

Negotiations and the struggle for socialism in South Africa

The fundamental premises of this essay are twofold, viz., that the ANC, for reasons that derive from the logic of its own approach to the struggle for national liberation, entered into the negotiations process prematurely as seen from the point of view of the most exploited and oppressed people of South Africa and, secondly, that this negotiations process as conducted at present and under the prevailing circumstances can if successful, lead nowhere else but to a slightly modified, structurally adjusted racial capitalist system that will continue to generate class inequality largely as racial inequality.

Phases in the struggle for national liberation

Depending on the criteria one adopts, different periodisations of the struggle for national liberation in South Africa (hereafter "the struggle") are possible. Considered from the point of view of class leadership and ideological direction, the struggle can be periodised along the lines described briefly below.

1910 - 1945: The Lazarus Period

In this phase, political struggles of the oppressed and exploited people had certain common features which expressed themselves "automatically" again and again. With the exception of the small Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), all the major political organisations of the people were based largely on "race" or colour and on ethnic group consciousness. "Africans" were represented largely by the African National Congress, "Coloureds" by the African People's Organisation and "Indians" by the Natal Indian Congress and (later) by the Transvaal Indian Congress. The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) was half-trade union, half-political organisation. It included in its ranks both African and Coloured people in very large numbers during its short life (1919 - 1929).

All these organisations fought to improve the lot of "their own people", the A.N.C. for Africans, the A.P.O. for Coloureds and the Indian Congresses for Indians. Their leaders were middle-class people (teachers and preachers mainly, also some skilled artisans and traditional chiefs). While all of them at the end wanted an equal vote for all men (only very much later also for all women), they were prepared to settle for less than the full franchise at any given moment. In other words, they "struggled" for concessions from the white minority governments. Theirs was a Lazarus policy of gradual and peaceful change which depended at bottom on begging for the crumbs that fell from the tables of the rich and the powerful.

For this reason, their methods of struggle were mostly non-confrontational. Their leaders would write letters to "the authorities", draw up petitions to them, go on delegations and generally plead hat-in-hand for some betterment in the conditions of life of "their people". Only very seldom, under extreme pressure from the spontaneous actions

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Address prepared for the *Ruth First Memorial Colloquium* on
THE POSSIBILITIES OF RADICAL TRANSFORMATION IN
SOUTHERN AFRICA AFTER NEGOTIATIONS: THEORY AND
POLICY

(Centre for Southern African Studies, University of the Western
Cape,
17-18 August 1992)

Neville Alexander
Director: Project for the Study of Alternative Education in
South Africa,
University of Cape Town

of workers in the cities, would they agree to support such actions as strikes, boycotts or pass-burnings. While some minor privileges for middle class blacks were gained during this period, it is in fact a period of retreat. It is the period during which the Smuts-Hertzog system of social and political segregation based on colour was firmly established. Socially, its record of defeat and retreat is marked in particular by the Natives Land Act of 1913, the Natives Land and Trust Act of 1936, the Natives Urban Areas Act of 1921, and by a string of laws that made it almost impossible for black people to become skilled workers. Politically, the low point of this record is marked by the passage of the Natives Representation Act of 1936. Under this law, even the few 'African' men in the Cape Province who had the right to vote in parliamentary elections, were deprived of this symbol of their semi-citizenship.

Today, it is easy to underestimate the importance of what these organisations tried to do. It is all too easy to denounce the leading men of that time as Uncle Toms unworthy of our respect. We have to remember, however, that these were men (and a precious few women) who placed themselves at the head of a dispossessed and defeated people (Africans) or of people who had only recently come out of slavery (Coloureds) or out of indentured labour, that is, temporary slavery (Indians). Without the power of new ideas, or the power of arms and almost without the power of property, they could hardly lead a militant struggle for their rights. On the other hand, we should resist the fashionable temptation of overestimating their contribution to the struggle for national liberation. History should record, not glorify, the actions of those who made it. Whether they knew it or not, the leaders of this period of our struggle were at bottom promoting the interests of the tiny mission elite, of the would-be black middle class, i.e., those few out of the mass of blacks who got near enough to the white man's table to be able to stretch out their hands to catch some of the falling crumbs. Because they were also oppressed, their actions and their words possessed a definite dignity. But because they tried to be included in the existing system of white minority rule, they could never lead a struggle for liberation that would embrace all the oppressed and the exploited people.

1946 - 1960: The Period of Protest and Defiance

The second phase of our struggle for national liberation was one of militant mass action. It began with the African Mineworkers Strike of 1946 and picked up, as it were, the baton of some of the struggles pioneered in the first phase by organisations such as the CPSA and the ICU. If the first phase had been the moment of "the leaders", this second phase was to be the moment of "the masses". Yet, as we shall see, there was no basic difference in the direction of the struggle even though it began to include ideas of democratic organisation, of political programme and of militant action.

