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South Africa: The Dynamics of a Beleaguered State

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An Overview: Theoretical and Historical

Hardly any state in Africa has been a subject of so many theses as the South African one. Yet, we are not any wiser for it. Could it be, as some wit or nitwit (*niet weer*) has surmised, it is so full of nonsense that it beats the best minds. South African rulers often reply that "you have to be a South African to understand the reality of our country". Barely, anybody would deny that authenticity is the ultimate test for truth. However, the only rub is that those who so speak scarcely remember that authentic subjects are never formed but in contradiction i.e. in any given situation there is more than one truth.

Thus, interacting subjects mutually create one another, whether in the positive or in the negative sense. In other words, it is in the nature of ideological affirmations to be collective as well as exclusive or inward-looking. For instance, the South Africa of the Afrikaners is not the South Africa of so many other collectivities in the country. Even "our country" is not as self-evident as it sounds. In this context "reality" often turns out to be so many rationalisations or excuses for things which could be understood otherwise. Vested interests is what comes to mind immediately. This is not to say that symbols are less important than what they stand for. On the contrary, they are the means for predicating the necessary link between objects and subjects.

This as it may; it so happens that symbols, like the subjects who manipulate them, operate at more than one level. The symbols which are used for deciphering universal history need not be the same as those which are used for deciphering local history. By now everyone is familiar with the distinction between "universal" language and "vernacular", especially in colonial countries. In the context of domination, universal languages are a supreme instrument for indoctrination and in the context of liberation "vernacular" languages are a powerful instrument for self-assertion and self-rediscovery. Every politician or cadre knows this. In their moment of triumph when Afrikaans became an official language in South Africa, the Afrikaners boasted as if to convince themselves: "*Die taaltjie is nou 'n taal*" (*The little language*

is now a language). As is known, this is not the way universal languages are made. Think of Latin during the feudal period in Europe, French during the rise of the bourgeoisie or capitalism, and English during the colonial and imperialist epoch. The truth of the matter is that Afrikaans is a vernacular which serves distinctly parochial interests. Therefore, the apparent or actual political hegemony of the Afrikaners over a wider social formation with universal dimensions is an anomaly and the basic cause of their social and political dilemma. "Upon this rock I shall build my Church". It is a question whether St. Peter was a founding hero or simply a trickster.

For the time being, seeing that we all exhibit the same ambiguity and pretension either as organic or synthetic intellectuals, it is important to clarify the status of our texts or syntaxes. It is more or less acknowledged now that scientific languages like ordinary languages are capable of universalism as well as its antinomies. It was only yesterday when structural-functionalism and behavioralism were parading as universal theories. It took a specifically Latin-American paradigm, the *dependencia* "theory", to shatter that illusion. In the wake of these developments one has heard repeated calls for the indigenisation of the social sciences. While this is perfectly consistent and generally acceptable, it is clear that the left and the right in the affected regions are not agreed on the terms of reference. Nor is this simply a matter of theory. It is also a matter of political choices which are strongly contested among classes and within classes. The latter is particularly relevant to us with regard to the petit-bourgeoisie in Africa — a category which is crucial in our discourse and will receive fuller treatment later.

The relationship between theory and political choice or ideology is particularly intractable in the social sciences. This is so much so that the more reflective among social scientists have come to the inevitable conclusion that, methodologically, the social sciences are *incorrigible* i.e. they cannot be rid of their subjective or ideological component (the implicit comparison with the other sciences need not concern us here). This raises questions regarding distinction between universalism and "indigenism" (a vulgarism which does not appear even in the most low-brow English dictionary and, thus, we are left with the ideologically-loaded term, "parochialism", which was so beloved of the "modernisation" theorists). This is directly related to the problem of authenticity in theoretical representations.

Since the beginning of the 1970s there has been a noticeable trend towards Marxist theory among African social scientists (and others). This has been most striking among the political scientists in Africa. Whether this is reflective of the pliability of their relatively young discipline, the resurrection of political economy under the impact of the *dependencia* school, or of the primacy of political issues in the continent at this historical juncture is

something which is very difficult to disentangle. This notwithstanding, what is germane to our exploration is the fact that Marxism has universalistic pretensions and yet is founded on European history at a particular juncture. Slogans about "Marxism-Leninism", appealing as they are, cannot be offered as an epistemological explanation. If Marxism is a universal scientific theory, how does it overcome its own syntactical as well as semantic limitations? In other words, methodologically, how does it relate to vernacular languages, understood in the analytical, political sense? Deep down, this might be the problem of every contemporary Marxist but some, out of dogmatism or intellectual opportunism, pretend otherwise.

For South African organic intellectuals, the problem is even worse. It is *known*, but not often acknowledged out of political expediency, that the beginnings of Marxist theory and socialist politics in South Africa were a result of a total transplant of the twenty-one points laid down by the Third International or Comintern for fraternal organisations everywhere in the world. But in fact Lenin and his party had designed these specially for the leadership of the socialist movement in capitalist Europe, where schooled Marxists and an experienced working-class existed. In contrast, in South Africa there was a dearth of both the Marxist tradition and working-class politics. Neither the Jewish Bund nor the International League, which were the precursors of the Communist Party of South Africa, could be looked upon as authentic local representatives. Not only did they look upon the African workers in the mines as "semi-savage" but also reflected none of the great debates in Russia concerning the future of the peasant commune, as against what happened in Western Europe. The same short-comings persisted after the foundation of the Communist Party of South Africa, as is evidenced by events during the 1922 miners' strike where some members of the CPSA went so far as to join white vigilantes to quell the "Black manace".

Apologists see such recollections as an ill wind that blows nobody good. Naturally, if wishes were horses, we would all ride. These things are still very much with us. It would be idle to suppose that South African revolutionaries have lived down the problem of the relationship between universal and vernacular language. After the First World War the African migrant workers in the mines were as "uncouth" as they are today. More importantly, they spoke a different language, as they still do, from that prescribed by the Third or even the Fourth International. The European immigrant workers and intellectuals were more than presumptuous in supposing that they were the natural or authentic interlocutors in the situation. As has been remarked, they were neither up to date with Marxist debates in Europe nor adept in African political vernacular. Their imported notions of "tribal economy", "communal land tenure", "feudal landlords" and "peasants" were like semantic categories abstracted from another language. This resulted in two

critical developments. First, the CPSA became ever so dependent, theoretically, on its Third International mentors, as is shown by the frequent visits of its leaders to Moscow for consultations and *instructions* which are still evident in all its programmes. Second, being unable to reach the "semi-tribal" black workers, it turned to the black petit-bourgeoisie who predominated in the African National Congress. The CPSA should have known from the beginning that this was the only class among the blacks in South Africa who comprehended both the vernacular and the universal language. They were the *natural* and *authentic* interlocutors. "No one shall enter the Kingdom of God but through me." This was and still is, as will be shown later.

