

## QUO VADIS THE UNITY MOVEMENT? A DISGRACEFUL EPISODE

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THE *EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL*, organ of the Teachers' League of South Africa, of June 1992, in its 'Notes in School', comments on the present conflict in Yugoslavia. It states that:

The news media focuses on the tragic war in Yugoslavia has attempted to project a Good Guys, Bad Guys situation. The European Community, with Germany in the forefront, America and the UN are presented as the Good Guys supporting the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia. The Serbs are the Bad guys fighting a cruel and destructive war. News reports also create the impression that there is a religious, very strong anti-Muslim element in the strife . . . But the strong motivating force of Serbian nationalism is in fact the desire to prevent the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation into separate warring states. The Serbs wish to see the retention of the coherence that was built by Marshal Tito after World War Two and of the social system that flourished for 40 years after to the benefit of the people of Yugoslavia.

This view is ill-informed and misconceived on several levels. Firstly, it does not take into account that the Serbs have been actively following a policy of 'ethnic cleansing' as part of their attempt to reconstruct the region on the terms of a Greater Serbia. Every day there is mounting evidence of atrocities that sicken, anger and revolt people across the globe. Only someone indulging in wishful thinking could suggest that this was being done in the name of socialism — however relative that term might be. Since this position was not reassessed in subsequent issues, one must assume a consensus with the ideas expressed in this article.

Secondly, to interpret the evidence of the concentration camps, brutality, random bombing of civilian targets, mass expulsion of people, systematic rape and murder, and seizure of lands and homes as a 'wish to see the retention . . . of the social system that flourished for 40 years . . . to the benefit of the Yugoslav people' must surely be more than an act of political blindness: it is a callous disregard of the enormity of the Serbian expansionist policy. Moreover, exactly who is being referred to as the 'Yugoslav people' remains unclear - one can therefore assume that it serves a purely theoretical purpose.

Thirdly, the article ignores all the evidence mounting daily about aggressive Serbian expansionism because of the belief that the end is the preservation of the Yugoslav Federation. Surely unjust means cannot lead to a just

end! Or is the humanitarian basis of socialism over-ridden by the Stalinist Diktat (the ends justify the means) ... in certain circumstances? Abhorrence of Stalinism was a fundamental point of departure of the Unity Movement, which distinguished it from the SACP dominated Congress movement, and which the tenor of the article in the *Journal* calls into question.

This would seem to be regrettable since the Teachers' League has been part of the Unity Movement since its inception about fifty years ago. Its monthly journal was a beacon of light during the dark years after the closure of *The Torch* c.1959, and banning of those newspapers associated with the broad liberatory movement. In this context, it provided extensive analyses of world imperialism and an analysis of social struggles in Africa, Asia and South America. The philosophy that it adopted supported the principles of non-collaboration and the need for a struggle based on a principled programme of demands, the 10-Point Programme of the Non-European Unity Movement as it was then called. The ideals were to influence a generation of political activists and theorists within the broad left. Thus, taking its history into account, the views expressed in Article VIII of the 'Notes in School' can be construed as a betrayal of the Movement's position. This refers to its championing of the cause of the oppressed against the oppressor – and arguing for the rights of human beings in upholding their own language, culture and religion. For the UM to adopt the view that the bloody slaughter and expulsion of entire communities from their homes and the confiscation of their property can be justified, on the grounds that it furthers the socialist ideal, is absurd.

What is more disconcerting is the fact that the views put forward in 'Notes in School' were repeated and developed at length in the September 1992 issue of *The Bulletin of the New Unity Movement*, vol 6, no 2.

The article headed 'The Bloody Tragedy (sic) of Yugoslavia' speaks in portentous and omniscient tones. I quote the opening lines and will then proceed to deconstruct its meaning though, frankly, their spuriousness is blatantly self-evident.

