Debating Liberalism in the 1980s

a critique

What is liberalism? And what is its place in current resistance politics? CEDRIC DE BEER responds to Daryl Glaser's analysis of these issues, which appeared in WIP 30.

Daryl Glaser's article in **Work In Progress** 30 ('Liberalism in the 1980s'), takes the reader on a guided tour of recent political developments in South Africa. Most guided tours have two flaws: they try to show you too much; and while they look at interesting sights, they do not give you the chance to investigate the deeper realities. So it is with Glaser's article.

In a few pages, the 'Liberalism' article looks at three important topics:

* the differing strategies of those groups which, while attempting to reform South Africa, want to retain the structures of exploitation and domination intact;
* the nature of liberalism in South Africa today;
* the different class interests of those who have at least one goal in common - the transformation of South Africa into a single non-racial political system which allows the majority of citizens access to political power.

The third of these topics is the most interesting and important for **WIP** readers. It touches on the nature of class alliances; the political struggle of the working class; and the relationship between oppression and exploitation. It is also the shortest section, covering just one page of a six-and-a-half page article.

This division of Glaser's article is my own, rather than the author's. He presents his argument as if he was only looking at the middle theme: an analysis of liberalism in the 1980s. The analysis of so many different political positions under the catch-all term 'liberalism' is the major deficiency of Glaser's article. His failure to define liberalism results in confusion, and what follows is an attempt to clarify some of the issues he raises.

THE NATURE OF LIBERALISM

The rise of liberalism as a political doctrine closely corresponds to the emergence of the capitalist class in Western Europe, and particularly to the rise of industrial capitalism.

To create political conditions conducive to capitalism, the rising bourgeoisie needed to break existing feudal power. This was held by the aristocracies and monarchies which governed the societies where capitalism was struggling to take root. Their rule, regional in nature, was based on peasant or feudal economic relations. It was passed from generation to generation, and so excluded the capitalist class from the power needed to transform society.

The political battles that were fought to dislodge the aristocracy from power gave rise to a set of political principles according to which each state should have a single constitutional form of government. The individual was placed at the centre of the political universe, with political rights and duties. Individual liberty was guaranteed under the law. Economically, individual 'freedom' was assigned a more limited, but nonetheless critical meaning. Pre-capitalist economic forms tied most producers to the land. But industrial capitalism needed an urban work-force. This had to be created by 'freeing' direct producers

from the land (their only means of subsistence), and allowing them the 'freedom' to work as wage labourers in the new factories.

Liberalism has certain clearly defined ideological components. Formally, all people are born equal, and are free to exercise this equality within a political system. This guarantees individual rights to the extent that they do not infringe on the rights of others. These 'civil rights' include freedom from discrimination, freedom of speech, freedom to choose where to live and work and, importantly, the right to elect a government which represents 'the wishes of the majority'.

Classical liberalism was committed to the logic of the market place, the rationality of competition, and the belief that individuals are rewarded according to their merits. But this faith in the capitalist economy and a minimum of state interference has not gone unchallenged, and no longer holds the dominant position in the spectrum of liberal beliefs. A new school of thought argued that political rights and capitalism were not enough; that, in addition, it is necessary for the state to provide for the well-being of all citizens. This involves eradicating the worst poverty and providing essential services and care for those who are unable to look after themselves. This position is reflected in the modern welfare state - 'capitalism with a human face'.

Before returning to Glaser's article, two points need to be made about the relationship between liberalism and capitalism:

* Liberalism was forged out of the political struggles waged by the emergent capitalist class. It is also a reasonable description of the political system existing in the advanced capitalist countries. But this does not mean that liberalism and capitalism are linked in all cases. Indeed, many capitalist states in Latin America, Africa and Asia employ totalitarian and anti-democratic political systems to guarantee the continued existence of capitalist relations.
* It is quite possible to hold liberal political beliefs without having a specific commitment to capitalist economic relations. Concepts like 'freedom', 'equality', 'individual rights' and 'universal franchise' have acquired sufficient autonomy to have no necesssary relationship to an economic system based on wage labour and private ownership of the means of production. Indeed, it is one of the tasks of radical activists to win to their cause liberals whose prime commitment is to political democracy, and to show them that their commitment is inadequate if it does not also incorporate democracy in the economic sphere of relations of production.

