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4

Socialist Transformation and the Freedom Charter

Z. Pallo Jordan

This conference, whose theme is "Socialist Transformation in South Africa," comes at a time when our entire region is seized by the problem of a well-orchestrated counterrevolutionary drive directed from Pretoria. To some it may appear ironic that it is at this time that the social scientists of southern Africa have chosen to address themselves to this theme when the radical transformations that have occurred during the last decade are manifestly in danger. The irony, however, is not that great when one recalls that to one extent or another the changes that so dramatically changed the geopolitics of our subcontinent were all inspired by precisely the vision of "Socialist Transformation." Indeed, the counterrevolution is directed specifically against this cutting edge.

We are meeting also during 1983, the 100th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx, one of the founders of scientific socialism, who during his lifetime made the most prolific and profound contribution to the theory of socialist transformation. Marx's writings are indeed wide-ranging, covering many different countries, representing various forms of political and economic domination. Though this paper will deal specifically with South Africa, and will be addressing itself to the manner in which South African revolutionaries, partisans of the

national liberation movement, have approached this question, and will attempt to outline the theory of the South African Revolution that has evolved from these approaches, we shall be drawing on the particularly rich heritage bequeathed to humanity by Marx and his co-worker, Engels. The writings of Marx and Engels on colonialism, the national question, and the struggle for democracy, have a particular relevance for South Africa in the present day. Many of these, we feel, can assist us in throwing light on some of the more thorny problems of theory and revolutionary practice that confront our country and its people.

A comparison of the map of Europe, east of the Rhine, during the 1840s when Marx first entered politics, and South Africa today, clearly demonstrates the relevance of Marx's work to the problems that beset our country in the present day.

Both maps, on examination, would reveal an extraordinary degree of fragmentation, an immense disparity in the sizes of the various fragments and the levels of socio-economic development both within and among the fragments. What the observer would have to discover are the political realities behind the map: birth pangs caused by a new social and political order struggling to emerge. He would observe also, hidden behind that map, two apparently contradictory yet integrally related processes: the dismemberment of an empire(s) and the unification of nations.

Nineteenth-century Europe and southern Africa during the last quarter of the twentieth century are qualitatively different situations, we can hear our readers object. And we have to agree. But, let us focus our attention on one of these similarities for a moment to bring out the parallels we are referring to.

Speaking at the Fourth Congress of the Frelimo Party, Comrade President O.R. Tambo said of the ANCs vision of our country's future:

> We conceive of our country as a single, united, democratic and non-racial state, belonging to all who live in it, in which all shall enjoy equal rights, and in which sovereignty will come from the people as a whole, and not from a collection of Bantustans and racial tribal groups organised to perpetuate minority power.[1]

Compare this with the first two clauses of the "Demands of the Communist Party in Germany" drawn up by Marx and Engels soon after the outbreak of the 1848 Revolution:

> 1. The whole of Germany shall be declared a single and indivisible republic,

> 2. Every German, having reached the age of 21, shall have the right to vote and to be elected, provided he has not been convicted of a criminal offence.[2]

The similarities are striking. But these similarities are not the result of plagiarism on our part. They are, we contend, the outcome of similarities in the circumstances which led to the adoption of common solutions. An even more instructive parallel emerges when we focus on the relations between the Polish and German national movements of the period. Compare the words of Engels on the Polish question:

> We German democrats present here clasp hands with the Polish democrats, so the whole German people will celebrate the alliance with the Polish people on the very field of the first battle won in common.[3]

Compare these words with those of President Tambo on Namibia:

> The ANC once again affirms its support for the people of Namibia in their legitimate struggle for national independence under the leadership of SWAPO. The apartheid regime must be encircled by your struggles and by your actions; by our struggles and by our actions. Together with you we shall be unconquerable and invincible.[4]

Decaying Feudalism And Monopoly Capitalism

Though there are these parallels between Europe of the 1840s and South Africa of the present, we do not intend that these be carried too far. More important and illuminating are the divergences in the two situations.

Europe, east of the Rhine, during the 1840s represented a stark picture of decaying feudalism, overripe for the bourgeois democratic revolution. This state of sociopolitical putrefaction rested on the twin pillars of the counterrevolutionary compact concluded in Vienna at the close of the Napoleonic Wars, and the political flabbiness of the big bourgeoisie of these territories, especially Germany. One regional power, Tsarist Russia, underwrote and sustained these obsolete institutions with its armed might.