These observations often provoke resentment or even hostility among South Africans. Yet, the lines of cleavage are not absolute. But our interest in raising the question at all here is the ambiguity of the relationship between black and white in South Africa. One of the theses of the South African Communist Party is that South Africa is an example of "internal colonialism by whites over blacks". This applies *pari passu* to the white immigrant mine workers at the beginning of the century and the CPSA in the 'twenties'. Both groups wanted not only to impose on the black workers their imported language but also reserved the right to "guide" them. Leo Marquard, a well-known South African liberal, espoused the same theory and advocated "white leadership with justice". Paradoxically enough, it is the Afrikaners, the acknowledged perpetrators of white colonialism in South Africa, who have no universal language to impose on the blacks and offer them no guidance to their green pastures. Instead, they fight in a *vernacular* language to exclude Africans from a white (bourgeois) civilisation they themselves have never known since they disappeared into the Karroo in the middle of the 19th century. Thus, the class content of the struggle of the Afrikaners might not be different from that of the black nationalists.

The idea of internal white colonialism in South Africa detracts from class-analysis and might obscure the supreme importance of imperialism in contemporary Africa. However, if it is to be used, there can be no exceptions to it. But it would be more opposite not to reduce different forms and phases of racism into one fixed category. Colonialism is a historically determined mode of political and economic domination. Its method of extraction of economic value is basically extra-economic. This definitely does not fit South Africa where capitalism has long entered its imperialist or monopoly stage. South Africa does not thrive by exchange value but rather by *surplus-value*. This implies a definite social relationship between black labour and white capital, which is not affected by any colonial anachronism in the South African society. Otherwise, the colonial thesis commits its advocates irrevocably to "surrender unto Caesar that which belongs to Caesar" i.e. to the indigenous population, as was the case in the rest of Africa. This makes

nonsense of any claims about "our country" by groups other than Africans; not even just blacks.

From here, we could only get caught up in the morass of racial classification and pedigree, which is the precise ideological recipe of the South African government. Needless to say, this is being fought fiercely by black South Africans and a small white minority. It is also tempting to latch on to this and to start talking glibly about "black or African nationalism". First of all, the concept of "black" has changed significantly in South Africa. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s the social divisions between Africans, Coloureds and Asians more or less held, except among some petit-bourgeois intellectuals who belonged to the various liberation movements, from the 1970s onwards, starting with the youth movement which culminated in the Soweto uprising, the amalgamation of non-white trade unions, the rise of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the rejection of the second chamber for Coloureds and Asians in the South African parliament, such divisions have been irreversibly shattered. In the current vernacular terms such as "Coloureds", "Asians" have been expunged. People refer to themselves as "blacks". But, noticeably, "black" is not yet used interchangeably with "African", except by those blacks who have always called themselves "Africans". Does this signify anything important or is it merely a passing phase? This brings us directly to the national question in South Africa.

The National Question

Classical theories about what a nation is can be taken as having been read and derived from particular universal languages which are quickly getting antiquated. For instance, different waves of South Africans have occupied the same territory for up to 500 years, the latest immigrants being the British and Indians who arrived about 150 years ago. They do not have a common language but, instead, have five major languages in common and all of them are spoken simultaneously to varying degrees. This phenomenon is most marked in the urban areas and is independent of formal education. This means that even with increasing urbanisation and industrialisation South Africa cannot hope to dispense with a plurality of languages. Boundaries between linguistic categories in South Africa have always been more fluid than boundaries between racial groups which were enforced by law. The attempt to segregate people according to linguistic category in the urban areas has failed patently, as is illustrated by the rise of integrated popular movements in the last decade.

The Bantustan policy might have succeeded partially in isolating people from one another, as is evinced by the formation of tribal organisations such as the *Inkatha*. However, there is no evidence that this affected the language situation. If anything, the opposition from the youth to Chief Gat-

sha Buthelezi and his *Inkatha* cuts across language categories. In addition, it is well to remember that the Bantustans could not have overcome the problem of linguistic confluence in South Africa. For instance, the people in the Transkei and the Ciskei speak the same language, Xhosa, as well as English. The knowledge of Afrikaans is also fairly widespread. The northern Bantustans have in common Northern Sotho, English and Afrikaans. Basotho Qwa Qwa has in common Southern Sotho with Lesotho and the bordering parts of the Transkei. Likewise, it shares Xhosa with the Transkei and, finally, English with all its neighbours. If language is the medium for cultural representations, then linguistic promiscuity in South Africa is no doubt felicitous. Different cultural codes are understood and, though not used all the time, are invoked in the right circumstances.

Culturally, the difference between a penis-sheath and a pair of trousers might seem dramatic and yet migrant miners have for years moved from one to the other with perfect ease. Likewise, in the age of "Native" or "Bantu" commissioners in South Africa witnessed whites engage in traditional ceremonies with full African regalia befitting their status as "supreme chief of the Natives". Whereas in the 19th century there was hardly any difference in mode of production, dietary habits and beliefs in witchcraft and diviners between Africans and Afrikaners on the highveld, in the 20th century cultural differences between middle-class English-speakers and missionary-trained African petit-bourgeois elites was only a matter of degree. Of course, the statutory prohibition on mixed marriages was the major barrier. Among African peoples where such prohibitions did not exist, intermarriage, especially in the urban areas, has led to a veritable cultural fusion, a vibrant complex. Tribal stereotypes exist, but they are no more than the joking relationships encountered by the ethnographer of Rooiyard in Johannesburg in the 1940s or the stereotypes about the Irish and the Scots in the United Kingdom. The so-called tribal faction-fights in the mines especially are more a result of the ghetto mentality fostered by the South African government and the mine-owners than a reflection of deep-seated tribal antagonisms. Otherwise, it is not unusual for certain groups to be used as scape-goats under conditions of severe competition. The inevitable conclusion we reach in this analysis is that in South Africa there is a dynamic, cultural *melange* which is completely at variance with the Government's apartheid policy.

Consequently, one is puzzled and at the same time embarrassed to acknowledge the fact that the position of the South African Communist Party on the question of "nationalities", though inspired by a liberatory ideology, coincides with that of the government on Bantustans. Fortunately, one does not have to strain to establish this point because the Communist Party has more publications on this issue than any other political organisation in South Africa. From its inception the Communist Party has been guided by Stalin's

thesis on the right of nations to self-determination and the recommendations of the Third International/Comintern to fraternal organisations. As was observed earlier, both these represented universal texts which had to be translated into the vernacular. The slogan recommended for South Africa in the 1920s was a "Native Republic", which was to fight for the overthrow of British and Afrikaner imperialism and for the restoration of lost territory to the natives. As a further development, in 1932 the Comintern advised that the concept be made more explicit by including *inter alia* the following slogans: "Drive out the imperialist. Complete and immediate national independence for the people of South Africa. For the right of the Zulu, Basuto, etc., nations to form their own independent republics. For the voluntary uniting of the African nations in a Federation of Independent Native Republics". (Cf Botha's "constellation of independent nations" in South Africa).

