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APPROACHES TO THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

In both the theoretical and practical political spheres, the question of the nation in South Africa has become highly controversial. Besides the predictable differences between exponents of ruling class positions and exponents representing the exploited and oppressed majority of the people of South Africa, major differences of approach and perception have become manifest within the liberation movement itself. There is also the allegation that this is in fact a non-question. Some left-inclined activists hold that the national question ceased to exist in 1910 (with the Act of Union) or at the very latest in 1931 (with the Statute of Westminster). The reasoning is very simple: the national question, following Lenin, is essentially a question of self-determination, ie, a question of national independence to the point of secession from an existing multi-national state or empire. Since Britain granted dominion status and full independence to 'South Africa' (or to the national bourgeoisie) in the period 1910 - 1931, there is no national question. Quod erat demonstrandum! The short answer to this position is that it equates the national question with the colonial question and, clearly, is unaware of the full range covered by the term 'the national question'.

Another version of this thesis holds that the national question is 'the land question of the bourgeoisie', ie, it is essentially a question of the peasantry freeing itself or being freed from feudal restrictions of one kind or another. Since there is no peasantry in South Africa because of the rapid development of capitalism in the agrarian sector and because the 'Prussian road' prevented the development of an African yeomanry in South Africa, there is no national question in South Africa. Quod erat demonstrandum! However this position reflects a very

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narrow Eurocentric approach and hence profoundly misconceives the national question.

In both these negations of the national question, it is held that the struggle being waged in South Africa is a classical struggle between labour and capital i.e. only a class struggle, **not** a struggle for national liberation. On the basis of this 'banality' (Amin, 1981:191), it is argued in these circles that what is referred to as the national question by 'petty bourgeois ideologues' is in fact the consequence of racial ideology - the ideology of the capitalist class in South Africa. All that needs to be done, therefore, is for the working class in its organisations, and more generally, to promote the counter-ideology and practices of non-racialism or anti-racism.

The opposite extreme, which is defended by significant groupings in the liberation movement, is reflected clearly in its entire problematic in the following passage:

A developed internal market with a clearly defined area within which a particular currency is used as a medium of exchange is a *sine qua non* for a capitalist nation.

In the case of Azania the Xhosas, Zulus, Sothos, Indians and the so-called Coloureds constitute that many different nationalities. But because they suffer from the same economic disabilities - landlessness and structured propertylessness - they also constitute a single Black nationality. Their further evolution into a nation cannot be effected without a revolutionary transformation. The repossession of land and the consequent seizure of political power is an absolute necessity for the achievement of nation-hood in the specific conditions of Azania. By the same token and precisely because they have gone through their bourgeois democratic revolution, the white settlers have constituted themselves into a nation. (Tsotsi, 1982:8)

Within the liberation movement, the 'nationalist' pole is opposite to that of the 'workerists'. It implies that the

struggle being waged by the oppressed and exploited people of South Africa is a struggle for national liberation. This struggle is being waged by the oppressed black 'nationality' against the white 'nation'.

In some versions of this position, this struggle is held to be prior to or at least more important than the class struggle between labour and capital. In more sophisticated versions, these 'two struggles' are seen as intersecting and mutually reinforcing even though they are held to be distinct from each other. A view that is now commonly held is that the two struggles are in fact one struggle because of the fact that 'race' and 'class' coincide. In most versions of this position, its proponents believe that the struggle for national liberation is totally compatible with the struggle for the emancipation of the working class, ie, the struggle for socialism.

We see, therefore, complete confusion and contradiction. Yet this is a complex and vital question of our struggle, one which we ignore at our peril.

THE APPROACH TO THE NATIONAL QUESTION

What is the national question? For a subject that is written off so easily by some people, this question has generated an astounding number of theoretical and historical treatises in most languages of the world! Whole libraries were written on this question in the Soviet Union alone before the death of Stalin in 1953; and whole libraries were (and are being) written there since 1956 when it was found that Stalin had been fallible in a number of important questions, including certain aspects of his celebrated essay on the national question.

More than anything else, it has been the coming into being of the 'emergent' nations' of Africa, Asia and, to a lesser extent, of Latin America, that has reopened the debate on a question that was one of the major preoccupations of all socialist and many liberal theoreticians and political parties in Europe during the 19th century. Indeed, the two phenomena are directly related. For, it soon became obvious after World War II that the nations of the ex-colonial and semi-colonial world did not correspond in form to the nations of 19th century Europe. They

were possessed of very few of the features of nationhood variously considered to be 'essential' by socialist and liberal theoreticians and students of nationalism in Europe. Yet the movements that brought these nations into being were undoubtedly 'nationalist' in some very obvious sense. Clearly, the European models were not absolute. Even for Europe itself, important differences between the modalities of western and eastern European nations were identified. The division of Germany and Korea into two states in 1945 with the consequent theorisation of the implications on all levels of this act, redirected the attention of theorists to the inadequacy of the existing theory.

Any treatment of the national question will be found to deal with either the problem of **national unity** or the problem of **national independence** or with both problems. Most of the works on the subject are concerned with the question of national independence and this itself reflects the peculiarly Eurocentric bias of the work in this field. The implicit or explicit assumption of all work on the national question is that nations are the mode of existence of virtually all capitalist and socialist social formations. They are the 'mould' within which the classes that constitute the modern social formations conduct their lives and their affairs.² Even opponents of nationalism do not deny that internationalism is predicated upon the existence of nations. The formal recognition and climax of this thesis is the existence of the United Nations Organisation, in which both capitalist and socialist states are represented. However, it seems decidedly questionable whether one can go as far as Régis Debray (1977) who sees the nation as a kind of eternal in-group that is vital for the continued existence of the human species. There is also no inherent contradiction between the postulate that nations are the normal mode of existence of capitalist and socialist social formations and the almost universally recognised fact that the nation state is outmoded in terms of the development of the forces of production on a world economic scale. The existence of trans-national companies and political formations such as the European Economic Community indicates how the actual contradictions are (temporarily) resolved.

