Rethinking the Leftist Struggle in South Africa

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A struggle between the Left and Right in South Africa intensified after 1976[1]. The resolution of this struggle during the 1990's will seemingly grant considerable power to the Left (a reversal of trends in other parts of the world). It is thus hardly surprising to find Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCS) theorists trying to understand the South African phenomenon, and in the process often re-working CCS itself[2].

CCS theorists of the Birmingham School were closely tied to the growing *leftist* concern at the 'collapse of the Marxist dream' [3] — manifested within the Western European communist parties of the 1970's (and spreading to Eastern Europe in the 1980's). Because Marxism, and then Marxist-Leninism had come to dominate leftist discourse, a collapse of *this particular interpretation* of leftist praxis rippled through the entire left-wing, affecting even those leftist positions outside (and often opposed to) the Marxist-Leninist camp. Thomas Kuhn[4] notes how once a paradigm becomes dominant, this ascendant position tends to wipe out the memory of an era when this was not the case. So it is that many leftists (both Marxist and others) have 'forgotten' that Marx had to engage in battles with other leftist positions (eg. Bakunin, Proudon, Lasalle and Feuerbach)[5]. Marxism became 'naturalised' as 'mainstream' leftist discourse; a naturalisation that was institutionalised by the Second International (1889-1914). The next battle was between Lenin's Marxism and Bernstein's (social-democracy). Lenin won and his success was institutionalised by the Third International (1919-1943).

If the crisis and disintegration of Marxist-Leninism is not to be translated into a full-scale rout of the entire 'leftist project',[6] then 'new thinking' on the Left is urgently required.[7] Such rethinking will

have to break the bounds of past 'naturalisations' and methodological 'purities' and will require an openness to the full range of leftist possibilities from anarchist to social-democrat, and a diversity of 'mixes' between these.

CCS represents one attempt to deal with the 'collapse of the Marxist dream'. CCS examined the relationship between communication and power within historical material contexts. Habermas also moved in this direction[8]. CCS[9] attempted to 're-formulate' historical materialism to meet the challenges of a multinational 'Information Age' capitalism; the 'post-modern' era; and the problems (theoretical and practical) within Marxism for many Marxists — especially Marxist-Leninists — clung to a view of the world rooted in Victorian capitalism.[10] As the capitalist mode of production mutated into the electronic, and Information Age, many Marxists were left behind.

But CCS attempted to deal with the 'new' capitalism which meant coming to grips with communication, culture, ideology, and hegemony[11] - in other words, coming to terms with the relationship between the superstructures and power. CCS aimed at understanding, and/or redressing the declining intellectual and political (hegemonic) fortunes of the Left within a world where capitalism was becoming stronger. As Richard Johnson (formerly director of Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) stated, this intellectual interventionist approach manifested itself in a CCS concern with the "relationship between academic knowledges and political aspirations".[12]

CCS migrated to South Africa in the early 1980's[13]. This growth of a significant South African academic-left was parallel to the emergence of a strong internal leftist constituency following the Soweto uprising in 1976. In South Africa CCS faced many of the same concerns which confronted the 'New Left' in Europe or North America. This was not surprising, given the international nature of multinational capitalism, and the international crisis of Leftist praxis.

Meeting this challenge calls for critical appraisal of (local and international) Leftist theory and practice. This article does not seek to provide 'solutions'; but rather to raise questions, problems and challenges from a South African 'New Left'/CCS perspective. But, in raising and discussing questions, 'answers' may appear. These 'answers', however, must be seen to be 'relative' and embedded in a particular moment.

Problems/challenges for the South African Left[14] in the early 1990's:

The internal context changed after February 1990. What was appropriate for resistance is not necessarily appropriate for building hegemony. The South African Left's habit of failing to attempt to communicate with the non-left was tied to in-group solidarity as a clandestine organising principle. The changed context requires the Left 'struggle' to win votes and build alliances between different constituencies. The African National Congress (ANC) had difficulties, during the first years of its unbanning, in restructuring itself to changed needs.

O   The collapse of East European Marxist-Leninism deprived the South African Left of an ally, and finance. This greatly strengthened the hand of the South African Right in the battle for hegemony. The 'New Left' and CCS face the same challenges/problems posed to the wider South African Left. It is possible that ultimately the South's control of oil-revenues may ultimately become a new source of backing for leftist opposition to multi-national capitalism (MNC). But even if this were to occur the Left faces significant problems now.

O   The East European collapse has discredited the notion of social planning. The irony is that in the South Africa it is planning (and state intervention), as a means of overcoming the massive socio-economic problems and mass misery, wherein lies the real appeal for socialism-as-planning. Perhaps South Africa is not yet ready for a post-structural and post-modern world? South Africa may first have to pass through a 'structural' or 'modern' period. But the South African Left will be forced to consider central planning versus a producers' democracy versus a market (whether a capitalist or 'socialist' market).

O   The collapse of Soviet hegemony altered the global balance of power toward a world capitalist ascendancy closely aligned to South African centre-right forces (the 'reformed' NP and its allies).

O   The ascendancy of world capitalism dramatically increases the probability of the South African left becoming another Third World [15] dependency of multinational capitalism (MNC), ruled by a comprador ruling elite. Such a co-opted group would, of course, be in a position to trade upon prior links to 'the struggle'. By manipulating calls to 'solidarity' a comprador group could use 'socialist' rhetoric as a means of serving MNC interests. (In other words, 'superstructural' power relationships will appear to have

changed, but material power relationships will be, by and large, unaltered). If the South African Left were to allow this to occur it would discredit 'socialism' still further.

O   Historical materialism, socialism and Marxism are facing theoretical challenges across a wide front, ranging from the 'New Right' to post-modernists. This world-wide crisis of leftist praxis will impact on the South African Left. Both locally and internationally the 'New Left' is in a better position to deal with the malaise/crisis because it has a theoretical tradition of acknowledging the inadequacies of orthodox historical materialism, socialism and Marxism and has a storehouse of leftist conceptual tools which offer hope of a way out of the crisis.