The Communist Party of South Africa still abides by the same principles, as is witnessed by its programme: "Communists recognise the right of all peoples and national groups to self-determination. They respect the languages and progressive traditions of all African peoples, and their right to independent development of their culture". These are noble principles. But to whom do they refer? The Sotho, the Xhosa, the Zulu, the Coloureds and, perhaps, the Indians whom the programme describes merely as a "community"? All this received wisdom violates the empirical history of South Africa which is being made right in front of our eyes by the people themselves. One can even hazard the prediction that in another few years nobody will want to be called "Coloured" in South Africa. Even if some old diehards wished it, how could the so-called Coloureds, who have never had an independent territory, language and culture, be cast in the frame of a nation? They have always been South Africans, if underprivileged like all other blacks (or is it browns?).

Another way of judging the same issue would be to look at the rise of national organisations and their self-identification. What we have seen since 1912 is Africans projecting themselves as "Africans" and not as representatives of separate "nationalities" or "national groups". Chosen names such as the African National Congress, the All African Convention, the African Youth League, the Society of Young Africa, the Cape African Teachers' Association and the Pan-Africanist Congress emphasize this self-perception. Not only that, they also epitomise an aspiration for a transcendent nationhood. This is what has been referred to as African nationalism. *Prima facie* there is nothing peculiar about it. It occurred everywhere in colonial Africa. The aim was to overthrow an alien power. It was not until Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) that certain ambiguities began to creep in. There the objective of the struggle was to overthrow a "white minority regime". This gave

significance to the principle of "majority-rule" but not necessarily to the principle of "independence", as was the case in the rest of Africa. Had not Rhodesia in the meantime achieved "independence" from Britain? It would have been bad propaganda for the African liberation movement to admit so. All the same, the Zimbabwean freedom-fighters were as preoccupied with the "white settler government" as they were with the "white minority regime". Did this make black nationalists of them? That is a question they can answer themselves.

Of relevance to us is the fact that these ambiguities have plagued the South African struggle. As has been shown, there is no doubt that the Africans in South Africa are, and have always been since the turn of the century, committed to African nationalism and to one African nationhood. In that respect all the national movements are violently opposed to the policy of Bantustans and uphold the integrity of the South African state — not government. The concept of "independence", unlike elsewhere in Africa, does not feature in their political repertoire. Instead, they call for a "non-racial democracy". Is this a tacit acknowledgement of the fact that South Africa is already an independent country? This is one of the instances where the theory of internal "colonialism" runs into difficulties. The acceptance of an existing state and the demand for a "national democracy" which includes the supposed white "colonialists" is a contradiction in terms. Imperialists and colonialists are worth driving out, as the Comintern had recommended in the 1930s. It has proved hard enough in independent Zimbabwe to reconcile the interests of the black majority with those of the white settlers. How much more with the white "colonialists" in South Africa, if that is what they are?

It has been argued by the followers of SACP in the pages of the *African Communist* that: "The great disadvantage of the one-nation thesis is . . . that it obscures the colonial nature of our society and in consequence the national character of our liberation struggle. It is this flaw that the two nations thesis is deliberately designed to counter . . . This holds essentially that South Africa is a colonial situation of a special type in which two nations, an oppressing nation and an oppressed nation, live side by side within the same territory". This formulation is certainly unsatisfactory. First, the "colonial nature" of a society is determined by particular political and economic relations, the most critical being domination of pre-capitalist formations by a capitalist one and extraction of value by largely extra-economic means. Not only has South Africa long passed that stage but that, historically, it was not peculiar to her. Nor was it contingent on racial oppression. Both the United States and Australia (and the Cape as is shown by the Great Trek) were *white* colonies of Britain and suffered the same ravages as everybody else (the brutalisation of the British ex-convicts in Australia was particularly bad and carried out by British settlers). It might be then what is peculiar

about South Africa and former Rhodesia is *racial oppression* in an age of modern capitalism or imperialism.

It was remarked earlier that all South Africans, irrespective of tribal origin or physical appearance, are being drawn towards one another, especially in the urban areas. The driving force behind all this is undoubtedly the development of commodity and labour relations under capitalism. What has militated against fuller integration is racial oppression and segregation — in a word, *apartheid*. Apartheid created group feelings on either side of the colour-line. This is what it was meant to do for the whites. But dynamically, as resentment and frustration mounted among the non-whites, it fostered an increasing sense of solidarity among them. For a while the government succeeded in keeping it down by practising territorial segregation among the various groups even in the urban areas. As is shown by the current upheavals in almost all the South African towns, that ploy has lost its ideological efficacy. Under conditions of a continued crisis it is beginning to wear thin among the whites as well. Emerging class differences among them, as will be argued in the next section, are calling for new forms of rationalisation i.e. new ideological projections. In contrast, the blacks who had been kept within narrow confines by the apartheid policy have experienced less class differentiation and their aspirant petit-bourgeoisie has not been able to graduate out of the struggle.

Acknowledgement of the fact that there is, and has been racial oppression in South Africa and that there is group feeling and consciousness on either side of the colour-line should not be seen as a vindication of the position of the "two-nation" theorists. If South Africa is a capitalist state (as we have reason to believe so), then the white racists could not have hoped to form a nation by themselves to the exclusion of the blacks who constitute more than 70 percent of their labour force. In fact, their policy of racial oppression or apartheid was designed deliberately to guarantee a supply of cheap, servile, black labour. Every communist knows that but every communist is not free of racial indoctrination. On the other hand, the disenfranchised blacks, whoever they are, could not have hoped to form a nation without state power and control over national resources. Therefore, political and economic disenfranchisement is what their fight is about. This does not say what they will do once they have got the franchise. "Non-racial democracy" is the common denominator. This is a demand for inclusion in the body polity of the country and guarantees the national integration that has been frustrated by apartheid hitherto. It is noteworthy that since the end of the wars of conquest in the last quarter of the 19th century, the blacks had reconciled themselves to the idea of living in the same territory as the whites. Nevertheless, since the formation of Union of South Africa in 1910, they have never known anything else but rejection and humiliation from the whites.

Otherwise, South Africa has not been a contested territory since the end of the 19th century. What has been at issue is hegemonic power *within* it.

To summarise: a) in South Africa where territory is not contested either from outside (colonialism) or from inside (secessionism as in some of the African states or in Europe), the concept of "independence", as evolved elsewhere in Africa is inapplicable; b) South Africa seems not to be a 'settler problem' and hence no serious reference has been made in that direction by the national liberation/movements since World War II; c) consequent upon this, it seems that the idea of "internal colonialism" is a misconception both difficult to sustain logically and to reconcile with the fact that South Africa is a capitalist and not a colonial state; d) "majority rule" in South Africa as in Zimbabwe is perfectly consistent with the concept of a "non-racial" democracy, but does not in itself say anything about socialism; e) "black nationalism/consciousness" is a reaction to racial discrimination and white chauvinism in South Africa and other racist societies. It is not a political bid to establish an independent nation or state in the same way that African nationalism did elsewhere in Africa. It is a move to create a more inclusive state in which the processes of national integration which have already taken place, despite apartheid, can continue unimpeded; f) finally, this vitiates any suppositions or trajectory about the right of "nations" to self-determination in South Africa, or in Zimbabwe for that matter.

