

By Joe Slovo

# 'REFORMS'

# AND REVOLUTION

# IN SOUTH AFRICA

*Ruth First was killed by a parcel bomb on the 17th August 1982. The Ruth First Memorial Lectures were inaugurated in 1983, and the second of these lectures was delivered in Maputo on the 24th August, 1984, by her husband, Joe Slovo.*

It is perhaps clearer today than it was two years ago why they killed her. Her selection as a target was neither capricious nor accidental; it served a need which, with the benefit of hindsight, we can now identify more precisely.

A phase in Pretoria's strategy was coming up for review; the phase of uninhibited military violence against virtually all the neighbouring states. Naked acts of aggression, deliberate economic destabilisation and the creation of vast bandit armies had inflicted serious wounds on the young Southern African states still trying to find their feet in the post-independence era. And Pretoria sensed that they had done enough to create a mood of desperation within these states.

Looked at from the point of view of those bearing the main brunt of racist bullying, the position appeared indeed to be desperate. For while the Reagans constructively engaged on

the side of this thuggery, the rest of the world seemed paralysed. It was neither ready nor perhaps endowed with sufficient resources to stop the thug or to provide the means, economic and military, to enable the victims to do so.

And so many of the ideologues and pundits of Botha's strategic think-tanks began (at around the time of Ruth's murder) to toy with fresh ideas. The stick, they speculated, seems for the moment to have done its job. Those against whom it had been wielded must surely by now have absorbed the lesson that the alternatives before them were (to parody Botha's phrase) to adapt or to continue dying.

Pretoria's policy formulators therefore began to judge that the time was near when a new way could be charted to satisfy South Africa's appetite for economic expansion and domination in the sub-continent and, above all, to spike the guns of the ANC-led liberation forces.

For those charged with preparing the ground for these new tactical options, the elimination of Ruth First must have figured somewhere in the equation.

They knew her as an internationally 3

respected scholar, writer and radical campaigner, whose work lent great prestige to the liberation movement in which she was so active. But more than this — she was increasingly devoting her considerable talents to help lay bare the real and undeviating historic mission of South Africa's ruling class both within the country and in our sub-continent. And she was inspiring this work in what they venomously called Marxist Mozambique, and in a study centre which focused on Party and state cadres; a study centre whose dynamism and vigour were beginning to influence researchers and scholars from an increasing number of institutions of learning in Southern Africa. Her last project, the UNESCO-supported seminar, was testimony to this.

The growing influence of this work, both inside and beyond Mozambique, must have seemed to the racist planners to have been at least marginally relevant to the kind of reception which they could expect to a future shift in their tactical emphasis. In the theoretical scheme of things which Ruth tried to promote there was no place for the expectation that you could get any change from a bargain with Pretoria. In this sense she was in their way. And so someone among them ordered the parcel to be prepared, and went off to have his dinner.

On an occasion such as this the most apposite tribute one can pay to Ruth's memory is to reflect on a few concepts of the South African struggle whose pertinence has been underlined by contemporary developments.

In troubled times, theory and basic concepts are also at high risk as potential casualties, and need to be jealously guarded. I have selected a few of the concepts which have a fundamental bearing on our perspectives of struggle, and I have been influenced in my selection by the fact that of late some questioning voices are being raised about aspects of our strategy; voices which **have** to be taken seriously since they come from friends and brothers. The theses I propose touching on and arguing for tonight are the following:

★ Firstly, that the Botha regime is not a re-

formist regime bent on a retreat from apartheid. On the contrary, it has gone further than any previous regime in South Africa's history in an advance towards the implementation of the essentials of apartheid.

★ Secondly, that while, historically, political control of the country has shifted from an externally based to an internally based ruling class, the colonial status of the Blacks has, in substance, been maintained (albeit in different forms) from 1910 until now.

★ Thirdly, that the immediate struggle in South Africa is not just against apartheid or merely to achieve civil rights, but is a struggle for national liberation in the full meaning of that term.