Already at the end of phase 1, in 1943 - 44, the Anti-C.A.D. Movement and the ANC Youth League respectively promoted (different) ideas of new political programmes and of militant mass action. The young men and women of that period were strongly influenced by the anti-colonial struggles that were sweeping through Asia (India, China, Indonesia) at this time. They were also influenced in some cases by radical socialist and

Marxist ideas and by the struggles of communist and socialist parties (Spain, Yugoslavia, Greece, China). In the case of the Anti- C.A.D. (and later of the All-African Convention) leadership, ideas of "Non-European" (Black) unity, non-racialism and political struggle based on a democratically formulated programme (i.e., not on the say-so or the whims and fancies of this or that "leader") took shape in the late 'thirties and early 'forties. These ideas came to influence mass politics in the whole of the Cape Province, including the Transkei, but especially in the cities and towns of the Western Cape. It was the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) that fashioned the ideas and forged the tools of non-collaboration, the boycott as a weapon of struggle, of non-racialism and of the programme for nothing less than full democratic rights for all.

Indeed, the tragedy of the Unity Movement was that it failed, after 1948, to involve itself consistently in the mass protest and defiance campaigns of this period. Its leaders became paralysed by the fear of brutal repression at the hands of the neo-nazi storm troopers of the apartheid regime. They acted, in effect, on the basis of a theory of "the perfect moment" when everything would magically come together and the oppressed people of South Africa would "rid themselves of the scourge of white domination". As this was simply a fantasy, it meant that - after 1948 - the Unity Movement was unable to test its ideas in the fire of mass action.

In so doing, they gave the historical advantage to the other main stream of the struggle for national liberation. This is the current of Africanism or African nationalism pioneered as a systematic programme and ideology by the ANC Youth League at the same time as the young men and women of the Western Cape were building the Unity Movement. Africanism was the mirror image of Afrikaner nationalism. That is to say, it held that the indigenous Bantu-speaking people of South Africa constituted the nation and would determine the future shape of the country. The minority "national groups" of Whites, Coloureds and Indians would be accommodated in the independent black state which would be based on the ideas of African Socialism and Panafricanism (a United States of Africa).

Whatever might have been the false hopes and illusions of the first Youth Leaguers, to them belongs the honour of having pioneered the forms of mass defiance and mass protest without the semi-religious, pacifist delusions of a Gandhi. The year 1948 marked the beginning of the brutal era of apartheid. Suddenly, it became crystal clear to the black youth of South Africa that things were going to get worse, not better. The very devil of Fascism and Nazism that many of their fathers had volunteered to fight against in World War II was now in power in South Africa. Clearly, the Lazarus policy of pleading and begging did not work. The Youth Leaguers, therefore, formulated their Programme of Action in 1949. This programme was to shape the landscape of liberatory politics during the entire decade from 1949 until 1960. The war had also led to an influx of black people into the cities where they lived in *pondokkies*, *blikkiesdorpe* and *sakkiesdorpe*, that is to say, in squalid, unhealthy squatter camps. This unskilled and semi-skilled working class represented the social base for the militant action driven by the utter desperation of poverty and by the shame of racial oppression. Those of us who witnessed and lived in

those times can never forget the many ways in which the insane racism of the vast majority of whites reduced black people to the level of the most brutalised animals.

The Africanism of the Youth League was the logical and intuitive response to these conditions. The Youth Leaguers appealed to the blood-and-soil emotions of the majority of the oppressed people and tried to instil feelings of pride and resistance in the downtrodden masses. Their greatest success, of course, was the Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws (Defiance Campaign) of 1951-52.

In the course of the many struggles conducted during the early 'fifties, some of the Youth Leaguers were influenced by the ideas of their Coloured, Indian and Communist allies and began to accept what was in effect a philosophy of *multi-racialism*. This wing of the Youth League went on to gain control of the ANC and later formed the Congress Alliance (with the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the South African Coloured People's Organisation (SACPO) - later called the Coloured People's Congress (CPC) - and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). The Alliance was cemented in 1955 by the adoption of the Kliptown (Freedom) Charter.

The other wing of the Youth League, which insisted on the original Africanist doctrine eventually broke away in 1958 to form the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC). They continued the tradition of "positive direct action" and were strongly influenced by the coming to power of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, in 1957, and of Sekou Toure in Guinea, in 1958. It was the PAC leadership who organised the anti-Pass campaign of 1960, which led to the massacres at Sharpeville and Langa in March of that year. These events rang in the next phase in the struggle for national liberation.

The gains made in this period were mainly political and organisational. The ANC became a mass organisation, a tradition of mass protest politics was firmly established and the politics of bowing and scraping for concessions was left behind. On the other hand, in spite of SACTU and the high profile of the SACP (Communist Party) leaders, the specific interests of black working people had not yet become the main content of the struggle. African (and sometimes black) nationalism obscured the class differences between middle- and working-class people. In the conditions of the apartheid state, this meant that the preoccupations of middle-class people (especially higher educational facilities and business opportunities) were placed in the forefront of the struggle. Of course, apartheid in the early years levelled everybody and helped to deceive the oppressed people into believing that they all had the same interests. The bitter struggles against the pass laws, the migrant labour system, the Bantu Authorities Act, the location system, the Group Areas Act, the Bantu Education Act, the Suppression of Communism Act and against the hundreds of other laws and regulations that imprisoned black people in the land of their birth: all these many struggles served to bring black people together and to reduce their consciousness of "race" and colour and, to some extent, even of language and ethnic differences. They created the basis for what came to be known as Black Consciousness in the third phase of our struggle, to which we now turn.

