

History: The Proposed Outline.

Some comments.

The London Educ. com. are to be congratulated

Part of fierce debate re
History syllabus for Masimbo
school, London (Harold Wolfe
vs. Lusaka - two quite opposed
views - social/nationalist approaches -
Maputo attempting a bridge)

the crucial
and objective
School
have been
discussion on
and rather
on 'period -

for
que
of
sh
ref
the

full comments.
isation' assists us greatly because it is based
on a concept that hangs together consistently
and is not a mere conglomeration of interesting
information. This enables us to discuss basic
themes in a direct and scientific way.

We fully support the attempt to get away
from the standard racist and pro-imperialist
histories of South Africa, with its myths and
falsifications, its disorder, and its list of
chosen villains and heroes. As a revolutionary
organisation dedicated to the destruction of the
present system of exploitation and oppression, and

History: The Proposed Outline.Some comments.

The London Educ. com. are to be congratulated for raising in a very concrete form the crucial question of what the basic character and objective of the History course for the Morogoro School should be. Since we in Maputo have been ~~not~~ involved rather late in discussion on the syllabus, we offer our first and rather full comments. The draft outline on 'periodisation' assists us greatly because it is based on a concept that hangs together consistently and is not a mere conglomeration of interesting information. This enables us to discuss basic themes in a direct and scientific way.

We fully support the attempt to get away from the standard racist and pro-imperialist histories of South Africa, with its myths and falsifications, its disorder, and its list of chosen villains and heroes. As a revolutionary organisation dedicated to the destruction of the present system of exploitation and oppression, and

its replacement by a ^{2.} new society built on
totally new principles, we have the duty
not merely to rectify this or that error
in the existing histories, but to re-define
what is meant by history, who are the
makers of history and in what conditions.
Simply to swap around the heroes and villains,
while leaving the basic assumptions unchallenged,
would be to fail in our revolutionary duty.
Our task is to re-tell the story of our past,
in a way that heightens consciousness and
understanding of our present struggle and lays
the basis for profound advances in the future.
It is not simply a question of re-capturing
a past that has been distorted and denied,
and of giving pride and courage to the present
generation of fighters - important though that
is - it is also a question of discerning and
outlining the basic patterns of our history in
a scientific way that educates the people,
old and young, uncovers past deficiencies,

and creates clear ^{3.} perspectives for the future.

Our movement has a particularly rich history that has been extensively discussed and analysed. Unfortunately, most of the analyses are piecemeal. There are some outstanding studies that must form the foundation of any comprehensive account, but as yet we have no 'people's history' of South Africa, save for the occasional pamphlet. It is our function to at least trace the outlines of such a people's history, from the earliest days to the present, using what materials we have, filling in the gaps, giving an overall shape and underlying sense of progression to the whole. It is not our function to re-write the policy of the ANC and its allies, but rather to explain how this policy came to be made and what its full implications are. If we feel, as members of the organisation, that the time is ripe for the extension and deepening of some themes in ~~our~~ ^{the ANC's} programme, then it is as militants in our branches that we must campaign, not as members of the

4

Education Committee entrusted with what is essentially a task of implementation. This is not merely a 'legislative' point - though we must respect our structures - a history syllabus out of phase with the line and style of the movement simply would not work. The teacher would not be able to handle it effectively, the pupils will be confused rather than have their ideas clarified, there will be a sense of conflict, of disjuncture with the everyday life and activities of the organisation.

In our view, there are ~~few~~ four themes pressing on the minds of the people that need to be dealt with by the course, four basic questions underlying the whole enterprise: Why is there so much oppression (where did it come from? Why has it lasted so long? How can we overthrow it? What are the options open to us for the future, how can we ensure that there is no exploitation in the new society we wish to build? Each of these themes is related - it is the

task of the historians precisely to show the connections, the continuity.

