

SEARCHLIGHT No 3

SOUTH AFRICA

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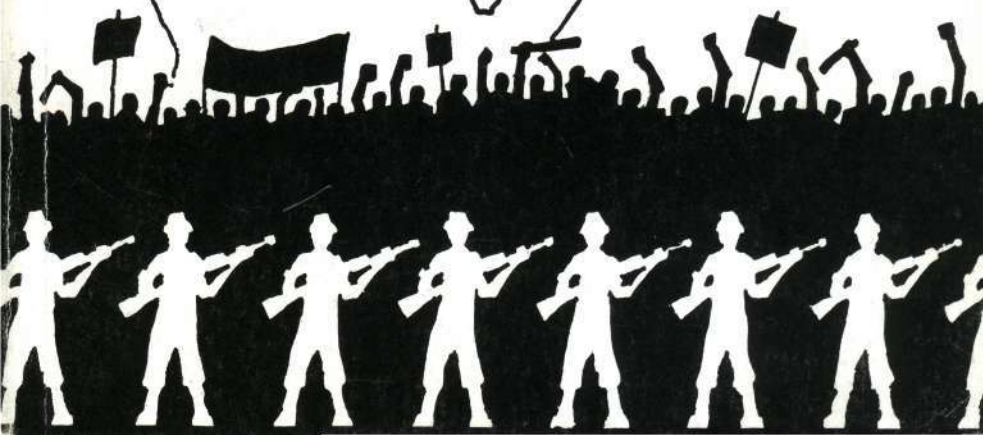
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Bunting vs. Bukharin, 1928 •

USSR: Gorbachev vs. the workers •

Islam, South Africa and Rushdie •



SEARCHLIGHT SOUTH AFRICA No.3

A Marxist Journal of South African Studies

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SEARCHLIGHT SOUTH AFRICA

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Notes to Contributors:

Articles and reviews, accompanied by IBM ASCII files — on disc if possible — should be submitted to the editors, typed or printed out, in one-and-a-half, or double spacing. The editors will maintain a flexible policy on the length of articles: ideally they should be between 3,000 and 6,000 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Short articles (other than letters) will only be accepted if they are of exceptional interest. Pseudonyms will be accepted but, unless there is an obvious security risk, we need to know the author's identity.

If substantial alterations would improve the article or review, the editors will communicate with the author before proceeding with publication. The editors reserve the right to alter grammar, spelling, punctuation or obvious errors in the text. Where possible, references should be included in the text, with sources listed at the end of the article, giving author, title, publisher and date.

We have had difficulties in production, and have grappled with computers, but we will try to adhere to publication dates and early submissions will ensure early inclusion. Letters commenting on recent articles in *Searchlight South Africa*, or relating to current events in South Africa, will be printed as soon as possible. These contributions should not exceed 1,000 words. Reviews of books will be by invitation and must be ready for the following issue of the journal.

A REQUEST TO READERS

If readers have documents of contemporary or historic interest that would bear republication, we would be pleased to receive them. They will be returned immediately.

THE RUSSIAN CONNECTION

In this issue of *Searchlight South Africa* the relationship between the USSR and South Africa is explored at two crucial moments in the history of the socialist movement: in the formulation of the 'Native Republic' slogan in 1928, when the 'two-stage theory' was first introduced to South Africa; and during the past few years when the USSR has intervened to alter the course of events in Namibia, Angola and South Africa. Although 1928 was a critical year in the development of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), the events of that year only highlight a relationship that commenced in 1917 with the Russian Revolution and has been present ever since, whether by commission or omission.

When the Third Communist International (or Comintern) was launched in 1919 it was greeted by small groups of socialists in South Africa as the beginning of a fruitful period of co-operation in which the proletariat would receive the assistance of their comrades-in-arms in Europe and elsewhere. Unlike governments everywhere who measured success in money terms and raised the bogey of 'Moscow gold', this assistance was to come from a pooling of political ideas. By this means revolutionary strategy would be strengthened and the overthrow of capitalism made more certain. It was a grand perspective that was not implemented, or when applied, led to disaster after disaster. From 1921 through 1928 the CPSA received little or no assistance from the Communist International. Even when Communist Parties in Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa were involved in the British seamen's strike of 1925, as S.P. Bunting complained in his address to the Comintern conference in 1928, there were no communications between the Comintern and the South African party.

Then precipitously, in 1928, in the wake of severe factional struggles in the Bolshevik Party in the USSR, the CPSA was ordered to change course. The promise of political assistance, so warmly welcomed in 1921, had turned into a menace which all but destroyed the South African party. The leaders of the CPSA did not understand what was happening in the USSR, but they were not expected to understand: theirs was to do (and die) and follow the line as handed down from Moscow. To ensure compliance, constituent Communist Parties were instructed to accept all Comintern decisions without alteration.

In the inglorious years in which Comintern instructions were followed slavishly, there was one brief moment in which S.P. Bunting, the South African delegate to the Comintern conference of 1928, stood up and defied Bukharin, the representative of the party leadership. This was to be one of the last public declarations of Leninist positions in open debate on Soviet soil. In this, Bunting towered above the delegates who acceded so tamely to the demands of the Soviet leaders. He had attended the second conference of the Comintern in 1922 and had accepted the thesis on the question of colonial self-determination, which stressed the leading role of the proletariat. Then, in 1928, faced with the reversal that was being pressed on delegates, he reasserted a class analysis that cut across the populist message of the leadership. Although Bunting condemned the Soviet leadership for denying the primacy of the working class, and replacing it with an amorphous conception of the 'masses', he did not comprehend the profound decay of the revolution in the USSR. Bunting had no connection with Trotsky and the left opposition, and no inclination to side with them against the new rulers of the Kremlin, nor could he be accused of having such inclinations. Yet the ideas he advanced came close to the left opposition's views on the colonial question.

Bunting's intervention at the Congress coincided with Trotsky's critique of the Comintern's new draft programme, which was allowed limited circulation at the conference. James Cannon and Maurice Spector, delegates from the US and Canada respectively, were persuaded of the correctness of the criticism and smuggled a copy out of the USSR. This marked the beginning of the international left opposition. That Bunting should have taken issue with Stalinism at this turning point of communism, independently of other opposition voices, is a mark of his world significance. Three years later he was slandered, humiliated and expelled from the party he had helped establish.

In the Gorbachev era, when the defamed are being posthumously 'rehabilitated', Bunting may yet be accorded such treatment. This would place him as a waxworks figure around which the party faithful could gather. The problem however is that his works would need to be republished, and his words would reflect badly on the crass phrases of the current leadership. This would upset the cosy relationship the SACP has established with Archbishop Tutu, Rev Boesak, Oliver Tambo, Zac de Beer and Mr Relly.

There is little purpose in rehearsing the series of turns executed by the CPSA in its course of compliance with the needs of the USSR, but the disastrous outcome was seen both in the failure of that party to meet the needs of the working class in South Africa and in the

bankruptcy of its theories. Like the Bourbon kings of France (whose demise two hundred years ago is celebrated this year), they learnt nothing and forgot nothing.

In order to understand the nature of USSR intervention in South Africa, there must be a reappraisal of the nature of the USSR, and towards this end we print an article by Hillel Ticktin (a member of our editorial board, and of the journal *Critique*) on the nature of the USSR under Gorbachev. In the late 1980s few observers can remain sanguine about the nature of this so-called 'workers' state.' The disaster of Chernobyl, the disorganization after the earthquake in Armenia, the disclosures of criminality and corruption, the use of poison gas in Georgia, the shortage of consumer goods and the bread riots in its Asian domain demand new answers about the country that was once held up as a living example of socialism in practice.

Ticktin's article provides a picture of the Soviet state as it is, and not as wishful thinkers would have it be. This is a state, formed by revolutionaries who believed that together with other states in Europe it would be possible to advance together towards socialism. For Lenin and Trotsky there could be no success unless socialism existed in the most advanced regions of the world, and it was inconceivable that socialism could be built in one country, certainly not in the most backward country in all Europe. It is a measure of the backwardness of socialist theory that so many people could believe otherwise, particularly after the many reports from visiting communists of corruption, nepotism and gangsterism in the USSR. Now there can be no more excuses that 'We were not told.'

This account by Ticktin was delivered at a workshop in Hawaii and contains a comparison of events in the USSR under Gorbachev and Mrs Thatcher in Britain. There are many obvious reasons for including this comparison in *Searchlight South Africa*, not least because of the popularity of Thatcher in South African government circles, the talk of her intervening to find a 'solution' to the problems in the country, and because Helen Suzman (the Progressive MP) expressed her admiration of the British Prime Minister and stated that in Britain she would be a member of the Tory Party. The interpretation of Thatcherite Britain is new, but that of the USSR, which will be known to readers of *Critique*, must be read in conjunction with the events of 1924-28 and also against the account of what has been happening in the current period of Soviet disengagement from the Third World. Baruch Hirson (also on the editorial board of *Critique*), who set out to write on this latter topic, found that the farcical and cynical approach to world politics detected in the pirouetting Mrs Thatcher, the gyrating Mikhail Gorbachev, the compromising Cuban and Angolan leaders and the confusion in the ranks of the South African

Communist Party (SACP), could not be written as a straight piece. Where events are farcical the only way of addressing them is through satire, and this is what he has attempted. But his account has a sting in its tail. The supine approach of USSR officials and of SACP leaders tells only one part of the story. This has to be seen alongside governmental tyranny in South Africa and the inhuman conditions under which the mine owners hold their workers. If these are the friends of the people, then their enemies can do little worse.

Farcical or not, and altered or not, there has been a consistency in Soviet policy since 1924 towards countries like South Africa. The USSR did not relish the idea of independent socialist activity in countries too far away to be under Soviet direct control. The stage theory (insisted on after 1928), which calls for an interim period of capitalist democracy takes socialism off the agenda. Whatever changes Gorbachev has introduced, Soviet policy has not altered radically. South Africa is not a candidate for socialism because it is too far from Moscow to be controlled, and because Moscow has decided that it is an American sphere of interest.

The leaders of the SACP, and undoubtedly of the ANC, have been told to change their tactics and their appraisal of victory in South Africa. This instruction will be followed by a lessening of strategic and economic assistance. These reductions are part and parcel of the deals that the big powers have made behind the backs of the people of the region, complemented by the decision that ANC bases in Angola will close when the fighting in Namibia ceases. The existence of these bases might, or might not be, valuable to the people of South Africa but that is not the issue as seen from the eyes of Soviet policy makers. They have taken the decisions and their client bodies will be required to acquiesce.

The Soviet union has dictated and some SACP leaders have accepted the decision. Others, less happy, have distanced themselves from the Gorbachev policy of glasnost. They complain that criticism has gone too far; and that they cannot support the denigration of Stalin the man or of Stalinist policies in the USSR. Consequently the SACP is being pulled in two directions. Joe Slovo (the leader, no less) beats his breast and says that Stalin might have to be tried posthumously; the editors of *African Communist* reprint Gus Hall, the USA leader, who say just the opposite. The only guilty people, he says, were those naughty Kulaks who wanted to...who wanted to restore market forces?

For those readers who are not in the CPSA, who do not have to take sides in this factional in-fighting, there are other lessons. First and foremost, the problems facing South Africa cannot be solved by internal forces alone. In the struggles that must take place, there are

external forces prepared to intervene to stop the South African working class carrying through the revolution and instituting political changes. At every step there will be attempts to get sections of the ANC/SACP, and possibly others like Buthelezi, to negotiate some political settlement behind the backs of the people who still trust these leaders. For such a deal to go through would be the ultimate betrayal of all those men, women and children who have been maimed, detained or killed in the struggles for freedom. It is to prevent this that we have called for a National Assembly, as Lenin did in Russia in 1912, and Trotsky did for China in the 1930s. Not because they believed that such an Assembly could solve the pressing problems of those countries, or because they wanted to engage in parliamentary games, but because it was a period of downturn and defeat in which the the working class had to be remobilized. In the coming months, when South Africa once again engages in a so-called general election, a counter call for a National Assembly can allow the people to seize the time and regain the momentum of the struggle.

When we decided on the contents of this issue we had an article by Mick Cox on Comintern policy towards national liberation movements, in which he traces continuities in Comintern policy on this question that extend from 1922 onwards. This is a subject that requires some rethinking, but we doubted whether our readers would have welcomed an issue of the journal that was devoted entirely to the USSR and the Comintern. Therefore, this piece has been held over for our next issue. Our decision was not entirely negative. There were also pressing reasons for our carrying an article on *The Satanic Verses*. We knew some months back that protests against the book were of international importance. The banning of the book in South Africa, and the split over Rushdie among intellectuals and academics, gave notice that this was an issue that had to be tackled. There are other journals that should have undertaken this task. Yet, we found that most journals skirted the problem of religion and only repeated the old liberal cry: Freedom of expression. The problem has now gone far beyond that elemental call. The Rushdie affair makes it quite obvious that it is the thought process of persons in the twenty-first century that is at stake. Either the cobwebs will be cleared from the brain, or the spiders will take over and bind humanity in coils of ignorance.

We complete this issue with three items: a letter from Dr Gavin Williams in answer to our criticism (in an editorial) of his article in the journal *Transformation*. We believe that our position is made clearer in the articles that appear within, but, so urgent is the debate on the future course of socialism that we would welcome further contribu-

tions on the subject. There is also an item taken from documents lent to us on the question of trade union organization in the early 1980s. These are essential reading for those interested in the history of trade unionism – providing further information on the hi-jacking of the workers' movement by the SACP. Finally, our first book review. We hope to make this a regular feature.

STOP PRESS:

As we prepared this issue for the printer the news from China was omnipresent. This was not 'peace breaking out' (to quote from Hiron's article), but a stirring of millions in protest against the regime in China. If the system there is 'communist' as its apologists proclaim, then it has failed to satisfy the most basic aspirations of its people. After 40 years of rule the leaders of the party in control has been given the thumbs down sign by the men and women who should be its warmest protagonists.

First, it must be noted that there have been experiments (limited maybe) in introducing a market economy in China. Over several weeks last year Chinese made films were shown on British TV glorifying the return to capitalist farming and extolling the entrepreneurial spirit of 'progressive' farmers. This was the new formula for regaining economic initiative. What was not shown was the corruption that accompanied these success stories, nor the misery of men and women who could not, or would not, participate in this 'economic miracle.'

Our information over the past weeks comes from western journalists, and we cannot be certain that the opinions of the men and women they interview are representative of the general public. The speakers (in English) are mainly students, and although they seem to provide the leadership of the demonstrations, we do not know whether there are alternative views, but being students they are probably among the more articulate, and have been chosen by the newscasters for presentation. What seems obvious is that the lack of serious political debate, and the absence of political groupings, has not allowed them to develop the perspective necessary for reshaping their society. Their demands were important but simplistic: The old leaders (or most of them) must go. There must be more direct participation in decision making by the people (the workers?). With these we agree. They sang the *Internationale*. We can only applaud.

But is that all? Have they no ideas on the nature of the society they wish to see reconstructed? Do they only want a reshuffle at the top? Do they really believe that western style democracy will solve their problems? Do they think that the American Statue of Liberty (with two hands holding the torch aloft) offers hope for the future? Or is there information that the journalists are concealing?

But even if other voices were heard they did not seem to point to any profound ideas about revolutionary change. The workers played at most a secondary role; soldiers did not cross over to the rebels (at least not in any appreciable numbers) and the students did not disarm them; alternative councils that could challenge the government were not established; there was no appeal to the vast rural population and the slogans around which to rally the urban population were poorly formulated.

Yet, the bubble has burst. What was most obvious to the students and workers of Beijing was the flowering of nepotism and the emergence of ruling families among the party tops. We do not know how long these old men of Beijing can command the support of the army and suppress the rebellion. Our reading at the moment is that the generals have taken the initiative. The moment for demonstrations is over and the initiative has passed to the army. Precisely what the generals will do is still not clear, but they are the arbiters of events in China today..

We repeat. We do not have all the facts. However, it does mean that the myths of the past are being stripped away, in the USSR, in eastern Europe, and in China.

In the first issue of our journal we stressed the importance of the history of the revolutionary movement in China for an understanding of current political developments in South Africa. The debate in the Comintern in 1928 (see this issue) was related directly to events in China and the defeat of the Chinese revolution. The criticism of Comintern policy by S.P. Bunting is as relevant to events today, in both China and South Africa, as they were 60 years ago.

ADVERTISEMENT

YOURS FOR THE UNION: CLASS AND COMMUNITY STRUGGLES IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1930-47, by Baruch Hirson, Zed Books, September 1989. Special pre-publication offer to Subscribers £6.00 (incl p&p), from *Searchlight South Africa*.

A major new history of the Black working class in South Africa, covering the years from the end of the depression to the collapse of the general strike, by Black miners, in 1946. Set against the background of expanding industry and the Second World War, this is the first account of the workers and organizers who built the Council of Non-European Trade Unions; and of the men and women who conducted major campaigns to improve living conditions in the black townships. Among the personalities discussed are trade union organizers Dan Koza and Max Gordon, Naboth Mokgatle and Mike Muller, and hitherto unknown workers who tried to organize the work force around them. The title of this book is taken from the greeting of one such individual, Willie Bosiamé.

The workers fought a many sided struggle: for higher wages and better working conditions; against police harassment; against rising transport costs; for better housing; and also against the deterioration of conditions in the rural areas in which they still had roots. In this history of organization and struggle, the events covered include the Vereeniging riot of 1937; the strike wave during the war and the bus boycotts and shanty town movements. There are also accounts of the struggles against the implementation of the land laws in the Zoutpansberg, and the campaign to remove educational control from unsympathetic missionaries in the Bethanie district.

The author participated in some of the events recorded in this book, but only includes accounts that are backed by documentary evidence. In reading the documents of the time he was struck by the relevance of much of that experience to events today. The attempt at building a working class movement in the 1940s is as pertinent to contemporary South Africa as it was in those days of global warfare.

During a long career of political involvement Baruch Hirson has been a political organizer, a lecturer in Physics and in History, a political prisoner. He is the author of *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt* (Zed Press, 1979).

GORBACHEV AND THATCHER AGAINST THE WORKERS

Hillel Ticktin

[An edited transcript of a talk given at a Critique 'workshop' in
Hawaii, November 1988]

Gorbachev and the Soviet Economy

There is obviously a crisis in the Soviet economy and this has led to calls for reform and the introduction of a market economy. Yet, Gorbachev's economic proposals are not really 'new', and it is clear that despite his wish, he cannot introduce the market in the USSR. The last point was illustrated in a talk by Aganbegyan to the *World Affairs Council* in Los Angeles on 17 November 1988. He spoke at length about how little had been achieved so far, but I was struck by how little was going to change when he outlined his plans for the future. He stressed the need to raise living standards; the imperative of introducing new techniques; and of encouraging foreign investments in the USSR, but nothing about fundamentally restructuring the economy, of price reform or unemployment, or establishing a convertible ruble. It was a careful speech suggesting more of the same, rather than radical change. I take this to be the official line.

Several questions must be asked. What is the cause of the Soviet economic crisis? Why, despite itself, is the Soviet elite unable to introduce the market? Given the elite's inability to reverse the economic decline by introducing the market, what does the future hold for the USSR? Following from this, what specific measures has Gorbachev taken — short of the market — and what are their impact upon the USSR? I will show that although Gorbachev cannot prevent the disintegration of the USSR (by which I do not mean its collapse), he has, like Thatcher in Britain, given a declining system a new lease of life. Historically, that is his main function.

Thatcherism and Capitalist Decline

There are parallels between Gorbachev's perestroika and Thatcher's programme (besides the obvious rapport between the leaders of the

USSR and the UK and the praise for Thatcher in the Soviet press). Both are products of economic decline in their respective countries. Both are premised on the assumption that the working class is the principle obstacle to economic renaissance. Both are bound to fail, because neither Gorbachev nor Thatcher can break the social power of the working class.

When Thatcher took office in 1979 the situation was critical. The rate of profit had dropped to below 2%; wage differentials between skilled and unskilled workers had dropped dramatically; and more profoundly, after its severe battering in the late sixties and seventies at the hands of the British working class, the bourgeoisie faced a crisis of class relations. Thatcher set out to right these 'wrongs', and was quite open about her objectives: she aimed to raise the rate of profits; increase income differences; and restore 'normal' bourgeois rule.

What then of denationalization? For the consumers, the measures so far have made very little difference, and for the workers, conditions of work after privatization are neither better or worse than those within nationalized industry. The savage rationalization in the nationalized steel and mining industries took place under both Labour and Conservative administrations. Although a minority might have reaped the dividends of cheap sell-outs, most workers who received shares are not going to be deceived for long into supporting capitalism. Nor can it be argued that the restrictions imposed on trade unions led to a profound alteration in social relations. In fact the restrictions that were imposed were often popular, precisely because the unions were bureaucratic entities that failed to support their members. Mrs Thatcher, by restricting the unions, attacked bodies that were already degenerate and possibly moribund. Consequently, genuine workers' committees emerged, which, but for her attacks, might have taken longer to emerge.

In only one sense has Thatcher been a success. She has, through her combined policies of unemployment, tax cuts, anti-trade union legislation, and so on, helped force up the rate of profit in the UK. In every other respect she has failed. British industry has been routed and, once the work-shop of the world, Britain now buys more manufactured goods than it exports. The British economy has shrunk since 1979; there has been no improvement in Britain's competitive position; and there have been major declines in Britain's research and development, in the universities, and so on. Thatcher espouses nationalism but under her crucial sectors of the economy (whether it be cars, computers and even the City) are integrated with dominated by the United States. Although Thatcher has succeeded in demoralizing and exposing the pretensions of social democracy, she has not

reversed Britain's economic decline. As a recent study published by the Centre for European Policy Research admitted: 'Britain...has not yet transformed itself into an economy capable of rapid growth in the long run.'

'Thatcherism' is not a meaningful term, being neither a doctrine nor a policy. Thatcher abandoned monetarism within a few months of taking office, and she never had any strategy for pacifying and containing the working class, the most urgent need of the bourgeoisie. If she had any goal, it was to proceed towards the restoration of the market in its 19th century form. This was a mirage, because in the present era the market is superseding itself. All attempts to restore the market leads only to the necessity for further intervention by the state. Thus, the Thatcher programme can be summed up as reactionary utopianism.