1960 - 1976: The Years of Silence

The brutal repression which followed on the massacres of Sharpeville and Langa changed the character of the resistance to the system of racial capitalism, now called apartheid. With the exception of one wing of the Unity Movement, the entire liberation movement turned to one form or other of armed struggle. For a people that had been reared for more than fifty years on ideas of passive resistance, delegations and petitions, defiance campaigns, non-collaboration and boycotts, the turn to arms was a difficult but dramatic decision. The formation during 1961 - 62 of Umkhonto we sizwe (MK), Poqo (later APLA) and the Yu Chi Chan Club (later the National Liberation Front) transformed the politics of South Africa and of Namibia. Although the armed struggle in South Africa never developed beyond the level of armed propaganda, it did have a decisive influence on the changing character of the national liberation struggle.

For the dominant current in the struggle, i.e., the Charterist current, as for the others (Africanist and broadly socialist), the turn to arms meant "the continuation of policy by other means". The underground leadership of the ANC and its allies made it clear repeatedly that the strategic goal of their struggle was to force the government of South Africa to the negotiation table. Although from time to time voices could be heard which put forward the idea of fighting for the revolutionary overthrow of the regime, these were never (except perhaps in 1984 - 86) the dominant voices in the Charterist camp. Their position was further strengthened by the practices and theories of the anti-colonial struggles in Africa during the 'sixties and 'seventies. All of these struggles were conducted against foreign colonial overlords represented in their African colonies by a small coterie of administrators, business people and the Christian church hierarchy. They were, of course, supported by collaborationist classes of traditional chiefs and would-be or sell-out (comprador) black capitalists. In all these cases, as in Asia a decade earlier, the colonial powers (Britain, France and Belgium mainly) decided to withdraw and to "transfer power" to the new elite of African professionals and middle-class men and women who usually led or gave voice to the demands and the struggles of the urban and the overwhelmingly rural masses in most of the African colonies.

The pattern of mass protest and direct action followed by negotiations became the model for one struggle after another. Only in those colonies where there was a sizeable white settler minority (Kenya, Algeria and "the white South" of the Portuguese colonies, Rhodesia and South West Africa) was a higher level of force necessary. Guerrilla warfare and mass action followed usually by a negotiated settlement became the tried and tested model of liberatory strategy in all these cases. The peculiarities of the South African case are dealt with separately below in the section entitled **The Conquest of Power in South Africa**. It is, of course, a matter of history now that in all these cases, in spite of a very radical rhetoric and some lasting revolutionary practices, the post-liberation governments could not get beyond the neo-colonial socio-economic and political structures of the rest of Africa. Why this was so is a separate but important story, one which we shall have to study carefully since our movement is trapped in similar circumstances to those of the anti-colonial struggles in Africa.

It is now common knowledge that the ANC and MK were able in the course of the many years of exile to develop a strong international support network through the anti-apartheid movements in Western Europe, later also in the USA, Canada and Australia as well as through the Nordic governments and the governments of the actually existing socialist states of Eastern Europe, Cuba, Viet Nam and, to a lesser extent, of China and North Korea. Besides excellent propaganda, they had definite advantages over the PAC-Poqo-APLA, the only other section of the movement that got anywhere beyond the preparatory stages of the armed struggle. They had the invaluable alliance with the SACP which opened the doors to the USSR and its allied states. These were the only countries, outside of some African states, that were willing to supply arms and advanced-military training. In the circumstances of the Cold War, i.e., the competition between "East" and "West", this was decisive since it meant that the ANC had the same potential as any of the other successful guerrilla movements of that time and of the previous period (Cuba, Algeria, Viet Nam). For this reason, liberals and social democrats in the West wooed those in the ANC whom they regarded as pro-democracy (i.e., pro-capitalist) moderates. This is where the liberals in the anti-apartheid movement played such a big role. They insinuated themselves the ANC and all its structures and made sure that the radicals would not become dominant. In this, as we shall see, their tactics were reinforced by international developments. Because of its own politics of incorporation into the existing South African state, the ANC was open to such infiltration. The organisation obtained many advantages and large-scale support for educational, health and developmental projects in exile and inside the country. From the beginning, those who supported the moderates in the ANC were not simply salving their conscience. Slowly but definitely, leverage was established by means of "development aid" in order to enable the West eventually to influence the policies and strategies of the ANC and of its allies.

After the Soweto uprising of June 1976, the ANC (and to a lesser extent, the PAC) obtained a very necessary transfusion of revolutionary youth. More than a decade of exile had led to very little military action and, in fact, the view had become widespread that the ANC was not really concerned about violent revolutionary action. Even its "military" actions appeared to be no more than the logical extension of its pressure politics. The PAC, wracked by disunity and feuding among the leaders, did well simply to survive the rigours of exile under conditions where its revolutionary message was rejected in the West, where Africa was too weak and itself too divided to be of much assistance and where the PAC's only "socialist" backer, China, could not give much more than military assistance.

It has become fashionable among those who have tried to write the recent history of our liberation movement to ignore or to play down the work of the Black Consciousness Movement during the latter half of the years of silence. There can be no doubt at all that one of the crucial mistakes of the Verwoerd era was the creation of the Bush colleges. In these academic squatter camps during the late 'sixties and the 'seventies, thousands of young black men and women from every corner of the country, including the rural areas and the Bantustans, came together to learn the skills and gain the knowledge that their masters believed them to be capable of. The incredible paternalism of the racist rulers makes one shake one's head even today, many years after the worst intellectual and moral

brutalities have faded in one's memory. Few ruling groups in the history of humanity have humiliated the intellectual cream of a people so deliberately and so profoundly.

