

## Capitalism, Socialism and the Freedom Charter

The article by Fine: "The Freedom Charter, a critical appreciation (SALB 11.3); and the two by Innes: "The Freedom Charter and workers' control" (SALB 11.4) and "Worker politics and the popular movement" (WIP 41) quite correctly recognise the significance of the Freedom Charter to any consideration of change in South Africa. Both writers present a critical appraisal of the Charter. They are of the view that the document does not provide an adequate basis for socialist change. They suggest that it should either be altered, or that a new document be drawn up to put forward an unequivocal demand for socialism.

This paper is a defence of the Charter: it argues for the Charter to be understood as a set of minimum demands of the South African working class which provide the basis for the construction of a socialist programme; and so, against the attempt to alter or disregard it.

### A set of minimum working-class demands

Bob fine points out that the campaign launched by the National Action Council to collect and collate demands for the Charter was not thorough, nor scrupulously democratic and that the Kliptown Congress was not conducive to much debate or detailed discussion.

This tends to obscure the fact that the Charter was enthusiastically accepted by three thousand predominantly working-class delegates from all over the country. It is wrong to imply that these delegates had no understanding of the clauses they ratified or that they were manipulated into accepting a set of demands the in no way reflected their interests. Also, the majority of demand collected were from the townships and villages. There was much less interest in the campaign in the more petty-bourgeois areas.

It is significant that the people opposed to the Charter were the Africanists, who considered the content too socialist and "un-African" and who later broke away from the mass-movement, and the liberals who were strongly linked to big capital. No significant objection to the Charter by workers or the other "dissatisfied groups" that Fine mentions is recorded. (1)

Fine insists that the Charter is not above criticism. He is correct; and de-mythologising the Charter's origins is essential to understanding some of the problems and power-plays that faced the mass-movement in the 1950s. This in no way detracts from the document's legitimacy as a set of working-class demands, and it remains the most widely discussed and representative document in the history of the South African struggle. Neither Fine nor Innes can deny this fact.

In their consideration of the Charter, Fine and Innes make no mention of its basic material demands: for houses, security, jobs, education, comfort and land. These are immediate demands of the classes that have been systematically deprived of such necessities - the working class and rural population. They locate the Charter at the root of the struggle against a system designed for making profits. A system which forces the working class - in the words of SACTU - "to organise or starve".

Capitalism, anywhere in the world, does not have a reputation for meeting such basic demands. Wherever it has been possible for the working class to force capitalism to make concessions like: higher living standards, more jobs and better services, it has been factors extraneous to capitalism that have enabled it to do so, not anything inherent in capitalism.

In the history of the advanced capitalist countries it was either the exploitation of a double proletariat (one at home and one in the third world) during the colonial period, or the boom that accompanied the reconstruction of Europe after the second World War that made it possible for capitalism to meet certain of the demands made by the organised working-class.

From the mid 1970s this has no longer been the case. The ten day general strike in Denmark in 1985 and the general strike in Sweden in 1979; the over two million unemployed in West Germany and the four million unemployed plus fifteen million on the poverty datum line in Britain, testify to the present bankruptcy of world capitalism.

No variety of capitalism, even a social democratic one, will be capable of meeting the demands put forward by the Freedom Charter in South Africa. For during the post war boom in South Africa it was only possible for capitalism to buy off the relatively small, white proletariat and win its allegiance. During this "boom", the

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black proletariat and rural population lived in grinding poverty. Furthermore, the present recession in South Africa has as much to do with world recession and capitalist crisis as it does with the internal "unrest" or the "unprofitability" of apartheid. There is no possibility of South African capitalism succeeding where world capitalism has failed.

The organised South African working class of the 1980s has expressed a range of demands; some specific to industry, others increasingly political in nature. These include: the demand for May Day and June 16 to be public holidays; demands related to civic matters and the occupation of the townships by the SADF and SAP; the release of detainees and union leaders and the unbanning of organisations.

Undoubtedly, were a set of demands to be drawn up now it would reflect the militancy and growing socialism of this working class. The Charter was drawn up when SACTU was only a few months old and despite the working class being the strength of the ANC's mass-campaigns, there was not the broad realisation of its strength that there is growing today. These facts should be taken into account when criticism of the Charter is made. Fine and Innes ignore these realities.

