

NATIONAL AND CLASS STRUGGLE

Is the Communist Party programme still valid?

By Peter Mackintosh

The South African Communist Party is today under attack from both right and left sides of the political spectrum. The right-wing attack is typified by the 1982 United States Senate report headed "Soviet, East German and Cuban Involvement in Fomenting Terrorism in South Africa", by the South African regime's 1986 pamphlet "Talking to the ANC" and by the 1986 pamphlet "ANC — A Soviet Task Force?" published by the British Institute for the Study of Terrorism. All allege that the ANC is controlled by the SACP which in turn is controlled by Moscow, which uses terrorism as an instrument of undermining democratic western regimes and values.

The left-wing attack is as infantile — it asserts that the South African Communist Party has abandoned the struggle for socialism and is tailing behind the bourgeois nationalist movement. It attacks the so-called "two-stage" policy of the Communist Party and calls on the South African working class to proclaim that its objective is socialism and not "merely" national liberation which would leave power in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

Both attacks have a similar consequence. In the case of the right wing it is deliberate — to sow division in the ranks of the liberation movement, to smash the ANC-SACP-SACTU alliance, to rescue apartheid and preserve the capitalist system from destruction. The ultra-left attack on the SACP and

consequently on the liberation alliance inevitably plays into the hands of reaction and strengthens the position of the apartheid regime without in any way advancing the cause of socialism.

A study of "The Road to South African Freedom", the programme of the South African Communist Party adopted at the 5th national congress of the Party held underground in South Africa in 1962, reveals that the analysis made by the Party in 1962 is still valid in 1987. Many things have changed in Africa and the world in the intervening years. The socialist countries have consolidated their power and influence; many countries in the so-called third world have gained their independence, including Mozambique, Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho; South Africa itself has changed. Nevertheless, the main political, social and economic contradictions in the capitalist world, both at home and abroad, remain largely unaltered, presenting us with essentially the same challenges today as in 1962. The centre-piece of our analysis — that South Africa's "colonialism of a special type" can only be ended through a revolutionary change in the social system, "a national democratic revolution which will overthrow the colonialist state of White supremacy and establish an independent state of National Democracy" — still stands up to scrutiny. The experiences of the past 25 years have demonstrated its effectiveness as a guide to action.

What distinguishes the Party programme is the historical perspective on which it is based. This is not the hasty product of a few nights of sweated labour, but the distillation of decades of struggle and study. The Party does not regard the apartheid system as an Afrikaner aberration which only manifested itself after 1948. The programme declares:

"This system of race domination and oppression has its origins far back in South African history. However, it has developed into its present, extreme form with the development of capitalism and especially of the great diamond and gold-mining monopolies . . . The colonial status of the African people facilitates the maximum exploitation of their labour".

The programme analyses the nature of this special form of colonialism in which the White minority holds the monopoly of political rights and economic opportunities. Some might argue that with the inauguration of the tri-cameral parliament in 1984, it is no longer true to say that whites alone can vote for and be elected to Parliament; but the passage through parliament last year of security legislation which was rejected by the Coloured and Indian chambers indicates that the white minority still holds the monopoly of political power. As for economic opportunities, the whites still have sole access to 87 per cent of the land, while white capitalists own and control the

mines, factories and banks and most of the country's commerce. The regime through its education and cultural policies inculcates the doctrine of race superiority, which is used to promote the policy of divide and rule. The black majority are deprived of access to the land, jobs and training, despite all reforms designed to develop and incorporate a tiny elite. There is still monstrous inequality and discrimination based on race.

Struggle of Two Systems

How has this barbarous system of oppression come about? The programme sets South Africa in its international context.

“We live in an epoch of struggle between two opposing social systems, an epoch of socialist and national liberation revolutions, of the breakdown of imperialism and the abolition of the colonial system”.

The capitalist system is giving way to socialism. Imperialism is under siege. The forces of socialism and national liberation have transformed the world in this century, beginning with the Russian Revolution of 1917. The masses of people in Africa and other former colonial territories are beginning to understand that capitalism cannot give them true equality, independence and democracy.

