

**THE POLITICS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN  
COMMUNIST PARTY 1962 – 1990**

**A Critical Analysis of Aspects  
of its Theory and Strategy**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study is a critical exploration of the ideas of the South African Communist Party (SACP). The thesis focuses on four major political questions that have confronted the party in the period 1962 to 1990. Firstly, it investigates the organisational form of the SACP and the politics that governs its organisational structure and reviews the polemic between Lenin and Luxemburg on this question, as well as the debate between the SACP and the “workerist tendency”. Questions such as how closely the SACP resembles the Marxist-Leninist form of organisation, whether the party violated the fundamental principles of vanguard organisation, and whether Stalinism is a product of the vanguard party, are raised and addressed. The more recent interventions of the SACP on the debate on organisational form are also considered.

Secondly, the thesis focuses on the SACP’s theory of the South African revolution. It explains and discusses the theory of “colonialism of a special type”, national democracy, and the various interpretations associated with this theory. The thesis also investigates the party’s commitment to a mixed economy and its proposals for a post-apartheid state, and thereafter critically analyses the possibilities of achieving a democratic society outside the transcendence of capitalist relations of production.

Thirdly, it discusses the SACP’s strategies and strategic perspectives in the South African revolution. It addresses the nature of the party’s alliance with the ANC and the changes in its conception of armed struggle throughout the three decades in exile. The party’s recently adopted strategic perspective of a negotiated path to power is also analysed.

Finally, it explains the SACP’s current attempts to restructure its theory and practice. It discusses the party’s analysis of the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and details its current proposals and the hallmarks of its restructured path of politics. The thesis addresses crucial questions confronting both political theorists and activists alike, such as, whether socialism has failed, and the nature of Stalinism. On the basis of these theoretical analyses, it subjects the party’s new proposals and its restructured path of politics to a critical scrutiny.

The thesis concludes by attempting to draw together the arguments and analyses conducted in the former chapters. On the basis of these analyses, it details certain preliminary conclusions on the politics of the SACP which are, firstly, that a revolutionary vanguard party is a necessary

vehicle for the realisation of a classless society but that the party's organisational history indicates that it violated fundamental principles of such an organisation; secondly, its theory of the South African revolution will not lead to the attainment of national liberation and democracy; thirdly, that the party's strategic alliances and strategies works to the disadvantage of the communist goal; and finally, that the party's current restructuring in the form of a parliamentary road to socialism and a reconceptulization of the socialist economy to one that incorporates market mechanisms within the framework of the plan will not realise the goals of the socialist project.

## **DEDICATION**

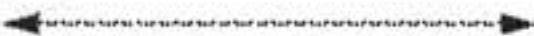
**This thesis is dedicated to the memory of those members of the black working class who made the ultimate sacrifice in our struggle for a non-racial non-sexist, classless society.**

**History has not yet given us her final verdict on the century that is approaching its end. Most of the world is passing through bad times, but however fragile and precarious the advances that have been made sometimes seem, hope itself cannot be abandoned.**

**Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years***



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## **PREFACE**

This thesis is about political ideas. It is not an historical account of the development of the SACP, but a discussion of how I analyse and understand the political ideas of this organisation. The SACP continues to exercise enormous fascination for political activists and commentators within South Africa. This is because it is the largest, most popular, and most established political organisation committed to the realisation of a classless society. It thus commands the loyalty of a large number of activists within the country.

This is the primary reason why I chose to subject the politics of the SACP to a close scrutiny. But researching and investigating the political ideas of an organisation that had been banned for over 40 years proved to be a time-consuming and frustrating experience. Nevertheless it has also turned out to be an extremely stimulating one.

This study would not have been completed had it not been for the generous participation of a number of my political comrades and academic colleagues. They are, of course, too many to mention by name. It will suffice, I hope, to say that I owe a great deal to my comrades in the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA) who have contributed so greatly to the development of my political ideas. I also need to note my comrades in the Combined Staff Association of the University of Durban Westville (COMSA), with whom I've debated, fought and sometimes struggled with.

Four individuals, however, need to be mentioned by name. Vishnu Padayachee, whose broad-minded loyalty to scholarship and ideas was crucial for the realisation of the final draft of this study. My two supervisors, Prof. Douglas Irvine and Duncan Greaves, to whom I'm indebted for their comments on the drafts of this thesis. And most importantly, to Fatima Habib, my wife and companion, who encouraged, pushed and cajoled me into completing this study. Fatima also commented on various drafts of this thesis, and I can truly say that had it not been for her love and support, this thesis would never have been realised.

Finally, it should be noted that part of this thesis was published in a slightly different form in Transformation (Number 14, 1991).

**ADAM HABIB**

Except where the contrary is acknowledged this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted to another university.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>AC</b>	:	<b>The African Communist</b>
<b>ANC</b>	:	<b>African National Congress</b>
<b>CCP</b>	:	<b>Chinese Communist Party</b>
<b>COMINTERN</b>	:	<b>Communist International</b>
<b>COSATU</b>	:	<b>Congress of South African Trade Unions</b>
<b>CPSA</b>	:	<b>Communist Party of South Africa</b>
<b>CPSU</b>	:	<b>Communist Party of the Soviet Union</b>
<b>CWIU</b>	:	<b>Chemical Workers' Industrial Union</b>
<b>ERIP</b>	:	<b>Educational Resources Information Project</b>
<b>FOSATU</b>	:	<b>Federation of South African Trade Unions</b>
<b>MK</b>	:	<b>Umkhonto we Sizwe</b>
<b>NUMSA</b>	:	<b>National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa</b>
<b>PAC</b>	:	<b>Pan Africanist Congress of Azania</b>
<b>PT</b>	:	<b>Partido dos Trabalhadores</b>
<b>SACP</b>	:	<b>South African Communist Party</b>
<b>SACTU</b>	:	<b>South African Congress of Trade Unions</b>
<b>SADF</b>	:	<b>South African Defence Force</b>
<b>SALB</b>	:	<b>South African Labour Bulletin</b>
<b>SAP</b>	:	<b>South African Police</b>
<b>WIP</b>	:	<b>Work in Progress</b>
<b>WOSA</b>	:	<b>Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action</b>
<b>ZAPU</b>	:	<b>Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union</b>

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The South African Communist Party (SACP) was born as the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA)<sup>1</sup>, in humble quarters in Plein Street, Cape Town, on the 30th of July 1921. Its midwives, the 14 delegates from the Rand and the Western Cape, were of course unaware that they had facilitated the birth of one that was to suffer the extremes of intense vilification and ardent support. Indeed, of all the organisational actors on the South African political stage, none has suffered more from the South African government's flaming wrath of anti-communism than has the SACP.

Since its birth, the party has been subjected to the most intense forms of repression and ideological defamation. The first major struggle which the party engaged in, the "white-red revolt of 1922", was viciously repressed by the Smuts government. In the first 29 years of its existence, its leading officials were ostracised and subjected to humiliating verbal assaults by successive South African governments and other white parliamentary parties. In 1950, it was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act. In the ensuing four decades, its officials and members were banned, jailed, tortured and assassinated. Even today, it is subjected to the most intense forms of vilification by the South African government, western powers and the local and international media.

Yet, simultaneous with this repression and defamation, the party has generated popular support from sectors of South Africa's black population. The veil of mysticism that enshrouded the SACP, due to its underground character and its participation in armed struggle, attracted thousands of South Africa's militant working and youth masses. This was reflected in the party's welcoming rally in July 1990, where it played host to a crowd of more than 80 000. Its banners and symbols are raised in virtually every political march within the country.

This popular support of the SACP ensures that it will be a major player in the 'post-apartheid' political scene. Yet despite this, the organisation, its political programmes and its strategic perspectives are relatively unknown amongst the general populace. This is perhaps due to the fact that information about the organisation has until very recently been censored by the South African authorities. In any case, this study is an attempt to explain and understand the politics of this controversial organisation, in the period 1962 to 1990.



The dissertation will in no way exhaust the study of the SACP. Rather, it will approach the study of the organisation from a specific angle, namely through a critical analysis of certain aspects of the party's political ideas, theory and strategy. It is hoped that this analysis will, together with other research projects on the SACP, feed into the broader debate about the organisation and thereby contribute to an understanding of the party and its future role in the post-apartheid political scene.

## **A Brief History**

The ideas of the SACP have, since its birth, generated much controversy and debate. During the organisation's infancy, it focused its attention on the white working class, and supported the controversial slogan "Workers of the World Unite and Fight for a White South Africa". However, the co-option of white workers in the National Labour coalition of 1924 (the protection of civilised labour policy serving as the carrot), drastically reduced white labour support for the CPSA, and compelled the organisation to turn its attention to the awakening black proletariat of this country.

This coincided with the rise of SP Bunting and the Communist Youth League within the CPSA, who had long expressed the desire to reorientate the organisation towards organising the black working class. By 1928, the party was transformed from an all-white organisation, to one the majority of whose members were blacks. This change in the organisation's constituency increased the party's awareness of national oppression, and facilitated its adoption in 1929, of the Communist International's (Comintern's)<sup>2</sup> resolutions which suggested that "the main task of the revolution in South Africa was to overthrow the rule of the British and Boer imperialists, to set up a democratic independent native republic (which would give white workers and other non-exploiting whites certain 'minority rights'), as a stage towards the final overthrow of capitalism in South Africa." (Simons & Simons: 390).

The adoption of the Native Republic thesis established the theoretical foundation for the party's alliance with African nationalist organisations. This alliance, however, soon dissipated under the pressure of conservative African moderates within the African National Congress (ANC). For the subsequent two decades the party continued to exist and organise independently. However, the latter part of the 1940's, witnessed a growing popular militancy that facilitated greater co-operation between CPSA and ANC cadres. Thus when the party was banned in 1950,

its cadres located themselves in the ANC and allied organisations.

The party reconstituted itself in an underground capacity in 1953. However, throughout the decade its cadres continued to function within the structures of legal political organisations of the Congress Movement<sup>3</sup>. This practice was only given theoretical expression subsequent to the banning of the ANC and Pan African Congress (PAC). In 1962, the SACP adopted a new political programme, *The Road to South African Freedom*, which categorised South Africa as a "colony of a special type" and suggested that the transition to socialism would occur through the stage of national democracy. The logical conclusion of this theoretical conception was the establishment of an alliance with the ANC. This alliance has remained steadfast throughout the organisations' lives in exile, and the party remained loyal to the ANC's strategic perspective of armed struggle as a means of realising the establishment of a democratic, non-racial society.

Both constituents benefited mutually from the strategic alliance. For the ANC, the alliance with the SACP facilitated generous political, moral, financial, and military support from the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries. For the SACP, the alliance provided it with the necessary legitimacy, and generated for it a popular following amongst the country's black proletariat. This became clearly evident with the regeneration of popular mass struggle in the mid-1980's, when the party's banners were hoisted in all major political marches and funerals.

By 1990, when the party was unbanned, it had become a major actor on the South African political stage.

The years prior to the organisation's unbanning also witnessed the party's attempts to restructure its communist theory and practice. Influenced by the policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the Soviet Union, and by transformations in the national body politic, the party adopted a new political programme at its 7th Congress in 1989. This programme, aptly entitled *The Path to Power*, tightened up the theoretical formulations of "colonialism of a special type" and national democracy, and posited a new strategic perspective for the organisation.

In any case, this process of theoretical restructuring took on an added momentum after the collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. 1990 witnessed the release of a new document by Joe Slovo, then General Secretary of the SACP, which attempted to distance the party from the theoretical underpinnings and political practices of the discredited regimes of



Eastern Europe. On the basis of this analysis, new policies have been adopted and a new path of politics is being charted for the organisation.

## **The Structure of the Dissertation**

This study is a critical exploration of the ideas of the SACP. The thesis is structured in five chapters, the first four of which focus on four major political questions that have confronted the party in the period 1962 to 1990. Chapter 2 investigates the organisational form of the SACP and the politics that governs its organisational structure. It reviews the polemic between Lenin and Luxemburg on this question, and the debate between the SACP and the “workerist tendency”. Questions such as, how closely did the SACP resemble the Marxist–Leninist form of organisation, did the party violate the fundamental principles of vanguard organisation, and is Stalinism a product of the vanguard party, are raised and addressed. Finally, the chapter considers the more recent interventions of the SACP on the debate on organisational form.

Chapter 3 focuses on the SACP’s theory of the South African revolution. It explains and discusses the theory of “colonialism of a special type”, national democracy, and the various interpretations associated with this theory. The chapter also investigates the party’s commitment to a mixed economy and its proposals for a post–apartheid state. Finally, it critically analyses the possibilities of achieving a democratic society outside the transcendence of capitalist relations of production.

Chapter 4 discusses the SACP’s strategies for and strategic perspectives on the South African revolution. It addresses the nature of the party’s alliance with the ANC and the changes in its conception of armed struggle throughout the three decades in exile. Finally, the chapter critically analyses the party’s recently adopted strategic perspective of a negotiated path to power.

Chapter 5 explains the SACP’s current attempts to restructure its theory and practice. It discusses the party’s analysis of the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and details its current proposals and the hallmarks of its restructured path of politics. The chapter addresses crucial questions confronting both political theorists and activists alike, such as, whether socialism has failed, and the nature of Stalinism. On the basis of these theoretical analyses, it subjects the party’s new proposals and its new path of politics to a critical scrutiny.

The final chapter attempts to draw together the arguments and analyses conducted in the former chapters. On the basis of these analyses, it details certain preliminary conclusions on the politics of the SACP.

## **A Note on Methodology and the Qualification of Class Categories**

All critical works of organisations and their political ideas are based on certain theoretical premises. Much of the time, these premises, if not inarticulated, lead to a series of misunderstandings and unnecessary polemics. In an effort to minimise such obsolete debate, the theoretical framework of this study will be clearly outlined. The acceptability or otherwise of this theoretical framework depends, of course, on the class position adopted by the reader. This study thus shares the attitude expressed by Neville Alexander who, in his pioneering study of the national question in South Africa, *One Azania, One Nation*, unequivocally stated that:

... within the context of a shared class position, criticism will be expected and accepted. On the other hand, criticism from outside the framework of my class position, while also expected, will be of less importance to the life of this document and the ideas that it contains. (1979: 5)

The theoretical framework underlying and guiding this entire study is a historical materialist one. The study is thus rooted in a Marxist–Leninist framework – a tradition that extends from Marx and Engels, through to Lenin and the Bolsheviks, Trotsky and the Left Opposition, and even Luxemburg and Gramsci.

Yet merely mentioning this theoretical paradigm is insufficient. A justification for the use of such a theoretical framework is imperative, especially in the light of the collapse of "socialist" social formations in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Moreover, the need for such a justification is underlied by the fact that theories of class are contested even within a marxist paradigm. Thus, if this dissertation is to avoid the charge of it being guilty of propagating the notion of "truth", then it must confront the question: why is a Marxist-Leninist framework superior to a conservative, revisionist, or alternative marxist one in understanding the politics of the SACP?

The inappropriateness of a conservative or revisionist theoretical paradigm for this particular exercise is easy to establish. The gist of the conservative thesis is that the establishment of a



socialist society, a central goal of the SACP, is not possible. Karl Popper, perhaps the best known modern representative of this tradition, argues that the historical materialist method is inadequate in explaining developments within wider society. Its weakness, he argues, lies in its insistence on downplaying extraneous factors and emphasising the economic structure as the root to understanding historical developments. Thus, he rejects the Marxist dictum that 'all history is the history of class struggle', arguing instead that a considerable proportion of past conflict is a product not of differing economic and class interests, but rather as a result of extraneous factors such as religious or racial tensions.

Popper, using his methodology of falsification <sup>4</sup> concludes that marxist theory falsifies itself by the fact that while it spawned the Russian Revolution, the latter occurred in a form that was unforeseen by Marx.<sup>5</sup> He also disputes the realisability of Marxism's ultimate goal of a classless society. Popper argues,

The unity or solidarity of a class, according to Marx's own analysis, is part of their class consciousness, which in turn is very largely a product of their class struggle. There is no earthly reason why the individuals who form the proletariat should retain their class unity once the pressure of the struggle against the common class enemy has ceased. Any latent conflict of interests is now likely to divide the formally united proletariat into new classes, and to develop into a new class struggle. - (1966:138)

Thus, for Popper the successful revolution is bound to unleash new contradictions between new forms of classes as the imperatives of office are imposed on the new ruling elite. This repeated phenomenon will always ensure that the classless society remains merely a utopian dream.

For Popper the alternative is to effect a programme of piecemeal reform that will gradually culminate in a society that promotes the well-being of all its citizens. Rejecting Marx's notion of the state as 'merely representing the organised power of one class for oppressing another', Popper suggests that the modern state plays essentially a protective role, by developing a rational political programme for the protection of the physically and economically weak. He thus concludes by suggesting that,

political power is the key to economic protection. Political power and its control are everything. Economic power must not be permitted to dominate political power; if necessary, it must be fought and brought under control by political power. (1966:126)

The revisionist thesis similarly disputes the realisability of a classless society as envisaged by Marx and Lenin. Polan, a contemporary revisionist, argues that the authoritarian nature of the Soviet state, lay not in the hostile conditions of 1917, but rather essentially in the theoretical body of Bolshevism. Yet unlike many marxist critiques of Bolshevism and the development of the Soviet Union, he relegates the authoritarian structure of the vanguard party to a subordinate status in his explanatory schema. Rather, he suggests that roots of Soviet authoritarianism must be found in Lenin's proposals for a post-capitalist state form which are essentially contained in his pamphlet *State and Revolution*.

Polan begins his critique on what he argues as Lenin's inability to understand the problem of bureaucratisation. Using Weber as his basis, he rejects Lenin's premise that bureaucratisation emerged out of economic backwardness. Instead he argues, as did Weber, that,

the space for bureaucracy is provided by the disappearance of the small scale and scattered producer, the increase in literacy and education, the rise in the general level of culture, the extension of the methods of communication and the growing interdependence of the various sectors of the economy. (1984:61)

According to Polan, this incorrect assessment of the roots of bureaucratisation leads to Lenin's and Trotsky's inability to understand the nature of the bureaucracy's power.<sup>6</sup> Both, he suggests, reduce "bureaucratic interest to something outside the specific function of the bureaucrat" and this "robs them of the insight that recognises that the bureaucrat derives a motivation from the function he performs, and a power from the necessity of that function and the skills that he possess to fulfill it". (1984:70) Thus, according to Polan, Lenin's safeguards against bureaucratisation such as the 'right to recall', are inadequate in dealing with the problem since they are products of an incorrect assessment of the roots of the problem. Thus he argues,

the right to recall will not overcome the power and moral authority granted to the bureaucrat who can lay claim to some measure of expertise. If the power of the bureaucrat comes from knowledge, if knowledge is power, the situation will evade the control of procedures designed to monitor a situation where the only commodity involved is power itself. (1984:70)

Polan also argues that Lenin's proposals for a post-capitalist state form are unrealistic and do not take into account the increasing complexity of industrial society. He suggests that the states' traditional tasks of administration are now being replaced in the advanced industrial societies with a much more complex function; namely, "the guidance and resolution of conflicts of



competing interests, and of performance of problematic tasks which had previously been the domain of the autocratic and unconscious processes of culture and civil society".(1984:61) This problem was, however, not confined to capitalist societies. For Polan, the state in a socialist society, in addition to these tasks, will also be confronted with organising the production and distribution of goods that the the absence of a market will impose on it. Thus the socialist society will not witness a reduction of the functions of the state as Lenin envisaged it, but rather will be confronted with greater tasks of immense complexity.

Polan's argument then is that Lenin's proposals for a post-capitalist state form does not take into account this increasing complexity of tasks confronting states in both capitalist and socialist societies. He argues that the latter's proposals conflate the role of representative, legislator, and civil servant and collapses all political functions into a single institution, namely, the soviet. Thus, he argues,

Lenin's state form is one dimensional. It allows for no distances, no spaces, no appeals, no checks, no balances, no processes, no delays, no interrogations, and above all no distribution of power. (1984:129)

In Polan's view, this conflation of roles undermines the possibility for the emergence of an opposition to the dominant party, and thereby facilitates the emergence of a single-party state. For Polan then, the Bolsheviks had theoretically destroyed the possibility of organisations expressing diverse views long before hostile conditions forced it practically upon them.

What then is the alternative for Polan? Polan argues for the necessity and willingness of one to reconcile oneself to the bureaucratic age. Within this framework his concern then becomes, like that of Weber, to control the bureaucracy through separating the domains of politics and administration.

I am ... suggesting that there is a conflation of politics and administration in the State and Revolution. Such a conflation must herald a disastrous cross-pollution, and this is what underlies the enormous steering problems of Soviet society. The mechanisms of social operations becomes impenetrable and devoid of any possibility of control. (1984:129)

Polan also argues for the separation of political functions into a variety of political institutions and the emergence and protection of a parliamentary opposition. This, he argues, will ensure an avoidance of the excesses of authoritarianism which characterised the development of the Soviet Union.

Both the conservative and revisionist theses then reject the goals, theories and strategic perspectives of the SACP. Using such theses as theoretical paradigms for an analysis of the SACP would then merely 'degenerate' into critiques of the ideological framework of the organisation. This is not to suggest that such critiques are not important. Indeed, a critical analysis of Marxism-Leninism, and more broadly, a consideration of the critiques of Marxism-Leninism from other ideological perspectives, and responses to such critiques is indeed necessary. But to do justice to such a project would require that the theoretical paradigm of Marxism-Leninism be the focus of the entire study. A broader methodological premise is then being suggested; namely, an organisation, its political ideas, theories, strategies and tactics can only be coherently understood, and analysed, within the framework of its own goals and theoretical paradigm. This then suggests that since this study has chosen its object of analysis as the SACP, the dissertation's theoretical paradigm must at least identify with the goals and theoretical heritage of the organisation.

The question that can then be asked is why has not an alternative marxist paradigm been utilised? Why is it that a theoretical paradigm enunciated, for instance by Rudolf Bahro (a well-known marxist dissident who was jailed in East Germany) in his *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, not been utilised in a study of this nature? Clearly Bahro identifies with the goal of a classless society, and believes that it can be realised. His goals and theoretical heritage are similar to those of the SACP. The political paradigm generated by Bahro could thus be utilised in a study of this nature. Its omission from this study has to be accounted for. However, before proceeding to this, a succinct summary of his political ideas needs to be outlined.

Bahro's prime task in *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* is to identify the root causes of exploitation, and the preconditions needed to rid society of this exploitation. His argument can be summarised in three essential points. The first is that the abolition of the social division of labour is necessary for the realisation of a classless society. For Bahro, "social inequality is anchored in the division of labour, in the structures of technology and cooperation themselves". (1978:124) He argues that this division of labour generates two distinct systems of information; an unlimited and general one for the privileged minority, and a limited and censored one for the majority producers of the society. These distinct systems of information, according to Bahro, are in part generated by a fragmented system of education, namely a stifling one for the children of the producers of the society, and a stimulating one for the children of the privileged.<sup>7</sup> This fragmented and unequal access to education in turn contributes to the reproduction of social



inequality within society. For Bahro then, the transition to socialism (which is characterised by the abolition of social inequality) is premised not only on the existence of a social surplus extensive enough to satisfy society's material needs, but also on a concrete and deliberate effort to abolish the social division of labour.

Bahro's second and related concern is to identify the roots and character of the bureaucracy in what he describes as the proto-socialist societies.<sup>8</sup> These societies, he argues, are frozen midway between class and classless societies because of the absence of a deliberate and conscious effort to abolish the division of labour. The bureaucracy within these societies represent a privileged minority who, through its access to universal information, monopolises 'general labour' and is responsible for administering and managing all spheres of social life. This monopoly, according to Bahro, provides the bureaucracy with the opportunity to obtain material privileges.<sup>9</sup>

As to the character of the system, Bahro argues that the bureaucratic system of planning is structured along hierarchical lines which stunt the creative initiative of the masses and ensures that the realisation of the plan is dependent on material incentives for the bureaucrats. But such material interest "is directed towards the condition of plan fulfillment" (Bahro:1978:220) which, since the plan is predetermined and since material resources are constantly in short supply, ensures competition between bureaucrats not to increase economic rationality, but to conquer "important positions of political and administrative power".(Bahro:1978:221) Bahro thus argues, in the words of the former Hungarian Prime Minister, Andras Hegedus that the bureaucratic system is a "system of organised irresponsibility." (1978:114) He concludes that "the politbureaucracy must be disarmed, the domination of the apparatus over society removed, the relationship between society and the state newly arranged, and the communist movement newly constituted ...." (1978:313)

The third and final part of Bahro's thesis is concerned with outlining an alternative to the bureaucratic nature and form of the proto-socialist societies. For Bahro, the strategic task confronting socialists in Eastern Europe is the maintenance and consolidation of the non-capitalist base of these societies, whilst at the same time instituting radical changes in the sphere of the infrastructure and superstructure. The central features of his alternative programme involve: the establishment of a system of self-management and self-administration, integrating all aspects of the reproduction process through a federation of communes (1978:442); a deliberate effort to undermine the vertical division of labour through the infusion of "the entire

managerial and intellectual staff in simple operative labour" (1978:392-393) and the generalisation of scientific and artistic education (1978:408-409); a calculation of the objectives and achievements of the economic plan in working hours instead of prices (1978:390-391); an abolition of piecework and work norms (1978:387-392); the harmonisation of the reproduction process through "a primacy on simple reproduction with the employment of existing energy and resources", "care for machinery instead of innovatory competition at any price", "strengthened macro- and micro-economic measures to reduce the use of raw materials and energy", and "an orientation towards functionality, solidity and aesthetic quality of mass consumer goods" designed to improve the quality of life for consumers (1978:429-430); a reduction of all salaries above the upper limit of the normal wage-scale and an abolition of all material, social, medical, cultural and other fringe benefits for the bureaucracy (1978:385-386); "a new determination of the need for material goods and the availability of living labour from the standpoint of the optimization of conditions of development for fully socialized individuals instead of from the standpoint of the traditional demand for material values" (1978:407); generalised access of all citizens to centralised information, particularly in the political, economic and cultural fields (1978:436-437); liquidation of all bureaucratic corruption (1978:382) and the demolition of all hierarchical structures based on bureaucratic centralism; and a radical attack on the patriarchal family (1978:445-446). In addition, Bahro, aware of how the Third World is prejudiced on the world markets, argues that "the economically advanced countries must do away with the law of value in trade with the less developed countries" and "create the broad social basis on which a massive and economically effective development aid can be established on a scale appropriate to the magnitude of the North-South antithesis". (1978:432) On the basis of this alternative programme then, Bahro concludes his thesis by suggesting that,

This is how we can conceive the order in which the conditions of genuine freedom coincide with those of genuine equality and fraternity. Communism is not only necessary, it is also possible. Whether it becomes a reality or not must be decided in the struggle for its conditions of existence. (1978:453)

Bahro's thesis then represents a magnificent attempt to plot an alternative model to the bureaucratic nature of the then existing proto-socialist societies. But three essential weaknesses are contained in his thesis which directly contributed to it being omitted as the theoretical paradigm of this study. These three weaknesses relate to his conceptions of the historic role of the bureaucracy, the working class, and the state.



Bahro's essential thesis on the bureaucracy, despite his valiant condemnation of it, is that it was an inevitable phenomenon in the Soviet Union under the conditions of 1917. He argues,

It was not only on account of the constant threats to it, but rather because of the positive task of driving the masses into industrialisation which they could not immediately desire, that the Soviet Union had to have a single, iron, 'Petrine' leadership.... We should not fail to recognise that this is a justification of the same kind that Marx accorded the revolutionary activity of the bourgeoisie. (1978:116-117)

For Bahro then, the absence of a victorious socialist revolution in the West, necessitated the emergence of a bureaucracy as an instrument to ensure the tasks of 'primitive socialist accumulation'. He thus argues that the bureaucracy essentially played a progressive role in the era of extensive industrialisation, and its reactionary character only emerged in the period of intensive industrialisation.

But this 'objectivist', and almost fatalistic characterisation of the bureaucratisation of the Soviet Union misunderstands the dialectic relationship between objective and subjective factors in concrete historical situations. It is not possible to deduce the inevitability of a bureaucratic dictatorship from the particular historic conditions prevailing in Russia in 1917. The weakness in Bahro's thesis is that it ignores the relative autonomy of subjective factors and denies the possibility that an alternative reaction by the worker cadres of the party to the threat of bureaucratisation "could have caused a change in the international and national configuration of social and political forces capable of averting Stalinism".<sup>10</sup> (Mandel:1979:115) As Mandel argues,

Neither the defeat of the world revolution, nor the depoliticisation of the Soviet working class, nor the definitive stifling of Soviet democracy, nor the delay in accelerated industrialisation, nor the concentration of the agricultural surplus in the hands of the kulaks was inevitable or irreversible in 1923, 1924, or 1925. Nor were the consolidation and dictatorship of the bureaucracy. A correct reaction by the cadres of the party could have opened the way for developments in the opposite direction, which could have led to cumulative modifications of the trend. The underestimation by these cadres of the danger of Thermidor and bureaucratisation and the fact that they understood these dangers too late and in too scattered a manner had decisive effects on the cumulative consolidation of the bureaucracy. (1979:115)

The second, and perhaps more serious weakness in Bahro's thesis concerns his cynicism of the revolutionary potential of the working class. Bahro contends here that the workers of Eastern

Europe "are automatically atomized vis-a-vis the regime" and are "no longer a class for itself, and not at all so in a political sense". (1978:190) He extends this criticism to the working class of the West and argues that that "all marxist discussion since 1914 ends up by declaring that the interests that the workers really do display are not their real interests". (1978:193) Thus Bahro concludes that the working class cannot be the bearer of a genuine socialist programme, and argues instead that this historic task should be allocated to a 'historical bloc' within which intellectuals, technicians, and highly skilled white-collar employees will play a much more dynamic role than workers.

But this exaggerated pessimism is problematic. It emerges particularly because Bahro's analysis lacks a concrete understanding of the development of working class consciousness in relation to the emergence of objective crises within society. As chapter two of this dissertation will argue, workers are spontaneously reformist in periods of lull in the class struggle, but in era's of revolutionary crisis their consciousness spontaneously transforms itself into an essentially anti-capitalist focus. This is borne out by a reflection on working class struggles in the twentieth century. As Mandel argues,

It is simply not true that 'since 1914' the entire behavior of the European working class has been confined to a search of material immediate advantage of a 'trade-unionist' or 'corporatist' type. What about the German revolution of 1918, when workers' councils were created throughout the country? What about the general strike against the Kapp putsch in 1920? What about the great strikes and factory occupations in Italy in 1920? What about the general strike of June 1936 in France? What about the Spanish revolution of 1936-37? What about the great battles during and after the Liberation in France and Italy, culminating in the Italian general strike of July 1948? What about May 1968 in France and the 'creeping May' in Italy in 1969? What about the Portuguese revolution of 1974-75 and the rising combativity in Spain today? (1979:117)

Bahro's thesis concerning the working class of proto-socialist societies is similarly found deficient when confronted with the weight of historical evidence on the Hungarian revolution, the Prague spring, and the Polish events of 1980. His revision of Marxist theory then is founded on a political prejudice rather than a comprehension of the objective dynamic of the class struggle.

The third and final analytic weakness in Bahro's thesis concerns his attitude to the role of the state. For Bahro, "the state is far more than the executive of the capitalist class".(1978:137) He



argues that although it still functions as the instrument of class suppression, society can no longer afford its destruction without threatening the entire process of production. This conclusion is derived from an understanding that suggests that "this machine acts as the organiser of productive forces that have outgrown capitalism. And the state cannot disappear as domination over men, it cannot be reduced to the administration of things, without the traditional division of labour being overcome". (1978:137) Thus Bahro approves of the Eurocommunist parties abandonment of the demand for the dismantlement of the state."