The German bourgeoisie's fear was occasioned not by its economic backwardness or weakness but precisely by its strength. Within the confines of the archaic institutions of absolutism, the bourgeoisie had accumulated wealth, established factories, and had even forced a half-

hearted type of land reform on the landowning Junkers. These developments, however, produced their historical concomitant, the proletariat, which, though still in its infancy, had demonstrated its revolutionary potential and embraced political ambitions and a social vision the bourgeoisie might find impossible to contain. The images of Jacques Roux, the Enrages, not to mention Babeouf, were still fresh in the minds of the European bourgeoisie. They therefore chose to deal with the devil they knew rather than entertain the risky project of arousing the masses to revolutionary struggle. Commenting on this turn of events, Marx wrote:

> The German bourgeoisie developed so sluggishly, timidly and slowly that at the moment it menacingly confronted feudalism and absolutism, it saw menacingly confronting it the proletariat and all sections of the middle class whose interests and ideas were related to those of the proletariat. . . . from the first the German bourgeoisie was inclined to betray the people and to compromise with the crowned representative of the old society, for it itself already belonged to the old society. . . . The big bourgeoisie, which was all along anti-revolutionary, concluded a defensive and offensive alliance with the reactionary forces, because it was afraid of the people, i.e. of the workers and the democratic bourgeoisie.[5]

The abandonment of revolution by the bourgeoisie imposed on Marx and Engels the task of reevaluating the whole character of the revolution in Germany. They concluded that a new type of bourgeois revolution was in the making in which the task of mobilizing and leading the other revolutionary forces devolved on the proletariat, since the bourgeoisie had ceased being revolutionary.

The German bourgeois democrats and socialists had conceived of the national democratic revolution as entailing two inseparable processes: the unification of the German people, to include those of Austria and those of the smaller German principalities, on the one hand; and the emancipation of the various smaller nations oppressed by Austrian and Prussian absolutism, on the other hand. In contrast to them, the forces of reaction in both Prussia and Austria, for divergent reasons, were opposed to the unification of the German people. Prussia, the weaker of the two, though favoring unification under its domination, realistically could not support it since it could lead to Austrian domination over Prussia. Austria too would have preferred unification under Austrian control but feared that advocacy of national

rights might have a subversive effect on its non-German dependencies. The Austrians therefore became proponents of confederation because this would enable them to dominate the other German states while retaining their oppressive grip on the smaller nations within the Hapsburg Empire.

The upshot was that Germany's transition to full-fledged capitalism was presided over by a Bonapartist regime headed by Bismarck and the military caste of Prussia. Austria was excluded from this unified Germany and wars of conquest rather than revolutionary struggle, initiated from below, became the chief agency of sociopolitical change. The tragic consequences of this evolution do not form part of our theme and have been widely discussed elsewhere.

In sharp contrast to the decaying feudalism of nineteenth-century Europe, South Africa today is a highly integrated capitalist socioeconomic formation characterized by the domination of huge industrial, financial, and mining monopolies. Yet we find that the country is being fragmented and subdivided into various ethnic and racial compartments. All fractions of the ruling monopoly capitalist class—to different degrees—advocate the creation of artificial ministates and tribal principalities as a bulwark against revolutionary change from below.

Fearful that any popularly-initiated change of the political order may have consequences inimical to their property rights, the very class whose historical task was once described as becoming "political centralization" almost daily concocts harebrained schemes—"federalism, confederalism, consociationism, national pluralism"—anything but the unitary state, as a means of preserving white minority domination and capitalist power under some superficially "new" guise. In the most obscene and absurd imitation of the white capitalist interests groups they serve, various black collaborationist leaders have offered up their versions in the shape of ethnic utopias, the so-called "Buthelezi Commission," and a host of other farcical proposals.

The National Liberation Movement has thus emerged as the only champion of democracy and national unity. Consistent with these principles, the ANC is also the only consistent ally and advocate of the national emancipation of the Namibian people under the leadership of their vanguard, SWAPO. We have here again the recapitulation of the tasks Marx and Engels assigned to the new democratic movement, headed by the proletariat of Europe more than 150 years ago.

The Evolution Of A Theory Of The South African Revolution

The South African liberation movement, headed by the ANC, is a

multiclass alliance embracing movements that draw their inspiration from two modern political currents, nationalism and socialism. Though South Africa is not unique in this respect, there is one dimension of our movement which was not present in others of this region; namely, the presence of an organized Marxist-Leninist party as a component of the liberation movement. African Nationalism in South Africa traces its origins to the liberal-democratic traditions of the European "Englightenment," imbibed by the mission-educated African petit-bourgeoisie. Socialism came to our country in the baggage of European immigrant workers and returning black students who had been exposed to the influences of the labor movement in Europe. The complex interaction between these two currents in our movement has been dealt with elsewhere. We shall focus here on how these two grew together, leading first to a political alliance and later to the emergence of a common approach to the immediate tasks facing our people and our country. To elucidate this process we shall discuss separately the various approaches that have evolved within these two traditions.

African nationalism in South Africa can be dated from the first half of the nineteenth century, when two black converts, Jan Tshatshu and Andries Stoffels, travelled to Britain as part of a missionary-led deputation to petition the British colonial authorities. Both were representatives of the "new men" who had come into existence in the interstices between European colonizer and the African colonized. Attracted by the achievements of European thought and technique, the new men oscillated between collaboration and resistance. Unlike the majority of their countrymen, they were modernists, seeking to master the instruments of European culture and the political institutions created by the colonialists in the Cape. At the same time, they were repelled by the brutal aggression of the British and the racial arrogance of the colonialists. In the end, both Tshatshu and Stoffels finally opted for resistance.

