

# The African Communist



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## IN THIS EDITION

- Is Allan Boesak Anti-Communist?
- Organising Women In The 90s
- A Tribute To Yusuf Dadoo
- How The Left Got It Wrong In The Philippines



**Marxism**  
and  
**Feminism**  
Are they uneasy bedfellows?

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# Contents

- 1**            **EDITORIAL NOTES**  
FW's constitutional proposals: A blunder or a threat?  
NP and IFP: Strains in the honeymoon  
Springing to the defence of fascist culture
- 6**            **INTERVIEW WITH ALLAN BOESAK**  
Is he anti-communist?
- 10**           **FEMINISM**  
Marxism and feminism: Uneasy bedfellows?  
*By Pat Horn*
- 21**           **ORGANISING WOMEN**  
Power to the people and the emancipation of women  
*By Jenny Schreiner*
- 30**           **TRIBUTE**  
A tribute to Yusuf Dadoo  
*By Joe Slovo*
- 34**           **HEALTH POLICIES**  
Why national health insurance is not enough  
*By Cara Jeppe*
- 39**           **WORKER EDUCATION PAPERS**  
A basic introduction to Marxist dialectics
- 43**           **INTERNATIONAL**  
How the Left got it wrong in the Philippines
- 48**           **INTERNATIONAL NOTES**  
Nelson Mandela in Cuba
- 50**           **REVIEWS**  
Commanding Heights & Community Control — Patrick Bond is  
interviewed by Jonny Steinberg
- 54**           **LETTER TO THE EDITOR**  
Learning from Lenin

# **THE AFRICAN COMMUNIST**

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## FW's constitutional proposals: A blunder or a threat?

**A**t first sight it is hard to understand why the National Party bothered to table its present constitutional proposals. The NP has lifted and caricatured every possible mechanism they could find world-wide for weakening a central government. The result takes us back to those weird and wonderful constructions that Chris Heunis used to invent in the 1980s.

As Raymond Suttner writes in the *City Press*: 'South Africa has traditionally made

unique contributions to constitutional law. Without exception these have been devices aimed at securing white domination. These proposals follow this unworthy tradition.'

Virtually all the commercial English-language press politely dismissed the new NP proposal. 'Don't take it too seriously,' they said, 'it's just a first bid in the constitutional negotiating process.' Even SATV's Freek Robinson, with a disbelieving grin, asked Stoffel van der Merwe if this was

actually a serious constitutional proposal, or merely a first offer in a bargaining process. And Van der Merwe more or less conceded that it was indeed the latter.

This widespread disbelief in the seriousness of the NP's draft constitution is certainly well founded. In fact, the NP seems to be advancing a constitution designed to make South Africa ungovernable.

Among its most bizarre features are the proposal for a constitutionally entrenched multi-party presidency, and a strange second house that transforms the majority into the minority.

### **The rotating president**

In regard to the president, the NP draft proposes that each of between three to five of the major parties will have a member on the presidency (or 'executive college'). Each of the three to five individuals will be president for one year at a time. Decisions are supposed to be made by consensus in this presidency (in other words the ANC may have to reach detailed daily consensus on every issue with the Conservative Party). A motion of no confidence by parliament can only be passed against the entire presidential grouping and not any one individual. This is a recipe for total presidential paralysis.

To be sure, there are some precedents for a constitutionally enforced rotating presidency - in Yugoslavia for instance. But, in the first place, the Yugoslavian constitutional arrangements do not exactly inspire confidence in the year 1991! In the second place, even so, the rotating presidency in the Yugoslavian case is at least based rather more sensibly on their federal system - each federal state gets its chance to have a Yugoslavian president.

To be sure, there are also many cases

where the executive arm of government is based on a coalition of parties. FW De Klerk, Stoffel van der Merwe and their colleagues in the NP keep mentioning Italy and Germany. But in these cases:

- the coalition is based on election results, that is on the will of the voters, and on deals struck between parties, usually based on the election results (or what is expected to emerge from such results). These coalitions are not timelessly enforced by a standing constitution. The ruling coalitions in Italy and Germany, for instance, result from the fact that the dominant party happens not to have an absolute majority, and so is compelled to enter into a ruling coalition.
- these ruling coalitions are not made up of the three or five leading parties regardless of their policies. In the German case, for instance, Kohl's Christian Democratic party (the party that received the highest votes in the last election) rules in a coalition with Genscher's much smaller Free Democrats. There is an overlap and coincidence on key points in policy between these two parties. This ruling coalition excludes the second major party in Germany, the Social Democrats, and other left-leaning parties, like the Greens.

Coalitions and consensus are not necessarily a bad thing. But they only work when they are based on some shared policy perspectives, and when they bear some relationship to the will of the electorate. Where power-sharing arrangements are entrenched constitutionally (as they have been in Lebanon) they are a formula for governmental paralysis and social chaos.

### **A bizarre second house - or, the miracle of the loaves and fishes in reverse**

Even more bizarre than the multi-party rotating president is the NP's recommen-

dition for a second house which will be able to block any legislation coming from the first house (elected on the basis of proportional representation). This second house will be comprised of representatives from nine regions. Irrespective of the size and population of these regions, each will have equal representation. This immediately loads decision-making against an area like the PWV where Africans, and the working class, are the overwhelming majority.

But this is not all. Each party that receives 10 percent of the vote will be entitled to an equal number of seats in the region's representation. In other words, if the ANC gets 70 percent of the vote, and three other parties each get 10 percent, the ANC will have the same number of representatives as each of these three! This is the miracle of starving the multitude to feed the handful. It is the miracle of turning the majority into a minority!