The South African State: Its Nature and Evolution

It is apparent from our previous discussion that the South African state is a state without a nation. Consequently, every political movement in the country can afford nationalist pretensions. It is interesting that all the South African movements have in their propaganda and programmes an everlasting refrain, "our country". The only group for which we have no record of the same is the English-speaking bourgeoisie, starting from the Liberal Party through the Progressive Party to the present Progressive Federal Party. Consistently (and symbolically enough), they refer to South Africa as "this country". Both unconscious reflexes are intriguing. It might be that to some minds South Africa is a contested territory and that to some is a base for operations as good as any other. Nor should this be thought of as a purely moral question. It is apparent that the transnationalisation of classes under monopoly capitalism is very uneven. Above all, the vicissitudes of a state without a nation is something which deserves serious attention, as it is not peculiar only to South Africa but to virtually all the states in black Africa. The comparison might strike some as odd and undesirable. But racialism, important as it is, might obscure what is otherwise more basic and general. We are accustomed, especially on the left, to hearing certain standard formulae such as "the state is an instrument for class oppression", "the state in a capitalist

society at all times serves the interests of the bourgeoisie" and so on. If things were as self-evident as they are made to sound, we would not be able to justify ourselves as a community of social scientists and we would be reduced to being mere consumers of received knowledge. States born under imperialism abound in ambiguities. This is accounted for by the inchoate nature of social classes in imperialist-dominated societies. In turn, this renders the national democratic revolution too difficult to define in terms of its class content. Chronologically, South Africa might be an old state but, socially, it shares the same ambiguities as most new states.

The conquest of African societies in South Africa was carried out by both the Boers (later Afrikaners) and the British for different reasons. Having escaped from British colonialism in the Cape, the Boers were looking for a free territory to settle. There was vacant land but no free territory. Whatever territory they traversed or coveted turned out to be the domain of one African tribe or another. Because they would not accept the authority of the African tribes in the way any supplicant group was expected, the Boers had to live by the gun which ultimately delivered to them the Boer Republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. It was here that they carved out big estates (averaging 3 000 morgen each) for themselves and set up independent administrations. For all this, they had neither labour nor capital. For the latter, they turned to the vanquished Africans whom they used as labour-tenants (there was forced labour as well but fear of British intervention kept it in check). This did not really compensate for lack of capital and managerial skills among the Afrikaner landowners. Rent-paying African squatters became the solution to the problem. Africans who were in need of land for cultivation for the market undertook to farm for the landowners, using their own farming equipment and seeds, in exchange for an agreed amount of land for their private use. This was prevalent during the later half of the 19th century and was referred to as "kaffir farming". If labour-tenant relations (and rentier-landlords) were the nearest thing to feudalism we have ever had in South Africa, it did not last long. It was followed close on its heels by commodity relations, of which the dispossessed Africans were the leading agents from about the 1860s to 1913.

In contrast to the Boers who were still aspiring to being slave-owners or, at least, feudal lords, the British settlers had been brought over to the Cape and Natal to produce wool and sugar respectively for Britain along capitalist lines. The British capitalist state undertook to create the necessary political and social conditions for such production. This meant subjugating all pre-existing political authorities to British Rule and creation of free labour. Amongst other things, this meant the abolition of slavery which was the major cause for the Great Trek. For the Africans it meant complete domination of their subsistence mode of production. The attack was two-prong —

large-scale alienation of land and imposition of several taxes which were payable in cash. This created a big reservoir of cheap labour for white employers and eliminated any prospects for surplus production by the Africans in the reserves. This pattern has been repeated only in Zimbabwe, Swaziland and to some extent in Kenya. Elsewhere in black Africa the original subsistence sector was allowed to participate in surplus production through cultivation of cash crops which were heavily taxed through marketing boards and other extractive mechanisms. Falling real incomes and a finely tuned system of taxation guaranteed a steady flow of labour — seasonal or otherwise. The incorporation of the African household economy at only the level of social reproduction of labour in South Africa (by extension in Zimbabwe and Swaziland) has led to a generalisation by the South African analysts about the absolute need on the part of colonial or underdeveloped capitalism for a "reserve army of cheap labour". As will be shown later, this generalisation is too sweeping for even South Africa.

The subordination of pre-existing modes of production by colonial capitalism in South Africa was not limited only to Africans. The Boer Republics and their erstwhile rentier-landlords also came under fire. The discovery of gold in 1884-5 might have quickened the pace, but there were already complaints from emerging white commercial farmers in the Orange Free State, the Transvaal and northern Natal about unfair competition from "cheap kaffir farming". The British colonial administration, which saw prospects for the expansion of the market and capitalist production in the whole region, listened to these complaints with more than sympathy. Sooner or later the antiquated mode of production in the Boer Republic had to be swept aside to create scope for the free flow of capital and labour. The Boers, who by then identified themselves as Africans ("Afrikaners" in their language) disagreed and went to war against the British whom they described as foreigners ("uitlanders"). The ostensible reason given by the Afrikaners for resisting to the bitter end was to defend their sovereignty which, in fact, was already "subject to British seizure" by previous "agreements" (threats). The British did not pose just a formal threat to the Afrikaners; it was real. The question then is: at this historical juncture and in the totality of things what social force did the Afrikaners represent? An answer to this question is the key to an understanding of the reflexes of the South African state since the unification of 1910.

Many answers have been given to the question and a great deal of new research material has been brought to bear on the issue. The prevalent view is that the Afrikaners feared most domination by British imperial capital. Whether or not the distinction between foreign and "national" capital in South Africa at the turn of the century can be clarified in general, the alleged fear of British capital by the Afrikaners presupposes a number of things

which might not be true. First, it presupposes that all Afrikaners stood in the same relation to capital. Second, it presupposes that the Afrikaners were owners of national capital and that this capital was incompatible with foreign capital.

According to information at hand, a small section of the Afrikaner landlords had turned to commercial farming by the end of the 19th century. They were, therefore, owners of agricultural capital. But so did a number of city-based foreign companies in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal and the English-speaking farmers in Natal and the Cape. Although the exact ratios have not yet been worked out, one suspects that the non-Afrikaners in fact held a higher ratio of agricultural capital than the Afrikaners at this point in time. Yet, they did not feel threatened by British "foreign" capital. Instead, within the South African economy they were willing to cooperate with it or take advantage of it. This would include those African *bywoners* (sharecroppers) who were looking for opportunities for investment in agriculture, *free of Afrikaner domination and exploitation*. Therefore, objectively and statistically, it cannot be said that at the turn of this century the Afrikaners represented "national" capital *per se*. Also, it is yet to be proved that whatever agricultural capital they had was incompatible with British capital which was largely in the mining industry (diamonds and gold).