The Charter's specific demands for workers: full-unemployment benefits; equal pay for equal work; paid annual leave and sick leave; maternity leave on full pay; an end to job reservation; the abolition of child labour, compound labour and the tot system; a national minimum wage and a forty hour week, are minimum demands. These are central to the policy statements and shopfloor struggles of today's working class; there can be no escaping the fact that these demands reflect the views of a vast sector of the South African proletariat.

The Charter also contains demands which may be regarded as broadly democratic:

1. Universal adult suffrage
2. Abolition of racist restrictions, in particular
  - (a) in schools and official institutions
  - (b) on the ownership of land
  - (c) on land occupation
  - (d) for membership of police-force and the army
  - (e) in sport and cultural amenities
3. Free rights to trade and to enter professions

4. Freedom of speech, publication and organisation
5. Abolition of pass laws
6. Freedom of movement
7. Free and compulsory education
8. Higher education financed by the state
9. Free medical and hospital services provided by the state
10. The abolition of fenced locations - and a national housing scheme with full social amenities. (2)

The social democratic nature of these demands does not make them exclusively middle class. They are still legitimate working-class demands; particularly of a nationally oppressed working class. Furthermore the organised strength of the working class, supported by sections of the middle classes and the rural population is capable of ensuring that these demands are met.

These demands may be summed up in what is essentially a single demand for national liberation. The achieving of national liberation and the establishing of socialism are the principal tasks of the South African working class. The consistent backing of management by police and army, so obvious when Gencor sacked 20,000 workers from Impala Platinum, will make it increasingly clear to the South African working class that achieving one is inconceivable without achieving the other.

South African capitalism is built and sustained by the cheap labour that is ensured by apartheid. The recent attempts by liberal capitalists to disassociate themselves from apartheid must not be regarded as a shift towards support for a struggle by a class that is diametrically opposed to capitalist interests.

While all the demands the Charter makes are unquestionably demands of the working class, there are demands in the charter which cannot be considered as anything but socialist:

- (i) nationalisation of the mines, banks and monopoly industry;
- (ii) public control of all other industry and trade and the establishing of democratic organs of self government;
- (iii) and, the division of the land among those who work it. (3)

(i) Innes concentrates on the section that deals with the ownership and transfer of wealth. He points out that nationalisation of banks and big industry would not guarantee the implementation of a socialist system. Innes is correct here, however: the Charter correctly calls for the nationalisation of banks and big industry;

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for despite the fact that nationalisation can and does exist under capitalism, socialism is inconceivable without it.

Ben Turok, who motivated the clause at the conference, did so in these words:

It [the Charter] says ownership of the mines will be transferred to the ownership of the people. It says wherever there is a gold mine there will no longer be a compound boss. There will be a committee of workers to run the gold mines. Friends, we also say that wherever there is a factory and where there are workers who are exploited we say that the workers will take over and run the factories. In other words, the ownership of the factories will come into the hands of the people.

...Let the banks come back to the people, Let us have a people's committee to run the banks. (emphasis added) (4)

This is quite clearly a motivation for socialist nationalisation of banks and big industry. It was this form of nationalisation that was accepted by the Congress of the People at Kliptown.

(ii) Fine remarks that, "Socialism requires the extension of democracy beyond the limits allowed by liberal constitutionalism." (5) - but what the Charter envisages is hardly a replication of an untenable, Westminster-type parliamentary system.

The Charter calls for, "All bodies of minority rule, advisory boards, councils and authorities to be replaced by democratic organs of self-government." - and for public control of all remaining private industry and trade.

In South African these are not social-democratic demands; they require that power be taken from the existing ruling class and exercised by a predominantly black, proletarian population through its organisations and according to its programme.

The demand for universal suffrage, widely recognised as a basis for social democracies, would not result in a social democracy in South Africa. Steve Gelb and John Saul in The Crisis in South Africa tentatively agree with this:

One man (sic), one vote: this essential bottom line of liberal capitalist strategy in successfully incorporating the mass of the population within its hegemonic framework elsewhere in the world is perhaps impossible for capitalism

in South Africa, and in any case seems non-negotiable for the foreseeable future. (6)

Any government, elected on the basis of one-person-one-vote, would be elected on the basis of a mandate, impossible to implement under capitalism.

(iii) The division of land is always on the agenda for socialist transformations in the third-world. The principle as expressed in the Charter: "the division of land amongst those who work it", is essentially socialist. For in South Africa: "50,000 white farmers have twelve times as much land for cultivation and grazing as 14 million rural blacks." (7) Redistribution in this context is unthinkable under capitalism.

