

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF SOUTH AFRICA --

ITS COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY ROLE

Some Comments on the Statement From The Dock by Abram Fischer of
the Communist Party of South Africa

by K.A.J.

"I believed when I joined the illegal Communist Party that South Africa had set out on a course which could lead only to civil war of the most vicious kind....Algeria provided perfect historical example of that. I believed, moreover, and still believe that such a civil war can never be won by the Whites of this country. They might win some initial rounds. In the long run the balance of forces is against them, both inside and outside the country....But win or lose, the consequences of civil war would be horrifying and permanent. Clearly it is imperative that an alternative "solution" be found, for in truth civil war is no "solution" at all."

- Abram Fischer

He who wants to change the old society, but recoils from the only effective methods of doing so, ends up by accomodating himself to that society. He thereby accepts the values and class morality of the old society, the services of those rulers and supporters he frantically seeks to enlist in order to effect social change. In the result, he enters into concubinage with them, and embarks upon a course of action which, far from bringing about the desired social change, merely leads to proposed surface modifications of the old society. We call such a person a reformist, or "a left wing fellow traveller of the status quo", in whose eyes the cause of liberation is not compelling enough to permit the use of all means to attain it. But when a person, having set himself the goal of radical social change, is prepared to use the swiftest and boldest methods to achieve it, means and ends are in complete unity; and we call him a revolutionary.

We have before us the speech which Abram Fischer, leader of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) delivered from the Dock in the South African Supreme Court. It is called "What I did was Right". Our comments on his speech are therefore virtually an analysis of the policies of the CPSA who saw to it that it was widely circulated and did so with acclamation. Hence we often refer to excerpts from Fischer's speech as CPSA statements.

But, first of all, it is necessary to record that Fischer embarked on his course of action with deep personal conviction and a remarkable display of valour. This evokes our admiration and solidarity with him against the rulers of the country. Having said that, there are many who will disagree with the methods his Party adopted to achieve their professed aim of democratic change. They are methods which the C.P. have doggedly followed for a number of years in our country, methods which lead further and further from the goal of liberation and which tend to set back the struggle each time they are employed. Fischer's speech summarises those C.P. methods, and in taking it as the point of departure for another criticism of them, we do so in the hope that the finer counsels of revolutionary socialism will finally prevail throughout the Azanian movement for the

prosecution of the struggle.

"What I did was Right" is certainly not cast in the mould of Fidel Castro's "History Will Absolve Me". Whereas the former sought accommodation with the rulers, the latter defiantly stated the revolutionary objective of liquidating the ruling class and doing so by following Danton's prescription of "audacity, more audacity, and once more audacity". Fischer's speech is an abstract "criticism of weapons", while Castro assailed his rulers by combining "criticism with weapons".

Did Fischer's own end justify the faith he had in them (the rulers) that they would play the game according to the rules and finally sit down with his party in perfect unity to listen to the voice of reason and then make provision for a peaceful transition to democratic rule? More concretely, did the ends of his party justify the means? Did those means not lead further and further away from the ends they had in mind? It is this complete dislocation between ends and means, as expressed in his Court speech, that is the essential tragedy of the Fischer story. For running like a red thread through C.P. policy is their willingness to accommodate the rulers at every turn, to the extent of watering down the liberation programme, so that they might become amenable to the idea of sharing power with the oppressed. By accepting the assumptions and presuppositions of the ruling class, he met them unarmed in their own battle-field - their own "reasoning" in the teeth of opposition - and became a captive of their special morality. In consequence, his political ends receded and became more obscure as the means of attaining them became more ineffectual.

"MARXISM" AS OLD-FASHIONED LIBERALISM

The C.P. make their retreat from Marxism under cover of Marxism. The C.P. change themselves from professed Marxists to old-fashioned liberals, but can only do so by changing Marxism itself into a liberal doctrine. Poor Marx. He is not here to defend himself. Marx was very clear on the kernel of his doctrine. In a letter to J. Weydemeyer (1852) he writes:-

"no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society, nor the struggle between them."