I shall not discuss in detail here the slippery question of

the definition of the nation as I have covered some of this ground elsewhere (as Nosizwe, 1979:165-168). However, it is necessary to state clearly that

The limited scientific value of a general definition is evident not only in the fact that it is incapable of revealing the essence of nations and the laws of their development but also in the fact that it cannot characterise fully and in a rigorous scientific manner the multiplicity of forms and the peculiarities of the origins and evolution of nations in all their phases of development, and finally it cannot include all types of nations with their peculiarities under a general concept ... (Mnacakanjan, 1967:63)

This insight is now shared by most students of national movements in contrast to what Eugen Lemberg (1967) called 'Risorgimento nationalism'. The latter's insistence on, amongst other things, the principle of **one language, one nation** is not a universally valid definition of nationhood despite the ideologues of Afrikaner nationalism and also despite the impeccable Kautskyan-Leninist pedigree of Stalin's famous definition of 'a nation'. Davis' (1978:206) warning is very apt:

It is high time that historians, Marxist and otherwise, stop trying to fit Africa into the Procrustean bed of European development. African history has to be studied in its own terms. Nations have appeared in Africa as elsewhere in the world; but the modalities of their development and those of Europeans are different.

Generally speaking nations develop in the course of the establishment of capitalist relations of production.⁵ How and where the territorial boundaries of any specific nation are drawn is a purely historical question which cannot be predicted accurately. It is a question that is decided in the course of the class struggle within a given social formation or between different social formations. The leading or mobilising class of the

nation necessarily and 'naturally' bases its mobilising activity on the peculiarities of the historical development of the peoples concerned and in this sense every national movement is unique.

The crucial point, however, is that while the nation may mean more or less the same thing at certain times to most of those who constitute it, it more usually does not. Or, to put it differently, because the nation has to be constructed ideologically and politically on the basis of the developing, ie, also changing, capitalist forces and relations of production, each of the antagonistic classes in the social formation, generally speaking, conceives of the nation differently in accordance with its class ideology. We have to bear in mind, however, that

the concept of class ideology is not synonymous with the ideological configuration prevailing among the members of a given class at a given time. (Therborn, 1982:54)

This fact, indeed, will serve to explain why within the working class there are competing (non-class) ideologies which inform the different conceptions of the nation of South Africa that prevail among the workers.

A recent contribution by Benedict Anderson (1985) has helped to clarify this aspect of the study of nationalism very much. Anderson's central thesis is that the development and spread in Western Europe of 'print languages' (eg high German or Standard English) in conjunction with the elaboration of capitalist relations of production replaced the juxtaposition of 'sacred languages' such as Latin to local or regional idiolects. This made possible a new kind of 'imagined community' qualitatively different from extant religious or dynastically centred 'communities'. The development of printing and its intimate connection with the invention of 'print languages' is the bridge between the development of capitalism and the origins of modern national consciousness. Anderson's book goes a long way towards explaining the historical link in Europe between language and nationality. It also simultaneously negates the Eurocentrism of most works on the national question which accept without

reservation Edward Freeman's dictum that 'language is the badge of nationality':

Language is not an instrument of exclusion: in principle, anyone can learn any language ... Print-languages is what invents nationalism, not a particular language per se. The only questionmark standing over languages like Portuguese in Mozambique and English in India is whether the administrative and educational systems, particularly the latter, can generate a politically sufficient diffusion of bilingualism

In a world in which the national state is the overwhelming norm, all this means that nations can now be imagined without linguistic communality ... (Anderson, 1985:122-123)

The value of Anderson's contribution lies particularly in the fact that it enables us to concentrate on the nation as an ideological and political construct. In fact, Anderson himself, in what appears to be a quite unintended way, firmly points to the link between the study of the nation or nationalism and the most recent researches in the fields of ideology and semiology, when he maintains that '... from the start the nation was conceived in language, not in blood, and ... one could be "invited into" the imagined community'. (Anderson, 1985:15) He proposes to define the nation as 'an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (1985:15) and explains that it is **imagined** 'because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. (1985:15)

This is not in fact a very good definition. It smacks of idealism as it stands. In his book, however, it is at all times clear not only that the nation as an imagined community is a social reality to which individuals and groups inside and outside the nation have to respond, but in addition, that it is an entity embedded in very concrete (capitalist or socialist) relations of production (normally) on a very concrete territory.

For our purposes, the two most important terms in Anderson's thesis are the words 'imagined' and 'language' because they lead on directly to the examination of how national consciousness or national identity is generated. This examination, as we shall see, is in fact nothing other than the examination of the process of national unification or national unity. Here Anderson's work **via** the findings of semiology becomes important for the study and the solution of the national question in South Africa.