Stoffel van der Merwe has tried to suggest that this second house proposal is based on the US system (where each state, regardless of size, has equal representation on the Senate).

In fact, NP spokespersons keep telling us that there are international precedents for each of their more way-out proposals. In virtually every case, closer examination shows that what they are proposing is a major distortion of this or that foreign precedent.

But even if they can point to some foreign precedent, the fact is they have selectively snipped out this or that feature. It is one thing to imitate the German, or US, or

Swiss constitutions, and quite another to snip and caricature items from here and there and then mix them all together, completely out of context, into a cosmopolitan potjiekos.

Of course, every single constitutional item snipped and caricatured from elsewhere has one objective: to weaken a future democratic government.

### **Check and balance - yes. Weaken - no!**

A democratic state needs to be one among several social organisations that empowers the people of our country. A future state must be able to carry through the mandate for which it is elected. It must have the power to implement a national policy of

reconstruction. It must be able to promote economic and social transformation. It must be able to implement policies of affirmative action. It must be able to safeguard the independence of our country.

The NP proposals slide together two different things. The state certainly must be checked and balanced, as our own SACP Draft Manifesto notes.

This is why the SACP supports a justiciable bill of rights and a democratic constitution that will bind the government, regardless of which party is in power.

This is also why the SACP advocates strong, independent organs of popular power - civics, street committees, self-defence structures, trade unions, consumer bodies, etc.

Vibrant, independent organs of civil society with a strong working class base will

**It is one thing to imitate the German, or US, or Swiss constitutions, and quite another to snip and caricature items from here and there and then mix them all together, completely out of context, into a cosmopolitan potjiekos**

check and balance, but they will also, in principle, **strengthen** a democratic state. They will enable a democratic state to stand up more forcefully in the face of, for instance, IMF or AWB attempts to undermine the state's democratic mandate.

This is why we say: Check and balance a future democratic state - yes! Weaken it - no!

### **Blunder or real threat?**

But why did the NP put up such a bizarre draft proposal? One explanation, which, as we have noted, much of the press has given, is that this is just a first, advance bid in the negotiations stakes.

On this explanation, De Klerk hopes he will seem reasonable when he makes concessions. Having given a box of matches a R1000 price tag, he hopes that by coming down to R500 it will look reasonable.

But there is another explanation, too. The draft proposal is an outright admission that the NP knows it has very little hope of winning, in coalition with the IFP and others, any democratic election. Indeed there

are growing signs that De Klerk is beginning to be uncertain about his love affair with Buthelezi (see below).

From De Klerk's point of view a more reliable, and probably a numerically stronger coalition base remains those whites currently supporting the Conservative Party.

De Klerk has spent a lot of time lately appealing to CP supporters.

He did so once more at the September Peace Convention. This draft constitution is an intervention with which to woo the white right-wing.

So too is De Klerk's chilling threat concerning his draft. It is a threat directed at us, but it is spoken with a wink over his right shoulder: 'In our defence of these values, we shall not waver. The National Party has the capacity to prevent the adoption of a constitution which will militate against these values. We will not hesitate to use that ability.'

Listen carefully - 'WE WILL NOT HESITATE TO USE THAT ABILITY'. That, in a nutshell, is why the ANC-led alliance is insisting upon an Interim Government.

## **NP and IFP: Strains in the honeymoon**

**O**ur national offices have been broken into and almost certainly bugged, our mail has been opened, our administrative head, Geraldine Fraser, was under surveillance last year. But in the 'new South Africa' our Party's representatives now occasionally also find themselves unwittingly listening in on conversations of the other side.

Take, for instance, the recent Peace

Summit at the Carlton Hotel. Quite by chance, some of our SACP representatives were seated directly behind Gatsha Buthelezi, so they could hardly not hear a controlled, but clearly angered FW De Klerk tell Buthelezi just before lunch to get his armed impi outside the hotel to disperse. Nor could they help noticing the sulky, cold shoulder that Buthelezi turned upon De Klerk.



Later in the day the entire press corps witnessed Buthelezi's churlish refusal to shake De Klerk's hand.

So, is the IFP-NP honeymoon over? Not quite. They both need each other. But certainly there are growing signs that Pretoria is somewhat embarrassed by the ineptitudes of their ally. This embarrassment is certainly not diminished by a growing awareness that the IFP's ability to deliver a sizeable slice of the black vote is not what it has sometimes been cracked up to be. After all, this was never an affair of the heart. It was always a question of bride price and dowries.

Dr Bertus de Villiers, head of the Centre for Constitutional Analysis of the HSRC (supposedly a non-partisan institute - but

one which works closely with the government), says that the chances of an NP and IFP alliance winning an election against the ANC are extremely slim.

'We [who is `we', Dr de Villiers, aren't you meant to be independent?] must be very careful not to fall into the hole of a Muzorewa and a Dirk Mudge. Up to 50 percent of the black population in South Africa is under the age of 20. Millions of black voters who will be voting in some 5 years time, are today 12 and 13 years old. If the National Party thinks it is going to make a 50 percent impact in this constituency, then it is being totally unrealistic. To get into a relationship just with the IFP with its Zulu power base, is not nearly enough.' - *Beeld*, 23.9.91

## Springing to the defence of fascist culture

**A**t the recent CNA literary awards ceremony Professor Jakes Gerwel, rector of the University of the Western Cape, noted that, unlike fascism, communism has always stimulated great art. Many of the great names of 20th century culture were communists - Mayakovsky, Eisenstein, Picasso, Leger, Brecht, Neruda, Hikmet, Ritsos and many, many more.