Furthermore her 'policy' is not supported by the bourgeoisie. They consider her government crass in operation, parvenu in composition and doomed to fail. Heath and Macmillan said as much. Who then does Thatcher represent but the fringe and parvenu section of finance capital: the property developers, the speculators, merchant and market predators. The bourgeoisie have little reason to like her, but they accept that a populist leader can do what they are incapable of doing: holding the working class at bay

The failure of Thatcher's policy is most evident in those plants still operating. There, workers have not been disciplined. As indices of this: output per worker in Britain is still much lower than that of its main competitors; and wages have constantly risen, leaving inflation as a major problem. Nor has she 'rolled back the state.' Indeed, many key industries that were denationalized (Telecom, BP, BritGas, etc.) still depend upon state support. Moreover, the government still plays a vital role in the UK economy, and probably intervenes more now than in 1979. Also, the 'needs based' sector of the economy is probably bigger in 1988 than in the 1970s. Finally, in spite of the increasing authoritarianism of the Thatcher government – itself a reflection of its underlying insecurity – the Conservatives are still constrained by the democratic imperative inherent in all modern industrial societies.

The Thatcher government set out to break the power of the working class in order to prevent the further decline of British capitalism. But, given the power of the working class under conditions of the socialization of production, this has proved a utopian project despite the defeat of the miners. The working class, both directly – as a result of its position in production – and indirectly – through the pressure it exerts on the state – has rendered impossible any fundamental rejuvenation of capitalism. In the USSR, the social power exercised

by the working class has posed equally difficult problems for the Soviet elite.

Gorbachev vs the Workers

From the outset Gorbachev identified the working class as the key problem and like Thatcher, he expressed this point euphemistically. Yet his message, however coded, was clear: 'The workers have to work harder, stop being lazy, and become truly productive members of society.' The key word for Gorbachev, as for Andropov before him, was 'discipline'. This was repeated *ad nauseam* by Gorbachev's advisers and by the intelligentsia. Aganbegyan (as cited above) said that the main opposition to restructuring did not just come from the apparatus, but also from those people '*in work who do not work,*' implying that these lazy workers would have to be made to work.

Given the anti-working class bias of the present campaign, the cynicism expressed by Soviet workers is hardly surprising. Thus, Kostin, writing in *Sotsiologicheskiye Issledovaniya* (No. 2, 1988) said of a recent survey of workers: Firstly, that alienation—previously said by the regime to be non-existent—still existed in the USSR. Secondly, that 60% said that perestroika had to start with the leaders. Thirdly, that they rejected Gorbachev's official democratization campaign and called for: freedom of speech, freedom of criticism, equal rights, the right to choose the leaders and the widening of the rights of the working class. A letter from a worker in Magadan to *Pravda* on 18 April 1988, displays the bitterness felt against bureaucrats and factory managers. He wrote:

The administration tells us fellows: work, work, work. Then they raise the average speed of drilling and reduce wage rates, insisting that our speed is low and our pay does not correspond to the work produced...But for themselves they raise salaries. For what? For sitting in their offices. They do not care about workers, or their conditions of work, but how to extract a surplus from those who carry the whole administrative apparatus on their shoulders. For this they increase their salaries.

One possible strategy for the regime would be to tackle the grievance about privilege, and thus address, to some extent, the problem of worker 'alienation'. This is what Yeltsin tried to do, but he attacked party privilege and not inequality as such, seeking in effect, to incorporate the workers. For his pains, he was attacked by the party leadership, particularly at the 19th Party Conference (June-July 1988) and he lost his job. Ligachev, replying to Yeltsin, even

claimed that party officials were not privileged and actually received low salaries. This was a statement which would not be treated seriously within the USSR, and only reinforces the workers' sceptical attitude towards perestroika.

Significantly, while the question of privilege has been raised on several occasions – by Yeltsin and by the trade unions at the 27th Party Congress (1987), it has made no real headway among the party leadership. This means that the regime is extraordinarily rigid with little, or no, capacity for change. After all, Yeltsin was not proposing the abolition of the elite, but the reduction, or possibly the elimination, of the elite's non-monetary privileges, and their replacement with 'normal' monetary rewards. If the regime does wish to incorporate the working class, some gesture is required to overcome their indifference or hostility to economic reform. The regime's inability to countenance such a move indicates that nothing is going to change.

Soviet Decline

The present impasse is explained by both Soviet and western sources as due to the ending of the previous 'extensive' form of growth (or the quantitative development of the means of production). It is claimed that to develop further the USSR must move to an 'intensive' phase of economic growth. This it cannot do: hence the economic crisis. This is wrong on several counts. Firstly, the explanation is mechanical, taking a general thesis abstracted from the history of capitalism and imposing it upon the USSR. Furthermore, a discussion about the economy cannot be separated from existing social relations.

At the heart of the crisis in the Soviet economy lies the relationship of labour and labour time to the economy, and particularly in the change in the availability of easily exploitable labour. Previously this came from: the countryside, decimated economically by Stalin's agricultural policies; the family (nearly all women worked by the end of the thirties); and, partly, eastern Europe after the Second World War. These sources no longer exist, ending a 'growth' made possible only by the availability of a mass of labour.

The problem is not just quantitative. The USSR has always had great difficulty in introducing new technology, and often solved this problem only by establishing new factories. Today, for instance, over 66% of all new technology goes into newly constructed factories. This is only possible if there is an ample supply of labour to construct the factories, but where labour is not available, new factories cannot

be built and new technology is not introduced. Once again: there is economic stagnation. In short, the economic crisis is due to the shortage of labour and in consequence of this a failure to introduce new technology. Also, where labour is scarce, it becomes more powerful and over the past thirty years the power of the Soviet working class has grown, allowing it to reinforce its negative control over the work process and strengthen its position relative to the elite. This is reflected in the areas of wages and of norms (that is, the rates set on the production line).

Under Brezhnev's 'years of stagnation,' wages rose quite considerably, the average monthly income rising from 90 roubles in 1960 to 216 by 1986. Added to by the pegging of the price of bread and milk since 1962 (the year of the Novercherkask riots). Brezhnev, no more pro-worker than Gorbachev, was also forced to yield over norms – a problem extending back to the thirties, when the centre was unable to exercise control and plans tended to be overfulfilled. Consequently, under Brezhnev, work bonuses led to wage rises, and more seriously, workers' control over the production process was reinforced, increasing the level of inefficiency in an already inefficient economy.

Aganbegyan, in his November speech, pointed to the increasing inefficiency and waste in housing construction. The number of flats built in 1984 was approximately two million, about the same as that built in 1960, although the population had risen by 30%. The cost of construction almost trebling. The same trend of increasing costs and diminishing results is found in agriculture and throughout the economy, with official figures showing an enormous growth of the capital-output ratio in the period before 1985. In effect, one can speak of a 'law' of increasing inefficiency and waste under Brezhnev: leading ultimately to the crisis of the early eighties that brought first Andrapov and then Gorbachev to power

Gorbachev's Dilemma

It is no surprise that Gorbachev is regarded with scepticism by the Soviet working class, but has become the hero of the intelligentsia. He is, so to speak, their man in the Kremlin, having granted them greater intellectual freedom, and also made a deal with world capitalism which will give them greater access to the west. But, unlike Brezhnev who made concessions to the workers while attacking the intelligentsia (a primary cause of dissent in the USSR after 1964), Gorbachev has done the opposite. He has made concessions to the intelligentsia while trying to discipline the working class. It was this

that led to the joke among the workers of Kharkov: 'Bring back Brezhnev'. Gorbachev declares that the 'peace' bought by Brezhnev has led to industrial stagnation and social decay, and has brought into question what some observers called the 'social contract' between the regime and the working class. If drastic action is not taken, he insists, the USSR can only continue to decline.

If the working class were challenged, this would have momentous ramifications for the Soviet system. It could also be a dangerous move. As I have argued in *Critique*, this is because the elite never established full control over the economy, while workers achieved a limited degree of negative control over the work process—a control which led to the enormous waste endemic to the Soviet system. This must be broken if the economy is to be restructured, but to do so could provoke social unrest. Firstly, only if unemployment was introduced and the workers disciplined through fear of job loss could the elite gain control over the labour process. However, as Gorbachev admitted in his book *Perestroika*, this would undermine what he called the 'organic unity' of the USSR. Secondly, such control would necessitate much more supervision of the work process itself. This would require stricter adherence by workers to defined norms and tighter control on the shop floor by factory management. The workforce, which now 'enjoys' a large degree of autonomy within the factory, would resist such control, and this would lead to a rapid politicization. The workers would cease being an atomized socio-economic category and become a collectively defined working class, or in theoretical terms, abstract labour.

The elite is therefore trapped. A continuation of the present situation spells stagnation, yet a change would bring into being a different and more dangerous working class. The individualized form of control now exercised by the workers may cause waste on a vast scale, but atomization of the workers keeps the system stable. The elite would undermine the stability if it sought to challenge that control.

But would this unrest not be contained by the secret police? I do not underestimate the power of the secret police (and Gorbachev has never proposed the abolition of the KGB's 1st Department inside the factories), yet, even they could not control the working class once it began to move. Moreover, we should not ignore the enormous weight of the working class in the USSR today—a function of its enormous size and also of its extraordinary concentration. Industry in the USSR is located in huge factories, aggregated as far as possible in four or five key areas to contain the centrifugal tendencies in the economic system. Potentially this makes them extremely powerful. The situation is very similar to what it was in 197, and not surprisingly, some of the more intelligent commentators in the USSR today

have suggested that the factories be dispersed. Whether this will ever happen remains unlikely.

Gorbachev cannot challenge the working class and for this reason cannot introduce the market. Some western commentators like Ed Hewitt of the Brookings Institute admit the real problem for Gorbachev is not so much the 'bureaucrats', but workers who would be adversely affected by serious economic reform. Consequently he writes: 'That is why economic reform in the Soviet Union is so difficult to carry out, and why previous efforts at reform have had such a chequered history.'

Gorbachev obviously cannot carry out the programme proposed by the 'radical reformers'. But, lest we forget, when he came to power in 1985 people were in despair and the regime looked tired and ossified. Under Brezhnev the intelligentsia had reached its nadir, and the USSR's international position looked extremely weak. What Gorbachev has been able to do, is to extend the life of the Soviet Union, which is no mean feat. The intelligentsia now has a positive attitude towards the system, and many people have a new hope about the future. The appearance of serious reform at home, and the reality of meaningful change in US-Soviet relationship has done much to bolster the regime.

The depth of the Soviet crisis has led to serious discussion about how best to control the workers. The solution produced by Gorbachev and his advisers is the traditional one of exploiting pre-existing divisions within society, particularly those within the working class, and between the workers and intelligentsia. The publicity given to the research of Tatiana Zaslavskaya attests to the importance now attached to the 'scientific' study of this problem. Her many admirers in the west regard her with awe, but her work (like that of most social scientists in the USSR) is almost Machiavellian in serving those in power. She and her colleagues have identified at least four potentially exploitable divisions in Soviet society.

Firstly, there is the obvious but important division between men and women. Gorbachev has already touched on the 'woman question' in his speeches, arguing that perestroika has to improve the lot of Soviet women. It is also significant that many of the methods introduced to improve productivity since 1985 have been in light industry where female labour is predominant. However, if some form of unemployment were to be introduced, this would almost certainly be accompanied by calls for women to 'return to the family.'

Secondly, Gorbachev could exploit the division between workers in privileged and less privileged regions and Republics. It would be difficult and dangerous to play with reforms in sensitive areas around

Moscow and Leningrad, but it might be feasible to experiment in the more peripheral areas where, politically, there is less threat to the regime. However, Gorbachev cannot and will not change the underlying regional inequality in the USSR, since this division, in a contradictory way, is a source of stability for the system as a whole.

The last two divisions are those between skilled and unskilled workers, and the intelligentsia and working class as a whole. Zaslavskaya, in her 'Novisibirsk Report' (*Survey*, 1984) maintained that the regime had to win both intelligentsia and skilled working class to the reform programme. Gorbachev has been doing this since 1985, with some degree of success, at least in the case of the intelligentsia. He has been less successful in integrating the skilled workers. This is because there is no major difference between the real incomes of skilled and unskilled workers: most being on the same pay grade. The technical intelligentsia who work in factories and whose wages are determined by output have had no increases (unlike doctors, teachers and scientific workers who have received pay increases under Gorbachev). In a statement, made after the recent wage reforms had been introduced, the Deputy Chairman of the State Committee on Labour said the regime had manifestly failed to achieve 'its main object of surmounting egalitarianism in the payment of labour'. Continuing, he said: 'In some instances specialists are being allocated pay up to 24% below that of workers in the same factory. Differentiation among workers [he complained] has not been imposed either. Nor have norms been raised. Moreover 180% over-fulfillment of the plan continues.'

Finally, the campaign to raise productivity by increasing inequality between the different social layers (the so-called anti-levelling campaign) has run into a major obstacle: money incentives fail where major shortages mean there is no genuine market. In these circumstances, money is not money, and it is extremely difficult to create meaningful inequalities which will act as a spur to productivity. Consequently, the campaign against levelling is bound to fail.

Has Gorbachev Found a Solution?

The crisis in the USSR today cannot be explained in terms of an aborted transition between the extensive and intensive phases of Soviet industrial development, nor is it the consequence of a 'Marxist experiment that has failed' (to quote the headline in an American magazine). An explanation can only be found in the change in the supply and nature of labour. This has led to a strengthening of the working class, but not in the direction of socialism: rather, it has led

to increasing economic inefficiency. The elite seeks a solution through the introduction of the market to break the negative control of the economy exercised by the working class. But this is impossible because it would lead to workers' unrest, and this would be economically disastrous, internationally damaging, and politically difficult to crush.

Yet, if the regime has been unable to discipline the working class by going over to the market, it has given the impression at least that the system is being regenerated by a new dynamic leadership led by a man who has authority at home and great prestige abroad. It has bought time for itself even if it cannot solve the crisis by: exploiting the divisions within Soviet society; integrating the intelligentsia; and has further bolstered the system by striking an historical 'new deal' with the US.

There is one further card that Gorbachev can play, and the basic shape of the reform has already been outlined: he can improve the food supply through a limited degree of privatization. But this cannot solve the agricultural crisis because, as G.A.E. Smith wrote in *Critique*, No.14, 'Soviet industry is incapable of supplying the inputs required.' However, Gorbachev's position will have been strengthened and the USSR temporarily saved, if this works.

There is no possibility of either Thatcher or Gorbachev achieving the market they want: and this means they must both fail. In the USSR the working class remains undefeated, but its resistance takes place in an atomized fashion. In the UK the working class has achieved a similar position through collective action. The difference in the methods used by the workers reflects the different kinds of society in which they function. But until they emerge triumphant their respective societies will continue to decline.

THIEVES IN THE THIEVES' KITCHEN:

THE SOVIET UNION AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

Baruch Hirson

The Peace that Broke Out

There was a week, not very long ago, when I laughed and laughed and laughed. There it was on the box: Mikhail Gorbachev embracing Fidel Castro. Just like embracing a bear, I thought, and not a very cuddly bear either. However, that embrace was almost innocent of affection. Then Mikhail was all but smothered by Margaret ('we' who had just become a grandmother) as he stepped off the plane at Heathrow. Comrade Thatcher (to use the title bestowed upon her in Zimbabwe) had just jet-stepped through Africa, spreading largesse in Malawi and Mozambique, before waltzing into Namibia to oversee peace (and a little slaughter of Swapo guerillas). She went there to talk to her old friend, Pik Botha. Not to be outdone, Pik took his new/old friend, Comrade Anatoly Adamishin, on a helicopter trip over the Witwatersrand. The mind boggles over what might have been discussed in Havana, London and Windhoek, over the luncheons and suppers. The menus were well publicized, but what did they talk about all the time? What did they discuss as they picked over the fish-bones, or sipped the wines? Was it the shortage of food in the USSR, or indeed the misery of millions in the former colonial states? What did Maggie and Pik talk about, beside condemning Swapo fighters? Was it perhaps about South Africa supplying a few guns to Protestant loyalists in Northern Ireland? And what did Pik say to Anatoly as they flew over Johannesburg? Did Pik point out that lovely garden suburb called Soweto, and did they compare the relative merits of using Caspirs or shovels in crowd control? And did Anatoly say anything about the use of poison gas to disperse demonstrators?

These kissings, huggings and salutations have become a bore. It was zany when the pope went around kissing the land, fructifying the good earth. It was clean fun (until he got to Lesotho), it was quite sexless, and it got him into the publicity in the media just as effectively as all these statesmen, with pride of place alongside royalty, film stars, pugilists and Page 3 models. With this new round of kissing I thought of switching off the box and the radio, but I am a sucker

for the news service. In any case, I could not, because I had to get the 'good news'. Peace, it seems, was breaking out everywhere: in Afghanistan, in the Gulf, on the Chinese-Soviet border, in Kampuchea, in Nicaragua, in Angola. At least, that is what they said. Not that the press-comrades were out of work. Oh, no. There were still massacres on the Palestinian West Bank, Lebanon and Northern Ireland, land mines and ambushes in Sri Lanka, genocide in Kurdistan, Guatemala and Haiti, and an attempted coup in Ethiopia. Troops were pursuing 'rebels' in Burma; were in control of South African townships and keeping the peace in Prague, Georgia, Kosovo, Jordan and Kabul—while the 'faithful' hoped to bring 'peace' to Jahajabd. And the army of Comrade Li Peng, fresh from its peace mission in Tibet, was in the streets of Beijing. But I must stop taking up precious space just listing place-names.

It seems, despite this peace offensive, that there is still a lot of travelling ahead for these peace-comrades, and for their wives (or husbands), their friends and relations, and maybe their foreign ministers too. Even the Queen can join in and if she cannot bring peace to Ireland, at least she can win hearts and minds in Moscow. I can just see the little boys and girls lining the streets around Red Square, the Union Jack in one hand and the red flag in the other, singing *Land of (Soviet) Hope and Glory, Mother of the free....God who made thee mighty, make thee mightier still...*

Come to the point say the editors, so, O.K., to the point. What the papers seem to be saying is that we have by-passed Armageddon and are about to reach that Garden where the lion lies down with the lamb. But maybe there is something behind these pronouncements. Perhaps we are at the stage where the USSR desperately needs to disengage in Africa, Latin America and Asia in order to survive, and the west needs eastern Europe as a market for its goods? Is all this peace-trotting only a space-maker in which the Nato and Warsaw pact countries draw closer, and insulate themselves from possible upheavals, and shame-of-shame, the possibility of revolution?

So, perhaps I got it all wrong. There I was, thinking all those years that the workers were to be encouraged to overthrow their masters and take possession of the bountiful earth. I thought that the chains of slavery were to be burst forever; that the workers were to bring socialism, and with it peace between countries. But this was all a (bad) dream. The world is to be saved for us by the Comrades: Bush (after he has removed any socialists from central America?); Thatcher (after she has removed the word socialism from the dictionary?); Gorbachev (after he has restored market forces and settled accounts with the Soviet working class?); Deng (after he has a buried a few more of the old guard, and a few hundred students?)

One Body, Two Faces?

The peace-makers kiss and talk: lesser mortals of the communist world have only mastered knee-jerking. Not a pretty spectacle, but worthy of some study if it makes it easier to understand what is happening, and for this I take as a prime example the case of the South African Communist Party (SACP). Readers are warned that what follows is not a pleasant spectacle and more sensitive souls who might be embarrassed should skip this section..

On 4 November 1988, Joe Slovo, Secretary-General of the SACP declared (in an interview in the London *Independent*) that until glasnost he had been a Stalinist. In the best tradition of the great purges of the 1930s he confessed that: 'For there to be a personality cult, there had to be worshippers and I was a worshipper.' Continuing, he said that until he read about it in the Soviet press, he did not believe stories about Stalin's massacres: now 'Stalin may well have to be tried posthumously.'

Now Comrade Slovo is not a fool, and there is little purpose in asking what he believed or did not believe before he read the Soviet press. But there are some facts that have to be confronted. Slovo had heard these accounts of Stalin's crimes over many decades: was he deaf, or did he lack a sense of morality? He heard them from Trotskyists in Johannesburg in 1943, he knew them when he read about the condemnation and rehabilitation of the Jewish doctors in the USSR, or from the writings of H. Levy (veteran member of the CPGB) on Soviet anti-semitism, from Solzhenitsyn on life in Soviet prisons, from Khrushchev's revelations at the 20th congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956, and so on. He knew, and he read about, the crimes of the Soviet regime when the Red army walked into Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and he could not have avoided news of the faked trials of Laszlo Rajk and Slansky, or missed the fact that they were rehabilitated posthumously in 1963. Even more depressing, it must be asked whether a man who needs such details spelt out in the Soviet press can be trusted to think for himself. Is he just another knee-jerker, a blind follower of a line handed down from above, and what will he say when the story is changed again?

However, if Comrade Slovo has now seen the light, his 'comrades' in the SACP are not impressed by these revelations from the USSR. The latest issue of the party's journal, the *African Communist* (First Quarter, 1989) reprints an extract from an article by Gus Hall, national chairman of the Communist Party of the USA. Mr Hall is angry because in an 'explosion of self-expression' Soviet people 'now feel they have a civic duty to express their views' in which he detects slan-

der, exaggeration, falsification and provocation. There had been mistakes, he concedes, but using the arguments once advanced by Stalin, he said these could not be understood if the struggles of the times, and the existence of the class enemy are ignored. Consequently, he claims, history has been distorted.

Yes! There it is in print. What can I say about a man who still thinks (if that is a word that can be used when writing about Gus Hall) that the history of collectivization needs to take account of 'the class nature of the kulak who killed, terrorized and burned crops.' Concerning this, one of the worst of Stalin's crimes which carried off millions of lives, Hall makes a mockery of those people who were murdered. I hesitate to suggest to anyone that they read the Soviet press, but if Mr Hall followed in the footsteps of Comrade Slovo, and did read the Soviet journals (and could work his way through a jungle of misrepresentations) it might stop him writing this nonsense. And perhaps the editors of the party journal would cease disseminating these falsehoods.

