
THE NATURE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN REVOLUTION

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INTRODUCTION

The most important issue which every committed militant in South Africa has to come to grips with is the question of the nature of the South African revolution. It is a question which, in the present phase of the struggle, has thrown up a multitude of different and often sharply divided opinion – opinions, which, it is said, stand in the way of, the realisation of the necessity of unity. However, when sifted through, this multitude reduces itself to two diametrically opposed positions - positions which we say, demand clarification if the basis upon which unity is to be achieve is to be made clear. Here we repeat the words of Lenin writing in a situation not too dissimilar to ours: “Before uniting, and in order to unite, we must first decisively and definitely draw a line of separation. Otherwise our union would be merely a fiction covering up the present confusion and preventing its radical removal.”

Let us draw these lines of separation. The two opposing positions ultimately reduce to this:

- a. The struggle for national liberation and political democracy is the most immediate task. To this end all the oppressed must unite around their common lack of democratic rights. Some who hold this position declare that after democracy has been achieved, then the struggle for socialism can begin.
- b. The struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat is the most immediate task. To this end all the oppressed must be united under the leadership of the working class and against the bourgeoisie. It is the dictatorship of the proletariat which will solve the question of democracy and open the road to socialism.

It is against the backdrop of these two positions that all debate regarding ‘the people’, ‘the workers’ and ‘unity’ must be seen. Moreover, it must be remembered that political positions, strategies and programmes are not just the expression of individual opinions, but are ultimately the manifestation of the interests of different classes or strata. What follows is that revolutionary commitment does not consist solely of the “sincerity” of the individual. Our struggle demands a scientific understanding of the forces which go to make up our society and how the interests of various classes express themselves in the slogans and programmes of organisations. The two positions outlined above are manifestations of precisely such different class positions. The former is the position of the radical section of the oppressed petit-bourgeoisie, who finds under the conditions of South African capitalism that their universal instability as a class is compounded by their lack of democratic rights. The latter is the position adopted by all Marxists struggling to prepare a vanguard party to lead the working class in its historic role as the vehicle for smashing capitalism and replacing it with socialism.

The ANC, purveyors of petit-bourgeois revolutionariness.

It is no secret that position (a) is that of the ANC. It is also no secret that the most fervent supporter of the ANC is the Stalinist SACP which provides the ‘Marxist’ justification for ANC policies. To those committed militants who respond in dismay to this allegation, we

reply that we have long passed the stage of emotionalism. It is time we called things by their proper names.

The ANC has since its inception been the organisational expression of a section of the African petit-bourgeoisie. It is through the ANC that for the past seventy years our Native gentlemen-turned-National liberationists have been striving to stave off the threat of proletarianisation by seeking access to the ranks of the bourgeoisie.

Since the 1880's when the capitalist mode of production began to take firm root in South Africa, the forced proletarianisation of the dispossessed African tribes meant the total collapse of the pre-capitalist mode of production – and with it, the destruction of the social basis for the power of the chiefs, elders and their functionaries. The central contradiction in South African society became that between capital and labour. All pre-capitalist features and contradictions which continued to exist were subsumed entirely under the major one within the capitalist mode of production or continued to exist precisely because they were functional to the process of capital accumulation. The capitalisation of social relations in South Africa threw the old tribal aristocracy into total confusion. Their power base was completely destroyed by the very process of proletarianisation which they often abetted. They found themselves in no-man's land with two alternatives:

1. To accept roles as subservient lackeys of capital (tax collectors, recruiting agents).
2. To find some way of restoring their lost fortunes, but within the new set of social relations. (The third option of recovering lost fortunes under the old pre capitalist relation was settled for them by the superior military power of the imperialists –the failure of the Bambatha rebellion graphically illustrates this.)

Those who opted for the first fell into the category of disgraced chiefs who sold their people to the exploitative machinations of imperialism. Those who chose the second became the founding fathers of the ANC.

The following resolution adopted by the ANC against the 1913 Land Act expresses most cogently the fears and aspirations of a class on whom history had played a cruel trick. Unable to grasp the historical process which had rendered them obsolete, they responded with petulant indignation. For them the Land Acts was designed: “To deprive the Natives as a people of their freedom to acquire more land in their own right. To reduce by gradual process and by artificial means the Bantu people as a race to a status of permanent labours. To lessen their chances as a people of competing freely and fairly in all commercial enterprises.” (Karis and Carter: Volume 1: p.87)

And so, refusing to be condemned to the “status of permanent labourers”, our outraged Native gentlemen combined - in the name of “the Natives as a people”- to pressurise the bourgeoisie into giving them the right of “competing freely and fairly” in the exploitation of the proletariat. Defenders of the ANC might want to raise the following objection at this point: We can accept that the ANC might have had petit-bourgeois origins, but surely that has

changed by now? Is not the fact that the ANC is at this point involved in an armed struggle evidence of its commitment to revolution?

We shall deal with the supposed revolutionary turn of the ANC to armed struggle later. At this point it is sufficient to expose once and for all the inconsistency and bankruptcy of what Lenin termed “petit-bourgeois revolutionariness”. For Lenin, as for all Marxists, the petit-bourgeoisies:

“Who under capitalism suffers constant oppression and very often incredibly sharp and rapidly worsening conditions of life and ruin (and this is certainly true of South Africa), easily becomes extremely revolutionary, but is incapable of displaying perseverance, ability to organise and staunchness....” And “in all essentials, falls short of the conditions and requirements of the sustained proletarian class struggle.” (Lenin - Left Wing Communism).

The class instability of the petit bourgeoisie manifests itself in political vacillation between two options:

1. respectfully appealing to the bourgeoisie to accede to their requests or
2. subsuming the spontaneous struggles of the working class under their control so as to pressurise the bourgeoisie.

The history of the ANC is the history of its frenetic zigzagging from one option to another, depending on the state of the class struggle at the time. From its inception to World War II, the ANC’s activity is dominated by the “respectful submission” of petitions and deputations to British Imperialism to save them from the threatening process of proletarianisation.

This spinelessness is matched only by their open hostility to the outbursts of embryonic proletarian consciousness in the same period. The ANC rejected the use of strikes on principle and tried whenever the opportunity presented itself, to turn these outbursts into support for its own cause. Two examples are illustrative: the 1918 Stores Boycott on the Rand mines and the Shilling Strike (of sanitation workers) of the same year.

In February 1918, workers on the East Rand started boycotting the concession stores from which they bought their supplies. The key issue at stake was the high prices charged by these stores which cut deeply into the already meagre wages earned by the workers. But the workers’ struggle against higher prices was taken up by the ANC as the struggle against the monopoly of trade enjoyed by the mining capitalists. The petit-bourgeoisie agitated to have the right to trade extended to Africans. Thus they turned the workers ‘struggle against inroads into their wages into an attempt by the petit-bourgeoisie to extend trading rights.

The TNC (the strongest branch of the ANC) in evidence before the Commission of Inquiry appointed to investigate the boycott felt that the introduction of free trade on proclaimed ground or ground held under mining title should give a person: “After having complied with certain requirementsthe right to carry on any trade or industry on such ground as upon any other ground.” (Secretary for Mines and Industries Box 471 FMM1483/18)

Also in April 1918, sanitation workers went on strike in Johannesburg, demanding increased wages of 1 shilling a day. Many of the strike leaders were jailed. Joining in the ensuing outcry was the Transvaal National Congress who called for the release of the strikers, but rejected the use of strike action on principle. Paul Msane of the TNC had this to say:

“If you wish to ask for more money, choose your leaders and approach your employers in the proper way...I am opposed to anything like a strike. Not a single man must leave work.” (The Star 29.6.1918)

Despite the treachery of the ANC, the workers did decide to intensify the strike. The ANC contrived to take over the leadership, however, especially after the original leadership, comprising members of the Industrial Workers of Africa (IWA) who had opposed the reformist position of the ANC, were banned. At a public meeting in Vrededorp (attended by over 5000 people), the ANC emphasised the necessity for making demands in a constitutional fashion. During this time of unrest the TNC sent numerous deputations to the government. Although the deputations did half – heartedly talk about wages and the colour bar, it seized the opportunity to stress the demands of the “respectable” elite. In this respect it complained about the difficulties which “decent” Africans encountered when applying for letters of exemption from the Pass Laws and about the lack of and restriction upon educational facilities. (The Star 12.7.1918)

However, the inability of the ANC to organise workers and the cynicism with which it approached independent action of the workers led to its near demise. During the 1920’s the ANC was totally eclipsed by the economist ICU and then proceeded to tumble thorough the 1930’s as a self –confessed “moribund” organisation with founding father, Pixley ka Isaka Leme declaring that if:

“Congress is to be made a real success; it should founded more firmly upon its original constitution, namely: that the ANC be made really and truly to consist of two Houses –the Upper House of Chiefs and the Lower House of Representatives and Delegates.” (Karis and Cater: Volume 1:p.314)

Here, exposed in all its idiotic innocence, stands the painful delusions of a tribally-derived and Western educated petit-bourgeoisie, knowing only how to ape the imperialist power which had spawned it, but unable to comprehend the earth-shattering march of capitalism in South Africa.