In the last quarter of the 19th century the majority of the Afrikaners were not capitalists but rather medium and small producers who were generally inefficient and who since the days of slavery in the Cape looked upon farm work as "*kaffer werk*". Secondly, there was a dearth of industrial skills among them which in the Cape had been provided by slaves from Malaya and Mauritius. The majority of them were, from every point of view, an extremely insecure rural *petit-bourgeoisie*. While big capital, agricultural or industrial, cannot be said to have been an immediate threat to them, British *political domination* was. It had two implications for the relatively backward Afrikaner *petit-bourgeoisie*. First, the British colonial government was quite willing to over-rule all forms of unfree labour by which it benefitted and for which it relied on the Boer state whose ideological outlook was a guarantee. As a corollary to this, the British administration encouraged commercial farming which exposed the backward sector to unfair competition even from the blacks. Second, the establishment of British industries under conditions of "free labour" was bound to expose the poorer Afrikaners to competition for jobs with blacks who were not only used to hard work but also had no preconceived ideas about "white" work or wages. Finally, although we have no evidence for it from the Orange Free State and the Transvaal where education for Africans started late, in the Cape the educated *petit-bourgeoisie* elite evoked the strongest antipathy from the Afrikaners. They sarcastically referred to individual members of this class as "*swarte*

Engelsman". The 1857 Constitution of the Cape, the policy of "exempted Natives" and qualified franchise made their emergence possible and the Afrikaners rightly feared that they would be used against them, politically. It is true that until the abolition of the special vote for Africans in 1936, the enfranchised Africans voted for the English-speaking United Party or independent English-speaking candidates.

It is, therefore, our hypothesis that the over-riding fear of the Afrikaners all round was loss of political control which enabled them to protect what they could not defend under British dominion and assimilating black elites and workers. The rise of Afrikaner nationalism in this context becomes explicable. The economic argument about competition between "foreign" and "national" capital is empirically weak and theoretically unsound. This is particularly so that it has been hypothesised by the same people who claim that the development of capitalism in South Africa took the "Prussian Path" — a combination of "maize and gold". This presupposes the existence of common interests between British mining capital and Afrikaner agricultural capital. But was there in fact big Afrikaner capital? If so, why did it fail to over-rule its own petit-bourgeoisie (and later workers) and, instead, joined them to fight the British who unambiguously represented big industrial capital? Acceptance of the "maize and gold" thesis renders inoperable the hypothesis about the struggle between "foreign" and "national" capital. Both obscure the basically political nature of Afrikaner nationalism against the British as well as the Africans. The Afrikaners were quite happy to take advantage of British mining capital in South Africa as well as of the African majority as long as they ruled both. As far as big capital was concerned, they thus could effect surplus allocation in their favour as a petit-bourgeoisie, without affecting any similar interests amongst their ranks. On suppressing the African majority, they could count on the support of big capital which had a vested interest in a ready supply of cheap, *docile* black labour. It is our hunch that both conditions do not apply any longer and, hence, the Afrikaner government is politically beleaguered and is likely to move from bad to worse.

A few illustrations will suffice to show that *politics* had been in command in the struggle of the Afrikaners since their military defeat at the beginning of the century until their final victory in 1948. At the time of Union they insisted on formalised racism to protect the interests of "people of European descent". As is known, big capital was quite willing to embrace "all civilised people" as was the case in the Cape. As is shown by the 1913 Land Act which confined Africans to only 13 per cent of the land in the country, both the British and the Afrikaners were agreed on the need for cheap black labour. After all, in crushing the Afrikaner Republics, Lord Milner had

declared that one of the objectives of the British government was "a well-regulated supply of labour from the Cape to the Limpopo". The African peasantry which had emerged and was extremely competitive up to the time of the passing of the Land Act had to be smashed for the benefit of both British industrial capital and the rural Afrikaner petit-bourgeoisie. Squatting and share-cropping on white farms by Africans was prohibited. Only hired labour was legally permissible. A great many Afrikaners in the *plateland* could not afford commercial farming even with the cheapened black labour. Therefore, they started drifting to the urban areas (especially the Rand) in search of employment. There, they were faced with the same kind of competition as they had met with from the African *bywoners* (squatters). So, the African workers, like their fellow-peasants, had to be defeated not economically but *politically*.

From 1913 onwards white workers, of whom the least skilled were Afrikaners and therefore could not benefit from the usual distinction between artisans and labourers, started fighting for higher white wages so as to maintain a "civilised standard of living". These demands met with approval from Hertzog's National Party as well as the International Socialist League from which came the majority of the members of the Communist Party of South Africa. Shortly after its formation in 1921 the CPSA was still debating the question of whether or not Africans should be included in the labour movement. When the 1922 white miners' strike erupted, the African workers refused to be left out in an impressive demonstration of strength. The CPSA came out in support of the segregationist white workers on the grounds that they were the "core of the proletariat" and that "their success would liberate all the proletariat".

The one white group which was not reconciled to the idea of higher wages for whites which were not commensurate with their labour productivity was the mineowners i.e. the big industrial bourgeoisie in South Africa. They prevailed over Smuts' government which represented their interests. Consequently, the strike was crushed ruthlessly by the army. This fanned the flames of Afrikaner nationalism. The chauvinism of the white workers and their allies issued in a permanently divided working-class. The white workers left the labour Party for Hertzog's petit-bourgeois *National Party* and the black workers for the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa, whose acronym, ICU, got popularised in the vernacular in the Rand as *Keo Kubona* — I See You (White Man). Like the African National Congress in 1913, the ICU was a reaction to *political exclusion* and its long-term implications. The long-term implications were allocation, and not generation of surplus. In our view, this is the major distinction between nationalist movements and class or class-based organisations. The Afrikaners, despite their anti-imperialist rhetoric and flirtation with a misconceived idea of Bolshevism

by their labourits, were not opposed to capitalism. Instead, they wanted British capital in South Africa to compensate them for their *economic* weaknesses. Since capitalism does not allocate value according to weakness but according to economic strength, the Afrikaners had to find a power-base *outside* economics. The fall of the Smuts government as a sequel to the miners' revolt and the rise to power of the National — Labour Pact under Hertzog in 1924 gave them a glorious opportunity for consolidating an Afrikaner *block*, consisting of the Afrikaner petit-bourgeoisie, drawn from both rural and urban areas, and the white urban workers who were not all Afrikaner but identified with the Afrikaner government. This block was opposed to both British domination and African advancement in particular. The first thing it did when it got into power was to declare a "civilised labour policy", which meant "white worker privilege" and official discrimination against black workers. All this was given a legal status, by the industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, the Wage Act of 1925 and the Mines and Works Amendment Act of 1926. The Industrial Conciliation Act stripped the African workers, who henceforth were categorised as "employees" of their right to form trade unions and to strike for higher wages. Parallel to this was a conscious effort by the government to reserve most jobs in the service sector e.g. the bureaucracy, the railways and harbours for white workers who were commonly Afrikaners.

The South African mining bourgeoisie had been thrown out of its own parliament and the road had been opened to Afrikaner petit-bourgeois economic nationalism. After the First World War there had already been demands from its representatives not only for reallocation of surplus but also for its re-investment. For instance, in 1918 the Federated Chamber of Industries urged the government to allocate more funds for the development of manufacturing industries. Secondary industries, though penetrated by British capital, were still an open frontier. But for the Afrikaner petit-bourgeoisie the scope was much wider in agriculture than in industry. It is, therefore, notable that the 1922 Drought Investigation Committee, while critical of the "bad farming practices" of the Afrikaners, blamed lack of necessary capital for the regressive nature of South African agriculture. The Pact government responded to these demands by re-allocating ever increasing amounts for investment in agriculture and "protected" industries. The latter referred to locally-owned industries, was against the mining industries which operated largely on foreign capital. In 1925 the government not only put up a high tariff against imported goods but also revised upwards price indices for protected industrial goods. In a double strategy it used its protection to induce employers in the relevant industries to use more white labour. In 1933 the Customs Tariff Commission estimated the number of whites employed in protected industries at 26 000 — 28 000. It concluded that "for

1933 the ratio of employment of Europeans is higher in protected than in economic secondary industry”.