★ Fourthly, that the element of revolutionary violence (as an integral part of the political struggle) is an imperative imposed on us by South African reality and that, like every other similar struggle, it of necessity implies both an external and internal factor, and

★ Fifthly, that the dramatic advance and massive impact of the ANC-led liberation movement in the post-Soweto period is a tribute to the strategic and tactical approaches, and that the situation created by this impact is forcing Pretoria and its Western friends to probe for other ways to cope with the ANC.

Let me now say a little more on each of these interconnected themes.

It is a measure of the sophisticated quality of South Africa's public relations machine that Botha and his colleagues are occasionally talked about, even in some well-meaning circles, as if they were a bunch of secret liberals who, if given half a chance, would break with apartheid altogether. One thing is clear. This illusion is not shared by those in South Africa (and they are in the vast majority) who are at the receiving end of Botha's dispensation.

We will say a little more about the reforms in a moment. But we should be clear that the least important reforms (which sometimes attract the most attention), such as allowing a Black to actually share your park bench, your restaurant, your football field, and perhaps even your bed, are part of a larger package

deal. It is a package deal made up, in the main, of items which are designed to imprint race domination finally and irreversibly into South Africa's social fabric.

Botha has proved to be a most efficient sales representative of this package deal. It is extremely important to understand what is actually being sold. What is actually being sold is the South African version of the Hitlerian final solution.

In terms of this, over half of the African population have already been proclaimed foreigners in the land of their birth, with perhaps less political rights and less rights to freedom of movement than the Turkish *gastarbeiter* has in West Germany. Botha the reformer has put new energy into the resettlement programme which, in the last two decades, has uprooted, transported and dumped into the veld over four million African souls — virtually the size of the total White population.

The very foundation of apartheid — the Bantustan creations and the fragmentation of South Africa (with one of the fragments, covering 87% of its area and 99% of its riches, going to the Whites) — has been pursued by the Botha regime with more vigour than by any of their predecessors.

It is under Botha that the door of access by Africans to central state power has been slammed with a deadening finality.

It is through the duet of Botha and Malan (in pursuit of apartheid's total strategy) that every surrounding country has felt the blows of military intervention and the chaos of bandit armies created and sustained by them. And it is during their time that Black political opposition has felt a heightened level of brutality.

It is only if words lose all conventional meaning that we can describe the Botha regime as one which is straining at the leash to move away from apartheid. It is in fact straining at the leash to be left in peace to take apartheid (in its real meaning) to its ultimate conclusion.

How then do we explain what is generally referred to as the reforms? Are they merely cosmetic? More time would be needed to reflect exhaustively on the complex mosaic of

the reforms and the social needs and tendencies which they express. But, in brief, they must not be seen either as flowing from the same set of causes or as having the same significance.

Some reforms are indeed cosmetic and represent gestures to placate embarrassed allies or (as for example in the sporting arena) to cope with international isolation.

Other reforms are designed to co-opt Black collaboration, particularly from the middle strata, and (as in the case of the new constitutional dispensation) to break the unity of the Black opposition.

Yet other reforms are the achievements of people in bitter class and national struggles, as for example in the trade union field.

Some reflect the new type of labour needs of sectors of the ruling class which are poised to break into the technological age.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the reforms do touch on the daily lives of sections of our people. In so far as they are won in struggle, in so far as they create tensions within a power bloc made up of segments who do not benefit in exactly the same way from the exploitation of the Blacks, in so far as they attempt to create false expectations in order to divert classes and communities away from the real issue — in so far as all this is so, we cannot demagogically dismiss the whole process as cosmetic and leave it at that.

It is, however, one thing to be sensitive to the impact of the reforms on the unfolding of the day-to-day struggle, and quite another thing to encourage the illusion that we have a regime in South Africa which has the potential to break with those ingredients of apartheid which constitute its real essence. Indeed, it is precisely because apartheid has been rooted so firmly in the recent period that steps can be contemplated which would have met with more universal revulsion and opposition from the White community, especially its Afrikaner section. Before fragmentation had reached such an advanced level with the creation of the Bantustans, the defence of White cohesion had to be carried out in communities which, although segregated, were sharing common

urban and rural territory. The pressures for a common South African society were not yet counterbalanced with its institutionalised creation of a dozen separate so-called countries. In these circumstances, among the early lines of defence of the purity and cohesion of the White laager were institutions which prevented inter-race mobility, such as the Immorality Act, the Mixed Marriages Act and so on. These mechanisms no longer play the same important role as they previously did in perpetuating White exclusiveness.