Imperialist policy is one indivisible whole. It has turned its violence against the semi-colonial oppressed in Africa, Asia the Americas, or Eastern Europe, or to any socialist state. In South Africa, the Liberal-Social-Democratic-sponsored (eg ANC) policy of 'working from within' or seeking 'space' inside imperialism (eg CODESA) serves only this single indivisible imperialist policy. That policy is: total war, on ALL fronts, against the semi-colonial and socialist peoples. This policy [was?] shaken by the defeat inflicted on the USA in 1973 by Vietnam. This defeat led to what came to be known as the 'Vietnam syndrome'. But this syndrome was ended by the 1990-91 US/EC/UNO 'Gulf War' against Iraq. Its place was taken by the 'Gulf Syndrome' of arrogant triumph, of committing any crime against humanity anywhere not only with impunity, but with the shameless backing on the 'United Nations'.

'Imperialism is one indivisible whole' needs only to be uttered to reveal its fallaciousness. The US, the EC, Japan . . . one indivisible whole? All the GATT sparring, skulduggery and vying for supremacy mere play-acting to confuse the oppressed? So, it can all just really be reduced to a great capitalist imperialist conspiracy – and thus the problems of analysis are dealt with – the answer is self-evident! Certainly imperialism battens on the colonial and semi-colonial world and now seeks to extend its tentacles into the erstwhile 'socialist' countries of eastern Europe. But one Indivisible Imperialism? The mind boggles at a procrustean world view that has not, seemingly, reflected on the internecine piratical power conflicts – neither has it come to terms with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the eastern European pseudo-socialist societies.

'Imperialism is one indivisible whole', implies one imperialism acting in a unified way, or else the meaning is at variance with the language, a bit like *Alice in Wonderland*, where words mean whatever the writer wishes them to mean. By assuming that there is this 'unified' imperialism, the writer turns a blind eye on the embargo busting *competition* among western capitalists to provide arms and fuel to Yugoslavia. More ironic it is that this 'unified' imperialism finds no difficulty in applying stringent embargoes to Cuba, Libya, Iraq, Cambodia and other countries that have incurred its wrath, yet cannot successfully impede the supply of arms and fuel to Serbia. Couple this with the effect that Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, the supposed imperialist allies, have been denied the means of defending themselves against their aggressors. If imperialism indeed had any intention of teaching 'the most promising Socialist experiment' a lesson, as the writer suggests, then surely the Serbs would not have found it so easy to breach the so-called embargo.

The writer has for polemical reasons, no doubt, used the pejorative term *Ustashi* to blanket all of Croatia, but selectively fails to use the term *Chetnik* for the Serbians, a term the Yugoslav National Army has no difficulty in adopting.<sup>1</sup> To append emotional epithets to disparage entire communities is reprehensible and only clouds the issue.

We have moved beyond the Good Guys/Bad Guys scenario that made political analysis relatively straightforward. Prior to 1989 there were the 'western' capitalist systems (which included Japan) vs the eastern 'Peoples' Democracies'. We defended and supported, unreservedly, the latter against the imperialist countries, despite a growing awareness that these so-called socialist societies were far from socialist. We called them 'deformed workers' states'; nevertheless they denoted a possibility for ultimate victory against our own oppressors and a hope for the future. Indeed, few of the struggles in the colonial and semi-colonial world would have achieved success were it not for the material assistance of the Soviets and other non-capitalist states.

However, these utopian wishes were, as we know, to be sadly dashed with the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The state-corruption that has continued to be revealed, the corruption, tyranny and despoliation of the environment

demand a re-evaluation of simplistic, conspiratorial and, moreover, manichean or 'black and white' views.

Lest the attack against the decayed and corrupted forms of socialism be regarded as support for capitalism, let it be stated beyond doubt that this in no way indicates the victory of capitalist-imperialism. The empty, bankrupt office towers, mass unemployment, with beggars and homeless people thronging the streets all over the so-called developed world; the underdeveloped world starving – and this includes large portions of the once named 'socialist states' and our own South Africa; and the plundered planet in extremis, provide overwhelming evidence of the effect.

It is well for us to remember, also, that in condemning the rapine, mass slaughter and other atrocities of the Serbian regime we should not put a halo around the other participants in the civil war. Ghastly acts of brutality have occurred on all sides and, in addition, the unstable alliance between the Croats and Bosnians does not augur well for peace in the region. The Croats have not been averse to inflicting their own brand of 'ethnic cleansing' against the Muslims.