Two problems can immediately be identified with this thesis. The first relates to the relationship between the 'withering away of the state' and the overcoming of the traditional division of labour. Bahro premises the former on the success of the latter. Yet establishing this relationship leads to an inconsistency within his argument. If the withering away of the state can only occur when the division of labour is overcome, then who is to organise and ensure the elimination of the latter? Bahro's thesis has clearly demonstrated that the bureaucracy has no interest in doing so - in fact it has been his contention that it is precisely the bureaucracy's monopoly of management that lies at the root of the perpetuation of the social division of labour. If this then is the case, how can the social division of labour be overcome without the overthrow of the bureaucracy's monopoly over management, and thereby the dismantlement of the state? Thus, using Bahro's own analysis of the roots of the social division of labour leads us to the conclusion that it is not that the latter is based on the 'withering away of the state', but rather that both phenomena would have to occur simultaneously.

The second problem with Bahro's thesis on the state relates to his suggestion that the production process cannot be organised without the presence of the state apparatus. Yet Bahro does not explain why it is impossible for the production process to be managed and the arbitration of the particular interest groups to be conducted by the elected representatives of the direct producers themselves. As Mandel argues,

Why should this 'power of men over men' - this administration of men, as distinct from administration of things - be necessitated by 'the present level of technology'? In other words, why should the self-organisation and self-administration of the producers be 'utopian' in the industrially developed countries (for West Germany, France, and Italy must certainly be classed in this category)? Why could not the necessary arbitration among 'particular interest groups' be effected by collectively elected representatives of the associated producers? Why should this require an enormous apparatus of functionaries and gendarmes (for that is what the state is!),

even under conditions of relative abundance and satisfaction of basic needs?  
(1979:120)

Bahro answers none of these questions. Yet such answers are essential if his thesis is to be maintained. In the absence of such answers one must conclude that his thesis on the state is based on mystification and systematic confusion.

These three weaknesses in Bahro's analysis lead to serious programmatic ambiguities. Mandel identifies three such ambiguities. The first is the lack of clarity on whether Bahro supports a political revolution or a mere reform of the bureaucratic system through a protracted transformation. His scepticism of the revolutionary potential of the working class prevents him from pronouncing in favour of a political revolution, whilst at the same time he concedes the inadequacy of reforms. This ambiguity needs to be cleared up if the bureaucracy's monopoly on power is to be abolished. Secondly, Bahro neglects to clearly define the relationship between the communes and the workers' councils. As Mandel argues,

The principle of association is of course highly laudable. But what does it mean concretely, especially in the light of the enormous powers Bahro attributes to the communes? Will they be elected by universal suffrage? Or constituted by the delegates of the councils? Territorial councils and factory councils, or only the former? How can it be guaranteed that the non-producers will not again impose sacrifices on the producers? Bahro scarcely furnishes any precise answers to these questions, which nonetheless flow logically from all the premises developed at great length in his book. (1979:121)

The final and perhaps most serious ambiguity that Mandel identifies in Bahro's study concerns his attitude to the principle of political pluralism. A glaring weakness of *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* is its neglect in openly condemning the one-party nature of the proto-socialist societies. At no point does Bahro come out in complete support for a multi-party system. The most that he calls for is the creation of a 'League of Communists'<sup>12</sup> and it is unclear whether he views this as "a second party, a single party, or not a party at all". (Mandel:1979:122) But this ambiguity is unacceptable since the principle of political pluralism lies at the heart of the socialist programme in that its existence is essential if planning is to be realised to the satisfaction of the producers and consumers of a socialist society. Once again Mandel's argument is incisive:

The essential function of the state in post-capitalist society is to determine which



priorities and preferences should orientate the plan. There are only two possible institutional variants. Either the selection of these priorities is imposed on the producers-consumers by forces outside themselves (including 'market laws' under the sadly famous 'socialist market economy'), or else they are made democratically by the mass of citizens, the producers-consumers themselves. Since there is no material possibility for this mass to choose among 10, 000 variants of the plan ..., the real content of socialist democracy is indissolubly linked to the possibility of their choosing among certain coherent alternatives for the general plan. ... The formulation of such alternatives presupposes precisely a multi-party system, with free access to the mass media and free debate by the mass of the population. It is only under these conditions that the enormous potential for creative initiative that exists among a highly skilled and cultivated proletariat can be fully liberated. (1979:123-124)

These weaknesses and programmatic ambiguities then directly contributed to the omission of Bahro's thesis as the theoretical framework of this dissertation. However, this does not conclude the justification and defence of the theoretical paradigm underlying this study. This dissertation's use of a Marxist-Leninist theoretical framework needs to be qualified particularly because two distinct and separate theoretical traditions profess adherence to the theoretical corpus of Bolshevism. The first of these traditions can be described as Stalinism - a tradition which represented and theoretically justified the bureaucratisation, excessive authoritarianism, and one-party nature of the Soviet Union, and which the SACP had for much of its existence adhered to. The second theoretical tradition could, for want of a better name, be termed Trotskyism a tradition whose essential theoretical premises underlie much of the analyses conducted in this study.

How then is a Trotskyist interpretation of Marxist-Leninism justified as the theoretical paradigm of this study? The justification is premised on a denial that Stalinism accurately reflects the theoretical tradition of Marx and Lenin. This assertion is of course a highly contested and unpopular one, with many historical and political scholars of marxist and other ideological persuasions drawing explicit links between the practice of Bolshevism and the subsequent evolution of the Soviet Union. Much of their arguments is based on three premises. The first is that the Bolshevik revolution in October 1917 represented a premature revolution with no hope of evolving into the desired socialist end since it occurred in economically backward conditions. Its degeneration into Stalinism then is seen as a direct result of Lenin's blind adventurism.<sup>13</sup> The second premise suggests that the authoritarianism of the Soviet Union has its roots in the vanguard nature of the Bolshevik party - the architect of whom was Lenin. According to this

thesis, the totalitarian nature of the Bolshevik party determined the subsequent authoritarian direction of the Soviet Union.<sup>14</sup> The third and final premise suggests that the Bolshevik's dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918 represents proof of their totalitarian and undemocratic nature, and that this act was instrumental in ensuring the consolidation of the single-party state in the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup>

The weakness in all three premises and thereby the entire argument that suggests that there is an inextricable link between the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism and the subsequent evolution of Stalinism, is that these analyses are abstracted from an understanding of the concrete conditions of the Soviet Union in 1917. This is not to suggest that the cadres of the Bolshevik party were completely innocent of the charge that their actions contributed to the evolution of Stalinism. indeed, as will be argued, the party's cadres did make crucial mistakes that contributed to the institutional safe-guards against totalitarianism losing their effectiveness, thereby creating conditions for the emergence of Stalinism. However, as will also be argued, such mistakes, whilst they must be criticised, must be understood within the conditions that the Bolshevik party found itself in. Such mistakes then cannot be attributed to the theory of Marxism-Leninism, but must rather be seen as a result of the concrete conditions that the Russian revolution laboured under. This study thus contests the view held by the proponents of the above premises that Stalinism has its roots in the theoretical corpus of Marxism-Leninism. Rather it argues that whilst the Bolshevik party is guilty of certain mistakes, the totalitarian evolution of the Soviet Union must be understood within the specific conditions within which the October revolution occurred. The weaknesses then of the above premises is that they are abstracted from the evolution of Lenin's political thought and the concrete conditions which the revolution laboured under.

This is most evident in the first charge. Proponents of this argument who suggest that the Bolshevik revolution represented a premature attempt to transcend to socialism, ignore the fact that Lenin's conversion<sup>16</sup> to the goal of an immediate socialist project for Russia occurred only after he conducted a substantial analysis of the nature of the internationalisation of capital. As Harding notes, Lenin's fundamental premise in *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, " was that capitalism had changed in nature. From being competitive, thrusting and progressive, it had become monopolistic, passive and degenerate. At the same time, however, finance capital had carried the socialisation of the productive process to its ultimate extent and had created, in the banks, cartels and trusts, mechanisms through which social control of production and



distribution could easily be achieved. The obverse of the degenerate, parasitic side of imperialism was that it had finally established the objective basis for an advance to socialism ..."  
(1983:42)

However, Lenin and a large layer of the leadership of the Bolshevik party, aware of the weakness of Russia's industrial foundation and realising that the socialist project could only be successfully established and consolidated on the international plane, based the final victory of the Soviet socialist project on "an all-European revolution". (Carr:1966:53) And this was not a far-fetched possibility. Lenin's own economic analysis of the nature of imperialism had already led him to conclude that economic crises and war in a variety of countries was bound to unleash an unprecedented level of international class struggle. And this indeed did occur. As Victor Serge argues,

revolution descended on the streets of Vienna and Budapest ... From the Scheldt to the Volga the councils of workers' and soldiers' deputies - the soviets - are the real masters of the hour. Germany's legal government is a Council of People's Commissars made up of six socialists. (quoted in Rees:1991:12)

He goes on to recall,

The newspapers of the period are astonishing ... riots in Paris, riots in Lyon, revolution in Belgium, revolution in Constantinople, victory of the Soviets in Bulgaria, rioting in Copenhagen. In fact the whole of Europe is in movement, clandestine and open Soviets are appearing everywhere, even in the Allied armies; everything is possible, everything. (quoted in Rees:1991:13)

The Russian Revolution was not premature. On the contrary, it was ripe as the first in a series of such phenomena. The degeneration of the Russian revolution then cannot be ascribed to its prematurity and Lenin's adventurism, but rather on the concrete international conditions of 1917, one of which was the failure of the European wide revolutions. But should the Bolsheviks have tried? The answer may be contained in the prophetic words of Marx:

world history would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on conditions of infallibly favourable chances. (quoted in Rees:1991:9-10)

The second charge which links the authoritarian nature of the Soviet Union under Stalin and his heirs to the vanguard form of organisation misrepresents the essential nature of the Bolshevik

party by refusing to penetrate its analysis beyond the formal structure of the organisation. Proponents of this charge neglect to take into account that the Bolshevik cadres were fanatical in their devotion to internal debate and argument.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, as chapter 2 will indicate one of the essential pillars underlying the theory of democratic centralism is the commitment to an open internal life within the party. This ensures that prior to any decision being adopted by the party, it must be subjected to a wide-ranging open debate amongst all the structures and cadres. It is only subsequent to this wide-ranging debate that the party cadres are obliged to carry into practice such decisions. As the notable liberal historian Robert Service notes,

The image of a tightly knit bunch of inveterate conspirators, so sedulously cultivated by their enemies, was ... a cruel mockery of their real condition. Indeed so much of their public reputation was wide of the mark. They did not look upon Lenin, even when he succeeded in keeping in contact with underground committees, as the only acceptable source of plans and policies. They did not regard *What is to be Done?* as an organisational blueprint ... they in fact wanted to found a mass socialist party as soon as it was practicable.(1979:576)

The above contradicts analyses that suggest that the Bolshevik party was a monolithic, totalitarian organisation that simply reflected the ideological dogmatism of Lenin. Rather, it's been argued that the Bolshevik party displayed a large degree of internal democracy, which played no small part in the successful culmination of the October revolution of 1917. This is not to deny the party's degeneration into authoritarianism, or the mistakes of the Bolshevik leaders which contributed, in no small measure to this process. Indeed by the late 1920's the Bolshevik party was completely transformed into a monolithic organisation which refused to tolerate even the slightest internal dissent. Moreover, the argument that suggests that this degeneration was contributed to by the Bolshevik leaders when they banned internal factions at the party's tenth congress in 1921 does retain a plausibility. However such judgments in retrospect, while important, must not allow us to forget that this decision was forced upon the party by the very specific conditions that Russia laboured under. Deutscher graphically describes these conditions:

It was a grim and paradoxical outcome of the struggle that the industrial working class, which was supposed now to exercise its dictatorship, was also pulverised. The most courageous and politically minded workers has either laid down their lives in the civil war or occupied responsible posts in the new administration, the army, the police, the industrial managements, and a host of newly created institutions and public bodies. ... With the passage of time many of them became estranged from the workers and assimilated with the bureaucratic environment. The bulk of the proletariat too became declassé. Masses of workers fled from town to country during



the hungry years; and being mostly town dwellers in the first generation and not having lost roots in the country, they were easily reabsorbed by the peasantry ... The proletarian dictatorship was triumphant but the proletariat had nearly vanished. (1959:6-7)

In explaining the conditions that forced the ban on inner-party factions, Deutscher says,

The very circumstances of its own growth and success drove the party to adopt this course. Early in 1917 it had no more than 23, 000 members in the whole of Russia. During the revolution, the membership trebled and quadrupled. At the height of the civil war, in 1919, a quarter of a million people had joined the ranks. ... Between 1919 and 1922 the membership trebled once again, rising from 250, 000 to 700, 000. Most of this growth, however, was already spurious. By now the rush to the victors' bandwagon was in full progress. ... In this mass of new-comers the authentic Bolsheviks were reduced to a small minority. They felt that they were swamped by alien elements; and they were alarmed and anxious to winnow the chaff from the wheat. (1959:17)

Thus, the authoritarian nature of the party in the post-Lenin period was not a product of inherent defects in the theory or organisational form of Bolshevism, but rather of the very concrete and specific conditions within which the organisation was located in the post civil war days. To accuse the theoretical corpus of Marxism-Leninism for this is to abstract one's analysis from the very specific historical conditions of the Russian revolution itself.

This then raises the third and final charge which suggests that the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly reflected the inherent undemocratic nature of Bolshevism. Once again, proponents of this charge abstract their analyses from an understanding of the essential nature of the socialist project and from the peculiar conditions which the Russian state laboured under. It needs to be noted that while the Bolshevik party constituted only a substantial minority of support in the Constituent Assembly, its support in the Congress of Soviets was overwhelming.<sup>18</sup> This apparent paradox is explained by Deutscher through the large layer of illiterate peasant vote who supported the Social Revolutionaries because they had "little grasp of the involved disputes between the urban parties". (1954:320) However, this questioning of the quality of peasant support for the Social Revolutionaries cannot be used as a justification for the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. What should be the focus of the debate is which structure, the Constituent Assembly or the Congress of Soviets, retain a greater legitimacy in the case of a socialist project. And since the Bolsheviks had since 1905 always stood for the proletarian dictatorship in Soviet form<sup>19</sup>, the decision to retain power on the legitimacy of the latter was

entirely consistent. A further note to consider is the fact that the Constituent Assembly was only disbanded when it refused to ratify the transfer of power to the Soviets. Thus, the real reason for its dispersal was that the "rule of the Assembly was incompatible with the rule of the Soviets". (1954:372)

The above then contests the view that the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly reflected the totalitarian and undemocratic nature of the Bolsheviks. Rather, it suggests that the dissolution was a perfectly legitimate act in the light of the fact that the Assembly's continued existence was incompatible with the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. It needs to be also noted that the Bolsheviks subsequent banning of political parties, which can in retrospect be criticised, must be viewed within the framework of the threatening actions of such parties to the socialist project<sup>20</sup> and the already mentioned specific conditions which the new Russian state laboured under. As Trotsky maintained, "the prohibition of opposition parties was a temporary measure dictated by conditions of civil war, blockade, intervention and famine". (1972:266) The later erection of this temporary evil into a principle cannot be accounted for by identifying essential weaknesses in the theoretical corpus of Marxism-Leninism. Rather, the later codification of the one-party principle into the Soviet Constitution must be viewed as a product of the degeneration of the Russian revolution and the capture of political power by a bureaucracy - a process which was facilitated by the very specific conditions of the post-World War 1 period.

To sum up then: this study rejects the charge that suggests that the phenomenon of Stalinism is a practical manifestation of the theory of Marxism-Leninism. It thus rejects the Stalinist theoretical tradition's interpretation of the ideas of Marx and Lenin, and argues that a more valid interpretation is contained in the works of Leon Trotsky. This latter interpretation then serves as the theoretical foundation of this study. However, lest this dissertation be accused of as an example of ideological dogmatism, let it be immediately added that the analysis set out here is by no means definitive, but, like all contributions to the Marxist tradition, will no doubt require elaboration in the light of criticism and of subsequent experience.

A further methodological point needs to be made with regard to the use of resource material in this study. It is acknowledged that the thesis, to a large extent, utilises the more public documents of the SACP to determine the organisation's political theory, strategies and tactics.<sup>21</sup> This has of course the disadvantage of not reflecting the complexity of the SACP's intellectual life during the period. However, this is not the primary task of this thesis. Rather, the essential



project of this study was to determine the dominant political strand within the organisation, and to critically analyse it within the political tradition of Marx and Lenin - two historical figures from whom the SACP professes to draw its theoretical heritage. Moreover, it needs to be noted that this procedure of utilising the public documents of the SACP to determine its political direction cannot be described as unfair since the party, throughout this period, adopted a vanguard organisational form which committed all its members to the policies, strategies and tactics of the organisation.

Finally, it is perhaps necessary to clarify the racial qualification of class categories expressed throughout this thesis. This is done primarily because the distinctive feature of the South African social formation is the racial scissor which cuts through all class categories within the social formation, and generates differing material and political interests for different racial groups within a particular class category. An example will clarify the matter: The working class in South Africa is politically and materially divided into two class fractions, the white working class who have a material and political stake in the maintenance of the status quo, and the black working class, whose political and material interests is in the overthrow of the racial-capitalist system. Thus, the study will, at all times, stipulate which class fraction is being subjected to scrutiny.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE POLITICS OF ORGANISATION**

The SACP was born as an organisation of activists. Inspired by the victory of the Russian revolution in 1917, this godson of the first socialist revolution adopted an organisational form that closely paralleled that of the Bolshevik party<sup>1</sup>. Yet this form of organisation, commonly known as the vanguard party, has, throughout this century, been the centre of great controversy within the international communist movement. Predictably, it has also been the source of intense debate within the political arena of South Africa's extra-parliamentary left.

This controversy relates to whether the organisational structure of the SACP facilitates or inhibits the realisation of a classless society. According to the SACP, its adoption of a vanguard organisational form is based on the realities of its immediate circumstances, and within its conception of the free, socialist society. The SACP's critics, however, counteract this by accusing the SACP's organisational form of promoting the bureaucratisation of the workers' movement, and thereby undermining the self-activity of the working class. This controversy is the central focus of this chapter.

The chapter reviews the debate surrounding the nature and form of the SACP's organisational structure. It is primarily concerned with understanding the politics that govern the organisational form of the SACP. The chapter will begin by reviewing the historical debate on organisational forms within the international communist movement. It will then outline the form and nature of the SACP, and thereafter, consider the critiques surrounding the SACP's organisational structure. Finally, it will assess the similarities and differences between the SACP and a Marxist-Leninist form of organisation.

#### **The Need for a Separate Organisation of the Proletariat**

It is accepted in Marxist circles that the proletariat will require a separate and distinct organisation to achieve its conquest of political power. The reason for this lies in a combination of factors: the effects of bourgeois society on the proletariat, and the nature of the tasks that confront this class within society.

For a long stage of its existence the proletariat in bourgeois society exists merely as a class against capital, but not as a “class for itself”. Marx argues in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, that there exists a long period of struggle between the stage when the proletariat exists as a “class in itself” and that when it behaves as a “class for itself”<sup>2</sup>. The reason for the proletariat not being conscious of its class interests in the initial stage is to be found in the fragmentation that it is subjected to through the conditions of bourgeois society. Marx clearly sees this when he argues in *The Communist Manifesto* that “the organisation of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political body, is continually being upset, again and again, by the competition between the workers themselves.” (Feuer:1984:58)

This tendency to fragmentation is continually reinforced by the dominant ideology that exerts its stranglehold over the working class. To use the words of Marx:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, ie: the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas, hence of the relationships that make the one class the ruling class, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.

(McLellan:1977:176)

Bourgeois society, then, hinders (but does not prevent) the maturation of the proletariat’s class consciousness through both the fragmentation of the working class in competition, and by preventing the proletariat from becoming aware of its class interests through the bourgeoisie’s control of the means of intellectual production. But the socialist revolution, which is the first revolution in the history of mankind that tries to reshape society in a conscious way and according to a plan, requires both the unity of the working class and the highest possible activity by the broadest segment of the population. Both these prerequisites require a highly developed class consciousness amongst the proletariat. This contradiction then, between the need for a highly developed class consciousness amongst the proletariat for the socialist revolution, and its stunted consciousness in bourgeois society, has led some political commentators to conclude that it is utopian to expect the proletariat, which is constantly exposed to the ideological onslaught of the bourgeoisie, to be capable of carrying out a social and political revolution<sup>3</sup>.



However, this seemingly irreconcilable contradiction is resolved if we replace the simplistic and static interpretation with a dynamic and dialectical one. As long as capitalism is stable and on the upswing, the consciousness of the oppressed classes will be dominated by the ruling ideas of the day. However, "the more the stability of the existing society is brought into question, and the more the class struggle intensifies, and the more the class rule of the exploiters itself begins to waver, in practice, the more will, at least, sections of the oppressed class begin to free themselves from the control of the ideas of those in power." (Mandel:1985:3) Mandel argues further:

Prior to, and along with, the struggle for the social revolution, a struggle goes on between the ideology of the rulers and the new ideals of the revolutionary class. This struggle in turn intensifies and accelerates the concrete class struggle out of which it arose by lifting the revolutionary class to an awareness of its historical tasks and of the immediate goals of its struggle. Class consciousness on the part of the revolutionary class can therefore develop out of the class struggle, in spite of and in opposition to, the ideology of the ruling class. (1985:3)

E.P. Thompson masterfully depicts this development of class consciousness in his influential work *The Making of the English Working Class*. Through this social historical work, Thompson indicates how the English working people, through their own conscious efforts contributed to the making of their own history. In an insightful passage on the struggles of the English industrial working class in the first half of the nineteenth century, he argues

working men formed a picture of the organisation of society, out of their own experience and with the help of their hard-won and erratic education, which was above all a political picture. They learned to see their own lives as part of a general history of conflict between the loosely defined 'industrious classes' on the one hand, and the unreformed House of Commons on the other. From 1830 onwards a more clearly defined class consciousness, in the customary marxist sense, was maturing, in which working people were aware of continuing both old and new battles on their own. (Thompson:1968:782)

Indeed, under particular objective conditions, the ideas of the ruling class lose their grip on the consciousness of the proletariat, and sectors and sections of the working class begin to acquire a class political consciousness. In part this process is assisted by a workers' party or organisation which disseminates alternative ideas which battle for hegemony and the allegiance of the populace. The party then is the centrepiece in the jigsaw of alternative propaganda and ideas and these are generated through the medium of newspapers, theoretical journals and educational



forums. Or in the words of Trotsky, “the part played in bourgeois revolutions by the economic power of the bourgeoisie, by its education, by its municipalities and universities, is a part which can be filled in a proletarian revolution only by the party of the proletariat.” (1987:73)

The workers’ party also assists in prefiguring what an alternative society should look like, guaranteeing a superior form of democracy within the organisation to that of bourgeois society, and developing a theory of revolution as well as a strategy for the taking of power. In conformity with these demands, the workers’ party continuously argues for unity of the proletariat and acts as a counter to bourgeois society’s attempts to fragment the working class. The party then is the central organisational piece that establishes the independence of the proletariat in the class war that exists. It attempts to crystallise and heighten the political class consciousness that was generated in the previous phase of the class struggle. The party, thus, “helps give form to a factor of continuity, as opposed to the necessarily discontinuous action of the mass, and to a factor of consciousness, as opposed to the spontaneity of the mass movement in and of itself.” (Mandel:1985:5)

### **The Lenin – Luxemburg Debate**

Whilst Marxists have accepted the need for a separate and distinct organisation of the proletariat, very little consensus has been found as to the nature and form of that organisation. Two distinct conceptions dominate the debate within the international workers’ movement. The first, which derives its legitimacy from the First International, the writings of Marx and later of Luxemburg, argues for a loosely structured mass workers’ party. In a number of countries where this form of organisation has emerged, it has been based on the independent trade union movement<sup>4</sup>. The second conception, which derives its inspiration from the Russian Revolution of October 1917, some of the writings of Marx and, of course, those of Lenin, conceives the party as a structure comprising “professional revolutionaries” and the advanced layers of the working class. The party, in this sense, can be described as a vanguard organisation of the working class.

These differing conceptions of revolutionary organisation have provoked a debate that still rages on and confronts every serious revolutionary socialist tendency throughout the countries of the six continents of the globe. South African Marxists, like their counterparts elsewhere in the world, have also been confronted with this debate. Thus, it is imperative that we first consider the roots of this debate before we proceed to analyse the organisational form and nature of the

SACP. As indicated earlier, the emergence of these debates predates the Russian Revolution, and if it is necessary to determine its roots, its seeds could possibly be said to have been implanted with the publication of Lenin's path-breaking pamphlet, *What is to be Done?* It was with the publication of this pamphlet that an intense controversy emerged which resulted in the Bolshevik–Menshevik split, and Rosa Luxemburg's organisational polemic against Lenin. The different conceptions of revolutionary organisation can be said to have emerged out of the resultant debate that took place in the international workers' movement.

The central task of *What is to be Done?* was to put forward a case against 'economism', and for the establishment of a nationwide revolutionary organisation comprising professional revolutionaries, and a national revolutionary newspaper. But this conclusion was premised on the struggle that Lenin's understanding of the relationship between spontaneity and consciousness. For Lenin,

... there could not have been Social–Democratic<sup>5</sup> consciousness amongst the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade–union consciousness, ie. the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation<sup>6</sup>. (Tucker:1975:24)

But this does not mean, as the "economists" asserted, the underestimation of the spontaneous element. On the contrary, Lenin argues in the same pamphlet that "the spontaneous element, in essence, represents nothing more nor less than consciousness in embryonic form." (Tucker:1975:24) The task of the revolutionary was to assist in the development of this embryonic consciousness to a genuine political consciousness. And how was this to be done? In Lenin's words:

It is not enough to explain to the workers that they are politically oppressed (any more than it is to explain to them that their interests are antagonistic to the interests of the employers). Agitation must be conducted with regard to every concrete example of this oppression .... In as much as this oppression affects the most diverse classes of society, in as much as it manifests itself in the most varied spheres of life and activity – vocational, civic, personal, family, religious, scientific, etc. – is it not evident that we shall not be fulfilling our task of developing the political consciousness of the workers if we do not undertake the organisation of the political exposure of the autocracy in all its aspects? (Tucker:1975:36)



But the political exposure of all forms of oppression in class society can only be accomplished if revolutionaries understand and apply a materialist analysis. And materialist analysis and Marxian socialism, are in the final instance a science, which can be assimilated only in an individual and not a collective manner. It is not the entire class that assimilates this science, but only a small fraction of it. It is therefore important for this fraction to locate itself within a tightly knit organisational structure so that they can import this science to wider and wider layers, and also be capable, should the opportunity present itself, of sweeping the broader masses into action around objectives that challenge the continued existence of bourgeois society and the capitalist mode of production. The tasks of this type of organisation then, were to maintain the connection between revolutionary socialists and the mass movement, to overcome the division between politics and economics that bourgeois society creates, and to act as a memory of the class by learning the lessons of past struggles and imparting these to the class. Lenin conceded that the class struggle arose independently of the existence of the revolutionary party, but he resolutely maintained that the successful outcome of these struggles crucially depended on the existence of such a party.

The alternative view was of course best articulated by Rosa Luxemburg. Luxemburg, perturbed by the Bolshevik–Menshevik split in 1903, formulated her own conceptions of a political party in a famous pamphlet entitled *Organisational Questions of Social Democracy*<sup>7</sup>.

In the latter she takes issue with Lenin in relation to what she perceived as his ultra–centralism, and argues that,

... the social democratic movement is the first in the history of class societies which reckons, in all its phases and through its entire course, on the organisation and the direct, independent action of the masses. Because of this, social democracy creates an organisational type that is entirely different from those common to earlier revolutionary movements, such as those of the Jacobins and the adherents of Blanqui. (Waters:1970:117)

Rejecting Lenin's notion of a vanguard organisation, she goes on to argue:

Social democratic centralism cannot be based on the mechanical subordination and blind obedience of the party membership to the leading party centre. For this reason the social–democratic movement cannot allow the erection of an air–tight partition between the class conscious nucleus of the proletariat already in the party and its immediate popular environment, the non–party sections of the proletariat. (Waters:1970:118)



The alternative for Luxemburg was a much more loosely connected organisation that would recruit as much of the class as possible. "Social democracy", for Luxemburg, was "itself the proletariat." (Waters:1970:119) The principal task of the party was to assume political leadership of the class in its struggle for emancipation. The party was to exercise its influence "primarily through its ideas and its slogans rather than through the power of its organisation or its own initiation of actions." (Molyneux:1985:104)

But by posing an alternative conception of the party to that of Lenin, Luxemburg, wittingly or unwittingly, was positing an alternative conception of the formation of class consciousness. This is because the former has to be located on the foundation of the latter. In *Organisational Questions of Social Democracy* she argues that "the proletarian army is recruited and becomes aware of its objectives in the course of the struggle itself." (Waters:1970:118) Thus, the working masses gain an understanding of their tasks in the course of the vigorous struggles they engage in. For Luxemburg then, spontaneity and consciousness occur at one and the same time<sup>8</sup>.

These differing conceptions of spontaneity and the nature of workers' parties have crucially influenced the debate on the form and nature of a workers' organisation in South Africa. This discussion will now turn its attention to this debate.

### **SACP – Form and Nature of the Organisation**

The SACP has modelled its organisational structure on the Leninist conception of organisation. The basic structure of the organisation in the pre-banning period was the branch, which was replaced in the more repressive conditions of apartheid with what is described by the latest constitution as the "unit". The latter is an underground structure not open to the public eye, and it is impermissible for any member of the organisation to divulge membership of such a structure. Units in a particular region are directly accountable to the regional committees which are constituted and appointed by the Central Committee in suitable geographical and industrial areas. The Central Committee is the highest body of the organisation in between Congresses, which take place not less than once every five years. A Political Bureau is elected by the Central Committee and is responsible for the daily workings of the party. (SACP 1989) The form of the organisation of the SACP closely resembles that of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

The essential content of this form of organisation has been carried forward in the post-February 2nd period. Branches, Regional Internal Leadership Groups, and a National Internal Leadership Group, represent open, public structures, with a similar chain of command, that co-exist with the organisation's underground structures. This co-existence of dual structures is to characterise the SACP's form of organisation through the transition to an open, public vanguard organisation whose projected establishment date has been set as December 1991<sup>9</sup>.

An underground pamphlet of the organisation described the party as "the material embodiment of socialist theory. The party is not the entire working class, but part of it, its vanguard." (AC: 1988(112): 41) In its current programme, *The Path to Power*<sup>10</sup>, the organisation argues that "a workers vanguard political party must be made up of the most tried and tested representatives of the class. Its members must be committed revolutionaries with an understanding of Marxist theory and practice, an unconditional dedication to the workers cause, and a readiness, if need be, to sacrifice their very lives in the cause of freedom and socialism." (1989:43) The SACP then, is an organisation comprising mainly activists and militants, that is, that sector which possesses a permanently high level of consciousness and displays this through its high level of militancy and activity.

In relation to the decision-making process within the organisation, the party's earlier programme, *The Road to South African Freedom*<sup>11</sup>, committed itself to the principles of democratic centralism. This is reaffirmed in the organisation's current constitution where democratic centralism is defined as a situation in which:

All members shall have the maximum opportunity permitted by existing conditions to take part in the discussions and formulation of party policy and the right to participate in the election and selection of all higher organs.

and where

All decisions taken by higher organs are absolutely binding on all lower organs and individual members. The minority is always subordinate to the majority. (*Path to Power*:1989:62)

The above two clauses attempt to serve seemingly contradictory goals. On the one hand, the former clause, for reasons of minimizing the risks of incorrect decisions and more importantly,

by recognising that socialism without the highest level of participation is an impossibility, argues for the maximum amount of inner-party democracy that is possible within the terrain that the organisation is situated in<sup>12</sup>. The latter clause, arising out of the need to develop a highly disciplined combat organisation that would be capable of challenging a centralised state, attempts to enforce all decisions democratically arrived at, on all sectors and members of the organisation. Thus, the SACP theoretically resolves the tension between democracy and centralization by adopting democratic centralism which, it believes, encourages the maximum amount of debate within the organisation, whilst at the same time, enforcing all decisions arrived at on all of the organisation's structures and members.