It was from these lowest depths that SASO, under the inspired collective leadership of people like Steve Biko, Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Peter Jones, Saths Cooper and tens of others hoisted the university generations of the late 'sixties/early 'seventies to heights that made it possible for the whole of the oppressed people to visualise a new and a better future in spite of the all-embracing repression and the omnipresence of the police state. Today, there are many, some very good, books and films that tell the story of this innovative generation. We need not repeat that here. In a nutshell, we can say that the BCM revived the hope and the energies of the oppressed people, gave them for the first time the idea of practical alternatives to the racist state and made it possible for the youth especially to understand how the cultural revolution was an integral and a decisive part of the struggle for the total liberation of the black people. They were children of their time, only too aware - some of them - of their weaknesses and the chinks in their ideological armour. Black consciousness, as an ideology, was inevitable, given the brutality and the racist exclusiveness of apartheid. To become a truly liberatory idea and practice, it had to grow beyond itself, deepen and enrich its theory of South African society and root itself in the struggles of the working people at the point of production. These issues, and the question of armed struggle, led to major debates in the BCM after 1976 - 77 and eventually split it asunder.

16 June 1976 - 2 February 1990: Armed Propaganda and Revolutionary Mass Action

The new youth of the Soweto generation galvanised the "parent movements". In particular, the ANC proved to be the most suitable vehicle for the promotion of the revolutionary dreams and aspirations of this youth. By 1978/79, the first trained guerrillas among the new generation were ready and eager to come back. They did so and opened up a period of armed propaganda that gave the ANC the edge over all actual and potential rivals by the early 'eighties. The profile of the organisation was enhanced beyond anything that its leadership had ever dreamt of; the young lions of MK became heroes/heroines and role models for the township youth of the 'eighties. Young men and women like Solomon Mahlangu, even more than Basil February in the 'sixties and Joe Gqabi in the 'seventies, became revolutionary martyrs admired and respected by all oppressed and exploited people irrespective of their political affiliations. The ANC without any doubt became the most popular of the liberation movements.

It was the armed propaganda of the ANC together with the fact that the majority current in the independent trade-union movement that had been developing alongside the students', civic, youth, church and women's' organisations in the 'seventies and early 'eighties, decided to support the Charterist current that eventually gave the United Democratic Front the edge over the National Forum as the main opposition movement to the Tricameral dispensation of P. W. Botha. Of course, without the support of the anti-apartheid movement abroad and the plentiful funds and other resources poured into

the UDF by Western governments, churches and foundations, the UDF would have had a much more difficult growth path. The dominance of the Charterist (Congress) movement in the 'eighties gave rise to the illusion that the ANC was "the sole authentic representative" of the oppressed people of South Africa, a view which bred all manner of sectarian and undemocratic beliefs and practices as well as equally sectarian responses from other political tendencies. It is not too much to say that, ideologically, the roots of some of the sectarian violence that is now threatening to negate so many of the gains of our struggle have to be sought here.

Most of this period was characterised by the political struggle against the Tricameral dispensation, the mushrooming development of what is loosely called "civil society" among black people, i.e., the dense network of social, cultural, educational, health and economic organisations that sprang up after 1973, especially the trade unions and civics, by the rapid urbanisation of black people due to the poverty of the rural areas, the collapse of the South African economy in the wake of world-wide recession and because of financial sanctions, and by waves of unprecedented repression, destabilisation and general state terrorism.

This latter strategy of the Botha regime was the attempt of the securocrats to contain and roll back the waves of radicalisation that were engulfing the entire subcontinent of Southern Africa in the early 'eighties as a result of the inspiring developments in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia. So intense were the struggles in South Africa itself that for a short time some activists in the SACP and the Congress movement apparently believed that an Iran-type insurrection could get rid of the apartheid regime. Conversely, the policy of destabilisation and state terrorism reached its climax in this period and "succeeded" in halting for a while the further intensification of the mass struggles.

The present period: Negotiations and the conquest of power in South Africa.

The events that changed decisively the political-economic framework in which our struggles were fought out in the 'eighties took place elsewhere. I refer, of course, to the rise to power of the Gorbachev tendency in 1985 and the earth-shaking events that followed in the subsequent five-year period. Today, it is clear that talks between the South African government and the Rivonia leadership in prison had begun by 1986 already and that via the IDASA initiatives, South African capital and individuals connected with the apartheid state made contact with the ANC leadership in exile at about the same time. It is tempting to suggest that inside information about the direction of Soviet policy induced the SACP and its allies in the Congress movement to begin to tone down the insurrectionist rhetoric of 1984-86 (witness the SACP/SACTU messages to the 1987 (Second) Congress of COSATU in which they cautioned that "socialism is not on the agenda"). However, until those who know the facts are willing to write about them, this is mere speculation. What is very probable is that some of the leaders of the ANC had lost faith in the efficacy of the armed struggle as waged up to the mid-'eighties as an

instrument to bring the South African government to the negotiation table and were willing to try constitutional means if the regime would talk on terms that were not humiliating. Sanctions and other forms of international leverage were useful weapons in the arsenal of this group of leaders. While these weapons could not neutralise the armed might of the South African state, they gave the government a credible argument to put to its white constituency for justifying the ideological somersault that was begun by Botha and eventually concluded by de Klerk. This became even easier after the *Gotterdammerung* of 1989 in Eastern Europe and later in the Soviet Union itself. The speech of 2 February 1990 was the culmination of a carefully orchestrated process of elite-level co-operation on the one hand and of a series of totally unforeseen events on the global level on the other hand.

