

# The African Communist

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# CHRIS HANI



**An interview with the  
new general secretary  
on the challenges  
facing communists,  
the role of the SACP,  
and relationships with  
COSATU and the ANC**

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# **THE AFRICAN COMMUNIST**

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# **Eighth Party Congress — a triumph**



EDITORIAL NOTES

**T**he SACP's 8th Congress, held at the beginning of December 1991 in Soweto, was a triumph for the party.

Even the most hostile of our critics were compelled to admit that it was a Congress that witnessed unprecedented openness and democratic debate. No other party in South Africa has ever dared to be as open in its debates. The key to the 8th Congress was a process of simultaneous RENEWAL and CONTINUITY. In fact it is impossible to understand the political significance of the Congress without grasping both of these aspects, jointly. The Congress marked a major RENEWAL of the party in many respects:

- In the most obvious sense of renewal, it was the first open national Congress of the party on South African soil since our banning in 1950.
- It also marked a massive renewal in membership and class composition of the party. Between January 1991 and November 1991 the party's membership soared from 5000 to 21 000. The 414 delegates at the Congress

represented three hundred new branches. In the exile years, the party's small but effective cadreship was overwhelmingly from the ranks of exiled youth (the social stratum that numerically dominated the ANC-led alliance's exile population). By contrast, at the 8th Congress, 75% of delegates were either workers (many active trade unionists) or unemployed.

• There was also ideological renewal. In particular the new Manifesto, 'Building workers' power for democratic change', begins to develop a creative approach to socialist transition, grounding it in strong mass democratic formations. "Under socialism," it states, "the rudimentary organs of popular power...that emerged in struggle in the mid-1980s, should be greatly extended and they should increasingly have an institutionalised right and opportunity to participate in the running of the country."

Some commentators, among them Karl von Holdt, relatively sympathetically ("The South African Communist Party: preparing for a new era", *SA Labour Bulletin* January

1992), and Devan Pillay, much less sympathetically ("Having its cake and eating it", *Work in Progress* 80), have complained that the Congress did not produce a fully elaborated and sufficiently detailed perspective of socialism. They might be right. But they also miss the point. When the SACP sat down at its 8th Congress it had 21000 members, of whom at least 20000 were entirely new to the party. The Congress was also meeting at a dark hour for socialism internationally. It is no secret that, generally, world-wide communist and socialist forces are in disarray.

There might be individuals and small left sects that now imagine that they have all the answers, that they have elaborate socialist blueprints. And perhaps they do. But it is one thing to have an academic theory or position, and it is quite another to translate that into a meaningful, organisational weapon, that is, into a perspective that has been debated, understood, amended and accepted by tens of thousands of working class militants. The real question, then, is: Has the 8th SACP Congress laid the basis for mass debate and discussion on a socialist programme for South Africa? Or has it simply served to block and stifle such a process? We have no doubt whatsoever that the former is the case. Indeed, the most vivid feature of the Congress was the debate. Seasoned (and often cynical) political journalists who covered the Congress in large numbers couldn't believe their eyes when a majority of delegates voted to replace the term "democratic socialism" in the draft manifesto and constitution with just plain "socialism". The vote clearly went against a position held by the majority of the leadership, including Joe Slovo and Chris

Hani. "Is the SACP going to split?", one worried international guest wanted to know after the vote on "democratic socialism". Nothing could have been further from the collective mind of the Congress.

If there was renewal there was also profound CONTINUITY. The Congress delegates in their great majority were determined to ensure that renewal, which they accepted, should not mean the abandonment of basic principles, still less opportunistic face-lifts. This was the underlying motivation for retaining the concept of "Marxism-Leninism" and even for restoring the term "Political Bureau" instead of the proposed "Central Executive Committee" in the original Draft Constitution.

A mechanical clinging to symbols and shibboleths? This is the allegation of some cynics (see Tony Karon, "A lament on the ditching of the SACP faithful", in *Die SuidAfrikaan*, no.37). Even if the cynics were right on this score (and they are not) let's face it, a forthright and honest upholding of our communist symbols, anthem, colours and pride in our name is a million times more welcome than a yuppy indulgence in scepticism.

Fidel Castro, surveying international developments over the last few years, recently put his finger on this kind of scepticism: "All these events have led to an enormous triumphalism on the part of imperialism, and to scepticism among many progressive forces and a large part of the world's left-wing forces. There are people who would rather die of opportunism before remembering that they were once members of a communist party, who are afraid of the

immense honour of having belonged to a communist party.

“Because being a member of a communist party — regardless of errors that party may have committed — will always be a great honour. Belonging to a party of the poor is not the same as joining the parties and clubs of the millionaires and plunderers.”

The 8th SACP Congress said yes to renewal, but no to opportunism. It said yes to continuity, but no to a stifling dogmatism. And if the 8th Congress said all of these things, it said them, not up in the air, but on

the basis of decades of real struggle and real experience. Most of the delegates were new Party members, but everyone of them was a veteran of intense struggles in the underground, in MK, in trade unions and other mass democratic formations.

The 8th Congress did not pronounce the final word on any of the issues debated. That was not its task. It has, instead, created the space and organisational means to carry forward the debate on and, above all, the struggle for a socialist future here in South Africa. ♪

## FW, there's one thing on which we agree...

**F**W De Klerk was at great pains in the referendum campaign to defend himself from the laughable allegation by the extreme right that he is sympathetic to communism. At least on this score we agree with De Klerk.

What De Klerk stands for has absolutely nothing to do with communism.

In setting out how he differs from communism De Klerk focussed on five core issues. But in each of these, he moved from one distortion to the next.

### • Private Property

Having dispossessed millions of South Africans of their property, through land dispossession and group areas removals, De Klerk now tells us that the NP, unlike the SACP, stands for the protection of private

property. What he means is: what was stolen in the past by a minority must now be protected. The SACP, for its part, upholds the right to personal property, we do not want to dispossess people of their homes and personal effects. But we are opposed to exploitative private property. We see no reason why a small clique should control, as a result of colonial conquest, apartheid 98% of all productive property in our country.

### • Nationalisation

Having run a massive state sector, designed to prop up capitalism in South Africa and provide sheltered employment to an ethnic minority, De Klerk now says that, unlike communists, he is not in favour of nationalisation. The SACP sees nationalisation as a valid option, but only in

the context of a democratic, publicly answerable state. Our ultimate objective is not nationalisation, so much as socialisation, that is the increasing public (as opposed to state bureaucratic) control of the commanding economic heights.

### • **Centralisation**

Having run one of the most oppressive, centralised regimes, De Klerk now says that he is not in favour of strongly centralised approaches. He even claims to be a champion of local democratic initiative. In fact, De Klerk's policies of privatisation are leading to a more and more centralised economy, not in the hands of the state, but in the hands of two or three giant conglomerates that are grabbing ever more sectors of our economy. It is the SACP and its allies, with our emphasis on mass democratic struggle, on grassroots organs of popular power, together with a strong and effective central government that is elected by the people, that stand for REAL devolution of power. We stand for the devolution of power to the people, not to the conglomerates, not to ethnic minorities, not to the privileged

few.

### • **Multi-party democracy**

De Klerk's NP has been implicated in an effective one-party rule for over 40 years. That is his record. As far as the SACP is concerned we must have an effective multi-party democracy now, in the transition, and in a future socialist South Africa.

### • **Religion**

Finally, De Klerk with all the crimes of apartheid still on his hands (crimes for which we still await a forthright apology) claims that, unlike communists, he upholds the best values of Christianity. The SACP is proud to have in its ranks many Christians and other believers. As communists we stand for a common internationalist brother- and sisterhood, we stand for the poor and oppressed, not for the rich and powerful. There is more in common between Christianity and these core communist values, than the dog eats dog world of the JSE and the IMF that De Klerk upholds.

Yes, De Klerk, you are certainly not guilty of communism. ♪

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# Chris Hani

**The Party's new general secretary speaks on the future of socialism; affirmative action to stamp out sexism; organising in the rural areas; and why he took on his new post**

**C**omrade Chris, do you feel there is still relevance for socialism and the socialist project?

The crisis of socialism cannot spell the end of history. I'm saying this because we've got to go back to the reasons for the emergence of the theories of scientific socialism. These theories emerged out of an in-depth study by Marx and Engels.

And that study was based on an examination of the capitalist system of the modes of production, and the division of a capitalist society into classes, namely the class which owns the means of production, and the other one which sells its labour power.

That is still the position in capitalist countries, we have a class which own the means of production, and we have the workers who only sell their labour power. So as long as that contradiction of social production and private appropriation remains, there'll always be a case for socialism.

**But what went wrong with what we used to call actually-existing socialism?**

I think there are multifold reasons for the crisis and collapse of what we now refer to as bureaucratic socialism.

Firstly, we feel that there were a number of serious violations, both political and economic. Politically, because there was a violation of democracy and an arrogation of power and

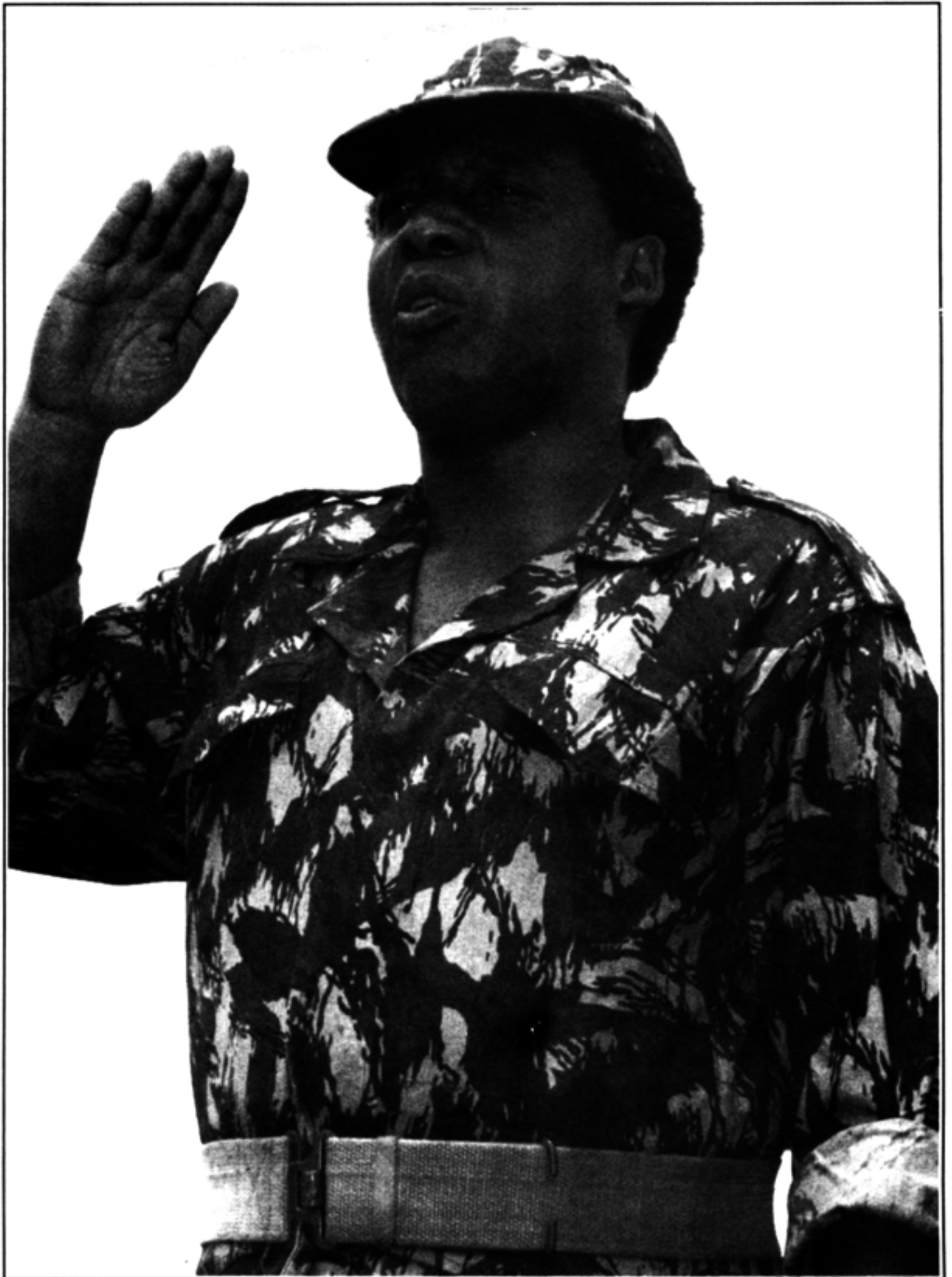
control by the Communist Party. The party became the only political and economic organ in society. All organs of civil society were not functioning effectively.

The party became the government, and generally the organiser and mobiliser of society. The party played a crucial role in the trade union movement, in community organisations, and those who really played a role were the people who were members of the Communist Party. And out of a population of more than 200-million, it generally meant only about 18 to 20-million participated in shaping society.

What came about as a result of imperialist intervention, the civil war, and famine, later became institutionalised. After the defeat of the interventionist forces and the victory in the civil war, the party started entrenching itself as the only organ, and those who disagreed with the party were dealt with in a way that cannot be acceptable in a democratic society.

Also in the field of economic development, a commandist economy emerged. The market forces were completely ignored. We see therefore these reasons as having contributed to the crisis of socialism.

But apart from the problems within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), there were also external forces ... there was the hostility, vehement hostility for that matter, of the capitalist countries. The Soviet Union had to face economic sanctions, and it was really





**Chris Hani inspects an MK guard-of-honour during the army's 30th anniversary celebrations: 'We were**

regarded as a pariah state. It was isolated ... there was a cold war.

**You've painted a fairly bleak picture of the Soviet Union. If one looks at the balance sheet of what was achieved there, are there not perhaps some positive features as well?**

There are certain positive features which we should always focus on. The victory of socialism in the Soviet Union opened up a new era in the struggle of the colonised people. It certainly accelerated the victory of the national liberation movements throughout what we call the third world today.

The Soviet Union assisted by providing both

material and political support to those who were fighting against colonialism.

That was sort of the external contribution of the Soviet Union as the first socialist country.

But secondly we've got to look internally, inside the Soviet Union itself. The socialist state accelerated the social economic upliftment of the people of the Soviet Union. Education was made free and compulsory, and illiteracy was wiped out in a very short historical period. The Soviet state immediately intervened to bring about the social protection of the poor and working people.

The basic commodities used by ordinary people were heavily subsidised so that the



**over-dependent on the Soviet Union'**

prices were within the range of the working people. I'm referring to basic commodities like bread, cereals, as well as the daily needs like rent and electricity. These came within the reach of ordinary people.

As a result, for several decades after the victory of the socialist revolution, the standard of living of the Soviet people rose considerably. For instance they achieved a lot in the field of full employment ... there was no unemployment for a very long time in the Soviet Union, despite the other problems.

Industrialisation was accelerated, and jobs were created for the working people of the Soviet Union. We must also take into consid-

eration how within a short historical period they raised the standard of living of those who lived under the Tsarist empire ... the peoples of Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaidjan, Uzbekistan, etc. These people were literally pulled out of feudalism, and their countries were immediately industrialised and we saw the emergence of a working class. We saw also the wiping out of illiteracy, and the destruction of the power and control of the feudalists in these countries.

It is important to balance the negative and the positive, because a lot of positive things took place as a result of the victory of the socialist revolution.

**Would you say the Soviet Union had an important impact on our struggle in South Africa? Could you evaluate it?**

There's no doubt at all ... the very formation of the South African Communist Party owes a lot to the victory of socialism in the Soviet Union. Of course, the primary tasks were tackled by South African communists, but I think the victory of that revolution quickened the need to form a South African Communist Party.

But in addition, theoretically we owe a lot to the Soviet Union. The theory, for instance, of a native republic — forerunner of colonialism of a special type — equipped us with an important theoretical position in terms of an explanation of our own route both to national liberation and socialism.

Furthermore, many South African communists, especially at a leadership level, benefitted even in that early period by studying political theory at the schools established by the Soviet Communist Party.

In turn this helped the ANC. I think the party here played a role in radicalising the ANC, moving it away from an organisation which at the beginning was really in the hands of petty-bourgeois intellectuals and chiefs into an

organisation which began to embrace into its fold the workers of South Africa was well as the poor.

**Cde Chris you talk about the enormous contribution that the Soviet Union clearly has made to our struggle. But is there not a flip side to that contribution? Could we not say that, on occasions, as South African revolutionaries, we've been over-reliant on this big brother?**

Undoubtedly, there is a flip side. We were very close to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. We as a communist party saw ourselves as an integral part of the international communist movement. And looking back, we are aware of the dominant role played by the CPSU in the whole international communist movement.

The various positions of the international communist movement were generally influenced to a very unacceptable level, now with the wisdom of hindsight, by the CPSU. And in some cases we saw internationalism as meaning the endorsement of positions of the CPSU.

In its ideological dispute with China, we tended to follow the position of the CPSU. When it sent troops into both Hungary and Czechoslovakia, we endorsed those positions. And I think generally we are all agreed as South African communists that it was not the right thing to do.

But coming back to the question of even our own strategy in terms of the South African struggle. In the mid-60s, it was the Soviet Union which was ready to train us militarily.

So our strategic and tactical positions were really shaped by Soviet military theoreticians. And the very fact that the Soviet Union was always willing to supply us with military support reduced our capacity to explore ways and means of acquiring these materials within South Africa. That was certainly our fault, not theirs.

It reduced our capacity to do work within the

security forces inside the country, winning them over to us, and exploring possibilities of getting indigenous weapons, including getting weapons from the security forces. In other words, I think there was a position of over-dependence on this ready-made supply, and we have got to credit the Soviet Union with their being more than willing, because they were always more than willing, to supply us with everything we wanted, including sophisticated weapons.

Hence there was a growing tendency on the part of MK fighters to worship the AK47, and actually to elevate it to a position above any other weapon in the world.

There was a way of belittling the effectiveness and efficacy of western-made rifles, because they had been trained in the use of the AK, they began to worship the AK, and comrades once they got inside the country, they developed a tendency of saying supply us with nothing else but the AK47.

Even our Military Combat Work (MCW) theory was really a duplication or a replica of the experience of the Bolsheviks, and we therefore failed to take that theory and to apply it creatively to our own indigenous conditions.

**Let's turn to capitalism. You've referred to the fact that the need for socialism remains. But some people argue that with welfare states in a number of parts of the world supplying most of the basic needs, the need for socialism is less. Are the conditions of people in capitalist states such that the socialist project doesn't really have much appeal?**

The weakness of the whole debate on the necessity for socialism revolves around the fact that attention has been focussed on the problems of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and thus very little attention is being paid to what is happening in capitalist countries.



**Chris Hanl supporting striking Kentucky workers: 'Capitalism says nothing about the fact that political power and economic decision-making power still remains in the hands of the few'**

... these countries are still facing problems of illiteracy.

Yes, people are speaking of welfare in the capitalist countries. In the first place, that welfare is coming under increasing attack. But secondly, there are more profound issues, like the question of who controls the political and economic processes.

Workers are not just fighting for welfare. They're fighting for a decisive say in both the political and economic processes. Because they don't want a situation where a few should decide what is good for them and what is not good for them. We as communists are fighting for a situation where the workers must have a role in the political and economic decision-making in society.

**Let's turn to South Africa and the SACP. The first question to be asked is: Do we really need an SACP? There's the ANC—the SACP says it has no strategic differences in the short term with the ANC. By having a separate party organisation,**

**aren't we taking valuable comrades away from their organisational tasks within the ANC?**

In responding to that question, one has got to look back into history. Our party is not a product of the recent political processes of this country. We were formed in 1921, and when the party was formed its historical mission was to fight for socialism in South Africa, to fight for the victory of the national liberation revolution. From the very beginning it allied itself with the nationalist movement, the ANC, as

We know, for instance, that a country like Britain is going into its second recession in a very short time, millions of workers are unemployed, and there's no real economic growth. And we know that the working people in that country are facing serious problems.

If we are to move to the US, the same tendencies manifest themselves there. Millions are unemployed, millions without houses. And the plight of especially the black people is alarming. There is the drug problem, illiteracy

well as the trade unions.

This strategy was a product of a careful analysis of the South African situation. We have fought together with the ANC and progressive trade union movement. We feel our presence in this broad alliance has actually strengthened the alliance, and brought about a situation where the interests of the workers and the poor are embraced in the basic programme of the ANC and the trade unions. I think that's a major contribution that we have made.

And I don't think we should feel shy about saying openly that we actually radicalised the ANC. We have moved the ANC from being a narrow nationalist movement championing the interests of a few, to a movement which has embraced the interests of the workers, the oppressed intelligentsia, the black middle class, and I think that is our basic achievement.

Now having gone that far, and having contributed together with the ANC to bring about the present situation of the legalisation of the ANC and the ongoing negotiations process, is there a role for the Party? My answer again is that there is clearly a role for the SACP. We must never forget that the SACP champions the interests of the workers and the poor. Therefore our role has become, in my own view, even more critical. As we see unfolding before our eyes a clear tendency by the National Party government to isolate our Party, it is clear that the major strategic objective of the ruling class is to render the African National Congress weak. And they see the Party standing between the NP and its objective of rendering the ANC weak.

The ANC, despite being a multi-class organisation, must still retain that element which has made it appealing to the majority of our people, namely, the radical element, the element of addressing some, not all, of the aspirations of the working class.

Yes, it's going to be a very big burden on the

part of communists, working within the ANC and also building the Party. But the victory, the ultimate victory of the national liberation movement in this country, depends on the maintenance of this alliance. And once this alliance is tampered with, that will lead to a weakness where the interests of the workers would be sidelined. Already, we can see an offensive by the local capitalists, National Party government, as well as international capital, to weaken this alliance.

So in a nutshell, this is also the time where we should consolidate this alliance. And this alliance cannot work in the old way, a few communists working within the ANC and COSATU to try and strengthen these organisations.

The Party in this country can only be strong if it spends some of its time on building and consolidating itself as an independent entity. We can only become influential if everybody can see we are really independent, we are strong, we've got a presence in regions, we've got branches, and we're beginning to tackle some of the issues that face the workers and the poor in this country.

**Is it valid to say that the Party is actually making an independent input into the alliance?**

The SACP has got an important historical role of bringing into the national liberation movement the aspirations and the problems of the working class. As far as I'm concerned, there's no other political formation which can tackle this important issue.

Some people might say, 'What about COSATU?' COSATU is a revolutionary trade union movement. We must never forget that COSATU played a decisive political role in the past. Because both the ANC and the Party were banned.

But there's a new situation where these two organisations are legal. COSATU is still play-



ing a political role, but COSATU is a trade union movement in whose ranks are workers who have different ideological outlooks—and some of them are not even political at all. They are in COSATU because COSATU is tackling their day-to-day problems around improving working and living conditions.

But the only formation that can really focus on the political and economic problems of the working class is the SACP. And the SACP can actually tackle this issue, because it is ideologically best suited to handle it without a fear that it could cause tension.

Let's accept the fact that there'll always be a struggle within the ANC (not a hostile struggle) for the predominance of the ideas of the various classes within the ANC; there'll always be an attempt to balance these tendencies within the ANC. The ANC has always got to have these tendencies, otherwise it wouldn't be the ANC ... it's a broad national liberation movement.