But why the need for a vanguard organisation? Why is it so essential for a democratic centralist structure to be established? The SACP has developed its form of organisation on the basis that socialism, as a scientific body of ideas, cannot rise spontaneously in the consciousness of people. It has to be taught to them. This historical responsibility falls on the shoulders of the revolutionary intelligentsia and the advanced layers of the working class who are charged with the task of infusing into the consciousness of the proletariat, those principles of socialist ideology<sup>13</sup>. To substantiate and legitimate its position, the party quotes the much heralded statement of Lenin:

Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only outside of the economic struggle, outside of the sphere of relations between workers and employers. (AC: 1982(90): 26)

The spontaneous struggle of the masses, according to the SACP, cannot by itself generate revolutionary consciousness. Rather, the organisation argues that, since the dominant ideology in any society is that of the ruling class, there is every likelihood that spontaneity will fall prey to the ideas of the ruling capitalist class<sup>14</sup>. To fight this tendency, through utilizing the sparks of political consciousness generated by the workers struggle is the supreme task of the vanguard party in order not only to win concessions, but also to organise the workers for the destruction of the social system that gives rise to this oppression and exploitation in the first place.

But it should be noted that the SACP is careful to guard against the conclusion that socialist ideas are the property of an elite. On the contrary, it argues;

... the working class will increasingly produce from its ranks socialist theoreticians and fighters when such ideas are implanted in its ranks in the course of struggle by



committed socialist revolutionaries, who themselves are the class conscious elements within the workers, or members of the intelligentsia committed to the cause of socialism. (AC: 1982(90): 27)

The party then conceives of its organisation as being distinct from, but at the same time, implanted in the working class. Or in the words of the SACP, "the party is the highest form of political organisation of the working class. It is the political leader of the class without whose guiding theory and activities, it will be impossible to build socialism." (AC: 1988(112): 42)

### **The "Workerist" Alternative**

The SACP's conception of the form and nature of a revolutionary workers organisation has not gone unchallenged. But perhaps the most coherent and influential alternative to this conception emerged from what, for want of a better term, I have called the "workerist" tendency<sup>15</sup>. The latter, an ill-defined grouping of trade union activists and university academics who were traditionally based in the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), but are now located in crucial Congress of South African Trade union (COSATU) affiliates such as National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) and Chemical Workers' Industrial Union (CWIU), were much influenced by Luxemburg's critique of Lenin's form of organisation, and the anti-Stalinism of the new left in Europe. This tendency developed a critique of the dominant Congress position which appeared in its most coherent form in a paper by the then National Education Officer of FOSATU, Alec Erwin, entitled *The Question of Unity in the Struggle*.

Erwin's concern in the paper was to distinguish between, what he termed, "liberation politics" and "transformation politics"<sup>16</sup>. The former, he argued, can take on three forms: "national defence", "nation building", and "populism". The struggle in South Africa, according to Erwin, was an amalgam of populism and nation building. He argued that "the racial divisions and Bantustans policy made nation building one essential basis for mobilising whilst the racist and anti-democratic policies of the regime cemented a popular alliance" (1985:60), that is, an alliance of classes whose economic interests differ but who find common cause against the regime. Erwin commented that the South Africa of today is a substantially different one from that of the 1950's and 1960's. He then went on to say:

Liberation politics is subject to new pressures. Economic growth and the state's attempt at reform place pressure on the bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie elements

of a popular alliance to break ranks. In tension with this is the fact that the state's political reforms remain based on race so that nation building is still of paramount importance. Rampant apartheid, if we might call it that, cemented both populism and a platform of nation building. Economic growth and political reform are weakening the cement of populism. (1985:61)

The conclusion for Erwin then, was that liberation politics tends to become "no longer liberation politics but rather a process of negotiating." Thus, "the politics of liberation is itself in danger of co-option." (1985:62) Liberation politics then did not address the profound structural problems of the economy "which requires substantial transformations if the working class both urban and rural is to improve its material and humanitarian position." (Erwin:1985:68)

This was essentially the gist of the address by Joe Foster, General Secretary of FOSATU, to the Congress of the Federation three years earlier. For Foster it was imperative that,

... workers must strive to build their own powerful and effective organisation even while they are part of the popular wider struggle. This organisation is necessary to protect and further worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters. (FOSATU:1982:24)

Foster suggested that a working class movement needed to be developed in order to create an effective organisational base from which workers could play a major political role. However, although indicating that such a movement would need to be broader than the unions, he provided little clarity as to the nature and form of that organisation.

But most pro-FOSATU supporters tended to interpret Foster's speech as implying the need for the development of a mass-based workers party. Indeed FOSATU's newspaper, *Worker News*, carried two articles on the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), the Brazilian Workers Party based on the independent trade union movement, in July and August 1985. In an interview with *Socialist Worker Review*, Moses Mayekiso<sup>17</sup>, one of the best known worker leaders in the country, when confronted with the question of such a party being developed, replied:

Yes, it will be formed ... next year. It's a possibility. People are discussing it heavily at the present moment. (Callinicos:1988:124)

A clear alternative then, to the SACP's conception of a revolutionary worker's organisation, existed on the agenda of the South African political arena. However, such a party did not develop. This can perhaps be attributed to the reluctance of the leadership in FOSATU to engage



in any struggle considered political or community-orientated. The result was that the “workerists” allowed the ANC-SACP alliance free reign to mobilise outside the shop-floor. Thus when COSATU was formed, the Charterist movement possessed sufficient legitimacy to undermine the “workerists” base, and sweep the newly-formed federation into the ANC-SACP camp.

Yet, despite this, the idea of a mass-based workers’ party still holds considerable sway within the country. Recently, due to the changes that have taken place since 1987, and the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe, significant sectors of the SACP have been converted to the idea of a mass-based workers’ party. Issue no. 3 of *Umsebenzi*, distributed at the party’s mass rally in Johannesburg in July 1990, carried the slogan “Build the New Mass Party” in its lead article. Jeremy Cronin, a leading member of the party and a member of its Internal Leadership Group, argued in a recent contribution to the *South African Labour Bulletin* that the party must establish itself in a mass form, although he qualified this statement by suggesting that it should still retain its vanguard role<sup>18</sup>. Despite the latter’s qualifying statement much confusion exists within the party in the debate over vanguard and mass-based forms of organisation. For this reason the next section will focus on a critical analysis of the two differing conceptions of a revolutionary workers organisation.

### **Vanguard vs Mass-Based Party**

Any consideration of the debate concerning vanguard and mass-based parties needs to take as its starting point differing conceptions of the development of consciousness that would underlie these different proposals of organisation. The proposal for a vanguard party presupposes that the broad mass of workers alone, through their spontaneous action, cannot achieve a political consciousness, and that they need to be drawn into sustained political action and infused with this consciousness by “conscientised individuals.” On the other hand the notion of a mass-based workers party is based on the belief that the broad mass of workers, in the course of their spontaneous struggles, could reach a revolutionary consciousness.

In the proletarian revolutionary process three sectors tend to intersect in support of the revolution. The first is a small nucleus of activists, whose social roots are mainly located outside the working class, and who are primarily driven by their understanding of the social whole and a scientific appraisal of the movement of history<sup>19</sup>. The second sector is the



advanced worker's, that is, the leadership of the workers spontaneous struggles<sup>29</sup>. This sector is impelled to continuous action, organisation and growing class consciousness by the practical knowledge they acquire in the struggle. Mandel terms this consciousness "empirical and pragmatic consciousness", which he argues "can enrich action to a certain extent, but which is far inferior to the effectiveness of a scientifically global consciousness." (1985:4) The final sector is of course the broad mass of workers, "whose elementary class struggle, elementary class organisation and elementary class consciousness, are born directly out of action, and only the experience arising out of that action is able to develop and accelerate [their] consciousness." (Mandel:1985:41) But the masses only engage in action in periodic episodes – once the action has subsided, they once again retreat into their private lives and become enveloped by the dominant ideas in society.

Three conclusions can be drawn from this analytical dissection of the revolutionary process. The first, is that the development of consciousness amongst the working class is an uneven, and sometimes, contradictory process. This contradicts Luxemburg's assertion that revolutionary consciousness can be attained by the broad mass of workers simply in the course of struggle, for if this had been the case, the workers would not retreat into their private shells once that struggle has subsided. The second conclusion is that, despite the above statement, the primary arena for the emergence and development of revolutionary consciousness amongst the broad mass of workers is the school of struggle itself. This contradicts Lenin's initial assertions in *What is To be Done*, namely that the development of consciousness occurs external to activity. In fact, Lenin himself seems to have concluded that his initial thesis was erroneous, when after the October Revolution, he argued,

we do not expect the proletariat to mature for power in an atmosphere of cajoling and persuasion, in a school of mealy sermons or didactic declamations, but in the school of life and struggle ... The proletariat must do its learning in the struggle, and stubborn, desperate struggle is the only teacher. (Harding:1983b:195)

The third and final conclusion, which is linked to the first two, is that the revolutionary process is made up of two sub-processes: the first being the merging of the activist nuclei with the advanced workers which would enable the latter to transform itself from its state of pragmatic consciousness to a theoretical understanding of the entire historical process, and thereby create the vanguard; and second, is that a revolutionary situation arises with the merging of actions of the vanguard and the broad mass of workers. This merging receives its highest expression in

what Luxemburg termed the Mass Strike<sup>21</sup>.

The second sub-process is of course based on the first. And the first, that is the merging of the nuclei and the advanced workers, can only effectively take place with the formation of the vanguard party, which would have to restrict its membership to advanced workers. The analysis of the development of consciousness then leads us to the conclusion that the formation of the vanguard party is an absolute imperative if the revolutionary process is to reach its successful climax.

The case for a vanguard party is given greater weight when one considers that a revolution must also deal with the question of a direct collision with state power. Both Lenin and Luxemburg recognized that "the revolution was directed as much against the old state power as against capitalist exploitation"<sup>22</sup> (Waters:1970:202), and that the established state could not be gradually dismantled but would have to be forcibly overthrown. But this can only be done through an insurrection, and an insurrection must, by its very nature, be organised: "it must be a unified, simultaneous action of decisive sections of the proletariat, prepared in advance and in secret and set for a definite date. Its execution demands, therefore, a well established chain of command with influence and authority extending throughout the class". (Molyneux:1985:115) But these tasks can only be fulfilled by a party – a disciplined combat party – that can centralize its operations and operate as one. The conclusion then, in the words of Trotsky, is that,

Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer. That is the principal lesson of the past... (1987:72)

## **The South African Case**

Applying these lessons to the South African political arena leads one to the conclusion that a revolutionary workers' organisation must take the form of a vanguard party, although such a party could be reinforced and supplemented by the development of a mass-based workers' organisation. If a workers organisation was to simply take a mass form, then it would reflect all the uneven levels of consciousness within the black proletariat. And the South African black proletariat's consciousness stretches from tribalism to revolutionary socialism. In this case, the party would not be able to lead the class, but would tail-end it, since, rather than overcome, it would simply reflect all the vacillations and contradictions that exist within the class as a whole.



And indeed how can a party, which represents such a broad political spectrum, be expected to provide an alternative to the dominant ideas of the day?

The necessity of a vanguard party in South Africa is also underscored by the fact that any revolutionary workers' organisation would be facing a highly centralised, militarised and repressive state apparatus. The South African state's military capabilities are formidable and unmatched in sub-Saharan Africa, and it is supported by a powerful "white" social base, and a range of legislative weapons that enable it to detain without trial, ban and deport individuals, restrict the media, and engage in a series of extra-legal repression such as torture, political attacks and assassinations<sup>23</sup>. Operation in such a terrain necessarily requires centralization, discipline and combativeness; that is, all the fundamental characteristics of a vanguard party.

It should be noted that such a vanguard party could be supplemented and reinforced by the development of a mass-based workers' organisation. A mass-based organisation would facilitate the political mobilisation of the working class and enable alternative ideas to spread to greater and greater sections of the proletariat. However, the presence of a vanguard party would still be necessary particularly to counteract the negative influences of the uneven levels of consciousness that is bound to exist within the mass party. This marrying of the two forms of organisation is not something new. A precedent for this has already been set in Brazil where the Partido dos Trabalhadores allows the presence of vanguard forms of organisation within its organisational structure. Such a development will be enormously beneficial for the socialist project in South Africa. But the conclusion still remains: a vanguard party is an indispensable pre-requisite if the enormous potential and the inspiring revolts of South Africa's black working class is to reach fruition.

### **Is Stalinism a Product of the Marxist-Leninist Party?**

But what of the common assertion that the Leninist form of organisation has and will lead to Stalinism? Two criticisms of the vanguard party are implicit in this assertion. The first is that the vanguard party is by its very nature undemocratic and prevents the development of internal party democracy. But, as Mandel argues, "this objection is a confused one, for in as much as the Leninist principles of organisation restrict the organisation to active members operating under a collective control, they actually expand rather than reduce the scope of party democracy." (1985:12) The restriction of party membership to class conscious militants ensures



greater independent thinking within the party, which thereby prevents an elite of individuals or groups from dominating party decision-making. Should the party be composed of the class as a whole, the bulk of its membership would be passive or apolitical, thereby restricting the process of democracy rather than enhancing it.

This brings us to the second criticism levelled against the vanguard party, namely that the demand for centralism leads to the bureaucratisation of the workers' organisation. But this centralisation is not the root of bureaucracies. Rather, "bureaucracy in workers' organisation is a product of the social division of labour, i.e. of the inability of the working masses, who are largely excluded from the cultural and theoretical process of production under capitalism, to themselves regularly take care of all the tasks which must be dealt with within the framework of the organisation." (Mandel:1985:10) The danger of bureaucratization, thus, threatens all organisations, both mass-based and vanguard. In fact, mass-based workers' organisations such as trade unions are more vulnerable, despite their processes of accountability and report back, because of the presence of a large layer of passive, and even apolitical membership.

But this should not lead us to the static conclusion that bureaucratic degeneration of organisation is inevitable. For just as there is a tendency to the bureaucratization of workers' organisation in bourgeois society, substantial counter-tendencies also exist. Among these are, in the words of Mandel,

... the integration of the revolutionary organisation into an international movement which is independent of "national" organisations and which constantly keeps a theoretical eye on them (not through an apparatus but through political criticism); a close involvement in the actual class and actual revolutionary struggle that makes possible a continuous selection of cadres in practice; a systematic attempt to do away with the division of labour by ensuring a continuous rotation of personnel between factory, university and full-time party functionaries; institutional guarantees (limitation on the income of full-timers, defence of the organisational norm of internal democracy, and the freedom to form tendencies and factions, etc.). (1985:12)

Any serious workers' vanguard organisation needs to create the space for the systematic implementation of these measures. Without the implementation of these rules there exists a danger of the party degenerating into a sectarian, bureaucratic, unaccountable, autonomous construct, independent of its membership. It is in the light of the above principles that the next section turns its attention to the SACP.

## **SACP – Vanguard in Form , but Anti–Leninist in Content**

The Marxist–Leninist form of organisation is based on the foundation of two fundamental principles – democratic centralism and socialist pluralism. The former feature characterizes the inner regime of the vanguard party, whilst the latter characterizes its external relations with the class. Democratic centralism, while ensuring that the party achieves the maximum amount of discipline from its membership, provides an actual right to that same membership to define the direction of party policy. Trotsky argues that “freedom of criticism and intellectual struggle was an irrevocable content of party democracy... the history of Bolshevism is a history of the struggle of factions. And, indeed how could a genuine revolutionary organisation, setting itself the task of overthrowing the world and uniting under its banner the most audacious iconoclasts, fighters and insurgents, live and develop without intellectual conflicts, without groupings and temporary factional formations.”<sup>24</sup> (1972:94–95)

But the SACP has been irrevocably opposed to this form of inner–party democracy. Its 1962 Programme, *The Road to South African Freedom*, defines democratic centralism as “demanding strict discipline, the subordination of a minority to the majority and of lower Party organs to higher organs, *and the prohibition of all factions within the Party* [my emphasis], (while) upholding the principle of democratic election of all leading organs of the party, collective leadership and full debate of policy.” (1981:31) But the full debate about policy, which the organisation is committed to, can only be realised if members are given the right to engage in intellectual conflict, a conflict which by its very nature, must be premised on the right to form tendencies and factions. The prohibition of factions is all the more serious in the light of the fact that the party, until very recently, operated under illegal and repressive conditions. And illegality of course limits the party’s interaction with the class. This makes it all the more imperative that party policy be allowed to be subjected to the most vigorous criticism and analysis if it is to remain in tune with the struggles and demands of the black proletariat.

However, it is not only the SACP’s theoretical conception of inner–party democracy that has been deficient. Its practice has also left much to be desired. In the long course of its history, the party has committed unjustifiable acts against members critical of party policy. One example which demonstrates this is the expulsion of P Richter, M Richter, L Bach and SP Bunting, who in 1937 were all charged with counter–revolutionary activity. It needs to be noted that the former three were executed in the Soviet Union when they went there to protest against their



expulsions and argue their case. And not a word of criticism, in the subsequent fifty years, was raised by the organisation. It was only recently, in the 1989 Congress of the Party, that it was acknowledged that the charges were a frame-up, and the individuals posthumously reinstated as members of the party<sup>25</sup>.

But there are others who have not been so fortunate as to have their reputations redeemed. One group of such individuals are Martin Legassick, David Hemson, Robin Petersen and Paula Ensor<sup>26</sup>. All four were expelled from the ANC in 1979 for, (according to Francis Meli) “pushing a line that was not SACTU policy.” (*Inqaba Ya Basabenzi*: 1985(16/17): 33). While these individuals were not members and thus were not expelled from the SACP, the latter clearly supported their expulsion from the ANC. Even as late as 1985, an article in *The African Communist*, entitled “New Marxist’ Tendencies and the Battle of Ideas in South Africa”, accused the four’s programme (*The Impending Socialist Revolution of the Marxist Workers’ Tendency*) of being “full of flaws, innuendoes, lies and distortions.” (AC: 1985(103): 52) The article proceeds to indicate support for the expulsion of the four and hoped that “they would stop their parasitic and dishonest attempt to exploit the reputation and prestige of the ANC...” (AC: 1985(103): 52)

The charge that the SACP has been lacking in inner-party democracy, is also borne out by the publication of Joe Slovo’s recent paper, entitled *Has Socialism Failed?* This paper, published in January 1990, whilst still underplaying the lack of inner-party democracy, goes some way towards acknowledging the charge of a lack of democracy when it says,

... the commandist and bureaucratic approaches which took root during Stalin’s time affected communist parties throughout the world, including our own. (1990:25)

Slovo further acknowledges the lack of inner-party democracy within the organisation when he goes on to argue for “ continuing the search for a better balance between advancing party policy as a collective and the toleration of on-going debate and even constructive dissent.” (1990:25) Clearly then, the organisation has been traditionally burdened with commandist and bureaucratic methods of operation.

But this type of behaviour is the antithesis of Marxism and the vanguard party. It goes against the grain of Marx’s fundamental dictum: “De omnibus dubitandum “ (“You have to doubt everything”). Marxism is not a full, final doctrine or dogma, but is always open to new



experiences which are to be incorporated in the corpus of scientific socialism. The theory of the vanguard party recognises this, and it is for this reason that it allows tendencies and factions. For without the latter, how else can one challenge the dominant political line within the party and thereby, through discussion, upgrade the organisation's analysis of the world?

The SACP has been similarly lacking in its implementation of the second pillar of the vanguard party, namely socialist pluralism. The organisation has often reacted negatively to the formation of working class structures outside the Congress fold. This was especially true of its attitude to FOSATU's suggestion and attempts, in the early 1980's, at developing a workers' movement in South Africa. In a reply to Joe Foster's address to the 1982 FOSATU Congress, Toussaint, a regular contributor to *The African Communist* argues,

... the existence and achievements of the Communist Party are well known to everybody. Its members today are in the frontline of struggle. Dare FOSATU ignore this? And dare it ignore the confusion and division it will sow in the ranks of the working class, if it sets up a new workers "movement" in competition with and alongside the still living Communist Party. And dare it ignore the disruptive and divisive effect its "workers movement" may have on the premier force in the country, the African National Congress, if the relations between its "workers movement" and its "workers leadership" on the one hand, and the national liberation movement on the other hand are not defined and clarified.

(AC:1983(93):46)

Implicit in this statement is the assumption that only the SACP has the right to lead the black working class in this country. This assumption, that socialism and the single-party system are compatible, is also evident by the fact that, until very recently, the party did not once question the lack of socialist pluralism in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc countries. Even as late as 1987 when the organisation released a publication commemorating the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, not one mention was made of the fact that the single-party system in the Soviet Union contradicted the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism<sup>27</sup>.

And this is indeed the case. The theoretical conception underlying the single-party system and the assumption that the SACP is the only force that has the right to lead the black working class, is that the party represents and acts on behalf of the class. But this is a substitutionist conception of working class leadership and organisation. It goes against the foundation of Marx's thought, namely that, "the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself". As the second stanza of the international proletariats anthem, *The Internationale*, says,

Only the whole mass of producers can emancipate themselves.  
There is no God, no Caesar, no unfailing Central Committee, no unfailing Chairman, no unfailing General Secretary or First Secretary who can substitute for the collective efforts of the class. (Mandel:1983:13)

The socialist revolution then, if it is to be the act of the working class, must be based on socialist pluralism. This is because the socialist revolution requires a constructive, creative and high level of participation and consciousness on the part of the proletariat. And if the proletariat is to be able to perform this function, they must have the freedom to choose from the different solutions and variants, that which conforms the most to their interests as they understand them. And if that same proletariat commits an error, then the words of Luxemburg are incisive:

Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee.”  
(Waters:1970:130)

The evidence would seem to suggest that the SACP has been deficient in the implementation of the foundational principles of the vanguard party, namely inner-party democracy and socialist pluralism. However, it needs to be noted that since 1989 there has been some acknowledgement of the problem and the implementation of certain measures to address this question. In the 1989 Congress of the organisation, the party's current programme, *The Path to Power*, claims that “a Communist Party does not earn the honoured title of vanguard merely by proclaiming it. Nor does its claim to be the upholder and custodian of Marxism–Leninism give it a monopoly of political wisdom or a natural right to exclusive control of the struggle.” (1989:43). This position was also clearly stated in *Umsebenzi* where it was argued that the organisation can only win its place as a vanguard force “by superior efforts of leadership and devotion to the revolutionary cause.” (1989(5): 3)

In addition, as indicated earlier, important sectors of the organisation are now suggesting that the SACP should establish itself as a mass vanguard party. Cronin argues that it is imperative for the organisation “to get the balance right between a party of quality, and a mass party”. This supplementing of a mass membership to the party's original vanguard role is seen as necessary if the organisation is to avoid the three-fold dangers of elitism, bureaucratization, and the exclusion of important sectors of the working class, namely women. (1990:7)

## **Some Concluding Remarks**

An analysis of the social and political conditions in capitalist society generally, and in South Africa in particular, clearly indicates that the SACP was correct to insist that a revolutionary workers' organisation adopt a vanguard form. This is so because unless a workers' party is comprised of mainly developed activists and militants, it would simply reflect the uneven levels of consciousness within the black proletariat, and would be unable to provide an alternative to the dominant ideas of the day. The necessity for a vanguard party is also underscored by the fact that the central task faced by a workers' party is the overthrow of the existing state apparatus. This of course requires centralization, discipline and combativeness. In short, it requires a vanguard party.

However, despite the SACP's correct conclusion with regard to the form of organisation required for a revolutionary workers' party in South Africa, the organisation's practice in this regard has been deficient in many respects. A critical review of the party's organisational history indicates that the SACP represented the Marxist-Leninist conception of organisation merely in form, but not in content. Whilst the party professed to be based on this form of organisation, it violated its fundamental principles of inner-party democracy and socialist pluralism. And without the practice of these principles, the party simply degenerated into a bureaucratized parody of a Marxist-Leninist form of organisation.

But recently, there have been a number of progressive gestures on the part of the SACP with regard to the question of organisation. The organisation's acknowledgement of the problems of its past history, its publicly announced commitment to the principles of inner-party democracy and socialist pluralism, and its proposal for a mass vanguard party, are of immense symbolic value and must be welcomed and supported by all. But the party's true test will emerge in its practice. And until the results of this future practice can be determined, history will have to reserve its judgement on the organisational structure of the SACP.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE THEORY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN REVOLUTION**

The previous chapter was concerned with identifying and analysing the politics that govern the organisational structure of the SACP. But the determination of appropriate organisational forms has merely been one of a series of questions confronting the party. Another has been the theoretical categorisation of the South African social formation, and a theory of the transition to socialism. This chapter will focus on the SACP's theory of the South African revolution.

Any theory of the South African revolution must, because of the existence of racial oppression within the country, confront the crucial question of the relationship between national and social liberation. Yet this issue has for long bedeviled communist theory and practice. Since the early part of this century, intense academic and intellectual enquiry into this relationship has led to immense controversy, with the various tendencies within the international communist movement adopting differing positions. These positions have replicated themselves in South Africa, making attitudes to the relationship between national and social liberation the major dividing line between socialist parties and commentators in the country.

The roots of the controversy in South Africa date back to 1928 when the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) fractured with its endorsement of the Native Republic thesis. This thesis pioneered the view that the transition to socialism in South Africa would occur over two separate stages, the first being the establishment of an "independent native South African republic", and the second, a "workers' and peasants republic"<sup>1</sup>. Over the ensuing decades the organisation reformed and reformulated its theoretical conceptions within the framework of this policy of "two stage transition to socialism". In 1962, the SACP officially categorised the South African social formation as a "colony of a special type", and argued that the first stage of the transition would have to be a "national democratic" one. This theory of "colonialism of a special type" and the national democratic path to development serves as the theoretical foundation of the current strategy of the SACP, and rationalises the party's alliance with the African National Congress (ANC) – the mass based multi-class liberation organisation.

The objective of this chapter is to understand and analyse this theory of the South African revolution. The chapter will first focus on explaining the theory of "colonialism of a special

type” and national democracy. It will thereafter discuss the variety of interpretations associated with the theory, and finally, it will subject “colonialism of a special type” and national democracy to a close scrutiny in the hope of determining the theoretical validity of the former as a description of the South African social formation, and the latter as a method for the transition to socialism.

### **Colonialism of a Special Type and National Democracy**

The SACP’s categorisation of South Africa as a colony can be traced back to the Central Committee report submitted to the last conference of the CPSA in 1950. This report suggested that South Africa displayed characteristics of both an imperialist state and a colony within the boundaries of a single geographic, political and economic entity. It concluded that the national movement in the country must be transformed into a revolutionary multi-class organisation that would co-operate closely with the Communist Party towards the objective of national liberation. (1981:201–211) This perspective governed the work of the majority of communists in the 1950’s.

Throughout the decade members of the SACP were closely involved in the work of the ANC and allied organisations. They occupied many of the leadership positions in the ANC and SACTU<sup>3</sup>, and were instrumentally involved in the drawing up of the Freedom Charter (see Appendix 1). These activities, in the realm of a national liberation struggle, were supported by the gradual evolution of the theoretical perspective outlined in the 1950 Central Committee report. Michael Harmel, the party’s chairperson and leading theoretician, elaborated on the 1950 perspective in a talk delivered at the Johannesburg Discussion Club where he used the theory of internal colonialism to explain the unique character of the South African social formation (Lambert:1988:60). However, due to the lack of consensus within the organisation<sup>3</sup>, a programmatic adoption of this thesis evaded the party until 1962, when the organisation, at its Sixth National Conference in Johannesburg, adopted a new programme, *The Road to South African Freedom*.

This programme defined the South African social formation as a “colony of a special type”. This definition, it was believed, captured the unique character of the South African system which reflected “a combination of the worst features of imperialism and colonialism within a single national frontier” (1981:300). The programme argues:

At one level, that of “White South Africa”, there are all the features of an advanced capitalist state in its final stage of imperialism. There are highly developed industrial



monopolies, and the merging of industrial and financial capital. The land is farmed along capitalist lines, employing wage labour, and producing cash crops for the local and export markets. The South African monopoly capitalists, who are closely linked with British, United States and other foreign imperialist interests, export capital abroad, especially in Africa. Greedy for expansion, South African imperialism reaches out to incorporate other territories – South West Africa and the protectorates. But on another level, that of “Non-White South Africa”, there are all the features of a colony. The indigenous population is subjected to extreme national oppression, poverty and exploitation, lack of all democratic rights and political domination by a group which does everything it can to emphasise and perpetuate its alien “European” character. The African reserves show the complete lack of industry, communications, transport and power resources which are characteristic of African territories under colonial rule throughout the continent. Typical, too, of imperialist rule, is the reliance by the state upon brute force and terror, and upon the most backward tribal elements and institutions which are deliberately and artificially preserved. Non-White South Africa is the colony of white South Africa itself. (1981:300)

According to the SACP, the net effect of this imperial-colonial dichotomy on the South African social system was the homogenisation of the black population towards the goal of overthrowing white supremacy. *The Road to South African Freedom* suggested that white supremacy had ensured that there was no acute or antagonistic class divisions among the African people. It argued that “the special character of colonialism in South Africa has strangled the development of a class of African capitalists... (and)...the interests of the African commercial class lie wholly in joining the workers and rural people for the overthrow of white supremacy”. (1981:304–305) This convergence of economic interests between the various classes amongst the black population promoted a national consciousness which allowed for the alliance of all black classes against white supremacy.

The promotion of national over class consciousness, the SACP argued, is further reinforced by the acute national oppression experienced by the black proletariat in this country. Toussaint, a regular contributor to *The African Communist*, argued in 1978 that black workers were blinded to their real class aims “since society rubbed their face deeply in their national oppression” (AC:1978(1):30). This view was taken up by Dialego, some years later in a contribution in the same journal, where he argued that,

... the nature of exploitation manifests itself first and foremost in the context of the place he (black worker) occupies in the racial equation, in the specific way production relations manifest themselves under internal colonialism. He therefore not only sees his position on the factory floor through the colonial screen, but also identifies with the rest of his number who belong to the lower ‘caste’. This is not a



false consciousness, but a reflection of the most immediate contradiction within South African society – between the oppressed people and their rulers. (AC:1985(1):70)

Black workers, Dialego suggested, perceived their social identity in racial, and not class terms. This, together with the fact that the immediate economic interests of all classes within the black population converged, inhibited the development of a class consciousness amongst the black proletariat. But for Dialego such a class consciousness is a necessary subjective ingredient for the socialist revolution. Its absence, due to the fact that the colonial character of South African society promoted national over class consciousness, led adherents of the “colonialism of a special type” thesis to the conclusion that despite the development of the society’s forces of production, a socialist revolution was not subjectively possible. The result, according to the “colonialism of a special type” thesis, was that South Africa would have to undergo a preliminary stage of development in the transition to socialism.

*The Road to South African Freedom* defines this preliminary stage as one of national democracy<sup>4</sup>. The programme argues:

... the immediate and imperative interests of all sections of the South African people demand the carrying out ... (of) ... a national democratic revolution which will overthrow the colonialist state of white supremacy and establish an independent state of national democracy in South Africa. (1981:313)

The main aim of the national democratic revolution, it was suggested, would be the national liberation of the African people. According to this thesis, the national democratic state would reflect the basic civil liberties demanded in the Freedom Charter, and effect profound economic changes such as “drastic agrarian reform to restore the land to the people, widespread nationalisation of key industries to break the grip of white monopoly capital on the main centres of the country’s economy, (and) radical improvements in the conditions and standards of living for the working people” (1981:314). Such a state would follow a non-capitalist path of development that will eventually culminate in the realisation of a socialist future.

### **Reinterpreting “Colonialism of a Special Type” and National Democracy**

In the three decades since the adoption of *The Road to South African Freedom*, the SACP has remained committed to the categorisation of the South African social formation as a “colony of a special type”, and the theory of national democracy as a method of transcending to socialism.

However, the post-1962 period also witnessed a reformulation of “colonialism of a special type” and national democracy from within the party’s ranks. Within the framework of the 1962 programme members of the SACP and the party itself attempted to reformulate the theory within the context of a changing South Africa, and in response to the critiques that the party programme had been subjected to<sup>5</sup>. This process finally culminated in the adoption of the party’s current programme, *The Path To Power*.