It is no surprise; therefore, that World War II shook the ANC to its very marrow. Those six years of internecine imperialist conflict (from which, the ANC claimed, the anti-imperialist forces emerged victorious) was matched on the South African labour front by ever increasing confrontation between worker and capitalist. During this period the South African economy was rocked by a strike per day on average as workers all over the country demanded higher wages, better working conditions and the abolition of the industrial colour bar. This offensive by the working class culminated in the great Mineworkers Strike in 1946, involving no fewer than 100 000 workers and briefly bringing the mining capitalists to their knees.

True to its opportunist character, every section of our petit-bourgeoisie, including the ANC, was totally stunned by this massive war-time surge of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie had contemptuously thrown out their supplications of fair play. The proletariat was showing more and more and with ever-increasing consciousness its readiness to overstep the reformism within which petit-bourgeois organisations were attempting to confine their struggle. This intensification of the class struggle sent all the traditional organisations of the petit-bourgeoisie into disarray, from the ANC to their coloured counterparts in the APO and the TLSA. The blatantly reactionary polices of these organisations, the total subservience to the politics of requests and deputations, were manifestly inadequate to deal with this rising tide. The situation in which our petit-bourgeoisie found itself was truly critical. A way out had to be found.

In the case of the “coloured” petit-bourgeoisie, the period spawned a vociferously radical clique who broke with the traditions of the APO and the old TLSA. Organised as the “principled” Non European Unity Movement (NEUM), they laid claim to their place amongst the bourgeoisie. The basis of their politics would be abstentionism: “The boycott is our weapon.” That is, if they refused to work the apartheid machinery, the bourgeoisie would yield to their pacifist pressure. Having proved their civilized standards, our coloured petit-bourgeoisie would then take their “rightful” place amongst the exploiters.

In the case of the African petit-bourgeoisie, however, the counterpart to abstentionism was populism. The fathers, hypnotised by their self-image of deserving civilised “Natives” were at a loss. The sons would have to come to the rescue. And so arose the Congress Youth League (CYL) in 1943. But whereas the founding fathers of the ANC were an amalgam of a land – owning tribal royalty and a newly – educated Native petit-bourgeoisie, with one foot in the halcyon days of land-ownership, the young bucks who constituted the Congress Youth League were part of a generation which had been forcibly torn out the “idiocy of rural life” and were no longer prepared to “submit respectfully”.

Like their founding fathers, they too would demand the right to share in the exploitation of the proletariat. But they would do it much more vociferously on the basis of dissipative politics of African Nationalism a platform which to this day remains the cornerstone of ANC politics.

Hear the clarion call: “....The Congress senior leadership reflects the dying order of the pseudo-liberalism, of appeasement and compromises. The Youth League reflects the new spirit of a self – conscious Africa, striving to break age-old oppression and liberate the national forces of progress.”

Hear also the theoretical basis of nationalism: “The political philosophy which we profess is that of African nationalism. This, *inter alia*, impliesthat they (Africans) suffer an alien and foreign oppression. Africa is the black man’s continent, the African peoples are groaning under a foreign oppressor, because their country has been colonised by foreign powers and its resources and their (sic) labour are being exploited not for their benefit but for the benefit of the conquerors and exploiters.” (Karis and Carter: Volume 2: p.320; 321)

Here lies the germ of what has become inscribed in ANC theory as the Internal Colonialism Thesis (more of this curiosity later). Two factors – the rising tide of the proletariat and the persistent intransigence of the bourgeoisie - demanded that our petit-bourgeoisie develop a new strategic line in their struggle for entry into the ranks of capital. Their response consisted in this: to define the struggle as one of “national liberation” from “alien and foreign oppression”, to strive to lead the “Africans as a nation” to regain their “African spirit” and “race pride” lost in the alienating process of colonisation, to formally reject class divisions amongst Africans, in an attempt to rally the working class around an anti-colonialist (!) struggle (despite the fact that South Africa ceased to be a colony and became an independent state as far back as 1910) and that under the leadership of the petit-bourgeois class. The latter point is made by Lembede, founder of the CYL, as follows:

“The basis of national unity is the nationalist feeling of the Africans, the feeling of being Africans, irrespective of tribal connection, social status, educational attainment or economic class.” (Quoted in Gerhart: p.60)

In other words , “irrespective “ of whether workers have the “social status” of pariahs, “irrespective” of whether they simply have no chance of “educational attainment” and “irrespective” of whether they are mercilessly exploited as an “economic class”, they should, on the basis of “the feeling of being Africans”, give up the struggle for a decent life , free of all the brutalities of capitalism and help to forge the “national unity” which will help the petit-bourgeoisie in their struggle to obtain the “social status “ which befits their “educational attainment”. In sum, the workers should be part of the struggle to ensure that their “labour” is exploited not by “conquerors” but by our erstwhile petit-bourgeoisie itself.

Listen to the Manifesto issued by Youth League in 1948: “There are certain groups which seek to impose on our struggle cut – and – dried formulae, which far from clarifying the issues of our struggle , only serve to obscure the fundamental fact that we are oppressed not as a class but an a people , as a Nation. Such wholesale importation of methods and tactics which might have succeeded in other countries, like Europe, where conditions where different , might harm the cause of our people’s freedom, unless we are quick in building a militant mass liberation movement”. (Karis & Cater, Volume 2:p.330)

And first lieutenant A.P.Mda: “The Africans are a conquered race, their oppression is a racial oppression, in other words, they do not suffer class oppression. They are oppressed by virtue of their colour as a race - as a group – as a nation! In other words, they suffer national oppression. As a colonial people suffering national oppression we can overthrow foreign domination, and win national freedom by organizing a powerful national liberation movement.”

For the ANC the turn to the politics of African Nationalism was truly radical. But it was a turn engendered not by a basic transformation of its class character, or of strategic objectives but a turn demanded by the changing state of the class struggle.

The proletariat had shown some of its tremendous power during the war. The crushing of the 1946 strike followed by the increased brutality of the new “Apartheid” state saw the beginning of a period of low ebb amongst the workers. Above all, the absence of an organised disciplined vanguard placed a ceiling on the spontaneous outbursts of worker activity. Nevertheless, the struggle between labour and capital had been placed on a new, more acute level, a circumstance to which all organisations, including the ANC, had to adapt.

And so, having overcome token opposition offered by some of their more timid and older class colleagues, the Youth Leaguers, on the basis of the 1949 Programme of Action, set about energetically popularising their politics: Africa for the Africans, Africa is a Black Man’s continent, Africans must be led by Africans and even that Africans are inherently (?) socialist (?). But in the tradition of the Stalinised CPSA which they apparently hated so much, they declared: “Our immediate task is not socialism, but national liberation.” (Karis and Carter: Volume 2:p.318)

In fact the turn – to – the masses campaigns of the fifties saw the consolidation of the link between the CPSA and the ANC. Why did the marriage between these apparently opposing forces take place? How did the supposed party of the working class come to genuflect at the altar of the petit-bourgeoisie? For this we have to look (albeit briefly) at the history of the workers ‘movement since Lenin’s death and the brutal acts of betrayal perpetrated by the Stalinists both within Russia and internationally.