**Let's turn to the issue of sexism in our organisations. And let's be honest, the SACP is no exception, although it might be a lot better — there is a great deal of sexism in our organisations. Do you agree with that perception — and if so, how do we fight the problem of sexism?**

It is important to be very honest with ourselves. The Party has got a clear position on the issue of affirmative action to uplift women in our society.

But that remains in our documents, and in our programme. We have not made a drive to translate this correct position in terms of our day-to-day practice, in terms of our work, in terms of involvement of women in our struggle, in our programmes, in negotiations, at a number of levels.

If you look, for instance, at the composition of the Central Committee and the Politburo, women are still very few. And if you look at our

delegation and working groups (at CODESA), we can't say we have made a lot of progress in involving women.

The Party, therefore, must lead this process, because I think it is only the Party which can show other organisations, and move the whole question of non-sexism from the field of theory into the field of practicality. And I believe we can do this by intensifying political education, stimulating confidence among our women. And I think we have got to go down to our branches, to our regions. We need actually to monitor the progress. In the reports we receive from the regions there should be a format where we say what are you doing as a region to implement the question of affirmative action? What is the situation within your branches? Are women in leadership positions? What educational programmes do you have? How many women attend these programmes? How are they faring?

And even when you look at branch elections, we've got to ask the question: Why do you have few women in your branch structures?

I feel it is one area the Party leadership should monitor in an attempt to tackle an important issue of the embedded nature of sexism in the whole of South African society.

**How was this issue dealt with in MK?**

Even in MK there were always serious problems. In the first place, there were very few women in MK. So you found a situation where there was a dominating and powerful presence of males.

The women who really made it were those who were very powerful ... those who had the drive.

There was a lot of backwardness among males in MK itself, though they knew that the position of MK and the ANC was for equality of the sexes.

But I always saw a reluctance on the part of the command to give women a chance. Let me give you an example: There was a situation where only women were expected to go and clean the dwellings of the commanders, and although we questioned this, there was no move taken to change this.

So you would get one of the best female comrades who was actually a better soldier than most males, being reduced to the level every morning, before going for training, to come around to clean, polish and wash the uniforms of commanders.

We didn't get real commitment, even on the part of some of the commanders — and some of them were in the Party — in terms of ensuring that there was equality.

That sort of situation even prevails today. There are certain positions and jobs in the national movement which are regarded as jobs for women. And others as jobs for males. In other words, we are inheriting a legacy from the present society, and accepting it as a norm. I believe that as long as we are leaving this issue to women's organisations only, the Women's League and so forth, we are not going to solve it. Because males tend to think, let the Women's League sort out this process. And by so doing, we are even bringing about a situation where there are very few meetings, for instance, between the women in the ANCWL, and the ANC, or the ANCWL and the Party, where there's a discussion on



**Chris Hanl at the Johannesburg District launch in 1991: 'The sort of Party cadre we want is an activist — not the one who just sits on a chair and boasts about his or her Party membership.'**

whether progress is being made.

I'm sure the issue will come sharply in another three years when there's another ANC national conference as to whether we have made progress in terms of uplifting women. And then it's going to be discussed in a sort of emotional atmosphere, whereas we want to begin now. It's not just a question of getting

women in the National Executive, but an overall national programme that goes down to the grassroots.

**In the traditional literature of communism, one reads a lot about the moral qualities required of a communist. In the new phase of the Party's existence, as a legal mass organisation with about 30 000 members, do you think it's as important as before to maintain these moral qualities? And what is the duty of the Party, and the Party leadership in particular, to try and maintain this?**

We've got to maintain those moral qualities, but in a different way. As a small group working in the underground, MK and the mass movement, we evolved basic guidelines. I remember the leadership, from time to time, had to issue guidelines to Party units directing them on how to handle problems in the mass movement, in the underground, and in the army.

Party comrades were supposed to be the most disciplined, to be more ready than anybody else to accept the need for sacrifice, to be punctual and to be accountable. There were also strong rules in recruiting. You had to undergo probation before you were accepted in the Party, and the Party leadership had to be unanimous. If there was a single individual saying so-and-so is not suitable, he or she was not recruited. This is just an example of the strict measures that were taken before anyone was accepted in the Party. The Party was also very strict against those who violated basic norms of Party membership.

Now we are building a Party under different conditions and circumstances, a legal Party which is growing very rapidly and which has a membership of 30 000.

Can we use the same old norms that were applicable during the days of illegality? I said earlier that those high moral standards are still important. But I think we can bring them about through systematic political education —

through inspiring our people to uphold the need to be exemplary, to be self-sacrificing, not to hanker after vulgar bourgeois values like accumulation of money, accumulation of property and that sort of thing.

And to be ever-ready to be seen to be serving the interests of the working class — ready, for instance, to go out and mobilise the people, to participate in branch and unit meetings, as well as going out on demonstrations, in picket lines, and generally the whole question of honesty in building the Party, the ANC and COSATU. In other words, the sort of Party cadre we want, despite the fact that we are a big party, is an activist — not the one who just sits on his or her chair and boasts about Party membership. We want somebody who is involved totally in the struggle to transform our society.

**One of the flip sides of people taking seriously being a member of the Party is that you sometimes find an elitist attitude towards the ANC. Some people are members of the Party, but not of the ANC. Do you have a message for those members of the Party?**

That tendency is growing. I've heard reports that, in some areas people would rather join the Party than the ANC.

But I think Party elitism is a dangerous tendency and I believe the Party must step in to stop it. And it can reduce it considerably by again embarking on political education and showing our people why it is necessary to be active and ardent workers within the ANC.

They must realise the need for a successful national democratic revolution led by the ANC. And if the ANC is weak, then the ANC won't be able to achieve that objective.

In our programme, as communists, we attach a lot of importance to the successful outcome of the national democratic revolution, building a state of national democracy.

So that programme, although it's an ANC

programme, is a programme we support totally. Although our constitution doesn't say you should become a member of the ANC before you become a member of the Party, through education we must show the political correctness of our comrades joining the ANC and being part of finding a solution to any problems within the ANC. Those are also our problems, not just the problems of the ANC.

We appeal to communists, rather than pointing an accusing finger at the ANC, to feel that the weaknesses of the ANC are weaknesses of the Party, of all of us. The ANC is ours, it's a movement we are building as the Party, along with others, and therefore I think the SACP would never accept a position where communists tend to seek refuge in the Party whenever there are problems in the ANC, instead of going into the ANC and, in a democratic way, trying to solve these problems.

**The SACP is basically a party of the working class. But nearly half the people of South Africa don't live in the urban areas, don't work in factories. Millions of our people live in the rural areas. Is there anything the SACP is doing in regard to the rural areas?**

Our Party is growing very rapidly in the rural areas, especially those of the Border region, the Transkei and Ciskei. We've got thousands of communists there. We're beginning to spread in other rural parts of the country — Northern Transvaal and Eastern Transvaal, for example.

There are millions of our people who are not industrial workers, but who are oppressed and poor, and we say in our programme that we are a party of the working class and of the poor.

So we've got to pay a lot of attention to the people in the rural areas. Politically, we've got to mobilise those people to be part of the struggle for a democratic South Africa.

As communists, we want a democratic South Africa to address the problems of poverty and

unemployment. Problems which affect the rural population.

Again as a party of scientific socialism, as a Marxist-Leninist party, we are against feudalism. And we know that feudal structures still exist in the rural areas. You find, apart from corrupt bantustan administrations, the institution of chieftainship — an institution which is not democratic, and which over the years has been collaborating in the oppression of the rural poor.

So, as we build the Party, as we enter into negotiations, we cannot marginalise the rural areas. We've got to mobilise the rural people for democracy — and that implies the democratisation of the rural areas. We've got to ensure that there are democratic structures in the rural areas, not only now but in future. And acknowledge that though, as a Party, we say we acknowledge the institution of chieftainship or traditional leaders, that institution of traditional leaders can no longer exist in the old way. It has got to work closely with the democratic structures in the rural areas.

We cannot accept a situation where chiefs have got vetoing powers over the democratic decision of the majority of the people. Chiefs could be seen as ex-officio members of such democratic structures, even chairing, but without having the powers of veto.

We must begin to address a dangerous tendency within the broad national liberation movement where we just in a vague way say we shall respect the institution of traditional leaders without examining the implications in terms of more democratic values.

If we speak about democracy, this democracy must extend to all parts of our country, including the rural areas. Gone should be the days when chiefs would unilaterally impose their views on poor people, or call on poor people to contribute towards buying a car, or towards the wedding of a chief. The people had

no choice but to agree, because they assumed chiefs have got divine rights to do these things.

We as a Party must educate our people there, mobilise them, put them on par with the people in the urban areas. In the urban areas we are calling for the creation of vibrant organs of civil society. Those organs of civil society should be extended to all the parts of South Africa.

**Comrade Chris, some people think you are a bit 'unhinged' to have taken the job as general secretary of the Communist Party. Do you think you have moved from a high position in a 'government in waiting' to something that is actually a going concern?**

Let me answer you in the following manner: We are involved in a struggle. That struggle has got its own objectives: a democratic South Africa which is non-racial, united, and non-sexist.

In that struggle we have always identified the central role of the oppressed and democratic forces in this country. We have always felt the need to mobilise the people to bring about that democratic South Africa.

We played this role in the ANC, in MK, and in the mass democratic movement.

Now, the ANC, the SACP and other organisations have been unbanned. Most communists continue to play an important and leading role within the ANC, and everyone expects the ANC to be the next government.

If you take the experience of other countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the prospect of being in government means an elevation of

status of those in the leadership echelons of that movement. In other words, people expect to be ministers, prime ministers, presidents, generals in the army and so on.

Some people have said, for instance, that had I remained in the ANC I would be amongst those who would be in the next government of this country.

But you see, let us raise the issue — which is basic as far as I'm concerned — the material improvement of the conditions of millions of poor people in this country; the workers and the rural masses. And in my view, a new South Africa would be meaningless if the problems of the millions of poor people were not tackled.

So when I was approached to stand for the position of general secretary of the SACP, for me this was actually a challenge, a challenge of belonging to a party that must link up with the day to day struggles of the people at a number of levels.

The perks of a new government are not really appealing to me. Everybody, of course, would like to have a good job, a good salary, and that sort of thing.

But for me, that is not the be-all of a struggle. What is important is the continuation of the struggle — and we must accept that the struggle is always continuing — under different conditions, whether within parliament, or outside parliament, we shall begin to tackle the real problems of the country. And the real problems of the country are not one is in in the cabinet, or a key minister, but what we do for the social upliftment of the working masses of our country. ♪

## They said it

**"Everybody is in favour of the market but nobody knows what it is" - Alexander Savchenko, a 33-year old Ukrainian economist who spent a hurried year at Harvard University and has now been given the post of deputy director of the new Ukrainian National Bank.**

# Political Report

**Party chairperson JOE SLOVO's report to the 8th Party Congress, held near Soweto in December 1991**

**Y**our presence here representing 23 000 communists is living proof that in our country the vision of socialism is alive and well. We have emerged from 70 years of repression, including 40 years of illegality, stronger than we have ever been. The red flag which you proudly hold aloft has been passed on to you by generations of communists whose record of struggle and sacrifice is unequalled in our country's history.

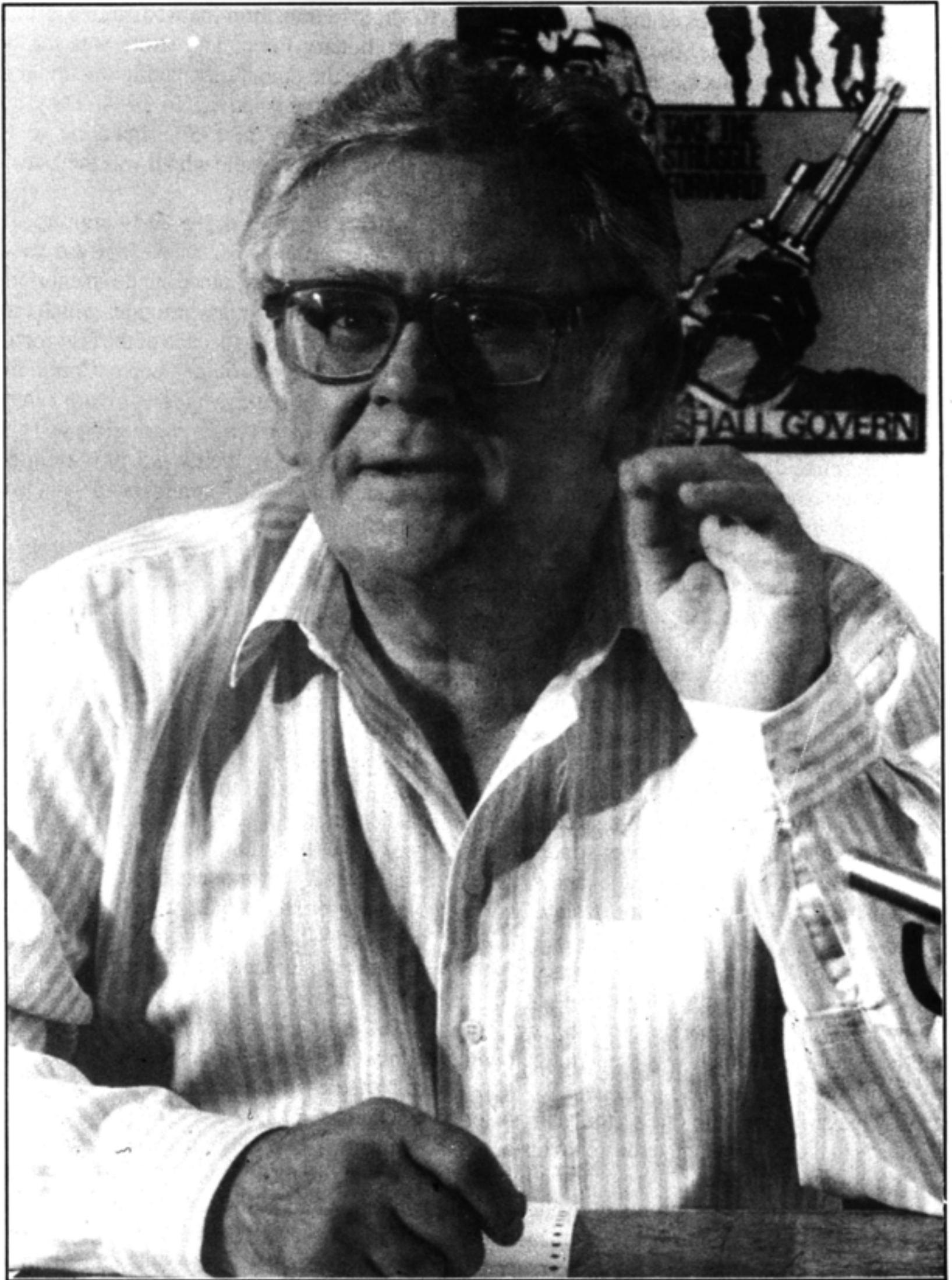
Each of the seven decades of our Party's life is punctuated with dedication, personal sacrifice and a unique contribution to the cause of liberation and social emancipation.

Born in 1921 from the militant sector of the white labour movement, the party was swiftly Africanised. It was during this decade that we pioneered the first truly non-racial political organisation in our country, a position we held for 65 years. It was also during this decade that our party was the first in our country's history to come out boldly with a demand for majority rule even before the liberation movements.

We laid the very foundations of political democracy and non-racialism in our land. And it is this achievement which helped establish our party not only as a party of socialism but also as one of the key sectors of the national liberation struggle. It was also during this period that some of the greatest figures of both the party and the ANC - such as Moses Kotane and JB Marks - began their political life.

The thirties opened for us with the murder by police bullets of our general secretary, Johannes Nkosi, at the head of an anti-pass demonstration in Durban. We responded to the rise of Hitler fascism and its local supporters by working ceaselessly to create a broad united front against this scourge. Our internationalism was also demonstrated when, in 1936, communists answered the call to join the international brigade in Spain against the Franco dictatorship. In the late 1930s Yusuf Dadoo - undoubtedly the greatest South African figure of the modern-day Indian resistance movement - found his home in the party. In the years that followed he was to play a seminal role in cementing the unity in action of all the black oppressed groups. The notorious 1936 Land Act found communists among those in the forefront of the struggle.

The world scale battles against fascism and for democracy in the first part of the forties once again attracted a group of white militants to our party despite the preceding period of harassment and persecution against us by the white regime. Among the great figures who left their mark on our history were comrades like Michael Harmel, Lionel Bernstein, Ruth First, Jack Hodgson and Bram Fischer. Some of them, on the instructions of the party, joined the army and took part in the battles against the Italian invasion of Africa and the Nazi hordes in Europe. They played a pivotal role in the



formation and activities of the grassroots soldiers' movement in the South African Defence Force - the Springbok Legion.

Bram Fisher, like Eddie Roux before him, stands out as a shining example of the democratic spirit which fired the few Afrikaners who had the courage to break with white supremacy. For this he was vilified and hated even more than black communists. But to the end of his life he stood his ground. He had the talent to reach high judicial office. But he died in jail serving life imprisonment as leader of our party's underground. In the last few days of his life he was transferred to his family home in the Free State which was declared a prison. And when he died the prison authorities confiscated his ashes which they still hold. I use this opportunity to raise a cry here and now to demand the return of these imprisoned ashes so that they can be scattered on our land in honour of one of the greatest sons of our soil.

The drive to build black trade union organisation received a new impetus in the 40s. There is no political force in this country which has done as much as our party to pioneer black industrial unionism during the many decades when black trade unions were dealt with by the bosses and the regime as an illegal conspiracy. Communist trade union giants straddled this period, among them Ray Alexander, Gana Makabeni, HA Naidoo, Leslie Masina, George Peake, and a host of others. The great 1946 miners strike was led by JB Marks and was sustained for many days in the face of police bullets with the support of our party's collective leadership which was then charged with sedition.

This strike became one of the main watersheds in the political and trade union history of our country; it was the biggest single inspiration to the emerging group of ANC Youth League radicals - among them Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu - in their success-

ful drive to transform the ANC into a militant revolutionary force. The strike was the last straw for the communist-hating apartheid regime which took power in 1948. They outlawed our party in 1950, signalling to the majority of our people who it was they saw as their principal enemy.

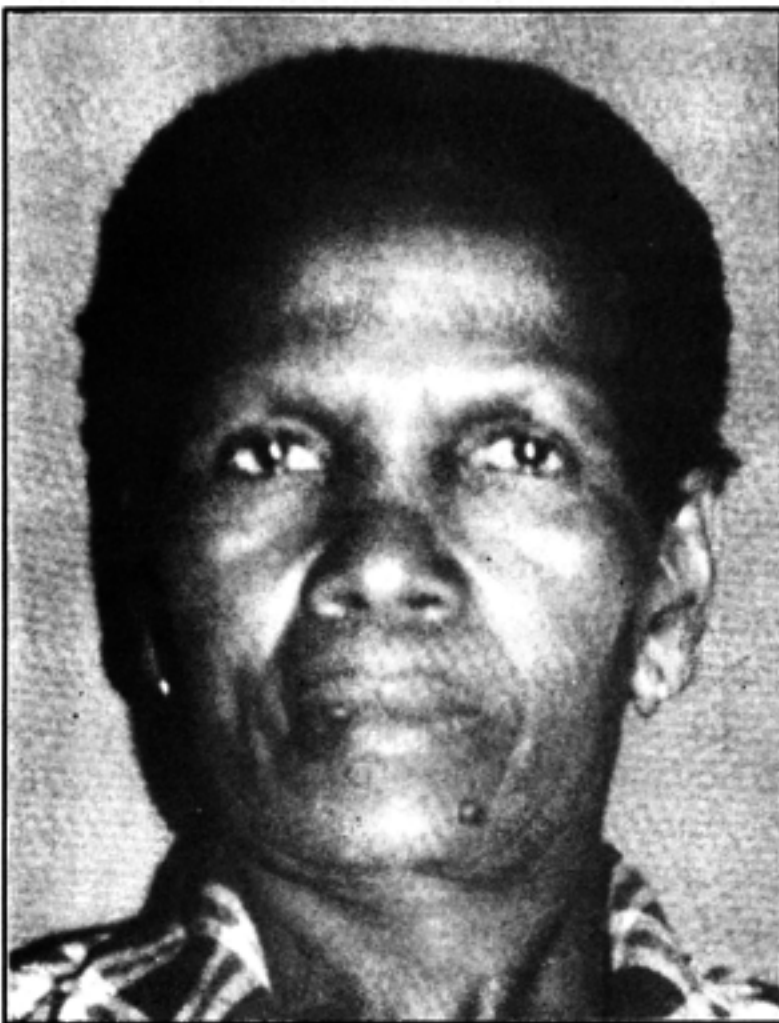
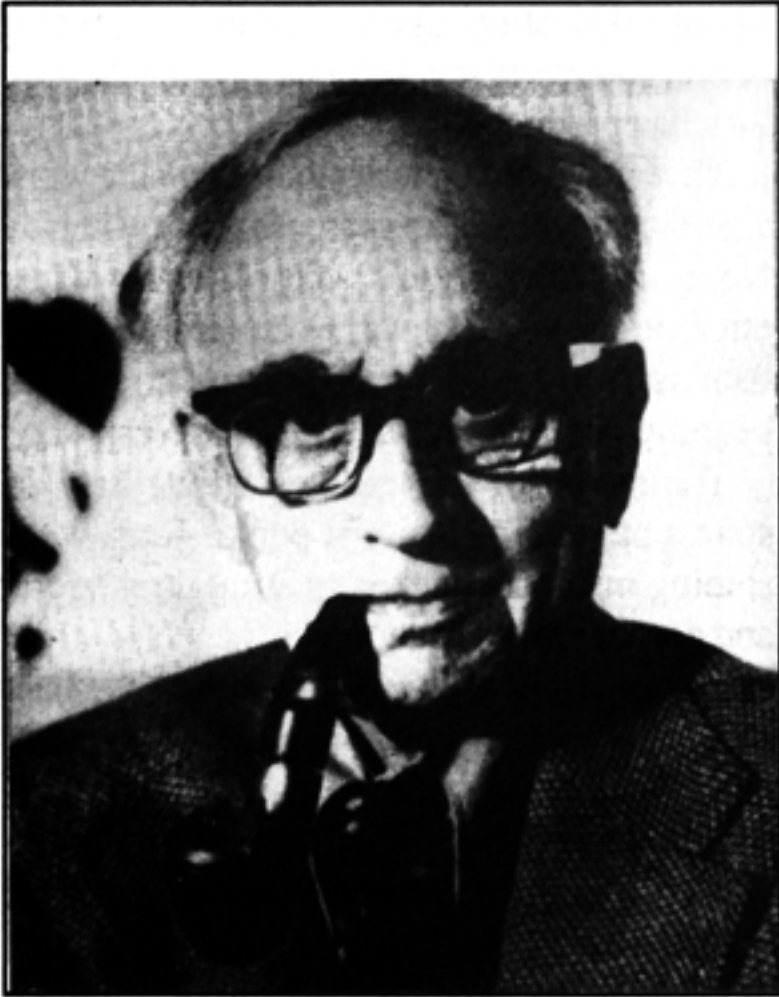
After a short break the Party regrouped in the underground and, as part of the newly formed Congress Alliance, made an enormous contribution to the mass struggles which escalated throughout the decade of the 50s, including in the Congress of the People. Communist women like Florence Matomela, Dora Tamana and Josie Mpama were among those in the forefront of the women's anti-pass struggles. Ironically, the dual membership which the regime most complains about was given a major spurt by the banning of the party. The regime left only one way open for the public political activities of communists, and that was through the legal mass organisations including the ANC.