NATIONAL UNITY AND THE CREATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

The construction of a discursive order in a particular society is the historical outcome of struggles waged by social forces at crucial moments of contradiction and crisis. According to historical materialism, the decisive aspect of these struggles in class societies is the class struggle, and the resulting discursive order is a class order, articulated with existential-/and historical-inclusive discourses. (Therborn, 1982:82)

Therborn presents the key to understanding why the class struggle and the struggle for national liberation constitute two moments of one and the same social process in contemporary South Africa. In other words, why the struggle for national liberation is, from the point of view of the exploited classes, the inescapable political form of the class struggle. Stated as simply as possible, we can say that in South Africa, because of the peculiar development of capitalism, different strata of the working class have been 'subjected and qualified' differently. They have been 'open to' different non-class ideologies with the result that working-class ideology has articulated with different existential and historical ideologies. Moreover,

It is, then, natural - and not an aberration of underdeveloped class consciousness - that class ideologies coexist with inclusive-historical ideologies, constituting the subjects of the contradictory totality of an exploitative mode of production and/or so-

cial formation. (Therborn, 1982:27)

Black workers have quite naturally experienced and explained their exploitation not simply in terms of class but also in terms of colour. Indeed, even white workers, especially Afrikaans-speaking whites, have at various times experienced and explained their exploitation in ethnic rather than merely in class terms. Black workers and other black people perceive themselves as being excluded from the imagined community of the 'South African nation', ie they see themselves as outcasts. Therefore, through their organised political and cultural vanguards, and in other ways, they have generated alternative conceptions of this 'South African nation'.

Two crucial points have to be made, however. It has to be noted, firstly, that ruling-class domination is not explicable simply in terms of racism or racial ideology. While the latter is integral to the system of racial capitalism in South Africa, it rests upon and reinforces class exploitation which, as in any other capitalist social formation, is the source of surplus value and capital accumulation. Hence, the struggle against racial discrimination cannot be unhooked from the struggle against capitalist exploitation. It is simply a fallacy to claim that black workers are faced with two autonomous but intersecting systems of domination, viz a system of 'racial domination' and a system of 'class domination'. However valid it might be for specific analytical purposes to distinguish between the 'racial' and the 'class' elements and constitute the system of racial capitalism, it is impossible to transfer such a dichotomy on to the social reality in political and ideological practice, except in terms of, or for the purposes of, ruling-class mystification of that reality.

The second point to note is that from within the working class and other black strata different conceptions of the South African nation have arisen. There is no single conception that corresponds a priori to working-class ideology. This insight is vital for the understanding of the complexity of the national question. What happens in practice is that the workers, like other class agents, are confronted with a range of actual and possible identities (generalised subjectivities or subject posi-

tions) from which they select those which they consider appropriate to their situation. Which of these identities will be selected is a question of practical politics, ie of mobilising the revolutionary classes by demonstrating to them the most effective and, from the point of view of eliminating exploitation and oppression, the most appropriate strategy.¹⁰ Of course, this choice is not arbitrary even though we may be unable to predict accurately which choices will be made by the individual or by groups of people. The choice is always materially determined, since every ideology necessarily operated through affirmations and sanctions within a material matrix.

If every ideology operates within a matrix of affirmation and sanctions, then the competition, coexistence or conflict of different ideologies is dependent on the non-discursive matrices. The power of a given ideology in relation to others is determined by its pertinent affirmations and sanctions. (Therborn, 1982:34-35)

CLASS AND NATION

In another context (Nosizwe, 1979), I have discussed very inadequately the ways in which different conceptions of the nation of South Africa relate to the question of the emancipation of the working class. Before summarising these different positions, it is necessary to undertake a slight digression in order to head off another argument which bedevils discussion of the national question. This is the view that nationalism and nation building are attitudes or activities which are peculiar to the bourgeoisie or the petty bourgeoisie. The working class, it is often held, is 'inherently' internationalist and anti-nationality. As such, it is held to be completely fantastic and, of course, reactionary, to claim that the working class can lead a struggle for national liberation.

This argument has been repeatedly refuted in historical practice; the most notable examples being the cases of People's China and Viet Nam. Ever since the collapse of the Second International at the outbreak of World War I, the question of

the internationalist instincts of the working class has preoccupied historical materialist analyses of concrete struggles. In the light of the experience of workers' and national liberation struggles in the twentieth century, few students of this question would disagree with the view that

It is now clear that no dogmatic statement can be made about which social class is the 'natural' leader of a nationalist movement. Stalin's statement, referring to the period before World War I, that 'the national question is in its essence a bourgeois one', has been attacked even in the Soviet Union, where K. Ivanov has denied that this part of Stalin's essay was inspired by Lenin ... (Davis, 1978:77)

Twentieth century working-class movements and their organisations in different countries have in fact led struggles for national liberation and national re-unification and, ipso facto, taken the lead in building or consolidating the particular nations in their national states. Of course, this does not imply that Marxists or socialists are or should be nationalists in any chauvinistic or exclusivist sense. The point is simply that the working class starts from a national perspective rather than an internationalist one. It is precisely the task of class-conscious 'vanguardist' elements to assist in the transformation of the consciousness of the working class in order that it transcend the national sphere and encompass the entire class on an international plane. It remains true, despite surprisingly deprecatory inferences drawn by serious students of the question,¹² that the workers of the world are structurally more equipped than any other class to overcome the abysses of nationality and national chauvinism.

In South Africa, too, the task of building the nation has devolved on the shoulders of the black working class. As in other colonial and post-colonial formations, in South Africa, too, the original colonial administrative unit has 'created meaning' (see Anderson, 1985:55; 105) for all the inhabitants, who have been linked in one degree or another through the mechanism of the market. The national question in South Africa

consists in the task of unifying the nation and extending equal rights to all who constitute it. In order to mobilise the revolutionary classes, ie the black working class and the radical sections of the urban and rural middle classes, the vanguard organisations of the black working class have **necessarily** to project an alternative conception of the South African nation. That this conception of the nation can only be realised in a social formation that is organised along socialist lines is no contradiction, as should be abundantly clear by now, but, on the contrary, a guarantee that only the working class can lead this struggle for national liberation to a successful conclusion. The bourgeoisie, which is tied to imperialism, is itself the lodgemaster of national oppression in that its very continuation depends on the denial to the vast majority of the workers and to other black strata of the democratic rights of citizenship. Far from uniting the nation, as its Jacobin ancestors had done in Europe, the colonial national bourgeoisie evolved and implemented 'elaborate strategies ... to divide the working people into ever smaller potentially antagonistic groups'. (Alexander, 1983:7) The tricameral fiasco is the latest example of this strategy of divide and rule.