The idea of “economic” industries reveals two factors: a) that the protected industries were not necessarily economic, and b) that though the issue had been posed as foreign versus “indigenous” capital, in reality the protective policy signalled discrimination in favour of Afrikaner neophyte industrialist and their political allies. The Afrikaner government was not satisfied with simply supporting favoured flagging industries. In 1928 it took the one single step which made a difference economically. This was the establishment of the Iron and Steel Corporation of South Africa (ISCOR) as a public enterprise. Not only did it lay the foundation for a *national capital goods* sector but it also inaugurated state capitalism in South Africa which has far-reaching effects, as will be shown presently. The immediate effect was that the government had discretionary power over the supply and level of prices of technological inputs for the different sectors of the economy. For instance, consistent with its policy, protected industries and agriculture were highly favoured.

It is unusual for agriculture to be favoured in a growing economy or an economy which is still going through the stage of primitive accumulation. South Africa might be an instructive exception. From the mid-twenties onwards the Afrikaner government offered generous loans, subsidies, railway concessions and tax reductions or rebates to white farmers (mostly Afrikaner). The economic value of these benefits averaged between 13 and 15 percent of the total contribution of the agricultural sector to the country's GNP (the situation has not changed much ever since). The source of the revenues so deployed was the leading sector of the economy, namely, the mines. This can be gleaned from the fact that while the value of gold out-put increased from a base of 100 in 1913 to 220,9 in 1937 and the dividends declared to 203, in the same period taxation on the mining industry rose from a base of 100 to 1191. Thus, state taxation as a percentage of total dividends paid was 13,33 percent in 1913 and had risen to 78,28 percent by 1936 (Frankel, 1938).

This was corroborated by the evidence submitted by the Gold Producers' Committee of the Transvaal Chamber of Miners to the Departmental Committee on Mining Taxation in 1935, which showed that state taxes on gold mining in South Africa were higher than in any country in the capitalist world. For the benefit of the farmers in the backveld, the government also engaged in building infrastructure which was considered uneconomic by its opponents. In addition, far from maintaining the previous quality regulation measures, the Pact government passed legislation to increase the prices of virtually all domestic agricultural products. This culminated in the Marketing Act of 1937.

It is not as if the mining magnates accepted this with equanimity. The 1940-41 Industrial and Agricultural Requirements Commission could not help pointing out that there were "heavy excess costs both in agriculture and secondary industry" and that these two activities could "exist under present conditions only because of the surpluses diverted to them by means of taxation, price raising measures, subsidies and the like". The Afrikaner government had over-ruled and constrained, *politically*, big business to serve its largely petit-bourgeois interests.

This is perfectly consistent, for it is said that "the state serves the interests of the ruling class". But according to the same doctrine, the petit-bourgeoisie is a vacillating class which is incapable of an independent political enterprise. Secondly, by virtue of its position, it is incapable of producing real (added) value in the manner of the capitalists and the workers. It can, therefore, only benefit by extraction of surplus-value by the capitalist class. This is heady universal language and requires translation into the vernacular. The Afrikaners succeeded eminently in their political enterprise and in their strategy to use state capitalism to compensate for their economic weakness. Nobody who has suffered under Afrikaner state oppression and that of the other petit-bourgeoisie governments in most of the Third World countries would deny the former. It is, therefore, our hypothesis that the petit-bourgeoisie is capable of a successful political enterprise, depending on the objective strength of the contending classes. But this qualifier is true of all classes.

For that matter, the term "independent" in classical texts is misleading, for even in the European bourgeois revolution, the leading class (the bourgeoisie) needed the support of all oppressed classes. The success of the national democratic revolution in ex-colonial countries is predicated on this premise, whether the struggle is socialist-oriented or not. In their struggle the Communist Parties of China and Vietnam relied heavily on the support of the peasants and other progressive sections of the petit-bourgeoisie. This gives prominence to the leading role of the petit-bourgeoisie in underdeveloped countries. It is, therefore, our second hypothesis that all nationalist/national movements in underdeveloped countries are most likely to be dominated by the interests of the petit-bourgeoisie. While the existence of a progressive petit-bourgeoisie in these countries cannot be denied or dismissed, it cannot be used as an index of a socialist struggle. It is, by historical necessity, a minority force which is in competition for the support of the workers and peasants who under conditions of nationalism mistake their interests for those of the leading class.

In the short-run this illusion might be confirmed by the protective or concessionary policies of a petit-bourgeois government which is fighting for sur-

vival under conditions of imperialism as happened in South Africa under the Afrikaners and might happen again under black nationalists. This is more so that, economically, this is not contingent on private ownership of the means of production but on effective *control* over the means of production, as under state capitalism. Accordingly, it is our submission that under modern conditions *control* over means of production can be as effective as ownership was under classical capitalism. This gives the petit-bourgeoisie opportunities that did not exist before. It is also a strong warning against equating state capitalism with socialisation of the means of production. The bureaucratic petit-bourgeois elite is quite capable of expropriating the direct producers, as is testified by a number of known cases.

The South African State: Its Revolutions and Prospects for the Future

Nor does the story end there. The problem of the state petit-bourgeoisie, unlike the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, is that it cannot reproduce itself consistently and, therefore, indefinitely. South Africa is a supreme example of this. The Afrikaner petit-bourgeoisie, appreciative of its military defeat by the British bourgeoisie, mobilised disadvantaged Afrikaners of all classes and other disgruntled whites, politically. Upon success it adopted a policy of protectionism and economic nationalism for the benefit of its constituency and thus forsook any pretence of being representative of "all classes". Through these policies, successive Afrikaner governments up to the 1950s were able to satisfy both their bought working-class and forested businessmen and farmers. In the process it spawned, unwittingly, an Afrikaner bourgeoisie in the true sense of the word.¹ While the agricultural bourgeoisie had made its appearance in the 1930s, the industrial bourgeoisie became apparent in the 1960s. They accepted apartheid but had some reservations about the policy of Bantustans.

This had already been fore-shadowed by the report of the government-appointed Tomlinson Commission in 1955. The Commission had recommended that the black industrial workers be accepted as an integral part of the urban population in South Africa. It further acknowledged that the African "reserves" were over-populated by two-thirds. It, accordingly, recommended that the surplus population be moved to create room for yeoman farming among the rural Africans. This was the voice of capital speaking and it coincided with that of the English-speaking bourgeoisie. It was instantly rejected by Verwoerd's government. But the internal struggle between the old Afrikaner petit-bourgeois leadership and its foster-child, the new Afrikaner bourgeoisie, had begun. The latter also had its intellectual wing, as is shown by the symptomatic revolt by a number of Afrikaner professors, literati and clergymen against the doctrinaire *Broederbond* in particular from the late 1950s onwards.