We support, then, the idea of a radical re-structuring of the standard type histories of South Africa, of presenting a concept of history which is as revolutionary in the field of studies as no organisation is in the field of politics. Such a history must be based on principles of social development that are scientific, that is, that does not ascribe history to the will of a Supernatural Being, nor to such allegedly eternal psychological principles as human greed, the drive to power etc., nor to the deeds of a few unusually gifted individuals. Such a history must look to the laws of social development, which because they assume that the world of people like the world of nature can be studied scientifically, should be the same for the whole world. We feel this is an important contribution made by the draft. By getting

away from the categories of race, which assume (in conflict with the whole programme) that there is something inherent and necessary in race conflict, and in getting away from the purely 'constitutional' type of history which sees the whole story as a mere succession of governors, chiefs and Prime Ministers with varying qualities of goodness and badness, in doing all this, the proposed outline performs an important service. It does so by placing South African history firmly in the context of world history, of the history of the peoples of the world, by escaping from the racist straight-jacket imposed by the rulers (and accepted to some extent by some opponents of apartheid who also define people in purely racial terms). It recognises that there are universal processes of history that apply to southern Africa just as they do, say, to the Caribbean or South East Asia or Europe.

Nevertheless, we have some strong misgivings about the outline, much as we

welcome the scientific and coherent way in which it has been presented.

Basically, we feel it implicitly understates the basic theme of the people as the active creator of history. The sense of structure is there, the sense of struggle is not. We feel it should be possible to reconcile the proposed framework with a phrasing of forms of popular struggle. We study modes of production in order to understand better modes of struggle - the 'history' takes place at the level of struggle, the mode of production is merely the (crucial) underlying base. If we are to accept the statement that all history is the history of class struggle, then let us see the class struggle, as struggle, in its special southern African forms.

Secondly, we feel that state formation is a vital aspect of southern African history - the early African states with an internal ruling class beginning to emerge - still close to the people, but with the beginnings

8.
of feudal type exploitation, and an ideology
of tribalism - so, on the one hand, leaders of
the people in resistance to ~~invasion~~^{invasion}, on the
other, ready to collaborate to protect their
emerging class interests. Similarly, the Boer
states need special treatment - their destruction
and the creation of a unified state system
under the control of British imperialism, is
one of the important themes of our history.
More important is the establishment of the
special system of national oppression within
which capitalism operated and still operates
in South Africa. Without a clear explanation
of this state form, this special type of
oppression, the development of the South
African Liberation Struggle makes no sense.
It is not enough, as the outline does, to
present the different ways in which capital
was accumulated - the state forms encountered,
fought against, overcome, created or utilised
by capital also need to be presented. The
movements of capital under history; they are

not in themselves history, and work themselves
out through conflict within the state and
between states. Why, if we are part of a
world capitalist system at its monopoly,
imperialist stage, do we have a separate
liberation movement? It would be a strange
kind of history for the pupils that could not
even explain why they were learning about
the history of their country, in a foreign
country. The question of state formation also
has importance as the setting for the activities
of prominent leaders in south African history.
It is one thing to insist that it was the
people, and not they, who were the true
agents of history; it is another to wipe them
off the face of the record altogether. Their
deeds, their victories and defeats, their manner
of living and dying became incorporated into
tradition, legend and myth, for frequently
they embodied important social processes taking
place, concretised in their person the struggles
between arising and declining social forces.

How do we characterise the mfecane today, the emergence of the centralised, militarist Zulu kingdom under Chaka? A brilliant innovation within the conditions of the time to resist capitalist encroachment? Or the sudden emergence of a military/feudal society which laid the foundation of tribal division and internal exploitation? Or both?