No class, other than the black working class, is capable of bringing about the unity of the nation in the political and cultural-ideological spheres by extending to the entire population of South Africa equal democratic rights.

The middle classes cannot be consistent since their interests are, generally speaking and in their own consciousness, tied to the capitalist system. Hence only the black working class can take the task of completing the democratisation of the country on its shoulders. It alone can unite the oppressed and exploited classes. It has become the leading class in the building of the nation. It has to redefine the nation and abolish the reactionary definitions of the bourgeoisie and of the reactionary petty bourgeoisie. The nation has to be structured by and in the interests of the black working class. But it can only do so by changing the entire system. A non-racial

capitalism is impossible in South Africa. The class struggle against racial oppression becomes one struggle under the general command of the black working class and its organisations. Class, colour and nation converge in the national liberation movement. (Alexander, 1983:11)

VIEWS OF THE NATION

It is necessary to consider which of the prevailing non-class ideological discourses are most likely to promote the objective interests of the working class. In recognition of the complexity of the question and the tentativeness of the study of how ideology articulates with other dimensions of the social formation, it may be added that

There will be no single incontrovertible answer to this question. It is one which will have to be settled in the cut and thrust of democratic debate and political and ideological practice. It is one which the working class itself, through its own day-to-day experience, will set boundaries to. But once we have gained a reasonable measure of clarity on this score, it becomes our task to bring to bear all the scholarship at our command to help to create that universe in which new subjects can be constituted. (Alexander, 1984:22)

The black working class is confronted with any number of variants on four basic views of the South African nation. There is, first of all, the present regime's, or rather, the Afrikaner nationalists', view of South Africa as a multi-national state. In this view, South Africa is composed of between ten and twelve 'nations', each of which is entitled to the 'right of self-determination' to the point of 'accepting' a gratuitously proffered 'independence'. Whether in its *verkramp* or in its *verligte* version, this view of the nation operates centrally with what passes as a scientific appreciation of the importance of 'ethnicity'¹³ and, incidentally, with, in some cases, an

unexceptionable 'Risorgimento' definition of the nation! Most pluralist schools of modern liberalism of South Africa - of which van der Merwe and Schrire (1980) is a typical example - operate with a similar ethnic ideology in more flexible, less crude scholarly formulations.

Among the oppressed classes, only the most reactionary elements of the black middle class, mainly 'tribal chiefs', headmen and some civil servants are systemically open to this ideological subjection. Clearly, numerous semi-proletarians in the reserves, migrant workers on farms and in the mines are either totally or partially subjected to this ideology. In making this point, we need to recall, however, that even in the normal course the 'Xhosa' or 'Malay' or 'Hindu', etc, worker is never a frozen Xhosa, Malay, Hindu etc, subject. S(he) is at the same time a 'worker', a 'migrant', and 'African' or 'Coloured' or 'Indian', etc, or 'South African', perhaps even an 'Azanian'. One of the effects of successful ideological subjection would in this case be precisely that the person concerned automatically qualifies him/herself always as a Xhosa, Sotho, etc.

Within the liberation movement, this particular schema has never had any serious adherents with the exception of one curious episode in the 1930s involving the Communist Party of South Africa. (see Nosizwe, 1979:50-52) People like the Woltons and Moses Kotane in the CPSA, who actually put forward the demand for a federation of 'ethnic' soviet republics in Southern Africa, were motivated by the very opposite considerations of those of present-day Afrikaner nationalists or liberal pluralists. However, the incident does serve to underline the potentially disastrous consequences of transplanting a theory (in this case, Stalin's theory of the nation) without further amendment from one set of historical conditions into a totally different one.

The classic liberal position on the national question in South Africa is the so-called four-nations thesis. This view, which reifies the phenomenal aspect of the South African social formation has deep roots among all layers and classes. It has been, and is, promoted by a spectrum of political tendencies and organisations ranging from the old United Party through the Progressive Party, the Liberal Party to the Congress Alliance

and recently even a faction within the Pan-Africanist Congress. Of all the possible discursive systems to which the black working class is exposed, this one has, until very recently, had the greatest resonance.

Three important variants of this view of the nation are identifiable. The basic liberal position, analysed in terms of a 'race relations' framework, was and remains that the four population registration groups that inhabit South Africa are 'races' which should be enabled through sound economic, political and cultural policies to coexist in 'multi-racial harmony' within a single nation state. These 'races' were never considered to be 'nations'. The franchise used to be conceded by liberals to all 'civilised', ie westernised, pro-capitalist, individuals within the 'South African nation'. Under pressure from the radicalised national movement, the franchise qualifications, at least in the old Liberal Party, were eventually dropped. The long term strategic aim of the liberal establishment was, and remains, to co-opt significant layers of the black middle class, which had to be nurtured, and moderate elements within the liberation movement. Today, because of the fundamental changes in class structure and political consciousness among the labouring people in South Africa, this largely white liberal, multi-racial position has tended to blur into the more subtle ethnic ideology referred to previously. The theorists who uphold this position analyse South Africa in terms of one or other variant of pluralism.

