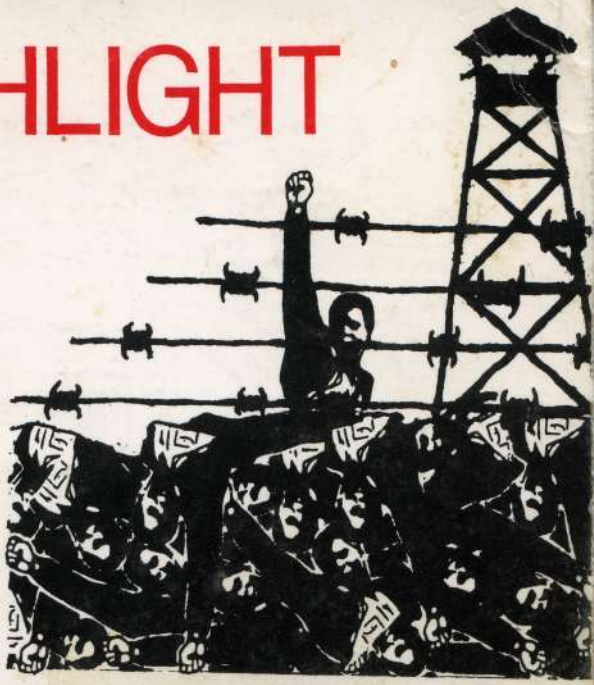
SEARCHLIGHT SOUTH AFRICA

№4

Feb. 1990



In the SWAPO gulag

£3.50

Financial Sanctions in South Africa •

SWAPO Prisoners in Angola •

The Colonies and Independence: •
Did the Left get it Wrong?

SEARCHLIGHT SOUTH AFRICA No.4

A Marxist Journal of South African Studies

SEARCHLIGHT SOUTH AFRICA

Published Quarterly
Address: BCM 7646, London WC1N 3XX
ISSN: 0954-3384
Editors: Baruch Hirson, Paul Trewhela, Hillel Ticktin, Rose Phahle, Brian MacLellan.

Annual Subscriptions
Individual £12 Institutions £24 – Special student offer £9
Abroad: add £4 p&p
or $US/Canadian equivalent.

Notes to Contributors:

Articles and reviews, accompanied by IBM ASCII files on disc – if possible – should be submitted to the editors, typed or printed out, in one–and–a–half, or double spacing. The editors will maintain a flexible policy on the length of articles: Ideally they should be between 4,000 and 7,000 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Short articles (other than letters) will only be accepted if they are of exceptional interest. Pseudonyms will be accepted but we need to know the author's identity.

If substantial alterations would improve the article or review, the editors will communicate with the author before proceeding with publication. The editors reserve the right to alter grammar, spelling, punctuation or obvious errors in the text. Where possible, references should be included in the text, with sources listed at the end of the article, giving author, title, publisher and date.

We regret that we continue to have difficulties in production, and battle with computors, but we will try to meet our publication dates and early submissions will ensure early inclusion. Letters commenting on recent articles in *Searchlight South Africa*, or relating to current events in South Africa, will be printed as soon as possible. These contributions should not exceed 1,500 words. Reviews of books will be by invitation and must be ready for the following issue of the journal.

A REQUEST TO READERS

If readers have documents of contemporary or historic interest that would bear republication, we would be pleased to receive them. They will be returned immediately.

A WORLD UPSIDE DOWN?
A BALANCE SHEET OF THE YEAR 1989

A Case of Political Blindness

The 7th Congress of the South African Communist Party (SACP) was convened in 1989. Delegates, according to the *African Communist* (No.118, Third Quarter 1989) were of 'political and theoretical maturity'. They were presented at conference with a revised party programme which they subjected to scrutiny 'sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph' (p.12). Readers of the *African Communist* had been primed by the previous issue to believe that there were words of profundity in this document. Govan Mbeki, Jay Naidoo, Jack Simons, and the great man himself, Oliver Tambo, had written to express their admiration for the programme that was to be submitted for adoption. Always eager to learn we read the printed programme and wondered, firstly at the ignorance of the drafters, and secondly at the nature of that scrutiny. Did delegates really believe the nonsense that appeared in their draft copies? Were they so short–sighted that they could not see through the absurdities of the document in their hands?

Adopted – after scrutiny, 'sentence by sentence' – only a few months before their world was turned upside down. The document proclaimed:

> Socialist countries today represent a powerful international force. Some of them possess highly developed economies, a considerable scientific base, and a reliable military defence potential...A new way of life is taking shape in which there are neither oppressors nor the oppressed, neither exploiters nor the exploited, in which power belongs to the people.

This was not all. With barely a hint that there might be cause to doubt (despite a reference to 'extensive bureaucratic control and criminal violations of socialist justice' in the USSR) the authors of the document spoke of the 'growing might' of the socialist countries which brought changes to the forces opposing imperialism. These socialist countries, they claimed, 'inspire the working people throughout the world to struggle for social and national emancipation' and 'provide significant and many sided support to revolutionary movements throughout the world.' Yea! they proclaimed: 'Socialism has demonstrated the enormous potential for all–round progress' (pp.78–79). These were the words of wisdom acclaimed by an unknown number of delegates who were so elated that they erupted into song at the end of the conference. What inspiration, what profundity, they showed – when they declaimed:

USlovo no Tambo Makomando
[Slovo and Tambo are our commanders]

We grant that it is not given to all to predict events. We grant further that there has been so much concealment for so long that most delegates could not have guessed at what lay in store for their 'socialist countries' in eastern Europe. But they should have been warned – if they had only listened to some of the voices coming out of those countries. The people of these 'socialist' states had no cause to believe that 'socialism has demonstrated the enormous potential for all–round progress'

Benin - The Land of Make Believe

In line with the absurdity of the SACP programme we turn, for light relief, to events in a remote country in west Africa. On 9 December 1989 the government of Benin declared that the country would no longer follow the path of Marxist–Leninism, would cease to exist as a one–party state and that its economy would henceforth move closer to the western world. Few people knew where this state was, or even known it under its former name, Dahomey. Even fewer would have known that state officials had not been paid for months and that there were angry demonstrations in the streets of the capital.

There is no indication that the change caused any perceptible interest in the White House, Paris, or Whitehall and it is doubtful whether there was any more interest in Moscow or in Beijing. Yet this event underlines again, and again, that no state is an island and that the fate of the smallest country is tied to events in the capitals of the world. Set against the dramatic news from eastern Europe, announcing the virtual collapse of Stalinism, the news from this Ruritanian state has a further significance in world terms in underlining the absurd pretensions of countries such as Benin whose governments have claimed to be communist.

A few years ago there were at least fourteen states in Africa that were said to be following the 'Marxist' path to socialism: Angola, Benin, Burundi, Cape Verde, the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea–Bissau,Mali, Malagasy, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe, and Zimbabwe. In earlier days similar claims had been made by, or on behalf of: Algeria, Ghana and Tanzania (see the article on C.L.R. James in this issue). The leaders, from Ben Bella and Kwame Nkrumah to Sekou Toure sought a new place to pay their respects. Few stopped to ask what had gone wrong. They wiped away their tears, found that their one–time heroes had grave personal defects that had gone unobserved, and praised new leaders in other states who would lead humanity along the 'shining path'.

The obvious need to explore the nature of the societies that had spawned 'African socialism' went by default. There were few analyses of the political economies of these societies before they achieved political independence and

equally little attention was paid to the class structure of these states. Even more seriously, when the ideologue of the Algerian revolution, Franz Fanon (among others) rejected the working class as parasitic, few stood up to question this new theorist of revolution. It is as if the very premises of Marxism had been forgotten, even by those who professed to be disciples of Marx. Worse was to follow. When the 'socialist' leaders of the African states left the pre–colonial social and economic structures intact, there were few who dared to speak up. Yet, it was easy to see that the local appropriation of whatever wealth the society possessed remained in the hands of small cliques who controlled government office or filled privileged positions in society.

There is little need to add that the altered status of Benin will not alter the social structure of the country, will not lead to a redistribution of resources in the country, and will leave the people as impoverished as before. Even if some heads do roll the change from a 'Marxist–Leninist' to the new 'western-style' state will not lead to any basic transformation in the country. The class of expropriators – if not its incumbents – will remain unaltered.

Collapse in East Europe

What happened in Benin would have warranted little comment if it had not followed in the wake of events in eastern Europe. The fate of this African state would not even have been noticed and would not have found a place in the overcrowded pages of the media. But it is precisely because the dissolution of this 'socialist' state is so absurd that it has found a place alongside the momentous events of China, the Soviet Union and eastern Europe. The farce played out in Benin throws light on the real drama in the so–called communist states. The switch in government policy in this pocket state will not effect the course of world events, but it reflects, as in a distorting mirror, the votes in the parliaments of Poland and Hungary to scrap communist party control. At the same time the ending of one-party rule in Germany and Czechoslovakia mirrors the end of no–party rule in Benin.

It seems to us that the course of events in Europe, China and even Benin has left a trail of illusions – and disillusion – among socialists that needs urgent examination. To this end we start with a balance sheet of what has happened before seeking out the underlying dynamic of events. Firstly we must get the record straight. The demand for change in eastern Europe did not begin in 1989. The record of strikes and revolts, in the USSR, and then in its satellite states, extends back over many decades. Despite the silence surrounding many of these struggles their existence can no longer be denied. Strikes and riots in the USSR, uprisings in east Germany and Poland, like the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, are common knowledge. All that is new is the confessions by Soviet leaders that the use of the Soviet army to crush popular uprisings was unjustified.

It is not possible to view events in eastern Europe without looking at the developments inside the USSR. Not because everything was determined

from within the Soviet state but because the possibility of Soviet military intervention was omnipresent. In almost all the satellite countries (Yugoslavia and Albania excepted), Stalinist regimes were imposed by the Red Army at the end of the Second World War. The complete panoply of repressive agencies, perfected in the USSR were built into these states – involving secret police, judiciary and prison systems. An elaborate network of repression, ruthlessly silenced all critical thought. Some of these states were also stripped of their industries by Stalin (in the name of war reparations) and large bodies of men and women used as unskilled labourers in reconstructing the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Soviet troops were stationed in these countries, or held in readiness at the border.

The new regimes were welcomed by some sections of the population. After years of militarist or fascist control it seemed to many that a new era was in sight. However, that illusion did not last for long – despite the claims of communist parties outside eastern Europe that a new, better, society had been established. In fact the local population soon found that it had exchanged one repressive society for another. There was ample cause for resentment over the subordination to Russian demands and the presence of an arrogant occupying army. There was a deep discontent over the direction of local affairs by a bureaucracy that cravenly followed the Russian model, with its ever widening system of thought control and the familiar knock on the door at 4.0 a.m. Above all else, countries where industries had once flourished went into economic decline, the shops were emptied, farms failed to produce and social amenities declined.

There have been rumblings in many centres during the 1980s, but those that received most publicity occurred in Poland. There, against all the odds, a series of major strikes led to the formation of the trade union movement known as Solidarity. Over a decade, this union confronted the state, was illegalized, and then won back its right to exist. Now a political party with strong support from a section of the intelligentsia and the Roman Catholic heirarchy, Solidarity has taken control of the government with effects that will be discussed below.

The confrontation in Poland took place over a decade and received widespread publicity. Except for Romania, at the end of 1989, confrontations in other eastern European states were less dramatic. In several centres groups were formed to campaign for human rights under the Helsinki Charter. They were not dissimilar to the protests organized by Sakharov and others in the USSR, and leading dissidents achieved prominence in the west when they were arrested and imprisoned. But there were few signs of large scale protest, or of large followings for these campaigners. Furthermore the protesters seemed to be drawn from a limited group of people, mainly intellectuals, with no perceptible large scale following.

The focus of protest switched to China in May and June 1989. Starting as a student call for democratic reforms demonstrators were joined by workers in Beijing, Shanghai and other major cities of China. There was little coherence in a movement that mushroomed into a massive display of dis-

satisfaction. The students rallied millions in a melange of demands that ranged from calls for greater democracy to support for members of the Chinese Communist Party who wanted to open the economy to market forces. The one common factor was the disaffection of the population and the demand that privileges (for the elite) be abandoned. When it seemed that the student's led movement might prevail, at least in the cities, and an independent trade union was started, the army was called in to crush the protest. Nothing we say can bring back to life those killed by the armed forces or executed by the state. No sympathy for their fate can undo the fact that there was no real hope for a movement that was not backed by a revolutionary movement able to rally the workers and peasants on a programme and thus overthrow the existing government. Yet, despite the defeat, and despite the buckets of tears shed by the right, socialists everywhere were heartened by the spectacle of men and women in revolt.

While China shook there were struggles and strikes in the USSR, the very centre of the 'communist' world. Despite the one–time claim that socialism had been finally built, the news from the USSR indicated that there was deep discontent over the course of events. There was massive dissatisfaction, concealed behind obvious grief: after a series of man-made catastrophes: over the atomic plant in Chernobyl, the oil-pipe explosion and the train crash in central Russia, the collapse of poorly built houses in Armenia following the earthquake. There were demands for food and there were bread riots, calls for the end of privileges for the few, attacks on corruption at the centre of the party. Arising alongside these complaints, and growing out of the miserable conditions inside the USSR, there were ethnic riots, nationalist irredentism, religious rivalries. Despite all previous claims that such matters had been peacefully settled (by the beneficent Stalin, of course), the so–called land of socialism has spawned racism and a virulent anti–semitism, religious intolerance, and inter–ethnic chauvinism.

It is against the backdrop of chronic food shortages, industrial mismanagement, faltering social services and bureaucratic inefficiency that the miner's strikes of July 1989 must be viewed. The miners declared their opposition to private enterprise, the introduction of market forces and privileges for the elite. They demanded better working conditions, more consumer goods, workers' committees, a change in personnel of Soviet and party committees and improved workers' conditions both at work and at home. These were conceded, but on condition that there would be no political demands. So successful was the regime that it was able to ban strikes in the energy industry (among others), without fulfilling most of its promises. Despite the return of the miners to work, their demands have not been honoured. There has certainly not been any transformation of the social system in the USSR even though the name Stalin has become a term of abuse in the Soviet press. The name has been condemned in order to continue the system under new management.

After this, Solidarity in Poland acquired a new momentum and protest movements in the satellite states seemed to take fire. In turn, the crowds

moved into the streets and squares of the cities of Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and then Bulgaria and Romania. People were rallied in the name of civil liberty and the church offered a focus around which organization could take place.

The only existing party in each country – all moulded in the Stalinist fashion – produced new figureheads who postured as 'reformists' and in some cases, saved many of the old state institutions. There were local variations. In Hungary the Communist Party effectively surrendered power – although its personnel continued to occupy the centre stage. In east Germany the protest took the form, initially, of a massive escape to west Germany, made possible by Hungary opening its borders and encouraging the migration. Here too, a 'reformed' hierarchy has stayed in control. In Czechoslovakia the Communist Party surrendered its leading role while its second tier leaders sought new areas in which to entrench themselves. In Bulgaria a series of changes inside the ruling party has temporarily maintained it as the leading force in the state.

Events in Romania took a more dramatic turn. In this case a regime that had been isolated inside the Warsaw pact alliance had few friends in the eastern European bloc. Its hard–line leadership (once beholden to Mao and the discredited cultural revolution and then to the 'conquerors' of Beijing) tried to stop the protests by emulating the Chinese leadership. Its utter inflexibility, and its efforts to brazen out change by the use of armed force might have worked in a different climate. However, the change that was sweeping through eastern Europe was unstoppable and the government folded when the army joined the protests. There are conflicting stories, some alleging that the revolution was in effect a coup – or at least, not quite as spontaneous as early commentators suggested. What is clear is that with the discrediting of the security police, and the shoot–out in the major cities, this has left the army in effective control of the country today

There can be little doubt that the system was rotten–ripe for change. The old leadership was corrupt; the political process was restricted to a privileged minority; the cultural and intellectual life had atrophied – or been destroyed; and the economic gap between the elite (in army, police and party and their servile followers) and the rest of the population had outstripped that in the western world.

However, the speed with which this has all happened and the glee with which the events have been greeted in the west calls for reflection. There are too many factors that do not make sense. Why, after all these decades of suppression, did the Soviet army not act? In fact, the Soviet army stationed in east Germany was told to stay in its barracks. In the same way the leadership in the USSR gave its nod to a Solidarity government in Poland, and has obviously had a hand in generating the changes in the rest of its satellite states. Was it really a sheep that assumed the shape of a wolf in days gone by? Had the Soviet army (and the dreaded secret police) suddenly discovered its humanity? Had the heirs of Stalin been converted? In the light of the 'Gorby' mania that swept through eastern European states, is it possible that the communist parties have been transformed?

Where is the USSR Going?

In seeking an answer to the questions that every socialist has been asking about events in the USSR we turned to the editorial (written by Hillel Ticktin) in the latest issue of *Critique*. In questioning the stories coming out of the USSR of a collapsing economy and of massive inflation Ticktin points out that the elite has found it useful to present this view of society in order to urge restraint on the working class and reduce subsidies on food, rent and transport. The malaise in the system does not lie in some financial crisis but in the exploitative system that is threatened by a new working class militancy. It is this that is the real crisis in the Soviet state.

Gorbachev's task is to protect the elite, satisfy their needs (for videos, computers and so on), protect the party functionaries with

> ...their summer houses, special shops, sanatoria, palatial party offices, health facilities... Gorbachev demands that the workers work harder and accept a still greater differentiation in income. The regime rails against levelling (or egalitarianism), which has never been so strong in popular consciousness as today. The reformers demand *an end* to forms of equality in pay. They demand a *differentiation* between workers and the right of the manager to manage. The workers have elected their own officials in various towns and clearly show that they want a democratic form of control over the system, which is not just cosmetic. Hitherto all concessions to workers...have been minimal, designed to incorporate rather than give control. It can now be seen why the regime needs a crisis. It needs an apparently uncontrollable problem as an enemy to be tamed by the nation as a whole.

Continuing an analysis that has been unique to *Critique*, Ticktin maintains that the elite in the USSR has few available alternatives. It cannot rule in the old way and the west cannot provide the economic aid required to pull the Soviet economy out of the quagmire. One solution is political repression while political polarisation proceeds apace. He quotes the well known Soviet socialist Kagarlitskii who writes in his 'Dialectic of Change' (*New Left Review* , No.169), of a bloc between elements of 'the technocracy' and the Stalinists who opposes democracy. At the same time they support workers against the imposition of the market. It also uses workers in its battle with nationalist or reformist forces of the centre, depending on the context. On the left, social democratic forces are trying to gain support from the workers. The reformist apparatus has based itself on the intelligentsia but finds it too vacillating. Unable to extend itself to the working class, which it has attacked almost without pause since 1985, it has a limited degree of support.

A coalition now appears to be emerging between market reformers and authoritarian Slavophiles. Such a bloc formation is problematical, but the intelligentsia is, in general, anti–democratic with a programme which is either for the market or for something akin to fascism, in the shape of the organisa-

tion, Pamiat. The Soviet elite, on the other hand, cannot fulfil the aspirations of either the workers or the intelligentsia and because it cannot work we can expect a period of repression, with a clampdown on workers' action. The elite cannot defeat the workers, but will not surrender power. The period of discontent can only intensify, with the standard of living coming under pressure and civil rights withdrawn.

If the workers do support one of the opposition groups, or found their own party, the regime will be on the verge of revolution. Ticktin writes:

> Sporadic strikes have indeed re–appeared and workers committees have established themselves in miners' areas. But the regime is now hell bent on accelerating the pace of the market reform. Something has to give.

However there are other possibilities. The USSR has already withdrawn its support and assistance to so–called national liberatory organisations and regimes. The resources that have been saved can be diverted to internal uses. In return, a grateful United States has altered its cold war rhetoric and gives verbal support to Gorbachev. In this altered climate, the USSR call for the market provided the lead to which communist parties in eastern Europe responded. They either surrendered power or made way for an alternative elite that can and will implement the market.

In Poland the Solidarity–led government has introduced measures for privatisation allowing the Polish elite and a section of the intelligentsia to acquire property and establish themselves as a capitalist class, while maintaining austerity for the working class. It will now be Solidarity's historic task to axe subsidies, supervise bankruptcies and unemployment, and stop workers organizing against unpopular measures. Social democrats in the west still have something to learn from their friends in Warsaw.

The same path has been adopted by the Hungarians, not under the aegis of another party, but through the instrument of a 'reformed' communist party. In its wake the other eastern European governments have accepted the need to take the same path – even to the extent of calling for the end to the old system where the former leadership did not move fast enough. What a remarkable scene: Hungary demanding the end to the communist regime in east Germany and opening its borders to Germans who wished to decamp; East Germany (having seen the 'light') urging the Czech leaders to follow suit; and all these states baying for the end of the control by the old–style Romanian leaders.

Of course, a huge popular groundswell led to the mass demonstrations in the streets of Leipzig, Berlin, Dresden, Prague and Bucharest. Nonetheless, even though the full story has yet to emerge, we emphasize: *the deposition of the old leaders was welcomed by those very forces that previously supported the now departed leaders*. Gorbachev has blessed the action – alongside Bush, Thatcher, Kohl and the leaders of the capitalist west. Who then has gained most from the dramatic events of 1989?

The Winners and the Losers

'What a wonderful Christmas present for the people of Romania' said Mr Kinnock in response to the news from Bucharest, thereby echoing Mrs Thatcher. Stretching in a human chain from Washington to the furthest reach of Siberia there are congratulations over the changes in Europe. From Bush, through the leaders of west Europe to the Pope in Rome and the Patriarchs of the Orthodox Church; from Lech Walesa in Poland to the trade union leaders of Great Britain; and from Ministers in the South African government who have rushed to eastern Europe to recruit skilled workers, there are mutual congratulations over the fall of the so–called communist regimes.

For these western leaders the prize seems obvious. With the departure of the old Stalinist leaders there might in some cases be an incentive for capital investment and for trade with the citizens of the 'liberated' territories. We are sceptical, but we leave it to our readers to imagine all the goodies that can be made, packed, transported and sold in the hinterland of Europe. Imagine the use to which cheap labour can be used in eastern Europe if capitalism can be made to work, and profits can be extracted for foreign investors! Precisely how the populations of the liberated states will bear the importation of western capital, western factories, western goods and food is not yet clear. But it is not hard to see more indebtedness, more inflation, more unemployment, more poverty. That is 'a wonderful Christmas present for the people.'

There is also a prize for Mr Gorbachev if these changes can only be made to work. He will have allied states who have moved into the market and this will act as a half–way house for his own tentative moves in that direction. At the same time this will act as a deterrent to different sections of the Soviet population. For some there will be a warning that they must make some movement along the road he has laid down: for others a warning that movement that is too precipitous can end by sweeping them all away. And Gorbachev's moves to welcome the changes can only assist businessmen who have not yet taken firm decisions that the USSR is safe for investment.

At a stroke, Gorbachev has overseen the removal of the apparatus in eastern Europe that might have sustained his adverseries in the *nomenklatura* in the USSR. But that is if it works. If on the other hand the events of 1989 spark off fresh discont in the USSR, a new wave of strikes, ethnic conflict and nationalist demands will destabilize the regime. At that stage will Bush and Thatcher, Kohl and Kinnock, and perhaps the Pope, rush in to prop up 'comrade' Gorbachev?

Communism and South Africa

The editors of *Searchlight South Africa* have insisted from its inception that there was no socialism in the USSR, in eastern Europe or in China. In taking this position we had no illusion that this would be widely accepted. Our viewpoint placed us in a minority – apparently isolated from popular opinion,

and seemingly unable to join with the forces of progress, not only in South Africa but across the world.

The fact that world wide events have shown us to be correct does not bring us pleasure. Every defeat, real or apparent, acts against the people's struggle for socialism and devalues the ideals of humankind. We must expect that in the coming period there will be a retreat from the very idea of socialism and that communism will be, for many, a dirty word.

Yet, despite the inevitable swing in public opinion after the massacres in China and Romania, the abdication of the communist parties of Poland and Hungary, and the collapse of the governments in east Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, there is one positive gain: the myths of Stalinism and of Maoism have been exploded. They are known to have been monstrous lies imposed on the working class movement. The question must now be faced by every member of the ANC and the Communist Party in South Africa: are they prepared to cast aside the Stalinism that has haunted the left for nearly 70 years? By the same token, is the PAC (and its associated movements) prepared to shed the discredited conception of one-party statism that it inherited via Stalinism from the ideologues of Pan–Africanism? And will those groups that are associated with, or grew out of, the Unity Movement recognize that past acceptance of events in eastern Europe or Asia rendered them equally guilty in relation to the states they endorsed?

We are not only asking a question – but calling on every thinking person to decide now how they believe their organization must respond to the shattering events of 1989. In making this declaration they must also grasp the fact that the struggle in Southern Africa is not isolated from events elsewhere in the world. The SACP always carried a commitment to the policies of the USSR – despite the fact that they did not argue as internationalists. Similarly, other political movements have always linked their struggles to events elsewhere, whether it was in Africa, in the so–called Third World, the Non–Aligned countries, or any other alliance of states.

While we write we notice the posturing of Mr Mugabe in Zimbabwe. Despite the crumbling of his ideas about him he still talks of a one–party state, of a Marxist–Leninist state. Citizens in his state still use the title 'Comrade' as a personal–handle in communication. All this in a land of gross inequality and widespread poverty. Are there no persons in this country able to stand up and challenge this farce before it too crumbles and brings further disillusionment to the people of Zimbabwe?

It will take time and it will take courage for socialists to face up to the lessons that must be drawn from the debacle of Stalinism.. It will also be difficult for people in the former colonial states, in Africa, Latin America and Asia, to stand up and say that the model, copied by their movements and their leaders from the USSR, was wrong. It might take an even longer time before such movements can meet and remove every sign of authoritarian control – but this is the message that must be drawn from the events of 1989. The martyrdom of so many thousands of people, in whatever part of the world, must be taken as the price that has been paid by humanity to secure a new

international movement, dedicated to the construction of democratic socialism.

