

Slovo taken to task

However, the point Adam makes is that the tyranny of Leninism - the almost magical justification of evil under the rubric of "the people's cause" - is worse than any other because of its pretences.

"The Leninists glorified higher productivity as the patriotic duty of selfless brigades. The apartheid labourer at least knows of his exploitation and grudgingly complies because alternatives are lacking. The Leninist/Stalinists betrayed their victims in addition to exploiting them. Hence the magnitude of the fury for revenge when set free.

"Blacks in South Africa, on the other hand, always knew that racial rule was for the benefit of the ruling race. They do not feel cheated as the hardworking party member did when the luxurious corruption of the people's representatives was finally revealed."

Adam also criticises Slovo for his orthodox assertion of the scientific nature of Marxism, an attitude long abandoned by leading historians and critical theorists who stress the interpretative task of analysts.

Reliance on the determinism implicit in Slovo's view of human behaviour denies "the infinitely varied subjectivity through which people perceive, interpret and mediate their world". It also "results in a crude reductionism or economic approach that neglects the fact that people not only have material interests but ideal interests as well".

If a theory is inadequate to the reality of individual human beings, it follows that its conceptualisations involving groups of human beings will also be inadequate. When inadequate concepts are held not only as articles of faith, but exalted beyond doubt as "science", mayhem results. Thus, says Adam, one must ask who are "the people"? Who are "the working class"? Who are "society as a whole" that Slovo sees assuming control?

QUOTING Mervyn Frost quoting Robert Michels and Max Weber, he says: "In modern states control by 'society as a whole' means in practice bureaucratic rule. Those who say 'organisation' inevitably say 'oligarchy'. Oligarchic tendencies can only be counteracted by a democratic culture below, not by Leninist 'democratisation from above'."

Looking specifically at Slovo's (and Marx's) conceptualisation of an abstract working class, Adam notes that it "misses the crucial social texture".

"The working class is comprised of blacks and whites, women and men, religious adherents and agnostics, homosexuals and heterosexuals, skilled and unskilled workers who live in urban and rural settings. Above all there are employed and unemployed.

"To expect solidarity because of common exploitation lingers as a long-standing illusion. Yet it is precisely such a self-deception on which the ANC and SACP bases its strategy. Working-class unity and solidarity has failed throughout the history of the left around the world," Adam says. Beyond this false assumption about working-class solidarity, there is also a neglect of the split in the labour movement between the employed and the unemployed.

Adam notes: "Neither the ANC nor Cosatu has devised a strategy for coping with the one third of the workforce who are unemployed. The unions are increasingly representative of the employed only. Mere employment in South Africa almost qualifies one for membership in a labour aristocracy... Those millions outside the formal economy - in the backyards of townships, in the ring of shacks around the cities and in desolate huts in the barren countryside - form a permanent underclass."

Adam records the sombre fact that it is from the desperate ranks of the unemployed that the state recruits *kitskonstabels* and warlord vigilantes. He accuses orthodox Marxism of "traditionally writing off this lumpenproletariat", abandoning them to the fundamentalist church cults, drug peddlers and petty criminals who "vie for the souls and the pockets of the downtrodden".

On the positive side of Adam's engagement with Slovo, is approval for the SACP chairperson's "sensible, pragmatic assessment that the South African economy cannot be transformed by edict without risking economic collapse". Adam hails Slovo's backing for a mixed economy and public control through effective democratic participation by "producers at all levels".

However, he does not give Slovo credit for a courageous attempt at theoretical accommodation of the chaos exposed by the collapse of Eastern European state socialism. Rather he chooses to note with an almost audible sneer that "not much of economic orthodoxy is left among former Leninists".

It seems necessary to observe, therefore, that the people of South Africa could only benefit if those adhering to other fixed positions took a leaf out of the SACP book. It was Lenin who remarked that the mark of a serious party was its willingness to acknowledge error.

More justly, Adam concludes his paper by noting that SACP recognition of union independence, a multi-party system and traditional liberal freedom "bodes well for South African democracy".

He notes that at present, security reasons can be invoked legitimately for the SACP's secret membership and strategic infiltration of unions and other political organisations. But he asks whether this will change when "a more democratic climate allows and requires less clandestine behaviour".

He is nervous about the fact that Slovo was authorised by the party to circulate his discussion paper, saying this procedure makes the SACP look more like "an authoritarian Jesuit order for the organic intelligentsia" than "an open, broad-based vehicle for the self-critical exploration of feasible socialism".

Nevertheless, he construes Slovo's self-critical paper as a hopeful first sign of "democratic renewal" that "may lay to rest Pierre van den Berghe's sceptical comment that 'South Africa, which has already spawned the world's last official racists, may also see its last Stalinists'."

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(Heribert Adam's full text will be published shortly by Idasa as an occasional paper.)

Research a waste of time, money?

By Ian Liebenberg

MOST research findings are either never implemented or are implemented without planning, resulting in an enormous waste of money, time and energy.

This was the problem addressed by an interdisciplinary conference of the Human Sciences Research Council held in Pretoria at the end of April and attended by over 400 people.

One of the main obstacles to the implementation of research was found to be an organisational style lacking in planning for implementation, long-term strategies, flexibility and responsiveness to change.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation in terms of carefully formulated objectives would obviously be a vital part of the process of implementation.

While most participants found the conference informative and useful, there were some weaknesses. The international isolation of South Africa was evident in the fact that there were very few foreign participants (mostly British and Taiwanese).

Also, while the interdisciplinary approach was valuable, the attempt to include both natural and social sciences on the same panel or platform demanded an unrealistic level of dual expertise from participants.

More importantly, perhaps, the conference gave no attention to research as an instrument of liberation, or to the uses and abuses of science in the interests of ideology and the state.

However, the understanding reached at the conference, that research and its implementation should be planned as a single process, with continuous evaluation as an integral part, is clearly of value.

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Harms should inquire further

THE brief of the Harms Commission of Inquiry should be extended to include all political murders, not only those committed in South Africa.

This was the unanimous view of a May meeting of 500 people organised by the Stellenbosch branch of Lawyers for Human Rights and the Northern suburbs' Veldtog vir 'n Geregtelike Ondersoek na Moordbendes (Campaign for a Judicial Inquiry into Hit Squads).

Unless this was done, the Harms Commission could be seen as a mere whitewash job.

One of the speakers, End Conscription Campaign chairperson Laurie Nathan, pointed out that more than 300 people were involved in the Civil Co-operation bureau (CCB), which had not been disbanded. It had merely been suspended.

Vrye Weekblad editor Max du Preez accused the government of playing host to terrorists and stressed the need for action against the "free-for-all paranoia" that had led to political murder.