It was only after 1880 that a large enough number of blacks with access to the political institutions of the Cape came into being. Before this time meaningful participation in Cape politics had not been possible. Organized black politics is usually dated from this period, which saw the first mass registration of African voters and the publication of the first secular newspapers in the African languages (1884). The following three decades constitute the formative years of African political thought during which African political leaders were forced to adapt to and learn from the changing needs of Cape liberalism and the shifting policies of the British imperialists. The inauguration of the Union of South Africa in 1910 brings this period to a close.

The founding of the ANC in January 1912 marks the end, but also the beginning, of a political practice that had developed among the black elite over the last decades of the nineteenth century. It brought to a close the preceding period during which black politics had been concerned with fighting an unsuccssful rearguard action in defense of the few rights the black petit-bourgeoisie had enjoyed under colonial rule, but it was also the beginning of a new era during which black politics would increasingly challenge the institutions of white overlordship and in the process learn to pose alternatives and new options for the country as a whole. In this light the conception of the ANC as an alternative parliament, so often decried as puerile mimicry of the British ruling class, was itself a revolutionary measure. As the "parliament of the African people," the ANC assumed the role of custodian of ideals, aspirations, and political values that had no place in the "official" white parliament. Implicit in these actions was the intent to seize the initiative from the white minority and reshape the entire body politic to their own design.

The European liberal tradition formed the core ideas of the politics of the national movement during its early years. These were the ideas the leadership had learned from their predecessors. They shared an idealized perception of the British Empire and its institutions, all supposedly rooted in this political tradition. That the empire was in reality a prison house for millions of Africans and Asians escaped their notice. They, like their white counterparts therefore, turned to Britain as the final arbiter in South African affairs and tried to legitimize their claims by an appeal to this political tradition. It was of course the economic realities—rich mines, large farms, the need for a mass labor force—that carried weight in Whitehall. Hence it was the pro-imperialism white settler bourgeoisie and its Afrikaner nationalist opponents who received a sympathetic hearing in London.

The political programs and objectives of both these latter dovetailed with the interest of British imperialism. African nationalism did not. Thus, despite the skeleton of the Boer republican rebellion rattling in his political cupboard, General Hertzog was able to secure a firm promise for greater autonomy when he went to London at the end of World War I in 1918. The African nationalists, who had loyally stood by the Empire and enthusiastically mobilized volunteers for the Native Labour Contingent, came back empty-handed.

The racial exclusivity of the Union constitution, however, also had a quite unintended effect. Racism circumscribed the activities of the black elite in the state, the economy, and the political and cultural institutions into dealing mainly with their own people. This tended to reinforce group cohesion and solidarity, both of which became factors

in political action. Confined to the ghetto of its skin color, the elite also became susceptible to aspirations and objectives that were not necessarily its own. It gradually came to realize that the fulfilment, even of its own limited objectives and ambitions, was contingent upon the status of the black community as a whole. This realization imposed on it the task of acting as the spokesman of the Africans and other oppressed nationalities.

As Thomas Hodgkin has noted, every African colonial city was divided into an opulent white section and an impoverished African section, which stimulated an identification with socially radical causes. The legal racial barriers erected to hold back black advancement made it plain that the distribution of wealth, power, and privilege was not preordained, but was the direct consequence of a particular mode of organization of the economic and political order. The intransigence of the white ruling class, the vacillation and betrayal of principles by erstwhile friends in the liberal establishment, and the growing capacity for struggle displayed by the poorer strata of the black population, all had a radicalizing impact on the black elite which synchronized with its own changing self-perception.

The most important contributory factor to the radicalization of black politics, specifically that of the ANC, was the impact of industrial development. This catalyzed the emergence of a rapidly-growing black urban community, made up overwhelmingly of industrial workers who had acquired a stake in life within the modern sector of the economy. It was from among these that the first mass black trade union, the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa (ICU), developed during the 1920s.

Starting out as a dockworkers' union on the Cape Town waterfront, the ICU grew into a nationwide general workers' union which at the peak of its power had a membership of over 100,000 unskilled African and colored workers. The inflow of politicized black workers, many of whom received their political initiation in the ICU, into the ANC during the 1920s was bound to have a radicalizing effect. That these events coincided with the presidency of Josiah T. Gumede was both a fortunate coincidence and its effect.

Josiah T. Gumede's political evolution is itself very instructive about the radicalization we are referring to. He started as a devout Christian and committed liberal, violently opposed to what he saw as the pernicious influence of the communists among the African working class. By 1926, at the emergency conference convened to discuss Hertzog's Native Administration Bill, he emerged as the leading spokesman of the radical minority caucus, composed mainly of

younger men, calling for more radical measures—other than petitioning and deputations—to meet the racist regime's onslaught. It is generally agreed that the decisive step came when he attended the World Congress of the League Against Imperialism, held in Brussels in 1927. His report to the ANC's national conference in June of that year contributed to his election as president. But it is also evident that his radical views coincided with the mood of the general membership when we recall that Eddie Khaile, a known communist, was elected as secretary-general by the same national conference. Though it is difficult to document the specific contribution of Gumede and Khaile's leadership to the evolution of ANC policy because of the scarcity of primary sources, the few that are extant indicate that they introduced a revolutionary new theme into ANC politics.