From Socialism to Barbarism or How the party of Lenin became the handmaiden of imperialism: The October revolution in Russia heralded the beginning of the workers’ revolution internationally and the death knell of the bourgeoisie. Historically, capitalism had by the turn of the century entered its highest, its degenerate, its last phase – Imperialism.

This meant that the process of the establishment of capitalism as a world mode of production was completed. No area of the world escaped this all-embracing web. The domain of the commodity extended from the icy wastes of Greenland to the sunny isles of Hawaii. The world – wide extension of capitalist social relations saw the forced subsumption of all countries under its yoke. Together with this went the plunder of the colonial world and the stifling of even capitalist economic development in these countries. They became nothing more than sources of raw materials and cheap labour-power and the dumping grounds for the discarded commodities of the so-called First World.

Having reached its zenith, capitalism now also began to move inexorably towards its nadir as it turned on the very forces of production which it had once promoted. The highest phase of capitalism also marked the beginning of its degeneration as the relations of production started impeding the growth of the forces of production.

Together with the plunder of nations and the stifling of the colonial world, came the brutality of racism, national chauvinism and “world wars”. For the colonial world (and even within the so-called First World) democracy became too expensive a commodity. The proletarian revolution in Russia graphically proclaimed the necessity for the dictatorship of the

proletariat as the only means to break the hindrances foisted by capitalism, which were retarding human development.

The proletarian revolution took place in the country which Lenin called “the weakest link in the Imperialist chain.” But being the “weakest link” meant that Russia was economically backward and the successful revolution inherited this backwardness. The leaders of the Bolshevik Party, Lenin and Trotsky, saw clearly that the continued success of the revolution depended on the success of workers’ revolutions throughout the world. To this end, they energetically propagated and supported proletarian internationalism via the Third International.

But the very backwardness which the revolution inherited saw the growth of a bureaucracy whose interest were diametrically opposed to proletarian democracy in Russia and world socialist revolutions. Both Lenin and Trotsky fought this parasitic growth from its inception. However, with Lenin’s death, the bureaucracy, under its most outspoken representative, Stalin, turned against world revolution and propounded the anti-Marxist theory of socialism in one country. For socialism in one country, viz. Russia meant literally the decapitation of revolutionary movements in other parts of the world and the handing over of revolutionaries to capitalist death squads. In short, the history of the workers’ movement since Lenin’s death is the history of its betrayal by the Stalinist leadership. The fact that capitalism still lurches on (from crisis to crisis) is due, not to the immaturity of objective conditions, nor to the lack of preparedness of the workers, but to its treacherous leadership. The chief method employed by the Stalinists has been the emasculation of any independent action of the working class. South Africa has not been immune to the stench of Stalinist betrayal. South Africa has had a Communist Party since 1921 and a thoroughly Stalinised Communist Party since 1928. This organisation has suffered the ignominy of having to follow the Stalinist distortions of Marxism with regard to the nature of revolutions in the twentieth century and the nature of alliances in the struggles of the proletariat:

1. ***The two – stage theory of revolution:*** the countries of the world are divided into those which are mature for socialism and those which are not. Those countries not deemed to be ripe for socialism (these varied depending on the particular requirements of the bureaucracy at the time) first had to struggle for bourgeois democracy as a separate stage.
2. ***The Peoples’ Front:*** those countries unfortunate enough to be classified as immature by the bureaucracy would in their struggle for national democracy unite all the oppressed classes (petit-bourgeoisie, peasant and workers) under the progressive bourgeoisie. In the old Menshevik tradition, the bourgeoisie is seen as the natural leaders of the democratic struggle.

This crass form of Marxism emerged from the so-called Second Period of the (by then) Stalinised Comintern. These strategies, prescribed for the rest of the world, were a direct extension of the manoeuvres of the bureaucracy inside Russia. For it was at this time that the Stalinists were seeking alliances with the kulaks and all other anti-Bolshevik tendencies

against the challenge of the Left Opposition. This marriage of bureaucracy and reaction inside Russia was expressed in Peoples' Frontism for the rest of the world. The most tragic consequences of the Peoples' Frontism of the 2nd Period was the brutal defeat of the 1925-1927 Chinese Revolution in which the Chinese Communist Party was instructed to submit to the discipline of the bourgeois Kuomintang. The South African equivalent was the Moscow proclamation of the Native Republic for South Africa. This instruction in 1928 has resulted in the CP lying prostrate before the altar of the Peoples' Front for more than 50 years.

Although the pre-1928 CP committed grave errors (e.g. its involvement on a racist basis in the 1922 Strike), nevertheless, it had every chance of becoming a real revolutionary organisation. Witness the fundamentally correct position of one of its forerunners, the IWA (International Workers of Africa), with regard to the ANC in 1917:

“This Congress was composed of well – known men who owned lands, were exempted from native laws and they had nothing to say as regards the bad treatment of the natives in South Africa.” (SMA Box 213. Jail ‘s Report 19.7.1917)

And again the wise words of one of its forerunners, the ISL (International Socialists League) “This body (i.e. ANC) in whose more reactionary, middle class and religious-cum-racial tendencies socialists can have no part, but which may be compelled by the close co-incidence of the native and the working class interest to play a useful role ...” (The International 21 .6 . 1918.)

However since 1928, when, on the instructions of the Thermidorian butchers of the 1917 proletarian revolution (fresh from their liquidation of the Chinese CP), the CPSA was purged of all potential revolutionaries. The South African model of this undialectical, anti-Marxist theory was the thesis on the Native Republic. This thesis proclaimed that first the “Natives” had to win a bourgeois democratic republic and then after this had been achieved, the workers would see necessity for struggling for socialism.

Even the revisionist Ernest Harsch has been able to see the consequences of the CP’s adoption of the Native Republic thesis: “As the party’s record showed after it adopted the slogan, the stress on the bourgeois –democratic nature of the struggle led the CPSA to de-emphasise the leading role the Black working class, to look towards the Black petit – bourgeois figures as the ‘natural’ leaders of the struggle.” (Harsh: p.203)

Old CP stalwarts were horrified at this perversion of Marxism and as a result the party was split and for many years lurched from crisis to crisis. The degeneration of the CP was so bad that liquidationism was the next logical step. The burial rites were formally performed in 1949 under the threat of the forthcoming Suppression of Communism Act.

A more criminal betrayal of the working class would be hard to imagine! This liquidationist mania spelt the end of the pretence of trying to lead the working class. Here we have the proverbial “dead cat”- the carcass of what had been initiated in the spirit of the great party of the proletarian revolution created by Lenin. The CP’s capitulation to the revisionism of the two-stage theory of revolution meant giving the struggle for leadership of the proletariat and

publicity acknowledging the ANC as the only real organisation of liberation. It meant the resurrection of the social democratic minimum programme in an era of decadent capitalism and the abrogation of the responsibility to prepare the proletariat for its dictatorship. In effect, the CP has become one more agent of imperialism in attempting to put a brake on the wheels of history.

Although the CPSA has re-emerged as the SACP, it is still, under the dead weight of Stalinism, on its knees before the demon of People's Frontism and slavishly follows every vacillation of the ANC. It still has the gall to speak occasionally on behalf of the working class and less occasionally about the workers' revolution. But this only after the national democratic / bourgeois / Native Republic has been installed. 1928 lives on! For the CP, socialism has become a word used only for 'holiday speechifying'.

The present role of the CP is very much that of the junior partner in the Peoples' Front –the ill-named Congress of the People. It is tolerated by the ANC because it provides the theoretical justification for the latter's policies. The move to the masses on the part of the ANC found its theoretical expression in a perversion of "Marxism" which provided good "scientific" reasons why the working class should tail behind the petit –bourgeoisie. The fact that the ANC occasionally finds Marxist jargon useful is an index of the growing militancy of the working class, and not of a fundamental change in objectives on the part of these opportunists. As Lenin so often said, with increased militancy of the working class comes the increase necessity to revise Marxism, to remove its revolutionary content. One way of doing this is for everybody, from bourgeois professors to the local shopkeeper, to proclaim himself a Marxist. The fact that the ANC is seen as under the control of the CP is entirely due to this necessity to employ Marxist language occasionally. Let us once and for all look at the effect of the marriage of the ANC and the CP and expose the treachery of the CP (the ANC has never claimed to be leading the workers to revolution) as well as wipe out any illusions that the ANC can be transformed into a workers' organisation, as some centrists preach.