LIBERALISM AND REFORMISM

Glaser's article provides us with no definition of liberalism. It seems to include almost everyone who expresses a commitment to any kind of change in South Africa - except the forces of the ultra-right. Under the title of 'liberal' are included such diverse positions as supporters of National Party reforms, and those whose liberalism 'consists in their vague and tendentially social-democratic definition of socialism, and in their failure to articulate a clearly defined anti-capitalist position'.

The inadequacy of this definition is revealed in Glaser's analysis of the white vote in the recent referendum. We are told that PW Botha's ability to rally a substantial 'yes' vote for what he portrayed as a mandate for change reflected the 'profound divisions currently rending white politics in general and South African liberalism in particular'. But this is inaccurate. PW Botha's constitution united South African liberals as they have seldom been united before. No one espousing any of the basic liberal doctrines could have considered voting for a constitution which:

* excludes the majority of South Africans from the political process;
* is based on ethnic identity rather than the value of the individual;
* is based on laws which restrict where people may live and what jobs they can seek;
* requires undemocratic laws and authoritarian practices to ensure the survival of the state in its present form.

The constitution has attracted the support of many who wish to see limited

changes introduced into South Africa. Many of these are business people whose commitment to minor reform is premised on their desire to see the capitalist order strengthened and protected against *the rising tide of popular resistance*. But to deduce from this that they are also liberals is a step which defies all logic.

Debate and the vote in the white referendum show that many PFP members and others who oppose the National Party voted 'yes for reform'. What the referendum did was to divide out liberals from reformists. This process has nudged the more militant of these liberals, and those with a less conscious commitment to capitalism, towards the popular democratic groupings *most substantially represented by the* UDF. This is something that should be welcomed and encouraged. The fear that it might somehow threaten working class interests is something that will be dealt with later on in this article.

If we ignore this woolly use of the term 'liberalism', the bulk of Glaser's article is unexceptionable. It provides a brief survey of the positions occupied by a number of different groups who are interested in reform. What calls for a reply, or rather for expansion, is the last section of the article.

In summary, Glaser's argument is this: 'radical liberals' found in large numbers in the UDF represent the interests of the petty bourgeoisie and are committed to a unitary democratic South Africa. They are 'more than willing to mobilise and consolidate a proletarian base in pursuit of their goals'; indeed, 'the popular democratic politics they espouse enjoys considerable working class support'. What is uncertain is whether the 'proletarian social base' will force popular democratic politics into a 'socialist *project' or whether* liberals will guide it in a reformist direction.

This is fair enough as far as it goes, but we are back on the guided tour, seeing the sights but not asking any of the interesting questions. Firstly, what is the basis for the class alliance (potential or actual) between the petty bourgeoisie and the working class? Secondly, what will determine which of the two classes will dominate such an alliance?

THE BASIS FOR CLASS ALLIANCE

The answer to the first question can be found if we ask ourselves (using Glaser's terminology) why there is substantial working class support for popular democratic politics with its vision of a unitary democratic South Africa.

Those espousing popular democratic demands have no specific commitment to capitalism. Indeed, Glaser tells us elsewhere in his article that 'they are prepared to push reform to the outermost social-democratic limits compatible with capitalism **or even beyond**'.

The political programme of these democrats is reflected in the Declaration of the UDF. It aims at 'the creation of a single, non-racial, unfragmented South Africa; a South Africa free from bantustans and Group Areas'. The target is quite clear - the destruction of apartheid in all its forms and the end of 'all forms of oppression and exploitation'.

The question before us can now be rephrased: why should this programme, 'tendentially social democratic in nature', enjoy considerable working class support?

On one level, the answer to this question is simple. It is the working class, and particularly the African working class, which suffers most at the hands of the apartheid state. Lack of access to political power; the effects of bantustan fragmentation, especially the loss of citizenship; the rigid control over where people live and work through contract labour and group areas; the indignities and brutalities of influx control and population removals; these are essential components of apartheid, and have a *profound effect on the quality of life* of the working class.