'Pollux', a senior political commentator on the Afrikaans language Sunday newspaper *Rapport*, felt obliged to spring to the defence of fascism.

What about the American poet Ezra Pound, he asked. And what about the Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsun? And then, what about our own poet Roy Campbell who fought for the fascists in Spain during the civil war?

Well, Pollux has certainly managed to unearth three political cranks with literary skills.

But, let's face it, it's a terribly short list.

What's more significant is Pollux's anxiety to defend the 'honour' of fascist culture! ★

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**Religious leader Alan Boesak was recently elected chairperson of the ANC's Western Cape branch. We spoke to him about his views on the SACP, and how he perceives the relationship between the ANC and the Party**

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**African Communist:** There is a perception, perhaps an incorrect perception, that you are anti-SACP.

Allan Boesak: Let me say very clearly that I am not anti-SACP. I have often stated that I have no problems working with the SACP.

My problems lie at a different level.

As a Christian I have problems with the underlying philosophy of the SACP.

I believe in God, I believe in Jesus Christ as my saviour. What has inspired me through all of my life to act politically was not so much any party political ideology, but my faith.

Let me come to another problem. The other problem I have is not so much with the alliance between the ANC and SACP, as the strange symbiotic relationship in terms of dual membership.

Frankly I do not understand this. Frankly I am afraid it will present difficulties in trying to sell the ANC to people and in trying to shape a political programme that would be acceptable to people.

This is something I have said publicly. It is something one ought to talk about.

**AC:** You have underlined your reservations and differences. Are there points of convergence between your own outlook and that of the SACP?

AB: There is so much that radical Christians and communists share, and one has to say that too. The concern for the poor, the



## Are you An interview

weak and lowly is a concern that we share.

There is the common understanding that you cannot talk of half measures, that when you talk about change it has to be fundamental.

On the fundamental human rights of the oppressed, on equality in society, on the rejection of an economy where a few control and enjoy the wealth while the masses



# anti-communist?

## with Dr Allan Boesak

continue to suffer - on all these a radical Christian cannot compromise.

We may differ on political strategy, but I think we share the same essential goal of justice, fairness, equality and the dream - yes, let people joke about the utopia - Christianity is essentially utopian.

The Biblical image of a society in which all people share whatever the land offers is

something we have had long before Marx. Why should we Christians now deny that vision because Marx has grasped it for his time?

On this basis I must honestly say to you that I do not have a fight with communism. I think I have a fight when it comes to the application of the ideology as we have seen it in eastern Europe.

**AC:** You have answered three or four of my questions before I could ask them! Let's shift to another issue. You were quoted a few months ago in the press criticising the use of "MK rhetoric". Could you comment?

**AB:** For me personally non-violence in the struggle has always been more than just a political strategy. Even in the dark days of the state of emergency, and before, one could make out a good practical argument for non-violence, especially to our young people. Look, when you stand there with a stone in your hand, in the end it is just a stone. Those people come with Casspirs, guns, dogs and teargas. We have seen that they have no compunction whatsoever in killing our people.

But the moral argument is still stronger. My argument has always been that if we can learn to challenge this government in a non-violent way we will expose their violent nature. We will win morally.

Violence has a way of running away with you, of contaminating your soul.

The more you justify violence the more you have to romanticise it. The more you romanticise it the more you get carried away yourself.

I have always felt that if we employ violence we imitate the worst that is in the oppressor.

I remember nights of arguments with students when I was student chaplain at the University of the Western Cape. In a sense I defended the decision of the ANC to take up arms.

I am not blind to the fact that the ANC did not make that choice because it wanted to. The government had slammed the door in the face of our people. I always said that insofar as I would criticise the ANC for the armed struggle, that criticism would be



★ **Boesak: 'Violence has a way of running away with you'**

nothing compared to what I would say of a government whose very policy was violence.

The implementation of its policy was violent. The maintenance of it was violent. The way it forced it down our throats was violent.

**AC:** Okay, I understand the general background of your views, but what specifically did you have in mind when you made your recent critical remarks about "MK rhetoric"?

**AB:** I was referring to the way in which the ANC approaches people. If you go into an urban township like Khayelitsha, for instance, and you say we have to struggle and defend ourselves.

If you call for an eye for an eye, a life for a life, people will respond, they will cheer. But if you toyi-toyi with toy guns down the streets of Beaufort West, or Springbok, or Maraisburg you will get a totally negative reaction.

What I said, therefore, was that you cannot send young people into a conservative Christian rural community, and they come with SACP or MK rhetoric - that is what I said.

**AC: De Klerk has boasted that the National Party will get the support of the Coloured community in an election. On the other hand, it has often been said that you have influence in the Coloured community. Some media commentators have even suggested that you could "deliver the Coloured vote to the ANC".**

AB: Let me first say that I feel extremely ambivalent about this "Coloured" connotation. I am one of those who cut their political teeth in the Black Consciousness Movement.

That involved a total psychological and spiritual change. I am really one of those people who feel happy to have left my "colouredness" behind. When the UDF came and we were introduced into the politics of non-racialism I did that with a lot of conviction.

My work within the UDF was decidedly nonracial, and I enjoyed that tremendously. I said at the time that the politics of ethnicity was dead, that it had no future, and I still believe that.

Nevertheless, it is true that there is a group of people who have been parcelled off, set aside, given slightly more privileges than others in the black community.

This group is now being targetted and wooed by the government in a different way

from other blacks.

I would not say I am the person to "deliver" this constituency to the ANC. I certainly can, and would like to continue to play a role in this regard, but always understanding that my work and my appeal are non-racial, broader than just that.