How the, CP rendered the ANC more profound.

By now even the most casual reader will have noticed that the ANC in no way foresees a socialist South Africa, but is in fact in mortal fear of it. This is hardly remarkable since nowhere in its history has the ANC claimed to be a working class organisation. What is remarkable is that the SACP has not only bent to the ANC's dominance of the struggle but has actively helped to propagate the treachery of a South African Peoples' Front.

We have heard the clarion call of the Youth League, we have listened to the humble pleas from the Founding Fathers –but the ANC today is not so crude. The latter-day ANC language is often punctuated with what appears to be sophisticated Marxism. We have already stated that the objectives of the organisation have not changed. No, it is the ever ready Stalinist CP and its ideologues who provide the radical cover for the reformist's politics of Tambo and his ilk. But no sophisticated cover can mask the naked bourgeois aspirations lying beneath the surface. Let us look closely at the ANC's theory of revolution, or in more profound terms, the Stalinist "improvement" on the earlier ravings:

1. The focus of the struggle is racism and its instructional expression, apartheid.
2. The platform of this struggle is National Liberation.
Its programme is the Freedom Charter.
3. The struggle for National Liberation is dominant because of the peculiar nature of South Africa, viz. Internal Colonialism, i.e. the white oppressor nation has colonised the African, Coloured and Indian oppressed nations (diluted occasionally in the official literature as national groups and nationalities). The difference between classic colonialism and internal colonialism is that in South Africa both the oppressor and the oppressed nations occupy the same geographical area.
4. The liberation forces consist of a broad alliance of the three oppressed nations under the leadership of the African people because it is the largest and most exploited group.
5. The working class has a special role in the national democratic struggle.

We shall deal individual with these ‘profound’ concepts: National Liberation; Internal Colonialism; The Four –Nations Thesis and finally, the Freedom Charter.

National Liberation.

In the era of ascending capitalism, the struggle for the nation state was the struggle for unfettered capitalist development and the con-comitant political freedoms which went with it. The former simplified class antagonism and the latter opened up the prospects of preparing the proletariat for its dictatorship.

However, in the era of degenerate capitalism (imperialism), the struggle for national liberation is meaningless without the right of the oppressed nation to political independence. Lenin attacked those chauvinists who did not see that talk of national liberation without political secession is opportunism. If therefore, we are to struggle for national liberation, from who must we become politically independent, from whom must we secede? The Act of Union already established South Africa as an independent, unitary, capitalist state. And unless we take the Verwoerdian Bantustans seriously, the struggle for national liberation obviously amounts to a caricatured application of Lenin’s “Thesis on the Right of Nations to Self-Determination” to South Africa –as the SACP has done so “admirably” with its perverse internal colonialism thesis. This much we can say on the question of National Liberation: with regard to the cultural, language, etc. aspect of the South African revolution, the social revolution will appear to have a national form, but only in the sense that the new non-racial proletarian state will have to bury the corpse of white racism. The systematic counteracting of generations of white domination by the new proletarian state will impart to it a black imprint. Let us not baulk at this admission. But this does not imply confining the content of the struggle to a racist conception of inter-racial struggle, as the ANC so regularly does.

If, however, the slogan of National Liberation is meant to be taken as a call for the unfettered growth of capitalism, then we still remain in the same quagmire of confusion. In the era of degenerate capitalism, to talk of the struggle for unfettered capitalist development is to talk

nonsense. For world capitalism is already caught in the throes of the mortal contradiction between the relations and the forces of production. Far from the need to unfetter capitalist relations, these relations have themselves become fetters upon the further development of the forces of production. Only a revolution which bursts asunder these relations can produce the conditions for the further development of the forces of production.

If, finally, the struggle for National Liberation is understood to be the struggle of a formally independent country to free itself from the economic yoke of imperialism, then it is totally bound up with the questions of the class which is brought to power. In this regard we say that it is only the proletariat, organised as the new head of the nation, which can begin to break the imperialist domination by forcibly bringing the means of production under its control – that is, to expropriate and concentrate in its hands the monopolies of trade and the cartels of the foreign overlords, and to join the international struggle for the upliftment of the forces of production.

If, therefore, the struggle for national liberation does not mean the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, it can end only in giving the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie an extra lease of life, in these, the convulsive days of its death agony.

The ANC's platform of National Liberation leads inexorably to the latter. Class enters only insofar as the self-evident awakening of the proletariat has forced the ANC to accord it a so-called "special role" in the struggle namely, "...as distinct and reinforcing layer of our liberation (La Guma, p.203)

The working class does not want a special role in the struggle. It does not want to reinforce the struggle of its would-be exploiters. It wants a distinct role only insofar as it is a leading role. It declares for all to hear that "our liberation" is not the liberation of the most oppressed section of the South African petit-bourgeoisie. "Our Liberation" is the liberation of all mankind from the horrors of barbarism down into which degenerate capitalism is rapidly forcing us.

Even the struggle for the most basic elements of bourgeois democracy, which, at best, national liberation implies, must be led by the proletariat. For capitalism can no longer afford the luxury of its most appropriate political shell, bourgeois democracy. Today only the dictatorship of the proletariat can solve the democratic tasks of the South African revolution and usher in an era of truly revolutionary democracy.

Internal Colonialism

The theoretical basis for the continued use of the concept, national liberation, is the internal colonialism thesis: "South Africa's social and economic structure and the relationships which it generates are perhaps unique. It is not a colony, yet it has, in regard to the overwhelming majority of its people, most of the features of the classical colonial structures: conquest and domination by an alien people, a system of discrimination and exploitation based on race and techniques of indirect rule. These and more are the traditional trappings of the classical colonial framework. Whilst at one level, it is an "independent" national state (their use of

quotes), at another level, it is a country subjugated by a minority race. What makes the structure unique and adds to its complexity is that the exploiting nation is not, as in the typical imperialist relationship, situated in a geographically distinct mother country, but is settled within its borders. What is more, the roots of the dominant nation have been impelled in our country for more than three centuries of presence.” (Strategy and Tactics of the ANC: Morogoro Conference: p.195)

Seldom is so little said in so many words. Even Slovo, prime theoretician of South African Stalinism, has been able to perceive the phenomenal “level” at which the Internal Colonialism Thesis is located: “If then the overwhelmingly dominant mode of production within this unitary state (i.e. South Africa) is capitalist, is it ANALYTICALLY correct or useful to talk of “two South Africa’s” defined, at a certain level, in national rather than class terms” (Slovo: p.133) To this question which Slovo poses, but never answers (except by default in his defence of the thesis), we answer absolutely Not!

We repeat, South Africa is a single capitalist formation which possesses all the general features of capitalism as world – wide mode of production. Its social and economic structure is therefore not unique, but in fact corresponds in all basic aspects to the “social and economic structure” of the majority of the countries in the world. This is, of course, not to deny that South Africa, as a capitalist social formation, possesses certain specific features and national peculiarities. Let us attempt to employ the ABC of Marxism to find our way out of the problem South Africa’s “uniqueness” which seems to trouble our Stalinist theoreticians so much.

The law of uneven and combined development posits unevenness as the most general feature of all development and, in particular, capitalist development. In this regard, the rate of capitalist development was different in Britain as compared to South Africa. While the former was moving into the era of imperialism, South Africa, together with so many other colonial countries, showed only isolated capitalist features. While Britain had undergone a capitalist revolution dating from the seventeenth century, in which the internal consolidation of bourgeoisie social relations had been achieved by a struggle against feudalism, South Africa had barely emerged from the domain of tribalism. While the process of proletarianisation was only about to begin in South Africa, it had long ago been completed in Britain. While bourgeois democracy as the best political shell for capitalism had long ago been achieved in Britain, South Africa did not have a unitary state, let alone a consistent political norm.... The imperialist yoke which Britain threw over South Africa towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, suddenly brought backward South Africa under the general domain of Monopoly Capitalism. The unevenness of development between South Africa and Britain sought out its counterpart – combined development. Here we have the basis for South African’s specific features as well as its general characteristics. The unevenness of their development accounts for the differences between South Africa and Britain. The combination of backward South Africa and imperialist Britain accounts for the features in common between South Africa and Britain, viz. capitalist social relations.

