Chapter Twenty

> It follows that … there remains for a time not only bourgeois right, but even the bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie! Vladimir Lenin.[1]

Moscow, Havana, Harare and Home

Preparing for Power?

The perception that the pace of struggle was quickening was evident from the early 1980s, but by then we had been in exile for two decades and had accepted the reality that the struggle would be a long one. But things were stirring. Was it just a new phase that we were witnessing or the imminence of change? There were many analyses of the situation: cracks in the regime were glaringly apparent; the mass movement was more assertive; and more groups and individuals were seeking informal discussions with the ANC. A stream was turning into a river. At the same time state repression had become worse. More young activists were in jail and two states of emergency had been declared between 1983 and 1990.

Taking the long view, the ANC prepared itself for government. How change would occur was not easily foreseeable. It might be imminent or some time in the distant future. Whether it would come about through negotiation, insurrection, armed struggle or the regime imploding on itself, was a matter for conjecture. Best to be ready; to have a position on the post-apartheid economy, the constitution, the agrarian question, health and labour at the very least. I personally attended seminars in Lusaka on the economy and the land question and held workshops on the labour market and skills needs (referred to in the previous chapter). I was also part of an ANC team to attend a conference with Soviet social scientists in the USSR in 1987.

A month before this event, I'd received a letter from the ANC's Social Scientists' Preparatory Committee (an ad hoc committee based in Lusaka, whose existence I knew nothing about) requesting a paper for a seminar to be held on Moscow in March 1987. The seminar was to be held under the auspices of the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee and the gathering diplomatically referred to as the Social Scientists' seminar. Cooperation between the liberation movement and this committee had gone on for the last 30 years. Vladimir Shubin, who attended the seminar, actively facilitated much of the logistical and student support that the committee provided. Technically it was an NGO,

but the relationship between the state, the Party and non-state institutions was symbiotic and Shubin somehow seemed to bridge the bureaucratic divisions between all of them. An ebullient figure, larger than life, with an intimate knowledge of the ANC and SACP from the early sixties to the years beyond 1994, he was described in the seminar's proceedings as a candidate of history and a member of the Presidium (of the Solidarity Committee). There were probably important omissions in this citation, but his book *ANC: A View from Moscow*,[2] (published after Mandela assumed office) is an authoritative and scholarly account of the relationship between the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee (and other non-state agencies) and the liberation movement in South Africa.

A number of developments in the USSR provided the context for the Social Scientists' seminar in March 1987. An ANC mission (technically an informal consulate office) had been established in Moscow earlier in 1986 and accredited by the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee. Unusually for a non-state entity, the mission was accorded all diplomatic privileges, including diplomatic immunity.[3] The formalizing of relationships paved the way for a meeting (facilitated by Shubin) between President Gorbachev and Oliver Tambo in November 1986, and later a series of seminars, commencing in March 1986, "to stimulate long-term discussion and work".[4]

The academics who attended the 1987 conference on the Russian side were impressive, with specialisms in history, law, international relations and economics. It seemed as if the Soviets had brought out the whole academy: Apollon Davidson, professor of History at the Moscow State University; Valentin Gorodnov, deputy director at the Institute of Africa; and Irina Filatova, of the Institute of Countries of Africa and Asia (Moscow State University). They were all knowledgeable about South Africa. In addition to the historians, there was an economist and five "generalists", all of them helpful on the politics of social transition. The representatives on the ANC side were also impressive, although not as eminent at that time. We debated on equal terms with our Soviet colleagues and argued freely – the Russians anxious to alert us to the problems they encountered during the course of their transition after 1917, and we unduly optimistic about what was initially possible in a new South Africa. But the debates were engaging. Our team consisted of Pallo Jordan, already a public intellectual within the ANC; Zola Skweyiya, a lawyer (unfortunately ill for most of the seminar); Ivy Matsepe Casaburri, an educationist; Max Sisulu, an economist; Tessa Marcus, a sociologist; Norman Levy an economic historian; and Pascal Ludidi, Jeffrey Marishane, Dan Cindi and Frances Meli, respectively spokespersons on education, international affairs, human rights and the ANC. Meli's surname, a pseudonym which fooled us all, was formed from the initials of the Marx, Engels, Lenin Institute.[5] None of us guessed it. Pallo, Zola and Ivy subsequently became cabinet ministers in Mandela's government; Tessa Marcus distinguished herself as an academic; Max Sisulu became chief whip and subsequently

speaker in parliament: and I devoted the first five years of my return to South Africa to work on the transformation of the country's new public service.

Serious business was discussed at the seminar, which was both engaging and lively and could conceivably have gone on for longer than the three days assigned to it. The topics (defined by the core clauses of the Freedom Charter) covered a plethora of problems from the national question to the economy and the transformation of the land. These were followed by sessions on culture and human rights. Crisscrossing them all was the role of the state in a post-apartheid South Africa. Although all the sessions were stimulating, I personally found the discussion on the national question the most rewarding. It was interesting for the breadth of the presentation of the subject by Pallo Jordan and the insights of the Soviet social scientists after 70 years of Bolshevik rule. There may have been some resonance with South Africa that prompted their questions on the unintended consequences of ethnic separation after 40 years of apartheid. Possibly they had their own ethnic minorities in mind.