You are certainly right, incidentally, when you say that De Klerk is boasting. It is just a boast.

It is wishful thinking on his part if he imagines that his propaganda that the ANC is just an African organisation which does not care about minority groups is going to work.

De Klerk is hoping that he can woo the so-called Coloured people by playing on their Christian traditions and by developing some kind of Christian Democratic politics.

What the ANC stands for, its traditions, its history, all of this appeals to our people. Nothing the National Party can do can appeal to them to the same extent.

Sure, there has always been a small number of people in the so-called Coloured community who found for themselves a political home with the National Party.

There are people in the Coloured community who have internalised the racism that apartheid thrived on, people who have never come to terms with this. They may well be deceived by the swart gevaar which De Klerk now brings in a different language. But I do not believe a majority of our people would join the National Party.

But the ANC has to work hard for this constituency. In the beginning the ANC, I think, had a tendency to take its constituency broadly for granted.

I do not think the ANC is making that mistake any more. ★

# Marxism and feminism: Uneasy bedfellows?

By Pat Horn

**T**he liberation struggle in South Africa has produced a diverse range of Marxist currents and analyses. However, very little of this has applied itself specifically to the subjugation of women in our society. This is not so much a shortcoming of South African Marxists as a shortcoming in the Marxist classics from which theoretical inspiration has been drawn.

As a result, when addressing the question of women and their place in society, we find a repeated failure to apply the materialist analysis to patriarchal relations of exploitation as is done to capitalist relations of exploitation. Underlying this is a lapse into a 'naturalistic' view of women's position in society being determined by the biological differences between men and women.

However, this is not very satisfactory. The exploitation of women in patriarchal society is not a phenomenon of nature. It is a social fact which, like other forms of exploitation, has a material basis.

The first Marxist who attempted a substantial materialist analysis of the subjugation of women in patriarchal society, in order to avoid the pitfalls of naturalist thinking, was F. Engels, in 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State'. Engels analysed family structures in different societies through the ages. He traced a historical pattern of transition from matri-

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**Are Marxism and feminism compatible? Yes, argues Pat Horn — but only if it is not a rigid, doctrinaire Marxism**

---

archal to patriarchal family forms, and then a narrowing down to the form of patriarchy he attributes intrinsically to capitalism, i.e. the monogamous family.

He describes this family form as the subjugation of the female sex by the male for the purpose of regulating the ownership of private property, and regards it as essential to perpetuating the capitalist system. This is an extremely economic position, and is an underlying thread running through the Communist movement henceforth.

Engels' vision is that, when capitalism is overthrown and replaced by a classless society, this form of exploitation would be replaced by non-exploitative freely-chosen sexual unions within which the status of male and female would be equal, as would their status in the broader society (Engels 1975 chapter II).

Unfortunately this analysis is also idealistic and deterministic, and gives the idea that the class struggle would automatically solve the problems of women's oppression in the course of their battle against capital for a classless society.

It does not leave much room for the organisation of women to struggle against their oppression. Joan B Landes (1989) points to this shortcoming in this and other writings of Marx and Engels: '... the Woman Question remains subordinate to the fate of the working-class movement, and political, social, and gender questions are all too easily dismissed by way of a naturalizing discourse on matters of sexuality and family life. Following Engels, social democrats and communists have recommended public house-keeping - the socialisation of domestic work - as the solution to women's domestic oppression. In this prescription, there is no recognition of the need for women and men to wage a conscious struggle to transform interpersonal relations, nor of the political requirements of such a task' (Landes 1989 p.26)

### **The first socialist experiments**

The Bolsheviks incorporated the position of Engels and attempted to implement it after 1917. The Bolshevik Party 'came to power with an ideological approach



based on the ideas of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and August Bebel. According to the Marxist tradition, capitalism itself gradually undermined the family by involving women in production outside the home.

Under socialism, the state would assume the basic functions of the family (Goldman 1989 p.61). In 1918 the new state ratified the first Family Code, based on these principles, and which 'constituted the most progressive family and gender legislation the world had ever seen' (Goldman 1989 p.62).

### **Obstacles for Bolsheviks**

However, Bolshevik commitment to changing the position of women, tenacious as it was, encountered numerous obstacles and by 1930, the Bolshevik Party 'began to retreat from its earlier vision' (Goldman p.62). Mary Buckley's view is that the fluctuations in policy on the Woman Question reflected state economic and productivity policy directions current at any particular time.

She points out that early Russian feminists such as Inessa Armand and Alexandra Kollontai addressed the Woman Question in a different way from Marx, Engels and Lenin whose analyses assumed that gender equality was inevitable once class exploitation ended. Armand and Kollontai's view was that women's issues had to be addressed specifically (not only where they coincided with economic imperatives) and that the success of socialism in fact depended on women's liberation from patriarchal oppression (Buckley 1989 p.252). However, their ideas did not win the day, as is well known. The economism and determinism in Engels' analysis were reproduced, not only in Bolshevik Party policy, but also in Soviet state policy on the position of women.

Lenin, too, did not depart from an essentially economist position on the Women Question. Hence neither Lenin nor the Party posed the political problem of patriarchy, let alone challenged it.

In the 1920s, a certain degree of women's organisation was still permissible, because it was understood that women still experienced problems which lingered on from capitalism. By the 1930s, however, despite significant reversals in state policy on women's and household issues, 'the Woman Question won the proud status of 'solved'' (Buckley 1989 p.254), and so women's issues were no longer focussed upon, and women were not supposed to organise as women.