South Africa does not thus have unique features because it stands outside the capitalist mode of production, but precisely because of the path that capitalist development took here . South Africa is not unique because it does not quite obey the laws of capitalism but precisely because it illustrates how the laws of capitalism came to be promulgated in the era of degenerate capitalism. South Africa is unique in the sense that the course of its development is different from that of, say, France or Britain. But this uniqueness it shares with all colonial and ex-colonial countries who were late arrivals in the arena of capitalism.

The very uniqueness of South Africa flows precisely from the general features of world capitalism in the era of imperialism. And, as a country forming part of world capitalism, its central contradictions are the contradictions within capitalism. There are thus not two South Africa's, but one. There is thus no justification, “analytical” or “useful”, to talk about two South Africas.

South Africa's peculiar feature is not internal colonialism, but racism. The result of South Africa's subsumption under capitalism in its degenerate phase is the complete absence of political democracy. No revolutionary can ignore the effect which these peculiarities have on the class struggle and their importance in the formulation of revolutionary strategy and tactics. To refuse to take cognisance of national specificities and wage struggle only on the basis of general features is to succumb to the foolishness which sees capitalist social formations as mere carbon copies of one another. However, it is equally incorrect to wage a struggle entirely on the basis of the “peculiar features”. Such is the conception of all reformists who merely wish to change the form of capitalism without destroying its essence.

For some of the Stalinists (such as Slovo), The Internal Colonialism Thesis is ultimately justifiable only because it is good analogy:“(The Thesis of Internal Colonialism) ... is based on the historical analogy of the classic imperialist –colonialist situation.” (Slovo: p .132)

And again:“To identify “White South Africa’ with an imperialist state and “Non-White South Africa’ with the ‘colony’ is undoubtedly a useful shorthand , at one level , to depict the reality of the historically specific race factor .” (Slovo : p. 135)

But to base one's conception of the revolution, one's strategy and one's programme on a mere “analogy” or “useful shorthand” is inadmissible. And this is precisely what the Stalinists do: “This characterisation (i.e. the Internal Colonialism Thesis) provides the theoretical foundation for the conclusion that the main content of the immediate struggle for change is the national liberation of the Africa people”. (Slovo: p. 134)

When all is said and done, one can only conclude that the Internal Colonialism Thesis is nothing but a piece of deceit (an awkward one at that) –designed by the pedlars of petit-bourgeois revolutionariness to give the “theoretical” justification for the politics of reformism. The thesis exists for one purpose only – to import to the platform of National Liberation a “basis” other than the naked class interests of those who propagate it. National Liberation needs a colony. But South Africa clearly is not a colony. Nevertheless, it does possess some ‘colonial features’ at ‘particular levels’. Then by some remarkable process of

mental gymnastics, transform what began as a ‘useful short-hand’ into a theory....and voila – National Liberation lives again. Such are the methods of Stalinism.

The mumbo-jumbo does not stop here. The Internal Colonialism Thesis proclaims not only an oppressor and oppressed nation occupying the same geographical area, but goes further to identify four Nations – the white oppressor nation and the African, Coloured and Indian oppressed nations – a scenario which, if the Rights of Nations is to be taken seriously, logically leads to the prospect of South Africa being split into four distinct, independent states. However, even the ANC knows that there is no historical, political or geographical basis for this and does not contemplate such a situation. Instead, it argues that since the three oppressed nations face a common oppressor they should unite in their struggle for national liberation – but under the leadership of the African nation. Furthermore, the ANC has insisted on the need for separate racially – constituted organisations to lead each nation. The Congress of the People, held in Kliptown, where the Freedom Charter was supposedly drawn up, comprised the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured People’s Organisation and the White Congress of Democrats. Not only is the petit-bourgeoisie trying to gain access to the ranks of the bourgeoisies, but in doing so, they also ape the racist categories of their masters.

In South Africa , where the working class is each day showing its readiness not only to battle with the bourgeoisie, but also to do so on a non-racial basis, to talk of nations which can be specified in no other terms than race, is to present obstacles to the progress of revolution.

No, gentlemen, Internal Colonialism and its offspring, the Four –Nation Thesis, is nothing more than the creation of minds trapped in the quagmire of philosophic idealism, and its offspring, theoretical confusion. It is a conception located entirely in the heads of its protagonists, leading to conclusions which are blatantly reactionary.

The Freedom Charter.

Hand in glove with the fictitious internal colonialism thesis and the national liberation struggle goes the resurrection of the old Social Democratic minimum programme in the form of the Freedom Charter.

Much heat is generated by this programme and many a militant has been warmed by the thought of the future the programme promises. Opinions differ as to the nature of the programme and three schools of thought can clearly be distinguished amongst the supporters of the Charter:

- a. Those who unashamedly admit that the programme idealises their dreams of bourgeois democracy.
- b. Those who see the attainment of the demands as a first stage in the two-stage conception of revolution.
- c. Those who are prepared to criticise the ANC elder statesmen, but who see in the Charter a natural socialist content.

The first two viewpoints are respectively that of the ANC (Tambo and his ilk) and that of the wretched Stalinist ideologues who kneel so slavishly before the petit-bourgeoisie. We shall deal first with arguments a. and b. And then tackle the third –what is rapidly becoming the most dangerous interpretation, i.e. the centrist attempts to reform the ANC.

The official historian of the SAPC describes the origins of the Freedom Charter thus: “The oppressed majority and their organisations protested and resisted against every new step on the road to fascism. They went further in deciding to convoke a true people’s (?) parliament or constituent assembly, one which would embody in one single charter the aspirations of the people for a free and democratic South Africa.” (Lerumo : p.98)

In keeping with its People’s Front politics, the SACP joined in the Congress of the People to reach an understanding of the “... the sort of South Africa which could enable its people to live together in amity .” (Lerumo : p .98)

In other words, a community of capitalists and workers living under the “amicable” exploitation of the workers by the capitalists. Similarly, the use of the terms “free and democratic South Africa” (not in an agitational leaflet but in the official history of the CP) bespeaks either ideological confusion as to the class nature of democracy, or else deliberate obfuscation. What is envisaged is a “national democratic state” (class nature left unspecified) headed by the ANC. And despite the ever-ready Slovo’s denials, this non-proletarian, non-bourgeois state can only be the unstable transition to the further consolidation of imperialism over South Africa.

Sometimes the Stalinists do leak out some honesty as to their objectives: “Essentially the South African Freedom Charter stems from the tradition of the proclamation of the Rights of the French and American revolutions and echoed in the United Nations declaration of Human Rights The charter is not a socialist Manifesto. Its demands for the redivision of land amongst those who work it and the nationalisation of mineral wealth and monopoly – owned industry are clearly attributable to the historical realities of a country where the white minority has forcibly appropriated of a country nearly all the country’s land and assets, rather than adherence to socialist doctrine on the part of those who made and support the Charter.” (Lerumo : p.100)

and also: “Rural policy involves confiscation, redistribution and redivision of the land amongst the people, implying an extension of private ownership.” (Slovo : p.147)

Now what is claimed is that these demands, although non-socialist, lead towards the conditions necessary for socialism by making major inroads into capitalism. Summarising:

1. The realization of the demands of the Charter constitutes a major “reorganisation of South African Society.”
2. The new national democratic state in the epoch of anti-imperialist struggles will side with the socialist camp in the interest of obtaining economic emancipation

3. The working-class presence in the new state will act against narrow nationalism or the “classical drive by an elitist (?) group amongst the oppresses to gain ascendancy.” (Morogoro : p. 198)
4. “None of this detracts from the basically national content of our liberation drive. In the last resort it is only the success of the national democratic revolution which – by destroying (?) the existing social and economic social and economic relations (??) – will bring with it a correction of the historical injustices perpetrated against the indigenous majority and thus lay the basis for a new and deeper internationalist approach.” (Morogoro : p. 198)

Here, in its defence of the Freedom Charter lies the most graphic illustration of the SACP’s attempts at “rendering profound” the reformist politics of the ANC. It has given this “depth” to the Charter for no other purpose than to justify the depths to which it itself has degenerated . This more profound rendition is accomplished not on the basis of the realities of South African capitalism and the requirements of a successful revolutionary strategy, but on the basis of an existing programme for which a “Marxist” foundation had to be invented. The result is a total inversion of the real order of things .The SACP presupposes “a major reorganisation of South African society” on the attainment of “democracy”, whereas “a major reorganization of South African society” (specifically the taking of state power by the working class) is required for the attainment of democracy. In other words, the SACP postulates that the victory of the national democratic revolution will eventually lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat, whereas we say that only the dictatorship of the proletariat can ensure the victory of the democratic revolution.