The current programme attempts to emphasise class relations within its formulation of “colonialism of a special type”. It argues:

Within South Africa, bourgeois domination and capitalist relations of production, which emerged within the context of colonialism, have been developed and maintained since 1910 through a specific variant of bourgeois rule – colonialism of a special type. It is a variant of capitalist rule in which the essential features of colonial domination in the imperialist epoch are maintained and even intensified. But there is one specific peculiarity: in South Africa the colonial ruling class with its white support base on the one hand, and the oppressed colonial majority on the other, are located within a single territory. (1989: 19)

The above explanation of “colonialism of a special type” is phrased differently to the organisation’s 1962 formulation. Beside the stress on class factors, the current explanation attempts to emphasise the existence of a single social system, as opposed to the “two nations” conception implied in the earlier formulation. However, this in no way rescinds the party’s earlier categorisation of the South African social system. *The Path To Power*, despite its greater emphasis on class relations, still argues that “in all essential respects the colonial status of the black majority has remained in place”. (1989:22) It still views the relationship between South Africa’s ruling class and oppressed majority as an imperial-colonial one. The reformulation then, still ties the SACP to a colonial categorisation of the South African social formation.

In any case, the reformulation of “colonialism of a special type” has also led to a reformulation of the theory of national democracy. Whilst the 1962 programme implied a two-stage theory of social change (where the struggles around race and class occurred in two distinct historical time-frames), the 1989 programme argues for an interpretation that suggests a much more complex relationship between national democracy and socialism. *The Path to Power* argues:

The transition to socialism will be neither completely separate from nor contradictory to the tasks of the national democratic revolution. On the one hand,



consistent implementation and defence of the national democratic programme constitute a major guarantee for progress towards socialism. On the other hand, many of the major objectives of the national democratic revolution will be fully accomplished in the process of socialist reconstruction. Among these tasks are complete national liberation and equality, elimination of sex discrimination, and, more significantly, the elimination of monopoly domination over the economy. (1989:40)

This perspective was not entirely new. Prominent figures within the organisation had been arguing for over a decade that national democracy and socialism should not be seen as two separate stages, but rather as two distinct points in an uninterrupted process of transition. This position was enunciated as early as 1976 when Joe Slovo argued that "if ... the liberation struggle should bring to power a revolutionary democratic alliance dominated by the proletariat and peasantry, the post-revolutionary phase can surely become the first stage in a continuous process along the road to socialism. (1976:148)" This notion of uninterrupted transition became the central theme of Slovo and the party press in their subsequent interventions on the debate on "colonialism of a special type" and national democracy, and has become the dominant conception within the organisation. *The Path to Power* then, details a much more complex and sophisticated interpretation of the theory of national democracy than the earlier formulation contained in *The Road to South African Freedom*.

However, once again, the reformulation did not constitute a complete break with the conception contained in *The Road to South African Freedom*. Despite the reinterpretation of the relationship between national democracy and socialism, the party still holds onto the need for what it terms the "national democratic" stage. This is clearly evident in *The Path to Power's* proposals for a post-apartheid state. The programme argues that the foundation of the national democratic state will be representative institutions of government based on one-person, one-vote, universal and direct adult franchise without regard to race, sex, property and other discriminatory qualifications. (1989: 35) Whilst such a proposal would definitely constitute an advance on the present situation, it represents nothing more than a basic representative democracy characteristic of bourgeois democracies in the First World. This then raises an intriguing question. If the proposals for the form of a national democratic state represent nothing more than a basic representative democracy which is compatible with capitalist relations of production, then what does this say of the national democratic stage, which according to the SACP's definition, is supposed to constitute the non-capitalist path to development?



Such vagueness and confusion is compounded by developments since the unbanning of the party. In the period after February 2nd 1990, prominent members of the party have argued that a post-apartheid state must intervene decisively within the economy in order to correct racial imbalances, although it is conceded that “the private sector must remain a vital part of the post-apartheid economy”. (Slovo 1990 (d)). It is clear then that what is being suggested is some form of mixed economy, very much along the lines envisaged in the ANC’s Constitutional Guidelines<sup>7</sup>. But a mixed economy can occur within the framework of both a bourgeois and an incipient proletarian state. Without a restructuring of social relations and state forms in a post-apartheid South Africa, a mixed economy is bound to occur within the framework of capitalist relations of production<sup>8</sup>. Yet none of these factors has ever been clarified by either the party press or official statements of the party leadership. In this context, Padayachee raises an important issue when he suggests that those who support a mixed economy “have yet to reveal or spell out those processes and dynamics inherent in this stage that would begin the irreversible movement to socialism.” (1988:201)

This leaves us with a high degree of uncertainty and vagueness as to the nature of the SACP’s national democratic stage. The party’s proposals for a post-apartheid state structure and economy are not necessarily incompatible with the models of advanced bourgeois democracies of the First World. Yet the party programme states there is a difference between national and bourgeois democracy. The question that remains then is: what features of national democracy distinguish it from bourgeois democracy? On this the party has remained silent. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether the party is envisaging the transition to socialism occurring either over two separate stages with the post-apartheid stage being, in content, one of bourgeois democracy, or a single, phased, process of transition. Nevertheless, despite this vagueness, and perhaps because of it, it would be wise to proceed to a critical evaluation of the party’s theory of “colonialism of a special type” and national democracy.

### **Critical Reflections on “Colonialism of a Special Type”**

As mentioned earlier, the SACP has throughout the last three decades remained committed to a colonial characterisation of the South African social formation, albeit with the qualification that this occurs within the boundaries of a single geographical area. This thesis has, despite some reformulations and reinterpretations, retained its essential theme, namely that the South African system is dominated by an imperial-colonial dichotomy with the majority of South Africa’s

people subjected to colonial oppression. But the thesis has not gone unchallenged. The theory of “colonialism of a special type” has since its adoption been subjected to a variety of critiques that have revealed a number of serious analytical limitations within the thesis.<sup>9</sup>

The first charge that the thesis is vulnerable to is one of economic reductionism. This reductionism is most clearly evident in an anonymous contribution, published in *Africa Perspective* in 1983, which engages in a defence of the theory of “colonialism of a special type” against critiques of the thesis. The contribution, clearly written by a member of the SACP, conceptualises classes and class contradictions only in an economic sense, that is, it suggests that this class contradiction is confined only to the economic sphere although its effects are felt throughout the whole society (Anonymous:1983:79). Stephen Gelb suggests that this economic reductionism emerges since the theory of “colonialism of a special type” employs a formalistic use of the base–superstructure metaphor. This, according to Gelb, involves identifying the base and superstructure, “which initially were separable only analytically, as two concrete entities involving different sets of activities”. (1984:3) This distinction between the base and superstructure, then, enables SACP adherents to locate the existence of classes within the economic base, whilst identifying race on all of the economic, political and ideological levels.

Gelb argues that this economically reductionist conceptualisation of classes and class contradiction has two implications. The first is that classes are conceived as not being able to act politically since they are seen to exist solely on the economic level. This then enables the theory of “colonialism of a special type” to interpret the political and other social spheres solely in terms of race. The second implication is that “colonialism of a special type” adherents, by suggesting that “the material contradiction is abstract, explicitly push class as an analytical dimension into the background” (Gelb:1984:5). This leads them to emphasise the reality of race in all regions of society – a conception that justifies the assertion that the dominant contradiction is one between the white colonial bloc and the black colonised majority.

A second, but related, inadequacy within the “colonialism of a special type” thesis is its treatment of race or ethnic relations. Harold Wolpe, in a critical analysis of the internal colonialism thesis, argued that,

... the theory of internal colonialism is unable to explain the relationship between class relations and race or ethnic, etc., relations. As a consequence, the latter relations come once more to be treated as autonomous and in isolation from the class



relations. To this extent there is a close convergence between internal colonialism and conventional race relations theory, more particularly, ... when the latter is based on a plural model of society. (1975: 240)

The autonomous treatment of race or ethnicity in internal colonialist and pluralist analyses had the effect, Wolpe argued, of ignoring other structures and relations in explanations of the existence, nature, and relationships of such groups; yet class structure, class relations, and the mode of production are necessary ingredients in any explanation of race and ethnicity. Wolpe argued that the theory of internal colonialism was guilty of an error similar to that of pluralist analysis, when it inhibited analyses from proceeding beyond “a mere description of the ideology and political practices of the ethnic, racial and national groups”, to a consideration of how such groups “relate to the mode of production and social formation in which they are located”. This then made these analyses “too abstract from the social totality in which racial, ethnic or national groups are embedded and which explains them”. (Wolpe: 1975:238)<sup>19</sup>

Gelb raises a similar critique to Wolpe’s but avoids the latter’s slide into class reductionism<sup>21</sup>. Following the lead of feminist theorist Iris Young<sup>22</sup>, Gelb describes “colonialism of a special type” as a dual system theory which is guilty of treating race and class as two distinct systems of social relations, “occupying separate parts of society, and relating to each other as external forces” (1984:5). This separation, according to Gelb, enables SACP adherents to conceive of class as a “pure” concept since the latter’s definitions, formations and relations exclude race as a defining ingredient. The theory of “colonialism of a special type” can thus be criticised for class reductionism since it refuses to theorise class as a racially structured social category. Also, according to Gelb, the dual systems approach displays a tension since it needs to establish a hierarchy between the two systems concerned. In the case of South Africa, “colonialism of a special type” prioritises race relations since it sees the latter as being relatively more concrete and closer to the world of immediate experience – a conclusion derived from our earlier critique of the economic reductionism of “colonialism of a special type”.

Thirdly, the theory of “colonialism of a special type” can also be criticised on the related ground that it posits a two nation conception of the South African social formation. Ben Molapo confirms the SACP’s adherence to the two nations thesis in an article in *The African Communist* in 1978, where he suggested that the party holds the view that South Africa is a colonial situation of a special type in which two nations, an oppressing nation and an oppressed nation,



live side by side within the same territory. Molapo then, goes on to argue that the advantage of this thesis, which receives its fullest outline in the SACP's programme (1962), is that it emphasises the colonial nature of our society. (AC:1976(3):84) This view however, is challenged by Neville Alexander, who in a series of influential contributions<sup>13</sup>, suggests that "the fundamental problem with the two nations thesis ... in the South African context is that it holds within it the twin dangers of anti-white chauvinism and ethnic separatism". (1986: 83) Proceeding from the foundation that a nation can be defined only in a given historical context, Alexander suggests that "the working class has become the leading class in the nation and is about to constitute itself as the nation of South Africa". (1979:180). In short, according to Alexander, the nation in South Africa is being born in the course of struggle.

From this perspective, Alexander proceeds to argue that "colonialism of a special type" was an inadequate categorisation since it remained imprisoned within the confines of pluralist theses which were based on the mystified conception of race. The essential weakness in this categorisation was that it equated "race" with "national group" – an equation that Alexander correctly describes as invalid since the term "national group" applies only to fully fledged nations or groups striving towards nationhood through the creation of a separate state. In the South African situation, neither the oppressive nor the oppressed racial groups constituted fully fledged nations, nor did they desire separate statehood<sup>14</sup>.

The theoretical inadequacy of the "colonialism of a special type" thesis is aggravated when one takes into consideration the fact that despite many of the SACP theorists adherence to Stalin's celebrated essay on the national question, neither the oppressed nor the oppressing nation implied in the "colonialism of a special type" thesis meet all of the characteristics of Stalin's definition<sup>15</sup>. Leaving aside the question of the adequacy of Stalin's definition<sup>16</sup>, the fact that adherents of the SACP thesis profess to support Stalin's definition on the one hand, whilst at the same time their categories of nation meet none of its essential characteristics, creates confusion and makes the thesis vulnerable to charges of inconsistency.

Finally, and most importantly, the danger of the "colonialism of a special type" paradigm and its conception of two nations is that it legitimised the argument for the partitioning of South Africa. The theory's assertion that the South African system is characterised by the existence of two nations, one white and the other black, leads to the logical conclusion that such nations have the

right to self-determination. As Alexander argues,

...the consistency [of the “colonialism of a special type” thesis] breaks down at the fundamental point concerning the right of nations to self-determination. This right – for nations – involves the right to secede from the multi-national state. In this the Afrikaner sectionalists are – theoretically – more consistent than other multi-nationalists who baulk at the spectre of the logical conclusion of this theory.

(No Sizwe:1979:110)

This right of “nations” to break-away and form their own separate states would in the South African case mean the partitioning of the country into white and black – a proposal roundly rejected by both the SACP and other components of the liberation movement. The SACP thus becomes vulnerable to charges of inconsistency since it rejects the logical conclusion to its theoretical categorisation of the South African system – a conclusion that suggests the partitioning of the country under the guise of independence.

What conclusion does all of this lead us to? Clearly the SACP’s problematical conceptualisation of classes and class contradictions, its inaccurate treatment of race and class as autonomous systems of social relations, and its inadequate conceptions of nations, all of which underline the theory of “colonialism of a special type” make the latter an inadequate categorisation of the South African social formation.

But the question that now confronts us is: does the party’s reformulation of “colonialism of a special type” constitute a challenge to the above critiques of the theory? Or to phrase it differently, does the reformulation contained in *The Path to Power* adequately transcend the limitations and theoretical deficiencies in the party’s earlier formulation?

A close reading of *The Path to Power* indicates that any answer to this question must be in the negative. This is so because this programme, despite its greater emphasis on class relations and a single social formation, still conceives of the South African system as being dominated by an imperial-colonial divide. But it is this very conception that represents the essential problem, since it is premised on an inadequate conceptualisation of classes, class relations, racial and national groups. The problem with the reformulation then is that it retains the root of the theoretical paradigm while attempting to rid itself of the problematic conclusions that the root gives rise to. Thus all of Slovo’s recent protestations that the “colonialism of a special type” thesis does not imply a two nations conception<sup>17</sup> will remain in vain as long as the party

continues to suggest that the South African social formation is characterised by an imperial-colonial divide. As Alexander argues,

There is simply no logic in maintaining on the one hand that South Africa's inhabitants of European descent are no longer a settler population, that they have become indigenous to South Africa, and so are Africans, while on the other hand attempting to stretch the colonial analogy to the point where it negates this valid assertion. (No Sizwe:1979: 109)

### **Critical Reflections on "National Democracy"**

Thus far, it has been argued that the theory of "colonialism of a special type" is an invalid categorisation of the South African social formation. This then necessarily throws into question the theory of national democracy, since the latter theory is based on the former thesis. As mentioned earlier, the SACP's 1962 programme suggested that the transition to socialism would occur over two separate and distinct stages in South Africa, that is, that the socialist stage would be preceded by a stage of national democracy. It is this conception that we shall now subject to a critical review.

The SACP's two-stage theory of the transition to socialism is premised on a particular conception of the formation of mass consciousness. The organisation argued that the colonial nature of South African society ensured that national rather than class contradictions dominated the consciousness of the black working class. Implicit in this analysis was a division of consciousness formation into two historical epochs. According to the SACP, the black working class would be able to demonstrate only a national democratic consciousness prior to the destruction of apartheid. A "real" class consciousness amongst the working class was possible only when the apartheid system was destroyed and the democratic demands<sup>18</sup> of the entire population met. This two-stage conception of the formation of mass consciousness justified the SACP's stagist approach to the transition to socialism.

Two points need to be made with regard to this view of mass consciousness. The first is that this conception represents a mechanistic vision divorced "from any dialectic which takes into account the development of the productive forces and the real proletariat as a class created by capitalist development" (Blumer:1989:31). The tremendous expansion of South Africa's industrial base in the post-1960 period, and the rapid monopolisation of South African



capitalism, have led to the development of a huge black working class capable of engaging in militant action to defend and advance its specific class interests<sup>19</sup>. The establishment and growth of militant trade union federations in South Africa, and the radical labour struggles engaged in by organised workers in the past two decades<sup>20</sup>, bear testimony to black workers' recognition of their specific interests and their identification of themselves as constituting a separate and particular social force.

This should not be interpreted to suggest that black workers are not conditioned by racial questions. On the contrary, the nature of apartheid society ensures that this will indeed be the case. However, black workers are also conditioned by the capitalist mode of production. This dual conditioning is a product of the way racial and class categories intertwine in variant and shifting ways in the South African context.<sup>21</sup> In the words of Ruth First,

... the national and class struggle are not part of some natural order of succession, but take place coterminously. This is so because workers are exploited as workers and also as members of a nationally oppressed group ... (1978:98).

This duality in black workers oppression and exploitation creates a much more complex consciousness – there exists no pure race or class consciousness. Black workers in this country display aspects of both racial and class consciousness. Mass consciousness is a much more complex phenomenon than that envisaged by SACP adherents.

The second point that needs to be made with regard to the SACP's conception of mass consciousness is that it is abstracted from the peculiarities of South African reality, and divorced from an understanding of the process and nature of mass struggle. Leon Trotsky argued, over sixty years ago, that consciousness formation and evolution occurred in the course "of all-round life in capitalist society, on the basis of unceasing class struggle. The growth of consciousness of the proletariat transforms this class struggle, (and) gives it a deeper and more purposeful character". (1986:87–88) Trotsky thus suggested that the evolution of mass consciousness occurred in the process of mass struggle itself.

This foundation enables us to understand the nature of mass struggles and the evolution of mass consciousness in South Africa. It is very likely, as the SACP asserts, that political struggles will begin from the foundation of national and democratic demands. These demands will be a reflection of the elementary levels of consciousness within the working class. However, because

of the existence of a strong proletariat as a really existing class, it is likely that the democratic or national mobilisations will gradually evolve into anti-capitalist struggles. The evolution of mass consciousness in South Africa is bound to proceed from its democratic foundation to flow and develop into a class consciousness in the course of mass struggles themselves.

The question that now requires an answer is why this social dynamic should be posited as an objective reality? The answer to this question lies in the peculiarity of capitalist development in this country. The discovery of gold and the development of gold mining in South Africa led to the domination of the capitalist mode of production. From very early on, mining capital recognised that it was imperative, because of the low-grade quality of the ore on the Witwatersrand and the fixed price of gold on the world market, that production costs, especially labour costs, be kept to an absolute minimum. Moreover, because neither blacks nor whites possessed the necessary skills to service the mines, expensive foreign labour had to be imported from Europe. Skilled jobs in South Africa thus became monopolised by whites. The expensive nature of skilled labour further pressurised mining capital to reduce costs with regard to unskilled labour. This was done through the utilisation of the existing reserve system which was still outside the determining influence of the capitalist mode of production, and which considerably reduced the cost of reproducing black labour power<sup>22</sup>.

This super-exploitative system was carried over into the Union of South Africa. The latter adopted the pre-capitalist system of class and racial relations, and refined, developed and perpetuated it to serve the interests of mining and agricultural capital in this country. As Alexander notes, the Union of South Africa's drastic curtailment and denial of franchise rights for blacks, "measures which were interpreted and explained on grounds of race", (No Sizwe:1979: 156) served the interests of mining capital by providing the latter with the political and legal space to maximise the exploitation of the black mineworkers. This exploitation of labour through the denial of national, democratic, and legal rights to the black population has continued unabated through the ensuing decades. This of course is not to suggest that the various fractions of capital have displayed a homogenous response to this process. On the contrary, contradictions between various fractions constantly arose with regard to their "differential needs for labour of differential quality". (No Sizwe:1979:156) However, these contradictions were resolved through the state by adaptations of the original process. Thus, the contradictions that arose after 1920 between primary and secondary industry were initially resolved by "segregation", and after 1948, by means of apartheid<sup>23</sup>.



Racism was thus functional to the rapid development of capitalism in South Africa. However, this should not lead us to a conclusion that suggests that capitalist relations in South Africa would inevitably and inescapably have to adopt a racial form. Wolpe correctly criticises this view since it “functions to close off questions about the possible separation of and contradictions between capitalism and racism”. (1988:31–32) Wolpe’s critique is borne out by developments over the last two decades which indicate that apartheid has indeed become a fetter to the further expansion of certain fractions of capital, particularly the manufacturing and merchant sectors. These latter fractions of capital are dependent on the availability of semi-skilled and skilled labour, as well as on the expansion of the home market for their continued growth – factors retarded by the continued existence of formal apartheid. Coupled with this, for these fractions of capital, is the instability inherent in the system which in threatening the politics of white domination, also jeopardises the reproduction of the entire social system. These factors have compelled these fractions of capital to intervene with reformist policies in the political arena, in an attempt to detach capitalism from the maintenance of white domination<sup>24</sup> – provided of course that the latter occurred without endangering the continued reproduction of a reformed capitalist order.

How then should we describe the relationship between apartheid and capitalism? Any description needs to guard against, on the one hand, the reductionist conclusion that suggests capitalism need of necessity adopt a racial form, and on the other, the equally problematic and obsolete conclusion that apartheid and capitalism have been and are fundamentally incompatible<sup>25</sup>. A useful description of the relationship between racism and capitalism in South Africa is one utilised by Wolpe. Wolpe suggests in his *Race, Class and the Apartheid State* that the relationship is a contingent one. He argues that the usefulness of this description lies in the fact that it allows us to accede to the reality that contradictions do exist between certain fractions of capital and racism, and that in principle capitalism and racialism are separable, whilst enabling us still to retain the understanding that “the inter-penetration which has occurred in practice and, most importantly, the vested interests of powerful groups and class forces in racial domination, are such as to make the de-racialisation of capitalism unrealisable”. (1988:32)

What is the implication of this analysis? Any description portraying the relationship between race and class as a contingent one must conclude that within the foreseeable future it is unlikely that a non-racial order could be realised within the framework of a capitalist system. This implies that the national question, that is, the achievement of a non-racial democratic order in



this country, cannot be resolved within a bourgeois framework, for the simple reason that the achievement of national and democratic demands would require deep inroads into bourgeois property rights<sup>26</sup>. From this perspective, the theory of national democracy is inadequate since it divorces the achievement of democratic demands from social ones, that is, it posits a democratic stage as preceding the socialist stage. Yet, as the analysis of the relationship between racism and capitalism indicated, the achievement of the democratic stage is premised on the transcendence of capitalist relations of production.<sup>27</sup>

The SACP would argue that the national and democratic demands can be achieved within their vision of the national democratic stage since the latter will be characterised by a "mixed economy with a socialist orientation". Two points need to be made with regard to this assertion. The first, mentioned earlier, is that a mixed economy is perfectly compatible with capitalist relations of production. Indeed, without the capture of political power by the black working class, such a mixed economy is bound to possess a bourgeois content since it would be located within such a political and economic framework. This takes us to the second point. A mixed economy within a capitalist framework would not ensure the achievement of the democratic demands since it would be geared by motives of profit rather than that of social good. Moreover, it needs to be noted that the "success" of the mixed economies in the advanced welfare states of the "First World" were made possible only because they occurred in a period of sustained capitalist boom. Over the last decade, with the onset of an international economic recession, most of these states have begun to cut back and erode the hard fought welfare gains won by their working classes.<sup>28</sup> In this context of international economic recession, it is highly unlikely that a mixed economy in the South African context would be able to provide the necessary redistribution of wealth that would be required to satisfy and enforce the basic national and democratic demands.

To reinforce this argument, some empirical evidence would be useful. Jack Lewis, in an insightful paper entitled *Mixed Economy—Illusions of Reformism*, arrives at a similar conclusion when he suggests that a post-apartheid capitalist South Africa would be "unable to satisfy the social demands (education, housing, health, unemployment and wage levels) demanded of a democratic government ...." (1990:10) This conclusion is based on a series of research projects conducted by well-known educationists and economists in the country - the findings of which have been published in newspapers such as *The Business Day*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Financial Times*, and *The Star*.

One such project on education financing in South Africa, conducted by the Economics Department in the University of Pretoria, argues that " education would have to be allocated 42 per cent of the state budget and 11 per cent of the GDP if the amount currently spent on each white pupil was to be matched by the amount spent on blacks. Total primary and secondary education spending would rise from R9,3 billion to R25,6 billion. Present spending on black education would have to increase fourfold from R5,4 billion to R21,7 billion". The report proceeds to conclude that " taxes would have to be increased 25 per cent to equalise spending on education and would lead to an economic fiasco ...." (*The Business Day*: 20\06\90)

The situation in the accomodation sector seems to be no better. Dhiru Soni, in his doctoral investigation into the housing crisis concludes that "the housing backlog of South Africa, as a whole, is close onto three million units." (Soni:1990:123) Yet despite this desperate shortage, only plans for a mere 25 195 and 23 921 homes were approved for the black community during 1988 and 1989 respectively. The situation becomes further disheartening when one realises that the number of homes actually completed is even less - 12 067 in 1989 compared with 11 168 in 1988. (Lewis:1990:11)

Prof. Attie de Vries of the Business School in the University of Stellenbosch bears out the above figures when he concludes in an article in the *The Business Day* that " the total tax rates in South Africa would have to be increased 50 per cent to (simply) meet the backlog in housing, education and pensions. The increase would be higher if health care was included." (3\05\90) Servaas van den Berg, a fellow economist at the same univeresity calculates: "the cost of abolishing fiscal apartheid - introducing parity between white and black levels of benefit in the fields of education, pensions, health and housing would be some R75 billion more than the whole 1990/1991 budget". (*The Financial Times*:11\06\90)

The figures on employment and wage levels are simarlarly devastating. A spokesperson for the construction industry commented in the beginning of 1989, that the industry employed just under 100 000 workers. By the beginning of 1990 this had fallen to about 93 000 workers. *The Sunday Times* on the 2nd of September 1990 reported that in the gold mining sector, 80 000 jobs had been lost in that year and another 20 000 workers faced retrenchment. *The Business Day* reported on the 14th of September 1990 that employment in the manufacturing sector had fallen once again. It argued that "total employment in this sector stands at 1 462 000 - roughly the same level as in 1970". These figures were borne out by Dr Jan Visser, chief executive of the National Productivity Institute, who concluded that "between 1980 and 1989, the overall rise in



jobs was only 4.5 per cent in the total economy, excluding agriculture, while the population growth rate shot up by 21 per cent." (*The Business Day*:5\08\89)

And for those that were fortunate to be employed, the situation was not much better. An Institute of Race Relations Survey found that in 1990, 68 per cent of all black families still lived on less than R600 a month, while 60 per cent of families had an income of less than R500.00 a month. (Lewis:1990:12)

Clearly then, a continuously growing economy is a pre-requisite if the social demands contained in *The Freedom Charter* are to be met. But according to Lewis, " in the 20 years since 1970 growth has averaged only 2,5 per cent per annum lagging behind population growth. Gross domestic per capita has declined from R3 698 in 1985 to R3 678 in 1989 and GNP per capita has declined from R 3 502 per capita to R3 451 per capita." (1990:11) In another major study, conducted by the National Productivity Institute (NPI), it was found that " while wages in the manufacturing sector rocketed ahead by no less than 352 per cent since 1975, labour productivity had crawled forward by a mere 18,5 per cent. The result has been that unit labour costs have soared by a staggering 282 per cent - in stark contrast with an actual decline of 3 per cent in Japan over the identical time-span." (*The Star*: 23\02\88)

To contain rising unemployment, *The Business Day* estimated, that " more than 1000 jobs a day have to be created at a cost of R50 000 per job. It is estimated that a growth rate of 6 per cent over 15 years is necessary to absorb unemployment in the formal sector. It would take an investment of fixed capital of over 800 billion rand at constant 1988 prices over this period - 53 billion a year - to achieve a GDP growth rate equal to the population growth rate." (4\05\90)

Yet, according to Lewis, total investment had declined from 31,4 billion in 1984 to 23, 3 billion in 1987 and was about 26,4 billion in 1989. (1990:12) The *Reserve Bank Quarterly* noted that " real expenditure in machinery and equipment shrank by 3,5 per cent last year leading to a widening of the margins of unused capacity in the manufacturing industry". (*The Business Day*:7\05\90) And where investment had taken place, much of it has passed into speculative as opposed to real investment channels. Lewis estimates that in 1990 Anglo-American distributed R752 million in dividends and total investments amounted to to R1 123 million. However, he argues, that "the largest part of this investment related to takeovers of or increased stakes in existing enterprises. For example Anglo-American increased its stake in Gold Fields to 25 per



cent and bought a 22 per cent stake in Deutsche Steinindustries A. G. which accounted for most of the investment." (Lewis:1990:12)

Lewis thus concludes that while ownership remains in private hands it is impossible to interfere with such investment decisions by legislative or administrative means beyond certain narrow limits. He therefore argues,

Any mechanism which the monopolies and the state may concede will be inadequate to the scale of the problems confronting South Africa. With a genuinely democratic constitution the old inequalities will not be allowed to continue. If they are to continue, there cannot be a democratic constitution. If they are to be eliminated then the very basis of capitalism in South Africa will be challenged. (1990:13)

All this suggests that the resolution of the national question, which in the South African context would require a massive redistribution of wealth, will not be realised within the SACP's "democratic stage". The words of Leon Trotsky (in another context) are incisive here:

Under the conditions of the imperialist epoch the national democratic revolution can be carried through to a victorious end only when the social and political relationships of the country are mature for putting the proletariat in power as the leader of the masses of the people. And if this is not yet the case? Then the struggle for national liberation will produce only very partial results, results directed entirely against the working masses. (1986:256)

The question that now confronts us is whether this critique of the theory of national democracy still possesses any validity with the SACP's reformulation of the thesis in the 1989 congress. As mentioned earlier, this reformulation suggested that the national democratic phase is merely the first phase in a single process along the road to socialism. This paraphrasing of Trotsky's thesis of permanent revolution has resulted in a number of prominent theorists, by acknowledging its essential validity, falling prey to this wording<sup>29</sup>. However, this reformulation is deficient in that it adopts the framework of the permanent revolution thesis without its essential content. The thesis of permanent revolution suggests that the factor that tilts the balance in favour of socialist construction and the erosion of private in favour of public property, is the proletariat's capture of political power. The SACP's reformulation remains silent on this question. In fact, *The Path to Power's* proposals for a post-apartheid state represent nothing more than a representative democracy – which, as mentioned earlier, is fully compatible with bourgeois relations of

production. The question that then poses itself to the SACP is: what is the factor in its scenario that ensures the irreversible movement towards socialism.<sup>39</sup> In the absence of an answer to this pertinent question, one is forced to conclude that the party's reformulation represents nothing more than a smokescreen to disguise the essential two-stage thesis of the earlier formulation.

### **Some Concluding Remarks**

A careful analysis of the theory of "colonialism of a special type" and national democracy indicates that the SACP's theory is questionable as a description of the South African social formation, and as a conception of the transition to socialism. The inaccuracy of the "colonialism of a special type" thesis is reflected in its economic reductionism, autonomous treatment of race and ethnic relations, and in its two-nation conception of the South African social formation. The problem with the theory of national democracy lies in its abstraction from the peculiarities of capitalist development in South Africa, which enables it to suggest that democratic and national demands can be realised outside the transcendence of capitalist relations of production.

Yet, despite these problems, the theory of "colonialism of a special type" and national democracy have been crucial in influencing the SACP's strategies and strategic perspectives in the last three decades. It is these strategies and strategic perspectives that the next chapter subjects to a close scrutiny.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **STRATEGIES AND STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN REVOLUTION**

The SACP's commitment to the theory of "colonialism of a special type" and "national democracy" has informed its strategies and strategic perspectives. In 1987, Ben Turok, a leading theorist within the SACP and ANC, argued that,

The primary aspect of the system is its colonial character, which means that this governs the whole question of strategy and tactics. This is the decisive question. If the forces of liberation or the forces of struggle ignore the colonial aspect and think only of the class aspect, they will make the most catastrophic blunders.... (quoted in Bundy:1989:11)

Turok then went on to argue that it was the ANC and SACP's correct theoretical categorisation of the South African social formation which informed the strategies and tactics that put revolution on the political agenda of South Africa's liberation movement.

Leaving aside the accuracy of Turok's conclusion, this chapter is concerned with identifying and critically analysing the strategies and strategic perspectives that the party adopted in the period 1962 to 1990.

