

# South Africa: An unfinished revolution?

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I

In her historical novel, *A Place of Greater Safety*, which is played out against the backdrop of the Great French Revolution through an illuminating character analysis and synthesis of three of that revolution's most prominent personalities, viz., Maximilien Robespierre, Georges-Jacques Danton and Camille Desmoulins, Hilary Mantel imagines the following conversation between Lucile Desmoulins and Danton:

So has the Revolution a philosophy, Lucile wanted to know, has it a future? She dared not ask Robespierre, or he would lecture her for the afternoon on the General Will: or Camille, for fear of a thoughtful and coherent two hours on the development of the Roman republic.

So she asked Danton.

"Oh, I think it has a philosophy", he said seriously. "Grab what you can, and get out while the going's good"

This sentiment, I make bold to say, puts in the bluntest possible way the dominant sense of disillusionment and disbelief that most middle-class South Africans have when they feel compelled to "whine" and complain about where we appear to have landed in post-apartheid South Africa. All the heady hopes which even those who were not in or of the Congress Alliance had in 1994-95 seem to have turned into ash. There are few thinking South Africans today who would be prepared to say that they are happy with how things have turned out.

Because the title of my talk is bound to raise all kinds of expectations about its content, it is essential that I state clearly at the outset that I shall not wander off again into the well-trodden paths that are supposed to bring the excited novice to an understanding of the relationship between the "bourgeois democratic" and the "socialist" revolutions or, even more superiorly to the realisation that "the revolution" is permanent and that the first necessarily "grows over" into the second under the conditions that obtain in semi-industrialised or newly industrialising countries. These debates are as relevant today as they were at the beginning of the last century. I do not for one second wish to deny the importance of getting conceptual and strategic clarity in this domain. For, without such clarity, we do no more than tap about in the dark in the hope of finding by chance a route out of the suffocating maze of the world capitalist system. I shall, however, have occasion to refer to this subject briefly when I discuss the illusion of the "National Democratic Revolution".

In the Marxist paradigm, the word "revolution" has very precise meanings. Most often, it is used to refer to a "social revolution", i.e., the displacement of the rule of one class by that of another, usually by violent means, i.e., in the course of a civil war or an armed struggle[1]. Thus, for example, the Great French Revolution formally put an end to the rule of the feudal nobility and the clergy in

France and, later, in the rest of Western Europe, and the Great October Revolution ended the rule of the tsarist aristocracy and of the incipient Russian bourgeoisie. It ought to be clear to everyone here tonight that, in South Africa, we have not, in this very precise sense, experienced a social revolution. If anything, the post-apartheid state is more capitalist than its apartheid parent. To deny the continuity between the apartheid capitalist state and the post-apartheid capitalist state, as some people actually do, is a futile and quixotic exercise.

A “political revolution”, in this context, refers to what we would nowadays term “regime change”. That is to say, certain fundamental changes in the form of rule and of the institutions of the state machine are brought about without, however, a concomitant change in the fundamental power relations at the level of the economy and of the management of the repressive apparatuses of the state. In my view, what we have experienced in South Africa during the past two decades is precisely such a political revolution. For reasons of focus, I shall refer only briefly to the third social dimension, i.e., the “cultural revolution”, important though it is to grasp the integral but intricate relationship between these three aspects of any revolution.

Why and how the regime change came about is not the focus of my address this evening either. There have been many scholarly analyses, biographies of significant actors as well as insightful journalistic articles and documentaries on the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa. Read together, these provide us with a range of perspectives, which help us to make sense of the often bewildering events of the period. Instead, I want to talk about the fact that most South Africans, certainly most oppressed and exploited South Africans, feel that they have been, if not betrayed, then certainly misled. And, because I do not believe that political action is a monopoly of so-called politicians, I want to talk about what we can do in order to get out of the state of shock into which we have been driven. I want to talk about what we can do to find again that vision of a different South Africa that inspired all of us in one way or another regardless of what political tendency we belonged to at the time. For, I believe that if, through discussion and practical action, we can again visualise that other South Africa, we will very soon put behind us the barbaric and vulgar universe in which we are forced to try to survive with dignity today.

Let me also make it clear that in spite of the implication in its title, I have no idea what “the finished revolution” would have looked like or what it will look like. Revolutions, I think, are never completed. Radical social transformation, even when it is imperceptible in the here and now is a continuous and complex process. But, even though this is an essential part of the meaning of revolution, this objective process has to be articulated in concrete programs and strategies for any kind of revolution to eventuate. The success or failure, the “completeness” or otherwise of the revolution we speak of in South Africa can only be measured against the extent to which, roughly, the set of ideas and programmatic demands that have guided all sections of the national liberation movement since the axial period, 1928-1945 approximately, and which were refined and differentiated according to the ideological predispositions and class position of the different tendencies within the broad movement[2], were realised in the course of the 80 years that have elapsed since then. Without reducing the complexity of contemporary South African history to some simplistic formula, I believe one can say without any distortion that the discourses of the national liberation movement were characterised by the intersection of nationalist, liberal-democratic and broadly socialist paradigms and that the particularity of one or other political tendency was determined by the ways in which its exponents blended or interpreted these three discursive

strategies, each of which, of course, derived from and reinforced specific class interests, whether or not the social actors involved were conscious of these.