This assault on the well-being, and sometimes even the survival of individuals within the proletariat, is sufficient reason for the working class to be committed to destroying apartheid and to supporting any democratic movement which has this destruction as its major goal. However, it is the task of political analysis to take us deeper than the level of what people experience, and how they feel about

it. This brings us to the point of examining why those who are committed to what Glaser calls 'a socialist project' should be interested in 'popular democratic' anti-apartheid struggles.

This question involves the relationship between capitalism and apartheid. They are not the same, and exist at levels which, for the sake of analysis, can be separated. Capitalism is an economic system - a way of ordering the production and distribution of commodities and the relationship between different classes involved in this process. Apartheid, on the other hand, is a way of ordering the political and social relationships between population groups. While capitalism and apartheid are not identical, they are very closely linked. Racial discrimination, segregation and apartheid played a vital role in establishing capitalism in South Africa. They continue as factors maintaining the conditions necessary for the survival of the capitalist system. By the same token, the needs of capitalism have played a crucial role in determining how racial politics has been structured in South Africa, and the development of monopoly capitalism in South Africa is a major factor in the restructuring of apartheid currently taking place.

In the decades after the discovery of diamonds and gold, various Land Acts (which laid the basis for the present bantustans) drove large numbers of Africans off the land, so contributing to the work-force that the mines needed so badly. The existence of rural 'homelands' provided both the opportunity and the justification for the low wages paid to these early workers. The profitability and survival of the mining industry depended on the low wage structure that resulted.

In the history of South African capitalism the three pillars of apartheid - bantustans, influx control and migrant labour - have given critical support to capitalist development. They have ensured the smooth flow of cheap labour to industries of dubious profitability; they have made it possible to keep to a minimum the cost of housing the work-force by allowing only the worker and not his family into the towns; they have allowed the reserve areas to be turned into rural ghettoes into which the vast army of unemployed can be dumped, there to be controlled by the surrogates of the central state. Residential segregation, another essential feature of apartheid, has made it easier to crush militant opposition to the social order amongst permanent urban residents.

Finally, racial classification has facilitated the process whereby inferior and cheaper health, educational and social service facilities are made available to different groups. Services are provided up to the point that is required to maintain a literate and able bodied work-force, rather than an educated and healthy community.

It is possible to conceive abstractly of some far distant time in which South Africa might have a form of non-racial capitalism. Such theoretical bubble blowing is of little concern to the present argument. What is of concern is that capitalist relations have been built on racial domination, and that the structures of exploitation continue to be inextricably bound up with the political system that is apartheid.

It is this which creates the objective basis for an alliance between the working class and other oppressed class fractions engaged in a struggle for political democracy. It is, for the same reason, essential that any 'socialist project' must incorporate a strategy to end the political system which ensures the continuation of capitalist relations.

The organic link between oppression and exploitation in South Africa provides a major reason for socialists to oppose apartheid. But it is not the only one. Apartheid does not exist only in people's heads. It has concrete effects, and structures the institutions of society in its own image. In particular, it is dangerous to believe that segregation and the bantustan policy have not created and consolidated real ethnic divisions, and real conflicts of interests between rural and urban communities; and between those who are included in, and those excluded from, the new constitution.

These conflicts may be secondary to the fundamental capital-labour contradiction. They will, nonetheless, prove to be a substantial obstacle to any attempt at building socialism

which involves rational planning in a single, co-ordinated political entity. As such, it would be naive for socialists to believe that these conflicts can be dealt with after the more fundamental contradiction has been overcome: this is a kind of 'two stage theory' in reverse, where questions of national divisions and conflicts are *postponed until the economic structure* has been transformed.

THE BALANCE OF FORCES

The final question raised in Glaser's article is that of the relative balance of forces within a democratic class alliance. Before turning to this, it would be as well to clarify the meaning that is being assigned to 'working class'. Glaser no-where comes to grips with this problem. He avoids it by talking about the 'organised working class' by which he means workers at the point of production and the unions into which they are organised.