What then were the strategies and strategic perspectives of the SACP? The one was of course the official establishment of a strategic alliance with the ANC. The other was the party's adoption of the armed struggle. Its conception of the latter, however, changed during the course of the three decades. Initially the formation of Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK) was premised on rural-based guerrilla warfare. By the late 1970's, however, it had become clearly apparent that South Africa was not suitable for a classical guerrilla uprising. For a brief span of time, the party envisaged the alternative as being armed insurrection involving a people's war. However, subsequent to the unbanning of organisations in 1990, this strategic perspective of armed insurrection was replaced with one that suggested negotiations as a viable alternative in the new conditions.

This chapter undertakes a critical analysis of these strategies and strategic perspectives. The chapter will first explain the nature of the party's alliance with the ANC, and the conceptions of



armed struggle that it adopted in the period 1962 to 1989. It will also detail the change in the party's strategic perspective after 1990 to one of a negotiated path to power. Finally, it will subject these strategies and strategic perspectives to a critical scrutiny.

## **The SACP'S Strategic Alliance with the ANC**

As chapter 3 indicates, the SACP's adoption of the theory of "colonialism of a special type" and national democracy, led it to consider two distinct stages in the transition to a classless society: first national liberation, and then socialism. This commitment to a stage of national liberation independent of a socialist framework crucially influenced the party's perceptions of its strategic tasks. Since national liberation represented the immediate aim of all of South Africa's revolutionary forces, the party defined its strategic task as being the establishment of an alliance with the ANC – the principal and largest national liberation organisation within the country.

Yet what was the nature of this alliance? *The Road to South African Freedom*, which was adopted as the SACP's official programme in 1962, provides some indications of the nature of this alliance. It argued;

The Communist Party unreservedly supports and participates in the struggle for national liberation (*headed by the African National Congress*) in alliance with the South African Indian Congress, the Congress of Trade Unions, the Coloured People's Congress and other patriotic groups of democrats, women, peasants and youth. (SACP:1981:315) (my emphasis)

The party's official programme then, subjected the organisation to the leadership of the ANC. This in effect relegated the SACP's role within the strategic alliance to a secondary one.

Throughout the ensuing three decades, the party remained wedded to this secondary status within the alliance. In 1976, Slovo reaffirmed the party's recognition of the ANC as the leading partner within the Congress Alliance<sup>1</sup>. *The African Communist*, which throughout the 1980's hosted a series of contributions on the relationship between the national and social question, similarly reflected the party's commitment to the leadership role of the ANC<sup>2</sup>. Even as recently as 1989, this commitment to the leadership role of the ANC remained absolute. *The Path to Power*, the current programme of the party adopted at its 1989 congress, argues:

The African National Congress is the spearhead of the national democratic

revolution. The ANC was formed in 1912 to unite the African people in the struggle against colonial oppression. It has since developed to represent and lead all the oppressed and democratic forces in militant struggles. Today, despite many years of illegal and underground existence, the ANC – as head of the revolutionary alliance – occupies a virtually unchallenged place as the popular vanguard force in the liberation struggle....

The SACP plays its role both as an independent organisation and as part of the revolutionary alliance headed by the African National Congress. There is no contradiction between the multi-class leadership role of the ANC, and the working class vanguard role of the party. (1989: 42)

This study of course contests the SACP view that it can at one and the same time maintain its independent role whilst still being part of a strategic alliance acknowledged as being headed by the multi-class leadership of the ANC. The party's suggestion that it plays an independent role despite its participation in a secondary capacity within the strategic alliance is based on a decidedly un-Marxist premise that ignores the differing material and political interests of the various classes within capitalist society. Once these differing class interests enter as factors into the political equation, one can only conclude that the party's independent role exists merely in form, but not in content.

The above view challenges the popular perception amongst certain academics, the liberal press and governments of the advanced liberal democracies that suggest that the ANC is manipulated and controlled by the SACP.<sup>3</sup> This latter view has been given a large degree of credence by the fact that all of the three splits or expulsions that occurred within the ANC during its years in exile revolved around the role played by SACP cadres within the structures of the former organisation. Much of the evidence marshalled to support this conclusion revolves around demonstrating that key positions which determine the ideological, strategic and propaganda functions of the organisation are controlled or occupied by individuals linked to the party. This is indeed true. Since the Morogoro Conference in 1969 prominent members of the SACP have occupied senior positions within the Revolutionary Council (which planned and implemented military action), Umkhonto we Sizwe (which is the armed wing) and the National Executive Committee (which represents the highest decision-making body within the ANC). Indeed, it is estimated that at least sixty per cent of those elected to the current National Executive Committee of the ANC are or have been associated with the SACP.

Nevertheless the mere fact that SACP cadres occupy crucial positions within decision-making



structures of the ANC, and are responsible for a large amount of the latter organisation's ideological, strategic and propaganda functions does not represent conclusive evidence of the ANC's control by the SACP. The weakness in this argument is the fact that it neglects to take into account the political underpinnings (whether nationalist or socialist) of the ideological, strategic and propaganda functions engaged in by SACP cadres in their role as ANC personnel. These analyses have not conclusively demonstrated that the ideology, strategy and propaganda of the ANC are premised on some sort of socialist rationale. But this is essential if the argument is to retain some validity. Moreover the argument also does not take cognisance of the programme of the SACP and the lines of accountability of its cadres located within the structures of the ANC. As Andrew Prior argues,

There is no evidence that the SACP has a hidden agenda in its relationship with the ANC. Its aims are clearly stated in the documents that have been analysed: it is committed to participation in the 'liberation struggle' to bring about the national democratic era, whose means and goals are shared by the ANC....

The SACP is more dependent on the ANC than is the ANC on the SACP. As the senior party in the alliance the ANC is now able to control the SACP and the importance of the latter in the alliance is likely to decline if the ANC is successful in obtaining increased diplomatic, financial and military support from the Western countries.... (Prior:1984:194)

Tom Lodge concurs with Prior's conclusion when he argues that "in contrast to the development of many exile African political organisations the ANC's ideological position remained noticeably conservative (and realistic). Its essentially nationalist character remained unchanged." (1983:301-301)

In any case, the dominance of the ANC over the SACP in their strategic alliance is reflected in the party's pledge of unqualified support for the Freedom Charter – the official political programme of the ANC (see Appendix 1). But it is also reflected in the party's mode of organisational work. Throughout the four decades of its banning, the party continued to operate through its cadres activities in the ANC and allied organisations<sup>4</sup>. These militants were of course subjected to the leadership and discipline of the ANC and its programme of action. Even as late as 1990, when the party had already been unbanned, the bulk of its cadres continued to operate and engage in political work through the structures of the ANC.

From a Marxist perspective, the validity of subjecting these communist militants to the leadership of a nationalist organisation is indeed questionable. However, before proceeding to



analyse this phenomenon, we will detail the party's changing strategic conception of the path to power.

### **From Rural Based Guerrilla Warfare to Armed Insurrection**

1960 marked an irrevocable turning point in the history of South Africa's liberation struggle. In the wake of the Sharpeville crisis, and the banning of the ANC and PAC in April 1960, the popular mood turned to armed conflict. In response to this turn in the popular mood, and the closure of the limited political space available to black political organisations, both the ANC and PAC produced insurgent offshoots.

The ANC in collaboration with the SACP launched Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), which although remaining institutionally separate from the two organisations, nevertheless in practice acted as their armed wing. At its annual conference in December 1960, a full six months prior to the formation of MK, the SACP had already committed itself to a campaign of economic sabotage to precede a guerrilla war. (Lodge:1983:234) And this was indeed the programme MK followed.

On December 16th 1961, MK initiated its sabotage campaign. Tom Lodge, in his impressively researched study, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, argues that of the initial armed actions engaged in "72 were of a minor character (setting fire to letter boxes, severing electric cables, etc.), 95 were incendiary bomb attacks, mainly on public buildings, and a further seven were more ambitious still, involving dynamite and attempts to destroy railway signals systems, important electrical installations and so forth". (1983:236). A flyer issued by the MK high command on the first day of the attacks detailing the reasons for embarking on armed actions stressed the need to break with the non-violent strategies of the past. Yet at the same time, it also retained the hope that "our first actions will awaken everyone to a realisation of the disastrous situation to which the nationalist policy is leading... and bring the government and its supporters to their senses...." (Karis & Gerhart:1977:717) A non-violent transition was therefore not abandoned; it was still hoped that the initial wave of armed actions without loss to human life would prompt the regime to open up the possibility of a peaceful and negotiated transfer of power.

However, once it became apparent that this would not happen, the MK high command, comprising both ANC and SACP cadres, proceeded to develop a plan of armed struggle.

"Operation Mayibuye", one of the central documents in the Rivonia trial, argued,

The objective military conditions in which the movement finds itself makes the possibility of a general uprising leading to direct military struggle an unlikely one. Rather, as in Cuba, the general uprising must be sparked off by organised and well prepared guerrilla operations during the course of which the masses will be drawn in and armed. (Karis & Gerhart:1977:761)

On the basis of this perspective, it was suggested that 120 individuals be identified for external training, who would then return in secret, recruit guerrilla platoons, and engage in guerrilla campaigns in selected areas. The choice of areas would, according to the plan, be determined by the availability of base areas "from which our units can attack and to which they can retreat" (Karis & Gerhart:1977:763) Operation Mayibuye, then, despite the fact that it was stillborn<sup>5</sup>, indicates that strategic thinking in the 1960's and early 1970's centred largely upon rurally-based guerrilla warfare.

This strategic perspective was first implemented in 1967 and 1968 when trained MK guerrillas, together with Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU) units, infiltrated Rhodesia and confronted both the Rhodesian army and South African policemen<sup>6</sup>. At the ANC's conference in Morogoro in 1969, this strategy of guerrilla warfare received an important endorsement when, according to Bundy, guerrilla warfare "... was declared to be the special, and indeed in the case of South Africa, the only form in which armed liberation struggle could be launched" (1989:5). Bundy succinctly summarises the thinking at Morogoro:

Guerrilla warfare was championed as the weapon of the materially weak against the materially strong. Surprise, mobility and tactical retreat were its hallmarks; it would stretch the resources of the opposing conventional forces over vast areas; the very sophistication of the South African economy made it potentially vulnerable to guerrilla attacks. Even though South Africa might not contain a single impregnable mountain or impenetrable jungle, the terrain was regarded as certainly no less favorable for guerrilla operations than some of the terrain in which other movements operated successfully. The primary theatre of guerrilla warfare would be shifting bases in the countryside, but actions 'of a special sort' in urban areas would be an important auxiliary. (1989:6)

It should be noted that the Morogoro conference also cautioned against militarism that separated the armed struggle from its political context<sup>7</sup>. In any case, this strategic conception of guerrilla warfare endorsed at Morogoro was staunchly defended by Joe Slovo in 1976. In his widely read article, *South Africa – No Middle Road*, Slovo restated many of the arguments at Morogoro for



rural based guerrilla warfare. Throughout the article, Slovo constantly referred to the success of this strategy in Cuba, Algeria, Vietnam, Angola and Mozambique, and concluded that guerrilla warfare was indeed viable in South Africa, and only had to be adapted to ensure that “the survivalist tactics” were adjusted “to the sort of terrain in which operations (had) to be conducted”. (1976:199)

However, despite Slovo’s spirited defence of guerrilla warfare, important developments within the country, especially the spontaneous mass eruptions in the form of the 1973 strikes and the 1976 student revolt, raised reservations in the minds of many about the viability of protracted guerrilla war. These reservations were voiced in a heated exchange on the merits of guerrilla war hosted in *The African Communist* between 1981 and 1984<sup>8</sup>.

Two viewpoints emerged within this debate. The first, articulated by Mzala and Migwe, advocated the “arming of the masses”. Both authors highlighted the fact that “outbreaks of revolt by workers and students have been constantly accompanied by unorganised and sporadic street fighting and other acts of violent resistance on a nation-wide scale”. (AC:1981(3):85) On the basis of this it was suggested that the movement’s strategic perspective should change to one of organising, training and arming people within the country. Migwe, in proposing “combat units” of students and workers argued that the strategy of “arming the masses” would only have been assimilated “the day ordinary workers, peasants, students etc. have been given training in Mzimkulu ... or were instructed in some house in Soweto, Guguletu, New Brighton or KwaMashu”. (AC:1982(2):81) Both authors also expressed the need to combine political and armed forms of struggle, with “political organisation being the determinant of military organisation, and not vice versa”. (AC:1981(3):90)

This view was strongly challenged by Hugh Trevor in a subsequent contribution. Trevor questioned Mzala and Migwe’s conception of arming the people, suggesting that they too easily ignored the role of peasant revolts and strikes in the build up to insurrection. In any case, he argued that the call for an insurrection was premature since there was no widespread mass upsurge on which insurrection could be based. (AC:1984(2):62–73) According to Davies, O’Meara and Dlamini, the SACP came out in favour of Trevor in 1984 when it continued to advocate a strategy of armed struggle waged by MK. (Davies et al:1984:291)

However, a change of position was not long in the offing. As Bundy maintained, the withdrawal of rear bases from Mozambique through the Nkomati Accord, and the eruption of spontaneous



popular protest after September 1984, once again opened the debate, but this time in favour of the insurrectionists<sup>9</sup>. (1989: 8) Slovo, in a speech delivered on the 65th anniversary of the party, came out squarely in favour of the insurrectionary path by arguing for the need “to prepare and be ready to adjust to a much swifter transformation which would involve insurrectionary ingredients”. (AC: 1986(4): 28) This position was strongly supported by Harold Wolpe in *Race, Class and the Apartheid State*, in which he briskly dismissed the viability of guerrilla warfare, and argued for “an insurrectionary movement” which had at its centre “the mass political and trade union struggles”, supported “by the presence and actions of MK”. (1988:105)

This strong support for an insurrectionary perspective was given added boost in the party’s conference in 1989, when it was codified in *The Path to Power*. Here it is argued:

In what sense can we talk of an insurrection as a possible path to power?

The crises facing our ruling class will be aggravated still further by a combination of mass upsurge, in which working class action at the point of production will play a key role, mass defiance, escalating revolutionary combat activity, intensified international pressure, and growing demoralisation, division, vacillation and confusion within the power bloc. When all these elements converge in a sufficient measure, the immediate possibility of an insurrectionary breakthrough will present itself.... Seizure of power will be a product of escalating and progressive merging mass political and military struggle with the likelihood of culminating in an insurrection. (1989:57)

The switch to a strategic perspective of armed insurrection had been made.

## **The Negotiated Path to Power**

This strategic perspective of armed insurrection, however, experienced an extremely brief lifespan. Indications already existed at the time of the party’s 1989 conference that negotiations would soon emerge on the political agenda of South Africa’s liberation movement<sup>10</sup>. This of course compelled conference to leave the “negotiation option” open, and the organisation argues in its current programme that “if, as a result of a generalised crisis and a heightened revolutionary upsurge, the point should ever be reached when the enemy is prepared to talk, the liberation forces will, at that point, have to exercise their judgment, guided by the demands of revolutionary advance”. (1989:58) This judgment was exercised a few months later, when the SACP agreed to participate in the negotiations process.

The emergence of negotiations on South Africa's political agenda was due to a range of factors. The political and economic crises of the Soviet Union and the collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe transformed the international balance of forces, creating an international climate more conducive to the settling of regional conflicts through political means<sup>11</sup>. This transformation in the international order was coupled with internal developments which had, by 1989, led to a political stalemate between the liberation movement and the South African state. The South African government on the one hand, despite its success in smashing political and social movements within the country continued to face a legitimacy and economic crisis of immense proportions<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, the liberation movement, and in particular the Congress tendency, faced a cul-de-sac after its strategic perspective of "making the country ungovernable" floundered on the rocks of the state of emergency and other forms of state repression. In the face of this political impasse, both contending forces within the South African political terrain became more amenable to the prospect of a negotiated settlement.

Since the unbanning of all political organisations in February 1990, the party has committed itself to the strategic perspective of a negotiated path to power. Indeed, its chairperson, Joe Slovo, has as part of the ANC delegation already participated in the Groote Schuur and Pretoria discussions with the South African government<sup>13</sup>. A number of editorials and articles in *The African Communist*, have also indicated the organisation's willingness to engage in the negotiations process<sup>14</sup>. This commitment to negotiations, however, has been qualified by an insistence that a "climate for negotiations" be created. Such a climate, according to the *Harare Declaration*, would involve the unconditional release of all political prisoners and detainees, the unbanning of all political organisations and individuals, the ending of the state of emergency, the repeal of all security legislation that circumscribe political activity, and the cessation of all political trials and political executions. (ERIP:1989:47-8)

A number, but not all, of these preconditions have already been met in the first half of 1991. However, the eruption and persistence of mass violence on the Reef, clearly prompted and sustained by elements in the SAP, SADF and Inkatha<sup>15</sup>, forced the ANC, SACP and other allied organisations to formally withdraw from constitutional negotiations. Nevertheless, these organisations still remain committed to the negotiations process.

In any case, the SACP's commitment to negotiations has also been coupled with demands for a constituent assembly and an interim government. Jeremy Cronin, in outlining the perspective of

the organisation, argues:

The Constituent Assembly is the body which should frame the new constitution for South Africa. Its the most democratic way of proceeding. It should be made up of delegates elected on a "one person one vote" basis. The legitimacy of the constitution emerging from such a Constituent Assembly will be enhanced by going through the process rather than being cobbled together in a hidden corridor. (*Workers' Voice*: 1991(2):12)

Cronin proceeds to argue that the demand for an interim government is motivated by the need to ensure free and fair elections to the constituent assembly. He maintains that "one needs some kind of supervisory force in regard to the security forces, violence and intimidation from whatever source. The existing government can't be both player and referee." (*Workers' Voice*: 1991(2):13)

The SACP is of course aware that the existing government will not simply accede to these demands. It therefore argues strongly for mass action to realise these goals. To facilitate such mass action, it posits the need for a Patriotic Alliance which would constitute "a broad anti-apartheid front, an important plank of which will be the demand for a constituent assembly". (*Workers' Voice*: 1991(2): 12) The party's strategic conception of negotiations, then, contains within it the demands for a constituent assembly and an interim government, a commitment to mass action and an alliance of all progressive anti-apartheid forces.

Thus far, this chapter has merely detailed the nature of the party's alliance with the ANC, and the evolution of some aspects of its strategic perspective in the three decades since it went into exile. Yet, how viable has the SACP's strategic perspectives and its alliance with the ANC been for the realization of even the minimum demands outlined in the Freedom Charter? This discussion will now turn its attention to answering this question.

### **The Strategic Alliance – Abdicating the Leadership of the Black Proletariat**

The earlier analysis of the nature of the ANC-SACP alliance indicates that the party occupies a secondary role within the strategic alliance. It was argued that presently and throughout the three decades in exile the party abrogated its leadership role to the ANC. Yet how valid is this strategy of subjecting communist militants to the leadership of a national liberation movement?



Any answer to this question must begin with an understanding of the relationship of communist parties with other oppositional organisations in struggles for national liberation. Marx argued in *The Communist Manifesto* that communists:

... fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class, but in the movement of the present they also represent and take care of the future of that movement ... In Poland they support the party that insists on an agrarian revolution as the prime condition for national emancipation ... But they never cease, for a single instant, to instill into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat... (Feuer:1984: 81–82)

In a similar vein, Lenin, in his widely read study entitled *Communism and the East: Thesis on the National and Colonial Question*, argued that:

The communist international must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form. (Tucker:1975: 624)

Both theorists of the Communist movement, then, predicate communist support of other oppositional movements on the condition that the communist party's political and organisational independence is maintained. This, in the words of Peng Shu-tse<sup>16</sup>, "is necessary because the historical mission of the party of the proletariat is to unite the vanguard of that class, become the leader of the revolution, expose all types of frauds by bourgeois and petit-bourgeois politicians, organise all the exploited and oppressed masses, and prepare for armed struggle to destroy the bourgeois state and establish its own regime in order to follow the road to socialism". (Evans & Block:1978:80)

Yet the SACP is unable to fulfill many of these historic tasks, particularly because it ignored one of the basic principles of Marxist theory – the complete political and organisational independence of the communist party<sup>17</sup>. The party's adoption of the ANC's political programme, and its voluntary subjection to the multi-class leadership of the ANC, ensures that it has been and will be unable to expose the vacillations of the leadership of the national liberation organisation<sup>18</sup>.

The party's abrogation of its leadership role is all the more perturbing when one considers the

historic role assigned to the black proletariat within the South African social formation. As chapter 3 indicated, the interpenetration between class and race in the South African context, and the vested interests of powerful groups and class forces in racial domination, ensure that it is only the black working class that has both the political and material interest to support the full implementation of a democratic revolution. Thus, the historic burden of national liberation and the achievement of a truly democratic nation fall on the shoulders of the black proletariat of this country.

This conclusion suggests some of the political tasks confronting communist militants and organisations within the country. Since the black proletariat is the only consistent social force capable of realising the democratic revolution, it follows that the immediate political task of communist militants is to facilitate the struggle for proletarian leadership of the national liberation struggle. This of course requires the proletarian party to fight for the direct independent leadership of the black proletariat. The strategic task of such a party is to organise the advanced elements within the working class, and thereby lead the black proletariat, independent of other classes, into the leadership of the democratic revolution. Leon Trotsky succinctly summarises these tasks:

The proletarian party must solve the national question by its own methods. The historic weapon of national liberation is the class struggle. (*Free Azania*:1989(1):22)

But the SACP's strategic alliance with the the ANC prevents it from leading the democratic revolution and ensures that the party abrogates its historic leadership role to a black nationalist organisation. And this abrogation of leadership, will, in the final instant, constitute the abandonment of the South African revolution.

### **Critically Analysing the SACP'S Strategic Perspectives: Guerrilla Warfare, Insurrection and Negotiation**

The subjection of the SACP to the political programme of the strategic alliance, and thereby to the ANC, becomes all the more evident in a critical analysis of its strategic perspectives for the South African revolution. As indicated earlier, the party's strategic perspective from 1962 to the latter part of the 1980's was one of rural-based guerrilla warfare. This perspective, however, was highly problematic both from the theoretical framework of Marxism-Leninism and from a

concrete analysis of South Africa's geographic, political, and social uniqueness.

The unviability of rural-based guerrilla warfare in South Africa is best expressed in the party's current programme, *The Path to Power*. This document details five objective difficulties confronting any establishment of a classical guerrilla war in South Africa. These are the lack of knowledge amongst the subject people of the use "of modern weapons and other instruments of war"; the lack of a substantial peasantry which is a necessary social base "for the survival, growth and manoeuvre of guerrilla and other combat formations in the rural areas"; the lack of external rear bases required "to facilitate the flow of either personnel or logistical material"; "the lack of extensive areas of classical guerrilla terrain"; the inability to use a substantial number of militants because they are already known by the South African military apparatus; and finally, "the existence of a highly centralised state apparatus, including well-organised instruments of repression, powerful and highly mobile armed forces and a sophisticated communications network, anchored on a powerful economic base". (1989:50)

In the light of these objective difficulties, why then did the SACP adopt a strategic perspective of rural-based guerrilla warfare? The answer of course lies in the party's inaccurate theoretical categorisation of the South African social formation. As chapter 3 indicated, the party categorised South Africa as a "colony of a special type", and this prompted it to direct its search for a strategic perspective to anti-colonial struggles elsewhere in the world. This is most clearly evident in Slovo's defence of guerrilla strategy in 1976, where he justified the use of rural-based guerrilla warfare on the basis of its successful application in the Algerian, Mozambican and Angolan revolutions<sup>19</sup>.

In any case, from a Marxist-Leninist framework, the use of guerrilla warfare in the form the SACP has adopted is highly problematic. This is so because Marxism stipulates, as is evident in *The Communist Manifesto*, that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself. Within the strategic perspective of guerrilla warfare, however, the agency of emancipation shifts from the proletariat to an elite of heroic armed warriors. The SACP's strategic perspective, then, undermined the basic maxim of its own theoretical framework.

What then is a realistic strategic perspective? Any answer to this question must be premised on a concrete analysis of the South African social formation and on an understanding of the nature of transition in capitalist societies. As chapter 3 indicated, the democratic revolution in South



Africa can only truly be consummated within the framework of a workers' state. The logical conclusion of this analysis is that any strategic perspective adopted must be geared to dismantling and destroying capitalist social relations in South Africa. This then poses the question of the need to destroy the existing state apparatus. Capital in South Africa, or anywhere else in the world, will not negotiate its own demise<sup>20</sup>. It will have to be forcibly overthrown. The only option thus available to communist militants is, in the words of Leon Trotsky, "the path of armed insurrection, ... that bloody price which the revolutionary class has to pay for power". (1975:48)

But this then poses another question, namely, what are the prospects for a successful social revolution in South Africa? Any answer to this question must, of necessity, confront a host of controversy around what is a revolution, why does it occur, and what preconditions are necessary for it to succeed. These questions should be the focus of an entire study. Nevertheless despite this, the central propositions, underlying this thesis, on the possibilities of a social revolution in South Africa will (with some reservations) be detailed.

This study views social revolutions very much in the vein of Theda Skocpol who suggests that they are "rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below." (1979:4) However, in agreement with Bundy, Griewank and Hobsbawm, its view also includes one additional feature to Skocpol's definition, namely, that a social revolution consolidates itself in terms of an ideology or programme. This then suggests that revolutions "involve conscious objectives", seeking "to promote changes justified as positive improvements."<sup>21</sup> (Bundy:1987:61)

Yet what are the essential preconditions for the culmination of a successful social revolution? Charles Tilly in perhaps one of the culminating works of the political-conflict approach to revolutions suggests that the success of a revolution is dependent on the emergence of multiple sovereignty and a revolutionary coalition. By the former he means a situation which is characterised by a shift of resources from elites to those previously denied access to such resources, the proliferation of revolutionary ideologies and the increase of popular discontent, and finally by the concentration of a significant share of state power in the hands of revolutionary elements. In a powerful passage that closely resembles Lenin's description of dual power,<sup>22</sup> he argues,

The revolutionary moment arrives when previously acquiescent members of ... a population find themselves confronted with strictly incompatible demands from the government and form an alternative body claiming control over that government - and obey the alternative body. They pay taxes to it, provide men for its armies, feed its functionaries, honour its symbols, give time to its service, or yield other resources, despite the prohibition of the still-existing government that they formally obeyed. Multiple sovereignty has begun. (1975:520-521)

But multiple sovereignty, according to Tilly, needs to be supplemented by the emergence of a revolutionary coalition if the revolution is to reach a successful conclusion. This involves a coalition between members previously aligned or part of the government and the contenders advancing exclusive alternative claims to control over the government. It also involves the "control of substantial force by the revolutionary coalition". (Tilly:1978:212)

Skocpol, unhappy at what she describes as the stress on voluntarism in Tilly's and other theoretical perspectives,<sup>23</sup> advances three additional principles to enable an understanding of social revolutions. She argues,

In the first place, an adequate understanding of social revolutions requires that the analyst take a nonvoluntarist, structural perspective on their causes and processes.... In the second place, social revolutions cannot be explained without systematic reference to international structures and world-historical developments. ... In the third place, in order to explain the causes and outcomes of social revolutions, it is essential to conceive of states as administrative and coercive organisations - organisations that are potentially autonomous (though of course conditioned by) socio-economic interests and structures. (1979:14)

Skocpol thus concentrates on the socio-structural causes of revolutions. She ignores " the consciousness and 'active making of history' in favour of stressing the deep-seated historically generated fault lines within a given society". (Bundy:1987:67) Her approach also insists that the success of a revolution is dependent on the international climate, and in particular the economic, military and political relationship between the society in question and all other nation states. Finally she insists on treating the state as an autonomous actor <sup>24</sup>, and argues that an analyst of revolutions "must explore not only class relations but also relations of states to one another and relations of states to dominant and subordinate classes".(Skocpol:1979:31) In particular she draws our attention to the question of the state's control over its armed forces and its relationship to military competitors abroad as crucial variables in revolutionary outcomes. She thus concludes,



Organised revolutionary vanguards have with time become increasingly self-conscious and vociferous about their indispensable role in "making" revolutions. It nevertheless seems to me that recently revolutionary crises, just as surely as those who launched the classic social revolutions, have come about only through inter- and intranational structural contradictions and conjunctural occurrences beyond the deliberate control of avowed revolutionaries.<sup>25</sup> (1979:291)

What preconditions are then necessary if the South African revolution is to reach a successful conclusion? For analytical purposes, let us divide the preconditions discussed above into two distinct categories: the one being objective preconditions and the other subjective.<sup>26</sup> Within the field of objective preconditions one can include long-term structural contradictions within a given society, international factors that disadvantage the regime and favour oppositional forces, the undermining of the state's control of its armed forces, the collapse of consensus around the ideologies of the regime with the result that erstwhile supportive elites decide to defect, and finally, the emergence of dual power or what Tilly termed multiple sovereignty. The category of subjective preconditions could include the emergence of new forms of political activism amongst subordinate classes, a dysjuncture between a large segment of the population and the ideology of the ruling class, the presence of a political movement or party acting as an instrument of political centralisation, "combining fragmentary and sectional forms of struggle and directing them to a confrontation with the state" (Bundy:1987:69), and finally the emergence of a revolutionary ideology within the political party. Also included in this category could be the coincidence of widespread rural instability or even rebellion with urban unrest a precondition which Bundy insists as necessary in facilitating a successful social revolution.<sup>27</sup>

How many of these preconditions can then be said to exist in South Africa? In 1987 Bundy concluded that a large number, but not all, of these preconditions existed in the mid-1980's. He argued,

The international context since about 1973 is one of recession and insurgency; Southern Africa, along with Central America and the Middle East has been the epicentre of political change, with an overall realignment of forces in central/southern Africa that does not favour South Africa's ruling minority; the South African economy, after a period of rapid expansion has for over a decade been plagued by inflation, unemployment, balance of payments pressures and foreign debts - the symptoms of the structural impasse of dependent industrialisation; radical social and political opposition has intensified: overt struggles between capital and labour have become endemic, while ever since June 1976 mass-based political



movements have increased in numbers and militancy.  
(1987:68)

Clearly, South Africa did display a large number of these preconditions. Most political and economic commentators agreed that South Africa was caught in the throes of a structural economic crisis.<sup>28</sup> Whilst the western world still largely shielded South Africa from a decisive blow, they were constantly confronted with pressures to harden their stance in relation to the South African state, and subject the latter to a high degree of economic pressures through sanctions and disinvestment.<sup>29</sup> The state was also confronted with a legitimacy crises which led both to the defection of previously supportive elites<sup>30</sup> and to a flourishing of alternative ideologies which were supported by substantial sectors of the populace. Resistance was distinguished by its widespread character within both rural and urban areas, and the emergence of new forms of political activism, most clearly reflected in the construction, however rudimentary, of alternative forms of political structures that competed, and sometimes took over the role of local organs of government.<sup>31</sup> Finally, the ANC-SACP axis was able to generate a broad degree of nation-wide support for their political programme and actions.

Yet two essential preconditions were still absent. Firstly, the state's control over the armed forces remained completely intact. As Bundy argued, this fact ensured that the South African state continued to be insulated against an indispensable precondition of revolution. Secondly, as chapter three indicates, the political programme of the SACP still remained highly ambiguous, which blunted its revolutionary potential and ensured that a crucial subjective precondition of revolution remained absent.

In 1991, one year after the unbanning of the ANC, SACP and PAC, one could argue that the situation looks much bleaker for socialists. De Klerk has succeeded in winning over a large number of allies who previously defected from the state.<sup>32</sup> He has also managed to reverse the defeats sustained by the South African state on the international plane, with many of the western countries now looking to him to provide a credible alternative to the political impasse confronting the country. It is also true that much of the pro-revolutionary ideas characteristic of the mid-1980's have been curtailed in favour of more pragmatic and 'realistic' ideologies.<sup>33</sup> This has of course reflected itself in terms of a downturn in mass resistance which has been clearly apparent since the beginning of 1991.<sup>34</sup>

But the reversal of fortunes is not certain. The current transitional era is extremely fluid, with the result that the situation could easily swing in favour of revolutionary prospects. The South African context still displays deep structural contradictions, which could easily provoke other preconditions required for a social revolution. Mass resistance could easily emerge, and could compel both the international community to adopt a harsher attitude in relation to South Africa, and pressurise political movements within the country to abandon their 'realism' in favour of a revolutionary ideology and strategy. Moreover, the state's control over the armed forces is no longer as certain as it was at the end of the 1980's. Recent empirical studies indicate that large layers of the armed forces seem to identify politically with elements to the right of the government.<sup>35</sup> These tensions within the armed forces could easily spin out of control, fracturing the state's unified control over its coercive structures, and thereby undermining its ability to suppress black resistance. A more credible scenario is the assumption to power of the right-wing through constitutional means - a situation that is bound to antagonise world opinion and provoke major social resistance within the country. These scenarios should be of concern to the state especially in view of the fact that large layers of the police force and Bantustan defence forces are now staffed by a majority of black persons. This makes a fracturing of the states' armed apparatus a more feasible option, thereby removing one of the granite pillars against a change in the status quo. This suggests that conditions for a social revolution could, under very specific circumstances, emerge in South Africa. There are of course no certainties - only possibilities.