Within the liberation movement, the 'four nations thesis' was given its most complete formulation in the writing of Lembede and in the literary publications of the ANC Youth League in the early 1940s. In 1948, the Youth League declared in its manifesto that

South Africa is a country of four chief nationalities, three of which (the European, Indians and Coloureds) are minorities, and three of which (the Africans, Coloureds and Indians) suffer national oppression. (Karis and Carter, 1972:32)

In its most widespread version, this Youth League conception

of the South African 'nation' postulated that the 'African' people constitute the nation of South Africa and the other three 'nationalities' constitute 'national minorities'. (Turok, nd) This version eventually found expression in a more ambiguous formulation in point no. 2 of the Freedom Charter.¹⁵ Adherents of this view range from those who maintain that the 'national groups' are either actual or 'potential nations to those who see them as no more than 'ethnic groups' bound together in one historically evolved state. None of the politicians and theoreticians of the four-nations thesis has, except as a formal hypothesis, to my knowledge, ever put forward the right to self-determination (in the Leninist sense) of these four 'national groups' although there is much confusion and uncertainty about whether these national groups are nations or not.

The dilemma was given classical expression by Lionel Forman in a symposium held in the Mowbray Mitra Hall in Cape Town in 1954. In his contribution entitled 'Nationalisms in South Africa', Forman, who took Stalin's definition of the nation and Soviet practice in the national question as his point of departure, said, amongst many other extremely interesting and courageous things, that

... if the people struggling are indeed nations, then an important part of our policy must be the demand that these nations have the right to self-determination. If they are not nations, and if they are national groups, aspiring to be nations, then in turn they have the right for the conditions to be created by which they may become nations with the right to self-determination.

This means that it will become part of working-class policy to guarantee to those nationalities which have not their own territory that they will be given territory which they will be able to administer autonomously, in which their own language will be one of the official languages and in which their national cultures may flourish ...

Which of South Africa's peoples are nations? I would not like to say. Possibly there are several communities in South Africa which are full-fledged nations.

But I think the majority of communities which have common language and psychology in South Africa are not full nations, but national groups. That is, I think they are aspirant nations, lacking their own territory and economic cohesion, but aspiring to achieve these.

Because of incisive criticism of his thesis in the subsequent discussion, Forman added that his view did not imply

that one is not in favour of the obvious end aim - one single, united South African nation ... But the only correct path towards a single South African nation is through the creation of conditions by which the different national cultures in South Africa may first flower, and then merge... (He conceded that the demand for national self-determination) does not imply that this is an urgent immediate issue facing us today. While I think that the time will surely come when it will be a correct and popular demand ... it would not yet be correct to put forward as a major demand¹⁶ the right to self-determination. (Forman, 1954)

There are obvious contemporary implications of such analysis:

The danger in this kind of talk is quite simply that it makes room in both theory and practice for the preaching of ethnic separatism ... 'Ethnic or 'national group' approaches are the thin edge of the wedge for separatist movements and civil wars fanned by great-power interests and suppliers of arms to opportunist 'ethnic leaders'. (Alexander, 1983:9)

Although these views were held mainly by activists in Congress and Communist Party circles, earlier 'Trotskyist' and Unity

Movement writers on the subject held similar, if less clear-cut, views on this question. Debate on the issue has continued in the Communist Party particularly. More interesting is the fact that a certain section from within the Pan-Africanist Congress has, via a Maoist path, come to identify itself with an amended version of the old ECCI position of colonialism of a special type and ended up accepting what is theoretically the same position as that of the South African Communist Party, despite bitter attacks on the supposedly 'opportunist' tactics of that party. (see Nosizwe, 1979:120-121) A recent formulation of this position, clearly mindful of the development of the black consciousness movement and ideology since 1969, has it that

While the African people are the pivot of the new nation their main allies are the so-called Coloureds and the Indian people. They form one bloc with the African peoples, take the latter's Africanist aspirations as their own, regard themselves as Africans living in an African country, identify with the history of the African people as their own ... (TLHATSI, 1983:2)

It is the right of the African people to self-determination that is the heart of the national question. This struggle for self-determination is something the other Black national groups identify with as part of their own liberation. (TLHATSI, 1983:3)

The ironies of history are indeed profound!

Another variant of the colonialism of a special type thesis is that associated mainly with the black consciousness and PAC tendencies. This represents a third view of the nation that is available to the black workers. In this view, there are two nations in South Africa, an oppressing white and an oppressed black nation, sometimes referred to as a 'black nationality'. (Tsotsi, 1982) There is no need to go into any detailed discussion on this position on which much has been written, both pro and contra. It is noteworthy, however, that the exponents of the black consciousness position have tended to conflate 'race'

and 'class' to the point that in some versions **all** whites are projected as capitalists while **all** blacks are seen as workers.

Classes are inherent in all capitalist societies. In any industrial and capitalist society we have those who own or those who manage the productive processes on behalf of the owners on the one hand and, on the other hand, those who do not. In fact the workers, blacks, are the most ruthlessly exploited in South Africa for they are the dispossessed; they do not own land, they do not own any means of production, they do not wield any meaningful and significant power

The fact that one, as a member of the black race, is deprived of meaningful political power does not make him a member of the white group (sic) which wields both political and economic power. Whites en masse are the perpetrators of this exploitative status quo. (Mthembu, 1982:163)

A distinctive aspect of this 'two-nations' thesis is that it, not unlike some variants of the four-nations thesis, holds that the struggle for national liberation will eventuate in one (socialist, Azanian) nation. The oppressing white nation, it is to be supposed, will disintegrate, in that very many whites will refuse to live in a free Azania and will emigrate to more racially congenial climates. Those who remain will identify themselves with the Azanian nation and cease to belong to the white 'nation'. Consequently, the proponents of the two-nations view see no contradiction between it and the now universally known slogan of One Azania, One Nation! This slogan, clearly, represents a political programme of national liberation involving in some interpretations the leadership and emancipation of the black working class. The tactical-strategic inference often drawn from, or justified by, this theory of the nation that individuals classified as white cannot participate in the organisations of the black people, ie that identification by individual whites with the Azanian nation is possible only after liberation, is a point of dispute within the liberation movement. At bottom, it would seem that there is a certain meta-

physical assumption about the ways in which oppression and exploitation qualify those who suffer these phenomena. It seems to be assumed that whites in South Africa, because they are not oppressed, cannot identify at certain unspecifiable deep psychic levels with the oppressed and with their struggle.