Any 'socialist project' must aim at eradicating the deformations and distortions created by capitalism. As such, it must have a broader conception of the working class. It must, for example, include the women who provide free services to capitalism by maintaining male workers and ensuring the reproduction of the working class. And it must include those three million or more people rendered jobless by being excluded from the production process. These sections of this more-broadly defined working class are precisely those who suffer most from apartheid. Many of them are confined to the death-like conditions in the bantustans. In the case of women, they are trebly oppressed: as women, as blacks and as part of the working class. For them in particular, the struggle against apartheid has an immediacy which cannot be defined away as being of secondary importance.

We are now in a position to come to terms with Glaser's fear that in a democratic class alliance, the interests of the working class will be subordinated to the petty bourgeoisie. We know:

* that a national political struggle for democracy and against apartheid is in the interests of the black petty bourgeoisie who are certainly an oppressed group.
* that any socialist project must have, as an essential goal, the termination of apartheid.

This leads directly to two further propositions:

* that it shows a naive misunderstanding of politics to believe that the petty bourgeoisie will not wage a political struggle against apartheid, and try to mobilise all other oppressed classes, including the working class, into this struggle.
* this being the case, the only way to ensure the dominance of working class interests in political struggle is if the proletariat does what it must in any case do if it is to end economic exploitation: enter wholeheartedly into the national struggle against the political system which guards and protects that exploitation.

It is of no use to bewail the fact that 'petty-bourgeois elements' dominate, or might dominate, the democratic movement. If they do so, it can only be by default - because the political leadership of the working class is not meeting its responsibilities.

There is a final ambiguity in Glaser's article that needs to be clarified. It involves the relationship between trade unions and the popular democratic movement. He implies, rather than states, that because unions are organised at the point of production, they are more likely to represent the political interests of the working class. In this context he states that the 'radical liberals' in the UDF fail 'to articulate a clearly anti-capitalist position'.

On referendum day last year, FOSATU encouraged union members to display slogans calling for 'one-man, one-vote'. This is a most typical liberal slogan, containing not the slightest social-democratic tinge. But one cannot conclude that FOSATU is liberal in character, nor that it is soft on capitalism. It merely demonstrates that *organisations should not be categorised* by their political pronouncements, but by their overall programme.

It should also be borne in mind that unions, by their nature, do not organise the unemployed or the spouses of workers. There will even be times

when the short term interests of the unemployed may be at variance with those who have jobs. In short, working class politics must incorporate both organisation at the point of production, and a programme aimed at establishing a democratic political order.

These two elements are both separate and closely linked. The most difficult question facing progressives is how they can be united in a single programme. It is a difficulty rooted in the complexity of South African society and in divisions imposed by political and economic structures.

To simplify and sloganise these difficulties is unhelpful. They are not a matter of union officials' distrust of petty-bourgeois liberals, nor of political activists' dislike for 'workerists'. The problem is how mature progressives can wield together an effective force to end both economic exploitation and political oppression.

a response

Continuing the debate on liberalism, DARYL GLASER considers some of the criticisms of his WIP 30 article raised by Cedric de Beer.

THE DEFINITION OF LIBERALISM

The question central to both Cedric de Beer's article and my own (**WIP 30**) is: what is the definition of liberalism? Whereas my article (wrongly) utilised an unstated definition, de Beer set out (correctly) to make his definition of liberalism explicit. It is in the interests of the debate as a whole that the meaning of 'liberalism' be clarified.

In this regard it is interesting to note that de Beer's main concern is to establish the alleged distinction between 'liberalism' and 'reformism'. He argues that the white referendum 'neatly' separated 'liberals' from 'reformists'. This, he says, is because 'no one espousing any of the basic liberal doctrines could have considered voting for a constitution' of the type proposed by the Botha government. I shall take issue with this shortly. On the other hand, de Beer is quite happy to accept the basic proposition about 'radical liberalism' advanced in the **WIP 30** article: in de Beer's words, the referendum debate 'has nudged the more *militant of these liberals, and those* with a less conscious commitment to capitalism in the direction of popular democratic groupings most substantially represented by the UDF'. His only point of difference with my article is that he stresses the positive implications of this process whereas I emphasise its ambiguous (not its negative) implications.