This conclusion then enables us to assess the recent and current strategic perspectives of the SACP. The party's adoption of the strategic perspective of armed insurrection in 1989 reflected accurately the tasks confronting the black proletariat of this country. However, its subsequent shift from this perspective to one of a "negotiated path to power" represents a major setback for the full consummation of the democratic revolution in this country.

The SACP of course justifies this shift in its perspective on the basis of the change in the balance of forces within the South African social formation and the remote possibility, in the near future, for the emergence of conditions that would facilitate a successful insurrection. (AC: 1990(1):26-34) This is indeed true. However, strategic perspectives cannot simply be determined by changes in the balance of forces. They are primarily determined by an analysis of the uniqueness of the social formation in which the party resides. This is of course not to negate the importance of changes in the balance of forces and conditions in wider society. These are indeed important. But their primary importance lies precisely in the fact that they enable the



organisation to formulate tactics conducive to engendering conditions that place the party's strategic perspective on the political agenda of the day. This approach is perhaps best summarised by Lenin:

It is our duty to participate actively in this process of working out means and methods of struggle. When the students' movement became sharper, we began to call on the workers to come out to the aid of the students without taking it upon ourselves to forecast the forms of the demonstrations... When the demonstrations became consolidated, we began to call for their organisation and for the arming of the masses, and put forward the task of preparing a popular uprising... We do not close our eyes to the difficulties of this task, but will work at it steadfastly and persistently, undeterred by the objections that this is a matter of the 'vague and distant future'... (1990:10)

Within this framework, then, negotiations cannot be simply disregarded. To do so will be either a recipe for non-intervention or blind adventurism. The strategic task of a workers' party in the current conditions in South Africa is to engage in what Gramsci termed the "war of position"<sup>21</sup>. This would involve engaging in the negotiation process, demanding the constituent assembly, and through these, promoting mass struggle and organisation. Negotiations, thus, must be engaged in not with the utopian hope of achieving a satisfactory settlement, but rather for promoting mass struggle and the self-activity of working class – two essential prerequisites for any armed insurrection.

But how does the SACP approach the question of negotiations? An editorial in *The African Communist* in 1990 provides some indications when it argues:

at Groote Schuur it was the ANC that met with the government as an equal in an attempt to create conditions and structures which, it is hoped, will for the first time in South African history lead to the resolution of the country's political problems ... This is an agreement with the leaders of a revolutionary movement whose declared objective is to restructure the country on non-racial and democratic lines. This development signals the beginning of the end of the apartheid system. (1990(3): 6)

These words indicate that the party's engagement in the negotiations process is based on the belief that it is possible to realise a democratic society outside the transcendence of capitalist relations of production and through a negotiated settlement. It is this belief in the possibility of a negotiated settlement that governs the party's entire approach to mass struggle. Mass struggle in the party's perspective is designed merely to usher forth and ensure the continuation of the negotiation process. This is clearly evident in the SACP's selective promotion of mass struggle.



The party has constantly promoted mass struggles around the constituent assembly and the interim government<sup>37</sup>. However, at the same time, it has undermined or remained silent when worker struggles on the factory floor were dampened for fear of upsetting the negotiations process<sup>38</sup>.

Two perspectives then exist. The goal of the first, outlined initially, is mass struggle and the self-activity of the working class. Within this perspective, participation in the negotiation process represents merely a means towards an end. The SACP's perspective, however, views negotiations as the goal. Mass struggle here is merely the means, not the end.

The problem with this latter perspective of the SACP is that it is dislocated from an understanding of the uniqueness of the South African social formation. The entire thrust of the previous chapter has been to argue that the democratic revolution cannot be consummated within the framework of capitalist relations of production. Yet the party's strategic perspective of a "negotiated path to power" is based precisely on this possibility. The root of the flaw in the party's strategic perspective lies in its inaccurate categorisation of the social formation, and its misunderstanding of the nature of the transition to socialism in South Africa.

This is not to suggest that a negotiated settlement cannot be achieved. A settlement is indeed possible. But this settlement will not consummate the democratic revolution. It will not fully realise the national and democratic demands encapsulated in the Freedom Charter. The party's strategic perspective will not facilitate the minimum demands of its own constituency – the black proletariat of this country.

### **Some Concluding Remarks**

An analysis of the party's strategic alliance with the ANC indicates that the alliance subjects the SACP to the multi-class leadership of the ANC, and prevents the party from fulfilling its historic task of organising the black proletariat and resolving the national question through proletarian means.

It has also been argued that the SACP's previous strategic perspective of guerrilla warfare and its current one of a "negotiated path to power" are highly problematic both from the theoretical framework of Marxism-Leninism and from an analysis of the uniqueness of the South African

social formation. The specific geographic, social and political features of the South African social formation, it was suggested, retarded MK's ability to launch a classical guerrilla-type war. Guerrilla warfare was also subjected to scrutiny from a Marxist-Leninist theoretical framework, leading to the conclusion that it is an incorrect strategic perspective since it makes the guerrilla army, rather than the working class, the prime agency of emancipation.

The strategic perspective of a negotiated path to power was similarly scrutinised. It has been argued that this strategic perspective is flawed primarily because it is dislocated from an understanding of the nature of the social formation, and the form that the democratic revolution would have to take in South Africa. Thus it was concluded that a negotiated settlement, if realised, would not consummate the democratic revolution, and not meet the minimum demands of the black proletariat in this country.

The overall conclusion of this exploration of the party's strategic alliance with the ANC and its previous and current strategic perspectives is that they lead the organisation and the black proletariat of this country into the cul-de-sac of reformism. This is never more clearly evident than when one considers the SACP's current attempts to restructure its theory and practice. This is the focus of the following chapter.

# CHAPTER 5

## THE NEW PATH OF POLITICS

The transformation in the national body-politic of South Africa since February 1990, the collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and the ever-growing crises of China have begun to pose a serious political, ideological and moral crisis for the SACP. This crisis threatens to erode the popular legitimacy and moral highground that the organisation has, to date, occupied in the South African extra-parliamentary political arena. Confronted with this threat, sections of the organisation, and indeed the organisation as a whole, have begun to restructure the theoretical foundations that have, until now, underlined the SACP's existence.

This process of theoretical restructuring involves a thoroughgoing reassessment of communist theory and practice. Contained in the Party's current programme, *The Path to Power*, and in a newly released document entitled *Has Socialism Failed?*<sup>1</sup>, this theoretical reappraisal involves a critical analysis of the disfigurement of socialism as applied in the "socialist world", in the international communist movement, and within the SACP itself. On the basis of this analysis, a new political path is charted for the organisation.

This chapter is concerned with understanding this new political path. Its task is to consider the organisation's self-critique of its traditional theories, perspectives, and modus operandi. It is also concerned with critically analysing the alternative path of politics as suggested within and by the organisation. The chapter will begin by detailing the SACP's response to the crisis of "socialism", and its proposals for a new political direction. Thereafter, it will assess the implications of this crisis for Marxist theory and the socialist project. Finally, it will subject the party's new path of politics to a critical analysis in the hope of determining the future road that the organisation will traverse in the long, and uncharted waters of post-apartheid politics.

### **The SACP – Responding to the Crises of Communism**

The crisis of the socialist world has prompted a major ideological onslaught on the validity of Marxist thought, and the viability of establishing a socialist society. Daily, bourgeois theorists and commentators churn out thousands of books, papers and articles that celebrate the victory of capitalism and the failure of socialism<sup>2</sup>. In South Africa, this ideological onslaught has been



targeted at the SACP, in an effort to undermine the popularity of the latter. Faced with this attack and threat to its support base, the organisation has been forced to respond<sup>3</sup>.

How has it done this? Firstly, the organisation has recognised that the collapse of its counter-parts in Eastern Europe represented “popular revolts against unpopular regimes.” (Slovo:1990a:11) This concession, however, does not lead the organisation to conclude that socialism has failed. On the contrary, the organisation is still of the firm belief that “the theory of Marxism, in all its essential respects, remains valid and provides an indispensable theoretical guide to achieve a society free from all forms of exploitation of person by person.” (Slovo:1990a:15)

Joe Slovo accounts for the failure of “existing socialism” by suggesting that deficiencies existed in the application of socialist theory. The commandist and bureaucratic distortions of these societies, he argues, were facilitated by the fact that socialist transition in these societies occurred without the foundation of a democratic political tradition. These distortions in the Soviet Union were further fuelled by the aggression displayed by the imperialist countries to the October Revolution<sup>4</sup>. Economic siege, armed intervention, and the imposition of political isolation, decimated the country’s small working class and created the opportunity for the transformation of the party leadership into “a command post with an overbearing centralism and very little democracy, even in relation to its own membership.” (Slovo:1990a:17)

For Slovo the divide between “socialism” and democracy is not a logical result of Marxist revolutionary science, but rather a product of the misapplication of socialist theory by its proponents. The task of socialists then, is to “subject the past of existing socialism to an unsparing critique in order to draw the necessary lessons.” (Slovo:1990a:11) It is this belief that lies at the heart of the reassessment of communist theory and practice conducted in *Has Socialism Failed?*

## **The SACP – Reassessing Communist Theory and Practice**

The reassessment of Communist theory and practice has been prompted by the desire to distance the SACP from the heritage of Stalinism. In *Has Socialism Failed?* Slovo blames Stalinism for the tattered condition of the “socialist world”. Stalinism, viewed by Slovo as “socialism without democracy” (1990a:12), is seen as having deprived producers of real control and

participation in economic and political life, and thereby entrenching a form of "socialist alienation". This "socialist alienation" then lies at the root of the structural crises that confronts the socialist world today.

This rejection of Stalinism has forced the SACP to come out clearly and unequivocally in support of inner-party democracy and political pluralism. Rejecting those that defend Stalinism as a dying breed, Slovo, in *Has Socialism Failed?*, commits his organisation to the principles of inner-party democracy. This commitment was reaffirmed in a recent issue of *Umsebenzi* which argued forcefully for the right of criticism, self-criticism, free and fair elections to leadership, and the maximum possible information flow and consultation within the organisation. The journal goes on to say that "it is vital that the spirit of democratic tolerance should be understood and practised by every member at whatever level of our structures". (*Umsebenzi*: nd:3)

This re-emphasis on democracy also extends to the organisation's external relations. *The Path to Power*, the programme adopted at the 7th Congress of the Party in 1989, argues that

... a Communist Party does not earn the honoured title of vanguard by proclaiming it. Nor does its claim to be the upholder and custodian of Marxism-Leninism give it a monopoly of political wisdom or a natural right to exclusive control of the struggle. At each stage of its political life, guided by a correct application of Marxist revolutionary theory, a Party must win its place by its superior efforts of leadership and its devotion to the revolutionary cause. (1989:43)

*Umsebenzi* carries a similar message when it suggests that "the essence of democracy is to listen to people who don't agree with you and to weigh up their views on merit and not on fixed preconceptions or personal prejudices". (1989(2):3) Slovo is more forceful when he says:

... the most pernicious of old habits is the purist concept that all those who do not agree with the party are necessarily enemies of socialism. This leads to a substitution of name-calling and jargon for healthy debate with non-party activists. (1990a:27)

The recent documents and programme of the party then, clearly indicate a commitment to political pluralism. In *Has Socialism Failed?*, Slovo says:

... because experience has shown that an institutionalised one party state has a strong propensity for authoritarianism, we remain protagonists of multi-party post-apartheid democracy both in the national democratic and socialist phases. (1990a:28)

But what is the nature and form of this political pluralism? Indications of what is meant are expressed when Slovo questions (but does not refute) the historical validity of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the transition to socialism. It is further suggested, when he argues that should there exist real democracy in the post-apartheid society, then "the way will be open for a peaceful transition towards our ultimate objective – a socialist South Africa.... It is perfectly legitimate and desirable for a party claiming to be the political instrument of the working class to lead its constituency in democratic contest for political power against other parties and groups representing other social forces." (1990a:28)

The essential message that Slovo tries to impart here is that it is possible to achieve socialism through participation in a real democratic political process. But what does Slovo mean by the existence of "real democracy"? Posing this question is imperative, for the concept of democracy is today used by ideological proponents of all political persuasions<sup>5</sup>.

In any event, does Slovo's use of the term denote "bourgeois democracy" in the form of a representative system – a system on which the advanced capitalist democracies of the "First World" are modelled? Or does Slovo use the term to mean a form of working class or socialist democracy which is based on the delegate system and allows the producers of society unfettered control over the economic and political destiny of that society? If Slovo used the term to mean the latter, then this form of democracy is only truly attainable within a socialist society. However, since Slovo attempts to distinguish between a post-apartheid and socialist South Africa, it seems fair to presume that he uses the term to denote some form of bourgeois democracy that guarantees all citizens, without exception, the right to vote and elect representatives to the governing political structure.

The essence of Slovo's message then is that it is possible to achieve socialism through participation in the channels of a "normal" bourgeois political process. The conquest of state power is conceived here as occurring primarily through winning a substantial majority within parliament. This line of thinking seems to be in accordance with that of the majority of the SACP leadership. The latter, when confronted with the question of the viability of the parliamentary road to socialism after the achievement of national liberation, responded by saying:

... the struggle against capitalism and for an advance to socialism, will obviously be



taking place in a completely new context ... the parliamentary road can never be separated from extra-parliamentary struggle, but it is certainly a possible projection. (WIP: 1989(60) :21)

Clearly then, the organisation views a parliamentary transition to socialism as a concrete possibility if "normal" democratic rights are achieved within a post-apartheid society.

The revision of Communist theory, however, is not only limited to strategies for the transition to socialism. It also extends to the form and nature of the socialist society itself. In an article published in the *Weekly Mail*, Slovo argues that "if we have learnt anything from the economic ravages of capitalism and the economic failure of existing socialism, it is surely that the "plan" and the "market", seen as exclusive categories, have fallen on evil days." He goes on to suggest that we should now search for a mix between the two, "although the balance between the 'market' and the 'plan' must accord pride of place to the latter." (1990b:2) This view is clearly in line with that of the dominant thinking in the Soviet Union. *Perestroika*, the official economic policy of the previous Soviet leadership, envisaged precisely this mixture between the "market" and the "plan". This is what distinguished it from "market socialism", for unlike the latter, its use of market mechanisms in the economy was subservient to its overall commitment to central planning<sup>6</sup>.

In any case, Slovo's commitment to the previous Soviet leadership's current economic programme is clearly evident when, in arguing against critics of the latter economic policy, he accredits *perestroika* and *glasnost* by describing them as the diagnosis and prescription for the ailments of socialism. And he is not alone in this view. The SACP, as an organisation, seems to hold a similar perspective. One of its recent commemorative publications on the Russian Revolution approvingly says:

Now, seventy years from the first great revolutionary leap of November 7th, they (the Soviet people) are striking boldly forward again, under the new watch-words of 'glasnost' and 'perestroika' .... The people who made the great break-through to socialism for the first time are once again on a world-shaking exercise to blaze a path for all mankind, and make the passage to socialism easier, less hazardous ....

A conscious, all-out assault is under way against negative hangovers of the past. New ways of tackling problems of socialist development are being devised and put in place to replace those which were adequate for the early age of socialism, but which can no longer serve the socialist society of today. ... While we on the outside remember and celebrate the birth of the socialist dream, they are already setting out

on another great venture towards the completion of the socialist reality, its gold age.  
(Toussaint:1989:28) <sup>7</sup>

This reassessment of communist theory and practice, then, has led to the establishment of a new political path for the organisation. This new path contains an emphasis on inner-party democracy, a commitment to a particular interpretation of political pluralism that leads the organisation to consider the parliamentary road to socialism as a viable strategy, and a reassessment of the nature of the socialist economy which is now viewed as taking the form of one dominated by central planning, but making substantial use of market mechanisms. The question that now confronts political commentators and activists is, how viable is this new political path? However, before proceeding to answer this question, it is imperative to consider whether the crises of the "socialist world" have indeed invalidated Marxist theory and made the desire for a socialist society a noble but utopian dream.

### **Has Socialism Failed?**

Most current analyses (both within and outside the Communist tradition) that respond in the affirmative to this question, premise their answer on the belief that the Soviet Union and its allies represent the model of the "socialist vision". The crises of some of these societies and the collapse of others, thus, immediately put into question the realisation of the socialist goal. For some, the crises of the "socialist world" have merely meant confirmation of the futility of striving for a socialist project. For others, it has meant either abandoning the propagation of the socialist cause, or redefining the form and nature of the socialist society.

Yet all these responses are deficient in that they are based on an incorrect premise, namely, that the Soviet Union and its allies were examples of a socialist society. But this is far from the truth. Characterizing the Soviet Union as a socialist society would involve a revision of everything that Marxist theory proposes as a definition of the nature of socialism. How is such a "heretical" statement justified? In order to answer this question, let us pose the question: what is socialism?

Socialism is the outcome of a series of reforms that the proletariat sets into motion once it has captured political power. In the words of Marx,

The proletariat will use its political supremacy in order, by degrees, to wrest all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all the means of production into the hands of the state, and, as rapidly as possible, to increase the total mass of productive forces. (Feuer:1984:69)

Engels is more precise in his description when he says,

The proletariat seizes the public power, and by means of this transforms the socialised means of production, slipping from the hands of the bourgeoisie, into public property. By this act the proletariat frees the means of production from the character of capital they have thus far borne and gives their socialised character complete freedom to work itself out. Socialised production upon a predetermined plan becomes henceforth possible. (Feuer:1984:151)

Socialism, then, is distinguished by the socialised character of the production and distribution process. It involves the replacement of individual ownership and control of the means of production with public ownership and control, ie., the means of production are brought under the direct ownership and control of the proletariat of the preceding class-ridden society. Under socialism, the conscious force of the working class replaces the unconscious force of the capitalist market in the co-ordination of the production and distribution of the millions of different products.

And how is this situation brought into realisation? According to Marx and Engels, the socialisation of the means of production has to be preceded by the proletariat's capture of political power. This situation is characterised by the subjection of the political apparatus to the control of the working class, thereby enabling the latter gradually to extend its social control over the economy. Socialism then, is the product of socialist reforms unleashed by the working class once it has captured political power and established its own state apparatus.

But even this proletarian state withers as the advance to socialism intensifies. For Marx, the state was always a manifestation and symbolic reflection of the class-ridden nature of capitalist society. It was, in Marx's graphic description, "the executive that managed the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie." (Feuer:1984:51) But the advance to socialism and the erosion of class conflict dissipates the need for an armed apparatus to defend particular class interests. The realisation of socialism then, will simultaneously witness the erosion of the political authority of the state. In the words of Engels,



... In proportion as anarchy in social production vanishes, the political authority of the state dies out. Man, at last the master of his own form of social organisation, becomes at the same time the lord over nature, his own master, free. (Feuer:1984:151)

This is not to suggest that the withering away of the state becomes immediately realisable after the overthrow of capitalism. As mentioned earlier, there exists a substantial period of transition between the overthrow of capitalism and the realisation of the socialist vision. This transitional period, commonly referred to as the dictatorship of the proletariat<sup>8</sup>, requires a fully developed proletarian state that will defend the revolution's gains against attempts at counter-revolution, and ensure that the reforms unleashed lead to the gradual encroachment of social control over the economy.

But this proletarian state differs substantially in form and nature from its bourgeois counterparts. Reflecting the transitional period it lives in, it is structured in such a way as to facilitate the goals that the revolution will set as its task. Marx, in attempting to prefigure the form and nature of the future proletarian state, argued that it would be similar to the Paris Commune. In *The Civil War in France*, he described the latter:

The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army and the substitution of it of the armed people. The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged leaders of the working class. The Commune was to be a working not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time. Instead of continuing to be the agent of the Central Government the police was at once stripped of its political attributes and turned into the responsible and at all times revocable agent of the Administration. From the members of the Commune downwards the public service had to be done at workmen's wages. The vested interests and the representation allowances of the high dignitaries of the State disappeared along with the high dignitaries themselves. Public functions ceased to be the private property of the tools of the Central Government. Not only municipal administration, but the whole initiative hitherto exercised by the state was put into the hands of the Commune ...

Like the rest of public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible, and revocable. (Feuer:1984:405)

Socialism then, is characterised by the absence of the state. However, the dictatorship of the proletariat, that transitional period to socialism, does possess a state apparatus. But this state

apparatus is the hallmark of democracy. The standing army is replaced with an armed people. The police force is made directly accountable to the local workers' structure. All officials are directly accountable to the proletariat, and can at all times be recalled. Officials earn the same wage as the average worker. The legislative and executive powers of the state are all combined in the hands of the structure that directly represents the working class. Thus, the proletarian state in the transitional period differs substantially and fundamentally from its bourgeois counterpart.

Did the Soviet Union and its allies, then, represent socialism? Many of the affirmative answers to this question are premised on the belief that socialism equates to the abolition of private property. But this is a simplistic and inaccurate equation. The invalidity of this equation becomes clear when we look at the nature of pre-colonial African societies. Private property was not a feature of these tribal economies for the land was owned by the community as a whole. But does the absence of private property in these societies make them socialist? No, of course not. If it had, then socialism would represent a reversal, not a progression of history.

Socialism, then, cannot simply be equated with the abolition of private property. Of course the latter is a fundamental foundation for the establishment of socialism. But the abolition of private property needs to be accompanied by other features if socialism is to be realised. These are the replacement of private property with workers' ownership and control of the means of production, and the withering away of the state. Neither of the latter two features existed in any part of the "socialist world". The economy of these societies was controlled by a bureaucracy that was responsible for all management decisions. The mass of producers, the workers and peasants, had no power to determine the direction of their individual enterprises, let alone the economy as a whole.

As to the withering away of the state in these societies, this was as far away as it ever could be. In fact, the state apparatus in these societies has strengthened and separated itself from the mass of the producers. The bureaucracy monopolises political power, and the organs of the working class, namely the soviets, had long been denuded of their power and had simply become rubber stamping structures of the bureaucracy. The latter had set themselves up as a separate layer in society. They lived in different places from the working class, shopped in different shops, earned different salaries, and were not accountable to anyone but themselves<sup>9</sup>. In all these societies a standing army existed and had been used on a number of occasions to smash

workers' resistance<sup>19</sup>. Thus, the societies of the "socialist world" could not be described as either socialist or transitional regimes to socialism. Their collapse do not throw into question the socialist vision, but rather jeopardise the dreams of the bureaucracy. The collapse of the "Socialist World" then, is a collapse of the bureaucracy – it is a collapse of Stalinism.

### **Critical Reflections on the SACP's Political Path**

The SACP's establishment of a new political path emerges from its desire to disinherit itself from the heritage of Stalinism. Based on its understanding of the latter, the organisation has embarked on substantial theoretical and policy revisions that will, it hopes, sever its link with Stalinism. This new political direction, as mentioned earlier, contains a commitment to inner-party democracy, political pluralism, the "parliamentary road to socialism", and a redefinition of the nature of the socialist economy in line with the official thinking in the Soviet Union, commonly known as *perestroika*. However, before proceeding to analyse this new path of politics, it is imperative that we first critically reflect on the foundation of these proposals, namely, the organisation's understanding of Stalinism.

#### **What is Stalinism?**

Joe Slovo views Stalinism as "the bureaucratic-authoritarian style of leadership (of parties both in and out of power) which denuded the party of most of its democratic content and concentrated power in the hands of a tiny, self-perpetuating elite". (1990a:12) Stalinism then is, "socialism without democracy".

Two problems exist with this definition. The first is that Slovo's definition is abstracted from a historical materialist analysis of Soviet society. Slovo views Stalinism as a distortion of socialism amongst higher echelons of the party or country's leadership. But this is an inadequate portrayal of Stalinism. It is unable to account for the duration and depth of the phenomenon, and also falls into the trap of bourgeois thought by explaining the degeneration of the Soviet Party and state through the mere actions of "great men".

The phenomenon of Stalinism can only be adequately explained by utilising a materialist approach to the problem. Since the latter views the relations of domination as flowing from the



relations of production, our starting point should be to locate the conflicts of material interest between the different social forces in Soviet society. Applying this approach to the Soviet Union leads us to conclude that Stalinism represents the rule of a bureaucracy, which while not occupying an independent structural role in the process of production, is nevertheless able, through its capture of political power to skim off part of the social surplus. Trotsky, in his unparalleled study of the Soviet Union entitled *The Revolution Betrayed*, succinctly explains this rule of the bureaucracy:

The basis of bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption, with the resulting struggle of each against all. When there are enough goods in a store, the purchasers can come whenever they want to. When there are little goods, the purchasers are compelled to stand in line. When the lines are very long it is necessary to appoint a policeman to keep order. Such is the starting point of the powers of the Soviet Bureaucracy. It 'knows' who is to get something and who has to wait. (1972:112)

Trotsky thus located the phenomenon of Stalinism within the context of scarcity, a category basic to historical materialism since Marx's formulation of it in *The German Ideology*. But he also noted a parallel political factor that contributed to the phenomenon.

It [the bureaucracy] arose in the beginning as the bourgeois organ of the workers' state. In establishing and defending the advantages of the minority, it of course draws off the cream for its own use. Nobody who has wealth to distribute ever omits himself. Thus out of a social necessity there has developed an organ which has far outgrown its necessary social function, and become an independent factor and therewith the source of great danger for the whole social organism. (1972:113)

But this excessive bureaucratisation was not inevitable or something that was historically ordained. Although it had profound roots in the social and economic reality of the Soviet Union in the 1920's, and in particular, in the political passivity of the working class, it is not as if this phenomenon was unavoidable. Already in the 1920's both Lenin and the Left Opposition<sup>11</sup> – the latter forced to wage a factional struggle within the party against the rightward swing of Stalin – were preoccupied with the task of fighting this dominance of the bureaucracy.

The proposals of the Left Opposition are incisive if we want to understand how this fate of the Russian Revolution could have been averted. They proposed amongst other things: accelerating the industrialisation of the country to strengthen the weight of the proletariat, increasing wages and fighting unemployment as a means of increasing the confidence of the working class,

increasing democracy in the soviets and in the party as a means of increasing the level of political activity and class consciousness of the working class, assisting the poor peasantry as a means of strengthening the alliance with the proletariat and differentiating this strata from the kulaks<sup>12</sup>, and finally, correcting the tactics and strategies of the Comintern to make it more effective in assisting world revolution.

Thus far, the phenomenon of Stalinism has only been discussed within the context of the “socialist world”. Yet how did it manifest itself in the Communist Parties outside the socialist bloc? This then takes us to the second problem of Slovo’s definition, namely, that it views Stalinism only in an organisational aspect. But Stalinism, as a political counter-revolution, occurred at both an organisational and ideological level. With the rise of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, the theoretical premises underlying the October Revolution of 1917 were disfigured so as to justify and legitimate the new ruling stratum. This process began in 1924 when Stalin challenged the Marxist commitment to proletarian internationalism with his theory of “socialism in one country”<sup>13</sup>. Until then almost all Marxists were unanimous in the belief that for the final victory of socialism, the efforts of one country would be insufficient, and that the efforts of the proletarians of several advanced countries would be required. Stalin’s thesis suggested that socialism could be realised in the Soviet Union because of its immense riches and the support the revolution generated. In any case the theory of “socialism in one country” promoted Soviet national messianism which justified the subordination of the interests of world revolution to that of the supposed interests of the Soviet Union. Mandel argues,

The conservative character of the bureaucracy, its fear of the international repercussions of any advance of the revolution elsewhere in the world, its awareness that the passivity and depoliticisation of the Soviet proletariat constituted the foundation of its power and privileges, and the risk that this passivity and depoliticisation could be placed in question by any major progress of the world revolution – all these factors inclined the bureaucracy towards a policy of peaceful coexistence with imperialism, attempts to divide the world into spheres of influence, and determined defence of the status quo. (1979:117)

It was in fulfilling this policy of peaceful coexistence that the bureaucracy proceeded to reverse the theoretical advances made by the Bolshevik Party in the long build up to the Russian Revolution. One of the first such reverses related to the nature of the transition to socialism. In 1928 the Comintern, which by then had been completely cowed into submission by Stalin, reverted to the previous Menshevik position of the transition to socialism occurring over stages. This position argued that it was incorrect for a Communist Party in a “backward



country” to try and lead a socialist revolution. The strategy was : first achieve national liberation, and then begin the battle for socialism<sup>14</sup>.

This theoretical position was implanted into Communist Parties affiliated to the Comintern. The bureaucracies of these parties submitted blindly to the orders of the Comintern for they saw no alternative either because of their political and material dependence, or because of their view of medium-term national and international perspectives. These Communist Parties were instructed, in line with the theory of revolution by stages, to form popular fronts with the national bourgeoisie. This entailed the subordination of the Communist Party’s programmes to that of the national bourgeoisie with disastrous results.

In 1927, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was forced to join the Kuomintang, thereby losing its independence and rendering its cadres to the mercy of Chang Kai-Shek who massacred them and drowned the revolution in blood. In 1936, the Spanish Revolution was similarly defeated. In 1959, when Fidel Castro led the Cuban Revolution, the official Communist Party, under the strict instructions of Moscow, opposed him. When the Sandinistas led the victorious revolution in Nicaragua in 1979, the official Communist Party, under the same instructions from Moscow, once again, opposed the revolution. (Habib: 1991 b)

Stalinism, then, cannot simply be reduced to an undemocratic and bureaucratic style of leadership. Stalinism must be seen as the usurpation of political power by a bureaucracy that enables the latter to direct the planning of the economy in a direction that benefitted it materially. This ruling stratum produced an ideology to achieve and justify its goals. The theory of “socialism in one country”, the strategic conception of socialism being a product of revolution in stages, and the tactic of the Popular Front as a particular form of alliance, are all inextricable parts of the Stalinist whole. Stalinism must be viewed as a counter-revolution which has developed its own organisational practice, political programme, strategy and tactics. The task then, of destalinising the Communist Movement must be based on this understanding of Stalinism.

### **Disinheriting The Heritage Of Stalinism**

How successful has the SACP been in distancing itself from the heritage of Stalinism? Does the establishment of a new path of politics signal the organisation’s break with its past history?



The SACP would of course answer in the affirmative. It would cite its commitment to inner-party democracy and political pluralism as proof of its efforts of destalinisation.

And to a limited extent this is true. The notions of a party without internal dissent and the single-party state have perhaps been the greatest and most blatant distortions of socialist theory and practice. The organisation's rejection of these notions and its commitment to inner-party democracy, political pluralism, and a non-sectarian attitude to activists both inside and outside the party, is of immense symbolic and practical value and represents some movement towards the destalinisation of the SACP. But, as chapter 3 indicates, the organisation still remains wedded to a conception that views the transition to socialism occurring over stages. And *Has Socialism Failed?* reaffirms this commitment to a two-stage transition to socialism – the first being, according to Slovo, the construction of a post-apartheid state, and the second being the establishment of a socialist South Africa<sup>15</sup>.

Whilst Slovo and the SACP have recently begun to refute the theory of "socialism in one country", they have declined to reject its South African manifestation, namely, the conception of the transition to socialism occurring over stages. And for good cause. Rejection of this strategy would of course require the organisation to jettison the theory of National Democracy. And an abandonment of the theory of National Democracy would immediately compel the organisation to review its strategic alliance with the ANC and abandon its tactic of broad Popular or anti-apartheid Fronts with bourgeois parties; a tactic to which the SACP is committed. Complete destalinisation by the SACP would lead to an abandonment of its current theories, programmes, strategies, and tactics. The entire foundation of its current practice would disintegrate.