Pallo characterized the South African conflict as an anti-colonialist, national liberation struggle with the same motives and aspirations as other liberation struggles. Where South Africa differed, he explained, was that the white oppressors (who derived their power from the former Dutch and English colonists) lived in the same country as their black subjects. Spatially, there was no separation between them – a phenomenon that the ANC and its allies referred to as a system of Colonialism of a Special Type (CST). The struggle for self-determination would only be achieved through the establishment of a democratic state in which there was universal adult suffrage and full civil liberties in a non-racial South Africa. The attainment of this would not be easy, as the apartheid state was founded on laws that not only provided all classes of whites with certain rights that the black majority did not have, but was also based on a rationale that underpinned the capitalist economy. "White domination" was the ideology the minority espoused, but the concept had changed over the years to notions of "domination with justice", "white supremacy" and "white leadership". Later the terms "apartheid" and "separate development" denoted harsher forms of subordination. The big colonial reward for whites was the exploitation of black labour, in which the capitalists were the greatest beneficiaries.[6]

There was enough meat in Pallo's presentation for a month's discussion. The Soviet historians, Davidson, Gorodnov and Filatova urged the ANC to think beyond the formulaic and to be wary of glib formulations: "the best Marxist-Leninist definitions are useless unless they take into account the historical conditions", Valentin Gorodnov cautioned. His comment was commonplace but he was again referring to the subject of ethnic minorities, wondering whether the development of the bantustans had served to consolidate ethnic groups, making the process of future integration into one nation more

difficult; creating new national problems that might become acute after liberation – old problems that might reappear – albeit in a new form. The development of national cultures, they reminded us, was important, giving attention to them was one of the ways of resolving the national problem.[7] Nobody disagreed with that. Apollon Davidson pressed the point: "[p]erhaps it is easy to declare all dwellers of South Africa [as] Africans" but – for instance – he asked: "what about the Zulus? They should see themselves as South Africans, as black and as Zulu". How would the ANC provide for respect of each of these three qualities? The question was equally pertinent to Afrikaners and other national groups, he said. Ethnic sentiments were tenacious, closely intertwined with different kinds of dissatisfaction and prejudices. Perhaps, he suggested, an inventory of prejudices was needed so that they can be addressed.[8]

This was a line of argument that we were unused to; potential ethnic divisions were seldom discussed. Francis Meli skirted the issue by saying that an inventory of what we had in common was more pertinent than a list of divisions: there were common aspirations – solidarity with great leaders; attachment to the ANC; participation in the struggle: and opposition against the bantustan authorities.[9] These were sufficient to unite the nation. Irina Filatova, a specialist on ethnicity, agreed that there were many unifying factors at present but what was being discussed at the moment was what came after apartheid – when the common enemy had disappeared. It was easier to unite people who were in opposition to apartheid, she said, than to distribute the benefits of victory. It was not so easy to decide on the national composition of government, the education facilities, the distribution of finance … "honestly, I am very sorry for the person who has to decide these things after apartheid is gone ...".[10] Her remarks were prescient.

The debate could have continued for days, but time was up, and the papers on the next topic by Max Sisulu and Gleb Smirnov on the "Nationalisation of the Monopolies and the Restructuring of the Economy", were being shuffled across the table. A summary of their informative interventions would not do justice to their papers, but what was notable about their presentations was how each of them interpreted the economic clauses of the Freedom Charter and the modalities of "abolishing the monoplies" and returning the wealth of the country to the people. Sisulu used the term "nationalization", Smirnov referred to "the liquidation of the monoplies". But neither seemed sure that that would happen soon after liberation. Smirnov insisted that nationalization was a very long process and should happen in stages, taking into account the state of the economy and the character of the revolution. Max was not quite so equivocal, but nevertheless aware that nationalization was likely to be an extended social process. His paper, which is as trenchant 20 years later as it was then made it clear that the chances of the implementation of the Freedom Charter were small if the grip of the monopolies on the economy was not loosened.[11] Interestingly, after 16 years of the political liberation of South Africa, the

conversation has predominantly been about the privatization of the state monopolies and not about those in the private sector.[12] The language of the debate has changed, but not the issues.[13]

There was a lighter side to the seminar, including an overnight excursion by train to Leningrad which was snow-clad at the time. The trip to the Winter Palace and to the Hermitage, with its vast collection and impressive display of impressionist paintings. many not seen before, was a special treat. Back in Moscow, between the sessions of the seminar and in the evenings, we enjoyed the conviviality of colleagues at the Oktober Hotel, with its dark wooden panels, plush drapes and 1920s décor; all of this a marked change from the rough bus trip I took in 1972, where we slept on the ground in tents at the camp sites and shared stories with ordinary Russians.