O   Information technology and instantaneous world-wide electronic communication — has become dominant. Once more capitalism has demonstrated a capacity to evolve and confound the predicted collapse of capitalism. Orthodox historical materialism and socialism is ill-equipped to deal with this new mode of production, whereas the Frankfurt School and Hans Enzensberger issued important challenges to Marxists over this issue.

O   What constituency should the South African Left serve? The working class (a 'labour aristocracy' in contemporary South Africa)? An alliance between the working class and the lumpen proletariat? An alliance between the working class and the petit bourgeoisie (the 'workers' who staff the electronic communication network)? Dealing with such choices will create tensions. The choice of constituency will have enormous consequences. If the 'Leninist' route (to serve the weakest and most disadvantaged) is chosen, conflict with MNC will result. If, on the other hand, a social democrat ('Bernstein') approach is adopted — ie. serving a labour aristocracy — then serious conflict with MNC will be avoided.

O   Expectations are so high that they are unlikely to be fulfilled in the short-to-medium term (if ever). This is likely to put a severe strain on any future Leftist hegemony.

These challenges present the South African Left with the prospects of intense activity (theoretical and practical). A South African-based CCS has much to contribute to an understanding of the relationship between power and superstructure (eg. culture, knowledge, ideology, and the media). CCS will be witness to a shift from struggle to a Leftist hegemony. Considerable potential therefore exists for

developing understanding of culture, knowledge, ideology and the media.

Defining the 'Struggle'

Before one can 'rethink' the struggle, it is necessary to define what 'the struggle' has been. The term has become cliched and rhetorical.

The point about the notion of 'the struggle' is that it has meant different things to different people. Movements like the ANC and United Democratic Front (UDF) have been multi-class, multi-party, multi-ethnic, multi-religious 'movements' or 'alliances'. This meant that a 'vagueness' was an advantage. Since the unbanning of the ANC in 1990 this vagueness has become a liability.

The SACP has 'backgrounded' the notion of 'class struggle' through its adoption of the 'two-stage' theory of revolution. The UDF attracted many of the country's social democrats; and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) provided a home for workerists. By the end of the 1980's the ANC, UDF, COSATU and SACP collectively constituted the components of the left-wing Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). Within the Movement, socialists and Marxists formed an important sub-constituency, especially amongst black youth. South Africa has gone against the trend in the rest of the world because communists and socialists have a significant mass following. This support developed as a result of 40-years of virulent anti-communist and anti-socialist propaganda. Hatred for apartheid policies was translated into 'adherence' to that which the NP opposed; an 'adherence' that sometimes takes the form of a 'cut-and-paste Marxism' at the grassroots level. But at another level, the success of communism and socialism in South Africa is the outcome of the realistic flexibility of South African leftist theoreticians and practitioners, who adopted a popularist 'revisionism'.

Socialism — in Marxist and social-democrat forms — has become a significant factor in South Africa. Socialists adopted two different strategies: (1) the popular-alliance route; and (2) the workerist (trade unionist) route. The workerists — seeing class conflict as central — seek to organise a specifically working class constituency.

The popularists (notably the ANC and UDF) down-played 'class struggle' in favour of a broad anti-apartheid struggle. Even COSATU and the SACP subsumed themselves into this popularist alliance. Socialists within the popular alliance are either not Marxists or are *de facto* 'practical' revisionists. This *de facto* (practical) revisionism is

central to my argument. There is a need to formalise this 'revision' and to theoretically 'rethink' what is meant by 'the struggle' if one is a 'Marxist' within a (non-Marxist) popular alliance because such a strategy significantly ALTERS Marxist theory. The success of Marxism in South Africa is tied to the pragmatic 'revisionism' of Marxists and socialists. Through this pragmatism, the South African Left represents a constituency similar to Solidarity in Poland; but with a major difference — whereas in Poland labels like 'socialist' and 'Marxist' are dirty words, in South Africa they are proudly adopted. South Africa seems destined to be the last major country in the world in which 'Marxists' (and even Leninists) will have a significant influence over policy. This gives the South African struggle a significance beyond South Africa itself. This scenario places a particular burden onto the shoulders of the South African Left — to demonstrate that 'socialism' and 'democracy' have meaning and actually construct a democratic-socialism. One of my key assumptions is that such a democracy will be centrally tied to the communication policy and media infrastructure. The Information Age has developed the technology for an interactive democracy (public sphere).

New Forms of Struggle Required

The unbanning of the ANC and other anti-apartheid organisations in February 1990 significantly altered the terrain of struggle. The Left needs to reorient itself away from a vanguard-led armed struggle, mass mobilisation and diplomatic foreign manoeuvres towards electoral politics, and hegemonic alliance-building. During the first year of its unbanning the ANC experienced difficulty in achieving such a re-orientation[16]. The popularist policy of the MDM provided a good foundation for an electoral-oriented struggle, but the ANC had yet to learn how to capitalise on the experience of MDM activists. Winning an election also requires the Left to pay serious attention towards the superstructures. CCS is equipped to contribute to superstructural analysis and practice, and to theorising the popularist 'revision' of Marxist theory towards a New Leftist 'parliamentary' approach to hegemony-building.

In 're-thinking' Leftist praxis the Althusserian notion of granting *de facto* dominance to the 'autonomous' (from the material base) political ISA's may have value in the intensely *political* struggle for hegemony in the coming years. This is perhaps even more true of Poulantzas' modification of Althusserian theory which foregrounds

class alliances. This places the onus on the Left to move beyond 'proclaiming' rhetorically that they represent 'the people'. Instead, the Left will have to learn how to win over 'the people'.