II

Since the main burden of my talk concerns the developments after 1994, it seems to me most realistic and, in an important sense, also fair, to take as the point of departure for my analysis the general demands of the Freedom Charter, which guided the political strategy and tactics of the Congress movement since 1955. Given the decision to negotiate a deal with the apartheid regime rather than getting entangled in a 100 years war, such as that raging in Palestine[3], the leadership of the Congress Alliance had to make definite decisions about which of the demands of the Charter could be put on the back burner, as it were, in order to make a deal acceptable to the economic and political elites of the old regime. Today, it is obvious to all who wish to look, that the fundamental concession was made with the agreement not to touch the existing property relations except for the virtually unimplementable provisions about land restitution and the clauses referring to affirmative action. To put it differently, these agreements deliberately restricted the horizon of the “revolution” to the conditions that prevail in any bourgeois democracy. This means that the middle-class leadership of the Congress movement were albeit “temporarily” in effect abandoning their pro-poor and pro-proletarian comrades and the mass of its working-class members and supporters. This is where the theory of the “National Democratic Revolution” was called upon to play a useful mediating role. At the crucial moment, i.e., when the actual concessions were being made, the NDR found its programmatic expression in the now forgotten “Reconstruction and Development Programme” (RDP). The simple, clear language of former President Mandela’s version of it is how most of the oppressed and exploited masses understood the promises made by the leadership in the early 1990s:

The ANC drafted a 150-page document known as the Reconstruction and Development Programme, which outlined our plan to create jobs through public works; to build a million new houses with electricity and flush toilets; to extend primary health care and provide ten years of free education to all South Africans; to redistribute land through a land claims court; and to end the value-added tax on basic foodstuffs. We were also committed to extensive affirmative action measures in both the private and public sectors. This document was translated into a simpler manifesto called ‘A Better Life for All’, which in turn became the ANC’s campaign slogan. (Long Walk to Freedom, p. 605)

Mandela goes on to emphasise that he regularly reminded his audiences that “freedom” would not translate into some kind of Cinderella-like overnight change into prosperity. In essence, he was truthfully warning his people that now the class struggle would become brutal and unrelenting. Unlike some of his left-wing comrades, he did not try to sell this straightforward fact as a so-called “National Democratic Revolution”.

But, before I expand on this matter, let me say a few words about individual psychology and shifts of social or class positions. I should like to phrase this as simply and authentically as possible, since it is at this level that resentment and hostility are engendered when one criticises a movement, such as the Congress movement, that has become so powerful and hegemonic in South Africa. I do not doubt for one minute that most, if not all, members of that movement sincerely believed in the ringing trumpet tones of the Freedom Charter: The people shall govern; There shall be houses, security and comfort, and so forth. It is probable even that many, but certainly not the majority, of

the leaders considered that the deviations from the trajectory which the Freedom Charter seemed to suggest, i.e., away from the race-based capitalism of more than 100 years towards some kind of African socialist or at least social-democratic future were no more than tactical adjustments necessitated by the realities of the political terrain at the end of the 20th century after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is impossible to guess at how each of the prominent individuals actually came to terms with the psychological dissonance caused by the need, as they saw it, to carry out one or more ideological somersaults. Not all of them were as public and as forthright as Mandela himself, especially in his famous U-turn with respect to nationalisation as the policy of the ANC. The biographies of many of the actors undoubtedly provide some insight into this matter. All I wish to stress here is that any blanket statement about “sell-out” and “betrayal” could only be made at the most general and abstract level against the background of the avowed previous ideological or programmatic positions of the individuals or groups of people concerned[4].

I want to say as clearly as possible that apart from incorrigible revolutionary socialists, such as myself and many others who were routinely maligned as “ultra-leftists” or even more anachronistically, as “Trotskyites”, the bourgeoisie and a few of the leaders of the Congress Alliance were clear that the 1993-94 agreements were in essence about stabilising the capitalist state and system in South Africa and creating the conditions for its expansion as a profitable venture. Examples of this understanding are today easily accessible even though they are, for obvious reasons, condemned as prejudiced, false, malignant and even “unpatriotic” by those who are now the powers that be. A few of the more significant statements will suffice to make the point. As early as April 24, 1991, almost 20 years ago, John Carlin, the South Africa correspondent of *The Independent* wrote:

Mr. Mandela and the other “moderates” in the ANC leadership [...] believed that the government and the ANC would be equal partners in the voyage to the “New South Africa”, that apartheid would go and they, as the natural majority party, would glide into power ... In one sense [that] trust was not misplaced. Mr. de Klerk will remove apartheid from the statute books. [...]. But this was never the issue; he knew from the day he came to power that this was what had to be done. The real issue was to retain power, to perpetuate white privilege and the economic status quo after apartheid had gone. (Cited in McKinley, Dale T. 1997. *The ANC and the Liberation Struggle. A Critical Political Biography*. p. 122)