For those who wish to draw a positive message from the events of 1989 there will have to be much serious thinking. There will have to be a reassessment of their understanding of the nature of the Soviet Union and/or China. For those who have stayed loyal to the Soviet regime – and none have been more loyal than the South African Communist Party – there must be an end to the brainless chanting of slogans and repetition of stupid lies. The eulogies to leaders must be replaced with critical appraisal of what has been done, and what achieved. The history of the left must be rediscovered and hidden pages exposed for all to see and there must be a serious reconsideration of political principles. It is not enough to 'rehabilitate' those who were killed or driven to their death as was done to S.P. Bunting, Lazar Bach and the Richter brothers. In fact the very thought of such rehabilitation is sickening. If past crimes are to be wiped out there must be a reconsideration of what went wrong and why members of the Communist Party allowed such activities to go unanswered. Until that is done there can be no understanding of what went wrong in the USSR, in eastern Europe and China.

The illusion that a socialist society can emerge without such searching must become a thing of the past. It is the task of the revolutionary movement to examine and re-examine every step taken in the struggle for socialism. This is a mighty project which will demand the labour of workers, peasants and intellectuals everywhere.

Stalinism and Maoism are dead. Their shrouds must be buried.

ADVERTISEMENT

YOURS FOR THE UNION: CLASS AND COMMUNITY STRUGGLES IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1930–47, by Baruch Hirson, Zed Books. Special pre-publication offer to Subscribers £6.00 (incl p&p), from *Searchlight South Africa*. The publishers now advise that the book should be available by March 1990.

A major new history of the Black working class in South Africa, covering the years from the end of the depression to the collapse of the general strike, by Black miners, in 1946. Set against the background of expanding industry and the Second World War, this is the first account of the workers and organizers who built the Council of Non–European Trade Unions; and of the men and women who conducted major campaigns to improve living conditions in the black townships. Among the personalities discussed are trade union organizers Dan Koza and Max Gordon, Naboth Mokgatle and Mike Muller, and hitherto unknown workers who tried to organize the work force around them. The title of this book is taken from the greeting of one such individual, Willie Bosiame.

The workers fought a many sided struggle: for higher wages and better working conditions; against police harassment; against rising transport costs; for better housing; and also against the deterioration of conditions in the rural areas in which they still had roots. In this history of organization and struggle, the events covered include the Vereeniging riot of 1937; the strike wave during the war and the bus boycotts and shanty town movements. There are also accounts of the struggles against the implementation of the land laws in the Zoutpansberg, and the campaign to remove educational control from unsympathetic missionaries in the Bethanie district.

The author participated in some of the events recorded in this book, but only includes accounts that are backed by documentary evidence. In reading the documents of the time he was struck by the relevance of much of that experience to events today. The attempt at building a working class movement in the 1940s is as pertinent to contemporary South Africa as it was in those days of global warfare.

During a long career of political involvement Baruch Hirson has been a political organizer; a lecturer in Physics and in History; a political prisoner. He is the author of Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt (Zed Press, 1979).

FINANCIAL SANCTIONS AND THE FUTURE OF SOUTH AFRICA

Paul Trewhela

Cassius: The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.
Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, I,ii.

The Economic Boycott

Politics has its own logic. Therefore, it is only consistent that the sanctions campaign of the African National Congress (ANC)and the South African Communist Party (SACP) should have ended up where it was always directed, in the hands of capital. And not only capital in general, but capital in the guiding nucleus of modern society, the banks.

The call for action by the banks against the South African economy has been in existence for many years. The End Loans To Southern Africa (ELTSA) campaign, with support especially among the Protestant churches in western Europe, grew out of the Anti–Apartheid Movement (AAM) in the early 1970s. ELTSA saw it as a famous victory when Barclays, formerly the bank with biggest holdings in South Africa, sold its entire stake in 1986 (to the Oppenheimer empire) after a campaign lasting 17 years.

By contrast with the 1960s and 1970s when the ANC called mainly for an international consumer, sports and cultural boycott, as well as disinvestment by foreign capital, the decisive practical role in the sanctions campaign now lies with world financial capital. The shift represents a change in kind, a qualitative moment of transition revealing the class character of the ANC and the anatomy of South African society as this is being shaped by international conditions.[1]

This first official boycott of trade by an external government was imposed in 1946 by the Congress Party in India, outraged by the 'Pegging' Act which discriminated against the Indian community in South Africa. It grew out of several decades of Ghandian politics in both South Africa and India and had a formative influence on the ANC, but did not prevent South African gold from flowing into India.

Calls for consumer boycotts in South Africa were initiated in the late 1950s by the Congress movement. These were directed against manufacturers of cigarettes and canned fish as representatives of so–called 'Afrikaner capital' in the illusion that it was principally this that was represented by the National Party government. Effectively this was to signal to the Oppenheimer interests, then and now the dominant core of capital in South Africa, that a rapprochement between big capital and the ANC was open for discussion. The first calls for economic sanctions were succeeded in 1959 by the ANC's potato

boycott, aimed at improving the appalling conditions of labour – under the whip, and under a prison regime – in the Bethal region of the Transvaal. The boycott threw light on conditions on the farms; the worst excesses were temporarily curbed; but it altered nothing basic. Through the late 1950s there was debate on the efficacy of boycotts: economic, cultural and political. Then in 1960, after Sharpeville, Chief Luthuli called for an international economic boycott. This led to the sanctions campaign abroad, principally with the passive form of consumer boycott in mind, derived from the experience of the 1950s.

The General Assembly of the United Nations voted for extensive economic sanctions in November 1962. Thereafter an international conference on Economic Sanctions against South Africa was called in London by the ANC and the British AAM with Ronald Segal as convenor. Delegates came from Stalinist states and countries in Africa and Asia, and unofficial delegates from other countries. Its resolutions looked mainly to the executive decision of states and local government bodies, or moral gestures on the part of individuals and strikes by workers against handling South African goods.

From these beginnings grew the current campaign for financial sanctions, which differs significantly in character from the international boycott proposed in 1964. Complete trade sanctions, in the words of the recommendations of the conference, provided 'the only effective means of intervention short of military intervention' (Segal, p.271). The slight difficulty of effecting a 'cessation' of gold sales from South Africa, at a time when the country supplied world economy with 70% of all newly mined gold outside the Stalinist states, was dismissed with the idea that it would be 'perfectly feasible for the appropriate United Nations agency to make credit available to offset any loss of world liquidity' (Segal, p.249). If it was faith in the magical powers of credit that characterized the supporters of sanctions at that time, it is faith in the benificent nature of the banks as providers of credit which marks the ANC campaign today.

With the Sanction of Finance

The central place of financial capital in the ANC's current sanctions politics was made clear last August by executive member Aziz Pahad in Canberra, at the meeting of the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa (CFMSA), a committee in which Britain does not participate. It was affirmed in October by the ANC delegation to the Commonwealth heads of government meeting at Kuala Lumpur, and endorsed also by the Pan Africanist Congress, which on the issue of sanctions has never had any major difference with the ANC. It was also approved – most important of all – by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), represented at Canberra by a member of its executive and general secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), Moses Mayekiso.

Formerly a leader of the left wing of the unions, Mayekiso was acquitted of treason charges last year. He spoke at conference as a representative of the Mass Democratic Movement, a loose alliance of organizations attached to the ANC and successor to the banned United Democratic Front, but with one crucial difference: the MDM was dependent as the UDF never was on the social weight of the trade unions in Cosatu. This was because only the unions, despite loss of membership, preserved their organizations intact through the regime's state of emergency. Never before has the ANC been so dependent on the black trade unions, but never since the 1950s – when the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) promoted the aims of the ANC and the SACP within the country – have the unions been so dependent on political direction from the ANC.

Besides Mayekiso, the CFMSA also invited the former treasurer of the UDF, Azar Cachalia, who did not attend because the government refused him a passport: retribution for having urged financial sanctions as part of a UDFmission in July to the US and Britain. Cachalia stated later that that the UDF had asked Bush and Thatcher 'for three kinds of financial pressure: no rescheduling of debts, no new loans and denial of trade credit' (*Guardian*, 9 August 1989). The same demands had been urged on Bush in Washington earlier in the year by the religious leaders Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak, Frank Chikane and Beyers Naude.

Cachalia's three points sum up the demand for financial sanctions agreed at Canberra. The CFMSA was committed to pressurizing governments, banks and international financial institutions for: (a) restriction of trade credits for South Africa to 90 days; (b) a ban on insurance cover by official export credit agencies; (c) strict enforcement of adequate provision by banks for loan loss; (d) immediate payment to the banks of outstanding balances due for re-negotiation and other debts maturing by June 1990; (e) imposition of the highest possible interest rates on South African debt; and (f) approaches to Japan, other countries of the Pacific rim, West Germany and Switzerland, which have increased their trade with South Africa in proportion as the United States has cut back its own. The CFMSA further proposed a permanent inter-governmental body to monitor a ban on medium and long-term lending to South Africa. Decisions on further action were to be made by the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

Just when the demand for no rescheduling of debt was due to be made at Kuala Lumpur, the South African government announced an agreement with the creditor banks, recycling payments of $8 billion from mid-1990 until the end of 1993. With this agreement the campaign for further tightening of financial sanctions received a setback. The first, and most important, of the three kinds of financial pressure sought by Cachalia and the ANC fell away. On the second of these three points, the British government represented by Mrs Thatcher assented in a joint Commonwealth statemen that there be no new loans, only to issue a disclaimer an hour later reiterating its opposition to sanctions in general. The third of Cachalia'a three demands – denial of trade credit, beyond a maximum of 90 days – was agreeed, also excepting

Britain. Again with the exception of Britain, the meeting accepted the Australian government's offer of 'substantial initial funding' to set up a body to review and report on South Africa's international financial links, as the CFMSA had proposed. The British government's opposition rendered the exercise more complex and contradictory, since while the CFMSA was committed to a full programme of financial sanctions, Britain was the only Commonwealth country in a serious position to apply them.

The Banks as Liberators

Every proposal for financial sanctions against South Africa now seeks to generalize and intensify measures already taken by the US banks themselves. Headed by the Chase Manhattan Bank, US financial capital imposed financial sanctions on South Africa in July–August 1985 at the height of the township revolt, by means of a block on further credits and the demand for the return of outstanding loans. The banking system took these measures for the same reason that it has taken all credit restriction measures internationally since the Mexican debt crisis of 1982: to recoup principal and interest on outstanding loans and to limit further risk, by all–round reduction of exposure in zones of political and economic upheaval. The immediate result in South Africa was a very serious financial crisis, forcing the government to declare a moratorium on payments and the present currency controls involving a two–tier system for exchange of the rand.

These sanctions by US financial capital, resulting in some 250 banks internationally being caught in the South African government's moratorium, are the only really serious measures so far directed against the South African economy. As the CFMSA reported in a statement issued in Toronto on 3 August 1988, the refusal of banks to lend to South Africa has been

> the most significant sanction in restricting economic growth through forcing large capital account deficits to repay maturing loans, and requiring corresponding current account surpluses (*South Africa's Relation with the International Financial System*, p.ix)

This is still the position, following the debt rescheduling agreement in October. Pressure on South Africa's balance of payments remains severe. Shortage of capital will continue to impose constraints. Total foreign debt stands at $21.6 billion, the equivalent of one year's total exports. Some $15 billion of foreign debt has been repaid following the debt standstill in 1985, with a further $10 billion leaving through other channels. Last year the country made net transfer to foreign banks estimated at $3-3.5 billion, and will continue to export capital at the current rate (*Financial Times*, 20 October 1989).

Mitigated only by export of rare minerals to the world market (principally gold, but also platinum, chrome, vanadium), as well as sales of diamonds,

which last year increased in rand terms by 50 percent (AAC, 1989), these financial sanctions imposed the same austere conditions on South Africa as measures imposed on other countries by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the banks during the 1980s. The banking system compels these societies to transfer capital abroad to the most powerful axes of world financial power, at the same time accelerating legal and illegal capital flight.[2] This capital transfer is achieved by generating a huge surplus of exports over imports, by depression of the living standards of the masses and by general lowering of the level of capitalist development through reduction in import of new technical equipment. It represents naked tribute to financial capital from hundreds of millions of the poorest people on earth, and is one of the dominant characteristics of world economy of the 1980s.

At the opposite pole in world economy, this relation finds expression in net import of commodities and capital into the US and Britain, financed by 'hot' money borrowed short term at very high rates of interest. These world relations of debt and finance are the general context to which any campaign of financial sanctions is subject, and it is to this system that the ANC and SACP have subordinated their international political campaign. The high interest rates by which the US finances its trade and budget deficits, through foreign loans, above all from Japan, are the prime means by which the people of the 'third world' are thrust deeper into the abyss. Albeit for special reasons, South Africa now shares the fate of the damned. What is not investigated by supporters of the ANC is the place of South Africa's debt crisis in the wider context of the debt crisis of the system, with the political leverage this gives banks and the major bourgeois states in the event of a negotiated settlement.

The Banks, the Treasury and the ANC

The action of the banks in July–August 1985, setting in motion the sole effective process of economic sanctions so far, was a measure by capital in its own defence against a future threatened loss. All other forms of economic sanctions against the South African regime, advocated by the ANC, the SACP and the AAM, have not had any decisive effect politically because they were urged generally at variance with the needs of capital. While South Africa remained a source of substantial profit they were anomalous to capitalist world economy, and thus at best tangential. Financial sanctions are an affair of a different order, since here the agent is the ruling element in modern capital – its cerebral cortex – acting on its own behalf, in its own interest, and acting towards longer rather than short term ends. What the banks require are political changes in South Africa that can assure them of future safety for their investments, and a safe field for future investment. While through the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s it was the ANC that was anomalous to the needs of capital, by 1985 the township revolt together with the mobilization of the trade unions made plain to the banks that what is anomalous is the apartheid regime. Identical measures would be taken against a future government, if the banks considered it necessary.

The Bush administration is therefore merely answering to the needs of capital, made explicit by the banks, when it declares through the new assistant secretary of state for African affairs, Herman Cohen, that it seeks 'a negotiated non–violent transition to a new constitutional system' (*Weekly Mail*, 3 August 1989). Cohen gives the new administration of President de Klerk two years to make the transition (*Weekly Mail*, 27 July 1989). That is what the banks seek.

The convergence of real practical bank sanctions and the agitation of the ANC for financial sanctions marks its co–option into the political operations of world capital. Outside the environs of Mrs Thatcher, it is hard to discover who does not either support or threaten to support their extension. Congresses of bishops and the Trade Union Congress, the UN and the Communist Parties, radical leftists and the far–seeing right: all look to the agency of money–dealing capital to undo what money–dealing capital set in place at the founding of modern South Africa, in the period of Rhodes and Rothschild. At that time, when the old Boer republics stood in the way of the development of capital, the City of London took southern Africa by the scruff of the neck and shoved it violently into the required shape. The present troubles in South Africa are the result of the social order set in place at that time, supervised by a centralized apparatus of coercion constructed under the immediate supervision of finance capital. The USSR now lines up with the US to enforce the motion of no–confidence passed on the apartheid regime by the banks in August 1985. Their joint political operations recall the moralizing coercion of British finance capital in 1899, which like world capital today, clothed its own self–interest in the language of concern at the exclusion of a section of the population from the vote. It used to be said: *Ex Africa, semper aliquid novo* (Out of Africa, always something new). It would be more appropriate to reply: The more things change, the more they remain the same.

It is significant that the thinking behind the campaign for financial sanctions is not the work of South Africans, and does not result at all from the labours of the ANC, the SACP, the AAM, the UDF, the MDM, Cosatu or any of the organizations that have promoted sanctions politics over the years. The most professional draft of the new ANC policy was invented for it by state technocrats from three bourgeois countries, including two which in 1988 ranked third and fourth as world gold producers after South Africa.[3]

These two states, Australia and Canada, together with India, provided officials from their treasury ministries to assist a senior aide to the Australian prime minister, Bob Hawke, in drawing up the earliest draft of a serious programme for financial sanctions (*Weekly Mail*, 24 August 1989). Its leading author, A.S. Cole, is assistant first secretary of the Economic and Policy Division of the Australian prime minister, and previously alternate executive director of the World Bank in Washington. He was assisted by Terry O'Brien, head of the the resources and finance banch of the Office of National Assessments, Australia; Anthony F. Burger, director of the international finance and development section of the Department of Finance, Canada; Bethany Armstrong of the Department of External Affairs, Canada; and K.L.

Deshpande, an adviser in the Department of Economic Analysis and Policy of the Reserve Bank of India. This study was initiated at the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Vancouver in October 1987, when the CFMSA was also established. Terms of reference were agreed by the CFMSA at Lusaka in February 1988. The finished report, under the title *South Africa's Relationship with the International Financial System*, was submitted to the CFMSA in Toronto in August 1988.

In its insight into the operation of modern capitalism, the report of this financial state cabal was qualitatively superior to anything coming out of the ANC and SACP or their various liberal and left supporters: hardly surprising, since it represents a serious policy study of the bourgeoisie, by the bourgeoisie, for the bourgeoisie. The ANC/SACP was required merely to accede to the findings and policy recommendations of this statist think–tank of capital.

Known as the Cole report, the document presents valuable statistical and factual material on its subject. The CFMSA backed its findings and moved the initiative be taken further. This report formed the framework for the Commonwealth discussions in Canberra and Kuala Lumpur, where Hawke was greatly assisted by having Cole to advise him in presenting his five–point plan for extension of sanctions. The Cole report guides equally the campaign of the ANC, the MDM and the men of God. Only after the submission of this report in August 1988 did the first whisper of the present programme of financial sanctions come from Tutu, Boesak and Cachalia, who appear to have been briefed (from above?) in the interim.

The report had a further rebirth in the form of a book completed last June and published shortly afterwards by Penguin Australia, written by Cole with assistance from a New Zealand journalist, Keith Ovenden. Intended for wider distribution as part of the international campaign by the ANC and the AAM, the book, *Apartheid and International Finance: A Programme for Change*, is a rewrite of the Cole report, with some updated material. Chapter four on 'The Financial Crisis of 1985 and Beyond' is particularly informative. Lucid on South Africa's financial crisis, like the earlier report it is uncritical and unhistorical in relation to the overall development of world capitalist conditions. The book originates from an undertaking by the Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade at the third CFMSA conference in Harare last February to make the Cole report available 'to a larger audience'. Ovenden and Cole state in the introduction that publication was 'made possible by the Australian federal government' (p.11).

A Turning Point

A turning point is reached in South African politics when, instead of trying to influence the policy of the bourgeois governments, as before, the ANC becomes the medium for distribution of the policy thinking of the banks and the treasuries of various bourgeois states. Australia, which provided troops

so that mining capital could take command at the turn of the century, now offers its services to eliminate the racist forms through which capital has operated in South Africa ever since.

The imprimatur of the Commonwealth appears also on another document on financial sanctions drawn up with the assistance of eight academics including Auret van Heerden and Colin Stoneman, and headed by a US financial journalist with close ties to the AAM, Joseph Hanlon. This document originated also with the CFMSA and returned to it at the August conference in Canberra. Its full title is the *Independent Expert Study on the Evaluation of the Application and Impact of Sanctions. Final Report to the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa*, better known as the Hanlon report. Published commercially in Britain under the title *South Africa: The Sanctions Report*, it was on sale in time for the heads of government meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

The Hanlon report is a remarkable document, since by tracking alongside the recomendations of the Cole report, it abandons a central tenet in Hanlon's previous argument from as recently as 1987: that boycott of South Africa's gold production 'holds the key to any sanctions campaign' (*The Sanctions Handbook*, p.255). By contrast, the Hanlon report now avoids recommending any major campaign of sanctions on gold, despite this having been agreed as a priority at the previous annual general meeting of the British AAM, and having entered into policy calls by the ANC and the PAC. The compilers of the report state that there are 'a number of difficulties' about sanctions on South Africa's gold production which persuaded them 'to not include it in the first targeted package'. Somewhat lamely, the report argues that nevertheless a practical gold sanction 'could be developed', and is even 'promising'. But wisely that mystery is left to itself (Hanlon et al, 1989b, pp.175, 163).

I made a critical examination of the delusory nature of Hanlon's argument concerning sanctions on gold in *Searchlight South Africa*, No.2 (February 1989). The Cole report makes clear that a boycott of South Africa's gold would be extremely difficult to implement. Treasury officials are not permitted to forget, like some ideologists, that the world's monetary authorities 'attach considerable importance to their gold holdings' (Cole, et al., 1988, p.69). As the Cole report explains:

> A decline in the price of gold would affect the value of gold reserves held both by industrial and developing countries; it would also affect the revenues of several gold producers [not least, Australia, Canada, the US and the USSR] With so many potentially substantial losers, it is unlikely that this option would receive wide international support. Another likely objection to the proposal is the disruptive effect a large fall in gold prices would have on the international financial system.
>
> Because there is no way to distinguish new South African gold from old South African gold or gold produced elsewhere, an embargo on new South African gold is not practicable. Nor is it expected that major

> official holders of gold would be prepared to sell their gold stocks for the purpose on hand...Central banks are unlikely to put their gold stocks on the market in face of the risk that the scheme would push prices down, reducing not only the proceeds from sales but also the value of remaining stocks.
>
> Thus, no option to reduce South Africa's earnings from gold looks practical at this stage (pp.69–70).

Since then a modest rise in gold price has further undermined Hanlon's argument of 1987, in part because of central bank discussions in Moscow concerning a possible return of the ruble to a gold base.

Hanlon and the other independent experts have been compelled to acknowledge the cold winds of reality blowing from the boardroom of the Chase Manhattan and the treasuries of Australia, Canada and India, albeit reluctantly. Compared with the report of the treasury whizz-kids, the Hanlon document remains oriented to the older ANC/AAM outlook concentrating on commodity sanctions, is more ideological and carries less weight as an inquiry into the actual place of South Africa within world capitalist relations. By avoiding the crucial dimension of finance capital, it emerged stillborn. The Cole report joins the serious literature on the political economy of South Africa; the Hanlon report will more likely prove ephemeral, aside from an appendix containing nearly fifty pages of trade statistics up to 1987.

In one respect, however, the Hanlon report is very revealing. Sanctions, it says, are directed towards bringing into existence 'a large group of white moderates favouring negotiations'. This is crucial. The perspective is bluntly stated:

> Sanctions are a diplomatic tool. They are a spur to the negotiating process, not an alternative to it. The ultimate goal of sanctions is political – to promote negotiation. The intermediate goal is to create a growing group of [clearly, white] people who will press for genuine talks, and thus help to build a lobby for negotiations.

The inner relation of financial sanctions to the politics of the bourgeoisie is repeated in a further sentence: 'Sanctions are essential to create a lobby for negotiations...' (*Final Report*, p.ii). Curiously, in explaining this 'essential' relation, the commercial edition of the report omits these frank words on the pivotal place of 'white moderates' in the Commonwealth strategy.

The original version of the report thus suggests that financial sanctions are advocated, and endorsed by the CFMSA, principally for the purpose of strengthening a white party such as the Democratic Party in the racist electoral system. Through the presence of the former Anglo American director Zach de Beer in its leading triumvirate, the Democratic Party bears a direct relation to the central nucleus of South African capital.

There is a symbiotic relation between agitation for financial sanctions and the politics of capital, which emerges clearly – too clearly, for some – in the

Hanlon report. With its eye on transforming white politics in South Africa within 'moderate' (i.e. bourgeois) limits, the Hanlon report – promoted by the ANC/SACP and the MDM – thus repeats the orientation of the former Progressive and United Parties, under changed conditions.

Masters of the Globe

Debt is a weapon to bring political and social change, in this conception. Historically debt has played a very radical role in different periods. It reduced the free Roman peasantry to propertyless proletarians and subverted the feudal gentry. In the 1980s, the relation between debt–ridden countries and global finance capital has features in common with the relation between the main bourgeois countries and the primary–producing countries in the 1920s. Between 1925 and 1929, a process of 'structural deflation occurred in the world primary–product economy', which in turn 'imposed a kind of structural deflation on the system' (Kindlebergerpp.92-93). That is, the great depression of the 1930s was preceded by a general ruin of the primary producing countries, especially those dependent on agricultural exports, including grain producers in South Africa. This was the real beginning of the great depression, spreading from the periphery of world economy to the centre, from the country to the city. Similarly, the debt crisis of the 'third world' in the 1980s is related through the role of the bank lending to the debt crisis of the 'first world', expressed most vividly in bank exposure to debt-based 'junk–bonds' in the US. An enormous inflation of debt by the banks throughout the system over the past 15 years is the common denominator at each pole of world economy. By their advocacy of financial sanctions, a relationship in which coercive power is exercised by the banks through debt, the ANC and the SACP thus relate uncritically to the tendency to mass pauperization in the system as a whole. This is the real content to their policy of economic sanctions.

Within South Africa, the coercive measures of the US banks have stimulated a severe rise in inflation amounting to over 40 percent on various foodstuffs, since reliance on gold exports has compelled the country's monetary authorities (the Reserve Bank) to depreciate the rand in order to maximize income from gold earnings. Simultaneously the Bank has cut imports in order to conserve revenue from exports, for repayment to the banks (Hirsch). With gold price falling at times to less than $360 per oz, and by relative and actually rising costs of production reinforced by record world supplies from other countries with lower production costs, the burden of maintaining rand income to gold–mining capital, is thus carried by the mass of the population: principally by the black workers, urban unemployed and rural poor, but now extending to sections of the white workers.

The debt strategy of the ANC/SACP is as foolish as it is hostile to the needs of the majority of the people. If the position of capital in South Africa is relatively fragile, under pressure by the US banks, so is the position of the US

banks themselves under pressure of their own system. It is not without irony that Chase Manhatten, which initiated the crisis of August 1985 for the South African economy, is second most at risk in the US in total exposure to 'third world' and junk–bond lending (*Financial Times*, 20 September 1989). Australia, whose government provides the intellectual general staff for use of debt as a weapon in South Africa, is similarly wounded by its own artillery: a secret government report by the country's Economic and Planning Advisory Council warns that at least 20 of the largest companies are dangerously in debt (*Guardian*, 18 November 1989). This applies not least to the Bond Corporation, owned by interests close to prime minister. Even the IMF, at the pinnacle of post-war financial capital, is $2.1 billion in arrears, the result of interest payments being suspended by a number of debtor countries (*Financial Times*, 23 September 1989).