### **The Move To Eurocommunism**

The SACP's re-found commitment to political pluralism has expressed itself in the organisation's consideration of the "parliamentary road to socialism" as a viable strategy, should 'normal' democratic rights be achieved. The adoption of this strategy, termed Eurocommunism, is in line with developments in the European Communist parties, who have long participated in the democratic contest for parliamentary majorities. The attractions of this strategy are obvious. It is simple and it seems to contain no messy or violent confrontation with the capitalist class. Yet the viability of this strategy is clearly questionable. Eurocommunism is based on the premise

that the state is an impartial arbiter above the selfish contention of classes. It believes that it is possible progressively to empty the parliamentary institutions of their class content so that they cease to be props for the class rule of the bourgeoisie. But this is either a utopian conception or a deliberate mystification of the nature of the state.

The flaw in the Eurocommunist strategy is that it dislocates the state from the socio-economic environment within which it is situated. It neglects to take into account the bourgeoisie's control of the state apparatus. And it is also deficient in that it underestimates the consequences of the bourgeoisie's command of political and economic power on the proletariat. In capitalist society workers live and act under conditions of material dependence on the bourgeoisie. As Mandel indicates, "workers' jobs, incomes and living standards are determined in the final analysis by economic mechanisms which function on the basis of the objectives pursued by the bourgeoisie." (1979:192)

Just as important is the latter's command of political power which enables it to manipulate the ideological apparatuses of the state so that workers are daily bombarded with ideas, values, and historical distortions that are compatible with the maintenance of the status quo. This behaviour is not inexplicable. Modern parliamentary institutions historically evolved as the bourgeoisie's political weapon against the feudal lords. Today these same structures have become their weapons against the proletariat. The modern state's leading personnel are almost exclusively members of the ruling economic elite. In those rare circumstances where a leading member of the state emerges from working class origins, the size of their incomes and the inevitable accumulation of capital to which these lead, ensures that they are absorbed and integrated into the bourgeoisie. The hierarchical structure of the state also facilitates this process. Mirroring the hierarchy in capitalist society, it justifies the huge salaries paid to the leading personnel of the state, restricts major decisions to the higher echelons of the state apparatus, and creates the conditions for the bourgeoisie to manipulate state institutions. Thus, as Mandel says, "it is inevitable in bourgeois society that the summits of the state apparatus, the people who represent and incarnate the 'state machine', regardless of their individual origins, are absorbed and integrated into the bourgeois class. On the whole, then, they can only serve the interests of the bourgeoisie." (1979:155)

This of course questions the viability of the Eurocommunist notion of gradually reforming the capitalist system. Workers will often act in unison with their class enemies against their



long-term class interests. But this is not to suggest that the hegemony of the ruling class can never be threatened. At precise moments in history, objective conditions weaken the ideological, political and economic hegemony of the ruling class and compels the proletariat to engage in the struggle for state power<sup>4</sup>. But these moments, known as "revolutionary crises", never last very long. And they provoke extreme tension for they involve attempts to dismantle the mechanisms that run bourgeois society. This, of course, involves a direct conflict with the ruling class; a strategy that Eurocommunism precisely attempts to avert.

The essential kernel of the Eurocommunist strategy is the achievement of a parliamentary majority that would provide communists with the supreme power to gradually usher forth reforms that will lead to a transition to socialism. But all indications are that even if communists achieved a majority in parliament, they would still be powerless to determine the direction of that society. Elected chambers of parliament all across the world have very little effective control over what the government does. Much of the running of the state is left in the hands of the permanent administrative bureaucracy who, unlike governments, are not prone to being ousted from power. Moreover, capitalist societies are progressively witnessing power being passed into the hands of the executive. The more representatives of the workers' movement gain admittance into parliament, the more the role of parliament in the ensemble of mechanisms of the bourgeois state tends to narrow. The executive is now becoming the ultimate guarantor of the bourgeois order.

Even if communists captured control of the executive, they would still be unable to initiate substantial transformations of the status quo. This was clearly evident in June 1981 when Francois Mitterrand and the French Socialist Party swept into power and proceeded to implement a programme of large scale nationalisation. The bourgeoisie responded by refusing to invest, transferring liquid capital out of the country, causing an acute financial crisis. The franc slumped and Mitterrand was forced to surrender by adopting a programme of austere measures involving retrenchments, closures, and cuts in real wages and in welfare services.

But what if these intimidatory tactics had failed? What if Mitterrand held out? One option for the bourgeoisie, despite the entrenchment of parliamentary democracy, would have been to respond with the armed apparatus. That is the principal lesson of the Chilean experience. Here, Salvador Allende and the Chilean Socialist Party came into power through the bourgeois parliamentary game. When workers took the offensive and threatened the material interests of the bourgeoisie,



Allende was forcibly overthrown by the military and the revolution crushed<sup>17</sup>. Such is the neutrality of the bourgeois state.

The final flaw in the Eurocommunist strategy is that they view the class struggle purely in its political aspect. As Mandel says, "relations between classes are reduced to relations between political parties, or rather, between leaderships of political parties. A handful of 'chiefs' is supposed to represent and faithfully articulate the social interests of millions of people in all their complex interconnections, solely on the basis of election results." (1979:197) Added to this is the belief that it is this handful of "chiefs" that will institute measures that usher forth the socialist society. But this is a substitutionist conception of the transition to socialism. Socialism is the product of the self-emancipation of the working class. The implication of this fundamental premise of Marxism is that no variety of socialism is possible unless through the self-activity of the working class. This is the principal difference between utopian and scientific socialism.

The Eurocommunist strategy then, is a questionable one. Socialism can only be achieved with the forcible overthrow of both the bourgeoisie and its state apparatus. As Engels, who later became a key architect of parliamentary socialism, says, "... the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy." (Feuer:1984:401) At another point in the same pamphlet, he says, "... from the very outset the Commune was compelled to recognise that the working class, once come to power, could not go on managing with the old state machine, that in order not to lose again its only just conquered supremacy this working class must, on the one hand, do away with the old repressive machinery previously used against itself and, on the other, safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials, by declaring them all, without exception, subject to recall at any moment." {Feuer:1984:399} The SACP's absorption of the strategy of a "parliamentary road to socialism", can but only weaken the working class when the decisive contest for political power emerges. This is the principal lesson imparted by the rich history of the international working class struggle.

### **Redefining the Vision of the Socialist Economy**

The SACP's latest vision of a "socialist economy" envisages an economy characterized by a mixture of "plan" and "market". Whilst the precise mix between these two categories is as yet

unclear, general guidelines espoused by the promoters of this vision indicate that the "market" will be subservient to the "plan". If current experiments in the Soviet Union are anything to go by, then what is envisaged is that while the overall thrust of the economy will be determined by central planning, a substantial use of market mechanisms will be made in micro-economic decision-making and day-to-day management of enterprises.

This vision of market mechanisms being an integral part of the socialist economy has been prompted by what is perceived as being the failure of "socialist planning" in the Soviet Union. The gist of the argument is simple. The Soviet experience indicates that command planning (which is equated with central planning)<sup>18</sup>, while achieving structural change, causes stagnation in productivity and living standards. The "market" is the only mechanism capable of combating this economic stagnation. Being an "objective" agent, the "market" will impose an efficiency and discipline on producers and will achieve the variety and quality of goods required to satisfy consumer demands. But because the "market" imposes high social costs, the use of market mechanisms need to be carefully supervised; thus, the "markets" subservience to the "plan".

Before proceeding to critically analyse this thesis, certain preliminary remarks need to be made. First, defining the nature of the socialist economy is not simply a matter of semantics. The road adopted for the realisation of socialism must be informed by an understanding of the nature of our immediate circumstances and the proposed goal. Thus, a general vision of the socialist economy is a necessary yardstick for assessing current economic proposals and strategies.

Second, a critique of the SACP's vision of a socialist economy does not automatically mean that an immediate radical suppression of market relations is being suggested. This study recognises that socialism is the ultimate product of a long transition process; a process characterized by revolutionary reforms that gradually lead to social control over the economy. Thus, market mechanisms will prevail for a considerable period after the overthrow of capitalist society. On this there is complete consensus amongst the extra-parliamentary left. However, the departure of revolutionary socialists from the SACP emerges on the issue of the social character of the state on and after the day of liberation. Whilst the SACP remains silent on the nature of the state, revolutionary socialists insist that a pre-requisite for the transition to socialism is the establishment of a workers' state. For revolutionary socialists, liberation marks the capture of state power by the working class which then creates the political and social conditions for the gradual transformation of the economy and wider society<sup>19</sup>.



Moreover, for the SACP, market mechanisms are not limited to the transition period. They are now being incorporated in the organisation's vision of the future socialist economy. In view of this a critique of previous Soviet thinking about utilising market mechanisms within the framework of the "plan", commonly known as *perestroika*, is pertinent.

According to Abel Aganbegyan, Gorbachev's chief economic advisor, *perestroika* was the attempt to replace "the economy of administrative command and fiat methods of management" by "an economy with predominantly economic methods of management, a market economy, an economy with developed financial and credit relations". (1988:77) He says, "from wage-leveling and neglected material incentives, we are working towards an economic system orientated to take due account of economic interests based on economic self-reliance and material encouragement." (1988:77) But this does not convey the overall thrust of the model. A more balanced picture of *perestroika* is provided by the documents of the Central Committee Plenum of April 1985 which committed the regime to act against corruption and the black market; to extend the market in agriculture and services; to give priority to technological and scientific development; to promote greater work discipline through the use of material incentives; and to eliminate the middle-level management bodies while simultaneously strengthening the central organs of planning and the powers of enterprise directors. This latter policy, which is the essential kernel of *perestroika*, involves the re-organisation of ministries to deal with macro-economic decisions, whilst simultaneously granting individual enterprises greater autonomy with day-to-day management affairs, with the hope that these enterprises will be run "on the principles of full self-accounting, self-financing, and self-administration."<sup>20</sup> (Aganbegyan:1988:78)

The essential aim of this managerial reform was to increase the efficiency of individual enterprises in the hope that the economy could be uplifted from the bureaucratic impasse that it has become submerged in. But could enterprise efficiency be guaranteed by simply granting greater powers to local directors? It is extremely doubtful. In capitalist society the motivation to increase the efficiency of individual enterprises emerges from the entrepreneur's ownership of private property. This enables them to increase their personal consumption and maximise their wealth, all of which they can transmit to their children and other heirs. However, this was not possible in the Soviet Union. In the "best" of cases, local managers' material remuneration for their enterprise's efficiency would merely have been some form of increase in bonuses which would have increased their access to consumer goods. But this was an insufficient material



incentive to promote the typically entrepreneurial behaviour that would have been required to boost enterprise efficiency. As Mandel says, "the reform will only be effective and coherent if the material interests of managers, linked to profit, goes (sic) beyond the realm of current income, and is linked also to the long-term performance of the enterprise as a whole. His fate, as well as that of his children, is tied to the enterprise; he is no longer a manager, but an owner." (1989:155) But this would constitute a reversion back to capitalism, a situation that Gorbachev could not realise<sup>21</sup>.

Moreover, the attempt to realise enterprise autonomy within the framework of the Soviet Union's previous economic structure was bound to fail. Yes, management was able to retain a part of the profit for reinvestment. Yes, they were able to enter into contracts with other enterprises. But their ability to determine the prices of products produced was severely curtailed. The central planning mechanisms had retained the power to determine prices of raw materials. This curtails enterprises' abilities at price-fixing for if they could not negotiate the price of their inputs, then their freedom to determine the price of outputs was severely limited. The same went for the determination of wages and resource allocation. Both were controlled by the central planning mechanisms, severely inhibiting local enterprises' attempts at achieving self-accounting, self-financing and self-administration.

Thus, Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika*, which represented a massive recourse to market mechanisms within the framework of the "plan", was economically incoherent. It was unable to realise its aims of greater economic efficiency for the simple reason that its two constituent categories, the "plan" and "market", continually pulled in different directions. The result: much of the practical initiatives embarked upon were often haphazard, contradictory and self-negating. Mandel's warning is incisive here: "within the framework of planning, the market cannot rule, just as the plan cannot rule within the framework of a market economy." (1989:153)

But what were the social implications of the implementation of *perestroika*? These were obvious even to the most naive. The systematic implementation of the principle of financial self-sufficiency in individual enterprises led to the closure of thousands of factories and the retrenchment of millions of workers. This was clearly evident. In 1989 Soviet estimates of unemployment had already surpassed the three million figure, and *Pravda* suggested that the continued utilisation of market mechanisms would have seen this figure rise as high as sixteen

million<sup>22</sup>. The extension of the principle of financial self-sufficiency to the fields of social services (health, education, etc.) threatened to further accentuate the immiseration of the Soviet working class. This, together with the fact that subsidies had been eliminated from basic goods and services, reduced the buying-power of workers and thereby dramatically lowered their standard of living.

Workers were aware of this. In general, they remained sceptical of the economic measures implemented in the Soviet Union. This scepticism even turned to overt hostility because of the growing poverty that had begun to afflict greater and greater sections of the workforce. Between 1989 and 1991, the Soviet Union had registered the greatest rise in labour conflicts in a quarter of a century. The first nine months of 1989 witnessed seven million days lost through strike action<sup>23</sup>. In 1989, more than forty million people lived on or below the official poverty level (Mandel:1989:150). For the Soviet working class, *perestroika* meant nothing more than austerity, greater poverty, greater social inequality, and greater social strife.

Yet it is on this economic framework that the SACP's vision of the "socialist economy" is modelled. The utilisation of market mechanisms, even if subjected to the framework of a "plan", works to the disadvantage of the proletariat and accelerates social inequality within society. This is so because it does not provide an alternative logic to the system of bureaucratic rule. On the contrary, it merely attempts to increase the efficiency of that system at the expense of the producers of society. Thus, the SACP's current vision of a "socialist economy", like that of its predecessor, is a reductionist one that would be unable to realise the Marxist goal of an egalitarian society.

But what is the alternative? The revolutionary socialist alternative is premised on the foundation of an entirely different logic to that of the Soviet system. It is structured to serve, primarily, the interests of the producers of society. This system, known as democratic socialism, or what Mandel calls "self-articulated management", involves the coordinated allocation of resources democratically determined by the producers themselves. A federal body, elected by universal franchise, would be responsible for allocating proportions of the GNP, according to consciously formulated priorities. Since this would require different coherent alternatives to be presented for discussion and eventual adoption, political pluralism and the enjoyment of all basic democratic freedoms and human rights must be guaranteed. Once proportions of the GNP are allocated, sectorial and territorial bodies would be responsible for the distribution of these resources in



their own field. This devolution of power would extend further to provide individual enterprises with the right to organise production as they see fit. The latter would also be given power to dispose of parts of the current output and social surplus product. To ensure consumer satisfaction, models and quality of products produced would be subject to a veto power by consumers. This entire system, then, is premised on the practice of political pluralism, a serious reduction of the workday, and a precise combination of political and economic mobility<sup>24</sup>. Only such a system, that allows the producers of society the freedom to choose what to produce, how to produce it, and to determine the destiny of that output, can realise the goal of a classless society. As such, it is the only system that can truly be described as the vision of the socialist economy

### **Some Concluding Remarks**

How then should we view the SACP's restructuring of communist theory and practice? A critical overall assessment of the party's new path of politics indicates that it represents a shift to the right. The organisation's break with Stalinism to date can at best be described as formal. This assertion is easily defensible. Whilst condemning the atrocities of Stalin, and denouncing sectarian practices, undemocratic behaviour and one-party rule, the SACP still remains wedded to crucial pillars of the Stalinist orbit. The theory of "Colonialism of a Special Type", the strategy of National Democracy, and the tactic of Popular Fronts, all derivatives of Stalin's theory of "socialism in one country", still remain at the heart of the organisation's programme.

This essential core of the party programme is supplemented by two new features; the adoption of the Eurocommunist strategy of achieving socialism through the ballot box, and the redefinition of the vision of the socialist economy to incorporate market mechanisms within the framework of the "plan". Both new features represent a reformist project incapable of realising the socialist order they set as their task. The strategy of Eurocommunism is based on the understanding that it is possible to gradually reform the capitalist state and system without effecting an overthrow of the bourgeoisie's monopoly of political power. However, as mentioned earlier, a critical analysis of this strategy and the results of its consistent application for over eighty years indicates that this is a project that is doomed to failure. Similarly, the SACP's latest vision of the socialist economy is an incoherent economic programme that will accelerate social inequality and inhibit the realisation of the classless society.



The vision of the classless society can only truly be brought into realisation if theories, strategies and tactics are derived from the rich heritage of authentic Marxism–Leninism. The failure and collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe does not invalidate these tools of thought. On the contrary, it re-affirms Marxism–Leninism's historical accuracy for it is the only paradigm that consistently explained, criticised, and predicted the downfall of this nightmare. The task of revolutionary socialists now is to rejuvenate the authentic traditions of Marxism–Leninism. The SACP's new path of politics does not do this. Its members need to heed the words of Pallo Jordan:

South African Communists would do well to turn to the works of the anti–Stalinist Marxists and Communists to rediscover the true meaning of this vision which has, over centuries, persuaded thousands of militants to lay down their lives; which has inspired thousands with the courage to storm the citadels of power even when the odds appeared insuperable; which moved great artists to create magnificent works. The South African Communist Party owes it to itself and to the cause that it espouses that it boldly grasp this nettle. (1990: 88)

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **IN LIEU OF A DEFINITIVE CONCLUSION**

A definitive conclusion on the party's future politics will have to be written sometime in the future. The SACP, like the social formation within which it is situated, is in transition. At this stage, it is merely a seed in the midst of winds of change, and the nature of its current politics is left to some extent to the good or bad fortune of forces outside its control. Very few conclusive statements can thus be made on the nature of the organisation's politics and its future political role. And those conclusive statements that are chanced are easily vulnerable to the winds of change that are sweeping this country.

Nevertheless, despite these perils, certain preliminary remarks on the politics of the SACP will be made. This study has investigated four central questions that have confronted the party in the period 1962 to 1990. Chapter 2, which investigated the politics of the party's organisational structure, argued that a revolutionary vanguard party was a necessary vehicle for the realisation of a classless society. It suggested that the SACP's commitment to such an organisation extended only to its form, and not to its content. The chapter proceeded to argue that the party's organisational history indicated that it violated the fundamental principles of vanguard organisation, such as inner-party democracy and political pluralism, and thereby undermined the character of a Marxist-Leninist form of organisation.

Chapter 3 investigated the SACP's theory of the South African revolution. It argued that the SACP's colonial categorisation of the South African social formation and its conception of a "two-stage" transition to socialism are wholly inadequate and abstracted from the peculiarities of capitalist development within the country. The chapter suggested that national liberation or the democratic revolution would not be achieved outside the transcendence of capitalist relations of production, and that the party's current attempts to realise this will merely result in the establishment of a political and economic structure that will prejudice the poor in favour of the rich.

Chapter 4 carried this critique further by suggesting that the party's flawed theoretical analyses lead it to formulate incorrect strategies and strategic perspectives for realising the goal of a democratic classless society. It argued that the strategic alliance between the SACP and ANC

works to the disadvantage of the communist goal since it subjects the party to a nationalist programme. The chapter then demonstrated this by detailing the inadequacies in the party's previous perspective of rural-based guerrilla-warfare, and in its current strategic perspective of a negotiated path to power.

The penultimate chapter focused on the SACP's current restructuring of communist theory and practice. The chapter argued that this has not involved a complete break with Stalinism, since the party still remains wedded to crucial theoretical constructs of the Stalinist orbit. Moreover, it suggested that the distinctive feature of this restructuring is the organisation's shift to a Eurocommunist strategy of achieving socialism through the ballot box. The chapter then proceeded to argue that this shift to a "parliamentary road to socialism", and the party's reconceptualisation of the socialist economy to one that incorporates market mechanisms within the framework of a "plan", will be unable to realise the goals of the socialist project. It thus concluded that the SACP's restructuring of communist theory and practice involves a shift to the right.

These theoretical investigations into the politics governing the SACP's organisational structure, its political programme, its strategic perspectives, and its current restructuring of communist theory and practice, indicate that the party did not adequately represent the classical Marxist tradition. The study also suggests that the SACP has lacked and does lack the organisational capacity, political programme and strategic perspectives to enable it to fulfill its historic task of leading the black proletariat to political power. But this is not a definitive conclusion for all time.

As indicated earlier the party is in the midst of transition, and as in the case of any institution in transition, its future political programme and direction is the focus of struggle between different political forces within the organisation. This has been clearly evident in the course of this study. Chapter 2 indicated that the party is currently reviewing its organisational structure, and that important sections of the organisation are suggesting that the party adopt a mass vanguard form based on the principles of inner-party democracy and political pluralism. Chapter 3, whilst maintaining that the party remains committed to its theoretical conceptions of "colonialism of a special type" and national democracy, nevertheless indicates that the party's new programme is aware of some the inadequacies within these theoretical conceptions and has attempted to tighten these formulations in its current programme. This then suggests that there does exist



some space for new theoretical formulations to emerge. Chapter 3 and 4 have argued that the party's perspectives and restructuring of communist theory represent a shift to the right. However, it should be clearly evident that this shift to the right has been facilitated by the changed political circumstances and the prospect of a successful negotiation process. Should this process fail, the party could easily shift to the left and adopt a more insurrectionary attitude to political power. It should be noted that the party's current programme, and its recent statements, have left open the possibility of an insurrectionary path to power.

These factors then indicate that the struggle for the political direction of the party is far from over. A definitive conclusion must thus await the outcome of this political struggle. That then is the task of political analysts and historians of future generations.

# NOTES

## CHAPTER 1

1. Up until its dissolution in 1950, the party was known as the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). In 1953 it reconstituted itself in an underground capacity under the name of the South African Communist Party (SACP).

2. The Communist International (Comintern), also known as the Third International, was a child of the Russian worker's revolution of October 1917. It was formed in 1919 by leading members of the Bolshevik Party and representatives of other Communist Parties in Europe and Asia. Duncan Hallas argues that by 1921, parties affiliated to the Comintern had the support of the majority of politically conscious European workers in France, Italy, Norway, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, and had a substantial minority in Germany, Sweden and Poland. The Comintern was formed on the premise that internationalism is the bedrock of socialism, and that the victory of socialism was dependent on the victory of the proletariat in a number of the advanced countries. It was thus formed to promote and lead the anti-capitalist revolutionaries in the advanced countries. However, a mere ten years after its formation, the Comintern became a tool of Stalin's foreign policy, and was part of the strangling of worker's power inside Russia by a bureaucratic stratum. For a discussion of this rise and fall of the Comintern, see Hallas:1989.

3. I use the term "Congress" to mean all those organisation's and individuals committed to the political programme of the ANC and SACP. The latter two organisations form the core of this tendency.

4. Popper's methodology of falsification suggests that all theories and scientific laws while not conclusively verifiable, nevertheless are conclusively falsifiable. To utilise his own example: no number of observation statements reporting observations of white swans allows us logically to derive the universal statement 'All Swans are White'. However, a single observation statement reporting one single observation of a black swan, allows us logically to derive the statement 'Not all Swans are White'. Thus, the statement, like all theories demanding the label 'scientific', whilst not verifiable, should be falsifiable. For a simple explanation of this theory, see Magee:1973.

5. Popper is speaking here of Marx's prediction that the first socialist revolution would occur in the most advanced industrialised countries, when in reality it occurred in Russia which was the most economically backward of all the industrialised nations.

6. Lenin argued that the bureaucracy was able to materially benefit from his service to the state through directorships, while Trotsky argued that the bureaucracy's monopoly of political power granted it a direct access to material privileges. Both thus viewed the motivation of the bureaucrat as economic gain. For a fuller discussion of their positions, see Trotsky:1972.

7. For a fuller discussion of Bahro's position on this, see Bahro:1978:178-182.

8. These societies were the previous existing post-capitalist societies, which Bahro argued were in a transitional phase to socialism. Bahro thus adopted the Leninist conception, which distinguishes three phases of post-capitalist society: the phase of transition, the socialist phase and the communist phase.

9. It should be noted that this position was originally argued by Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed*. See Trotsky:1972.

10. An alternative did exist in the form of the proposals of the Left Opposition. In fact, Bahro acknowledges that the alternative programme of the Left Opposition would have reduced the painful costs involved in the industrialisation of the Soviet Union and averted the barbarity of forced collectivisation. However, he dismisses the validity of the programme by the fact that it was unable to convince the cadres of the party. See Bahro:1978:100-101.

11. In particular Bahro uses the examples of the French and Italian Communist parties who "set themselves the task of conquering the state machine rather than destroying it". (1978:137) For a critique of this Eurocommunist project, see chapter 5.

12. For a more detailed account of Bahro's position on the 'League of Communists', see Bahro:1978:365-376.

13. Two surprising recent analyses putting forward this position were authored by Eric Hobsbawm and Robin Blackburn. See Hobsbawm:1990 and Blackburn:1991.



14. For a fuller discussion of this thesis, see Cohen:1985 and Blackburn:1991.

15. Once again, see Blackburn:1991.

16. I use the term 'converted' particularly because prior to conducting his investigation on imperialism, Lenin remained tied to the slogan of 'the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants'. It was only subsequent to this investigation that he adopted Trotsky's perspective, which had, since 1906, been the simultaneous resolution of the democratic and social questions. For a fuller examination of Trotsky's thesis, see Trotsky:1986.

17. The Bolsheviks commitment to heated debate is easy to prove. One need only read any cursory history of the Bolshevik party to realise that the organisation divided on a host of questions throughout its years in existence, from the debate on whether to participate in the Duma, through to the very nature of the 1917 revolution, and even on when to call for the second revolution.

18. On the 1st of June 1917 the Bolshevik's commanded a mere 13% of support in the all-Russian Congress. This figure, however, grew to 51 % by the 2nd of October 1917, and by the 5th of July 1918, an astounding 66% of all delegates to the all-Russian Congress identified with the Bolshevik party. For more detail on the Bolshevik's support in this period, see Rees:1991.

19. Since the 1905 revolution, when Lenin interceded and forced the Bolshevik leadership in Petersburg to support the soviets, the organisation remained committed to the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in soviet form. For a fuller discussion of the Bolshevik's attitude to the soviets, see: Cliff:1986:163-168.

20. For a greater discussion of the Social Revolutionaries and other parties counter-revolutionary behaviour, see Rees:1991.

21. This is not to suggest that other material has not been consulted. On the contrary, I have utilised the material of a host of party activists, and in particular those of Ruth First's, to develop my ideas on many of the issues under scrutiny in this dissertation. For an example of this, see the critique of 'colonialism of a special type' in chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 2

1. It needs to be noted that the party abandoned this vanguard organisational form during the decade of the 1940's. For a discussion of the effects of this decision, see Lodge:1985.

2. This distinction between a 'class in itself' and a 'class for itself' was outlined by Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. (Marx:1977) A 'class in itself' is where a social layer is determined by its objective position in the process of production independent of its state of consciousness. On the other hand, a 'class for itself' is when the state of consciousness figures as an element in the determination of such a social layer.

3. One such political commentator is Herbert Marcuse who takes as his point of departure the Marxian definition of the ruling class, and finishes by calling into question the revolutionary potential of the working class.

4. Examples of this are the Labour Party in Britain, and the more recent development of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) in Brazil. The latter organisation has a rich and impressive tradition of resistance and was given birth to by the massive struggles of the Brazilian workers in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Today the PT commands a membership of about 200 000 and it boasted a combined vote of nearly 1,5 million in the 1985 Brazilian mayoral elections.

5. Lenin's use of 'social-democratic' in this context should be interpreted as being synonymous with 'socialist'. It was only subsequent to the establishment of the Third International that the term acquired a specific meaning, namely, as a description of that tendency that viewed the transition to socialism as an evolutionary process through participation in parliamentary structures.

6. Lenin went on to suggest immediately after these words that political consciousness had to be infused by the radical intelligentsia. This however, contradicts Marx's fundamental dictum that "the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself", since if we accept Lenin's premise then the truly revolutionary class would be the discontented intellectuals. However, it needs to be noted that according to Trotsky, Lenin "subsequently acknowledged the biased nature, and therewith the erroneousness, of his theory." (Trotsky: 1968).

7. Being a founder member of the Social Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania which was intertwined with that of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, Luxemburg, always maintained a keen interest in the development of the Russian Socialist Movement. Some of her articles, focussing on Russia, were *Organisational Questions of Social Democracy; Mass Strike, Party and Trade Unions* and *The Russian Revolution*.(Luxemburg:1990 abc)

8. Many political commentators have attributed Luxemburg's emphasis on spontaneity to her immediate struggles against reformism in the German Social Democratic Party. (see Cliff: 1959).

9. For a greater exposition of the organisation's structures, see *Weekly Mail*, August 3–5 1990.

10. *The Path To Power* is currently the official programme of the SACP. It was drawn up at a Congress in 1989, and is seen as the official repudiation of the party's past association with Stalinism. See *Weekly Mail*, 31 August 1989.

11. *The Road to South African Freedom* was drawn up in 1962 and survived as the official party programme until it was replaced by *The Path to Power*.

12. It needs to be noted here that inner-party democracy can be substantially constrained by the terrain in which the organisation operates. For instance, the SACP has, for the last four decades, operated under very much harsher and far more repressive conditions than its counterparts in the western democracies. This situation, however, has changed with the unbanning of the party .

13. This position is argued in T. Singh, "The Vanguard Party in the Fight for Socialism", in *The African Communist*, no. 90 third quarter, 1982, as well as in an underground pamphlet of the SACP entitled "Workers, Organise and Unite – Join the ANC, SACP and MK for Freedom and Socialism". The latter pamphlet is reprinted in *The African Communist*, No.112, 1st Quarter, 1988.

14. This analysis of the development of revolutionary consciousness amongst the working class is also contained in the article by T. Singh, *The Vanguard Party in the Fight for Socialism*, op. cit, and in the organisation's underground pamphlet, *Workers, Organise and Unite – Join the*



*SACP, ANC and MK for Freedom and Socialism, op. cit.*

15. The term "workerist" has at some level, taken on negative connotations in the South African context. There also exists much confusion as to what the term means. Some articles in *The African Communist* for instance, describe Trotskyists as "workerists" since the author/s believe that the supporters of Trotsky are modern day syndicalists. This I believe is a gross misinterpretation of modern day Trotskyism. In any case, I have used the term in this study, minus its negative connotations, to describe simply those activists that were located in FOSATU, or at least supported the political position espoused by the FOSATU leadership.

16. I believe this distinction between liberation and transformation is an extremely simplistic one. For a critique of this position, see Cronin: 1985.

17. Mayekiso has now shifted his position and is currently a member of the National Internal Leadership Group of the SACP.

18. For a greater discussion, see Cronin:1990.

19. I am speaking of the radical intelligentsia whose commitment to social and political change arises mainly from their theoretical consciousness, rather than through their actual experience in struggle.

20. An example of this layer in the South African political terrain is the shop-stewards of the independent trade union movement. The latter are elected by the mass of organised workers on the factory floor and are the best example of the leadership of local worker struggles.

21. For a greater discussion of this, see Luxemburg:1970(c).

22. Luxemburg's struggle against the Kautskyite centre of German Social Democracy was precisely on this question. While the latter believed that socialism could be attained via parliamentary means, Luxemburg clearly argued for the destruction of the established state apparatus. (see Luxemburg: 1990(c)).

23. It needs to be noted that until very recently most of the extra-parliamentary organisations,

including the ANC, PAC and the SACP, were banned and unable to function legally in the country. Also the exposure of the role of the Civil Co-operation Bureau in political assassinations merely confirmed the belief of left activists and political commentators that political assassinations were sanctioned by structures of the South African State.

24. In the 1903 split in the RSDLP, the young Trotsky sided with the Menshevik faction, reproached Lenin for substitutionism and opposed the latter's conception of organisation. However, it needs to be noted that following the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917, Trotsky fully adopted Lenin's analysis of the formation of proletarian class consciousness and hence also Lenin's theory of organisation, and until his death he stubbornly defended them against all sceptics and arch-pessimists who claimed to detect in them the embryo of "Stalinism."