Liberalism is notoriously difficult to define because the term is used variously to describe several different kinds of state forms and political philosophies. The first of these philosophies, associated with the ascendent bourgeoisie in early capitalist Europe, is **classic liberalism**. This asserted individual rights in opposition to feudalism's exactions; the market and meritocracy in opposition to feudal monopolies and hereditary privilege; and national and market unification in opposition to the feudal parcellisation of society along dynastic and religious lines. It sought a codified legal system to regulate competition in the **economic** market, and the separation of powers, a plurality of parties and the franchise to regulate **political** competition. Classic liberalism is associated with the **classical liberal state** of the type forged after the French and American Revolutions.

The second state form, the creation of which required a further elaboration of classic liberal philosophy, is the **bourgeois-democratic state**. This is the state whose inter-party competition is regulated by a universal rather than restricted franchise. Far from being a part-and-parcel of the classic liberal state - which sought to restrict the vote first to the propertied and then to males - the 'universal franchise' state was established in Western Europe, North America and Australia only in the twentieth century and only after a long series of popular struggles, wars and

other ruptures.

Thirdly, there is **welfare liberalism.** At first sight, this appeared a paradox: how could liberalism, with its emphasis on free competition and its opposition to state interference, include a welfare dimension? The paradox is resolved if we understand that, just as universal franchise amplified the principles of universalism and liberty contained in classic liberalism, the **welfare state** proved compatible with the liberal idea that competition and individual acquisitiveness need to be regulated in the interests of wider harmony. It should be added that the welfare state concept originated with the un-liberal Bismarck regime in nineteenth century Germany; it was only later welded to the liberal state both via explicitly 'liberal'parties (eg the British Liberals, the US Democrats), and via the parties linked to the working class (Britain's Labour Party, West Germany's SDP). Though at times portrayed as superseding capitalism - especially by social democrats - it has been shown that the post-war welfare statism of the advanced centres is compatible with the reproduction of capitalist relations. Its essential effects have been to extend the scope of state intervention to include the maintenance of the working class and the management of capitalism's economic and social crises.

The definition of liberalism is further complicated by the existence of hybrids. In Latin America, liberalism often refers to the philosophy of landed oligarchies opposed to state interventions designed to serve independent industrial development.

The matter is compounded also by the fact that liberalism can be classified along a qualitatively different plane, according to its degree of willingness to reconcile with the existing order, versus its determination to transform it. In the French Revolution, for example, constitutional monarchists faced the opposition of more militant Republicans. The liberalism which began to sprout in Germany after 1848 *was conservative enough to be* neutralised by Bismarck through the co-optation of its adherents with growth-promoting economic measures. By contrast in Nicaragua the liberal-democratic bourgeoisie tried to take the lead in the struggle to overthrow the Somoza dynasty in the late 1970s. A great deal depends on the strength or the extent of grievances present in the urban-based bourgeoisie, which in turn usually provides the main support for liberal political and economic reform. This need not, however, be the decisive factor, as the more radical liberals may sever their ties with the bourgeoisie altogether, and cement alliances with the masses.

Finally, it should be mentioned that 'militant' or 'radical' liberals may be **coherently** and philosophically liberal (and inter alia 'anti-communist'), or may have an **ambiguous** attitude to socialism (this is true especially of social democrats). This ambiguity is notably present in the 'progressive nationalism' of many third world movements (including ZANU in Zimbabwe). One may wish to question the analytical wisdom of treating **European** social democracy - committed as it frequently is to 'socialism' and linked to the unions - as 'liberal'. The label, however, has much greater resonance in third world contexts where social-democratic currents have traditionally not been linked to working class movements, and have concentrated on 'universal' demands for 'democracy' and

so on. European social democracy is, by contrast, often quite 'workerist'.

LIBERALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

It is not easy to apply these categories of liberalism to the South African context. The original categories used in **WIP 30** - Establishment, Independent-Establishment, Bourgeois-Democratic and Radical Liberalism - do not fit easily into any of the 'pigeon-holes' just discussed, but incorporate elements of each. To be schematic:

South Africa:

Establishment Liberalism	=	(i) conservative reformist (ii) classic liberal
Independent Establishment Liberalism	=	(i) somewhat less conservative (ii) classic liberal
Bourgeois Democratic Liberalism	=	(i) strongly change-oriented (ii) bourgeois-democratic at the level of politics, undefined, though always anti-socialist at the level of economics.
Radical Liberalism	=	(i) militant (ii) tendentially social-democratic, welfarist.