The economic boom of the 1960s had not only raised capitalist stakes but had also increased the demand for skilled labour. Advancement of black workers became a necessity, vindicating the position of the bourgeoisie in general. Ironically enough, when the recession set-in in the 1970s, resulting in unofficial strikes among the black workers, it added extra weight to the arguments of the "enlightened" capitalists who urged abandonment of the old ways in favour of stability and productivity. As the political and economic crisis deepened in the 1970s, the schism between the conservative (*verkrampste*) wing of the Afrikaners, representing petit-bourgeois and privileged white worker interests, and the enlightened (*verligte*) wing, representing the interests of the emergent Afrikaner bourgeoisie, got so acute that it led to the dramatic split between the *Nasionale Party* and the *Herstigte Nasionale Party*.

Although one would have thought that the position of the national bourgeoisie would have given them respite, actual events from the 1976 uprising to the current upheavals belie this. As was mentioned in the introduction, militancy and solidarity among the black popular masses has increased. Under these conditions Botha's, like Vorster's, *verligte* government cannot fulfil its historic mission i.e. the transformation of petit-bourgeois Afrikanerdom. It is caught on the horns of a dilemma.

With the worsening political turmoil in South Africa and the dramatic recession in the economy and threatened economic sanctions, the national bourgeoisie is urging ameliorative intervention. The government, which is predominantly *verligte*, is anxious to meet these calls, as is shown by its ill-fated Second Chamber for Coloureds, its flying a kite on possible retreat on the question of Bantustans and on "power sharing" between white and black. But, in fact, it is torn between the convergent interests of the Afrikaner and English-speaking bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and the demands of the enfranchised white petit-bourgeoisie and workers on whom it has always depended for votes and security, on the other hand. The latter, fearing for their interests which had been racially defined and protected since the Act of Union in 1910, are bracing themselves up to fight a rear-guard battle. In this they seem to have the unannounced support of both the military and the civilian wings of the white bureaucracy. This is unheard of in the history of South Africa. In the traditionally formalistic set-up in the country the bureaucracy had remained unimportant as a political force and took its cues from the executive. This is a further crack in the Afrikaner power-block whose implications have not yet been fully analysed. But certainly the advancing struggle by the disenfranchised black population increases its importance and appeals to the *kragdadige* (zeal) mentality of the right-wing.

Therefore, each concession or reform the government makes to placate the blacks is seen as weakness, if not betrayal. This effectively puts the *verligte* government on the defensive. Nothing demonstrates this more clearly

than Botha's scandalous retreat in his much heralded speech to the National Convention of his Party in August, 1985. After consultations with his international allies and briefings with some of his black neighbours, it was agreed that he renounces apartheid, offers the blacks some power-sharing subject to negotiation and scraps the policy of Bantustans. As is known, at the crucial moment he dithered and ultimately reverted to the *kragdadige* language: "We shall not be dictated to by foreigners". The cat was already out of the bag and the leader of the *verkrampies*, Treunicht, lost no time in chastising him for his ineptness and idle talk about the *Bantoes* "who spend their time thinking about sex". Even though the BBC interviewer was too embarrassed to pursue the point, this is the vernacular in which Afrikanerdom was conceived in history and in ideology.

As of now, petit-bourgeois Afrikanerdom has suffered its ultimate demise. Its heir-apparent by history is beleaguered. It is faced with irreconcilable antagonisms: white petit-bourgeois and worker privilege and black mass deprivation, on the other hand. Militancy on both sides diminishes the chances of the *verligte* government to fulfil its historic mission, namely, the re-institution of bourgeois political rule. If the Union of South Africa in 1910 had marked the unification of the Afrikaner agrarian bourgeoisie and the British industrial bourgeoisie, the so-called "union of maize and gold", the present polarisation would not have occurred, except along *class* and not racial lines. For the bourgeoisie the complete domination of the African traditional mode of subsistence was a sufficient guarantee for an unlimited supply of black labour and a potentially large domestic market, something still not given to South Africa. As is illustrated by their political revolt and ensuing economic nationalism, this would not have allayed the fears of the Afrikaner petit-bourgeoisie and workers who felt sandwiched between British imperialism and the African multitudes, *die swarte gevaar* (which does not exactly give one the impression of idle fornicators).

Furthermore, if the union of the bourgeoisie had been a fact, one of its consequences would have been the birth of a truly national bourgeoisie in alliance with international capitalism in the same way as the present *verligte* Afrikaner bourgeoisie is. This would have pre-empted the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and blunted African proto-nationalism, since it would not have been averse to African petit-bourgeois aspirations, as is historically true of all national bourgeoisie(s). Class differentiation would have been the primary thing. This would have been consonant with the dynamic of a bourgeois national democratic revolution in the classical sense. We would not have referred to it as nationalism precisely because of its all-embracing nature. Heretical as it may sound, nationalism is by nature *sectarian*. It is either a reaction to exclusion or a claim to exclusiveness i.e. an affirmation of a particularistic

identity. It may lead to the establishment of a nation or its **opposite**, secessionism. At a certain point all these become a matter of definition, as is shown by the history of most African states since the anti-colonial struggle. Of immediate relevance to us is nationalism in South Africa. Most analysts would agree that in South Africa the national democratic revolution was emptied of its bourgeois meaning by the exclusion *ab initio* of black South Africans of all classes. In that context Afrikaner nationalism since its inception in the 1920s could not have been, short of secession, but a perversion of the idea of a nation. Confirmation of the fact is to be found in the belated attempt by the *verligte* Afrikaners to re-define their concept of a nation and, thus, reaffirming the original notion of "all civilised people" espoused by the liberal British bourgeoisie. In contrast, African/black nationalism which is a reaction to exclusion has tended to be inclusive in its orientation, as is evidenced by the general slogan, "non-racial democracy". Insofar as this is true and contrary to its popular rhetoric, it *does not* represent a nation in itself and by itself, as happened elsewhere in Africa (barring Zimbabwe). If successful in its objective, it would not have of necessity transcended the original South African bourgeois idea of a nation, consisting of "all civilised people" and a "well-regulated supply of labour" (i.e. effective incorporation of all into the capitalist system).

Marxists within the South African liberation movement are acutely aware of the implications of the above fact. While there is unanimity on the question of the struggle for the extension of democratic rights to all, "irrespective of colour, creed or sex", there is no agreement on the nature of the *national democratic revolution*. Some, such as the members of the Communist Party, advocate a two-stage theory — a national democratic (bourgeois?) revolution followed by a socialist revolution. In the first stage the right of the African majority, "which is the most oppressed and exploited", are given primacy, whereas the belief in the second stage is based on the existence of a "vast proletariat" in South Africa whose majority also happens to be "African". There is general equivocation on the role of the white working-class, as there has always been. Meanwhile, lack of a necessary link between the first and the second stage in the light of a *divided* working-class has prompted some, especially the members of the Unity Movement, to oppose vehemently the two-stage theory. Their counter-argument is that "in the morrow of the so-called national democratic revolution" the African peasants and workers will find themselves begging and will, therefore, be obliged to continue the struggle. The overtones of a permanent revolution are implicit in the second position. But the grounds for supposing that a socialist revolution is implicit in the South African national liberation struggle are as tenuous as the postulated link between the national democratic and the socialist revolution in the two-stage theory.