“Led by the small, but growing, working class, in close alliance with the masses of rural people, they are striving to achieve non-capitalist forms of development, leading towards socialism”.

Let us not argue over the meaning of “non-capitalist forms of development”. The path to socialism will differ from country to country, but the basic laws of Marxism-Leninism apply to all countries. The Programme stresses:

“Headed by the Marxist-Leninist Party and in alliance with most of the peasants and other working people, the working class must destroy the state of dictatorship of the capitalists, and replace it with the dictatorship of the working class”.

Counter-revolution must be suppressed. Private ownership of the main means of production must be abolished and public ownership established in its place. Agriculture must be transformed on a socialist basis.

“The national economy must be planned, to raise the people's living standards and build socialism and communism.”

There is no ambiguity here. Anyone who tries to argue that the SACP programme does not have the objective of socialism, is deliberately distorting the facts.

A New Type of Colonialism

The programme's analysis of the South African social system makes clear the relationship between the struggle for socialism and the struggle for national liberation.

“South Africa is not a colony but an independent state. Yet millions of our people enjoy neither independence nor freedom”.

The conceding of independence to South Africa by Britain in 1910 was not a victory over the forces of colonialism and imperialism. Power was transferred, not into the hands of the masses of people of South Africa, but into the hands of the white minority alone. The new set-up, far from ending imperialism, was designed to perpetuate it.

“A new type of colonialism was developed, in which the oppressing White nation occupied the same territory as the oppressed people themselves and lived side by side with them. On one level, that of ‘White South Africa’ there are all the features of an advanced capitalist state in its final stage of imperialism . . . But on another level, that of ‘Non-White South Africa’, there are all the features of a colony. The indigenous population is subjected to extreme national oppression, poverty and exploitation, lack of all democratic rights and political domination . . . Typical, too, of imperialist rule, is the reliance by the state upon brute force and terror, and upon the most backward tribal elements and institutions which are deliberately and artificially preserved. Non-White South Africa is the colony of White South Africa.

“It is this combination of the worst features both of imperialism and of colonialism, within a single national frontier, which determines the special nature of the South African system”.

There follows an analysis of South African monopoly capitalism which is still accurate, though some of the detail is altered. Real power in South Africa is still in the hands of the monopolists who own and control the mines, the banks and finance houses, and most of the farms and major industries. Though these monopolists may have their differences with the apartheid regime, and some of them may be pressing for “reforms”, they still regard the State as their protector and accept that the special type of colonialism serves their interests. Though organised commerce and industry, Afrikaans and English, may now declare their objection to the pass laws and the Group Areas Act, it is significant that none of these bodies supports a policy of one person one vote in a united, free and democratic South Africa.

Capitalism Breeds Monopoly

The apartheid regime and all organs of big business oppose communism ostensibly on the grounds that it leads to the suppression of human liberty and that capitalism and the free enterprise system create the conditions for the greatest efficiency of production and the widest satisfaction of the needs

and aspirations of the individual. Yet, as Lenin pointed out in *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, written in 1916, so-called “free” competition under capitalism inevitably gives way to monopoly.

“Cartels come to an agreement on the terms of sale, dates of payment, etc. They divide the markets among themselves. They fix the quantity of goods to be produced. They fix prices. They divide the profits among the various enterprises, etc.”

A glance at the South African economy will confirm that this is the way capitalism has developed. The concentration of monopoly and the power of the coupon clippers, as Lenin called the finance capitalists, are commented on in the SACP programme, which pointed out that the gold and diamond mines were owned by seven mining-financial corporations and controlled by a handful of powerful financiers. “These seven corporations are closely linked with British and American imperialist interests . . . they dominate large sections of manufacturing industries. They are linked with the main banks . . . They own vast tracts of arable land and mining rights in almost every part of the country. In agriculture too monopoly dominates . . . In mining, industry, commerce and farming, monopolists dominate the country’s economy. They are also closely linked with *State monopoly* capital ventures, such as Iscor (Iron and Steel), Escom (Electricity) and Sasol (Petrol). These monopolies are the real power in South Africa. The special type of colonialism in South Africa serves, in the first place, their interests”.