Of course, de Klerk also miscalculated on the dynamics of the negotiations but the essential point remains true. Today, thanks particularly to Professor Terreblanche’s summary of the hidden negotiations about the economic aspects of the negotiated settlement, in his *A History of Inequality in South Africa 1652–2002*, we know that there was no innocence on the side of the leadership of the ANC and of prominent leaders of COSATU and the SACP, in spite of disagreements on policy, which fact became evident most dramatically with the eventual imposition of the macroeconomic policy [known as the Growth, Employment and Redistribution] GEAR. Chapters 3 and 4 of Terreblanche’s book ought to be compulsory reading for any remaining Doubting Thomases in the former liberation movement. We cannot here thread our way through the intricacies of the debates and the manoeuvres that led to the shifts in the approach of the ANC leadership. The following statement gives a crystal clear picture of what actually happened.

At stake was not only the economic policy of a democratically elected government but also the nature of South Africa’s future economic system. Given that South Africa was the most developed

country in Africa, the stakes were extremely high, and the negotiations were strategically hugely important for the corporate sector. For almost 20 years all the joint attempts of the corporate sector and the NP [National Party] government to find a new accumulation strategy had been unsuccessful. After almost 20 years of prolonged stagflation, the latter was desperate to convince the core leaders of the democratic movement what the economic ideology and economic system in a democratic South Africa should be.

The strategy on which the corporate sector and the ANC agreed during the informal negotiations in 1993 can be described as the fourth phase of the AAC-led [Anglo-American Corporation] search for a new accumulation strategy. [...] The main characteristic of every phase of the AAC-led search for a new accumulation strategy was that the supreme goal of economic policy should be to attain a high economic growth rate, and that all other objectives should be subordinated to this. By convincing ANC leaders to accept the AAC's approach, the corporate sector in effect persuaded – or forced – the ANC to move away from its traditional priority, namely to uplift the impoverished black majority socially and economically. (Terreblanche, Sampie. 2002. *A History of Inequality in South Africa 1652–2002*. pp. 95-96)

Although it is tempting to dwell on the details of this shift, I think the essentials are clear enough. There ought to be no doubt in anyone's mind after a close reading of this text that, and why, the bourgeoisie, the self-same capitalist class of yesterday, is in command of all the strategic positions, no matter what the "democratic" posturing of the politicians might be. And, although it would be an oversimplification to maintain that the ANC at the beginning of the 21st century has become a party of the capitalist class, it ought to be equally clear that the bloodletting and the cruel battles that are currently tearing the organisation apart are precisely about how soon it will become such a party rather than the supposed broad church it continues to be marketed as by the bureaucratic leadership. The sketch I have given, without any attempt on my part to join all the dots, does, I think, explain to a large extent why we have been catapulted into the ugly world of modern-day capitalist barbarism with its devastating features of high and growing unemployment, increasing social inequality, horrific violent crime, racist and xenophobic dog-eat-dog conflicts, among many other things. This is very far from the almost utopian revolutionary euphoria with which most South Africans, unaware of what had been agreed upon in the devilish details of the negotiation process, had so proudly cast their votes on April 27-28, 1994.

I cannot resist the temptation to cite one of my favourite texts in order to illuminate the dilemma of the governing party. President Zuma and his team are reaping the bitter fruits of the negotiated settlement. They find themselves in the tragic situation described by Friedrich Engels in the memorable paragraph in the Peasant War in Germany:

The worst thing that can befall a leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to take over a government in an epoch when the movement is not yet ripe for the domination of the class which he represents, and for the realization of the measures which that domination implies. [...]. Thus he necessarily finds himself in an unsolvable dilemma. What he can do contradicts all his previous actions, principles, and the immediate interests of his party, and what he ought to do cannot be done. In a word, he is compelled to represent not his party or his class, but the class for whose domination the movement is then ripe. In the interests of the movement he is compelled to advance the interests of an alien class, and to feed his own class with phrases and promises, and with the

asseveration [solemn assertion] that the interests of that alien class are its own interests. Whoever is put into this awkward position is irrevocably lost.

III

Enter the National Democratic Revolution, i.e., the smoke and mirrors of the so-called left in the Congress Alliance. Let me say it very clearly: the new South Africa has brought about fundamental changes in the form of rule and in the institutional furniture of the capitalist state. The realm of freedom has been expanded beyond anything that most people imagined in the 1960s, and millions of people have been lifted out of abject pauperism to some level of human dignity. The struggle has not been in vain in any sense of the term. But, the struggle continues. After 1994, and especially after 1996, it is no longer a struggle for national liberation. It is a class struggle “pure and simple” or, in good South African English: finish en klaar. The inverted commas are necessary because one cannot discard overnight the birthmarks that are imprinted on the new body politic by the old order. Social inequality continues to be reproduced objectively largely as racial inequality in spite of the continued growth of the “black” middle class. Racial prejudice, inequalities justified on alleged cultural, linguistic, ethnic or nationality differences, all the things that defaced colonial-apartheid South Africa, persist even if in attenuated forms. They will require decades, perhaps centuries, to become completely irrelevant.