The article is both factually and politically flawed, but it is also unforgivable to give as a justification of the anti-Muslim crusade the fact that the 'Muslims . . . are descendants not of the Turks who dominated the Balkans from the 15th to the 19th century, but of Christian Bosnians who found it convenient to embrace Islam'. There then follow statistics of the percentage of Muslims and Croats and that the former, though fewer in number, are being used as shock troops to 'complete the destruction of the most promising socialist experiment thus far in Europe'.

It is said that seasoned politicians do not make idle statements. One must assume therefore that the writer has carefully calculated the nature of his/her remarks. The writer obviously does not wish to offend those in the movement who are Muslim, and therefore hastens to assure Muslim supporters that their sympathies are misplaced. The Bosnians are therefore not genuine Muslims, but rather, *Kafirs* [unbelievers] deserving to be put to the sword. Remarkably, the article does not mention the fact that the Bosnians love their cherry brandy and their women do not wear the veil.

Then, trusting to the weak memories of the old guard and the ignorance of the not so old, the writer refers to 'Yugoslavia . . . the most promising socialist experiment thus far in Europe'. Is there no shame? When Tito broke with the Soviet Union he was attacked with vitriolic venom by us in the NEUM. He was breaking the Warsaw Pact, he was a capitalist roader, he was anti-socialist. Perhaps he was, but now, it seems Tito has been rehabilitated – and the Yugoslav regime is to be regarded as a model to emulate. This cynical volte-face is done almost parenthetically.

The main thrust of the writer's argument is an attack on the UN as a 'thieve's kitchen'. It is undeniable that the UN since its inception has been flagrantly used by the US as an adjunct to employ as it pleases, and all those concerned with the struggles of the oppressed need to grasp that basic fact.

The writer is using a well worn ploy known as 'knocking down skittles'. A target that is so blatantly open to criticism, such as the UN, is targeted in order to divert the reader's attention from one of the worst travesties of recent times and, more significantly, gives support to the butchers of Greater Serbia and Croatia in their campaign of 'ethnic cleansing' and its accompanying atrocities against the Muslims of Bosnia. And is ethnic cleansing not another way of saying *apartheid*, with all its hideous implications? Is this not what the Unity Movement claims to be fighting in South Africa?

Thus the question is posed: Where is the Unity Movement going? Clearly the position adopted in the bulletin and in the journal of the TLSA is no minor aberration that can be dismissed as of no significance. This is surely the lowest depth to which this movement, once so proud of its stance on democracy and human rights, has sunk. When will its members speak out and call for an end to this sophistry.

It is a feature of tragedy, as Shakespeare knew full well, that often 'the stamp of one defect . . . / Shall in the general censure take corruption from that particular fault'. (*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 4)

## Notes

1. The **Ustashi** were the fascist Croatian forces that supported the occupation by fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in World War Two. They received substantial support from the Roman Catholic Church. The **Ustashi** massacred Jews and Serbs, who generally belonged to the Orthodox Church. Their policy, which they implemented, was to kill one-third of the Serbs, forcibly convert another third to Catholicism and endure the remainder. The **Chetniks** were pro-monarchist Serbian forces under General Draza Mihailovic, who supported the war aims of the Allies but were in conflict with the pro-Soviet partisans led by (Josip Broz) Tito. Atrocities took place on all sides. A general massacre of **Ustashi** members and supporters took place at the end of the war, when the German and Italian occupation forces withdrew. After the war, the 'left' habitually underestimated the force of inter-ethnic tensions in the region in its admiration of Tito's regime, which generally favoured the Serbs. — Eds.

For those of our readers who have no knowledge of the Latin language, it must be explained that *Qou Vadis?* means Where is it Going?

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Y S Rassool was a member of the New Era Fellowship until its dissolution in c1960. A member of the executive of the Teachers League of South Africa and active in the Anti-CAD, NEUM and affiliated organisations until his departure for the UK in 1970. Remained a subscriber to the TLSA journal until 1993.