Yet it is in the hands of the IMF that the politics of the ANC must end. The ANC could not be expected to be forthcoming on such a subject. It is possible, however, to read the logic of the relation binding sanctions politics to the IMF from other sources. The official statement issued at Kuala Lumpur (and supported by Britain) called on

> appropriate international institutions, and in particular the International Monetary Fund, to examine how resources might be mobilized upon evidence of clear and irreversible change [in South Africa] (*Financial Times*, 23 October).

In essence the IMF is thus urged by the Commonwealth (including Britain) to continue financial sanctions in force since 1983, when standby credits for help in balance of payments difficulties – of which South Africa like many other countries has made use – became no longer available, on political/economic grounds. The Commonwealth decision to approach the IMF for a package of loans conditional upon political changes arose out of the five–point proposal by Hawke. This sought to exert new forms of financial pressure by exploring the possibility of the IMF developing a major supportive financial package for South Africa, with its implementation made contingent on structural political reform of a kind that could reasonably guarantee the economic stability of the country in the future (*Financial Times*, 20 October).

Loans contingent on 'structural political reform' that will 'guarantee economic stability'...this is what the IMF is all about, as the workers of Chile learnt to their cost in the 1970s when the state was subverted (in the interest of 'stability') by the army. The campaign for financial sanctions is actually directed not towards eliminating oppressive social relations but towards stabilizing capitalist social relations, during and after changes of form of social administration. A major objective is to ward off any serious effort by the proletariat – so obviously the strongest class in the society – in the direction of socialism.

The ANC and the IMF

This specific location of an open, public role for the IMF in the sanctions campaign is new. When the campaign was first put on a serious footing, at the London conference in 1964, individual experts did foresee a role for the IMF in making funds available to the US and Britain to compensate these countries if they took economic measures against the South African regime (Segal, pp.185,195). The concluding report which looked to the cessation of South African gold sales expected it would be perfectly feasible for 'the appropriate United Nations agency' to issue enough credit to 'offset any loss of world liquidity' (p.249). This can only refer to the IMF. But what is instructive is the absence of any reference to the IMF directly in relation to South Africa in the commission report, or in the resolution adopted by the final plenary conference, which referred only to 'all specialized international...bodies' (p.273).

In 1964, of course, it would have been highly embarrassing for the SACP and the British Communist Party – which had members on the steering committee – as well as for Stalinist states represented officially at the conference, if it had explicitly called on the IMF to assist in bringing change in South Africa. Stalinists at that time spent a lot of energy pointing (correctly, in fact) to the nature of the IMF as the policeman of world capital. To have called openly for IMF assistance in the final conference documents would have opened them to charges of hypocrisy and reformism. Now that these states are dismantling certain forms of state property and are themselves applying for membership of the Fund, the SACP and the ANC are less squeamish and a little more honest about the actual destination of their own politics. That does not stop the campaign from being a swindle on the workers of South Africa, who in the main do not know that they are being sold to capital by their leaders.

The IMF's likely future role in South Africa was noted by Vishnu Padayachee in a paper delivered in September/October 1986. Without referring specifically to the ANC and the SACP, Padayachee foresaw that the IMF 'with all its power to open and close aid and loan "doors"' would be a 'signifiant though unseen part of any Western package deal' on South Africa (Suckling and White, p.193).

It is a measure of how rapidly the programme for a bourgeois change in southern Africa has advanced that the role of the IMF, which Padayachee in 1986 still thought would be unseen, is now spelt out publicly, albeit not to the workers. The Cole report gives an informative account of South Africa's present and historical relation with the IMF, noting that it is 'extremely unlikely' that South Africa will be able to draw further credits from the IMF under the present regime (p.5). But it makes no recommendation on any future role for the IMF. (The Hanlon report makes no mention at all of the IMF in its list of thirty proposed actions, or in the index of the resulting book).

Although lacking the comprehensive detail of the Cole report, Padayachee's study goes beyond it in making a critical examination of this crucial element in the relation of South Africa to world finance capital. He shows that from 1945 to 1983 the relation of the IMF to the South African regime was 'rather cozy' (p.193). In particular, he points out how IMF credits to South Africa 'helped to steady foreign bank creditors' in 1960/61 and 1976/77 after the police shootings at Sharpeville and Soweto. In the immediate aftermath to the massacre in Soweto, he notes:

> the IMF [balance of payments] assistance to South Africa for the two years 1976/77 was greater than the combined IMF assistance to all other countries for the same period. In those two years only two other countries, Britain and Mexico, were bigger beneficiaries of IMF aid [of all kinds] (p.194).

South Africa again received an IMF standby loan to assist in balance of payments difficulties as late as mid–1982, though for cosmetic reasons this were not announced at the time.

Dealing with the 'mixed economy' model of a post-apartheid South Africa as envisaged by the ANC (though he leaves this unsaid), Padayachee examines its problems and contradictions. Noting the experience of Jamaica, and Portugal, where political and economic crises paved the way for intervention of the IMF, he analyses the abstract logic of breakdown inherent in the programme of a popular nationalist government of the type likely to involve the ANC. Especially in a period of acute balance of payments problems, he writes:

> international financial pressure increases for a 'reform' of this national/popular development strategy as a precondition for investment and loans that will be more acceptable to the West, the IMF and consequently the international banks. Under this pressure such a government – however strong its commitment to the well-being of the masses – may have little option but to grant even greater powers to the bourgeoisie. It may have to free markets, to freeze wages, to reduce subsidies on food, etc. – in general, to make the turn to the right that spells the end of national sovereignty, involves the capitulation to Western capitalist interests and ensures defeat for the goals and strategies of this development model. There are no glib solutions for overcoming these enormous difficulties in dealing with an inherently antagonistic Western controlled international economic system (p.199).

For this reason, he writes, the IMF may very well form 'an integral part of the formidable weaponry available to the West in shaping the emergence, nature and development of a post-apartheid South Africa', involving 'immense negative implications' for the needs and demands of the working class and the mass of the people (pp.202, 201). It is not necessary to share every formulation in Padayachee's conception to recognize the truth of this

analysis, which is all the more striking because he locates the breakdown of an ANC–type model of development through the working out of its own dialectic. As *Searchlight South Africa* stressed in an editorial on 'The "Post-Apartheid" Society' (February 1989), the future of the country will be determined by the way in which apartheid is ended. If the banks and the IMF play a major part in ending apartheid, their influence will be decisive in the subsequent society. It is a merit in Padayachee's thoughtful paper that he sees no easy solution, 'short of a fundamental change in the nature of power relations in the world economy' (p.202).

Analytical thinking of this kind in South Africa is rare indeed. Proposals that envisage placing the people in the hands of the IMF should be put to the test through critical study of the fate of those African countries placed under its 'trusteeship' during the 1980s. Advocates of financial sanctions should be confronted with the appalling reality that emerges in the recent two–volume collection on *The IMF, the World Bank and the African Debt*, edited by Badi Onimode. In a paper on 'The Bretton Woods System and Africa', Laurence Harris – one of the few writers not to succumb to romance on the subject of sanctions on gold – reaches a conclusion similar to Padayachee. Looking at the desperate crisis in which the continent has fallen under the *Diktat* of the IMF, he stresses the 'need to change the international system...' (p.24). This may be interpreted from a reformist or revolutionary viewpoint. Harris's paper has the merit, however, like Padayachee's, of turning South African eyes to the nature of the world system determining South African conditions. Unlike the ANC and the SACP, which invite the people to put their heads in the noose, Padayachee and Harris each discover general world tasks lying at the heart of the question of the relation between finance capital and modern Africa.

Gleichschaltung in the Unions

Ultimately it is the future of the workers in South Africa that is under examination. Nowhere is discussion of these questions so urgent as in the unions, yet it is here that discussion has now become extremely difficult. The ANC has passed from the patronage of the USSR into the US sphere of interest. Its guiding policy in international affairs has in the last resort become that of the IMF and theUS banks, the real authors of 'financial sanctions'. In aligning themselves with this politics, the leaders of Cosatu, and in particular Mayekiso, have become the means of transmission of the politics of the banks within the proletariat. There has never been so little room in the unions for views critical of the ANC, and thus by implication of finance capital. As in the days of the Popular Front in Spain, stalinization of the unions is advanced hand in hand with their liberal policy towards capital. The perspective of the banks and the treasury ministries now has massive support, via the ANC and the SACP, in the organized working class. This is the central question in South Africa today. It represents the political alignment of the workers with the heirs of Cecil Rhodes.

The content of the policy of financial sanctions, as advanced by the leaders of Cosatu, can be seen in practice in a very major step already taken by the National Union of Mineworkers, the biggest union in the country (and no doubt, in the continent). In sharp contrast to manufacturing industry in which the workers had to form their own unions before compelling recognition from the employers, the compound system on the mines was virtually impregnable to union organization until a strategic political decision was taken by mining capital. The decision of the Chamber of Mines to open the compounds to union organizers, agreed in October 1982 – mainly at the urging of Anglo American – has since paid rich political dividends.

It was on the mines, a closed world insulated from the most radical currents of thought, that conditions were best developed for initiating the Bismarckian *Realpolitik* that governs the current process of negotiations with the ANC. Agreed procedures between the Chamber of Mines and mineworkers' representatives permitting access of NUM to the mines were followed within three years by the mission to Lusaka of Gavin Relly, chairman of Anglo American, for discussions with the ANC.

As Relly states in his 1989 annual report, Anglo American has sought as one of its 'core aims [to promote] a sense of belonging, and hence participation in and identification with our operations' (p.9). It seeks an 'interface' with the unions, speaking of a 'revolution of economic opportunity' in which blacks 'liberate themselves from the oppressive arm of officialdom and take charge of their lives in a way which was simply not possible in the past...' (p.11). In South Africa today a few key words like 'liberate', 'revolution' and 'oppressive' go a long way. Similar thinking is expressed in an earlier book by Anton Rupert, whose Rembrandt group was once – oh days of yore – the object of ANC boycott. Rupert envisages the future of the country along the lines of Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore, none of them countries characterized by excessive concern for workers' welfare or democratic liberties (p.102).

In the interests of this 'revolution of economic opportunity', Anglo American initiated its Employee Shareholder Scheme in 1988. By March last year 69% of its 192,000 'lower grade' employees were registered as (individually miniscule) shareholders in their own exploitation. Far more important, it established also an industry-wide provident fund for black mineworkers in association with the NUM, with a board of trustees drawn jointly from mining capital and the union. The secretary of NUM, Cyril Ramaphosa, will be its first chairman. Through such structures Anglo American aims to build up a trade union bureaucracy and a labour aristocracy among black workers, through which it hopes to control the class, while at the same time greatly expanding the scope of finance capital.

Given the centralized nature of capital in South Africa, this is the high road towards company unionism. The implications of this joint venture between capital and labour have unquestionably been concealed from the mineworkers. Irrespective of the good intentions of individuals, and irrespective of the protection this will afford to mineworkers as individuals within

capitalist society, the setting up of the provident fund represents an enormous acceleration of bourgeois, anti-working class politics among the workers and an access of strength to capital. This fund – to use a phrase dear to the heart of Gavin Relly – will act to 'suck [the workers] into the system.'[4]

In the first place, trustees acting for the union will find themselves drawn – even against their wills – into friendly, day-to-day co-operation with the bosses in the clublike atmosphere beloved by the British ruling class. The scope for corruption, political even more than personal, is breathtaking. Secondly, but even more important, 'the fund is likely to become the biggest statutory saving institution in South Africa', according to Relly in his chairman's statement (p.9). This stands to reason. Even with the future decline in numbers, which is certain, the mineworkers will remain the biggest individual section of the working class in South Africa for a long time to come, and their numbers will provide a massive base for accumulation of savings. In seeking to maximize the fund's investments, its trade union directors thus become responsible for managing vast financial power. Imperceptibly they must come to think in the same way as their fellow directors drawn from the employers as they determine the operations of one of the most influential elements of modern financial capital. The criterion of profit and the criterion of worker solidarity necessarily come into conflict in such a financial institution, irrepective of the moral character of its leading personnel.

The Logic of Abstract Capital

One sees here the truth of Trotsky's comment in the last months of his life, that 'the whole task of the bourgeoisie [consists in] liquidating the trade unions as organs of the class struggle and substituting in their place the trade union bureaucracy as the organ of leadership over the workers...' (Trotsky, p.74). In a study of financial institutions in Britain published in 1982, John Plender noted that pension funds had reached the stage where they would 'soon become the most powerful group of proprietors in the private sector of the economy, [through a process that was] largely imperceptible to the lay public' (pp.15,13). He quotes Richard Titmuss, writing as early as 1958 on the growing power of insurance companies and pension funds, the equivalent to the Anglo American/NUM provident fund:

> It is a power concentrated in relatively few hands, working at the apex of a handful of giant bureaucracies, technically supported by a group of professional experts, and accountable, in practice, to virtually no-one (p.19).

The consequence of this trend towards institutional saving, according to Plender, is that 'capitaliism has become depersonalized in Britain to an extent not seen in any other advanced Western democracy' (p.18). Extreme concentration of wealth within a small group of funds had brought about a profound change in the balance of power within financial capital, charac-

terized by relative decline of the merchant banks. By 1980 the biggest of the funds, the Prudential, managed sums amounting to 'twice the combined gross assets of N.M. Rothschild, Baring Brothers, Hambros and Lazard Brothers, financial houses that used to dominate the world's capital markets' (p.17).

At the same time, the merchant banks now act very frequently as investment managers for the pension funds. A merchant bank or a firm of stockbrokers will in all likelihood manage the NUM–Anglo American provident fund. But even if management is carried out 'in–house', as in some of the larger pension funds in Britain, the essence of the activity remains the same. Finance capital is in charge, not the workers or their representatives. This social contradiction within South Africa will prove the same as in Britain, where pension funds of workers in the nationalized industries 'spawned some of the most powerful engines of modern finance capitalism...' Anglo American has no doubt drawn from this experience. As Plender states, 'Many Conservatives...believe that the best way to sell capitalism to the workers is through the medium of collective savings...' (p.30).

That is the point made by the *Economist* in an article on the release of Sisulu and other ANC leaders. The journal seeks to de–politicize the proletariat as quickly as possible with the assistance of the ANC leaders, which it is overjoyed to find them 'so mellow'. Under the heading 'Small is beautiful,' it argues for the rapid break–up and privatization of state corporations such as Iscor, mainly to hide links between politics and economy that are now strongly grounded in the consciousness of the workers. It seeks to maintain an atomized, depoliticized working class, such as exists in the major capitalist countries. Concealing the fact that privatization will simply place yet another lever of accumulation in the hands of Anglo American or related interests, it suggests that capital should 'steer some of the shares to the workers in each industry, to worker pension funds and the like' (21 October).

The cynicism with which this is proposed throws light on what Anglo American has already carried through, helped by the leaders of Cosatu. As a force of purely abstract capital confronting a still very concrete form of labour, the provident fund must undermine the capital that sustains it since as the rate of profit in South Africa tends to decline it will simply move its investments elsewhere. The provident fund as a form of abstract capital is by its nature parasitic, feeding off and weakening its industrial base, and conforms perfectly to the nature of finance capital, which the ANC and the SACP see as a force of liberation.

Trade Unions at the Crossroads

The trade unions in South Africa now stand at a critical juncture. By endorsing the ANC strategy of working through finance capital, and by promoting negotiations in what is in essence a bourgeois political process, the leaders of Cosatu anticipate and enforce a continuing servile role for the working class. As for the National Council of Trade Unions (Nactu), which

has rejected negotiations 'at the present stage' along with the PACand the Black Consciousness Movement, its numbers are less than those in Numsa alone, and its opposition to negotiations is far from clearly thought out. These negotiations are in any case already a fact of life, and cannot be escaped. The point is that clarification of the relations between finance capital and all classes and strata in South Africa is urgently necessary in light of the strategy of the ANC/SACP, above all in theunions. Without this insight it is not possible for the workers to defend their interests.

One thing is certain: on the day after the ANC receives a presence in government, the class struggle of the workers will begin to be directed against it. Every one of its actions, and still more its lack of action, will be evaluated against the very rich experience gained by these workers during the course of their struggle for existence against capitalism run by and for whites. All these questions have already come to a head in Zimbabwe, and will shortly do so in Namibia.

The great men of the future must have nightmares over what they are going to do about this force that has lifted them up, only to remain chained to the rock of insecurity where capitalism confines it. The decades of politicization of the proletariat in South Africa will then be turned against its own previous politics, and with it the bearers of that politics, the ANC and the SACP. The political strategy of the left in South Africa must now be directed towards preparing the strongest possible base in the working class for that day after tomorrow, when the workers will again turn out for work, this time to clean up after the Festival of Liberation. There are no short cuts, no easy solutions, no simple way of avoiding a very oppressive period before the class struggle of the workers resumes against its new political masters. The question of strategical orientation, and the tactics to be derived from it, urgently needs to be clarified. This is not the place for that discussion. It is enough to point out that the future of the workers under finance capital will be no more happy than the past, while their objective strength in the society will be all the greater.

Notes

1. The history of boycott in South Africa is as old as the struggle against discrtiminatory legislation. In its many forms it has included the boycotting of buses or trains, shops, beerhalls, or schools; rejection of 'advisory bodies' and of 'Native Representatives'; the refusal to accept passes; the opposition to cattle dipping and 'better schemes' in the Reserves. There have been calls for cultural and for sports boycotts, for consumer boycotts and for sanctions against South Africa. Some of these have been discussed in separate studies but there is no comprehensive discussion of the efficacy of these tactics in South Africa. This article is confined to the question of economic sanctions.
2. By 1988 total flows of finance to the so–called 'third world' reached the lowest point of the whole decade, while net outflow to the richest countries

in the world increased more than four times over the total for 1987, from $2.5 billion to $10.9 billion (OECD, Paris, reported in *Guardian*, 5 September 1989). According to the World Bank, developing countries paid their creditors a record $50.1 billion in 1988, making a net transfer of wealth greater than in any previous year. The Bank itself, whose supposed purpose of existence is to promote development in these countries, last year received back $1.53 billion more in interest and capital repayments than it lent (*Guardian*, 18 September 1989).

3. Gold production in South Africa, still in first place, had fallen to little more than 40% of the total from the non-Stalinist countries by 1988, down from about 70% in 1980 (*Gold 1989*, pp.15,7).

4. Speaking about purchases from small black-run suppliers, Relly said the aim of Anglo American was to 'use our clout – our buying clout particularly – to suck into the system, so to speak (I don't mean the political system, I mean the economic system) as many people as we can.' *The Money Programme*, BBCII, 17 December 1989.

Bibliography

Anglo American Corporation of South Africa Limited (1989), Annual Report and Chairman's Statement, Johannesburg.

Cole, A.S., et al. (1988), South Africa's Relationship with the International Financial System. Report by an Inter-Governmental Group, Commonwealth Secretariat, Toronto.

Hanlon, Joseph, and Roger Omond (1987), The Sanctions Handbook, Penguin.

Hanlon, Joseph, et al. (1989a), Independent Expert Study on the Evaluation of the Application and Impact of Sanctions. Final Report to the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa, Commonwealth Secretariat, London.

——(1989b), South Africa: The Sanctions Report, Penguin/James Currey.

Hirsch, Alan (1989), 'The Origins and Implications of South Africa's Continuing Financial Crisis', Transformation, No.9.

Harris, Laurence (1989), 'The Bretton Woods System and Africa', in Onimode (ed.), Vol.1.

Kindleberger, Charles P. (1987), The World in Depression 1929–1939, Pelican.

Milling-Stanley, George, and Jessica Jacks, Gold 1989, Consolidated Gold Fields PLC, London.

Onimode, Badi (ed.) (1989), The IMF, the World Bank and the African Debt, Zed, 2 Vols.

Ovenden, Keith, and Tony Cole (1989), Apartheid and International Finance. A Programme for Change, Penguin, Victoria.

Padayachee, Vishnu (1988), 'The Politics of International Economic Relations: South Africa and the International Monetary Fund, 1975 and Beyond', in Suckling and White.

Plender, John (1982), That's the Way the Money Goes. The Financial Institutions and the Nation's Savings, Andre Deutsch.

Rupert, Anton (1981), Priorities for Coexistence, Tafelberg, Cape Town.

Segal, Ronald (ed.) (1964), Sanctions against South Africa, Penguin.

Suckling, John, and Landeg White (eds.) (1988), After Apartheid. Renewal of the South African Economy, Centre for Southern African Studies/ James Currey.

Ticktin, H.H. (1983), 'The Transitional Epoch, Finance Capital and Britain. Part 1. The Political Economy of Declining Capitalism', Critique 16.

Trapido, Stanley (1959), 'The Place of Boycott', in Africa South, Vol.3, No.4, July/September.

Trotsky, Leon (1975), 'Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay', in Leon Trotsky on the Trade Unions, Pathfinder, New York.

Journals:

Economist, Financial Times, Guardian (London). Weekly Mail (Johannesburg).

CRITIQUE

A biannual journal of socialist theory with analyses of contemporary society. *Critique* rejects the concept of socialism in one country, and the possibility of a country being both socialist and undemocratic and seeks to show that the problems of our times are governed by the necessity for democratic control over all aspects of society. The absence of such control leads to inefficient, wasteful and hierarchically structured economies. *Critique* provides analyses of the forms, laws, tendencies and relations in different countries, in the broader perspective of the epoch. The journal endeavours to develop Marxist method and political economy in principle and through application.

Subscriptions :

Individuals UK £4 (USA $8)
Institutions £8 ($18)

Cheques/Money Orders to Bob Arnot
Dept of Economics, Glasgow College of Techno;ogy
Glasgow G4 0BA

THE NATIONAL AND COLONIAL QUESTION IN THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF THE COMINTERN, 1919-24

Michael Cox

Introduction

Marxist analysis of the National and Colonial question in the First Five Years of the Communist International has been limited in quantity, superficial in quality and in the case of Soviet and Chinese historiography, deliberately distorted to serve party interests. Even those on the Trotskyist left have found little of theoretical import to detain them in this period and area. Lenin had after all laid down the 'correct' line in 1920. The real task they assume is to see how far this was revised *after* 1924 under the impact of ascendent Stalinism. The earlier period – precisely because it was Leninist – is thereby denied the critical attention it deserves. Indeed Trotsky himself hardly discusses the years *before* 1924. His new and limpet–like adherence to Leninism made him critically shy of analyzing Lenin on the National and Colonial question. The cult of Lenin affected everyone, and not just the official Soviet leadership in the 1920s.

How is the period between 1919 and early 1924 best characterized? Those were first and foremost years of theoretical transition and fluidity. The rigidities of Stalinism had yet to be introduced. The impact of the collapse of the Second International and the success of the October revolution on theoretical discourse, was still immediate. This was the high point of the Russian Revolution politically and programmatically; immensely rich and yet also immensely open–ended.

There were however two paradoxes about the Russian revolution. The first was that it had in practice made a mockery of 'orthodox' European Marxism of which Bolshevism had been a part. The bourgeois revolution had been consummated in proletarian dictatorship. Economic and social backwardness had been turned into its political opposite. The Bolsheviks had achieved in practice what they had always considered a theoretical impossibility and in so doing had injected a tension between theoretical orthodoxy and political achievement. The first paradox of October therefore was that few Bolsheviks were theoretically prepared for it. The second was that even fewer learned from it. As Harold Isaacs eloquently said of the Bolsheviks:

> When the wave receded and left power in their hand it found them still clinging to their 'pre–revolutionary' antiques. The experience of October had passed, barely leaving a trace upon them.[1]

There is a more specific problem which has to be addressed however. It has been argued, by Trotsky in particular that it was Stalinism *after* 1924 and 1925 which led to the debacle in China in 1927. [2] The Chinese Communists pushed into an almost unbreakable alliance with the Kuomintang (KMT) were forced by the logic of that alliance to subordinate themselves, the proletariat and the peasantry, to the Chinese bourgeoisie within the framework of the bourgeois revolution. Two related charges can be distilled from Trotsky's analytical polemic. Firstly, that the Comintern had developed, under Stalin and Bukharin, an entirely false analysis of the national bourgeoisie. Secondly, that their rigid stages view of the colonial revolution – the political consequence of the polemic against Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution – was not only theoretically impossible, but disastrous politically. The end result of these mistakes was Chiang Kai-Shek's destruction of the working class movement in the coup in April 1927 and the decimation of the insurgent peasantry in spring and summer of the same year.

The correctness of Trotsky's critique is in my mind beyond doubt. However, the problem emerges as to the precise origin of the disastrous Comintern policy in China. For Trotsky there is no doubt that Stalin and Bukharin are largely to blame after 1924 and 1925. Equally, according to Trotsky, their policy stands in opposition to an earlier Bolshevik or Leninist line. Writing in June 1928, Trotsky highlighted the difference:

> It would be unwise pedantry to maintain that, had a Bolshevik policy been applied in the revolution of 1925–1927, The Chinese Communist Party would unfailingly have come to power. But it is contemptible philistinism to assert that such a possibility was entirely out of the question.[3]

Trotsky's implicit assumption is that there were two diametrically opposed periods and policies. One correct – one false. One Leninist and Bolshevik – one Stalinist. One with which he expressed theoretical and political solidarity – one which he opposed. The question which he never asked, (in fact never posed) was to what extent there might have been more continuity than discontinuity between one phase of Comintern history and another? Indeed might it not be argued that Trotsky attempts to draw too rigid a contrast between one period and another on the national and colonial question? Furthermore, is he correct in assuming or implying that his own quite distinct position on the colonial revolution was the same as the Bolsheviks as he often claimed? In what follows I hope to answer these questions.

The Colonial Question: Continuity or Discontinuity?