Since 1962 the monopoly process has been carried even further, and by 1986 no less than 80 per cent of all the assets quoted on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange were controlled by only four companies — the Anglo-American Corporation, Sanlam, SA Mutual and Rembrandt. Towards the end of 1986 the process of concentration continued with the acquisition of Barclays by Anglo-American, and the same process may have taken place with the sale of assets by other foreign companies which have decided to get out of South Africa. In 1900 foreign capital constituted the bulk of investment in South African mining and industry. But as a result of the development of indigenous South African capitalism, the stake of foreign capital in South Africa today amounts to only about 20 per cent. Foreign capital’s interest in South Africa was due to the fact that the internal colonialism practised here guaranteed a return of between 20 and 30 per cent in the post-war period — at times double what could be obtained in other countries around the world. Thanks to the “unrest” of recent years, this return has been greatly diminished. In the case of United States investment in South Africa, for example, a return of 30 per cent in 1980 had been reduced to 7 per cent by

1984, and has probably declined still further in the last two years. Other foreign capital was undoubtedly equally affected.

Capitalism Breeds Nationalism

The roots of the national question are to be found in the development of the capitalist system, whether or not the capital involved is domestic or foreign. In his *Imperialism* Lenin made a comment which is very relevant to the situation in South Africa. Imperialism, he pointed out, introduces everywhere “the striving for domination, not for freedom. Whatever the political system the result of these tendencies is everywhere reaction and an extreme intensification of antagonisms in this field. Particularly intensified becomes the yoke of national oppression and the striving for annexations, i.e., the violation of national independence (for annexation is nothing but the violation of the right of nations to self-determination)”.

It was with the development of capitalism, following the discovery of gold and diamonds, that the white colonialists completed their annexation of South Africa, dispossessing the indigenous inhabitants, introducing the Land Act, intensifying the scope of the pass laws etc., turning the black masses, the overwhelming majority of the population, into a source of endless cheap labour. And because under this colonialism of a special type, the oppressing nation occupied the same territory as the oppressed, it adumbrated theories of national superiority and racism more vicious than anywhere else in the world. The dispossessed peoples were denied their civic and language rights, driven into ghettos, treated with the utmost barbarism and savagery.

This national oppression leads in turn to the awakening of national consciousness and resistance on the part of the people who are dispossessed; and oppressed. Lenin quotes the German Social Democrat Hilferding who in his book *Finance Capital* (published in Russian in 1912) stated:

“In the newly opened-up countries the capital imported into them intensifies antagonisms and elicits against the intruders the constantly growing resistance of the peoples who are awakening to national consciousness; this resistance can easily develop into dangerous measures against foreign capital. The old social relations become completely revolutionised. The age-old agrarian isolation of ‘nations without history’ is destroyed and they are drawn into the capitalist whirlpool. Capitalism itself gradually provides the subjugated with the means and resources for their emancipation and they set out to achieve the goal which once seemed highest to the European nations: the creation of a united national state as a means to economic and cultural freedom. This movement for national independence threatens European capital in its most valuable and most promising fields of

exploitation, and European capital can maintain its domination only by continually increasing its military forces”.

Lenin wrote *Imperialism* during the first world war, which was demonstrably an outright imperialist war to establish the division of the world amongst the imperialist powers. Capitalism inevitably engendered conflict and violence, which were extreme forms of the competition waged by capitalists against one another for the domination of the market. Lenin asked pertinently:

“Once the relation of forces is changed, what other solution of the contradictions can be found *under capitalism* than that of force?”