25. See *Weekly Mail*, 31 August 1989.

26. All four are members of the Marxist Worker's Tendency of the ANC (MWT). The latter organisation believes that the black working class will naturally gravitate to their traditional organisation, that is the ANC, and therefore argue for the transformation of the ANC into a mass workers' party.

27. The publication is entitled *Seventy Years of Workers' Power: A Tribute by the South African Communist Party*. See Toussaint:1987.

### **CHAPTER 3**

1. For a greater exposition and discussion of the Native Republic thesis, see Simons & Simons: 1969 and Legassick:/n.d.

2. SACTU was launched in 1955, and very soon after adopted an overtly political role. It was one of the constituents of the Congress Alliance and it adopted the latter's political theories, perspectives, and strategies. Communist Party cadres occupied crucial leadership positions in both SACTU and the ANC and were instrumentally involved in these organisations' activities. For a greater discussion of this, see Lambert:1988.

3. For a greater discussion of this lack of consensus, see Lambert: 1988.

4. The declaration of the meeting of 81 Communist and Workers' parties in Moscow in 1960, defines national democracy as being committed to the:

... strengthening of national independence, land reforms in the interests of the peasantry, abolition of the remnants of feudalism, extirpation of the economic roots of imperialist rule, the limitation and ousting of foreign monopolies from the economy, the foundation and development of a national industry, the raising of the standard of living of the population, democratisation of public life, and an independent, peace-loving foreign policy. (Hudson:1988)

For a greater discussion of the genealogy of the concept, see Hudson: 1988.

5. For the more salient critiques of the party programme, see Wolpe: 1975; No Sizwe: 1979; Hudson: 1988. For the most developed responses to these critiques, see Anonymous: 1983; and Slovo: 1986.

6. This position has also been put forward by prominent theorists such as Pallo Jordan and Bernard Magubane. See Jordan: 1986; and Magubane: 1989.

7. The Constitutional Guidelines suggest that "the economy shall be a mixed one, with a public sector, a private sector, a co-operative sector, and a small scale family sector". It goes on to say that "the state shall ensure that the entire economy serves the interests and well-being of the entire population... the private sector of the economy shall be obliged to co-operate with the state in realising the objectives of the Freedom Charter in promoting social well-being". See Appendix 2 for the Constitutional Guidelines.

8. This assertion is derived from a close reading of *The Communist Manifesto* which suggests that "the proletariat must first acquire political supremacy before it can implement socialist reforms and wrest by degrees all capital from the bourgeoisie ...". (Feuer: 1984: 69) From this understanding, I maintain that without the capture of political power by the proletariat, it would be impossible for a mixed economy to adopt a socialist orientation.

9. Much of my critique of "colonialism of a special type" is based on the works of Stephen Gelb,



Harold Wolpe, and Neville Alexander. Despite the fact that these political analysts have emerged from very different political traditions, I believe each has played, in his own way, a central role in subjecting "colonialism of a special type" to a critical scrutiny. This is not to suggest that there is no conflict between their critiques. For instance Stephen Gelb categorically states that he disagrees with the class reductionism implicit in Wolpe's critique - a concern I fully endorse (see Footnote 11).

10. Two points need to be made here. The first is that Wolpe's use of the term "social totality" creates confusion since he neglects to emphasise why the mode of production should be prioritised as an explanatory factor within this model. The second point that needs to be made with regard to Wolpe's contribution is that despite his critique of the party's official interpretation of "colonialism of a special type", he ends up defending a form of the thesis. For a greater discussion and critique of this, see No Sizwe:1979.

11. This charge of class reductionism can be directed at Wolpe, because he seems to suggest that race can be simply and fully explained by class. See Wolpe:1975 :238.

12. Iris Young is a feminist theorist seeking to combine class and gender analysis. See Young: 1981.

13. It needs to be noted that Alexander also writes under the pseudonym of No Sizwe. In any case, see No Sizwe:1979; Alexander: 1983; and Alexander: 1986.

14. It could be argued that Verwoerd's plan was precisely to do this. However, the abandonment of this strategy by even the National Party clearly indicates the unviability of this project. Presently, it is only the far-right that would dare even put forward such a proposal.

15. Stalin defines a nation as "a historically evolved stable community of people based on community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture." He goes on to suggest that the " nation is not simply a historical category but a historical category belonging to a specific epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism". (Quoted in No Sizwe:1979:175).

16. For a critique of Stalin's definition, see No Sizwe:1979:168.

17. In one of his recent publications, Slovo denies that the theory of “colonialism of a special type” implies a two–nations conception. See Slovo:1986:35.

18. I am aware that the term “democracy” is a highly contested one, and that there currently exists a raging debate as to what the term means. This debate, however, is not the focus of this chapter. The terms “national” and “democratic” demands have been used in the context of this article to simply denote those demands accepted by the SACP and the Congress Alliance within their national democratic programme, that is, those contained and fully enunciated in the Freedom Charter. (See Appendix 1).

19. The monopolisation of South African capitalism has had contradictory effects for workers’ struggles in the country. On the one hand, by virtue of its need for semi–skilled and skilled labour – positions which black workers have come to increasingly occupy – it has provided black workers with greater bargaining power since they are more difficult to replace. On the other hand, monopolisation has provided capital with greater staying power to withstand major labour conflicts.

20. These on–going struggles have been well documented in journals such the *South African Labour Bulletin (SALB)* and *Work in Progress (WIP)*. For further references, see Friedman:1987; and Maree:1987.

21. For a greater exposition and discussion of the way racial and class categories intertwine in the South African context, see Wolpe:1988. For a useful but more general discussion on class approaches to race, see Bonacich:1980.

22. Paraphrased from No Sizwe:1979:155-156. It needs to be noted that the relationship between state and capital in the period prior to 1910 (when no national state existed) has not been clarified. For a greater discussion of this extremely complex relationship in this period, see Yudelman:1984.

23. For a discussion of how “segregation” and “apartheid” resolved the contradictions between primary and secondary industry, see Leggasick:1974; and Legassick:1975. The alternative explanation is provided by the liberal modernisation theorists, the most prominent of whom is Merle Lipton. See Lipton:1986.

24. This intervention to detach capitalism from racism has found its expression in the reformist policies of the Democratic Party, various business organisations such as the Associated Chambers of Commerce, the National African Chamber of Commerce (NAFCOC), The African Bank, the Urban Foundation, and even the National Party.

25. The liberal-pluralist thesis which suggested that racism and capitalism are incompatible also held the view that economic development will gradually erode racism. See O'Dowd:1978. However, as Wolpe argues,

... the old view has been falsified by historical events. The processes, political and economic, of capitalist development did not lead to the predicted evolutionary change, only to intensified conflict. The social, political and ideological conditions have now rendered obsolete the old theory and, in particular, have undermined the radical separation previously drawn between the polity and the economy. (Wolpe: 1988: 28)

26. One simple example of this is the land question. The resolution of the latter question would require the wholesale confiscation of land from white farmers and property owners – a measure unlikely to be supported by both state and capital since it would threaten ownership rights normally guaranteed under the bourgeois order, and severely weaken white capital's control over the agricultural sector. An indication of this reluctance is the government's recently released White Paper on Land Reform which while abolishing formal apartheid in terms of land ownership, doesn't come close to resolving the land question for the majority of dispossessed in this country. For a greater discussion on the inadequacies of this White Paper on Land Reform, see *Post*, March 20–23 1991, p 10; *Sunday Tribune*, March 17 1991, p 18; *Mayibuye*, March 1991, p 8, and *Mayibuye*, April 1991, p 18–21.

27. A note of caution needs to be sounded here. I am not suggesting that the transcendence of capitalist relations of production is the sole criteria for the achievement of the democratic stage. If this had been the case then the Soviet Union would not have disintegrated under the force of conflicting nationalisms. All that is being argued here is that the financial costs to resolve the social demands necessary for the achievement of the democratic stage in South Africa simply cannot be borne by a post-apartheid capitalist state.

28. It is already a well known fact that the Reagan and Thatcher governments effected major



ANC and occupy leading positions within MK. Examples are Joe Slovo, Chris Hani, Joe Modise etc.

5. The strategy contained in Operation Mayibuye was never tested because prior to its implementation, security police swooped on a farm in Rivonia and captured the entire high command of MK. The celebrated Rivonia trial was a consequence of this raid.

6. For greater detail of these campaigns, see chapter 12 of Lodge:1983.

7. One consequence of this was the decision to extend and consolidate the ANC underground machinery. For a greater discussion, see Mzala, "Umkhonto We Sizwe: Building Peoples' Forces for Combat War & Insurrection", part 2, in *Sechaba*, Dec. 1986 & Jan. 1987.

8. See *The African Communist*, no. 86, 1981(3); no. 89 1982(2); no. 97 1984(2).

9. The 1984–86 uprising witnessed the spontaneous development of popular people's structures such as street committees and peoples' courts. This factor, together with the removal of MK's armed bases from Mozambique as a result of the Nkomati Accord signed by the South African and Mozambican authorities, tilted the debate back in favour of the insurrectionists.

10. The period was characterised by intense "behind the scene negotiations" between the ANC, the South African government, the Soviet Union and the United States. At about the same, F. W. De Klerk succeeded in ousting P. W. Botha as leader of the National Party. These factors, together with the Namibian political settlement, led to a new mood within the country, and there existed intense speculation that the Rivonia trialists would soon be released, thereby opening the path to constitutional negotiations.

11. One of the external consequences of *perestroika* and *glasnost* had been the development of a new foreign policy which attempted to extricate the Soviet Union from foreign zones of conflict. This commitment of the Soviet government to political rather than military solutions had led to a rash of peace conferences and negotiated settlements all over the world. The ANC is burdened with an additional external pressure from the Frontline states, who prefer a political settlement since it would enable them to rebuild their devastated economies and societies. For a greater discussion of the external factors that influenced the negotiations process, see *Workers' Voice*,

no. 1 1990, p 11– 16; or Phillips & Coleman:1989.

12. Despite its success in smashing political and social movements within the country, the South African government was unable to win the hearts and minds of the black population. Moreover, the economy continued to face a structural crisis and all leading economists concluded that political reform and the restructuring of the accumulation process were indispensable if South Africa was to manage this crisis. For details of this crisis and the state's attempts to restructure the accumulation process see Morris & Padayachee:1989; or Gelb:1991.

13. Both the Groote Schuur and Pretoria meetings represented discussions between the ANC and the government about the removal of obstacles to full constitutional negotiations. It needs to be noted that both talks established a range of sub-committees with ANC and state personnel, who were mandated to investigate the removal of these obstacles to negotiations.

14. See the following editions of *The African Communist*; no. 120 1990(1); no. 121 1990(2); no. 123 1990(3).

15. Nico Basson's recent testimony to the *New Nation* (June 14–20, 1991) detailing SADF involvement in the violence served merely to confirm the long-standing belief held by activists and political commentators that elements within the security forces were responsible for the wave of violence that recently erupted on the reef.

16. Peng Shu-tse was a founder member of the Chinese Communist Party, and was elected to the Central Committee and to the Politburo at the CCP's Fourth Congress in January 1925. He consistently opposed the CCP's entrance into the Kuomintang, and in 1929 he was expelled from the CCP for organising a Left Opposition. For a greater understanding of his political views, see Evans & Block:1978.

17. The SACP is not the only example within the Communist Movement to have sacrificed the political and organisational independence of the communist party. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) embarked on a similar course in the mid-1920's and entered the Kuomintang under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, who rewarded these communist militants by massacring them in 1927. For a greater discussion on the ill-fated episode, see Evans & Block: 1978.

18. These vacillations of the nationalist leadership within the ANC are bound to increase in the coming period of negotiations. Already tensions have surfaced within the ANC which indicate that sections of the leadership are prepared to engage in major compromises to achieve a negotiated settlement.

19. See Slovo:1976.

20. For a discussion of the reasons for this, see chapter 5.

21. Bundy adopts this additional feature into his own definition of social revolution from a quotation of Griewank contained in an article by Hobsbawm. See Hobsbawm:1986.

22. It needs to be noted that Tilly's position is distinguished from Lenin's description of dual power by the fact that he contends that not merely two, but several competing groups with significant support may justifiably advance claims to control aspects of government.

23. In addition to Tilly, Skocpol also criticises Ted Gurr's *Why Men Rebel* and Chalmers Johnson's *Revolutionary Change* for their overriding stress on voluntarism. For a detailed discussion of their position see Gurr:1970 and Johnson:1966. However, what is of greater interest is her criticism of Leninism as also displaying this voluntarism because of its commitment to a vanguard form of organisation. This I believe is an unfair criticism of Leninism. As chapter 2 indicates, Lenin was indeed guilty of this in 1903, but his position on the development of class consciousness had changed sufficiently by 1917 for it to be argued that at this point he accurately reflected Marx's original position. Skocpol would of course argue that Marx himself displayed this voluntarism. This criticism of Marxism, I believe, reflects her own weaknesses in understanding the emergence of revolutions. For more on this, see also footnote 25.

24. Skocpol correctly criticises the vulgarisation displayed in some marxist interpretations of the state which suggest that states are merely instruments manipulated in the interests of the dominant class. However, as she readily admits, recent marxist studies on the state have attempted to address and counter this vulgarisation by introducing the notion of the 'relative autonomy of the state'. For a greater understanding of these debates, see Miliband:1969; Poulantzas:1973; Anderson:1974; and Therborn:1978. It also needs to be noted that Skocpol



feels that these studies still do not go far enough in adequately depicting and explaining the role of the state in advanced western democracies.

25. Skocpol correctly emphasises the need to investigate inter- and intranational structural contradictions in attempting to understand the causes of social revolutions. However, I believe that in her quest to avoid voluntarism she moves too close to the position of theorists from the Second International who completely underplayed the subjective element and overplayed the objective structural contradictions. As Hobsbawm argues,

One must not exaggerate structure and devalue situation. Ordinary cost of living riots, which for most participants imply no intended or immediate challenge to the existing order, may become the starting-point for revolution when they occur in 1917... Structure and situation interact, but what determines the possibility of action is primarily situation. At this point the analysis of forces capable of mobilising, organising, and moving into action groups of people on a politically decisive scale becomes relevant...(1986:17)

26. This distinction between subjective and objective preconditions can only be made at an analytical level. In reality the two are hard to distinguish and often intersect and crucially influence one another.

27. A notable exception to this was the Iranian Revolution (which occurred in a highly developed economy) which closely resembled the classic conception of the mass strike and was entirely based in the urban areas.

28. For a greater discussion of this structural crisis, see Saul & Gelb:1986.

29. The Anti-Apartheid Movement played a crucial role in this regard by popularising anti-apartheid political organisations and speakers, lobbying governments, and hosting popular concerts and marches to highlight the situation in South Africa. For a more detailed discussion of this, see Saul & Gelb:1986.

30. This was indicated by a series of events that occurred in the mid-1980's, some of which were Slabbert's withdrawal from parliamentary politics, and big business and Afrikaner students visits to the ANC in Lusaka.

31. The most notable cases for the emergence of such organs of popular power were Cradock, Mamelodi and Alexandra. For a fuller discussion of this, see Habib:1988.

32. Two events most clearly indicate this. The first is the Democratic Party's commitment not to contest seats against the National Party in future elections if a Conservative Party candidate is standing. The second is the increasing number of defections from the Labour Party in the House of Representatives and the Solidarity and National Peoples' Party in the House of Delegates to the National Party.

33. See for instance Stephen Gelb's justification for the need to regulate capitalism in Gelb:1991.

34. For a fuller discussion of this, see footnote 38.

35. See for instance, *The Daily News* (21\02\92) and *The Natal Mercury* (22\02\92).

36. The "war of position", was for Gramsci the struggle for hegemony in civil society which is prosecuted, in periods of lull to create the capacity and conditions for socialist militants to engage in a "war of manoeuvre", that is, a frontal assault on state power. For a greater discussion of this, see Harmen:1986b.

37. The demonstrations outside parliament on February 1st 1991 were examples of such action. In addition, there has been a series of marches, pickets, and a signature campaign around the issue of the constituent assembly and the interim government.

38. There is a series of examples of this. In March 1990, Mandela urged Soweto teachers to halt their strike action against overcrowded classes and poor pay. In May, following a request from De Klerk, Mandela intervened to settle a strike at Soweto's Baragwanath hospital, and this had the effect of dampening the strike action which was beginning to spread to other hospitals. (see *Weekly Mail*:30/03/ 1990) More recently, the National Union of Mine Workers'(closely aligned to the SACP) effected a wage agreement with particular mining bosses that tied salary increases to increases in worker productivity. In all of these cases, the party has remained silent, without once questioning the *bona fides* of such tactics.

## CHAPTER 5

1. Part of my analysis of the SACP's reassessment of Communist theory and practice is based on this paper. It could be argued that this is unfair to the Communist Party since the publication of the paper was qualified by the statement that the paper represented only the first reflections of Joe Slovo. However, the central arguments in *Has Socialism failed?* are also contained in an official interview with the party leadership after the 7th Congress in 1989. See WIP:1989(60)
2. One example of this is Francis Fukayama, US State Department official, whose celebrated article the "End of History", argues that the great ideological clash between Marxism and Liberal-Capitalism was over – the latter had won. (Fukuyama:1989)
3. A case in point is Ken Owen, the political commentator whose columns in *The Sunday Times* are especially well-known for their attacks on the SACP.
4. It is estimated that some 21 armies invaded the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the October Revolution. Whilst these attempts at counter-revolution were repelled, they resulted in the utter ruin of Russia's economy and the disintegration of her social fabric. For a graphic description of this process, see Deutscher: 1987.
5. This is easily demonstrated. Many state leaders, such as P.W. Botha, Margaret Thatcher, and even Ronald Reagan, paid lip-service to democracy, whilst simultaneously committing the most anti-democratic acts against their own working classes.
6. This distinction between *perestroika* and "market socialism" is drawn from Catherine Samary. See Samary:1988.
7. This publication, entitled *Seventy Years of Workers' Power*, was published in 1988. The striking feature of this document is that its analysis of Soviet society, from 1917 to the present, neglects even to mention the Stalinist atrocities and distortions of socialism committed by the bureaucracy.
8. The term, Dictatorship of the Proletariat, was first used by Marx in 1850, and subsequently by Lenin in *State and Revolution*. Both use the term as I've described it here, that is, as the



transitional period between capitalist and socialist society; the distinctive feature of which is the existence of a democratic workers' state in which the working class controls political power. I am aware that Marx's writings on the Paris Commune overlooked the need for a transitional period between capitalism and socialism. For a greater discussion of this tension between Marx and Lenin, see Harding:1981.

9. These special privileges of the bureaucracy arose when Stalin institutionalised a system of secret payments of large sums of money to all high officials in addition to their official salaries. Although Khrushchev abolished this in 1956, he replaced the financial remunerations with additional payments in kind, through a system of special shops and distributors, where high officials could purchase items, at a very low cost or entirely free of charge. See Mandel:1989.

10. There is ample evidence of this. One need only draw on the examples of the Hungarian workers in 1956, the Czechoslovakian workers in 1968, and Polish workers in 1980.

11. The Left Opposition represented the left wing of the Bolshevik Party in the 1920's who were subsequently expelled, jailed, tortured and murdered. Its most outstanding member was of course Leon Trotsky, who was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1928, and later assassinated by a GPU agent in Mexico in 1940.

12. Stalin's alternative response to dealing with the Kulaks was the complete extermination of this entire class; a response that was morally reprehensible, but also economically catastrophic since it plunged Soviet agriculture into an abyss that it is still submerged in.

13. This theory was first forwarded in the second edition of Stalin's *Fundamental Problems of Leninism*. (Trotsky : 1987)

14. The impact of this reversal on South Africa was reflected in the adoption of "The Black Republic Thesis" by the CPSA. As indicated earlier, this thesis committed the organisation to the slogan "an independent native republic as a stage towards a workers and peasants republic". For a greater discussion, see chapter 3.

15. Slovo's recent publications, and the Party's current programme, have insisted that there is no Chinese Wall between the national democratic and socialist phases. For a greater discussion

and critique of this position see chapter 3.

16. Examples of such moments were in the Soviet Union in 1905 and 1917, Germany in 1918 and 1923, France in 1968, Chile in 1972/73, Nicaragua in 1979, Poland in 1980, and in Rumania and East Germany in 1989.

17. This defeat of the revolution in Chile plunged the country in a military dictatorship, and submerged the Chilean working class into a vortex of demoralisation and passivity for over 15 years.

18. The protagonists of this argument neglect to consider that central planning does not only take the form of command planning, but can also occur within a decentralised and democratic framework. See Mandel:1986 for a greater explanation.

19. This position is in line with that of Marx in *The Communist Manifesto*. See Marx:1984:69.

20. It needs to be noted that the policies of *perestroika* were superseded by the failed coup in the Soviet Union, the subsequent dissolution of the CPSU, and the eventual emergence of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

21. This was so because a reversion to capitalism would have threatened the material interests and existence of a substantial proportion of the bureaucracy. Gorbachev as its representative could not usher forth its decline.

22. These estimates were published in *Pravda* and *Moscow News*. (Quoted in Mandel:1989).

23. The most notable of these strikes were conducted by the Ukranian and Siberian miners. For a greater discussion, see Mandel:1989.

24. For a greater exposition and explanation of this system, see Mandel:1986; and Mandel:1989.

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# **APPENDIX ONE**

## **FREEDOM CHARTER**

(adopted by the Congress of the People, 26 June 1955)

### **PREAMBLE**

We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know:

That South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people;

That our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty, and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality;

That our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities;

That only a democratic state, based on the will of the people can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief;

And therefore, we, the people of South Africa, black and white together – equals, countrymen and brothers – adopt this **FREEDOM CHARTER**. And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing nothing of our strength, and courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won.

### **THE PEOPLE SHALL GOVERN!**

Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws.

All the people shall be entitled to take part in the administration of the country.

The rights of the people shall be the same regardless of race, colour or sex.

All bodies of minority rule, advisory boards, councils and authorities shall be replaced by



democratic organs of self– government.

## **ALL NATIONAL GROUPS SHALL HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS!**

There shall be equal status in the bodies of state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races;

All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride;

All people shall have equal rights to use their own language and to develop their own folk culture and customs;

The preaching and practice of national, race or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime;

All apartheid laws and practices shall be set aside.

## **THE PEOPLE SHALL SHARE IN THE COUNTRY'S WEALTH!**

The national wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people;

The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole;

All other industries and trade shall be controlled to assist the well–being of the people;

All people shall have equal rights to trade where they choose, to manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts and professions.

## **THE LAND SHALL BE SHARED AMONG THOSE WHO WORK IT!**

Restriction of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended and all the land re–divided amongst those who work it, to banish famine and land hunger;

The state shall help the peasants with implements, seed, tractors and dams to save the soil and assist the tillers;

Freedom of movement shall be guaranteed to all who work on the land;

All shall have the right to occupy land wherever they choose;

People shall not be robbed of their cattle, and forced labour and farm prisons shall be abolished.

### **ALL SHALL BE EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW!**

No one shall be imprisoned, deported or restricted without a fair trial;

No one shall be condemned by the order of any government official;

The courts shall be representative of all the people;

Imprisonment shall be only for serious crimes against the people, and shall aim at re-education, not vengeance;

The police force and army shall be open to all on an equal basis and shall be the helpers and protectors of the people;

All laws which discriminate on grounds of race, colour or belief shall be repealed.

### **ALL SHALL ENJOY EQUAL HUMAN RIGHTS!**

The law shall guarantee to all their right to speak, to organise, to meet together, to publish, to preach, to worship, and to educate their children;

The privacy of the house from police raids shall be protected by law;

All shall be free to travel without restriction from countryside to town, from province to

province and from South Africa abroad;

Pass laws, permits and all other laws restricting these freedoms shall be abolished.

### **THERE SHALL BE WORK AND SECURITY!**

All who work shall be free to form trade unions, to elect their officers and to make wage agreements with their employers;

The state shall recognise the right and duty of all to work, and to draw full unemployment benefits;

Men and women of all races shall receive equal pay for equal work;

There shall be a forty-hour working week, a national minimum wage, paid annual leave and sick leave for all workers and maternity leave on full pay for all working mothers;

Miners, domestic workers, farm workers and civil servants shall have the same rights as all others who work;

Child labour, compound labour, the tot system and contract labour shall be abolished.

### **THE DOORS OF LEARNING AND CULTURE SHALL BE OPENED!**

The government shall discover, develop and encourage national talent for the enhancement of our cultural life;

All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands;

The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace;

Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children;

Higher education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances



awarded on the basis of merit;

Adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass state education plan; Teachers shall have all the rights of other citizens;

The colour bar in cultural life, in sport and in education shall be abolished.

## **THERE SHALL BE HOUSES, SECURITY AND COMFORT!**

All people shall have the right to live where they choose, to be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security;

Unused housing space shall be made available to the people;

Rent and prices shall be lowered, food plentiful and no one shall go hungry.

Free medical care and hospitalisation shall be provided for all, with special care for mothers and young children;

Slums shall be demolished and new suburbs built where all have transport, roads, lighting, playing fields, creches and social centres;

The aged, orphans, the disabled and the sick shall be cared for by the state;

Rest, leisure and recreation shall be the right of all;

Fenced locations and ghettos shall be abolished, and laws which break up families shall be repealed.

## **THERE SHALL BE PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP!**

South Africa shall be a fully independent state, which respects the rights and sovereignty of all nations;

South Africa shall strive to maintain world peace and the settlement of all international disputes

by negotiation – not war;

Peace and friendship amongst all our people shall be secured by upholding the equal rights, opportunities and status of all;

The people of the protectorates – Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland – shall be free to decide for themselves their own future;

The right of all the peoples of Africa to independence and self government shall be recognised, and shall be the basis of close cooperation.

Let all those who love their people and their country now say, as we say here:

**‘THESE FREEDOMS WE WILL FIGHT FOR, SIDE BY SIDE, THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES, UNTIL WE HAVE WON OUR LIBERTY.’**

## **APPENDIX TWO**

### **CONSTITUTIONAL GUIDELINES FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA**

(submitted by the ANC for discussion by the people of South Africa)

#### **PREAMBLE**

The Freedom Charter adopted by the Congress of the People at Kliptown near Johannesburg, was the first systematic statement in the history of our country of the political and constitutional vision of a free, democratic and non-racial South Africa. The Freedom Charter remains today unique as the only South African document of its kind that adheres firmly to democratic principles as accepted throughout the world. Amongst South Africans it has become by far the most widely accepted programme for a post-apartheid country. The stage is now approaching where the Freedom Charter must be converted from a vision for the future into a constitutional reality.

We in the African National Congress submit to the people of South Africa, and to all those throughout the world who wish to see an end to apartheid, our basic guidelines for the foundation of government in a post-apartheid South Africa. Extensive and democratic debate on these guidelines will mobilise the widest section of our population to achieve an agreement on how to put an end to the tyranny and oppression under which our people live, thus enabling them to lead normal and decent lives as free citizens in a free country.

The immediate aim is to create a just and democratic society that will sweep away the centuries-old legacy of colonial conquest and white domination, and abolish all laws imposing racial oppression and discrimination. The removal of discriminatory laws and eradication of all vestiges of the illegitimate regime are, however, not enough; the structures and the institutions of apartheid must be dismantled and be replaced by democratic ones. Steps must be taken to ensure that apartheid ideas and practices are not permitted to appear in old forms or new.

In addition, the effects of centuries of racial domination and inequality must be overcome by constitutional provisions for corrective action which guarantees a rapid and irreversible redistribution of wealth and opening up of facilities to all. The Constitution must also be such so as to promote the habits of non-racial and non-sexist thinking, the practice of anti-racist behavior, and the acquisition of genuinely shared patriotic consciousness.



The Constitution must give firm protection to the fundamental human rights of all citizens. There shall be equal rights for all individuals, irrespective of race, colour, sex or creed. In addition, it requires the entrenching of equal cultural, linguistic and religious rights for all.

Under the conditions for contemporary South Africa 87% of the land and 95% of the instruments of production of the country are in the hands of the ruling class, which is solely drawn from the white community. It follows, therefore, that constitutional protection for group rights would perpetuate the status quo and would mean that the mass of people would continue to be constitutionally trapped in poverty and remain as outsiders in the land of their birth.

Finally, success of the constitution will be, to a large extent, determined by the degree to which it promotes conditions for the active involvement of all sectors of the population at all levels in government and in the economic and cultural life. Bearing these fundamental objectives in mind, we declare that the elimination of apartheid and the creation of a truly just and democratic South Africa requires a constitution based on the following principles:

### **The State**

- a) South Africa shall be an independent, unitary, democratic and non-racial state.
- b) Sovereignty shall belong to the people as a whole and shall be exercised through one central legislature, executive and administration. Provision shall be made for the delegation of the powers of the central authority to subordinate administrative units for purposes of more efficient administration and democratic participation.
- c) The institution of hereditary rulers and chiefs shall be transformed to serve the interests of the people as a whole in conformity with the democratic principles embodied in the constitution.
- d) All organs of government, including justice, security and armed forces shall be representative of the people as a whole, democratic in the structure and functioning, and dedicated to defending the principles of the constitution.

### **Franchise**

- e) In the exercise of their sovereignty the people shall have the right to vote under a system of

universal suffrage based on the principle of one person one vote.

f) Every voter shall have the right to stand for election and to be elected to all legislative bodies.

### **National Identity**

g) It shall be state policy to promote the growth of a single national identity and loyalty binding on all South Africans. At the same time, the state shall recognise the linguistic and cultural diversity of the people and provide facilities for free linguistic and cultural development.

### **Bill of Rights and Affirmative Action**

h) The constitution shall include a Bill of Rights based on the Freedom Charter. Such a Bill of Rights shall guarantee the fundamental rights of all citizens, irrespective of race , colour, sex or creed, and shall provide appropriate mechanisms for their protection and enforcement.

i) The state and social institutions shall be under a constitutional duty to take active steps to eradicate, speedily, the economic and social inequalities produced by racial discrimination.

k) The advocacy or practice of racism, fascism, nazism or the incitement of ethnic or regional exclusiveness or hatred shall be outlawed.

l) Subject to clauses (i) and (k) above, the democratic state shall guarantee the basic rights and freedoms, such as freedom of association, thought, worship and the press. Furthermore, the state shall have the duty to protect the right to work and guarantee the right to education and social security.

m) All parties which conform to the provision of (i) and (k) above shall have the legal right to exist and to take part in the political life of the country.

### **The Economy**

n) The state shall ensure that the entire economy serves the interests and well-being of all sections of the population.

o) The state shall have the right to determine the general context in which economic life takes place and define the limits, rights and obligations attaching to the ownership and use of productive capacity.

p) The private sector of the economy shall be obliged to cooperate with the state in realising the objectives of the Freedom Charter in promoting social well-being.

q) The economy shall be a mixed one, with a public sector, a private sector, a co-operative sector and a small scale family sector.

r) Co-operative forms of economic enterprise, village industries and small scale family activities shall be supported by the state.

s) The state shall promote the acquisition of managerial, technical and scientific skills among all sections of the population, especially the blacks.

t) Property for personal use and consumption shall be constitutionally protected.

## **Land**

u) The state shall devise and implement a land reform programme that will include and address the following issues:

i) Abolition of all racial restriction on ownership and use of land.

ii) Implementation of land reform in conformity with the principle of affirmative action, taking into account the status of victims of forced removals.

## **Workers**

v) A charter protecting workers' trade union rights, especially the right to strike and collective bargaining, shall be incorporated into the constitution.



## **Women**

w) Women shall have equal rights in all spheres of public and private life and the state shall take affirmative action to eliminate inequalities and discrimination between the sexes.

## **The Family**

x) The family, parenthood and children's rights shall be protected.

## **International**

y) South Africa shall be a non-aligned state committed to the principles of the Charter of the Organisation of African Unity and the Charter of the United Nations and to the achievements of national liberation, world peace, and disarmament.