This was seen as unpatriotic, bordering on treason. Only under Khrushchev and Brezhnev did the problems and double burdens of women again start to be recognised (as other problems with earlier economic policy became more pronounced and were similarly recognised), and only under Gorbachev has the role of women properly returned to the political agenda (Buckley 1989 p.255). While there are some different features to women's position in Soviet Russia compared to Western capitalist states, patriarchal oppression thrives as freely in both.

### **Challenging oppression in China**

Another important early experiment in transforming women's position in a socialist society was in China. A (very male) intellectual movement known as the May Fourth Movement (1915 - 21) challenged oppressive traditional kinship structures, and saw great potential for liberated women to make a central contribution in the national liberation struggle.

This movement and Engels' critique of



the family 'mingled in the communist movement as part of a single historical trend and for a few years served to enshrine the ideal of women's emancipation within the movement itself. The impact of this trend was witnessed in the voluminous flood of writings of early male Communists on women's emancipation, which invigorated the feminist press.

These men indicted the Confucian morality code, particularly the traditional value of female chastity, provided a materialist interpretation of the development of patriarchy, argued for the importance of women acquiring an education and becoming economically independent, and echoed Engels' critique of the institution of marriage as analogous to prostitution, with the role of the wife differing from that of the hooker

only in the duration of her services' (Gilmartin 1989 p.84). Gilmartin goes on to trace the implementation of this ideology in the Communist liberation struggle until 1927, and to describe the backlash which followed these early attempts.

These beginnings shaped the policies of the Communist Chinese state after 1948 on the Woman Question, as did the puritanical moralism of the nationalist movement. Despite many official changes in the position of women which were implemented strenuously by the Party, patriarchy remained dominant, albeit in some instances in a more modern form. Delia Davin (1989) outlines 'some brief indications of the positive and negative aspects of the Marxist heritage for women in China', and comes to the conclusion that what is really needed is a strong women's movement to 'take up

women's issues and work out new approaches to them' (Davin 1989 p.357). She clearly does not believe that the Party-led National Women's Federation entirely fits the bill, although she gives them credit for defending gains, such as blocking attempts by the Party to ease women out of the economy — to make way for males in a time of heightened unemployment.

She clearly does not believe that the Party-led National Women's Federation entirely fits the bill, although she gives them credit for defending gains, such as blocking attempts by the Party to ease women out of the economy — to make way for males in a time of heightened unemployment.

Maria Mies (1986) juxtaposes the way in which need of the state to increase population in the Soviet Union on the one hand, and state needs to reduce population growth in China, on the other, have both dominated state



policy towards women, and undermined women and women's issues in different ways. In China, because children provide labour on the land, and the state provides incentives to limit the number of children to one per family, rural women face pressures to remain at home to perform unpaid labour. Again, the way in which women are seen and dealt with in China reflects primarily the economic imperatives of the society.

'By defining women as housewives and breeders, it is possible to obfuscate the fact that they are subsidizing, as unpaid family workers and as low paid production workers, the modernization process. And as in other such, apparently dual, economies, violence here is also the last word to ensure socialist ongoing primitive accumulation of capital' (Mies 1986 p.188).

These experiences, instead of being able to be critically examined by Socialist women's movements in the rest of the world, to serve as lessons of how to avoid the same mistakes, were immortalised and spread to other parts of Europe through the influence of the Comintern to the Communist parties of Europe. The recognised authority on the Woman Question in the Soviet Communist Party, Clara Zetkin, was the leader of the international women's movement (Waters 1989 p.32) and not feminists like Kollontai, Armand or Henriette Roland Holst, a prominent Dutch Communist Party member. Holst identified housework as an important source of female oppression (not only the capitalist formal economy) and demanded immediate measures to eliminate this form of oppression. Zetkin's leadership of the movement ensured the continued hegemony of Marxist-Leninism as the theoretical basis for struggles for women's emancipation in the whole

Comintern-dominated Communist world.

'The Comintern proved as incapable as its predecessor of integrating the ideas and practices of socialism and feminism. Indeed, the Comintern would seem to have provided a less favourable environment for the pursuit of feminist aims, its hierarchical structure and its overwhelming focus on production and the public sphere allowing little space for the development of politics that were responsive to gender as well as class relations. If the (International Women's Secretariat) underlines the importance of political autonomy for women, it also suggests that unless the central theoretical principles and organizational practices of socialist movements are rethought and reconstructed, women's movements will continue to live in their shadow' (Waters 1989 p.51)

### **Anti-Marxist reaction**

The failure of the early socialist experiments to liberate women was a grave disappointment to socialist feminists. Some tried to look upon these particular experiments as defective and not socialist enough, in order to cling to the belief that the overthrow of capitalism and the classless society would still ultimately liberate women. Others have tried to focus on the role of reproduction in the classic economic class analyses, and to look for the source of women's oppression in their inevitable link to reproduction. There is a substantial amount of Marxist thinking around this theme. Other socialist experiments, less affected by the political dynamics of the Soviet Union, have taken place, such as in Mozambique and Nicaragua, but have also had limited success in challenging patriarchal relations of exploitation. These political movements also suffered as a result of the failure of

Communist thought to challenge patriarchy on a political level.

But a large number of feminists have basically reacted by regarding Marxism or materialist analysis as a totally inappropriate means of analysing the oppression of women. Consequently other strands of feminist analysis have become more attractive to many women seeking to challenge patriarchy. Postmodernism emerged and carried with it many feminists, and postmodernist feminism has become a substantial analytic trend. Radical feminists, particularly in the USA, have developed a theoretical framework which revolves around violence against women as the central cause of their oppression in any particular patriarchal society. These theoretical frameworks find all the more resonance because of the shortcomings of classical Marxist theory on the oppression of women.

