

One Base, Two Superstructures

by IMRANN MOOSA

It may be assumed that the central point of BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS (BC) ideology is the hegemony of the Black working class but this is simply not true. and from this misconception, an opportunist distortion of BC might very easily arise.

Those who recognize *only* the hegemony of the Black working class are not yet thoroughgoing revolutionaries. They may well be found to be still within the straight-jacket of bourgeois ideology.

Only she or he is a thoroughgoing revolutionary who *extends* the recognition of the race/class struggle to the recognition of the Dictatorship of the Black Proletariat and of the necessity to continue the revolution under this Dictatorship through the long socialist transition period.

Revolutionary Consciousness

The fundamental right of the Black Proletariat is to rule. Without this, any prattle about the "rights of labour" is absolutely meaningless.

The crucial point, comrades, is that the struggle for scientific socialism is a struggle for the *conscious* control of society by the Black working class. The Black Proletariat *must* be aware and conscious of just what it is doing and the fact that its own rule is, from an historical standpoint, merely transitory. This is why socialism can never grow up spontaneously within capitalism as did capitalism within the bowels of feudal society.

And this is precisely why the gains of a socialist revolution can be so completely reversed that a capitalist restoration can be effected. We have seen this happen under Khrushchev in the Soviet Union: we have seen it recur under Deng Xiaoping in China.

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Today we see the capitalist road being faithfully followed in Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* and Deng's much-vaunted "economic reforms."

And the fact that the distance between capitalist roaders and fascist dictators is more apparent than real is forcefully illustrated in the 4 June 1989 massacre and its aftermath in Deng's China as also in Gorbachev's bloody suppression of revolt in the Soviet republics.

It is poetic justice that the Tiananmen Square Revolt in China occurred almost simultaneously with the Sino-Soviet summit and quite thoroughly eclipsed it.

In Tiananmen Square in 1966 Deng Xiaoping was paraded wearing a dunce cap by students as a result of his capitalist line expressed in his words "It doesn't matter if it's a white cat or a black cat, as long as it catches mice."

Until his death, Mao Tse Tung led the struggle against Deng and Co.'s attempts at capitalist restoration. Mao called Deng out: "This person does not grasp class struggle; he has never referred to this key link. Still his theme of 'white cat, black cat', making no distinction between imperialism and Marxism."

"He knows nothing of Marxism-Leninism; he represents the bourgeoisie. He said he would 'never reverse the verdict'. It can't be counted on." Prophetic words indeed!

Democracy

In many ways socialist society is not much different from capitalist society, especially as regards inequality among the people, the contradiction between mental and manual labour, between workers and peasants and between women and men, wage differentials, etc. This provides the basis for capitalist relations and bourgeois elements representing them to constantly emerge.

Under socialism, there can and must be full democracy for and increasing broad participation of the masses in all spheres of political, economic and social life. But the guarantee of such democracy is the exercise of dictatorship over the old exploiters and any new exploiters who arise from within socialist society and the ranks of the revolution itself.

Such a Dictatorship must, perforce, be an *all-round* one. The Black Proletariat needs must occupy the commanding heights of society. It must not only wield political power but must also control the economy, education, literature and art, the sciences, medicine – in short, all aspects of social life. Wherever the power of the Black Proletariat fails to reach, there the power of the oppressors will remain and thrive.

In dealing with the question of democracy, any purely formalistic approach can only end in promoting bourgeois democracy. The broad category "the masses" includes different classes; the masses are at all times divided into advanced, intermediate

and backward sections. Democracy has a definite class character!

Base and Superstructure

We know that the "superstructure" refers to all the factors that decide a people's idea of their social reality including the laws and the courts, the police and the army, the bureaucracy and the whole apparatus of government, ideology, values and morals, religion, philosophy, education, culture, etc. The superstructure generally rests upon and reinforces the economic base of a society.

Our starting point is the material world and the economic activity of people. Material conditions determine the activities, development and products of the human mind, and not the other way around. As Marx pointed out:

"In the social production of their existence, men enter into definite, necessary relations, which are independent of their will, namely, relations of production corresponding to a determinate stage of development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which there arises a legal and political superstructure and to which there correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life-process in general."

