



New Unity Movement

FOOD FOR THOUGHT ON HERITAGE DAY

On 24 September each year, South Africa celebrates “Heritage Day.” Coinciding as it does with the onset of Springtime, Heritage Day has light-heartedly come to be referred to by many as “Braai Day” – a public holiday for taking it easy and enjoying oneself.

And so the Rainbow Nation trivializes what should be a matter of serious contention.

The notion of “heritage” in South Africa raises complex issues.

We are a nation divided by our past. Years of colonial and apartheid indoctrination have left a legacy of *eiesoortigheid* – of thinking of ourselves as members of distinct racial or social groups, a legacy that the present regime has done little to eliminate, and in fact, is in many ways reinforcing. And so, even though the onset of the neo-liberal era has seen the expunging of racial discrimination from our statute books, the myth of racial identity is kept alive in numerous direct and indirect ways.

It matters not that science has over and over again debunked the myth of race. The biological and social sciences have proven conclusively that there is no scientific basis for race; race is a social construct. As a 2017 Harvard University article remarked:

The popular classifications of race are based chiefly on skin color, with other relevant features including height, eyes, and hair. Though these physical differences may appear, on

a superficial level, to be very dramatic, they are determined by only a minute portion of the genome: we as a species have been estimated to share 99.9% of our DNA with each other. The few differences that do exist reflect differences in environments and external factors, not core biology.

But these few (non-biological) differences have been sufficient justification for the commission of horrendous crimes and atrocities against people whose culture, language, history and socio-economic status are different – and not only in South Africa, either.

In America right now, fueled by rampant Trumpism, we are witnessing the crudest forms of alt-right discrimination against anyone who does not fit their definition of *whiteness*. In a climate of open, murderous police brutality against African-Americans, and the arming of white-supremacist militias, a woman was seen on TV to remark that she would “bring up her grandchildren to hate blacks.” (And she no doubt would have meant to include Hispanics, Muslims, Jews and gays as well).

At the same time, we are witnessing massive xenophobic explosions in Europe, America and Australia against immigrants from mainly African and Asian countries fleeing domestic crises such as wars and famine. There is also the attempt by British racists to deport people of Caribbean descent who arrived in the UK between 1948

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who travelled to Britain in response to that country's labour-shortage problems.

We must not forget the widespread xenophobic violence prevalent in our own country. As reported in a Human Rights Watch web article on September 17, "Xenophobic harassment and violence against African and Asian foreigners living in South Africa are routine and sometimes lethal." And, "Despite the March 2019 adoption of a government action plan to combat xenophobia, the government has done very little to ensure that attacks by members of the public, the police, and government officials are investigated and that those responsible are held accountable."

Unsurprisingly, racialism/xenophobia has provoked an upsurge in "identitarianism" and identity politics across the world. These signal a sharp polarization across national and other social divides. In the ranks of the victims, identitarianism means an assertion of group identity, and is invoked as a rallying call to struggle, whereas, among right-wing elements, it results in a call to defend the national barricades against "foreign invasion."

Terms such as "multiculturalism" and "ethnopluralism" have gained currency in recent times. Racists who want to conceal their racism in a veneer of respectability will hasten to assure you that they are not racists or nationalists, but that they support the idea of "ethnopluralism" – that all groups are equal but should live in separation from one another.

The "multiculturalists" for their part are liberals who appeal for equality among the "different cultures, races and groups." They are what American socialist academic Adolph Reed referred to as the "left-wing of neoliberalism." They support the kind of thinking that Greg Ruiters in an illuminating article recently referred to as "colour-blind politics."