Before June 1927, it would be fair to describe the ANC's strategy and the political outlook of its leadership as liberal-reformist. The notion of overthrowing white minority domination and replacing it with a government representative of the majority was at best considered utopian, at worst the scheme of wild-eyes extremists. The aims of the ANC, as expressed in the "African Bill of Rights," adopted in 1923 were:

1. The restoration of the Cape African Franchise and its extension to the other provinces (i.e., a property-owner franchise)
2. The abolition of the statutory color bar
3. Restoration of the African rights to buy and sell land anywhere in the country

In other words, the struggle was conceived of as essentially a struggle for civil rights, an extension to the blacks of the rights enjoyed by the whites within the framework of the 1910 Union constitution. As for the idea of radically restructuring the economy, that was not even part of their political vocabulary.

The clearest exposition of the political strategy and program associated with the Gumede-Khaile leadership of 1927–30 is contained in Gumede's presidential address to the ANC's annual conference in April 1930. It was, ironically, this address that precipitated his removal from the presidency. This should hardly be surprising if we bear in mind that this was the first explicit call for majority rule emanating from a sub-Saharan liberation movement in the period preceding the Second World War. Gumede's radicalism frightened the ANC old guard, reared on the politics of moderation and "respectful petitioning."

The most radical departure was in the area of strategy. Gumede called upon the oppressed to unite and rely on their own organized strength rather than on the empty promises and doubtful loyalties of the liberal establishment. The tactics of deputations and petitioning had proved fruitless, the regime would only respond to power . . . and that lay in the numbers of the oppressed and the dependence of the economy on their labor power.

Though the movement had been conceived as the political home of all the African people, it has in fact mainly struck root among the educated elite in the rural areas and the most acculturated and urbanized among the urban Africans. The outlook of the leadership and the tactics it employed reflected this rather narrow political base. The influx of workers into the movement was beginning to change all that. Having been called into the political arena by the predominantly petit-bourgeois leadership, the black working class was acquiring objectives of its own, which it could, in time, impose on the movement as a whole because of its numerical strength. The political implications of such a strategy were clear to a number of the old guard of the ANC. If accepted, it would hasten this process and thus take matters out of the hands of the elite.

Gumede also introduced a new dimension into the ANC's self-image. From its inception, the ANC had a Pan-African vision, embracing the whole continent and peoples of African descent in the new world. Gumede now sought to extend this by making references to the Asian struggles for liberation, establishing a community of interests based not only on skin color and geography, but principally on common struggle against imperialism. The strategy of the ANC, as he saw it, would embrace these two aspects as its primary thrust—the self-emancipation of the oppressed black people and the solidarity of the anti-imperialist and anticolonial forces.

As the immediate program towards which to strive, Gumede broke completely with the reformist tradition. His premise was the illegitimacy of the white racist regime. From this it followed that what was required was not a rearrangement of its parts but a completely new structure. This was expressed in the call for a "Black Republic" as the ANC's central political demand. It was this that proved to be the last straw for the old guard. Though he did not spell out the institutional framework of this "Black Republic," it is clear that it necessarily entailed majority rule and the creation of political institutions of popular power as a condition and guarantor of majority rule.

Led by Seme, Mahabane, and Mapikela, the old guard leadership campaigned to have Gumede ousted from the presidency and

restored the prior state of affairs with a vengeance. In areas like the Cape Province, a McCarthyite-style witchhunt was conducted to drive Gumede's working-class supporters out of the ANC. The revolutionary nationalism he espoused, however, survived as an underground current within the movement, reappearing during the 1940s when a new generation of fighters rediscovered it.

The Revolutionary Nationalist Tradition

It took the national liberation movement almost ten years to recover from the disastrous consequences of the purge of the radicals. During the 1940s, the main exponents of a radial approach to politics were the ANC Youth League (ANCYL).

At its founding congress, the ANCYL announced that it adhered to the ideology of African nationalism, that it saw itself as the "brains trust and power station" of this ideology within the ANC whose objective was to transform the movement into a broad-based movement fighting for national freedom and the unity of the African people.

The principles of African nationalism, as understood by the ANCYL, are set forth in one of its founding documents, *The Youth League Manifesto:*[6]

- That the African people, like any other people, have the "inalienable right to national self-determination"
- That the emancipation of the African people "will be achieved by the Africans themselves"
- That the leadership of the ANC "must be the personification of the aspirations of the people"

We can note in these the continuities between the thinking of the ANCYL leaders and the radicals of the 1920s. These were to be the most enduring contributions of these two groups to the evolution of ANC strategy and tactics. We may note the following themes:

1. White supremacy, no matter in what guise, is essentially illegitimate.
2. The oppressed people claim the right to national self-determination—i.e., racist South Africa cannot be considered a sovereign state.
3. The oppressed people must be their own liberators.
4. Since power will not be willingly conceded, the need [is] to employ whatever means are necessary to wrest power from the white minority regime.