The Right is investing considerable energy in the direction of 'ideological' and communicative struggle. The NP-hegemony has, since 1978, placed much emphasis on Andre Beaufre's[17] concern with 'psychological' and 'communication' struggle. Prior to the 1990 reforms, the NP had no 'saleable' message with which to win mass support for Rightist policies in a Beaufre/WHAM (Win Hearts and Minds) programme. But the reforms have provided the NP with a potential base upon which to construct a South African-type Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). In the wake of the reforms, the NP utilized communicative struggle to develop and propagate a new 'reform discourse'[18], so blurring the formerly easily discernible left-wing/right-wing nature of the 1980's. This increases the pressure on the Left to pay attention to ideological and communicative struggle. British CCS grew increasingly concerned with 'revising' Leftist strategy and developing a superstructural interventionism to challenge the Thatcherist threat to the British Left[19]. A South African CCS will be concerned with the challenge that a conservative, but de-racialised capitalism poses. The South African Left must not reject CCS' New Leftist solutions and 'revisions', formulated in the British context when they come to the new challenges offered by a reformed-Right in South Africa.

Laclau & Mouffe[20] have taken the 'revision' process to its extreme. They have looked (1) to groups other than the working class as radical agents; and (2) to considering how radical groups (and/or classes) do not 'exist-in-themselves', but have to be built through 'hegemonic labour'. For Laclau and Mouffe struggle is for the minds of the petit bourgeoisie within ideology. Laclau & Mouffe are concerned with Europe/North America where economic deprivations are less sharp than those in Africa. The South African context is different: economic deprivation and class conflict are very apparent, and hence socialism (and even communism) is still on the social agenda. A popular-alliance in South Africa will have to pay serious attention to (state-socialist) 'affirmative action' programmes and economic struggles. The reconstruction of Leftist struggle I am proposing would lean more towards the Habermasian reconstruction of historical materialism model and a Poulantzian concern with political (superstructural) struggle and alliances (including with non-working class interests),

rather than a full-blown shift into 'discourse' (superstructuralism) per se.

A single political party or movement does not replace civil society. Rather, civil society becomes a 'space' for dialectical engagement — a valuable terrain of struggle — and a 'space' to be cherished if the social dialectic is not to be killed. In this regard, Habermas has said:

> *"Everyone should be justified in expecting that the institutionalization of the process for the non-exclusive formation of public opinion and democratic political will can ratify their assumption that these processes of public communication are being conducted rationally and effectively ... which ought to ensure that all socially relevant questions can be taken up and dealt with thoroughly and imaginatively until solutions have been found that, while respecting the integrity of every individual and every form of social life, are uniformly in everybody's interests".* [21]

Popular struggle is, above all else, premised on alliance-building. This implies moving the superstructures centre-stage within Leftist struggle. Communication for mobilisation, alliance building, organisation and co-ordination is central to a popular alliance. If socialism is to be expanded within the popular alliance, the socialist constituency must develop effective communication by: (1) learning to 'use' the alliance communication network to 'bargain' the best possible position for itself; and (2) developing rhetorical skills to 'sell' socialism to others in the alliance. Yet communication is an area that is poorly developed (relative to other areas) within historical materialism. CCS is well placed to examine how such Eurocommunist ideas can be integrated into the South African struggle.

The contemporary leftist crisis demands an openness towards theoretical experimentation rather than a retreat into methodological pedanticism. CCS has created an interesting precedent for the 'rethinking' of leftist praxis.

Habermas' [22] reconstructive work, by operating explicitly within the totality approach, prevents a superstructural analysis becoming 'detached' from concern with the economic base. As important is Habermas' work on the 'public sphere' [23] which offers the Left a communication model for dialogical (ie. democratic) organisation.

But there is a need to go 'beyond' Habermas[24] 'theoretical' challenge and also consider Enzensberger's[25] 'practical' challenge to

develop a 'praxis' communication. In addition, on a practical level, the experiences in Chile[26], Nicaragua[27], and South Africa's own *grassroots* model[28] are excellent examples of leftist-communication as 'democracy-in-action' (which complement Habermas' approach).

Incorporating Habermas and Enzensberger into CCS would channel the field into an explicit examination of the potential role the superstructures could play in the struggle. Four potential roles for 'communication' are immediately apparent: communication to (1) strengthen the popular alliance through improved intra-alliance dialogue (and to counter any right-wing attempts to disrupt the popular alliance); (2) widen the Left-alliance by recruiting new sectors and members; (3) 'disrupt' the NP-alliance; and (4) 'promote' socialism within the popular alliance. (This would include working to 'expose' the attempts of anti-socialist foreign powers' to 'confuse' and 'deflect' the course of the struggle).

In meeting the challenges of the 'Marxist crisis', the South African struggle's implicit 'revisionism', and the wider post-modernist condition, the CCS-approach (in which various theoretical strands are pulled together, and reshuffled into new configurations), seems the only sensible way forward.

A composite reading of Enzensberger (communicative praxis), Gramsci (hegemony) and Poulantzas (class fractions and alliances) would direct the New Left towards a consideration of: (a) seeking allies for the Left; and (b) seeking 'ways' of communicating with different sectors of the population. Rhetorical communication methods of advertising and public relations offer some guidance in this regard. The Congress alliance — if it is to expand its net — will need to develop rhetorical communication skills. Sophisticated media and communication skills need to be diffused throughout the alliance. In this area the NP-hegemony is currently better placed than the ANC because it incorporates a wide range of professional communicators (journalists, public relations officers, advertising specialists, media technicians, media bureaucrats, etc).

A left-wing media network should avoid 'mixing' its messages: ideally separate 'socialist', 'nationalist', and 'liberal' media should be created for the different sectors. The Left has to think beyond the 'alternative media', which, in 1989, communicated only with a small section of the converted (ie. the total sales of all the left-wing weekly newspapers[29] only 206 000 per week). This network requires con-solidation, in the print field. It also needs expansion in other fields,

such as: radio, film, video, audio-cassette, computer-networking, etc. In addition to media-hardware, such a network requires, above all else, more trained Congress-alliance personnel.

This leads into considerations of 'what' message is to be communicated. Clearly, the wider the anti-apartheid alliance, the more likely it is to be successful. A Leftist bloc would be ill-advised to stress either a (Marxist) class-based conflict or a (Black Consciousness) race-based conflict. Both will alienate potential left-wing allies. 'Purists' might better serve socialism by confining their activities to clear 'workerist' (trade union?) activities, and avoid alliance-building (popular) work, where their orthodoxy could alienate potential ANC allies.

