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RICK TURNER AND SOUTH AFRICA'S "SIXTIES"

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This article examines the life and thought of South African radical philosopher Richard "Rick" Turner (1941–1978), a crucial figure in the 1973 anti-apartheid political conjuncture known as the "Durban Moment." Though steeped in existentialist philosophy, Turner's real contribution to New Left thought in South Africa came elsewhere. Turner's receptivity to "Black Consciousness," his vision of radical pedagogy, and his commitment to participatory democracy and "workers' control" all made a deep imprint on Black working class mobilization and the birth of a democratic trade union movement in South Africa.

From White Liberal to Radical Existentialist

If apartheid South Africa had its May 1968 or its Prague Spring, the moment came five years late in January and February 1973, with the mass strikes that rocked the Indian Ocean port city of Durban and the surrounding province of Natal. Marking an unusual confluence of Black Consciousness, white student radicalism, and spontaneous shop-floor action by African factory workers, this "Durban Moment" (as it came to be called) helped make the industrial working-class a central player in the challenge to apartheid inside the country. And, if the Durban Moment threw up a representative intellectual figure akin to Herbert Marcuse, Guy Debord, or Vaclav Havel, that person was Richard (Rick) Turner, a young professor of politics at the University of Natal. Although "banned" by the South African government in February 1973 in the midst of the strikes,[1] Turner's influence on a generation of anti-apartheid activists proved significant. More than forty years later, amidst the ferment engendered by post-apartheid disillusionment with the politics of the African National Congress, Turner's commitment to participatory democracy and Marxist humanism have taken on a renewed resonance (Webster 2016).

Though recognized today as a minor struggle-hero in South Africa (there is a thoroughfare in Durban that bears his name), Turner remains a fleeting, protean figure, and it is not always easy to reconstruct the development of his thought. The South African journal of social and political theory, *Theoria*, occasionally revisits his legacy (e.g., Greaves 1987; Morphet 1990; Webster 1993), and a recent biography (written by an American anarchist) has brought him some long overdue renewed attention (Keniston 2014). In fact, Turner spent a scant seven

years as a visible figure on the South African political and intellectual scene, bracketed by his 1966 return from graduate study in existentialist philosophy in Paris at age twenty-five and his government banning order in 1973. With this banning order his publications—at least under his own name—ceased; nevertheless, his influence on South African radical thought proved enormous. Murdered under mysterious circumstance (probably by a government-sponsored death squad) in 1978, just as his five-year ban was set to expire, he left his mark much more through his friendship with Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko (1946–1977), his role as a teacher, and his work with the nascent Black trade union movement in Durban, than through any of his limited intellectual output.

Born in 1941 in Cape Town, and raised on a small farm in nearby Stellenbosch, Turner experienced a conventional English speaking white South African upbringing. This meant a fee-paying private school "English-style" education followed by enrolment at the nearby University of Cape Town (UCT), the bastion of English-speaking "liberalism" in the Western Cape region of South Africa. In the geography of the Cape, Stellenbosch University was just down the mountain from the Turner farm, but as the epicenter of conservative Afrikaner intellectual life—indeed, the cradle of Afrikaner nationalism—it was no place for an English-speaking South African. By way of contrast, UCT embodied Cape liberalism's deeply paternalistic approach to South Africa's black majority, rooted in the British imperial legacy. Couched in well-meaning ideals of uplift and "trusteeship," this approach to the "native question" was legitimized by its distinction from the allegedly harsher racism of Afrikaner nationalism, which came into political power in the country in 1948 (Morphet 1980). It was this so-called "white liberal" approach to race, as much as the apartheid ideology it claimed to eschew, that Turner would devote his intellectual life to challenging.

Although he intended to study engineering, he soon switched to philosophy. As Tony Morphet, Turner's most perceptive interlocutor, points out, this shift came at a turbulent moment in UCT's history. In 1959, the apartheid government sought to crack down on the English-speaking universities' liberal gesture of admitting a handful of Black, Colored, or Indian students, insisting that each "race" in South Africa must attend its own dedicated institution (Morphet 1980). This made apartheid more than a purely academic question for many young whites at the time. The state-enforced segregation of the liberal "open" universities was followed by the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre, the ensuing state of emergency, and the government's vicious crackdown on Black opposition to apartheid. Both the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress were banned and driven underground or into exile, as was the South African Communist Party (SACP) and much of the leadership of the allied trade union movement, the South African Congress of Trade Unions. Thus students of Turner's generation experienced what might be called an aborted moment of revolt, during which they largely sat on the sidelines. There was a small group of radical students in Cape Town, some of them associates of Turner's, who followed the lead of the ANC and embraced anti-government sabotage, but they were soon betrayed to the security police. This too offered Turner an important political lesson about

the potential futility of violent revolutionary action and the politics of a vanguard party.

By 1964, Turner had embarked for Paris to pursue graduate study in philosophy with the French Hegelian and early existentialist, Jean Wahl (1888–1974), who helped him delve into the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, who himself had once been Wahl's student.[2] Unlike many white South African dissidents of his generation, Turner did not travel to Oxford or London for graduate study. This may have allowed him to keep his distance from the gravitational pull of the SACP and its ANC comrades in exile, permitting him to develop an independent, anti-authoritarian, and non-sectarian radicalism, neither communist nor Trotskyist in orientation. Although he departed France two years before the 1968 upheaval there, while in Paris as a graduate student at the Sorbonne in the mid-1960s, Turner wrote his thesis on Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, embracing the great philosopher's emerging synthesis of existentialism and Marxist humanism. Moreover, as one University of Natal colleague recalled shortly after the South African government banned Turner in 1973, "because he studied in Paris at a time when explosive things were happening in the French student world, he was himself excited and made impatient by them" (Duminy 1973, 3). Although he never published a major philosophical or theoretical work on Sartrean philosophy *per se*, it seems clear that Sartre's thought made a major imprint on his thinking about the ability of human beings to choose consciously and freely their own destiny and to make their own history.[3]