In discussing the long neglected question on Comintern colonial policy two broad questions emerge as being most important. First, and above all others, what was the general strategy established by the Comintern by 1924? Was there, for example, a clear and unambiguous rupture with old Bolshevism

and its stages theory? How did the Comintern perceive the relationship between the bourgeois revolution and proletarian dictatorship? And were any lessons drawn from the Russian experience?

Second, what analysis was made of the political economies of individual colonial countries and in terms of that, of the colonial bourgeoisie? What role were the latter assigned in the colonial revolution, if any? Finally, what analysis was there of the relationship between the colonial bourgeoisie and imperialism on the one hand, and the proletariat and peasantry on the other?

* * * * *

There is, in my view, no strong evidence to suggest that the Bolsheviks attempted a theoretical revision of their previously held conception of revolutionary strategy in the years between 1917–1920. It was not, it was true, a pressing problem. It was assumed that the European revolution was imminent and would succeed. In this situation controversies which had divided Russian Marxism before 1917 might have appeared to be both unnecessary and inopportune. The debates on the National and Colonial question in 1920 should therefore be seen not only as attempting to outline a new strategy for the colonial world, but as a reflection of Bolshevik thinking on their own revolution.

Two sets of theses were drawn up, by V.I. Lenin, and by the young Indian Marxist, M.N. Roy. Strangely, neither dealt with the particular socio–political character of the colonies. The relationship between the bourgeois revolution and proletarian dictatorship was not discussed, nor, in fact, was it raised as a problem in their theses in any systematic fashion. If anything it was Roy rather than Lenin who appraised the question in his ninth thesis, where he stated briefly that: 'The revolution in the colonies is not going to be communist in its first stages.' However, having argued this his analysis became entangled in an inconclusive discussion on the use of peasants' and workers' Soviets.

The two sets of theses were then discussed in detail in commission. Unfortunately, we do not have a full stenographic report of the deliberations. Clearly, however, a 'lively debate had occurred,' as Lenin admitted in his speech on the work of the commission. His statement is extremely important and I quote it in full:

> The question was posed as follows: are we to consider as correct the assertion that the capitalist stage of economic development is inevitable for backward nations now on the road to emancipation and whom a certain advance towards progress is to be seen since the war? We replied in the negative. If the victorious revolutionary proletariat conducts systematic propaganda among them, and the Soviet governments come to their aid with all the means at their disposal – in that event it will be mistaken to assume that the backward peoples must inevitably go through the capitalist stage of development...with the appropriate theoretical grounding, with the aid of the proletariat of the advanced

> countries, backward countries can go over to the Soviet system and, through certain stages of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist stage.[4]

Although Lenin's position appears clear at first sight, it cannot be taken as a simple and decisive rejection of the stages strategy. Firstly Lenin implies that only the *prior* success of the European revolution would allow the colonies to avoid a long period of capitalist development. In 1920 a successful European revolution was anticipated but if this necessary prior condition was not fulfilled, did that mean that the backward countries would have to go through the 'caudine forks of capitalism' as Marx had once referred to them?

Secondly Lenin's argument does not proceed from an analysis of the *internal* class structure of the colonies. He made no theoretical case for the dictatorship of the proletariat, even though this is the only possible political solution to the colonial revolution. This is crucially important. He only suggested one external factor which might make it unneccesary to pass through a capitalist stage: namely, the success of the European revolution.

The 2nd Congress thus left a legacy on the question of strategy and overall perspectives that was ambivalent and in need of further elaboration. Those looking for an embryonic theory of permanent revolution will have a long and disappointing search. It plainly is not there. Nonetheless, the case for a two stage revolution is not made with any degree of conviction either. There is a dialectical tension and open–endedness in Lenin which escapes a simple classificatory label.

* * * * *

The most striking development after July 1920 was the rapidity with which the 'tensions' in Lenin's position, were removed. What he left 'open', subsequent Comintern spokesmen tended to terminate. What was a problem for Lenin was solved in a mechanical and rigid way by his successors. Lenin's ambivalence was transformed into Comintern dogmatism.

Consider two examples in 1922:

1) The 1st Congress of the Toilers of the East in January (convened to protest the Washington Conference of late 1921). The delegates were communists and various bourgeois nationalists. The whole tone of the Congress was essentially anti-Western rather than specifically communist. Nevertheless important spokesmen from the Comintern were present. Indeed Georgi Safarov's contributions were designed to provide the main theoretical framework and guidelines for the discussions.[5]

In his 'Report on the national–colonial question and the Communist attitude thereto', he made it clear that 'The chief task with which (the Chinese working masses) is confronted is to achieve emancipation from the foreign yoke' and it's replacement with 'a democratic government which will bring down the cost of living.'

In a later speech the delegates were told: 'In colonial countries the first phase of the revolutionary movement must be a national–revolutionary movement.' In Mongolia for instance, 'to preach communism and the proletarian revolution is ridiculous...It is quite clear that it is no use putting the cart before the horse...It is impossible to skip over a number of inevitable historical stages.'

But perhaps the most revealing statement was made in his comparison of the Chinese and Japanese revolutions. Its schematism would have shamed Lenin and pleased any self–respecting Menshevik. As he prophesied:

> The Chinese labour movement is beginning to walk. We are not building any castles in the air for the near future...We do not expect the Chinese working class to take the commanding position which the Japanese workers are able to gain in the near future. But the young Chinese labour movement is growing.

Safarov's general view was by no means an isolated phenomenon.

2) At the 4th Comintern Congress in the last two months of 1922 Radek (who was to be one of the main Comintern spokesman on China) reproduced the same position. He advised communists in the colonial countries that:

> The time has not yet come for the final struggle for emancipation...you still have a long road to travel side by side with the revolutionary bourgeois elements.[6]

It was precisely this rejection of any strategy which went beyond the bourgeois democratic revolution that was to be the political axis of Comintern policy in the colonial countries. An example of this can be seen in the Comintern's policy for China. It is often forgotten (or conveniently ignored) that the political subordination of the Chinese Communist Party to the KMT, the result of the Comintern's two–stage theory of colonial revolution, had in reality occurred long *before* the political ascendancy of Stalin and Bukharin. It had effectively been implemented by 1923. It would be useful to reconstruct the way in which this occurred.

From 1921 onwards Mareng [Henryk Sneevliet], the Comintern representative in China, had sought to forge a firm alliance between the communists and the nationalists. By 1922 he had succeeded. The specific organizational form this alliance took should not detain us here. The important factors were: firstly, that the alliance whatever it's organizational expression, was based on the strategic assumption that the coming Chinese revolution would be national only; and secondly, that all of the detailed negotiations conducted by Mareng were ratified both by the Executive committee of the Comintern and the Politburo of the Russian Party. In short his specific proposals had been sanctioned at the very highest level.

The Executive Committee in a statement on the 12th January 1923 talked of the 'central task for China' as being the 'national revolution'. The Joffe–Sun

Yat–Sen agreements on the CCP–KMT alliance, signed on the 26th January 1923, made it clear in the first paragraph that there was no possibility of 'leaping over stages of historical development'. As Joffe put it:

> Dr Sun is of the opinion that, because of the non-existence of conditions favourable to their successful application in China, it is not possible to carry out either communism or even the Soviet system in China...the most important and most pressing problems are the completion of national unification and the attainment of full national independence.[7]

Little wonder therefore that at the 3rd Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in June, the manifesto declared that:'our task is to lead the workers and peasants into joining the national revolution...'[8] The point is – this was not just the Chinese line – it was the Comintern position in 1923. Not just for China alone, but for all the colonial countries.

It is now possible to answer the questions posed above. The general strategy developed by the Comintern by 1923 and 1924 was unambiguously bourgeois democratic. I can find no suggestions of any serious attempt to pose or even discuss the possibility of proletarian dictatorship as a solution to the tasks of the anti–imperialist struggle in the colonies. That is, a well developed stages conception of the colonial revolution preceded Stalinism. The lessons of the Russian Revolution were not grasped. The 'tensions' that can be found in Lenin in 1920 had disappeared without trace by 1922..

The Comintern and the National Bourgeoisie

Two points must be made before considering the attitude in the Comintern on the colonial bourgeoisie during the first five years.

1) That the essence of Russian Bolshevism before 1917 – and what divided it from Menshevism – was a deep hostility towards it's own bourgeoisie. The contradiction of Bolshevik theory was that its slogan – the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry – combined this hostility with an ambivalent approach to the nature of the Russian Revolution. In this respect the formulations of the Mensheviks and of Trotsky were more consistent than that of the Bolsheviks – before the latter (under Lenin's urging) finally oriented itself to proletarian dictatorship in April 1917. This theoretical contradiction was carried over in Comintern policy towards the colonial bourgeoisie.

2) The Bolshevik's hostility toward it's own bourgeoisie, however, was not simply reproduced in formulations about the bourgeoisie in the colonial countries. In fact before 1917 Lenin had developed a quite positive assessment of their role.

In May 1913 Lenin noted:

> Everywhere in Asia a mighty democratic movement is growing, spreading and gaining strength. The bourgeoisie there is *as yet* siding with the people.[9]

Writing a year earlier he argued, with embarrassing gusto:

> In Asia there is *still* a bourgeois capable of championing sincere, militant, consistent democracy, a worthy comrade of France's great men of Enlightenment and great leaders of the close of the 18th century.[10]

Thus, there appeared to be two pressures, and not just one, working on Lenin by the 2nd Congress of 1920. A scepticism about the potential of the Russian bourgeoisie to participate in its own democratic revolution (the result of Bolshevik experience in Russia); and a contrary belief that the colonial bourgeoisie *might* be able to play the role which its Russian counterpart could and did not.. These two elements appeared in Lenin's theses most clearly.

What is most striking about Lenin's original draft is the partial accommodation he seems prepared to make to the national bourgeoisie. A comparison of the theses of Lenin and Roy brings this out most clearly. Lenin, while posing the necessity of proletarian leadership and independence in the anti–imperialist struggle, stressed the importance of an alliance with what he termed the 'bourgeois democratic liberation movement'. Although he tried to make this alliance conditional and temporary, an alliance of some sort was still posed.

Roy rejected any sort of accord, however temporary or conditional, because this might lead to the subordination of the proletariat and peasantry to the native bourgeoisie. This was possibly a difference in emphasis rather than overall strategy, but it is a difference that should not be ignored. In the commission it was Roy and not Lenin who was forced to retreat and his uncompromising theses were toned down: 'the co–operation of the bourgeois nationalist revolutionary element was now deemed useful.'

Lenin while agreeing that 'in many if not most' cases the colonial bourgeoisie had come to some sort of accommodation with imperialism, still insisted that where it had not, support could still be rendered. The alliance, however loose, conditional and even unlikely still remained important in Lenin's thinking.

Of course, in practice Lenin might have ruled out such an alliance even though he continued to stress its desirability. He was equally insistent that communists must only enter into an alliance on a temporary basis, where there was no organizational dilution and, perhaps most important, as long as communists continued to struggle *against* their erstwhile allies. It seems that Lenin was torn by a theoretical and political contradiction which he had as yet not resolved. He insisted – unlike Trotsky – that the colonial bourgeoisie could still be anti–imperialist. Hence the necessity of assistance and support. At the same time he expressed grave reservations about the alliance.

The ambivalence of the 1920 theses can be demonstrated by looking at developments in 1922 and 1923. At the Fourth Congress of the Comintern it was argued that a

> compromise with imperialist domination becomes more acceptable to the indigenous bourgeoisie...which carries on the struggle of a weak and oppressed bourgeoisie against a powerful and highly developed metropolitan bourgeoisie...this struggle is a struggle between competitors, and therefore contains possibility of compromise..

And again:

> The bourgeoisie has come a lot too late to the colonial and semi–colonial countries and is thus in no wise inclined to play the role of liberator...the national–revolutionary movement cannot achieve victory under the leadership of the bourgeoisie.

The same view was expressed in the theses. Indeed they express a thought which was absent in 1920. As soon as the proletariat and peasantry are drawn into the struggle, the bourgeoisie will capitulate:

> The national bourgeoisie will be unable and unwilling to lead the struggle against imperialism in so far that struggle assumes the form of a revolutionary mass movement...As the proletarian and semi-proletarian peasant masses are drawn in, the big bourgeoisie begin to turn away from the movement in so far as the social interests of the lower classes come to the forefront. There is a long struggle ahead for the young proletariat in the colonies... against imperialist exploitation and their own classes.[11]

In short it is impossible in reality to struggle both against and with the national bourgeoisie. This is the key point. However, compare these statements (which probably go further than the theses of 1920) with those made by Safarov at the First Congress of the Toilers of the East ten months previously.[12] The whole emphasis was different. The other part of Lenin's dialectical picture emerged: the alliance with the national bourgeoisie had become the aim above all else. Scientific analysis of the bourgeoisie in the colonies was replaced with moral exhortation to it not to compromise with imperialism and reaction.

> We do not wish any forcible Sovietisation, but on the other hand, we say, that in as much as we support the national-democratic movement, we demand a loyal attitude to the labour movement, to the Communist Party and to the working class.

As Trotsky was to argue at another time, but in the same context:

> It would be absurd in such a case to demand that the devil should generally become converted to Christianity, and that he use his horns not against workers and peasants, but exclusively for pious deeds. In preventing such conditions we act in reality as the devil's advocate, and beg him to let us become his godfathers.

But Safarov was not content with exhortation alone. Although he argued, rhetorically, that communists 'must not connect themselves with any democratic party' he went on to add:

> We do not intend to hide the truth. We know perfectly well that in the nearest future there can be no sharp conflicts between us and the bourgeois democratic elements organized in the national revolutionary organizations.

But this was the whole point for Lenin. The prior condition for an alliance between communists and 'these bourgeois democratic elements' was such a conflict. In reality Safarov removed the key condition for any type of principled co–operation between revolutionaries and nationalists. The dialectical tension of Lenin's position was eliminated.

This point was demonstrated forcibly in Comintern practice in China in 1922–23. In forging the alliance between the Chinese communists and the KMT, the Comintern and its representatives ignored nearly every stipulation laid down by Lenin. Firstly the communists merged organizationally with the Kuomintang in 1922 and 1923, thus sacrificing the independence of action which Lenin had deemed essential. Secondly, in establishing the KMT as the central focus of the 'national revolution', the leadership of that struggle was handed to the colonial bourgeoisie. In order to facilitate this they even redefined the class character of the Kuomintang. Thus in January 1923 the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) declared that the Kuomintang was based on four classes: the liberal democratic bourgeoisie; the petty–bourgeoisie; the intelligentsia; and the workers. The peasants were added as an afterthought in 1925. Finally the Comintern declared all criticism of the KMT taboo.

In short, every condition and safeguard laid down in 1920 was overturned. The Comintern had sanctioned, if not initiated an organizational 'merger' between the communists and nationalists; the leadership of the movement had been handed over to a non–proletarian force; an uncritical, and obviously long term, strategical alliance had been established with bourgeois democracy. As ECCI put it in January 1923: 'The only serious national-revolutionary group is the Kuomintang.'[13]

Conclusion

Is it possible to explain this contradiction between two sets of contrary statements: between the theses of the Fourth Congress and actual policy in

China; between Safarov's attitude to the colonial bourgeoisie and that of the Comintern itself?

The simplest and most obvious answer is that the Comintern said one thing and did another. But this is a statement of fact, not an explanation. Part of the answer clearly lies in the ambivalent legacy on the national and colonial question bequeathed by Lenin. On both general strategy, and the attitude to the colonial bourgeoisie, his formulations allowed for different interpretations, especially on the question of the relationship between communists and nationalists in the colonial revolution. Were the communists to struggle *against* or *with* the colonial bourgeoisie. Lenin had answered by saying *both*.

However, although such a position was tenable theoretically in practice it was impossible. Roy, and later Trotsky recognized that as soon as the proletariat and peasantry expressed their specific class interests, the colonial bourgeoisie would be pushed into compromising with Imperialism. A strategic alliance with the colonial bourgeoisie, if it is was to be tenable required the subordination of the class to the national struggle or its repression.

But why should Comintern members interpret Lenin's ambivalent position on the colonial bourgeoisie one way and not another? Lenin had only posed the alliance with this class as being possible. It was equally feasible to decide that because a principled alliance was impossible in practice, the communists' task was to struggle against the national bourgeoisie. One possible answers to this key question is that even by 1922 the Comintern as a revolutionary instrument had been subordinated to the needs of the Soviet State's need for allies abroad and although nationalist bourgeoisie were unreliable, at least some diplomatic mileage might be made in that direction. Hence the revolutionary potential of the colonial revolution was subordinated to Soviet requirements. There is some truth in this, but it does not constitute the whole explanation. Lenin, remember, eliminated the contradiction in Bolshevism in April 1917 by calling for a second, proletarian revolution.

The Comintern removed the contradictions of the 1920 thesis on the colonial question by moving in the opposite direction. They moved effectively to Menshevism because they were in a different historical conjuncture. Lenin was able to rearm the party in and after April against strong opposition because the revolutionary situation in Russia provided him with the objective situation in which such a re-arming was accepted as necessary.

The spontaneous unwinding of the film of revolution forced the Bolsheviks, with Lenin's help, to redefine their conceptions. After 1920 it was the film of reaction and retreat, not revolution in Europe, which was unwinding. In this situation the contradictory elements of the 1920 theses were more likely to be interpreted in a reactionary, and not a revolutionary way – even though the colonial region was moving into a revolutionary phase. This what was happening in 1922 and 1923. The effect of Stalinism after 1924 – the policy of socialism in one country, was to freeze this reactionary tendency into a vice-like mould.

Notes

1. Harold Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution,* (1938).
2. See Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin,* (1970).
3. Ibid, p.185.
4. Lenin at the Second Congress of the Comintern. See V.I. Lenin, *The National Liberation Movement in the East,* (Moscow, 1969).
5. See *The First Congress of the Toilers of the Far East,* (Petrograd, 1922, Reprinted Hammersmith, 1970). See also (in Russian) G Safarov, *The National Question and the Proletariat* (Moscow,1923).
6. For documents pertaining to the Fourth Congress of the Comintern see J. Degras, *The Communist International, 1919--1943,* Vol.1, (London, 1976), pp.382–393.
7. For the Joffe–Sun Yat–Sen agreement see X.J. Eudin and Robert C. North *Soviet Russia and the East, 1920–1927*, (California, 1957), pp. 131, 141.
8. For a guide to the early history of the Chinese Communist Party see the relevant section in Robert North *Moscow and Chinese Communists* (Stanford, 1963).
9. *The National Liberation Movement in the East,* p.82.
10. Ibid, p.58.
11. On the Fourth Congress theses on the national and colonial question see Degras, ibid, pp.382–393.
12. See *The First Congress of the Far East,* pp.156–174 for Safarov's contribution.
13. See Degras, ibid, for the ECCI meeting of January 1923.

[Michael Cox lectures in the Department of Politics, The Queen's University of Belfast. He is on the editorial board of Critique].

THE BLACK REPUBLIC SLOGAN - PART II
THE RESPONSE OF THE TROTSKYISTS

Baruch Hirson

[Part I of this article appeared in Searchlight South Africa No.3, July 1989]

The Debate in the 1930s

In the aftermath of the Sixth Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1928 propaganda for the Independent Native Republic filled the journals and pamphlets of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). Anyone opposed to or half–hearted about the party line, including its founder members, were condemned as counter-revolutionary, vilified and expelled.

In 1929 the Communist Party of South Africa claimed a membership of 3,000. By 1933, after years of fratricidal in–fighting, expulsions and resignations the membership was reduced to a few hundred. Some Africans found a home in the African National Congress (ANC) and a few whites joined the South African Labour Party, but most were shattered by the squabbling, vindictiveness and ostracization by their former comrades. In three known cases, party members loyal to the Comintern, who were in the USSR during the Moscow purges, were arrested and executed (see *Searchlight South Africa* No.2).

The 1928 decision was neither accident nor deviation. The CPSA, like other national communist parties, was manipulated by the new thermidorian leadership of the USSR, intent on destroying all opposition in the USSR and rooting out opposition in the Comintern. In South Africa the results were calamitous. The Black Republic slogan – foisted on the CPSA without any analysis of the political economy of South Africa – provided no viable alternatives for day–to–day activities. Even before the new slogan was formulated the party had turned its attention to the black proletariat and Africans constituted the majority of the party. As S.P. Bunting had claimed: the Black Republic slogan was ideological verbiage and had no theoretical basis. Nonetheless it introduced the two–stage theory which dominated thinking in the CPSA thereafter, leading to its contemporary (and natural) successor: 'Colonialism of a Special Type', which is as spurious today as was the 'Black Republic' slogan in 1928.

The leaders of the CPSA were in a quandary. Whatever they proposed was condemned by the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) as reformist and tinged with white chauvinism. According to Douglas and Molly Walton, who returned from a visit to Moscow in 1929, the CPSA was not revolutionary enough and lagged behind mass discontent. Furthermore, the party erred in supporting petty bourgeois nationalist movements like the Industrial and Commercial Workers of Africa (the ICU). Its task was

to 'strive to organize mass action of the peasants,' linking such actions to the slogan of an Independent Native Republic, and the confiscation of all the land...' It was the Waltons who moved the main organizational resolution at the party conference in December 1930. In a motion that was more conspicuous for its illiteracy than for its practicability they said:

> It is the task of the party to take the initiative in preparing strikes and to win the independent leadership of all economic struggles and to convert the local partial struggles increasingly taking place, into wide class battles developing into mass political struggles in which the agrarian demands of the masses of the peasantry are assisted and led by the proletariat against the landowners, the employing class, the Government, for the agrarian revolution as a stage towards a Workers' and Peasants' Government.

Forty years later the official history of the CPSA condemned the conference as ultra–left and sharply intolerant.

A thirty–two page set of notes entitled 'Class Struggle: The Foundation of Socialist Teaching from the Manifesto of 1848 to the 1928 Programme' was used to re–educate party cadres. According to the writer there were four types of 'revolutionary struggle' outside the USSR, varying 'with the degree of proletarianization reached in the particular region.'

i) Where industry was highly developed, with 'insignificant' small–scale production, there was 'a proper proletarian struggle for dictatorship.'

ii) In countries of 'only medium development, small–scale industry with many feudal survivals,' the struggle was said to be 'bourgeois democratic,' passing through 'to proletarian revolution.'

iii) In 'colonial and semi–colonial areas, where feudal and other pre–capitalist forms of production predominate,' the struggle 'takes the form of a peasant agrarian revolution and a struggle for national liberation.'

iv) In the 'colonies proper' the aim was 'national liberation only.'

The problem for communist parties, according to this document lay only in identifying which one of the four 'types of revolution' applied to their country. The writer of these notes decided that South Africa lay somewhere between the second and third type. The proletariat was still 'inconsiderable,' and the African miners oscillated 'between tribal relations or feudal–squatter (*sic*) relations on the one hand and proletarian relations on the other.' Consequently, Africans were 'principally concerned with ancillary rights and liberties when they enter into proletarian relations – the right to family life, equality of opportunity, education and the franchise. They are increasingly aware of the need for at least Bantu National Unity – a step towards a sense of working–class unity' (pp.28–30).

The party member who sought an analysis of the relations of production or the role of finance capital in the opening up of the gold mines, or wanted to understand the dynamics of change in the country, was left with this sterile

categorization – in which the right to a normal family life or the franchise were listed as 'ancillary' rights.' Worse was to follow. South Africa, said the author, lay nearer 'type two' and could move towards 'proletarian revolution' provided that a force was available to transform the country. Then came the *bon mot* that made nonsense of all that had been previously implied: this force would be found among the Afrikaners whose 'hostility to Imperialism is an instinctive antagonism to finance capital.' Unfortunately they had been misled into racial disunity [and consequently]... 'Finance Capital uses the oppressed African to oust and oppress the Afrikaner, however much it pretends to a contrary policy.' The task of the CPSA was to overcome this disunity and 'foster a genuine struggle for independence upon a real democratic basis in which the African is included' (p.30).

Did the writers really believe this? Were the Africans 'ousting' and 'oppressing' the Afrikaners? Were the Afrikaners [as a people?] 'instinctively antagonistic to finance capital'? And in the supposed task of the CPSA (struggling for independence and democracy) what was meant by the assertion that the African was to be 'included' with the Afrikaner? There is little meaning in these assertions and it poses the question: *Where did the 'independent native republic' fit into this nonsense?*

There was urgent need for a programme based on a critique of the political economy of South Africa and an examination of the dynamics for change in the country. Yet the thesis on colonial countries that emanated from Moscow provided no understanding of the economic structure of the different regions of the colonial world. This was made even more absurd by coupling the situation in South Africa with that of the USA, and the call in both countries for the formation of independent black states – because...because there were blacks in both countries! How either of these fitted into the more general description of the Comintern theoreticians was not clear. Or did it really matter? The communists in the USA never set out to form their 'independent Negro republic,' and after a certain amount of drum-thumping the slogan was buried in South Africa. Considering all the events, did Moscow set out deliberately to destroy communist parties in regions where it could not exercise direct control? Whatever the reason, the CPSA was all but destroyed by the imposition of this slogan.

The Debate Inside the Opposition

The agenda for discussion in Trotskyist groups in the early 1930s was set by the Comintern decisions. Their supporters had been involved in the polemics inside the CPSA, disagreeing with the programmatic formulation of the leaders: arguing about events in the USSR or the Comintern, or about policies in South Africa. They had been shaped, and their ideas forged, inside the CPSA, and even after they left (or were expelled) they brought with them echoes of the old debates. Several small groups in Cape Town combined to form the Lenin Club and they attracted academics and students from the

university, providing a forum for the discussion of problems of socialism in South Africa.

Conditions inside the CPSA had been intolerable and the Lenin Club rejected (at least in principle) the undemocratic way in which policy decisions were taken. It also expressed support for the exiled Leon Trotsky, co-leader with Lenin of the Russian revolution. Members of the Lenin Club restored the lost tradition of debate inside the left but their understanding of the problems of South Africa lagged behind the needs of the time. They argued inside the Club as they had once argued inside the CPSA: about the role of the Afrikaners and their possible allegiance in the event of war, the advisability of working clandestinely or openly as a revolutionary movement, the importance of the 'land question' and the advisability of organizing trade unions.

