

REPUBLIC SLOGAN

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(AN HISTORICAL APPRECIATION OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE THEORY OF THE MAIN AIM OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN REVOLUTION).

We know very well that the decisive moment in our freedom struggle is fast approaching the day when our national banners, black, green and gold will rise never to fall. United under this banner we will advance to wipe out all forms of oppression and exploitation from the face of our embattled Motherland. This will not be easy, we understand. It calls for our blood, sweat and toil guided by knowledge. At times we will be confronted by obstacles which seem unsurmountable; even then we will never lose courage. We will always be inspired by the well-known and confirmed truth that in the pursuit of their goal of freedom every people and whenever the situation demands, develop the necessary added ability to overcome obstacles that emerge on their path. Our people's history, too, has this on record. The invaluable experience of the South African Communist Party (SACP) when it had to begin to search for an understanding of the vital connection between the inseparable class and national aspects of our revolutionary struggle is a fine example.

HISTORIC MISSION

What we have in mind here are the testing moments immediately after the formation of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) in 1921 up to the moment when the slogan of "Native Republic", which meant the liberation of the oppressed majority, first appeared in the revolutionary political scene in South Africa. But to appreciate the significance and complexity of the challenge facing the communists of our land in these eventful days it is necessary to briefly point out the historic mission of the SACP and the South African working class it is leading, and the dual nature of the South African society.

As with all contingents of the working class, the historic mission of the South African working class, black and white, is to completely destroy the enslaving capitalist sys-

tem and build a completely new society, a bright future in which "the class war shall have been for ever stamped out, when mankind shall no longer cower under the bludgeon of the oppressor, when the necessities and amenities of life, the comfort and the culture, the honour and the power shall be to him who toils not him who exploits, when none shall be master and none servant, but all shall be fellow-workers in common." This is the lefty ideal for whose realisation the CPSA called upon "all South African workers, organised and unorganised" to fight for as published in its Manifesto adopted at the Party's foundation Conference held in Cape Town on July 30th to 1st August 1921.

SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY

South Africa is a capitalist state - and a highly developed one for that matter. Here you have a handful of people owning and controlling the means of production; the mines, factories, shops, banks, insurance companies, farms, etc., obtaining, maintaining and increasing their wealth by exploiting the millions of black and white workers who own nothing except their ability to work. At the same time the Pretoria fascist regime, through its racist laws and practices, denies the black people, Africans especially, be they workers, peasants, businessmen or intellectuals, the right to own land or any other productive property, to participate in ruling their country, to have their own political organisations, trade unions or live and work where they choose. Through this brutal system of national oppression, colonial domination, the racist regime ensures the continued super-exploitation of the black workers for the enrichment of the South African capitalists and the imperialist investors of USA, Britain, France, FRG, Japan, etc. This also provides for the privileges with which the white workers are bribed to win them over to the side of the oppressors and exploiters against their black fellow-workers. Our people are presently engaged in a struggle for national independence and freedom to bring an end to this system of national oppression.

The connection that exists between these two inseparable aspects of our situation and the types of struggle arising out of them is that socialism can only be achieved when the national aspirations of the oppressed majority are satisfied by the victory of a national democratic revolution. The aims of this revolution are clearly stated in the Freedom Charter. This is a pre-condition for the unity of the black and white workers which is indispensable for the victory of socialism.

Briefly, this is the basic question of our revolutionary struggle as understood by the main forces of our revolutionary struggle - class and national. Without this crucial knowledge it would have been impossible for our liberation movement to advance our struggle to where it is today. Yet to the young Communist Party this situation presented itself in a completely different way.

THE AFRICAN PEOPLE

It should be remembered that at that time the national liberation struggle of the African people and their Coloured and Indian compatriots following colonial conquest had not as yet had enough impact. The armed resistance by the African people against colonial domination up to 1906 still had to express itself in strong political national organisations. The African National Congress formed in 1912 to unite the African people to fight for their liberation certainly stimulated the national consciousness of the African people but had not yet developed powerful means of struggle. That was to be achieved decades later. And although the African working class had already been involved in some strikes, they still lacked stable trade unions. Pass laws and the migratory labour system greatly hampered this process.

On the whole the great class battles which accompanied the development of capitalism in South Africa were mostly led by the organised white workers, most of whom had the benefit of the tradition of organised struggles in Britain where they came from. In fact it was these struggles which produced the Communist Party. That is why too the membership of the CP was composed of white workers, including veteran trade unionists and socialists, when it was born. Added to these hampering factors was the fact that the advanced Marxist-Leninist thinking on the national and colonial question had not yet reached South Africa and most literature on this question had not yet been translated into English. In other words, the CP had to find its bearings in a hitherto untrodden path. It had to blaze the way into the future.

Naturally the pioneer communists of our country set off to mobilise the workers to fight for their emancipation on the basis of what the earlier class struggles had already produced. They concentrated on political work among the white workers. It was hoped that white workers would come to realise the oneness of the basic interests of all workers, black and white, in spite of the privileged position which the latter already occupied. Thus the white workers would lead the struggle for

socialism. This would bring an end to all forms of oppression. As for the black workers it was believed that the more revolutionary ideas had an influence on them the more they would become a significant force within the labour movement. Their urge for national emancipation was not seen as a potential revolutionary force.