The New Left in South Africa

Upon his return to Cape Town from Paris in 1966, rather than take up a university post, Turner settled on his family's farm outside Stellenbosch. While there, Turner served as a magnet and gadfly for local university students and assorted bohemian radicals beginning to feel the refreshing—if still faint—distant breeze of the New Left from other shores. He even found some common ground with a handful of Afrikaner dissidents at Stellenbosch who had begun to chafe against the reigning intellectual paradigms justifying apartheid (Macqueen 2013, 373–74). More promisingly, when white students at the University of Cape Town staged a brief protest in 1968 to demand the re-instatement of African lecturer, Archie Mafeje, barred from teaching by apartheid laws, Turner appeared on the scene to give an impromptu speech (MacQueen 2013, 370–71; Plaut 2011). By the late 1960s, he took up temporary teaching posts at Stellenbosch and then at Rhodes University, until he found a permanent position in the Politics Department of the University of Natal in 1970.

In this rough biographical sketch we can begin to identify the main contours of Turner's thought, and see the seeds of some of his ideas that inspired a new generation of South African radicals when brought into a combustible combination during the early 1970s in Durban. Like the "Durban Moment" itself, Turner's thought synthesized a number of tendencies associated with the global New Left of the 1960s, many of which filtered only slowly into South Africa. First,

there was his New Left existentialism, derived from his Parisian sojourn, and imbued with a healthy skepticism of Soviet communism and the vanguardist politics that came with it. Second, and closely related, there was his commitment to radical pedagogy and the possibilities to change of consciousness through unorthodox forms of grassroots education. Here, Turner drew heavily on his reading of Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire, his familiarity with the tradition of workers' education in the United Kingdom, and his growing engagement with the workers' movement in Durban. Third, in the Durban area there was the essential presence of Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness movement, which offered a potent synthesis of American Black Power ideology, Black theology, and African nationalism. Finally, and in my view, most significantly these currents found their deepest expression in Turner's commitment to a vision of "workers' control," an extension to the factory floor of his fundamental belief in the New Left's fundamental conception of "participatory democracy." This element of his thought should be of the most interest to readers of this journal; but it also represents his most lasting contribution to South African politics, in what came to be called the "workerist" tradition in the South African trade union movement, in the anti-apartheid movement more generally, and in today's fraught post-colonial moment in South Africa.

In the closed intellectual environment of apartheid—the government banned many works considered "subversive," and university libraries were forced to put them under lock and key–the actual sources of the new winds of leftist thought can be difficult to detect.[4] Comrades' memories and secret police reports, if they can be trusted, hint that Turner paid close attention to events back in Paris in May 1968, to the Prague Spring, to the Cultural Revolution in China, to Rudi Dutchske and the German student rebellion, to Ivan Illich's writings on "deschooling society," and to Che Guevara, among others (Keniston 2014). As a friend of his noted in retrospect, Turner was "absolutely the key to opening [students] up to new ideas and news from abroad" (Keniston 2014, 51). A significant lecture of Turner's certainly smacks of New Left thinking on the nature of the university and its prominent ethical place in making a new social order. Students, Turner proclaimed,

> don't want universities to train them to be technicians for servicing the present social machine. They want universities to be involved in the creative task of evaluating the present social machine, of exploring different ways of organizing society. . . . All they want . . . is to be part of a society which actually looks for questions and answers, a society which isn't smug, whether its smugness be that of the old Czech Stalinist bureaucracy, the American influence-peddling party machine, or the white South African oligarchy (Keniston 214, 45).

There is no way to know for sure if Turner was aware of the Students' for a Democratic Society's "Port Huron Statement" (1962) or of Mario Savio's Free Speech Movement oratory from 1964, but his calls for relevant education surely read that way. Furthermore, as his biographer notes, while personally

uninterested in the counterculture's use of mind-altering substances, Turner enthusiastically embraced its ideas about seeking out new forms of living and loving. In the latter case, this meant directly flouting South Africa's racial laws when he fell in love with and married a "coloured" woman, Foszia Fisher, and thus contravened the color line in his most intimate personal relationship as well as in his thinking (Keniston 2014). Turner was nothing if not a free spirit, which for a white person in culturally repressive apartheid South Africa, threw one into direct opposition with the regime.

Although personally a nonbeliever, Turner was also a frequent speaker at events sponsored by the dissident anti-apartheid church movement represented by the Christian Institute and the South African Council of Churches.[5] As a consequence, many of his lectures and published articles between 1970 and 1973 sought to reconcile Christian humanism with the new currents in socialist thought generated by the New Left thinkers he was reading and interpreting for a South African audience. Turner prepared his most thorough exposition of his vision for a transformed South African society, *The Eye of the Needle: Towards Participatory Democracy in South Africa* (1972), at the behest of Spro-Cas, the Special Project on Christian Action in Society. The Spro-Cas program proved wide-reaching, drawing together black theologians, dissident white churchmen (both English and Afrikaner), radical students, economists, sociologists, and white liberals into a common project designed to highlight apartheid's incompatible with Christian ethics. Although not willing to embrace the materialist left, Spro-cas distinguished itself sharply from white liberalism by its receptivity to Black consciousness and its deliberate efforts to eschew liberal white paternalism (Stadler 1975). It is a sign of the radical ecumenism of Spro-Cas organizers that they asked an atheist like Rick Turner to produce one of their major philosophical statements about apartheid. In fact, Turner had to ask Spro-Cas for the citation for the exact biblical line that formed the basis of his title![6]

In *The Eye of the Needle*, Turner not only challenged whites to transcend their racism, but offered a positive program of utopian socialism—testing the limits of the regime's censors, to be sure–that drew heavily on several New Left thinkers. Written quickly, *Eye of the Needle* was not an academic tome, and thus it remained only lightly footnoted; as a result, Turner's influences can be difficult to trace. As Turner scribbled in a note to his Spro-Cas sponsors, "one of the main purposes of the book is to act as study and discussion document."[7] Turner's radical pamphlet claimed to "seek some vision of what South African Society could be if Christianity was taken seriously" as a source of ultimate values incompatible with apartheid and capitalism. Indeed, Turner's contribution was meant to provide the Spro-Cas initiative with "serious consideration of socialism and such concepts as participatory democracy and workers' control," in the words of Spro-Cas director Peter Randall, who himself was banned in 1977 (Randall 1973, 4–5).