The banning of the ANC itself in 1960 signalled the culmination of a period in which all avenues for legal struggle were being firmly closed. The party and the ANC took up the challenge. By a joint decision in 1961 our people's liberation army, Umkhonto we Sizwe, was created. The organised party underground played one of the primary roles in the sabotage campaign which followed and numerous party members volunteered for guerrilla training in exile.

In the 30 years which followed hundreds of communists were among those who returned to do battle with the enemy. Scores were killed in combat, many were hanged or tortured to death in police cells, and others spent their youth in imprisonment. We pay homage to all who died and sacrificed in the cause of freedom.

Those outside who were forced to live





**Fallen Party heroes: Yusuf Dadoo  
and Dora Tamana**

through the long night of exile regrouped and worked to re-establish the underground. They spread the message of resistance from the Party and the liberation movement, and helped lay the foundation in the seventies and eighties of the renewed mass organisations and black trade unions. And, not least of all, our Party continued to make a most important ideological contribution to the unfolding strategy and tactics of our complex struggle.

The sketch I have drawn of the high points of our party's life, is not just an exercise in self-congratulation. It explains why we are so deeply rooted in our soil and why our party and its vision of socialism occupies such an important place in the hearts and minds of our working people.

De Klerk says we are dying and that we cling to the ANC like a parasite. This is little more than a hopeful cry. Our people know who the parasites are and which system is dying. We will certainly outlive the decadent National Party. This is their nightmare.

And as much as it may make their hearts bleed, our alliance with the ANC remains firmly in place. It was born in struggle and common sacrifice and is based on the complete independence and integrity of each organisation. It is these reasons which influenced the 2,000 delegates at the last ANC congress to give well known communists a most generous share at the top of the poll for ANC leadership.

De Klerk warns the ANC that the Alliance with our party is undermining its reputation. His sudden concern for the good reputation of his main political enemy can only make us laugh. On the contrary, what really concerns him is the fact that the reputation of the ANC among the black oppressed is heightened by the Alliance. In any case, he must keep his nose out of our business. The time is past when we need advice or permission from the white regime to choose our friends. We don't tell him

who to embrace as allies.

There are whispers from some quarters, including leaders of the National Party, that we should follow some East European parties and at least change our name. If there is any name which stinks in the nostrils of the overwhelming majority of our people, it is the National Party. True, there are certain negative aspects of our past which we need to wipe clean. But on balance we can carry our name with pride. For most of our working people the name South African Communist Party is a name of honour. And we will move confidently into a future of socialism under its banner.

### **Supporters of capitalism**

But the supporters of capitalism say that we are wasting our time. They tell us that it is the end of history. According to them, the world is doomed forever to the exploitation of labour; a world peopled by a small group of haves and an overwhelming mass of underprivileged have nots. They endlessly raise their champagne glasses to celebrate the funeral of socialism.

We say loud and clear that history has not ended; it will find a way of giving the lie to their forecasts. The corpse they are trying to bury is not true socialism. It was weakened and succumbed through self-inflicted wounds. It succumbed because it was drained of the very lifeblood of socialism which is based on real participatory and economic democracy. Those who drained it of this lifeblood have justly paid the price.

It is saddening that some of those in the Soviet Union who helped diagnose the disease have now allowed themselves to be pushed into a treatment which addresses the disease by killing the patient. Gorbachev himself has completely lost his way. He responded to the attempted coup by hardline Stalinists by a Stalinist decree to dissolve the Party, as if it were his personal property. He is colluding in the cho-

rus of vilification against Lenin, the greatest Soviet and world revolutionary which this century has produced.

The ten days of October that shook the world are being treated like a shameful family legacy. November 7th was this year officially wiped out from Soviet history. Even simple patriotism is being sold in an attempt to fill the begging bowl of charity from the West.

The record of Soviet internationalism, despite a number of Stalinist perversions, was a shining inspiration to every struggling people and gave it a moral standing in the world which no other nation enjoyed. This, too, has been completely sacrificed on the altar of a so-called new world order. And nowhere is this more evident today than in the indecent haste with which the new Soviet establishment is rushing to make friends with racist Pretoria.

All in all, the Soviet people are beginning to experience the difference between capitalism of the glossy magazines and the real thing. I say loud and clear on your behalf that the mass of the Soviet people will, at the end of the day, not allow the new breed of power-seeking bureaucrats to undo some of the positive advances and achievements of October. And they and all harassed genuine communists can count on our solidarity.

We remain absolutely convinced that, despite some of the horrors of Stalinism, it is socialism and only socialism which can, in the end, assure every individual and humanity as a whole of freedom in its true meaning.

The wretched of this earth make up over 90% of humanity. They live either in capitalist or capitalist-oriented societies. For them if socialism is not the answer, there is no answer at all. And that is not the way humanity works; in the end it moves inexorably towards an answer. History has not ended and will not end. Indeed, we are confident that the mass of the world's population which has been treated as a

pawn of history will truly re-enter it and use its power to mould a new just society which will serve people and not merely profit.

This vision is not based only on a declaration of faith. It is a vision which pre-dates Marx and which animated humanists and all that is best in the ethic of the great religions from the beginning of time. And today it is a vision which is inspired by the realities of the world we live in, a response to the miseries, inequalities and poverty which we are asked to accept as an eternal and irreversible fact of human existence.

We are accused of being utopians. We are asked to believe that the private profit motive, greed and inequality is so deeply ingrained in the very nature of humankind that no society can function without it. They see the whole of humanity in their own image. They ignore the historical truism that the morality which they proclaim to be eternal is no more than an historical product of their economic system and the superstructure which sustains it.

One thing in which capitalism excels is the big sell. And the main thrust of this massive ideological salemanship is centred on the claim that capitalism works and that socialism has failed. The measuring rod for this claim is that, in its main citadels, capitalism has undoubtedly proved its capacity to make dramatic technological innovations and to produce an abundance of goods and services; a capacity which, by the way, Marxism has never disputed.

If a system's capacity to make dramatic advances in the rate of growth is the sole test, they should have few problems with the Soviet Union under Stalin. Between 1928-1937 when capitalism was flat on its back Soviet industrial growth averaged more than 12% and, according to CIA estimates, was 9.3% during the 50s, more than twice the rate in the US over the same period. Coming closer to home, the pe-

riod of the height of apartheid repression between 1960 and 1975 recorded an average growth rate of 6%. We know the price. We know who benefited. We know the South Africa that was created during these sordid years.

So let us look at the world that has been created by 500 years of capitalism. Let us look also at the ravages wrought by this system to our African continent. And let us look at the capitalist roots of the racial miseries of our own country, South Africa. The real question is not whether a system works, but for whom it works.

### **Inequities**

Even in its main citadels the abundance of wealth of which it boasts cannot hide the glaring inequities of the system for millions upon millions of its citizens. In the US close to 36 million of the population live below the poverty line. Over 16 million are unemployed or under-employed. 24 million Americans need government assistance to eat. Hourly wages are below the level of 1973 (*Citizen* 25/11/91). A visit to New York or any other major city will find thousands sleeping in subways and parks because they have no homes. It is a country in which it becomes a nightmare to become ill because of the free market in medicine. Even in resource-deprived Havana the infant mortality rate is lower than in the capital city of world capitalism - Washington.

Over 120 years after the abolition of slavery the black population of the US occupies the bottom rung of the economic ladder. If this is what we are offered as the end of history and as an ideal which humanity must aim for, then I say on your behalf thank you very much, but no thanks.

The US crows that it is the defender of the so-called free world and the protector of human rights. In this year's State of the Union message President Bush told Americans to "prepare for the next American century", and

claimed that "among the nations of the world, only the United States of America has both the moral standing and the means to back it up ..." They have certainly shown that they have the means to back it up.

But what moral standing has a country got which has used its armed might to invade so many sovereign territories and in support of every bandit movement and every tyranny in every part of the world so long as it has turned its face against socialism. If the 21st century is to become, in the words of Bush, the "American century" then the future of humanity is indeed bleak. Erstwhile communist leaders should stop talking so glowingly about this type of new world order which will indeed usher in the "American century". Let us work to make it the century of the common man and woman.

And the common man and woman in our world has no illusions about the ravages of capitalism. Three-and-a-half billion people - three quarters of all humanity - live in what is called the South and neither they nor their children can look forward to the glitter of consumerism which benefits mainly the middle and upper strata of the industrial north. This divide, with its historical roots in 500 years of colonial plunder, has effectively deprived the South of real economic sovereignty.

### **Cabal**

At the end of the day the whole world economy is managed by a self-appointed cabal made up of the seven leading industrial nations, known as the Group of Seven. This group produces a minute proportion of the world's primary commodities. Yet, through their financial institutions and the terrible power of their transnational corporations, they ensure cheap access to these commodities. The unequal terms of trade between North and South and the manipulation of the South's debt burden has effectively mort-

gaged the economies of the developing world to the North's technological, industrial and financial machine.

Our continent of Africa is undoubtedly the world's most tragic victim of this world capitalist order. In the continent as a whole average living standards fell by 20% during the decade of the 80s. Exploiting our continent's desperate economic plight, the North's financial institutions peddle their philosophy of the so-called free market and their formula of structural readjustment.

For Africa's agricultural producers the free market is a cynical myth. It was the third world which unsuccessfully argued for free trade in agricultural products at the 1946 assembly of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT). Today the third world is virtually unable to compete with the North because export subsidies by the US and the EEC enable them to dump primary agricultural products on the world market below the costs of production. This fraudulent evasion of the so-called free market principle in world trade has helped ruin African agriculture.

Reduced to dire poverty, third world countries are forced to plead for aid. The condition for this aid is drastic structural adjustment programmes enforced by the IMF and World Bank. These include cuts in wages, cuts in social spending, cuts in educational programmes and cuts in subsidies for staple food including maize and bread. The message to the South is clear: you have been committing economic crimes in your welfare projects and if you do not stop our charity will end. However much they give of this so-called charity, it can never compensate for what they sucked out of the South to lay the foundations of their accumulated wealth.

But there is no doubt method in this madness. It is designed to at least plant the seeds of a society in the image of capitalism; a society

which gives second place to the mass of its people and which showers its benefits on an elite of aspirant entrepreneurs. It is in effect a programme based on a redistribution of resources away from the deprived and in the direction of the internationally-connected middle strata who stand to benefit from the so-called free market. Food riots and other popular forms of resistance to these programmes provide the excuse for tyrannical measures and for an all-round assault on human rights.

In South Africa the historical link between capitalism and poverty is nowhere more apparent and more disgraceful. At the height of apartheid from 1950 to 1970 the economic system made it possible for foreign capital in South Africa to attract a 21% rate of return - three times higher than that of the advanced industrial countries. We are asked to believe that economic growth necessarily brings jobs, that an increase in profits necessarily means a better life for all South Africans. This has certainly not been our experience. For example, during 1990 the 100 JSE-listed companies increased dividends by 21.3%. Employ-

ment in these companies grew by only 0.1% (LRS Survey, *Weekly Mail* 1/3/91).

The system of apartheid, which the world described as a crime against humanity, was not just a post-1948 invention. Its foundations were laid and built upon from the moment, more than a century ago, when they began to accumulate their fabulous riches on the backs of cheap black labour. Who was it if not the mining houses who campaigned remorselessly for pass laws, ghettos, military-style compounds, the perpetuation of the reserve system, etc., etc? The answer is there in black and white in the submissions of the mining houses to every government economic commission from the beginning of the century. And they achieved their purpose. The real wage of a black miner in 1948 was exactly the same as it was in 1911.

Now when you accuse them of these crimes, you hear them say, as Mr Ogilvie Thompson told *Die Burger* (12/4/90) that "inequality ought to be blamed on the selfish system of apartheid" and that "the legacy of inequality is not a function of capitalism".

No, gentlemen, when we point a finger at

you don't look over your shoulder. You will find the true answer by taking a good look in the mirror. This is the time for straight talking. We will not allow the new political culture of dialogue to inhibit the truth about the past. If they can't even admit where they have come from, what trust can we place in their promises about where they are going?

It is crystal clear that it is capitalism which has failed and brought untold miseries to our people. It is this indisputable fact which, despite socialist distortions elsewhere, unravels the mystery as to why there is such a



groundswell of support among our working people for a future of socialism. And this explains the unique popularity of our party in a world in which so many other workers' movements have suffered decline in the aftermath of East European failures.

Comrade delegates,

Our agenda is clear and we do not hide it. As an independent party of democratic socialism we view the post-apartheid period as a period in which conditions must be created and people mobilised further in support of the socialist perspective. We see this as a process within the framework of a multi-party, non-racial democracy. Socialism cannot be won by proclamation or through the capture of power by militant minorities. It must be won in ideological and political contest in which the urban workers seek allies, more especially from the rural millions, and sections of the middle strata.

At the same time the path towards our strategic objective takes into account the realities of the transformation process. History has taught that there is no Chinese wall between social systems. Even the political victory of socialist-oriented forces is merely a starting point; it does not in itself put in place a new economic system. The day after a political change, the economic system is exactly the same as it was the day before. Experience has confirmed that any attempt to ignore this reality by proclamation and edict, and by so-called big leaps forward, leads to economic chaos and discredits the socialist perspective even in the eyes of the working people.

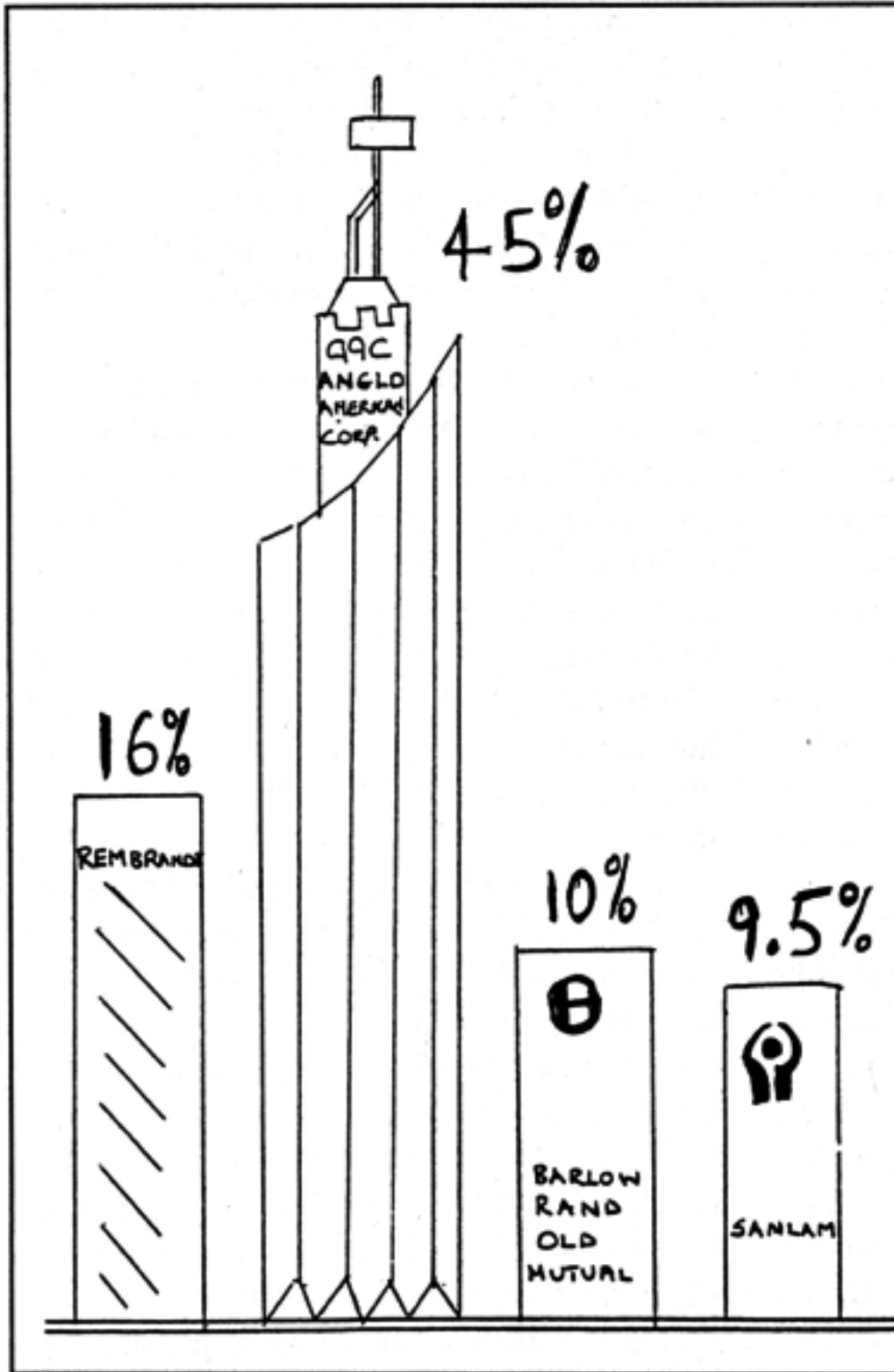
At the moment, as spelt out in the draft programme and draft constitution, the immediate content of our revolution is centred on the process of the eradication of national domination and the achievement of a national democratic transformation. This does not mean that we postpone the spread of socialist ideas; it means that we are taking the shortest and the

only possible road to socialism, the road of a non-racial, non-sexist, united and democratic South Africa.

The battle about the economic shape of this new South Africa is growing sharper by the day between two main and distinct contending camps. On the one side, those who have inherited all the main heights of political and economic power tie their flag to the so-called free market; a market undisturbed by state regulation which will, in practice, safeguard most of their race accumulated economic privileges. They pay lip service to correcting race imbalances. But all mention of affirmative action, land and wealth redistribution, the break-up of monopolies and state involvement in the production and provision of basic human needs, are dismissed as economic treason.

We have seen enough of their practice to know that untrammelled private capital goes to the market for one thing, and one thing only, and that is maximum private profit. In an unguarded moment the mouthpiece of big business - *Business Day*, 13/11/91 - let the cat out of the bag: "Business is in the business of making profits. Its responsibilities should not include helping to contain inflation or getting governments out of embarrassing corners. There is no duty, legal or moral, to forsake an opportunity or to lower prices when tax systems change". American English would have a neat way of putting it: Making a quick buck is the beginning and end of our morality and social obligation.

The free market they talk about gears itself automatically to consumers with the greatest purchasing power. Indeed, what kind of free market exists in our country when 80% of the stocks on the JSE are controlled by merely four giant corporations. We know from bitter experience that capital gives as little to the social fund as it can get away with legally and, often, illegally. That is why tax evasion has devel-



**80% of the stocks on the JSE are controlled by four giant corporations**

oped into a major and respectable industry.

We accept that the market is an effective watchdog over economic efficiency and viability, and that its absence in socialist economies contributed to their ruination. But left to itself as the sole mechanism for distributing the social surplus, it is a social disaster. In any case, in the way in which it is presented both internationally and domestically, it is a myth. State power, in its various forms, has been used in

every part of the capitalist world to direct the economy in the main in the interests of the large corporations. In our own country the very people in authority who extol the virtues of the unregulated free market, used every possible state device to upgrade and uplift their own disadvantaged people, including sheltered employment and massive land handouts based on black dispossession. Now with majority power looming they engage in privatisation and other devices in order to prevent the boot from being worn on the other foot.

For the majority of South Africa's people, liberation has little meaning without disturbing the existing racial access to, and distribution of, wealth and resources. It has been correctly put in Nafcoc's business charter: "All South Africans have the right of access to the wealth of the country and to secure democratic control over their economic destiny".

We are warned by Judge Olivier's Law Commission against the "misuse of affirmative action in an attempt to justify redistribution of minerals, land and other assets". All we need, they say, is

"equal opportunities for all". How many generations will it take to create equal opportunities if the process is left to the operation of so-called free market forces? Four million blacks were removed from the land in the last 30 years as part of the process of redistributing wealth to whites by affirmative action. What equal opportunities are offered so that they can regain their status? Of the 2,885 top income categories in the central state departments and prov-

inces, only 14 are black. Without affirmative action the state administration will remain totally in the hands of the dominant group for generations to come.

What flows from all this is that the transformation we seek cannot be brought about without a considerable degree of state intervention and, therefore, the existence of a public sector. And the private sector must be tamed to the needs of the people. This does not imply across the board nationalisation. Where state involvement is considered necessary for effective social planning it can take a multitude of forms from fiscal policies, to joint projects with the private sector, to state-owned enterprises, to affirmative action and, certainly direct state involvement to ensure the provision of public utilities and social services. We reject old-style statism and commandist bureaucratic control. Our draft constitution commits us to respect and protect all personal non-exploitative property and such other private property as may be necessary for effective economic development and growth.

This is the broad vision of our liberation alliance for the immediate shape of the post apartheid mixed economy. But we give notice that we, as an independent party of socialism, will exert every political effort to orientate this mixed economy in a socialist direction. This must imply a steadily growing socialisation of the economy involving the independent participation in economic life of social organisations and the people as a whole, in their capacity as producers, consumers and owners. I am sure that we will emerge from this congress better equipped than ever before to spread the message of an ultimate socialist future.

### **Draft constitution**

Comrade delegates, the draft constitution which is before you, with whatever amendments you consider necessary, will become the internal

law of our party. It attempts to provide guidelines on our political and organisational thrust in the period ahead. These guidelines are inspired by three inter-connected factors; our broad theoretical principles, the way some of them were distorted in actual practice both here and elsewhere, and our own indigenous realities. Let me briefly elaborate.

Marxism is a living body of thought. It is neither a catechism nor a do-it-yourself kit. It is no more than an analytical tool. Like any other tool, it must be used with skill and imagination by those who wield it. Like any other tool, it must be continually refined and developed, keeping pace with the fabric of changing social realities. It must address situations which could not have been addressed by the founders of Marxism because those situations did not exist in their time.

At the risk of being labelled a heretic or revisionist, I go even further. If the experience of revolutionary practice has put in question the validity of some of the original formulations, then we must have the courage to examine them. It is un-Marxist to replace thought with dogma. We are dealing with great thinkers and not infallible gods. We must remember Lenin's warning to the students of the University of the East. He told them that they will not find the answers to their unique problems in any communist book. Indeed, you will not find our own thesis of colonialism of a special type in any communist book.

For all these reasons our draft constitution insists that we are guided by those principles of Marxism which have proven universal validity by historical experience and that we are primarily concerned with the indigenous elaboration and application of the principles of Marxism to the concrete realities of our own developing situation.

In addition, when talking about Marxism we should remember that Marx did not suck his



theories out of his thumb. His philosophical, economic and social theories were in many important respects developed from intellectual giants such as the economist Ricardo and the philosopher Hegel who preceded him. Indeed, Marx's theory of dialectical materialism owed an enormous amount to the idealist Hegel. Lenin's major work on imperialism drew extensively on the work by the non-socialist, Hobson.

This point needs emphasis because we have too often in the past closed our minds to the researchers and writings of thinkers who do not completely tie their flag to our ideology. And even the works of those who support the socialist alternative have, too often in the past, been contemptuously dismissed without study merely because they differed in some respects with the established communist parties. This, too, has been an un-Marxist approach. Marxism, as a living body of thought, requires, among other things, that it be enriched with the positive creativity of social thinkers even if they don't hold a party card.