In terms of **class alliances**, Establishment and Independent-Establishment Liberalism are supported by the bulk of South Africa's capitalist class. Bourgeois-Democratic Liberalism receives the support of the more enlightened bourgeois and professional strata. It also has links with quasi-mass organisations (like Inkatha). Radical Liberalism is treated with fear by a bourgeoisie which is concerned to avoid the disruptive and radicalising effects of mass action. Radical liberals have allied themselves instead with the popular classes. They should be clearly distinguished from other elements aligned to the masses, notably left-wing (socialist) activists, who are found in the same organisations.

Organisationally, Establishment and Independent Establishment Liberalism find expression in the conservative Sunday newspapers, the employers' federations, the right of the PFP, etc. Bourgeois-Democratic Liberalism is dominant in the PFP, and is strongly represented in church hierarchies, the Black Sash and the South African Institute of Race Relations. Radical Liberalism is **one of a number** of philosophical world views present in the UDF and the National Forum. The National Party is **not** liberal (the reference to 'NP liberalism' in **WIP 30** is a misprint). Though its current economic and racial policies have a sympathetic audience in Establishment Liberals, the NP includes, alongside a liberal current, a proto-fascist component (authoritarianism, anti-parliamentarianism, 'remnants' of white populist racial chauvinism). At the other 'extreme', the UDF, too, is **not** liberal, since it includes left activists and, in important instances, assertive grass roots structures. Liberalism is, however, a definite current within the UDF (as de Beer would agree).

ON POPULAR FRONTS

De Beer's emphasis on the positive implications of Popular Frontism rests on his tendency to stress the common opposition of blacks of all classes to apartheid, and on the close and organic link between racism and capitalism (the notion of a non-racial capitalism being relegated to the realm not so much of logical impossibility as of, in de Beer's words, 'theoretical bubble blowing'). Presumably de Beer also has in mind the more thoroughly transformative achievements of mass-based radical nationalism (eg Mozambique and Viet Nam). His position is probably also informed by reflections on the disasters associated with the 'workerism' of the Third International in the late 1920s and early 1930s - disasters which culminated in fascism and the obliteration of working class organisations in much of Europe.

These arguments and factors all deserve serious attention. They should not, however, blind us to the fact that a strong case can also be made for

emphasising the ambiguous implications of Popular Front formations. Such a case could rest on the less encouraging experiences of 'progressive nationalism' (from Mexico in 1910-20 to Zimbabwe in the 1980s), and on the repeated upstaging of the combative sections of *the working class during the anti-*fascist popular frontism of the 1930s and 1940s. Apart from this, a very strong case - which we do not have the room to elaborate here - could be made for rejecting the functionalist claim that a non-racial political order is incompatible with the reproduction of capitalist relations in South Africa.

Whatever their merits or demerits, these arguments - and the problems they pose for Popular Frontism - cannot be dismissed as lightly as de Beer occasionally implies. His article seems to suggest that the marriage of Popular Frontism and socialist objectives can be consumated just as soon as the political leadership of the working *class recognises, and carries out, its* historical 'responsibility' to rise above trade unionism and 'enter wholeheartedly into the national struggle against the political system'. It was precisely the 'political leadership of the working class' which, under the rubric of various kinds of Popular Frontism - anti-fascist until 1945, and thereafter anti-monopoly - helped rescue Western and Southern European capitalism from the most active social and political crises.

This does not mean that the organisations of the working class should confine themselves to simple trade unionism, nor that they should avoid alliances with the representatives *of non-proletarian classes and strata.* It is rather to reassert what should be an obvious point: that the mere presence of socialists and combative workers within the terrain of popular opposition politics is not enough to guarantee a sustained challenge to the authority of capital. Surely, at a minimum, it is necessary to note **both** the possibilities **and** the dangers associated with Popular Frontism - and to concede that the mere entry of the working class and its leaders into fronts is not sufficient to obviate the risks entailed? In this light, de Beer's singular emphasis on the 'positive' value of fronts as weapons of socialist transformation appears one-sided.