That the Charter does not say what form of government should implement the demands, is problematic for Fine and Innes. For them, this omission and others which they regard to be crucial render the document ambiguous. The bulk of their criticisms are to do with the sections they regard to be incomplete or limited in their conception of the new society.

However, there are many demands the Charter does not make: it does not demand an end to legal and social discrimination against gay people; or an end to pollution; or an end to nuclear power. Also there are many details that the Charter does not give about the make up of the future society. This is because the Charter is not a thesis or even a programme for change. The Charter is a set of minimum demands, rooted in the grievances and aspirations of the working class.

Fine complains that, "the likelihood is that where democratic demands are not explicitly articulated, they will succumb under the weight of old prejudice concerning the needs of the state." (8)

This is curious: the mere articulation of demands, explicit or otherwise, guarantees nothing. Bophuthatswana's locally celebrated Bill of Rights did not stop the massacre in Winterveld any more than ZANU-PF's uncompromisingly socialist programme prevented the anti-worker sections of its recent labour legislation. The socialist programme of the FLA in Algeria, or the lack of such a programme in Cuba when Castro came to power, were equally irrelevant to the course of events in those countries. Ultimately it is not

the nature of the expression of demands on paper that matters. What matters is the support that exists for them and the organisation that is built around them in the mass-movement.

It may well have made this debate a lot simpler, and Fine and Innes a lot happier, if the Charter had explicitly called for socialism and worker control as does the Azanian Manifesto. However, merely calling for socialism and worker control is not enough for building socialism.

The Charter is not written in stringent socialist rhetoric but the endorsing of its working-class demands and their championing by the mass-movement makes the Freedom Charter a necessary basis for building socialism.

### The construction of a socialist programme

To speak of a mass-movement is not to imply the existence of a single organisation to which every member of the oppressed belongs; nor does it deny that there may be a range of political viewpoints and allegiances within the mass of oppressed people. It is to acknowledge the fact that the vast majority of oppressed people in South Africa, now, as in the 1950s, support the Freedom Charter and will rally under the banner of the ANC.

The mass-movement of the 1980s is characterised by a level of militancy and organisation unprecedented in the history of South African struggle. In considering the construction of a socialist programme, it is necessary: firstly, to understand how this militancy and organisation reflects and informs the political consciousness of the rank and file; and secondly, how it is possible to ensure that the rank and file draws socialist conclusions from the experiences of the mass-movement.

Militancy implies more than the defensive and frustrated violence of rioting mobs, or the necklacing of collaborators, that has been so widespread since Sebokeng in September 1984. Militancy reflects the consciousness that fighting is the only response to the repressive state machine. This militancy is reflected in the revolutionary songs and chants at mass funerals and meetings and the display of Congress and South African Communist Party (SACP) flags. The popularity of the SACP and the red flag are to be understood in the widespread association of these symbols with revolution and worker control, however inaccurately this may

represent the SACP's position.\*

The mock-drilling and battle formations with wooden AK47s at Eastern Cape funerals, and the recent shootings of policemen with not-so wooden AK47s in Alexandra and Guguletu, vividly illustrate the growing militancy in the country. Umkhonto we Sizwe is the most popular symbol of this militancy, young cadres place hope in the hidden arms caches and there are clear calls by many youth and worker activists for guns. These developments reflect the beginnings of a revolutionary consciousness around the ANC and the Charter, whether Fine and Innes choose to recognise it or not.

The tasks the movement faces are: the channelling of this militancy into organised local militias and defense committees to defend the community from vigilantes and police action; and the generalising of these developments towards the building of the movement to carry out the socialist transformation of society.

Only well developed organisational structures will be able to harness and direct this militancy, structures that are developing at local level: like village committees in Sekhukhuneland and the Eastern Cape and the street committees in Mamelodi, Alexandra, and Port Alfred. These structures reflect a growing understanding of the basics of socialist organisation; a participating rank and file and an accountable leadership. Again, Fine and Innes choose to ignore these facts.

People participating in these structures will have a strong idea about what is meant by the "democratic organs of self government" that the Charter calls for. One can argue they have begun to put the Charter into practice. This link with the Charter must be made and developed if the Charter is to be implemented and defended by the movement as a basis for socialism.