Building a left-alliance requires a struggle with the apartheid sign system, or what Keyan Tomaselli calls "struggle for the sign" [30]. The first anti-apartheid group to recognise the importance of 'signs' was the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). However, BCM mobilized exclusivist (racial) signs and ruled themselves out as a widely-based counter-hegemonic force. An exclusivist (either class or race) sign system would damage an anti-apartheid alliance, since it would exclude incorporation of elements of the 'sympathetic' bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie into 'the struggle'. During the 1980's both the 'Freedom Charter' and 'Mandela' were unifying signs.

The Congress movement needs to emulate the communicative 'professionalism' of both the NP and BCM. Socialists within the ANC will also need to ensure they are not 'out-communicated' by the nationalists, liberals, and even capitalists within the Congress-alliance. Communication has not been a traditional' area of concern for South African Marxists who need to 'reconstruct' their paradigm to deal with: (1) popular-alliance (multi-class; multi-ethnic; multi-religious) politics; and (2) communicative 'struggle'.

The Crisis in Western Marxism

Some have criticised 'importation' of 'First World' theories and debates into South Africa, claiming that this is a form of neo- colonialism[31]. The contemporary world is linked by a global information network and MNC relations of production. (Even the Soviet Union is set to be incorporated into this MNC net). Given this 'globalization', no theory can be exclusively pegged to one context. Theories shift across contexts, mutating as they move; a process described by Johan Muller and Keyan Tomaselli[32]. So no theory is exclusively 'European' or

'African' (see also Towa and Hountondji)[33].

The theories (and practices) of both the First and Second Worlds have already dealt with many of the problems that the South African Left will have to come to terms with. A thorough grounding in such work is one way of avoiding the wasted energy of 're-inventing the wheel'. The ANC's Pallo Jordan appears to agree as he refers to the Left's European experiences when looking at South African left-wing problems[34].

It is significant that it is the New Left (including CCS) which has been least devastated by the collapse of East European 'state socialism'. In many of the other schools of Marxism the Soviet collapse has led to a deep pessimism and failure of nerve. The collapse of state socialism has confirmed many of the positions adopted by the New Left and Critical Theorists. Perhaps Adorno will be proven correct — it will be the Critical Theorists who will be heirs to the Marxist legacy.

For those concerned about communication, ideology and hegemony within a Leftist struggle — the work of the Birmingham School is of special interest.

We can find the early origins of CCS in the work of 'reformulators' like Lukacs, members of the Frankfurt School, Korsch, Gramsci and Volosinov. These early theorists were merely early warning signals of what, by the 1970's, could be discerned as the 'collapse of the Marxist dream'. Lukacs, the Frankfurt School, Korsch, Gramsci and Volosinov continued to work *within* the historical material paradigm despite their recognition of the methodological problems. These theorists of 'totality'[35]: saw the superstructures as part of a process, in which the base and superstructures were part of a dialectical totality. Struggle was both economic (base), and political-discursive (superstructural).

Others like the Althusserians and post-Althusserians[36] responded to the Marxist crisis by moving 'out' of historical materialism. Althusser's granting the superstructures 'autonomy' was to abandon a core feature of the historical materialist/realist paradigm[37]. Laclau and Mouffe, building on the Althusserian legacy, took Althusser's 'autonomy' notion to its logical conclusion. These theorists came to see social reality as being constructed in discourse ('autonomous' of the economic base). Struggle became discursive and political (ie. superstructural rather than economic). This view moves very close to a liberal position.

The work of both the 'totality' and 'discourse' groups deserves

serious attention from Leftists trying to deal with the contemporary 'superstructural age' and the post-modern condition which are of direct concern for the South African Left because South Africa is integrated into the superstructural age in which communication, media and information play central binding roles within multinational capitalism. To argue that the totality group (like the Frankfurt School) is concerned with so-called 'First World' issues is to ignore the importance of dealing with the impact of the MNC Information Age on South Africa.

The MNC Information Age is a 'superstructural' mode of production. Capitalism has mutated once again — in a way unforeseen by Marx. Communication and the media have moved centre stage in multinational capitalism. Relocation of production associated with earlier phases of capitalism (eg steel/heavy industry, or the chemical industry) to the peripheral Third World areas explains why Marx's theories (developed to deal with Victorian capitalism) still have considerable explanatory power in the Third World. In many respects South Africa shares the characteristics of the industrialised Third World with its large (and growing) urban proletariat working in 'dirty' heavy industries. On the other hand, South Africa entered the 'superstructural age' of electronic information networks, where a portion of the population is integrated into a media-centric world.

The South African Left reflects the South African context: 'superstructural' concerns are marginalised within the local praxis. However, sections of the South African Left have utilized the 'superstructural gaps' that the Information Age provided[38]. The alternative media made use of desk-top publishing methods[39]; activists used photocopiers; video units were established; Media Resource Centres and media training schemes were set up[40]; left-oriented community libraries integrated themselves into local and world-wide computer networks using modems[41]; and the Congress-alliance used computer networking in operations, including underground military operations.

Despite this practical work, surprisingly little has been done by local leftists to theorize this superstructural work and to produce a coherent 'superstructural praxis'. It is this void that CCS fills by sifting through work done by Western Marxists on the superstructures to ascertain its potential; and secondly, by developing a local understanding of the superstructural age as it impacts upon

South Africa.

The Collapse of Eastern Europe

The collapse of Soviet 'state socialism' in Eastern Europe is the outcome of multiple causation, too complex to be addressed in this article. A few very limited remarks are, however, called for.

Lenin's interpretation meant socialists served the weakest and most exploited sections of the proletariat — who were increasingly found in the MNC-dependent Third World as the 20th century progressed[42]. Bernstein's[43] interpretation of Marxism would have resulted in socialism *de facto* serving the First World's 'labour aristocracy' instead. Lenin's option meant an on-going conflict with world-capitalism, and hence condemned the USSR to an arms race it could not win[44]. (Gorbachev's *glasnost* terminated Soviet support for revolutionary movements around the world with implications for South Africa).