There is no doubt that economic and political realities brought the South African ruling class to understand that the apartheid option of the racial capitalist system had been exhausted. By the early 'seventies already - as has been demonstrated in numerous scholarly works - the system had reached its ceilings and become counter-productive in all important respects. I need not repeat these arguments here. What is important, however, is the proposition that the - at first tentative - reform of the system was a deliberate pro-active strategy decided upon by the rulers in their various think-tanks particularly after the 1976 uprising demonstrated the system's total loss of legitimacy. It is important to stress this, not in order to downgrade or trivialise the heroic battles fought on all fronts by our people in the decade between 1976 and 1986, but in order to concentrate our minds on the fact that the "racist Pretoria regime" has not been defeated militarily. This awkward but stubborn fact is usually elided in discussions about the present conjuncture and about our perspectives, even though it is clearly one of the central features of the political landscape.

Usually, Humpty-Dumpty attempts are made to pull the wool over the eyes of our audiences. This is done by the simple trick of pretending that the discourse of the "seizure" or conquest of power is categorically the same as the discourse of the "transfer" of power. Another way of putting this is to maintain in the usual woolly way that "negotiations is a site of struggle". Yet another way of playing around with words is to try to translate the fact of "reform from above" (i.e., through elite-level co-operation) into some version of "transformation from below". In the game of power politics, this might be a legitimate ploy but it is an unseemly and unacceptable sleight-of-hand when indulged in by a leadership ostensibly involved in a revolutionary struggle for national liberation, democracy and the emancipation of the working class.

The time has come for us to state clearly the character of "the transition to democracy" that is being negotiated by the contending social forces in South Africa today. This is necessary because unless we do so, we shall be aware neither of the limits nor of the possibilities inherent in the present conjuncture. Successful political strategy and tactics require precisely such clarity.

The armed struggle that was launched in 1961 by the forces of liberation against the apartheid-capitalist system has failed insofar as it ever was its military objective to

overthrow the South African state. Let it be said immediately that the dominant core of the leadership of the ANC itself never set out to overthrow the South African state; instead, their stated goal was always to force negotiations on the regime.

This is a decisive fact, to which I shall return presently. As part of an ensemble of political tactics formulated, or sometimes arrived at, by the liberation movement, however, the armed struggle had definite successes in that it forced the ruling class generally and the N-P government in particular into accepting the need to reform the system by restructuring the economy and the society within certain definite limits. In their concise analysis of the economic and socio-political reasons for the failure of apartheid, Morris and Padayachee (1988:11) identified three elements in the state's reform initiative. These were:

- » *initiating a limited process of 'democratisation' of ideological and political life;*
- » *implementing a dual process of 'de-racialisation/re-racialisation' of social and political life;*
- » *instituting a partial, and selective, 'redistribution' of social resources towards the black majority." (Emphasis in the original).*

They stress the point made above that the repressive apparatuses of the apartheid state have remained intact (Morris and Padayachee 1988:13) The first question on which some clarity has to be attained, therefore, is the following: **Can the forces of liberation push beyond the capitalist system in the present conjuncture, one feature of which is precisely that the repressive state apparatuses are almost wholly intact?** The answer to this vital question is, paradoxically, in the affirmative. However, it depends on the realisation of at least two socio-political conditions, both of which are in the short term highly improbable. The first of these, is the escalation of mass action to the point where what propagandists have aptly named the "Leipzig option" becomes possible. In essence, this means that the armed might of the state is neutralised by the very magnitude of peaceful resistance, strengthened by the occupation of strategic points and the gradual erosion of the *esprit des corps* of the standing army. A prior condition for the realisation of this option, however, is the commitment by the state authorities to a humanistic ethos that prevents them from unleashing the kinds of massacres that have characterised 20th Century South African history with such sickening regularity from Bulhoek to Boipatong. My own sense of the situation, especially because of the relative weakening of the position of the white minority and a fortiori of the National Party as an instrument of imperialism in Southern Africa, is that we have probably gone beyond the law of the frontier and that such massacres have become unlikely but not impossible.

This is a new element in our political landscape. Guerrilla warfare was forced on to our movement in 1960 because of the fact that the South African army, until very recently, was never recruited from the people. Even today, it remains essentially the army of the ruling white tribe despite the fact that, in the lower echelons, more and more blacks have been admitted on terms that often make them more ruthless enemies of the people than their white counterparts. As long as the army was insulated from the people by racial

prejudice and racist structures and practices, we could never take for granted one of the basic tenets of the classical theory of insurrection, viz., that in the final phase of a revolutionary struggle, the action shifts from the streets to the army and that it becomes imperative to break the chain of command so that soldiers refuse to shoot on the revolutionary people. Today, because of the changing class ("racial") composition of the armed forces, the changed character of the dominant strata of the ruling class and because of the changed global balance of forces that makes a *white* ruling group expendable if a black elite is available for the more efficient management of the capitalist system in a black majority situation, we can rely at the very least on dividing the armed forces in an insurrectionary situation in a manner that could spell disaster for the ruling class.

