**POL 3013: SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT**

**TUTORIAL 5: LEMBEDE’S AFRICANISM**

This worksheet includes two extracts from the writings of Anton Lembede. The questions below form the basis for discussion in tutorials.

In South Africa, the conflict has emerged as one of race on the one side and one of ideals on the other. The whiteman regards the Universe as a gigantic machine hurtling through time and space to its final destination; individuals in it are but tiny organisms with private lives that lead to private deaths; personal power, success and fame are the absolute measure of values; the things to live for. This outlook on life divides the Universe into a host of individual little entities which cannot help being in constant conflict thereby hastening the approach of the hour of their final destruction.

The Africa, on his side, regards the Universe as one composite whole; as an organic entity, progressively driving towards greater harmony and unity whose individual parts exist merely as interdependent aspects of one whole, realising their fullest life in the corporate life where communal contentment is the absolute measure of values. His philosophy of life strives towards unity and aggregation; towards greater social responsibility.

—“Congress Youth League Manifesto,” in Lembede, *Freedom in Our Lifetime*, p. 59.

“White Civilisation” as understood by the Whites in South Africa namely Colour Superiority, discrimination and oppression, has no future in Africa; but Western culture and civilisation in the form of science, art, philosophy, has a longer future than we can imagine in this continent, for the latter, although to a great extent developed by Europeans, is yet a legacy, a heritage of the whole human race. No section of Mankind has the right selfishly to keep or reserve this to itself.

—Lembede, “African Nationalism and the New African Masses,” in *Freedom in Our Lifetime*, p.97.

1. Why do you think it was politically important for Lembede and his comrades to defend a distinctively African conception of the world? How does this philosophical starting point set the politics of the ANC Youth League apart from the ANC leadership of that time—described as “a body of gentleman with clean hands . . . failing to see the problems of Africans through the proper perspective” (pp. 63–4)?

2. Is the ANC Youth League claim of 1944 that there is a distinctively African view of the world consistent with Lembede’s view in 1947 that western civilization is a legacy of the whole human race?

3. The contrast between white and black views of the world has several parallels with the contrast between a capitalist and scientific view, on the one hand, and a pre-capitalist and pre-scientific view, on the other. Do you think this is how Lembede intended it? Do you think he attributes to African civilization what could also be true of societies in any other continent as well?

4. Nelson Mandela writes in his autobiography that he and his comrades, from the time they encountered Lembede, “took it for granted that one day he would lead the ANC” (*Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 90). Why do you think they were so impressed?