The attempt to frame the class struggles in which we are now engaged in terms of the so-called NDR is no more than tilting at windmills. To put it bluntly: for the leadership of this NDR to be an integral part of a bourgeois government while pretending to conduct a revolutionary struggle against the capitalist system is the merest political buffoonery. Workers and other poor people can be got to mouth and repeat all the heroic phrases that are supposed to give expression to the demands and aspirations of this “revolution” but at some point, they will realise that they are being sold a dummy. What is at issue here is not the value or the socio-historical impact of the day to day struggles being waged by the working class and other strata of the urban and the rural poor. That does not depend on the misleading discourses of the NDR that is supposed to guide their struggles. The real danger is that the goal, the destination, of these struggles is being described and presented in terms that necessarily limit the horizons of the class struggle to the bourgeois universe. Strategically, this can only lead to the consolidation of the social democratisation of the workers’ movement in South Africa, a process that began with the tying of the main trade union federation to the goals and modalities of the Congress Alliance in the mid-1980s. In doing so, a vital part of the workers’ movement was agreeing to the leadership of the liberation movement by the nationalists, as opposed to the socialists. The SACP had gone even further by allowing, indeed compelling, its members to become card-carrying members of the ANC. Things can change, of course, but, as I see it, the SACP is currently not an independent political formation.

Theoretically, we are once again faced with a concept of the state that makes any movement beyond capitalism inconceivable. I have neither the time nor the inclination to enter into this particular debate in any detail in this address. Suffice it to say that the question can be formulated quite clearly in terms that Rosa Luxemburg first made famous in her essay on Reform or Revolution, published in 1900, i.e., 110 years ago. In her own words:

[... People] who pronounce themselves in favor of the method of legislative reform in place of and in contradistinction to the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a

more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the same goal, but a different goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modification of the old society. If we follow the political conceptions of revisionism, we arrive at the same conclusion that is reached when we follow the economic theories of revisionism. Our program becomes not the realization of socialism, but the reform of capitalism; not the suppression of the system of wage labor, but the diminution of exploitation, that is, the suppression of the abuses of capitalism instead of the suppression of capitalism itself. (Luxemburg, Rosa. Reform or Revolution, pp. 49-50. Non-italics in the original)

Another way of putting this is the proposition that, in Gramscian terms, the class struggle gets stuck, as it were, in a war of position in the belief that these manoeuvres in themselves constitute a transformation of the capitalist state and society into a socialist society and a workers' state. (See Bensaid, Daniel. Revolutionary Strategy Today, p. 30.) This, as I see it, is the tendency of much that is put forward as the program of the NDR, quite apart from the fundamental sleight of hand perpetrated by those who are busy stabilising the capitalist system in South Africa while they pontificate at the same time about the "fundamental transformation" of our society. By way of example, I refer to the resolutions of the 1997 COSATU national conference, all of which remain on the agenda in 2010.

building a robust anti-capitalism, which means a relentless criticism of capitalism; building working class hegemony in many areas such as sport, culture, values, the media and most importantly (sic), in politics; and tirelessly upholding a vision of full equality (and not just constitutional equality), including gender equality;

rolling back the market – water, education, shelter, healthcare are basic human rights, not commodities. Everyone should have a right to these things, regardless of whether they can afford them. We should not allow the market to dominate in meeting the basic needs of people

transforming the state – a powerful public sector is a crucial component of socialism, but should not be big for its own sake. Our vision is that it should be developmental and facilitate participation and consultation; it should be more responsive and accountable, and the higher, bureaucratic echelons should be reduced;

advancing and experimenting with other, non-capitalist forms of ownership such as cooperatives and "social capital" (eg. Workers' pension and provident funds);

transforming how work is organised and managed – toward worker control and worker self-management. The actual conditions of the workplace should change, so as to empower working people;

strengthening worker organisation – in addition to trade unions, there are other organisations in which workers are active, and these should be part of a socialist program. (COSATU/SACP publication: Building Socialism Now: Preparing for the New Millennium. p. 68. My italics).

While few left-wing people will disagree with any of this, except for the give-away phrase about "transforming the state", it is clear that these objectives are put forward in the mode of Bernsteinian revisionism and that, as a consequence, they can at best lead to what I have already referred to as the consolidation of social democracy in the workers' movement. The entire strategy depends on a

notion of the state as being essentially neutral[5]. The final disillusionment will come, of course, when the repressive apparatuses of the state, instead of supporting the exploited classes and other oppressed strata, turn their weapons on the masses to protect the interests of the capitalist class. The response of police personnel to many of the so-called service delivery protests prefigures what I am saying here.

#### IV

On the other hand, this is not an inevitable outcome, as the history of every successful revolution attests and we are probably decades away from any such scenario at this moment. However, not to postulate consistently and as a matter of daily practical political education the need to end the rule of the local and international capitalist class, as eccentric as that may appear to be at present, is to disarm the working class and its allies ideologically before the decisive battles are fought[6].