One further point needs to be emphasised. What Botha thinks, says, or believes in is of some interest and importance. But at the end of the day, what counts decisively is what he does, and, more especially, the economic aspirations he represents at the political level.

In short, Botha (and I refer to him as a shorthand for the state and its basic apparatus) has acted, and can be expected to continue to act, in broad conformity with the interests of the ruling class.

Just as there is no abstract socialist society unrelated to its specific historic origins, so there is no capitalist society which conforms precisely to the model described in *Capital*.

In general, capitalist exploitation and race domination are not symbiotically linked. They can exist without one another. But in every phase of South African capitalism, from its emergence to its stabilisation and to its growth and development, race and class have been inextricably and inseparably joined together. Primitive accumulation in South Africa involved internal national conquests and dispossession. The creation and consolidation of cheap labour reserves were virtually completely colour-based. And today not only does the race factor continue to play a dominating role at the level of the relations of production, but also the very survival of the ruling class — its continued monopolistic hold on the land, mines and other means of production — depends upon maintaining and even reinforcing the mechanisms which guarantee White race political control and domination. That is why even the Oppenheimers, with all their enlightened talk against the excesses of apart-

heid, do not show a readiness to eliminate the Bantustans and to risk the immediate grant of full political and economic rights to the indigenous people.

The great divide between liberal and radical analysis in South Africa has always been a liberal belief that race discrimination is an obstacle to capitalist development, and that, in time, racist practices will be inevitably eroded by capitalist economic forces. The last two decades have demonstrated more clearly than before that this thesis is a false one. It is during this period that we have witnessed the most dramatic advance in the South African economy, and it is also during this period that we have witnessed the most intense application of the worst features of apartheid and race discrimination.

It is not only at the level of the ruling class that South African capitalism displays specific features, but also at the level of the ruled (most of whom are working people), who occupy a position which does not conform to the classic situation of the proletariat in European capitalist countries. Even the most superficial



grasp of South African reality will tell an observer that the Black worker suffers from a dual form of exploitation — both as a worker and as a Black. Which brings me to the much discussed thesis on internal colonialism.

I want to start by separating the thesis of internal colonialism from some secondary and perhaps misleading questions with which it is sometimes linked. And the first of these questions is whether or not South Africa is an independent, sovereign state.

Now I happen to believe that a convincing case can be made out to demonstrate that South Africa is not an independent and sovereign state, and I have read some very learned legal treatises in support of this proposition. There are no doubt other lawyers who would contest this conclusion. But whichever side you opt for in this debate, you must surely agree that independence and sovereignty do not dispose of the political and social question whether the existing South African state is a legitimate representative of the people. Nor does it dispose of the question whether it should be recognised diplomatically, and associated with as a normal part of the comity of nations.

Zionist Israel, Pinochet's Chile and Batista's Cuba would all be described by most lawyers as sovereign and independent states. Does this have a bearing on whether you recognise them diplomatically, whether or not you join in the world campaign to isolate them, or whether you have the right to support the revolutionary opposition in a struggle which involves violence? In other words, the issue of sovereignty and independence has very little bearing on the political and social obligations of world democratic forces. The fact that this is so has been evidenced in this country by Mozambique's recognition of the PLO as the diplomatic representative of the people of Palestine over which Israel rules as an independent and sovereign state; a state which is justly shunned by most of Africa.

The question as to what you can actually do on the ground to help destroy Pinochet-type regimes is a question of power and not policy. We must not be tempted to mix up what in principle we should do and what in practice we

have the power to do. A confusion of these two categories can so easily lead to damaging theoretical cover-ups and rationalisations.

So, whether or not you believe that Botha's regime is sovereign and independent, we all surely agree that at any rate it is not the legitimate representative of the South African people. What outsiders can do about that fact is for them a practical rather than a theoretical question.