The CP do not subscribe to this pith of Marxism, because it conflicts with their concern over the fate of the privileged whites and their current collaboration with imperialism.

Whereas Marx says that "Force is the midwife of every old society carrying in its womb a new one" the CP rule out force completely. This naturally flows from their abhorrence of the dictatorship of the proletariat which in Azania simply means an armed black majority crushing the privileges of the whites in general and the imperialist owners of the means of production in particular.

Fischer is quite frank that he is more concerned over the fate of the whites in a war of liberation than he is over the blacks. "I..believe" he says, "that a civil war can never be won by the whites of this country" and that in any event "the consequences of civil war would be horrifying and permanent".

What the "horrifying" and "permanent" consequences are, he does not spell out, but it is clear that he regards the impress of a black proletariat on the State, resulting from a revolution, as more menacing than the retention of white minority rule by force of arms. It is precisely this fear for the future of the whites and their place as a special group in a new society that leads the C.P. to rule out revolution. For he says:

"The sole question for the future for all of us...are not whether the change will come but only whether the change can be brought about peacefully and without bloodshed; and what the position of

the white man is going to be in the period immediately following on the establishment of democracy".

In essence, this means that they are prepared to witness for an indefinite period the perpetuation of white domination by the ruthless persecution and slow mass murder of the black majority rather than to opt for a swift revolutionary way out that can put an end to three hundred years of race wars and genocide. They can not agree to spill a little blood now in order to save a lot more later, because the blood of the white minority might be involved.

"Neither at that stage (1950) nor at any stage since then has a socialist revolution been on the agenda in South Africa", Fisher assures us. Of course not, when the C.P. always had a vested interest in certain aspects of the status quo and when their collaboration with imperialism rules out any action that threatens the expropriation of imperialist interests in Azania, like the mines and private manufacturing.

Having placed socialism into cold storage, the CP proceed to water down even the minimum democratic programme with their emphasis on change by negotiations between the oppressor and the oppressed, exploiter and exploited. The type of State the CP call for is neither fish nor fowl.

It is hard to believe, but it is true that in this day and age the CP still see a dichotomy between democracy and socialism, when it has been proved by life itself that democracy can be consolidated only by introducing socialist measures as soon as the revolution is victorious. To limit the programme of the democratic revolution to the frame-work of capitalism is not to guarantee the success of democracy but to repudiate it. History testifies that a democratic revolution must either grow over into socialism or suffer defeat at the hands of those against whom wholesale expropriatory measures are not taken in good time.

It has never happened in history for the propertied classes to sit in conference with the people they oppress so as to hand over peacefully and voluntarily a part of their power. Marx mercilessly ridiculed the German liberals who, in 1849, called a parliament to draw up a constitution for a United Germany and then present it to the Austrian overlords for ratification. This parliament or convention of democratic nannies and bourgeoisie lawyers deliberated for weeks on constitutional niceties, gloriously unconcerned with the question of effective power to enforce their constitutional decision-making. When, therefore, the Austrian rulers had crushed the revolts that had broken out in various parts of their Empire, they could turn their attention to this assembly of "old women" -- as Marx called them -- and disperse them without any trouble.

Together with the ANC, the "communists" called an "All-in-Conference" in March 1961 "and decided", according to Fischer, "to make one more peaceful call on the Government to hold a Convention, at least to discuss the constitution for the new Republic of South Africa failing which there should be a three-day stay-at-home at the end of May". This conference was really "all-in" in the sense that the agents of imperialism were called upon to lend their support to the idea of a national convention. And if the Government still remained intransigent, there was to be a strictly controlled strike of limited duration so as not to estrange and jeopardise the interests of imperialism whose co-operation the CP wanted for an Openheimer-Luthuli coalition within the framework of neo-colonialism.

What the CP wanted was what Marx called "a partial, merely political revolution" which, with the backing of the forces of law and order, could be achieved peacefully, without arousing the most down-trodden masses who have more "radical chains" to break. The CP stood in dread of the most exploited sections of Azania, because they feared a thorough renovation of society.