On two issues they seemed united. They rejected the slogan of an 'independent native republic' and its corollary, the two-stage revolution in South Africa, in which a bourgeois democratic state would abolish racial discrimination prior to a socialist transformation. Yet this agreement concealed many differences. The Black Republic policy had no theoretical underpinning, but rejection of the slogan did not in itself lead to acceptable alternatives. In trying to formulate a new programme the Lenin Club split: one group formed the Workers Party of South Africa (WP), the other became the Communist League and shortly thereafter entered the newly created Socialist Party. Both produced a set of policy documents (or 'theses') and a group in Johannesburg apparently drew up a third set of theses. If they did no copy has yet been found.

Veteran members of the Lenin Club, interviewed in the mid-1970s, ascribed the splits to a number of differences that ranged from the issues of 'entryism' in France – an issue that might have had some relevance in Cape Town where there were possibilities of entering the newly formed Socialist Party – as well as some of the issues mentioned above. But it was the atmosphere inside the left at the time that created conditions in which every difference, small or large, became a point of conflict. Forty years after the event one old-timer still ascribed the differences to conflicts between the 'hard' and the 'soft', with his side most obviously that of the 'hards'.

I am in no position to decide whether the groups were 'hard' or 'soft'. Nor does this seem important today. What does need attention is the set of ideas espoused by the groups and in this the land question looms large.

The Alpha and the Omega of the revolution?

One of the WP papers is devoted exclusively to the land question and it is this document, entitled the 'Native Question' that has remained as the main legacy of those early debates. In their opposition to the Comintern the members of the WP proposed that the programme of a revolutionary party must start with the problem of the dispossession of Africans from the land.

A tiny minority of whites, they said, owned 92 per cent of the land divided into 95,000 registered farms. Yet 87 per cent of Africans lived on the land, half in the Reserves where land possession was permitted and a further third lived in 'virtual serfdom' as farm labourers (500,000), seasonal farm labourers (700,000), or squatters (500,000). These were described loosely in the thesis as 'landless peasantry'. The figures, said the WP, concealed the level of concentration in land holdings. Eleven per cent of the white farmers (11,000) with holdings between 2,000 and 10,000 morgan each, owned more than half the total land. Under these conditions there was no possibility of land reform.

The thesis then went on to consider the land question in terms of the needs of capital. The men in the Reserves were required as workers and they were 'burdened with heavy taxes, polltax, hut tax, quitrent, squatter's tax...[and in that way] forced to find work in the mines or on the farms.' On the mines and farms, the WP said, Africans produced the wealth of South Africa, subject to 'intense exploitation':

> The main characteristic of the South African economic system...is the exceptionally low level of the wages of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers. There are very few countries in the world where capitalism is able to extract such tremendous profits out of the meanest type of exploitation.

Although African workers were the producers of the immense wealth accruing to the mineowners and the state, they received one-tenth the wages paid to whites who they outnumbered by 9.3 to 1 on the gold mines and 16.88 to 1 on the coal mines. The wages of the whites, the WP said, would be dragged down to the level of the unskilled workers, unless the entire working class organized to narrow the wage gap. That is, the WP, like the CPSA, failed to see that the division of the working class and the wage differential across the racial divide, was built into the method of political control. The preference given to white workers in the mines and in industry, the reservation of jobs and the higher wages, the segregation in housing and social amenities, all provided the mechanism by which the working class was atomized and split. It also created a privileged group in the working class that would jealously protect its own position and consequently act as a praetorian guard for capital. Their call for a united working class movement to fight for the emancipation of labour from capital was in the best tradition of socialism. However, in calling on the white workers to take their place in the fight 'for the removal of all repressive legislation against the Natives and all the other workers,' they gave undue prominance to the potential role of the whites, and underestimated the revolutionary potential of the black workers. Yet it was the black workers that had to take the lead in the struggle against discrimination.

The WP was aware of the forces at work in South Africa. The group was conscious of the threat of fascism and the danger of losing the few remaining democratic rights. They called on Marxists to find a link between the

'emancipation of the working class and the liberation of the oppressed races, [to throw]...off the yoke and chains of Capitalism and Imperialism.' Racial oppression would only be removed when the revolutionary movement grasped the national struggle – but without obscuring the class struggle and without pandering to petty bourgeois black nationalism. There could be no competition with the ANC in nationalist slogans to win the masses – national liberation could only be achieved through proletarian revolution.

At this stage the WP surrendered its independent thinking to the Comintern and retreated from the position upheld by Bunting (see *Searchlight South Africa*, No.3). Proletarian revolution was apparently the task of the white workers alone. The motive force for Africans, they said, would be the demand for land and this would be followed by the call for national emancipation. This central programmatic point was encapsulated in a phrase that gained currency (or notoriety) in sections of the left: '*Only the revolution can solve the agrarian question, which is the axis, the alpha and the omega of the revolution*' (my stress). This transformation would only be effected by the revolutionary working class together with the 'potentially great revolutionary reservoir' of African peasants. However, even this was in doubt. The WP was far from sanguine about the possibility of unifying the workers or of organizing the black rural population, as yet 'untouched by revolutionary propaganda, revolutionary ideas, revolutionary outlook.'

The assertion that the people of the rural areas were peasants was false. They were little more than a labour reserve for the mines, the farms and the burgeoning industries. A quarter million African labourers worked on the mines, and a million Africans were townsmen, and the boom that followed South Africa's departure from the gold standard in 1932 would bring more to the towns. This was the proletariat that had to be organized in the coming period, separately from the white workers if necessary.

The demand by Africans for land could not stop the process of proletarianization, and to suggest otherwise was to ignore the dynamics of change in South Africa. Nevertheless the revolutionary movement had to be sensitive to the agitation for land, and the incipient revolts in the countryside. This was a period of extensive unrest among farm labourers and in some of the Reserves, some recorded in the organs of the CPSA, others noted by Edward Roux in January 1928 in *Labour Monthly*. Under the title 'Agrarian Revolt in South Africa' he wrote of rising discontent in the northern Free State, the eastern Transvaal and Natal. Being in Cambridge (as a post-graduate student) Roux underestimated the extent of the disturbances, but his understanding outstripped that of his contemporaries in the CPSA: the silence on these events in WP publications is inexplicable. The land issue was highlighted again in 1935 when the 'Native Bills' were presented to parliament. The 'final apportionment' of land to the African peoples was demarcated in the Native Trust and Land Act and the restricted Cape African vote was removed under the Native Representation Act. African bodies responded by convening a new body, the All African Convention, to contest the disenfranchisement and the restrictions on land purchase. Under these

circumstances no serious political organization could ignore the major issues – land and the vote – that caused concern throughout the country.

The legislation was attacked, and socialists demanded that restrictions on land purchase be abolished and the right to the vote extended to all. Socialists also had to explain that it was the nature of capitalism, and its need for an ever increasing proletariat, that lay behind the land question and the forced move to the mines and the towns. This was irreversible, and there was no possibility of returning to the supposed 'golden age' of tribal land regulation. The old order had been disrupted and the process was painful, but the birth of the working class had created the possibility of building a new society that could break out of the bounds of capitalism. The WP wrote about the new Bills in *Spark*, and linked the land question with the needs of the mines and industry, but did not change their basic position. Land was 'the axis, the alpha and the omega of the revolution.' Consequently they concluded an article on the Bills in October 1935 by saying:

> If the All–Bantu Convention or the African Congress are prepared to wage a real revolutionary struggle for national liberation, for democratic rights, for equal franchise in all Provinces for Bantu, White, Coloured, etc., and for land for the Natives, all revolutionary workers in South Africa will support them and will join hands for the combined struggle against oppression and exploitation.

The formulation was flawed. The struggle for land and against 'oppression and exploitation' could only be achieved by the working class in its own struggle for socialism. Precisely what was meant by 'national liberation' was not defined, but presumably incorporated the demand for 'democratic rights'. The WP, usually so far ahead of other groups in their understanding of the problems faced by socialists in South Africa had failed to provide the analysis that would inform the revolutionary cadre ot the future.

Peasants and the Working Class

The two groups that emerged from the Lenin Club differed on the slogans to be used in South Africa when war came. Both agreed with the revolutionary anti–war stand of the left opposition, but the Communist League believed that an appeal to Afrikaner nationalists (who would also oppose the coming war) could win many of them to the socialist movement. This was a reversion to the position of the CPSA (as see the quotations above) and was patently absurd. Yet their thesis on the War Question, which at that time was taken as unexceptional by the international left opposition, provides a much more rounded position on many questions, including a lengthy discussion of South Africa's economy. This was overlooked then, and was subsequently forgotten, although it contained invaluable insights on the country's political economy.

Except for agriculture, said the writer, the South African economy was subordinated to Britain. The mines, sugar, secondary industries, transport,

the banks and the national debt were controlled by British finance capital. The control of the gold industry by finance capital determined the ultimate behaviour of the government: its search for higher and more stable profits, its need to secure 'a settlement of the Native Question, that is...securing the supply of cheap and yet cheaper labour...'

Little that appeared in this document was new. Some of the statements can be traced back to Hobson's writings at the turn of the century, updated to take in the effects of going off the gold standard in 1932. However, by failing to link this discussion with their paper on the 'Native Question' the WP got the equation wrong. The land question was inseparable from the labour question. The African workers had come to stay, some on the mines and others in the industrial towns. They had not all been removed from the land – partly because they resisted proletarianization, partly because it was found convenient to retain a large reserve army of labour in the rural areas. In the years to come the African's demand for land would merge with, and be overtaken by, the cry for better living conditions in the towns.

It is perhaps easier to see this with hindsight. In the early 1930s two occupations predominated: that of farm labour and domestic service. The other occupations in which large numbers of men were employed were in transport (the railways and harbours) and on the mines and these were not the industries in which the modern proletariat was formed. One characteristic was common to most African workers: the majority were still tied by family and kinship to the land. The journey to the mines and towns was still largely confined to men, and was considered a sojourn away from home. This body of workers, illiterate and unskilled, was not conceived of by socialists as the class that could take control of the state.

The Communist League took issue with the Workers Party over the land issue. In *Workers Voice* (February 1936), they said that the 'main need' of Africans was not for land and that 'a mere cry for land by the Native does not constitute an agrarian problem.' The main problem, said the writer, was the taxes that forced Africans to sell their labour power to the Chamber of Mines. Consequently, 'their chief need is relief from taxation. Their chief enemy is British Imperialism which extorts their very life blood by means of sweated labour.' The writer went further. He said that it was contradictory for the WP to claim that the land question was the central issue and then reject (even if correctly) the Native Republic slogan: 'The Workers Party appeals to the peasant with a slogan for more land. But the peasant is the Native, and so their correct slogan in these circumstances should be the "Native Republic".' He also added, in obvious ignorance of the rural struggles of the time, that the peasants were notoriously backward politically and 'had not once succeeded in offering resistance to the cruel oppression of the white slave-owners.'

To give the Africans more land would be useless, he said. If that was done taxes would be raised still further to secure the required work force. From this the article went on to more secure ground, albeit with information that was not always accurate. There were a million Africans in the towns (out of

a total of six million) and they would take the leadership in the event of a revolution.

Trotsky on the Black Republic

Leon Trotsky, in exile, received copies of the WP draft theses, but not those of the Communist League. He replied, saying he was 'too insufficiently acquainted with the conditions in South Africa' to offer opinions on several practical questions. However, he had to voice disagreement on certain aspects of the draft theses – particularly those which arose from polemical *exaggerations* in the struggle with the 'national policy of Stalinism.'

Unaware as he was of the specific conditions in South Africa, Trotsky was being unnecessarily modest. He had already arrived at his own conclusions on the 'Negro Question' and, meeting with supporters from the USA in Prinkipo in 1933, he discussed the Comintern's resolution on the 'Negro question' in the USA. This instructed communists to agitate for an independent Black state in the Southern states of America. Trotsky had met with black American delegates when he was a leading member of the Comintern and explored the nature of their oppression: in Prinkipo the question was raised again. He declared that the Blacks (of America and Africa) were a race but in Africa they were becoming a nation. The American blacks were at a higher cultural level and would provide leaders for Africa. Discussing the relation between socialists and the American blacks he said that it was for blacks to decide whether they wished to become a nation. But, he insisted, if they wanted self–determination they should get full support. If there was class fraternization between white and black workers, then perhaps it would be wrong to propagate this position. However, at the moment, Trotsky wrote:

> ...the white workers in relation to the Negroes are the oppressors, scoundrels, who persecute the black and the yellow, hold them in contempt, and lynch them

Asked whether such a slogan would lead to an alliance with the black petty bourgeoisie, Trotsky agreed, but said the latter would be by–passed by the militant black proletariat who, recognizing that white communists fight for black demands, would advance through their own struggle to the proletarian revolution.

In concluding the meeting Trotsky referred to the struggles in Africa. In this case the central problem was with the workers in Europe who held the key to 'real' colonial liberation:

> Without their liberation real colonial liberation is not possible. If the white workers performs the role of the oppressor he cannot liberate himself much less the colonial peoples. The right of self determination of the colonial peoples can in certain periods lead to different results;

> in the final instance, however, it will lead to the struggle against imperialism and to the liberation of the colonial people.

Two years later Trotsky received the theses from the WP. He commented almost exclusively on the document that dealt with the Black Republic and the land issue, and of this he said:

> Three quarters of the population of South Africa...is composed of Non-Europeans. A victorious revolution is unthinkable without the awakening of the native masses; in its turn it will give them what they are so lacking today, confidence in their strength, a heightened personal consciousness, a personal growth. Under these conditions the South African Republic will emerge first of all as a 'Black' Republic: this does not exclude, of course, either full equality for whites or brotherly relations between the two races (which depends entirely upon the conduct of the whites). But it is entirely obvious that the predominant majority of the population, liberated from slavish dependence, will put a certain imprint on the state.

All struggles had to be seen in the context of imperialist rivalries, and Trotsky linked the issues in South Africa with the necessary overthrow of British imperialism. This could only be achieved through the class struggle, both in South Africa and in Britain:

> The South African possessions of Great Britain form a Dominion only from the point of view of the white minority. From the point of view of the black majority South Africa is a Slave Colony.

In describing South Africa as a slave colony, for any part of the population, Trotsky lent credence to a varient of pluralism which ignored the very point that the WP had made in their thesis on the war question: namely, the centrality of gold in the South African economy, with the creation of a vast army of workers to satisfy the financial and commercial needs of the world's economy. The formation of this proletariat, exploited and oppressed, was the feature that had to be stressed by a Marxist theoretician – and not ringing metaphors that ignored economic reality. Consequently, the entire history of Trotskyism in South Africa was directed into a quagmire from which it has had difficulty in extricating itself. Such was the inevitable consequences of a Comintern directive that almost destroyed the CPSA and tarnished the groups that tried to establish a new and healthier Marxist tradition.

However, there was a tension in Trotsky's formulation, and repeating his formulation of 1933 he said that a proletarian party, using the methods of class struggle would affect a social revolution which also had a national character. 'We have not the slightest reason to close our eyes to this side of the question or to diminish its significance.'

Trotsky raised two further points on which he said the WP thesis was deficient, both tactical rather than substantive. Firstly, he called on the

revolutionary party, despite their strictures, to defend the ANC against attacks by the 'white oppressors and their chauvinistic agents in the ranks of the workers' organizations.' It was not incorrect, he said, to enter into episodic agreements with the ANC, while exposing its inability to achieve even its own demands. At all times however the revolutionary movement had to retain organizational independence and freedom of political criticism.

Secondly, while agreeing that the national and agrarian questions 'coincided on their bases', and that these questions could only be solved in revolutionary ways, he disagreed with the WP contention that agrarian and not national demands be put first. The struggle for land (an essential ingredient of the struggle for socialism) had to be related to the necessary political and national demands. The failure by Africans to link the demand for land with that of liberation only reflected political backwardness.The problem for the revolutionary movement was to transform the demand for land into a demand for both land and liberty. The agrarian problem had to be made political if there was to be change in the country. For reasons that were mainly tactical, in view of the smallness of the revolutionary party, said Trotsky, the message had to be taken into the rural areas 'mainly if not exclusively through the medium of the advanced workers.'

Trotsky also pinpointed one of the problems that would face the revolutionary movement in the 1930s, and on to the 1970s. The proletariat of South Africa, he wrote, consisted of 'backward black pariahs and a privileged arrogant caste of whites.' These white workers would have to be confronted with the alternative: 'either with British Imperialism and with the white bourgeoisie of South Africa, or, with the black workers and peasants.' The WP could not confront the white workers and therein lay the difficulty facing the left: if advanced workers had not yet emerged from the ranks of the black labour force, who was to take the message to the peasants? In fact, for practical and theoretical reasons the small set of intellectuals, isolated from the urban workers and lacking contact with the rural population had to concentrate their efforts on building a base among the working class. The WP did not attempt this task, nor did the Communist League (which acknowledged the need for working in the unions) ever establish itself in the working class organization. It was only in the Transvaal that members of the left opposition made a serious effort to organize a black trade union movement. Through the 1930s a number of Trotskyists including W. Thibedi, Murry Gow Purdy, Ralph Lee and then Max Gordon established the first viable black trade unions. These efforts received no support from the Cape Town groups and received no mention in their journals.

Ever mindful of the international dimensions of the working class struggle Trotsky concluded his discussion by looking optimistically to the advantages that would come from co-operation between a Soviet Britain and a socialist South Africa. He also looked forward to the influence that a Soviet South Africa would exercise over the rest of Africa. That was fifty years ago and the working class suffered serious defeats during that time. But the vision still remains. Only a socialist South Africa can revive hope for an altered southern

Africa – in Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswans and Zimbabwe, as well as Mozambique and Malawi – in which blacks can unite to build a better society.

Echoes of the Past

Shortly after the theses were dispatched to Trotsky the 'Native Bills' (referred to above) were placed before Parliament. The CPSA, still shattered by the expulsions and defections that followed adoption of the Black Republic slogan, turned their attention elsewhere. Following new Comintern directives the slogan was dropped and the CPSA became involved in building a 'popular front' with the white trade unions, the Labour Party, and white liberals. It was only pressure from their remaining black members that led to their participation in the new organization that was called into being under the name of the All African Convention.

The WP, with its focus on land, concentrated its propaganda against the Bills and, despite its scepticism, sent delegates to the AAC conferences. The WP was scathing in its reports of the conferences and Ralph Bunche (at the time associated with Paul Robeson) who visited South Africa in 1937, wrote of a left caucus at the AAC which was in constant conflict with the conservative leadership. Nonetheless, the premise upon which the AAC was formed was not challenged in the WP journal. Although the party never accepted the Black Republic slogan its member immersed themselves in work inside the national–liberation movement. The WP ceased to function openly in the months preceding the outbreak of war in 1939 but several of their leading members assumed a leading role in a revived AAC in 1943, in the Anti–Coloured Affairs Department (Anti–CAD) and in the Non–European Unity Movement (NEUM) which acted as an umbrella organization. Although accused by their opponents with being 'Trotskyists', they vigorously denied any such connection. Intent on proving their nationalist 'credentials' they denounced left critics who called for a socialist programme or pointed to the working class as the vanguard of the struggle.

The former members of the Workers Party defended the land thesis resolutely, and their successors in the NEUM made this a central plank of their programme. This persisted through 1958 when the NEUM split over disagreements on the interpretation of their land programme. In a struggle that was acrimonious former members of the WP disagrred: the leaders of the AAC proclaiming the right to private land ownership and those of the Anti–CAD opposing this position.

I.B. Tabata, veteran member of the Workers Party, and leading theoretician of the AAC, has recently reaffirmed the 'correctness' of the WP thesis – and its central place in the programme of the AAC. An issue which should have been scrapped decades ago has the full support of the revived Unity Movement, has a central place in the programme of the Pan Africanist Congress and is, of course, the central plank of every 'Homelands' leader.

The Black Republic slogan has appeared in a number of guises but in different packagings. There is no doubt among socialists that majority rule means black leadership – this was stated as far back as 1919 when Ivon Jones stood trial in Pietermaritzburg for distributing leaflets in support of Bolshevism. But those working inside the AAC, the ANC or the PAC denied the class base of the struggle and accorded the working class a secondary position in the struggle. Indeed, they stayed with or resurrected the stage theory. The CP produced its own revamped stage theory when it adopted the idea of 'internal colonialism' – now refurbished as 'Colonialism of a Special Type.' It has become mandatory for all supporters of the ANC/SACP to accept this designation. Twist as they may as they try to justify their line, this requires support for a bourgeois democracy in which the black majority will have no redress for the exploitation to which they are subjected, and no substantial change in land allocation.

REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

Featuring a wide range of articles from the revolutionary Marxist movement which have been unattainable for many years or have appeared before in English translation.

Vol.2, No.3, Autumn 1989: The German Left: 1919-35

Subscription (Vol.2, 4 issues)
Back copies available

Surface Mail
UK £12, Rest of World £15.50
Air Mail
North Africa and the Middle East £ 21; USA and Latin America, South Africa, Canada and India £ 23; Australia, New Zealand and Japan £ 25

International Money Order or UK Cheques to Socialist Platform Ltd, c/o Barry Buitekant, 111 Riverside Close, Mount Pleasant Hill, London E5.

Document

REMARKS ON THE DRAFT THESES OF THE WORKERS PARTY

Leon Trotsky

Trotsky received the Workers Party theses in exile and replied on 20 April 1935. Copies circulated in South Africa, and appeared later in the Workers Voice Theoretical Supplement, November 1944 and the Fourth International, November 1945.

A 'Slave Colony' for the Blacks

The theses are written without doubt on the basis of a serious study of both the economic and political conditions of South Africa as well as the literature of Marxism and Leninism, particularly that of the Bolshevik–Leninists. A serious scientific approach to all questions is one of the most important conditions for the success of a revolutionary organization. The example of our South African friends again confirms the fact that in the present epoch only the Bolshevik–Leninists, i.e, the consistent proletarian revolutionists, take a serious attitude to theory, analyze the realities, and are learning themselves before they teach others. The Stalinist bureaucracy has long ago substituted a combination of ignorance and impudence for Marxism.

In the following lines I wish to make certain remarks with regard to the draft theses which will serve as a programme for the Workers Party of South Africa. Under no circumstances do I bring forward these remarks in opposition to the text of the theses. I am too insufficiently acquainted with the conditions in South Africa to pretend to a full conclusive opinion on a series of practical questions. Only in certain places I am obliged to express my disagreement with certain aspects of the draft thesis. But here, also in so far as I can judge from afar we have no differences in principles with the authors of the theses. It is rather a matter of certain polemical exaggerations arising from the struggle with the pernicious national policy of Stalinism. But it is in the interest of the cause not to smooth over even slight inaccuracies in presentation, but, on the contrary, to expose them for open deliberations in order to arrive at the most clear and blameless text. Such is the aim of the following lines dictated by the desire to give some assistance to our South African Bolshevik–Leninists in this great and responsible work to which they have set themselves.

* * * * *

The South African possessions of Great Britain form a Dominion only from the point of view of the white minority. From the point of view of the black majority South Africa is a Slave Colony.

No social upheaval (in the first instance, an agrarian revolution) is thinkable with the retention of British Imperialism in the South African Dominion. The overthrow of British Imperialism in South Africa is just as indispensable for the triumph of Socialism in South Africa as it is for Great Britain itself.

If, as it is possible to assume, the revolution will start first in Great Britain, the less support the British bourgeoisie will find in the Colonies and Dominions, including so important a possession as South Africa, the quicker will be their support at home. The struggle for the expulsion of British Imperialism, its tools and agents, thus enters as an indispensable part of the programme of the South African proletarian party.

The Black Republic

The overthrow of the hegemony of British Imperialism in South Africa can come about as the result of a military defeat of Great Britain and the disintegration of the Empire; in this case the South African whites can still for a certain period, hardly a considerable one, retain their domination over the blacks. Another possibility, which in practice could be connected with the first, is a revolution in Great Britain and her possessions. Three–quarters of the population of South Africa (almost six million of about eight million) is composed of non–Europeans. A victorious revolution is unthinkable without the awakening of the native masses; in its turn it will give them what they are so lacking today, confidence in their strength, a heightened personal consciousness, a cultural growth. Under these conditions the South African Republic will emerge first of all as a 'black' Republic; this does not exclude of course, either full equality for whites or brotherly relations between the two races (which depends mainly upon the conduct of the whites). But is it entirely obvious that the predominant majority of the population, liberated from slavish dependence, will put a certain imprint on the State.

In so far as a victorious revolution will radically change, not only the relation between the classes, but also between the races, and will assure to the blacks that place in the state which corresponds to their numbers, so far will the social revolution in South Africa also have a national character. We have not the slightest reason to close our eyes to this side of the question or to diminish its significance. On the contrary the proletarian party should in words and deeds openly and boldly take the solution of the national (racial) problem in its hands.Nevertheless the proletarian party can and must solve the national problem by its own methods.

The historical weapon of national liberation can be only the class struggle. The Comintern, beginning from 1924, transformed the programme of national liberation of colonial people into an empty democratic abstraction which is elevated above the reality of the class relations. In the struggle against

national oppression different classes liberate themselves (temporarily!) from material interests and become simple 'anti-imperialist' forces. In order that these spiritual 'forces' bravely fulfil the task assigned to them by the Comintern, they are promised, as a reward, a spiritual 'national–democratic' state (with the unavoidable reference to Lenin's formula, 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry')

The thesis points out that in 1917 Lenin openly and once and for all discarded the slogan of 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' as if it were a necessary condition for the solution of the agrarian question. This is entirely correct. But to avoid misunderstanding it should be added (a) Lenin always spoke of a revolutionary bourgeois democratic dictatorship and not about a spiritual 'peoples' state, (b) in the struggle for a bourgeois democratic dictatorship he offered not a bloc of all 'anti-czarist forces' but carried out an independent class policy of the proletariat. An 'anti-czarist' bloc was the idea of the Russian Social Revolutionist and the Left Cadets i.e., the parties of the petty and middle bourgeoisie. Against those parties the Bolsheviks always waged an irreconcilable struggle.