Another source of confusion stems from the reasoning that you cannot at one and the same time regard a country as sovereign and independent and yet hold that it is practising a form of colonialism against a section of its people.

My first response is — why not? If Britain had handed over to Smith in 1966, which would have made Rhodesia an independent and sovereign state by an act of Westminster, would that have ended the colonial status of Black Zimbabwean people under Smith? Surely not.

Those who are sceptical about the internal colonial thesis should perhaps have another look at the way it is actually handled in the Programme of the South African Communist Party, a programme which, in the best tradition of Marxist methodology, uses basic concepts, not as a dogma, but as a tool to enable it to cope with concrete reality.

The programme spells out the duality of South Africa's socio-economic formation, which has unique features. It actually uses the following words, and I quote:

"South Africa is not a colony but an independent state. Yet masses of our people enjoy neither independence nor freedom ... 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 by a group which

does everything it can to emphasise and perpetuate its alien European character."

The latter face of South Africa (i.e. the social, political and economic status of Africans) is deliberately not described simply as colonialism, for the reason that it does not conform to the classic colonial model. It is described as colonialism of a special type or as internal colonialism. The term might not suit everyone's verbal tastes. But the reality is almost self-evident. It would be an interesting exercise for any of us to sit across the table with a South African Black and convince him that his status as a colonial subject has substantially altered since the shift of political power from London to Pretoria. Every single disability — whether it be access to real political power, ownership of land, the right to free movement and to live and work where a Black man pleases, etc, etc — attaches to him, not as a member of a class, but because he is part of the indigenous, conquered and colonised people. And the ruling class, which is internally based and drawn from the White group, relies, in the first place (like all imperialist ruling classes) on its kith and kin, to whatever class they belong, to "keep the native in his place." The validity of the colonial thesis as an analytical concept has perhaps been reinforced by the process, which is taking place under our very eyes, of institutionalising the colonial status of the Black people through the creation of territorial entities — the Bantustans — which are developing some of the more classical attributes of colonies and neo-colonies.

'Colonialism of a special type' or 'internal colonialism' are, I think, the closest we can come in our search for an accurate description of the South African reality. But it is not merely a desire for analytical delicacy which requires us to grasp this unique reality. A grasp of the institutionalised national oppression which characterises South Africa is the starting point for elaborating the perspectives of our revolutionary practice, and leads to the conclusion that the main content of the immediate struggle is to achieve complete national liberation for the racially dominated and racially exploited Black communities.

The organisation which stands at the head of the alliance and which leads this struggle is the ANC, and its description as a **national liberation movement** is not a careless slip of the tongue; it actually describes correctly the main goal of the immediate revolutionary process, which is national liberation.

The populist slogan of the struggle against apartheid has its place; it helps the world to identify the most extreme manifestation of race domination, and provides a platform which can, on occasions, be shared by a revolutionary and a liberal. This is of some positive value, but only if we understand that, for example, Mrs Suzman and I may both be against apartheid but we are certainly not both for liberation.

Apartheid is, broadly speaking, the post-1948 mechanism for maintaining racial domination. It has specific features which merit careful analysis. But it is necessary to emphasise that it is not apartheid which fathered race discrimination and domination, but the other way about. The struggle against apartheid and against race domination are not the same. We are not engaged in a struggle just to end apartheid; that is to go back to the pre-1948 days when the inferior and colonial status of the Blacks was underwritten by a policy called segregation rather than apartheid. We must therefore be on the alert lest the slogan which concentrated only on apartheid becomes an excuse to denude the struggle of its revolutionary content by restricting it merely to the excesses of the Nationalist regime and therefore keeping it purely within the arena of reformist politics.

What I have said about apartheid applies with equal force to the question of the struggle for civil rights. This is a term which, in the recent period, once again gained currency in the struggle by Black Americans to assert their rights in terms of the US constitution. There are no civil rights which South African Blacks can hope to assert in terms of the South African constitution. It is a constitution which is specifically designed to exclude all Africans (whatever class they belong to) from all political and civil rights. It is a constitution

which creates a power framework which closes the door to even the remotest possibility of an advance by blacks to democratic rights through anything resembling a constitutional process which is implied by the phrase, "struggle for civil rights."