The British and French empires were built and maintained by force, and force was the mechanism by which an attempt was made in two world wars to bring about a redistribution of the world’s territories and human and material resources. Hitler used force to crush the working class challenge to capitalism in Germany; Mussolini in Italy and Hirohito in Japan joined with him in the the Axis crusade for conquest. Yet the basic contradictions in society remain. In the United States, superficially the wealthiest country in the world, more than 30 million people live below the breadline. In Britain and the US, the gap between rich and poor grows wider by the year. In the world at large the class divisions of capitalist society are reflected in the gap between the have nations and the have-nots, a gap growing wider by the year as the imperialist nations refuse to take any of the steps demanded by the debtor nations to establish a new international economic order. In South Africa the apartheid regime responds to demands for social change by the imposition of states of emergency and mass detentions, torture, kidnaps and killings as well as aggression against the border states.

Under capitalism the national problem is created by force. The oppressed peoples are dispossessed by force. In South Africa the restriction of the franchise represents the exercise of force by the white minority against the black majority. How, except by the use or threat of force, is national oppression to be ended?

Nationalism and Bourgeois Democracy

Traditionally Marxists had regarded national movements as linked with the development of capitalism, reflecting the need of an aspirant bourgeoisie for freedom from feudal or colonial restraint in order to achieve domination of the market.

In his 1914 thesis on *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, Lenin wrote:

“For the complete victory of commodity production, the bourgeoisie must capture the home market, and there must be politically united territories whose populations speak a single language, with all obstacles to the development of that language and to its consolidation in literature removed. Therein is the economic foundation of national movements”.

This was the reason for the development of nation-states, under which the requirements of capitalism could best be satisfied. Thus national movements would inevitably be under the leadership of the aspirant bourgeoisie. Lenin called on the working class to support the various demands for democracy advanced by the bourgeoisie, because they were as much interested in freedom and equality as anybody else, in the right to speak their language, etc. At the same time, the various demands of democracy, including the right to self-determination, were only a small part of the revolutionary socialist movement which recognised that only the elimination of class exploitation, the replacement of capitalism by socialism on a world scale, would bring a final end to national and class oppression.

The experience of war and revolution changed the Communist perception of national movements. The 21 points laying down conditions of admission to the Communist International adopted at the second congress of the Comintern in 1920, and appended to the constitution of the Communist Party of South Africa in 1921, stressed that every affiliated Communist Party must support, not only in words, but practically, “all movements of liberation in the colonies” and cultivate among the workers of its own country “a truly fraternal attitude towards the working population of the colonies and oppressed nationalities”.

In his report to the congress, Lenin pointed out that about 70 per cent of the world’s population belonged to the oppressed nations and constituted great revolutionary potential in the struggle against imperialism. The congress decided to substitute the term “national revolutionary” for the term “bourgeois-democratic” previously used in reference to the national movements. One year later, at the 3rd congress of the Comintern in July, 1921, Lenin contested the view which had prevailed in the Second International that the national movement was of secondary importance:

“But this is not so. It has undergone great change since the beginning of the twentieth century. Millions and hundreds of millions, in fact the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe, are now coming forward as independent, active and revolutionary factors. It is perfectly clear that in the impending decisive battles in the world revolution, the movement of the population of the globe, initially directed towards national liberation, will turn against capitalism and imperialism and will perhaps play a much more revolutionary part than we expect.”

The South African Experience

The South African Communists who broke away from the Labour Party in 1915 to form the International Socialist League had two objectives in mind: 1. to register their protest against imperialist war; and 2. to pursue the struggle for socialism on the basis of proletarian internationalism. An editorial in the fourth issue of *The International*, the weekly paper of the ISL, stated on October 1, 1915:

“An internationalism that does not concede the fullest rights which the native working class is capable of claiming will be a sham. . . If the League deal resolutely in consonance with socialist principles with the native question, it will succeed in shaking South African capitalism to its foundations. . . Not till we free the native can we hope to free the white”.