***

After Moscow, there was even more dialogue and renewed stirrings from South Africa, some of them from unexpected quarters. The dialogue between the ANC and intellectuals from the universities, as well as leaders from civil society, church and business was an intimation that our days of exile were drawing to a close.[14] None of us suspected or were aware of the seminal meetings in 1989 between Mike Louw, deputy head of the National Intelligence Services and Thabo Mbeki and (at different times), with Jacob Zuma and Aziz Pahad. These clandestine meetings paved the way for the first tentative formal meeting of the ANC with De Klerk, which took place in August 1990 at Grote Schuur, the president's official residence in Cape Town.[15] Significantly, almost at the same time as the meeting between Louw and Mbeki in 1989, senior members of the Broederbond met a delegation of the ANC at a secret venue in London.[16] News of this, however, filtered down to us. I was not present at that meeting, but we later discussed the Broederbond's memorandum on reform in a Political Research discussion group in London. Harold Wolpe, myself, Aziz Pahad, Francis Meli and Tony Trew were among the members of this group. Tony (the group's co-ordinator and formerly a fellow political prisoner at Pretoria Local Prison) fed the contents of our discussions to the Regional Political and Military Council, but I'm not sure that there was any feedback. We met a number of individuals wishing to make contact with the ANC as they passed through London, and also frequently discussed articles and papers by prominent anti-apartheid activist academics from South African universities.[17]

Despite these discussions and meetings with emissaries from business, students and intellectuals we had no idea that we were only months away from the unbanning of the ANC and the South African Communist Party. We still met clandestinely in small groups in the UK, debating the same issues as we did in the Political Research discussion group, and at branch meetings of the ANC.[18] The interpretation of events differed from one

group of discussants to another, specially when we discussed them at meetings of the SACP's Regional Committee for the United Kingdom and Europe. I was the chairperson of that committee from about 1987 to the time I left for South Africa in April 1991. As the Party did not work openly in London, few people had any idea of the identity of the members of this committee or knew that I was its chairperson.[19]

***

Despite all the discussions and the interaction with visiting South Africans, the startling announcement of the Party's unbanning by De Klerk on 2 February 1990 took us completely by surprise. Less than a year before this announcement I attended the 7th Congress of the SACP in Cuba, where insurrection was high on the list of possibilities for change. The unbanning of the ANC and the SACP, and a smoothly managed transition through a negotiated process, did not seem credible at that time. The idea of "negotiations" was referred to in the abstract, but we had no idea of the form, content or timescale it would have – or if it would happen at all in our lifetime. Only Thabo Mbeki and a few people very close to him, who were privy to his preliminary discussions with emissaries of the South African government, knew that insurrection was an unlikely option. Mbeki must have known about these discussions when the 7th Congress of the SACP was held in Cuba in 1989.

The holding of the SACP congress was a delicate undertaking at which delegates from units in South Africa, the frontline states, Mozambique, Botswana and Swaziland – as well as from party structures in Luanda, Lusaka and London – were present. Harold Wolpe, Sonia and Brian Bunting and I were among those from London as well as Jeremy Cronin, Aziz and Essop Pahad. Those of us who were not at that moment in Zambia were first flown to Lusaka and from there to Moscow on an Aeroflot flight. We stayed overnight at the Oktober Hotel in Moscow, where we met Simon Makana, the ANC chief representative in the USSR. He was as solicitous of our welfare as any good ambassador might be. It was not protocol to inquire whether he too was a party member and, of course, I did not ask. (He was not at the congress, but that was not necessarily indicative of his SACP membership.) Vladimir Shubin similarly spent some time with us, jovial as ever. I assumed that he had made the arrangements for our stay in Moscow and had worked together with Simon Makana on this matter. Shubin was a genius at public relations, talked volubly and shook with his whole body when he laughed, which was often. The flight to Havana was physically turbulent but uneventful. On arrival, we were whisked through immigration to a tour bus and from there to the conference centre, near Havana, where we spent the next four or five days. Except for the brief bus tour my experience of Cuba was unfortunately limited to the conference venue.

It was an interesting congress, the first in exile. Held on the eve of the negotiations, it was remarkable for the presence of activists from SACP structures in South Africa and the frontline states. The mood of the delegates was upbeat and optimistic although it was evident from the discussion during the congress' proceedings that no one suspected the Party's imminent unbanning. The programme adopted at the congress, the "Path to Power", laid the basis for a much needed class analysis of the concept of CST, which Jeremy Cronin, Harold Wolpe and Joe Slovo had worked on beforehand. It was more nuanced than earlier versions of the theory and its elaboration was one of the notable achievements of the congress. In making it more accessible to the average reader, Jeremy did well in breathing life into Harold's rigorous prose. The concept of the South African National Democratic Revolution (NDR) was spelt out more sharply than before and for the first time the likely scenarios of the "path to power" were set out in a series of stages. The new state would introduce democratic freedoms, full adult franchise and economic and social rights; their attainment would prepare the way for Socialism. The interval between the first and last of these stages was expected to be long and problematic, but I doubt whether at the time we appreciated quite how complex that transition would be.