When grilled subsequently by the government's Commission of Inquiry into Certain Organisations (known as the Schlebusch Commission), Turner reminded his inquisitors that *Eye of the Needle* "is not a call for revolt, it is a

suggestion for what a just society would look like" (Republic of South Africa 1974, 561). In "sketching an ideally just society" (Turner 2015 [1972], 1) in his Spro-cas pamphlet, one ultimately compatible with a "Christian model" of "freedom and love," he distinguished his own vision from that of the Old Left, which in his view "accepted the capitalist model of human fulfillment through the consumption and possession of material goods" (Turner 1971, 76). Drawing on the work of John Kenneth Galbraith (*The New Industrial State*) and Herbert Marcuse, Turner was critical of the "forced consumption" (Turner 2015 [1972], 18) on which modern capitalist economies—including that of white South Africans—depended for expansion and growth. The New Left, by way of contrast, sought to transcend materialist(ic) notions of human fulfillment and potentiality. As an antidote to consumer capitalism, Turner posed "the idea of community, love, co-operation with one's fellows as an end in itself" and proposed "communal living based on the sharing of property" (Turner 1971, 78; Turner 2015 [1972], 123). To the obvious retort that in the South African reality the vast majority of the population still suffered extreme material deprivation rather than a surfeit of consumer goods, Turner suggested that it was *whites* who would have to learn to substitute community for material values. With a touch of romanticization, he added that they might even learn from "the human model characteristic of African tribal societies" (Turner 1971, 80).

Although never published by Spro-Cas, Turner offered up a list of readings designed to "help people to explore further some of the ideas suggested" in his work. In addition to Galbraith, his reading on economics included Paul Sweezy and Paul Baran on monopoly capital. He complemented his reading of Marcuse's *Eros and Civilisation* (1955) with Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* (edited by Frankfurt School thinker Eric Fromm), as well as Fromm's own *The Sane Society* (1956), which emphasized the problems of workplace alienation and rampant consumerism. When it came to the political theory of participatory democracy, he drew on Carol Pateman's *Participation and Democratic Theory* (1970). Looking out to existing models of socialism, interestingly enough his critical view of the Soviet model came from Solzhenitsyn's novel *The First Circle* (1968), in which the Soviet police state was at war with the power of individual conscience. At the same time, he proved surprisingly receptive to the Chinese Cultural Revolution, an idea derived from his reading of a French work, *La Construction du Socialisme en Chine* (1965), as well as William Hinton's *Fanshen* (1966). Finally, his radical ideas about alternative forms of pedagogy looked not only to Illich (*De-schooling Society*, 1971), but also to John Holt, A.S. Neil (the founder of Summerhill), and anarchist Paul Goodman, the author of the New Left bible, *Growing Up Absurd* (1960).[8]

Especially interesting, I think, is Turner's engagement with the "young Marx" of the 1844 manuscripts. It was in this text that Marx most fully introduced the link between capitalist labor relations and human alienation, a concept with obvious appeal to Turner (and many of the New Left thinkers he was drawn to). As Fromm puts it in his introduction to the translation Turner used, "[Marx's]concept of socialism is the emancipation from alienation, the return of

man to himself, his self-realization" (Fromm 1961). Finally, in a paper on "dialectical reason," Turner included a lengthy quote from the "young Marx," to the effect that "we develop new principles for the world out of the principles of the world" (Turner 1973, 33). In fact, I believe the task of demystification proposed here by Marx became in many ways the impetus for *The Eye of the Needle*.

But Turner's true power as a "political agitator," as he self-mockingly called himself in a biographical note provided to Spro-Cas, was as a teacher.[9] His most lasting influence on the trajectory of the South African left really came after he took up his post at the University of Natal in Durban in 1970, where his influence on students proved enormous. Given that he only was able to operate openly as a radical in Durban for three years before the apartheid state served him with the banning order denying him access to the classroom (the university continued to pay him), and making it impossible for him to speak publicly, publish, or meet with more than one person at time, the range of his contacts and the depth of his impact in the surrounding community during that short time is also striking. By his own count, between 1970 and 1973 he gave at least forty-eight speeches and lectures outside the confines of the university lecture hall, and probably many more informally. During those three years, Turner had spoken at dozens of student meetings and addressed numerous local organizations—church groups, women's groups, white liberals–on a wide range of topics, including "radical thought, socialism, communism, and the philosophies of Sartre, Mao Tse Tung, and Marcuse," according to the information collected (probably from the secret police) by the Schlebusch Commission (Republic of South Africa 1974, 93). He had also worked closely with radical white students in the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) who formed a "Wages Commission" to investigate and publicize the poor pay and working conditions of Black workers in Durban and its surrounding industrial areas. Many of these students—David Hemson, Halton Cheadle, Paula Ensor, Jeanette Curtis, Eddie Webster and others—would come to play prominent roles in the new non-racial labor movement and Black workers' education initiatives that exploded during and after the strikes (Davie 2007; Hemson 2014 [interview]; Lichtenstein 2015; Morphet 1990; Webster 1993). Many of these students were called before the Schlebusch Commission as well, and banned along with Turner in February 1973.