So, what should we be doing, those of us who consider ourselves to be on the left and as being committed to bringing about that other world which socialists across the globe and across the centuries have envisaged? I want to address this question briefly at a general, rather than at an operational level, since this is not a forum for the discussion of tactical issues.

In a sentence, I would say that we have to find the ideological and organisational means to build the counter-society that insulates the oppressed and exploited from the undermining and disempowering values and practices of bourgeois society. This goal must once again become an integral part of the class struggle against exploitation and oppression. Today, because of the massive pollution of the popular consciousness by means of (mostly) US consumerist culture, this is a much more difficult task than it was for those who fashioned – in struggle – the mass social-democratic parties and workers' movements of Europe towards the end of the 19th century, or of some of the mass parties of the newly industrialising countries, including, incipiently, the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s.

In order to get to the orientation I wish to suggest, I want to put forward a number of propositions that have to be borne in mind.

First, for reasons that I assume need not be spelled out, the collapse of the USSR and of its satellite states in Eastern Europe catapulted the pro-socialism forces in the world into one of their most deep-going and enduring crises. In particular, I think, there can be no doubt that the credibility of the socialist project as the only viable alternative to capitalism as a world system has been called into question. The very fact that the majority of human beings in the second half of the last century equated socialism with what had come into existence in the Soviet Union has once again raised the question of what we mean by the concept. This is not new, of course. At the end of the 19th century, similar debates were conducted among, especially, socialists in Europe, notably in the German Social Democratic Party. However, we live in an entirely different world today and the question has, therefore, to be approached with the new technological and ideological environment in mind. I realise, of course, that most of us have ready answers to this question but I believe it is essential that we find a different language in which to articulate these answers. Otherwise, our cliché-ridden formulae will continue to alienate the popular consciousness. We have to use traditional as well as modern media in order to disseminate these answers in diverse and innovative forms among all of

humanity. Stories, utopias, novels, plays, songs, rapping, even soapies, we need to experiment with all of these forms, and more, in order to get our message across more effectively.

Second, the caving in of layer after layer of former so-called socialists to the pressures and enticements of neoliberal bourgeois norms and aspirations, which has been one of the most melodramatic political developments of the late 20th century, has temporarily weakened the socialist forces numerically and intellectually but, in the longer term, has also laid the foundation for a much more solid political edifice built with the will and the knowledge of many dedicated men and women. Clearly, the question that we have to consider here is something along these lines: how do we, among other things, maximise the acceptance of the need by the majority of people in our societies to base their lives and their aspirations on the principle of sufficiency (André Gorz)? The question implies an understanding of the moral economy in an industrial environment, a countering of the capitalist myth of “economic rationality” and a reintegration of the, if you wish, pre-industrial, pre-capitalist values based on the notion that “enough is as good as a feast”[7]. This approach has obviously been reinforced by the insights derived from the researches of ecological science and activism. It is from this ideological mindset, formulated in political programs of principle and practical action plans, that the motivation and the passion will be generated to oppose, and, therefore, not to emulate, the acquisitive and status-seeking desiderata which are the stock-in-trade of the capitalist system.

We need as a corollary to this to spell out what we mean in practice when we proclaim that socialism is a process, not an event. For example, in the educational domain, should we not place the spotlight firmly on pre-school education and, consequently, universalise this phase of education as a defining component of any modern democracy? (It goes without saying that we have to work out all the curricular and training implications of this proposal).

Third, there is very little doubt in the mind of any serious revolutionary socialist protagonist that the form of organisation, the party, for short, that will lead or guide the struggle for socialism in the world has once again become a point of debate. This is so because of the elitist pretensions, authoritarian ethos and undemocratic practices that have often come to be associated with so-called vanguard parties of the working class. It ought not to be necessary to say that this is a fundamental question, one that requires from all of us total honesty and intellectual integrity, since the fact that socialist activists are – ideally – people who have specialised in the study of society and of history, necessarily equips them with a certain kind of knowledge that others either don't have or do not consider to be essential to their “happiness”. Because of the social power that this knowledge endows us with, which, incidentally, is not very different from the power that technocrats such as civil engineers or nuclear scientists have, we are called upon to display higher levels of social responsibility than most “ordinary” people, something that recent history has taught us not to take for granted at all.

Fourth, we find ourselves in a strategic impasse. Both theory and history tell us that socialism in one country is impossible. Yet, the domino effect of socialist revolutions seems always to be interrupted by imperialist machinations and direct intervention. Hence, at the international level, where one always has to begin any analysis, the strategic question today is: what do we have to do in order to prevent the isolation of any socialist revolution such as that which is underway in Latin America? This question is not about not fighting against your own bourgeoisie, as some wiseacre tried to tell

me at a recent conference; it is about ensuring that your own efforts at the national level can be sustainable once they eventuate in successful overthrow of the existing system. It is also about the most effective practical manner of countering the paralysing sectarianism of the left. It is only when all revolutionary socialists in the world act together (in international brigades, large-scale boycott and sanctions campaigns against aggressor nations, etc.) that some of the edges that make it impossible for left-wing people to act in concert will begin to be rubbed off.