Elaborating on the timescale between the NDR and Socialism was always problematic, but at least the SACP congress seemed clear on the preliminaries. The national democratic state would be the political form the state would take in the transition from apartheid to democracy. Socialism was essentially about a shift in the property relations. But the tendency to separate the two phases of transition as if there were a visible barrier between them, was too mechanical in its thinking. The deepening of the democratic process would create the conditions for further gains for the working class and lead to an increase in public ownership, as well as prepare the way for Socialism. The programme adopted by the SACP at this congress was more explicit than the Party had ever been on the tasks of the national democratic state – its role was to root out domination by foreign capital and create the industrial and technical base for Socialism through democratic ownership and control of the economy … "[including] … mining, heavy industry, banks and other monopoly industries".[20]

The big question at the time was whether "insurrection" was the most likely "path to people's power" or whether that point would be reached through negotiation between the ANC and the apartheid state. The key to the Party's thinking was that the regime would preempt a revolutionary transition by seeking its own kind of transformation – one which would go beyond reform – yet frustrate the basic objectives of the liberation struggle. They would do this "by pushing the liberation movement into negotiation before it is strong enough to back its basic demands with sufficient power on the ground".[21] This was primarily the view of Joe Slovo who made sure that the programme that emanated from the congress would make it plain that "[w]e are not engaged in a struggle whose objective

is merely to generate sufficient pressure to bring the other side to the negotiating table".[22] The mood was more combative than this.

The situation envisaged was that the country would be made ungovernable by mass action, including strikes and protests and that this would be followed by a revolutionary upheaval. In this, the working class would play a key role. Together with "escalating revolutionary combat activity" [meaning armed combat] and intensified international pressure, all the elements would converge to create an "immediate possibility of an insurrectionary breakthrough". While Slovo was the main protagonist of this view, he knew that like most other liberation struggles on the African continent, the conflict was likely to be resolved at the negotiating table. Yet he insisted that the success of the struggle would depend on the development of both the political and the military forces of the revolution.

The congress ended with a rousing rendering of the ANC's national anthem and a less robust singing of the Internationale (which fewer people knew). After that the exiles and internal delegates shook hands, optimistic that they would meet on home territory in the not too distant future. We could not have known then how close we were to that historic moment. As the congress closed, a few of the delegates, from the internal structures in South Africa accompanied Joe Slovo to meet Fidel Castro. I was not so lucky. Neither did I see much of the Cuban landscape, except for the short tour of the countryside on the afternoon before leaving. I have not seen any description of the proceedings of the congress but an amateur video-tape was made of the event, entitled "Amakomanisi". The video was frantically overseen by Ronnie Kasrils who was trying to participate in the meeting at the same time as directing the film. From time to time he would signal to the film crew to tell them which of the speeches to cut and which to keep on record. This he did with a thumbs-up sign if the footage was to stay and an explicit movement of his right forefinger across the full length of his throat if the contribution was to be cut. For this and for security reasons, the film did not do justice to a truly historic event or offer an intelligible account of the proceedings. It did, however, evoke the ebullient mood of the participants and record the stirring struggle songs, many of them fresh from the frontline. The video also captured the frequent shouts of "Viva!" at short intervals during the course of the congress, urged on by more than one cheerleader.[23]

***

Legal at Last

The answer to the question that worried the Seventh Congress – whether liberation would be achieved through insurrection or by negotiation – came sooner rather than later. On 2 February 1990 De Klerk made the astounding announcement of his intention to unban the

ANC and the SACP. The two organizations were incapable of differentiation in his mind (or in the heads of the senior security personnel who advised him). The ANC and SACP were “not a scrambled egg” he said, but “an omlette”. He felt it best to declare them both legal organizations, before the start of negotiations.

I had a sudden sense of feeling free, which had much to do with the lifting of the burden of secrecy that had become second nature to me. Caution in speech; prudence in the choice of company; discretion in making relationships; always having to have a ready story to cover my tracks; and a handy excuse for any contingency – all that had become part of a culture of survival. In England, while the activists in the ANC worked openly, the members of the SACP continued to work on a “need to know” basis, to meet in secret, adopt assumed names, have no knowledge of the identity of individuals on its leading committees or any direct hand in their appointment. This had nothing to do with any desire to secretly influence ANC policies by concealing membership of the SACP– that sort of factionalism was distinctly rejected. It was not that the ANC took the issue of security less seriously than the SACP or that its members were any the less vulnerable to the regime’s spies. For the SACP, there seemed to be no reason to abandon it while the organization was illegal. In any case, we did not know under what conditions we might return: certainly we did not expect the door to be open. Secrecy had become second nature to us – and had to some extent helped to protect our smaller membership for a long time.

