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February, 5 1993

Comment On The Retirement Of Dennis Reinecke F rom Pact.

D. Reineckg: chief executive officer: Performing Arts Council of Transvaal.

The retirement of Pact's chief executive officer, Dennis Reinecke, and the fact that his successor happens to be his blue-eyed boy, Louis Bezuidenhout does not necessarily bring any relief to any democratic formation well versed with this pro-apartheid Performing Arts council of Transvaal which has (and still is) always been heavily subsidized by the apartheid Nationalist Regime, to the exclusion of non-establishment cultural formations.

Despite all Bezuidenhout's claims, inter alia, that Pact is a non-racial organization and has always distanced itself from politics, that at no stage of its thirty year history has it been dictated to by any political body, not even by the National Party, and that political organizations and certain leaders are trying to coax Pact into the political arena, but the facts speak volumes for themselves:

t the minister of national education which controls white education is a National Party member and he is the one who appoints the chairperson of the Pact's board.

'b the department of the national education, Transvaal Provincial Administration, Johannesburg City council, Pretoria City Council & the Municipal Association of the Transvaal nominate representatives who automatically become directors of Fact.

" the minister may also remove any director either appointed or nominated to the board, at his discretion.

:6 the entire board of directors has always consisted of whites only.

it during the heyday of state banning and censorship orders virtually 100% of the bannings and censorship were influenced by the racist socio-economic policies of the regime and were mostly against indigenous African artists.

2 Alternatively the local authorities would simply refuse to make premises . available to theatre groups especially when the Afn'cans' socio-economic situation was the content of the production.

THE PEOPLE SHALL GOVERN

Somewhere in his state of confusion he goes on to say should the powers to decide about culture in South Africa be handed to one group(which has never been the DAC or any other democratic cultural formation's demand, nor will it ever be !) it was debatable whether any form of culture whatsoever would survive.

Responding to the DAC's demand that Pact should become a democratic and non-racial organization, he claimed that "Pact was a non-racial organization long before any of the current advocates of equal rights had even thought of it." One can only wonder who exactly is he still trying to fool?

The confusion arises from the hundreds of years of historical lies and the false security with which these pro-apartheid institutions have surrounded themselves, the consequences being that today people like Bezuidenhout cannot differentiate the truth from the fiction with which they have enveloped themselves so tightly. Another confused Pact apologist, Julius Eichbaum, publisher and editor of the performing arts magazine, Sceneria, consciously or unconsciously contradicts Bezuidenhout's equal rights claim at Pact. In response to the allegations of the Eurocentricity in the arts, Eichbaum, inter alia, said: " in short, we are being told that unless we turn our backs on our cultural heritage and embrace some nebulous and unproven culture of limited international appeal, we are supporting apartheid." (Eichbaum should refer to the July 1 1992's Tonight (Star) page. 1. for some enlightenment.) In the past two years no less than 10 local indigenous art productions (not to mention the internationally acclaimed former exiled artists) enjoyed international acclaim denied them in their own country for decades now. They, however, still do not receive any state subsidy to help maintain and bolster the international standard which Eichbaum so laments (unfortunately for the wrong reasons).

It is due to narrow-mindedness and racial bias (from which Eichbaum, and the rest like him, still suffer today) that indigenous African art forms were never accorded the status they should have. Europeans in Africa failed and made no effort to try to understand traditional African art forms and their aesthetic development as a product of literary artistry. Due to the racial bias and the grand plan to destroy African culture the Europeans chose to derogatively assume that African art forms were undeveloped, primitive and pagan. History has long since proved this derogatory assumption, which of-course the ignorant Eichbaum yet again commits, to be very far from the truth!

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He went on to say 'democracy had no place in arts' and adds that 'a benevolent dictatorship' was the only way to maintain artistic standards.

(Eichbaum should be reminded of the constitutional guidelines of the ANC concerning culture which he is so obviously ignorant of: 'The cultural policies of the post-apartheid South Africa should be a true reflection of all South Africans...')

Eichbaum, his grasp of the local socio-political issues heightening in confusion, goes on to say: " To this day the ANC remains an unelected body - democratically or otherwise - without a mandate to negotiate anything on behalf of anybody."