FEAR OF REVOLUTION BY THE BLACK MASSES

Several times in the course of his speech, Fischer proudly pointed to the C.P. record of warning the rulers that unless they altered their policy a revolution would be unavoidable. In fact the C.P. willingly and knowingly acted as the barometer of the political pressures building among the masses so that the rulers could take measures in good time to deal with an impending political storm or heed the advice of the C.P. to introduce such reforms as would stabilize the situation in the country.

Fischer says that it was his duty to be active in the C.P. "in view of...the dangerous circumstances which have been created in South Africa". He speaks of the "extremely dangerous situation into which South Africa is being led" by the policies of the government; of "...the present dangers in South Africa which would impel people to act". "The situation created," he warns, "would immediately be explosive and lead overnight to extreme unrest and violence." "South Africa," he continues in the same vein, "had set out on a course which could lead to civil war of the most vicious kind," and concludes: "Had our white political leaders....preached the possibility of inter-racial co-operation...we might already have reached a position of safety."

What kind of language is this, coming as it does from "communists"? It amounts to this: the C.P. doubly perspire in fear of the prospects of armed revolution and find it more "horrifying" than the continued race violence and genocide committed by the rulers. There is no other interpretation one can place on these remarks.

The C.P. were exhorting the government to act at once before the liberation struggle came under the influence of a leadership that aimed at nothing less than a radical social overturn by methods of armed struggle. In this connection they refer to their services to the rulers. Fischer cites the Umkhonto Manifesto which says:

"We of Umkhonto we Sizwe, have always sought to achieve liberation without bloodshed and civil clash. We hope, even at this late hour, that our first actions will awake everyone to a realisation of the disastrous situation to which Nationalist policy is leading. We hope that we will bring the government and its supporters to their senses before it is too late, so that both the government and its policies can be changed before matters reach the desparate stage of civil war. (emphasis added)

The "first actions" which Umkhonto (the military wing of the Congress Alliance which is under the spiritual leadership of the C.P. and to which the African National Congress of South Africa is a junior partner) undertook to "bring the government and its supporters to their senses" were "some highly controlled and restrictive sabotage" against "carefully selected targets, targets which could be attacked without endangering life and limb....(and) which, if successfully attacked, would disrupt the process of governing."

The C.P. do not tell us that these futile methods not only increased the intransigence of the whites, but exacerbated their race prejudice, compelling the government at the same time to strengthen their armed forces and arm the whites more effectively.

What is significant here is that, while the C.P. irrevocably rule out force and revolutionary violence by the masses, the race violence of the ruling classes is simply deplored each time it occurs, and this in response to the peaceful methods of the C.P. and the organisations it controls. This is a double standard of morality which naturally flows from their concern over the white voters and the existing property relations. Thus the C.P. acted in order to prevent a recurrence of the "Paarl riots" and the "Bashee murders" (both P.A.C. led) which led to the loss of white lives. Their actions were calculated "to have the effect of detering extremists, whose numbers and influence

were growing at an alarming rate, from undertaking precisely that kind of terrorism which we have always sought to prevent." (emphasis added)

Equally damning is the C.P. view of the Azanian revolution as nothing else than the beginning of a race war. The calculated race wars of the rulers down the centuries hold less terror for them. But as soon as the black masses undertake some sort of concerted action to counter the race wars of the whites in order to protect themselves and improve their conditions of life, then the C.P. view of this is the beginning and aggravation of racial strife. Listen to this:

"...there had been grave unrest in many parts of the country due to the application of apartheid laws - in Zeerust and Sekhukhuni-land, in Durban and Warmbaths, in Zululand and Pondoland.

"All these pointed to the almost inevitable outbreak of violence in its most dangerous form, i.e. indiscriminate violence purely on racial grounds."

Thus the steps taken by the poor peasants in these areas to resist the measures of the rulers to destroy their crops, cull their cattle and destroy their villages in order to force them to work for starvation wages, are called by the C.P. "violence in its most dangerous form"; more dangerous, that is, than the violence of the State against defenceless people. The C.P. are more concerned over those organised actions by the masses which "stimulate race antagonism" and lead to loss of white lives than they are over the actions of the State which increase race antagonisms and the loss of black lives a hundred times over.