If we are to make any sense, therefore, of the SACP’s arguments we would have to reverse the order of their points. In so doing we arrive at the following diametrically opposed conclusions:

1. Only the destruction of the “existing social and economic relations” will ensure the success of the “national democratic revolution”. But this in turn will mean that the revolution cannot remain democratic or national.
2. Only the worker’s state can act against “narrow nationalism” and the “classical drive by an elitist group” In other words, it is not a question of working – class participation in the state (whatever that they may mean) but dictatorship of the proletariat to smash any future class of exploiters.
3. Only worker’s state can consistently side with the “socialist camp” (actually participate in the regeneration of worker’s democracy in the USSR and elsewhere). Moreover, only by expropriation of the property of the bourgeoisie (especially foreign exchange) can economic emancipation begin to be realised.
4. The far-encompassing “reorganization of South African society” can only take place on the basis of the proletariat seizing power on the basis of its own programme.

In the final analysis, then, any talk of the realization of the democratic demands of the Freedom Charter presupposes the existence of the independent organisation of the working class, leading an alliance of oppressed classes. And this can only be done in opposition to the petit-bourgeois organisations and the treacherous Stalinists who are responsible for Freedom Charter.

This is of course not to deny the importance of democratic demands, even demands which would not be out of place in bourgeois-democratic programme. But no programme, in this era of degenerate capitalism when proletarian dictatorship is the order of the day, can ignore the question of control of the means of production and which class is to exercise that control. Such a programme must bring into sharp contradiction the attainment of democracy with the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. The history of the ANC as a petit-bourgeoisie organisation, together with the servile collaboration of the SACP gives a lie to the idea that the Freedom Charter has this as its aim.

Marxists have never baulked at committed support for democratic demands. In fact, in the earlier period of capitalist advance Marxists have often insisted on the need for a bourgeois-democratic minimum programme in the struggle against the fetters which have hampered the full proliferation of capitalism. At the time the development of capitalism was deemed a prerequisite for the development of its gravedigger – the proletariat. It was only in the sense, of the necessity of the growth of the proletariat that Marxists gave unqualified support to the bourgeois-democratic struggle. But South Africa is already a capitalist country (a small imperialist one at that) and it has in power a bourgeoisie which is not interested in democracy. The resurrection of the anachronistic minimum programme is akin to wearing furs in summer and going naked in winter.

In class society no programme can pretend conciliation between classes. The idealism which manifests itself in devotion to the Freedom Charter objectively amounts, in the era of degenerate capitalism, to a betrayal of the working class, to dissipate the energies of this class by making it struggle for bourgeois democracy under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. But let us look at the Freedom Charter itself to finally bury its so called progressive content:

“...No government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all (?) the people ...” No state is above class - in fact, the state is the highest instruments of class rule. By definition, no government is therefore based on the will of all the people. When the government does become based on the will of all the people, then that presupposes that classes and hence class antagonisms would have ceased. But this implies that the state itself would have withered away. How then are we to make sense of this demand? Surely the petit-bourgeoisie is trying to represent its interests as the interests of all the oppressed! “The people shall share in the country’s wealth. The national wealth of our country. The heritage of all South Africa, shall be restored to the people.”

But the wealth of the country has never belonged to all the people. The whimsical dream of reclaiming wealth which was taken from ‘the people’ is the remnant of the yearning of the chiefs and landholders of the pre-capitalist era, who once ruled. The spectre of the founding

fathers still haunts the ANC today. Moreover, the people, under the vicious apartheid capitalist regime, do share in the country's wealth, only disproportionately, of course. Every worker does share in the wealth of what he himself produces. But the capitalist expropriates the major portion of this wealth produced! To call for the people the share in the country's wealth without posing the question of control of the means of production, is to talk nonsense.

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

Here we have the supposed 'socialist' content of the Freedom Charter. Presumably, this means nationalising the key industries (the mines, etc.). Now there is nationalisation and nationalisation. The nature of the state is the crucial question and this in turn depends upon who controls the state. Once again, we can back to the utopia of the first demand: to talk about the "people as a whole" presupposes a "people's" state...All people shall have equal rights to trade where they choose, to manufacture, etc..."

In the era of monopoly capitalism the notion of the small trader and petty businessman is an anachronism. The survivors are only those who can transform their small businesses into big ones. Here we have the naked self interests of the petit-bourgeois who wants to transform his corner-shop into a supermarket. "...Restriction of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended, and all the land divided amongst those we work it, to banish famine and land hunger."

But the removal of restrictions on land ownership implies the extension of private property in land. And private property in land implies intensification of class divisions, increased land hunger and thus greater famine. The bourgeois forerunners of this Charter were more realistic than this. The local petit-bourgeoisie, however, finds it necessary to mask its desire for reformed capitalism with idealistic dreams about 'no famine' and "no land hunger", when it is capitalism itself which causes these phenomena. "All shall have the right to occupy land wherever they choose.'

But private property in land means that anyone cannot merely go and "occupy" land. The class struggle on the land on the basis of increased private property will make the free "occupying" of land illegal. The same state which the ANC so avariciously desires will see to this. In a period of insurrection the call to occupy land is the battle cry of the rural workers and poor peasants to expropriate the property of the capitalists. To talk about occupation as a right under capitalism is ludicrous. "...The courts shall be representative of all the peopleThe police force and the army shall be open to all on an equal basis and shall be the helpers and protectors of the people."

The courts, the police force and the army are all mechanisms, through which the ruling class establishes its authority. Under capitalism the police and the army are the violent wing of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie - and the courts legalise their actions.

"...All who work shall be free to form trade unions, to elect their officers and to make wage agreements with their employers. The state shall recognise the right and duty of all to work and to draw full unemployment benefits."

The first statement presupposes the continued existence of the labour capital relation. But the capitalist does not work. Instead, he appropriates unpaid labour from the worker. This unpaid labour is the source of all profit for the capitalist as well as his means of substance. To talk of the state recognising the duty of all to work implies that the capitalist no longer ‘exists’ on the exploitation of the worker. But then capitalism no longer exists. Twist and turns as much as you like, you cannot get out of this contradiction. “There shall be houses, security and comfort. Rent and prices shall be lowered , food plentiful and no one shall go hungry.”

The coming to power of the ANC’s equivalents in Kenya, Ghana and the rest of Africa, has proved that the state decree cannot lower rent and prices, let alone abolish hunger. Unless capitalism is abolished, private ownership of the means of production will deny houses to the workers, there will be no security and comfort, rents and prices will skyrocket and the majority of the people will go hungry. What, therefore, is this demand doing in a self-confessed bourgeois-democratic minimum programme which calls for increased private property? How is any sane person to understand this muddle? Again, only as a mealy-mouthed appeal to the working class to follow the petit-bourgeoisie down the rocky road to reformed capitalism.

And last, but by no means least, “....Miners, domestic workers, farm workers and civil servants shall have the same rights as all others who work”. If this is to cater for the often more intense oppression of the first three, then it has some credibility. But why “civil servants”, who regulate the oppressive mechanisms with respect to miners, domestic and farm workers. “... Teachers shall have all the rights of other citizens.”

