

SOUTH AFRICA — THE STATE OF A NATION

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VIGILANCE AND THE NEED FOR A CRITIQUE

The transformation of South Africa in 1994 has evoked two very different responses in the press outside South Africa. The major response has been to speak in hyperboles of the change that, they claim, comes to a country only once in a millennium. This is a startling assertion that needs more attention. If it has been so radical a transformation there will have to be a major recasting of political theories on change in general and revolutionary change in particular. This is absurd. There has been no revolutionary change in South Africa and no need to rethink old theories of change.

The other response, particularly in the far left press, has been to condemn the African National Congress (ANC) for 'betraying the people'. This approach is also false. Despite suggestions by leaders of the ANC that they intended transforming social and economic relations in the country, it was always clear that they had little intention of introducing radical changes. The ANC, in the words of Nelson Mandela, was not a party but 'a government in waiting'. His aim, and that of his colleagues, was to take over the country and install an ANC-led administration within the framework of the existing society. This is precisely what has happened and only those who failed to understand the nature of the ANC could talk of 'betrayal'.

Equally misleading have been statements, again from a far-left group, this time in the US, that the world revolution is now dependent on the workers' movement in South Africa. This is a fantasy. There is no working-class political organization, and the workers have no revolutionary ideology. The scope for activity by the minuscule left-wing groups is severely limited and they know it. This is the hard reality and to suggest otherwise is downright misleading.

Finding our way between the extremes of these views is not easy but will be essential, not only for readers of *Searchlight South Africa*, but for the citizens of the country. In setting out an alternative view I do not wish to be simplistic. It must first be said that the transformation of the country is (and will be) a task that surpasses anything that has happened in the former colonial world. After three and a half centuries of repressive control in the sub-continent, of wars, conquest and dispossession, of rural impoverishment, industrial exploitation and race discrimination

that introduced the term *apartheid* to the world's dictionaries, it will be no easy task to reshape social relations.

There are other impoverished societies that are in far worse shape than South Africa. Their poverty, lack of social welfare and arbitrary political control mark them as pauper countries. Yet South Africa stands unique as a country with an advanced industrial base and obvious wealth and prosperity from which the vast majority were excluded as a matter of principle. Part of government policy was directed at reducing the black population to servility. The catalogue of measures designed to achieve this is printed on pp 14-15 and makes dreary reading but, because of its effect on generations to come, its consequences must be spelt out.

Education for blacks is in tatters and non-existent in many areas. What has survived the revolt of the schools in Soweto and elsewhere in 1976-77 is third rate and unable to serve the needs of the population in a modern state. Facilities for health care serves only a small portion of the African population and those that survived childhood are subject to diseases that have been virtually eliminated in the western world. Mental health care is scarce and stress related to trauma is barely covered — and this in a country in which the level of stress has been so high over so many years.

Housing is non-existent or crude for the vast majority — and where it does exist it is in segregated townships miles from the place of work. The existing housing stock, with small exceptions, is rudimentary and the townships in which they stand are slums, mostly without electricity or water borne sewage, without water in the houses and with minimal facilities for sport or leisure activities. Transport from these plague spots, essential for any employed person, is expensive and unreliable. Yet these built-up townships are like oases amidst the sprawling squatter camps that offer the barest shelter from inclement weather and are without basic amenities.

The situation in South Africa is one of unemployment or under-employment, of a predominantly unskilled work force and of starvation wages. Is it any wonder that the crime wave — said by the World Health Organisation to be the highest in the world except where war is raging — is totally out of control. Many regions are dominated by criminal gangs who leave a daily toll of rape, mugging and murder. This is so great that the daily press, already filled with tales of violence, do not carry accounts of most crimes. So it should be. There are more important events that need attention in the press and on television, but that does not make the crime go away, nor does it lead to easy methods of bringing the crime under control.

Yet the few possible solutions must lead to even greater problems. Only a massive injection of finance can set up the workshops and fac-

ories to offer employment. But such investment will mortgage the state to institutions that will further control the South African economy. Furthermore the introduction of such industry, if it is viable economically, can only provide employment for a small minority of those without work and cannot employ men and women who are illiterate and innumerate. Schooling will take years even if special methods are employed to speed the path to literacy for those who must be employed now. There are also problems that have to be faced in combining the resources of four separate school systems (one for whites, the others for blacks), with different syllabuses and buildings that are grossly unequal. Yet, despite the difficulties, when six thousand black pupils were bussed into an otherwise unused building at Ruitervacht in the Cape, without furniture or staff, the youth were greeted with hostility by the local white residents. The item hit the news headlines and then disappeared. What transpired thereafter is unclear: did the pupils (reduced to 600 to fit accommodation) settle into the old routine of Bantu Education in a new building? Were the teachers retrained to meet a new syllabus? Was there enough money and equipment to make the school viable? And was this a single instance or were other buildings taken over to relieve the still existing primitive conditions of schools in the townships?

In all this there is still the greatest of all problems: finding a way to eliminate segregation. This is not a matter of removing legislation, which is the easiest part of introducing change, but of destroying the townships and moving the millions of township dwellers and squatters to houses and apartments in the residential suburbs of towns and cities. That would obviously help to dampen the crime wave but would also disperse gangs to parts of the towns that have been relatively immune to this pestilence. As we will see, current policy will only entrench the segregated areas and leave a legacy of despair for generations to come.

Of course one of the solutions would be to provide land for farming and moving people, on a voluntary basis, out of the towns. It need hardly be added that this is beyond the financial resources of the country. If land is not commandeered, but bought, that will be a burden that the state cannot contemplate. That would be only the beginning. People who go back to the country need housing, including schools and hospitals and shops, implements, fertilisers and seed. Financial reserves must be made available to tide people over both their first few years and also the periods of drought, and flooding, to which the country is afflicted.

I do not think that this is an overstatement of the current position in the country and there are undoubtedly many issues that have not been mentioned. The enormity of the problem is such that even the most ingenious of governments would experience great difficulty. Even a partial alleviation, which would win the support of a section of the population, would not satisfy those who felt they were being neglected.

