

## INCOMPLETE DRAFT

### DO WE NEED DIALECTICS?

'...[A] revolutionary party of the working class cannot but formulate, and having formulated, hold fast to, develop and treasure, its party philosophy. In this philosophy-dialectical materialism- are embodied the general ideas by means of which the party understands the world which it is seeking to change and in terms of which it defines its aims and works out how to fight for them. In this philosophy are embodied the general ideas by means of which the party seeks to enlighten and organise the whole class, and to influence, guide and win over all the masses of working people, showing *the conclusions which must be drawn from each stage of the struggle*[emphasis inserted], helping people to learn from their own experience how to go forwards towards socialism.' - Maurice Cornforth, *Dialectical Materialism, An Introduction*, vol 1, pages 10-11

Why do we need to study dialectics? Some people feel that this is holding up all sorts of crucial tasks of the Party. It is said we need strategic direction, we need clarity as to the Party's role, we need above all to get on and do things.

The point about dialectics and a dialectical method is that it provides a way of understanding and undertaking all of these tasks successfully. We know that Marx said :up to now philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point however is to change it.

By that is not meant that you can change the world without first interpreting it. There is an ongoing relationship between the two. Your understanding informs your strategies and tactics and your experience on the ground will bring insights that modify that initial understanding.

Dialectics or dialectical materialism is fundamentally a way of approaching reality, a method of coming to grips with *what* is essential in things, a way of explaining what is, how it came into being and how its future development can be influenced. It is above all concerned with reality as a process or series of processes.

Understanding any situation with a view to impacting on it, involves deciding on the weight to be attached to one or other factor, whether that factor must be considered in relation to other factors and what the character of these links are.

To use a militaristic example, if one ignores some link one may well launch an attack which can be deflected or defeated because of that omission. If one pays detailed attention to each and every link one may be diverted from what is the essential link or the weakest link in the chain.

Equally if one assumes a link without understanding the specific

character of the elements that are connected you can make a too generalised attack without noting the specifics that are also crucial for success

Take an organisational question related to the concept nonracialism. Within the unity that nonracialism stresses, there are also distinct elements. If we organise only on the basis of the unity, we fail to take account of the specific elements and may well fail. You have to consider the type of area where you are organising, and consider what type of organisers are needed to do the work. Sometimes people with great skills are unsuitable or not the best suited people for work in a particular area. Are Joe Modise or Chris Hani the best people to send to canvass support in Houghton? Is Ahmed Kathrada the best person to raise funds in Israel?

You have to consider the whole as well as the distinct components, sometimes opposites that make up this unity

If you one-sidedly stress differences, you fail to build on what is common. You create a narrow ethnic consciousness and inhibit the development of the weapon which nonracial unity is. If you onesidedly stress an unchanging, static, unity, you fail to attend to the specific organisational tasks thrown up by the distinct community-cultures etc

Dialectics is the enemy of one-sidedness

Dialectics is the enemy of static and unchanging ways of thinking

Dialectics is about change. Dialectics understands the world as being in motion, always subject to change.[elaborate with e.gs]

Dialectics is about interconnection

At the same time it does not see interconnection as everything

It also seeks to understand the specific qualities of distinct elements that relate to one another and what the character of the connection is

Dialectics as a weapon for acting on the events of the day

I want to deal with some key questions occupying our mind and show how we are already consciously or unconsciously applying a dialectical method to understand them. Alternatively, where we are not using such a method, I will show how it provides us with insights that we need

## 1. Understanding the violence

The current violence on the reef has been depicted as ethnic violence, as Zulus attacking Xhosa and vice versa. We have correctly challenged this and pointed to the manipulation of ethnic factors and the fact that it is fundamentally counterrevolutionary violence against the African masses in general and the people's organisation, the ANC, in particular.

While that may be true the impact of continual attack by Zulu-speakers wearing red headbands, who are adherents of an organisation that stresses Zulu consciousness above most other things has led to a change in consciousness amongst some of the victims.

There is a growing tendency amongst people on the ground to identify the enemy as the 'Zulus' and in a sense it does correspond to the reality that they encounter, that the people who attack them are Zulu speakers who stress that they are Zulus attacking Xhosas

What we have here is an illustration of one of the 'laws of dialectics' that quantity transforms over time into quality, that an accumulation of the same factor(s) over time, changes the quality of a situation. In this case, we have to deal with a real situation, that the intensity of the counterrevolutionary violence has undermined or is undermining the national cohesion of the forces against apartheid.