CPSA SEEK THE RETENTION OF RACE CATEGORIES

We have seen that, far from basing themselves on the most exploited sections of the people, as every genuine Communist Party does, the CPSA stood in dread of them, fearing the "racial" consequences of their mass mobilisation. When they were organised at times then the C.P. simply used them as a pawn in order to negotiate from strength with the ruling classes for petty reforms; and this they did with scant regard for lives, the sacrifices and the morale of the black masses.

The attitude of the C.P. to the race divisions in Azania is intimately connected with their collaborationist politics and their limited democratic objectives. Their goal of a multi-racial imperialist state in Azania rules out a class approach to politics completely. Instead, the C.P. operates purely within the assumptions of the race divisions laid down by the despotic states.

As a predominantly white organisation, the C.P. could have done a service to the movement if they had attempted to work among the white workers, especially the Afrikaaner workers and helped to bring them to their working class senses. Not that whites should only organise whites and blacks organise blacks, but they were obviously more accessible to the economically less privileged white workers than the black leaders of the movement. They could have made propaganda among the white workers showing that, because they are used by imperialism and the Afrikaaner bourgeoisie as an instrument for the oppression of the blacks, the ruling classes thereby strengthen their domination over them. In the words of Marx, they can be taught the lesson that "Labour with a white skin cannot be free while labour with a black skin is in chains."

The C.P. concern is how "men of different races (can) live and work together in harmony and peace - to co-operate for the good of all." They seek to be all things to all men and end up by being nothing to anybody. "All the peoples," says Fischer, "...must be given a voice in their own affairs and in the whole country which they work in and they must be taught that races can live and work together in harmony."

The C.P. do not even measure up to the Liberal Party of South Africa that have opted for a non-racial democracy under which there will be no distinctions based on race and each is simply regarded as a human

being, and not a member of any distinctive species.

Emphasis is placed by the C.P. on the Freedom Charter of the Congress Alliance which fore-shadows the retention of the race categories in a Democratic South Africa. It says:

"All people shall have equal rights to use their own language and to develop their own folk culture and customs; and

"All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride."

In the Colonial world, imperialism's traditional policy is the division of the people by exploiting tribal, religious and race differences. This is part of the policy of divide and rule. Imperialism is thus able to establish its hegemony over the colonies and semi-colonies on the basis of such differences. To this day, imperialism fosters such racial differences in order to thwart the movement for national unification and full independence.

In Azania imperialism and the Afrikaner bourgeoisie had erected within the frame-work of an integrated society the barriers of race in order to exclude the Africans from the body-politic on the grounds of their inferiority and the need to safe-guard the cultural supremacy of the white race. This served as the basis for the economic super-exploitation of the Africans. The creation of the "Cape Coloured" and "Indian" groups, with just so much social privilege as will keep them apart from the Africans, yet not enough to close the social gulf between them and the whites, was designed to sow the seeds of race divisions among the oppressed so that the whites could maintain their supremacy. These groups were calculated to serve as social buffers for a small white minority against a turbulent black majority and in this way maintain a social equilibrium.

The rulers of South Africa encourage cultural parallelism by endowing each group with a special culture and exhorting them to develop along their own lines and take pride in their race and customs.

The emphasis on race pride and customs that divide us is an insidious attempt by "progressive" whites in the movement to preserve their identity and prevent themselves from being swamped by the black majority. The C.P. therefore repeatedly refer to the position of the whites as a special group in a democratic Azania, because they are seeking a built-in bill of rights for the white minority as a form of protection against the dangers of black majority rule. This is not only a manifestation of racial fears, but race prejudice.

With the rapid politicisation of the masses in Azania and the growing awareness that, despite their forcible division on racial lines, all of them share a community of interests, they are sloughing off "colourism", "Indianism" and tribalism in order to form a unified national movement. For the C.P. and the ANC-Congress Alliance to peddle such things as "race pride" and emphasising the need to maintain race differences is the most abject capitulation to the white racialists that we can find anywhere.