Black Consciousness

Turner's commitment to existentialist humanism, his growing disgust with white racism and impatience with the paternalism of white liberalism, and his search for new models of human potentiality, made him particularly receptive to the eruption of South Africa's local strain of Black Power, that is, "Black Consciousness," (BC) which came to the fore in Durban during these same years (MacQueen 2013; MacQueen 2016). Articulated best by Steve Biko, BC insisted that Blacks in South Africa no longer should seek the crippling "tutelage" of paternalistic white liberals. Instead, they had to throw off their psychological

chains in order to achieve an independent consciousness of themselves. This meant, for instance, refusing to work in concert with NUSAS, and to encourage Black students to organize themselves *for* themselves. Anyone familiar with Stokely Carmichael's work, *Black Power* (1967), from which Biko drew liberally, will recognize this approach, although Biko and his followers gave BC a South African inflection, building on a deep tradition of indigenous Africanism (Gerhart 1979). As in the U.S. civil rights movement, many South African white liberals found such a program profoundly threatening, but Turner immediately saw its import as an opportunity for whites to explore their own dominant position and compromised consciousness within the South African racist reality.

Much like Biko, who he befriended in Durban, Turner regarded white liberals as "whites first, liberals second." Notwithstanding the critical gaze they directed at apartheid, he concluded, even the most liberal whites could not imagine a transformed South Africa without their basic privileges as whites left intact. As Turner wrote approvingly in a 1971 essay entitled "The Relevance of Radical Thought," "the desire [of Blacks] is no longer to be accepted into white middle class society, as though this were the peak of human attainment . . . . What is aimed at now [by BC] is the construction of a new kind of society with a different value system . . . . This involves a rejection of the whites' assumption that they have the right to select the criteria of acceptability,' 'responsibility', 'civilisation', or even beauty" by which to measure Blacks. While Turner agreed with Biko and BC that social change in South Africa would have to be initiated by blacks, he still saw a very important role to play for whites—namely, that they would have to address the limits of their own *white* consciousness as an obstacle to broader social transformation. In particular, because BC would autonomously articulate a new set of cultural values—what Biko called "the quest for true humanity"–this might allow whites to scrutinize and question their own value structure—to critique, in short, their own ideals of "white western civilization" (MacQueen 2013; Turner 1971, 72–3).

A Radical Pedagogy

For Turner, the critique of "white consciousness" made necessary by his understanding of BC was closely bound up with his ideas about radical pedagogy, drawn as we have seen from his reading of Illich and Friere. "Just as the organizational structure of the factory socializes the worker in a particular way," he wrote in *Eye of the Needle*, "so does the organizational structure of the school" socialize the student (Turner 2015 [1972], 87). In a memo to Spro-Cas on "education reform," Turner noted that "people must be helped to organize and act for themselves in spheres which are immediately relevant to them." When he turned his eyes to education, Turner saw—somewhat naively, it must be said—a realm in which whites could have their pre-conceptions challenged. "If we assume that education should produce learning individuals who can involve themselves intelligently and creatively in the ongoing process of living with other people," he wrote, "then there are two major issues—the question of attitudes

and the question of information." In the arena of the former, Turner contended, schooling needed to be turned away from "programming [white students] for variously prepared roles" and instead "open people up to the world." In the latter case, Turner hoped Spro-Cas would develop "alternative syllabi" that might, for instance, offer a more critical account of South African history. Turner saw this program as "an attack on `white consciousness," but in apartheid South Africa such an approach seemed doomed from the start (at least in secondary education). His suggestion however that the "ILLICH/FREYRE[sic] methods" of radical pedagogy could be applied to *Black* education made some headway, especially in the materials produced by his students engaged in workers' education and, a decade later, in the popular education materials produced by Luli Callinicos, a participant in the "Durban Moment."[10] (Callinicos 1987; Webster 1993). Here too, like his vision of "participatory democracy," Turner's larger philosophical project would ultimately find its most potent application in ongoing efforts to organize the Black working class.

Turner's political antennae were by no means flawless, however. When it came to Black education, he imagined for example that the pseudoindependence granted to the South African black homelands, or "Bantustans," might provide the opportunity for a restructured education system (Turner 2015 [1972], 97). While recognizing the real limits of homelands politics, which "had a platform from which to speak but not a power base from which to act" (Turner 2015 [1972], 163), Turner still imagined that "if the homelands leaders can link up with the [urban] working class, then there is a possibility of a movement that has both potential power and a developing political voice" (Turner 2015 [1972], 171). In Durban, this particular illusion led Turner and some of his fellow activists to seek out links with KwaZulu homeland leader Gatsha Buthelezi, who "endorsed" *The Eye of the Needle* and served as the honorary "chancellor" of the workers' education project established by Turner and his students, the Institute of Industrial Education (IIE). In retrospect, given that Buthelezi came to consolidate his power base with the ideology of Zulu ethnic nationalism and material support from white foreign capital and even the apartheid state, sowing the seeds of a future civil war in Natal, this proved to be a profound miscalculation (Hemson 2014 [interview]; Maré and Hamilton 1988). But perhaps that was less obvious in 1972 than it became later in the decade.

Workers' Control

> Workers' control in the enterprise is a necessary condition for freedom but it is not a sufficient condition (Turner 2015 [1972], 64).

Somewhat paradoxically, given his sympathy for BC and its emphasis on racial identity, in his interactions with his white students Turner helped push them toward a class analysis of South African society. As his colleague Andrew Duminy put it, "through Sartre he approached Marx and, like them, he became

convinced that capitalism is by its very nature exploitative and therefore unjust" (Duminy 1973, 5). Lecturing on Herbert Marcuse, Turner was reported as saying that "whilst a revolution cannot succeed without direct worker participation, nevertheless student revolt can act as a vital detonator" (Turner 1978, 85) Indeed, Turner apparently had lifted this conception of a "detonator" directly from Sartre himself, who relied on the very same term in his own description of the May 1968 events in Paris, where workers and students had famously joined forces (Sartre 1970).