However that may be, there is no doubt that among the exploited and oppressed, this view of the nation has become extremely resonant. Indeed, during the late 1960s and all of the 1970s, it was unquestionably the dominant view among black activists. So much so, in fact, that even adherents of the four-nations view began to consider tentatively that this may well be the way in which the liberation struggle and capitalist development were shaping the people of South Africa. Since the theory is generically the same as the colonialism of a special type theory,¹⁷ which holds, amongst other things, that 'Non-White South Africa is the colony of White South Africa itself', it is not a very large jump to make. Consider the following: one exponent of this view, (Molapo, 1976), claims that the major disadvantage of the one-nation thesis is the fact that it obscures the colonial nature of South African society and consequently the national character of the liberation struggle. In his eyes the two-nations thesis is designed to overcome this flaw, as the two-nations thesis views South Africa as essentially a colonial situation of a special type, comprised of the oppressive nation and the oppressed nation, coexisting in the same territory. Both the tentativeness of this position and the ~~mortmain~~ of Stalin's theory of the nation become evident in the tortuous qualifications which Molapo hangs on to his thesis.

Although Molapo (1976) clearly views the two-nations thesis as correct he acknowledges that there is a problem with the meaning of the term 'nation' in this context. For, both the oppressing nation and the oppressed nation in South Africa do not meet the general conditions laid down by Stalin's classical definition. He acknowledges that it is preferable to reserve the term 'nation' for fully fledged national communities which satisfy all four components of Stalin's definition rather than those which are still advancing along the lines of national organisation. As a consequence he concludes that the two-nations thesis while being appropriate as a characterisation of the general nature of

the class struggle in South Africa, does need slight adjustment for neither of the two nations is complete in the fullest sense of the word.

The fundamental problem with the two-nations thesis and with any other many-nations thesis in the South African context is that it holds within it the twin dangers of anti-white black chauvinism and ethnic separatism. It may not be possible with the ideology of a single nation to tap all those currents in the South African social formation which are systemically opposed to such divisive ideologies and thus to avoid completely the danger of petty bourgeois controlled movements based on anti-white chauvinism or ethnic separatism. To the extent, however, that the revolutionary classes in South Africa accept that they are part and parcel of a single nation, the liberation struggle becomes ideologically insulated against these dangers. Of course, believing in something is no guarantee that it will happen. The objective basis for the realisation of the idea has to exist, otherwise it remains no more than a dream and an illusion. I have previously tried to demonstrate both the feasibility and the superiority from the point of view of a socialist or working-class project in South Africa of the one-nation thesis. (see Alexander, 1983; 1984; Nosizwe, 1979) In doing so, I have tried theoretically to reconcile this with the view that the struggle in this country is simultaneously one for national liberation and class emancipation.

The position of this fourth view of the nation can be put concisely and summarily.¹⁸ According to this view, the people of South Africa are being moulded into one unified nation by the twin forces of capitalist development and the class struggle resulting from it. The national bourgeoisie, for reasons of capitalist accumulation, in effect aborted the nation in 1920 by fragmenting and freezing the population into four 'races' and a number of 'tribal' or 'ethnic' groups. As long as primary, especially extractive, industry was the dominant sector of the South African economy, or as long as the development of a large and diversified domestic market for the products of secondary industry and for tertiary services did not exist, this system produced the superprofits that justified it. In the course of the ensuing class struggles, and especially after 1946, the

black workers gradually became the decisive force that will determine the direction of the entire system of racial capitalism. The oppression of the totality of the black people, which is one of the main features of the system, is akin to colonial oppression in a number of respects. It is national oppression in the sense that the vast majority of the people are denied the rights and privileges of nationhood, ie democratic rights, purely on the basis of the colour of their skins.

Because of the peculiarities of capitalist development in South Africa, the only way in which racial discrimination and racial inequality, ie national oppression, can be abolished is through the abolition of the capitalist structures themselves. The only class, however, which can bring into being such a (socialist) system is the black working class. On it, by virtue of its unique historical position, devolves the task of mobilising all the oppressed and exploited classes for the abolition of the system of racial capitalism. In doing so, it has to unite the workers and their allies by undermining the divisive factors which have as a matter of policy been retained and invented by different ruling class governments in order to disorganise the South African proletariat. Beyond that, the working class has to devise counter-hegemonic strategies and practices which prepare the ground, in fact will constitute the ground, upon which the Azanian nation will stand.

Although it is a secondary question, we have to add to this analysis the fact that the physical and political reintegration of the so-called independent homelands constitutes another aspect of the solution of the national question. National unification and national reunification are part and parcel of the same process of national liberation. In this view, the workers of South Africa are exercising the right of self-determination by rejecting, in concrete mass struggles as much as in the programmes of their political organisations, the partition and balkanisation of our country.