I will return to the *African Communist* below, but revert first to the interview in the *Independent*, in which Cde Slovo, once again stated the Communist Party's perspective:

We are engaged in a struggle in which socialism is not on the immediate agenda or should be a criteria (sic) of participation in the struggle.. For some while after apartheid falls there will be a mixed economy. There must be a certain redistribution of wealth and this will facilitate the drive towards socialism. But in a democratic framework the future could well be settled in debate rather than in the streets. There is no pole-vault into socialism.

In this Slovo was repeating his own pronouncements, and more significantly what Soviet politicians and academicians have been saying for several years. What was new in these statements was Slovo's contention that glasnost allowed him to criticize statements by Soviet academicians without being denounced as anti-Soviet. It might be asked why such criticism should ever be considered as anti-Soviet, but that question will not be pressed here. The issues at stake are too important to stop at such absurdities.

Soviet Politics and South Africa

South Africa has seldom been out of the international press through the 1980s, and it is only censorship that has stopped it filling even more columns every day. Yet, in all that time reviews of Soviet atti-

tudes to South Africa have been more noted by their absence than their presence. Nor can this be blamed entirely on the bourgeois press. Journals of the communist parties of Britain and South Africa have not provided much insight into Soviet thinking on the subject. How different from the early years of the Russian revolution, when there was an openness which went hand in hand with revolutionary policy, when secret diplomacy was condemned and bodies like the League of Nations dismissed by Lenin as 'thieves' kitchens'.

There was a logic in early Soviet policy that needs restatement. The new state was committed to international socialism, and secret diplomacy was renounced as acting to the detriment of the working class. Consequently, policy decisions of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs were publicized and widely disseminated. There was a freshness which attracted workers and intellectuals, and the USSR was seen as a state which had opted out of the system that led to war and destruction. The policy did not last: partly because of the defeat of revolutionary movements in Europe, and with that the degeneration of the Soviet state. Instead a new state emerged, claiming the legitimacy of the revolution of 1917, but interested only in preserving its own institutions. The leading role of the proletariat in establishing socialism was negated and the Soviet state resorted to all the evils it had once denounced: secrecy, lies, and a turn to the discredited League of Nations. Critics of the new policy were denounced, and unlike Comrade Slovo who feels free to criticize today, were condemned as anti-Soviet and shot.

One of the results of that turn in Soviet policy was the concealment of news. Speaking of this period and the extermination of millions of people, Andrei Gromyko (who ignored the millions who died around him) told the editor of the *Observer* (2 April 1989) that 'Stalin had one amazing quality: the ability to keep things secret. He had an entire system to conceal the facts.' I do not believe it. This is little more than Gromyko's way of proclaiming his own innocence, but on one aspect he has a point: the masters of the Kremlin did resort to secret diplomacy, and Stalin's successors have maintained much of that system intact, despite the claims of openness or glasnost. Consequently, tracing contemporary Soviet views on South Africa has involved scrambling through interviews filed by foreign correspondents and Stellenbosch academics. But where possible I have relied on statements by Soviet officials, believing that they would not have become available if they conflicted with official thinking on the subject.

The key paper setting out Soviet thinking on South Africa was that presented to the 11th Soviet-African conference ('For Peace, Cooperation and Social Progress') in June 1986 by Gleb Starushenko of the Africa Institute. At the outset it was pointed out that USSR

policy was determined by the political report of the CPSU central committee to the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union which (according to Starushenko) stated that

we are in favour of vitalising collective quests for ways of defusing conflict situations in the Middle East, Central America, South Africa, in all of the planet's turbulent points. This is imperatively demanded by the interests of general security.

The author had no doubt that the South African regime was 'evil and despicable' and condemned it for its 'superexploitation, militarism, contempt of any human being that does not belong to the elite.' He equated the 'regime of apartheid' with the parliamentary victory of the Nationalists in 1948, and in so doing showed a lack of understanding of the South African state, its capitalist structure, and the existence of segregation that extended back to the 19th century if not before. In fact he even uncovered a new economic category: 'the production relations based on the system of apartheid.' Remarkable. Gleb Starushenko has discovered a political economy that nobody ever saw before. No mineowners, no capitalists, not even a working class. Just an apartheid production relation. Consequently, all that is required is an anti-racist struggle...or as Comrade Starushenko would have it:

The anti-racist struggle in South Africa and the national-liberation movement of the Namibian people directed against the colonial oppression join in a single revolutionary torrent. The amalgamation tends to enhance the revolutionary potential of both liberation armies and expand the scope of [the] South African revolution.

Starushenko saw no hope of getting the international community to support the struggle of these liberation movements in 1986 because of the 'neo-globalist, i.e interventionist policy' of imperialism. 'Neo-globalists': here is a new word to tickle the fancy. Is Starushenko really trying to say something, or is he trying to confuse his readers? Is he being as meaningless now as when he spoke of 'apartheid production relation'? No matter. Having left the heavy field of theory Starushenko turned to practical politics. Here he found a role for the SACP, who, he said, were 'the recognized and experienced leader of the South African workers, and other anti-racist forces.' They played an important part 'in raising the level of the scientific guidance of the movement.' Quite what this means is also not clear. If the SACP does 'guide the movement' how does it raise the 'level of the scientific guidance'?

Starushenko hurried on. He did not believe that socialism was on the order of the day and gave pride of place to the two-stage theory:

Proceeding from the objective laws of social development, the communists do not advance at the present stage of social development any other slogans but general democratic ones. They believe that the restructuring of South African society along socialist lines is a matter of the future and will be possible only after the necessary conditions have ripened.

What are these mysterious 'objective laws of social development, and what conditions must ripen? Are the Soviet experts so befuddled with 'apartheid relations of production' that they do not recognize capitalism when they see it? Do they not know that the country has one of the most advanced capitalist economies in the world and that the social relations are rotten-ripe for transformation to socialism? No wonder Margaret Thatcher greeted the Soviet leader so warmly. She has international allies in her fight against socialism and, although I never expected to say so, she is at least more honest in her intentions and prefers to spell out her message without obscuring it with long words. In her eyes there can be no conditions for socialism. But strangely, although Starushenko had reverted back to Bukharin's position of 1928, he opposed a Black Republic as leading 'the masses away from the actual struggle for their independence and do[ing] irreparable damage to the liberation movement.' despite claims by the SACP theoreticians J.H and R.E Simons, that the slogan was a great advance on previous class analyses.

After praising the ANC and the UDF and proclaiming the former as the leader of the 'patriotic forces in South Africa', Starushenko laid down the basis for peace and progress in South Africa. He said he observed a split among the whites and he pinned his faith on the capitalists (Anglo American? Consolidated Gold Fields?) who, unlike the middle and lower strata of the white community, were 'not tied to the chariot of apartheid'. The capitalists are the ones with whom the ANC-SACP can negotiate, particularly, he said, because the latter 'do not advance plans for a broad nationalization of capitalist property as an indispensable condition and are ready to give the bourgeoisie the corresponding guarantees.'

Next, he believed that the ANC would work out comprehensive guarantees for the whites—and cited Kenya and Zimbabwe as possible models for a future state. Starushenko had started with the premiss that race was the central issue in South African politics, and therefore he had to provide an answer to racism in his model for a 'post-apartheid' society. He therefore proposed that an upper House

be established in which the four ethnic groups would be equally represented, and each group would have the right to veto legislation. That is, the present dominant race under apartheid would have the right to continue dominating the society by virtue of the veto rights it would have in this upper house.

Throughout the paper this Soviet savant stated that there was no possibility of the ANC negotiating with the government. The regime, he said, 'embodies what is the most evil and despicable in the capitalism of the imperialist stage'. This regime had to be eliminated, he thundered, 'not negotiated with.' Six pages on he proposed a national conference on the changes, 'its main participants being the government of the Republic of South Africa and the true representatives of the non-white population.' Is such a man to be taken seriously?

Victor Goncharov—Or More of the Same

Speaking in Harare in 1987, Victor Goncharov, Deputy Director of the Institute of African Studies of the USSR Academy of Science, said that Starushenko's proposals were not those of the Institute or the Soviet government. But this seems to have referred mainly to the proposal for the upper House with equal representation for all ethnic groups.

Most of what Goncharov had to say concerned his belief that the two super-powers, the US and the USSR, could work together to solve the problems of South Africa, because neither side had 'vital' interests in the region. The USA had 'no vital interests in South Africa'? That is a statement that should be inscribed on Goncharov's forehead for every marine to read. To return: on the issues of change in South Africa his position was almost identical to that of Starushenko. The USSR supported the ANC, and in securing a settlement, the two main parties would have to be the South African government and the 'forces of national liberation'. Goncharov also believed in the stages theory. The present struggle was for liberation, and although he thought that the ANC should not stop socialist propaganda, he also warned that an ANC victory would not be achieved in under ten years. As for socialism: that would come in the end, 'maybe not in 25 years but in a century...I am an optimist.'

Not an ounce of class analysis; no discussion of the country's political economy; no consideration of the capitalist nature of South Africa. Although there might have been some disagreement with Goncharov's 'optimism,' it is in line with this thinking that the *African Communist* (Fourth Quarter 1988, pp.126-8) printed a resume

of a meeting in Moscow. There it reported that on 27 April 1988 a delegation of the SACP led by Slovo met with E.K. Ligachev (member of the Politburo), A.F. Dobrynin (Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee) and A.Yu. Urnov of the International Department of the Central Committee). There was very little information on the proceedings except to say that Slovo 'described the courageous struggle of the SACP' and its work in the 'deep underground'...and so on. In the discussion it was said that 'as a result of the powerful thrust of the liberation movement,' the apartheid regime was 'in the throes of a deep and irrevocable crisis' and that the government had to 'agree to a political solution to the problem, accepting a just demand of the ANC and other patriotic forces to transform South Africa into a united, democratic and non-racial state.' This it was said

would be in the interests of all those who live in South Africa black and white alike. It would contribute to peace in the country and in the region, and to the improvement of the international situation as a whole.

Whom Can We Believe?

Through the 1920s and 1930s few leftists in the west would accept newspaper items on Russia without scepticism. This was capitalist propaganda, designed to spread lies on events in the 'worker's state'. There was justification for this suspicion. Many stories purporting to be about events in the USSR were indeed false. Unfortunately, the press in the USSR was no less reliable, and readers were left to pick their way through the press services of both east and west with circumspection. When horrific tales were told about Stalin, about forced collectivization, the purges of the 1930s, the Hitler-Stalin pact, anti-semitism or the suppression of nationalities, it was not always easy to determine where the truth lay. But members of the SACP like Slovo chose to accept all that they read in the Soviet press uncritically. Recent events in the USSR have made it obvious, for even the blindest, that there is less and less reason to dismiss critical accounts of the USSR as being mere propaganda, but in what follows I have been careful to quote from sources that could not be the product of right-wing fantasy.

I turn to Kate Clark's articles in the London *Morning Star* of 17 March 1989. Nobody can accuse this paper of presenting an anti-Soviet story. Clark said on the one hand that Soviet officials had condemned apartheid forthrightly and declared their support for the ANC. She also reported comments by members of the Africa In-

stitute in Moscow. Anatoly Gromyko, its director, spoke of the need for 'a programme of reforms submitted to nation-wide discussions at which all sections of society will be represented,' followed by negotiations for two, three, or more years if need be, to solve the problems of South Africa. The stress in the discussions reported by Clark was the need for dialogue with the government. She quoted USSR vice-president Anatoly Lukyanov as saying that: 'We would prefer a political settlement in South Africa and a political solution to end apartheid.'

All references were to the abolition of apartheid. Seemingly the removal of that system is the alpha and the omega of Soviet policy, and after all, who can oppose the removal of that obnoxious system. But if that is where the struggle stops there will be no comfort for the workers of South Africa, and no relief for the millions trapped in the rural areas, without land, and without means of existence. They will greet the end of race discrimination only to find that they are as mercilessly exploited as before.

I started this piece confessing to bouts of laughter. I end it with tears when I contemplate the enthusiasm that might greet the beginning of negotiations. Imagine the setting. The representatives of black South Africa (and for purposes of this piece I will assume that they are mostly from the ANC) will meet representatives of the governing class. Of course some will be from the government, but the ANC will insist that some of their white friends be present. Who will those be? Perhaps some Stellenbosch professors, and some members of the Democrats, say, Zac de Beer straight out of an Anglo American directorship, and Dennis Worrall who designed the present constitution and represented the South African government so competently in London. And of course Harry Oppenheimer will be sitting in the wings, offering advice. What a scenario.

The mere thought of such a gathering turns the stomach. I have no need to write of the government's record of repression, of torture, detention and deaths. What then of the mine owners, who have been in contact with the ANC. An article by Eddie Koch in the *Weekly Mail* of 13-19 January 1989 provides a picture of the way that body treats its labour force. Whether apartheid stays or goes, these are the masters of South Africa, and if they are to stay in control in the country if capital continues to rule all talk of freedom remains meaningless. With acknowledgments to the *Weekly Mail* and Eddie Koch, here is a picture of workers' conditions as arranged by these 'friends' of the ANC.

The Hell that is Mine Compound Labour

Little that comes out of South Africa can surprise me anymore. Labourers have been killed by farmers who go scot-free, and workers harassed and maltreated with little or no recompense. Trade unionists are detained and held on trumped-up charges and officials threatened, charged with treason and even assassinated. Is it not surprising then that there has been a tightening of control of mine workers in the compounds of the Anglo American Corporation. I doubt whether prisons have been more regimented than these notorious compounds.

Over half a million black workers in these compounds have always been closely guarded and closed to outsiders, but new measures seal them off even more tightly. According to Koch, the hostels are surrounded by high walls and rolls of razor wire; the areas are patrolled by mounted security men, armoured vehicles and dog squads, and in some mines white miners are active members of the security force. There is no entrance to the compounds except for workers in possession of electronic identity cards and inside the grounds the mine police set up surprise roadblocks, make video and tape recordings of union meetings and search rooms (particularly of shaft stewards) while the men are at work. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has claimed that these are all measures against the union and many of them have been stepped up since the mineworkers' strike in 1987.

There was some relaxation before 1987 when women were allowed to visit their husbands or relatives in the compounds. That this was considered a privilege is scandalous, but since 1987 there have been reports of these women facing harassment from mine officials. There are also restrictions on the movement of workers, on their right to visit other compounds, and NUM organizers have to get permission to enter the compounds. Workers have been divided ethnically in hostels, and strict residential segregation between unskilled workers and Black team leaders or clerical staff has been enforced.

In the campaign to undermine the NUM, meetings have been banned or restricted, union offices removed from mines, and anti-union propaganda relayed to workers on local radio programmes while working underground. The corporation has claimed that the new security measures are necessary because of increasing violence on the mines. The NUM has refuted these allegations. They say that violence on the mines had to be situated inside the apartheid system: or as they claim, 'The mining industry is defined by the migrant labour system which in itself is a form of institutionalized violence.'

Yet, the capitalists are the people on whom Starushenko pins his faith because they are 'not tied to the chariot of apartheid'. They were the ones with whom the ANC/SACP could negotiate, because the latter 'do not advance plans for a broad nationalization of capitalist property as an indispensable condition and are ready to give the bourgeoisie the corresponding guarantees.'

What the members of the NUM would say of this is not known. Do they believe that when apartheid is removed the capitalists (who are to be part of the negotiating team, no less) will emerge transformed? Will the lion lay down with the lamb?

Ugh!

ISLAM, SOUTH AFRICA AND THE SATANIC VERSES

Paul Trewhela

It is a question today...not whether we are Christians or heathens, theists or atheists, but whether we are or can become men, healthy in soul and in body, free, active and full of vitality...In place of the illusory, fantastic, heavenly position of man which in actual life necessarily leads to the degradation of man, I substitute the tangible, actual, and consequently also the political and social position of mankind .
Ludwig Feuerbach¹

Incoherence of the 'Democratic Movement'

The Islamic campaign for suppression of Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*,² and its sentence of death against the author, are so important that they transcend all local interests. Within the general issue there is a South African dimension, and it is essential that both be clarified.

The left in South Africa has always shunned a serious study of philosophy, and has shied throughout its history at a critical examination of religion. That conforms in general with its anti-theoretical bias. Yet the sudden, violent irruption of theology as an important current in world politics in the late 20th century proves that if the left wishes to leave religion to itself, religion nevertheless will not leave it alone. Thousands of socialists, left nationalists, secularists and members of the Bahai faith murdered within prison walls in Iran before the Ayatollah Khomeini's decree of death against Rushdie are witness to a weakness of theory and programme in international political life, all the more fatal as in 1979 the Iranian left – above all, the Tudeh (or Masses) Party, sister party of the South African Communist Party (SACP) – welcomed the Islamic Republic.

The secular intelligentsia of the world has now been confronted, in the furore over Rushdie's novel, with a phenomenon it thought had disappeared: the bursting forth of mass popular irrationalism, which many governments are eager to conciliate. In South Africa, the so-called 'mass democratic movement' found itself divided between conflicting tendencies during the book week in Cape Town and Johannesburg in October/November last year, organized jointly by

the *Weekly Mail*, the Congress of South African Writers (Cosaw – an organization loosely in sympathy with the African National Congress) and various publishers. The leading speaker was to have been Salman Rushdie, speaking on censorship. In the event, the left and its intelligentsia were covered in shame. According to a report by Chris Louw (1988), the book week had

been billed around the participation of Rushdie, whose invitation had been made possible by the intervention and agreement of the 'broad democratic movement' in South Africa. Implicitly, this also meant that his participation had the approval of the international anti-apartheid movement, and therefore, indirectly, of the ANC.

At the moment when Rushdie was due to embark for South Africa he found himself the focus (or target) of a process of censorship directed simultaneously from several sources. Life proceeded to excel his own fiction in the grotesqueness of its contradictory elements. Firstly, certain Muslims in Cape Town and Johannesburg threatened Rushdie with death, should he have the temerity to arrive in South Africa to speak on censorship. These gentlemen threatened also to bomb his meetings and attack those who had invited him. Muslim organizations could not be persuaded to ensure Rushdie's safety, despite nearly six hours of talks with leaders of Cosaw, among them its executive representative, the novelist Nadine Gordimer.

The South African government (no friend of literature) then banned Rushdie's novel, along with the governments of India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Malaysia, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Iran and many others. Shortly afterwards it shut down the *Weekly Mail* – which had organized this and previous book weeks – for a month. These actions followed the demand of the South African Muslim Judicial Council that the government ban the book (*Cape Times*, 1 November), and its call on Muslims to boycott the book week.

As the victim of these forces of censorship, against which he was invited to speak, Rushdie was at the last moment dis-invited by Cosaw, represented by Gordimer, the very people who had invited him. The decision to deprive South African audiences of Rushdie (and to deprive Rushdie of a South African audience) was taken without his being consulted, on the grounds of his own safety. This provoked a first-rate row in Cape Town among participants in the book week, many of whom were sharply critical of the 'experience of censorship' (Louw's phrase) to which they and Rushdie had been subjected.

In Cape Town, Cosaw's decision was attacked from the platform by the novelist J.M. Coetzee, who alleged the visit had been sacrificed

in 'some kind of trade-off' between Cosaw and Muslim leaders, 'for the sake of not making life too difficult for Muslims in the alliance' [the United Democratic Front]. Cosaw upheld freedom of speech, he said, only so long as it did not threaten this political alliance (*Sunday Tribune*, 6 November). From the same platform, Gordimer repudiated Coetzee's accusation, insisting that Rushdie's safety had been Cosaw's prime consideration, and that this could not have been secured without the tender services of the South African Police.

Behind Coetzee's allegation, however, lay this fact: in demanding that Cosaw cancel Rushdie's visit, Muslim groups had been joined by two political organizations allied for many decades with the ANC—the Transvaal and the Natal Indian Congresses (*Star*, 11 November). After the withdrawal of one panellist, 'in the face of death threats from elements within the Muslim community' (Louw), this political dimension became more apparent. Another panellist, Professor Fatima Meer, withdrew from the book week in solidarity with the call by the Muslim Judicial Council. Meer departed with a statement in which she denounced Rushdie as someone who played the 'colonizer', despite Rushdie's transparent anti-colonialist views, set out clearly in his book on Nicaragua (1987). 'In the final instance', said Meer, 'it is the Third World that Rushdie attacks, it is the faith of the Third World in itself, and in its institutions, that he denigrates...' Rushdie had made 'a malicious attack on his ethnic past', in defiance of millions 'who combat the tyranny of materialism by their faith in an ideal or ideology', for whom 'the absolute is imperative'. He was guilty of 'parodying the faith by which the generality of human beings live' (*Cape Times*, 4 November).

Meer's contribution is interesting, since she was prominent in the activities of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the years of upsurge from 1984 to 1987, and had published a biography of Nelson Mandela only a month previously. The principal speaker at the launching of her book had been Winnie Mandela. Her confusion of Rushdie's views on religion with his attitude towards imperialism is in harmony with the Iranian theocracy, which shortly afterwards decreed death to the 'apostate', having pronounced him guilty of a 'colonial atheistic challenge to holy Islam' (*Times*, London, 14 March 1989).

As Louw reports, the book week 'had originally been made possible precisely through the good offices of [Mongane Wally] Serote as the ANC'S Arts and Culture representative in London', and it was Serote—in his dual capacity as poet and official representative of the ANC—who at short notice replaced Rushdie as panellist in Cape Town, via a telephone hotline from London. (When the book week

continued later in Johannesburg, Rushdie spoke for himself by telephone from London to the audience).

The ANC appears to have taken no stand on the threat to Rushdie's life as the guest of Cosaw, nor to the banning of his book by the South African state, nor to his forced exclusion from South Africa by organizations informally allied to itself. The SACP carried no report, either on the book week or the principles at stake, in either of the two subsequent issues of its journal, the *African Communist*. Yet Rushdie was the first really major world cultural figure to be invited to the country by supporters of the 'broad democratic movement'. Its leading organizations are now silent, after the international murder hunt set in motion against him. To their credit, however, a number of prominent South African cultural workers—including Gordimer, J.M.Coetzee, Athol Fugard, Don Mattera, Andre Brink, Pitika Ntuli and Barney Simon—joined the world protest by writers and publishers against the international lynching of Rushdie and suppression of his book. The main victor in this affair was the state, indicating what a poor thing in South Africa is any really democratic, let alone socialist, politics.