V

Let me add a few points with respect to political economy issues at the beginning of the 21st century. The centrality and dominance of the USA in the world economic landscape, though it continues to shape events and political economy processes, is beginning to become less taken for granted than even five years ago. This situation is most visibly manifest in the decline of the dollar and the zig-zag rise of the euro. Besides the ever more obvious interimperialist rivalry between North America and the European Union, we are witnessing the appearance on the world stage of the Asian capitalist giants of China, India and Indonesia, as well as of the more established capitalist regimes of Japan, South Korea, Malaysia-Singapore and an assertive Russia. The new dynamic that these relations have inserted into the world capitalist system has been exhaustively analysed by many Marxist and other progressive scholars. It will suffice, therefore, if I highlight a few issues that appear to me to be relevant to our present context.

First, the dominance of finance capital is clearly a high-risk situation as far as the system as a whole is concerned. The latest series of crises triggered by the collapse of the so-called sub-prime market in the USA demonstrates this most clearly. Not only the banking system of the USA but those of all countries have been put in jeopardy and are relying on their central banks (i.e., their taxpayers) to bail them out.

Second, and related to the first point, the bull markets of the past decade or more have been demand driven, i.e., based on consumption that is itself the result of the expansion (over-expansion) of credit. This situation is unsustainable and the continued creation of ever more sophisticated credit-creating instruments (especially the plethora of loyalty cards and smart cards for their not so smart "owners") is a recipe for the deepest possible recession and, ultimately, depression. This predictable fact has produced the usual oracular pronouncements about the collapse of capitalism from all manner of Marxist and other socialist analysts. It is my view that we should avoid this eschatological tendency, since it really does not enrich our understanding of how the system actually works. We cannot at one and the same time say that the system will not collapse of its own accord and, without any reference to whether or not the subjective factor, i.e, the leadership, the party and all that that implies, is adequately prepared to deliver the final blows, predict its "inevitable" fall. The so-called resilience of the capitalist system, as we know from especially the world and other wars of the last century, is based on its "creative destruction" of resources through, among other things, primarily investment in the military-industrial complex and the conduct of war on the most threadbare of "justifications". If any person on Earth still doubts the truth of this proposition after the exposure of the official lies about the so-called weapons of mass destruction in Saddam's Iraq, nothing will convince them. Not even two years ago, George Bush was embarrassingly stopped from publicly pushing in the direction of preparing for a similar war scenario in Iran by his own

“intelligence service” releasing a report that shows clearly that Iran had given up any notion of producing nuclear arms as far back as 2003!

Of course, a realistic assessment of the prospects for successful anticapitalist-imperialist actions by large masses of exploited and oppressed people in many different parts of the world does not mean that one is suggesting that socialist revolution is not on the immediate agenda. In Latin America, as I have pointed out, the conditions for such a leap across the ideological and political hurdles that have been placed so very deliberately and effectively in the path of the workers of the world has become decidedly possible, even probable.

Third, from the point of view of the economic South of the globe, the entrance of China and India as major investors in infrastructure and consumers of raw materials and other commodities has the potential of re-establishing a “neutral” space for the elites that is not dissimilar from that which made it possible during the Cold War for a Nehru, a Nasser, an Nkrumah and others to strut large on the world stage, whatever their nationalist and personal attributes might have contributed to their stature. Bloc formation such as that manifest in the EU, African Union, Association of South-East Asian Nations, Bolivarian Alternative for Our Americas (ALBA) and other similar entities, is, in Manuel Castell’s terms, initially a form of resistance to “globalisation” by the elites. It implies the manifest rejection of the new international division of labour imposed by the international financial institutions on behalf of the USA hegemon on the rest of humanity[8]. It can, however, only succeed in the long run if it manages to create what he calls “project identities”, i.e., if the generality of the population identifies with the newly created block. This is the reason for the discussion about a European identity and for the ongoing discussion in South Africa of the question: Who is an African? For the left, it poses the question (in Africa, for example) whether we can and should give new meaning to the pan-African project, i.e., as a left project that is implacably opposed to the capitalist-imperialist basis and the elitist ethos of NEPAD [New Partnership for Africa’s Development] and all its ancillary formations. I believe that this is a fundamental question for socialists in Africa, one the consideration of which we can no longer defer.

Fourth, the increasingly coordinated strategies of the world capitalist class via entities such as the World Economic Forum as well as the yawning gaps between the rich and the poor that are the direct consequence of the neoliberal economic orthodoxy and its barbaric practical instantiations in most countries of the world, especially in the economic South, have given rise to a worldwide protest movement that has come to be associated in the main with the World Social Forum and its geographical offshoots with the catchy motto/slogan to the effect that “Another world is possible”, reminiscent of Schiller’s “Ode to Joy” eternalised in the Chorale of Beethoven’s 9th symphony. Now, whatever else the WSF might be, it is universally acknowledged that it is not, and should not try to be, a new International. It does, however, by implication raise many questions about the international coordination of revolutionary socialist and other working-class activities.