If this had any substance at all one would then be wondering why the nationalist government (a regime which steadily refused to acknowledge the aspirations of more than 80% of the total population but chose to respond with brutal repression), and after sustained local and international pressure, saw it imperative to negotiate the future of all South Africans with the ANC.

Jumping into the bandwagon of the naive and confused lot is one Lesley Dellatola, editor of the state-owned Southern Africa Today. In a letter to the Head of the national DAC, Wally Serote, she says: "... not to try and obliterate something which is making marvelous efforts to bring us all together, with more understanding of each other and goodwill than there has ever been before. If Pact were to be forced to go out of business, many of your people would be much, much poorer..." 2

She adds that Pact was not an apartheid structure, but merely fortunate enough to have: "... a government subsidy because we whites value our arts so highly that we are prepared to be taxed, to subsidize them..."

What she fails to mention though, is the fact that indigenous Africans have always been heavily taxed. There were many times in our long history of racial oppression when the revenue generated from African taxation paid for the entire administration of both black and white in certain parts of the country, a system so harsh that it extremely denied the indigenous people an independent existence. Despite this long history of harsh taxation, only pro-apartheid councils like Pact have always been heavily subsidized to the exclusion of all anti-apartheid cultural formations.

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Indigenous Afn'cans have, too, always held their culture in the highest possible esteem, a culture which formed the core of their socio-economic unity. It is no small wonder at all that traditional African cultural norms were rated amongst the top priorities to be targeted for total destruction by the racist minority governments in their quest for the total subjugation of the indigenous peoples of Africa and/or the so-called third world countries for selfish socio-economic gains.

This also meant acquiring many thousands of non-European slaves and later extremely cheap labour, including forced indentured labour consisting of many young children, to do all the work while the Settlers stood by barking this order or the other.

This forceful incorporation of indigenous people into the European-styled economy as labour or indenture labour was generally the results of the slow destruction of their indigenous culture and system of production. It was in this system that the unity of Afrikan politics and economics was to be found.

The minority regimes in their desperation for cheap labour imposed extremely harsh taxes in order to force Africans, who had adhered to their cultural beliefs and practices, thereby, remaining for a long time independent from the harsh labour system, into the labour market.

The country was flooded with missionaries, schools of industry, trade in money and so on, with one primary aim, that of attaining the total triumph of European civilization. The missionaries mostly equated Christianity with European civilization and behaviour, they thus coerced the indigenous people to abandon their trusted cultural practices which they regarded as essential to their earthly prosperity and general well-being.

The missionaries became more and more one of the many groups of agents of the new socio-economic order and discouraged indigenous political independence.

They diverted the attention of the Africans away from socio-economic problems to the vision of 'another world' hence slowing down the achievement of a just society. Christianity undermined indigenous Afn'can culture and thereby identified with the western culture and created a 'racist dependence syndrome' amongst African Christians.

Without saying, anyone who is acknowledgeable of the cultural history in Africa, especially in the Southern Afn'ca, knows fully well that indigenous culture was brutally replaced with the so-called 'western civilization culture' which was so obviously foreign to the African Societies that they rebelled against. Many cultural workers were detained, jailed, banished, had to go into exile and some were killed.  
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Against this brief background, one wonders if this is not precisely what Eichbaum is so naively justifying in saying: "... democracy had no place in arts..." and that "...a benevolent dictatorship was the only way to maintain artistic standards..." One cannot stop keep wondering where exactly these people's loyalties (as Euro-South Africans) lie, but whatever the case may be, they certainly do not reflect the true interests of an all representative South African art and culture (Perhaps he never was a South African anyway!). The many likes of him must be reminded that in the past two years 'less than 20% of the members of the National Symphony Orchestra were South Africans. Yet there are 100's of South African artists who are very desperate for work.

In addition, these councils' audiences, spectators and users are drawn from one race group and though some, like Pact, claim to be non-racial and apolitical they have a long history of complicity with custom as envisaged by the minority governments and have (as Lesley Deltatola so proudly acknowledges and not without racist overtones, too) been greatly supported by the state and have greatly profited a lot from this grossly unfair state support.