In any case, especially in the South African context, national liberation implies more than formal participation in the electoral processes and more than the replacement of black faces for white ones in the Mercedes Benz!

We cannot talk seriously of ending race domination and leave undisturbed the ownership and control by the existing ruling class of virtually all the means of production — a control which is the real source of its power to exploit and to maintain its domination.

You don't have to be a Communist or a Marxist — you just need to be an honest Black patriot with a justified sense of national grievance — to accept that liberation in our country has little or no meaning without a return of the land and its wealth to the people. And this reality reinforces the conclusion that we cannot restrict the struggle objectives to the bourgeois democratic concept of civil or democratic rights.

There is an inseparable link in South Africa between national liberation and social emancipation. The existence of this link raises important questions which would require more time than is available to us tonight; questions such as the relationship between national and class struggle, the nature of the alliance which constitutes the liberation front, the role and character in the struggle of the different classes which take up positions both in the enemy camp and among the revolutionary forces, the way we conceptualise the link between the different phases (or stages) of the continuing revolution, and so on.

Today I merely wish to stress that the inseparable link between national liberation and social emancipation implies a strategy which must lead to the revolutionary overthrow of the existing ruling class, and the complete dismantling and replacement of its state apparatus.

Does this imply, as it is sometimes crudely put, that we want to drive the Whites into the sea? On this question (as on quite a few others) it has been the fate of the ANC to be fired at from all directions (right and left) for completely opposite reasons.

The PAC split away from the ANC precisely because they accused it of being "charterists," that is, followers of the Freedom Charter, which opens with the words, "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, Black and White." Sections of the black consciousness movement have also accused the ANC of being multi-racial in its alliances and in its organisational structures.

We can say with confidence that there is no organisation in South Africa, either in the White or Black camp, which embraces the kind of advanced revolutionary non-racism which the ANC espouses and practises. Even a cursory examination of our basic policy documents and our public pronouncements will demonstrate that we have always stood for one united democratic South Africa in which all groupings (including the Whites) will participate on the basis of complete equality as individuals and not as racial or ethnic entities.

We do not believe that classes ever commit collective suicide, and we therefore dismiss the illusion that any meaningful advance on the road to liberation can be achieved within the framework of what is known as White parliamentary politics. This does not mean that we are maximalists to the point where we deny significance to all reforms and to events within White politics, some of which (as we have seen) affect the political cohesion of the ruling class. But it does mean that the drive towards freedom and liberation cannot take place within the arena demarcated by the ruling class. In this arena we are completely powerless. All we can hope to do there is to take up our begging bowls and go cap in hand to the bosses of our country.

Which brings me to some questions connected with the liberation movement's policy of revolutionary violence as an imperative part of the mass political struggle.

The attempts, particularly in the West, to

question this policy and to influence the ANC to consider the adoption of a "peaceful road to change" is nothing less than a recipe for submission and surrender of national liberation aims. We must bear in mind that the ANC was declared illegal long before it adopted a policy of armed struggle. If you are a Black man, born and bred in Soweto and other Black ghettos (like 75% of South Africa's Black people) what peaceful road of change is open to you? Is there a single constitutional way forward for the voteless and rightless Africans in the Black urban ghettos and in the neo-colonies of the Bantustans?

The extraordinary impact which the ANC has made both inside and outside the country since 1976 has been precisely as a result of its strategy of combining mass political struggle with revolutionary violence which has, for the first time since the indigenous wars of resistance, inculcated into our people a belief and a conviction that the seemingly all-powerful White state can indeed be dealt with. This factor has, perhaps more than any other, created the psychological and inspirational atmosphere in which the people themselves have made such dramatic advances in the field of mass organisation, trade union struggle, UDF, etc, etc.

There is a new and refreshingly revolutionary arrogance abroad amongst the Blacks, particularly amongst the youth, precisely because they have seen their compatriots abandoning their meekness and showing a readiness to challenge the enemy with weapons it has monopolised for 350 years. It is abundantly clear to us, and even more clear to our enemy, that an abandonment or a weakening of our policy of armed activity will have a most negative effect on the process of mass political opposition, resistance and organisation.