VI

Any illusions individual socialists or groups of socialists may have had about the class nature of most co-opted regimes, especially in Africa, have been dispelled by the blatant and abject subordination of the South African liberation struggle to the dictates of international and domestic capital. Africa’s position in the international division of labour has been very firmly defined as supplier of certain raw materials, especially oil, gas, precious metals and plantation goods such as sisal and cotton. Only

South Africa itself has a sufficiently diversified economic structure to withstand to some extent the devastating consequences of essentially monocultural economies. As has been pointed out by authors such as John Saul and Colin Leys in numerous publications, the situation of the urban and especially the rural poor in most of Africa is exacerbated by the fact that all previous populist notions of “African” socialism have been discredited, most of them even before the implosion of the USSR. In spite of this, of course, the sporadic and sometimes sustained protests and uprisings against the International Monetary Fund and World Bank imposed austerity regimes, most prominently in Zimbabwe in recent years, but equally so in Zambia, in Uganda, Senegal and elsewhere, are a sign of the latent force of anti-neocolonial and anti-capitalist resistance, of the potential of the second chimurenga. These actions have highlighted the need for

[...] nation-wide movements and/or parties through which such local groups and initiatives can ultimately unite to confront the political and economic power of the transnationals and the states that back them[9].

For this reason, as well as others, the direction that the class struggle takes in South Africa during the next few years will be crucial to the rest of the continent. Currently, because of all the smoke that is being projected by SACP sleight of hand as a raging fire of revolutionary “transformation” of the ANC into a quasi-socialist party, there appears to be much confusion. However, the position can be stated clearly and simply. The working and unemployed masses are voting with their feet. Whatever their lingering loyalties and ever more feeble hopes in the myth that “the ANC will deliver”, however big the gap between political consciousness and material practice, the thousands of township uprisings, countrywide strikes and serial metropolitan protest actions have one simple meaning: we reject your policies and your practices as anti-worker and anti-poor. It is, in my view, a misnomer to refer to these stirrings of self-organisation of the working class as an expression of “collective insubordination”[10], even though their immediate impulse is usually reactive rather than proactive. They are saying very clearly and very loudly that the appeal to nationalist, blood and soil rhetoric has lost its power and that we are standing on the threshold of a politics that will be shaped by a heightened sense of class struggle. It is this understanding that should inform our analysis and our estimation of the prospects for a more principled socialist-orientated direction of the struggle in South Africa.

The Biko generation inculcated positive values of self-respect, self-esteem and self-consciousness into the young people at schools and at higher education institutions as well as older people in communities and in workplaces. They did so because they understood that the slave mentality is the proximate source of the sense of disempowerment, despair and political apathy that keeps the oppressed in thrall. Above all, they understood intuitively that power is not simply the control of armed force, legitimate or otherwise. Hence, they undertook community development programmes and mobilised people at the grassroots in order that they might survive in the menacing environments of apartheid South Africa. Under the banner of the slogan You are your own liberators! the Black Community Programmes empowered whole communities across the entire country. Together with the evolving modern labour movement inside the country, it was this war of position that eventually put an end to the apparently linear curve on which the apartheid regime thought itself to be proceeding ever upwards. There is no doubt, of course, that the struggle against racial oppression in all its reprehensible forms compelled everyone to focus on the overriding

objective of throwing off the yoke of racism. The mistake that many made, was to assume that the end of apartheid would bring about the end of class exploitation.

Let us try, however briefly, to sketch some of the consequences of applying the principle of sufficiency as the major moral force shaping post-apartheid South Africa, a principle that can create the kind of unifying vision, based on the paramountcy of working-class interests. To begin with, in the domain of education, where the state and other public institutions can legitimately intervene, the content, orientation and delivery of the curriculum at all levels of the system would be changed fundamentally. The psychological, pedagogical, ideological and emotional revolution implied by an approach that does not glorify individual or group domination while allowing for the full development and flowering of the potential inherent in each and every human being can be imagined and extrapolated very easily. Individual brilliance expressed and deployed on behalf and for the benefit of democratically legitimated groups at different levels of society will continue to be one of the drivers of all social progress, including economic development. In the domain of the media and especially advertising, we would be rid of the brutalities and socially disreputable messages which subject us to the domination of capital. Adverts like one that is currently popular in South Africa which claims that everyone wants to be a “winner” and in the “first team”, rather than a “deputy chairperson” or a “benchwarmer” – or words to that effect – would become as absurd and counterproductive as they are from the point of view of a more humane social order. The glorification of the ostentatious consumption and high life of so-called celebrities in politics, culture, sport and even religion would cease to be the supposedly inspiring models of “the good life” that they are marketed as being in television programs such as Top Billing and others. All domains of life would be affected in the most profound possible way.

What a drab and boring vision, I hear the privileged strata exclaiming. On the absolute contrary, I should like to respond to my imagined detractors. Artists, designers, architects, urban planners, in fact all creative individuals and agencies will be faced with the challenge of finding the optimal ways of expressing and realising the entire range of possibilities in every domain of life. This will be the terrain of competition, not for individual glory and unequal reward but precisely for the common good, the old-fashioned commonwealth!