The ISL and after 1921 the Communist Party made contact with all existing black organisations, including the ANC, and founded the Industrial Workers of Africa trade union long before the ICU was thought about. Party members carried out intensive propaganda work amongst all sections of the black population and attempted to draw them into the ranks of the Party, which from the outset had no colour bar. The attitude of the ISL was summed up in a statement published in *The International* on December 7, 1917, headed: “International Socialism and the Native — No Labour Movement Without The Black Proletariat”:

“The abolition of the Native indenture, passport and compound system and the lifting of the Native worker to the political and industrial status of the White is an essential step towards the emancipation of the working class in South Africa. Society is divided into two classes: the working class, doing all the labour; and the idle class, living on the fruits of labour. Strictly speaking, therefore, there is no ‘Native Problem’. There is only a working class problem.”

The Communist Party view was that national liberation and the ending of all forms of national oppression and race discrimination could only be achieved through the class struggle and the achievement of socialism under the leadership of the Communist Party. It pointed out that there was no black bourgeoisie, least of all an African bourgeoisie, capable of spearheading a national democratic revolution. Because of the apartheid laws, the Africans were “all helotised together”, and the class banner was inspiring more revolutionary enthusiasm than the racial banner. Certainly, by the end of the 1920s, the Communist Party had more to show by way of organised and militant cohorts than the ANC. But absent from the thinking of the Communists in the early days was any thought of the independent contribution that could be made by black national organisations to their own liberation or the creation of a socialist South Africa. The aim of the Party was

not black liberation as such but the emancipation of the working class, in the ranks of whom the blacks were at first thought to be a minority. There was no understanding of the way in which the economic and social structure of South Africa was being transformed by the destruction of the tribal way of life and the drawing into the ranks of wage labourers of millions upon millions of black men and women who could no longer live off the land. Nor was there any conception that the black millions in their liberation organisations could become allies of the Communists in the fight for revolutionary change and a new social order.

The impetus for change came from two main sources. One was the experience of the South African Communists themselves, the second was the experience of the International Communist movement.

It was Lenin, the arch-opponent of opportunism in politics, who conceded in *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution (1905)*:

“We all counterpose bourgeois revolution and socialist revolution; we all insist on the absolute necessity of strictly distinguishing between them; however, can it be denied that in the course of history individual particular elements of the two revolutions become interwoven?”

“Marxism teaches the proletariat not to keep aloof from the bourgeois revolution, not to refuse to take part in it, not to allow the leadership of the revolution to be assumed by the bourgeoisie but, on the contrary, to take a most energetic part in it, to fight resolutely for consistent proletarian democracy, to fight to carry the revolution to its completion. We cannot jump out of the bourgeois democratic boundaries of the Russian revolution, but we can enormously extend those boundaries, and within those boundaries we can and must fight for the interests of the proletariat, for its immediate needs and for the prerequisites for training its forces for the complete victory that is to come”.

Lenin was speaking of the relationship between the bourgeois and socialist revolutions, but the argument holds good for the relationship between the socialist revolution and the national democratic revolution. In his “Communism in South Africa”, the report presented in 1921 to the executive of the Comintern on behalf of the International Socialist League, the South African Communist David Ivon Jones commented:

“The national and class interests of the natives cannot be distinguished the one from the other. Here is a revolutionary nationalist movement in the fullest meaning of Lenin’s term”.

The “Black Republic”

Not all members of the Communist Party in the early 1920s were convinced of the revolutionary potential of the black masses. Many thought that socialism

would come from the struggle of the white workers, the only effectively organised section of the South African proletariat at that time, with three decades of struggle against the bosses and the government behind them. But the incorporation of the white workers after the election of the Nationalist-Labour government in 1924, together with the increasing Africanisation of the Party, altered the Communist perspective. When the so-called “black republic” resolution was adopted by the Communist International in 1928, a large section of the Communist Party of South Africa was ready to accept it, and indeed, through negotiation with Comintern leaders before the 6th Comintern congress was held, had made their own contribution to its formulation. (See *Moses Kotane, South African Revolutionary* by Brian Bunting, chapter 2.)

The 6th Comintern congress resolution on the South African question called for the establishment of “an independent native South African republic as a stage towards a workers’ and peasants’ republic, with full equal rights for all races, black, coloured and white”. A subsequent resolution of the Executive Committee of the Communist International gave the reasoning behind the slogan:

“South African is a black country, the majority of the population is black and so is the majority of the workers and peasants. . . Hence the national question in South Africa. . . lies at the foundation of the revolution in South Africa.”

