!

Unlike van den Berghe, I do not regard racialism as a mere trait, negative or otherwise, certainly not in the South African context. I am more at home with van den Berghe when he says (I only wish he could be theoretically consistent) that the "European settlers developed an elaborate racial mythology to rationalise their rule." I go further, in my articles on Kuper to analyse the compound and its motive force. The most relevant passage, dealing with the "habits and institutions" of South Africa, follows:

"These habits and institutions are racialist in orientation, but racialism is the effect rather than the cause of a system of crass economic exploitation. This is not to underrate the scourge that is racialism in South Africa. It is a terrible mental disease once it takes hold of the victim, but it is not in the blood; it is not congenital. True, there are many -- tragically too many -- among white South Africans in whom racialism has become a kind of second nature. But this is not a natural phenomenon. It is fostered and nurtured in the European homes and schools and in public life. The books the children read are littered with the grand myth of the black man's inferiority. But it remains an artificial growth; so artificial, indeed, that it has become necessary to enact legislation to bolster it up and patch up yawning cracks in the racialist wall. Thus we have laws preventing intermarriage between the races, banning multi-racial worship or social mixing in entertainment, sports and other vulnerable spheres. Without this elaborate intervention from the cradle to the grave, those whites who do not know which side

their bread is buttered might multiply enough to disturb the structure of white supremacy and so bring about the end of economic privilege.

Van den Berghe seems to have difficulty over what the PAC means by African. He has my sympathies here! But I would like to conclude by asking him not only to re-read my article, the one that has caused so much concern to him, but also the others to which I referred him. He should find in that article, also, that I never called him a counter-revolutionary, but said he was a victim of pernicious literature (as contained in his bibliography) which had been built up over the years in counter-revolutionary ideological warfare.

MATTHEW NKOANA TO 'D M ZWELONKE'

Your deep concern about the plight of the men on Robben Island, and about that of the others banished to remote places in our homeland, is truly touching. And it is proper for you and others not only to draw attention to these, but to speak out -- "lest we forget."

I share every bit of your agony and anxiety over the parlous condition of the movement abroad, as evidenced by what I had to say in the No. 52 issue of 'The New African'. It was not an easy but painful decision for me to write as I did, washing our dirty linen in public, as it were. But just as you say it is time for you inside South Africa to speak out, so it seemed time for me to do so.

While I agree with you about the correct interpretation of the PAC motto Service, Sacrifice, Suffering, I think you have missed the point of my use of the word selfless about South African freedom fighters in Rhodesia who were so unjustly described as mercenaries. The sentence read: "What is an insult, an unpardonable insult of a counter-revolutionary nature, is the description of selfless freedom fighters as mercenaries."

Perhaps it would have been less confusing if I used the word dedicated, but what selfless denoted in that context is that the freedom fighters were not fighting for remuneration like soldiers of fortune. So you can see I wasn't writing an essay on what you describe as a "philosophical misconception or Christian precept or altruistic motivation" of the concept of selflessness.

I think you are unfair to the great fighters of 1960 and 1963, most of whom, far from "going under the tables" as you aver, are as dedicated as ever. Many of those who in 1960 went into the fight as great patriots, became the victims of bad generalship in 1963 which resulted in what came to be known as the April Fools Day Debacle in Maseru.

I can vouch for these men, for their courageous spirit, and I am proud to have been fortunate to share experiences with them during the course of momentous events, in and outside prison. One of these imperishable memories was their part in what we came to know as the Battle of the Pick-handles inside the notorious Stoffberg Prison. History was made there, and it will yet be recorded.

These men and those of 1963 can be said to have gone into temporary retreat, to size up the enemy and take stock of their own position. So take courage, dear brother.

Izwe Luthu