Comrades, the draft constitution says that we seek to be the leading political force of the South African working class. There is only one acceptable route towards winning a position as vanguard and that is by democratic means and in the ideological contest with other political parties. We have no natural right to lead the working class or society as a whole by mere proclamation.

Those who claimed such a right and attempted to entrench it by law and in the state constitution found, in the end, that the very working class whose so-called vanguard they claimed to be, joined with the rest of society to reject them. The socialist project must, of course, be based on political power. But in the words of Lenin: "To become a power the class conscious workers must win the majority to their side. As long as no violence is used

against the people, there is no other road to power".

This leads us in a straight line to the question of democracy and democratic socialism, more particularly the question of the single party state. Our draft constitution ties us to a multi-party political framework in which there will be regular open and free elections. It also commits us to a social order which will respect completely the culture, language and religious rights of all sections of our society, and the democratic rights of the individual.

### **Democratic socialism**

Comrades may ask why we have to talk of democratic socialism when we are convinced that democracy, in its true meaning, despite previous distortions, is fully covered by the word socialism itself. There is also a suspicion that we are getting too close to bourgeois democracy in whose name so many crimes have been committed against humanity.

I respect the concern that harping on democratic socialism might sound too defensive and might signal the beginning of watering down principles for purely tactical reasons. But it is precisely because socialism was increasingly separated from its democratic content in the formerly existing socialist countries, that we need to give special emphasis to the word democratic. We must not forget that we are not just talking to ourselves. We are talking to our people as a whole. Some of them are genuinely questioning whether, in the light of East European practices, socialism can ensure real democracy, and whether we, as earlier supporters of these practices, can be trusted to respect real democracy. These are the legitimate concerns of quite a few militants who are committed to a socialist vision.

We, of course, know that there are historical moments when all avenues to democratic change are closed and which make the demo-



**The rank and file must have a proper say in all major decision-making processes**

cratic process impossible. In our own case this justified both the move to armed struggle in 1961 and the insurrectionary perspective until 1990. The October Revolution is another case in point. But only four months before the Winter Palace was stormed Lenin spoke of his hopes for the revolution's peaceful development. "Perhaps", he went on, "this is already impossible. But if there is even one chance in a hundred the attempt at realising this opportunity is still worthwhile".

There is nothing in Marxist theory which justifies a putchist approach to power or which prescribes the one party state as a permanent feature of socialist rule. It is indeed too often forgotten that immediately after October a multi-party government was established. This was frustrated by civil war and foreign military intervention, and by blundering and even counter-revolutionary activities of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries..

One more word about democracy. Although

its cornerstone is regular free elections, real democracy demands that we go beyond a statist approach. All the other major organs of civil society, such as the trade unions and other social organisations, must have the right to play an ongoing participatory role in the power structure. Our draft constitution commits itself to supporting and safeguarding the independence of all such formations.

The debate at regional level on our draft constitution has also focused on the relationship between a mass and vanguard party. There is no principle which should prevent a large party from playing a leading role. We have over seven million workers battle-hardened in militant class struggle. It would be strange indeed that there are not scores of thousands among them who merit a place as part of an organised workers' vanguard. The test must surely be one of quality and activism. Whatever word we use to describe it, the leadership role of our party remains valid. But changes in

its character - including its size - do not stem from a change in theory about its role but rather from a change of situation from illegality to legality.

And the obvious limitations imposed on party recruitment by illegal conditions cannot be used as a yardstick in the new legal conditions. If we aim, as we should, to root the party in every factory and mine and in the communities, what will we have if not a large party? Let us not fear size as long as it does not dilute the quality and activism of party members. I think we would all agree that the communist party of Cuba is helped rather than prevented from carrying out its vanguard role by the fact that it can be described as a mass party.

I also want to touch on a number of basic organisational principles of the draft constitution. The principle of the election of all leading bodies by secret ballot is firmly entrenched. The two-way process of accountability, from top to bottom and from bottom to top, is safeguarded. As a party we need to speak with one voice. At the same time we must ensure that we do not ride roughshod over the views of minorities. It has been the experience of humankind that most majority ideas start their life as minority rights whose protagonists have sometimes even been burnt at the stake. To act without tolerance towards minority ideas is to paralyse the development of thought and knowledge.

To act with unity and cohesion requires that members must defend the party and carry out its decisions, and that all lower organs are bound by the decisions of the higher organs. But this is not only a matter of discipline, it is also a matter of conviction. The rank and file must feel that they have had a proper say in all major decision-making processes so that even minorities know that they have had a democratic chance to influence the direction. Too often in the past, both in our party and more

especially in the practice of parties in the failed socialist countries, decisions have been handed down like edicts instead of being the result of real consultation.

The rights of minorities pose two problems which the draft attempts to address. Firstly, can we allow groupings with their own discipline? The answer is a firm no. At the same time, minorities are given the right to spread their views within the party prior to conferences which determine party policy. Secondly, however democratically a decision is arrived at, should we compel a party member who remains unconvinced to speak publicly in support of such a decision? To do so surely puts in question the honesty and integrity of individual members. The draft constitution attempts to move away from this practice.

In relation to members working in fraternal organisations, the longstanding practice of our party is once again confirmed in the draft. It insists that they shall be bound by the discipline and decisions of those organisations, that they shall not tolerate party caucuses designed to influence either elections or policies. How then does the Party spread its point of view to those organisations? It must do so openly in its public pronouncements and at official meetings between representatives of the party and representatives of the fraternal organisation.

You will no doubt debate the problems surrounding the independent identity of the party against the background of its place in the revolutionary alliance headed by the ANC. More especially, the consensus which has been developed between the alliance partners on the strategy and tactics of the transformation and key policies of the immediate post apartheid period have led to much speculation about the party's approach to possible future democratic elections. Our answer is clear. We are an independent party. We will insist on our right to act accordingly and, if necessary, place our own

name on the ballot paper. Whether we do so on our own or in alliance with our existing partners or even within a broader front will have to be addressed when elections are looming.

The past secrecy of Party membership has featured in the outpourings of our critics. Certainly, the regime cannot complain. For 40 years, they forced us to work underground, using illegal methods of conspiracy. We make no apologies for the fact that we did so. In this new period of legality, we must obviously return to the pre-1950 period, when there were no secret members.

### **Dangers**

Let me finally, in this section, make a few general remarks on some dangers ahead.

Under a barrage of hostile propaganda connected with the East European experience, we must not be tempted into one of two false paths. There must be no headlong flight into opportunism, in which we abandon our basic principles and objectives for tactical and cosmetic reasons and not because they have proved wrong or irrelevant.

But equally, we must not stray back into that other false path, dogmatism as a knee-jerk reaction to opportunism. Dogmatism is, for instance, the temptation to put all the blame on the eleventh-hour endeavour to democratise the Soviet Union and not on the crisis itself. Dogmatism is the temptation to bury our heads in the sand, to pretend that nothing, or very little, had gone wrong. Dogmatism is the temptation to retreat, in a world of sudden change, to some holy script with what we think are ready-made answers.

This Congress must reject both opportunism and dogmatism. And in doing so we will be building on our own direct and immediate experience.

Comrades, the Party plays a vanguard role in providing leadership to the working class, not

just by teaching it, but also by learning from it. And there is much that we can learn from the practices which have emerged in the working class movement, particularly during the last 16 years.

We must, as never before, absorb the lessons of the refreshing political culture which has taken root; the culture of inner-organisational democracy, of debate, of mandating and accountability, of anti-bureaucratism, of mass participation, of anti-elitism, of a deep mistrust of anything that resembles personality cults, of rugged independence for all the organs of civil society - in short, everything that is anti-dogmatic in character.

Comrade Delegates, the wheel of our country's history is about to come full circle. It is about two years since De Klerk was compelled by the insoluble crisis which faced the white regime to take his plunge. We must never forget that it was a forced march.

The cumulative effect of growing resistance made it as clear as daylight that the ruling class could no longer continue ruling in the old way. Repression failed to dampen the people's onslaught. The mass democratic movement grew from strength to strength. From 1976 onwards MK combat activity increased annually. The black trade union movement grew into a giant force. The bantustan policy stood in complete tatters. Civil administration in relation to blacks was breaking down. International isolation was escalating. The economy was sinking into an ever-deepening recession which seemed irreversible; it could no longer deliver up the superprofits which had, for so long, stemmed from old-style race domination. Above all, the ANC alliance and its underground came to be broadly accepted as the leading force in the drive to liberation.

In short, for the power bloc, the writing was on the wall. The country was becoming increasingly ungovernable with the promise of

growing confrontation which would risk personal security and threaten economic collapse. The choice for the regime was clear; either the failed path of brute force or a leap in the direction of reform. The latter was chosen and it led in a straight line to February 1990.

The movement then took initiatives to launch the negotiation process. We did so for two reasons. On the one hand for the regime old-style rule was no longer possible. On the other hand, an early seizure of power could not be realistically posed by the movement. This provided a classical scenario which placed the possibility of a negotiated settlement on the agenda. The clear objective of this process is to win the immediate transfer of democratic power to the majority. We know that this cannot be achieved merely by talk across a table. The key to success depends far more on the voice of our people mobilised and organised in support of our objective. Without them we amount to nothing. With them we are invincible.

The euphoria which was in the air after the unbannings encouraged the illusion, both internally and internationally, that we were now dealing with men of integrity who had shed their racist past and who were now willing to accept a future of real non-racist democracy. Events since February 1990 have confirmed that the political enemy we face is, at the end of the day, moved by only one thing and that is the organised power of the people.

And as the days pass it is becoming more and more clear that they will attempt to use every device at their disposal to prevent a full-blooded democracy and to retain for their constituency as much as they can retain of accumulated race privileges. This is no longer a matter for speculation. As the moment of truth draws nearer for them, their agenda is being spelt out with an ominous clarity. They have good information. They know that if a democratic election were

held tomorrow the ANC and its democratic allies would sweep the polls. They are therefore flying kites for a ten or fifteen year period of what they call transitional arrangements. We firmly reject this outrageous time frame. We must raise the cry throughout our land for a democratic election to install a new people's government within a year or eighteen months. And we will certainly never agree to entrust the election process to them and their racist state apparatus.

To guarantee a free and fair election requires that the whole electoral process, the security forces, the public media and certain aspects of the budget, be placed under the firm control of a fully representative sovereign body. That is why our demand for an interim government is one of the cornerstones of our approach.

Above all, they fear like the devil the idea that the final shape of our constitution be left to an assembly elected by the whole of our people on the basis of one person one vote. Gerrit Viljoen is nervous about leaving the future of the country to what he calls "the unsophisticated majority". Our people will never be taken in. They have for too long experienced the "sophisticated" tyranny imposed by his "sophisticated" white minority. They are the last people to give us lessons in democracy.

The calling of a democratically elected Constituent Assembly to finally decide on the future constitution is absolutely non-negotiable.

However much they manoeuvre we will never shift from our insistence on majority rule. They have been forced to pay lip service to the idea of one person one vote. At the same time they want us to agree to a constitution which, under different guises, will enable the white minority to block the will of the majority in a post apartheid South Africa.

Even more ominous are De Klerk's recent outpourings to congresses of his party's faith-

ful. It is there that he takes off his mask. When he goes on his international tours he is full of sweet talk. But to understand what he really thinks you must listen to his words when he talks to his own tribe. It is there that you hear the old language of platteland politics.

He assures them that they will never hand over power to the ANC. If language has any meaning he is saying to the people of South Africa: you will have the freedom to elect a government of your choice but we will remain in the saddle. In case there is any doubt about this, he spelt it out even more clearly. He has said over and over again that they have the power to ensure that a future constitution will not depart from National Party values.

He promises that he may not be the last white president. One thing is clear, he certainly was not thinking of me. Perhaps he had in mind the circus merry-go-round of his party's constitutional proposals which would give minorities the same right as majorities to take turns at riding the presidential horse.

These are not merely De Klerk's speculations about the future. He has begun, once again, to use the language of the Vorsters and Bothas, threatening emergencies, the use of his army and police force, and what he menacingly calls "other measures". He should be warned that he is not the only one with the power to use "other measures". Perhaps that is the reason why the regime is so anxious that we hand over our stores of weaponry under so-called joint control. Can we even think of this before we are convinced that the regime is no longer in a position to unleash its "other measures" against the people.

And De Klerk has delivered a special message to the SACP. He warns that "the government will not permit the introduction in South Africa" of (what he calls) "obsolete and rejected ideologies that have so drastically failed elsewhere". He should have no doubt about



**Joe Slovo: The regime must not**

this; we have never sought, nor will we ever seek, a permit from his illegal and illegitimate regime to spread our message of socialism.

### **Negotiations**

Comrade delegates, our party and its allies remain genuinely committed to the negotiating process. The regime must not recklessly test our patience. What De Klerk has been saying recently is not table talk; it is the worst kind of war talk. It is the kind of talk which can only help to pollute the air surrounding the forthcoming Convention for a Democratic South Africa.



**recklessly test our patience**

We must be clearly understood. The future will not be a gift from the National Party; it will be determined by the popular will of all South Africans. And it is the power of the majority which will chart the values of a future society and not the racist power wielded by the National Party. No amount of bullying, threatening and intimidation will divert us from this path. It has been tried before. It has failed and will fail again.

One thing is crystal clear. What has rattled the regime and caused De Klerk to lose his cool is the growing tactical success of the policies of the Alliance. We were vilified because of our

April Ultimatum. Events have since proved how timely it was and how it compelled the regime to respond to so many of our demands which made possible the new prospect in pursuit of peaceful dialogue.

Our insistence on the connection between the violence and the third force was at first dismissed as political posturing. There are now very few objective commentators who reject that connection. The Inkathagate scandal has confirmed our claim that the regime uses its secret apparatuses to channel resources and dirty money to undermine the ANC and its allies. The state-sponsored peace conference fell flat on its back, once again demonstrating the influence and status of the ANC-led liberation movement. The massive success of the anti-VAT general strike demonstrated the enormous power of our organised working people and terrified our political enemies.

Comrades, we dare not underestimate the difficulties ahead. But we can move towards the future with the confidence that the ANC-led liberation alliance, together with its friends in the democratic movement, occupy the pre-eminent position in our country's political lineup. The forthcoming Convention for a Democratic South Africa can become a major watershed in our struggle for a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist united South Africa.

But to ensure that this is so it must not become a mere talking shop. Its decisions must be binding and must be backed by the force of law. Above all its success depends upon two major decisions; a short-lived interim government with full sovereign powers to convene a Constituent Assembly within a framework which will guarantee free and fair elections based on universal suffrage. Our Party's delegation must be among those in the forefront of achieving these objectives.

We are heartened by the undoubted success of the preparatory meeting which launched

Codesa. We noted a new sense of realism across a wide political spectrum. The impact of the ANC-led alliance was clearly evident among even those who have previously been sucked into the government structures. Narrow and mechanical rejectionism can only add strength to our main political foes. We must attract allies for our principled positions. We must not repel them by an unthinking and parrot-like repetition of past slogans. The liberation movement must assume full leadership responsibilities that it in fact enjoys as the moral and political centre of gravity in the coming struggle for a democratic South Africa.

In the process as a whole is there room for compromise? Certainly not on fundamental principles. But we must be able to distinguish between substantive and irreversible matters of principle and purely tactical considerations. Those, in other left wing organisations, who are so fond of invoking Lenin's name in support of postures which they hope will make them look like better revolutionaries than the ANC or our Party, should remember his words: "To reject the permissibility of compromises in general, no matter of what kind, is childishness which it is difficult even to consider seriously". And we say to our friends that to refuse to participate in the process because you do not like its name, or some of the people who will attend, or where it will be held, would make Lenin turn in his grave.

### **PAC and Azapo**

We appeal to our comrades in the PAC and Azapo not to allow themselves to be left behind by history. There is only one test for revolutionary policy and leadership; it is whether or not the cause of liberation can be advanced and not whether it panders to emotional rhetoric. We earnestly hope that both organisations will see their way clear to give the process a chance to reach fruition.

In saying all this we have no illusions whatsoever. Agreements reached on procedural matters are only a most tentative start. There are far more decisive battles ahead. We must never forget that when Codesa begins its business we will be facing a political enemy with an agenda to rescue racist privileges in key political and economic sectors of post apartheid South Africa.

Our task is to prevent this. The increasing power of the democratic movement and the tactical advances it has made in the recent period give us cause for optimism.

### **From strength to strength**

Fellow delegates, our party has never been better equipped to face the new and exciting challenges of the present period. We are growing from strength to strength. We are here to stay. Our working people and our militant youth look to us as never before to play our part in helping to show the way out of the miseries of racism and dog-eat-dog capitalism. We will not let them down.

The torch of socialism which has been dimmed by so much that has happened elsewhere is seen by millions of working class militants in every continent of our world to be glowing brightly here in our land.

We say to our comrades - sisters and brothers everywhere - that we will remain true to the project of socialism and that we will do all in our power to chart the path towards it. In this commitment we are driven by history, by the reality of the world around us and by faith in the human spirit.

It is our task, here at this 8th Congress of the SACP, to build a powerful, united vanguard of the working class, a party that truly empowers the broad masses of our people, that enables them to carry through their historic mission.

This is the challenge before us, comrade delegates. We must not and will not fail. ♪



# Civil society and democracy

**In the wake of debates at the Party's 8th Congress, BLADE NZIMANDE and MPUME SIKHOSANA offer a critique of some aspects of 'democratic socialism'**

**T**he crisis in Eastern Europe, the failure of democracy in Africa, and, in the shadow of the above two, the apparent 'success' and 'stability' of western bourgeois democracies have all led to extensive soul-searching and debate amongst socialists and Marxists on how national and socialist democracy can be brought about in the contemporary period. These debates, in South Africa in particular, have some underlying common assumptions. Some of these assumptions are:

i. An uncritical revival of, and trust in, the concept of 'civil society' as the solution to establishing democratic regimes.

ii. Related to the above, the notion that the development of strong independent, non-sectarian social movements is a guarantee for democracy

iii. A tendency to simply abandon some of the fundamental concepts of Marxism-Leninism, without adequate theorisation of why they are no longer applicable eg. 'dictatorship of the proletariat' 'vanguardism'. Sometimes this is further accompanied by a very uncritical acceptance of some of the long discredited liberal notions of democracy.

iv. An evolutionary conception of the tran-

sition to socialism, rather than a revolutionary one, which is a very fundamental departure from the Marxist paradigm. Underpinning this evolutionary transition to socialism is the notion that the vehicle for this will be democracy, largely conceived in terms of liberal democracy. It is in fact this conceptualisation that has led to the emergence of the problematic notion of 'democratic socialism'. In fact we would argue that the concept of 'democratic socialism' is not merely used in a descriptive sense, but embodies a certain set of assumptions about democracy and transition to socialism.

v. Underpinning most of these responses to the crisis of socialism is the stripping of democracy of its class content, and the tendency to talk about 'democracy in general'.

vi. In virtually all of the interventions looking into the question of socialism and the democratisation of society is the absence of the analysis of the state, particularly the role of the state in bringing about democracy. This seems to be an outcome of an implicit, sometimes explicit, assumption that a vibrant civil society will act as a watchdog on the state to ensure that it acts democratically. In the development of the argument of 'democratic socialism', and in

some of its variants (eg. associational socialism), there is a very glaring lack of the analysis of the role of the state in building democracy.

vii. A rather strange assumption made in many of these interventions is the notion that 'organs of civil society' will create democracy only if they distance themselves from political organisations, and consequently for them democracy means 'civil society' distancing itself or disengaging from the state.

It is some of the above issues that this paper wants to engage, with a particular aim of highlighting in some detail the complexity of the issue of building democracy, both in the national democratic phase of our revolution as well as under socialism.

But first a few words about the use of the concept "civil society" in some of the classics of Marxism. Many of those in South Africa who invoke this concept seek justification for this in the works of Marx, Engels and especially Gramsci. It is our view that the claim is based on a serious misunderstanding of these works. It is only really in their early writings that Marx and Engels use the term "civil society". In these early writings the main thrust of their argument is to challenge Hegel's separation between political and civil society. They see this separation as essentially an abstraction born of bourgeois society, in which it is conceptualised falsely as an autonomous sphere in which people pursue their own interests.

Gramsci's use of the term "civil society" is not inconsistent with the critique of the early Marx and Engels. Gramsci, however, enriches the concept. Gramsci's primary concern is to underline how a dominant class exercises power throughout society - that is, by hegemonic domination primarily via civil society and by direct domination through state power. Gramsci's approach to civil society is best summed up in the following passage:

"The ideas of the Free Trade movement are

based on a theoretical error, whose practical origin is not hard to identify; they are based on a distinction between political society and civil society which is made into and presented as an organic one, whereas in fact it is merely methodological. Thus it is asserted that economic activity belongs to civil society, and that the state must not intervene to regulate it. But since in actual reality civil society and the State are one and the same, it must be made clear that laissez faire too is a form of state 'regulation', introduced and maintained by legislative and co-ercive means. It is a deliberate policy, conscious of its own ends, and not the spontaneous, automatic expression of economic facts<sup>1</sup>."

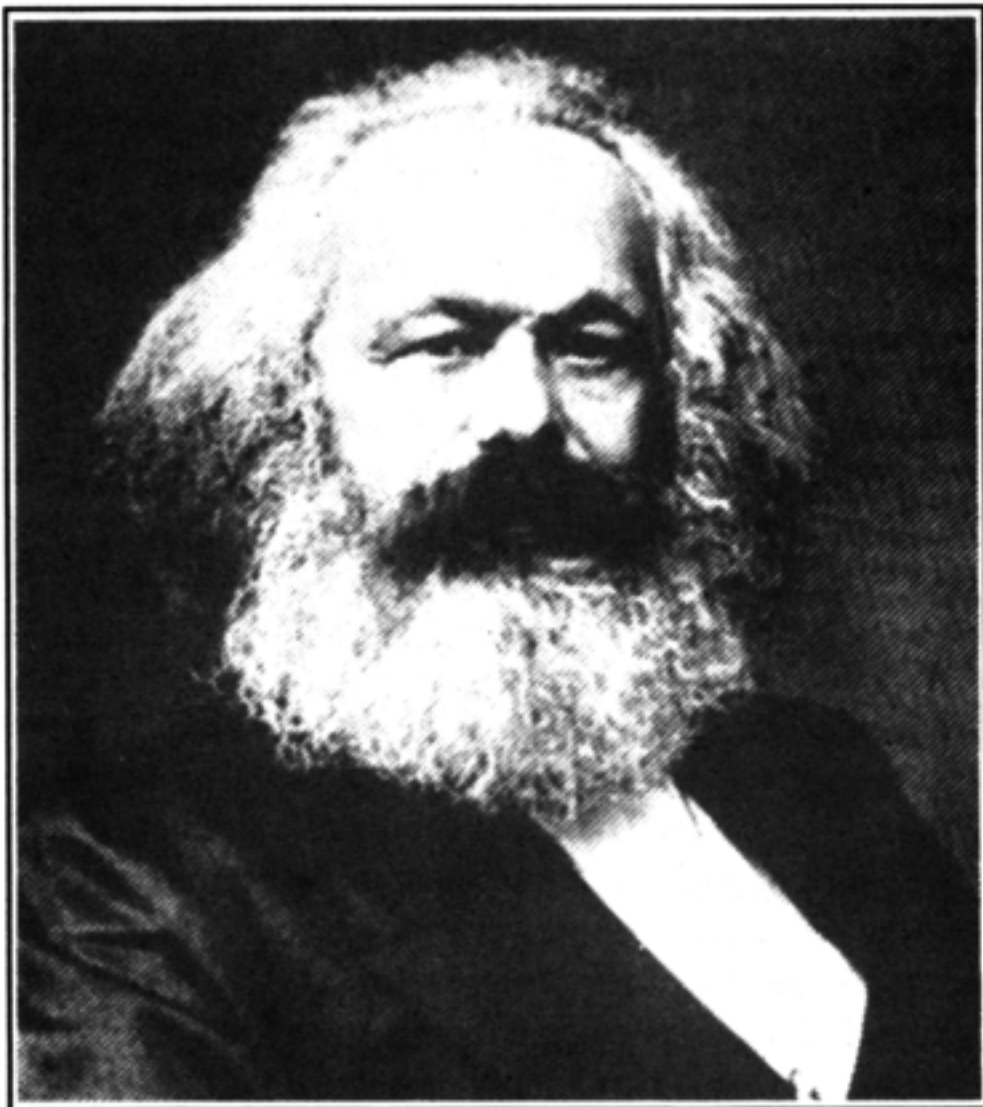
In other words, the early Marx and Engels as well as Gramsci are essentially emphasising the continuities between so-called "civil society" and political power, not the discontinuities.