- *Preface and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*

Society and nature are in a constant process of change – not a cyclical change, coming out of the same way it began, but a process of spiral-like change progressing from the lower to the higher level and marked by leaps.

The development of human society is ultimately determined by the development of the basic forces which human beings have built up in their interaction with nature to produce what they need and want – in other words by the *productive forces* of society. The

productive forces consist of tools and human beings. But human beings are the principal factor: tools are created, used and renovated by people, science and technology are discovered by people.

In order to use the productive forces, people have to enter into certain relations with regard to the overall process of production in society. These are referred to as the *production relations* of a society.

As Marx said in the quotation above, these production relations constitute the economic structure of society or the *economic base*. Political power and dominant ideology, belonging as they do to the superstructure, are ultimately determined by the nature of the economic base which in turn is determined by the level of development of the productive forces.

To be sure, the superstructure reacts upon the base and influences it enormously. The relationship between the base and the superstructure may be seen as one in which the base is the principal or *determining factor* and the superstructure is the *initiating one* – they interpenetrate dialectically and are interdependent and retroactive.

The relationship between the superstructure and base is never rigid, static or one-way. The superstructure is not a passive effect of the base; there is a constant and dialectical interaction between them. It can – and does – happen that the superstructure becomes principal and decisive in determining the nature and development of the economic base.

Engels forcefully addressed this point:

"According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately determining factor* in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Neither Marx nor I have ever asserted more than this. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic factor is the *only determining one*, he transforms the proposition into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure – political forms of the class struggle and

its results, such as constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and especially the reflections of all these real struggles in the brains of the participants, political, legal, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas – also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases determine their *form* in particular. There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless host of accidents (that is, of things and events whose inner interconnection is so remote or so impossible of proof that we can regard it as non-existent and neglect it), the economic movement is bound to assert itself."

- *"Engels to Joseph Bloch in Koningsberg"*

It was Mao Tse Tung who showed the decisive importance of continuously revolutionizing the superstructure as well as the economic base. He emphasized that under socialism the role of the superstructure assumes even greater importance and the struggle in the superstructure becomes even more acute and complex.

Mao underlined that transformation of the economic base does not *automatically* transform the superstructure: where the broom does not touch, the dust never vanishes of itself! He said: "Ideological and political work are the guarantee for accomplishing economic work and technical work, and they serve the economic base. Moreover, ideology and politics are the commander, the soul. If our ideological work and political work slacken just a little, economic work and technical work are bound to go astray."

Much as the bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie may retain or seize control in socialist society of certain units and departments in the economy, so also may they retain and seize control of certain parts of the superstructure, in particular of ideology.

It is in the superstructure that the counter-revolution by a new bourgeoisie under socialism is most likely to begin: here the superstructure

plays the decisive as well as the initiating role.

Occupied Azania

In occupied Azania, a corporate state maintained by surveillance and having all the trappings of capitalist democracy and capitalist culture co-exists with an authoritarian regime and gun law.

There are two superstructures to a single economic base in occupied Azania – one a Black superstructure and the other a white superstructure. This is brutally apparent in the large, airy buildings, well-kept gardens, tennis courts, golf courses, well-paved roads, lighted streets etc in the *herrenvolk* side of any South African city juxtaposed against the squalid hostels and matchbox houses, the dirt roads, the lack of sewerage disposal and other basic civic and civil amenities in the Black side.

The white superstructure undoubtedly exhibits all the trappings of capitalist democracy – including franchise, an elaborate network of rights and liberties, social and economic mobility and even a labour movement that represents the interests of the white labour aristocracy. The white working class, one third of whom are employed by the state, batters on the superexploitation of the Black workers: their standard of living and quality of life is comparable only to workers in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe and North America.

The Blacks, on the other hand, have no meaningful franchise (the franchise for the tri-racial Parliament or in various puppetstates amounts to nought), no representation, no real rights and liberties, no economic and social mobility (free settlement areas and open businesses in the Central Business District only underline this), no labour movement or political organisation that cannot be put down by the awesome power of the settler-colonial state, no education except gutter education, no law except naked police and judicial tyranny – no nothing!