However, those of us in the struggle in South Africa who regard ourselves as socialists and also as feminists (i.e., who see our struggle as one against capitalism as well as against patriarchy) still find ourselves searching for any analysis which lends itself to some sort of organisation for social transformation. In order to be able to move from a politics of feminist protest to a politics of power, we still find that the principle of collective organisation around the material oppression suffered under patriarchy seems to be as sound as it is when we are talking about the working-class struggle against capitalist exploitation. It is therefore not so clever to throw Marxism (or

materialism) out of the window and simply adopt another theory.

### **A Marxist alternative**

Most Marxist theory divides society into classes based upon their relationship to the means of production. The economic relations of production dominate to the exclusion of political relations of power in these definitions. Women who work for nothing in the home or in family businesses are taken to belong to the same class as the male head of the family. This then masks

the relations of exploitation and domination inside the family.

Alternatively, some Marxists or socialist feminists make a clumsy attempt to define all women as belonging to the working class - which clearly does not fit either. This dilemma essentially results from dealing with the class question from the point of the economic relations of production, excluding the political relations of power, and thus ob-

scuring the different positions of women in the household.

Christine Delphy (1984) attributes this difficulty to an incorrect analysis of marriage and the family. She points to the dependence of married women on their husbands in order to achieve a particular class position, irrespective of whether or not they have a classical relationship to production (i.e. a job). She identifies the existence of a domestic mode of production in terms of which married women give their labour power in exchange for being maintained in the class position of the head

**The failure of the early socialist attempts to liberate women was a grave disappointment to socialist feminists**



of the home (their husband). A married woman's dependence upon the husband becomes a stronger index of class membership than her economic occupation (if she has one). Hence the 'patriarchal class system overrides the industrial one' (Delphy 1984 p.38). Delphy points out that in classical Marxist theory, the family is regarded purely as a unit of consumption. She challenges this on two grounds. Firstly, she holds that consumption within families is not common or undifferentiated, as the term 'unit' implies, and that different patterns of consumption (and the maintenance of these) within families correspond to different class positions even within the family. Secondly, she argues that the family is also an important unit of production. She points to the production of food in rural families, and the production of certain goods and services in all families, by the women (and to a lesser extent some of the children) for consumption by the whole family (Delphy 1984 Chap.3).

Delphy's criticism of Marxist theory, as put forward by traditional Communist Parties, is that it 'does not account for the oppression common to all women, and it concentrates, not on the oppression of women, but on the consequences this oppression has for the proletariat' (Delphy 1984 p.57). It therefore incorrectly regards the oppression of women as a secondary derivative of the class struggle under capitalism. Where women's oppression still survived in countries which called themselves socialist, it was attributed to purely ideological factors, in the absence of any material oppression which it served to rationalise. Delphy challenges this non-Marxist definition of ideology, and insists on the oppression of women (and the ideological practices and institutions which

uphold it) being linked to the material patriarchal exploitation which results from the domestic mode of production. This analysis certainly takes Marxists much further than the classical Marxists, or the traditional Communist Parties, have ever managed to do. I would argue that this analysis is extremely appropriate, not only to the French situation where Delphy comes from but also to the South African situation.

'There are two modes of production in our society. Most goods are produced in the industrial mode. Domestic services, child-rearing, and certain other goods are produced in the family mode. The first mode of production gives rise to capitalist exploitation. The second gives rise to familial, or more precisely, patriarchal exploitation' (Delphy 1984 p.69).

#### **Wife remains responsible**

She points out that the wife in a family remains responsible for the production of goods and services in the domestic sphere, even if she also enters the industrial labour market. Either she has to produce these goods and services (as always, on an unpaid basis) after returning from her job in the industrial sphere, or she has to pay from her salary to hire the services of somebody else to perform these services. While the breakdown of family life generally in society today, has created many variations in the theme of the family unit, it still remains true to say that it is only women who are under an obligation to produce goods and services for domestic consumption. Men who do so, usually do so as a favour, not as an obligation. This is why Delphy maintains that 'patriarchy is the common, specific and main oppression of women' (Delphy 1984 p.74). Women are only supposed to

enter the industrial labour force once they have fulfilled their primary 'family duties', which are in turn an obstacle which allows capital to exploit women even more than men in their occupations outside the home.

Even where women do not live in a marriage or a family unit, the service of child care remains the primary responsibility of mothers (the majority of women, in the South African context) or grandmothers in a patriarchal society.

The patriarchal ideal dominates society both ideologically and economically, despite the wide-spread break-up of the standard married family unit, and women both inside and outside the standard family structures experience the oppression specific to patriarchal domination. The domestic mode of production is integral to, and its forces act upon, the entire social formation, not only standard nuclear or extended family units.

Of course, not all women experience the same immiseration as a result of patriarchal exploitation, just as, in a capitalist mode of production, not all workers are equally badly off. In the South African situation, the idle bourgeois housewife who gets money from her husband to employ a servant springs to mind as a glaring contrast to the woman worker or the hard-working proletarian housewife. But even in this case, the wife has the responsibility of ensuring the provision of the goods and services for the family's consumption, even where the servant who is in turn exploited by her does most of the labour. The basic relationship of domina-

tion and exploitation remains the key in that mode of production. It is this relationship which is central to the maintenance of patriarchy in society. Although patriarchy is much older than capitalism, modern patriarchal domination is now reinforced by the relationship of exploitation central to the capitalist mode of production.