According to Ruiters, the ANC-government operates within a constitutional dispensation in which all citizens are regarded as equal before the law even while the vast majority of us continue to labour under colonial, apartheid and neoliberal inequalities which make us the most unequal society in the world. What the ANC has in fact done was to try to pull off a massive deception. By declaring themselves the standard-bearers of "non-racialism" they are actually massively distorting the meaning of non-racialism AND ignoring the country's history of capitalist exploitation in order to justify their upholding of the neoliberal status quo. It is an ahistorical approach that ignores how deeply racialism is interwoven into our history,

and that ignores or underplays how ineffectual 1994 has been in switching the trajectory of our future onto a new path free of racial and other forms of oppression. In this sense, 1994 should be seen merely as an updating of the system of exploitation – a change from apartheid to neoliberalism, without addressing the fundamental roots or source of oppression, which in a nutshell, can be referred to as *racial capital*.

The answer is not to free capitalism of its racism, however, but to free society of capitalism altogether. A critical challenge facing the anti-capitalist struggle is to position the struggle for socialism in the forefront of the consciousness of the working class masses all over the world. Until this happens, we will continue to squander much time and energy on group- or identity-related issues, laudable as they might be. Uncritically celebrating cultural or any other identities is, at worse, a distraction, and plays right into the hands of the ruling classes, national and global.

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functioning in top gear. And to give special attention to the youth and workers by creating again the variety of organizations that operated in earlier times and in which our community organisations and teacher-members can function – cultural societies, civic organisations, school debating societies, rate payers' organisations, progressive workers' unions. We have to repair the damage, the setback, our political progress suffered as a result of the 1993 negotiated settlement which people were deviated by the illusion that liberation had arrived, that the struggle was over. More than a quarter century has passed since then and in all of that time the hardships of the vast majority of this nation continue, exacerbated by the spectre of increased racism. We want to state unconditionally that in order to fight racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, there is the need for the will at all levels, including preventive education, enforcement of international rules and obligations relating to human rights, social and economic measures, justice and equality. However, the eradication of racism requires, above all, a radical change in discriminatory attitudes and behaviour within

LEST WE FORGET – OUR UNEQUAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

Heritage Day should be more a day for us to reflect on anomalies in our society rather than a celebration. One area where it is visibly demonstrated is in our schooling system. Historically education in South Africa was designed to be a ruling class instrument for perpetuating a particular set of political, social and economic relationships. The whole education system was so manipulated that it prepared one section of the population for citizenship and the rest of the population for non-citizenship - masters and slaves. This duality existed for a long time and in many different forms. Education was governed by a race-based bureaucracy and the race-based legacy continues today in a variety of manifestations of inequality and inefficiency that continue to benefit the children of those in power and of the basically still-rich. In fact, education has become worse in the 26 years of so-called “democracy” with the poor majority still the victims. Racial discrimination is symbiotically linked with social class discrimination. This discrimination has created a two-tier education system which underpins economic and social inequalities in the country.

Voice after voice expresses the view that the Department of Education is failing to provide equality and quality in education, with the majority poor in particular receiving an education that prepares them for little besides unemployment and resulting poverty. As one education policy analyst puts it: *“As much as we have a second economy, we have a second education system. It reinforces the fact that these learners from poor economic circumstances are trapped in a second economy.”*

We remember only too well how in the apartheid education system huge amounts of money were allocated for the compulsory education of “White” children to equip them for their roles as masters, whereas meagre amounts were allocated to not White children’s schooling to ensure that they should not rise above subservience. During the liberatory struggle every progressive organization demanded that a system of free compulsory education should

apply for all children, not only to those classified White. The basis of the rejection of “apartheid” education was the fact that it propagated, promoted and entrenched the ideology of separateness and racial exclusivity.

The present government seem to have turned their back on that demand and instead have adopted policies that is in fact privatize education,

in that parents have to raise most of the money required for their children’s education. Education has been turned into a commodity. Channels for quality educational advancement are available only to those who can afford them. School committees elected by the community can set school fees and raise additional money to top up the State funding. A school committee made up of affluent professionals is much better able to raise funds and govern the school than a committee of poor parents who in the majority of cases are themselves inadequately educated and therefore in poorly-paid occupations. In short, the schools with the best facilities are the most expensive to attend and only those “black” pupils from relatively wealthy homes are likely to secure a place in them.