When the First World re-ordered its relations of production into the MNC-Information format around the new electronic-informatics technology, COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) could not keep pace. The huge bureaucratically-managed 'cradle-to-the-grave' social welfare system and full-employment policy made any economic structural readjustment (such as those caused by shifts to new modes of production based upon new technologies) difficult to implement because it made labour immobile.

The problem was severely compounded by the conservatism and inertia[45] of the bureaucrats and securocrats (the powerful *nomenklatura*) who did not want to engage in restructuring. In 'state socialism' these bureaucrats and securocrats developed a vested interest in maintaining relations of production built upon earlier steel and chemical technology, which benefitted themselves. Soviet Marxists were ill-equipped to deal with those shifts into new modes of production wherein the superstructures became more central than the material base. The central planning structures that had initially served the rapid industrialization of the USSR so well, undermined the USSR's 'socialist experiment'.

The new MNC Information Age relations of production precisely appear to depend upon a *lessening* of the centralised control. The capacity for instantaneous world-wide communication (which increases the capacity for control, when needed) seems to have lessened day-to-day need for rigid chains of command. Multinational

capitalism has been able to loosen up and grant more 'gaps' and greater autonomy. Information Age efficiency has increased autonomy to First World information workers (hence the proliferation of Personal Computers (PC's); a growing pluralism in civil society (even the USA is being increasingly 'de- homogenized'); and a growing 'individuation' in the worlds people are able to construct for themselves. The creative possibilities inherent in making Information technology (PC's, photostat machines, etc) widely available were denied in the Soviet bloc. As Enzensberger[46] pointed out, such denial is economically destructive and results in social retardation.

The effects on South Africa have been ambiguous — on the one hand the collapse of Soviet power emboldened the NP-government to enact the 1990 reforms. This created a significant window of opportunity for the South African left. But on the other hand, the East European collapse strengthened the hand of the Right and weakened the Left's ability to seize this opportunity.

For South Africans then, the COMECON experience is an important lesson in what not to do. Socialism without democracy proved to be destructive to socialism[47]. Democracy, in turn, requires an open communication flow. These lessons hold serious implications for re-construction of the South African media towards a media that can serve all South Africans. It vindicates those in the New Left who had argued for a democratic socialism and an open communication system. The East European collapse demonstrates the disaster of closed communication. The Soviets tried to curtail the information flow within society and, in consequence, 'socialism' paid a heavy price.

The challenge for the South African Left is to steer South Africa into the 'Information Age' (ie. avoid the COMECON disaster). However, it needs to do so without becoming a dependency of MNC, and/or facilitating the reproduction within South Africa of exploitative relations of production. In short, history may have given to the South African Left an opportunity to demonstrate that democratic socialism and an advanced economy based upon electronic-information technology are not only compatible but are complementary. This would be a vindication of the Habermasian and Enzensbergian theses.

The New Information Age

The 'information society' is the outcome of the impact of information technology on economic and human relationships within MNC, described by, amongst others, Bell[48], Porat[49] and Beniger [50]. A shift in

the mode of production has taken place: a growing proportion of human labour is now occupied in a 'service economy' which is concerned with moving 'information' around. The resultant (MNC) 'superstructural' mode of production (geared towards information-processing rather than manufacturing) is no less governed by the exploitative relations of production associated with capitalism.

As David Birch of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has said of Americans: "We are working ourselves out of the manu-facturing business and into the thinking business" [51]. To a considerable extent the Thatcher revolution in Britain represented an economic shift from 'industry' to 'information' (in part seen as a shift in labour from manufacturing in northern Britain to information in south east Britain). So the 'superstructural age' is one in which the First World sits astride a world-wide information-network which (superstructurally) links the world in a way which effectively places the (First World-based) MNCs in control of the industrial-complexes which are increasingly found in the Third World. In the First World it is the petit-bourgeois sector which is growing, while the percentage of workers declines. This has serious implications for a workerist-oriented Marxism. Part of the explanation of the collapse of the Marxism dream was that most historical materialists did not adjust to these shifts in MNC quickly enough.

South Africa sits in a curious position. Like other Third World countries, it experiences an expanding industrial sector and hence a growing working class. On the other hand, South Africa represents an important sub-metropole of MNC, and has been integrated into the wider information society, as a junior partner of the First World metropoles[52]. In a post-apartheid era the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal (PWV) Triangle megalopolis will increasingly become the key organizational metropole for Africa. This will increase the rate at which South Africa is integrated into the world-wide Information Age. And as South Africa is increasingly pulled into the 'superstructural age', so the crisis faced by historical materialism will become increasingly apparent. The South African Left will find itself pulled in two directions simultaneously. The workerists will pull in one direction (and will be able to call upon the support of a considerable working class constituency), while the New Left will pull in another direction.

The 'Information Age' poses a serious 'superstructural challenge' to historical materialism, which cannot be ignored by the South

African left. To date this 'superstructural challenge' has not been particularly well met.

Turning to the superstructures poses a number of questions. For example, when CCS approaches the superstructures, should any aspect of the (1) 'orthodox 'base-superstructure' approach be utilized? Or should the (2) 'totality approach' (eg. the Frankfurt School, Gramsci, Volosinov, etc) be privileged? Alternatively, some might argue that a (3) (structuralist) 'discourse approach' (Althusserian/post-Althusserian) is the key. Certain post-modernists (such as Derrida) would argue that leftists serious about coming to terms with the contemporary conditions would have to abandon 'structuralisms', like historical materialism, completely. In its place would be put a (4) (leftist) post-structural discourse-based deconstruction of the postmodern era.