What we do say is that it ill becomes a revolutionary leadership simply to reflect passively the consciousness of the masses. Their duty is to transform a race-consciousness into a national consciousness so that the people do not look at their problems through the prism of time-hallowed race categories. Above all, the mass of the people must develop a class consciousness that can alone undermine and finally eliminate feelings of race.

If the C.P. are concerned over the place of the white minority in a democratic Azania and seek to retain it as a distinct group, so that, according to Fischer it may secure a "fair share" of political and economic power, then they are holding the revolution to ransom and entrenching that very racialism among the whites which they fear in

the blacks. Indeed, how can a dictatorship of workers and poor peasants embracing the majority of the nation. share power with a privileged group that, moreover, elects to stand aloof from that nation?

The C.P. may profitably reflect on the policy which the French Communist Party followed in Algeria for a long time during the civil war. For, in the interests of the French settlers in Algeria and as a manifestation of their national chauvinism the French CP persistently called for the retention of Algeria as an inextricable part of France. This disastrous policy exacerbated the race feelings among the colons and encouraged them to make a last-ditch stand, when the French CP with their professed Marxist principles should have exhorted them to cooperate with the revolutionary forces to help rid the country of French imperialism and in this way shorten the civil war.

There is no historical proof that the ruling classes surrender without a bitter struggle. Fischer's reference to the peaceful extension by imperialism of independence to the African states is of course illusory. What happened was that under Colonial mass pressure imperialism was forced to groom a new "native" ruling class to act as the custodians of her vested interests in the African country.

It is the lesson of history that the most all-embracing liberation of a people can be brought about only by an armed revolution of the most sweeping kind. For no ruling class gives up by its own volition its economic and political power. That a man's property is finally worth far more than his very life is a Machiavellian dictum borne out by the struggle to the death of the dominant classes in defence of their possessions. Attempts to argue with them rationally to surrender do not help, because they are asked to give up, at their own expense, to those on whom their privileged positions depend. It is presumptuous cheek on the part of the C.P. to expect the South African ruling classes to respond to "reasonable requests" and to alert them to the dangers of revolution so that they would introduce reforms with the consent of the people.

(Condensed from Azania News)

S.A. POLICE SPY SAYS 'I WORKED BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN'

Standard 2/2/65

JOHANNESBURG, (AFP).

A SOUTH African security police agent, in a sensational revelation here today, said he had lived four years undetected as a communist, and had spied not only on secret communist activities here, but also behind the Iron Curtain.

The agent, Gerald Ludi, a former journalist, made the revelation in the trial of thirteen persons charged to be leaders of the South African communist party.

It was the second sensational disclosure at the trial. Last week Petrus Beyleveld, who said he was a member of the party's Central Committee, revealed that all the upper echelons of the party had been arrested. He identified three of the defendants as former comrades on the central committee.

IMMEDIATE REPORTS

The Communist party has been banned here since 1950. In his testimony today Ludi said it took him several years to gain the confidence of left-wing circles. To do so, he militated for various groups and frequented multi-racial meetings, where he openly advocated that a "people's democracy" should overthrow the "fascist" regime of Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd.

In December 1963, he was able to join the secret Communist Party.

PEOPLES DEMOCRACY

Except when he was behind the Iron Curtain and in Swaziland, he said, he had always sent immediate reports to the police. He wrote 500 or 600 of them in about four years.

Beyleveld returned today to the dock to be cross examined by defence lawyers.

He said he agreed to testify against his former comrades because he recognised the party had "suffered a complete defeat."

"The shock for me was that the police knew as much as they did," he said.

ANNOUNCEMENT

For a comprehensive summary of P.A.C. policy, its objectives, programme and the revolutionary path it has traversed in armed struggle, get a copy of "P.A.C. in Perspective". Copies available at all PAC offices. Anyone who speaks of the Azanian revolution without reference to PAC is a fiddler of Nero's ilk.

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