Disorganic Development

The contradictions of the apartheid-capitalist system are sharpest where they exist in the raw – precisely in the Black superstructure. All the Gross National Product (GNP) the Black workers amass for this country leaves them poorer than before.

The Black working class produces what is of no real value to it and yet cannot buy what it produces – neither use value nor exchange value.

Unlike the white workers, how the Black workers produce bears no relation whatsoever to how they used to produce. They have not emerged into capitalist production but have been flung into it – into a technology and a labour process that reifies them and into social relations that violate their customs and their codes.

The Black workers toil in the factories, in town, to support their families, their extended families, in the bantustans – to contribute to the building of the local Zion Church "at home", to help get teachers for the school "at home", to sink a well there.

But the manner of toiling socializes the Black workers into individualism, nuclear families, consumer priorities, artefacts of capitalist culture. The two capitalist passions – *greed* for more and the *fear* of losing in the quest for more – obtrude the Black workers' consciousness.

The Black workers are caught between two modes, two sets of social relations, characterized by exchange value in the one and use value in the other – and the contradiction disorients them and removes them from the centre of their being. At each step they have to come to terms

with *their* alienation from the fruits of their labour and the parasitical character of the white ruling class.

Neither has the peasantry (there is no white peasantry at all in occupied Azania) escaped the capitalist mode. What it has done is to wrench them from their social relations and their relationship with the land. Within a single lifetime, they have had to exchange sons for tractors and tractors for petrochemicals. And these things too have taken them from themselves in space and in time.

Rural society in occupied Azania is characterized by a juxtaposition of modes of production undergoing complex mutations and possibly producing new totalities. Pre- and non-capitalist modes of production and the relations of exploitation which characterize such modes of production are vitally necessary for the apartheid-capitalist system. Apartheid-capitalism adapts various modes of production to its needs and even "refeudalizes" social relations. Overall apartheid-capitalism has a conserving as well as a dissolving effect on pre- and non-capitalist relations. Feudalism is most certainly a feature of both the base and the superstructures in occupied Azania.

The extended family in the bantustans (reserves) – by caring for the very young and very old, the sick and the labourer during times of rest, by providing education (for which Blacks must pay) to the young – relieves the capitalist sector and the state of some of the expense of carrying out and paying for these functions. At the same time, the reserves furnish capital with an optimal selection of workers to replenish a brutally driven and rapidly exhausted labour force.

Thus the reproduction of cheap labour power in occupied Azania depends on a symbiotic connection between capitalist forms on the one hand and pre- and non-capitalist forms on the other.

What happens to all the production from the land and from the factories?

Where does all the GNP go – except to the white settlers and their imper-

ialist backers?

What capitalist development has meant to the Black masses is production without any purpose but to eke out an existence, massive immiseration accompanied by a wholesale attack on their values, relationships and entire cultural fabric.

This development makes no sense at all for the masses, it has no bearing on their lives. It is not simply a distorted (incoherent) or disarticulated (extroverted) development – it is a *disorganic development* undergirded by the modalities of superexploitation. There is no doubt that the disorganic development spawned by apartheid-capitalism is in synch with the requirements of modern industrial growth and is an intergral and exacerbating element of the overall imperialist crisis.

For the white superstructure the economic, cultural and political aspects of capitalism have evolved gradually, organically and out of that superstructure's history.

Hence the white superstructure is modified with changes in the level of the productive forces and class struggle. It accords with the economic imperatives of imperialism: the economic network is overlaid by a vast structure of military, administrative and financial control.

The capitalist mode of production has been grafted on to the existing cultural and political order in the Black superstructure. Capitalism in the Black superstructure is not an organised body of connected, interdependent parts sharing a common life – it is not an organism.

Hence the Black superstructure is at odds with the capitalist economy, sets the economy at odds with itself and inhibits its free development. The economic system is at odds with the cultural and political institutions of the Black people: it is not mediated by culture or legitimated by politics as it is in white society.

In summary, then, although the South African economy is based on the capitalist mode, the superstructures bear no organic relationship to

it, they do not on the whole respond to the imperatives of the system.