Perhaps it is Enzensberger (drawing on the Frankfurt School's Benjamin) who best expresses the challenge to the Left in the superstructural age. Developments in electronic-information technology should be seen as opportunities for a leftist social transformation[53]. As with Habermas, Enzensberger recognized the potential modern information technology holds for (socialist) human liberation. It is a liberation that differs from that sketched out by Marx himself because it is based upon a different mode of production (ie. 'information' rather than 'heavy industry'). The information age does not have to be imprisoned within MNC relations of production. Marx wished to 'socialize' and 'humanize' the heavy industry relations of production of Victorian capitalism. The challenge for today's Left is to transcend the 19th Century Marxist vision (and the Leninist 20th Century vision), and to 'rework' the 'socialist' spirit into a form appropriate for the 21st-Century. This would present the contemporary Left with the challenge of coming to terms with the superstructures, so as to attempt to 'socialize' and 'humanize' the MNC-Information Age' relations of production. The technology created by MNC gives us the possibility, as Habermas has noted, of a full participative democracy (based upon an electronic 'public sphere'). Further, the technology of the Information Age contains the potential for building a producer's democracy based upon (both white and blue collar) workers who have considerable individual autonomy. Meeting the superstructural challenge in this way might also assist in the formulation of a leftist challenge to the post-modern condition and the contemporary swing to the Right. The above view of socialism points

to the possibility of even moving away from central planning (whether of the 'capitalist'/MNC or 'state socialist' varieties), towards a producer's-controlled 'socialist market'. MNC has created the possibilities for such a socialist democracy.

Any notion that the South African Left should not concern itself with such 'First (or Northern) World' issues — ie. a democracy constructed upon the latest (information) technology — does a great disservice to South Africans. In fact, it is patronizing, since it implies that South Africans are not up to joining the 'modern' ('Northern') world, and should be kept in a state of 'Third (Southern) World' lesser-developedness.

The Post-Modern Era

In identifying the post-modern condition, Lyotard identified one of the most serious contemporary changes to socialism. The dramatic loss of influence over intellectuals (especially European intellectuals), particularly during the 1970's, significantly reduced the capacity of the Left to wage an effective struggle for hegemony in both the First and Second Worlds. Lyotard described how, since the Second World War, the 'structuralist' knowledges — which had come to dominate academic discourses since the end of the 19th Century (what he refers to as 'grand narratives') — have been in decline[54]. 'Truth', 'rationality' and 'reality' are discredited — all concepts central to the Marxist dream. The Enlightenment project (which Habermas argues Marxism takes to its limits) is abandoned. In its place are the pragmatics of capitalist 'performance', or as Lyotard says, the new goal for post-modern knowledge ('language games') is "no longer truth but performativity"[55]. Post-modernists delight in the deconstruction of grand narratives which are seen to be 'totalitarian' or 'fascist'. These are then replaced by a proliferation (anarchy?) of micro-narratives — a sort of *laissez faire* of knowledge.

It is somewhat ironic that it was a communist — Louis Althusser — who helped to give impetus, during the 1970's, to the shift within academe away from historical materialism, and towards post-modernism. It was Althusser's sophisticated attempts to deal with the crisis of Marxism — and to theorise the French Communist Party's shift away from Stalinism towards Eurocommunism — which inadvertently gave significant impetus to the deconstruction of Marxist-structuralism and hence to the subsequent rise of post-structuralism.

Post-modernism is not a purely theoretical issue. MNC requires an open world economic system; a free interplay of resources within one unified market; a *laissez faire* approach. It is not coincidental that the unstructuredness of the post-modernist 'pure difference' reflects academic 'power relationships' that neatly match the anarchy of the market within MNC power relationships. In South Africa one sees a further parallel in the way that, just as South Africa is a peripheral sub-metropole of MNC, so too has post modernist thinking entered South African academe in a way that matches this peripheral sub-metropole status. So, from a CCS perspective, it would seem that the post- modernists are not as 'unstructured' by their context as they might like to think; and their anarchistic approach is beneficial to MNC by its very weakening of any coherent world view which could challenge MNC. The anti-rationalism of post-modernist knowledge matches the anti-rationalism of MNC relations of production.

South Africa cannot be divorced from the 'post-modern condition'. Post-modernism — as a symptom of the crisis of the structuralisms (in both its monopoly capitalist and Marxist forms) — may be of more immediate concern to those at the core of the MNC world hegemony (in Europe or America), where the crisis is currently most acute. However, for the South African Left the crisis of historical materialism cannot be relegated to a 'First World issue'.

South Africa may be a peripheral player in the post-modern world, but it seems set to be a central player in the Leftist world of the 1990's. If the Left (including the South African left) is to find solutions to the leftist theoretical/methodological malaise (in the First World, Second World, and — since we are not an island, by extension — the Third World), some engagement with post-structuralism and the 'discourse' approach will be called for. The most logical point of entry into this discourse for the Left would be the point of intersection between historical materialist-structuralism and post-structuralism — ie. the Althusserian turn towards discourse. CCS's flirtation with Althusserianism and post-Althusserianism becomes valuable as a point of entry for dealing with the crisis of structural- Marxism, and by extension, with post-modernism and the post-structural challenge to Marxism. This creates, for a South African-based CCS, the fascinating opportunity of examining the Althusserian and post-Althusserian approaches within a peripheral post-modernist context like South Africa.

But if the post-modern era is one that has seen the serious

weakening of grand narratives upon which the Left has relied, the post-modern era has also created superstructural 'gaps' available for exploitation by the Left. Enzensberger identified these (super-structural) 'gaps' as the contradictions of this stage of capitalism. MNC has produced photocopiers, Personal Computers, computer networking, satellites, videos, etc. These have all become central to the functioning of MNC. But they also constitute spaces for creatively challenging the system. An example would be sections of the South African alternative press (like the *Weekly Mail*) which have used both Personal Computers/desk-top publishing technology, together with a space opened up by the new *laissez faire* market.

Quo Vadis?

The contemporary challenge for the Left is to develop a coherent response to the Information Age and post-modern condition. This is no less a challenge for the South African left.

In the Information Age, media and communication policy is potentially pivotal in hegemony building and development in a post-apartheid South Africa. The kind of communication system that develops during the initial reconstructive phase will have a profound impact on the nature of the emergent social order.

South Africa needs to be fully integrated into the global electronic grid of information. But what is to be avoided is integration into the network as a 'Third (South) World' MNC dependency where South Africans would be incorporated merely as uncritical 'takers' from a neocolonial system. A serious challenge for the Left is to demonstrate that being part of the Information Age does not necessarily mean accepting the top-down and alienating relations of production associated with MNC. A left-democratic alternative mode of Information-Age social organisation can be built.