Our suspicion (confirmed by prior knowledge) is that both positions are largely a rendering of universal texts, without filtering them rigorously through local history, whatever the theoretical implications might be. While the general postulates of the New Democracy, one of which concerns the fore-closure of the development of an independent national bourgeoisie in ex-colonial countries since the rise of imperialism, are an important starting-point for a theory of revolution in underdeveloped countries, their prescriptive value is always subject to question. Putting aside the question of whether or not countries such as South Africa have had a national bourgeoisie, (or Zimbabwe for that matter), it is obvious that the New Democracy theorists, like classical Marxists, underestimated the capacity of the petit-bourgeoisie in new states to mount their own political enterprise and frustrate any attempts towards a socialist transformation. Africa is full of examples as a sequel to African Nationalism.

Then, the question is why would the South African black petit-bourgeoisie not follow suit? This is more so that any concessions which will be made by the white bourgeoisie and imperialism will be directed towards them as before. Already, they are being courted by those who seek a negotiated settlement in South Africa. It is the obduracy of the Afrikaners which is fouling up the whole fair. For the would-be socialists this is made even worse by the existence of a divided working-class in South Africa. While they may wish otherwise, we know that, objectively, the white workers in South Africa, as in former Rhodesia, are the backbone of the army and the security forces. Under the present conditions there is not even a chance of their number "turning their guns against their class enemy". Does this necessarily commit the liberation struggle in South Africa to a bourgeois solution, as has been suggested by the two-stage theorists? If not, what is the meaning of the often repeated slogan of "national democratic revolution"?

Here, theoretical and strategic questions often get confused. The first theoretical supposition is that the national democratic revolution is a necessary condition for a socialist revolution. At the same time and consistent with the postulates of the "New Democracy", it is admitted that under conditions of monopoly capitalism, imperialism will abort the national democratic revolution by imposing a petit-bourgeois comprador class whose interests will be opposed to those of the majority of the people. Despite this acknowledgement, it is argued that, strategically, it would be a mistake for the workers to come out with a socialist programme at this stage of the revolution for they would alienate the other classes, namely, the black petit-bourgeoisie and white liberals whose support they need. This is pure cant. If the chances for a democratic revolution are foreclosed under imperialism, why would it hurt more for the workers and the peasants to insist now on their class interests than later? Second, why should it be supposed that in

the interim period the petit-bourgeoisie can dispense with the support of the popular classes? There is no record of this in all the recent nationalist struggles. Besides under the "New Democracy" the slogan is: "If the workers and the peasants be weak, the petit-bourgeoisie will betray".

Accordingly, it is in the interests of the workers and the peasants both in the short-run and the long-run to prevail over the black nationalist petit-bourgeoisie. As for the white liberals and other interested parties, the onus rests on them. The point is: while the support of all progressive forces is welcome, anything that threatens the conditions of livelihood of the majority of the people should be strenuously resisted. What this means in practice or what programme it envisages has been a source of controversy in the past. The main reason has been misapplication of historical materialism by some dogmatic Marxists or Stalinists. First, the tendency to treat "socialism" as a finite stage with a beginning and an end is contrary to Marxism. Far from being a mode of production, socialism is a transitional stage whose content is determined by concrete class struggles at a given time. In the process historical experience tells us what form the primary contradiction between capital and labour is most likely to assume. This is not a problem of necessary conditions, but of prevailing objective conditions i.e. it is dialectical and not derivative.

In the case of South Africa it is already clear what will threaten the conditions of livelihood of the majority of the people. First among these is an imposed settlement as in Zimbabwe. While theorists such as Samir Amin might advocate "delinking" and express fears about "re-compradorisation", it is doubtful if any of this is relevant to southern Africa. So far South Africa has not given the blacks in the region even the chance to be "compradors". Instead, she has sought to reduce all the neighbouring states to Bantustans. So, the would-be compradors in the region are embattled i.e. the struggle continues despite their so-called independence. Therefore, the actual danger is that if a negotiated settlement is achieved in South Africa itself, a virgin black comprador class will come into existence for the first time in the region — which might be a boon to imperialism which is having the problem of propping up jaded compradors in Asia and Latin-America. By engaging in a sustained struggle against imperialism and capitalist exploitation, the people in southern Africa have in fact "de-linked". The real question is whether they allow their aspirant petit-bourgeoisie to "re-link".

Already, there are a number of pit-falls in the existing programmes of demand. The slogan, "land to the tillers", interpreted as a bourgeois right, might mean that the landless African peasantry which was forced into labour migration from the late 19th century onwards will never be able to lay claim on the 87 per cent of the land that was taken away from them during col-

onial conquest. Not surprising, this is consistent with the position of the South African communists who believe that, anyway, there is no black peasantry in South Africa. In that case it would be the democratic right of the whites to hold whatever land they happen to occupy. Another example is the open declaration that the people shall share in the mineral and industrial wealth of the country, without specifying how. Nationalisation policies and state capitalism can no longer be treated as progressive measures, without relating them to the question of balance of power between contending classes in the transitional period.

Experience has shown that if the direct producers do not hold the balance of power in any alliance of classes, they are liable to political and economic expropriation by the petit-bourgeois bureaucratic elite. If in formulating programmes for revolutionary transformation we are guided by strict historical analysis, we can not but conclude that in the imperialist epoch the workers and the peasants can only guarantee the conditions of their livelihood and social reproduction by stamping the revolution with their own image and, thus, prevail over the petit-bourgeoisie and forestall its likely deviations. This in itself and by itself is not tantamount to a class programme but merely puts primacy on the interests of the exploited and dominated majority, without which we cannot meaningfully talk of democracy.

Socialist democracy is on the agenda precisely because of the unrealisability of bourgeois democracy under conditions of imperialism and monopoly capitalism. These are the objective conditions under which all contemporary liberation struggles are being conducted. Therefore, the question of whether South Africa is on the verge of a bourgeois revolution or something else is most pertinent.

Notes

- 1 Founding Afrikaner leaders such as Louis Botha might have been big landowners, but there is no evidence that they were *big capitalists*. Likewise, W.A. Hofmeyr's insurance companies, SANTAM and SANLAM whose capital stocks stood at a meagre £20,000 in 1918 and which were nearly ruined in 1922, if it were not for a loan of £50,000 from the Standard Bank, when the Orange Free State Chamber of Executors, in which 60 percent of SANLAM capital was invested, was liquidated, cannot be cited as examples of Afrikaner finance-capital in the pre-World War II period. Therefore, those who wish to argue otherwise will have to produce the necessary statistical evidence, instead of being guided by surface impressions. Moreover, individual cases do not make a class. Likewise, not all capitalists are part of the bourgeoisie in the sense of control of the commanding heights of the national economy.