Irreligious Criticism

The standard of enlightenment is central to the issue of *The Satanic Verses* and its author. In South Africa it is all the more crucial, since the country has yet to experience a climate of thought such as preceded both the French and the Russian revolutions, and such as Marx's thought took shape in during the 1830s and 1840s in Germany.

Clearly, what has most offended Muslims in Rushdie's novel is his use of ribald language in association with sacred characters in Islam, through sequences involving dream, fantasy or madness: in style reminiscent of the surrealist film *L'Age d'Or* by Buñuel and Dali, which provoked the anger of the Catholic Church. In several passages the sacred is discussed through everyday language of the streets. Ultimately it is the novel's secularizing tendency that is at issue, its intention (says Rushdie) to 'discuss Muhammad as if he were human'. As he explained after the storm had broken over him, his aim was to

discuss the growth of Islam as a historical phenomenon, as an ideology born out of its time. These are the taboos against which *The Satanic Verses* transgressed (these and one other: I also tried to write about the place of women in Islamic society, and in the Koran)...I have tried to

give a secular, humanist vision of the birth of a great world religion (*Observer*, London, 22 January 1989).

This of course is a proper theme for study, whether by means of literature, historical research or philosophical critique.

Precisely such a project, beginning as a movement of theological criticism, culminated in the revolution in thought brought about by Marx. This was the philosophical movement of the Young Hegelians in Germany in mid-19th century, in which Marx learned to think. It involved from its inception a critique of religion that drove it successively to more and more radical conclusions. His critique of social relations in *Capital* is unthinkable outside the criticism of religion developed by these young Germans of the 1830s and 1840s. One of the most harmful legacies of the Althusserian current of the 1970s is that it cut off many South Africans from study of this conceptual relation. Arising from Hegel's system of philosophy, the movement in thought of the Young Hegelians led Marx to develop the theory of the place of the working class in the modern world. Marx was not issuing an empty slogan when he wrote in 1843/1844 in 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction', that 'the critique of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism'.³ In this article – in which he first set out his conception of the revolutionary role of the proletariat – he wrote: 'The foundation of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man' (p.244). Here he summed up the fatal 'sin' (or blasphemy) running through the entire school of Left Hegelians, whose thought was a necessary prerequisite to his own. In this, notwithstanding differences between their thought, there is something in common with Rushdie's project concerning Islam.

Rushdie's novel involves (as one of many elements) an attempted fictional, surreal 'biography' of the prophet Muhammad as an actual religious and political leader living under imagined historical conditions, in which history is transmuted through fantasy, and theology through an artistically presented history. By comparison, the first major act of Young Hegelian criticism was *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* by David Friedrich Strauss, published in 1835.⁴ As the editor of a recent anthology of Young Hegelian writings explains, Strauss argued that the reports of miracles in the New Testament were

ultimately grounded in a shared mythic consciousness of their authors, a consciousness so excited by messianic expectations that it set a series of totally unhistorical supernatural episodes about the natural historical personage of Jesus (Stepelevich, p.19).

That is, Strauss treated Jesus as an ordinary historical individual (as Rushdie does Muhammad), about whom the messianic longings of the Jews created a vast superstructure of myth – in a word, ideology. Further, for Strauss, as his editor Stepelevich writes, ‘mankind is the actual Christ insofar as it is its own savior’ (p.7). The real, active, moving principle towards a betterment of human existence is shifted with Strauss from heaven to earth, from the divine to human, from the ideal to the material. The fact that Strauss’s philosophy did not exclude an ultimately religious conception of the world was not least of the contradictions at the birth of this movement of radical criticism. The German enlightenment after Hegel was the history of the unravelling of these contradictions latent in Strauss’s critique of religion. Marx was its culminating figure. *The Life of Jesus* – translated into English by the novelist George Eliot – created a sensation in intellectual life. For his blasphemous assault on the sensitivities of the good Christian Germans, Strauss was sacked from his post at Tübingen university and never permitted to teach again.

Less than ten years later, following study of the English classical economy of Ricardo and Smith, Marx found the active, moving principle of modern conditions to lie in alienated human labour, as the source and substance of value. In much the same way as the Young Hegelians drove towards the conclusion that the concept God was the inverted reflection of man, and that the imagined creative powers of the deity were an inverted mirror image of the powers of humanity and nature, so Marx concluded that living human labour must re-possess for itself its own alienated powers embodied against it in the fetishized form of capital. The study of capital, and participation in the struggle for emancipation from capital by its producers, the proletariat, was Marx’s life’s work. Thus his remark in his article of 1843/44 that it was the task of philosophy to ‘unmask self-estrangement in its *unholy* forms [i.e. through criticism of the state, political economy, etc.] once the *holy* form of human self-estrangement has been unmasked’ (p.244).

Before that, in his doctoral dissertation, Marx had written that ‘The proclamation of Prometheus, "in a word, I hate all the Gods", is [philosophy’s] own profession, her own slogan against all the gods of heaven and earth who do not recognize man’s self-consciousness as the highest divinity’.⁵ Much later, in 1865, in reply to a questionnaire prepared by one of his daughters, Marx gave as his favourite motto the Latin phrase: *De omnibus dubitandum*, to doubt in everything.⁶ Against the fatal certitudes of orthodox Islam, the theme of doubt, and loss of faith, is one of the most persistent in Rushdie’s book. This was sufficient to bring the charge of apostasy, and the penalty of death, upon him, particularly from Iran. A well-known survey of Is-

Islamic theology explains that from its beginnings, the Shi'ite branch of Islam was

a movement that places the emphasis on the leader...It was the manifestation of a deep unconscious need—a feeling in men's hearts that they would be happier and more satisfied spiritually if they had a charismatic leader to follow. The imam of whom the Shi'ites dreamed is precisely what is meant by a charismatic leader...Since the imam was...held to be divinely preserved from error, Shi'ite doctrine was encouraging a very autocratic form of government.

Between the critical artist and Islamic theocracy there could only be the sharpest contradiction.⁸

Profanity of the Sacred

Bruno Bauer, Strauss's immediate successor in the debate, and like him a theological scholar, went one stage beyond Strauss in considering Jesus to have been not merely not a god but a creation of fiction. For Bauer, Strauss's theory of a historical Jesus surrounded by a-historical myths was inconsistent. To invalidate the miracles of the New Testament, with their central place in the Gospels, was to invalidate the Gospels as a whole. Bauer argued that Strauss had not investigated the problem of historical priority in the writing of the Gospels, and concluded that a single author (he thought Mark) had been the actual source of what Strauss regarded as a social myth unconsciously and collectively cast up by the Jews. In his eyes, Strauss was no less superstitious and unhistorical than the biblical texts he criticized, since he had failed to produce any factual evidence of an actual Jesus. By contrast, Bauer attempted to identify a specific human source for the Christ legend.

Like Strauss before him, Bauer was removed from his teaching post in 1842 and forbidden to teach in any Prussian university: a sentence benign compared with the decree against Rushdie. Earlier still, the fate of Strauss and Bauer had befallen the most materialist of the Young Hegelians, Ludwig Feuerbach. In 1844, writing from Paris, Marx tried earnestly but without success to persuade Feuerbach to join the future Communist League, though years later (not long before his death) Feuerbach did join the First International. Feuerbach's career as a university lecturer had been ruined in 1830, when he published a work critical of the notions of an immortal personal soul and of the transcendence of God. His *Provisional Theses for a*

Reform of Philosophy was banned by the German censors in 1843. How ridiculous it is, Feuerbach wrote later that year,

to wish to suppress the 'atheism' of philosophy without suppressing at the same time the atheism of everyday experience! How ridiculous it is to persecute the theoretical negation of Christianity and at the same time to let the actual negations of Christianity, in which the modern world abounds, to stand as they are...And yet how rich with such ridiculous things is history. They repeat themselves in all critical periods'

Rushdie's presentation of sexual themes in relation to Muhammad compares with Feuerbach (also the poet Heine, and the young Marx) in emphasizing profane sexual love in opposition to the abstraction of religion, with its hostility to the senses and its supposed happiness (or torments) after death. Against the pious self-image presented by Islam as to its own origins, *The Satanic Verses* displays an imagined prosaic reality. Rushdie presents a 'secret, profane mirror' in which the triumphant Islam of the seventh century registers its own nature through its own 'profane antithesis', twelve prostitutes who assume the identities of the prophet's twelve wives on behalf of their clients, and who are then 'sentenced to death by stoning to punish them for the immorality of their lives' (pp.384, 376, 391). This is a matter that carries its own weight for today. In one passage, concerning a central character in *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie writes: 'He saw now that the choice was simple: the infernal love of the daughters of men, or the celestial adoration of God' (p.321). There is a more than implied criticism of the status of women in Islamic society as 'obedient, and — yes — submissive helpmeets' to the patriarchal husband, a notion that is developed through Rushdie's emphasis of the English translation of the term *Islam*, submission. ('The name of the new religion is *Submission*', p.125).

Rushdie's book is a celebration of the metaphysical, through a constant counterpoising of the categories of good and evil, ideal and material, life and death, sacred and profane, in association with a recognition of the senses, especially through the form of sexual love. Relating to Islam, it explores a theme developed long ago in relation to the Catholic Church by Boccaccio, Chaucer, Rabelais, Aretino and Balzac. Rushdie has done no more than claim the same rights of citizenship claimed long ago by literature, and more recently the women's movement, against Christianity. One of his characters, Salman the Persian, who rejects the prophet, puts it thus: 'It's his Word against mine'. This is the answer of Salman the Persian to another character, a poet (later executed on the prophet's orders), who asks: 'Why are you sure he will kill you?' (p.368). Rushdie's fiction is here confirmed, in its critical tendency, by the mirror subsequently held

up to it by life. Seldom has fiction anticipated so accurately the fate of its author. Written against the contemporary background of Khomeini's republic in Iran, with its mass executions and its mass sacrifice of youth in the interests of a clerical theocracy, Rushdie's portrayal of the exiled Imam ('Burn the books and trust the Book', p.211) was sufficient for the death sentence delivered against him by Khomeini, on account of its transparent *lèse-majesté*.

For Khomeini, Rushdie's book is a calculated move aimed at rooting out religion and religiousness, aimed above all at Islam and its clergy'. He argues that the war of Iran with Iraq 'was the war of poverty against wealth', and asserts that the 'genuine ulema of Islam have never given in to capitalists, money worshippers and landlords...The committed clergy are thirsty for the blood of parasitical capitalists.' Rushdie for him is not an independent literary figure, he is a 'foreign mercenary...the result of foreign infiltration of Islamic culture.' Khomeini is hostile in particular to 'the propagation of the slogan of the separation of religion from politics', which he represents as the 'first and most important move' by colonialism against the clergy and the seminaries.¹⁰

Here is a fully developed world view with a mass appeal in the modern world, sharing a good deal in common with attacks by National Socialism on 'international finance' and 'plutocracy', which for Dr Goebbels and his ideologists were the creation and social expression of the Jews. A species of ideological anti-capitalism was for them a means to genocide. Stalinism similarly deified its own Great Leader and autocratic secular clergy with its own demonology (Trotskyism), and its equally spurious claim to represent the poor (workers and peasants) against the rich (capital).

Within Islamic thought, Rushdie has introduced the dimension of critique in a manner even more disquieting than the defence of philosophical reason by the mediaeval thinker and Aristotelian, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), against the defender of dogma, al-Ghazali. As a teacher of philosophy, Khomeini understands this. The development of a materialist current within Islamic philosophy had important consequences:

Al-Ghazali, the 11th century Islamic theologian, in his *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, complained that 'skeptical, nihilistic, and sensualistic philosophers' profess atheism. The same accusation was made against all those — including Averroes, the great 12th century representative of Islamic philosophy in Spain — who professed the eternity of the world, thereby implying the existence of uncreated matter...In his response to al-Ghazali [in a book entitled *Incoherence of the Incoherence*], Averroes...affirmed the primacy of reason over faith...Latin Averroism was

undoubtedly the most significant source of atheism during the Renaissance.

From Ibn Rushd to Rushdie there is a thread of continuity. Averroes was dismissed from his position, exiled to north Africa, threatened with hell-fire; in Muslim Spain, books on logic and metaphysics were burnt. His later followers were condemned as heretics by Judaism and the Catholic Church.¹² Grounded in a knowledge of the Indian sub-continent and the experience of blacks in the Britain of 'Mrs Torture' (p.266), Rushdie's free and independent standpoint as an artist takes forward a long-standing conflict of tendencies within the intellectual heritage of Islam.

Rushdie's book has a place in the history of thought, because he has dared to challenge and explore the supremacy of faith in the minds of millions. Contrary to Meer, this for him is not an absolute, it requires investigation. His project of inquiry is similar to that set in motion by Ibn Rushd, Strauss, Bauer and Feuerbach, but one that is specifically literary and artistic. It is a brave, self-exploratory, personal vision whose right to exist, and the existence of whose author, a socialist defends. Drawing on thought currents from Gramsci, Brecht, Nietzsche, Kafka and a wealth of other sources in literature, it is perhaps with Joyce's *Ulysses* — with its stream of consciousness, and its long history of suppression in Joyce's native Ireland — that Rushdie's novel may best be compared: not least because both Joyce and Rushdie are writers in revolt (and exile) from the religious universe of their compatriots.

Trotsky, in particular, took the view that in the present century 'true art is unable not to be revolutionary, not to aspire to a complete and radical reconstruction of society'. His view was that modern conditions made the artist the natural ally of revolution. Calling in 1938 for the 'complete freedom of art' in a manifesto signed with the Mexican painter Diego Rivera and the French surrealist poet and critic André Breton, he demanded 'No authority, no dictation, not the least trace of orders from above!' He considered that the artist 'cannot serve the struggle for freedom unless he subjectively assimilates its social content, unless he feels in his very nerves its meaning and drama and freely seeks to give his own inner world incarnation in his art'.¹³ For doing this the writer is now condemned to death, as in Hitler's and Stalin's time, and his book burnt. The issue with Rushdie is not different from that of the poet Mandelstam, who died in Stalin's prison transports, or Diderot (locked up for his 'godless' writings in mid-18th century France) or Jean-Jacques Rousseau, driven from one place of exile to another, whose writings — subsequently the most

important texts of the French revolution – were condemned in Rome and burned in Paris and Geneva by the common hangman.

From Feuerbach to Marx

The decisive transition of Marx towards his own mature conception is in his *Theses on Feuerbach* of 1845. In this turning point in his own thought, Marx examined Feuerbach's theory of an alienated human essence as the source of religious alienation, taking it critically beyond Feuerbach. Not satisfied, like Feuerbach, to locate production of religion by human beings in their estrangement from their own needs, Marx stressed that the estranged conditions of this world be overcome in practice. 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it'.¹⁴

Here we arrive at a point beyond which Rushdie is powerless to assist us. Once the myths in the minds of millions of human beings are stripped down to a purely human, historical source – as Rushdie imaginatively attempts in relation to Islam – then the real problem is posed, since the conditions that drive these millions to these fictions remain intact. Rushdie's work, as Marx wrote of Feuerbach,

consists in resolving the religious world into its secular basis. But that the secular basis detaches itself from itself and establishes itself as an independent realm in the clouds can only be explained by the cleavages and self-contradictions in this secular basis. The latter must, therefore, in itself be both understood in its contradiction and revolutionized in practice (ibid).

Here Marx is making the same point as in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*:

Religious suffering is at one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against that suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.

The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is the demand for their *real* happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their conditions is to *call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions*...The criticism of religion disillusion man, so that he will think, act and fashion his reality like a man who has discarded his illusions and regained his senses so that he will move around himself as his own true sun (p.244).

Thus the baying for Salman Rushdie's head does not indicate absence of respect for international law, a deficiency in secular bourgeois culture, or a return to the middle ages. It is the deficiency of late 20th century conditions that has produced this intellectual paroxysm. The cry against Rushdie is more than just the cry of power-hungry priestly zealots. Far more important, it is the cry of the oppressed creature of the late 20th century, wrapping his chains around himself with indefatigable fury because no more substantial project of emancipation has yet presented itself. The high tide of Islamic reaction is the result of the absence over decades of any international politics that would address things by the root. The campaign against Rushdie is not purely or even primarily a religious affair. It is a form of self-expression of the wretched of the earth, a major part of the world's downtrodden, in which a contradictory mass of material and social impulses are confusedly bound together in a self-negating, self-destructive form. It is a form of anger at this world that serves only to strengthen its chains. Indignation at insults, at oppressiveness, at impoverishment is turned, not against the axes of power, but against an incidental target. As with religion, such politics is a medium in which the powerless are for a period of time permitted to indulge in the illusion of power, in order to subjugate themselves the more effectively.

It is easy to foresee, in countries such as Britain, west Germany and France, which retain gigantic resources of wealth and technique, how Muslim demands will strengthen even more powerful and more effective 'Christian' demands. The imperialist state is strengthened politically among the majority of its citizens, while racist and Christian groups are permitted to assume the mantle of Charles Martel the Hammer (victor against the Muslims at Tours) and El Cid (victor against the Muslims in Spain). Rushdie's novel, an enormously cosmopolitan work, working backwards and forwards between the consciousness of east and west, meets its antithesis from both sides at once.

Orchestrating and manipulating the fears and resentment of the Muslim poor, as so much raw material, the Islamic campaign in each country is in the hands of this or that stratum of the property-owners. These are out to strengthen their position relative to other classes through a political alliance with the imams, in which the mosques serve as nuclei of a political organization aimed, above all, at preventing access to civil society by the younger generation of Muslim women. The anti-Rushdie campaign is thus a question of existence for the women's movement, and a test of its internationalism. It embodies patriarchal violence in the crudest form. In many of the major bourgeois countries, as well as in the cities of the former colonial

world, young women from a Muslim background are leaping across centuries in their personal development. No other section of society in Britain is so much in motion as these young women, whose parents came mainly from the Indian sub-continent. Their personal development violates the power relationships of the family at every point. To this exceptionally important social phenomenon, Rushdie is acutely sensitive, and this alone earns him the hatred of those in revolt against the 21st century. All the more is it essential for socialists to take up the cudgels, not just for Rushdie, but for the new generation of women.

The sole consistent reply to these heavenly storms is honest and fearless criticism, preparing the way for a material liberation that will permit the billions of the world to take production of their own social life into their own hands, without mystification. The principal source of mystification in modern conditions is these modern conditions themselves, rooted in money-dealing capital. What, for instance, is one to make of the statement that a certain monetary forecast had 'disappointed the dollar' (Oracle news, Channel 4 television, 9 March 1989)? Feudalism presented a grandiose heavenly abstraction derived from the creative powers of humanity, yet capitalism humanizes a pure abstraction. ('Fictions were walking around wherever he went, Gibreel reflected, fictions masquerading as real human beings', p.192). Everyday life is determined for the vast majority of humanity by alien, hostile forces beyond rational control, under present conditions. By comparison, the ethical dogmas of Islam appear as simplicity itself.

Religion in the modern world finds its principal source of nourishment in capital, in self-generating and self-expanding value, in which the product of human hands appears as a mystical thing, dominating and negating its human producers. The international heretic hunt serves notice that modern everyday life is a source of uncomprehended, and in the present consciousness, incomprehensible, horrors. These horrors are openly present in South Africa, where human life has been dominated for a century by social relations summed up in a metal, gold. But the nightmares of Soweto are not more vivid than those of Beirut, Belfast or the Bronx. The contemporary spectacle of mass popular reaction is not confined to Islam, though Islam has mobilized a fanatical army where other militant ideologies have (for the time being) proved less successful. Despite important differences between imperialist Europe in the 1930s and the world of Islam of the 1980s, the violent obscurantism of the anti-Rushdie campaign draws the mind again and again to the classic form of 20th century popular counter-revolution, in which the burning of books preceded the burning of people. It is only appropriate

that the South African government should have banned this book, that supporters of the 'national liberation movement' should have menaced its author and that luminaries of South African culture should at the critical moment have joined in silencing him.¹⁵

Policing of the Mind

Special treatment by law for any religion is incompatible with democracy. So also state restriction on religious belief. Religion cannot be abolished: like the state, and like value relationships, it can only wither away when the necessary social conditions come into existence. Religion disappears only when the need for it disappears, and for this the conscious participation of all in determining the development of society is a basic precondition. While there is a single beggar, there is still myth.¹⁶ Anti-religious oppression has never removed religious consciousness and never will. By emphasizing the powerlessness of individuals over their own lives in the most offensive way, it serves in the end only to nurture what it claims to be abolishing, as the history of the USSR and eastern Europe shows. Anti-religious oppression, like religious oppression, is the negation of freedom of criticism, which includes above all the freedom of religious criticism: above all, because the domination of religion over the mind can disappear only in the absence of constraints serving to justify its existence. The Muslim heretic hunt and the South African state are at one with each other in repudiating such freedom of criticism, indispensable to democracy. Their interference with the right of individuals (whether Muslim or non-Muslim) to read Rushdie's book accords with their joint tendency towards a general despotism over society.

At the same time, faith is set against faith by this police meddling in civil society, just as it is set against the preconditions of democratic life.¹⁷ This is in keeping with the Christian-National colouration of the South African state. The end result is to strengthen the fissiparous, divisive forces among the oppressed—above all, among workers—obstructing the development of general, purely human bonds, reinforcing the powerlessness of society, its dependence, its lack of conscious maturity and self-responsibility. It is the old formula: Divide and rule, and complements the Bantustan and race classification policies of the South African state. Formation of the proletariat into a revolutionary class becomes impossible where religious, linguistic, racial, tribal, national, sexual or other such differences take precedence over its universal interest as the producer of mod-

ern society. The anti-Rushdie campaign is thus of first-rate concern to the working class movement. Muslim workers who uphold the South African state's ban on Rushdie's book look effectively to this state, steeped in blood, to uphold purely sectarian interests against the whole class. They uphold this state against themselves, negating the possibility of emancipation.