In the South African context, a leftist hegemony needs to work 'participation', 'development' and 'media/communication' into a single Programme for building a post-apartheid society with democratic (and more equally distributed) power relationships [56]. The challenge is not merely that of benefitting from the latest socio-technological developments derivative of the Information Age, but also potentially enhancing democracy in South Africa by creatively using the latest media technology. The challenge is to grasp the opportunities offered by the flux of the post-apartheid reconstruction of society to demonstrate that a left-popular democracy can be built by co-opting

CRITICAL ARTS

the media technologies developed by MNC. The South African left, because of its ascendancy in the 1990's, may be granted the historical opportunity to demonstrate that a practical leftist alternative does exist to both MNC and Marxist-Leninist vanguardism.

Notes and References

1. The terms *Left* and *Right* date back to France's Estates-General just prior to the French Revolution. At this time those supporting the King and the traditional social order sat on the right of the Assembly, while opponents sat on the left. From this has derived the definition that "those on the 'left' wish to change things in the direction of more equality and less tradition than those on the right" (Robertson, 1985:181). At the time of the 1990 Reforms, the South African *Left* included the African National Congress (ANC), Pan African Congress (PAC), South African Communist Party (SACP), Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), United Democratic Front (UDF)/Mass Democratic Movement (MDM), Azanian Peoples Organisation (AZAPO), National Congress of Trade Unions (NACTU), Workers Organization of South Africa (WOSA), the New Unity Movement (NEUM), Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (IDASA) and Five Freedoms Forum (FFF). The South African *Right* included the Tricameral system parties: the National Party (NP), Conservative Party (CP), Democratic Party (DP), Labour Party, Solidarity, National Peoples Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party. The Far Right would include: Afrikaner Weerstand Beweging (AWB) and Herstigte Nasionale Party (HNP). In 1990 the two largest actors were the ANC and NP: the ANC representing a centre-left position and the NP representing a centre-right position. In the course of moving towards a one-person-one-vote political system the above categorisation will undergo a series of modifications.

2. Tomaselli, K.G., Tomaselli, R., Louw, P.E. and Chetty, A.: *"Community and Class Struggle: Problems in Methodology."* **Journal of Communication Inquiry**, Vol 12, No 1, 1988, pp. 11-25.

3. Stuart Hall (Director of the Centre for Cultural Studies or the Birmingham School from 1968 to 1979) described this as his central concern during the formative years of the Birmingham School (telephone discussion, 20 September 1989, London).

4. Kuhn, T.S.: **The Structure of Scientific Revolutions**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

5. Kolakowski, L.: **Main Currents of Marxism, Vol 1**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

6. Robertson, D.: **A Dictionary of Modern Politics**. London: Europa Publications, 1985, p. 181.

7. Habermas, J.: *"What Does Socialism Mean Today?"* **New Left Review**, No 183, 1990.

8. Habermas, J. 1990, *op cit.*

9. CCS is only one of many 'groups' that can be associated with the *'New Left'* (a largely West European and North American phenomenon, being perhaps most characteristically associated with the 1968 French Uprising). The term 'New Left' has, since the 1960s, been claimed by a variety of groups who have been associated with the following sort of positions: (1) New Leftists have opposed the East European state-socialist model. But (2) they simultaneously oppose the capitalist world-order, and (3) want to see this capitalist world-order overthrown by (4) organised revolutionary groups. (5) the (orthodox Marxist) view that one has to 'wait' for the 'right conditions' to launch a revolution is specifically rejected. (6) The Third World is seen to offer especially favourable conditions for revolutionary action, and national liberation struggles have been enthusiastically supported. (7) The working class is no longer a reliable revolutionary actor because the capitalist ruling classes have learned to co-opt and 'de-revolutionize' workers. Kolakowski (1981, Vol 3, p. 492) has called this phenomenon a 'universalization' of 'Marxist ideology' and has suggested that it represents the 'disintegration' of Marxism.

10. Habermas, 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 11-12.

11. Hall, S., Hobson, D., and Willis, P.: **Culture, Media, Language**. London: Hutchinson, 1980.

12. Richard Johnson in Punter, D.: **Introduction to Contemporary Cultural Studies**. London: Longman, 1986, pp. 277.

13. Tomaselli, K.G.: **Contemporary Cultural Studies and the Unit of the University of Natal**. CCSU Seminar Paper, Vol 1 No 5, 1985; Tomaselli, K.G.: "A Contested Terrain". Inaugural Lecture. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1986; Muller, J. and Tomaselli, K.G.: "Becoming Appropriately Modern: Towards a Genealogy of Cultural Studies in South Africa". In Mouton, J. and Joubert, J. (eds.): **Knowledge and Method**. Pretoria: HSRC, 1989; and EKUS: **Program vir Eietydse Kultuurstudie/Contemporary Cultural Studies Programme**. Pretoria: HSRC, 1989.

14. A rough categorisation of what constituted the *'South African Left'* in 1990 is given in Footnote 1. For a discussion of the way in which the South African Left came to encompass such a *broad spectrum* of players see Louw, P.E.: *"Rejoinder to 'Opposing Apartheid': Building a South African Democracy Through an Alliance Which Includes Leninists,"* **Theoria**, Vol 33, 1989. Exactly which players will constitute Left and Right in the future is difficult to predict. A shake-down of political players, set in motion by the February 1990 Reforms, is already underway.

15. The terms *'First World', 'Second World'*, and *'Third World'* originated with Claude Bourdet, for whom the First World represented capitalism, the Second World represented Stalinist Communism, and the Third World represented a 'third way'. For Bourdet the 1950s and 1960s anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia and the New Left shared this 'third way' approach. The *rapprochement* between the former First and Second Worlds has now created a new world 'cleavage', namely 'North' and 'South' Worlds.

16. See editorials in **Work in Progress** *(WIP)* No 69, 1990; and **WIP** No 70/71, 1990.

17. Beaufre, A.: **An Introduction to Strategy**. London: Faber, 1965.

18. It is possible that the reformed-NP may not be merely cynically 'co-opting' UDF/ANC discourse, but may rather be shifting its political position towards the Left in order to facilitate an ANC-NP ruling alliance after the first one-person-one-vote elections.