The failure of the Communist Party to appreciate the significance of the national movement would lead to the separation of the Party from the African population. While the ECCI appreciated the extent to which the membership of the Party had been increased amongst the Africans, it was necessary that the leadership, too, must be Africanised. The land question was vital.

“It is the task of the Communist Party to influence the embryonic and crystallising national movements among the natives in order to develop these movements into national agrarian revolutionary movements against the white bourgeoisie and British imperialists. . . The Party should pay particular attention to the embryonic national organisations among the natives, such as the African National Congress. The Party, while retaining full independence, should participate in these organisations, should seek to broaden and extend their activity. Our aim should be to transform the African National Congress into a fighting nationalist revolutionary organisation against the white bourgeoisie and the British imperialists”.

The 1929 congress of the Communist Party of South Africa was attended by 30 delegates from all over the country representing a membership of 3,000. Greetings were sent to the congress by the ANC. The new party programme

based on the 1928 Comintern resolution was debated for a full day before being adopted. The key section of the programme relating to the nature of the revolutionary struggle in South Africa stated that the

“double burden of exploitation carried by the native masses calls for a democratic revolution which will mean the smashing of all feudal relationships and the securing of full citizenship rights. To all natives, whether farm labourers, factory workers, chiefs or peasants, the revolution means the abolition of all discrimination against blacks as such, with independence and the opportunity to develop as a national or racial unit. Such a revolution does not by itself mean the final liberation of the broad masses of South Africa. The stage remains to be traversed to the final abolition of exploitation and domination of class by class, of man by man, the final stage of the Social Revolution for the establishment of Socialism under which all men shall be socially, economically and politically free to share alike in the fruits of their joint labour, with equal opportunity and equal access to all the comforts of life.

“This can only be accomplished under the leadership of the United Workers and Peasants of town and country”.

Most Revolutionary Force

The programme stressed that the African people, as the most exploited and oppressed section of the population, as well as the overwhelming majority, constituted potentially the most revolutionary force in the country. Support for the movements of national liberation was aimed, not at driving the white man into the sea, but at removing all the political and social disabilities which make up the enslavement of the African people, restoring to them the lands and liberties taken from them by foreign conquerors, settlers and financiers, and vindicating their right, as the immense majority and in the truest sense the people of Africa, to equality, emancipation, independence and self-determination, and hence to predominant political power in their own country, with equal rights for all minorities.

The programme posed then the same question that is posed today by the critics of the Communist Party — “Is this a departure from the strict class outlook?”, and answered emphatically:

“By no means. . . South African imperialism helotises the whole of the native people as a race as providing a national labour breeding and recruiting ground. . . Unity postulates equality. If we are to achieve real labour unity we must first remove the greatest obstacle to it, viz, the unequal, subjected, enslaved status of the native workers and people. Hence race emancipation and class emancipation tend to coincide. Hence too the conception and realisation of native rule merges into

that of the Workers' and Peasants' Republic, non-imperialist, non-capitalist, non-racialist, classless and in effect Socialist".

The perspective then, as now, is that the so-called "two stages" of the South African are not necessarily or inevitably separated by barriers of time or space. The struggle for national liberation is inextricably linked with the struggle for class emancipation. The achievement of the national democratic revolution can only promote the cause of socialism because, as Lenin pointed out, the achievement of socialism is impossible without democracy.

"The proletariat cannot be victorious except through democracy, i.e., by giving full effect to democracy and by linking with each step of its struggle democratic demands formulated in the most resolute terms. It is absurd to *contrapose* the socialist revolution and the revolutionary struggle against capitalism to a single problem of democracy, in this case, the national question. We must *combine* the revolutionary struggle against capitalism with a revolutionary programme and tactics on *all* democratic demands: a republic, a militia, the popular election of officials, equal rights for women, the self-determination of nations etc. . . The social revolution is not a single battle, but a period covering a series of battles over all sorts of problems of economic and democratic reform, which are consummated only by the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. It is for the sake of this final aim that we must formulate *every one* of our democratic demands in a consistently revolutionary way". (*The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, 1915.).