### **'Civil society' as a liberal and one-sided concept**

For our purposes, the surveying of the meaning of the term civil society in Marx and Gramsci's works leads to the following conclusions:

i. the distinction between 'political' and civil society in Marx and Gramsci's works is a methodological (descriptive) and not a theoretical distinction. In other words, one cannot treat 'civil society' without simultaneously addressing the question of the state, and the entire social relations underpinning society.

ii. the current conceptualisation of separating the 'state' and 'civil society' in most of the contemporary debates in South Africa is a Hegelian one, and is rooted neither in Marx's nor Gramsci's use of the concept. However this conceptualisation is also a mechanical inversion of Hegel. If for Hegel the state was the incarnation of reason that had to mediate over the 'selfish civil society', for the 'democratic socialists' 'civil society' is the incarnation of reason that has to act as a watchdog to



**Karl Marx: Anticipated the Ideological nature of the separation between the state and civil society**

language of the national liberation and mass democratic movements, as well as in some of theoretical reflections on the crisis of Eastern European socialism. However some of the more significant published debates have raised this question within the context of the broad umbrella of 'democratic socialism'. From our survey of this literature there are a number of variants of democratic socialism, including Swilling's notion of 'associational socialism'; Glaser's 'Logic of democratic participation'; and that variant found within the ranks of our own Party.

The intention of critically evaluating these is not an overall assessment of the totality of their arguments on various aspects of the crisis of Eastern European socialism. Nor is the aim to evaluate the concept of 'democratic socialism' as such.<sup>2</sup> Our primary concern here

the state. In fact the current usage, as will be illustrated below, is a liberal usage, and a misreading of Marx and Gramsci.

iii. an argument for a 'civil society' independent of the state cannot be theoretically sustained because it obscures the fundamental role of the state in bringing about democracy.

Based on the above assessment it is therefore important to concretely illustrate how contemporary usage of this concept in South Africa is in fact a very narrow-minded and one-sided approach to the question of building democracy.

**Democracy and civil society: An overview of contemporary South African debates**

The discourse of 'civil society' has been used in a variety of ways both in the everyday

is to evaluate the usage of the concept of 'civil society' and its relation to democracy. First, a brief evaluation of Swilling and Glaser will be undertaken.

In order to illustrate some of the core ideas informing Swilling and Glaser's variant of 'democratic socialism', a few quotations will suffice. After criticising what he calls naive visions of 'civil society' as expounded by proponents of a free-market economy, Glaser presents his vision of the relationship between 'civil society' and democracy:

"This positive vision of civil society, goes beyond the call for individual freedoms, since it urges active use of otherwise formal 'rights' to establish the richest possible array of voluntary activity, perhaps supported by the state...It is also distinct from the (also important) de-

mand for 'direct democracy', since it does not render individuals and voluntary organisations accountable to local majorities or spontaneous crowds...Freed of its naive free market connotations, the idea of an autonomous civil society is a crucial counter-weight to the ambitions of any state."<sup>3</sup>

Swilling also advances arguments that are similar to that of Glaser. It is important to quote him in full as well, in order to fully grasp the essence of his arguments about the role of 'civil society' in building democracy and socialism:

"Civil society has emerged as the codeword for the associational life of a society that exists somewhere between the individual actions of each person (what some might call the 'private realm') and the organisations and institutions constituted by the state (or 'public realm'). It is where everyday life is experienced, discussed, comprehended, contested and reproduced. This is where hegemony is built and contested...The New Right, liberal intellectuals and even sections of the liberation movement are of the view that civil society should include the profit-driven shareholder-owned, industrial-commercial sector. This author is of the view that a true 'civil society' is one where ordinary everyday citizens, who do not control the levers of political and economic power, have access to locally-constituted voluntary associations that have the capacity, know-how and resources to influence and even determine the structure of power and the allocation of material resources."<sup>4</sup>

It is our belief here that if we are to develop a correct approach to the question of building democracy both in the immediate phase of national democracy and in the period of socialist reconstruction, we should spare no effort in exposing the weaknesses and distortions embodied in such views.

The first weakness in the above accounts and conceptions of civil society is the separa-

tion of civil society from the state. What is more, there is a tendency, particularly with Glaser, to counterpose civil society to the state, and arguing that an independent vibrant civil society can act as a check against the state. This is a distortion of Marxism and its conception of the state, whereby the state is the institutional, political expression of relations in ('civil') society. In fact we would argue that the theoretical strength of Marxism and perhaps its scientificity lies precisely in having exposed that the state in capitalist social formations is the political expression of relations in 'civil society'. Marxism also exposed the fact that the separation between 'civil society' and the state is largely an ideological one that hides the true character and source of exploitation and oppression in capitalist social formations.

The second weakness, related, to the above is that of narrowly presenting the task of building democracy only in terms of 'civil society'. This is extremely one-sided, and the question of democratisation cannot be separated from the question of the contestation and seizure of state power. It is our argument here that unless the national liberation movement gets hold of state power the process of democratisation of South Africa cannot even begin to be set in motion. The arguments of these variants of 'democratic socialism' end up limiting the question of building democracy to the task of developing an 'autonomous civil society', as if this on its own is adequate for purposes of building democracy, whether national or socialist.

The absurdity of these arguments is sharply revealed when Swilling suggests what should be included and excluded in civil society. It is as if institutions of capital and its reproductive organs can be easily removed from civil society as one wishes. The end result of these arguments are no different to those of liberals. In the same way as liberals want a private

sphere free of state intervention, these 'democratic socialists' also want a civil society free of state interference.

The **third** area of weakness of these arguments is that there is an underlying assumption that the state has no role at all to play in the process of democratisation. The state is presented as, by its very nature, incapable of playing a role in the democratisation process. This is simply incorrect. However even more serious is that this assumption prevents us from exploring the question of the nature of the national democratic and socialist states that should be constructed in order to deepen democracy.

There is also a related argument that 'civil society' will act as a watchdog against the state. The net outcome of such an approach is in fact the opposite of what it claims to be fighting for ie. abandoning the terrain of the state to the whims of state bureaucrats and capitalist institutions. Thus an important issue is obscured: How can, what these 'democratic socialists' call 'organs of civil society', play a role both inside and outside the sphere of the state. In other words, for them, the state ceases to be an arena of contestation, but only requires pressure groups from outside it to act as a check against its inherently undemocratic and bureaucratic character. If the state is inherently unable to contribute to a process of democracy (whether it be a national democratic or socialist one) we might as well forget about struggling for the capture or seizure of state power. The fact that socialist states of Eastern Europe became bureaucratic and oppressive towards the very same classes they claimed to be standing for does not mean that a socialist state is inherently undemocratic.

The **fourth** and very serious omission in these arguments is their disturbing silence on the role of political parties and organisations in the process of building democracy. No matter

how much one can engage in the wishful thinking of the building of democracy as the task of an 'independent and vibrant civil society', political parties *do* play a very significant role in this process. Political parties, whether they be bourgeois, petty bourgeois or socialist do not only play a role in the process of democratisation of society, but they *should* play a role in this process. Bourgeois and petty bourgeois political parties always intervene to shape 'civil society' in a manner that will reproduce the type of society these parties stand for. It is also incumbent upon and perhaps the most important function of a political party of the working class - like our Party - to *unashamedly* struggle for the hegemony of the working class and the socialist agenda throughout all levels of society. To suggest that the building of democracy is a task for 'civil society' and its organs is plain naivete of the nature of political struggle. In fact it is such a conceptualisation that has led to the problematic practice that is beginning to emerge within the national liberation movement and the mass democratic movement that, for instance, issues about services and development in townships are for civics, and that 'political issues' are for political organisations and parties.<sup>5</sup>

To develop the above point further it is also important to point out that political parties are *class* parties, ie. they represent the interests of particular classes in society, whether it be the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie or the proletariat.<sup>6</sup> In fact this is the essence of the *class struggle*, in that the class struggle throws up political parties that stand for the interests of this or that class or coalition or fractions of classes. Even in colonial societies the national liberation movements that spring up contain within them a number of classes who are always vying, within those movements, for political hegemony and supremacy. Political parties and national liberation movements al-

ways strive to shape society in a manner consistent with their own class interests. It is therefore inadequate to tackle the question of democracy without relating this to the question of class struggle and the role of political parties or movements thrown up by that class struggle. The notion of development of democracy primarily, and sometimes exclusively, through the building of a 'vibrant civil society', without taking into account the type of a movement or political party that should be the political vanguard of this process is idealistic. This argument can be harmful by disarming the liberation movement or our Party, by encouraging them to desist from building mass organisations or intervening in so-called 'civil society'.

The fifth and perhaps obvious weakness of the argument that the development of 'organs of civil society' within an independent sphere of civil society is a guarantee for democracy, is that oppressive and capitalist institutions are also independent organs of civil society. In fact the co-incidence between this argument and that of the ideologists of free market is particularly striking. Furthermore, even the apartheid regime's programme of privatisation can be regarded as an attempt to relegate political and economic power to the sphere of a civil society without state interference. By so doing the regime is hoping to reproduce apartheid through 'an independent and vibrant civil society'.

What the above critical review of the usage of the concept of civil society clearly shows is that an assessment of the crisis of Eastern European socialism that is purely based on the notion that the source of the crisis was largely due to the suppression of the development of a vibrant civil society is not useful at all. Our assessment should be based on an historical analysis of the development of those societies in their totality, namely the nature of social formations, the nature and role of the state, as

well as the nature and role of the communist parties that were in power and the imperialist onslaught on socialist countries. It is only then that we can learn proper lessons out of those countries for the future of national democracy and socialism in South Africa.

All that the 'democratic socialism' being reviewed above has done is merely to use the crisis of Eastern European socialism as a licence to revive liberalism in the name of socialism and Marxism. Proof of this is the argument that has become very fashionable among some sections of 'democratic socialists' nowadays that it was a mistake for Marxists and communists to simply dismiss liberal freedoms as 'bourgeois freedoms'. That Eastern European socialism is in crisis does not change the fact that the basic liberal political freedoms are bourgeois freedoms, freedom for the bourgeoisie to dominate in capitalist social formations! In fact what these arguments do is to search for socialist democracy in bourgeois democracy. This amounts to nothing else than the subjection of the class struggle to bourgeois democratic institutions. This is in fact what social democracy is about. And social democracy has failed to bring about socialism! Some of the outcomes of this approach to democracy are classically illustrated by what is advocated by Glaser thus: "...a logic of democratic preparation allows for going backwards too. It would sanction a democratic 'counter-revolution'."(!!)<sup>7</sup>

The above quotation is a classic illustration of the extent to which so-called socialists have become so confused about democracy. Any 'ABC' of Marxism would tell you that there is no such thing as a democratic counter-revolution! Counter-revolutions are brutal, undemocratic, and most often bloody phenomena. The violence that is sweeping our country and has led to the brutal killing of so many thousands of our people is counter-revolution. Even theo-

retically, anyone who pretends to be a socialist and knows a bit of Marxism should know that counter-revolutions are products of revolutions. It is unthinkable for any people struggling for a revolutionary transformation of society to become so 'democratic' as to sanction counter-revolution against their own revolution! Any beginner in Marxism also knows that the bourgeoisie and imperialists will never allow any socialist or national democratic revolution to succeed. The logical end of these arguments is the end of class struggle and that is what the bourgeoisie always dream about. This dream is being brought closer to reality by such conceptualisations and approaches - 'socialists' in the service of counter-revolution in the name of democracy and Marxism!

The greatest disservice that 'democratic socialism' is doing is to Marxism itself. It wipes out by a stroke of a pen the entire Marxist critique of liberal and bourgeois democracy. It is as if Marxist theory has not undertaken more than a century of the critique of capitalism and its political institutions. All of a sudden, without much reference to these debates, we are told that the mistake of Marxism was to throw away the baby with the bathwater (ie. throwing away capitalism together with its liberal freedoms), as if socialism is simply an incremental building upon liberal bourgeois freedoms!

### **'Democratic socialism' and 'civil society' inside our Party**

Although the concept of democratic socialism was firmly rejected at our Party's 8th Congress, and rightly so, it is important to evaluate this trend against the background of the issue under discussion. This is important for two main reasons. Firstly, the rejection of the concept of 'democratic socialism' by our Congress does not mean the end of the 'democratic socialism' tendency inside our Party. Secondly, the basis on which the concept of 'demo-

cratic socialism' was rejected at our Congress is not adequate. It is not enough to reject this concept purely on the basis that socialism is inherently democratic and needs no further qualifications. Whilst we would agree with this reasoning, it is not enough to stop here because it sounds as if we are merely rejecting a label without closely examining the content of 'democratic socialism' as found inside our Party.

Although a thorough critique of this concept is urgently required, this task is outside the brief we have set ourselves in the present paper. All that will be engaged here is how the variant of 'democratic socialism' as found inside the ranks of our Party shares some of the weaknesses highlighted above on the conception of democracy and 'civil society'. However it is important to ground this review in some of the fundamental propositions of 'democratic socialism' inside our Party.

The first articulation of the approach of 'democratic socialists' inside the Party towards the question of socialism and democracy is to be found in Slovo's assessment of the crisis in Eastern Europe. This intervention is largely premised on the observation that the key to the crisis in Eastern Europe was the separation of democracy and socialism. However there are a few disturbing features about this intervention which are worth highlighting. It is the ease with which 'democratic socialism' has simply abandoned some of the concepts and approaches that have come to form the basis of Marxism-Leninism, both in its theory and revolutionary practice. The first of these concepts is that of the 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' (DOP). This term has been abandoned not on the basis of any argued theoretical propositions but simply because it has been applied wrongly in Eastern Europe. Slovo says of DOP:

"The abandonment of the term by most communist parties, including ours, does not, in

all cases, imply a rejection of the historical validity of its essential content. But, the way the term came to be abused bore little resemblance to Lenin's original concept. It was progressively denuded of its intrinsic democratic content and came to signify, in practice, a dictatorship of a party bureaucracy. For Lenin the repressive aspect of the concept had impending relevance in relation to the need for the revolution to defend itself against counter-revolutionary terror in the immediate post revolution period. He was defending, against the utopianism of the anarchists, the limited retention of repressive apparatus.<sup>8</sup>

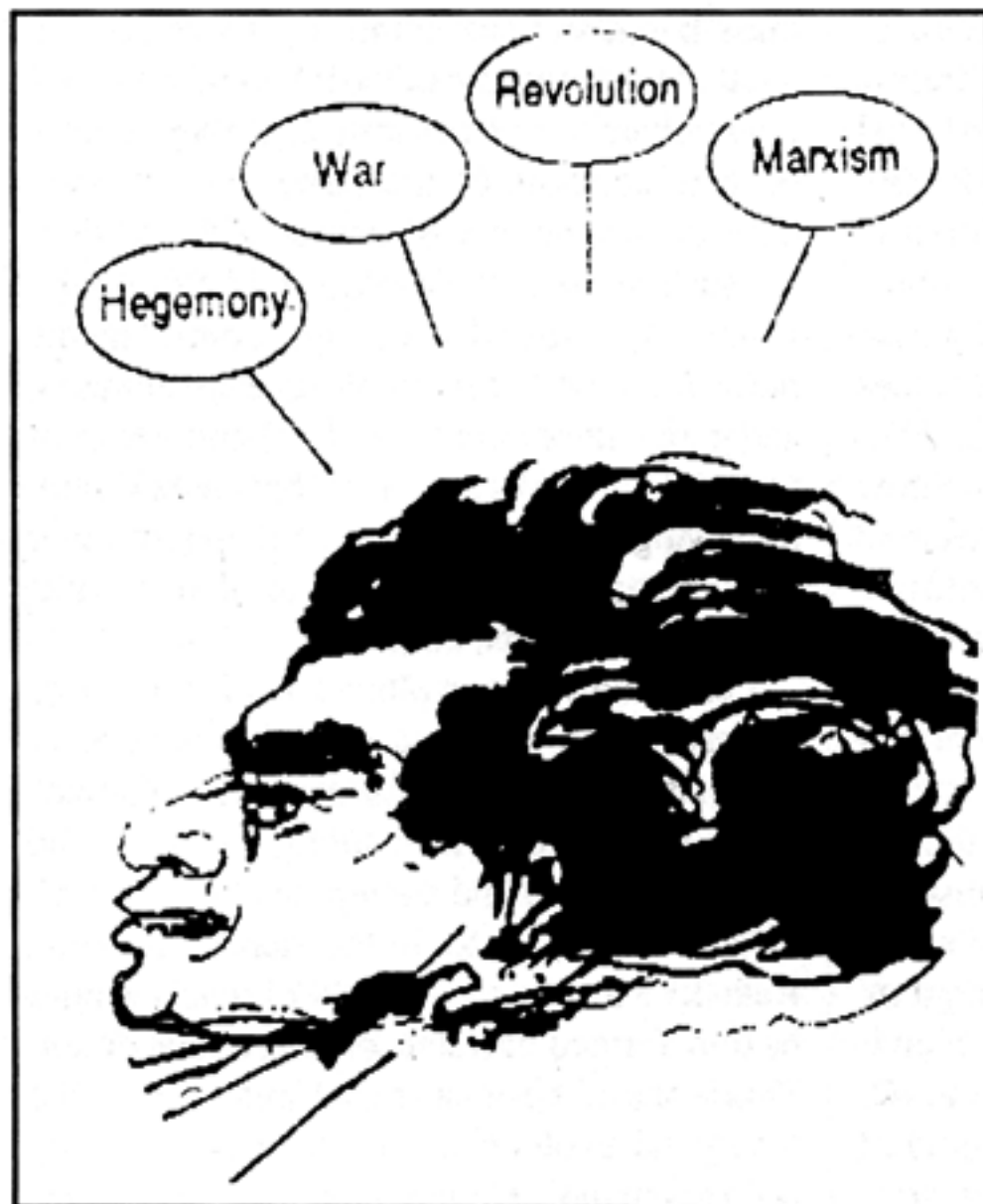
There are a few important issues that need to be highlighted here. It seems as if here the concept itself has no problem in terms of its meaning and intention, but just because it has been misused then it should be abandoned. This approach to eliminating concepts is very problematic. One wonders how far we should take such a practice, because taken to its logical conclusion, we should also abandon the idea of a communist party or even socialism itself because what Eastern Europe has done to the image of communist parties and socialism is exactly what Slovo says of DOP. Similarly 'democratic socialism' within our Party argues for a mass party, largely for the same reason that 'vanguardism' was imposed on the people's of Eastern Europe. Similarly as Cronin points out retaining concepts just because they form part of the classics of Marxism-Leninism is dogmatic. This is true. But what we take issue with here is that the theoretical basis on which these concepts are being dropped is very unclear, and according to Cronin again, dropping of concepts just because they are political embarrassing is opportunism.<sup>9</sup>

The problem of dropping concepts without any sound theoretical basis is further reflected in Slovo's arguments as to what Lenin meant by the DOP. In fact it is simply not true to say

that by DOP Lenin merely referred to dealing with counter-revolutionary terror and was arguing against anarchists on the retention of state power. The concept is one of the key concepts in Marxism itself. Actually the substance of the concept from Lenin's point of view was positive and aimed at smashing the bourgeoisie and its state machine and consolidating the class rule of the proletariat, as a goal in itself. That DOP had to be specifically applied in the context of the White terror and the attack by anarchists on the maintenance of the state was secondary to this overall objective of the DOP. In other words DOP took the form of dealing with White Terror, but was not the substance of DOP as such. In fact Lenin points this out emphatically when he says "The proletarian revolution is impossible without the forcible destruction of the bourgeois state machine and the substitution for it of a new one..."<sup>10</sup> This was the main task of the DOP! In fact Lenin always firmly situated DOP within the context of the *Communist Manifesto* and the experiences of the *Paris Commune*, and the broader tasks of guaranteeing that initial transition from capitalism to socialism. There is no clearer illustration of this than Lenin's *State and Revolution*.

The danger of abandoning concepts without any adequate theoretical explanations goes beyond just the opportunism of such a practice but leaves certain crucial questions and gaps in our approach to revolutionary transformation. For example what does the abandonment of DOP mean for the transition towards socialism? Is transition towards socialism ever possible when one treats the defeated bourgeoisie with kid gloves? How are the victorious socialist forces going to smash the capitalist state machine? Does this mean that we are for an evolutionary transition towards socialism rather than a revolutionary break with the capitalist past? Can attempts at evolutionary transition





**Gramsci: Criticised the separation of 'civil' and 'political' society**

to socialism ever go beyond social democracy? Even if evolutionary transition to socialism is a possibility, what is the reason for restricting our strategies at this stage to a particular path of transition? These are some of the questions that will have to be answered with the abandonment of the concept of DOP.

The above was by way of illustration of the key foundations and tendencies of 'democratic socialism' inside our Party, which forms the background against which to assess the question of the treatment of democracy and 'civil society'.

Although it might be regarded as unfair to criticise Slovo for things he does not say, after all his paper could by its nature not encompass

everything, it is important to interrogate some of the concepts that he uses unproblematically, like the concept of a 'socialist civil society'. Slovo argues that:

"Lenin envisaged that working class power would be based on the kind of democracy of the Commune, but he did not address, in any detail, the nature of established socialist civil society, including fundamental questions such as the relationship between the party, state, people's elected representatives, social organisations, etc."<sup>11</sup>

We believe that by his use of the term 'socialist civil society', without any theoretical clarification is a serious omission on the part of Slovo. In fact by so doing Slovo is committing a similar mistake to that of the other 'democratic socialists' as highlighted above, i.e. seeing the development of 'civil society' as one of the key elements in democracy, without demonstrating how. Since Slovo uses specifically

the concept of 'socialist civil society' it is important, in the light of what Marx, Engels and Gramsci said, to assess the theoretical validity of this concept. The use of this concept begs one very fundamental question. If the 'separation' between civil society and the state is, as Marx pointed out, an abstract dualism and a product of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, can we then theoretically sustain a notion of a socialist civil society? From our understanding of the use of the concept by Marx, the separation is a product of the evolution of bourgeois society and one of the key tasks of socialism is to bridge this separation. In fact this separation, we would argue, is an institutional expression of the alienation of

'man' in capitalist societies; the separation of the 'social' from the 'political'. The separation is a reflection of the relegation of human social needs to the private sphere of 'civil society'. Marx specifically points out that one of the task of socialist transformation is that "man must recognise his own forces as social, organise them, and thus no longer separate social forces from himself in the form of political forces".