Professor Meer's suggestion that Islam represents the interests of the oppressed of the colonial world is nonsense. By the same token, the Roman Catholic Church could claim to represent politically the people of Lesotho, the Philippines and the whole of South and Central America. One need merely point to the service given by Islam to imperialism in Spain during the war of revolution and counter-revolution in the 1930s (see *Searchlight South Africa* No.1), or the mass extermination of trade unionists, peasant leaders and intellectuals in Indonesia in 1965-67 under an Islamic pogrom – supervised by the military, and its policy managers in the US¹⁸ – or the mass murder of Christian Armenians in Turkey in 1915. In France, the demonstrations of Muslims for religious censorship and the murder of Rushdie can only strengthen the main fascist party, the Front National, led by the ex-paratrooper in Algeria, Jean-Marie Le Pen. The Islamic war against literature comes also at a time of increased support for the two main neo-Nazi parties in Germany, which are opposed mainly to the Turkish immigrant workers. Instead of serving to strengthen unity between the minority Muslim population and the main body of the working class in these countries, the Islamic agitation isolates and weakens the very people it claims to represent.

Contrary to Khomeini, it was a tremendous step for human culture when the founders of the American republic, especially Jefferson, moved to separate church and state in the early years of the USA. Against the 'loathsome combination of Church and State', Jefferson drafted an Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, passed by the Virginia assembly in 1786, stating that 'our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, any more than our opinions in physics or geometry'; that 'truth is great, and will prevail if left to herself'; and that no-one

shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall he be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities (See Peterson, pp.252-53).

Both the French and the Russian revolutions brought about the separation of church and state. Religion then ceases to exert executive power as it does today in countries such as Sudan — a multi-religious country, where enforcement of Islamic law has brought civil war and the death of tens of thousands, mainly non-Muslims. It finds its mirror image in the tyranny of the Jewish state, with its thousands of Muslim victims. Not only unification of the working class but unification or federation of groups of states becomes impossible once a religion seizes special privileges in the state. Religious division then threatens continuously to spill over into political division, civil war and war between states.

As for the demand for state-funded schools controlled by this or that religion, modern Irish history offers proof of the mischievous effect of clerical control of education. To demand that clerical education should be extended (as many Muslims in Britain now demand) is to strengthen the oppressiveness and divisiveness of bourgeois society, which maintains itself increasingly through the obscurantism opposed by Jefferson. The revolutionary demand, by contrast, is for all schools to be secularized free of the oppressor state, and all blasphemy laws to be repealed.

The most important theme running through education in Northern Ireland, has been the 'seemingly irresistible demand for segregated schooling', in which religious leaders and most lay people believe that children 'should be taught by teachers of their own denomination, that children should attend school with their own co-religionists, and that religious instruction should be woven into the school curriculum' (Akenson, pp.193-95). Yet nothing serves the oppression of the Irish (or the Lebanese, or the Cypriots) so much as political and religious division of the workers, which segregated schooling promotes. The Muslim agitation in Britain for state-funded Islamic schools must ghettoize social life all the more completely, both on religious and racial grounds, further extending the conditions of Belfast and Beirut within the main British cities. Thus far there is no evidence of substantial campaigning for state-funded Islamic schools in South Africa. But the campaign against Rushdie, like the statement by Professor Meer, augments the principle of racial segregation in South Africa with that of segregation by religion. The whole force of the struggle against segregation in South Africa over decades is negated by the Muslim campaign.

Nevertheless, where private religious schools are already financed by the state out of general taxation for some religions, as in Britain, it is not enough to demand an end to religious control of education. So long as discrimination persists against one faith, to the material advantage of another, the hold of religious zealots on the main body

of its members is strengthened, not weakened. Before the sweeping away of all privileges, those who seek that change have no choice but to concede the principle of equal treatment of religions in relation to education. If Muslims demand separate schooling, as in Britain, then bourgeois society must be required to concede to them no less than it already concedes to others, precisely so that Muslims may freely take issue against their own religious self-limitation, as Rushdie has dared to do. There is no other way towards developing a genuinely democratic consciousness, spread widely throughout the society. Without such a consciousness, intolerant of the least sign of special privilege, social revolution is impossible. To subvert the principle of religious privilege *in toto*, it must be made general.

Birth of the New

'If the old refused to die, the new could not be born'. This remark, adapted from Gramsci, with which *The Satanic Verses* begins and ends, speaks against Rushdie's traducers. Rich, complex and various, by its end the book attains a synthesis in the death of old Changez Chamchawala, with his eyes open, and without any word of God on his lips. Not having read the book before condemning it, the representatives of the Transvaal and the Natal Indian Congresses, like Professor Meer, could only miss the author's point. Old Changez's two loving and united wives, Nasreen and Kasturba, are of Muslim and of Hindu origin. It is a conception of the future union of the peoples of the Indian sub-continent, irrespective of religion. This is a point that has importance in South Africa, where social protest is strongly infused with religion: witness the political prominence of Archbishop Tutu and the Rev. Allen Boesak, or the funding of the *New Nation* by the Catholic Church, or the religious ban on intermarriage between Muslim and Christian and between Hindu and Muslim, in a state which for a long time banned Bertrand Russell's *Why I Am Not a Christian*.

The attack by state, clerics and nationalist political figures on Rushdie and his book amounts to a campaign for suppression of criticism of religion. Stridently asserting the principle of segregation in personal and social life, the clamour for Rushdie's blood further narrows the scope of political criticism, itself under ban. It is essential to state: every blow against publication of *The Satanic Verses*, and still more against Rushdie himself – whether by governments or clerics or religious zealots, whether in Cape Town, Teheran, Islamabad or London – is a blow against the emancipation of humanity. Of all

popular movements, the least supportable is a pro-slavery rebellion of the slaves.

But the book will not be silenced. Its notoriety as well as its uniqueness will compel it to be read – especially among Muslims – and its merit as literature will ensure its survival. We are at the birth, painful, bloody and difficult, of a new period of revolutionary enlightenment.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Hook, pp.222-23.

2. The uproar against Rushdie derives from the text: 'Idolatry is worse than carnage' (Sura 2, 186ff., *The Koran*, pp.352,355). Also: 'When the sacred months are over, slay the idolaters wherever you find them...make war on the leaders of unbelief' (Sura 9, 4ff., p.321).

3. Marx, (1977), p.243.

4. Studies of the movement of criticism initiated by Strauss, include Hook, Löwith, McLellan (1969), Wartofsky and Stepelevich.

5. Marx (1971), p.13.

6. Watt, pp.20, 24, 52.

7. Text in Marx and Engels (1971), p.179.

8. 'Poets are followed by none save erring men...Not so the true believers...' (*The Koran*, Sura 26, 227, 'The Poets', p.208). Poetical contests, once the forum for satirical verses directed against Islam, were stopped by the historical Muhammad. A character in Rushdie's book argues: 'A poet's work...To name the unnameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep' (p.97).

9 Feuerbach (in Wartofsky, p.25) considered the Dutch philosopher, Spinoza (a leading element in Hegel's philosophical synthesis) 'the Moses of modern freethinkers and materialists' because he conceived of God as an extended – i.e., a material – being (p.24). For this heresy Spinoza was expelled from the Jewish community in Amsterdam in 1656. No doubt it was said then of him, as Professor Bhikhu Parekh does of Rushdie, that he had been 'unnecessarily provocative' to the pious Jews and had shown 'lack of elementary respect' for this immigrant and refugee community, and tended to 'demean [Jews] in their own and others' eyes' ('Between holy text and moral void', *New Statesman and Society*, 23 March 1989). Parekh is deputy chair of the Commission for Racial Equality in Britain.

10. Extracts from a speech of 22 February 1989 by Ruhollah al-Musavi al-Khomeini, (*Guardian*, 6 March 1989). The SACP's embarrassment over the anti-Rushdie campaign follows its uncritical support for the

Khomeini regime, associating it with 'popular forces' and the 'mass of the Iranian people' (Editorial Notes, *African Communist*, No.82, 1980). It also published: 'Why Communists Supported Khomeini: The Anti-Imperialist Tide in Iran', praising the 'leader of the revolution, Imam Khomeini' and calling for 'unity of all patriotic forces supporting Imam Khomeini's line' (ibid., pp.56-7). As with Stalin, so with the Imam.

11. 'Atheism', *Encyclopaedia Britannica. Macropaedia*, 1979, Vol.2.

12. See Russell, pp.446-49, 474-75.

13. Trotsky, 'Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art' (1938), in Siegel, pp.117-20.

14. Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', in *Early Writings*, p.423.

15. Muslim ideologues invoke the climate of Weimar Germany to justify their death-squads against Rushdie in their attacks on 'liberalism', 'the politicians' and the 'dictatorship of parliament' in Britain, coupled with demands for a return of the death penalty, by Yusuf Islam, who in a previous incarnation was known as pop singer Cat Stevens ('Open to Question', BBC2, London, 15 May 1989).

16. A remark by Walter Benjamin, quoted in Adorno, p.199.

17. In Saudi Arabia, the religious police, the *Mutawa*, enforces Islamic law over Muslim and non-Muslim alike. The British official guide for expatriates working in Saudi Arabia states: 'Murder and sexual immorality such as adultery or homosexual acts carry the death penalty in Saudi Arabia. So does apostasy... The death penalty is carried out in public, usually by decapitation...being seen with a woman who is not a member of your family, for example, can lead to trouble with the authorities...' (*Times*, 17 March 1989). The South African press cited Saudi Arabia as the source of the campaign against Rushdie.

18. 'The mass slaughter...increased in intensity as the month of Ramadan approached...In five months between 300,000 and 500,000 people were killed...By the end of [October 1965] a new army entered the field: the fanatical Muslims who claimed it as their duty to cleanse Muslim Indonesia of atheism...[launching] an attack on the communists and their associates which grew through five months into one of the most appalling massacres of human history. The butchery was soon spiritually escalated into a *mujahid* – a Holy War.

'The *Ulamas* – the Religious Teachers – ruled that devout Muslims should regard communists as *kafir habir* – infidels of war – who, according to tradition, had to be put mercilessly to death' (Vitachi, pp.138-40). The secularized intelligentsia in Afghanistan face a similar massacre funded by the US and Saudi Arabia, and US armed, the *mujahidin* aim forcibly to thrust the city women back under the veil. Like the prison murders in Iran, the campaign against Rushdie expresses a general social reaction.

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BUKHARIN, BUNTING AND THE 'NATIVE REPUBLIC' SLOGAN

Baruch Hirson

'Stage' Theory and the South African Left

In early 1978, in the aftermath of the Soweto revolt, the *Review of African Political Economy* (No.11) carried a debate between Archie Mafeje (academician and anthropologist) and Ruth First (one-time leading member of the Young Communist League and then of the South African Communist Party—SACP) on revolutionary strategy in South Africa. My concern here is not their general views, but First's response to Mafeje's claim (p.26) that the transition to socialism in South Africa would proceed in a 'single stage' without having to go through an intermediary democratic form. First agreed. She said Mafeje was 'justifiably critical of the notion of any two-stage revolution' and that this was 'a notion long overdue for rejection' (p.97):

I agree with those who argue against the conception of a revolution having to pass through a national-democratic before a socialist stage. This is because I do not see any such thing as 'pure' national or 'pure' class oppression/exploitation. This is because workers are exploited as workers and also as members of a nationally oppressed group, and not even their national demands can be met without the destruction of the capitalist order (p.98).

First's conclusion is pertinent but there is much that she left unsaid. If the issue is exploitation, this must be seen in terms of the extraction of surplus-value inside the largest, most concentrated, industry in Africa; and if black workers are oppressed this needs exploration inside the context of the mine owners' ability to stop their organizing a union (until recently) and the determination of white workers to stop their advancement. The connection with 'national' oppression, (if 'national' is the correct word) is problematic, even if capitalists used race prejudice to prop up their barbaric treatment of the work force. But the theory of stages in the struggle for change in late capitalist society is absurd under any conditions. South Africa is an advanced capitalist society with a highly concentrated proletariat in

a single industry in a restricted geographical area. It is dominated by one mining house (Anglo American) which also controls one of the largest banks, many of the chemical and engineering industries and large tracts of land. The black proletariat provides the force capable of removing capitalist control and all discriminatory legislation at the same time and this above all calls for the elimination of a two-stage theory.

I have found no response to First's views in any open publications of the SACP, and the two-stage theory is maintained in tandem with the 'theory' of colonialism of a special type. Stage-theory has been policy since 1928 and, if there are to be no 'blank spots' in the history of struggle in South Africa (to borrow a phrase used recently in the USSR, where whole books are blank), a review of what happened then is instructive. Though events of 1927-28 (and beyond) in the USSR have been concealed for far too long, this is not the place to write an extended essay on the mass destruction of the peasantry and the forced march to industrialization in which tens of millions lost their lives. This was a period in which Marxist theory was perverted to allow Soviet theoreticians to advance the slogan of 'socialism in one country'. There was a massive cover-up to conceal the destruction wrought in Soviet society and destroy any signs of internal criticism.

During these vital years pseudo-left language was used to convince loyal party members that the victory of socialism was only a matter of time, and the overwhelming majority of communist party members throughout the world followed blindly. They accepted assurances that the Soviet economy was advancing towards socialism, and that workers everywhere were rallying to the USSR. To secure world-wide victory, they were told, all parties affiliated to the Comintern (Communist International) had to prepare for revolution. In this final period before victory, all opposing groups, particularly on the left, had to be exposed as social-fascists and destroyed. If Hitler were to succeed that would be of no consequence, because after him would come the turn of the Communist Party. The terrible tragedy that engulfed the world as a result of this suicidal policy is now well known. Millions upon millions died in gas chambers, in slave camps and on the battle fields. The new policy also led to the near destruction of working class movements everywhere, most particularly in the colonial world. The left opposition in the USSR fought valiantly to stop this march to destruction, and S.P. Bunting, one of the founders of the CPSA, stood up bravely in Moscow to oppose the new policy.

The slogans foisted on each country in 1928 differed, but in each and every case were absurd. In Germany the workers were told to

destroy the social democrats and communists concluded a pact with the Nazi Party; in China the workers were told to prepare for a fresh revolution after they had been all but exterminated in the large towns. In the USA the party was required to work for a Black Belt Republic in the southern states; and the CPSA was ordered to work for a 'Native Republic'. This, said J.H. and R.E. Simons, in one of their more absurd passages, was 'a great advance in the analysis of the relations between national and class forces in the liberation movement.' But that was not the opinion of S.P. Bunting. He fought against the policy at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, and dismissed the facile position of the proponents of the new policy with arguments that have stood the test of time. Bunting's contribution is not generally known. Even the version printed in *Inprecorr* in 1928 is virtually unknown. It is reprinted for the first time, from the fuller (uncensored) stenographic record, in this issue of *Searchlight South Africa*.

The architect of the new policy imposed on the world Communist movement was Bukharin, Stalin's main ally in the fight against the left opposition. Central to his view was the belief that socialism could be built 'at the pace of a tortoise' inside an isolated Soviet state. In alliance with Stalin he attacked the opposition's view that the Russian revolution was in danger if it remained isolated in a capitalist world. The struggle inside the USSR was bitter and ended with the execution of all the one-time leading Bolsheviks (excluding Stalin). Those events—tho 'blank spots' of Soviet history—cannot be recounted here: my concern is with events in so-called backward countries and the simplistic two-stage theory foisted on their communist parties.

Bunting believed at the time that behind the debate lay a hidden agenda and in a letter to Edward Roux on 5 December 1928 said:

the language about 'stages' represents ideological rather than chronological sequence (though I think it was dictated by the analogy of a bourgeois democratic native revolution in China, but of course I didn't say that) as really no black republic in SA could be achieved without overthrowing capitalist rule. And I think the 'stage' part of the formula is verbiage. (My stress) My idea is to carry on as best we can with the slogan and see how it goes, emphasizing about the 'minorities' so as to escape the N[ative] Ad[ministration] Act, but to concentrate rather on agitation and indignation as hitherto, and, at the Cape election, to concentrate mainly on the Cape vote and the 101 degradations\disabilities etc. There is something not quite intelligible to the crowd about 'Independent Native Republic'. They all ask 'Well, if it doesn't mean driving the Whites into the sea, what does it mean?' and they don't want something that involves a lot of explanation. (My stress).

This was a remarkable statement by a remarkable man, who did not adhere to the left opposition in the USSR and remained loyal to the Comintern throughout his life. It is doubtful whether Bunting saw the opposition's documents (distributed secretly at the congress in the face of party opposition) which condemned the policy of building socialism in one country and the disastrous policy in China (where the Communist Party was ordered to subordinate its policy to that of the Kuomintang, the 'bourgeois' nationalist movement). Like most delegates to the Comintern congress Bunting did not intervene in discussions on policy inside the USSR, but he was too astute to miss the Chinese connection. However, he was concerned primarily with events in South Africa and in this analysis the South African situation will be placed first.

Colonies and 'National Liberation'

Soon after it was launched in 1915 the International Socialist League—ISL (led by Bunting, Ivon Jones and W.H. Andrews) called for a new international headed by Karl Liebknecht, the anti-warite in the German parliament. Consequently the ISL sought membership of the new Third International when it was formed in 1919 and as part of the Communist Party joined the Comintern in 1921. Delegates went to its Congresses in Moscow and returned with new ideas on the international economy, the revolutionary potential in European states, the problems of social transformation in the USSR and even more central to South Africa, the issue of 'national liberation.' S.P. Bunting, a delegate to the fourth Congress in 1922, reported back on 'The Colonial Labour Front' (typescript, 23 October 1922, Hoover Institute Microfilm Africa 484, reel 5). He wrote this eight months after the end of a general strike in which white miners fought to prevent their replacement by blacks at lower wages. The CPSA had erred grievously in supporting the strike, but although Bunting's paper addressed the problem of a divided working class, he did not refer to it specifically. He first quoted from the theses of the Second Congress (of 1920) which stated Comintern policy on the national and colonial questions as being:

chiefly to bring about a union of proletarian and working masses of all nations and countries for a mass revolutionary struggle leading to the overthrow of capitalism.

Quoting further, Bunting said that support for national liberation and peasant movements was to be given 'for the exclusive purpose of uniting the various units of the future proletarian parties there.' The

victory over capitalism required the complete union of the workers of Europe and the toiling masses of all nations, but to the delight of the capitalists, the workers of Europe and the colonial countries had not set up a 'united front'. Australian workers were antagonistic to Chinese and Japanese workers, US workers lynched and persecuted Negroes, and South African whites entrenched themselves against black competition, and vice versa. Continuing, he said:

The struggle against deep-rooted petty bourgeois national prejudices, manifesting themselves in various forms such as race hatred, national antagonism and anti-semitism [and he added, nigrophobia (sic) must be brought to the foreground.

Race prejudice, he said, was largely based on competition in the labour market 'and was most acute where such competition is most keenly felt.' The better paid white workers could not be expected to unite with 'cheap labour' that threatened to take their jobs, any more than cheap labour could co-operate with those (white) workers who 'became their masters' accomplices in "keeping them in their place", closing various avenues of employment and objecting to them getting "equal pay" for equal work.' Obstacles to united action had to be overcome, said Bunting, and he referred to a supplementary thesis:

The CI [Communist International] and the parties affected must struggle to develop class consciousness in the working masses of the colonies...But even such agitation or organization does not of itself produce the World United Labour Front, the 'joint struggle', the cooperation and 'union of the working masses of all countries' notwithstanding cumulative disparities of race, colour, language, pay, grade, standard of living and civilization, such as is required by the CI.

Effective propaganda needed an atmosphere of co-operation between the races but, in both South Africa and the US, most white workers were hostile to any work being done among the blacks. This was not acceptable:

We cannot leave the coloured workers alone. Men who are good enough to exploit are good enough to organize; especially in view of the enormous proportion of the world's profits that is made from the exploitation of this cheap coloured labour...

The struggle required the support of the black workers, and white workers had to be persuaded to join the fight for socialism on an international scale. In Africa, in the Pacific, and in the US,

where a real national liberation movement of the coloured people is hardly practical politics and a peasant party with hope of success hardly exists...the only revolutionary movement of the subject people is the movement of their workers organized as workers. At least that movement must be stressed as an additional weapon and not necessarily one to be postponed in order of time, for in the Labour movement nothing comes first, all arms must be brought into action at once. And as the Supplementary Thesis says, 'we must in any case struggle against control by bourgeois democratic national movements over the mass action of poor and ignorant peasants and workers for their liberation from all sorts of exploitation.'

Bunting concluded by saying that

It is as workers that whites and natives find their point of contact as well as of repulsion. The proletarian movement is, or eventually becomes, the strongest revolutionary weapon in every country; it is the one *Feste Burg* [strong fortress], now and hereafter, of the oppressed and exploited of the whole world.

There were problems in Bunting's formulations and these stemmed partly from the theses of the Communist International which failed to examine the nature of capitalism and the relative strengths of the ruling class, the working, peasant and middle classes in most colonial countries. The Comintern offered no guidelines for countries in which the working class was divided along race lines despite the extensive writings by Jones (in Moscow) on the 1922 strike in South Africa. Nonetheless, members of the CPSA accepted Bunting's report in late 1922 and it was this formulation that was so rudely discarded in 1928.

During 1923-1928 the CPSA oscillated between work with white and with black workers. It followed the example of the British party in seeking affiliation with the all-white SALP, and even supported the Labour-Nationalist alliance in the 1924 general election. Yet, simultaneously, leading party members worked with the rapidly growing Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa (the ICU) and won many leading members to the CPSA. The majority in the Young Communist League appealed to, and gained support from, the international body in Germany in directing attention towards the organization of black youth. The CPSA was making progress, but after the death of Lenin in 1924 it (and every communist party in the world), was drawn into the turmoil that enveloped the USSR.

The struggle against Trotsky and the Left Opposition commenced soon after the death of Lenin. On 13 December 1924 Bukharin led the theoretical assault. In his paper 'Concerning the Theories of Per-

manent Revolution' (reprinted in *Inprecorr*, Vol.5, No.13, 1925; extracts in R.V. Daniels, Vol.1, pp.261-65.). He said that Trotsky had underestimated the peasantry and, contrary to previous Marxist theorists (including Lenin who condemned the peasant based policy of the populists), Bukharin claimed that the peasantry was a 'great liberating force' and that consequent on the failure of the European workers to take power aid would come to the USSR from the colonial peasantry. He maintained subsequently that nationalist uprisings in the colonies would deprive imperialist nations of markets and materials, and without colonies western capitalism could not survive. Consequently, the agrarian revolution would be decisive and usher in communism.