It was therefore in a lighter mood that I openly represented the Party seven months after the un-banning of the SACP in August 1990, at the Fete de L’Humanite, a festival that had been organized annually for at least 25 years by the French Communist Party’s newspaper, *L’Humanite*. The festival was traditionally held at the La Corneuve Park, in a suburb outside Paris, attended by scores of people, many of them “regulars” who came each year. They arrived in families: the younger children riding on the bumper cars, their parents moving off to listen to the speeches and the teenagers impatient for the rock-bands to start playing. I’d seen something similar before when I addressed an apartheid rally for the ANC in Pisa, in 1988. On that occasion, the crowds of young people preferred to hear Johnny Clegg than listen to political speeches. It was no different in Paris. People came and went freely, bought pamphlets, participated in the fringe discussions on world peace or neo-colonialism, listened to music, and bought sausages from the stands in front of a line of tents where representatives from fraternal communist parties sat behind tables full of literature, badges, tee shirts and other mementoes.

The free atmosphere was catching and I walked with abandon from one tent to the other, exposing my SACP membership in a way that I had not done since the old Party was banned in 1950. I spoke to the representatives from fraternal parties as one communist to another, meeting fellow comrades from the Lebanon, Morocco, Dakar,

Algeria, Sudan and from different countries in Europe.[24] They were surprisingly knowledgeable about the turn of events in South Africa and were as bemused as I was at our sudden emergence from illegality. Touchingly, they feared for our safety in the event of a massacre of communists by the De Klerk government on our return – a thought that in the euphoria of the moment had not crossed my mind. (Subsequently I heard that there were initially serious doubts about De Klerk's intentions, and many interpretations of his motives in unbanning the SACP and ANC.) The writer Allister Sparks, who was in Lusaka when the announcement was made, wrote: "I was there at the time and almost every member of the national executive committee that one spoke to had a different response to what was happening – from doves such as Thabo Mbeki to hawks like Chris Hani, chief of staff of the guerilla force."[25]

I think the view that Slovo and Hani were "hawks", bent on continuing the armed struggle at all costs, is probably simplistic. I know from my personal conversations with Joe Slovo at the 7th SACP congress in Cuba that although he thought insurrection was a likely path to power (and the road he preferred to go), he believed the state would most likely thwart the process by offering to negotiate with the ANC. He would not oppose it. He said as much in a foreword to a second printing of the Party programme, published by the SACP in 1990:

> In our 1989 Programme we argued that mass struggle was the key to advance … At the beginning of 1989 we associated this mass struggle with the possibility of an insurrectionary seizure of power. But we also noted that: "There is no conflict between the insurrectionary perspective and the possibility of a negotiated transfer of power" … There should be no confusion of the strategy needed to help create the conditions for the winning of power with the exact form of the ultimate breakthrough.[26]

Slovo did not think that an insurrectionary situation and the negotiation process were incompatible or contradictory. The mobilization of mass action would help to create the necessary leverage for a positive "breakthrough".[27]

"Leverage" was more to the point than armed combat, given the stubbornness of the old regime to relinquish its grasp on power, and the creation of a Third Force, which was most manifest in KwaZulu-Natal, where I went on the last lap of my journey home. But before this I witnessed the most unexpected gathering I experienced in exile. Ray Alexander could have referred to the gathering as a meeting of the working class and its vanguard party – had she not been moved to say with much more emotion and intimacy: "The SACP and COSATU have found each other".

Harare

It was a meeting of comrades-in-arms, described at the time as a historic and unique gathering. The description may be exaggerated, but it was a "first-time" encounter, which clarified the roles of the two organizations, beginning a path of cooperation between them that has continued into the present. It was certainly unique. Ray Alexander's statement (made at the end of the conference) that the "SACP and COSATU have found each other" captured the moment completely. I was struck by the confidence of the COSATU delegates and how casually they reacted to the astonishing unbanning of the liberation organizations. For many of them this summit meeting was an event waiting to happen. They probably had less difficulty in adjusting to meeting openly with Ray Alexander, Joe Slovo, Essop Pahad, John Nkadimeng and Jeremy Cronin – to mention some of the names best known to them among the SACP delegation – than we all had in meeting them. We regarded the COSATU leaders as freedom fighters in the frontline of the workers' struggle. We were so unused to meeting openly! Yet they seemed to be comfortable in the new situation and were sufficiently accepting of De Klerk's bona fides in unbanning the Party, to meet with us openly.

The conference was held over two days in Harare, between 29 and 31 March 1990. A week before the meeting, a high level delegation from COSATU had met in Lusaka with veterans in the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). The latter was in the process of phasing out its activity.[28] At the meeting with the Party almost all the trade union leadership was present: COSATU's secretary general, Jay Naidoo; the president, Chris Dhlamini; vice-president, John Gomomo (I had met him previously at one of the ILO seminars), and Executive Committee members Cyril Ramaphosa, Sydney Mufamadi, Moses Mayekiso, Johnny Coplyn and Alec Erwin – all of them names I knew but could at last put a face to. The unions were well represented: the list included delegates from the mining, metal, transport, clothing, chemical, communications, municipal, food and railway workers unions, a veritable roll-call of the new labour battalions.