No doubt 'democratic socialists' will throw their hands up in horror at what might seem to be a collapse of political and social life into one and therefore the subjection of 'civil society' to political life. Actually this issue is the crux of the issue on the question of socialist democracy. It is in this area that 'democratic socialists', in the way they pose the question of democracy, obscure the very real socialist imperative of overcoming the contradiction between 'civil society' and the state. By arguing for the development of an autonomous civil society, they do not address this issue at all, instead they fall into the very same mould of the separation of civil society and the state under capitalism. This obscures the need for the creation of organs of (proletarian) state power that are simultaneously organs of state power as well as autonomous mass social formations able to act independent of the state. In fact this is what the Soviets were originally, and they were intended to incorporate both these qualities in them as the only concrete political path for bridging social and political life as the highest form of human emancipation. It was not because they were organs of state power that the soviets failed, rather it was because their autonomous character as mass social formations was progressively stifled by the Party through the mechanism of a bureaucratic state. That this happened in Eastern Europe does not mean that this is bound to happen, and that there can be no simultaneous organs of state power that are simultaneously

mass-based and autonomous; It was not, we would argue, because of the inherently bureaucratic character of the state that they merely became conduits of the party and the state bureaucracy, but it was because of the particular state form that developed in the Soviet Union which stifled them - tight control by the party, merging of party with state apparatuses, and more important contextual problems of imperialism and its assault on the Soviet Union, outlawing of the opposition and undermining the heterogeneous character of, and debates within, the Soviets, etc).

Let us however explore a bit further how organs of state power can be simultaneously part of the state and at the same time be autonomous mass social formations. One of the issues that we should attempt to closely examine on this question is the debate between Kautsky and Lenin on whether Soviets should be transformed into state organisations or not. This is one of the most crucial areas of socialist theory and revolutionary practice that has hardly been given the attention it requires. It is therefore important to quote liberally in order to engage this issue.

Kautsky in his pamphlet *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* vehemently criticises the Bolsheviks in power for, amongst other things, converting the Soviets into organs of proletarian state power. He argued that: "...the Soviet form of organisation is one of the most important phenomena of our time. It promises to acquire decisive importance in the great decisive battles between capital and labour towards which we are marching...But are we entitled to demand more of the Soviets? The Bolsheviks, after the November Revolution, 1917, secured in conjunction with the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries a majority in the Russian Soviets of Workers' Deputies, and after the dispersion of the Constituent Assembly, they set out to transform the Soviets from a **combat organisation**

of one class, as they had been up to then, into a state organisation. They destroyed the democracy which the Russian people had won in the March Revolution."<sup>12</sup>

Kautsky's argument here is basically that, for democracy to flourish in socialist Russia at the time, the Soviets should not have been transformed into state organisations. Obviously this argument would today find favour amongst many of the 'democratic socialists', as they should have been left, in their language, to be 'organs of civil society' independent from the state. We could further state that perhaps this argument, taken to its logical conclusion in the present debates in South Africa, the Soviets would have constituted part of the 'socialist civil society' separate from the organs of the proletarian state. Indeed it is largely because of the hindsight of what happened to Soviets later that there is now talk of a 'socialist civil society'.

How did Lenin respond to Kautsky in this regard?

"Thus, the oppressed class (according to Kautsky - BN & MS), the vanguard of all the working and exploited people in modern society, must strive towards the 'decisive battles between capital and labour', but must not touch the machine by means of which capital suppresses labour! - It must not break up that machine! - It must not make use of its all-embracing organisation for suppressing the exploiters! Excellent, Mr Kautsky, magnificent! 'We' recognise the class struggle - in the same way as all liberals recognise it, ie. without the overthrow of the bourgeoisie".<sup>13</sup>

Lenin argues further that: "Whoever sincerely shared the Marxist view that the state is nothing but a machine for the suppression of one class by another, and who has at all reflected upon this truth, could never have reached the absurd conclusion that the proletarian organisations capable of defeating finance capi-

tal must not transform themselves into state organisations....<sup>14</sup> To say to the Soviets: fight, but don't take all the state power into your hands, don't become state organisations - is tantamount to preaching class collaboration and 'social peace' between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.<sup>15</sup>

According to Glaser this reply by Lenin would be an example of statist thinking. However the question that is essentially posed by Lenin in this reply to Kautsky, and which should be a key question pre-occupying all socialists at this point in time is this: After the overthrow of the rule of the bourgeoisie and its institutions, what type of proletarian organs of state power should be put into place? Marx had earlier given this answer by saying in the *Communist Manifesto* that the bourgeois state machine should be replaced by the proletariat organised as the ruling class. In all the criticisms and reflections on the failure of Eastern European socialism this question has hardly been engaged. In fact we would argue that it is the very same organs of the working class that overthrew the bourgeoisie that should become the new organs of proletarian state power, and in the case of Russia in 1917 the Soviets. Otherwise what institutions and organs should have become the organs of the new proletarian state power? With the Soviets having become the new organs of the proletarian state, there is no necessary connection between this transformation and the bureaucratisation that took place later. In fact the Soviets as organs of state power in the proletarian state should have subjected the state to the popular will of the working people instead of the other way round. By so doing the Soviets would have been autonomous mass social formations that wield state power at the same time. It would have been the strengthening of this character of the Soviets that would have deepened socialist democracy in the Soviet Union. In fact this is

what would have laid the basis for the withering away of the state, ie. Organs of people's power subjecting the proletarian state to their will, whilst essentially remaining autonomous organisations of the working class and the Russian people as a whole. This is in fact what Soviets operated as initially. That Soviet democracy was later reversed, should not merely be sought in the assumed (inherent) bureaucratic character of the state, but on how the Party conducted itself in its wielding of state power.

By posing the question of building socialist democracy (instead of 'democratic socialism') in this way, we will then be able to transcend the liberal-bourgeois and narrow notion of 'a vibrant and autonomous civil society'.

### **Building democracy, building organs of people's power**

There are three very important premises from which we should move from if we are tackling the question of building democracy. Firstly, the relationship between the state and 'organs of civil society' is not a dichotomous one but a **dialectical** one. Secondly, building of democracy cannot be abstracted from the conditions under which this task must be tackled. For instance in South Africa our immediate goal is the establishment of national democracy in the context of colonialism of a special type, and that national democracy should lay the foundations for a rapid transition to socialism. This question is important in that we can give content to concepts we deploy in our analysis. Thirdly, the process of building democracy is in the last instance a political process, whose realisation is ultimately dependent on political leadership of a particular type. If then building democracy is a political process, it cannot exclude the very central issue of state power.

Given the above conceptualisation it is therefore not appropriate to talk about 'organs of

civil society' but such organs should be **organs of people's power** as the only organs that will ultimately guarantee a democracy, both in the phase of national democracy as well as in the building of socialism. A brief definition of our understanding of organs of people's power and particularly the differences between them and social movements is necessary at this stage. For us social movements are movements that bring together a number of social forces and even classes around a particular issue. Social movements are therefore issue-based and can either be political, in the strictest sense of the word, or non-political. Social movements do not necessarily aim at fundamental transformation of society, but can be reformist or aimed at changing particular aspects of policy on the issue around which they are organised. Because of this social movements are subject to extreme fluctuations in their strengths and weaknesses, and usually sometimes emerge as fast as they can disappear.

Organs of people's power on the other hand are organs that may or may not develop out of social movements. Organs of people's power are primarily about fundamental and revolutionary transformation of society. They are therefore about the transfer of power to the people and are directly concerned with the wielding of state power. However their social base can be the same as that of social movements in that they are the organs that should form the direct link between the state and the people in a national democracy and under socialism. In fact organs of people's power are the form under which the people should exercise state power. This is the essence of participatory democracy. The conceptualisation of civics, street committees, NECC, people's courts merely as social movements is problematic in two ways. Firstly, it is an ahistorical understanding of the origins and intentions of these organs in the mid-1980's. These organs

were not merely social movements but were specifically organs of people's power aimed at a revolutionary transformation of South African society and establishment of people's power. To simply refer to them as social movements is both a theoretical retreat and a reformist understanding of their role even during this phase of negotiations.

Secondly, the notion of social movements as used in some sections of the 'Left' is problematic in that it is an ahistorical and abstract implantation of the notion of social movements as developed in advanced capitalist countries. The nature of social movements that develop in countries under the yoke of colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism are fundamentally different from, for instance, the Green movement in Europe or the Civil Rights movement in the US. The former take the character of organs of people's power and the latter tend to be pressure groups. There is a radical distinction here. We should however make it clear here that our argument should not be read as meaning that all social movements should be organs of people's power. But the essential point we are making is that the only guarantee for building both national democracy (as opposed to bourgeois democracy) and socialist democracy is the building of organs of people's power. And that civics, NECC, trade unions are not simply social movements. To want to convert these organs to just being social movements is a liberal reformist project that merely wants to reverse history and make these organs mere pressure groups in so-called 'civil society'.

Let us briefly then situate the argument of the development of organs of people's power as the key to the securing and strengthening of national and socialist democracy. Struggles for democracy in colonial countries should always be located within the nature of colonialism. National oppression and colonialism tend

to collapse what 'democratic socialists' would call 'civil society' and 'political life' in those social formations. Because of this civic struggles tend to take a political character, and political struggles are rooted in civic issues. This is particularly so where social and political life of people are rigidly controlled by a highly centralised state, where political and social opportunities are based primarily on racial considerations. This is more so in Southern Africa, where its particular form of colonialism (white settler colonialism) was characterised by racial criteria prescribing the place of different racial groups in the political, economic and social life of the country. Such a situation can be summed up in terms of the early works of Marx and Engels as the incomplete separation between 'civil society' and the state, as is the situation in bourgeois democracies of the advanced capitalist countries. That is why national liberation movements in all third world countries, and even more so in Southern Africa, incorporate within them aspects of social movements, and social movements take on a political form. It is this dialectical interpenetration that tends to throw up organs of people's power and the closer working relationship between national liberation movements and such organs.

It was in fact in South Africa where CST took this phenomenon to its most extreme. The lengthy banning of the national liberation movement and the growth of a strong mass democratic movement illustrates the relationship between civic and political issues under colonial conditions. In fact the development of organs of people's power and their relationship to the ANC in particular in the mid-1980's mark the highest expression of the interpenetration of civic and political issues in apartheid South Africa. To illustrate this point let us quote from an assessment of the nature of organs of people's power during the mid-1980's

in South Africa:

**"The street/area committees - the structures of an embryonic People's Power - are not only restricted to playing this (civic/local issues - authors) kind of role, but also has a far more directly or narrowly political dimension to them. At the same time as they are taking up the grassroots issues described above, they also form the units in and through which major political issues and strategies (eg. the Consumer Boycott) are discussed and organised. Thus the street committee system is beginning not only to form the avenue through which people can begin to take greater and more democratic control of the immediate conditions of their existence, but they are also emerging as the form through which direct political action against the state and ruling bloc can be decided on and implemented. Understanding this latter dimension is of crucial importance both in understanding People's Power correctly and, I would argue, in guiding the organisational dynamics unleashed recently to the greatest possible effect in welding the oppressed classes in South Africa into a mass force capable both of effectively confronting the central state and its apparatuses, and of governing after power has been seized (though the precise organisational forms will clearly alter dramatically between these different phases)".<sup>16</sup>**

A few points worth noting in the above quotation are the following: there is a close relationship between civic and political issues prior to February 2 1990 as shown in the above quotation; and that post February 2 the pre-occupation is the separation of civic and political issues, as a means of creating the political spaces for the respective civic and political formations. But in the process of doing this there is a very real possibility of weakening the national democratic revolution.<sup>17</sup> It seems that arguments for 'organs of civil society' are now

focusing on the terrain of struggle - 'civil society' - and saying very little about the people's institutions that should inhabit and in fact become dominant in this terrain. In fact this is the major reason for the shift away from talking about organs of people's power to talking about organs of civil society. **In fact the conception of 'organs of people's power' expresses the unity of political and civic struggles in the era of the national democratic revolution.** The nature of 'civil society' that will develop is not dependent on making the terrain independent, but is dependent on the type of institutions to be developed that will contest and transform even that very same 'civil society'. To talk of organs of civil society without addressing the question of organs of people's power is to strip our struggle of its revolutionary content. However even more dangerous is the possible premature and ahistorical separation of civic issues from political issues.

The conceptualisation of organs of people's power separates bourgeois from socialist democracy. This conception and approach to building democracy also cuts across the rather problematic divide between 'civil society' and the state. Here, we are, to use the phrase of some of our 'democratic socialists', defining the nature and content of the types of 'organs of civil society' that should be developed, ie. at the root of it we are talking about building people's power.

The concept of 'people's power' is rooted in our perspective of a national democratic revolution, where the people are not just an amorphous mass but are a people united for the bringing about of a national democracy. This is where the significance of the process of building democracy as a political task, that should have organs of people's power as its agency, lies. It is also only organs of people's power that are capable of practically bridging

the dichotomy of 'civil society' and the state, and lay the basis for a longer-term transition to socialism.

In concluding this paper it is important to point out that our major concern is that concepts that one uses have direct political implications. For instance the shift away from developing our understanding of 'organs people's power' and the new post February 2 1990 vocabulary ('organs of civil society'; 'an autonomous and vibrant civil society'; etc.) is not merely a change of concepts but perhaps a dangerous shift away from the perspective of a national democratic revolution to that of bourgeois democracy.

Although the concept of organs of people's power still needs further elaboration, for the purposes of this paper it is adequate for us to enter the debate from a different angle, which for us contains the revolutionary perspective that should characterise our Party in particular. Perhaps even more important for us is to begin to point the way towards which a revolutionary socialist perspective should be directed. For

our Party in particular what this means is that the strengthening of working class leadership and the socialist perspective lie in the development of organs of people's power. In other words organs of people's power should serve both as instruments for securing and deepening national democracy as well as the organs for the transition towards socialism. Of course in the process the nature and role of such organs will change as conditions determine, but they are the only structures that will ensure participatory democracy and counter any tendency towards a bourgeois-democratic settlement that might be found within the ranks of the national liberation movement. This is the route towards national and socialist democracy which 'democratic socialism' fails to grasp.

The perspective outlined above should guide us in our struggles around Codesa, the nature of an interim government, and even more important, in the struggle for a Constituent Assembly and the type of democracy we are struggling for whose constitutional basis should be secured in this Constituent Assembly. ♪

#### References

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2. Important as it is to critically examine the notion of "democratic socialism", this issue is a subject on its own that requires a separate intervention.
3. Glaser, D (1990), "Putting democracy back into democratic socialism", *Work in Progress*, 65, April 1990, p.30.
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7. Glaser, 1990, p.67.
8. Slovo, J (1990) "Has Socialism Failed?", *The African Communist*, no.121, 2nd quarter, 1990. Slovo has in fact developed his critique of the concept in "Socialist aspirations and socialist realities", *The African Communist*, no.124, 1st quarter, 1991.
9. Cronin is correctly points out in this regard that "The unprincipled abandonment of basic concepts, not because they have proved to be wrong, but because they are tactically embarrassing, is opportunism. But the freezing of Marxism-Leninism into a closed and unchanging doctrine, a blue-print that simply requires application in any given situation, is dogmatism." "Lenin is not a statue", *The African Communist*, no.127, p.12.
10. Lenin, VI (1976), *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, p.138.
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# Disregarding the lessons of history

**SKENJANA ROJI responds to an article in AC No 127 by SACP Central Committee member Harry Gwala on the role and nature of the party**

*"Those who disregard the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them" - George Santayana*

In responding to some issues raised in comrade Harry Gwala's article ("A Party of the working class or an amorphous mess" - *African Communist*, no. 127), I do not want to pretend to be writing on a clean slate. Many points, especially those relating to the role and character of the party have been raised by Jeremy Cronin in his responding article ("Lenin is not a statue", *AC*, no. 127).

I agree with Gwala that the crisis in Eastern Europe "throws new challenges to our Marxist theoreticians of today." Yet ironically by hiding behind "so-called" (see, for example, "in a great stampede from the so-called 'personality cult' and bureaucratic practices") Gwala betrays an unwillingness or incapacity to accept and deal with this challenge. It unMarxist to behave in an ostrich-like manner in the face of a harsh reality which is crying out for bold and critical examination for the defence of socialist ideas and the advance of the struggle for socialism.

A Marxist theoretician should always show readiness to confront issues of theory and practice of the revolution boldly, testing their scientific validity through the litmus of new his-

torical experience. Lenin, for example, in his work "The Slogan for the United States of Europe" developed Marxism by showing that the thesis advanced earlier by Marx that socialism would triumph simultaneously in developed Europe was no longer scientifically valid during the period of imperialism. Lenin demonstrated that due to the operation of the law of uneven economic and political development which manifests itself in extreme forms under imperialism, socialism would emerge victorious where the imperialist chain was at its weakest. Most of Lenin's works are informed by a consistent approach that is in keeping with the creative application of Marxist theory on the basis of what he called "the concrete analysis of the concrete situation."

A Marxist theoretician should know that social processes, due to their contradictory nature, do not manifest themselves in pure form. Such a theoretician should be aware that it is necessary at all times to penetrate the surface of appearance and delve into the hidden essence in order not only to correctly identify new historical moments that are thrown up by political motion but also, and more importantly, to seize such moments so that at all times possible the strategic and tactical initiative resides with the masses and their leading organisations. Those who move from



dogmatist premises, being slaves to the absolute, where the new comes out in a single flash like a religious revelation, fail to find their bearings in the complex world of politics.

We must therefore look critically at the events unfolding in Eastern Europe, with all the seriousness we can muster. We must distill the necessary lessons, not only for the advance of socialism world-wide, but also and more importantly for the benefit of revolutionary practice within our own country. But for us to be better able to grasp the real lessons and implications of the crisis of the deformed type of socialism in Eastern Europe, we must first of all correctly feel the pulse of the objective and subjective factors as they act on one another to engender that crisis. One of the weaknesses of the debate on socialism so far has been the tendency to overplay one factor at the expense of the other. On the one hand, there has been the trend, for instance, to overestimate the role of the subjective factor, the role of the individual, for example the role of Stalin. On the other hand, there has been another trend that underestimates the role of ideological factors in creating the climate for the incubation of elements that led to the crisis of deformed socialism.

Careful reading of history indicates that the seeds of the present crisis were born with the October Revolution itself, and not with the assumption of power by Stalin. Already, during the time of Lenin, when he was at the helm of government, bureaucracy was beginning to rear its ugly head. More than once he warned against the dangers of this "heap" (the bureau-

crats). The economic backwardness of Russia, the fact that the Soviet Union was the only socialist state in the world then, the intense activity of internal and external reaction, the peasant character of the country, are but some of the key ingredients which were to become the recipe for the crisis. But for any recipe to ferment there must be a fermenting agent. The policy and activity of the Bolshevik party, its commissions and omissions, and especially Stalin's propensity to abuse power, so ominously described by Lenin in his "Letter to the Congress" (written shortly before his own death) were to become that fermenting agent.

As a further illustration of the interpenetration of objective and subjective factors let us look at how the phenomenon of statism arose in the Soviet Union. It was the civil war that provided the ultimate material conditions for the emergence of statism. Objectively, the civil war imposed a need for commandism, a top down administrative approach to the construction of socialism. Later on the state began to dominate virtually every aspect of Soviet life. The state ownership of factories and land, for example, became synony-

mous with the ultimate form of socialist property. The state was seen, no longer as a strategic instrument for the transformation of society, but as an absolute and a fetish. Inevitably, in such a situation the scourge of bureaucracy was to grow and fester.

Viewing the phenomenon of statism from the perspective of the subjective factor, it is important to underscore one of the fundamental theses of Marxism that "in the history of



**More than once, Lenin warned against the dangers posed by the bureaucrats**

society...the actors are all endowed with consciousness." It is true that the objective factor in the ultimate resort determines the subjective factor. However, we should not be blind to the fact that the subjective factor has relative independence, and within this relative independence it can act not only to change, but also to create the objective factor.

Thus long before the outbreak of the civil war, ideological tendencies to statism existed in certain Marxist circles in Russia. Lenin's *State and Revolution*, for instance, where his conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat is heavily biased towards the absolute role of the state with little appreciation for the historical significance of the role of civil liberties and a vibrant "civil society" reveals some of the features of statism. Karl von Holdt, in the *South African Labour Bulletin* (September 1990), makes the same observation when, from the perspective of the role of the party, he argues that Lenin's underestimation of the role of civil liberties and civil society in *State and Revolution* saw the absolutisation of the role of the party at the expense of any independent activity of other mass formations or institutions.

I would like to stress that it was also this tendency to statism and the underestimation of the significant role of civil liberties, especially political pluralism, that partly (there were other factors) influenced Lenin's perception of the role of the constituent assembly. With the dissolution of the constituent assembly, the distinct role of the party and the state began to converge, and this convergence began to infect the political practice of the Bolsheviks.

As time went on, there were further ideological rationalisations for statism. There was Trotsky's proposal for the "militarisation of the trade unions". There was Stalin's theory of the "revolution from above", which saw the successful campaign for collectivisation and industrialisation thanks to an extreme

centralisation of power and the suppression of dissent. The creative energy of the masses from below was not harnessed in a democratic way. Then Stalin propounded the notion that the advance of socialism is inevitably accompanied by an acute intensification of the class struggle. As a result (so the argument went) there was a corresponding need to strengthen the state apparatus to deal with counter-revolutionary forces. Within this ideological milieu the monster of bureaucracy grew, and its tentacles began to envelop the whole process of socialist construction. Thus, at the end of the day, a warped and distorted type of socialism held sway.

And this brings me to the issue of the concept of Marxism-Leninism which Gwala correctly exhorts us to defend. I agree with Gwala that there is neither political nor ideological justification for us to be shy of Lenin. He was a truly committed, principled and selfless leader of the working people whom he and others led in a struggle which culminated in the overthrow of the class enemy and the birth of the first socialist country in the world.

Furthermore, Lenin made an extraordinary contribution to the development of the theory of Marxism. In his works he came up with new, distinct ideas on fundamental questions of Marxism. It is in the strength and recognition of this outstanding contribution that he rightly deserves to be singled out and honoured. However, against the backdrop of the current crisis, it is crucial that we look at the Marxist-Leninist body of theory afresh and re-examine it unsparingly, so as to rid our theory, not only of some of its uncreative and uncritical elements, but also and more importantly, to remove the blot of the Stalinist legacy once and for all.

Leninism as a concept, for example, was coined by Stalin in 1924 in his lectures on "The foundations of Leninism". He defined Leninism as "Marxism of the era of imperialism and the

proletarian dictatorship (and it was) of world-wide validity." It is a notion that was born and defined within a particular ideological climate that was characterised by an intense battle of ideas among Marxists. It was imposed on Soviet society and the international communist movement by Stalin with the hope that it would not just end with Leninism but would later incorporate Stalinism. Indeed in the USSR the words Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin were elevated into icons. Moreover, history bears testimony to the fact that most of Stalin's atrocities were committed in the name of Leninism.

Viewed from the perspective of its Stalinist origins, another weakness of the concept Marxism-Leninism is that it is narrow and restrictive in that it excludes other Marxist theoreticians who made equally outstanding contributions

to the development of Marxism. Consequently, taking into account the category of Leninism in its entirety, it is imperative to subject the ideology of Leninism to close scrutiny, redefine it if needs be, so as to salvage it from the Stalinist baggage.

