

AN UPDATE ON ANC DAC AND PACT NEGOTIATIONS

- A RUNNING BATTLE OR PROGRESS?

Ever since the ANC DAC initiated negotiations for the democratisation of South African arts and culture various arts and culture formations have emerged to contend the centre stage, some of them probably to maintain their privileged status which is threatened by the rising awareness of underprivileged cultural workers that they also deserve a stake in the transformation processes taking place in all artforms.

Most prominent in this regard have been the pro-apartheid Performing Arts Councils, particularly the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal, generally known as PACT which, although it claims

autonomy as a private company "not for gain" and even goes further to say that, "...At no stage of its thirty year history has it been dictated to by any political body, not even the National Party..." (PACT

PRESS RELEASE, 22 JULY 1992) has, in fact, always been heavily subsidised by the same National

Party government, to the exclusion of non-establishment cultural formations. PACT also claims non-

racialism "...PACT employs on merit and promotes of merit: there are no other criteria. PACT's

venues are open to all without exception. PACT'S staff reflects all the peoples of this province. PACT

plays by means of its TRANSNET TRUCK theatre, to thousands of black audience members etc.

" (Same Press Release) but it is controlled and directed exclusively by whites who have showed an

intolerance of opposition or any suggestions by other cultural formations and interested parties that

they perceive to be contrary to its own aims of dominance and patronage.

The negative attitude of the directorate of PACT towards change have led to the DAC HOD, Cde

Wally Serote, accusing it of negotiating in bad faith with the DAC and its allies for arts and culture

democratic transformation. Ample example of this bad faith has been provided by the scattering

attacks on the DAC conducted by the PACT directorate through the press. This has had the effect of

shifting negotiation from the still to be established Joint Working Groups suggested by the ANC

DAC and other cultural formations, to the press.

The press has, however, been fairly objective in its persuance of the ANC and PACT negotiations

debacle and at one stage even dubbed it: "It's a showdown at the Pact/ANC corral," (The Star Tonight:

9 -11-92)

In that article, Louis Bezuidenhout an executive officer of PACT quoted from PACT'S official

mouthpiece "Info", tried to defend the organisation from accusations that it suffered from "bureaucratic

high-handedness, bad labour relations and elitism" by counter-accusing certain groups of "trying

to use Pact for political gain," adding that a large number of people served by Pact were "apolitical

and therefore cannot allow any political movement to rule our culture." Another PACT apologist,

Julius Eichbaum, publisher and editor of the performing arts magazine, Scenaria, called on the ANC

to officially recognise "the contribution towards the creation of political awareness by the Performing

Arts Councils over the years." Eichbaum also said that, "The ANC forgets that the Arts Councils,

unlike the ANC have operated within the country for a considerable period of time..." and, the "so-

called" democratisation of the arts, as propounded by the ANC, and its allies, was one of the greatest

political shams ever to be perpetrated." Eichbaum concluded by saying: "those who would s

up with
the devil will wind up drinking from a poisoned chalice," a connotation that puts a question mark over
his objectivity.

Another person who showed an uninformed, if not unashamed support of Pact's racialism was Mrs Lesley Dellatola, editor of a State-owned glossy, called Southern Africa Today, who, on the 22 of September 1992, wrote an emotional letter to the ANC DAC Head of Department, entreating Cde Wally Serote. "not to try and obliterate something (Pact) which is making marvellous efforts to bring us together, with more understanding of each other and goodwill than there has ever been. ..Pact is not an apartheid body but was fortunate enough to have a government subsidy because we whites value our arts so highly that we are prepared to be taxed to subsidise them." Mrs Dellatola also quoted a few instances where blacks like Nomasa Nene and Peter Sephuma were given opportunities to appear on State Theatre stages as well as one other instance where about six hundred township high school pupils were bussed to the state theatre. She was promptly replied in a joint letter by two of the DAC staff members, Cdes Uriel Abrahamse and Mtutuzeli Matshoba, who pointed out that Blacks also paid taxes which were mostly used to subsidise the Pact's of this divided land, that the black talent which she so proudly referred to were, in fact products of the dusty township streets and church-house theatres, who had never received any assistance nor recognition by Pact until it saw it fit to use them as tokens to salvage its tattered image. Mrs Dellatola replied in a pacifyingly apologetic letter which did not, however, acknowledge her deliberate snipe at the DAC. The statements by Bezuidenhout, Eichbaum and Dellatola triggered off a volatile reaction from the cultural press, which accused Pact of "doing itself no favours with its blinkered approach to the situation in which it finds itself: namely, under attack by various organisations, including the ANC. It seems to be retreating further and further into the laager." (Pretoria News 6-11-92). In a letter to The Star Tonight, 17-11-1992, Carol Steinberg of the Performing Arts Workers Equity, gave an in-depth analysis of "Pact's pious claims of political neutrality..." in terms of historical facts. Steinberg pointed out that, "Pact's subservience to National Party politics is quite transparent. While the Nats were whites-only, so was Pact; when the Nats went Tricameral, so did Pact. It is not Pact's critics who dragged the performing arts into the political arena; Pact was there since its formation in 1963...Pact's present situation is not much better. The quick guage is representativity. The current Board of Directors comprises 15 members - two of whom are black. Of Facts 21 senior officials as at March 1991, all are white." In view of the above-mentioned developments, it is obvious that Pact is deliberately placing obstacles in the way of negotiations for transformation. As Ms Steinberg puts it, "By closing its doors to its critics (refusing to take part in public debates through Agenda and Radio 702), the leadership of Pact is contributing to a growing perception among black people that negotiations are impotent in the face of the white elite's stubborn refusal to shed its privileges. Given this, we believe that a significant element of Pact's employees and constituency are alarmed at the direction in which Reinecke (Head of Fact) is leading them. His hardline anti-negotiation stance locates him - and hence Pact - well to the right of the Nationalist Party." In response to Ms Carol Steinberg's letter, the Director General of the Transvaal Provinc

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Administration, Andre Cornelissen, claims that negotiations have been continuing between him and the head of the ANC DAC, Wally Serote. Infact what he is refering to are the twelve basic points of understanding between the parties which are that:

- 1.The whole of the R.S.A is undergoing change and there will also be changes in the performing arts in general and PACT specifically.
2. Negotiation to effect these changes in PACT have to take place at the earliest opportunity with all concerned h interested.
3. Negotiation must assure a better future- not a better past.
- 4.Basic differences exist between the political, managerial and creative levels of the performing arts.

The performing arts (PACT) operates at three distinctive levels:

- Board or "political" level - members are appointed.
 - Management level - management has the right to manage the organisation.
 - Creative level - Artists and other employees have the right to work as any other work force and to make an input into matters relating to their work.
5. An arrangement must be reached which will ensure that the service rendered by PACT through its management and performances will not be adversely affected in the interim.
 6. Both parties will endeavour to desist from making public statements and taking public actions that will jeopardise the process embarked upon.
 7. Training programmes must be instituted at all levels i.e. Board, Management and creative.
 8. Other interested parties in the Transvaal must be identified by both parties.
 9. Negotiations should be conducted under an independent chairperson.
 10. The negotiations and agreements only apply in the Transvaal.
 11. Attempts must be made to ensure that the performing arts are de-politicised.
 12. A declaration of intent in this respect be issued as soon as possible.

These twelve discussion points have been circulated amongst the DAC negotiations partners and interested parties for their input, in accordance with the democratic principle of consultation with everybody concerned.

The 8th of December is the date agreed upon by Cde Wally Serote and PACT representatives for further discussion of the twelve points. D