Only months before his banning order—and no doubt helping to precipitate it—a rash of mass strikes broke out amongst Black workers in Durban's industrial areas. The "Durban Strikes" of 1973, though too often subordinated in the anti-apartheid narrative to the Soweto uprising of 1976, drew a small cohort of young white radicals into solidarity with striking Black workers. Together they helped build embryonic trade unions that less than a decade later would emerge as a strong and vibrant base of working-class anti-apartheid struggle (Davie 2007; Friedman 1987; Friedman 2011; Hemson, Legassick, and Ulrich 2010; Lichtenstein 2015). In Durban, nearly all of these white activists had been students of Turner's and they continued to consult with him closely as they threw themselves into trade union activism and solidarity actions with Black workers. Turner, his wife Foszia Fisher, and several of these students founded the IIE, which published the first (and still the only) comprehensive study of the Durban Strikes in 1974 (much of it allegedly written by the banned Turner), inaugurated the *South African Labour Bulletin*, and became a vibrant centre for workers' education in the Durban area, modelled partially after Ruskin College in the United Kingdom, with which it affiliated (Copelyn 2009 [interview]; Hemson 2014 [interview]; IIE 1974).

It is impossible to understand the impact of *The Eye of the Needle* outside the context of Durban's mass strike wave. Turner's book sought to highlight what he called "the necessity of utopian thinking" (Turner 2015 [1972], 1). But, as Andrew Nash observes, "the main problem in understanding Turner's historical role is the apparent discrepancy between his philosophical utopianism and the strategic realism of the trade union movement in whose beginnings he played so active and widely-acknowledged a role" (Nash 1999, 69). The idea of "workers' control" marks the juncture at which such utopianism and pragmatism converged. It is also the place at which Turner's ideals of participatory democracy, faith in Black self-liberation, and belief in radical pedagogy came together.

Before it was banned by the South African government eleven months after its release, Spro-Cas distributed *The Eye of the Needle* to at least 3,500 people, "mostly to young white and black trade unionists and to those whose radicalism needed a philosophical foundation," Spro-Cas staffer Horst Kleinschmidt recently recalled (Kleinschmidt 2013, 11). This foundation was "participatory democracy," a concept that grounded Turner's approach to the workplace and much else besides. Turner may not have been directly familiar with the New Left manifesto, the Port Huron Statement; but because he cites it directly we can be sure that he had read Paul Blumberg's work of industrial sociology,

Industrial Democracy, which quotes the key passages on the democratic control of the work experience from the SDS manifesto on participatory democracy in its introduction (Blumberg 1968, 8; Turner 2015 [1972], 51). Emphasizing that in "any contemporary society" the workplace represented "the most vital area of people's lives," Turner naturally concluded that "the first essential for democracy is that the workers should have power at their place of work" (Turner 2015 [1972], 46–7). While he acknowledged that forming trade unions—something Black workers could, in fact, legally do under apartheid, even though striking was against the law—would have to be "the first step in the direction of power for these workers," Turner nevertheless insisted that these organizations could only serve as a "check on management" able to make "the work situation more comfortable" but not, in the end, more "meaningful" (Turner 2015 [1972], 47). The result of this limited step, he feared, would merely be the continued displacement of genuine human needs into the sterile and inauthentic realm of consumption and commodities. As Turner noted elsewhere, most likely drawing on his reading of Marcuse, "Passivity is the main trait of 20th century consumer man" (Republic of South Africa 1974, 692).

Thus, in Turner's view, to develop genuine participatory democracy at work, organized workers should aim ultimately at "full workers' control." Specifically, Turner argued, this would entail regular mass meetings and an elected workers' council in every enterprise to take over managerial duties. Building outward from this nucleus, workers could develop cooperative values applicable to all areas of their lives, not just the workplace. To the degree that he saw extant working models of this utopian vision, Turner looked to Tanzania's Ujamaa village schemes, the Polish revolt of 1956, the Prague Spring in 1968, and above all (drawing again on Blumberg) Yugoslavia, a place Turner himself had visited while in Europe during the 1960s.[11]

Finally, Turner imagined that the cooperative ethic and autonomous activity associated with such workplace democracy could radiate outward to the political economy and culture at large, making possible the emergence of a broad-based democratic socialism. As he put it, "Participation through workers' control. . .lays the basis for love as a constant rather than as a fleeting relationship between people, and is thus the basis for Christian community in the work situation" (Turner 2015 [1972], 52). "The basis of political freedom" in this social order, Turner maintained, "lies in the workers' control of the enterprise," giving them the power to "resist norms or priorities they considered totally unjustified" (Turner 2015 [1972], 81).

Turner's ideal of a more humane society thus placed fulfilling work at the center of his politics of participatory democracy. Like many of his New Left comrades Turner emphasized the need for "meaningful and creative work, work that is an expression of my own autonomous being and not something I do unwillingly" (Turner 2015 [1972], 45). This reflected the New Left's ideological repudiation of both a Keynesian growth liberalism that emphasized expanded consumption as the primary goal of capitalist production, and the alienating labor that Turner and those like him associated with the Stalinist command

economies. In the former case, of course, this view also marked a sharp break with the South African liberals' faith that capitalist growth would erode the commitment to apartheid, concluding instead that capitalism was part of the problem rather than part of the solution. At the same time, however, Turner saw little merit in what the Soviet alternative model—and thus, by extension, the SACP and its allies–had on offer. "There are," he pointed out, "no political institutions in Soviet society that would enable the people to assert their control over the means of production. . . . The result is a large, inefficient and undemocratic state bureaucracy" (Turner 2015[1972], 86).

Another important feature of Turner's thought that, like much New Left thinking, sharply distinguished him from the traditional Marxist Left was the question of means and ends. Turner insisted that "only if the new culture is embodied in the process of moving towards the new society will that society work when we get to it." "We must ensure," he warned, "that all organizations we work in themselves prefigure the future" and thus "be participatory rather than authoritarian" in character (Turner 2015[1972], 123–4). Rooted in workers' shop floor organizations, this participatory ideal would form the bedrock of the new democratic South African unions inspired by Turner's thought during the 1970s.