We have to recognise that what were at first false categorisations of a situation -as being Zulu vs Xhosa, have over time changed the consciousness of many people, fundamentally changed their perception of events in a way that has made the reactionary characterisation appear more valid.

This means that our work on the ground is not merely to protect people from violence, but to re-establish a particular perspective over these events, that does not allow them to be interpreted in a way that re-creates a pre-1912 tribal consciousness.

## 2. Dialectics and the negotiations

On the road of negotiations, there are again contradictory factors at work. We engage the regime, and form a unity as negotiating partners. At the same time as that unity is based on some agreement-the need to achieve some long-term solution that ensures peace, there is disagreement as to the character of this solution.

We form a unity but it is a contradictory unity of opposites, just as the capitalist mode of production [CMP] relies on a unity between capital and labour who are both united and in contradiction. You cannot have a CMP without both capital and labour. But the very way in which the CMP is constituted bears the seeds of its own destruction. The proletariat that it creates are its own

gravediggers.

Returning to negotiations, the contradiction between our negotiation goals and that of the regime can be treated in two ways. A negotiated settlement that sees the victory of the forces of reform, with absorption of the liberation forces into a power sharing relationship is one way. This would be a counterrevolutionary resolution that would not remove the contradiction between the oppressed masses and the privileged minority, but would in the short term submerge the dangers raised by the contradiction.

Another way of looking at it is that negotiations are in themselves generally not capable of providing a fundamental resolution of a contradiction. cf *The Road To Peace, ANC DPE 1990, page 8* The agreement at the table still has to be implemented and it is there, often, that the satisfactory resolution of the contradiction may be possible.

The revolutionary resolution of this contradiction in a negotiated situation means that we have to secure a constitution based on the Freedom Charter

But neither result comes from passive observation of the scene. The laws of dialectics do not simply 'unfold'. In the case of the regime it brings into the negotiation process all manner of forms of struggle to weaken the forces of liberation. It deploys a wide array of security laws and forces to hinder the development of the ANC as a political organisation. It launches counterrevolutionary violence to enable them to deal with a weak ANC. These are all independent factors in their own right, but they are all also connected to the negotiation strategies and tactics of the regime, including its attempt to elevate other organisations at the expense of the ANC

At the same time, if we in the ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance want to achieve our negotiation goals, it is necessary for us to pursue our negotiation strategies in a way that brings to bear all our power, at the table and beyond the table, through mass action, international solidarity work, underground and the establishment of self defence units that can protect our people against the violence

Through such a combination we attempt to ensure that the resolution of the contradictory relationship between us and the regime will be revolutionary, that it will secure the same result as we have sought through armed struggle—a state based on the Freedom Charter.

### 3. Changing our strategic perspective:

Negotiations as the swiftest route to the transfer of power



Dialectics is about change, how things that may seem permanent do in fact change, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. It is the job of political actors to understand this movement, to interpret it and act in a way that furthers their goals.

Macbeth asks the witches to 'look into the seeds of time, and say which grain will grow and which will not' and that is what we have to do. We have to look at initiatives and ask ourselves, has this or that got the potential to unfold into something that will have a large scale impact, whether there are factors about something in embryo that carry revolutionary connotations.

This was the case with the Soviets in the October revolution. In our own case there have been initiatives like the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee-for the first time uniting the entire community over the educational crisis, that carried the seeds of a move which later had national implications with the development of the NECC.

If we fail to recognise the potentiality of some things we fail to act strategically or to take advantage of strategic shifts or tactical changes.

Until recently the ANC saw the swiftest route to achieving its strategic goals as being armed action, coupled with struggle on all other fronts, leading to an armed seizure of power. The movement was open to the possibility of negotiations, though it felt that this opening would only arise through the cumulative impact of action on all other fronts.

And again, that has been proved true in our case. It was the cumulative impact of a variety of forms of pressures that created a qualitatively new crisis on the side of the regime, making it impossible for it to deny popular aspirations in the old way. It may also have made it necessary for them to recognise the need to accommodate some of these aspirations, while trying to maintain the fundamental privileges of whites.

The course for achieving this, the approach imposed on them, that was opened up to them and us by our struggle was that of negotiations

On our side we enter negotiations not to achieve reform or some accommodation of our aspirations while maintaining overall white privilege. Our goals in negotiations remain the same as that when we entered armed struggle and it is our job to achieve these strategic goals through negotiations

*We need to recognize that there is a change in our strategic understanding. We now see negotiations as providing the possibility of the swiftest route to a democratic transfer of power to the people.*

But we understand that possibility in a dialectical way.