* * * * *

When the thesis says that the slogan of a 'Black Republic' is equally harmful for the revolutionary cause as is the slogan of a 'South Africa for the whites,' then we cannot agree with the form of the statement: whereas in the latter there is the case of supporting complete repression, in the former, there is the case of taking the first steps towards liberation. We must accept with all decisiveness and without any reservations the complete and unconditional rights of the blacks to independence. Only on the basis of a mutual struggle against the domination of the white exploiters, can be cultivated and strengthened the solidarity of black and white toilers. It is possible that the blacks will after victory find it unnecessary to form a separate black state in South Africa. Certainly we will not force them to establish a separate state; but let them make this admission freely, on the basis of their own experience, and not forced by the sjambok of the white oppressor. The proletarian revolutionaries must never forget the right of the oppressed nationalities of self-determination, including full separation, and of the duty of the proletariat of the oppressing nation to defend this right with arms in hand if necessary!

The thesis quite correctly underlines the fact that the solution of the national struggle in Russia was brought about by the October revolution. National democratic movements by themselves were powerless to cope with the national oppression of czarism. Only because of the fact that the movement of the oppressed nationalities, as well as the agrarian movement of the peasantry gave the proletariat the possibility of seizing power and establishing its dictatorship, the national question as well as the agrarian found a bold and decisive solution. But the very conjunction of the national movements with the struggle of the proletariat for power was made politically possible only thanks to the fact that the Bolsheviks during the whole of their history carried

on an irreconcilable struggle with the Great Russian oppressors, supporting always and without reservations the right of the oppressed nationalities to self-determination including separation from Russia.

Self-Determination and the Class Struggle

The policy of Lenin in regard to the oppressed nations did not, however, have anything in common with the policy of the (Stalinist) epigones. The Bolshevik Party defended the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination, with methods of proletarian class struggle, entirely rejecting the charlatan 'anti-imperialist' bloc with the numerous petty-bourgeois 'national' parties of czarist Russia (PPS, the party of Pilsudski in czarist Poland, Dashnaki in Armenia, the Ukrainian nationalists, the Jewish Zionists, etc., etc.). The Bolsheviks have always mercilessly unmasked these parties, as well as the Russian Social Revolutionists, their vacillations and adventurism, but especially their ideological lie of being above the class struggle. Lenin did not stop his intransigent criticism even when circumstances forced upon him this or that episodic, strictly practical agreement with them. There could be no question of any permanent alliance with them under the banner of 'anti-czarism.' Only thanks to an irreconcilable class policy was Bolshevism able to succeed in the time of the Revolution to throw aside the Mensheviks, the Social Revolutionists, the national petty-bourgeois parties, and gather around the proletariat the masses of the peasantry and the oppressed nationalities.

* * * * *

'We must not,' says the thesis, 'compete with the African National Congress in nationalist slogans in order to win the Native masses.' The idea is in itself correct, but it requires concrete amplification. Being insufficiently acquainted with the activities of the National Congress, I can only say on the basis of analogies outline our policy concerning it, stating beforehand my readiness to supplement my recommendations with all the necessary modifications.

1) The Bolshevik-Leninists put themselves in defense of the Congress as it is in all cases when it is being attacked by the white oppressors and their chauvinistic agents in the ranks of the workers' organizations.
2) The Bolshevik-Leninists place the progressive over against the reactionary tendencies in the programme of the Congress.
3) The Bolshevik-Leninists unmask before the Native masses the inability of the Congress to achieve the realisation of even its own demands, because of the superficial, conciliatory policy, and develop in contradistinction to the Congress a programme of class revolutionary struggle.

4) Separate, episodic agreements with the Congress, if they are forced by circumstances, are permissible only within the framework of strictly defined practical tasks, with the retention of full and complete independence of our own organization and freedom of political criticism.

* * * * *

The thesis brings out as the main political slogan not a 'national democratic state,' but a South African 'October'. The thesis proves, and proves convincingly, (a) that the national and agrarian questions in South Africa coincide in their bases; (b) that both these questions can be solved only in a revolutionary way; (c) that the revolutionary solution of these questions leads inevitably to the dictatorship of the proletariat which guides the Native peasant masses; (d) that the dictatorship of the proletariat will open an era of a Soviet regime and socialist construction. This conclusion is the cornerstone of the whole structure of the programme. Here we are in complete agreement.

Tactical Slogans

But the masses must be brought to this general 'strategic' formula through the medium of a series of tactical slogans. It is possible to work out these slogans, at every given stage, only on the basis of an analysis of the concrete circumstances of the life and struggle of the proletariat and peasantry and the whole internal and international situation. Without going deeply into this matter, I would like briefly to deal with the mutual relations of the national and agrarian slogans.

The thesis several times underlines that the agrarian and not the national demands must be put in the first place. This is a very important question which deserves serious attention. To push aside or to weaken the national slogans with the object of not antagonizing the white chauvinists in the ranks of the working class would be, of course, criminal opportunism, which is absolutely alien to the authors and supporters of the thesis: this flows quite clearly from the text of the thesis, which is permeated with the spirit of revolutionary internationalism. The thesis admirably says of those 'socialists' who are fighting for the privileges of the whites that 'we must recognise them as the greatest enemies of the revolution.' Thus we must seek for another explanation, which is briefly indicated in the very text: the backward Native peasant masses directly feel the agrarian oppression much more than they do the national oppression. It is quite possible; the majority of the Natives are peasants; the bulk of the land is in the hands of a white minority. The Russian peasants during their struggle for land had for long put their faith in the czar and stubbornly refused to draw political conclusions. For the revolutionary intelligentsia's traditional slogan, 'Land and Liberty,' the peasants for a long time accepted only the first part. It required decades of agrarian unrest and the influence and action of the town workers to enable the peasantry to connect both slogans.

The poor enslaved Bantu hardly entertains more hope in the British king or in MacDonald. But his extreme political backwardness is also expressed in his lack of national self–consciousness. At the same time he feels very sharply the land and fiscal bondage. Given these conditions, propaganda can and must first of all flow from the slogans of the agrarian revolution, in order that, step by step, on the basis of the experiences of the struggle, the peasantry may be brought to the necessary political and national conclusions. If these hypothetical considerations are correct, then we are not concerned here with the programme itself, but rather with the ways and means of carrying this programme to the consciousness of the Native masses.

Considering the small number of the revolutionary cadres and the extreme diffusion of the peasantry, it will be possible to influence the peasantry, at least in the immediate future, mainly if not exclusively, through the medium of the advanced workers. Therefore it is of the utmost importance to train the advanced workers in the spirit of a clear understanding of the significance of the agrarian revolution for the historic fate of South Africa.

Through the Advanced Workers

The proletariat of the country consists of backward black pariahs and a privileged arrogant caste of whites. In this lies the greatest difficulty of the whole situation. As the thesis correctly states, the economic convulsions of rotting capitalism most strongly shape the old barriers and facilitate the work of revolutionary coalescence. In any case, the worst crime on the part of the revolutionists would be to give the smallest concessions to the privileges and prejudices of the whites. Whoever gives his little finger to the devil of chauvinism is lost. The revolutionary party must put before every white worker the following alternative: either with British Imperialism and with the white bourgeoisie of South Africa, or, with the black workers and peasants against the white feudalists and slave-owners and their agents of the working class itself.

The overthrow of the British domination over the black population of South Africa will not, of course, mean an economic and cultural break with the previous mother–country. If the latter will liberate itself from the oppression of its imperialist plunderers. A Soviet England will be able to exercise a powerful economic and cultural influence on South Africa through the medium of those whites who in deed, in actual struggle, will have bound up their fate with that of the present colonial slaves. This influence will be based, not on domination, but on proletarian mutual co–operation.

But more important in all probability will be the influence which a Soviet South Africa will exercise over the whole black continent. To help the negroes to catch up to the white race, in order to ascend hand in hand with them to new cultural heights, this will be one of the grand and noble tasks of a victorious socialism.

On Organization

In conclusion I want to say a few words on the question of legal and illegal organization. (Concerning the constitution of the Party).

The thesis correctly underlines the inseparable connection between organization, revolutionary tasks, supplementing the legal apparatus with an illegal one. Nobody, of course, is proposing to create an illegal apparatus for such functions as in the given conditions can be executed by legal organs. But in conditions of an approaching political crisis, there must be created special illegal nuclei of the party apparatus which will develop as need arises. A certain part, and by the way a very important part, of the work cannot under any circumstances be carried out openly, that is, before the eyes of the class enemies.

Nevertheless, for the given period, the most important form of the illegal or semi-legal work of revolutionaries is the work of mass organizations, not falling under the blows of the reactionary apparatus. This is a very important, for the given period most important, part of the illegal work. A revolutionary group in a trade union which has learnt in practice all the necessary rules of conspiracy will be able to transform its work to an illegal status when circumstances require this.

COMMUNALISM AND SOCIALISM IN AFRICA: THE MISDIRECTION OF C.L.R. JAMES[1]

Baruch Hirson

Kwame Nkrumah - 'African Socialist'

> ...when the time comes and the history of international socialism and the revolution to overthrow capitalism is written at the head of course will be names like Marx, there will be names like Engels, there will be the name of Lenin. But a place will have to be found for Kwame Nkrumah...
> C.L.R. James, Accra, 1960.

This declaration by C.L.R. James, one–time associate of Leon Trotsky, was remarkable. Not since the panegyrics to Stalin had individuals been greeted with such extravagant language. Even more amazing was the elevation of a man whose 'contribution' to socialism was nationalist, traditional and communalist, and whose message to other African leaders was:

> Aim for the attainment of the Political Kingdomthat is to say, the complete independence and self–determination of your territories. When you have achieved the Political Kingdom all else will follow...But this power which you will achieve is not in itself the end...Coupled with this will to independence is an equal desire for some form of African union...within the milieu of a social system suited to the traditions, history, environment, and communalistic pattern of African society. ('*Hands off Africa!*, Accra, 1961)

James soon tired of Nkrumah and his eccentricities, and sought new African leaders to place on the pedestal alongside Marx and Engels. Yet it was the career of Nkrumah, who caught the imagination of socialists throughout Europe, that needs discussion if there is to be an understanding of this crucial phase in the life of C.L.R.

On 6 March 1957, Kwame Nkrumah, founder and leader of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP), became Prime Minister in the newly named state of Ghana. On the same day the book, *Ghana: the Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, was published and, whether intended or not, for the next ten years the names of Ghana and Nkrumah were always coupled together. Then, in 1966, Nkrumah was toppled in a bloodless coup and went into exile. Whether his name will be added to that of Marx, Engels, Lenin,...must be doubted. James was reflecting the adulation shown the man in 1960, when African news figured prominently in the left–wing press and the career of Kwame Nkrumah was followed avidly, not only because of events in that small corner of west Africa, but because commentators believed that something new always

comes of Africa, and this was the newest of all the new things to shake the world.

Nkrumah's political aims could be found in his many publications, all carrying the same message. Ghana was to be a socialist state based on social justice and democracy. Not the socialism of Marx, he said, but a socialism with a strong moral base to bring real justice to the people of Africa. All this would be achieved through the assertion of the 'African Personality' 'which will allow us in the future to play a *positive role* and speak with a concerted voice in the cause of peace and for the liberation of dependent Africa and in defense of our national independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity' (quoted in Woddis, 1963, p.119).

Socialists in Europe and America who applauded the way in which he had campaigned since 1951, when the CPP won its first electoral success, were fulsome in their praise of the first socialist state in Africa. There were some reservations, but most commentators were prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt. There was further optimism in socialist quarters 18 months later when Sékou Touré, an 'African Socialist' and former trade union leader persuaded the people of Guinea to vote against entry to the proposed French Community. Touré who had once had connections with the French communist Confédération Génerale des Travailleurs, rejected the class struggle – which only divided the people in the struggle against colonialism. In line with Franz Fanon, he declared that the most exploited sectors of society were the peasants and women, and not the workers. As for the latter, Touré announced in 1958 that he would institute forced labour...'for the benefit of those who are going to work themselves' (quoted in Andrain, p.172).

There was nothing in what Touré said that fitted with Marx's thoughts, but here too the voice of critics was stilled. In fact, so great was the sympathy for Guinea, where the departing French administrators had destroyed every available amenity, from telephones to toilets, that Touré's stance came to symbolize the forces of anti-colonialism. Then, when he turned to Moscow for aid and secured the co-operation of Nkrumah, his standing among western socialists rose. The signing of an agreement on 1 May 1959 to unite Ghana and Guinea brought paeans of praise from socialist writers.

There might have been some doubts when the terms of the agreement between these states became known. There was no statement on social policy, and no sign of socialism in the new union. That was not all. Six weeks later, President Tubman of Liberia – known more for the tyranny of his regime and his rejection of socialism – joined Presidents Nkrumah and Touré in setting up a loose federation of West African states under the terms of the Sanniquellie Declaration.

If there were reservations about some of Nkrumah's activities there was consolation for the defenders of African Socialism, as the new ideology was named. In April 1958 Nkrumah convened a conference of the eight independent African states at which there was a declaration of loyalty to the UN, to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung. Resolutions were affirmed condemning

colonialism, calling for a just end to the war in Algeria, for the granting of independence to all trusteeship territories, for an end to racism in South Africa, Kenya, the Central African Federation and so on. This was followed by the All–Africa Peoples Conference in December, attended by governments and non–governmental bodies from across the continent. There were calls for the liberation of the Continent, the building of a Commonwealth of Free African States and the use of all means short of violence to secure these aims. The slogan 'Africa for the Africans' became the battlecry of the gathering. Most of the known African personalities were present and many made their first public appearance. One delegate who achieved prominence in the months to come was Patrice Lumumba who returned home to Leopoldville (Belgian Congo) to address an ecstatic crowd. The enthusiasm with which socialists greeted these leaders makes strange reading today. However, it would be wrong to ignore the mood of the time. History was being made, they all declared: Africa was on the march, new centres of socialist struggle were opening up which would take up the failing spark in Europe and light up the world.

Nkrumah was never out of the news for long. Modiba Keita of Mali joined with Ghana and Guinea in a new union of supposedly socialist states which formed the nucleus of the Casablanca group. This 'vanguard' for progress in Africa, which gave full support to Lumumba, included Morocco, Egypt, Libya (under King Idris) and the National Liberation Front of Algeria. Lumumba, whose martyrdom excludes any possibility of knowing what he might have achieved, was the adoptive darling of the left and an additional name for the champions of socialism in Africa to revere.

In a period just short of five years the enthusiasm for African Socialism spread among radical groups. Those that raised critical voices were sectarian, dogmatic, scholastic, or just foolish. How could anyone dare to question the credentials of Nkrumah, Touré, Keita, Ben Bella, Lumumba or Felix Moumié of the Cameroons? Had they not gone into the countryside and won mass support, organised their fellow countrymen into mass movements (or a revolutionary army in Algeria), had they not embarked on campaigns that humbled the imperialist powers? Were they not champions of world peace and opponents of the atom bomb? Did they not condemn apartheid, revile the Belgians, support the Algerians in their battles? Even Nasser joined the ranks of the near-socialists. He had rid Egypt of a corrupt monarchy, nationalized the Suez Canal, withstood the assault of Britain, France and Israel, and joined the Casablanca group. Why, he even turned to Moscow for aid and assistance in building the Aswan dam, and that alone qualified him for the appellation: socialist.

What if these erstwhile socialists imprisoned opponents, shackled trade unions, banned strikes, outlawed communist parties? These had to be accepted as part of the price of liberation, as the necessary consequence of the struggle against imperialism. Had the masters not said that 'freedom was the understanding of necessity.' Idris Cox of the British communist Party could not find praise enough for Nkrumah. He described his book *Consciencism*

as a 'creative contribution in the field of philosophy, in the application of Marxism to the specific conditions of Africa.' His considered opinion was that:

> Because Nkrumah sought to translate Marxism into African terms it gave the African peoples something which *belonged to them*, a *scientific outlook* which can guide them on the march towards socialism. Not only was it an enrichment of Marxism. It also served to demonstrate that Marxism is not a rigid dogma, but a guide to action, and a beacon light which illuminates the path to socialism (Cox, p.88).

Publications from Moscow were only slightly less enthusiastic. Academician I.Ia. Potekhin, as quoted by D. Morrison, declared that the CPP programme included not only the demand for the elimination of imperialism and oppression, but also the liquidation of capitalist exploitation and the building of a socialist society (p.89). In a final accolade, when Potekhin met Nkrumah in December 1962 he said of him, and of Keita, that they were 'scientific socialists'.

There were several features copied from the USSR that appealed to Stalinists. The new 'socialist' societies were all one–party states presided over by dominant leaders, all claimed to exercise democratic centralism, all co–opted trade unions into the state structure and outlawed strikes, and several introduced five– or seven–year plans and state farms in imitation of the USSR. Furthermore, they condemned colonialism and imperialism, welcomed aid from and tended to side with the USSR on cold–war issues, and supported the causes approved by Moscow: for the FLN, for Lumumba, for Nasser, against apartheid and against the regimes in East Africa and the Rhodesias.

Significantly, none of the Stalinist writers mentioned the influence on Nkrumah of George Padmore (see *Searchlight South Africa* No.2) or of C.L.R. James, who had become a close associate of Padmore and was a champion of pan–Africanism. They were not only present in Accra, speaking, advising, exhorting: their activities and opinions played an important part in establishing Nkrumah's place in Africa.

James and the African 'Revolution'

C.L.R. James, born on 4 January 1901 in Trinidad, was an early protagonist of West Indian self-government. In 1932 he moved to Britain and was profoundly affected by his reading of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*. He joined a Trotskyist group in the British Independent Labour Party in 1933/4 and proposed at this stage that the black people could only be achieved freedom by revolutionary means. Angered by the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 he joined with Padmore and others in forming a propaganda group, the International African Friends of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian army was faced with might of a technologically superior army and

was forced to surrender; but black opinion had been aroused. The led to the formation of the International African Bureau [IAB] to supply information on affairs in Africa and agitate for self-determination. George Padmore was President of the IAB and James, who was editor of the IAB journal, remained in Trotskyist groups and states that he 'worked on the application of Marxist and Leninist ideas to the coming African revolution'(James, 1977, p.64.) Remarkably, the 'Marxism' that James offered Africa was devoid of the Internationmalism that he demanded for the European revolution.

Within a decade ideas propounded by Padmore, and the black intellectual, W.E.B. Du Bois inside the Pan-African movement, led to changed orientations on Africa. James now said that the leading role of the proletariat in effecting change was scrapped as was the need for armed struggle to effect change (ibid, pp.74–5). Precisely when James 'saw the light' is not certain. In his writings before the war he concentrated on the history of the slave revolt in San Domingo, and what he wrote about Africa consisted of gobbets, some true, many erroneous, on local uprisings in African colonies. At no point did he stop to place these events in their social setting, and although he said it was not his aim to show that Africans were capable of revolt, this was precisely what he seemed to be doing (James, 1939).

James straddled two political philosophies: that of nationalism in his African writings, and that of Marxism in his writings on Europe. His statements in discussion with Trotsky in 1940 indicates that he did not manage to reconciled them. He wanted Trotskyist support for the IBA journal, but without mention of socialism; he sought a black organization in the USA which included all classes and agitated for the advancement of all blacks (James, 1980). Trotsky disagreed with James on these points, but he did stress again, as he had done in earlier discussions with members of the American left opposition, that American blacks should be given full support if they expressed a desire for their own independent state. Eventually James accepted this and it could only have reinforced his own nationalist inclinations.

James eventually left the Trotskyist movement in 1950, by which time he had extended the views developed in the Pan–African movement. There was no need for revolution anywhere in the world. The masses had demonstrated their ability for self-organization and this would come to permeate all society. All that was needed by organizers was to spread the word. The new proponent of this philosophy, in James's view, was Kwame Nkrumah. Thus it was, that in July 1960 James could deliver his tribute, an extract from which heads this article. But it was also a speech of self–glorification. If Nkrumah was to be raised to the Gods, there was to be no uncertainty about who had placed him there. I quote:

> My friends, I want to tell you: I have written, and there are people here who know it, a history of the Communist International. It begins with the study of Marx. It went on to the study of the Second International which originated and was inspired by Engels, and it went on to make a close study of the Third International which was established by Lenin.

> I want to say here and I want to say it most emphatically that when the time comes and the history of international socialism and the revolution to overthrow capitalism is written at the head of course will be names like Marx, there will be names like Engels, there will be the name of Lenin. But a place will have to be found for Kwame Nkrumah...[drowned by applause and shouts]. I state, as one who has studied the history of the revolutionary movement, that at the present time those policies that I have enunciated for you, those policies that you know spring from here are fundamental policies for the emancipation of all classes and all oppressed people in the world. And that today—I don't say yesterday, I don't say tomorrow, but I say today, the centre of the world revolutionary struggle is here in Accra, Ghana...[Loud applause]

Although James was to change his mind about Nkrumah – for whom a place would apparently not have to be found alongside Marx, Engels and Lenin; he nonetheless had the essay reprinted in the collection of essays in 1962, which went through four printings by 1977. The tone of the passage, and much more in the essay, is distasteful; but if the boasting is put aside, it is not easy to reconcile James's elevation of personalities with his claims to Marxist analysis. This 'cult of the individual' (if that phrase has any meaning) is more befitting to the Stalin cult that James had once condemned. Nor did James expand on the ideas that Nkrumah was supposed to have contributed (alongside Marx, Engels and Lenin), and he did not indicate how the new state of Ghana had become the 'centre of world revolutionary struggle,' whatever revolutionary struggle meant for him.

James began to have his doubts about Nkrumah's policies in the early 1960s: views he communicated in letters to the President, but Nkrumah did not deign to reply. The book on Ghana, says James, was concluded at a time when he 'feared for the future of Africa under African auspices, a fear which was immediately justified by the fall of Nkrumah' (James, 1977, p.24). Another God had failed and in James's favour it must be said that he distanced himself from the coming downfall where others continued in their praise of this failed leader. But for some unstated reason James does not discuss the roles played by Toure or Keita, or any of the other 'socialist' leaders in Africa. The dream had been shattered and James only wanted to distance himself from what had happened. But aid was at hand. James continued:

> My bewilderment, however, was almost immediately soothed by the appearance of the Arusha declaration of Dr Nyerere. Before very long, on my way to lecture at Makerere, I was able to pass into Tanzania and read, hear and see for myself what was going on. I remain now, as I was then, more than ever convinced that something new has come out of Africa.

Step up Comrade Nyerere and take your place alongside Marx, Engels, Lenin...and Nkrumah?

The Roots of Ideology

These writings of James on Africa, muddled and wrong, are all the more objectionable for their concentration on individuals who come to personify the state. Nkrumah had claimed that the CPP was Ghana and Ghana was the CPP. James equated Nkrumah with the CPP and when the leader failed to build the new society, James found a new leader for Africa in east Africa. The same personification was found elsewhere. Discussions of Guinea were converted into appraisals of Touré; Mali into a sketch of Keita; Algeria into a backdrop of Ben Bella. It was the ideas of these men that were quoted *ad nauseam*: plans for their countries, the meaning of socialism, their conception of democracy, the role of the trade unions, the attitude to peace, to neutralism, to African unity. This substitution of the party for the people and the leader for the party was a phenomenon that had taken root under Stalinism. It had taken hold in ever wider circles of writers who chose to ignore the social setting in which events occurred and ascribed success to charisma. As if a God–like favour was all that was needed to explain the emergence of particular leaders.[2]

The one factor common to colonial Africa was the predominance of the rural population. There were regions of these territories in which the colonial administration had been largely absent and where control was maintained through indirect rule. There were other districts in which the heavy hand of Commissioners was always apparent. But few regions were insulated from the needs and demands of the cash market, and there was widespread discontent in almost every colony. It is not always clear whether the aspiring leaders set out to capture the rural constituencies, or whether the process was reversed. In at least one well researched area, in the Kwilu district of what was the Belgian Congo, it is obvious that it was the radicalized rural population that forced the urban based leaders to advance ever more radical slogans (Weiss, *passim*).

To attract this vast constituency national leaders adopted tribal dress, used ceremonial libations, shook fly whisks, sang tribal songs, adopted tribal titles. They preached the virtues of the rural communalism: Nyerere extolled the mutual security of the rich and the poor, in which the community ensured the welfare of its members. This was supposed to have pre–existed colonialism and he called it the communitary society. Touré spoke of the communaucratic society with a 'unique humanism...in collective living and social solidarity.' In regions 'contaminated by colonialism' personal egoism abounded, but otherwise 'an individual in Africa cannot conceive of the organization of his life outside that of the family, village or clan. The voice of the African is faceless and nameless' (quoted in Cowan, p.193). Nkrumah harked on the same theme. Communalism, he wrote, involved the African:

> as primarily a spiritual being, a being endowed originally with a certain inward dignity, integrity and value...[Socialism] includes the restitution of the egalitarian and humanist principles of traditional African life

within the context of a modern technological society serving the welfare needs of its people (Mohan, p.232).

The worker was viewed differently. Fanon, Senghor, Mboya, Touré and others inveighed against a 'privileged minority', a 'selfish privileged group', who played little part in overthrowing colonialism. Nyerere said of them that after independence they 'displayed a capitalist attitude of mind' demanding a greater share in the general income because of the contribution they made. (Mohan, p.245) Attitudes differed, but African leaders were agreed that socialism did not involve working class control of production: some because they said the working class was minute (and in this they were often factually correct) or because they claimed that the workers were selfish. Behind much of this rhetoric came the claim that there were no class divisions in Africa, and no class struggle. Touré claimed that his party had 'adapted from Marxism everything that is true for Africa' and had 'excised' the class struggle 'to permit all Africans regardless of class to engage in the anti–colonial struggle' (Cowan, p.189). Elsewhere he said that the party had 'formally rejected the principle of the class struggle...' as a European inspired doctrine that was not relevant to Africa (ibid).