Having said this, of course, I have to say immediately that we are not at all within striking distance of this situation. The independent organisational strength of black workers at the political level is minimal, despite the impressive power of the independent trade-union movement. This is so because of the peculiar character of the struggle in South Africa where, in particular, racial oppression has put the emphasis on the unity of black (oppressed) people and blurred the fact of class exploitation. While the paramouncy of workers issues and interests was for a brief moment in the 'eighties almost the common-sense position of the people's organisations, this was never the case before and has since also been smothered in the populist rhetoric of "democracy" and "human rights". In short, mobilisation of the exploited and oppressed people with a view to reaching the ideological coherence and organisational depth that will make the Leipzig option feasible cannot be conceived of as a short-term matter which, tragically, is being done by not a few pro-ANC activists and strategists at the time of writing (early August 1992). It is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of a revolutionary strategy, the goal of which is to place in power the urban and the rural poor as opposed to the black (middle class) elite, which, objectively, is the most that the present negotiations strategy of the Triple Alliance can hope for. I shall return to this issue in a moment when I examine the alternatives to the strategy of negotiations for power sharing.

The second condition for pushing our struggle beyond the confines of the capitalist system, is the possibility of favourable developments on the international stage. In this regard, we have every reason to be pessimistic in the very short term. The collapse of the USSR and of Eastern Europe and the consequent crisis of credibility that has paralysed the international socialist movement have rolled back many of the gains made by revolutionary struggles of workers and peasants over the entire globe during the past 150 years or so. It is a crisis of world-historic magnitude, let there be no doubt about it. On the other hand, it is neither the first time that the international socialist movement has been faced with such bleak prospects nor is it strange or inexplicable given the epochal character of the struggle between capitalism and socialism on the scale of world history. It is perhaps difficult for our generation to realise the extent and intensity of the feelings of defeat, futility and betrayal that international socialist and workers organisation, especially in Europe, experienced with the collapse of the Second International in 1914 but we can read this up in the biographies and historiographical works of some of the leading socialists of that time. Arguments from analogy are never enough because the socio-historical context changes rapidly and often profoundly, yet I believe that it is useful

for us to bear in mind that today's defeat is often the necessary prelude to tomorrow's victories.

Such exhortative writing should not, however, obscure the main issue, viz., that a post-capitalist dispensation in South Africa is completely feasible in the medium term but its survival will depend on a profound shift in the balance of international forces in favour of labour. At the very least, it would require the de-linking of a few of the major advanced capitalist economies from the world economy. The circumstances under which this could happen are at present scarcely imaginable.

Let us return, for the moment, to the present negotiations process. The essential proposition I wish to advance here is that, objectively, the leadership of the Triple Alliance has entered the process on the terms of the class enemy. While it is more than clear that Vorster-Botha-de Klerk made their move in response to the pressures building up in the system, especially because of the waves of militant mobilisation in the 'seventies and 'eighties, I repeat, that their strategy is pro-active, not merely reactive, precisely because they have not been defeated. De Klerk's February 1990 speech makes it very clear that they shifted from talking in the ventriloquist mode via their puppets to the negotiation mode involving valid interlocutors who authentically represent the majority current in the liberation movement because of the shift in the global balance of forces in favour of capitalism-imperialism. In other words, they were emboldened to embark on this course at this time because they realised that what they consider the Congress "moderates", i.e., those in the leadership of the Congress Movement who at the very least are not anti-capitalist, would necessarily become dominant in the organisation under the new world-historic circumstances. Any negotiations process would by its very nature re-inforce this structurally induced dynamic. The subsequent demobilisation and demilitarisation of the Congress Movement, if we abstract from the complexities of inner-party feuds and conflicts for the moment, would seem to have borne out this calculation.

The ANC leadership itself, taken as a whole, has always been committed to a negotiated solution of the conflict in South Africa. As I have pointed out already (see page 7 above) for a brief period in the early and the middle 'eighties, insurrectionist discourse became very popular especially among the radicalised youth and some SACP activists but there was little prospect that, within the populist confines of the Congress Movement, that discourse could become hegemonic.

Because the ANC was the dominant political force among the oppressed and because of its programmatic stance of negotiations, it was the most available "partner" for the impending dialogue as far as the rulers were concerned. Other political forces which, at the time were and for the foreseeable future will be, marginal (NB. not negligible!) to the main action, were/are used by the rulers in order to weaken the ANC as a negotiating partner but the rulers well understand that the moment of these forces will come, if it does, if negotiations fail and if a coherent revolutionary strategy is arrived at. Either together with militants in a fragmented ANC or on their own, these more radical populist

forces would exact a greater price from the Establishment for any "settlement" or "solution". even within the framework of a modified system of racial capitalism.