Together with the previous appeal for the rights of civil servants, this demand, a particularisation of the first, is nothing more than the failed attempts of the petit-bourgeoisie to disguise its class interests. In all its talk about ‘the people’, these two can only be regrettable slips of the pen. They appear as fairly insignificant in the Charter as a whole, but they are very significant indices of the real class content of this programme.

This is what Nelson Mandela himself had to say about the ANC’s programme: “Under socialism the workers hold state power. They and the peasants own the means of production, the land, the factories and the mills...The Charter does not contemplate such profound economic and political changes. Its declaration, ‘The People Shall Govern!’, visualises the transfer of power not to any single class, but to all the people of this country, be they workers, peasants, professional men or the petit-bourgeoisie.....” (Mandela : 1956 - quoted by Robertson : 1971: p.174)

More than a century ago, Karl Marx, founder of scientific socialism, paid his last respect to that miscreant, the people’s state, in his Critique of the Gotha Programme. Today when the class nature of the state has been so often revealed to every worker – even those who have had only limited experience of struggles - the resurrection of this utopia is not only scientifically inaccurate, but also downright reactionary.

The Centrists

Then there are those who argue that the Freedom Charter itself remains a valid programme of revolution, but that it must be wrested from the control of the conservative ANC Leadership. Marxism long ago analysed this tendency as Centrism, i.e. the vacillating between reformism and Marxism - between the petit-bourgeoisie and the working class. Our local centrists are characterised by this in that they flirt with the ANC while occasionally talking about the independence of the working class (without the Party, mind you).

What distinguishes the Centrist support of the Freedom Charter from that of the Stalinists is that the Centrists do not see the Charter as fulfilling the bourgeois –democratic requirements of the first stage of the two-stage revolution. No, they say, let us take the Charter seriously , wage struggle on the basis of its demands and in the course of this all-embracing struggle the natural socialist content of the Freedom Charter will emerge. Moreover, the conservative ANC leadership will be overtaken by a dynamic pro-worker tendency coming from the militants involved in active struggles. This is idealism of the first order.

A programme represents the class interests of the organisation to which it belongs, regardless of the “non-class” language in which it is couched. The ANC is a petit-bourgeois organisation and the Freedom Charter in no way changes the class character of the programmatic statement of its aspirations. The fact that the SACP supports the Charter in no way changes the class character of the programme; rather it is an index of the extent to which the supposed vanguard of the working class has degenerated. Furthermore, the terminology used in the Freedom Charter –“We, the People”, “the people’s government,” “democratic state”, etc. –is nothing more than the mechanism by which a class tries to represent its particular interests as the general interests of society. To talk therefore of the Freedom Charter as a programme which can be taken over by revolutionaries, is to sow confusion - a favourite pastime of Centrists.

The Centrist defence of the Freedom Charter corresponds with their advocating that young revolutionaries enter the ANC to topple the leadership and breathe new militancy into the organisation. But no young militant, unschooled in the methods of propagating and defending a revolutionary working class position, can hope for very long to resist the reformism and opportunism which is everyday fare in the ranks of the ANC. This is not to say that Marxists reject out of hand the entering of petit-bourgeois organisations. It is the duty of every revolutionary to be wherever the working class is, no matter how reactionary the organisation may be, and to struggle constantly to win influence amongst potential allies. But this is possible only with the backing and under the auspices of an organisation which is clear about its revolutionary tasks and about the nature of alliances between the working class and other oppressed classes. And this organisation is the revolutionary workers’ party.

Unless entry is undertaken on this basis, it is tantamount to political suicide. It is clear then that the Centrist position on entryism amounts to nothing more than abandoning the struggle for independent workers’ organisations. And to abandon this struggle means surrendering the working class to all the brutalities of imperialism.

Armed Struggle

Notwithstanding all that we have said, a great attraction for young militants is the fact that the ANC is conducting an armed struggle against the state. For many the critique of the ANC in terms of its class character, its theory of revolution, its programme, etc. come to nought in the face of this fact. No organisation, they say, which is prepared to wage war against the state, and which has done so since 1961, can be bankrupt and counter –revolutionary as the ANC has been analysed to be in the a foregoing pages. We ask you to bear with us, as we let the ANC tacticians themselves explain the 1961 turn to armed struggle: “The general strike ...rendered impossible.”

Hear also the declarations of Umkhonto We Sizwe: “We hope, even at this late hour, that our first actions will awaken everyone to a realisation of the disastrous situation to which the Nationalist policy is leading. We hope that we will bring the government and its supporters to their senses before it is too late, so that both the government and its politics can be changed before matters reach the desperate state of civil war.” (Slovo; p.186)

These two statements express most succinctly the fundamental motivation behind the 1961 decision and the confines within which the ANC is determined to wage its armed struggle. On the one hand we have the ANC taking the radical step to launch an armed struggle – “ the only methods left open to us”. On the other , we hear the “hopeful” supplications of its own military wing to the State to yield “before matters reach the desperate stage of Civil war”.

How is one to make sense of this apparent non-sequitur? Only by making clear the difference between violence aimed at reforming the capitalist state and violence aimed at smashing the capitalist state!!

The ANC’s armed struggle, directed towards bringing “the government and its supports to its senses”, falls squarely within the first category. “Civil war”, however, is open class warfare, and raises directly the spectre of proletarian dictatorship. Hence, our petit-bourgeoisie’s “desperation” to avoid this “disastrous situation” which could mean the death of the system which it so desperately (and violently) is trying to reform.

We have come full circle: the 1912 delegates have been replaced by the 1961 saboteurs and the 1982 guerrillas. The “respectful submissions” have given way to violent threats. But the politics of it all remains the same – to secure for our petit-bourgeoisies their rightful place in the capitalist scheme of things.

In sum, then, the ANC’s present commitment to struggle is the climax of seventy years of pressure politics – years during which it skipped from method to method, finally arriving, in the face of the adamancy of the bourgeoisie, at “the only method open to us” –armed struggle. For the ANC, armed struggle is nothing more than its trump – card to force the South African bourgeoisie to the negotiating table, a la’ Lancaster House.

But lest we be misunderstood, let us declare once and for all our contempt for the lily-livered, pacifists who shudder to think of the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie state. The state, as every Marxist knows, is a “body of armed men”, designed to protect and maintain, under capitalism the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The seizure power by the proletariat therefore corresponds with the violent smashing of the bourgeois state. This is basic Marxism, a perspective which differs fundamentally from that of the ANC:

1. For the ANC, armed struggle is a last resort – used when all other methods have failed. Revolutionary violence, on the other hand, is the culmination of sustained all-sided political activity by revolutionaries amongst the working class – the political education of the workers via the exposure of and agitation around all aspects of capitalist brutality, involving all oppressed classes. In other words, for a Marxist, the armed confrontation between the working class and the capitalist state is feasible only on the basis of the success of other methods of political activity, and not because these have failed.
2. Whereas for a Marxist, the arming of the proletariat, the creation of armed detachments of workers, of workers militias – which will protect their fellows from police violence and deal with the marauding bands of thugs sent out by the capitalists – is indispensable to a successful revolution. For the ANC, armed struggle means guerrilla warfare – isolated attacks by small, mobile units of armed militants upon strategic installations or symbol of oppression. The heroism and courage of the guerrillas stand forth as monuments of revolutionary commitment. But all too often they are young, misguided militants sent on missions which end in their death at the hands of the police. Such wanton waste of human life and revolutionary potential is tragic especially in the light of the fact that nowhere in history has guerrilla warfare led to the dictatorship of the proletariat. In fact, guerrilla warfare takes the initiative in the struggle away from the working class and places it in the hands of a few desperate men, who can hardly “terrify” the state into submission, let alone smash it. No, only the armed, organised and politically conscious might of the proletariat can do this!
3. Some, especially the Centrists, argue that guerrilla warfare has a dynamic of its own. One that, as the incidence of guerrilla strikes intensifies, brings the masses to identify with guerrillas and offer them protection and support. In short, guerrilla warfare is that stimulant needed to rouse the masses of workers from their apathy, thereby providing the conditions in which the guerrillas can bring the state to its knees.