The administration has fumbled, carried out contradictory policies and scrapped crucial portions of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) that was designed to assist them. In this respect it can be said that a different government could have achieved more. Yet even the best of governments, devoted to social change, would face difficulties that could not be easily overcome. In the circumstances it would be arrogant to state that had socialists been at the helm we could achieve all that is required. But that is not our task. Although we are not in government we are concerned about the future of the country and can only use the tools of criticism that were sharpened by Karl Marx. He sought the underlying, often unseen, features of a system and pointed to methods of social change through revolutionary upsurge. Marx offered no prescription for a new society, saying that the people would have to find solutions for themselves. His critique was meant, not as a recipe for building the future, but of understanding existing events, allowing workers to undertake the reconstruction themselves.

In South Africa all the indicators point to a lack of involvement of the vast mass of the population in bringing about change since the election. It was only when the ANC/SACP alliance wanted to exert pressure on the National Party to resume negotiations, that the workers were called upon to actively demonstrate (as in the campaign against VAT). When negotiations were resumed the working class was required to stay passive, neither to be seen or heard. When *Searchlight South Africa* No 11 appeared the ANC was negotiating with the National Party and other movements over the future constitutional development of the country. At the time the ANC had more or less abandoned the claims of the Freedom Charter, the programme adopted by the Congress Alliance in 1956. There were grave faults in the Charter, but the nationalisation of the mines and the banks, which underlined its economic strategy, were features that had become a matter of faith in the ANC. Similarly, there was talk of a Constituent Assembly, under pressure from other movements.

Thus, on 18 February 1993, for example, a National Executive Council resolution of the ANC stated that a Constituent Assembly, which would be a 'sovereign constitution-making body . . . bound only by agreed general constitutional principles' would be summoned. It was to be elected on the basis of national and regional lists and, with decisions agreed by a two-thirds majority, would draft the new constitution. A sitting of regional representatives would perform the same task for the regions. Yet, in their race to take office, the ANC surrendered the principles upon which they had claimed to stand. The more recently planned sitting of parliament and the senate (which is drawn from the regional assemblies) to act as a Constitutional Assembly, with Cyril Ramaphosa as chair, is a caricature of the original call for a directly elected Con-

stituent Assembly. Although it was to be called within nine months, said the ANC resolution, even that meeting is long overdue.

In looking at the problems that faces South Africa I will ask whether there has been any fundamental change in the state — and if not, examine the reasons for the short-changed transformation. This will be done in the full knowledge that the problems facing the government are legion and none of them can be effected without great effort. On the other hand one can only despair at the lack of preparedness of the new administration. No liberation movement in history has had so many offers of assistance from friends or received so much financial assistance. Also, given Mandela's declaration before the elections that the ANC was not a party but 'a government in waiting', it would seem that the waiting was not backed by serious study of what needed to be done or, where plans were drawn up, expediency led to their being scrapped.

AMNESTY AND THE TRUTH COMMISSION

Anyone who has been tortured remains tortured . . .

Anyone who has suffered torture never again will be able to be at ease in the world, the abomination of the annihilation is never extinguished. Faith in humanity, already cracked by the first slap in the face, then demolished by torture, is never acquired again.

Jean Amery, quoted by Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, Abacus, 1989.

Are we to accept the right of past torturers and murderers to go unpunished if they stand before a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and state their culpability? Are we to tell the victims or their families that the maiming and the killing or the disappearance of countless men and women, over the past three decades are to be forgiven? Commenting on Amery's statement (quoted above) Primo Levi added:

We do not wish to abet confusions, morbidities, Freudianism and indulgences. The oppressor remains what he is, and so does the victim. They are not interchangeable, the former is to be punished and execrated (but, if possible, understood), the latter is to be pitied and helped . . .

The pain of the past in South Africa, as in Chile and elsewhere, is being constantly renewed by revelations of the actions of police, army and former government ministers in the running of death squads. What these armed goons did, in the name of an unspeakable ideology, is unforgivable and cries out for remedy. And, even if pardoned, how is it possible to prevent the guilty men from returning, as in El Salvador, to kill those who had given evidence against them?

It is not only the activities of the armed forces that calls for correction or retribution. People were harassed over decades for pass offenses or other administrative crimes that formed part of the segregation pattern

in South Africa. They were humiliated, beaten up, charged, sentenced and turned over to white farmers (in the notorious farm-jail system). They were arrested, imprisoned, and sometimes murdered, for participating in protests and strikes, for involvement in the stay-at-homes, for possessing banned literature or for advocating the programmes of underground movements.

Drawing a line, in time or in space, before which an event can be forgotten is impossible. The scar of the past remains to haunt the victim and there can be no possible reason why the perpetrator should walk free – whenever or wherever the incident occurred. What then could the victims say when the President unilaterally offered to extend the cut off date for amnesty to the 9th of May 1994?

The list of crimes is immense and includes death under interrogation, through parcel bombs, from the assassins bullet, or any of the many ways devised by evil men to intimidate and terrify those who could not otherwise be silenced.

Blacks were the main victims, but they were not alone in this. The killing fields extended to the white suburbs, the Indian and Coloured townships. Who shot and killed Rick Turner in his house or fired at Harold Strachen's house in Durban? I could continue with the roll-call of victims endlessly, naming events and people, yet undoubtedly missing more people than I could name. The events must be chronicled, the truth must be told openly and fearlessly. It must be stated clearly that it is impossible to draw the line in finding those who took part in the harassment of blacks and those who stood aside while approving the situation. As Desmond Tutu said wryly: it seems impossible to find a single white who supported the apartheid system.

There are those whose viciousness is beyond doubt. Former spy and state security agent, Craig Williamson, has brazenly declared that he was either present or instrumental in preparing the bombs that killed Ruth First and Jenny Curtis Schoon. In making this statement openly, in order, it appears, to save himself from prosecution, he implicated members of the government for instructions he received. But how many others did that man kill or maim? Of what other dirty tricks was he also guilty? A dossier listing his activities in South Africa and abroad would show that he, and his wife, were guilty of crimes that were planned by his superiors and also by himself.

What can be made of the military chief of the eastern Cape, Lieut-General Joffel van der Westhuizen whose request to the State Security Council for permission to kill eastern Province political leader, Matthew Goniwe and his three comrades, was confirmed by an inquest judge? While this is being written there are reports of the trial of de Kock, the man who controlled the death squads in the northern Transvaal. What he did places him beyond contempt but in some ways he is just more

unfortunate than others who imposed a reign of bloody terror in the regions they controlled. Many of them have now retired with golden handshakes that have made them Rand millionaires. de Cock seems to have been just too late to join this band of pirates.