Leaving aside biographical or subjective considerations that may have influenced specific individuals in the leadership of the Congress Movement to "engaged the state", i.e., to enter into negotiations, it is obvious that the collapse of Eastern Europe, the tragic success of destabilisation policies in Southern Africa which reduced the Frontline States to a condition of chronic apprehension and the overt and subtle arm-twisting by the liberation movements imperialist "benefactors", together with the attrition the fatigue and the exhaustion that were the result of the unprecedented struggles of the 'eighties: all these factors persuaded the ANC-SACP leadership to take the plunge and to probe the historic compromise in or about 1986/87. Clearly, also, it was the decision of only one albeit the numerically and organisationally most important part of the liberation movement. Hence, inevitably, it was, and was seen as, a power political move made from the vantage point of a particular approach to our struggle rather than from that of a united people. This is, no doubt, a complex matter. There is no point in now putting forward the view again that any entry into negotiations should have been preceded by exhaustive consultations with other political tendencies in the movement. No matter how insignificant they were, precisely because of the extreme danger of fragmentation and, in the final analysis, civil war. The so-called Patriotic Front was in all respects a total abortion and, I am afraid to say, an insult to the political intelligence and the courage of people who had risked their lives for freedom and democracy in South Africa.

What is more to the point, however, is the fact that, objectively, the leadership of the Triple Alliance was committing itself to seeking a solution to the conflict in South Africa within the framework of capitalism. This is the real explanation for the rapid shift in the political registers of that movement from a militant quasi-socialism to a common or garden "democratic" capitalism. This is why the ambiguities of the Freedom Charter which in the past had conveniently united the Congress Movement in an illusory populist coherence, had to be expunged. Everything became negotiable: "nationalisation" has given way to the "mixed economy", the unitary state can now encompass elements of federalism, "majority rule" now means 66,6 percent and even the universal franchise (one person - one vote) can be diluted through Byzantine constitutional mechanisms that no ordinary citizen will ever understand. One can argue, of course, that all negotiations imply compromise. This is certainly true, but if the purpose of the exercise is to place oneself in control of the levers of the state power within a capitalist framework, one has to realise and accept that the end effect will be to strengthen, not to weaken and much less to destroy, that system. In her classical attack on the revisionist theory and strategy of Eduard Bernstein in the German Social Democratic Party at the beginning of this century, Rosa Luxemburg set out with unrivalled clarity all the real issues. In essence, what she wrote then is equally true today:

» *"Can the social democracy be against reforms? Can we counterpose the social revolution, the transformation of the existing order, our final goal, to social reforms? Certainly not. The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of*

the conditions of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to the social democracy the only means of engaging in the proletarian class war and working in the direction of the final goal - the conquest of political power and the suppression of wage labour. Between social reforms and revolution there exists for the social democracy an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim.

- » *It is in Eduard Bernstein's theory... that we find for the first time the opposition of the two factors of the labour movement. His theory tends to counsel us to renounce the social transformation, the final goal of the social democracy and, inversely, to make of social reforms, the means of the class struggle, its aim....*
- » *But since the final goal of socialism constitutes the only decisive factor distinguishing the social democratic movement from bourgeois democracy and from bourgeois radicalism, the only factor transforming the entire labour movement from a vain effort to repair the capitalist order into a class struggle against this order, for the suppression of this order - the question : " Reform or revolution ? " as it is posed by Bernstein, equals for the social democracy the question : " To be or not to be ? " In the controversy with Bernstein and his followers, everybody in the party ought to understand clearly it is not a question of this or that method of struggle, or the use of this or that set of tactics, but of the very existence of the social democratic movement. " (Luxemburg 1978 : 8)*

To conclude this section: the present negotiations strategy of the ANC never was and does not have the potential to become the continuation of a revolutionary strategy for the seizure of power. Insofar as it could have been - conceptually - the continuation of a strategy for the transfer of power from one elite to another within a slightly modified capitalist system, it is premature and doomed to failure. The unfavourable balance of forces and the lack of organisational preparedness of the movement as a whole as well as the essential coherence of the state in the short to medium term guarantee a different outcome. If, after some period of profound or bloody conflict, at the beginning of which we possibly find ourselves today, the ruling elite, with the assistance of countless imperialist agencies, bring the "sobered" and "pragmatic" remnant of the leadership of a fragmented Triple Alliance to sign a settlement, it will be one in which the original agenda of the Broederbond, i.e., for a power-sharing arrangement between Afrikaner- and African nationalism, will have been realised.

This is the real significance of all the class - collaborationist talk about a " social contract " in the ranks of the South African labour movement today. In many cases, as is well known, trade unions have gone beyond words. As Frantz Fanon pointed out many years ago, the beneficiaries of this kind of neo - colonial deal are the rising (black) middle class and the top layers of the skilled and semi - skilled, especially the unionised

, workers. In South Africa, however, these strata, even though they are stronger than anywhere else on the African continent, still exclude the majority of the urban and the rural poor. Any premature, short - term " solution " will, therefore, be made at the expense of the latter.

ALTERNATIVES TO NEGOTIATIONS

In the short term, as I have pointed out on various occasions recently, the most likely alternative to the negotiated transition to democracy, however defined, is a military government of a special kind. Recent developments, especially after the breakdown of CODESA II, have underlined the fact that the gulf that separates the contending social forces in South Africa is so wide and so deep that, from the point of view of the bourgeoisie, only a military government will be able to control the transition in such a way that the danger of a successful black working - class revolution can be discounted. Indeed, the destabilisation of the townships can arguably be traced back to the need to create the conditions for persuading the West to accept that this is the only way. In the process, it is hoped by those behind this strategy, that the ANC will be discredited and weakened to the point where its leadership will be ready to settle for much less than they have always stood for, the independent organisation of the workers, especially the largest and most militant trade unions will have been destroyed or co - opted and a large proportion of the radical leadership of the Congress Movement (and of other political organisations) will have been decimated. Once the political and the economic attrition will have made its impact on the desperate but chastened masses, the military would be persuaded (by the West? or by the Broederbond?) to hand back power to the civilian authorities. Ironically, at that point, the military authorities will themselves convoke a Constituent Assembly in the secure knowledge that the outcome will be the best for the survival of the capitalist system in Southern Africa.