CONSTRUCTING THE AZANIAN NATION

The positive historical task of the Black workers in solving the national question in South Africa is the construction of the

(socialist) nation of Azania. This construction takes place in all the dimensions of the social formation, ie economically, politically and ideologically.

Although certain economic forms and structures relevant to a South Africa free of exploitation and oppression are emerging out of the present struggle, it is in the nature of the process of liberation that the political and ideological construction of the new nation precedes its socio-economic realisation. Indeed, such politico-ideological construction is an inescapable precondition for the formal realisation of the nation both as having new socio-economic content and as a juridical entity, ie as a new state. Gelb (nd:10) has drawn the correct inference from Anderson's work that

nationalist struggle involves a process of ideological construction of this different nation, rather than simply reflecting a pre-given nation.

Besides the many ways in which the workers in struggle construct the new nation - and it has to be emphasised that this is the ground on which everything else rests, without which all other efforts by individuals and organisations would be mere voluntarism - specific tasks fall to the 'organic intellectuals' of the working class in systematising the discourse in which this struggle is conducted.¹⁹

One of the ways in which organic intellectuals can use their access to scientific or scholarly skills is precisely by assisting the class in which they are rooted to fashion an oppositional or, more accurately, a counter-hegemonic ideology. This they do by, amongst other things, careful attention to the language which is inserted into and generalised in the political programmes and actions of the organisations of their class. The importance of this scholarly activity derives from the fact that it is in and through language that the individual is constituted as a subject. (Alexander, 1984:15)

Lest I be accused of generating an elitist notion of the role of intellectuals in the process of liberation, I hasten to add that the process of ideological production is not a unidirectional one in which intellectuals fill the empty minds of proletarians or of other class agents with a symbolical instrumentarium appropriate to their 'class interests'. It is a 'complex two-way process of learning and unlearning'. (Therborn, 1982:73) Therborn, indeed, reminds us that significant ideological mobilisations do not

... seem to owe much to the correctness or conjunctural adequacy of elaborate programmes or grand theories. The key figures in processes of ideological mobilisation are not theoreticians and writers of books, but orators, preachers, journalists, pamphleteers, politicians, and initiators of bold practical action. (Therborn, 1982:119)

One of the main tasks of the organic intellectuals of the working class in South Africa today is to counteract the reification of concepts such as 'race' and 'ethnic group' which are clearly being promoted by traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals of the ruling class to facilitate the perpetuation of the domination and subjugation of the exploited and oppressed classes.

By accepting, for example, the reality of entities such as 'ethnic groups' as part of what has been called the Cartesian Order 'which is suitable for analysis of the world into separately existing parts ...', we deprive ourselves a priori of the possibility of probing alternative, possibly more constructive discourses. For by doing so we reinforce the ethnic stabilisation or freezing of our audience through our ideological productions. (Alexander, 1984:21)

To put it differently: it is necessary for the organic intellectuals of the working class to undertake a process of decon-

struction of existing ideological discourses to which the black workers are subject, by 'analysing the process and conditions of (their) construction out of the available discourses'. (Belsey, 1985:103-124) An excellent example of this process is O'Meara (1983), where, using the example of Afrikaner nationalism, he demonstrates 'why and under what conditions ... differentiated collectivities of people come to be organised in terms of one ideology rather than another ...' In doing so, he successfully attacks Adam and Giliomee for failing to explain this in their work on Afrikaner nationalism because they use 'the highly circular concept of 'ethnic mobilisation' in which a priori 'ethnically organised groups' compete with each other for scarce resources'. (O'Meara, 1983:8)

What has to be stressed is the vital political and social importance of creating a new discourse. There is an urgent need to realise that language is much more than a passive reflection of a pre-existent, autonomous reality. Indeed, the language we use, by virtue of the fact that it is the medium through which the historical subject is constructed, helps to construct the reality within which we act and to which we react. While we have to guard against all idealist temptations and test everything we do against the non-discursive practices and possibilities of the working class, we need to realise that attention to this formative role of language is the province par excellence of the organic intellectual.

How to let a combination of word and deed render irrelevant possible ethnic identities and existing ethnic consciousnesses and subsume them under a larger national consciousness without destroying the rich cultural diversity of the people of South Africa? This is the current stuff of politics, especially of cultural politics. It is one of the major points of dispute on the national question between different political tendencies. How, further, to prevent national consciousness from being transformed into an exclusivist or sectional-communal consciousness that will undermine the struggle for a South Africa free of exploitation and oppression, ie for a socialist Azania? This is the other side of the national question in South Africa. Both sides of the question are answered positively only if the leadership of the working class in the national liberation struggle

is ensured.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 In an interesting passage, Samir Amin calls this the 'reactionary or bureaucratic, formal position' which 'simply denies realities other than class. It denies the importance of sex, nations, religions, or other categories, regarding them not as realities but as phenomena artificially manipulated by the exploiting classes. This position results, moreover, in tactical failure in the class struggle because these realities are tenacious and subtly undermine the development of the class-for-itself'. (Amin, 1981:30)
- 2 The literature is vast. However, the following works will serve as a point of orientation: Symons-Symonolewicz, 1965; Lamberg, 1967; OST-PROBLEME, 1967; Davis, 1978; Amin, 1981; Smith, 1983.
- 3 Consider the following by one of the leading Soviet Africanists who had a strong influence on the CPSA's position. (Written some 30 years ago on the basis of Stalin's definition): 'Today in the Union of South Africa the process of forming two national societies continues, that of the Bantu and of the Anglo-Afrikaner. There are no grounds for assuming that one nation can be formed which would embrace the Bantu, the Coloureds and the Anglo-Afrikaners. The Coloureds could not at the present time become a component of the national Bantu group, they do not know the Bantu languages and in language, cultural forms and self-consciousness they tend to identify themselves with the Anglo-Afrikaners. The Indians are a completely separate group'. (Potekhin, nd:15)
- 4 It is perhaps useful to note that in its properly translated form, Stalin's definition reads as follows: 'A nation is an historically evolved, stable community arising on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture'. (quoted in Davis, 1978:71)
- 5 Whether or not nations exist prior to the establishment of

capitalist relations of production is an interesting historical and methodological question which need not detain us here. For the range of the polemic in this regard, see Amin, 1978:10-12 and Kroker, 1966:20-21.