Two-way Process

Following the adoption of the "black republic" slogan the Communist Party went through a traumatic period in which its members tried to come to terms with its implications. During 1930 the Communist Party received from the Executive Committee of the Comintern a lengthy document entitled "How to Build a Revolutionary Mass Party in South Africa" which contained an attack on alleged "reformist" elements in the leadership of the Party who opportunistically accepted the black republic thesis in words but rejected it in practice. In the course of the document, which was printed in instalments in the Party paper *Umsebenzi*, the ECCI set out some valuable guidelines relating to the relationship between the national and class struggles. The document stated, inter alia:

"Failure to understand the bourgeois-democratic and the socialist tasks of the South African proletariat is reflected in the fact that both the leaders and the members of the Party, who have not yet cast off the remnants of white chauvinism, do not

understand the nationalist tasks of the revolution, and try to reduce the whole struggle of the South African proletariat to a purely proletarian class struggle, while the Native members, who are still influenced by petty-bourgeois peasant nationalism, on the contrary, do not understand the tasks of the proletarian class struggle, and try to reduce the struggle to a nationalist-revolutionary movement. . .

“This lack of understanding leads, in practice, to a position where both sections of the Party, in different ways, commit the same mistake with regard to the growing national revolutionary tasks of the proletariat and in this way deny the hegemony of the proletariat in the movement. The Natives, by restricting the tasks of the proletariat solely to nationalist revolutionary tasks, in practice would cause the proletariat to become absorbed in the broad petty-bourgeois movement, and in this way destroy its hegemony in this movement”.

This last sentence reflects the point of view of those present-day critics of the SACP who allege that the Party is tailing behind the national movement and has abandoned the struggle for socialism. The Party has long been aware of this criticism, and this danger, and has attempted to conduct its affairs in line with the developing Marxist-Leninist principles which have been outlined in this article. In the words of Moses Kotane’s famous letter from Cradock in February, 1934, as the Party became more Africanised, it paid less attention to European affairs and more to South Africa, it studied the conditions in this country and concretised the demands of the toiling masses from first-hand information, it spoke the language of the Native masses and knew their demands. Without losing its international allegiance, it “Bolshevised” itself, becoming South African not only theoretically but in reality. It proved itself as a Party working in the interests and for the toiling masses.

Furthermore, it is not possible today to refer to the ANC, in the words of the ECCI document, as a “broad petty bourgeois movement”. Broad, yes, but petty-bourgeois in its character and orientation, definitely no. The ANC is today a “fighting nationalist revolutionary organisation” of precisely the type referred to in the 1929 resolution of the Comintern Executive Committee quoted above. And it was Communists, amongst others, who helped to bring about this transformation. In the 1930s it was Party members like J.B. Marks and Moses Kotane who played a leading role in rescuing the ANC from the doldrums and, in the 1940s and 1950s, together with members of the ANC Youth League and other militants helped raise the level of struggle to the high point the ANC has displayed in the last two decades. Yet Party members never allowed themselves to be swallowed by the ANC. Marks and Kotane, while occupying key positions on the ANC executive, at the same time filled the two main official positions in the Communist Party, that of chairman and general secretary respectively. Their comrades in both organisations testified to their complete loyalty to the two organisations;

indeed, they were not alone. Every Party member who was eligible played his/her part in his/her national organisation and helped cement the alliance between the ANC, SACP and SACTU which is the centre-piece of the liberation movement today.