Jeremy Cronin introduced the discussion on behalf of the Party, highlighting its allegiance to the working class through the 1920s and 1930s and its innovative identification of the national question as the primary emphasis of struggle – "a step on the road to Socialism". He referred in close detail to the role of communists in the trade union movement since the 1930s and the Party's subsequent efforts to organize and assist the labour movement. Curiously, he said very little, if anything, about SACTU. The COSATU representatives, however, rapidly filled the silence. They knew that SACTU had contributed much to the tradition of workers' resistance and that like COSATU, it had championed the struggle for workers' unity. In the words of Jay Naidoo at the earlier meeting with SACTU, it had "urged workers (as SACTU had done in the 1950s) to join those struggles with political activities that were connected to the workers' lives".[29]

The subject that deeply interested the delegates was the question: “Has Socialism Failed?” This was high up on the list of everyone’s interest. My notes of the meeting do not do justice to the lively discussion. The debate, introduced by Joe Slovo, centred on the classical vision of Socialism as projected by Marx and Engels and what were seen as “distortions” (rather than something systemic) in government, administration, law and civil rights in the USSR and the post-war socialist regimes. Interestingly, while the delegates saw the failures described as abuses of the original vision of Socialism, they were also quick to identify an institutional need for a countervailing power to the state in the way of flourishing organizations of civil society – “forums of peoples power” – they called it. If workers’ control of the economy was to be meaningful and abuses of power prevented, an independent trade union movement was also indispensable. Slovo agreed. “It was the conflation of the party and state, and the party and the working class that had led to a situation of insufficient worker participation [in the USSR], let alone control of the vital democratic processes,” he said.[30] Erwin later elaborated upon this, also referring to the USSR. State ownership on its own, he said, did not guarantee worker control or guarantee collective ownership. Nor did it protect workers’ rights.[31]

Already well known to the labour movement as secretary of the National Union of Metal Workers Union, Erwin presented COSATU’s vision of the new dispensation to follow apartheid. His presentation, the product of a specialist research team, was a tour de force, a blueprint for government, covering rights in the constitution, land reform, education, forms of ownership, workers control, and the economy. This last, was the most crucial and potentially divisive problem the new dispensation would have to confront. Erwin’s contribution was significant for its exposition of capital’s need for a negotiated change of regime and his insights into the character of the economic crisis at that time. Nobody foresaw that the growth path he advocated would have to be fought for; that the economic direction that a democratic government might follow would not be what the mass movement dictated. There were four graphic prototypes of a mixed economy that a post-apartheid government would have to consider, he said. These included the Thatcher/Reagan replica of a free market capitalism; the Scandinavian model of a social democratic welfare state; the pre-1986 soviet model; and an example of a democratic planned socialist economy (DPSE), which was the one COSATU favoured.[32] Each of the models characterized the nature of the state, the economic system, the mode of production and its impact on civil society. If there is merit in revisiting this discussion, it is for the inequalities that were encountered then that have continued beyond 1994 and remain problems in 2011.

He saw capital’s plight in the late 1980s as part of a longer term accumulation crisis. Capital wanted to revise the growth rate and advance the general rise of profitability. Generally the domestic capital market was problematical. The corporate giants were not

investing in the productive economy and sought other avenues for profits in financial speculation.[33] He described the structural situation in the country plainly as a high-cost, low-wage, low-employment economy in which the policies practised then would lead at best to a 50/50 type of society in the future. By this he meant that 50% of the people would be in wage employment and 50% would be unemployed! If this were to continue after liberation it would produce an inequality that would retain its racial dimensions. More dangerously, there was "the likelihood that democracy would not survive such inequality".[34] An economic programme that reverses the free market approach was essential to redress the disparity in wealth and raise the general standard of living. For this a mixed economy was necessary with a range of ownership forms – public, co-operative and private.[35] In a Democratic Planned Socialist Economy – one that COSATU envisaged – a coherent plan for strategic economic sectors was essential. For this, as much of organized society as possible would need to participate in its drafting.

Erwin's insights then, were not those he followed in the 14 years in which he was a minister in the Mandela and Mbeki governments, but COSATU has been consistent in projecting this far-sighted programme for the last 18 years. If the issues that were discussed were thought to be urgent then, they are even more compelling today.

***

Home

The last lap was the most difficult. The start of talks for a negotiated political settlement changed my life completely. There was no sense in my staying in the UK when my head and heart were in South Africa. At the end of 1990, as soon as I could get my affairs in order, I came home for the first time. M.D. Naidoo (MD), a veteran in the struggle, was on the plane with me. His presence helped to allay the suspense of returning to South Africa after all our years in exile. Neither of us knew what to expect or could even be sure that we would be allowed to enter the country. It was three years before the negotiations were concluded and the old regime could refuse to accept us because legally-speaking we were still prohibited from re-entering the country. Finally, the plane landed – we were in Jo'burg at last! We were both overcome with excitement. MD virtually floated down the plane's stairway, chest out, the inevitable blue-black beret on his head, a new black blazer on his back, to meet his comrades after an absence of over 30 years in exile. His excitement was contagious and we both walked proudly towards the arrivals hall, amazed at the bustle around us. This was not the sluggish airport we knew.