In South Africa, where we have a capitalist patriarchal society, we clearly have a capitalist mode of production and a domestic mode of production which articulate with each other in a single complex social formation. Together with the racial opp-

pression which has characterised South African society, we live in a society dependent on the exploitation of the working class and the exploitation of women. As we work towards a post-apartheid society in South Africa, it is therefore essential that we strive to eliminate not only the racism of apartheid, but also exploitation of women and the working class, if we want to achieve a democratic transformation.

In order to maintain the struggle against patriarchal domination, women must be organised as women and as feminists. The main task for women's organisation which is working for transformation, is to both be involved in the mainstream of political struggle and everyday life, and at the same time to be able to step back and criticise the existing system in order to formulate a radical alternative, free of the ever-present patriarchal ideological constraints. This is not an easy balance to achieve (Briskin 1989). Some organisations will inevitably be so caught up

**In order to maintain the struggle against patriarchal domination women must be organised as women and as feminists**



in the mainstream as to be unable to challenge the system they operate within. Others who manage to step back and theorise on radical alternatives, may make the opposite mistake of becoming alienated from the majority of women and their concerns. There is not single answer telling us what is the right balance between these two aspects of women's struggle. In Briskin's words, 'socialist feminist practice must constantly struggle to combine and resolve the contradictions of mainstreaming and disengagement' (Briskin 1989 pp.102/3).

### **Nationalism and the bogey of western feminism**

A common feature of the struggles for transformation in China, Mozambique and Nicaragua, mentioned above, was that these struggles were also part of the struggle for national liberation. In these and many other national liberation struggles, a closer examination shows us that the struggle for women's emancipation has at all times been subordinate to the national liberation struggle. This must be a major contributory factor to the failure to transform relations of patriarchal domination in such societies. This factor is particularly significant for us in South Africa, because we are trying to wage a struggle for the emancipation of women in the context of our national liberation struggle. Mumari Jayawardena (1989) has criticised some of the tendencies developed by the Left in South East Asia during and after their liberation struggles against colonialism:

'Its nationalism and socialism have been expressed in anti-imperialism and in opposition to class privilege and vested interests. But the nationalism has frequently descended into chauvinism, racism and xenophobia ... The xenophobia about the West

has taken many forms, including the denunciation of Marxism, Christianity, secularism, and women's liberation .... The great historical failure of the Left in South East Asia has been its inability to give leadership to the movement for women's liberation. Far from recognising women's subordination as a question of central concern to any movement advocating democracy and socialism, the Left has either ignored the question or made some token gestures. Left parties have mouthed the rhetoric of women's emancipation, quoting the Marxist texts, but in practice have not treated the issue as one demanding any degree of priority. In fact, the Left has raised the bogey of Western feminism and has attacked feminism as a suspect foreign ideology aimed at destabilizing and splitting the family, the working class, and the party. The absence of the Woman Question in the programs of the Left and the Left's lack of support for feminist organisations are matters for concern, especially since the 'democratic struggle' has always been an essential part of left theory and practice' (Jayawardena 1989 pp.364/5).

And indeed, the bogey of 'Western' or 'bourgeois' feminism has been created, not only in other national liberation struggles, but also in many struggles for socialist transformation, whereby all feminism is equated with a crude 'women-must-all-hate-men' political theory which in actual fact represents only a small part of the world's feminist movement. If one calls feminism bourgeois, one must be alleging that it serves the interests of the (very male-dominated) bourgeoisie to challenge patriarchal domination, which seems rather a far-fetched and ridiculous idea. It does not take much to realise that this bogey is usually created or supported by those who are not

comfortable with the idea of challenging patriarchal domination. It is a means of boosting the dominant patriarchal ideology at a time when other ideologies, such as those which bolster up capitalism and racism, are being challenged and transformed. It is a particularly useful tool, furthermore, in keeping the struggle for women's emancipation subordinated to the struggle for national liberation, instead of transforming the national liberation struggle to integrally incorporate it. Baleka Kgositsile (1990) refers to the phobia for 'Western feminism' as an obstacle in the South African liberation struggle.

'If we get over the stage where our perception of the woman's question is always blurred by the spectre of 'Western feminism' then we should get on with the business of addressing the crucial question as expected and demanded of us by history' (Kgositsile 1990 p.56). ... 'We must consciously create mechanisms to ensure women's emancipation' (Kgositsile 1990 p.53).

### **Tasks for women's emancipation**

A revolutionary concept of emancipation must involve not only the systematic addressing of women's interests and gender interests to improve the status of women relative to that of men, but also a societal transformation. This transformation would need to pose the dismantling of patriarchy, first and foremost. Secondly, the marginal role which women play in the occupational division of labour would have to be transformed to a central one. Thirdly, given the current phase in the political history in South Africa, and the fact that we are engaged in a national democratic struggle against the apartheid regime, the national question in South Africa needs to be reformulated to ensure that the struggle be-

comes a gendered struggle for a new transformed South Africa.

'Many of the debates on the transition to socialism as well as platforms of left regimes have been dominated by an economic approach: their emphasis on economics tends to overlook other basic areas of human development and well-being. To the extent that women's condition is affected by these economic factors, the debates are relevant for a discussion of women and socialism. But to the extent that the debates neglect ideological dimensions and their interaction with the material, they cannot easily incorporate what Maxine Molyneux has called 'strategic gender interests' or short and long-term feminist demands. Thus, how gender roles are constructed and reproduced within the family and throughout the educational system, or through the media and other institutions, takes on a special meaning for women ...: not only do they effectively define women socially and politically, they also carry economic significance, when translated into, for example, sex-typing of jobs, occupational segregation, lower wages, different promotional ladders, and even job accessibility' (Beneria 1989 p.328).