Negotiations will not succeed simply through our new understanding. It will succeed as a result of an accumulation of various factors that can put that possibility on the agenda. Just as a variety of forms of struggle made negotiations possible, we need to understand what range of forces is needed for them to succeed. It demands in the first place that negotiations are not considered one-sidedly as purely talking to the regime, but as a form of struggle, interlocking with every other site of struggle

The accumulation of various pressures brought to bear in negotiations and through actions supplementing the negotiations can secure for us such a transfer of power. It is again a case of transformation of quantity into quality, creating a qualitative leap, making revolutionary transformation possibility

Dialectics is essentially concerned with development -how change can lead to something new. Our job is to understand what factors in any particular situation are the ingredients for creating this development. We then try to impact on a situation in a way that brings this about

#### 4. The role of the SACP at the present time

How do dialectics help us to understand this? Before answering that I want to suggest that there is not clarity as to what the current role of the party is. We need to understand the party as part of an alliance, but also as an independent member of that alliance. What is it about the SACP that makes it a distinct organisation? Is it the same answer that we would have given in 1989? Is it the same answer as we have given in any previous period of our party's history?

The Party forms a unity with the ANC and Cosatu in the tripartite alliance. It acts together with these organisations on a common platform relating to the national democratic struggle. Unity is not the same as identity. Cosatu is a trade union, whose prime task is to represent its members at the work place. ANC is a broad national movement, embracing all sorts of elements that accept the broad goals of this phase of our struggle. The Party is an organisation of Marxist-Leninists advancing the interests of the working class, politically

What is the current role of the party? The party is a Marxist Leninist organisation whose *ultimate* objective is socialism and communism. But that does not answer the question of its *current* role. If its ultimate objective is socialism, what is its present role, when socialism is not on the agenda? Clearly it must advance socialist ideas now, but is that a sufficient elucidation of its role? Has the party not got a specific role as a Communist Party, in the alliance, and if so what is that role?

That there are Communists in high places in the ANC tells us nothing about that role. What they do in those high places may or may not conform to the role that the party ought to be playing at this time.

If we ask what the current role of the party is, we must ask that in relation to the phase of struggle in which we are engaged, and that is primarily one of national democratic struggle, one for national liberation

Marxist-Leninism claims to be the most advanced theory, the most advanced way of understanding political events and planning ways of changing history. *Communists, armed with this knowledge, are so armed not only in relation to socialism, but in relation to whatever social formation they may be operating in.*

What we have to ask then is what our Marxist Leninist analysis can do to uncover the way forward in the current situation, what we as Communists, specifically, have to contribute to advancing the overall goals of the alliance.

Looking at the history of the ANC/SACP alliance the party has in the past made significant contributions, in particular clarification of the way in which the South African social formation should be understood as a special form of colonialism and related to this, the form of struggle that derives from this colonial situation-national democratic struggle.

The party has also made extensive contributions to the way in which the strategic objectives of the liberation movement as a whole are to be realized. Its most recent programme, *The Path to Power*, despite being overtaken by events, can be seen as a major intervention at the time of its adoption. It mapped out a clear path to power through insurrection. It gave a lead to the movement as a whole, that might well have been of decisive influence had the events of Feb 2 not taken place

Even that document took account of the possibility of negotiations coming on the agenda and did not see that as in contradiction with its insurrectionary perspective:

'There is no conflict between this insurrectionary perspective and the possibility of a negotiated transfer of power. There should be no confusion of the strategy needed to help create the conditions for the winning of power with the exact form of the ultimate breakthrough. *Armed struggle cannot be counterposed with dialogue, negotiation and justifiable compromises, as if they were mutually exclusive categories.* Liberation struggles have rarely ended with the unconditional surrender of the enemy's military forces. Every such struggle in our continent has had its climax at

the negotiating table, occasionally involving compromises judged to be in the interests of revolutionary advance....

....

'Whatever prospects may arise in the future for a negotiated transition, they must not be allowed to infect the purpose and content of our present strategic approaches. *We are not engaged in a struggle whose objective is merely to generate sufficient pressure to bring the other side to the negotiating table* If as a result of a generalised crisis and a heightened revolutionary upsurge, the point should ever be reached when the enemy is prepared to talk, the liberation forces will, *at that point, have to exercise their judgement, guided by the demands of revolutionary advance....*'

Looking at the post Feb 2 situation the truth is that the party has not provided a clear understanding of its role as a party in the present situation /current conjuncture.