So far the debate initiated by Slovo's watershed pamphlet, "Has Socialism Failed?", has focussed (as important as this is) on the causes and general implications of Stalinism and the crisis of the deformed type of socialism. I think the time has come for us to shift the centre of gravity of this debate away from the remote steppes of Russia towards more immediate and strategic terrain, our own continent, country, history, movement, party and overall political practice.

In that way, the debate will not only be more worthwhile but also more meaningful. ♪

## **They said it ...**

### **LONG LIVE THE FREE MARKET...**

The *Financial Mail* is one of the leading organs constantly extolling the merits of "free enterprise" and "market competition". But when it comes to the near monopoly control of the press in South Africa the *Financial Mail* is happy to invent other principles. In a leader article (January 17, 1992) the *FM* admits that "There is a concentration of ownership..." But it hastily adds:

"There is nothing sinister or undemocratic about that state of affairs. Indeed there are advantages. The most important is that the fewer the owners, the more interested they are in the business and the more determined they generally become in ensuring that it is successful."

In other words - Long Live the Free Market (except when it applies to us).

### **SOVIET OPINION POLL**

18 months ago the "free market" enjoyed a certain popularity in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe. It was seen as the way out from a severe crisis in the administrative command systems that prevailed in these countries.

But the popular honeymoon with capitalism is rapidly ending. In November *Pravda* published an opinion poll showing that only 33 percent of under-20s, 14 percent of the 21-30 age group, and still fewer among succeeding age groups now support capitalism.

# Lessons from Nicaragua

**ALEJANDRO BENDANA, a member of the Sandinista Movement in Nicaragua, looks at negotiation strategies**



**N**egotiations are a means towards an end - a double-edged sword - that if resorted to correctly can hasten the achievement of that end. This presumes a political and intellectual clarity without which you are lost. If you do not know what you are fighting for, what you believe in, what your priorities are, if you lack faith and historical vision, then you are already lost before you enter the battlefield. Our antagonists can detect strategic confusion, contradiction, lack of confidence or self-doubt, and they manipulate this to their advantage.

Throughout its history imperialism has demonstrated a remarkable coherence and tenacity of purpose. Throughout history the opponents of democracy have often raised the issue of negotiations in order to defuse mounting struggles, holding out false hopes of a just settlement which they have every intention of impeding.

On the other hand, no serious democratic movement can ever reject in principle a negotiated settlement of a conflict. Throughout modern history most armed struggles have ended in negotiations. The point is to be able to judge correctly when the objective conditions exist which will compel a serious and honest negotiation effort on the part of the opponent.

In other words, you need to be able to judge when it has become apparent to the other side that the democratic forces are not negotiating out of weakness, or at the expense of the historical aspirations they represent.

Unfortunately, often these are lessons learnt only through bitter experience. It is an experience, however, that we are duty bound to share.

**1. Social struggles transcend national boundaries. A democratic force seeking to win or defend national liberation must strategically take into account the domestic and international balance of forces.**

The Sandinista Revolution set out to build a thorough-going democracy for the first time in Nicaraguan and Central American history. The first stage of our struggle left no room for negotiation. It took a long armed struggle, culminating in a popular insurrection that smashed the Somoza dictatorship and forced the disintegration of its entire military and political apparatus. The extensive economic holdings of the Somoza dynasty family were nationalised.

Seldom in the history of revolutions has a revolutionary movement come to power with such an overwhelming and open mandate to



**Sandinistas were called upon to learn as quickly about diplomacy and multilateral defence, as they had about M-16s and AK-47s**

implement further change, to proceed with social transformation, laying the basis for independent economic development.

Between 1979 and early 1981, the domestic balance of forces could hardly have been more favourable for the Sandinistas. An election during this period, which in retrospect would have been a wise move, would have given the FSLN an overwhelming majority. But precisely because of the power we enjoyed, elections seemed unnecessary at that point. They were postponed for five years. But we believed

we had a green light to rapidly consolidate the revolution, to give strong impetus to agrarian reforms, to declare our independence from the United States, to express our identification with socialist ideals, and to give support to revolutionary struggles elsewhere, particularly in El Salvador.

Upsetting the traditional model of US domination in Central America has its price. Size simply did not allow us to deal with the US as we had dealt with Somoza, and so negotiations were in order. The struggle for national liberation, victorious at home by military means, now had to undertake a new stage of political struggle on the international stage, in order to defend the right to build democracy. This was a right which was now defensible in terms of international law. We were now a government, and the struggle for liberation was now a struggle to defend independence and the right to self-determination.

In this context, it is important to remember that the international and particularly the regional balance of forces might not be as favourable as

the domestic balance. Insofar as governments are legally bound to settle disputes peacefully, we Sandinistas were called upon to learn as quickly about diplomacy and multilateral defence, as we had about M-16s and AK-47s. On this score, during those crucial years, we miscalculated the unfavourable changes in the international balance of forces. This brings me to lesson number 2:

**2. The ultimate opponent is US imperialism. The revolutionary forces must never under-**

**estimate Washington's capacity and determination to mount counter-revolutionary warfare and pursue it viciously at all levels. We Sandinistas were not naive. We were aware that in history there has never been a revolution without a counter-revolution. And in the modern history of Latin America there has never been a counter-revolution without the involvement of the CIA. From day one of the revolution we knew that, even if we stood still, we were in trouble for having dared come to power without the permission of the US State Department. Yet we believed, and we continue to believe, that the inevitable contradiction between revolution and imperialism, does not have to take on a bloody, aggressive character, but might rather take the form of classic destabilisation techniques.**

But not even the most pessimistic among us predicted the obsession with which the Reagan Administration sought to overthrow our revolution. It formed a counter-revolutionary army, it mined our ports, it declared a national emergency to justify an embargo against us, it published assassination manuals, it disregarded domestic and international public opinion, it violated internal and international law, it elevated tiny Nicaragua to the top of its policy agenda, it even suffered the greatest political crisis since Watergate as a result of its obsession with our country. If it had not been so bloody, we might have been flattered by all this attention. By late 1981 the US government had unleashed a war against Nicaragua which was only to end almost a decade later. Which leads me to lesson number 3:

**3. Negotiation efforts or frameworks are bound to fail if they do not have as a premise the legitimacy of the democratic forces and their right to be in government, or to contest for governmental power.**

As with most other serious revolutionary

struggles, we had to battle to achieve a serious negotiations process. In fact, our sustained efforts to achieve an understanding with the US, based on mutual respect and international law, came to nothing. Time and time again we attempted to deal with the real and even perceived security concerns of the US. Washington simply refused to deal with us seriously. Serious negotiations presume a recognition of the legitimate interests of your opponent, indeed of the legitimacy of the opponent. This was never accepted as a premise by the Reagan Administration. Indeed, it made no sense for Reagan to do so because he was bent on destroying by military force the revolutionary option in Central America.

At this stage, all that could be achieved diplomatically was to build a multi-lateral effort that, failing to broker an understanding between Nicaragua and the US, or even failing to put an end to the contra war, could at least create obstacles for direct US intervention. This was the background to the Contradora regional diplomatic peace effort of 1983 to 1987.

Throughout this period diplomacy took a back stage to military developments. The main explanation for the revolution's survival in these years lies in the sustained, organised and heroic effort of the Nicaraguan people to defend themselves against the military onslaught. No doubt the diplomatic effort and American public opinion played a role, but they failed to change Washington's policy. Indeed, any signs of flexibility on Nicaragua's part were interpreted as indications of weakness that called for continued use of force.

By the end of this period, it was the Nicaraguan peoples' organised military effort, and the contribution of the socialist countries to that cause, that had stopped the contras strategically and thereby imposed upon Washington an unsustainable price for continuing the war.

This forced a change in tactics.

By late 1987 the strategic collapse of the contra military effort, the scandal in the US, the reluctance of Congress to continue backing the war on account of grassroots pressure, and the increasing questioning of that policy by Washington's own allies in Central America, made conditions ripe for a new peace effort. In the face of US opposition, the Central American presidents signed the Esquipulas peace plan in August 1987, in order to bring the war to an end, only this time on the basis of the recognition of the political and constitutional legitimacy of the Sandinista government. Once our neighbours recognised that the contras could not succeed, and that US policy had failed, they did not wish to be left hanging out on a limb. The revolution's battle for survival now became essentially political.

From our side, the growing crisis within the socialist camp began to impact on socialist support for our revolution. The inflation rate soared to a staggering 32,000% in 1988. The contras, although strategically defeated, continued hit and run attacks from bases in Honduras, compelling Nicaragua to remain on a war footing. There was an escalating economic and social cost for us. Even though our war effort could have been sustained, it was clear that short of invading Honduras to clear out the contras and engage the US army support structures (something which almost happened in April 1988), the war simply could not be ended by more war. For the sake of the revolution's own survival, the war had to be ended. This could only be done through negotiations.

**4. When they are forced to the negotiations table and to the test of free elections, imperialism and its allies seek every opportunity to employ old and new techniques in order to keep the democratic left from coming to power, or in getting it out of government**

**when it is in office.**

Forcing an historical opponent to the negotiation table is an undeniable victory. It is recognition of the legitimacy of the democratic struggle. But one cannot minimise the capacity of an opponent to manoeuvre on this terrain. It is a legal terrain which in some cases is better known to the enemy, or, as in the case of Nicaragua, a terrain that has been considerably eroded by years of war and economic crisis.

We certainly underestimated the capacity of the US and its allies to exploit this terrain.

Under the terms of the Esquipulas plan, the contras were to demobilise. In exchange they, and the internal opposition, were to be afforded every opportunity to organise and test their forces in a free election under international supervision.

The Sandinista government proceeded with its part of the bargain, but the US did not comply with the Central American call, but instead sustained the contras as a fighting force and maintained the economic blockade throughout the electoral campaign. At the same time the US took every advantage of the political space opened up and of the Nicaraguan compliance with the Esquipulas plan. The US sent the Nicaraguan electorate a clear message: vote for the Sandinistas and you will see a continuation of the war and the economic crisis (and if you don't believe us, look what happened to Panama).

We should not make the mistake that the alleged end of the cold war, and the disappearance of the Soviet strategic threat to the mainland of the Americas leads Washington to break with its traditional pattern of behaviour, least of all in Central America. On the other hand, this should not lead us to overlook how the Bush administration, without reneging on the contras and economic aggression, established a new consensus in Washington for the use of post-cold war mechanisms for waging

political-electoral warfare, not only in Nicaragua but also elsewhere.

We refer here to the semi-public apparatus known as the National Endowment for Democracy, funded by Congress to pursue US foreign policy objectives which, according to the liberals at least, was to replace illegal covert intervention with legal overt intervention on behalf of "democratic" actors. Of course, in practice one simply complemented the other. But what was new - and requires careful study by the left - was the working of the new apparatus, complete with political campaign techniques and the sophisticated use of media and communication technologies. These techniques have been used to help provoke the electoral ouster of governments that were feared or no longer desired by the US, once the ground rules had been negotiated or imposed to allow such electoral intervention as an integral part of free and fair elections.

The techniques employed in Nicaragua merit recounting. In brief, the US, acting of course through its allies, resorts to:

- insisting through local opposition (whose participation is indispensable for legitimisation of the electoral or referendum process) that they be granted legal access to foreign support;
- in the best tradition of US political campaigns, heavy emphasis on negative campaigning;
- strong "get out the vote" campaigns, with the creation of civic fronts - to turn economic discontent and political apathy into a vote for a US-unified bloc, rather than mere abstention which could prove favourable to the regime;
- sustained international and regional pressure on the unfriendly government, so as to keep its behaviour clean, including on election day;
- the existence of an apparatus to denounce irregularities, including rapid count mechanisms;
- manipulation of opinion polls, of interna-

tional observers and the foreign press.

This is an apparatus that functions best on behalf of US clients in opposition against incumbent governments, whether against former but now embarrassing right-wing allies (see the Philippines, and the Chile "no" vote) or against more progressive governments (Panama, and especially Nicaragua). It is an apparatus that is often wielded on behalf of so-called "third forces", supposedly between incumbent regimes that have outlived their usefulness for US imperialism and a revolutionary democratic left. In these cases the "third force" is conveniently created and sustained by the United States, very often with the support of the Church.

Mozambique, Angola, South Africa, Cambodia, El Salvador and Guatemala may all be the future testing grounds for this apparatus, in one form or another. It is an apparatus that was also tested in eastern Europe in 1989 and proved crucial in the organisational articulation of movements like Solidarity.

The question then arises: did the Sandinistas fall into a trap? Are free elections suicidal for a democratic government that has been under siege and whose social base has been eroded by the application of so-called low intensity warfare? Can there effectively be free and fair elections in the context of international economic strangulation and critical poverty?

This brings me to lesson number 5:

**5. In the politically negotiated defence of democracy, success will be determined by the capacity to engage the opponent with a strategy that draws its strength from the organised force of the people and which deprives the opponent of the political capacity to resort to force.**

Eight years of war and sustained struggle imposed a heavy toll on Nicaraguan society. The Nicaraguan government made great conces-



sions, based on the belief the FSLN was the most popular and best organised force in Nicaraguan society, capable of rallying a majority of the Nicaraguan electorate to its side on the basis of national pride and the defence of independence.

We were only partially correct. Being the best organised and largest force in Nicaraguan society, with a membership that believes the FSLN to represent a cause not just a party, was simply not enough to win an election. It was not enough, even against the bumbling, chaotic coalition led by Violeta Chamorro, who was more a religious symbol than a party candidate.

We overestimated the absolute weight of our relative strength. We underestimated the degree of discontent. We overestimated the capacity of a war-weary people to endure indefinite suffering and to continue demonstrating mass heroism. Looking back now, with the advantages of hindsight, the question we ask ourselves is not why did Mrs Chamorro manage to get 54% of the vote, but just how did the FSLN, in the face of enormous international adversity and foreign interference, still manage to attain 42% of the vote?

And if 42% of the electorate demonstrated a willingness to endure further suffering and stand up to the US in full awareness that the war and the blockade would continue in the event of a Sandinista victory, then indeed the election could be lost but the revolution saved. The historical test for the FSLN, for the Nicaraguan revolution and for the negotiation strategy employed may lie, not so much in 1990's electoral results, but rather in other factors:

First, the FSLN's capacity to survive the Reagan-Bush military onslaught that sought its destruction. The contras no longer exist as a military force, relative peace has been attained and the FSLN, even in opposition, continues to be the most powerful force in Nicaraguan society. We passed that test, which is no small

historical achievement.

Second is the capacity of 10 years of revolution to impose itself irreversibly upon the political culture of Nicaragua. The new government was a product of revolutionary legality, and it was compelled to pledge itself to uphold a revolutionary constitution. The military, political and ideological transformations in Nicaragua make it impossible for a return to a pre-revolutionary period, or for a successful counter-revolution to take place. The transformations at the level of people's consciousness and the organisational experience accumulated over the last 10 years, although facilitated by the Sandinista government, were not a product of the government but of people's own empowerment. No government can take that away, ever.

Over the coming five years, the revolution must be measured on the basis of the empowerment of popular civil society, and its capacity to struggle against anti-popular governmental programmes, in the defence of what was won and should not be taken away. Today Sandinista labour confederations, representing 85% of all organised workers, are not simply capable of paralysing the country, but also of negotiating with the government the character of its macro-economic and social programmes, arguing with the IMF, and taking up the challenge of privatisation by demanding that enterprises be turned over to worker's collectives with ten years of proven managerial competence.

In Nicaragua today there can be no governing without the cooperation of the labour organisations. The government and the FSLN both know this and behave accordingly and responsibly. While the Nicaraguan people might not want to be told that the only way to satisfy their aspirations is by way of 10 more years of war, they also will not accept being told that the real social gains of the last ten years must be compromised in order to receive

the blessing of the World Bank, the IMF and US AID.

We do not know how long this duality can be maintained, both from the side of the government and from the side of the FSLN. In the final analysis the fundamental contradiction continues to be between the people and the imperialist world system. Indeed, it may not be the best time for the left to be in government. Maybe the revolution can be sustained and propelled forward best without the straitjacket that governing entails. But the FSLN has to equip itself, not simply to win a future election, but also to sustain its historical principles and commitment to liberation, to prepare a viable governmental programme for a new type of party, committed to continue the struggle for the construction of popular democracy under new conditions.

### **6. Our social goals will not be achieved until we have dealt with the economic ones on a popular and international basis.**

In this day and age, traditional boundaries of sovereignty and liberation are receding. There is a limited capacity for individual political actors or individual governments to achieve economic development and meet basic human needs. More than ever, the smaller actors on the global scene must join together in order to attain better negotiation positions in the face of an unjust global capitalist order, and particularly in the face of the US with its most recent attempt to impose a new regional economic bloc that favours transnational capital and entails the loss of economic and political sovereignty.

The struggle, therefore, around the terms of our insertion within the world economy is inseparable from the struggle to define the social and economic model we wish for our nations. But in order to develop strong negotiating positions on a national and regional basis,

these positions must necessarily rest on the support of the masses. This in turn presumes a minimum of formal democracy and a new definition of self-interest on the part of traditional elites. In short, only democracy on a supra-national level will allow poor nations to confront the international power structure.

We are, however, in the Central American region, woefully behind in the task of defining new models of integration that take into account social development. Are there alternatives to structural adjustment packages? If not, how best can we negotiate collectively? Must we explore formulas to create national and transnational fronts that include governments in order to stand up to the IMF? Will responsible forces in the North, particularly social democrats, take up the new North-South challenge as they did the East-West one, and fight for greater flexibility for the developing nations? If the global economy is being portioned off into competitive trading blocs, where do the nations of the South come in? Do we resign ourselves to fighting for capitalism with a human face and postpone the struggle for socialism until better times roll around? We have no answers, in fact we are barely at the stage of defining new questions.

Coming to preside over a war shattered nation is not an attractive proposition. Indeed, managing a debt-ridden economy whose exports are a fraction of its imports can break even the most adventurous revolutionary. The point that the viable left in Central America is increasingly taking into account is not only the human and material cost of continued warfare, but the real considerations of what to do once power has been achieved. Some have even questioned whether assuming power is not, under many circumstances, a trap.

In Nicaragua and in the region, in or out of power, we are increasingly reaching the conclusion that peace with justice in the 1990s

requires political projects capable of forging multi-class alliances in order to sustain coalition governments in the face of an adverse national and international economic environment. Our societies have changed, grown more complex, the old worker-peasant alliance model and one-party notions must be discarded. Fortunately they never took much hold in Central America, a zone of unorthodoxy.

Despite everything there have been very real gains in our region over the last twenty years. The present balance of forces now allows the struggle to move on to a less violent terrain. Mass based political struggle is assuming the ascendancy over armed struggle. Local initiatives are attaining new importance as opposed to centralised directives.

The key is not so much seizing power or winning elections, but rather developing the conditions that enable broad-based mass movements themselves to assume power. And in

Central America at least this means capitalising on the institutional crisis of the region, and the collapse of communism, in order to expand popular political projects and demand peace. If the left does not lead the demand for peace and negotiations, then somebody else will.

It is imperative, however, that we are not placed on the ideological defensive as we move into the negotiation arena. Notwithstanding eastern Europe, and perhaps on account of what will take place there over the next few years, we on the left must continue to believe what history has demonstrated. A society cannot be democratic if it is ruled by profit-breeding social inequality, and in which the most vital areas of livelihood and survival are left outside public regulation. The development of new perspectives and the consequent broadening of policy alternatives represents a political and intellectual challenge, a historical necessity for the left everywhere. ♪

# Moscow tragedy

**'MKHULU', an old friend of the SACP and ANC in Moscow, gives a view from the inside of the days after the failed August coup**

**O**n Friday, August 23 last year, at 4pm the radio programmes on all channels in the premises of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in Moscow were cut off. An urgent message was broadcast: "By the decree of the mayor of Moscow, and with the consent of the USSR president, this building must be evacuated by 5pm. Those persons who delay will be detained..."

The actions of the mayor of Moscow, Gavril Popov, against the headquarters of the CPSU were expected. The day before Popov, until

recently a champion of the socialist planned economy and now an ardent supporter of the free market, announced the suspension of the activities of the city and district CPSU committees and ordered the militia to seal their offices. But the fact that Popov's actions, so obviously violating the law, had been sanctioned by Gorbachev, still the general secretary of the CPSU at the time, was cause for some surprise. Indeed, just the day before, at his first press conference after resuming presidential duties and the crumbling of the coup, Gorbachev had

defended socialism and spoke of the continuation of reform within the CPSU.

What had happened? Why did Gorbachev so abruptly change his line? Or did this, indeed, represent a change of line? These were questions that were circulating on the Friday.

The situation became clearer on Saturday evening, when Gorbachev's statement was read on TV and radio. Not only did he announce his resignation as general secretary of the CPSU, but he called on the central committee to take "a difficult but honest decision" and dissolve itself, leaving the party's republic and local structures to decide on their own future.

The statement of Gorbachev-the-general-secretary was immediately followed by the decree of Gorbachev-the-president freezing party property and putting it under control of local authorities

Gorbachev's actions followed immediately upon Boris Yeltsin's suspension of the Communist Party in the Russian Republic (though Gorbachev looked rather unhappy when Yeltsin made him witness the signing of the decree). On August 29 it was Yeltsin's turn again. He issued yet another decree, this time nationalising all party property on Russian territory. In doing this, Yeltsin referred indirectly to Gorbachev's earlier steps, claiming that "the suggestion to dissolve the CPSU comes from communists themselves."

Needless to say, the actions of both Gorbachev and Yeltsin were entirely illegal. No property can be nationalised, except by court decision, and the suspension of a political party is permitted only under a state of emergency.

Of course, as South Africans well know, this is not the first time in world history that a progressive party has been persecuted. But I cannot recall a case where the captain of the political ship not only abandoned it during the first troubles, but before doing it sealed the

wheel-house and all the storage rooms and fuel tanks, while his friend switched off all communications, including the intercom.

Within the space of a few days the CPSU leadership on all levels was deprived of channels of communication between itself and the party's grassroots membership.

What lay behind Gorbachev's apparent somersault? Was he so affected by information that some of the CPSU secretaries had supported the coup, or at best did not denounce it? Was it the result of the heavy pressure from Yeltsin? Or the strong influence of Alexander Yakovlev and other "reformers"? Yakovlev himself later boasted of his own role. Only Gorbachev himself can give a complete answer. But certainly on the day he parted ways with the CPSU he had a long discussion with Yakovlev - the man who had written dozens of books and articles praising socialism in the times of Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev, while working for two decades in the Central Committee Propaganda Department. The self-same Yakovlev nowadays shows off by proclaiming: "I do not know what is socialism and I do not know what is capitalism. The distinction is unknown to me, maybe because of my ignorance. But I don't understand it."

Another question. Why, after calling on the central committee to dissolve itself, did Gorbachev do nothing to facilitate the central committee meeting? On the contrary, when the party secretariat went knocking at his door in an attempt to secure a venue for its session, Gorbachev refused. Why? Perhaps he was not sure that his call for self-dissolution would be supported, and that the CPSU would become a serious opposition to his new policies.

### **Inside the party**

In an attempt to understand these developments, their causes and possible consequences, we have to go back to the story of the August

coup. A lot has already been written about it in Moscow and elsewhere.

Busy as they are, both Gorbachev and Yeltsin found time in the first weeks to write their memoirs on the "three days".

The right-wing press (by the way, it calls itself left-wing - political terminology here is upside down) did its best to project the coup as a "communist putsch".

