

CASA CONFERENCE  
17 December 1987

Poetry Address.

Alfred Temba Qabula described some of his experiences as a worker-poet/playwright. A COSATU member, he tries to mobilize and unite his fellow workers in eliciting poetical talent among them. His approach is characterized by non-competitiveness. This poetry is performed at meetings of all sorts which bring workers together. The richness of the worker experience, especially the suffering endured, is a source of inspiration to these poets.

Vernon February, speaking on behalf of the ANC, pointed out that S.A. has a sophisticated poetic tradition which pre-dates the colonial period. Together with the other arts, poetry has always had an important social function. It has been -and remains- one of many forces of progression in the struggle for freedom.

Discussion.

The poet is a recorder of history. English poetic forms (e.g., metres, structures, rhyme patterns, etc.) have been imposed on traditional African poetry to the detriment of the latter.

The Soweto uprising in 1976 opened the floodgates to a new breed of poetry, written by young people, expressing their suffering and anger.

Poetry education must teach us not only how to criticize, but also how to create poetry.

The aesthetic aspect of poetry must not be overlooked. Form should not be totally subjugated to the demands of content. Purely political subject matter need not be the only material drawn upon by poets and other writers. There is, at present, a lack of love poems in our liberation movement. A love poem is also a political statement. If we are serious in our liberation movement, we must be in love with humanity and be able to celebrate it.

Awards could be used to encourage young S.A. writers at home and abroad.

Women writers still feel burdened with fears and anxieties about going public. We come from a prudish society with unspoken inhibitions about addressing sex and relationships candidly. Our political commitments can also, at times, place restrictions on our candour in criticizing the liberation movement. Openness could be used against us by our enemies.

Sectionalizing artistic disciplines is a European phenomenon. Ours is a holistic culture. We do not separate dance, music, and poetry from one another.



Many of our poets write in English and do it very well, but we should be careful not to lose our traditional African poetry. Both have important social functions, and must exist side by side. Our future education system should offer its pupils knowledge of and facility with the African history and traditions, as well as the English. Mastering a Western language and civilisation should not be detrimental to mastering our own.

Through Cosatu the workers on the shopfloor get offered information in their own language.

A resolution needs to be adopted about children's poetry. Institutions for their schooling need to be set up.

People relate to people's needs and experiences, and so poets write about oppression, exploitation and suffering. People's poets in S.A. will always reflect revolution.

#### Visual Arts Address

Our cultural workers shall unite themselves in regional and national institutions. They will create links with other art institutions, will exchange films, photos and other materials, and will establish ways to acquire funding. We are aware of the need to protect our cultural heritage.

Panels on Photography, Posters, Crafts, Film, Fine Arts

#### Discussion

- Many people are engaged in crafts as a livelihood. Cooperatives are needed to ensure marketing, common workspaces and tools to use. Businessmen making profits from these crafts should be asked to assist in these projects.

#### Black

Businessmen are already financially assisting community projects. Their donations can be asked and they should be educated, they are also oppressed.

- Foreign funding is important, but comrades should continue to raise funds in the community, in spite of poverty.



- Progressive photographic material should be captioned. It is hard to trace its origin later or what exactly it depicts. We should also not forget our archives. We must be able to show future generations the expressions of our culture.

- We have to master our artistic skills, we need excellence. All art is propaganda, but not all propaganda is art. We should beware of the clinched fist syndrome, two <sup>angry</sup> words don't make poetry and a clenched fist does not make a revolution.

- Film societies must be started to discuss films, to show foreign alternative films and to offer film education. People must be shown there is more to film than Rambo.

A resolution proposal. We should take it upon ourselves to educate people in film literacy and make them critical. When people are thus taught or politicized we have also undermined the daily tv messages and the power of the SABC.

- Original S.A. fiction films must be made. There are many excellent alternative filmmakers in countries like Turkey, India, Mali or South America. They could be contacted. Perhaps a third world film festival could be organised, to exchange experiences.

- Exile organisations like Arikopaneng will arrange a dialogue with home to organise activities to raise the consciousness abroad about the struggle in South Africa.

- Women as educators of our children should have access to facilities for video and photography, to perpetuate the mobilisation against apartheid.

- A resolution proposal. All the programmes for the development of an alternative culture should, in all the disciplines, pay special attention to women and open their doors wide to them.