The charges against those that perpetrated the many dirty tricks, including the blowing up of the South African Council of Churches Headquarters in Johannesburg, the bombing of the ANC premises in London in 1982 and so on, have been laid at the feet of National Party leaders, including former state president de Klerk and foreign minister 'Pik' Botha, both of whom are in the present Government of National Unity. These are only a few of the many accusations that have been recently publicised. The list of assassinations or preparation of such acts is growing with the weeks as former state agents speak out in the hope of gaining indemnification. They must not be allowed to get away with their crimes and must pay their debt to society, by compulsory community service or some similar means where the criminal acts did not lead to death, by imprisonment where lives were taken.

The acts of violence have not been one-sided. Indeed, earlier struggles involved attacks on Azapo and other groups, and then between ANC cadres and members of the Inkatha Freedom Party. There have been campaigns, not against military targets, but aimed at killing and maiming ordinary citizens, trapping them in their burning houses, cutting them down with machetes or turning their guns on them. There might be excuses for some of these deeds but they were mainly dastardly and inhuman. There is nothing more vicious than 'necklacing', that is the hanging of a motor car tyre filled with burning petrol over the head of a victim, nothing as cowardly as the ambush of a bus or the shooting down of a carriage of train passengers. If the planners were often police or army personnel, the perpetrators were blacks who had lost all claims to humanity. They can be as little exonerated as those who organised the carnage that swept through the country and killed tens of thousands of people.

Among the more serious of crimes was the torture and execution of members of Umkhonto we Sizwe in 1984 after a mutiny that involved most of the volunteers in that army. When all attempts at suppressing knowledge of that event failed the top brass brazened it out and said that they had indeed stood by, or had actively participated in the tortures and executions. Instead of the perpetrators of these crimes being disqualified from high office some became members of parliament and were even appointed to the cabinet.

In the dying days of the National Party government President de Klerk signed a batch of indemnities and approved a number of reprieves for prisoners on death row claiming that he referred his decisions to the Transitional Executive Council. Then in the Further Indemnity Act of

1992 application for indemnity could be made for a political offence, the definition of which was so broad that it covered almost any crime. Ultimately at the national negotiations it was decided that the new government would grant an amnesty in 'respect of acts, omissions and offenses associated with political objectives committed in the course of the conflicts of the past.' This is impossible. The trauma lies too deeply in the hearts of the victims or their relatives.

That is a serious issue that has been underplayed. But there is an even greater danger: there are guilty men and women in comfortable positions — and it is precisely these people who will seek an opportunity to step back into positions of authority. If they ever do their reign of terror will outdo the era of repression that has been temporarily put aside.

THE CIVIL SERVICE

It is obvious that the transfers of resources and power will only be effectively managed if these are done via institutions that are in favour politically of the reconstruction and development process. This factor is the proverbial 'Achilles Heel' of reconstruction and development, as the established institutions of the state, the existing parastatals and the public corporations are nearly all in the hands of the National Party, owing to its own successful, if twisted, programme of affirmative action (apartheid) and its strategy to gain a firm hold of all the locations of power in society after the Second World War.

The public sector is riddled with racism, patronage, corruption and poor administration. There is a duplication of management, yet a shortage of services. The determination of service delivery points is irrational and the domination of the management by white, middle-class males is virtually complete. Years of job reservation have ensured that these imbalances are firmly entrenched and, coupled with the effects of Bantu education, the pool of potential replacements for key posts is tiny in comparison to what is needed.

Philip Dexter, *Work In Progress*, Feb/Mar 1994

Philip Dexter, MP, points crucially to the problem that must bar the way to progress in the new South Africa. If there is any problem with what he says it is in confining his discussion to the post-1948 government of the National Party. Indeed the restriction of personnel in the public sector to whites extends back to the former governments of the three Generals — Botha, Smuts and Hertzog. The public sector, notable for its rudeness rather than its service, worked solely in the interest of the white minority and a large proportion of its resources was used to administer the segregation (or apartheid) regulations.

Obviously this cannot continue and the civil service has to be transformed so that the entire community is represented — with Africans taking the commanding positions in its ranks. Yet such a transformation is prohibited by the agreement reached by the ANC/SACP and the National Party under which the incumbents of the civil service are protected until at least the year 2,000.

The state apparatus will need extensive overhaul if it is to meet the needs of underprivileged communities and is not to act as an agent against social transformation. It will need to be pruned and controlled to avoid the creation of a new elite, as rude and as inefficient as the old. If this is not achieved the new South Africa will fail to serve the needs of the vast majority of the population.

THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

To initiate many of the projects that are needed to transform South Africa, the government has been talking to representatives of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This is a road that can lead to disaster as so many other countries across the world have discovered.

Dot Keet, writing in *Work in Progress*, Feb/Mar 1994, says that the World Bank vice-president Edward Jaycox admitted that his organisation's experts have been a 'systematic destructive force' in Africa. Continuing, Ms Keet says that the amount of interest paid by African states during 1983-1991, some \$200-billion, was more than the entire debt owing in 1982. The \$26-billion paid every year by Africa did not stop the debt doubling to \$289-billion by 1992. In Sub-Saharan Africa the external debt has trebled. It now stands at 109 percent of gross national product and the states are technically insolvent. Despite some debt cancellations from the very poorest countries the banks continue to demand their repayments while the debts give the funds a political hold on the African states. The grip is maintained, says Keet, by the IMF and the World Bank working in tandem to ensure that the governments pay their debts and they structurally adjust entire economies by way of development project loans. That is, the world economic institutions continue to squeeze payments out of the poorest countries.

Vishnu Padayachee, writing in the Canadian *Southern Africa Report* of July 1994 (incorporating *Work in Progress*, No 97), cites the Letter of Intent, signed by the Transitional Executive Council — the joint pre-government body containing the ANC/SACP — and the IMF. It is a statement of the kind of policies and 'financial discipline' the new government is committed to follow.