These arguments were repeated by leaders in east and in central Africa. I have not been concerned with the truth or falsity of the claims for 'traditional society', but with the fact that African leaders rested their cases on such statements and that James did not refute them. This is remarkable: James knew full well that Engels had said of the utopian socialists that their theories were constructed during the 'immature phase of capitalist production' when class positions were correspondingly inchoate. Their answers were utopian and 'the more their details are elaborated, the more they necessarily recede into pure fantasy' (Engels, pp.23, 285).

Such fantasy led Nkrumah to the conclusion that capitalism was 'too complicated a system for a newly independent nation. Hence the need for a socialist society.' Others were more cavalier in their discussion of economic problems: 'You cannot be a capitalist when you have no capital' said Sedou Kouyate, Mali's Minister of Planning and Rural Development – without explaining how planning or rural development was possible without capital. Other Ministers used the arguments once advanced by the Narodniki in Czarist Russia: Capitalism led to fratricidal struggle, to degradation and social injustice, to personal enrichment. It was in this tradition that Nkrumah was to write in *Consciencism* that 'the presuppositions and purposes of capitalism are contrary to those of African society. Capitalism would be a betrayal of the personality and conscience of Africa' (see also Mohan, pp.221–2).

This word spinning circumvented the need to confront real problems. These phrases provided no means to secure development in industry or in agriculture, and no way to find food for the population. The 'personality and conscience of Africa' was a myth that brought neither capital nor socialism to Ghana, did not solve its inter–regional rivalries, did not appease the

Ashanti cocoa growers, did not provide the aluminium plant that Nkrumah tried to secure, and did not save him from the popular wrath.

A more extensive essay would show that similar fates were waiting for other states that claimed they could build socialism in their little states, without resources, without capital, and without a working class. Their failure could have been anticipated by Marxist thinkers – and if local leaders did not have the understanding of what was required, they were unfortunate in not finding the advisers they needed. Of James it must be said that he, more than any others, should have been better prepared to explain the problems critically. His great disservice was to give political mysticism the sanction of an apparent Marxist radicalism.

The problems of the 1960s, when James played a central role in Pan African politics, are of more than historic interest. The theoretical confusion of the left when confronted with class strggles in backward societies goes back to the polemics in Russia before the revolution of 1917: an issue resolved in practice, but leaving a legacy of theoretical confusion.[3] The struggles for colonial independence were denied the insights that Marxism should have offered. Instead, mysticism prevailed and populist theories replaced scienticfic analysis.

Notes

1. C.L.R. James (4 January 1901–31 May 1989). I was influenced, as were scores of others, by his writings on the revolution in San Domingo and his exposure of Stalinism as a world-wide phenomenon. But in the course of his carerr he erred on many issues – none more grievously than in his appraisal of events in Africa. It is of this aspect of his activities that I write below.

2. The dictionary meaning of 'charisma' is often overlooked. It referes to a favour or a talent bestowed by God. The concept explains little and is used here only because of its wide usage.

3. In Russia only Trotsky drew on the events of 1917 in calling for a reappraisal of the nature of the revolution. See his *Lessons of October*, first written in 1923.

Bibliography

Charles F. Andrain, 'Guinea and Senegal', in Friedland and Rosberg.

Gwendolen Carter (1962), African One-Party States, Cornell University Press.

Gray Cowan (1962), 'Guinea', in Carter.

Idris Cox (1966), Socialist Ideas in Africa, Lawrence and Wishart.

Frederick Engels (1940), Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science, Lawrence and Wishart.

C.L.R. James (1939), 'Revolution and the Negro', New International (December) reprinted

in Bulletin of IDOM, September 1989.

—— (1977), Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution, Allison and Busby.

—— (1980), 'Plans for the Negro Organization' in Trotsky.

Colin Legum (ed.) (1962), Pan–Africanism: A Short Political Guide, Pall Mall.

R. Milliband and J. Saville (eds), Socialist Register 1966.

Jitendra Mohan (1966), 'Varieties of African Socialism' in Milliband and Saville.

David Morrison (1964), The USSR and Africa, OUP.

Kwame Nkrumah (1964), Consciencism, Heinemann.

Leon Trotsky (1980), On Black Nationalism and Self Determination, Pathfinder.

Herbert H. Weiss (1967), Political Protest in the Congo: The Parti Solidaire Africaine During the Independence Struggle, Princeton University Press.

Jack Woddis (1960), Africa: The Roots of Revolt, Lawrence and Wishart.

—— (1961), Africa: The Lion Awakes, Lawrence and Wishart.

—— (9163), Africa: The Way Ahead, Lawrence and Wishart.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BEIJING WORKERS' AUTONOMOUS FEDERATION

Ralph Schoenman

15th June 1989

The Workers' Autonomous Federation emerged in May 1989 as a prototype for a future independent trade union movement in China. It arose alongside the student demonstrations which began in April 1989 calling for greater democracy, an end to corruption, a more open and accountable government and autonomous student unions.

Under the red banner of the Workers' Autonomous Federation and fluttering slogans calling for democracy and freedom of association, between fifty and one hundred workers erected a tented headquarters on the outskirts of the students' tents at the Tiananmen Square in Beijing in mid-May.

Members of the union were mostly production workers, service sector workers and worker intellectuals. Among the core members, there were steelworkers, railway workers, aviation workers, restaurant cooks, students and lawyers.

Apart from Beijing, workers at the camp also came from other areas such as Tianjin, Shanxi, the northern cities, Jiangsu, and they ranged in age from early 20's to late 40's. Their action was the first open attempt by workers to set up an autonomous organization outside the official-run All-China Federation of Trade-Unions (ACFTU).

The organizers launched their action by issuing pamphlets and leaflets to publicize criticisms of the present labour policies, union structure and to spread their call for a genuine and democratic workers' movement. They also set up a public address system in Tiananmen Square to explain their demands.

The organizers worked in harsh conditions, staging round-the-clock pickets in the Square under flimsy tent roofs, in the blazing heat, rain and cold with a lack of food and sleep. They were bombarded from two sides by the competing loudspeakers. On the one side, their own broadcasts continued to repeat their calls, punctuated by the Internationale and other songs. On the other side, the Central government public address system blared official propaganda, repeating Martial law regulations and issuing warnings to the demonstrators.

At any time during the day, hundreds and sometimes thousands of workers and residents crowded around the Federation loudspeakers, listening to the speeches. Whenever the union managed to print some handouts (which was sporadic due to the lack of printing facilities), the crowd rushed up to grab a copy. The demand always outstripped the supply many-fold.

The Struggle for Democracy is Linked to that of Satisfying Demands

Amidst the students' campaign for democracy and liberty, workers set up the union in mid–May. The founders reckoned that the fight for democracy and liberty bore relevance to their immediate interests, allowing the workers to have independent and genuine representation in policy making as well as improving their own economic position.

Members and correspondents were recruited at the camp site, and several hundred workers had already signed up and received membership cards.

The Hongkong Trade Union Education Centre (TUEC) paid daily visits to the Federation's tented headquarters in Tiananmen Square between June 1st and 3rd before the massacre. The situation was already growing tense by this time. Three of the Federation's leaders had been detained by the Public Security Bureau earlier in the week. Although they were later released, they were under close surveillance, and so remained in hiding. The other leaders were also pursued by the public Security agents and therefore could only appear at odd times.

During our meetings we discussed the issues and problems the union leaders were addressing, their needs and their future plans. The unionists said they felt the priorities were to build up their network among the grassroot workers, to consolidate the organization internally, to propagate their ideas further, to develop membership and to develop the resources, leadership, skills and infrastructure needed for the new federation.

They saw their main obstacle as the clearly expressed antagonism coming from the government and the government–run union movement, the All–China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). The authorities were labelling them an unlawful body comprised of unruly elements. They were also concerned that there was some resistance from some demonstrating students towards workers' involvement in the democracy campaign. Some students apparently felt the need to restrict their campaign purely to students and intellectuals.

The problem which the Federation was addressing focused on the corrupt bureaucracy and the existence of a privileged elite in China. The wide wage discrepancy between the workers and plant managers, the lack of workplace democracy, the lack of genuine workers' representation in the policy–making process, poor labour protection and working conditions, and the deterioration of workers' living standards in recent years were among their main grievances.

On June 3rd, the federation's leaders were still talking of ways to legalize their organization, by liaising with the some relatively sympathetic sections within the ACFTU, and by gathering support from the democratic political parties. They were insistent that they wanted to organize their Autonomous Federation through constitutional and legal means and stated that they did not oppose the rule of the Chinese Communist Party.

The Autonomous Federation Camp was sited towards the northeast of the square. On the evening before the massacre, troops were massing at that end of the square, and it was clear that a confrontation of some sort was about to occur. The members of the union were among the most courageous of the demonstrators, and holding their union banner high, they marched to the front of the crowds facing the waiting troops. It was from this corner of Tiananmen Square that the massacre began.

Students who survived the massacre told us in the following hours that most of the representatives of the Autonomous Workers' Federation were killed as the troops attacked.

On the eighth of June, three days after the massacre, the regime announced that the Workers' Autonomous Federation alongside the student Autonomous Federation were counter–revolutionary organizations, and they would specifically round up and arrest the organizers and activists in these groups. The government set up a special telephone hotline for informers to assist with the process of hunting the members of these groups.

On Friday 9th June, demonstrators numbering more than one hundred thousand rallied in Shanghai. Among the protesters' banners were those from the Shanghai Workers Autonomous Federation. It was reported that there were at least one thousand workers rallying behind this particular banner.

There were also reports that similar independent trade union banners were raised in Guangzhou following the Beijing massacre. Demonstrators continue in most cities of China as the truth about events in Beijing spreads through the nation.

After the massacre by tanks and machine guns of the peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations held by students and workers in Beijing on the morning of June 4th, the next ten days saw a reign of terror in the Chinese capital as well as in many other Chinese cities. The government had asked people to use its special hotline to report any leader of activists who were known to have been involved with the autonomous students' or workers' federations.

On 12th June, the Chinese Central Television (CCTV) showed a badly beaten leader of the Shanghai Autonomous Workers' Federation who was detained by the Public Security Bureau. On the same day, through the official media, the Chinese government called on official unions to mobilize workers to demolish independent workers' federations all over the country. It was reported that eighty people had already been rounded up in Beijing over the previous few days for involvement in the independent students' and workers' federations. The military and police forces were also given orders to shoot and kill in their arrests of the so–called 'counter–revolutionary activists'.

Initially, the ACFTU showed support for the students' pro–democracy movement in the capital city but, shortly before the violent crack–down, they back–tracked on their position. On 2 June, the ACFTU issued a statement in the *Beijing Daily*, denouncing the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation as unlawful, and called on the government to crush the pickets and other

activities organized by the federation. In the statement, the ACFTU also called on workers to rally behind the efforts to attack and eliminate the autonomous federation.

A Heroic and Historical Movement

At this moment, the Chinese authorities are waging a massive and brutal witch-hunt of the pro-democracy student and labour leaders. From our discussions with the organizers and workers, it is clear that they were simply organizing for a democratic and autonomous workers' body.

Before the massacre, one of their main objectives was to seek ways to legalize their organization through peaceful means. They were also planning for grassroots mobilizing throughout the country. When asked if they wanted to push for the right to strike (which was taken away from the Chinese people in the constitutional amendments in 1982), their reply was no, for the reason that they really just wanted to organize within the laws and constitution of China.

These workers made a historic and heroic move by raising the banner of the autonomous workers' federations in Beijing, Shanghai, Xian, Hangzou, Guangzhou and other cities of China. Their action marked the first open attempt by Chinese workers to fight for their right to organize independently since 1949. Their goals were radical, their will was genuine, their act courageous, and their means peaceful. They certainly did not deserve to be brutally murdered, beaten and detained by the Chinese authorities.

(*Open Forum*, No 2, September 1989, Paris).

A NAMIBIAN HORROR

In November 1989 two persons, associated with Searchlight South Africa were introduced to, and interviewed two former prisoners of the South West African Peoples Organization, in London. Impressed by the story they heard, and convinced of its veracity ,they wrote the following account. As we explain at the end of this article we have considered all the problems associated with telling the story and are convinced that justice can only be served by giving it the space it deserves. If we had kept silent we would be little more than accomplices to the perpetrators of outrageous and heinous crimes.

Silence of the Graves

There are people, some of them socialists, who welcome the exposure of crimes in the Stalinist regimes of eastern Europe but insist that the crimes of the leadership of the South West African Peoples' Organization (SWAPO) against its own members in Angola and elsewhere remain concealed.

They justify this on the grounds that Swapo fought the South African military in Namibia in a very long guerrilla war and at a terrible cost in casualties, and that South Africa – bearing in mind its overwhelming economic superiority, and Swapo's failure to win a single region within Namibia by force of arms – must continue to remain a power in the land. This ignores the appalling scope of Swapo atrocities continuing right up till the end of 1988, involving further hundreds of prisoners still unaccounted for. It ignores also Swapo's subjection in and out of the Constituent Assembly to the capitalist interests lying at the heart of the old regime: predatory mineral–stripping by multinational and South African mining captal, capitalist farming on the grand scale by a small number of white farmers, the state–within–a–state of the Oppenheimer diamond interests centred on Oranjemund.

To this is added South Africa's continuing occupation of Namibia's main port at Walvis Bay, which remains a heavily fortified South African military base on Namibian soil. To put the matter in terms of Cuba (and thus in terms very comprehensible to Swapo's security officials), it is as if the US had continued to hold not the base at Guantanamo but instead, Havana harbour. Namibia has become independent neither of capital nor of South Africa's military power.

To reach this negligible result, Swapo's war against its own members reached extraordinary dimensions. We print in this issue an interview with two sisters, Ndamona and Panduleni Kali, both committed to the same ideals with which they joined Swapo inside Namibia while at school 14 years ago.

They were arrested in Cuba in 1984 while studying on Swapo scholarships, flown to Angola under armed Cuban guard, handed over to Swapo in Luanda, tortured repeatedly on an absurd pretext by the Swapo security apparatus and imprisoned in holes in the ground for five years. They were

released last year in the transfer of political prisoners arranged by the United Nations as part of the global Namibian settlement.

We have received a number of documents prepared mainly by the Political Consultative Committee of Ex-Swapo Detainees (PCC) and the Parents' Committee, organizations which have fought bravely to establish the truth about the imprisoned, tortured and murdered Swapo fighters, when a deafening silence reigned everywhere else. These documents include lists of hundreds of names (still incomplete) of Swapo fighters known by the returned prisoners to have been held in numerous prisons, lists of prisoners known to have been murdered or died in the hands of their Swapo jailers, and a list of names of those immediately responsible.

From the interview with the Kali sisters it is clear that during official inspections of the prisons, the top Swapo political leadership – Nujoma, Mueshihange, Garoeb, Toivo ja Toivo – were confronted face to face by the prisoners with the facts of torture and extraction of false confessions on several occasions: and did nothing. There is no escaping the complicity of the entire political leadership of Swapo, especially Nujoma as president, over a very long period. These individuals have no place in any except a government of criminals and must be held to account.

An International Inquiry

We support the PCC's call for an independent international commission of inquiry to uncover the facts, let the consequences be what they may. If the inquiry concludes that all the Swapo prisoners – or a majority, or even a large minority of them – were South African spies, so be it. There is no other way southern and central Africa can begin to be made safe for democratic politics. This abscess infects the politics of the whole subcontinent. Without fully establishing the truth about these horrors associated not just with the 'liberation movements' but specifically with the name of Marx – we shudder to report that Swapo's torture headquarters was named the Karl Marx Reception Centre in Lubango – there can be no really democratic politics in the region, let alone socialism.

The momentous events in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union – in states which armed, funded and above all trained the Swapo torture-machine – cannot be cut off by the length of the continent from the struggles to create a free, democratic, prosperous and socialist society in southern Africa. The people of Namibia have the same interest as the tens of millions who seek to put an end to Stalinism and undemocratic politics in Europe, and in China.

Swapo's spy-mania has left a terrible legacy in the region, not only in the presence inside Namibia of scores of brutalized torturers and guards in the clique around the leaders of the majority party. In this huge territory with its pitifully small population (only one and a half million), the low level of development of manufacturing industry leaves the army and police in a very strong position to organize society. The question uppermost in the minds of

many in Namibia is clearly: Will the torturers of Swapo get their hands on the Namibian police and military? For many, that could be a death sentence. As it is, Swapo's legacy is a daily life of fear immediately reimposed on the returned prisoners, with videos of their false confessions circulated by Swapo in their home areas even before their arrival, like some kind of Stalinist obscenity. Fighters against imperialism are daily threatened with lynching by gangs stirred up by their former jailers, and their families are threatened and bullied.

The legacy remains in other ways too. As Max du Preez of the South African journal *Vrye Weekblad* has pointed out, Swapo's spy–mania had three leading elements: a powerful tribal consciousness on the part of the mainly Ovambo–speaking old guard around Nujoma, grouped especially in the Kwanyama sub–tribe; a very deep seated anti–intellectualism; and a contempt for democracy, in an organization which is not known for elected congresses and whose politburo and central committee are self–perpetuating (29 September 1989). To this we would add the consequences of Swapo's growing Stalinization in the Brezhnev years, especially after the Cuba/MPLA victory in Angola in 1975.

The successive changes at the top of the USSR after Brezhnev's death altered nothing in Swapo's methodology of rule. *Vrye Weekblad* reports in the same issue, for instance, the arrest and almost certain murder in Angola at the end of 1988 of Josef Hendricks, 18, known as 'Comrade Axab', the vice–chairman of the Namibia National Students' Organization (Nanso), only months after a Swapo journal *The Namibian Worker* had described him as a hero. He had escaped to Angola while on bail on a charge of incitement. Returning fellow–prisoners from Angola say he was hauled out of an underground cell and never seen again after threatening to tell what had happened to him. As Du Preez writes,

> The brutal truth of the drama of the last few years is that anyone who could read or write well in Swapo became victims of the 'cleansing process', especialy if they were not Ovambos. Especially students and graduates went down [translated].

Du Preez takes himself to task for not having investigated more vigorously the disappearance of several of his former friends in the Swapo leadership. He makes the observation that Swapo's measures against its own members have done more than Pretoria and the South African military over many years to destabilize the delicate tribal inter–relations in the country. He writes: 'The Ovambo–versus–the–rest sentiment is now sharper than I have ever experienced it in the eleven years in which I have actively covered Namibia as a reporter' [translated]. By comparison, the South African–supported Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) which Swapo for years excoriated as tribalist had emerged in this connection, if in no other, as 'little angels'.

This is borne out by the results in the subsequent elections to the Constituent Assembly in early November. Swapo won over 90 percent of the votes in rural

Ovamboland, and the largest total of any party in the three urban areas in the centre and south where there are big concentrations of Ovambo migrant workers (Windhoek, Swakopmund, Luderitz). This provided Swapo with 57 percent of the total vote throughout the country, and 41 of the 72 seats in the Constituent Assembly. Swapo's vote corresponds roughly to the proportion of Ovambo-speakers in the society. The non-Ovambo-speaking peoples in their entirety rejected Swapo. Yet it was not always thus. While large numbers of the prison victims have non-Ovambo names, all at one time enthusiastically committed themselves to supporting Swapo with the same naive good faith as Comrade Axab.

Descent into the Pit

The process of internal fracture within Swapo will need much further study, but a provisional interpretation can be offered here. Following an episode in the 1960s when the Tanzanian army was called in by Swapo to put down critics in its military training base at Kongwa, there were two crucial periods accelerating Swapo's desent to barbarism. The first was in the mid-1970s, when a storm of student struggles in Namibia – following the general strike of 1971 – coincided with the development of the black consciousness current in South Africa which culminated in the Soweto students' demonstration and massacre in June 1976. The black consciousness politics of that period set aside the former racially segregated divisions between the people designated in South Africa as African, Coloured and Indian enshrined in the old Congress alliance. Its effect within Namibia, especially among the youth, was to propel a large number of non-Ovambo speakers into Swapo, which had been formed in 1960 out of the Ovamboland Peoples' Organization, led by Nujoma.

In the same years, the collapse of the Portuguese empire compelled Swapo to reverse its alliances in Angola. Having fought previously alongside the Unita guerrilla army of Jonas Savimbi, the Swapo leaders now adapted to the Cuban/MPLA regime that won the civil war in Angola following the incursion by South African/CIA/mercenary forces. The new regime in Angola, dependent on the USSR, intensified moves within Swapo towards Stalinism that conflicted with the demands for democracy among its younger members, who called for a new constitution and convocation of the Swapo congress. On this occasion, Swapo called out the Zambian army against its own members, more than twenty of whom are listed by the Parents' Committee as having last been seen alive in Zambia in 1976/78.

The second crucial descent (literally) into the pit took place in 1983/84, when the security apparatus under Solomon 'Jesus' Hauala – head of security and deputy army commander – carried out a purge of the military leadership. Peter Eneas Nanyemba, Swapo's secretary of defence, died in 1983 in southern Angola, allegedly in a car accident. He was a member of Swapo's old guard, an organizer of the fish cannery workers at Walvis Bay on behalf

of Swapo's predecessor, the Ovambo People's Organization, as far back as 1959 (Herbstein et al, p.6). According to Johannes Gaomab (see below) Nanyemba was 'busy replacing members of the old guard in the military hierarchy. He was trying to replace illiterates with literates...'

Hauala claimed that Nanyemba's policy favoured only southern Namibians. In fact Nanyemba usually chose young, urban and educated men. The old guard ignored the fact there were many Ovambos among them. Educated Ovambos were considered decultured – *Mbutidis* (or weeds between the true corn). It seems that:

> Nanyemba's reshuffle offended many Kwanyamas (the largest Ovambo sub–group). So Jesus alligned himself with the Kwanyama's and encouraged them to perceive Nanyemba and the educated group as a threat...[Without Nanyemba's protection after his death] the educated officials in party and army were purged as Jesus pleased (*Weekly Mail*, 5 Ocober 1989).

At the time, leading South African nationalist leaders in exile (who knew Nanyemba) believed he had been murdered. Shortly before his death, Nanymeba and two of his closest colleagues in the leadership of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) had released a number of Swapo prisoners against the opposition of the security apparatus, headed by Hauala.

After Nanyemba's death, these two colleagues – Tauno Hatuikulipi and Bennie Petrus – were arrested by Hauala's men and died in prison, probably murdered after torture. Hatuikulipi was a former director of the Windhoek Christian Centre (the predecessor of the Council of Churches in Namibia–CCN) and a member of the Swapo central committee and military council. His death was not made public until six months later, when he was branded as an enemy agent who had committed suicide by swallowing poison from a capsule hidden in a tooth.

In the same period, one of the most successful of PLAN's military commanders inside Namibia, Johannes Mie Gaomab ('Comrade Mistake') was recalled from the field as commander of the southern sector in March 1984, arrested, tortured, made to 'confess' in GPU fashion and kept imprisoned until his release and return to Namibia last July. Gaomab, who had been decorated by both the Cuban and East German armies, was a friend of Petrus (*Independent*, 29 September 1989).

> In the event eight members of the Central Committee of which two were members of its political bureau were also seized...On the part of PLAN the arrest swept [away] the Chief of Personnel, the Chief of Military Intelligence, his Deputy, and the Chief of Protocol at the DHQ and numerous other officers and combatants ('A Report').

The lunacy of the spy mania may be appreciated from the fact that even Nujoma's wife Kowambo was held as a suspect, together with her sister and

her brother (a member of the Swapo central committee). The parallels in the history of Stalinism are obvious: in the purge of the military, the paranoid destruction of leaders' families (see *20 Letters to a Friend*, by Stalin's daughter Svetlana Alliluyeva), the method of fabrication of 'confessions' (described in *On Trial* by Artur London, a victim of the Czech show trial of 1951 and former deputy foreign minister) and the spiriting away of foreign students, as happened to Chinese Trotskyists in Moscow at the end of 1929, described by Wang Fan–hsi [Fanxi] in his book *Chinese Revolutionary*.

A Turn to the Left

What is further important about the Swapo prison tortures is the range of official bourgeois institutions that knew what Swapo was doing, and kept quiet; or were told, and did not investigate. The affair perpetuates the worst elements of the Popular Front politics of the 1930s when socialists and others found it expedient to remain silent over the destruction of all groups opposed to the tactics of the USSR during the Spanish civil war. Particularly culpable in Namibia are the United Nations and the churches. We can expect nothing from the ANC or the SACP, nor apparently from the organizations that claim to stand to the left of this unholy alliance.

At a press conference in Windhoek on 7 July last year organized by the Parents' Committee and by detainees released by Swapo, a former leader of the Swapo youth, Erika Beukes, whose brother Walter Thiro was murdered in the camps, stated:

> Since 1985, or 1984, we continually sent letters and telexes to Dr de Cuellar [the UN Secretary General], we phoned the UNHCR [High Commissioner for Refugees] in Zambia, but nothing came of it until last week, at the return of these detainees...

According to Phil Ya Nangoloh, the chairman of the press conference, a delegation of the Parents' Committee met with UNHCR as recently as 20 April 1989 and was told 'that there were no human rights violations in those Swapo camps'. Ya Nangoloh accused the CCN of having also denied the allegations. He said the Parents' Committee had contacted the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 1987, but 'unfortunately [their] response...was negative'. After being invited to Angola by Nujoma to inspect the Swapo camps, he said, the LWF reported that it 'could not find any human rights violations in those camps'. In addition, the British government had knowledge of Swapo's practices from at least as early as 1985, when it granted asylum to former Swapo members. Like the claims of the Swapo prisoners themselves, it is vital that these and other matters be checked by a painstaking inquiry.

