

WALLY SEROTE

CULTURAL WORKERS RIGHTS AND THE STATE

(Paper presented at Cultural Charter workshop organised by FOSACO (W.Cape) and the UWC Historical and Cultural Centre at UWC on the 10th August 1991)

It will be noted that I prefer to use the word cultural workers to artists. The reason is that when the concept of cultural workers was introduced into cultural work in South Africa, it became both a mobilising and organising concept as it also broadens our view of culture and as to who makes culture. But I also think this concept is relevant for discussions in this commission.

The working title for this commission is cultural workers rights and the state. This title confirms that there exists, must exist and will exist a relationship between the cultural movement and the state, as correctly the title raised the issue of rights of cultural workers as individuals. I approach the title from this angle for the important and vital reason that I do not want to think that we came here to talk and do nothing else. Therefore, I wish to be guided by reality in putting forward issues which must be highlighted on this important subject.

In the past ten years or so, cultural workers in this country in ensuring that their opposition to Apartheid culture will not only be permanent but will eradicate and abolish it, they mobilised and organised themselves and defined the fact that their lives, their organisations, and their work was, is and will be part and parcel of the liberation process for freedom in this country. In so doing, they also saw themselves as part of a whole democratic movement which not only fought against apartheid, but which also put forward the alternative South Africa as also it committed itself to fight for it, to protect it, and to defend it. That South Africa is a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic South Africa which is united as a nation.

I therefore want to suggest that our task in this commission must be to confirm that we are committed to the emergence of a democratic state, and that since we have fought for, and are still fighting for, and will have to defend democracy in this country, as cultural workers, we do so organised in a democratic cultural movement in this country. We are therefore examining here, the relationship between the democratic cultural movement and a democratic state. We want therefore as cultural workers a state which is democratically representative; and we should also expect that state will relate to a democratically representative cultural movement. That in my view, is the first relation between the state and part of and the whole of the democratic cultural movement .

The individual cultural worker and the democratic cultural movement must have democratic rights in a South Africa that we are building. It is the right of the democratic state to ensure that as it relates democratically to the cultural movement, that movement is itself democratic. In passing, I want to mention that if we look at most formations of the democratic movement in this country, PAWE, FAWO, SAMA, FOSACO, etc, the point must be made that they must make it their priority to become democratically representative, as at present, they are not. This issue is fundamental and essential even to this occasions where we explore thoughts for a cultural workers Charter, and for the constitutional rights of both the cultural workers and the cultural movement. It is when the formations of this

movement mobilise, and organise cultural workers, especially in the black communities in the townships and rural areas that in their participation in these organisations their aspirations, needs and interests will not only be articulated and expressed, but will also inform the content of both the charter and the constitution. It is the right of a democratic state to demand this of the cultural movement in this country. Our people have lived a history where the state made it its duty that we were not represented. As the state demands this of the cultural movement, it democratic must also defend and protect the autonomy and independence of this movement. It is correct that the state must defend the initiative which cultural workers have taken to form non-sectarian cultural structures as Cosaw and Fosaco and others intend to do, and it is not a contradiction to that principle for the state also to form structures of culture to relate to these structures if it does so on the basis of democratic principles. This is a crucial point to make, because the democratic state, if it is democratic, it is a state of all the people of South Africa, who elected it, and who make and express South Africa culture. It is also important because in South Africa, as all of us know, there has never been democracy, and it has been that 75% of people in this country are the oppressed and it is from the oppressed that the democratic cultural movement emerges. But it does not necessarily mean that this movement will remain protecting and defending the rights of the oppressed. The oppressed cultural workers need to be represented vertically and horizontally, in terms of participation and resources, so that they can be informed as they inform and so that they can implement what they decide. This cannot be left to the state, nor can this be left to the cultural movement, it is the basis of the relationship, as I said, between the democratic state and the democratic cultural movement.

It is when the state recognises the right of the cultural worker to organise, to improve him \ herself, and through the resources of the nation, makes it possible for South African culture to be expressed, that the very process makes it imperative that cultural workers and the cultural movement demand a relation between the state and cultural workers. This is the basis for defining the rights of cultural workers together with the state. Also, not to repeat myself, but to emphasise a fundamental point, which on the surface may seem a contradiction that, as it is that history tells us that the fate of the cultural movement must not be left with the state, the state must not leave the fate of the cultural workers and the cultural movement, to the cultural movement. The oppressed and the oppressor do live side by side, they still will share the destiny of this country; by the day, they oppressor is becoming non-racial, and the oppressor as we know will not volunteer not to exploit.

The oppressed always know when the oppressor has moved closer to them. It is an uncomfortable presence to say the least, but more important, the oppressed must have the means to defend and to protect their right, that right exists within the cultural movement as it exists within the state. There is a role which the state must play in culture. However, it is also a fact that, it is the people of our country who make culture. This reality must define the policy which defines the rights of the state in culture as it also defines the rights the rights of cultural workers, and their movement in that state. That the apartheid state abused this right, must not make us move to an extreme position which makes us seek how to ensure that the state does not leave cultural rights. This experience of our having lived under apartheid for 40 years, must, most important, cement our life within democracy and the defence for democratic rights of individuals and relations.

- 1) The opening up of parastatal structures to make them more representative of huge cultural resources suppressed by Apartheid.
- 2) Give recognition to alternative creative resources in the community.
- 3) Already parastatals must develop alternative practices less they be neglected.
- 4) Democratic state must protect rights of individual.
- 5) Grassroots cultural workers must be allowed to participate in the development of a democratic culture.
- 6) Cultural workers to be vigilant of the aspirations of the working class.
- 7) Meeting point between democratic & open cultural movement & the state = democratic.
- 8) Cultural pluralism (in democratic context & standards must be observe.
- 9) There should be redistribution of funds and resources.