On 22 August 1925 the Political Commission attached to the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) met in Moscow to discuss the South African situation. Bukharin was in the chair (Zinoviev having been deposed). Alexander Troyanovsky was specially invited. He had been a Bolshevik before 1913, was anti-Bolshevik in 1917; Soviet diplomat in Japan (1927-33) and the US (1933-35). He had assisted Stalin in his work on the 'National Question' but it is not known why he appeared before this sub-committee. He said little attention had been paid to South Africa, but 'the new colonial position of the Comintern,' required that the situation there be discussed. However, unable to propose any change in policy he concentrated on the role of the workers. He said that the demand by white miners for 'South Africa for the Whites...did not mean a desire to abolish black labour, but signified the supremacy of whites in South Africa and the oppression of the blacks.' The stumbling block was the lack of organization in CP activity.

He continued:

The ruling class in South Africa, and in no less degree the English government, make every endeavour to prevent any real agitation in favour of higher wages and better conditions for the native workmen, since they clearly understand that unrest among the natives would seriously affect the gold supplies for the world market. And of course the ruling class makes every effort to avert such a crisis.

Thus we see that the more educated natives are subsidized and it is firmly impressed upon them that the English government is the protector of the natives. It would be superfluous to mention that the government has at its disposal an expensive espionage system for the purpose of revealing the slightest sign of dissatisfaction and dealing with it on the spot. (Stenographic report, South African Department of Justice files, microfilm, London University).

Trojanovsky had apparently failed, but over the period 1926-30 new demands were made on the CPSA that it change its central slogan to conform with 'the new colonial position of the Comintern.'

Towards the Sixth Congress of the Comintern

After 1925 discussion on colonial liberation dominated the Comintern's agenda. First there was an abortive move in 1926 to launch a League of the Oppressed People, sponsored by veteran communists M.N. Roy (India), Pham Van Dong (Vietnam) and Korean nationalists. Thereafter the Berlin Branch of the CP convened a conference to launch the League against Imperialism in Brussels, using funds from Mexico (which aimed to lead the Latin American states against the US) and from the Kuomintang (which still projected a radical position).

The conference was attended by communists, socialists and leading nationalists from Asia. There were also black American communists, many of them former members of the African Blood Brotherhood which called for the world-wide liberation of the Negro race. South Africa sent three delegates: Josiah Tshangana Gumede, veteran member and forthcoming President of the ANC; James La Guma, formerly general secretary of the ICU and member of the CPSA; and Daniel Colrairie, secretary of the Garment Workers Union. According to *Inprecorr* (Vol.7, No.16, February 1927):

Gumede greeted the Congress in the name of the Zulu whose situation he described as socially and politically miserable. The natives were cut off from all forms of qualified work. The trade unions of the white workers refused to have anything to do with the negroes. The only party which represented the interests of the negroes and took the negroes into its ranks was the Communist Party.

In an atmosphere charged with nationalism the South Africans moved the resolution calling for 'the right of self-determination through the complete overthrow of capitalism and imperial domination.' This was carried unanimously and Gumede declared: 'We are waiting and longing for the liberation that must come'.

ECCI seized on the nationalism of the Black Brotherhood to advance the demand for 'national self determination in the southern states, where the negro forms a majority' with the right to secede from the US. Earl Browder (US party leader) later boasted: 'We could not have arrived at our programme only upon the basis of our own American experience.' (Quoted in Harvey Klehr, p.325). The 'Native Republic' slogan for South Africa was also Moscow made.

La Guma went to Moscow and met members of ECCI, the Anglo-American secretariat, and the Negro Commission, the sub-committee which took decisions on South Africa and the US. There are no reports of what was said, and Simons (p.390) gives only hypothetical reconstructions. But the background was ominous. In China, the Kuomintang had just massacred Communists and trade unionists; in Moscow, the left opposition had been defeated and was being hounded out of the Bolshevik Party; and with plans for accelerated industrialization in the USSR, Bukharin's tortoise-paced socialism was under attack.

In November Gumede and La Guma were in Moscow for the tenth anniversary of the Russian revolution. The colonies were discussed under the shadow of events in China, leading in December to the expulsion of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky from the Communist Party. It is doubtful whether this background was known, or if known, was understood by the South Africans. They made no mention of them when they returned to South Africa, but they also did nothing about the League against Imperialism. Colrairie who had said that he would work to further its aims had a change of heart. Gumede again praised the Communists as the only sincere and honest fighters for the emancipation of the oppressed, but elected President of the ANC, did not set up a branch of the League in South Africa. He also accepted an engagement in the Cape to canvas for the South African Party (the party of General Smuts) in the forthcoming Cape election although Wolton, secretary of the CPSA, was a candidate.

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern was due to meet in July 1928, and the new policy was sent by ECCI as a draft resolution to the Central Executive Committee of the CPSA. This document (printed in *Communist International*, Vol.6, No.2, 19 December 1928) stated that the central feature of South Africa was: 'the growing tendency to expropriate the land from the negroes and from a certain section of the white farming population...[and the endeavour by] legislative means to create a cheap market of labour power and a reserve army.'

In a crude historical sketch the resolution stated that

the country was seized by violence by foreign exploiters, and land expropriated from the natives, who were met by a policy of extermination in the first stages of colonization, and conditions of semi-slavery established for the overwhelming majority of the native masses...

'[South Africa was] a British dominion of the colonial type' [whatever that meant] and in the fight against British domination and the white bourgeoisie, the CPSA was required to advance the slogan of 'an independent native South African republic as a stage towards a workers and peasants republic with full equal rights for all races, black, coloured and white.' This included the 'restitution of the land to the landless and land-poor population.' The CPSA had to build a mass party based 'chiefly upon the native toiling masses while continuing to work actively among the white workers'; bring Africans into 'the active leadership of the party, locally and centrally'; participate in 'the embryonic national organizations among the natives, such as the ANC...[which should be transformed] into a fighting nationalist revolutionary organ...based upon the trade unions, peasant organizations, etc.' The land programme of the CPSA (printed in *International*, No. 449, 2 January 1925) was criticized as insufficient. The party had called for the appropriation of the big estates and their division among landless Whites and Africans but that had to be made concrete:

The party must show that the basic question in the agrarian situation in South Africa is the land hunger of the blacks and that their interest is of prior importance in the solution of the agrarian question. Efforts should be made immediately to develop plans to organize the native peasants into peasant unions and the native agricultural workers into trade unions, while attention to the poor agrarian whites must in no way be minimized.

Besides containing crude historical generalizations the 'resolution' ignored the centrality of gold in the country's economy. The central question in South Africa in 1927 was not the land question, but the position of workers inside a highly exploitative industrializing economy. The expropriation of the land in wars of dispossession had opened the way for later proletarianization, and to revert back to peasant status (if that was indeed possible) would destroy the country's industrial base. South Africa was an advancing capitalist country and the proletariat that had been recruited to produce its gold and other minerals held the key to the social transformation of South Africa. In so far as that class was divided on racial grounds, and the uneven development of the country helped maintain that division, there was no possibility of change in South Africa in 1928. To seek such change through peasant unions and to suggest that the poor white farmers could be organized by the CPSA was patently absurd.

However, the proceedings of the Comintern Congress in July 1928 was not concerned with such niceties. Stalin gave the keynote speech

and declared that the 'stabilization' of capitalism had come to an end, giving way to a period in which imperialism was planning to attack the USSR. Socialism was being built in one country, and national communist parties should be so powerful that no capitalist country would dare attack the USSR. Accepting the analysis, the Comintern predicted a catastrophic economic crisis in capitalist countries followed by a chain of revolutions. Consequently, communists had to prepare for the seizure of power through a general strike and armed insurrection. The claim that the western powers were preparing to attack the USSR was patently false, but even more absurd was the contention that capitalism was about to be overthrown. How they could hit back and attack the USSR when they were about to be overthrown was not explained. However, to prepare for this revolution Comintern rules were altered, obliging parties to obey all ECCI directives.

Bunting's Criticism of the 'Native Republic' Slogan

When the South African delegates appeared at the Negro Commission, dominated by 'Comrade Bennett' (Petrovsky), they were given a poor hearing and treated with scarcely concealed contempt. Roux, who accepted the arguments of Bukharin and Petrovsky, wrote to Wolton of 5 September 1928 saying that he had proposed that the slogan be amended to call for 'an independent workers' and peasants' S. African Republic, with equal rights for all toilers irrespective of colour, as a basis for a native majority government.': this would meet the claims of black workers, and provide a means by which to approach white workers. The Commission rejected this and 'would not even allow a slight editorial change in the wording, because they said, any such slight change would be interpreted as a partial victory for the S. African delegation.' They had to accept the Native Republic slogan, or stand condemned as 'enemies' to be discounted, slandered and silenced. (Correspondence on Hoover microfilm.)

The confrontation was absurd. Black majority rule was not in question (this having been the unspoken policy of the CPSA for many years), and the party leadership knew that they had failed to work in the rural areas. But that was not really the issue. What was at stake was: firstly, Bukharin's insistence that the 'colonial masses', with a mainly peasant constituency, were ready for bourgeois democratic revolution; and secondly, as Bunting realised, policies in the Comintern were being shaped by the views of the Soviet leadership on events in China. It was this understanding that led to Bunting's letter to Roux of 5 December 1928 (quoted above).

Bunting's arguments followed the earlier resolutions of the Comintern and placed the proletariat at the centre of any revolutionary change. This was not a general lack of theory in the party, as Roux maintained. Bunting had far more understanding of Marxism than the time-servers in the Comintern. But something far worse was happening in the communist world. The turmoil in the Comintern had penetrated party ranks. In his letter to Roux of 5 December, after his return to South Africa, Bunting said that he had been informed of letters sent by Wolton and La Guma to the Negro Commission condemning the delegation [the Buntings and Roux]. This was inexcusable.

The party split over the new slogan. Many officials in the white trade unions, including Bill Andrews, refused to accept it. African members could not understand the need for the new slogan because they had always understood party policy to point to a black majority government, and the leaders of the communist-led black trade unions, Ben Weinbren and T.W. Thibedi, were totally opposed to the slogan. However, there was a new side to the issue that was not foreseen: racism appeared in the ranks of the CPSA in the period 1929-32. This was noted by Frank Glass (see *Searchlight South Africa*, No.1), and is contained in the coded message written by La Guma.

Of the three South African delegates to Brussels, La Guma was the only champion of the 'Native Republic' slogan. In a hand-written (and unpublished) document entitled 'Who's for the Third International: Thesis on S.A', snippets of which are quoted by Simons (p.409), La Guma asked:

whether it was 'in accord with Communist principles' to sacrifice or delay the freedom of the large majority 'in the interest of a small minority of imperialistically imbued white workers?' They had refused to hear the Party's message for twenty years...In 1922 they rose in arms on the Rand 'to perpetuate our serfdom'; now through the Labour Party, they supported anti-native legislation and the enactment of colour bars in industry. A 'ray of hope has appeared on the horizon in the shape of an effective freedom and equality with other peoples' for which 'the enslaved black masses of South Africa would be prepared to demonstrate their manhood and desire...'

But there was also dissension among party members who sided with the Comintern leaders. Wolton and his wife wanted to leave the country, and gave as their excuse the need for blacks to take over the leadership. It was suggested that La Guma should take Wolton's place as secretary, but (according to Bunting) La Guma had 'come into a small fortune' near Cape Town' and would not leave it. Also he was on bad terms with many party members and shortly thereafter

canvassed for an independent Nationalist candidate in the election in which Wolton was a candidate, and was expelled from the CPSA.

Bunting tried to soften the impact of the new slogan by talking of a Workers and Peasants Republic and denying that this would lead to a 'black dictatorship.' At the party conference he allowed 'full discussion for the sake of arriving at an understanding but in compliance with the new Comintern statutes he disallowed amendments or a reference back for further discussion (letter to Roux, 9 January 1929). In effect, he implemented a policy which ensured his own destruction and which crippled the CPSA.

Party activities did not change much after the Native Republic slogan was ratified by conference. Party members had been organizing in the smaller towns and villages and this continued. The CPSA did not organize peasant unions, and could not pay 'attention to the poor agrarian whites' as demanded by the Comintern. Then, in June 1929, before the shift to the 'left' was enforced, the CPSA scored its greatest success in the reserves. Bunting stood as parliamentary candidate in the Transkei. With Rebecca Bunting and Gana Makabeni he conducted a three month campaign, addressed crowds of thousands, and won a number of recruits to the CPSA. The three communists faced continual police harassment, and were charged on several occasions under the Native Administration Act, (which made it an offence for any person to incite racial hostility). Despite administrative pressure Bunting secured enough votes to save his deposit and that alone was a notable success.

At Manzana, Bunting started the League of African Rights, which he described as a 'designedly innocuous organization with the preservation and extension of the Native franchise and universal free education as the prime objective.' A national conference was planned for December with leading members of the ANC and ICU (as individuals and not in their official capacities) listed as sponsors. In a report to ECCI (undated) the secretary of the CPSA said the objective was to form local groups that would affiliate to the League and that the Party would maintain its full independence. There was 'no danger of the Party fusing with reformist organizations or losing its identity or its leadership of the mass struggle.'

The participation of native leaders and the affiliation of national organizations has been sought, and would be welcome if it were forthcoming, but primarily we are appealing to the native masses to unite in opposition to the Hertzog bills. It must be remembered that existing native organizations are weak and have a very small membership. The main mass

of natives throughout the country being completely unattached politically. To sweep into political activity the vast mass of unorganized natives is the main task of the League.

He said the League, which allowed the CPSA to extend its influence, would emulate the British Chartists by launching a 'Petition of African Rights' embodying 'popular demands of the democratic revolution.' This was not a reformist gesture and the 'reformist' leaders were fighting the petition and boycotting it. The party was promoting the slogan *Mayibuye!* (Return to us our country!) and would organize meetings and mass demonstrations., improving the Party's ability to resist moves by the government to introduce drastic legislation and possible banning.

ECCI was not moved and insisted that the League be dissolved. Douglas and Molly Wolton, the main proponents of the Comintern's slogan left for Moscow in July 1929 and claimed there that the existing Party leadership was reformist and tinged with white racism. On their return they demanded change. The CPSA was not revolutionary enough; it lagged behind mass discontent; it should not support reformists like Gumede or petty bourgeois nationalist bodies like the ICU and the ANC. The party had to 'strive to organize mass actions of the peasants,' linking such actions to an 'Independent Native Republic,' and the confiscation of all the land (Simons, pp.438-40).

A Case of Political Suicide

It is not my intention to provide a history of the CPSA, but only to trace the effect of Comintern policy on the CPSA in those crucial years when careful organizational work might have built a mass movement. However, the course was set by ECCI. Isolated and torn by internal squabbling, the CPSA launched an anti-pass campaign for Dingane's Day (16 December) 1930 under slogans such as that coined by Josiah Ngedlane, a party activist:

Freedom or Death. Let us go forward in the spirit of Dingaan, Makana and Moshesh to free our country from white imperialism.

The campaign failed. Approximately 150 passes were burned in Johannesburg; 300 in Potchefstroom; 400 in Pretoria, and 3,000 in Durban. In Durban, however, the slogan 'Freedom or Death' became reality when the party organizer Johannes Nkosi and three others were killed and twenty others seriously injured by police who came prepared for the skirmish and attacked the demonstrators. The party pressed on, saying the campaign was justified, and called for its

extension in locations, farms, mines and factories. The government banished party members, prohibited public gatherings, expelled organizers from towns. The CPSA was isolated, the Woltons resigned and went to Britain, and party membership plummeted. Alongside this debacle, the ICU in Natal was decimated, and with the ANC exerting little influence, there was little opposition left in the country. Not until the Comintern reversed its policy in 1935 (a move decided in Moscow with little to do with conditions in South Africa) was the CPSA allowed to drop the Native Republic slogan. By this time its total membership in the country had fallen to 150.

[The Native Republic slogan was opposed, for different reasons, by persons who supported the left opposition in South Africa. Their history, and Trotsky's critical response to their arguments, will be discussed in the next issue of Searchlight South Africa].

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A TRIBUTE FROM SPARK (organ of the Workers Party of South Africa) on the death of S.P. Bunting, 1936.

The revolutionary movement has lost a valuable member. But in Bunting, South Africa has lost something more than a valuable member, something more than an honest revolutionary. It has lost a leader, a pioneer, a Bolshevik. And the Revolutionary Movement in South Africa, so poor both in quality and quantity, will find it difficult to replace a man of Bunting's calibre. Such men are rare.

He was one of the first to break not only with the Labour Party, but with Social Democracy; one of the first to hail the October Revolution in Russia, one of the first to form the Communist Party. And as an ardent Communist he had to fight, and did fight, enemies of every possible kind — Imperialism and Capitalism and their lackeys; the Labour Party; anarchists of various brands inside the Communist Party; and last, but not least, white chauvenism. When, moreover, he had succeeded in building up a Communist Party, he was deposed and expelled...for opposing as unsuitable the slogan of 'Native Republic.'

Bunting will always remain a living symbol in the South African Revolutionary Movement. For none in South Africa was so beloved as Bunting by the Bantu workers and peasants, who, thanks to him, were drawn into the movement. It was they who most fully appreciated his great loving heart, the true qualities of his character, his crystal-clear honesty as a man and as a revolutionary. This is not the time to recall his faults and mistakes. Who among us is faultless and which of us does not make mistakes?

The memory of Bunting will remain with us.

S.P. BUNTING AT THE 6th CONGRESS OF THE COMINTERN, 1928

SESSION: 23 JULY 1928

Comrades, I think it would be a good practice if the speaker announced himself, because we cannot hear from the chair who is speaking. Therefore, I begin this practice by announcing my own name which is S.P. Bunting, from South Africa.

I notice that all the speakers have been talking about Com. Bukharin's speech and saying 'we are being neglected', etc. I suppose we are going to say the same thing on behalf of South Africa, for we too think our affairs are important. Africa as a whole is a continent with 120 million inhabitants and I cannot say much about most of it, but I want to speak on the proletarian character of the subject races of South Africa; and here we also say that Comrade Bukharin's speech and in fact the Communist International literature in general, treats these races to a certain extent in somewhat Cinderella-like fashion. We know the theoretical importance given to the colonial movement, and I will not speak of that at the moment; but as regards the proletarian value of the African workers I agree with Comrade Ford that to neglect the value of the Negro proletariat is a very great mistake. The fighting strength after all of the colonial masses, for any objective, consists very largely in their working class, particularly in a country like ours where a native movement, proletarian or nationalist for that matter, has no chance for the present of being an armed movement, it must depend on its industrial weapons, on strikes and on political struggles and little more for the present, It is in the field of industrial strikes that the greatest militancy is shown and the greatest power exercised in South Africa as in India too, I think.

Of course, the bulk of the negro population of Africa, even of South Africa, is not proletarian; [just as the peasants are more numerous than the poroletariat] in most countries, e.g. in the USA. But in Africa, at any rate, far more of them are exploited than just those who could be strictly called working class. In West Africa, peasants nominally independent, are exploited in respect of their rubber. In South Africa again, our large 'peasantry' is continuously drawn upon to supply workers for the mines and other large industries or for the

farms. These workers are peasantry part of the time and workers part of the time so that the working class is really very widespread, and it is also by far the STRONGEST section of the native population when it comes to action.

Now if, as is said, as we have always been told, imperialism batters on colonies, has more power than ever before because it has the colonies as a mainstay to supply the super-profits, as fields of investment, as places of refuge for capital which cannot find sufficient profit in the home country, then it must follow that equally important is the labour which provides this profit. As a matter of fact, of course, both in our colony and others, there are capitalist enterprises of great importance. In our country the gold industry is a very first class capitalist development. It is vitally necessary to capitalism, and not least in times of war. It is not a case of 'backward industry' in any way. It is highly developed. An iron and steel industry is also about to be launched and other big enterprises of all kinds show that ours is not just a medieval, feudal, peasant country. The power of labour therefore, is of very great importance. I do not know if we ought to say that the colonial section of the labour movement in general is the most important, but I think we can say that it is the most important weapon for the overthrow of capitalist rule. Moreover, colonial labour is responsible for a great deal of the unemployment in the 'home' countries of the capitalists. All sorts of causes are assigned, but one cause is that industries have been moved from the home countries to colonial countries, and that is one of the reasons why unemployment increases in the home country. At any rate, this backward labour, or if you like, this 'uncivilized' labour as it is called in our country, may play as important a part in the attack on capitalism as the highly civilized labour, of e.g. the United States.

Of course the native labour movement in South Africa is only an infant movement; but it is a good, healthy, lusty infant, very responsive to our propaganda and is growing fast. Our native workers are true-to-type proletarians, as worthy of being called workers as anybody in the world. In spite of the special disabilities placed upon them as a subject race, nevertheless, I say these are as real proletarians as any in the world, they are as nakedly exploited, down to the bone; the relationship of master and servant, employer and employed, exploiter and exploited, is as clear and classical as it could be. The first native strike in Johannesburg was a strike of 'sanitary bucket boys', i.e. engaged in the most degraded 'kaffirs' work'. In a native school which we are carrying on in Johannesburg, we use the *Communist Manifesto* as a text book, reading it with workers who are actually workers in the factories, mines, workshops, stores, etc. we read the well known characterizations of capitalism and the proletariat in the

Communist Manifesto, and the pupils always agree, after arguing and stu[d]ying about what they have read, how completely and correctly every single characterization applies to themselves: 'we recognize', they say, 'how we have become workers, how we have been driven off the land, onto the industrial markets, how we are deprived of family life, of property, of culture, etc.' exactly as in the history of the European countries. And they have the advantage over the European workers, that they are not sophisticated with petty bourgeois or imperialist ideas (except religion, and even that is not native to them); which all helps greatly in the work of making them revolutionary. And in fact the trade unions which we have formed are applying to the Red International of Labour Unions to be admitted to that organization. It is true that the ICU which hitherto has been a strong union of natives in South Africa, is affiliated to Amsterdam; but the Communist Party, finding this body of no use owing to its reformist leadership, has found it necessary to form fresh trade unions which have already been baptized in the fire of strikes, and which are ready to apply to the Red International for affiliation.