6 For a similar approach, see Bourque and Laurin-Frenette (1975).

7 The whole question of the political and ideological forms in which the class struggle is conducted, though still extremely controversial in detail, has been given finality in practice. There are quite simply no attested cases of 'pure class consciousness or of 'pure' class struggles at the political level. Most analysts would agree with the following axiomatic statement:

'So far, at least, no great modern social revolution, bourgeois or socialist, has ever been made by a unified class subject demanding a completely new social order. Rather, such revolutions have been effected in particular conjunctures when the relations of force have changed in such a way as to undermine the old regime - in other words, through the emergence of economic, political, and ideological contradictions and situations of uneven development, both within the society and in its external relations, disarticulating the previous totality and its system of affirmations and sanctions. They have been consciously made when various forces, with different immediate demands pertaining to the conjuncture, have come together. The social-revolutionary import of these demands - bread, peace, land, independence, popular representative government, an end to repression - has stemmed from a constellation of clashing class forces and their organised expressions, through which certain historical social alternatives are ruled out and others open up ...

'The possibilities for revolutionary change should be derived from the likelihood of economic and political crisis, and from the existence of materially organised alternatives, rather than from the state of mind of a class'. (Therborn, 1982:110-111)

Of course, Therborn is careful to stress that class consciousness *is* important since the level of such conscious-

ness and organisation will determine the degree of preparedness of the revolutionary class(es) for post-revolutionary reconstruction. (see Therborn, 1982:111-112)

- 8 A recent study of how the Afrikaner workers were 'recruited' into the Afrikaner nationalist movement, that draws upon some of the insights of Louis Althusser is O'Meara (1983). See especially his introductory chapter.
- 9 See Therborn (1982:71).
'Class ideologies, like class politics, do not 'represent' anything other than themselves, such as 'class interest'. Indeed, the notion of 'representation' is part of the utilitarian heritage in Marxism, which should be definitely discarded'.
- 10 Compare Hudson's very relevant comments regarding Pechoux's notion of the 'interdiscourse'. 'It is the interdiscourse, then, which defines the available range of subject-positions in a society into which individuals are "interpellated". A concrete individual will then be interpellated into a number of distinct subject-positions throughout his personal history and the overall unity of these distinct subject-positions is determined by the state of the class struggle and is not guaranteed by any original or primary unity attached to the subject form in general'. (Hudson 1984:8)
- 11 The recent literature on the relationship between class and nation is increasing rapidly. The following references are a useful starting point: Löwy, 1976:98-100; Amin, 1981:30; Purivatna, 1979.
- 12 'It is time to drop altogether the idea that the "international working class" will bring about the revolution. There is no such thing as the international working class. Rather, there are many national working classes. In some countries there is not even a working class at all. In many others the working class, or the bulk of it, is not anti-capitalist or socialist'. (Davis, 1978:245)
- 13 J Sharp (1980) has shown the inadequacy and, in many cases, the charlatanism, of this 'science' of **volkekunde**.
- 14 For those who are unaware of the history of this period, it may be of interest to know that this slogan was derived from

the Comintern. In a letter to the CPSA dating from 1932, the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) counselled the CPSA to unite the 'Native, coloured, white and Asiatic toilers of S.A. and the protectorates' on the (basis of a programme that included, inter alia, the slogans): 'Down with the British and Afrikaner imperialists. Drive out the imperialists. 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. The establishment of a workers' and peasants' government. Full guarantee of the rights of all national minorities, for the coloured, Indian and white toiling masses'. (ECCI, 1983:14) Also see Omwony-Ojwolo (1978). At this same time (the so-called Third Period of the Comintern), a parallel trauma was shattering the Communist Party of the U.S.A. where, on the recommendation of the Comintern, the demand for a separate 'Negro Soviet Republic' in the black belt was being put forward seriously with some tendencies within the CPUSA. (see Gruber, 1984)

15 All National Groups Shall Have Equal Rights

There shall be equal status in the bodies of state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races;

All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride;

All people shall have equal rights to use their own language and to develop their own folk culture and customs;

The preaching and practice of national, race or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime;

All apartheid laws and practices shall be set aside.

- 16 A recent attempt to deny that the four-nations thesis bears this kind of interpretation and which put down all such allegations to 'mischief-making' seems to be an inept attempt to falsify history or is the result of a lack of information (see Anonymous, 1984). Echoes of Forman's dilemma resound across the decades in Congress - CP debates and writings. By way of example: 'Africans have always

retained an awareness of a separate historically constituted "national" identity. Perhaps nationality would be more accurate. At any rate "nation" here is not to be read as "nation state". (Turok, 1983)

- 17 Gelb (nd) has challenged the theory of internal colonialism along a broad front. Its specific implications for theory and practice in a national question have been outlined in Nosizwe, 1979:105-111.
- 18 See Nosizwe (1979:111-120) for its antecedents in the Unity Movement and the PAC.
- 19 See Alexander (1984:2-4) and O'Meara (1983:15) for the useful distinction, derived from Gramsci between 'literary' and 'popular' forms of an ideology.

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