Unfortunately, a short while before entering the arrivals hall, MD was suddenly overtaken by a crippling attack of emphysema. He was an inveterate cigarette smoker and as he coughed and spluttered it seemed as if his lungs had been nested-in by noisy

pigeons. Fortunately one of the attendants directed me to a wheelchair and allowed me to take him into the customs hall to present his passport before entering the main concourse of the airport (then still bearing the name of Jan Smuts.) As luck would have it, he had only a United Nations' document, which was not counted as a valid passport. He fished in his inside pocket for a while and hauled out papers that allowed him entry into Ireland, but these too were unacceptable. He whispered to me that he had a Ghanaian passport in his briefcase, but I thought a third passport would make him look even less credible, and advised him not to reveal it for the moment. He was at his wits' end. I too began to panic. I had not been "cleared" by the ANC for various bureaucratic reasons and had decided to enter the country on the strength of my British passport.

MD, I think, had obtained "clearance" but this was a very casual practice, well known to the ANC's officials at foreign airports (in countries sympathetic to the anti-apartheid struggle) but this most informal procedure was probably completely alien to the bewildered South African customs' officials. Whereas they would probably have received my passport without query had I been alone, they were mystified about my connection with MD and were uncertain of my legal status. They frankly did not know what to do with us. Eventually, I spotted an "official" wearing an ANC armband. She was standing near the barrier at the entrance to the passport hall, clearly an arrangement between the government and the ANC to receive exiles. I excitedly leapt towards her and told her of our plight. She did not know us, never had had any information that we might be arriving, but took in the entire situation in a flash and to the relief of the bemused customs' officials, announced that she knew us and that we should be allowed entry! The miracle was that they listened to her.

I beckoned to MD to sit straight and prepared to guide his chair grandly through the customs hall into the new South Africa. (It wasn't yet the "new" South Africa, but in the euphoria of the moment that seemed hardly relevant.) As I moved to push the wheelchair MD looked at me with dismay, making it quite clear that he would walk into the hall and greet his welcoming party standing on his own two feet. Without ceremony he abandoned the wheelchair and (I thought) moved rather jauntily into the public space where a sea of strange faces stared at us without recognition or interest. I saw two members of my family waiting apprehensively to meet me and quickly moved to greet them. Regrettably there was no red carpet, no welcoming party for MD. not even the wheelchair to ease the effort of his walking to a bench at the side of the hall. I phoned the ANC headquarters at Shell House (now Chief Albert Luthuli House) where no-one seemed to be expecting him, but bless the ANC's putative new bureaucracy where a quick-thinking reception clerk (possibly with a Masters degree acquired in Cuba or the UK, but not much office experience) appeared inexplicably adept at repairing a botched operation, mumbled that

there were “technical” problems … that they would come to the airport as soon as they could … that he should wait as long as it takes for someone to get there!

I risked a sidelong glance at MD and could have cried. He stood directly in front of me, body erect, black beret straight on his head, shoulders back like the soldier he was. If he was saying anything, I could not hear, but words did not seem to matter, for his buoyant body-language – turn of the head, chest expanded so far out that he might burst with pride – said it all. He had made it. In Johannesburg after more than 40 years since he served his apprenticeship in the Tea and Coffee Workers’ Union in Durban, he was back in South Africa, free to breathe as much of the invigorating air as his lungs would allow. I felt his elation, but was too overwhelmed with family and MD’s misfortune to connect with my feelings. I looked again at MD, but our eyes did not meet …

***

The struggle continues, but that is another story and perhaps there will still be time to say all that remains to be said of my 66 years in the movement. I look back on the two decades of my life that I have been “home” and see only an incoherent succession of images. Every day is a new beginning.

At work in Durban in the early 1990s, I concentrated on unravelling the racially skewed workforce and began to design affirmative action frameworks for a technical committee of the Labour Relations Forum at CODESA. These were the first to be recognized by local government *before* the ANC came to office.[36] I helped to create programmes at the University of Durban Westville for interns to take senior positions for a year in the plush departments of provincial and local government – where no black person had been allowed to enter except as a messenger or a cleaner. The buzz-word was “empowerment” and when the white public service officials saw what I and my colleagues were doing for the black trainees, they asked if they too could be empowered. We held workshops for them – in policy formation and mentoring; in performance-management and “development” – a catchword for everything connoting planning and change. My colleagues at the Centre for Community and Labour Studies (Billy Nair and Pravin Gordhan) called them “Norman’s bureaucrats”. I suppose that is what these officials were – except that I was not the only one who tried to change decades of inequality by rehabilitating incumbents of the old order. Pravin and Billy and all the others at the CCLS (in a major re-working of all they have done before) became very good bureaucrats in government and the public service. Pravin Gordhan and Billy Nair successively headed the Centre for Community and Labour Studies off campus and I headed the corresponding centre at the University of Durban Westville. Later, Gordhan would excel as chief commissioner at the South African Revenue Services and Nair served as a conscientious member of parliament until his untimely death in October 2008.