Poorly-resourced public schools are the only option left for children from the oppressed majority. At these schools, in many instances, there are no classrooms, no infrastructure and few resources. In other instances more often than not, the school buildings are dilapidated and have inadequate sanitary facilities. Although the national average for class-size may officially be between 30 and 40, there are many teachers at these schools who face classrooms filled beyond capacity, with more than 60 learners. It is in these overcrowded, under-funded public schools that there is a high student dropout rate and the matriculation pass rate is far below the national average. By their mere setting in the sub-economic urban townships and rural locations, these schools on a daily basis are exposed to a high rate of violent crime on their premises. Violence between children in school is also becoming a widespread problem. It is in these schools that the morale of teachers is at the lowest and where the health status of the pupils is at its worst. Inequities that have been created over the decades rule out most of these schools as centres for real education. In contrast to this are the schools servicing the moneyed classes which by and large, produce learners empowered to become leaders in various fields after an expensive tertiary education. Those advantaged by the money ethic will secure the well-paid jobs that will enable them in turn to send their children to posh schools whose fees effectively exclude the children of the poor. Thus, the vicious cycle of “race” and class privilege is kept in motion. Cultural heritage celebrations will have their place in

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OUR HERITAGE – TO STRUGGLE FOR THE COMPLETE ERADICATION OF RACIALISM

In the 1930s and 1940s a body of (mainly young) men and women, intensely aware of the oppressive nature of South Africa's race-based dispensation, engaged in dedicated reading, research and discussion in the fields of anthropology, history, sociology, education, economics, science and other fields of world knowledge. This scholarship enabled them to explore and challenge the theory of the existence of many human "races", some supposedly inherently superior, the rest inferior; some born to be masters, the rest slaves. This intensive study led to the foundation in 1937 of the New Era Fellowship (NEF) where many young students cut their political teeth.

They realized very clearly that national liberation was possible only by getting the country's oppressed majority to reject completely the rulers' lie that it was their innate "racial" inferiority that kept them in a state of submission, their labour ruthlessly exploited.

They understood too that the racist doctrine was exploited to keep the nation divided, one group from another, each clinging to a notion of its superiority to the others. And they saw that the road to freedom lay along the path of a vigorous united campaign to rid people's minds of the racist indoctrination by which the oppressors kept them divided and so could continue their oppression.

And so in 1943 was born the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), its slogan, its rallying cry, "We Build a Nation". One undivided nation of ALL South Africa's people. Its revolutionary obligation would be to liberate the minds of ALL South Africans – Black, Brown, Yellow, White – from the notion that their skin colour (by which mainly a "race" was identified) in no way diminished their humanity; in no way made them different from, superior or inferior to any other human being. The Unity Movement saw it as its revolutionary duty to struggle

for the creation of ONE SOUTH AFRICAN NATION, undivided.

To achieve this the Movement took the battle into every sphere of the country's life where racism raised its head – political, social, educational, civic, trade unionism, landlessness, cultural, sport.....

It exposed and succeeded in getting driven out the people's organizations, the quislings, the sell-outs, the government's collaborators, lackeys – who clung to an illusion of their superiority to the sections of the nation the Unity Movement was striving to unite.

The South African Nation?

".....Who constitutes the South African nation? The Nation consists of the people who were born in South Africa and who have no other country but South Africa as their motherland. They may have been born with a black skin or with a brown one, a yellow or a white one..... They may speak Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, English or Afrikaans, Hindi Urdu or Swahili, Arabic or Jewish..... So long as they are born of a mother and belong to the human species.... they all have an equal title to be citizens of South Africa, members of the nation, with the same rights, privileges and duties...." *Taken from the Unity Movements "Declaration to the People of the South Africa" issued in 1951.*

Several generations of South Africans are unaware of the existence of the NEUM-NUM. And even more ignorant of the significant role it has played in the struggle for the liberation of South Africa's oppressed and exploited majority; unaware of our movement's recognition that true liberation can be achieved only by the struggle of a united oppressed majority.

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