Indeed, the hothouse political and intellectual climate provided by the "Durban Moment" proved an ideal laboratory for some of Turner's most challenging ideas. Spro-cas published *The Eye of the Needle* in late 1972, and the Durban Strikes wave broke out in January 1973, drawing in many of the University of Natal students who had worked closely with Turner. A month later, in the midst of the strikes, Turner himself was banned, making it impossible for him to publish anything under his own name, but his wife and intellectual partner, Foszia Fisher was not. In "Class Consciousness among Colonised Workers in South Africa" Fisher offered her own reflections—and perhaps those of Turner as well[12]—on the relationship between the Durban Strikes and the "class consciousness" of African workers. From a Sartrean perspective, the essay described how an atomized working class might be suddenly moved to collective action erupting from the daily relations of the shop floor. Such spontaneous action was rooted in the shift from "serial" to "group" praxis, in which the "relation to the other is a source of strength rather than of weakness." More often than not, this transformation in consciousness was provoked by "a situation which suddenly illuminates the possibility of action for a large number of people"—the paradigmatic recent case in South Africa being that of the Durban Strikes (Fisher [Turner] 1978, 201, 213). In particular, in Durban in 1973 striking workers transcended the "serialized" experience of separate factories as they realized that others were engaged in spontaneous mass action without police repression. Using his colleague Gerry Maré's name as a front, Turner published in the *South African Labour Bulletin* a similar analysis of the East London strikes that broke out in 1974 (Maré 1974). Fisher—or was it Turner?—acknowledged that during the 1973 upheaval workers'

demands remained economistic, and "certainly, they do not think in terms of workers' control" (Fisher 1978, 215). At the same time, as this essay pointed out, in an apartheid situation where managerial prerogatives remained virtually absolute, in fact "all issues are issues of control."

Further evidence of Turner's hand in analyzing the 1973 strikes can be found in an important booklet on the labor upheaval entitled *The Durban Strikes*, and in other material produced by the workers' aid society founded by Turner, Fisher, and the students who had been active in the Wages Commission and in building Black trade unions in the aftermath of the strikes: the IIE. Written almost contemporaneously with the widespread job actions that defined Black workers' contribution to the "Durban Moment," *The Durban Strikes* offers immediacy; drawing heavily on interviews with workers and employers, the pamphlet serves as both an excellent documentary record of the events themselves and as an example of the thinking of Turner and his cohort of young radicals. Seeking the immediate causes of the strike outbreak, the pamphlet concluded that "the strikes either came about through some quite complicated underground organization (of which there is no evidence)" or "else they came about as a result of a large number of independent decisions by unofficial leaders and influential workers in different factories" (IIE 1974, 6). Investigating the process by which the multiple decisions made by African and Indian workers to down tools—as well as to return to the factory when their demands were met—the IIE pamphlet concluded that "consensus seems to have emerged from continuous discussion" on the shop floor and in the streets, hostels, taxi ranks, and buses (IIE 1974, 40). In fact, the study regarded the strikes as a textbook example of "spontaneous mass action" –that is, "a situation in which each individual recognizes his or herself in an ongoing action" (IIE 1974, 92). There is no way to tell if the banned Turner wrote those exact words, but they indicate the profound influence of his thinking on this document. Indeed, on the same page, *The Durban Strikes* concludes that "Sartre's concept of the 'groupe en fusion' [in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*] describes this form of spontaneity well." Here indeed we see the fingerprints of Rick Turner a year after his banning.[13]

The Fate of Workers' Control

While the mass strikes of 1973 soon dissipated, they nevertheless formed the basis for an ongoing effort to build more permanent organizations amongst Durban's Black working class. As *The Durban Strikes* put it, while the strikes had resulted in a "modest pay increase" for workers stretched to the financial breaking point, "the other main achievement of the strikes is less tangible but perhaps even more important. It is the sense of solidarity and potential power" workers had discovered on the shop floor (IIE 1974, 46). In the years following the strikes, in addition to publishing the influential *South African Labour Bulletin*, the IIE produced a handful of "workers' handbooks." These pamphlets sought to cultivate workers' shop floor power by promoting basic education while explaining South African history, the development of capitalism, basic economics, and

the principles of factory and union organization and negotiation to a nascent cohort of shop stewards and potential union officials in the newly formed Black unions.[14]

At its founding in early 1973, the IIE clearly was designed to "provide the basic information and skills [to Black workers] necessary for effective Trade Union activity." From the beginning, the risk of serving as a transmission belt for the aspirant black bourgeoisie was apparent. The goal, trade unionist and IIE ally Harriet Bolton wrote to David Hemson, was "to help workers improve their situation as workers, rather than helping certain individuals to escape the work situation at the expense of their fellows." At the same time, Bolton admitted that "in form, the education should be similar to traditional education, leading up to a diploma as a symbol of achievement."[15] This built in a potential contradiction on the ground floor.

In practice, the IIE ran less traditional educational exercises. One of the most successful was a simulation game that asked shop stewards, students, and organizers to take on roles as negotiators, employers, and workers, to put their newly gained knowledge into action.[16] Moreover, even the certificate awarded to students upon their completion of the course reiterated that it was "not a course to help individual workers get better jobs. It is a course to help all workers together to build a strong workers' movement." The certificate went on to read that "now your education must continue in the struggle itself, in teaching other workers what you have learnt, and learning more yourself through study and action."[17]

Here, we discover another important aspect of Turner's democratic praxis, the conjunction of his radical pedagogy with the ideal of workers' control. In *The Workers' Organisation*, for example, the IIE offered a basic history of the transition to capitalism, pointing out in straightforward language that under industrial capitalism, workers "lost the right to control their work." It was the trade union, the pamphlet suggested, that could "increase their control over their work and their conditions of work" (IIE 1975, 5–7). IIE staff used this booklet as part of their education program provided to budding trade unionists.[18] Much of the pamphlet, however, addressed a fundamental problem of organization confronting the new unions born out of the strikes: how to foster a broad solidarity beyond a single factory, while not eroding the unity built amongst workers in the tight networks that had made spontaneous shop floor action possible in the first place. Although the pamphlet posed a system of factory-based representation as a solution, the IIE recognized that "the representatives may lose touch with the workers" (IIE 1975, 22). The danger was that with the growth of union bureaucracy, "the workers no longer solve their own problems through the strength that come from unity," looking instead to paid staffers (IIE 1975, 26). In the context of the new unions, this had a racial element as well, with African workers potentially looking to educated whites to "solve" their problems, exactly what Turner, schooled by Biko and BC, wanted to avoid. The proposed solution to this dilemma was a robust workplace democracy—and this, in turn rested on deepened education for Black workers, as "democracy is only possible with knowledge" (IIE 1975, 37). Indeed, the only way to make

power flow upward from the shop floor, rather than downward from the union officials, was to engage constantly in education, both in dedicated programs and in concert with actual union activity.