It is necessary to repeat that nobody in the ruling class wants this scenario to be realised. They prefer, obviously, a successful negotiation process with the least possible dislocation of the system. But this is clearly not going to happen. (It is, in brackets, amusing to read today what some of our celebrated political analysts were saying a mere two years ago.) The ruling class is obliged and committed to the restructuring of the apartheid-capitalist system. They will use all the available mechanisms to engineer the transition. Their best scenario is the process of negotiations for power - sharing, the second-best is the military government of a special kind which I have referred to above.

At present, the social forces are deadlocked. We cannot overthrow the system and they cannot rule without massive and counterproductive repression. Is there another way? As indicated earlier, the answer to this question is a clear YES. There is the way of revolutionary socialism. In South Africa today, this means, amongst other things, the following steps.

* Continued class struggle for fundamental social reforms with a view to increasing the social weight and the economic leverage of the black working class. Such struggles

will bring about a secular shift in the balance of forces in favour of the working class as a whole. In this respect, campaigns, such as those against VAT, for a living wage, houses for all, a compulsory and free national health service, compulsory and free education for all, jobs for all, etc., are the nuts and bolts of this plank in our platform. At the political level, it involves the formulation of a Workers' Charter/Manifesto that will draw a clear line between the workers' struggle against capital and the populist-nationalist struggle for the cosmetic improvement of the system of racial capitalism. It will also put an end to the grand illusions of the oratory of the social contract and make it clear that workers cannot take responsibility for running the capitalist system of exploitation. Hence we have to give full support to and, wherever possible, initiate, mass struggles for the most rapid possible attainment of these reforms.

Again, we have to be clear that the goals of all such action have to be clearly related to the socialist project of the workers' struggle. Otherwise, the revolutionary energies of the masses will be dissipated and wasted on attaining the self-serving interest of power-seeking, elitist cliques. The class struggle should not be turned into a circus. We must guard against the situation described by the Czech novelist, Milan Kundera, in a memorable passage in which he compared the struggle to a contest between a theatre group and a modern mechanised army.

* At the same time, we have to propagate and fight for the most radical possible democratisation of our society at all levels. This means quite simply translating into practice the *real content of democracy*, i.e., **power to the people**, by establishing in practice and in detail in the context of the full decision-making participation of the working people, what power to the people can/does mean at every level, whether we are talking about control of educational institutions, structuring the labour process at the point of production, determining budgets and service charges at local-government level or whether we are talking about the most democratic possible constitution at central level. For this reason, the demand for the Constituent Assembly remains pivotal at this stage to the conquest of state power by the oppressed and exploited majority.

Yielding to this demand is clearly the last resort of the bourgeoisie in South Africa today on a scale that begins with the continuation of the present racist tricameral-cum-Bantustan constitution. They will only yield to this demand when the conditions for the Leipzig option have matured.

In my view, all other compromises that involve short- to medium-term governmental co-responsibility for maintaining the inequities of the existing system are a trap to be avoided like the plague. If for no other reason and having due regard to the very different circumstances in the two situations, we should study carefully the history of the "interim government" that was initiated in pre-independence Namibia with the drawn-out Turnhalle process. The entire history of reformism and social accords in this century in countries where conditions were that much more favourable than in South Africa today rises before us like a neon warning. Only people with a totally different reading of the history of our struggle or with a totally different agenda would ignore that warning. It is an exceptionally dangerous game to try to pass off any other constitution-making

mechanism for the democratically elected Constituent Assembly based on a one-person-one-vote non-racial franchise and proportional representation, an assembly that will have the untrammelled right to structure its own agenda. Those who try to play around with this demand are playing with a fire that will consume them.

* We have to internationalise our struggle by linking up concretely with all anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist forces in the world today, more particularly on the African continent. Only the security provided by the international solidarity of these forces will reinforce the sense of strength and power generated by working-class consciousness forged in the furnace of struggle against the actual and would-be managers of the racial capitalist system. Only the international elaboration of our struggle, its flowing together with similar struggles elsewhere, e.g., the workers' struggles in Brazil, in Korea, and in Eastern Europe can guarantee that it will not be suffocated after victory.

Finally, despite the restored hegemony of populist and middle-class ideologies in our political organisations today, the ethos and the goals of revolutionary democratic socialism are not far beneath the surface of the workers' struggles regardless of where and how they manifest themselves. I take my cue once again from the inimitable Rosa Luxemburg, writing about the state of what was then called the "social democracy" at the beginning of the 20th Century: "The proletarian movement has not as yet, all at once, become social democratic, even in Germany. But it is becoming more social democratic, surmounting continuously the extreme deviations of anarchism and opportunism, both of which are only determining phases of the development of the social democracy, considered as a process." (Luxemburg 1978:61)

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