I should like in all modesty to point out that the Communist International gives insufficient attention to this aspect of the colonial masses. I was reading the draft programme of the Communist International, where it says that there are two main revolutionary forces: the 'proletariat' in the countries at home, and the 'masses' in the colonies. I beg to protest against this bald distinction. Our workers are not ONLY mere 'masses', they are as truly proletarians as any in the world. The draft programme assigns to the colonies the one task of revolting against imperialism. All good and well. I may say that such nationalist revolt as we have had so far in South Africa has not been on the part of the black workers, but on the part of the Dutch Nationalists. The Dutch Nationalists have had their fling, and have made peace with Britain, and have agreed with a formula which gives them nominal independence; there is not much more to be expected from them. By all means let a nationalist movement carry on. But we can do more as a working class movement in South Africa. It is not good medical science to have one particular pill which you apply for all illnesses. Is it good politics to say that the function of every colony, irrespective of circumstances, is the same everywhere, and that its ONE AND ONLY TASK is to revolt against imperialism? What of the colonial proletariat, why is it that they are thus discussed? There is no reference in the draft programme, or in Comrade Bukharin's speech to the colonial proletariat, as such, to the class power of these colonial workers: as a class they are relegated to inactivity.

I was speaking to a comrade of the English Party, and advancing the view I am now advancing, and he said 'How can you talk like that?'

Look at the number of years of experience of capitalism and organization behind the British working class, which you have not got.' Agreed. But we are exploited down to the bone under the capitalist system and we have got to fight and [have the] determination to resist: what more do you want? We did not have to wait for capitalism to develop: it has been thrust upon us 'fully armed', fully developed.

Is not the distinction between European 'proletariat' and colonial 'masses' exactly the way our 'aristocracy of labour' treats the black workers? The 'prejudice' of the white worker is not that he wants to kill the black worker, but that he looks upon him not as a fellow-worker but as native 'masses'. The Communist Party has declared and proved that he is a working man as well like anyone else, and I want to bring that experience to the notice of the Communist International. If you will regard them also as workers, as proletarians, you will take a different view of the situation. We must abolish this public form of colour prejudice, or 'colour bar'. Uncouth, backward, illiterate, degraded, even barbaric you may call them if you like; they cannot read or write, most of them; but they work, they produce profit, and they organize and will fight. They are the great majority, they have the future in their hands, and they are going to rule, not only in the colonial countries, but in the world. We are going to see not 2 or 3% of non-European representatives in this Congress, but 80 or 90% representing the real strength of the entire colonial working class.

I might say that the Red International of Labour Unions seems to adopt a more matter of fact view of the colonial working class masses than the Communist International. It takes account of the facts and it invites the workers to join its ranks, as workers, in trade unions.

The Communist International is a chain, and the strength of a chain is the strength of its weakest link. Little parties like ours are links in the chain. We are not strengthened, but belittled in the way I have just mentioned. If our parties are weak, then they should be strengthened. Better communication is required. It will perhaps surprise you to know that until six months ago we have not had a letter (except for circulars) from the Communist International for five or six years. That is a thing which has to be attended to immediately. At any rate, we ask to be considered a little more as representing equally masses of workers, and not treated with, shall I say, a sort of step-motherly or scholastic contempt as representing mere shapeless 'masses'. When I came here an official of the Communist International said 'we are going to attack you.' That is rather a poor sort of reception to give to representatives elected by the vote of the party, in which there is a huge preponderance of natives. It is rather a poor reception to give to their representatives before anything has been

discussed to say, 'we are going to attack you.' We came here to take counsel together as to how we could strengthen each other. Certainly in our own party, whatever the differences between us, we do not treat each other like that.

We also want better communications, between the different sections of the CI. I could illustrate this in the case of several strikes. We had a shipping strike three or four years ago in South Africa, which affected also Australia, and to a certain extent Britain, and in which our party took the leading part. We had precisely no communication not only with the Communist International on the subject, but even with the British Party. The communication which requires to be perfected is quite as essential between party and party as it is between one party and the ECCI. I entirely endorse Comrade Murphy's remarks that the business of the CI Congress is not just for each Party to come here, as to a sort of father confessor, without reference to other parties; we are here above all to try and link up parties to each other. We parties *are* the Communist International, and as Comrade Murphy said, it is we parties between us who have to build up the leading forces in the world revolution. But there has been very little facility for that so far. A great deal more has got to be done.

Another thing with regard to Africa is that a very thorough study of African conditions is required. Out of that huge continent, the South African party is the only one represented here. At the last Congress I was at, there were representatives from Egypt and I believe there have been in the meantime representatives from West Africa. There is an enormous field of study in Africa. Conditions in South Africa are quite different from any other part of that continent. South Africa is owing to its climate, what is called a 'white man's country' where whites can and do live not merely as planters and officials, but as a whole nation of all classes, established there for centuries, of Dutch and English composition. There are also differences elsewhere, e.g. differences between two capitalist methods of administration — the English aloofness of the official who comes and goes for his term of office and has nothing in common with the people of the country; and the French method, which is rather to fraternize and assimilate. Also the differences between the 'eastern' and the 'western' methods of administration: the one driving the natives off the land, the other maintaining them on it. Such differences want a great deal more study than has so far been placed before the CI. I hope, when the next Congress is called, there will be representatives from every part of Africa, from North and South, East and West, who — far better than we — can put the needs of the whole of the population of Africa. The other day I was asked here of our natives: 'are they Dutch?' There was recently in the *Inprecorr*, one of the more as-

tounding articles on South Africa which could only be called a fairy tale. It was full of the most crass misstatements about conditions there. Such things tend to discredit our official organ, if it can be called such. The answer might be 'Why don't you send correct articles instead?' We have done so in the past, but we have too few people for much of this work, we are very busy, our proletariat, even possessing all the qualities I have given to it, is mostly not literate; and we must be forgiven. Nevertheless study and knowledge is required.

Again, in the attention which is given to the colonial masses we should not forget the achievements of the white working class in South Africa, for they have conducted big strikes of a quite revolutionary nature and I think are capable of carrying these out again. Both sides can contribute very powerfully to the weakening of British imperialism.

We in South Africa are at present a vulnerable link in the Communist chain. If we are properly strengthened and developed, and if we are treated as we think we deserve to be, we hope to become a strong link in the chain and thus be able to take advantage of the fact that countries like ours are also vulnerable spots in the imperialist chain. We could do a great deal in the weakening and breaking of one of those links of capitalism just as the Russian link is shown broken on the globe in the famous cover of the old *Communist International*.

DECLARATION BY SOUTH AFRICAN DELEGATE

(Comrade S.P. Bunting) 7.8.1928

Comrades, during the debate on the ECCI Report a couple of weeks ago Comrade Dunne of the American Party attacked a speech I had made on South Africa as a 'social-democratic' speech which should be sternly repudiated by the Comintern. He was followed in similar strain by Comrade Bennett [Petrovsky], of the English Party, who is secretary of the Anglo-American section of the ECCI in Moscow. I was puzzled at the time to know what I had said which could be called social-democratic but I let it pass, presuming that that term, grave and sinister as is its political import today, had nevertheless in this instance been used as we have no doubt all know it to be used occa-

sionally among polemicising comrades, as a mere term of abuse of one's opponents — there being a particular matter now awaiting debate between the South African Party and the Anglo-American Committee for the ECCI.

It is only a day or two ago that I happened to notice in the *Inprecorr* a report of Comrade Dunne's speech from which I discovered for the first time that his attack had been due to a complete misunderstanding of my speech and one which I think would have been impossible if he had given the speech a fair hearing throughout, although I may be myself to blame in that, for I am not a very clear speaker.

I was remarking on the absence of delegates from West Africa or any other part of Africa except South Africa, and was regretting this because, to quote my stenogram,

Conditions in South Africa are quite different from any other part of the continent. South Africa is, owing to its climate, what is called a 'white man's country' where whites can and do live, not merely as planters and officials but as a whole nation of all classes, established there for centuries, of Dutch and English composition.

This statement of fact — for it is a fact that the climate of South Africa, unlike that of most other parts of the African continent, is one admirably suited to Europeans — let Comrades Dunne and Bennett come out and test it for themselves — was distorted by these comrades into an advocacy of 'White South Africa' in the chauvinist sense of a claim that the whites have a right to possess the country as against the Negroes, and to dominate over and oppress them. It is inconceivable that a South African Communist could express such a view, the very view we have combated for the last thirteen years; and it is only due to our Party, to the masses black and white of South Africa, to the CI and its sections, to all who may read the report of this Congress, and to me personally, that the attack by these two comrades should in turn be sternly repudiated and disavowed.

Our Party has had the further misfortune to be referred to by Comrade Bukharin in a somewhat similar way. In his concluding speech in the same debate, he referred to signs of anti-Negro chauvinism in the American Party, and he seemed to imply that at a meeting of some commission, he had heard a similar charge brought against the South African Party. If such a charge was made it must have been many years ago, while the question was still a matter of debate with us; for if any Party in the world has as the very centre of its activities fairly and squarely fought, conquered and killed the dragon of chauvinism, until today nine-tenths of its membership are Negroes, its message of emancipation is the message most eagerly heard of by all

Negroes, it has formed numerous Negro trade unions and further has just lately succeeded in amalgamating white and black unions in one industry into one union—‘for the first time in history’ as was cabled to the *London Times*—then that party is the South African Party. Can any other Party show a record like that? Once more I think it is due to all concerned that the wrong impression given by Comrade Bukharin’s speech [should also be corrected].

SPEECH, 20.8.28

ON THE KUSSINEN THESIS

Comrades, I should like to have spoken on colonial or at least on South African matters in general but in the limited time must confine myself to a controversial matter seriously affecting our South African Party.

There is a proposal in the Negro Sub-Commission, presided over by Comrade Bennett, that the Party should put forward as its immediate political slogan ‘an independent native South African Republic, based on the workers’ and peasants’ organization, with full safeguards and equal rights for all national minorities’; also that the country and land be returned to the black population; a native national revolutionary movement to be developed by the Party in support. This formulation is opposed by the majority of our Party, mainly for practical reasons, which are very strong. But we may first consider the more theoretical basis of the formula. This is stated in a draft resolution submitted to the Sub-Commission as follows: ‘The national question in South Africa, which is based upon the agrarian question, lies at the foundation of the revolution in South Africa.’

Unfortunately we Party members in South Africa are so much occupied with practical work, which we have to do in our spare time only, that we have no time for study, so that we are only amateurs when it comes to theorizing. But according to our experience, it seems possible to harp too exclusively on the national chord in colonial matters. In an earlier debate on the ECCI resolution, I ventured the opinion, in effect, that it might not be universally true that the chief function of a colonial people was to engage in a national

struggle (predominantly agrarian in character) against foreign imperialism and for independence; and that in South Africa, at any rate, the class struggle of the proletariat (chiefly native) appeared more capable of achieving the task – in effect, that the class struggle there is more revolutionary and effective than the national or racial struggle for the same ends.

It is often said that the colonial thesis of the II Congress is authority to the contrary, but I do not find anything to that effect in the thesis. It says of course, that we should 'support the revolutionary movement among the subject nations and in the colonies...THE FORM OF SUPPORT TO BE DETERMINED BY A STUDY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS.' And it does also say:

There are to be found in the dependent countries two distinct movements, one is the bourgeois democratic nationalist movement, with a programme of political independence under the bourgeois order, and the other is the mass action of the poor and ignorant peasants and workers for their liberation from all forms of exploitation. The former endeavours to control the latter...but the CI and the Parties affected must struggle against such control and help to develop CLASS consciousness in the working masses of the colonies. For the overthrow of foreign capitalism, which is the first step towards revolution in the colonies, the co-operation of the bourgeois revolutionary elements is useful. But the first and foremost task is the formation of Communist Parties which will organize the peasants and workers and lead them to the revolution and to the establishment of Soviet Republics...

This is so even where there is a bourgeois democratic nationalist movement in existence, and bourgeois nationalist revolutionary elements to co-operate with. Until recently, nearly all subsequent Communist theory on colonial revolution that I have seen has been based on the assumption that such a movement and such elements are in existence in every colony; the present draft colonial thesis is one of the first to deal on a separate basis with colonies, like most African colonies, where they are not.

In general, in the case of all national and colonial governments, the II Congress thesis says:

The CI must establish relations with those revolutionary forces that are working for the overthrow of imperialism in the countries subjected politically and economically. THESE TWO FORCES MUST BE CO-ORDINATED if the final success of the world revolution is to be guaranteed...[And again] The policy of the CI on National and colonial questions must be chiefly to bring about a UNION OF THE PROLETARIAN AND WORKING MASSES of all nations and countries for a JOINT REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE leading to the overthrow of capitalism, without which national inequality and oppression cannot be abolished...Real national

freedom and unity can be achieved by the proletariat only...by the overthrow of the bourgeoisie...The real essence of the demand for equality is based on the demand for the abolition of classes...The colonial and subject countries have been taught by bitter experience that there can be no salvation for them outside of a union with the revolutionary proletariat

(which includes presumably the revolutionary proletariat of the imperialist race in the colony itself).

And in African colonies (including South Africa) there is as a rule no native bourgeoisie, and consequently no question of the 'two distinct movements' referred to in the II Congress Thesis; there is only the question of 'organizing the peasants and workers and leading them to the revolution and to the establishment of Soviets.' Put in another way, the class struggle is practically coincident and simultaneous with the national struggle. The object is the same in each case—the removal of all oppression (including all special oppression applying to members of the subject race as such) and the gaining of liberation and power for workers and peasants; the parties are substantially the same, and the weapons and methods of the struggle also. Hence there is no very great point of virtue, even where there is no exploited European class present (as there is in South Africa) in emphasizing the national aspect of the struggle as MORE FUNDAMENTAL than the class aspect; rather the reverse is the case. The two struggles would be the same even if the oppressing class were of the same nationality except that there is an additional element of revolt when the oppressor is a 'foreign devil'. As the draft colonial thesis of this Congress says of such colonies: 'The task of the class struggle of the workers and other toiling masses COINCIDE in the main with the tasks of the national anti-imperialist liberation struggle.'

Now a further complication arises in South Africa from the presence of a WHITE exploited working and peasant class as well as a black one—a minority of one in six perhaps, but still one that cannot be ignored and in which (as in the trade unions) the CP has a good deal of foothold. This minority too rises against the bourgeoisie and imperialists, sometimes in a very spirited and revolutionary way, more so indeed than any modern native national movement hitherto, although it has no RACIAL oppression to fight against. As in the case of the natives, its militant character appears chiefly on its proletarian rather than its agrarian side.

The South African native masses, in their turn, are being rapidly proletarianized and organized as a working class. The native agrarian masses as such have not yet shown serious signs of revolt: indeed, as the Draft Colonial Thesis of the Congress says: 'In those

countries the question of the agrarian revolution does not by far constitute the axis of the colonial revolution.' At any rate a live agrarian movement has still to be organized in South Africa.

What is the result of these peculiar factors? It is that both black and white exploited are fighting against the same masters. They both fight chiefly (at present) as proletarians, and the natives have the extra stimulus of fighting against masters who to them are a foreign oppressor race, whereas the whites have this to a lesser degree only (i.e. as 'South Africans' or 'Dutch' against 'British', overseas or 'cosmopolitan' financiers). The white workers, enjoying privileges and higher wages, are, however, disinclined at present to regard the black workers as comrades in the fight,

What is the duty of the CP in these circumstances? Must it not be the same as ever, or more than ever, according to the II Congress thesis? 'These two forces',—the workers of imperialist race and those of the subject race, or the 'home movement and the colonial movement—must be co-ordinated' for a 'joint revolutionary struggle': 'uniting the various units of the future proletarian parties', and also overcoming the distrust of the subject races for the workers of the imperialist races.

The draft colonial thesis of this Congress in reference to South Africa and other colonies puts it thus (paragraph 12)

:

The most important task here consists in the joining of the forces of the revolutionary movement of the white workers with the class movement of the colonial workers, and the creation of a revolutionary united front with that part of the native national movement which really conducts a revolutionary liberation struggle against imperialism.

But this task is no longer so easy. It is no longer a mere case of the national and the class movements coinciding as it were automatically. Here the white exploited are of the very race which the native exploited are, as nationalists, fighting against. It is almost inevitable therefore that the nationalist movement of the natives will clash with their class movement.. Similarly the white exploited, finding their race being attacked AS SUCH by a native nationalist movement, are predisposed by their superior economic and political position to side with the masters nationally and forget their class struggle. Special tactics and manoeuvres have to be adopted to prevent this and to harmonize the national and class movements in this special case, devoted principally to neutralizing and correcting white labour chauvinism (or, occasionally, native 'chauvinism'). And if there is danger of a clash, the question how far it is advisable to play on the national chord, whether the advantages exceed the disadvantages, whether

the same result or better can be obtained with less risk, becomes important.

Not only have we no native bourgeoisie or bourgeois national movement, but we have in South Africa no really nationalist movement at all of the kind contemplated in the draft resolution of the Negro Sub-Commission; certainly no movement for a native republic as such has been observable. The African National Congress, which the resolution wants us to boost up, is a moribund body, it has had its day. In any case its demands were not nationalist demands proper, but such as the following reflecting the poverty stricken conditions of the native masses: removal of all special race oppression and discrimination, land and more land, equality with whites, equal votes, equal education, equal treatment, rights and opportunities everywhere. It is inclined to ignore the weapon of the native proletarian movement as such, and has usually sought redress for grievances by sending deputations to the King of England, which of course have resulted in nothing. Thus, the existing 'nationalist' movement for equality, etc., only demands the same things as the Communist movement (proletarian and agrarian) does, with the extra stimulus supplied by national or race patriotism—but from observation of facts we believe the class stimulus is a greater stimulus even to the native masses, it has actually stimulated greater sacrifices and devotion already, and it has the advantage of gaining, instead of perhaps forfeiting the alliance of the white workers. The CP is itself the actual or potential leader of the native national movement; it makes all the national demands that the national body makes, and of course much more, and it can 'control' nationalism with a view to developing its maximum fighting strength. It can and will respond to the entire struggle of all the oppressed of South Africa, natives in particular.

Some reference to the actual work of our Party seems necessary to explain the foregoing. Incidentally, not much interest seems to be taken in this by the drafters of the resolution, any success seems only grudgingly acknowledged, we had to get an appreciative paragraph specially inserted in the draft; concentration of interest on a nationalist movement seems to involve a lack of interest in the day to day struggle against race oppression itself. (It is the same in the draft CI programme, and we have asked for a clause to be inserted in that, laying down that CPs must struggle in the colonies against race or colour discrimination and for absolute equality).

What have we done so far? Our work among the native masses, our chief activity, conducted so far mainly as a working class movement (although an agrarian movement will be developed as fast as we can get contact especially with the distant and not easily accessible native reserves) is limited only by our ability to cope with it. We have

1,750 members of whom 1,600 are natives, as against 200 a year ago, and we are adding to that and also rapidly organizing militant native trade unions which have learnt to conduct strikes. We are also combatting and slowly overcoming white labour chauvinism, which we find yields when confronted with organized masses of native fellow workers face to face. We have put through joint strikes of white and black which were victorious, also an amalgamation of white and black unions into one, an unprecedented thing in South Africa. As for the native nationalist movement, though it is somewhat dead and alive, we pay it a good deal of attention and whenever we see any life in it we apply United Front tactics as per the draft colonial thesis. Thus, after years of preparatory effort, we have recently begun to reap substantial success which will continue provided we can find the manpower to garner the harvest. Native workers and some peasants are pouring into the Party in preference to joining the purely native bodies, whether national or industrial, which have let them down and fallen into the hands of the bourgeoisie. They fully appreciate the 'vulgar Marxist' slogan of 'Workers of the World Unite', of joint action by black and white labour against the common enemy; and at the same time they see that the CP sincerely and unreservedly espouse their national cause as an oppressed race. (Recently, in the wilds of Basutoland, we found a well thumbed copy of Bukharin's *ABC of Communism*, brought there by an old pupil of ours and now widely read among the members of the 'Plebeian Party' of Basutoland, which seeks affiliation with the CP).

Such are the surrounding circumstances in which a native republic slogan would be launched, and we consider it would, not in theory perhaps, but certainly in practice, arouse white workers' opposition as unfair to the minority, and would thereby not only emphasize the contradiction between national and class movements, but put the whole native movement at a great disadvantage unnecessarily and without compensating advantage. It would not avail, when such suspicions are aroused, to put them off with smooth, 'empty liberal phrases,' to the effect that 'national minorities will be safeguarded,' especially when no definition is given of these safeguards — for that matter no definition is given of the precise meaning of 'native republic' itself. But expressions like 'South Africa is a black country,' the return of the country and land back to the black population, 'South Africa belongs to the native population,' etc., though correct as general statements, do invite criticism by the white working and peasant minority who will have to fight with the black workers and peasants if the bourgeoisie is to be overthrown. They certainly seem to indicate a black race *dictatorship*: they either are an exaggeration or they are calculated to be generally understood as one — and for

the purpose of overcoming white labour misgiving—that comes to the same thing. If the white working class feels, from the apparent exclusiveness of the phrase ‘native republic’, that the intention is to ride roughshod over it, it will not avail to say: ‘it is all right, it does not mean that.’ They will retort rightly or wrongly: ‘Under a native government built on a nationalist or racial foundation and thus biased against whites even though proletarians, any ‘safeguards’ of the white workers and peasants would go to the winds at the first clash. Who will have the power to stop it? The example of the Ukraine etc. is quoted. But the racial gulf between black and white in South Africa has no parallel there, and besides, the influence and power of the Soviet Union to stand by and see fair play makes all the difference; there was a case of a former empire now turned into a proletarian state, voluntarily liberating its subject nations and having the power to see such liberation through on such lines as a proletarian state would naturally approve. And as regards disposal of the land, the draft resolution does not even speak of safeguards. As the slogan will certainly be interpreted by the exploited whites, as it has indeed been interpreted by ourselves (so much so that its defenders have defended just that interpretation of it) it means that the exploited whites are to become in their turn a subject race, that the native republic in spirit if not in letter will exclude all whites, and that the land without exception will belong to the natives—not as a matter of the verbal drafting of a resolution but as a matter of fact. The slogan will have to be redrafted on less nationalist lines if it is to avoid giving that impression.