During the 1970s, this dual program of workers' education and fostering trade union democracy led to considerable internal friction between activists devoted to the IIE's educational mission and those who regarded it instead primarily as a training shop for new unionists (Keniston 2014, 174–86). Academic and IIE co-founder Lawrence Schlemmer, for example, continued to understand the IIE mission as "concerned with social change on a broad front. . . . directing its effort towards the needs of 'leaders' in the working class who were outside the unions as well as those inside the unions." A correspondence course was the mode of instruction favored by this faction. Trade union activists like Omar Badsha, however, believed firmly that the IIE's "purpose was to direct its efforts at those workers who were in the nascent trade unions"—hence his use of the pamphlet, which served such a dual purpose.[19] Other activists—and workers—felt that widening the reach of the course would allow IIE to identify worker leaders who still remained outside of union structures, and who would then educate other workers, not simply advance themselves up the ladder into managerial positions.[20]

The tensions that eventually tore apart the IIE by the end of the decade can be overstated, however, at least as they co-existed within Turner's own thought. Tony Morphet, for instance, one of Turner's colleagues and friends at the University of Natal and surely one of the most important figures in keeping the intellectual substance of Rick Turner's "Durban Moment" alive and relevant over the decades, implies that in this debate Turner (and Fisher) were ultimately outflanked by their more "instrumentalist" comrades on the Marxist left, many imbued with the structuralism of "Althusser and Poulantzas rather than the early Marx" (Morphet 2015, 224). But in my reading of *The Eye of the Needle*, Turner's educational project and his vision of participatory democracy rooted, first and foremost, in the workplace, are actually of a piece. As Morphet observed in a 2010 essay, Turner's major theoretical contribution to working-class struggle was the notion that "the authenticity of. . .working-class consciousness was to be ensured through the democracy of the shop floor" (Morphet 2015, 235). But for Turner, this was entirely bound up with his idea of a democratic, authentic form of education. Indeed, he envisioned that such education would no longer be confined to the stultifying atmosphere of the schoolhouse, but would instead become a crucial element within the reborn factory regime itself.

Turner completed *The Eye of the Needle* for Spro-Cas in 1972; two weeks prior to his banning order, he added a "postscript" dated February 12, 1973, after witnessing a month of apparently "spontaneous" work stoppages engaged in by thousands of African workers across every industrial sector in Durban. Alienated from their cultural roots and customs, yet poorly integrated into urban industrial life, Turner maintained that the city's African workers "resemble what has been described by sociologists as a mass society" of atomized individuals, with few available institutions of social solidarity or integration (Turner 2015 [1972], 155). In Turner's view, however, the strikes suggested that the factory might

serve as just such a place. Moreover, he judged that the "relative deprivation" experienced by urbanized Africans increasingly enmeshed in a modern consumer economy would lead to new expressions of grievances—as indeed, Turner no doubt had witnessed in Durban as he prepared the "postscript'" in January 1973. In the absence of any effective political organization, Turner noted, "there is only one sphere in which Africans do have potential power"—the economy (Turner 2015 [1972], 158–9). Grouped together in factories, African workers could find common cause and, through industrial action, collectively challenge their conditions of labor and life, with potentially revolutionary consequences. Of course, as Turner wrote these words, that was exactly what was occurring all around him in the industrial enclaves of Durban a few miles from his home. This experience, he correctly surmised, could "lead [Black workers] to an awareness of their potential power and the virtues of solidarity" (Turner 2015 [1972], 160).

The following decade indeed witnessed the efforts of South Africa's Black workers, their white allies (many of them former students of Turner), and an important core of Black activists recruited from the shop floor and IIE classes, to build democratic trade unions (Copelyn 2016; Friedman 1987; Friedman 2011; Moss 2014), crystallizing in the formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions in 1979. That same year saw the publication of the report of the apartheid government's Wiehahn Commission, which recommended official recognition of non-racial trade unions and the incorporation of African workers into South Africa's industrial relations machinery for the first time (Lichtenstein 2015). At the time, union activists divided sharply over whether this represented an opportunity for further struggle or a suffocating embrace. By then, Turner's banning had been followed by his assassination in 1978. Yet in *Eye of the Needle*, anticipating that white employers might respond to shop floor upheaval by introducing a "human relations" approach to their heretofore dictatorial managerial practices, Turner had observed that this would fail to displace the profit motive with an authentic emphasis on workplace satisfaction. "Personnel management," he remarked drily, "merely involves oiling the workers, just as one oils a machine," with the ultimate goal of improved workplace efficiency, not human fulfilment. The result, he feared, would offer little more to Black workers than "persuad[ing] them to cooperate more willingly in their own exploitation" (Turner 2015 [1972], 19–20). In his introduction to the 1980 edition of Turner's manifesto, Morphet observed that "in arguing for the establishment of black unions it had not been Turner's purpose to aid the regulation of the labour-capital conflict. . ., but to help create a truly rational system of production, in which labour controlled capital." Nevertheless, he acknowledged that for Turner the opening presented by the Wiehahn reforms might have "represented an important concession of power." At the same time, Morphet concluded, the new labor relations dispensation ushered in by Wiehahn "laid an even more urgent responsibility upon the unions to clarify and work towards genuinely rational social production" (Morphet 1980, xxvi).