There have been a number of developments in the mass-movement

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\* In fact, the historic position of the SACP leadership has been strict adherence to a two stage theory of revolution (the first explicitly excluding workers control) and a policy to nationalise only multi-national corporations, this would indicate a position far different from militant workers and youth in the mass-movement. Militant workers and youth see their struggle as a struggle for power not merely as a lever to be used by the leaders to negotiate a liberal capitalism in South Africa.



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which reveal an embryonic socialism and illustrate the potential for the construction of a socialist programme.

1. Most of COSATU's shopsteward locals, consisting of all shopstewards in a particular area are taking up community struggles. The direct involvement of union structures in community struggles and the reciprocal community support for striking workers in some areas, as in Atteridgeville during the ASEA strike and Katlehong during the Haggie Rand sit-in, are essential if the link between capital and the state is to be made.

The developments in the National Union of Mineworkers towards setting-up hostel and shaftstewards committees and COSATU's consolidation of the shopstewards locals indicate a conception of working-class struggle that goes beyond shopfloor issues. The relationship between these locals and the civics and resident's associations must be strengthened and developed.

2. The mass-actions of the movement have revealed an increasing strength, this is apparent in the overwhelming support of up to two million workers, for the May Day stay-away. The November 1984 stay-away - organised jointly by unions, the RMC and the student and civic associations - was successful only in certain areas in the Transvaal.
3. The consumer boycotts, co-ordinated by consumer boycott committees, especially those in Pretoria and Port Elizabeth, have evinced highly political demands; as have the successful stay-aways in Warmbaths and Witbank. This reveals a conception of struggle limited neither to the state nor capital, but one encompassing both; and a growing realisation of the strength of united and co-ordinated working-class action.
4. Crisis committees, established to cope with the deteriorating situation in the townships, have developed in many areas. The Soweto Parents Crisis Committee (SPCC), in response to the situation in the schools, hosted a conference at Wits University in December last year. This led to the formation of the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) and a nationally co-ordinated initiative to implement People's Education in the schools.
5. People's Education has been taken-up by youth congresses and parent-teacher-students' associations all over the country.

TRASCO, the newly established Transvaal Students Congress, was active in campaigning for a workers' week in the schools around May Day to educate students about the workers' struggle. This is reciprocal to COSATU's involvement in the NECC and campaign for a national stay-away on June 16, in solidarity with youth and the national struggle.

There is no longer a marked distinction between labour struggles, community struggles and youth/education struggles. The organisations that have emerged in the last few years have the potential to understand the complexity, yet singleness, of the problem and the broad unity essential for its solution.

The problem is the bosses and the state, capitalism and apartheid: the growing awareness in the movement is that the anti-apartheid and anti-capitalist struggles must be waged and won together.

COSATU, launched last year and currently representing 650,000 workers reflects this awareness most strongly:

We the Trade Union representatives here present firmly commit ourselves to a unified democratic South Africa, free of oppression and economic exploitation. We believe that this can only be achieved under the leadership of the united working class. (9)

Thus COSATU addresses itself to winning national liberation for the majority of South Africans and acknowledges that this can only be done on the strength of a socialist programme.

Working-class hegemony is to be achieved firstly, through the establishment of socialist structures (with an accountable leadership and a participating rank and file) in all aspects of working-class life - the shopfloor, the community and the schools; and secondly, through a strong and independently organised COSATU.

The construction of a socialist programme will depend on the conscious intervention of socialist ideas. It is in the educational programmes of the unions, through people's education in the schools and communities that the Charter must be discussed and interpreted. Starting with the Charter, a workers' plan for the economy and a programme for the socialist reconstruction of our society must be developed.

The Freedom Charter will be constantly re-interpreted in the con-

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text of the struggles and organisation of the mass-movement. It makes little sense to discuss the absence or presence of socialism in the document as it stands on paper and in isolation from this movement.

But to what end this building of socialism on the basis of the Charter? Only to this: The minimum working class demands of the Charter require a revolution for them to be met.

In South Africa: universal adult suffrage, democratic government and nationalisation under an ANC government are revolutionary demands. The simplicity of "one-person-one-vote" holds no minority guarantees of either reserved seats or powers of veto for whites; "government through democratic structures" allows no privilege for the wealthy or previously powerful; the transfer of wealth to the people holds no guarantee of moratoriums or payment for nationalisation or any compensation for land.