In 1996 at the School of Government at the University of the Western Cape, I turned to the larger task of transforming the public service. It was similar to scraping layers of decay from an old edifice. In doing this I owed a great deal to Nelson Mandela who appointed me to the Presidential Review Commission for the transformation of the public service.[37] It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reshape the public service and to see how the new government worked. There were few commissioners that served with me that had lengthy experience in government, least of all in re-designing the presidency and recasting the public service. But, I ask, had Madiba been taught to be president or Manuel been trained for the treasury? The questions are rhetorical.

Later, at the School of Government, at the University of the Western Cape, I directed a national audit of intergovernmental relations, trying to find new ways for the different spheres of government to talk to each other. The tasks were endless.

There is still much work to be done and our political culture has yet to match our liberal constitution. After 16 years of democracy the euphoria of liberation remains, but it is marred by contradictions that in our innocence we did not contemplate. For all our imaginings of a new society and a harmonious rainbow nation, these are ideals still in the making. There is no promised land, no earthly paradise, only the imperfect place we ourselves create and the vision we have to change it for the better.

End

Chapter 20

1 V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1970), p 118.

2 Vladimir Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow*, Mayibuye History and Literature Series No. 88 (Mayibuye Books, Belville, 1999).

3 Shubin, *A View From Moscow*, p. 311

4 Norman Levy, Special Collection: Correspondence, ANC Social Scientists' Preparatory Committee to the author, 9 February 1987.

5 He did not live up to his illustrious surname and died a lonely death soon after his return to South Africa in 1990, after succumbing to alcohol and allegedly providing information to the security police.

6 See Norman Levy, Special Collection: Social Scientists' Seminar, Moscow, 1987. The paper is untitled but bears the sub-title "The Specific Features of the National Question in South Africa". Jordan's introduction is recorded in the transcript of the proceedings, pp. 35–37.

7 Norman Levy, Special Collection: Transcript of the Proceedings of the Social Scientists' Conference, Moscow, 1987, pp. 35–40.

8 Transcript, proceedings of Social Scientists' Conference, 1987, p. 38.

9 Transcript, proceedings of Social Scientists' Conference, 1987, pp. 38–39.

10 Transcript, proceedings of Social Scientists' Conference, p. 39.

11 See Norman Levy, Special Collection: Social Scientists' Seminar, 1987, papers by Max Sisulu, "Nationalisation of the Monopolies and the Restructuring of the Economy"; and by G.V. Smirnov, "Liquidation of Monopolies and a Reform of the Existing Industrial Sector".

12 "The SACP and State Power: The Alliance Post-Polokwane – Ready to Govern?", SACP policy discussion document, September 2008, Section 3.1, Neo Colonialism.

13 In its 2008 policy document on "the SACP and state power" the Party affirmed its earlier analyses (made in 2005 and again in 2006), that the new democratic state had been progressively *hegemonized* by the capitalist programme of the bourgeoisie. This, it said, was due to "the capacity of monopoly capital … to win over the new state into an agenda of capitalist stabilization …" It went on to say that the democratic breakthrough of 1994 saw the demise of minority white rule, "but not the defeat of monopoly capital".

14 Among those wishing to talk to the ANC was Gavin Relly of the Anglo American Corporation, the biggest of the South African monopolies. For accounts of these meetings See Mark Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg and Cape Town 2007), pp. 501–505.

15 For riveting accounts of these encounters see, for example, Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki*, pp. 546, 563–564; and Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Negotiated Revolution* (Struik, Sandton, 1994), pp. 109–119.

16 For the ramifications of the meeting with the Broederbond, see Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki*, p. 547.

17 In one of the compilations of articles and discussion notes compiled by Tony Trew for the Group are articles by Steven Friedman ("The Struggle within the Struggle: South Africa's Resistance Strategies", *Transformation*, 3, 1987); Mark Swilling ("The Politics of Negotiation", *WIP*, 50, October/November 1987); and Tom Lodge ("State Power and Politics", *WIP*, 50, October/November 1987), which we discussed. The critical commentaries we made on each of these are also interesting to note for our perceptions of the internal political situation. For the articles and our comments, see Norman Levy, Special Collection: Political Research Discussion Group, RPMC, London, June 1988.

18 I also conducted a number of low-profile, one-on-one, Marxist political study classes for the ANC, one of them with a student from the University of Stellenbosch, whose political reliability I subsequently doubted.

19 It acted as the Regional Committee for the UK, Europe and Ireland and it co-ordinated the work of the units until the Party was un-banned in February 1990.

20 *The Path to Power*, pp. 33 and 34.

21 *The Path to Power*, p. 57.

22 *The Path to Power*, p. 57.

23 The film, called *Amakomanisi*, was directed by Ronnie Kasrils for the Inkululeko Film Productions, VHS 625 PAL.

24 See Norman Levy, Special Collection, for my report to the SACP Regional Committee, Minutes of the RC, 1990, p. 43.

25 Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country*, p. 121.

26 *The Path to Power*, pp. 2 and 3. The foreword was written after the signing of the Groote Schuur and Pretoria Minutes, initiating the start of negotiations.