Has the South African trade union movement met that urgent responsibility since that moment? The ensuing decades witnessed the formation of Congress

of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985, the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the banned organizations in 1990, the final end of apartheid in 1994, and the ascendance of a post-apartheid governing "tripartite alliance" of the ANC, the SACP, and COSATU. Yet many observers contend that over these same decades of liberation the promise of the "Durban Moment" and Rick Turner's transcendent vision of participatory workplace democracy have been squandered. The consolidation of the trade union movement under the command of the "liberation struggle" led by the ANC and the SACP entailed the erosion of the "workerist" shop floor democracy so painstakingly built from the Durban Moment. With only a few exceptions the COSATU unions today, it seems, have fallen into just the sort of bureaucratic collusion with employers and the accompanying alienation from their members that Turner and his students cautioned against (Buhlungu 2010). Above all, like a flash of lightning the terrible events at Marikana in 2012 illuminated the distance travelled. There the once heroic National Union of Mineworkers ignored the pleas of Lonmin's platinum miners, preferring instead to feather the nest of a leadership increasingly remote from the lives of the workers it claimed to represent. Into the breach stepped democratically organized and autonomous "worker committees," directly representative bodies empowered to speak to management in the name of all the workers—Sartre's "groupe en fusion"–and more than a little reminiscent of the spontaneous collectivities thrown up during the Durban Strikes nearly forty years before (Gentle 2012; Sinwell and Mbatha 2016). These workers found themselves dismissed by the union, the company, and the post-apartheid state alike as deluded by witchcraft, unrealistic and anti-modern in their demands. Instead, their radical claims to "participatory democracy" as Rick Turner had once imagined it were met with a hail of bullets, as they were once again denied control of their destiny (Alexander et al. 2013; Lichtenstein 2012; Marinovich 2016).

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Notes

Conversations with a number of participants in the "Durban Moment" and subsequent labor struggles proved essential to my understanding of Rick Turner's contribution to labor politics. I would like especially to thank Omar Badsha, Phil Bonner, Johnny Copelyn, Alec Erwin, David Hemson, Loet Douwes-Dekker, Dunbar Moodie, Tony Morphet, Jabu Ngcobo, and Eddie Webster.

1. In order to silence domestic critics, South Africa's apartheid government would "ban" them for up to five years. Such an order, issued summarily by the Minister of Justice, converted Turner into a non-person, making it illegal for him to attend public meetings, to travel outside of Durban, to meet with more than one other person at a time, and to engage in any sort of intellectual or cultural activity, and of course to teach.

Short of imprisonment and torture, it is hard to imagine a more excruciating—one is tempted to say Sartrean—existence for someone like Turner, who thrived on just these sort of unfettered human interactions.

2. *New York Times*, June 22, 1974, 32.
3. Turner's one academic paper, on "Sartre and dialectical reason," appeared in *Radical Philosophy* (Turner 1973). In his biography of Turner, Billy Keniston relies on notes Turner prepared during his years as a banned person for a longer work on Sartre to reconstruct Turner's scholarship on existentialist thought (Keniston 2014, ch. 2).
4. A fairly complete list of banned works in South Africa, searchable by year, title, and author, can be found here: http://www.beaconforfreedom.org/index.html. It is surprising to see what the censors let slip through: Stokely Carmichael's *Black Power* (1967) for example. They caught Julius Lester's *Look Out Whitey, Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama* (1969), however.
5. The fullest account of his activities, no doubt provided by the Special Branch, can be found in Republic of South Africa, *Fourth interim report of the commission of inquiry into certain organisations*, RP33/1974, Annexure M, 552-564 (hereafter cited as *Fourth interim report*.)
6. Rick Turner to Peter Randall, n.d., Spro-Cas papers, D.a.7.11, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand.
7. "Bibiography," Correspondence, Spro-Cas papers. Da.7ii.
8. "Bibliography," Correspondence, Spro-Cas papers Da.7ii. A current search of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (formerly the University of Natal) library catalog indicates that it does contain the following works: Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (1966), which includes the 1844 manuscripts; Fromm's *The Sane Society*; Galbraith's *The New Industrial State* (1967); Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society*; Carol Pateman's *Participation and Democratic Theory*, and Paul Goodman's *Growing up Absurd*. Of course, the library may have acquired these works after Turner's time, but it is quite possible that they were there when Turner did his research. None of them appears to have been a banned work.
9. Rick Turner to Peter Randall, n.d., Spro-Cas papers, D.a.7.11.
10. R. Turner, "Memo on Educational reform," Correspondence, Da.7ii, Spro-Cas papers.
11. His visit to Yugoslavia came out in his testimony before the *Commission of inquiry into certain organisations* (Republic of South Africa 1974, 552).
12. Nash (2009, 169) attributes this essay to Turner.
13. In his acknowledgments in the study, Maré slyly noted the banned Turner's role in "initiating" the pamphlet, even while stating that "we regret that we are not permitted to associate his name with this publication" (IIE 1974, 2).
14. These included "The Workers' Organisation," "The Worker in Society," "The Worker in the Factory," and "The Workers' Negotiation Handbook."
15. Harriet Bolton to David Hemson, May 19, 1973, FOSATU Papers, IIE Correspondence, E4.1, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand.
16. Harold Nxasana to Foszia Fisher, October 25, 1974, FOSATU Papers, IIE Correspondence, E4.3; Minutes of the Working Committee, July 25, 1974, FOSATU Papers, IIE, E5.1.2.
17. IIE Minutes, August 10, 1975, E3.1, p. 3.
18. Working Committee meeting, IIE, September 9, 1975, FOSATU Papers, E5.1.3, p. 1.
19. Working Committee meeting, IIE, September 9, 1975, FOSATU Papers, E5.1.3, p. 3.
20. Working Committee meeting, August 10, 1975, p. 7.

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