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

However, years of painstaking work among the workers were to influence the thinking and further activities of the CP. Such eye-opening events as the 1922 great Miners' Strike had a tremendous influence. As we know this was the greatest and last militant action by white workers. The entire mine workers in the Transvaal came out in a powerful strike, involving lots of bloodshed, directly challenging the power of the greedy and monopolist Chamber of Mines. Regrettably this heroic action was marked by the 'colour bar' stand of the white workers against the black workers whom the bosses had decided to employ in jobs previously reserved for white workers at very low rates. This the bosses did to lower the production costs in the face of the grave depression which followed in the wake of World War I. The CP found itself in the "horns of a dilemma". It could not stand aloof in a conflict between the workers and the capitalists while at the same time the colour bar content of the strike was irreconcilably in conflict with its principle of equality of all races. Thus in giving assistance to the striking workers it insistently pointed out to them that their enemy was the Chamber of Mines and not their African fellow-workers and also pointed out that it did not identify itself "with every slogan heard in the strike". Four decades later (in 1961) the SACP, looking back, observed: "From 1922 onwards, the purely 'white' labour movement in this country was transformed step by step into an emasculated adjunct of the boss class, exchanging their independence for concessions and privileges, the price for their support for white imperialism in its brutal oppression and exploitation of the African people."

On the other hand the black workers were beginning to display their capacity for organised militant action and to lead the national liberation struggle and turn it into a powerful and decisive force. This was indicated by the strength of the International Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) before it collapsed.

TURNING POINT

During the days of the International Socialist League

(ISL), the forerunner of the CPSA, foresighted socialists like David Ivon Jones, its first Secretary, had predicted in 1915: "An internationalism which does not concede the fullest rights which the Native working class is capable of claiming is sham." On his return from the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, in Moscow in 1922, S.P. Bunting echoed Jones' words and went further saying: "An all-Negro liberation or anti-imperialist movement throughout the world may well be more potent for the victory of our common cause than anything, our mere handful of white workers as such in South Africa can achieve, and it is also time we acted upon our professions regarding the organisation of Native workers." This was not a lonely voice. A shift in the CP's line of action was coming.

The 1924 Annual Conference was a turning point. It resolved that the Party should pay particular attention on organising the African workers. Immediately thereafter the Central Committee of the CPSA issued directives to members experienced in trade union work to concentrate on organising African trade unions. Party schools were established where African workers not only learned to read and write but acquired political knowledge. It was during this period that many African workers and revolutionary intellectuals came into the Party. Albert Nzula, Johannes Nkosi, "Uncle" J.B. Marks, Moses Ketane, Gana Makabeni, Josie Mpama and many others. The advances made by the Party on this basis were most clearly expressed by the then President of the ANC, J.J. Gumede when he addressed the International Congress of the League Against Imperialism held in Brussels in 1927. He said: "I am happy to say that there are Communists in South Africa. I myself am not one, but it is my experience that the Communist Party is the only Party that stands behind us and from which we can expect something." Gumede was expressing the feelings of an increasing number of our down-trodden people.

THE NATIVE REPUBLIC SLOGAN

At this point it is important to mention the invaluable assistance given by the Comintern to its section in South Africa (CPSA). The crucial problem which the CP had been grappling with in South Africa, the colonial question also became one of the main issues on the agenda of the Comintern. At its 1928 Congress, the Comintern acting on the recommendations and evidence of South African Communists e.g. J.A. La Guma adopted a resolution to the effect that the CPSA should mobilise for the achievement of "an Independent Native Republic". Many related questions remained unanswered in spite of

the discussions held within the CP and its exchange of views with the Comintern. The Party was still in the early stages of the process of overcoming the obstacles created by the factors which hampered the achievement of clarity on the place of the national liberation struggle in the labour movement as mentioned earlier.

As a disciplined section of the Comintern, the CPSA accepted the directive of mobilising for an "Independent Native Republic". Continued determined work among the nationally oppressed; African, Coloured and Indian people including the co-operation between the CP and the ANC and other revolutionary national organisations was to help the CPSA in giving meaning to this slogan. Thus the slogan brought about a permanent and beneficial change in the Communist Party's understanding of the colonial question in South Africa.

It was in these early years in the life of the CPSA that the foundation-stones on which our freedom struggle now firmly stands, were laid. Therefore, the unity in common struggle for common goals achieved by the class & national forces of our revolution and which is so vividly expressed in our entire people's loyalty to the lofty ideals of the Freedom Charter, the unbreakable comradesly bonds between the ANC and SACP, and the resultant giant strides made by our people towards our goal of freedom are all living testimonies to the heroic efforts made by those first communist sons of our soil.

Inspired by this example the SACP will always remain firm on its revolutionary position as clearly stated in its programme adopted in 1962 which declares in part that: "The South African Communist Party works for a united front of national liberation. It strives to unite all sections and classes of oppressed and democratic people for a national democratic revolution to destroy white domination... The Communist Party has no interests separate from those of the working people. The Communists are sons and daughters of the people and share with them the overriding necessity to put an end to the suffering and humiliation of apartheid. The destruction of colonialism and the winning of national freedom is the essential condition and the key for future advance to the supreme aim of the Communist Party; the establishment of a socialist South Africa, laying the foundation of a classless, communist society."