The return of the prisoners has now brought about a small though marked turn to the left, especially in non–Ovambo–speaking areas. Revulsion against Swapo's practices has radicalized politics in Namibia. This is focussed on a

small group around Erika Beukes, which launched the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) on May Day last year. The WRP participated campaigned in the recent elections within an umbrella organization, the United Democratic Front, which secured four seats and the third biggest total of votes after Swapo and the DTA. Swapo is now under attack from a vocal extra–parliamentary opposition that brands its programme and actions as a Stalinist betrayal to imperialist interests, and seeks a socialist revolution in Namibia and South Africa. A demonstration outside the legislature was organized by the WRP on the day the assembly began, denouncing the Swapo murders.

Three points need to be made about this group. First, it is politically dependent on the orientation, method and history of a British Trotskyist group, the Workers Revolutionary Party, which before 1985 was under the Stalinoid hands of Gerry Healy and others. The British WRP has made no independent study of the social conditions in Namibia, but has now found access for its politics in southern Africa. In giving support to the former prisoners of Swapo we must make it clear that we are in no way associated with the WRP or its political perspective.

Second, the international campaign to publicize Swapo's crimes against its own members is now principally the work of the British and the Namibian WRP. Other left wing groups in Britain shied from this task.

Third, the turn to the left among sections of students and workers in non–Ovambo–speaking areas presents a very complex phenomenon, with a bearing on conditions in South Africa. On the one hand, unlike in eastern Europe, the revelations of Stalinist crimes has not affected the attraction to the left. On the other hand, the form of politics of the WRP in Britain and the hasty and unconsidered way in which a programme of demands has been put together give serious grounds for concern.

These and other matters relating to Namibia cannot be explored here and will be considered in a future issue.

The fact that the main nationalist party in a country so closely tied to South Africa should already be so discredited, even before any public negotiations have begun over South Africa – where the working class occupies the pivotal place in the region – is a new element in a very swiftly changing scene.

* * * * *

SWAPO'S PRISONS IN ANGOLA

[We print the following edited and abridged interview with Ndamona and Panduleni Kali, twin sisters from Namibia. Until their return to Namibia in July 1989, they each spent five years in Swapo prisons in Angola].

Following interviews with other ex–Swapo prisoners, the London *Independent concluded that there were 'hundreds, perhaps thousands, of bemused victims' of Swapo's security apparatus (18 September 1989). Discussions are taking place to set up an independent international commission of inquiry to establish the truth of what took place in Swapo's prisons.

* * * * *

Born to Ovambo–speaking parents in 1958, the twins attended the Martin Luther High School in Omaruru (north of Windhoek) from 1974 to 1978. At school they took part in political activity in the Namibian Black Students' Organization (Nabso). In 1978 the political situation was tense and, harassed by the police, they left the country for Angola to join the military wing of Swapo, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). In 1979 they received military training at the Thobias Hainyeko camp. Ndamona was then sent to the USSR, Panduleni to Cuba. Both studied Lenin, Marx and Engels: Ndamona at the Komsomol in Moscow: Panduleni with the Federation of Cuban Women. After completing her course in the USSR Ndamona returned to Swapo bases in Angola and was then sent to join Panduleni at the University of Camaguey (in Cuba) where they both studied economics. Ndamona was a leader of the Swapo youth at the university, Panduleni a leader of the women's council.

Ndamona: Our recall to Angola was very dramatic. One day in November 1984 the man at the head of the foreign students at the university told us that we had to sign some papers from Swapo. A strange woman ordered us to go with her to a little office we had never seen before at the university. She ordered one of us to leave. We refused to separate, and when we tried to leave together we were violently pushed inside by Cuban security men who were outside the door. The woman ordered us to undress: everything off. She gave us no explanation and after examing our clothes she put on hand gloves and examined us internally. After we dressed, the men came in and when we asked why this was being done to us they said, 'You'll be given the explanation *if you deserve it'*.

Panduleni: Later in Angola we learned that the main accusation against female comrades was that they were supposed to be carrying poisoned blades

in their private parts.

Ndamona: Then I was taken back to the hostel. Everything of ours was already packed and I was asked to separate the university's books from our personal books. All the foreign students were rushing to see what was happening. The security men told them not to communicate with me. The woman responsible for the foreigners told me this was a question of state security and even she did not know. When one of the security men bent down I could see the pistol in his trousers, and it was clear to me that I was dealing with the state security.

When I was taken back to the little office, Panduleni and I and a [Namibian] man [also under arrest] were driven by car to a building with 'State Security' written on it. We asked them what we had done wrong on Cuban soil but no answer was provided. The security men changed into full uniform. We were handcuffed. Then we demanded to be handed over to our office, to our representative of Swapo. They said, 'Well, you'll see where you're going to end up'.

We drove from Camaguey to Havana, handcuffed for ten hours. We were taken to the State Security again, made to undress and checked internally. We were locked in a cell. Very early in the morning we banged on the door demanding to see the senior officer on duty. At last we were granted that privilege and we demanded to see our representative of Swapo. We were told that in an hour we would see him, and we were happy that we would be able to report to the Swapo official how the Cubans were treating us, not knowing the essence of everything. After an hour this man came, and we were taken separately to see him. We each told him we were very astonished that Cuban security should treat us in this way. Why had they handcuffed us, why had we been put in prison, what crime had we committed on Cuban soil? 'Well', he said, 'no, no, that was just a mistake, they were not really supposed to treat you in that way. You are just being called to Angola to clear up a very little matter, a small matter, and then you will come back'. We said we didn't even have clothes, only the clothes on our bodies. He said, 'No, that's not a problem, you'll be back within a week'. With those words we were led away to the cell again.

We stayed in that cell for four days. Early the next morning we were taken out of the cell and met with two more male comrades, so there were three now. While in prison we had been joined by three more female comrades. We were now eight in number. It was the 12th of November, 1984. We were told to go into a minibus, and we noticed that one leg of [each of] the male comrades was in plaster [of paris] so as to make movement difficult. In that minibus there were eight to ten security men, and we were escorted to the airport with heavy military vehicles including anti-personnel carriers. On the plane, we always had to ask for permission from security guards before going to the toilet. Plastic knives were removed after meal times.

Arriving in Luanda, we were again given over to the Cubans at the airport who put us in separate cells. After approximately an hour we were handed over to the Swapo people.

[Then followed a journey in a sealed truck. At a post in the bush one man was taken away and the remaining seven stayed there for a couple of days. One night the remaining two male comrades were removed, and the women were very worried. When they later saw the two men, the plaster had been removed from their legs but they had been handcuffed behind their backs to a big log.]

We got into a truck at sunset and found two people inside covered with blankets, one screaming. From their screams we realized those were the two comrades. They were saying 'Please loosen my handcuffs, my blood circulation is becoming very difficult.' This was met with cynical laughter from the Swapo security guards. The cuffs were loosened during the day, but at about six o'clock the handcuffs were tightened behind their backs. We all slept in a big tent and these two comrades could hardly sleep, they could scream the whole night from the pain on their wrists. A few nights later we came at night-time to the Karl Marx Reception Centre belonging to Swapo at Lubango, in the south of Angola. We were separated from the male comrades. I could not tell you what the centre looked like. I could only tell you specifically of three rooms: the one I was sleeping in, the office and the torturing chamber. We were not allowed out during the day, and had to go to the toilet at only two times, before sunrise and after sunset.

Panduleni and I were separated, only to meet again after two years. The day after we arrived I was told to write my autobiography. Then I was taken to a room where I spent three months in solitary confinement. I was called out from my cell at 2.30 in the morning and went into the office, where there were about six to eight men. I was told to sit flat on the floor and they asked me to repeat my autobiography, this time orally. I repeated it and they told me that I had left out something very important. I couldn't guess what it was and I told them that I didn't think I had left out anything important. I was told to go and think. After a couple of minutes I was told to come back. They told me to repeat my autobiography and at the end they said, 'You didn't add anything'. I said I didn't have anything to add.

They said, 'Stand up and go with this man'. I was told to follow a man with a lantern. It was very dark and the man said, 'Listen, if there is anything to tell, tell me now, and I will go and tell them, before anything can happen to you'. I told him there was nothing I knew that I had left out. I went into an under-ground room. There were two [upright] poles with a horizontal pole. I was told to sit down. The whole gang arrived and they said, 'Tell us what you have deliberately left out of your autobiography'. I said I had left out nothing and they told me to undress. They tied my hands and feet. My hands were tied to one end of the horizontal pole and my legs were fastened to the other end. My stomach faced down and my spine was curved. I had terrible pains in my back because of that position. As if this pain was not enough, they started beating me with sticks. I was beaten, I screamed and a woman guard came in and said my screams could be heard outside. A cloth was pushed into my mouth. They said, 'Tell what you have been hiding'. When I said I was hiding nothing the beating continued.

I fainted and was taken off. I don't know for how many minutes I lay there on the floor. When I regained consciousness I was told to dress myself, but I could only do it with difficulty. Again I was beaten and told, 'Make it quick'. They have combat names: Kawaya, Teenie, Katalionga, Santiago, Castro, BK and Poli. Some we had known in Cuba.

The next day at the same hour, at 2 a.m., I was taken again to the same place. They said, 'Are you ready to talk now?' They said they were going to work with me properly because I was unwillig to cooperate. I was tied in the same position and beaten up again. After a time they said: 'Now we are going to give you a clue. When, where and by whom were you recruited to work for the enemy?' To these questions I gave a negative answer, and told them I was never recruited by the enemy and I've never had any mission of infiltration into Swapo. I was beaten again. They said, 'We've just to work with you like the enemy and you know what we do to the enemy. If they are fighting with South Africa, we kill them. Now, you are going to be killed'. I said, 'You are going to kill me, but remember that you are going to kill a comrade and not an enemy.'

They said, 'Now, are you ready to talk?' I said no. They said, 'Well, we'll just have to kill you.' This worked on my nerves. With this emotion I went back. Every boot in front of my door meant death to me. I just thought, this is the person who is going to take me out and eliminate me. It was terrible. That was the type of psychological torture I had.

After three months I left the Karl Marx Reception Centre and was taken to another notorious camp, Etale. There I was told that if I had managed to get away alive from the Karl Marx Centre, there, I would never get away alive. So they started off again with their torturing. Here, they took two sticks, tied them together at one end, inserted my head between the two sticks, and tied the other end with my head between the sticks. With that pain in my neck, two to three started beating, one with a stick, another with tyre rubber. I endured the pain. They also took the string of a bow, loosened one end and tied my finger in it, and then tied up the loose end so that that string would be fastening until it gets on to my bone. I lost the function of the finger for about two months, it was kind of dead, I try to massage it. I've never experienced such pain in my life, even from sticks.

After four months of resistance in that camp trying to prove my innocence I was transferred to Thobias Hainyeko camp, or Shoombe's camp. There, since it was near the military training centre, I was told that they only dealt with military people. They said that they would deal with me militarily, so that I would talk. I went through torture. After a year I decided, no, I would have to make up a false story since even some of the interrogators approached me saying, 'There were people here who came resisting like you, and they died. Those who were clever made up a story and they survived.' So I just decided that, well, I will make up a story, and since the motto of the organization is 'Freedom, Solidarity and Justice', I strongly believed that justice will prevail one day and I will prove my innocence.

So I made up a story, giving them a lot of impossible information to make it easier for them to find out that this person was only forced through interrogation, she is really not guilty, she is innocent. The dates I said I was being trained by the enemy coincided, for example, with the dates when I was at school. But I've come to realize that Swapo was not interested in making a thorough investigation into the matter, and this was never found out. I confessed on 1st December 1985, and on 18 December 1986 I was transferred again to another jail called Minya Base. There I met Panduleni after two years of separation. We were placed in dug-outs, holes deep in the ground about six metres square and covered with corrugated iron. We had to get into some of them with a ladder, others down steps, and they were damp.

Panduleni: I persisted under the torture for eight months. There was no alternative, I had just to make up a story, so I said I had been trained in Nyobo by two Boers living there in a high building with 'South African Military Training' written on the wall. I put the time when I was still at school. I thought they would find out and free me because no white people live at Nyobo, and there are no big buildings there. But I stayed in that dungeon for five years.

Generally dug–outs were normal for the war situation but they were only used for emergencies, not for sleeping in. We were in them all the time. The men who were guarding us, the 'loyal sons of Swapo', slept in ordinary rooms. There was a small layer of bricks at the top of the hole to serve as windows. We covered ourselves with empty rice bags, sleeping on boxes. In one corner there was the toilet, and we were so overcrowded that the last person had to sleep only a few centimetres from the toilet. There was no fresh air. The dug–out served as hospital, dining room, toilet and even in one case as maternity room.

We were kept completely uninformed, we were not even allowed to read Swapo bulletins, everything that was happening was a big secret. We could only tell of the coming of visits [by Swapo leaders] from the behaviour of the commandants.

We were visited by Sam Nujoma, the president of Swapo, on 21st April 1986. Before the arrival of the president we were visited on 4th April by Solomon Hauala, the chief of security of Swapo, and Dimo Amaambo, the army commander. Amaambo is the top military leader of PLAN and Hauala is supposed to be deputy commander of PLAN. We were told to gather under a big tree, and 'Jesus' Hauala introduced us to Dimo saying, 'Those are the traitors of the nation, who have betrayed the Namibian nation'. He that some of the 'females'– that was the general term for us, the 'females' - had come with blades hidden in our bodies and had killed many combatants of PLAN. And very much surprising, the response of Dimo was, 'I wish I can see these blades, I've never seen anything like that'. That was the response of the army commander in 1986, and yet many females have been arrested right from 1980, 1982, with this main accusation of having blades.

My impression was that Dimo Amaambo did not really believe in these blades, but he didn't say anything more. Then on 21st April the president came. He was accompanied by Peter Shehama (recently the representative

of Swapo in Cuba), Ananias Angula, Peter Mueshihange [a former Swapo secretary for defence] and of course Solomon Hauala was there. We were put in parade formation, in rows. Among other things, Nujoma said that we were enemy agents, that we came with poisons to kill the combatants of PLAN, some of us even tested our poisons, we put them in the water and food of PLAN combatants, and these people died. He promised that they would fight more than ever before to liberate Namibia, and to take us to our mothers and fathers, and we would be paraded at a revolutionary square where they were going to hoist their flag and the nation would decide what to do with us.

Nujoma was told by us that we were never enemy agents, that we were forced by torture to confess: Theresa Basson was one who intervened, and Magdalena Goagoses was another. They both told Nujoma that people were forced to make false confessions, and it was even put clear to him that some of the interrogators gave people advice to make false confessions to save their lives. There was no reaction from the side of the president, he left.

Nujoma came back a second time to Minya Base in March 1987. By then Ndamona and I were together. He was told the very same thing, by Ilona Amakutua and Sarie Eises. Marta Angula also spoke. Emma Kambangula went to the extent of undressing herself to show the scars of interrogations, and also to show that she had had an operation while very young, on her back. She had been operated on in South Africa, and had later gone to the GDR for medical treatment. When she was arrested, Swapo security claimed she had a radio communication in her back. She tried to demonstrate to the president that that was a lie. Nujoma said nothing, he didn't mention any investigation, nothing.

Ndamona: He said, 'I've heard', that's all.

Panduleni: One girl said, 'The moment you turn your back, we'll be beaten. You must tell these people not to beat us any more'. The only response was 'I heard'.

On 10 January 1989 we had another visit, from the Swapo administrative secretary, Moses Garoeb. His main mission was to tell us that the leadership of Swapo had decided we would be released. He said that on 1 April, the UNTAG forces were going to take over in Namibia under Article 435. He informed us that there would be no second dungeon for us in Namibia. When he said there would be no second dungeon for us, by implication that means death. He said Namibia was going to be free, we were going to find the Boers, including those who had sent us to infiltrate Swapo.

After Garoeb left, a video team visited the camp. At that time there were about a hundred women in the camp and about twenty men. We received no visit from the Red Cross. Only the women were videoed. If you see these videos, it appears that the people being interviewed are really speaking from the depths of their hearts, but we were intimidated into sitting for the video. We were told, 'If you don't confess, you'll face another situation'. Those who did not appear before the video did not arrive in Namibia. We were told later

in the UN High Commissioner for Refugees camp in Lubango that Gerhard Tjozongoro, who had been held at Mungakwiyu, had not returned. Only security men were present at the interview, many who had tortured us. The interviewer was Peter Nambundunga, the chief of logistics of PLAN, wearing military dress.

Ndamona: On the video I said I couldn't remember my confession. I said I had forgotten the year I had been recruited. A Swapo security man called Bongi said, 'You will be reminded'. The video would stop, and a security man with the text of our confessions would give information to the inteviewer. In a second video we took the oath of allegiance not to work again with the enemy and to report all enemy activities to Swapo. We were filmed signing the oath of allegiance to Swapo.

After signing the oath we were taken to another camp on 12 May, called Production Unit. We were supposed to be free, but it was a semi-prison and we couldn't go to visit other camps. A regular visitor to Production was Swapo's secretary general, Andimba Herman Toivo ja Toivo. We as prisoners had hope in that man. He was the only and last man in the Swapo leadership who could understand our position. We said, 'Comrade Toivo ja Toivo, you're the only man in the Swapo leadership that our hopes rely on, since you languished on Robben Island for 16 years. You know what torture can make you do'.

He said: 'The truth lies in your own hearts. Here is a declaration from Swapo. You have two options. One, you accept you are forgiven, you go back to the ranks and your files will be closed.' We said we wanted our files to be kept open, so that we could be judged by the nation. We wanted the leadership of Swapo to know we are innocent. Then we could forgive and forget, we could accept it as a mistake of the revolution. But Toivo ja Toivo gave us no positive answer. He said, 'Option two, you remain enemy agents. Then Swapo will arrange for you to be transferred to representatives of South Africa in Namibia, and your files will remain open and active.' We said we had no interest in being handed to a representative of South Africa, we had done nothing to bring assistance to the enemy. We had never betrayed the nation either in thought, word or deed. We were patriots of the nation, and we wanted our problem to be treated as a Swapo problem, within Swapo. We did not want to go out of Swapo.

After that we were visited by UNTAG forces, and by international journalists from West Germany, France, Angola, Cuba and Namibia. Toivo ja Toivo introduced us to the international journalists as traitors who had betrayed the nation, they had been forgiven, now they were going to go back to Namibia. We found ourselves in an awkward situation. We went to the Cuban journalists and said that we had never been enemy agents, and that we want to clean our names. A few days later we handed ourselves over to the Angolan goverment, and on 4th July we arrived back by UN plane in Namibia.

The videos were already circulating in Namibia, saying that we are enemy agents. We had no option except to clear our names. We had to stay in

Windhoek, we could not stay in our home town, Luderitz. It was a very sad picture when we went to visit our mum in hospital in Luderitz. She was very sick, paralyzed after a second stroke. Whenever we visited her at the hospital it was always thrown at us that we were enemy agents. The hospital staff were starting to neglect her. One woman at the hospital referred to her as if she were not human, saying, 'Sy kan nog vrek'. [*Vrek* is a term in Afrikaans used for the death of animals].

One evening we visited our mum and we saw a group of youngsters near the hospital, and we could see that they were waiting for us to go home in the evening. We had to ask for a lift home, and on our way home we could see that they were planning to ambush us. So we stopped seeing our mother in the evenings, only in the afternoons, and we asked if she could be transferred to Windhoek, as she was deteriorating. She passed away on 10 September. We last saw her on Saturday the ninth. That Sunday, people shouted at us, 'Puppets!' and 'Swapo will win and you'll get it!'

I still get the feeling that if it were not for this enemy agent thing, my mother would have lived. We still don't know how many members of my family will suffer. The children of our two sisters at Luderitz come home from school crying, the other children say 'Your aunties are enemy agents and and are responsible for the death of many people'.

[*Searchlight South Africa* asked the Kali sisters why they thought all this had happened to them].

Ndamona: You have to go back to the history of Swapo. In 1976 Swapo showed its undemocratic, dictatorial nature. At that time some youth demanded more democracy in the movement. They wanted a congress to elect new leaders. The reponse was their imprisonment, with the help of the host countries, Zambia and Tanzania. Our imprisonment was a consquence of this unresolved crisis.

Swapo does not understand a person who has a different opinion. While we were in Cuba I was a leader of the youth and Panduleni was a leader of the women's council. We had a problem with some of the Swapo students, so we visited Naas Angula [Swapo's education secretary] but our move was taken as a criticism. We said that the Swapo students on the Island of Youth didn't have clothes. Cuba has economic problems, and as foreigners we didn't have ration tickets. We said to Angula that Swapo had to treat Cuba as any other settlement, but he said Swapo could not send bundles of clothes to Cuba, and that we were lucky to be there. So at the school the students didn't get clothes.

Also, Panduleni and I were studying economics at the University of Camaguey, and of course we were doing maths. So we said we needed calculators. We were told there was only one calculator in the whole of Swapo, in Angola, in the finance department. Swapo couldn't supply as with any.

Panduleni: For them, everything is a threat. Our main aim is to make the world know what was happening inside Swapo. All these crimes against the Namibian people in the name of the Namibian people have been kept a secret. We feel it is our duty to make these things known to the international

community, so that friends of Namibia can help us by pushing for an Independent Commission of Inquiry to clean our names, to bring these atrocities to light and to let the blame be put where it lies.

Ndamona: Some people who say they are friends of Swapo call this demand for an international commission of inquiry a right–wing plot. In 1976, when Swapo arrested freedom fighters, letters were written to the Anti–Apartheid Movement, but they were ignored.

Panduleni: There are still Swapo prisoners in Angola, we know who they are. The Political Consultative Council of Ex–Swapo Detainees and the Parents' Committee [which have campaigned for the freeing of the prisoners] spoke to the Red Cross and the UN. The UN set up a commission but without including any ex–detainees, although we know where the different jails are. The UN said they would not share responsibility with anybody. The UN said people had been repatriated and had been registered in Windhoek, but we know they have not come back. People like me are losing trust in the UN.

Panduleni: In the middle of 1984 the Swapo students in Cuba were brought on parade at the Hendrik Witbooi school on the Island of Youth and told that Tauno had committed suicide while under interrogation as an enemy agent, using poison carried in a tooth. His death was kept a complete secret from the exiles, and was revealed only after six months.

A few months later came their own arrest. The security apparatus under Hauala was in all probability trained by the KGB: this is a further matter for investigation. The 'Report to the Namibian People' also mentions a visit to Swapo prisons in Angola of a Soviet prosecutor in 1983, and the arrest and deportation to Angola of a Swapo student by the Bulgarian security police in 1986. Nujoma, Toivo ja Toivo, Hauala and the Swapo torturers now head the majority party in Namibia after the November elections for the constituent assembly. The formation of an independent commssion of inquiry is urgently necessary, first of all to protect the lives of former Swapo prisoners both in Angola and Namibia, and equally to establish the historical truth].

Sources

Alliluyeva, Svetlana (1968), *20 Letters to a Friend*, World Books.

Herbstein, Denis and Evenson, John (1989), *The Devils are Among Us: The War for Namibia*, Zed.

London, Artur (1970), *On Trial*, Macdonald.

Wang, Fan-hsi (1980), *Chinese Revolutionary. Memoirs 1919-49*, OUP.

Documents:

'A Report to the Namibian People. Historical account of the Swapo spy-drama'.

'People Missing or Detained by Swapo Listed by Region of Origin', 'Murdered by Swapo' (two lists), 'List of Swapo's Gestapo who Tortured Innocent Namibians on behalf of the Swapo Leadership', all issued by the Political Consultative Committee of Ex–Swapo Detainees, Windhoek, July 1989.

Text of Press Conference by the Parents' Committee and the Detainees Released by Swapo, Windhoek, 7 July 1989.

Verkiesing '89, Windhoek (text of election programmes).

Newspapers:

Windhoek Observer, *The Worker*, published by WRP, (Namibia); *Vrye Weekblad*, *Weekly Mail* (South Africa); *The Independent* (London).

POSTSCRIPT

The full weight of SWAPO's 22 years of war against the occupying South African power bore down on the half million rural population in Ovamboland in Namibia's northern border. The sheer horror of South Africa's reign of terror, operating without any restraint is catalogued in the book by Denis Herbstein and John Evenson, *The Devils are Among Us: The War for Namibia* (Zed, 1989).Military and police terror ensured that only those corrupted or broken by state violence would fail to support Swapo, which was regarded by the vast majority of the population as its defenders. What these authors fail to investigate with the same journalistic thoroughness was the degree to which the barbarism of the South African regime was reflected also in the hierarchy of its Swapo opponents.

We have thought carefully about publishing the above interviews. We are aware that the first major revelations of Swapo attrocities were made by a right wing organization, The International Society for Human Rights, based in west Germany. However we consider that this makes it all the more essential that as a socialist journal we do our own research and reach our own conclusions on a matter of vital concern.

Our readers will judge for themselves. After the pulling down of the Stalinist regimes in eastern Europe we believe even more firmly that exposures of crimes against any section of the people is an essential task of every socialist. Concealment can only aid reaction – and has nothing in common with our commitment to socialism.

BACK ISSUES: Contents include

1. Perestroika à la P.W. Botha
Angola, Namibia, South Africa and the Big Powers
Death of a Revolutionary: Frank Glass/Li Fu-jen: 1901–88
George Padmore: *Pan–Africanism or Marxism?*
The Defiance Campaign of 1952 Reconsidered

---

2. The 'Post–Apartheid' Society
Golden Dreams: The Sanctions Campaign
Spark and the 'Red Nun'
The Writings of Kenneth Jordaan

---

3. Islam, South Africa and the Satanic Verses
The Russian Connection
The Native Republic Sligan I
Bunting vs Bukharin, 1928

SUBSCRIPTIONS TO *SEARCHLIGHT SOUTH AFRICA*

ISSN: 0954–3384

I year Subscription (4 issues)

UK: Individuals £12, Institutions £24 – Special Student Offer £9
Abroad: (£ sterling or US/Canadian $) and add £4 p&p

Pre–Publication Offer: (see page 12)

Yours For The Union: Class and Community Struggles in South Africa, 1930-47 by Baruch Hirson, Zed, March 1990. (price £8.95)

Price for subscribers to *Searchlight South Africa* £6 (incl. p&p).

Money/Cheques to *Searchlight South Africa*,
BCM 7646, London WC1N 3XX