It states that the new government must reduce its budget deficit to six per cent of Gross Domestic Product within a few years. Spending must be contained, taxes pegged and the civil service wage bill limited. The tight monetary policies of the previous four to five years must be continued, and the government must pursue policies that 'couple wage restraint and training to foster investment and promote employment'. Padayachee is also concerned by the fact that the ANC negotiated the

terms of the IMF loan without opening the debate to the peoples' organisations. Instead it was all done in secrecy.

In the same issue of the Canadian journal, Colin Stoneman, a historian lecturing at York University, painted a bleak picture of South Africa's economic prospects. He said that in the 1980s only seven per cent of school leavers in South Africa found formal sector jobs. In the past two decades in most parts of Southern Africa the proportion of the population in employment has actually been decreasing. Capital intensive industry (and new technology) has been increasing so that the introduction of an average industrial job now costs \$40,000. Consequently, industry is now providing relatively fewer jobs than before. Stoneman adds that 'South Africa can no longer provide jobs to immigrants, for it cannot provide jobs for its own people.' So badly is the economy hit that there have been calls for the reintroduction of the once hated passbooks in order to stop workers from Mozambique, Malawi and elsewhere seeking work in South Africa. In a news film made recently workers from Mozambique were shown being rounded up by the police and taken to deportation centres for repatriation. Such is the moral state to which the country is sinking.

Once called the power-house of Africa, the per capita income of South Africa is only \$2,000, a tenth of that of the advanced (industrial) nations. Contrary to declared IMF policy, South Africa needs protection of domestic industry, state investment in key sectors, including the rapid construction of houses and the removal of shanty-towns and export promotion to create a substantial domestic manufacturing sector.

Furthermore, there has to be a programme of voluntary return to the land, not only to satisfy the demands of a people that has been forced to vacate land they owned, but also to provide sustenance for the millions who cannot find employment in the towns. Although this must take time such a move will create a larger internal market and provide food for the urban population. It properly managed it can also feed into the export market without depriving local farmers of their basic foods.

THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

The repossession of the land is an issue of immediate practical necessity and also one that meets an emotive need that has deep roots. It is an issue that has been raised over the years by those who were dispossessed by white settlers, either through early conquest, or by the Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 and then by the forced removals under the apartheid regime. It was among the most popular slogans for the liberation movement, particularly for the Non-European Unity Movement before 1960 and then for the Pan Africanist Congress.

The complexity of the problem is illustrated by statistics of land possession taken from *Work in Progress*, Feb/Mar 1994, with additional material culled from other sources.

There are about 60,000 (white) family units in the commercial rural areas which constitutes 87 per cent of the country's land surface. Three hundred and sixteen square kilometres of this land is desert or semi-desert. The average farm size is 2,500 hectares, much of it lying fallow. There are 1,000,000 labour tenants who live and work on these farms.

About 15,000,000 people lived in the former Homelands which consisted of fragmented regions covering less than 13 per cent of the country. Some 70,000 square kilometres is arid or semi-arid and large areas are eroded and infertile. The situation in these regions is grim. Thirty per cent of the population is homeless, between 60-80 per cent depend on earnings in the white industrial/commercial regions and over half are small-scale farmers who eke out a living on an average of one hectare of land: only 10 per cent get an income from agriculture.

There are 320,000 hectares of unoccupied state-owned arable land.

Some 3,500,000 people were removed by the state between 1960 and 1982, 1,300,000 in pursuit of bantustan policy, 475,000 from black freehold areas (the so-called 'black spots'). At the same time 834,400 people were removed from areas under the Group Areas Act and, although they were in urban or peri-urban areas, they too stand in urgent need of resettlement.

Despite the urgency of land reform the Constitution restricts what can be achieved. Hein Marais writing in *Work in Progress*, Feb/Mar 1994, said that Clause 28 allows for expropriation of land with compensation, but only for public purposes and not public interest. The restriction confines expropriation to such things as building roads, schools and hospitals, but does not provide for land distribution or reform. This Kafkaian world offers no right to restoration of land forcibly seized under apartheid, only the right to claim such restoration and, in each case, the state must certify that the return to that strip of land is 'feasible'.

Those dispossessed by the Land Act of 1913 can claim land through the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights which will mediate and settle disputes, and a special Land Court will hear cases on the restoration of land or the granting of alternative relief. Yet, once again, the Commission and the court can act only in so far as the state rules it feasible. In other words, the right to restitution is no more than the right to claim. Even the right to restoration of state land, fought for after two years of dispute, will be dependent on a state ruling of feasibility.

In effect, says Marais, the constitution entrenches white land ownership without recognising black land rights and claims. Despite holding out some hope of land reform landowners can use litigation to narrow the scope of change.

There is a further snag in land restoration. The Bill of Rights entrenches the right of private property and its use. This makes it unlikely that the state can nationalise land unless the Constitution is altered. However it is reported that the ANC is following World Bank proposals that the government buy farmlands outside the Homelands for redistribution at the rate of six per cent annually for five years. If they do — and the cost makes it unlikely — this could provide the promised thirty per cent of land for redistribution.

However it all seems unlikely and sections of the population are not prepared to wait before their claims can be heard. Squatters are already moving into empty land outside Johannesburg and in the eastern Cape without asking permission.

Repossessing the land, difficult as it might be, is still the smallest part of the problem and there is little information on what might happen when people return to the land. Where land is provided the new owners will need to be financed. There will have to be money for building houses and latrines, for a school and a teacher, and possibly for a chapel. Furthermore the land will lie fallow or under-utilised without proper seeding, fertilisers, draught animals and technical aids. There will also have to be some supervision — which will not be popular — to limit the number of heads of cattle and goats, to prevent the denudation of the land. Thirdly, the land allocated must be large enough and the feasibility of co-operative farming must be studied. A newly impoverished peasant class that was a continued burden on the state would be disastrous.

The tradition of the past, to which much of the rural population probably aspires, will need massive changes. To be successful there will have to be agricultural trainers, expert advisers, veterinary doctors, medical or para-medical practitioners and close co-ordination between developments of industry and agriculture. Has the new government the will, foresight or ability, to carry through such a revolutionary plan?