Thus the implementation of the Charter after a negotiated settlement is inconceivable: as any negotiated settlement must represent a retreat from the Charter. For the Charter to be implemented it would require a complete surrender of power and wealth by the status-quo. This would require a complete dismantling of the police and army under the present system. A settlement is impossible - the Charter allows for no negotiation, only unconditional surrender. The prospect of the present government surrendering is as inconceivable as the prospect of any negotiated settlement.

Further mitigating against a negotiated settlement is the growing strength of the rightwing. The AWB has threatened to fight to the last man should the ANC come to power. They will. Botha could only come to the negotiating table on the strength of a defeat of the rightwing and a major split in the Afrikaner volk. The ANC also stands to lose its support, and credibility as a revolutionary movement, among youth and worker militants if it comes to the table while the SADF and police remain intact (and possibly even in the townships). Negotiation under these conditions will represent a defeat for the ANC.

There can be no escaping the fact that power will have to be taken in South Africa. The construction of a socialist programme must proceed on this understanding.

The great strength of the Charter is that its demands reflect the

aspirations of the working class. Any achievement of these aspirations is inevitably tied to the need to build a socialist South Africa. The Charter's demands are also those of sections of the oppressed middle class and rural population. These classes must be won to the mass-movement on the strength of a socialist programme that will guarantee their rights to work the land and participate in small trade and industry.

Innes, in view of the necessity for class alliances, remarks that the "workers charter" must be drawn up in such a way that it does not alienate sections of the middle class and rural population. The Freedom Charter does this already. (10)

In keeping with the strict non-racialism of the Charter it must be argued here too, that even sections of the white working class must be won to the mass-movement. To make no attempt to do so would be to abandon them to the encroaching fascism to which they will turn as their living standards drop lower and lower.

The organised South African working class is not only divided racially: it is ideologically split into Congress\* and Black Consciousness federations. There is also a "worker party" lobby with some support and a new threat from the anti-worker Inkatha's UWUSA. High level debates with sectarian officials and leaders who have no real interest in a united working class, or a single mass-movement of the oppressed under the hegemony of that class, will lead to nothing. Only the strength of COSATU on the shopfloor and socialist structures within communities will in time bring all workers into the mass-movement.

The Charter provides an excellent basis for the construction of a socialist programme. The persistent attempt to redefine it on paper is an exercise in idealism not materialism. What is needed now is not an abstract redefining of the Charter's content but the movement which upholds the Charter. This is the task for socialists.

(Hugh MacLean, May 1986)

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\* While there may be objections by some, to the regarding of COSATU as a "Congress Federation", there can be no denying that COSATU is part of a mass-movement which is strongly Congress. The issue of Independent Organisation is an important one which cannot be gone into here.

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Footnotes:

- 1 T Lodge, Black politics in South Africa, Ravan, Johannesburg, 1983, pp70-74
- 2 D du Toit, Capital and labour in South Africa, Kegan Paul International Ltd, London, 1981, p201
- 3 op.cit. p202
- 4 G Carter, G Gerhart and T Karis, From protest to challenge, Vol III, Hoover, Stanford, 1977
- 5 B Fine, "The Freedom Charter: a critical appreciation", SALB 11.3, p42
- 6 J Saul and S Gelb, The crisis in South Africa, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1981, p44
- 7 J Lelyveld, "I love your shadow" extract in Weekly Mail 16-22.5.86
- 8 Fine, op.cit. p41
- 9 COSATU: Resolutions, taken at launching Congress, Durban, 1985
- 10 D Innes, "Worker politics and the popular movement", WIP 41.

## **Workers and the Politics of Consumer Boycotts**

"Our buying power is going to be the thing that is going to decide the future of our country", Mkhuseleli Jack, leader of the Port Elizabeth Consumer Boycott Committee, on the eve of the recent reintroduction of the consumer boycott in P.E. (New Nation 26.3.86)

Since July 1985 boycotts have proliferated across South Africa. Comments like Jack's are now common among the leaders of township and national anti-apartheid organisations. But the energy being put into organising boycotts has rarely been matched by careful assessment of the boycott as a general tactic, and more specifically of the different ways in which boycotts can be organised.

An early assessment of consumer boycotts in the major metropolitan areas was provided by Obery and Jochelson (WIP 39, October 1985), and more recently White (SALB 11.5, May 1986) has theorised the tactical and especially the strategic objectives of the consumer boycott. But these studies have not explored in detail the variety of forms of the consumer boycott, how these are linked to different objectives, and how they can transform the local as well as