Is this no more than John Lennon or Vladimir Lenin’s dream? How do we begin to initiate and incrementally realise this vision and this set of values? Besides the ongoing political and economic class struggles, in which we are willy-nilly involved and by means of which we attempt to create and to consolidate more democratic space in the short to medium term, we have to go back to the community development tasks that the Black Consciousness Movement initiated so successfully, if not always sustainably, owing to the ravages of the apartheid system.

We have to rebuild our communities and our neighbourhoods by means of establishing, as far as possible on a voluntary basis, all manner of community projects which bring visible short-term benefit to the people and which initiate at the same time the trajectories of fundamental social transformation, which I have been referring to. These could range from relatively simple programs such as keeping the streets and the public toilets clean, preferably in liaison with the local authority, whether or not it is “delivering” at this level, to more complex programs such as bulk buying clubs, community reading clubs, enrichment programs for students preparing for exams, teachers’ resource groups at local level, and, of course, sports activities on a more convivial basis. It is

important that I stress that wherever possible, the relevant democratic authority should be asked to support the initiative. On the other hand, the community and its community-based organisations must remain in control of what they are doing. This is the difference between South Africa today and South Africa yesterday. As long as, and to the extent that, we have a democratic system, there is no reason why any of these programs have to be initiated as anti-government initiatives. Any representative democratic government would welcome and vigorously support such initiatives, since they are pro-people and, in the current context, pro-poor initiatives.

There are already many of these initiatives and programmes in existence. They will, if they are conducted with integrity and not for party-political gain, inevitably gravitate towards one another, converge and network. In this way, the fabric of civil society non-government organisations that was the real matrix of the anti-apartheid movement will be refreshed and we will once again have that sense of a safety net of communities inspired by the spirit and the real practices of ubuntu, the “counter-society” I referred to earlier, that saved so many of us from being destroyed by the racist system. Today, the struggle is much more obviously being conducted as a class struggle against exploitation and unconscionable as well as totally unnecessary and unjustifiable social inequality, manifest in the miserable lives of the vast majority and the vulgar parading of wealth and comfort of the few.

## VII

Viewed from a different angle, the question we are confronted with is whether the revolutionary left cadres will be able to find the requisite solution to the organisational question so that the debilitating and paralysing fragmentation that has marginalised them can be overcome before this passionate resistance of the workers is transformed into the kind of passive resistance we associate with most other post-colonial African states or the nightmare scenario of race war and ethnic cleansing that we saw in Kenya not so long ago, finally overwhelms us. The strategic and tactical implications of this proposition are numerous and radical; among other things, we shall have to find practical answers to old questions in a new context, questions such as:

What kind of party or organisation should be created out of the confluence of all our political tendencies and traditions in order for the socialist alternative to be firmly rooted within this evolving social base?

What are the core issues around which a program of transitional demands and an action plan can be formulated in a democratic process?

How can such a program be connected to and informed by the essential task of rebuilding our communities and our neighbourhoods on the basis of cooperativist and collectivist values of ubuntu, of sharing and caring?

How do we align ourselves politically with COSATU and with the other union federations or with individual unions?

How do we work with the rest of the African working class, especially in southern Africa?

What position do we take with regards to the World Social Forum?

How do we relate to other left-wing international formations without getting encoiled in the sectarian knots or getting sidetracked and lost in the maze of largely irrelevant apologetics that constitutes the stuff of the debates among these sects?

There are, as we speak, a few serious national initiatives underway, all of which are posing these and other relevant questions from slightly different perspectives. I think I have spoken, and speak, in the spirit of Strini Moodley and his comrades when I express the hope that we will find unity in action even as we try to find new ways of seeing the struggle for another world and another South Africa.

[1] In the language of Marxist theory, revolutions become inevitable when the relations of production are outstripped by the development of the productive forces in a given social formation.

[2] My book, *One Azania, One Nation. The National Question in South Africa*, published pseudonymously in 1979, was one of the first attempts to deal with this period comprehensively.

[3] This is the real meaning of Mandela's biographical reference to how he came to his crucial decision to steer the ANC towards accepting the need to negotiate. (See *Long Walk to Freedom*, pp. 513-515.)

[4] In the cut-and-thrust of politics this language is taken for granted but when one sets out to explain a historical phenomenon, a different discourse is essential.

[5] I cannot take up the question of the so-called developmental state here but my critique of that fashionable concept would proceed along similar lines.

[6] Occasional references to this scenario do appear in the literature and, I am sure, in the speeches, of COSATU and SACP activists. They are, however, negated by the anti-revolutionary practices of most of the leadership of those formations.

[7] We have to bear in mind, of course, that today abundance is no longer a utopian vision.

[8] It should be noted, of course, that all of the mentioned formations, except for ALBA, are based on a vision of reforming the international institutions that keep guard over the international division of labour.

[9] Colin Leys, cited in Saul, J. 2006. *The Next Liberation Struggle. Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy in Southern Africa*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, p. 284.

[10] Celestin Monga, cited *ibid*, p.49.