It was on the initiative of the ANCYL that the ANC adopted the famous Programme of Action of 1949,[7] whose preamble states:

> The fundamental principles of the Programme of Action . . . are inspired by the desire to achieve National Freedom. By National Freedom we mean freedom from White domination and the attainment of political independence. This implies the rejection of the conception of segregation, apartheid, trusteeship, or White leadership which are all motivated by the idea of White domination. . . .

The implications latent in Gumede's earlier call for reliance on the organized strength of the oppressed were translated into reality after the Programme of Action was adopted in 1949. The 1950s saw the transformation of the ANC into a mass political movement leading and initiating popular campaigns, strikes, and civil disobedience campaigns during what we know as the "fighting fifties."

Neither in the perspectives propounded by Gumede nor in those of the Youth League was there an acknowledgement of the need to pass beyond the National Democratic Revolution. True, specific individuals like Khaile, associated with both, espoused such causes. How do we then include these developments as significant to the theme "Socialist Transformation?"

To answer this question we have recourse once more to the work of the founders of scientific socialism. Referring to the Polish question, Engels in a letter addressed to Karl Kautsky during 1882, says among other things:

> It is historically impossible for a large people to discuss seriously any internal question as long as its national independence is lacking. . . . To get rid of national oppression is the basic condition of all healthy free movement. . . .[8]

We as a movement, concurring with Engels, would insist that the seizure of political power is the essential element of any social change in South Africa.

The significance of the tradition pioneered by Gumede and Khaile, later built on and developed by the ANCYL leaders, lies in its contribution to the theory of the national democratic revolution. But before we can pass over into the present phase, it is necessary to trace the other political tradition that has inspired our liberation alliance.

The Marxist Tradition

In their writings on colonialism, Marx and Engels bring to light two contradictory yet integrally related tendencies in colonialism. This was first expressed by Marx with reference to India:

> England has to fulfil a double mission in India; one destructive the other regenerating—the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and to lay the material foundation of Western society in Asia.[9]

However, always keenly aware of the duality of all historical processes, Marx also recorded the human cost of this regenerating role: "England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. This loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindu. . . ."[10]

In laying the "material foundations of Western society in Asia," the colonialists were, however, unconsciously performing their historical task which would have consequences they had neither planned nor anticipated:

> I know that the English millocracy intend to endow India with railways with the exclusive view of extracting at diminished expenses the cotton and other raw materials for their manufactures. But when you have once introduced machinery into the locomotion of a country, which possesses iron and coal, you are unable to withold it from its fabrication. You cannot maintain a net of railways over an immense country without introducing all those industrial processes necessary to meet the immediate and current wants of railway locomotion, and out of which there must grow the application of machinery to those branches of industry not immediately connected with railways.[11]

Because of this, Marx concludes: "Whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious tool of history. . . ."[12]

These unintended consequences of colonialism were nonetheless realities which Marx and Engels anticipated would shake Asia out of its torpor and bring it abreast of developments in Europe and North America. But the Indians would never really derive the full benefit of this social revolution until

> . . . in Great Britain itself the now ruling classes shall have been

> supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindus themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether.[13]

It was specifically in relation to Ireland that Marx and Engels were able to study the effects of colonialism at close quarters and began to define a revolutionary strategy for relating the anticolonial national struggles to the working class struggles in the metropolitan countries. As we can see above, Marx at one time hoped that a successful working class movement in Britain would be able to extend national independence to the colonies. The militancy of the Chartist movement during the 1840s and 1850s reinforced these hopes. By 1869, in a letter addressed to Engels, Marx was forced by events to revise his earlier assessment.

> For a long time I believed that it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working class ascendancy. . . . Deeper study has convinced me of the opposite. The English working class will never accomplish anything before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland.[14]

From this followed the conclusion that it was the task of the British working class to support the Irish independence movement both as a deserving cause in itself and as an essential condition for their own emancipation from capital. Marx in these writings begins to draw linkages between the colonial revolution and the struggle for socialism. In relation to the Irish movement in particular Marx stressed that these two fronts of struggle are mutually dependent.

The destructive regenerative aspects of colonialism have perhaps been nowhere more evident than in South Africa itself where British imperialism pulverized the precapitalist African societies in order to make room for the most far-reaching social revolution yet experienced in Africa. In a matter of a few generations, the people of South Africa were force-marched from early communalism into the epoch of monopoly capitalism. The mining revolution of the 1880s marks the watershed of South African economic history which saw the implantation of the capitalist mode of production and the transformation of erstwhile traditional peasants into a bonded, mass labor force, press-ganged into the service of capital by taxation and land hunger. But, as Marx had predicted, the South African proletariat, forged in the crucible of these barbarities and tempered in the heat of bitter class struggles, is demonstrating with each passing day its capacity to

undertake the profound historical task of leading South Africa to freedom.