19. See Punter, *op. cit.*, Chapters 3 and 14.

20. Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C.: **Hegemony and Socialist Strategy**. London: Verso, 1985.

21. Habermas, 1990, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

22. Habermas, J.: **Communication and the Evolution of Society**. London: Heinemann, 1979.

23. Habermas, J.: *"The Public Sphere."* **The New German Critique**, Fall, 1974.

24. Habermas, J. 1979, *op. cit.*

25. Enzensberger, H.M.: **The Consciousness Industry**. New York: Seabury Press, 1974.

26. Mattelart, A. and Siegelaub, S.: **Communication and Class Struggle. Vol 2: Liberation, Socialism**. New York, International General, 1983, pp. 356-376.

27. Mattelart, A.: **Communicating in Popular Nicaragua**. New York, International General, 1986.

28. Louw, P.E.: *"The Emergence of a Progressive-Alternative Genre of Media Practice in South Africa with Specific Reference to Grassroots"*, **Communicatio**, Vol 15 No 2, 1989; Johnson, S.: "Resistance in Print I: Grassroots". In Tomaselli, K.G. and Louw, P.E. (eds.): **The Alternative Press in South Africa**. Anthropos, Bellville, 1991.

29. This figure incorporates the weekly sales of: **New Nation, UmAfrika, Weekly Mail, Vrye Weekblad, South**, and **New African**.

30. Tomaselli, K.G. 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 14

31. See Masilela, N.: *"Establishing an Intellectual Bridgehead"*. In Tomaselli, K.G. (ed.) **Rethinking Culture**. Bellville: Anthropos, 1988. p. 1; and
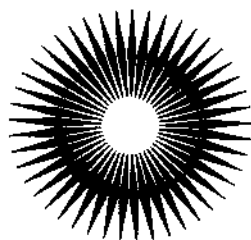
Sitas, A.: *"Culture and Production: The Contradictions of Working Class Theatre in South Africa,"* **Africa Perspective**, Vols 1/2 (New Series), 1984, pp.2-3.

32. Muller, J. and Tomaselli, K.G. 1989, *op. cit.*

33. Houtondji, P.J.: **African Philosophy: Myth and Reality**. London: Hutchinson, 1983.

34. Jordan, P.: *"The Crisis of Consciousness in the SACP,"* **Transformation**, No 11, 1990.

35. Jay, M.: **Marxism and Totality**. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984.

36. The term *'post-Athusserian'* refers to the way in which Althusser's ideas impacted upon an intellectual debate that was much *wider* than Althusserians or even leftists. Althusser's work represented a highly imaginative attempt in the 1970s by a Marxist to deal with the methodological crisis of Marxism. But his 'solution' to this crisis proved to be no solution at all. In fact, his work seems to have accelerated the collapse of the Marxist dream (Anderson, 1983, Chapter 2). But if Althusser failed to 'save' Marxism, he unintentionally enriched the debate about 'discourse'. This debate opened up a new way of understanding academic discourse. Althusser pushed a conceptual door ajar. In the process he helped give rise to a 'scientific revolution' (Kuhn, 1974). Once open, there was no stopping those who wanted to explore this new conceptual territory.

37. See Sayer, D.: **Marx's Method.Ideology,Science and Critique in Capital**. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979.

38. See Louw, P.E. 1989: *"Information Design and Community Media — the Case of the South African Anti-Apartheid Print Media"*. Paper presented at Information Design Conference, Bath, September.

39. Pinnock, D.: *"Popularise, Organise, Educate and Mobilise: Culture and Communication in the 1980s"*. In Tomaselli, K.G. and Louw, P.E. 1991: **The Alternative Press in South Africa**. Bellville: Anthropos, Chapter 6.

40. Criticos, C.: *"Group Media: a Creative Response to Censorship"*. **Group Media Journal**, Vol VIII, No 1, 1989; and Mackay, A. & Louw, P.E. 1990, *op. cit.*

41. Karlsson, J.: *"Resource Centre offers Alternative Information and Media Services."* **Group Media Journal**, Vol VIII, No 1, 1989.

42. Lenin, V.I.: **Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism**. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975, pp. 101-114.

43. Bernstein, E.: **Evolutionary Socialism**. New York: Schocken, 1961.

44. Marxism might have evolved in many directions. Lenin's interpretation (arising out of the Russian context) steered Marxism into a championing of the weakest and most disadvantaged sectors of world labour.

Championing the weak meant the USSR was dragged into an arms race with MNC which ultimately so damaged its experimental socialist economy that it was a major factor in precipitating the collapse of Second World Marxism. On the other hand, it is this very championing of the weakest and most disadvantaged sectors of MNC that has created such an immense credibility for Marxism in so much of the Third World. The contemporary support 'Marxism' enjoys in South Africa is one example of the 'opportunity' created by the Leninist interpretation. So whereas Marx expected socialist revolutions to take place in the most developed nations, Marxist-Leninism ironically generates inspiration in the least developed areas instead.

45. See Bahro, R.: **The Alternative in Eastern Europe**. London: Verso, 1981, Chapter 9.

46. Enzensberger, *op. cit.*

47. Gorbachev, M.S.: **Perestroika - New Thinking for Our Country and the World**. London: Fontana, 1988, pp.47-48

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50. Beniger, J.R.: **The Control Revolution: Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society**. Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press, 1986.

51. In Naisbitt, J.: **Megatrends**. London: MacDonald, 1984, p. 17.

52. See, for example, Kaplan, D.: **The Crossed Line: The South African Telecommunications Industry in Transition**. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand Press, 1990.

53. See Enzensberger, *op. cit.*

54. Lyotard, J.F.: **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, pp. 37-38.

55. Ibid. p. 46.

56. A proposal for such a programme has be proposed in Louw, P.E.: *"Media, Media Education and the Development of South Africa."* Screen, Vol 32, No 4, 1991, pp. 388-399.

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