We say categorically that this is absolutely false!! The fact is that the masses are everyday furiously roused by the very brutalities which they have to endure under capitalism. It is not they, but their “leaders” who must be stimulated to harness organise and concentrate: “...all these drops and streamlets of popular excitement, which are called forth by the conditions of (South African) life, to a far larger extent than we imagine, but which is precisely necessary to combine into a single gigantic flood.” (Lenin: What is to be done)

And this can be done only on the basis of consistent political agitation, of the all-sided political education of the working class, of the exposure, in all its manifold aspects, of the evils of capitalism. Nothing less than this is necessary if socialism is to triumph. And any leadership which seek to evade this imperative and substitute it with guerrilla warfare, must be replaced. The matter is as simple as that!

To conclude then, with an answer to those militants who have fallen in love with the romance of guerillarism peddled by the ANC: Guerrilla warfare is the “ultimate “weapon of a petit-bourgeois organisation dedicated to the reformation of capitalism, which, in the end, can only mean the strengthening of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Revolutionary violence is the weapon of the revolutionary working class party, which is dedicated to the smashing of the capitalist state and the installation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is time to fall out of love and rid ourselves of the blindness which goes with this condition!!

Conclusion

We began this essay by posing the question of the nature of the South African revolution. By now it is obvious that the question reduces to the following : to cripple the working class or to lead it to the conquest of the state power ; to attempt to reform capitalism or to smash capitalism ; to collapse into barbarism or to march on to socialism.

These are the sharply divergent options facing South Africa. There is no third variant. History has thrown up the life or death struggle between the working class and the bourgeoisie. To refuse to struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat is to betray the proletariat. To continue to deny the independent historical role of the proletariat is to be crushed under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. While the South African struggle remains under the leadership of the petit-bourgeoisie, this dictatorship can only be perpetuated. The radical petit-bourgeoisie can be divided into three camps : The national democrats (ANC), the Stalinists (SACP) and the Centrists. The first two form the backbone of reformism, while the third swings between reformism and Marxism, i.e. between the petit –bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

The prime representative of the petit-bourgeois radicals in South Africa is the ANC. Our analysis has shown that the ANC of 1912 and the ANC of 1982 are identical. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the sons. Methods and personalities have changed, but the goals remain the same - a colour-blind capitalism in which the petit-bourgeoisies can with “equal right” strive to share in the exploitation of the working class. Every change in method, every radicalisation of language has arisen not out of a change in class character or strategic objective, but in response to the increasingly militant activity of the working class and the intransigence of the bourgeoisie. The ANC by its own admission is not a working class organisation. But it has come to speak of a “special role” for the working class. Let us state quite categorically that this special role is nothing more than the attempt by the petit-bourgeoisie to add proletarian muscle to its struggle to gain access to the bourgeoisie.

We have been at pains to point out that in defining the ANC as a petit-bourgeois organisation, we have been talking about its official position as epitomised in its official programme and strategy. All militants must accept this definition, no matter how emotionally cataclysmic it may be. But this is not all.

The nominal militancy of the ANC and the fact that it is recognised internationally as the representative of the people attracts many dedicated militants to its ranks . It also often provides confidence and assurance to the masses whose conditions of life throw up spontaneous struggles against the state. This disparity between the official ANC line and the eagerness of the masses to take up the cudgels against the bourgeoisie, manifests itself as a growing contradiction between the reformist principles and strategies, which still define the character of the ANC, and the revolutionary dedication of many of its adherents.

This brings us to the Centrists, with one jaundiced eye seeing the necessity for organising amongst the working class and the other blinking fearfully at the possibility of this class coming to power. This tendency often talks publicly about the working class leading the struggle and that socialism must eventually replace capitalism. In this sense they can be distinguished from the hard –core reformist. But they shy away from the recognition of the necessity of the revolutionary party and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Instead they posit that the above-mentioned contradiction, between the leadership and the ranks will inevitably and spontaneously lead to a show-down, from which this organisation will emerge, free of the bureaucracy which has hitherto hamstrung it. Hence, their policy of entryism. Hence, their defence of the “ socialist content” of the Freedom Charter. But this position is fraught with delusions and dangers. A spring can be stretched to the limits of its elasticity, but it will not snap into two. An external factor, in this case, a pair of wire cutters is needed for the final break. Similarly with the ANC, it can be flooded with energetic and dedicated militants, but the leadership, past – masters at containing or nipping all opposition in the bud, will not be dislodged. The contradictions can only be sharpened to a breaking-point if the rank-and file opposition has the support of an organisation which is independent of the ANC and which bases itself upon the revolutionary strength of the proletariat. Otherwise, these sincere militants will in time be crushed by the jackboots of Tambo and his imperialist allies, in the same way as so many worker – communists were crushed by Stalin.

Finally, to the SACP, Stalinist to the core, hero of the Peoples’ Front and agent of imperialism. The history of the proletariat struggle for socialism is littered with examples of its betrayal by its leaders (China: 1929 ; Germany: 1933; Spain: 1936 : etc.). But it would be hard to find a more consistently cynical traitor than the SACP. Born in the heyday of proletarian internationalism, just four years after the victorious Russian revolution, this party has since 1928 been consistent in only one thing – the abrogation of its responsibility to struggle for the independent organisation of the working class.

Since 1928 it has been the veritable incarnation of liquidationism, resisting at every turn the burning desire of the masses of the workers to settle with capitalism. Instead, it calls upon the masses to throw its energies into a South African People’s Front led by the ANC and sponsored by imperialism.

We find it necessary to repeat that the SACP is nominally a Communist party, the supposed vanguard of the working class in its struggle for socialism. But it has long ago jettisoned Marxism, using only a “new revised version” in its official speeches and publications, to give credibility to its genuflection before the alter of the People’s Front. It has totally capitulated to the Stalinist epigones of Lenin, who, in this era of the death agony of capitalism, have resurrected the two-stage theory of revolution for one purpose only – to justify their desertion of the working class and putting off, in perpetuity, the necessity to fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat as the only solution to the crisis facing mankind.

Slovo, chief Stalinist ideologue and theoretician, on the relationship between the proletariat, the ANC and the SACP: “The continuing role of an independent (working) class based movement as part of the revolutionary front is... historically vital, despite the absence of any basic policy divergence between the ANC and the SACP on the main strategy and thrust of liberation aims”. (Slovo: p.149)

The first part of this most damning statement is nothing but rhetoric. For no communist party which declares its policy and strategy to be identical with that of a petit-bourgeois organisation, which gives “unqualified support” (Slovo : p.145) to the programme of that organisation as the SACP has done with Freedom Charter, can even pretend to be the vanguard of the proletariat .

What is “historically vital” is not an independent (!) working class movement as part of the People’s Front (?), but a revolutionary working class party, “independent” of the petit-bourgeois narrowness of the ANC, the capitulationist mania of the SACP and the cowardly vacillations of the Centrists; a party which wages relentless war upon all attempts to emasculate the workers’ struggle, while at the same time not baulking at the principled unity necessary to advance this struggle; a party between whose basic policies and strategies and those of the unholy marriage of the ANC and SACP there is a world of difference!

If there is an organisation which must stand accused in the dock of history it is not the ANC, but the SACP which, without even a struggle, has surrendered the working class to the treacherous machinations of South Africa’s radical petit-bourgeoisie and its imperialist allies. A hundred times, no a thousand times more criminal than the ANC’s attempts to harness the proletariat to its cause, is the SACP’s refusal to fight for the independence of this class, especially in this period when capitalism is writhing in its death agony and sees in the People’s Frontism, which the SACP is so vociferously propagating, the possibility of a new lease of life.

Socialism tops the agenda of history. If the international proletariat is to restore to mankind the gains of the October Revolution and lead it on to the road of unfettered development under socialism, then it must start by purging its ranks of all those who stand in the way of historical progress. The gates holding back the free flow of the great proletarian flood tide must be opened and washed away. For South Africa this means an irrevocable break with the politics of petit-bourgeois revolutionariness, and the unyielding struggle to establish the vanguard party of the proletariat. This is the task facing all revolutionaries today.