Before the First World War, though there were a number of socialists in South Africa, none of them had really addressed themselves to the national question in our country. The split in the South African Labour Party, precipitated by the outbreak of war, led indirectly to the first halting steps in this direction taken by the International Socialist League (ISL) in 1915. Adherence to the principles of internationalism was the basic distinction separating the left from the right wing in South African socialism at the outbreak of the war. The left, as constituted in the ISL, established links with the Zimmerwaldists and were among the first to hail the October Revolution. When the Communist International met in 1919, they immediately sought affiliation. The ISL's identification with Soviet Russia was to have a profound effect on the whole course of the Communist movement's subsequent history, eventually introducing another crucial distinction between official "social democracy" and Marxism-Leninism in South Africa—solidarity with the national liberation movement.

Though the left-laborites who constituted the ISL considered themselves Marxists, they were not particularly well-schooled in Marxism and were completely unfamiliar with the Marxian tradition relating to the national and colonial question. The embryonic South African Communist movement had developed in the peculiar environment of the white immigrant working class struggles in the Witwatersrand and the port cities of South Africa. It was strongly influenced by syndicalism and conceived of the class struggles in terms closely related to what is today referred to as "workerism." Consequently they simply regarded the black workers as the allies of the white workers and ignored the national aspirations of the black workers as members of an oppressed race. They proceeded from the premise that national differences were a device employed by the capitalist class to weaken working class solidarity and therefore should either be ignored or played down.

This attitude also dominated their approach to the national movement led by the black petit-bourgeoisie. In their view this was an elitist pressure group aimed at securing petit-bourgeois sectional interests at the expense of the workers of all races. The pro-imperialist pronouncements of the national leaders of the time only reinforced this view. The Communists' understanding of the South African struggle was put to a profound test barely six months after the founding of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA, July 1921) when the whole white working class on the Witwatersrand rose in rebellion in defense of the

color bar. This forced a major rethinking of the entire strategy of the South African communist movement and led to the resolution to concentrate on the black working class, sponsored by Bunting at the 1924 annual conference.

The CPSA's turn to the black working class was not merely a reflex to the reverses suffered in 1922, but represented a courageous attempt to deal creatively with the new developments in industry brought about by the war. By 1924, the black industrial working class, called into existence by the growth of secondary industry during the war years, had chalked up a series of stirring mass struggles beginning with the 1918 Bucket Strike in Johannesburg and culminating in the closure of 21 Rand mines during the miners' strike of 1920. The phenomenal growth of the ICU, reflecting the development of a national and class consciousness among the black workers, also laid to rest the racist conception that blacks were incapable of sustained struggle. Alone among the white socialists, the founders of the CPSA recognized the possibility these developments held out and tried to devise policies to unify the racially diverse working class. After 1924 the CPSA was the only political party in South Africa that sought to appeal to all races.

In approaching the national question in South Africa, the CPSA leaned on the experience of the Russian Revolution. The relationship between the revolutionary working class movement and the oppressed nationalities in the Tsarist empire had been the subject of intense debate from the inception of the RSDLP. Though most of the theoretical debate revolved around the Russian dependencies in the west (Poland, the Ukraine, etc.), the principles evolved in relation to these were held to be generally applicable. After the seizure of power by the proletariat in the leading urban and industrial centers of the empire, the pursuance of these principles yielded mixed results. Exercising their right to secede from the dominant Russian nation, former dependencies in the west opted for independence and promptly became springboards for the counterrevolution and interventionists. In the east, the knowledge that the formerly dominant nation had no interest in oppressing them helped to draw the oppressed nationalities to the new Soviet government. This seemed to bear out the essential rectitude of the Bolshevik policy on the national question, despite the disappointments in the west.

The results of the implementation of the Bolshevik nationalities policy could be traced to the specific features of the Russian Empire. Three-quarters of the empire was backward—a sea of peasants, as one writer expressed it—while in a few urban pockets, all of them west of the Urals, some of the largest industrial concentrations employing

some of the most advanced industrial plants and productive methods, constituted islands of modernity. It was the revolutionary movement, based in these industrial portions of the empire, that overthrew Tsarism and later the provisional government, thus creating the political space for the western dependencies to secede and the eastern dependencies to choose voluntary association with the new Soviet power. In this respect, the living experience of the Russian revolution seemed to bear out the relationship anticipated in the writings of Marx—the national emancipation of the colonial peoples as a by-product of working-class ascendancy in the metropole.

This idea, the liberation of the colonies from without as a byproduct of socialist revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries, was in fact written into the Communist International's first manifesto to the workers of the world. It was only at the Second Congress of the Comintern that Lenin finally repudiated the concept of the derivative colonial emancipation.