THE BEATIFICATION OF JOE SLOVO:

1926-1995

The news today is that Joe Slovo is dead. Given the state of his health, that is not surprising. What is surprising is that the current [Chairman] of the South African Communist Party and the ex-Chief of Staff of the ANC's armed wing should receive such gushing obituaries from all sides of the South African press. The most knuckle-abraded hairy back is apparently grief-stricken at the death of this sweet-natured, nay saintly old Stalinist hack. Of course one does not unnecessarily speak ill of the dead. At the same time it is not necessary to suppress one's criticism because one's political foes have the good grace to shuffle off this mortal coil before they can add to their crimes.

Jim Higgins — *Revolutionary History*, Spring 1995

The passing of a life is always a matter of regret yet readers of *Searchlight South Africa* will know full well that we have never been

admirers of Joe Slovo. We always considered him to be the epitome of Stalinism and we have nothing but contempt for those who either slavishly accepted the Soviet Union's political line or those who led the SACP in admiration of that land of tyranny and corruption.

Among those who laid down the party line, Slovo must count as among the foremost. Despite his retrospective statements, he showed no signs of wavering in his admiration of the USSR before the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. He agreed fully with the sentiments of those who attended the conference of the SACP in 1988 where delegates spoke of the victory of socialism in the USSR. And when the regimes in the USSR changed like musical chairs, Slovo discovered the greatness of Gorbachev: the greatest genius after Lenin in the communist pantheon, he said.

It was during this 'changing of the God' that Slovo discovered the importance of democracy. There was to be no more 'vanguard party' which had the monopoly of political sagacity, he wrote; no more centralism in the socialist movement. At last, it seemed, we heard the voice of reasonableness: the party had to win its spurs in competition with other movements trying to woo the workers. And on his Stalinist past he could only tell Philip van Niekerk, reporting for the *Observer* on 4 December 1994, that 'I was wrong and I am ashamed of some of the traps I was led into'. This innocent could merely say that when visiting the USSR he was assured that there were no gulags and he believed his informants. Do we have to ask how Slovo was able to ignore all the information, so easily available, which described events in the USSR? But more: How did he come to accept the Moscow trials and the condemnation of Lenin's comrades as fascist traitors, or the trials of all the leading communists of eastern Europe, or the slavish adoration of Stalin and his henchman? And how did he come to accept the Stalin-Hitler pact, the anti-semitism or the killing of Polish socialists?

These are all questions that Slovo refused to confront. Indeed he went his rounds in the 1950s claiming that he would shoot all Trotskyists — and we had no reason to disbelieve him.

It was almost possible to greet his change of heart after 1989. The proponent of dictatorship had 'matured and softened'. Slovo had taken off the mantle of tyranny and was the earnest champion of reasonableness. Or almost. Lurking beneath this cosmetic change the man had remained the same, as any reader of Soviet pronouncements, reported in the South African and the western press, could discover.

It is not certain when the Soviet 'experts' on Southern Africa started changing their line but it was evident in the mid-1980s that they had reconsidered their position on the armed struggle and on the need to find agreement with the incumbent government of PW Botha. I discussed the change in *Searchlight South Africa*, No 3. There I quoted the

Soviet academician Gleb Starushenko who said that the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party had decided in 1986 that:

it was 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.

Starushenko did not believe that socialism was on the order of the day in these countries. He made this quite clear:

Proceeding from the objective laws of social development, the communists do not advance at this 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 general conditions have ripened.

Details of one of Starushenko's articles were reprinted in the *Weekly Mail*, in January 1987. The message was transparent. He was quoted as saying that the ANC should 'not advance plans for a broad nationalisation of capitalist property [and] should be willing to give the bourgeoisie the corresponding guarantee'. This was not a mere matter of words: with it went a reluctance to continue Soviet support for the armed struggle. That meant that arms, ammunition and money were no longer available for guerilla warfare or party funds. More importantly, it was now openly said that the ANC/SACP could not defeat the apartheid regime directly and that it would be better to entertain talks with the authorities.

Although it was claimed that Starushenko was only speaking for himself there were several other Soviet academicians who made similar remarks. Speaking in Harare in 1987 Victor Goncharov, Deputy Director of the (Soviet) Institute of African Studies, said that the current struggle in southern Africa was for liberation and not socialism. He believed, he said, that the liberation movement in South Africa would have to negotiate with the National Party government. It was against this background of moderating Soviet voices that Joe Slovo led a deputation of SACP members to meet three members of the Central Committee of the USSR in April 1988. There are no available details of what transpired but, in the statement that was published, the stress was on the need for a political settlement that would transform South Africa into a united, democratic and non-racial state. The message was resisted, at least in some sectors of the SACP. It was not easy to switch lines and, despite the sycophantic chants of support for the 'home of Communism', there was a reluctance to accept the pacifist course in South Africa, as advocated by Moscow.

The first major indication available to us that Slovo was changing course appeared in his pamphlet *Has Socialism Failed?* It was a confused document and I criticised the thinking in *Searchlight South Africa* No 5. But even then I missed the central thrust of Slovo's thinking. He

had come to accept the Soviet line and was advocating, softly-softly, the end of struggle and the need to talk to the members of the government. It is not certain whether this was communicated directly to Mandela, who also entered into negotiations from his prison cell, or whether he had arrived at the same conclusion independently. However it was a remarkable coincidence.

The change had to be put into effect: in 1991 Slovo placed the motion for a cease-fire before the ANC national executive and in 1992, after negotiations with the National Party had been halted, he put forward his 'sunset scenario'. This reopened the negotiations and guaranteed a coalition government with the National Party until the turn of the century. It also ratified job protection for civil servants and the security forces.

Lambasting this compromise in February, Pallo Jordan, a leading member of the ANC and a prospective Cabinet member, said that 'this implied the retention of a public service that has no interest in serving the mass of the oppressed'. Once the sworn enemy of the capitalist class, Slovo now moved rapidly to become a defender of the system, while retaining enough of the radical rhetoric to remain the titular leader of the SACP. He preached the virtues of the free market with enthusiasm before the April elections but was reported as saying in an interview: 'we won't have real power — by "we" I mean the ANC — even if we win by an overwhelming majority. We will have political office. But the day after the election the framework of apartheid in its essence will still be in place' and he added that the struggle would continue for a transition to a real, non-racial democracy during which there would be a 'commonality of objectives' between the ANC and SACP which justified the maintenance of the alliance for at least a period.