Along with this, the way in which the current phase of struggle is being conducted by the liberation movement as a whole, often happens outside of a common, agreed strategic perspective. There may also be the possibility of divergence over the strategic goal, an assumption that the need to compromise in negotiations means that our goals may have been modified.

In this situation, the unity of the SACP with its alliance partners has been mainly symbolic and at a national level. also, within this unity, the distinct character of the Party has not emerged. Any elucidation of the Party's role must be able to locate it within the unity of the tripartite alliance, acting together for common goals. Such an analysis must also map out what is not in conflict with, but distinct about the Party in the alliance.

## 5. Conjunctural analyses

Any organisation wanting to map out the way forward has to engage in what is nowadays called a conjunctural analysis, that is, an attempt to unravel the balance of forces at a particular time, as well as the overall conditions within which they enter battle.

The dialectical method seeks to unravel internal contradictions, that is, the dynamics within a thing that tell us how it changes and can be changed. That means when we look at ourselves, our strengths and weaknesses we must try to understand what factors are crucial in making us grow, increasing our power and influence.

In the case of the ANC, in the early months of unbanning,, we saw the incremental growth of branches in the period when the



connection between the ground and the leadership was hardly felt. Regrettable as this rupture was, this was also related to the character of the organisation at the time, related to the lack of existing democratic structures and the need to build them. This, in turn, was necessitated by the establishment of interim structures from the top down, due to the return of the movement from exile and the obvious lack of legal structures within the country.

Around September 1990 we started to see the effect of the gradual growth of democratic structures, elected branches and regions throughout the country, with mass action in support of democratic demands, and also the impact of this new mass and democratic force within the ANC at the December conference.

This was again a case of qualitative change. If three or four branches or regions are launched it does not have a significant impact on the character of an organisation. What we saw however was that over time this incremental growth reached a point where there was a qualitative leap where the ANC became a new organisation

But the 'law' really entails the transformation of quantity into quality and back into quantity again, so that the ANC continues to grow quantitatively and this will also lead to further changes. The qualitative changes ought in turn to help with further quantitative growth.

But when we look dialectically at this process we also have to look at the internal character of the organisation. To say that we have half a million members does not mean that these members are disciplined and highly conscious and that is also a process of development, which if successfully carried out can also lead to a qualitative leap in the capacity of the membership to influence events

#### *Understanding the current situation*

The purpose of a conjunctural analysis is to uncover the overall situation, not merely our situation as the alliance and it is useful for us to consider this in broader terms.

One of the key questions we have to ask is to what extent things have actually changed. There are two extreme positions. One says that nothing has changed and the other says that change has become irreversible. How does a dialectical approach help us decide on a correct position?

When FW de Klerk replaced FW, Archbishop Tutu remarked that all that had happened was a change of initials. Many of our statements continued, for some time, to say that nothing had changed. Indeed there is much continuity in the conditions of black South Africans and people continue to be killed and arrested and harassed

In other words, there is much that is unchanged and we have to note that in our analysis. But there is also *substantial change*. The unbanning of the ANC and SACP, despite all the qualifications on our right to freedom of political activity, has created a fundamentally new political arena. We are free to legally propagate our positions and despite obstacles, we are doing this. We are building our organisations, despite attempts to harass us. The law is on our side, to a substantial extent, so that there is both ambiguity and actual legal right to exist, something that has not been possible since 1950 and 1960 in the case of the Party and ANC respectively

To ignore this new space is to blind ourselves to the opportunities that it offers for us to intervene in a way quite different from an illegal organisation. It necessitates a quite different style of work that we have to learn both as a legal organisation but also as one that is engaging on a national terrain of struggle that is changing substantially

If we do not appreciate this, we stand to be outmanoeuvred, as we constantly deploy the wrong tactics for the situation.

There is a trend of thinking that exaggerates the opening of the space and the process of opening up generally and is ready to believe that change is irreversible. In the first place, our ability to operate is hedged in with so many qualifications that we have not yet reached the point where there is a completed process that may be reversed. If what has been achieved is reversed it is a reversal of an incomplete process. So we have to defend what has been achieved but also complete the process of gaining our rights

So there is both old and new factors in the present. We have to ask ourselves how do we impact on this in a way that encourages those aspects of the new that advance our interests and discourage continuity of the old that hampers our struggle.

## CONCLUSION

This has been a tentative and experimental attempt to South Africanise dialectics, to try to apply principles of dialectical materialism to ongoing problems of the South African struggle. It is merely a basis for discussion and it is hoped that it will be enriched and developed through such input.