Nationalism and Class Struggle

A Central Committee report on "Nationalism and Class Struggle" presented to the national congress of the Communist Party in January 1950 — the last congress before the Party was outlawed by the Nationalist Government — confirmed that the Party had not altered its perspective since the "black republic" resolution was adopted in 1928. The resolution stressed that in the wake of the Nationalist Party's election victory South Africa was entering a period of bitter national conflict. On all sides national and racial differences were being emphasised, and the realities of the class divisions were being obscured. With every advance made by the black population of South Africa, the ruling class was attempting to raise the barriers still more — that, in reality, was the process reflected in the substitution of Malan's apartheid for Smuts' segregation. In a passage strikingly foreshadowing the slogan adopted at the 5th congress of the SACP in 1962, the 1950 CC report declared:

"The distinguishing feature of South Africa is that it combines the characteristics of both an imperialist state and a colony within a single, indivisible, geographical, political and economic entity. . . Communists have always regarded the colonial system as a special form of national oppression."

The resolution stated that the orientation of the national movements on the basis of the workers and peasants was to be brought about by relating the struggle against racial discrimination to the struggle against capitalism, by showing that the colour bar is primarily a technique of exploitation for private profit, by ensuring the dominant role of the class conscious workers in the national organisations.

"The national organisations, to be effective, must be transformed into a revolutionary party of workers, peasants, intellectuals and petty bourgeoisie, linked together in a firm organisation, subject to strict discipline, and guided by a definite programme of struggle against all forms of racial discrimination in alliance with the class conscious European workers and intellectuals. Such a party would be distinguished from the Communist Party in that its objective is national liberation, that is, the abolition of race discrimination, but it would co-operate with the Communist Party. In this party the class conscious workers and peasants of the national group concerned would constitute the main leadership"

It is a matter of record how far the ANC has in fact developed into a revolutionary party of the kind indicated in the 1950 report. The lines of

struggle indicated in the CC report were to become the guidelines for the entire South African liberation movement in the following decades. A process of cross-pollination occurred between the Communist Party and the national movement. On the one hand the Communist Party achieved and incorporated in its programme a truer understanding of the nature and importance of the national movement than it had ever had before. On the other hand, the national movement was moved towards an appreciation of the class forces which underlay the national conflict in South Africa and to perceive the relationship between the national struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa and the international movement against imperialism and war. The nationalism of the ANC and the other Congresses developed an international aspect; the Communist Party was indigenised on the lines of Moses Kotane's 1934 Cradock letter.

The ANC document "Strategy and Tactics" adopted at the Morogoro conference in 1969 reflects the enormous advance made in the thinking of ANC members in the period since the Nationalist Government came to power in 1948. The four main findings of the conference were:

1. The main content of the present stage of the South African revolution is the national liberation of the largest and most oppressed group — the African people.

2. Our national struggle takes place in a world which is no longer monopolised by imperialism — the socialist countries and the newly liberated countries have altered the balance of forces.

3. The horizons of struggle extend beyond formal political control and encompass economic emancipation. It is inconceivable for liberation to have meaning without a return of the wealth of the land to the people as a whole.

4. A key role in liberation will be played by the working class.

At a joint meeting of representatives of the ANC and SACP which took place at the same time, the ANC representative referred to the Party and the ANC as "the two leading pillars of our struggle", while the SACP spokesman said:

"The national struggle in our conditions cries out for the organised participation of the working class and its class political organ — the Party. And equally, the struggle for socialism cries out for a vigorous and strong national movement of the African people which heads the liberation front. Experience has proved over and over again that in our revolution collaboration between our two bodies has raised the level of struggle and has been a mutually reinforcing influence"

The further strengthening of the bonds between the SACP and the ANC was registered at the 60th and 65th anniversary meetings of the SACP and at the Kabwe conference of the ANC in 1985. The identity of outlook of the two

organisations in relation to the promotion of the national democratic revolution has been emphasised over and over again.

It is the pursuit of this policy by the ANC, the SACP and their allies which has made possible the mobilisation and organisation of the South African people in their millions and brought about the revolutionary situation which prevails in the country today. Had any of the policies advanced by the Party's "workerist" or "purist" critics been adopted, the SACP would have been left howling in the wilderness, the ANC would have been turned into an enemy and the masses of people would have been left confused and divided.

The SACP's 1962 programme "The Road to South African Freedom" has been vindicated by history.