REFORMISM VS LIBERALISM?

De Beer's conceptualisation of frontism in South Africa is not unconnected to his definition of liberalism. On the contrary, it depends *upon an understanding of the latter* which allows him to demonstrate liberalism's ready compatibility with socialist objectives. This involves a two-fold argument, the combined effect of which is to shift the locus of the definition of liberalism to the left and to thereby blur the boundary separating it from socialism.

In the first place, de Beer distinguishes between reformism and liberalism. The former label he pins to the Botha regime and those sympathetic to its initiatives; the latter designates only those who oppose the new constitution on the grounds of its incompatibility with basic liberal concepts (freedom, political *equality, nationhood, etc). Thus, in de* Beer's analysis liberalism begins where support for the constitution ends. It is difficult to see how such a rigid criterion can be applied without depriving liberalism of any meaning in the South African context whatsoever. For it would exclude from the liberal camp not only the **Sunday Times** and Anglo American, but all those abiding by the PFP constitution - a document which does little to hide its concern to preserve (via the minority veto, federalism, and so on) white political and economic privileges.

The fact of the matter is that the liberal commitment to universal nationhood arose primarily in the *context of struggles to weld* linguistically and, to some extent, culturally homogeneous European populations into single nations. When liberal social anthropologists and sociologists discovered the third world, however, their conception of nationhood was in many instances modified to accommodate 'ethnic' and cultural differences - 'pluralist' theories being one expression of this tendency. Moreover, we have already noted that liberalism was originally committed neither to universal franchise nor to mass-based democratic politics; these were the product of later elaborations of liberalism. It therefore seems quite unjust to exclude what I

have called Establishment Liberalism from the liberal camp simply because it does not conform to a 'pure' model of liberalism as defined by de Beer.

Botha's reformism is itself **not** liberal; its authoritarianism, its continuing obsession with ethnicity, and its bureaucratic interference in the labour market, are together sufficient to disprove its liberal credentials. However, given the context of a conservative-reformist bourgeois class - and an Establishment-Liberalism ready to take whatever it can get from the 'recalcitrant Nats' - an unhappy marriage between the regime and the right wing of liberalism becomes conceivable.

ON 'LIBERAL' RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

If de Beer's one concern is to define a whole section of the 'reformist' opposition out of the liberal camp, his other is to offer a definition of liberal values which allows a marriage of liberalism and socialism to appear relatively uncomplicated. Concepts like 'freedom', 'equality', 'individual rights' and 'universal franchise', we are told, 'have acquired sufficient autonomy' to have no necessary relationship to capitalism; they can, in consequence, be given a real socialist content. Were this not so, FOSATU's advocacy of universal franchise during the referendum would indicate that it is liberal and thus 'soft on capitalism'. Instead of judging movements on the basis of their pronouncements we should, de Beer concludes, examine their overall programme.

Everything here depends on how one formulates this argument. A socialist is perfectly justified in demanding a political order which respects universal franchise, party competition, civil liberties and so on. Indeed, the uneven record of 'actual socialism' in the twentieth century has led many in the European left to conclude that no democratic socialism is possible without such basic freedoms. De Beer's error is to portray these as 'liberal freedoms' when in fact liberalism has never enjoyed an exclusive claim on them. In the late nineteenth century it was the working class movement which demanded full civil freedoms and universal franchise, and the bourgeoisie which resisted. The liberal - and therefore capitalist - appropriation and monopolisation of these concepts since roughly the Second World War is perhaps one of the most dramatic developments of the second half of this century. If these concepts are to be recaptured by the left, it can only be on the basis of their disarticulation from liberal discourse. Liberalism is indissolubly linked to capitalism; **libertarianism** is not. Absorbing liberals into socialist-oriented political alliances ultimately requires not that their liberal but that their libertarian principles be given coherent socialist content. It requires that they should eventually **cease** to be liberals. It is because he ignores the necessity for this qualitative break that de Beer is able to present liberalism as a political partner which socialists can court without danger ■