In reality most of the central committee secretaries, including deputy general secretary Vladimir Ivashko got to know about the creation of the so-called "State Committee for the State of Emergency" (SCSE) from radio broadcasts.

In the words of Ivashko, who was number two in the party leadership structures: "The preparation of the coup was carried out by its makers in deep secrecy from the lawfully elected bodies of the party. No decision or other documents even connected in the slightest degree with the preparation and organisation of the coup were ever prepared, discussed or adopted by the plenary session, by the politbureau, or by the secretaries of the CPSU central committee."

True, most of the coup leaders were members of the CPSU central committee.

But after the earlier abolition of the clause in the USSR constitution which had stipulated the "leading and guiding role" of the party, the prime minister and other ministers (involved in the leadership of the failed coup) were not reporting to the CPSU central committee about their intentions and actions. They were subordinate only to Gorbachev, as president. If these people committed a crime against the state, they also committed it against the party to which they belonged.

Many people interpret the failed coup as a culmination of opposition by "reactionaries" within the Party. Gorbachev himself, at a meeting with journalists, disclosed that in April

of last year 32 regional party secretaries (in Russia) out of 72 signed a letter, "Down with Gorbachev", calling for Gorbachev's resignation as party general secretary.

But to equate the stand made by these comrades with the coup makers is totally unfair. The truth is that not a single "State Committee" member was ever among those who publicly criticised Gorbachev.

The exact opposite is the case. All of them had been hand-picked by Gorbachev just months before the coup, and the appointments were often made in the face of strong opposition from either the Supreme Soviet or the party.

Thus it took two rounds of voting for Gorbachev to push Gennady Yanaev into the post of Vice President.

It was only after several defeats that Gorbachev finally dropped the idea of appointing to the Security Council, Valentin Boldin, who had served as his personal assistant for many years, and who later headed the President's Administration. (Boldin's participation in the coup must have been most painful for Gorbachev.)

The only member of the politbureau involved in the coup - Oleg Shenin - was severely defeated at the inaugural conference of the Russian Communist Party.

In the race for the post of First Secretary he came a distant fifth, with just a handful of votes.

But this had not prevented Gorbachev from recommending Shenin to the post of the CPSU Organising Secretary. Indeed this appointment became critical in the coup period.

With the absence of both Gorbachev (on holiday) and Ivashko (in hospital), Shenin happened to be in charge of the party headquarters. It was Shenin who on August 19 sent a cable to the republican and regional party committees urging communists to assist the SCSE.

It was this cable which was to become the main argument for those who accuse the CPSU of collaborating with the coup.

### **A very strange coup**

In the press and in official statements much is said about "the people stopping the coup, the people defending democracy". But what actually happened?

Yes, indeed there was an attempted coup. The USSR president was held incommunicado and a special, unconstitutional body took all power into its hands. But it was a very strange coup. The actions of the coup makers (no arrests, no suppression of opposition structures, no disruption of communications) suggest that they did not regard themselves as law-breakers. Everything suggests that they wanted to keep their hands clean. As soon as the first blood was shed, they immediately retreated before they were ever defeated.

On the Monday morning, following the announcement of the creation of the SCSE, the Russian leadership, headed by Yeltsin, issued a statement calling for a general, indefinite strike. But in Moscow and in most of the regions not a single factory, enterprise or organisation responded to the strike call. Gorbachev himself later admitted that "at least 40% of the population" supported the programme of the SCSE. According to Gorbachev the general popular sentiment in regard to the coup-makers was "never mind them violating the constitution, as long as they manage to put the country in order."

Alexander Kraiko MP, who was never a member of the CPSU, but who is hated by the right-wingers for his independent position, said at a session of the Congress of People's Deputies: "We must gather our courage and admit that at the most alarming hour for the country a great number of citizens remained indifferent to the lawfully elected president, to the con-

spirators and to the constitution. This is the most awful truth about the events of August 19 to 21."

But what many Muscovites did seriously object to was seeing tanks and armed personnel carriers rolling through the streets of the capital. The army had never interfered in politics in this way in 70 years. With the appearance of paratroop vehicles near the seat of the Russian president and parliament, therefore, Yeltsin's call on the people to rally in defence did receive some response. Bit by bit the "White House" (as Yeltsin and his supporters often called the Russian Parliament's white-faced building) attracted more and more people, and it started to live its own life under siege - in striking contrast to the quite normal situation prevailing in all other parts of Moscow.

Who were the people who rallied to the "White House"?

One leading Russian writer, Alexander Prokhanov (who describes himself as belonging to the so-called "patriotic" wing with strong Russian nationalist tendencies) distinguished four "strata" of "White House defenders".

The first, in his opinion, were "youth, pop-culture and rock-revolutionaries, drawn by the culture of protest - students, hippies, reliving Paris of 1968, Sartre, Marcuse, and existentialism, living in the romanticism of the moment, 'Tanks are in the City!'"

The second category of people, according to Prokhanov, were those "who defended their system. They called themselves the 'perestroika strata' and in reality they are the emergent bourgeoisie, who had something to defend." The third significant category were women, who were horrified at the prospect of bloodshed, and "who appealed: 'Don't kill! Stop! God save you!'" "And the fourth, most active stratum were the professional politicians who, echelon by echelon, went to the mike and controlled proceedings."

Prokhanov's observations are largely correct. Just one of the new commercial banks, Incombank, boasted that it spent ten million roubles on "the defence of the White House" - paying for supplies of construction materials to build barricades and roadblocks, and feed the staff. As one journalist noted, the emerging bourgeoisie "has thrown all its available forces (material and combat) into the defence of the White House. And the 'combat forces' included not only the employees of security companies and private detective agencies, which have been mushrooming in the country, but also some armed criminals as well..."

### **Which was the coup?**

On the morning of August 22, the day after the coup failed, a "victory rally" was held near the "White House". Listening to the speeches on radio, one historian commented: "Most people do not understand that the real coup is taking place right now."

This may be an exaggeration, but there is no doubt that Yeltsin and his lieutenants were seizing the moment to take power into their own hands, at the expense of Gorbachev and the Union structures. Yeltsin showed little concern about the constitutionality of his actions.

The historian in question compared the August events in Moscow with developments in Indonesia in 1965. In both cases left-leaning coups took place followed in quick succession by counter-coups of the right-wing. The communist parties, in both cases, accused of conspiracy, were suppressed and their members persecuted. The presidents (Sukarno in one case, Gorbachev in the other) were allowed to stay in office for a while, but their powers were drastically reduced.

Of course, there are many specific features, the repression against communists in the USSR cannot remotely be compared with the massacre in Indonesia. Nevertheless, there has been

a campaign of dismissals, slanders and intimidation against Soviet communists.

The persecution of communists was only one sign of the major U-turn made in the Russian leadership. As soon as the coup failed the political language of Yeltsin changed too. Congratulating the "citizens of Russia", he spoke of "70 years of slavery". It would be interesting to find out how Boris Yeltsin, a party official for two decades and a member of the CPSU central committee for almost ten years, portrays his own role in this - was he a slave or a slave driver? Yeltsin, the man who just four years ago was the party chief in Moscow, now meets with Western journalists and speaks of the urgency of "decommunisation".

But do the people feel the same way? The Russian TV announcer could not hide his surprise when, reading the results of a poll a month after the coup, it was revealed that only 25% of respondents spoke for the rejection of socialism, 41% were for the creation of a new socialism, and 18% favoured a "restoration of the old socialism".

Analyses of the nature of the post-coup events continues. More and more they are described as a "bourgeois democratic revolution". Bourgeois? This may well be true, since the only stratum of the population which has strengthened its position after August is private business people. But to call it "democratic" requires a rich imagination. Apart from many law-breaking decrees already mentioned, let me note just one more example. When the Russian parliament voted for direct elections for the heads of local administrations, Yeltsin's supporters protested. The reason? Polls suggested to them that the "reformers" would win in only 15-25% of the regions. Russian secretary of state, Gennady Burbulis stated unabashedly: "The President (Yeltsin) cannot allow the opposition to win." Short and clear.

So, if definitions are needed, it would be much more precise to use the term "bourgeois authoritarian counter-coup".

### What went wrong?

There is a strong temptation to put all the blame for the CPSU tragedy on "Gorbachev's betrayal". Many party members in private discussions and in public statements do not bother to search for polite words in order to describe Gorbachev's behaviour. But such an approach is an over-simplification. The causes are more profound than the behaviour (or misbehaviour) of one person.

We should mention, first of all, the gap between grassroots party organisation and the leadership. In the years of perestroika many sweet words were said about inner-party democracy, about the rule of the masses. In practice the gap between leadership and the base hardly diminished. The first meeting between the general secretary and the working class and peasant members of the central committee took place a full year after their election. A similar attitude was expressed towards party full-timers. In his six years in office Gorbachev never once found the time to meet the staff of the central committee.

A second factor was an overwhelming desire to keep the party united at any cost. Both extreme conservatives like Nina Andreeva and

obvious opportunists like Yakovlev and Shevardnadze were tolerated as comrades for too long.

A very strong negative effect on party activities and on the party's authority also resulted from the gradual weakening of its collective leadership, especially after Gorbachev became the head of state. Both the politbureau, whose sessions were convened less and less regularly, and the secretariat, increasingly lost all real say in decision-making processes on the most crucial issues of internal and external policy. For example, the decision to raise prices sharply - three or four times on many goods - was taken in April 1991 by the government, without any consultation with central committee members. But the people at large put the blame for their hardships on the CPSU, which they still regarded as a ruling party.

The April events caught the CPSU in the midst of the difficult and painful transformation to real independence from being a party entwined with state structures. At the same time the party was becoming more and more hostage to one man, until this man sacrificed it in order to ensure his own survival for a few more weeks as Soviet President.

If there is one lesson we can derive from all this it is that the organised socialist movement in this country can only be achieved on a genuinely democratic basis. ♪

## They said it

### A UNIVERSITY EDUCATION?

"I think they (blacks in South Africa) deserve what I deserve. But you can't give them the vote. That won't work. There are so many of them. You have to try something like elections where only some of them can vote." - a white Potchefstroom university student (*The Star*, February 11, 1992).



# Religious identity and voluntary commitment

This is the second and final part of an article devoted to re-reading Marx on religion by CHARLES VILLA-VICENCIO, Professor of Religion and Society at the University of Cape Town

**T**heology is an attempt to understand human existence in terms of the symbols and teaching of the particular religious culture within which it is located. And there are sufficient resources in most religious traditions to theologially justify the actions of those who choose to escape from the rough and tumble of political struggle.

There are at the same time liberating resources in the major religious traditions which legitimate the appropriation of religion in support of the social revolution. Reflecting on the Christian religion, Gregory Baum suggests it is possible to read the Bible as a textbook on the pathology of religion, giving rise to hypocrisy, idolatry, group-egotism, collective blindness and escapism.

On the other hand it can also be read as a textbook on the therapeutic nature of religion, overcoming the maladies of society by promoting social and political renewal.<sup>1</sup> To address the question concerning whether religion is an illusion, it is necessary to endeavour to define what it is that lies behind the socially engaged, liberating dimensions of religion. The correct scientific procedure at this point would be to engage in several concrete case studies of liberating religion, with a view to discerning the nature and character of those values and goals which come to expression

within these events. For the sake of brevity an alternative approach is adopted, in the course of which an attempt will be made to show the link between theological and other humanist responses to what has been called the "transphenomenal abyss", located at the centre of what it means to be human.<sup>2</sup>

Recent developments in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, plus generations of resistance in South Africa and other situations of oppression around the world, suggests that despite the most rigid forms of political and social control there persists within human nature an unconditional human impulse to be free. In the words of Paul Tillich, "Human beings cannot renounce being human. They must think; they must elevate being into consciousness; they must transcend the given." "When this has happened," he continues, "there is no way back."<sup>3</sup> St Augustine, writing sixteen centuries earlier, suggested that theology is a response to this kind of restlessness located within the essence of what it means to be human. "Do not you believe," he asked, "that there is in (the human person) a 'deep' so profound as to be hidden even to that person in whom it is?"<sup>4</sup> Non-theists have articulated this human restlessness differently. In each case, however, whether understood psychologically, socially or theologially, it is articulated in

relation to the need to transcend the real or imaginary limits imposed on the human condition.

Whether religion be regarded as a neurosis, a projection or a response to "something" beyond oneself, it is a human phenomenon that has throughout history disturbed and often annoyed not only "born-again atheists", but also challenged those whom William James called the "once born" and "healthy minded".<sup>5</sup>

### **Marxism and God**

Julian Huxley has been helpful in reminding us that the notion of a God "out there" is neither adequate nor broad enough to describe or account for the feeling of the sacred which he discerns as innate to the human condition.<sup>6</sup> Such a God, he thought, was no more than "the last fading smile of a cosmic Cheshire Cat".<sup>7</sup> He nevertheless allowed for the place of what can be called a "religion of life", which creates new options and possibilities for humanity. In this tradition, Martin Heidegger thought to live religiously is not necessarily to be Christian, a Muslim or a Jew. It was simply "to dwell poetically".<sup>8</sup> Mircea Eliade similarly argued that "God" is too narrow a term to describe the ultimate order or reality or that



dimension of the historical process to which humankind could do no other than respond and seek to understand.<sup>9</sup> Paul Tillich in seeking to bridge the gap between Christian theology and secular society, spoke of the "God above God", and the need to "transcend theism".<sup>10</sup> The once reviled Bishop of Woolwich, John A.T. Robinson, was correct in his observation that

theological reflection begins on "the other side of the atheist critique".<sup>11</sup>

To state the obvious. Theologians are not alone in seeking to give expression to and take account of the demand that exists within humankind for "more" than what life offers at any given time. Paul Ricoeur argues that "the properly religious moment of all discourse, including political discourse, is the 'still more' that it insinuates everywhere, intensifying every project in the same manner, including the political project."<sup>12</sup>

Most Christians would, of course, not be content merely to acknowledge an undefined transcendent dimension to life. To them God is more than a lacuna in the human psyche, a psychological lure to something more. Religious attempts to name this reality (however metaphorically or poetically conceived), have at the same time given rise to forms of religious dogmatism and idolatry that have destroyed rather than elevated the transcendent dimension within the human quest for a fulfilled life. Differently stated, liberating ideas and insights concerning historical process are often destroyed when frozen into ecclesial dogma.

Ernst Bloch argues, however, that the Marxian attempt to reduce the fundamental determinant in history to economic organisation has also failed to give adequate expression to the complexity of the dynamic process of history. He at the same time credits Marx with introducing into political debate the importance of "the future".<sup>13</sup> Bloch's fascination with the biblical story, despite his atheistic stance, is clearly seen when he writes: "God appears...as the hypothesized ideal of the as yet truly undeveloped essence of man; he appears as Utopian entelechy (actuality)."<sup>14</sup> "The hope for a human kingdom of freedom", Bloch says, "is what lives on when the opium, the fool's paradise of the other-world has been burnt away to ashes. That remains as a call signalling

the way to the fulfilled this-world of a new earth."<sup>15</sup>

Leaving aside the hermeneutical implications of Bloch's selective use of the biblical message, what he does is to draw attention to the common ground between religious, secular humanist and historical materialist quests for the transcending of oppression and exploitation in pursuit of a radically different kind of society. The different exercises in conceptualising this quest, together with the different visions of the goal towards which history is seen to be moving (whether symbolised as a Marxian Utopia, the Kingdom of God or simply a lowly social goal) constitutes fertile ground for further debate between theists, atheists, theologians, social scientists, liberals, idealists and historical materialists.

Despite the differences which exist between Marxism and religion, Christianity, Judaism and Islam (all history affirming religions) can scarcely quarrel with the Marxian understanding of the human spirit. The Marxian vision of humanity which rises in rebellion against all forms of economic and political exploitation finds common cause with the social teaching in the prophetic message of the Hebrew Bible, the teaching of Jesus and the Quran. The religious critique of Marxism concerns rather a questioning of the confidence with which Marxism views post-revolutionary humanity. Social and economic structures do shape the character of people. More than a change in economic structures is, however, needed to keep alive the dream for a new and better world.

The sense of eschatology. The quest for more. The refusal to rest content with the fruits of any revolution is what the Christian theologian Karl Barth refers to as the "revolution of God". For him it is "the revolution which is before all revolutions," which ensures that all true revolutions are driven to attain their most cherished goals of justice, equality and human

decency.<sup>16</sup> It is "the axe laid at the root of the good conscience which the politician and the civil servant always wish to enjoy."<sup>17</sup> It is an incentive that gives rise to what Paul Lehmann has discerned as the need for a "permanent revolution".<sup>18</sup> While rejecting the "crazily unreal mythology of a God-hypothesis," it is the eschatological, utopian and messianic element of the biblical message which Bloch affirms as the core of Christianity, which constitutes a lasting contribution to political struggle.<sup>19</sup> Theologians undermine their own message to the extent that they fail to avail themselves of such non-theological resources that can help them do this. Historical materialists would, at the same time, do well to respond to the refusal of theologians to reduce the revolutionary incentive to any particular historical phenomenon or goal. To do so is to kill the revolution just when some seem to imagine it has arrived! Correctly understood the revolutionary theologian understands the notion of **permanent revolution** and **aluta continua** better than any historical materialist.

If the theological revolutionary vision (eschatology) results in no more than abstract critique of all attempts to build a better world, it is no more than left-wing idealism - what Lenin called a "childhood disease". If, on the other hand, it is built into the historical/cultural process, keeping alive the highest ideals of the revolution, it is an ingredient without which no social revolution can succeed. It is this that compels Johann Baptist Metz to insist that "God is no longer merely 'above' history, he is himself in it, in that he is also constantly 'in front of it' as its free, uncontrolled future...He is of decisive importance for the reality of history itself."<sup>20</sup> If such a God did not exist it would be necessary for the revolution to create such a God!

Debate on the God hypothesis continues. From a theological perspective it is enough to

ask with Nicholas Lash whether belief in the reality of God is compatible with the conviction that all that occurs, in nature and history, is explicable, in so far as it is explicable at all, without direct reference to the reality or agency of God." His answer is as thought-provoking as his question. "If it is, then there would seem to be at least a *prima facie* case for supposing that 'religious materialism' is not a contradiction in terms."<sup>21</sup>

### **Convergence and Contradictions**

The gap between Marxists and religious believers concerning the understanding of life, the character of the struggle for social justice and incentive to social revolution remains. There is common ground to be recognised. Any attempt to deny the differences constitutes, at the same time, an injustice to both Marxism and religion. Above all it undermines the dialogue (and confrontation) which is the womb of renewal and new insights into truth. There are areas of convergence and contradiction between Marxism and religion. However these are dealt with, few Marxists can question that religious teaching (theory) has become a material force in the South African context. It has been seized by the masses.<sup>22</sup> The 1980s saw people engaging in the social revolution on the basis of their religious ideals. The *Kairos Document* became a material force. It was owned by the masses in the religious sector as a means of legitimating their engagement in the struggle for revolutionary change. It is in relation to this kind of historical reality (rather than abstract ideological intransigence) that the debate between Marxists and Christians must take place.

Augusto Cesar Sandino, the legendary Nicaraguan revolutionary spoke of the Nicaraguan struggle within which Marxists and Christians have fought side by side for a common goal. His words translate well into the South African

situation. They also speak to the quest for truth pursued by both Christians and Marxists: "I am utterly convinced that no seed planted in good soil goes without bearing fruit...and I have not the slightest doubt that the people of Nicaragua are a rich and generous soil. You can be sure that although it will have to be irrigated with many tears and much blood from our people, some day, perhaps a long time from now, this seed will bear fruit unexpectedly and inexorably. The longer the period of germination, the more beautiful the fruit will be. Never lose faith." <sup>23</sup>

Sandinó's words apply to intellectual debate as much as they do to political struggle. By Marxists, Christians and people of other faiths exposing their respective visions of reality and

understanding of history to the scrutiny of one another, the essence of these visions will become clearer and the unnecessary accretions of social prejudice exposed. For rational debate to be an instrument of struggle, it needs to involve more than a mere exchange of ideas. It must involve intellectual work within the context of a common struggle to change society.

"When Christians are really concerned with the emancipation of those who labour and are heavy laden, and when Marxists retain the depths of the Kingdom of Freedom as the real content of revolutionary consciousness...the alliance between revolution and Christianity founded in the Peasant Wars (at the time of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation) may live again - this time with success." <sup>24</sup> ❧

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# 'KK' Papiyana

**A tribute to Comrade 'KK' Chule Papiyana, by Denis Nkosi**

**C**hule Papiyana, popularly known as "KK" for his soccer skills, died tragically in a car accident during the Christmas-New Year period. He was buried on January 5 in Soweto, his home town, although he had been living and working in the Border and Eastern Cape regions for some years.

An outstanding organiser and dedicated militant, comrade KK's death came just weeks after he had played an active role as a delegate in the SACP's 8th Congress. Our party has lost one of its most promising talents.

KK moved to the Border region in 1984 to read at Fort Hare university for a BA degree. He joined the South African National Students Congress, then known as AZASO, the following year. He went on to play a leading role within the organisation.

During his studies at Fort Hare, KK also devoted himself to organising in the community.

He put on grey flannel pants and a white shirt, and posing as a high school student, he



would visit schools in the surrounding communities. In this way he was instrumental in setting up numerous branches of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS). In 1985 KK assisted with the formation of the Alice Students Organisation (ASCO), which succeeded COSAS, after the latter was banned in that year. He was also active in the Alice unit of the United Democratic Front.

Owing to his work in the struggle for liberation, he was expelled along with 24 other students from Fort Hare. The expulsion sparked off weeks of protest by the students at the university. In the following year, 1986, KK enrolled at Rhodes University in Grahamstown. He was active in the Eastern Cape region of the UDF, and in various community organisations. In 1987 he was elected to the Eastern Cape region of SANSCO, and in 1990 he was elected as national political education officer of SANSCO.

To honour comrade KK Chule Papiyana let us all emulate his example, let us march forward to socialism. ✎

# Communists never retire!



LETTERS

## Dear Comrades,

The last Party Congress was tremendous. I felt after 62 years in the Party - a life fulfilled. We never had anything like it in all my years as a Party member. I was invigorated by the high standard of debate by our young comrades, men and women.

I was invigorated by their contributions in the debate on Party policy, principles, the manifesto and constitution. Their new culture of singing and toyi-toying has been imprinted on our country's culture.

I did not accept nomination for the Central Committee, and I owe an explanation to comrades and regions who nominated me, who pressed me to stand, to comrades who wrote to me expressing concern.

In the first place, I assure comrades that I have not retired from the Party - communists never retire - they work till their last breath. I shall carry on working in the Party branch and on any sub-committee to which I am directed, where I can make a contribution to strengthening our Party and its influence.



In the second place, the events in the Soviet Union and the rest of the socialist countries did not affect my decision. I fully believe, I am confident that the Russian, Bulgarian and German workers who produced such leaders for the communist movement as VI Lenin, George Dimitrov and Ernst Thaelmann will rebuild their communist parties and their socialist countries. What happened there did not diminish

my belief in Marxism and scientific socialism.

I simply did not accept nomination because of my age and, above all, because of my confidence in the young comrades, men and women. I felt I must give space for one of them.

I feel great satisfaction at the enormous contribution of our Party to the amazing course of events in South Africa. It was our Party that pioneered the demand for one person one vote, and now we are on the road to achieving a democratic South Africa.

Long live our Party. Long live our struggle for a democratic South Africa. Long live socialism! — **Ray Alexander, Cape Town**

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