The base and the superstructures do not complement and reinforce each other in occupied Azania. They are in fundamental conflict – and exploitation is naked, crude, unmediated, although fortified and prettified by the "happy products" of capitalist culture, capitalist homilies on "group and human rights" and on the "wonders" of Western civilization and increasingly desperate measures to "modernize" and "reform" the system of apartheid-capitalism while really intensifying superexploitation and plunder.

At a point, therefore, the political system – white racism – has to be extrapolated from the superstructures and made to serve as a cohesive and coercive – force to maintain the economic order of things. The contradiction between the base and the superstructures now resolves itself into one between the Pretoria regime and the Black people, with culture as a vital expression of the development from protest to resistance to rebellion to revolution.

Only changes in the Black superstructure are capable of releasing the economy into its own dynamic.

Mind you, the infrastructure (economic base) in occupied Azania is **secure**, *relatively speaking*. South Africa is definitely not a society in which ideology has ran amock and it is incredibly naïve to contend that the imperatives of capitalist industrialization will gobble up apartheid.

The economic, social and political control exercised over the Black majority flows from a specific model of capitalist accumulation which is inextricably bound up with the interests and imperatives of imperialist capital. In fact, the relationship between imperialism and racist South Africa is *itself a production relation*.

Culture in the Black superstructure differs as between the different modes of production but as Cabral says, it does have "a mass character." Cultural resistance takes on "new forms (political, economic, armed) in

order fully to contest foreign domination". (*Return to the Source*)

At the economic level, the different exploitations at the different modes confuse the formal lines of class struggle but the common denominators of political oppression make for a mass movement which in Marx's magnificent phrase will draw its poetry not from the past "but only from the future". (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*)

BC

Apartheid-capitalism has succeeded not only in dividing and separating the economic and cultural aspects of struggle – the standard of living and the quality of life – but also in concealing them from each other. In the process the economic aspect of struggle became the sole preserve of the working class while the cultural aspect became the preserve of the Black people – and the totality of struggle, its holism, was lost to view.

To build socialism the "lever" that makes possible the production, accumulation and utilization of the surplus cannot be commodity production and the law of value, but can only be ideological and political line – namely, BC!

While the march to the future is no unilinear advance, what is required in the first place is a revolution in the superstructures – which is the acquisition of state power by the Black working class. This constitutes only the very first step in its historic mission.

The Black working class must carry out a revolution in all spheres of the superstructures and the economic base to eradicate ideological influences, the force of habit and racist, racialist and ethnic practices. Its success will hinge on a radical break with imperialism.

The transformation of the superstructures will require patient, constant and intense effort. This kind of effort in turn requires BC, which is the only ideology capable of introducing a new rationality in Azania. To re-emphasize: it is precisely in the arena of ideology that there will be long and



tortuous struggle, especially under socialism. And the most important productive force liberated by socialism . . . is people.

BC uncovers the essence of social relations that underlie various appearances and forms. It stands completely opposed to the policy of seeking an accommodation with reaction, of stopping the revolution in return for a few reforms or for positions in government.

BC stands for thoroughgoing revolution and those who see the "liberation struggle" as a means to obtain their share in the exploitation of the masses will forever view it as their mortal enemy.

BC is knowledge, recognition, foresight, common experience and perception, sensibility, alertness, mindfulness. It stirs the senses, the blood; it exposes and suggests; it will objectify, enrage, direct – to ever greater leaps forward until the abolition of classes, races and the state itself.

Comrades, there is nothing hard in this

world, *if we dare to scale the heights*. We must satisfy our burning desire to retain the freedom, the life-style and the dignity that we have carved out from the mosaic of our lives, out of the rubble of our civilization, out of the wilderness of unlove. ■

A Big Question Sonnet

**If death has no dominion over our souls,
then who shall dare to dominate the indomitable spirit of our resistance
in our struggle to break the knot of bondage?**

**Who has a finger gigantic enough to snuff the fireflame on the glowing tail
of a relentless firefly,
a torch of freedom in the darkness, flashing
in the infernal prison cells
where wailing children have their loins torn
to shreds by the wanton beast?
Who will avenge the loss of their innocence,
the tenderness of their bodies
the purity of their brave hearts?**

Oswald Mtshali