Is it possible that this nonsense will continue to befuddle those workers who followed the SACP and believed that their leaders were guiding the transformation towards socialism — even though they claimed that further struggle would be contained inside a market economy? Oh! What a massive let down for those who so blindly followed the lead provided by Slovo and the Communist Party.

After the election Slovo was appointed housing minister. Addressing the Senate in October 1994 he said that there was a backlog of some 1.5 million houses and that this number was growing at 200,000 per year. That is, if the million (starter house) houses that he had promised were supplied within five years, the backlog would remain constant. Writing in the *Observer* on 4 December 1994, Philip van Niekerk, reported Slovo as saying that he planned to supply the million houses in five years but, before building could begin, the banks had to provide the finance. If the banks did not provide the loans, he warned, it might be necessary to ensure this through legislation. Slovo tried to overcome the problem by

coaxing the banks into the township market by deploying state funds to underwrite mortgages while urging residents to resume payments. For those who could not afford mortgages he proposed offering the basics of a foundation, electricity, water and sewage — the rest was up to the occupier. He also said that it was necessary for the occupiers to meet their bond repayments,

The situation was serious and there was no possibility of change. The breakdown of law and order had led to an impasse when court orders for the eviction of eighteen thousand families could not be implemented because the sheriffs, who were to repossess the houses, were threatened with necklacing and had fled. Yet all that the communist minister could say was that the payments had to be met.

Needless to say the reports on housing made no mention of the appalling state of existing housing. An estimated 70 per cent of black houses have no direct access to water and 50 per cent lived in buildings that were little more than shacks.

Was Slovo really serious in saying that he would build so large a number of houses, or was he playing to the gallery? It was physically impossible to build a million houses in five years. But, numbers aside, this was a remarkable proposal for a man who still used socialist rhetoric. Slovo was using the language of Margaret Thatcher in viewing housing in terms of the market. Did he, or his advisers, not think of providing accommodation through housing associations on low rental or even free of rent? Yet all he could say on township policy and on the rent boycotts, as reported in the *Southern African Report* on 13 January 1995, was:

I don't believe leadership should follow in the wake of popular prejudice . . . In the end you have to provide political leadership. If one becomes unpopular, so be it.

Over the months the reports that came from people sympathetic to the ANC claimed that Slovo was doing a great job in providing houses. However, available figures provide a different picture. According to Mark Nicol, in the *New Statesman and Society* of 28 April 1995, only 800 houses (less than three per day) had been built in the first year of the Mandela government and these did not come through the Ministry of Housing. The promise of one million houses in five years requires the building of 550 houses per day, including Sundays and public holidays. It is impossible to build 550 per day over the first five years and that will mean that the shortfall of houses in 2,000 AD will be over two million and the squatter camps will not have been removed.

Slovo helped move the liberation movement from continued resistance to negotiations. For this, he received the acclaim of the ANC and of the white population. The one-time ogre was transformed into an instant hero among the whites: among the ANCers he was revered as the

one-time head of Umkhonto and as the white they could trust. He held high office in the closing years of his life and was charged with solving the housing question. Perhaps it was an impossible project but we saw no greatness in his efforts and no imagination in the tackling of this task.

EXEUNT WINNIE MANDELA

In writing about Joe Slovo I said that I could not mourn at his passing but at least he was a man about whom there was no obvious personal impropriety. But there are others in the hierarchy of the ANC about whom there have been rumours that cannot be lightly dismissed.

It is said of Nomzamo Winnie Mandela, mother of the nation, estranged wife of the President, former Deputy Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, that she has been accused of fraud, shady diamond dealings, misappropriation of ANC funds, received money for seeing that a building contractor was awarded a contract, used money donated by Benazir Bhutto for her own project, the Co-ordinated Anti-Poverty Programme, involvement in abduction and murder. Paul Trehwela discussed her trial in some detail in *Searchlight South Africa* No 9. I will not repeat the details here but will, instead, round off her story.

Faced with the ongoing accusations top leaders of the ANC stayed silent and even gave Mrs Mandela their full support. They sat in court when she appeared before the judge on the most serious of charges and supported her claims to innocence. Some members of the organisation — and we do not know how high up in the ANC this was arranged — secreted the main witness against her, Katiza Cebekhula, and whisked him away to a Zambian prison. This story, using reports printed in the London *Independent*, was discussed by Paul Trehwela and has never been repudiated. This was a conspiracy against justice and there appears to have been no move to get Cebekhula out of prison, return him to South Africa, and hear what he has to say. This is an international scandal and the government of Zambia is as culpable as the administration in Pretoria.

The silence, from inside the ANC, on Winnie's deeds is deafening. When she was said to have misappropriated ANC funds, together with her deputy and lover Dali Mpofu, the commission established to investigate this has either not reported or its findings have been kept silent. She has been accused of diamond dealings, but there is silence. And there is silence on almost everything else of which she stands accused.

She seems to have flouted every law, in society and inside the ANC, and been allowed to continue from one exploit to another without sanctions. She had been ousted from office in the ANC Women's League yet

managed to appear at the League's conference and have herself elected as President. There she remained until members of her executive could no longer tolerate her underhand manoeuvres. Yet, when they resigned, this was accepted by Mrs Mandela. Since then the affair seems to have been swept under the carpet.

So defiant was this woman of all rules of the organization she represents in Parliament that she defied the President and rode off to West Africa. When President Mandela eventually dismissed her from the cabinet, there was no statement on her misdemeanours, no explanation of any sort. Then, to add insult to injury, this cabinet member condemned the government for spending money on celebrations held for the British queen. Mrs Mandela might have had a point if it were not for the vast sums of money she is said to have taken from her own movement, or for the fraud cases that the police said they were investigating.

All of the above is public knowledge, repeated again and again in the South African press, and there would be little cause for *Searchlight South Africa* to repeat it if there was nothing else to contribute to this continued saga of chicanery and dishonesty. As the stories emerge there are also repeats of all the old hoary excuses: the persecution suffered by Mrs Mandela, the imprisonments, banishment, harassment and, of course, the plight of a woman who was left a grass-widow by the imprisonment of her famous husband. Nobody can deny these stories and nobody who demanded change can do other than condemn the state that did all this to Mrs Mandela. But that does not give her any licence to act in this anti-social fashion.