The early South African Communists mechanically transposed the lessons of the Russian experience to the South African setting. The apparent endorsement of this idea by the Comintern in 1919 probably reinforced its legitimacy in the eyes of many. Assuming that the South African revolution would follow the same path as the Russian, the CPSA regarded the white working class as the leading force in the South African revolution which would on its victory "concede the fullest rights which the native working class is capable of claiming."[15]

In keeping with this conception of the South African revolution, the CPSA, while cultivating ties with the black working class, was keen to retain and preserve its roots among the organized white working class. The events of 1922 indicated that it would be difficult to straddle this divide. It took many years for the revolutionary left to grasp the centrality of the national question to any project of a South African revolution.

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern

The Sixth World Congress of the Comintern was spread over a number of weeks during which the colonial and national questions were thoroughly reviewed by the International Communist Movement. In many respects, this congress was the culmination of a process which began during the Second Congress when Lenin decisively broke with the tradition that regarded the colonial countries as mere auxiliaries in the ranks of the world revolution. The keynote address and reports on the colonial question were delivered by Palmiro Togliatti of the Italian

Communist Party, and the Finish Communist, Otto Kuusinen. Togliatti's report was a scathing critique of the colonial policy of the Second International, which had met in conference a few weeks previously.

The report elaborated the repudiation of the notion that colonial freedom would be the byproduct of socialist revolution in the metropolitan countries. This had been a widely-held view in the Second International, even before the First World War. It was based on the assumption, Togliatti held, that the colonial peoples were either incapable or unwilling to free themselves. The political effect of such ideas, the actual intent of their authors notwithstanding, was to give unwitting support to imperialism by reinforcing racist and chauvinist attitudes within the European working class. Most importantly, the report drew attention to the crucial distinctions between capital accumulation as it had occurred in the metropolitan countries and the process taking place in the colonies. According to Togliatti's account, because the colonies were not self-governing, even when sectors of the economy were developed, they had no means of regulating the inflow and outflow of capital and profits. The imperialists had devised a number of policies to perpetuate their domination of the colonies. In some instances, as in India, after defeating the forces of feudalism, the imperialists entered into alliance with them as a means of holding down the aspirant bourgeoisie. In others, the colonial power imposed its own regime and sponsored a comprador-collaborationist stratum while stifling the emergence of an indigenous coalition of classes that would develop a spirit of independence. Lastly, there were the cases where the colonialists prevented the coalescence of a proto-bourgeois class by expropriating the people of their land and handing it to white settlers (as in Algeria, Rhodesia, and Kenya).

The forms of cultivation pursued by the colonialists, large plantations which often resulted in monoculture, visited untold violence on the soil so that countries once renowned for their crops periodically suffered crop failures. Galloping rates of rural impoverishment, all the more painful in the absence of the compensatory development of industry that could absorb the destitute peasants, had become almost universal in the colonial countries, the report charged.

Togliatti's report was to have a profound impact on the colonial liberation movement, imparting to the concept of national self-determination a wider meaning, which would encompass not only political independence, but also economic independence to be achieved through an agrarian revolution and national reconstruction through the creation of an indigenous industrial base. In the countries dominated by white settlers, such an agrarian revolution would entail the expropriation of

the settlers; stating the matter unequivocally, Togliatti said: "The natives had been robbed of their land by the Whites. The agrarian revolution, therefore, will have as its chief point in almost all colonial countries the seizure from the Whites of the land which they have stolen."[16]

In regard to South Africa, the congress adopted the famous "Black Republic" resolution as part of a larger resolution on the "Negro Question." Read in relation to the Congress reports by Togliatti and Kuusinen, the section of the resolution dealing with South Africa is greatly illuminating. In 1930 an elaborated version of the resolution adopted in 1928 was published. This was the clearest exposition of a Marxist-Leninist approach to the South African revolution.

The Black Republic Resolution of 1930 characterized South Africa as a British dominion of the colonial type, its central feature being the dispossession of the indigenous people of the land. The main content of the revolution in South Africa therefore was the restoration of the land to the indigenous people. In the national liberation struggle the principal revolutionary agent would be the African peasants, in alliance and under the leadership of the proletariat. The resolutions then pose a number of strategic tasks, the first of which is the development of an alliance between the Communist Party and the national liberation movement. To be effective, the thesis argued, the national movement must base itself on the peasants, the semi-proletariat, and the proletariat. The radical impact of an organized peasant and worker contingent on the national movement would itself lend it a more profound social vision which would bring it into conflict with the less ambitious projects of the state-appointed chiefs. As the workers and peasants acquired self-confidence, their independent political action would also undermine the ideological domination of the national movement by the petit-bourgeois intellectuals.

The principal enemy was identified as British imperialism and the white settler bourgeoisie. A sharp distinction was drawn between the exploiter classes and the white wage-earners, whom the thesis regarded as potential allies of the national revolutionary movement. It stressed however that black and white unity could not be based on pandering to white chauvinism; South Africa was first and foremost an African country in which the whites constituted a minority.