What about the external factor in the military struggle?

The regime's attempts, through external pressures, to spike the guns of the ANC-led liberation movement has demonstrably failed, precisely for the reason that the arena of our struggle is amongst our people, deep inside our country.

It would, of course, be unrealistic to assert that the external factor of this struggle is irrelevant. There has not been a single people's armed struggle in Africa, or elsewhere for that matter, which has not depended in some degree on rear bases in fraternal and friendly countries (FNLA of Algeria — Morocco and Tunisia; PAIGC of Guinea-Bissau — Guinea Conakry; MPLA of Angola — Congo Brazzaville; ZANU of Zimbabwe — Mozambique). One wonders whether we should be sitting here without Tanzania's grant of exclusive and massive external rear base facilities for FRELIMO.

In this connection I wish to emphasise two points. Firstly, in each of the countries mentioned the struggle was fought out and **won inside their own national territory**, and this assertion remains valid despite the fact that they were helped by outside friends to meet any enemy who (by the way) also depended upon its external allies. So when we assert the imperatives of the external factor for our struggle, this must not be construed as detracting from the obvious objective that it **must grow from inside and engage the enemy inside**.

Indeed the actual reality of the power relationships in Southern Africa has made the ANC more modest than any other liberation movement in Africa in its search for rear base facilities. We have never had nor have we expected to have the kind of rear base facilities which all those movements in Africa to whom I have referred had in territories bordering on their countries.

Much of our strategy has been premised on the fact that even the initial stages of armed struggle could not (in the case of South Africa) depend upon those kind of facilities. In general, the training, arming, infiltration and replenishment of relatively large armed units operating in proximity to friendly borders (which was the pattern of the early phases of almost every single armed struggle in Africa) has never been the basis of our strategy.

We have concentrated on internal growth deep inside the country around a core of trained revolutionary politico-military cadres in both rural and urban areas. We have



deliberately avoided the pattern of using adjacent territory to hit close to the border and to run back.

The second point of emphasis is the special role in our conditions of urban guerrilla warfare and sabotage. This needs to be noted particularly in relation to the existence in our country of a relatively advanced capitalist economy and a working class which is the most important force in our revolutionary process. But above all, our starting point has always been on the political struggle, political organisation and underground leadership. It has always been our objective to work for the creation in all parts of our land of political revolutionary bases out of which people's war will grow and be sustained. And we see organised armed blows against the enemy as playing an indispensable role in stimulating the emergence of such political, revolutionary bases.

In these respects our own struggle perspectives differ in emphasis from most other people's war experiences in Africa. The latter (including FRELIMO) relied on the more classic tradition of launching relatively large military units from neighbouring friendly states which accommodated training and rear base camps and which made possible continuous supply lines of war and other logistical material to the internal forces.

I have kept away from an analysis of the current exciting happenings in widespread areas of South Africa. But let me add one word. Victory may not be around the corner, but events

have demonstrated that the ANC-led liberation front has taken ineradicable root among the people, and that there can be no long-term solution without the ANC. This explains the many-pronged hints of dialogue with the ANC; hints which are coming from various sources such as USA official visitors to Southern Africa, the South African English press, the government-supporting **Die Burger**, Pik Botha and others.

In the first place this is a recognition of the place we have won as leaders of the liberation struggle. But it also spells danger. They are no doubt prepared to talk, but they want to talk to an ANC which is different to the one we know — an ANC which will abandon its internal and international allies, an ANC which will jettison its advanced revolutionary nationalism and agree to work within the suffocating framework of Botha's dispensations. Whilst it is infantile to mechanically reject all dialogue with an enemy, we must frankly state that we do not trust Botha's current dialogue offensive. It is designed to advance and not to compromise his policies.

Comrade Chairman, there is of course no way to compensate for the loss of a person such as Ruth, to whose memory we have dedicated this talk. But when we look at the situation of revolutionary ferment which is developing in our country, it is clear that she has an important place among those whose dedication in life and martyrdom in death will bring the day of People's Victory that much nearer.

Thank you.