These pro-apartheid state arts councils have been receiving permanently a sum of R70-million per annum (This assistance has always been denied the cultural structures who refused to accept the state's racist and harsh profit motivated policies). This is, and always has been, both black and white, tax-payers' money. Should they not, therefore, have the right to influence how it is used, the policies and business affairs of these Arts Councils??? Besides this, how do these arts councils (especially Pact) such gross spending on a privileged class of less than 1% of the entire population in a country that has about 8-million unemployed, homeless and sick people of which more than 80% are indigenous people? Perhaps the answer to this question is to be found in this racial imbalance which would explain why this insensitive and reckless gross spending of the over-burden tax-payers' hard earned money.

It is very apparent from their dim-witted arguments that these elitist, high-handedness and myopic bureaucrats who are presently in charge of these councils think very differently. It is to be remembered that these are the people who have for many years now ridden on the grossest of the apartheid's groovy trains and are now afraid of getting off. These spoilt fat cats do not envisage any democratic transformations that will upset their racist acquired status-quo. It is to be recalled that Bezuidenhout was appointed Pact's Chief Accountant in 1984.

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These apartheid-propounded structures had long lost the confidence of the majority of tax-paying South Africans and will never win it by mere and hollow rhetoric of non-racialism which does not in itself ensure open-mindedness and progressive transformation to the benefit of all South Africans who are the actual creators of the South African culture, or their emphasis on the basis of merely integrating the indigenous Ali'icans into the Euro-Afn'cans' world, their adoption of the Euro-Ah'icans' structures, and hence, their conformity to the White-Afrcans' perception of society. There is justifiable suspicion that Bezuidenhout's jovial telephonic cement to the Sunday Times: "...Pact can deliver a lot of help to people if they are willing to use us..." loudly echoes 'a now 90's mentality of deceitfully trying to entice indigenous people into conformity to the white-Afn'cans' perception of society. In other words the Euro-African is saying to the indigenous people of this country "I do not mind you having anything you want, in-fact you can have it all, as long as you do not interfere with all the wealth that I have amassed over the years of white domination."

The DAC's demands that these apartheid white elephant structures must undergo a democratic transformation are aimed at involving the broadest possible participation of all South Africans ( both black & white) in the policy-making process with a clear understanding that this process is well informed by the lives of all South Africans.

Until such time Bezuidenhout proves to be progressively different from his predecessor, Dennis Reinecke, there would not be any relief on the part of the democratic cultural formations which are of the opinion that he, himself, suffers from the same bureaucratic high-handedness, bad labour relations and elitism constipation. It is to be hoped though that he (and the rest like him) will soon wake up to three very important facts:

it while not denying the forever increasingly jittery Euro-Afn'cans' perception of society, the indigenous people have for long fought to establish structures which also represent their perceptions of society and will not now be denied. They will continue to fight for democratic structures which also address specific needs of their own communities and as citizens (just in case you forget, citizens by their undeniable birth-right) and as tax-payers. they have all the right, more than anyone else could possibly do, to demand that certain structures or institutions be transformed accordingly.

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We must, therefore, find a balance somewhere in between these two traditional perceptions before it is too late. There is absolutely no doubt that on one hand the indigenous people have over the years shown a vast willingness to compromise (after all they have nothing to lose materially!), while on the other hand the Euro-Africans have shown an uncanny reluctance in the direction of compromise. There is no doubt at all that this reluctance is greatly influenced by the gross wealth they have so unfairly accumulated over many decades of white brutal oppression.

1" Culture is dynamic and always mirrors the circumstances of its immediate environment, therefore, considering the historical fact indigenous culture was suppressed for European political and economic gains, and while it must be apolitical, it has to first be released from its boundaries and limitations in order to really thrive and flourish! For this to happen, qualitative transformation of these structures must take place!

It institutionalized racism, bureaucracy and brutal repression has long hindered progressive growth of arts and culture in this country. A flourishing cultural life is vital to the well-being of South Africa and can greatly contribute to the national economic wealth, therefore, create employment opportunities.

Yours for Peace, freedom and democracy in our Time!

Sipho Singiswa

( DAC PWV Regional Secretary)

P/s. Personally I view the fact that people who still covertly harbour racist tendencies are now suddenly staunch preachers of a ' Bill of Rights' and even worse they are making unilateral decisions in this respect. One must ask whether this is not aimed at defending yet still the minority privileges contrary to the interests of all South Africans alike.