The projected Black Republic was conceived as the apex of a revolutionary strugged waged by the African peasantry, through their peasant associations, the national liberation movement, and in alliance with the Communist Party, as the class organization of the working class. The first task on its agenda would be the resolution of the

agrarian question, the establishment of organs of popular power, and uprooting the whole edifice of the colonial-racist state. The democratic republic would have a national form—it would be black—but a democratic content, expressed both in its social character, the peasant/worker alliance, and in the institutional guarantees of the rights of national minorities.

The Black Republic thesis was the first declaration of the demand for majority rule in our country, encapsulated in the slogan—*Afrika! Mayibuye!*—which the CPSA adopted as its own after 1928. In infused a truly revolutionary content into the internationalism of the young CPSA and created the opportunity for the Marxist tradition to enter the mainstream of the national liberation movement. Advocacy of majority rule and alliance with the national liberation movement clearly demarcated Marxism-Leninism from the reformist tendencies in South African socialism. But this was an achievement won through painful struggles of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, which tested the mettle of South Africa's Communists.

The most important facet of the Black Republic thesis, however, remains its laying bare the symbiotic relationship between national oppression and capitalist exploitation. The national and class dimensions are inseparable; neither can be stressed at the expense of the other; they must be read together. This was a theoretical departure which was to have the most profound implications once it was grasped by the liberation movement.

The Freedom Charter

The Freedom Charter, adopted by the Congress of the People in 1955, is the common programmatic statement of the liberation alliance comprising the ANC, the South African Communist Party, and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). At the time it was drafted, it was conceived as and remains as the formulation of the strategic line of march of the South African revolution. The central features of the Freedom Charter are clearly stated in its first five clauses: the demand for majority rule, institutionally expressed as adult suffrage; the abolition of all forms of racial and national domination, to be embodied in statutory rights for all national groups; the transference of the key centers of economic power to the ownership of the people; the dismantling of the white minority's monopoly over the best agricultural land; and civil liberties for all. This is a program around which the widest spectrum of forces opposed to white racist domination can be mobilized. Within this broad alliance of

class forces it is generally recognized that the vanguard contingent is the black working class. As conceived by the ANC and its allies, the line of march entails a national alliance of all the oppressed and exploited strata, under the leadership of the black working class, to dismantle the racist state and create in its stead institutions of popular power bearing the hallmark of this national alliance.

The Freedom Charter and its subsequent elaboration at the Morogoro Conference, *The Strategy and Tactics of the ANC*,[17] represent the crystallization of the theory of the South African revolution as it has evolved from these two principal sources. Though we do not claim any dramatically new theoretical contributions, there are two departures we feel we can point to.

In the Marxist tradition as we have traced it in the preceding pages, the principal controversy surrounding the relationship between the national liberation and class struggles has revolved around which of these two takes precedence over the other, or which shall be the dominant and which the derivative. Marx in his writings on India and Ireland, before 1869, seemed to be in a little doubt that the class struggle in the metropolitan countries takes precedence and would in fact result in the liberation of the colonies. His reversal of this position with regard to Ireland in 1869 had far-reaching implications both with regard to British socialism and the colonial liberation movement. If, as Marx implies, the lever must be applied in the colonies, does this not suggest that the colonial struggle can take precedence over the struggle in the metropole? The experience of the Russian revolution appeared to provide the answer in practice. But, by 1920, Lenin himself was beginning to recognize the limitations of its applicability.

South Africa presents the theoretician with an anomaly in which the metropole and the colony exist within the same national boundaries. This anomalous situation is compounded by the fact that the decisive sections of the proletariat are not of the metropole but of the colony. We can therefore suggest that South Africa will see an inversion of the Russian experience; it will be the working class of the colonized people that will take in tow the other class forces. In this context could one separate the class from the national liberation struggle? If neither takes precedence, does this then suggest that the two are coterminous? These are questions we suggest cannot be answered in the seminar room, but rather must be answered by revolutionary practice.

What then is the relationship between the Freedom Charter and the theme of our conference? We would suggest that the Freedom Charter, though itself not a socialist document or program, lays the basis for the seizure and holding of political power by the oppressed in

South Africa. The radical measures of agrarian reform and nationalization it entails will go a long way towards removing the commanding heights of the economy from the sphere of private ownership and open up the way for the socialist transformation of our country. However, the precondition for all this is the revolutionary overthrow of the Pretoria racist regime.

In conclusion we return to a point raised at the beginning of this paper, the counterrevolution directed against the efforts of southern African states to construct socialism. While we are certain that all of us have much to learn from the rich storehouse of experience already accumulated in this region, we must not minimize the grave dangers that beset us all. The primary source of all these—the one regime which is the bulwark of reaction in our midst—is the Pretoria regime. The greatest single contribution the people of South Africa, under the leadership of the ANC, will make towards socialist transformation in our region is the destruction of white domination and apartheid. We think we are justified in demanding the support of all social scientists of the region.

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