A people's history must have structure, yes. But it must also have sweep. It must suggest the drama of the people's struggle over the centuries, the sense of being actively in history, not just victims of historical forces. Our people over the centuries have passed through many great experiences - the vast migration through Africa, the peopling of the sub-continent, with new cultures and state forms emerging, the resistance to invasion, the long years of conquest, the humiliations of a ruthless capitalism that dehumanised them, sent them deep into the earth, transported them

from one part of the ^{11.} country to another, shot them down in the streets, made them carry documents and sent them to prison. This has been a long period, but the people are larger, they have always struggled, and now are poised to re-enter history as the master of their destiny, in control of their tools, through struggle, through understanding the law of oppression and the law of revolution, through organising themselves to overcome, in the conditions of the present, the weaknesses of the past.

The outline is really a history of capital in southern Africa. The villain is there - capital. Where it should be, at the centre of the stage. But the hero is lacking - the hero is 'the people'. To prevent this statement from being a mere slogan, the history itself must be presented in such a way that anyone studying it knows and feels that it is the people who occupy the stage, the masses of labouring people who in any society are the

creator of its wealth. ^{12.} The working people
are never an abstraction except in the eye of
their rulers: they express themselves in a variety
of cultural and political forms, and it is the
task of history to recreate for the present generation
the struggles of their predecessors.

Our other misgiving is about the style of
the course. We feel that a people's history must
be in the language of the people, clear, accessible,
~~and~~ vivid. We need to interpret our history,
not the language in which it is expressed. In
this sense a course for a school must be very
different from a course for a university, where a
higher level of abstraction and linguistic fluency
could be expected. We believe that if the ideas
presented in the outline are truly grasped, digested,
understood, not simply as ideas that hang well
together in a logical system but as true
descriptions of reality, then they can be expressed
in the everyday language of reality. There is nothing
expressed in the outline to the effect that
history must be expressed abstractly, but the
formulations seem to us to point in that direction.
We have argued our points in the forthright

way that we feel the subject and our responsibility to it deserve. Due to no fault of our own, we aren't well informed about the plans, and possibly much of what we say has already been considered by the Committee. Clearly, the production of History tests will be the most difficult and sensitive ~~for~~ the whole programme. They have great importance not only for the school but for our whole movement, and we would like to see the debate about our history spread to the whole movement. In the end, it cannot be us as 'experts' who decide on the major themes. These are political choices that belong to the movement and to its leadership. But we can help to crystallise the ~~debate~~ issues, to clarify the options, and to the extent that the outline encourages exactly such an examination, we would wish to repeat our gratitude to the London Committee. We should mention too that some of our observations reflect the rich experience we have had of living and working in Mozambique, where the question of history, of its meaning and

how it should be presented is regarded as a central political issue. ~~Three~~^{Four} pamphlets have been produced, representing as far as we know something quite new in our continent, and, in some ways, possibly, in the world. The first deals with the Origin of Man, and its objective is to lay the basis for a scientific view of the universe and of man's place within it, as the basis for all social studies. The second is a History of Africa, which deals with well-known themes such as the Kingdoms of Egypt, the Empires of West Africa and the great Bantu Migrations, but presents them in class terms. The third is a History of Mozambique and the fourth a History of FRELIMO. Each was produced in first draft by a team of teachers, historians etc. and then discussed at various levels inside FRELIMO. We understand that the discussion on presentation was as extensive as that on content. Passages, chapters, whole sections, titles, illustrations and summaries were 'tried out' on various groups of workers and pupils to see how clear the points were - all the writers knew who the audience would be, and felt the need to write directly to them. The

other feature of the work was its collective character. In the end it was FRELIMO that decided through its Dept. of Ideology, but at all stages people tried to work out a balanced, collective presentation within the guidelines given them. There does not appear to have been any fighting for positions, tactical manoeuvring, factionalism. It may be that the present stage of our liberation struggle still leaves open issues which have been clearly resolved in Mozambique, but we feel we have in our movement a rich legacy of experience, considerable creativity in the present period, and sufficient consensus on broad issues to work out a new history of South Africa in a collective, politically conscious way. Finally, the points we have made about South African history apply to world history as well. We would like more on the history of Africa, more on national liberation struggles, more on the ~~concrete~~ ^{background to the} options that face the people of our continent today.