Racist South Africa, over more than three centuries, maimed or destroyed an untold number of lives. Millions of men went to prison for failing to carry their passes, their poll tax receipts or lodger permits. Tens of thousands of women also went to jail for contravening one or other of these laws or for brewing beer. It was a society in which going to jail was a common occurrence, a cross to be borne in a state that made a mockery of justice.

Driven to despair many turned to real crime, to theft and mugging, to rape and extortion or to murder. Some were even cheered for their defiance of the law — making them mini-heroes of the townships. Vigilante groups emerged in the townships to root out the dreaded criminals and, when they succeeded, established an even more vicious rule by terror.

There might have been occasions when lawyers, arguing in mitigation, spoke of the miserable conditions in which their clients were forced to live. But if they did, it served little purpose. The accused were found guilty and sentenced. They were sent to jail, were whipped, hanged, or served their sentences. Some were sent to farm prisons where they slaved, dressed only in sackcloth, kept in near starvation and paid a

miserly wage. This was part of the system enforced by the ruling class to keep the African people in near-slavery, and it was a price that left deep scars on those who suffered — whether innocent or guilty.

It is in this light that the excuses for Winnie Mandela's plight must be seen. To use the arguments of harassment as an excuse for her behaviour is unacceptable especially when it is remembered that she is accorded every honour as a leader (in her own rights) and has always been provided with large sums of money by charitable organisations. She was given a large mansion in Soweto and always flew to Cape Town (to visit her imprisoned husband) in style. Yes, she was harassed but she was also venerated and she was universally acclaimed as a heroine. Even the absence of her husband was compensated for by the many men she invited into her life. Indeed she was quite indiscrete in such matters, flaunting her lovers, at least one of whom was accused of being a police informer.

Yet, Mrs Mandela plays, and will continue to play, an important role in South African politics. Her radical and populist oratory has won her grass-roots support as a champion of the poor and dispossessed. She was present during past struggles (and applauded the use of the 'necklace' to murder the peoples' opponents). But behind such mindless proclamations she is seen by her followers to offer the only way out of the political impasse. She might be a loose cannon, as Trewhela said, but she has not yet fired her last shots!

THE WORKERS ON STRIKE!

In the strike wave that hit South Africa in 1994, the workers were lambasted by President Mandela. In a call for 'nation building', he followed the pattern of all nationalist leaders in Africa and Asia in saying that trade union leaders were finding it hard to move away from resistance politics. He derided the strikers, saying:

Workers of a particular faction have their own interests. They forget that we have five million people unemployed. We want them to have jobs, not tomorrow, today.

At the end of a meeting to honour veterans of the anti-apartheid struggle at the end of July, Mandela repeated his attack on the strikers. This did not stop Joe Slovo, the Communist Party chief, from saying that Mandela 'was the greatest leader South Africa has ever produced'. He added that Mandela 'embodies all that we have fought for' — and perhaps, in so saying, Slovo was associating himself with the anti-working class stance of his leader.

Meanwhile the trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), was undergoing a period of uncertainty

and losing the support of groups of workers. By being so closely allied with the ANC in its election campaigns they had ceased representing the workers.

In a document entitled 'Towards developing a long term strategy', according to the *Southern African Report*, of 15 April 1994, trade union leaders said that the trade union movement had lost sight of priorities: its structures could not cope with changing circumstances and union members had been relegated to spectators in their own organisation. The shop steward committees — that is, Cosatu's leadership within work places — were no longer functioning. The holding of meetings during working hours — a hard won victory — were no longer being used by workers. The document noted that there was a lack of cohesion in strategies taken by affiliated unions and that little time was devoted to discussions of trade union work in Cosatu's central executive meetings.

It is against this background that the press reported widespread strikes in July 1994. The *New Nation* of 22 July — a report chosen at random — said that in two weeks in July 1994 more than 100,000 workers, from court interpreters to distributive workers, were involved in 45 separate protests. Among those mentioned were the South African Commercial and Catering Workers who represented the 20,000 strikers at the Pick 'n Pay. They demanded a twelve per cent increase and were only offered seven per cent. There were also 18,000 workers in dispute with the diamond conglomerate, de Beers, after negotiations, led by the National Union of Mineworkers, broke down. Ten thousand members of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa marched to their union headquarters in support of their wage claim. The union was also in dispute with Auto Manufacturers and Tyre and Rubber Manufacturers involving 26,000 workers and 5,000 Brewery workers were in dispute with their bosses. The South African Municipal Workers Union said that 1,600 workers were in dispute with management and a further 1,200 confronted the Rand Water Board.

The disaffection was widespread. The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union reported that 900 of its members were in dispute with the Witwatersrand University over arbitrary cuts in wages and 3,000 of its members were in dispute with Kroonstad Hospital. The list seemed endless. The Construction and Allied Workers Union was in dispute with Basil Reed over the lockout of 200 workers and the Chemical Workers Industrial Union reported a dispute with Total over pay rises and improved work conditions.

There was talk of tension between leaders of the ANC and Cosatu in the wake of the strike wave. While claiming to take a middle stance between bosses and workers, the ANC leaned towards business management. In calling on workers to modify their positions and, indeed, to stop strike action, Mandela's response to brutal police action in suppressing

the strikes was decidedly tame. His call to the police not to be so violent in restraining strikers, or in getting them back to work, carried no real challenge to the offending officers. When, shortly afterwards, there was a strike among black policemen their white counterparts had no reservations in shooting and killing one of them.

He quite unashamedly said in an interview in the *Sowetan* (as reported in *Southern Africa Report* of 22 July 1994): 'We have won this election, for those who do not know, because of the financial support of big business'. The implication is obvious: big business (and this includes the multi-nationals, the mines and the large department stores), provided funds for the ANC's election campaign and are not to be pestered by workers who want more money! If Mr Mandela is correct — and there is no reason to doubt his word — the names of the firms that gave funds to the ANC must be made public.

To add to our suspicions, Mandela's connections with business was underlined when he chose a successor to former Economic Minister Keys. It is reported that he turned for advice to business leaders in choosing the new minister and not to his allies, Cosatu and the SACP

THE NEW LABOUR BILL.