Of course, no one denies that *the immense majority must and will exercise its power as such*, from which it follows that a minority of the exploited is also entitled to its proportionate voice and share in power and land. The ‘native republic’ is defended, indeed, as a mere expression of *majority rule*, but it obviously goes beyond that, and the little difference makes all the difference when it comes to combating white chauvinism: it handicaps propaganda to that effect. It may be asked, why are we so concerned about the fate of a comparative handful of whites. It is certainly strange that we of the CPSA, who are accustomed at home to work almost exclusively among and for the native masses, and who are always attacking white chauvinism, should find ourselves obliged here in Moscow to take up unwonted cudgels for the white minority. But the reason is not any special love for the aristocrats of labour, or any chauvinist preference for the whites, as is superficially and malignantly suggested in the draft resolution, but first the need for labour solidarity and second a true valuation of the forces at our disposal. Our infant native movement, any revolutionary native movement, lives and moves in a perpetual

state bordering on illegality; on the slightest pretext it can be suppressed either by prosecution or legislation or by massacre or pogrom. We are therefore always looking for allies, or rather for shields and protections behind which to carry on; and even the *bare neutrality*, much more the occasional support of the white trade unions, etc. is of incalculable value to us. It undoubtedly helps us to avoid being driven underground, which in a country like South Africa, where we are well known, where there are no crowded masses to hide behind or among, would make our work almost impossible, and besides, in a political agitation for liberation of the mass of the people, publicity is a very valuable weapon.

We have always instinctively felt this need of white labour support, but it is only when threatened by this slogan with the loss of it, that we realize how very useful it is to us, and how impossible it is to agree with the defenders of the slogan who say 'To hell with white labour support, damn the white workers.' It is easy to sit here and, on limited experience of our local atmosphere, to lay down a policy and say 'It will be all right, you don't understand, this slogan will not alienate, it will attract the white workers.' We who would have to go back and preach it, we who have had all these years to drive a composite team, to work in both camps, black and white, who have learnt the art of doing it on uncompromising Marxian lines by long and hard experience of the enormous difficulties arising out of this very race question, the crucial question of South African labour — on a matter like this we must be heard with respect. We say that the white workers are unquestionably going to be alienated by the present slogan and that instead of support from white labour we are thus quite likely going to get its hostility and Fascist alliance with the bourgeoisie. This in turn will also encourage the government to persecute and the courts to convict everyone who preaches the slogan — we have had many successful legal contests on native propaganda, but the law has now been so tightened that we probably cannot get away with this slogan as a slogan, and thus our movement may not be just 'driven underground' but closed down. Indeed a further sequel may be violent race hostilities, a bloody struggle for mutual extermination or subjection between whites and blacks as races, and what is worse, between the white exploited and the black exploited, a struggle in which the class struggle is completely obscured and forgotten, and in which the unarmed side courts defeat — and all for the sake of a formula which will, as far as we can judge, not increase our work or our success in the present weak stage of our Party — it may be different when we are much stronger.

Our present policy is endorsed by good authority. The amendment of the CPSU to the ECCI thesis of Comrade Bukharin for instance says:

53. The Congress observes a growth of Communist influence in South Africa. The Congress imposes the obligation upon all Communists to take up as their central tasks the organization of the toiling Negro masses, the strengthening of Negro trade unions and the fight against white chauvinism. The fight against foreign imperialism in all forms, the advocacy of complete and absolute equality, strenuous struggle against all exceptional laws against Negroes, determined support for the fight against driving the peasants from the land, to organize them for the struggle for the agrarian revolution, while at the same time strengthening the Communist groups and parties — such must be the fundamental task of the Communists in these countries.

There is nothing here about a 'Native Republic.'

The draft of programme, English edition p.563 (1) *ad fin* lays down that

in colonies and semi-colonies where the working class plays a more or less important part and where the bourgeoisie has already crossed over to the camp of the avowed counter-revolution, or is crossing over because of the development of the mass proletarian and peasant movements (and as we propose to add, in colonies, e.g. in Africa, where no native bourgeoisie exists, but where the main mass of natives is being proletarianized the CP must steer a course for the hegemony of the proletariat and for the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry which will ultimately grow into the dictatorship of the working class. In such countries, the CP must concentrate its efforts mainly upon creating broad mass proletarian organizations (trade unions) and revolutionary peasant unions, and upon drawing up demands and slogans directly affecting the working class. It must propagate the idea of the independence of the proletariat as a class which on principle is hostile to the bourgeoisie, a hostility which is not removed by the possibility of temporary agreements with it. It must imbue the masses with and develop among them the idea of the hegemony of the working class; advance and at the proper moment apply the slogan of Soviets of Workers and Peasants' Deputies.

Here, too, there is nothing about a native republic.

It is worth while also to quote the views of Comrade Lozovsky in the Negro Worker of 15th July, page 5, which recall the language of the 2nd Congress:

The Negro worker must understand that the racial question will be solved together with the social question. Real equality and fraternity of

workers of all colonies will be forged in the joint struggle against capitalism.

The Negro workers of the USA, Africa, etc., will achieve equality with the white workers only through the organized struggle against the whole system of capitalist oppression.

After long consideration and having heard all that is said for the draft resolution, and in view of the special complications conditioning Communist progress in South Africa, we are at present, while standing for proletarian equality and majority rights and all that that implies, against the CREATION of any special special nationalistic slogan at all for South Africa, except of course the liberation of the native people from all race oppression and discrimination, and separation from the British Empire.

[These documents are taken from the original stenographic transcription at the conference in 1928, with corrections in Bunting's handwriting. Two sentences in our copy are missing and we have reluctantly used the Inprecorr report to fill the gap. These are printed in square brackets. The editors have substituted the letter 'z' for 's' in words like 'organization' to conform with contemporary practice. No other changes have been made. Extracts were printed in Edward Roux's *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography*, published by the author, Cape Town, 1944. Only 500 copies were printed. Roux also reprinted the tribute from Spark.]

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TWO LINES WITHIN THE TRADE UNIONS: A BRIEF REVIEW

More than 700 delegates from the COSATU and NACTU trade union federations, as well as from non-affiliated unions, met in Johannesburg in March this year to consider ways of countering the attack on the trade unions embodied in the Labour Relations Act (LRA) and from the employers. According to the communique issued at the end of the conference, 'delegate after delegate emphasized the need for united action against the backdrop of increasing state repression and attacks from employers'. The statement continued:

The summit transcended the differences existing between the various unions attending. While recognizing the different histories in the traditions and policies of the unions attending, the over-riding objective was always to emphasize the need for unity in action.

While delegates focussed on the immediate issues of state repression and the employers' offensive, the international political background to this conference was set by the turn of the Gorbachev regime in the USSR towards a settlement with capital over southern Africa, involving discussions behind closed doors between the African National Congress (ANC) and the great powers. (See the article 'Thieves in the Thieves' Kitchen' in this issue).

Since South Africa is governed in essence by a single capital located in the Oppenheimer empire, it is not surprising that the current process of political dialogue with the ANC (and therefore also, the South African Communist Party) was set in motion by this empire of capital, at least as far back as the Lusaka discussions of September 1985, and planned and prepared long before that. The relation of the working class to this international political process, and to the secret discussions of this empire of capital with the ANC/SACP, would be important under any circumstances. The question becomes all the more acute, given the leading place of the ANC and the SACP at the head of COSATU, the main trade union federation.

In this light, it is helpful to examine two documents relating to the South African trade union movement which were written in 1982, before the birth of COSATU. The first is from John Gaetsewe, general-secretary of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), based in London. SACTU was at that time little more than an exile rump promoting the political ends of the ANC and the SACP, with slender influence in the trade unions within South Africa. Today the

ANC and the SACP, then at odds with the main current, have captured the leading position in the trade unions, while tendencies which played a far more important part during the rise of the unions have been eclipsed. This is the significance of the second document, from Joe Foster, then general secretary of the Cape-based Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), which dissolved into COSATU. The standpoint of Foster and of FOSATU, then at the forefront of the struggle for unionization of the workers, has now largely been supplanted by that of SACTU and the SACP.

These documents, written in 1982, were replies to a discussion paper drawn up and circulated to a 'wide range of trade union bodies and individuals' by the International Department of the Labour Party in Britain, with a request for comments on the proposals that were outlined. (Labour Party, AF/1982/16). What is striking is the insistence by Gaetsewe in London, that all international contacts of workers' organizations in South Africa should be under the control of the ANC, through SACTU, as against the conviction of FOSATU (in the letter from Foster) that workers in South Africa required direct international worker contact through their unions, acting on their own behalf. Foster referred to a press release of October 1981 from FOSATU unions affiliated to the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF), in which these unions stated that they 'strongly favour fraternal contact between workers in South Africa and workers in other countries, at all levels, provided this is guided by the interests and requirements of the workers'.

Of these FOSATU unions in the metal industry, the strongest at that time was the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU), which later merged with other unions to form the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). The current general secretary of NUMSA, Moses Mayekiso, a former organizer of MAWU, was acquitted of treason charges in April along with four co-accused, after a powerful international campaign in their defence centred mainly in the trade unions. Foster had been secretary of the Western Province Motor Assemblies Workers' Union (WPMWU). These and three other black motor and metalworkers' unions played an 'important part in the establishment of FOSATU' in April 1979 (Webster, p.187). Characterized by an extensive system of shop stewards, plant-based negotiating procedures and a policy of non-racial membership, FOSATU rested on democratic election of worker leaders in the factories: conditions which 'allowed worker leaders to wield power' within the unions (Friedman, p.253).

As against Gaetsewe's insistence that the interests of the workers be subordinated to that of the ANC, the stand of Foster, FOSATU and the metalworkers' unions was hostile to control by any nationa-

list political party. FOSATU's stand, oriented towards political independence and international unity of the workingclass, was the main political casualty of the period of upsurge of 1984-87. Though they did not and could not 'make the townships ungovernable', as their rhetoric proclaimed, the ANC and the SACP did make the main body of the trade unions governable by their own politics: a crucial factor for power-broking in any future deal with capital. The process by which organizational unification of the trade unions during 1984-87 became the vehicle for their subordination to nationalist and Stalinist politics is a matter still awaiting study and analysis. FOSATU's inability to maintain its standpoint of working class independence, in the face of a powerful nationalist current rooted mainly outside the unions, remains a crucial question for any future Marxist politics in South Africa.

DOCUMENTS

(These are reproduced as far as possible as in the original).

1. SACTU.

38, Graham Street,
London N1 8JX.

International Department, Labour Party,
Att. Jenny Little.

6. 8. 82

Dear Friend,

re: your document from the Africa Sub-Committee on SA Trade
Unions.

The following are some comments on the paper. They are in short note form to facilitate matters but we could of course elaborate if required.

Page 2. para. 1. There are trade unions such as CUSA and the Media Workers which exclude whites and are thus not non-racial. Nonetheless we feel they deserve support since they are anti-apartheid.

Page 2. para 5. The most important reason for supporting the trade unions in South Africa is because they constitute an arm of the struggle against apartheid. In as far as they cooperate with and work towards the goal of national liberation led by the African National Congress, they deserve support. The SA Congress of Trade Unions in particular deserves such support because of its clear stand for national liberation. It should be borne in mind that the question of National Industrial Trade Unions of mass organizations etc. need

support and need fostering in SA. This too has always been SACTU's policy.

Page 2. para. 6 There have been many other calls for support of the struggle other than by the ICFTU. WCL, WFTU, ICATU, OATU, and Yugoslav TUs but to name a few international centres, have been even more prominent than the ICFTU.

Page 2. para 7. Material assistance has often been selective. Especially so has been the "aid" of the AFL-CIO, but such selectivity is not absent from the actions of ICFTU or TUC. Such selectivity is divisive.

Page 2. para 8. and onto page 3 and follows

Such visits are not a secret from the SA authorities. Why have such visits been kept secret from the liberation movement? Why have they appeared to be parallel contacts much in the same mould as parallel trade unions in SA? This creates suspicion and disunity and is not constructive. There should be no exchanges with SA except where such exchanges further the struggle of the SA people for liberation led by the ANC and SACTU. This necessitates, as a minimum, seeking and following the advice of SACTU in the trade union field. The movement in Britain must recognize the feeling of the Africans in SA against visits to South Africa as witness the reaction of the people against the recent football tour.

Yours sincerely,

John Gaetsewe, General Secretary

2. FOSATU

2 Goodhope Street
Bellville South
7530 Cape

Mrs Jenny Little
International Secretary, The Labour Party
150 Walworth Road
London SE 17 1JT

20th October 1982

Dear Ms Little,

Your letter of the 7th October refers.

We find it difficult to comment directly on the paper itself. We can however for your information, and we hope that this will assist you in your debate, state our policy in regards to overseas contacts. The following are policy resolutions adopted at our Inaugural Congress in 1979.

1. Congress resolves that:

FOSATU's main concern is with workers and their interests in South Africa. FOSATU will, therefore, independently decide what is in its best interests without being influenced or dominated by foreign organizations or Governments.

In dealing with international organizations FOSATU will be guided by the interests of South African workers, its own aims and objects as stated in its Constitution and the activities of those international organizations.

2. This Congress resolves: that FOSATU should strive to establish and assist its affiliates in the establishment of international worker contact so as to create common rights and conditions of employment.

In particular our immediate aim will be to establish working relationships between workers, shop stewards and unions working and organizing in multinational companies, subsidiaries of which are being organized by FOSATU affiliates.

Such activities will have as their focus worker contact but will be carried out with all due respects for the procedures laid down by national trade union centres and International Trade Secretaries.

It would be seen that the Press Statement of the 22/10/81 is consistent with the aforementioned policy and FOSATU therefore fully endorses it.

Should you require any further information please feel free to contact the writer.

Yours faithfully,

Federation Of South African Trade Unions

J. Foster, General Secretary

3. Press Release By FOSATU Unions Affiliated To The International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF), 22 October 1981

(This is the statement referred to by Foster in his letter to the Labour Party, as reproduced in the Labour Party's 'Advice Note' on 'Labour Movement Relations with South African Trade Unions', February 1983).

We strongly favour fraternal contact between workers in South Africa and workers in other countries, at all levels, provided this is guided by the interests and requirements of the workers. Visits to South Africa and visits overseas should involve not only top officials, but also plant-based worker representatives.

The aim of these visits should be to strengthen fraternal ties between organized workers in different countries and to carry forward

the struggle for workers in South Africa to win the same rights as have been won by workers in other countries.

Several visits to and from our unions have already taken place with shop stewards and union officials from Europe visiting unions and factories in South Africa and shop stewards and officials from our unions travelling to the USA and Europe. This contact has been valuable and will be encouraged in the future, provided it takes place in accordance with the above principles and guidelines.

Two other letters sent to the Labour Party in 1982 throw further light on the background to this defeat for the perspective of FOSATU. The president of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers in Britain, Terry Duffy, referred to 'tremendous pressure from the Communist Party in the U.K.' leading to cancellation of a visit to FOSATU unions in South Africa by members of the British section of the Metalworkers Federation. The general secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation in Britain, Bill Sirs, wrote of 'disgraceful statements being made by the Communists and the extreme left' in Britain against the proposed visit by the British trade unionists, 'who were going for the specific purpose outlined in the FOSATU guidelines...'

This was the period when SACTU, the ANC and the SACP were fighting for political survival against the perspective of FOSATU within the trade unions. At the FOSATU congress in April 1982, Foster made a major statement (endorsed as policy by the union) calling for 'a working class political position' different from that of the ANC and the SACP — a 'political presence for worker organization' that would concentrate on the antagonism between labour and capital as the 'very essence of politics' in South Africa. It was directed specifically against 'those who ask of workers their political support without allowing them the right to build their own organizations...' (in MacShane, et al, pp.156,153,150)

The SACP replied with a furious counter-attack. It understood Foster's (and FOSATU's) presumption as directed against itself as a 'political party of the working class'. In an article by 'Toussaint', the SACP claimed exclusive prerogative to represent the working class politically:

Dare FOSATU ignore this? And dare it ignore the confusion and division it will sow in the ranks of the workingclass if it sets up a new 'wor-

kers' movement' in competition with or alongside the still living Communist Party?

And dare it ignore the disruptive and divisive effect its 'workers' movement' may have on the premier force in the country, the African National Congress...? (Toussaint, p.46).

Dare FOSATU! This catches the authentic tone of the Vishynskys of South African politics. SACTU rounded on FOSATU in its exile journal, *Workers Unity* (April 1982), with the charge: 'Direct Links Stink!' Gaetsewe's argument was repeated in 1987 in a statement from the SACTU coordinator for Western Europe, Zola Zembe, demanding that 'there should be no affiliation' to the Friends of Moses Mayekiso Campaign, based in London, which played a central part in coordinating the international campaign within the unions leading to the release of Mayekiso and his comrades. SACTU instructed the National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO) in Britain that the Congress Movement does not endorse any such sectarian groupings. In addition this group launched the Campaign without any prior or subsequent consultation with SACTU, ANC or AAM [Anti-Apartheid Movement].

NALGO in turn condemned the Friends of Moses Mayekiso Campaign, on the grounds that 'by its refusal to consult with the Congress Movement' the campaign had aligned itself 'against the principles and policies of the progressive democratic movement in South Africa of which COSATU is a key participant' (in NALGO *Action on Southern Africa Bulletin* No.4). It escaped the authors of this comment that NUMSA, which elected Mayekiso as general secretary after his arrest, was the second biggest union in COSATU.

The release of Mayekiso and his comrades, despite SACTU's obstruction, was an important victory for the kind of international workingclass campaign advocated by Foster. Within South Africa, however, the defeat of FOSATU's project, following the counter-offensive of the SACP and the ANC, provides a lesson in the inability of revolutionary politics to emerge directly from the unions themselves.

Without endorsing the politics of Duffy and Sirs, or the strategy of the FOSATU leadership, it is clear that the uncritical politics of the left in many countries (especially Britain) played a part during the mid-1980s in isolating the more independent and international outlook of the FOSATU unions. The collapse of FOSATU's standpoint as the leading element in the unions, under a tremendous onslaught by nationalist and Stalinist politics, is thus partly also the responsibility of the international left. The workers' movement in South Africa has been the victim of romantic and thoughtless enthusiasm in

the way it has been greeted internationally, as well as of its own political weaknesses. In this matter, as in others, time is long overdue to proceed towards a form of politics that is critical, sober and revolutionary.

Waged against the hostility of the SACP, the ANC, SACTU and the AAM, the international campaign among workers for support of Mayekiso has been a practical step in this direction.

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REVIEW

Alex Callinicos, *South Africa between Reform and Revolution*, Bookmarks, 1988. 231 pp. £4.95

This set of five essays, four of them reprints, contains a large amount of information, conveniently gathered together in a short (and cheap) book. Covering the events of the 1970s and 1980s, and including background information on the political history of the country, it is no mean task to set the story down in this short space. But brevity is not a sufficient reason for recommending a book, and I tended to give the book some pluses and several minuses.

The pluses are important. Callinicos is not an uncritical supporter of the ANC and UDF; does not accept the spurious call of the 'Militant Workers Tendency' that socialists work as a 'loyal opposition' inside the ANC; and does not overburden his audience with adulation of all-things that emerge from the camp of the ANC\SACP. More than this, Callinicos is correct in his assessment of the ANC (or at least part of that movement's leadership) being prepared to compromise with capital in order to edge itself closer to the seat of power. Secondly, the author does not consign the workers to the second-class position given it by the 'liberation movements'. At times Callinicos appears to place too great a political burden on the trade unions, and he is not sensitive to the controls exerted on the trade union federation by the communist party, but he does accord them the significance that they merit.

And yet, the problems in the book are all too apparent. Despite Callinicos' obvious wide reading, the many errors in the text indicate that the writer has not kept pace with new historical research, and repeats errors (both on past and current events) that should not appear in a book. Is it possible that his party friends in the Socialist Workers Party cannot point out where he is wrong in fact.?

However, it can be argued that a popular book cannot avoid these pitfalls and I am demanding too much. But if this point is granted, the many crudities in the discussion – starting with assertions that feudal relations once held in the country – through to the statement that passes were extended to women for the first time by the Nationalists, are inexcusable. Has the author not read of the remarkable resistance movement of the women of Bloemfontein in 1913?

But the most serious criticism must be directed against the call, without preparation, for the formation of a new revolutionary movement in South Africa. What programme does the author propose for such a party? How is it to build its membership? What kind of party

is being proposed? And how is that party to operate under South African conditions?

In the short space of a review it is not possible to enter into a lengthy debate with Callinicos on many of these issues. However his statement that there has been an 'intellectual maturing of South African Marxism' (for which he quotes an assorted list of authors drawn from the school of Althusser, Poulantzas, and others), makes this reviewer wonder what kind of programme Callkinicos has in mind for the revolutionary party in South Africa. If his call leads to the formation of yet another splinter group, without roots in the country, or to a further crop of casualties, with a muddled progamme to boot, this appeal from Callinicos will only set the struggle back. Much more serious thinking is necessary before a Marxist party can be formed.

B. Oswin.

LETTER

From Gavin Williams, Fellow and Tutor in Politics and Sociology, Oxford.

I am flattered that my comments in a review should be singled out for attention in your opening editorial, but rather resent it being implied that I 'once believed that there was socialism in the erastern bloc, and now warn against working class leadership.' Whether the states established in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere are properly described as 'socialism' is a matter of definition. If they are not socialist, then socialism has yet to be put to the test. We need to know why alternative brands of socialism, or communism, will be different from what has hitherto been widely advertised under that label. I have never given support to the authoritarian regimes of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Nor do I warn against working class leadership (as opposed to claims to lead the working class). In the review you cite, I observe that 'In Europe, the organisations of the working class have historically been more committed to advancing and protecting democratic rights than have the parties of the bourgeoisie – and they have generally been more concerned to advance democracy than to bring about socialism.' And I argue that 'Socialists should be concerned to articulate a conception of socialism which gives primacy to democratic procedures, choices and accountability rather than to state planning.' Would you disagree?