

Anti-Colonialist or Anti-Capitalist

Most organisations and liberation movements in one form or another continue to believe that in South Africa we are dealing with a colonial situation. What is worse is that for many activists and strategists, this notion is not simply rhetorical support when one has to address mass meetings; many of our comrades actually believe this and act on this belief.

Ranging from the description of the S.A. ruling class as a 'settler colonial bourgeoisie' through the 'colonialism-of-a-special-type' view, to notions of 'internal colonialism, the analysts and the poets of our liberation movement continue to be trapped in the confines of the colonial analogy. This results in them coming up with faulty tactics and strategies.

It must be stated clearly that S.A. is a relatively advanced but dependent capitalist country. The racial-capitalist system that has evolved in our country is indeed a legacy of its colonial past, but it is a confusion of history to maintain we are still a 'colony'.

In this article, we look more closely at the description of S.A. society by the South African Communist Party (SACP) as an 'internal colonialist' society, or alternatively 'colonialism of a special type' (CST). It must be noted that it is not only the ANC/SACP who see the struggle in terms of colonialism; the Africanists view the struggle as one against 'settler colonialism'.

Beginning from the basis that the primary contradiction in the world is between imperialist and colonial countries, the theory argues that S.A. is dominated by a similar contradiction. Thus, it sees two societies in S.A., one black and one white. However, the difference between S.A. and other examples is that this imperialist-colonialist relationship occurs in one country. Thus the title of the theory - colonialism of a special type, or internal colonialism.

CST has two implications. Firstly, it argues that because black people are experiencing colonial oppression and exploitation, they are largely unable to experience a class consciousness. Black workers, it is argued, see their social selves in racial and not class terms. The second implication is that all classes within the black community are opposed to the maintenance of apartheid, further promoting national consciousness over class consciousness. This, according to CST theory, prevents the emergence of the necessary subjective conditions for socialist revolution. The direct consequence of this analysis is that there would be no question of the transition to socialism being direct. It must be preceded by a national democratic struggle leading to a national democratic revolution. But is CST a correct analysis of South African society?

South Africa does not have the economic and political system that imperialist/colonial situations have. Colour oppression in S.A. cannot be separated from the class struggle - it the curtain of capitalist development in South Africa. The system of apartheid was shaped to tailor the needs of S.A. capitalism.

BUILDING SOCIALISM: THE WORKER'S ANSWER

This is clearly evident in the mining industry where black workers have traditionally been deprived of decent wages, family life and safe, healthy working conditions on the basis of the colour of their skin. The mining industry is dependent on this cheap labour and, if apartheid is to be removed, the viability of the mining industry and S.A. capitalism as a whole would be threatened. The problem with CST is that it draws a line of separation between the national question and the social question. But the relationship between colour and class is a much more complex one, with colour masking the class struggle, and so cannot simply be divorced from each other.

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Colonialism cont.

This takes us to the second problem with CST. The theory argues that the black working class in this country is unable to transcend its so-called 'race' consciousness. But the 1984-1986 period has shown us that this is not true. The class consciousness of the black working class has developed to a large extent. This is shown by the mass appeal for socialism, the emphasis on democracy in township and trade union struggle, the emergence of organs of proletarian democracy (shop-steward councils and street committees).



Through their everyday lives, workers have realised that capitalism satisfies the interests of a few. Out of these grassroots experiences the mass of organised workers have gravitated towards socialism, a system which they broadly see as operating in the interests of the majority. Moreover, the educational and propaganda work which the independent trade union movement and other small socialist groups undertook throughout the 1980's, is now paying dividends. There exists a significant layer of advanced workers in both community and trade union organisations that are committed socialist cadres.

A question that also needs to be addressed is how the ANC/SACP/Congress Tendency responded to criticisms of it having abandoned the struggle for socialism. In the main, it still holds on to the two-stage conception of revolution, as can be seen from Joe Slovo's words: "...the main content of the immediate struggle is to achieve complete national liberation for the racially dominated and racially exploited black communities." Yet at the same time he argues that "if...the liberation struggle should bring to power a revolutionary democratic alliance dominated by the proletariat and the peasantry, the post-revolutionary phase can surely become the first stage in a continuous process along the road to socialism: a road that ultimately can only be charted by the proletariat and its allies." In this way, the CST theory seems to disarm its critics. But the question that is still of concern is how is the dominance of the proletariat in the alliance to be achieved?



Remember these comrades: *don't let bourgeois control your own issues, and rely on your revolutionary comrades!*



For the Congress Tendency, this would be done by the involvement of the organisation of the working class, namely the SACP. But this is not enough. To quote Lenin, "the party cannot substitute for the class." In South Africa, the presence of the SACP is not enough guarantee for the process of the struggle into the socialist phase. After all, the revolution must be created from below, not above. Just as important, is the fact that the Congress movement

has not shown its commitment to the dominance of the working class in the alliance. In fact, the contrary is true. At the COSATU Congress in 1987, SACTU and the SACP appealed to workers not to place socialism on their agenda. If this is not done, how will the working class ever achieve dominance in an alliance. In fact, the major danger in such an alliance is, rather than the working class neutralising the middle class elements, the opposite could occur.



The incorrect theoretical description of South African society then leads the SACP to argue for the incorrect strategy of two-stage revolution. When this was attempted in China in 1925, the nationalists turned around and murdered tens of thousands of socialist militants. To avoid this fate in South Africa, we have to engage ourselves in a single struggle for socialism.

The ruling class today, made up of Afrikaans- and English-speaking whites are indigenous to S.A. (and Africa) as are the 'white' Americans or 'white' Australians. We do not have the space to go into the particular details of S.A. history in which large parts of the country were conquered and subjugated in the wake of the mercantilist phase of capitalist expansion in the late 19th century. The important point is that the vast majority of white inhabitants of S.A. are indigenous to our

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country; the majority, in their support for PW Botha and the politics of apartheid, are racists not colonialists - even if they are the descendants of colonialists. Their privileged socio-economic, political and cultural positions have been determined by the peculiar racial character of capitalist development in S.A.

There is not a single feature of S.A. that is not adequately described by means of the concepts of racial-capitalism or apartheid-capitalism. These concepts draw attention strongly to both the class and national aspects of our liberation struggle, without either tempting us to confuse our struggle with an anti-colonial one or with a civil rights struggle (as in the USA).

If we believe our struggle is against settler colonialism or internal colonialism, besides being historically incorrect, it will result in not knowing the real enemy of the majority in our country - the capitalists (both white and black, both Rellys and Tshabalalas) and their state. It will result in dulling the class consciousness of workers and result in fighting for socialism in stages. This stages approach to the struggle will clearly lead to the betrayal of the working class. Against the nationalist rhetoric which serves to blind workers to their class aims, and dulls their sense of class power, we stand uncompromisingly for the class consciousness and class unity of the black working class, the struggle against apartheid-capitalism, and for democratic socialism.

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in its coverage and analysis will focus on actual struggles taking place inside South Africa. To all the organisations involved in the struggle and black trade unions, we give our critical support.

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