In February 1995 a new Labour Relations Bill was published. It was obviously designed to shackle the entire labour movement in a form similar to the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 which was Smuts's last act after the General Strike of 1922. His intention was clear: the white workers were to be prevented from ever threatening the state again. The intention of the new government in presenting the Bill is not dissimilar. All trade unions, except those that are racially exclusive, can be registered and only those so registered can use the system. Closed shops are banned although collective bargaining levies, paid by the workers, are allowed. The trade unions will in future be constrained to enter into arbitration before taking strike action over wages or work conditions. Although the Bill does legalise many categories of labour disputes, its aim is to proscribe the use of the strike weapon and, significantly, has the support of organised business.

The Bill applies to all workers in the public and private sectors except those in the police, the defence force and the intelligence services. All labour disputes must first be taken to a Commission for Conciliation for mediation and arbitration before any further action is allowed. Strikes over dismissals are outlawed — all such disputes having to go to arbitration.

In line with a clause in the draft constitution workers have the right to strike action — except for those in essential services related to the

health and safety of the public or where business infrastructure should be protected. Strike action in defence of broad socio-economic interests is allowed, subject to restriction. Presumably stay-at-homes, such as those used by the Mass Democratic Movement, or demonstrations called by Cosatu when VAT was introduced can be outlawed if found inconvenient by the government.

The Bill also provides for the establishment of workplace forums to encourage flexibility and efficiency in production. That is, it is designed to promote co-operative relations through consultation and joint decision making in order to boost production and increase profitability. All the worst practices employed by capitalism in Europe and America are to be enforced in South Africa in the name of liberation.

THE ARMED FORCES

The Government of National Unity was the inheritor of a large standing army, an air force and a small navy. This was the force used by the National Party regime to mount an invasion of Angola, to fight the South West Africa Peoples Organisation (Swapo), the Namibian movement, to conduct incursions into neighbouring territories and constituted the praetorian guard to quell rebellion inside South Africa. Quite obviously the National Party was at ease with such a body and wanted to keep it in the new South Africa.

The reason for its maintenance by the ANC-led government seems less obvious and the retention of the old generals is inexcusable. It is surely pertinent to ask why this body has been taken over intact and added to by amalgamation with the forces of Umkhonto we Sizwe and why the military budget, even when cut, should take such a huge portion of the budget?

What are its uses given that there are no external forces threatening the regime? Which nations threatened South Africa in the past and which nations would dare to attack South Africa today? Furthermore, if there are no such enemies, why are there plans to extend the fleet, an arm of the fighting forces that the National Party government found it convenient to downplay? Surely, the entire matter of arms (whether military hardware, aeroplanes or naval forces) must be reappraised in terms of the financial resources available for RDP.

Besides the obvious fact that the Nation State seems to demand that the government of the day surround itself with bodies of armed men with the very latest weaponry, the major reason for keeping a large armed force is to suppress any internal revolt. Short of keeping the extreme right from adventurous escapades – and it did not seem to need much military force to subdue members of the AWB when they went into

Bophutatswana to save Lucas Mangope's Homeland's regime — there seems to be no internal threat. Is it then an army that must be kept in reserve in case a disaffected black movement emerges to challenge the incumbent government? Or is this a force that will be called upon to suppress a rising working class? Or will such a movement be bombed into submission by an air force as happened in the General Strike of 1922?

There seems to be no other reason for the retention of this army and we have little reason to support the members of Umkhonto who flocked to join this army. It seems obvious that the Minister of Defence, who helped to suppress the mutiny in Umkhonto in Angola in 1984, should relish his new and powerful position. But do the rank-and-file know how they will be employed if there is a working class uprising in the country?

Even more ominously, does the regime not know that an army, much of it unreformed and shaped in the cauldron of apartheid, will remain a threat to its very existence? Are they unaware of the coups across the world carried out by the top brass or their immediate lower officer class?

These larger questions need an answer and, as if to foreshadow the answer of the government, there was a peculiar incident when 7,500 former members of Umkhonto went absent without leave in October 1994 — or more cogently, mutinied. The trainees' grievances included allegations of racism, attempts by some army elements to sabotage or at least postpone their integration into the army because of the disappearance of a number of files.

Mandela, as Commander-in-Chief, while recognising the justice of the men's complaints, said that the Umkhonto cadres had been 'infiltrated by people who wanted to destabilise this process [of integration in the army] and by sheer criminals'. This was a shameful and unjustified accusation which he used as a prelude to a rare display of firmness. That is, he gave the men who were still absent without leave seven days to return or be dismissed from the South African National Defence Force and demanded that there be no further absenteeism. About 4,500 out of 7,500 absentees returned the same day but the rest stayed away.

This was another shameful episode but its full implications are not clear. Was Mandela placating the army chiefs, hoping to keep them loyal to the new state? If so, he was playing a dangerous game because this is a body that has its own agenda and needs to be warned that the old habits and methods will not be tolerated. Where new regimes have not clipped the wings of the generals — and the lesson of previous coups must be heeded — the consequences for the elected regimes have been disastrous. The defection of Umkhonto cadres provided an opportunity for ending discriminatory practices in this central state institution.

Mandela's response fell far short of all previous warnings on racist discrimination and bodes ill for the regime.

The above picture of events, partial as it is, does not square with some of the reports emanating from South Africa. There is a new spirit, we are told. There is boundless enthusiasm and everybody is straining to build the new society. Commissions are sitting to plan land reforms, legal reforms have been promulgated, education has been altered, health schemes are in place and new social welfare schemes are being implemented. We have no doubt that there is a new spirit in some quarters. It would be remarkable if there was not some celebrations after the government was changed — both in the camps of the ANC and the National Party. Yet even the much publicised changes have been less than successful. The health scheme that was implemented failed to take account of the needs of the rural population, the hospitals are short staffed and the pharmacies are empty. The school system was altered but there was neither the trained staff, the required books or the school premises. Pupils streamed out of the townships and crowded into Coloured, Indian or white schools. The whites alone were protected — they moved to grant-aided schools.

I can see no way out from these (and other) miserable conditions but, given the financial constraints, the danger of increasing state debt, the difficulties of change in a capitalist society and the lack of schooling in the population at large it would be wrong to pretend that the transformation has been a great success. Indeed the nature of the new state ensures that it cannot succeed.

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