### **Conclusion**

On the question of whether Marxism and Feminism are compatible or not, therefore, one has to conclude that this all depends on what kind of Marxism one is thinking of. Unwavering and doctrinaire adherence to the classics of Marx, Engels and Lenin would clearly be antagonistic to a feminist struggle against patriarchal domination as distinct from the capitalist class struggle. However, Marxists who recognise the relative autonomy of the economic and the political and those who

analyse capitalism in terms of the co-existence of modes and forms of production in articulation with one another in a particular social formation would allow for a feminist struggle against patriarchal domination as interlocking with the socialist struggle against capitalist exploitation. Further, the struggles for socialist transformation (and national liberation too) cannot be complete without the emancipation of women.

Therefore the imperatives of the feminist struggles against domination and exploitation have to be merged into one struggle for the transformation to a non-sexist and socialist political economy in South Africa.

In a world where more and more activists are turning away from socialism of any kind, it is hard to find support for the idea that Marxism and feminism could interact in this way without one swallowing the other.

However, Jayawardena (1989) has hope that in South East Asia at least, the tension between the Communist-led Left and the women's movement is attaining this type of political maturity in their outlook. She expresses this cautiously in the words of a member of the Women's Power organisation in Hyderabad, India:

'We have been looked upon critically by the Left and labelled either anti-Marxist or bourgeois feminists. Attempts to co-opt us have alternated with attempts to denounce us. But our strength has been that we have retained our identity and coherence as a group.

'After initial attempts to bring us into the 'correct path', the Left has reassessed our role. Our relationship with the Left - originally so difficult for both us and them - is now far more balanced and marked with a certain respect for our identity.' (Jayawardena 1989 pp.356/7). ★





Jenny Schreiner delivered this paper — entitled **Power to the People and the Emancipation of Women** — during a recent seminar at Natal University

# Organising women in the 1990s

By Jenny Schreiner

**“Women’s Issues” are people’s issues.**

I disagree with a conception that identifies women’s issues as those issues which women alone should take up, or which affect women alone. Many socialist leaders have said that while our women are not free, the people are not free. All of the issues so neatly categorised as women’s issues, are in fact

issues that have direct bearing on the kind of society we live in, and on the quality of the lives of men, women and children. What are women’s issues conventionally? Rape, violence against women, maternity rights, ante-natal health, legal discrimination against women, childcare, contraception and abortion, media attitudes to women

and the objectification of women. Yes these all affect women, but in a different way they affect men too.

I think it is more conceptually useful to refer to these as gender issues, issues that relate to the manner in which society deals with relations between men and women. Rape is not always directed against women, and is no less socially unacceptable when directed against men, or children. Violence against women eats at the very fabric of our communities and our families - it is a matter that needs to be addressed by both men and women since its effect is to brutalise our relations in our community. Whether mothers have access to proper ante-natal health facilities and maternity rights is not a matter simply for women - the poor health of our nation's mothers results in the frailty of our children's health, and the disadvantaging of those communities where these facilities are scarcest.

I do not for a minute wish to suggest that these issues are not felt more acutely by women than by most men. What I am arguing is that we seriously weaken our fighting force around these demands by portraying them as issues that women should be responsible for solving on their own. What we must guard against is the danger of ghettoising the struggle for women's emancipation, by separatism around issues and around forms of organisation. As will become clear later, I do argue for an autonomous women's organisation, but in no way do I suggest that this should be an independent and separatist position. I find it necessary to refer to this point because of the legacy of European style feminism which sometimes creeps into discussion of the emancipation of women. There are many strands of feminism, and I do not reject all of them. But against feminist separatism,

we should have our guards up. What conventionally we have referred to as "women's issues" are in fact PEOPLE'S ISSUES, and the task facing the women who feel them most acutely is to make the entire nation aware of these issues and committed to finding a solution to them, to make them non-negotiable.

### **What does women's emancipation entail?**

What women's emancipation entails is more than a list of issues - it's easy to say women are oppressed in the family and home, in cultural traditions and media, in health policy and through birth control, in the workplace, in education, in access to social services, in access to technology and through the corridors of power in government. The Democratic Party, the ANC, the National Party and the South African Communist Party all have policy on these issues, but their policies differ.

Which of these policies sets us on the right road to the emancipation of women? The answer to this lies in which policy sees the emancipation of women in redesigning the social relations in each of these spheres, and providing the resources to facilitate the democratisation of these areas.

Let me take an area which is a complex and difficult issue - the family and the home. Migrant labour has left us with a legacy of divided families - do we emancipate women by demanding the right to family life? The issue is far more complex. We have laws that give predominance to men within marriage, (although less so than before 1984), that portray the nuclear family as the norm, that assume that women once married are less entitled to paid work than their husbands.

Our policy on the family and the home has to take the wide variety of family forms

that exist in South Africa into account. It is not for legal experts to decide that the nuclear family should be enshrined in our law.

Family history reveals that the concept "family" dates only from the late 18th century in Europe, and in the South African context it is over-simplistic. We need to understand how the industrialisation of South Africa has transformed the ways in which people have lived and turned the family into a workplace for women to provide an ongoing and replenishable supply of workers.

Our cultures have been constantly changing and new forms of households have emerged. How do single parent families relate to women's emancipation? Increasingly as women are forced through social dislocation caused by migrant labour and the poverty of apartheid, to enter industry and rely on their own resources for

income, women are setting up family forms in which men are a transient element.

Counter-balancing these forces are the cultural expectations that define women according to the four categories- daughter, wife, mother and widow. This conception is increasingly out of date with the economic reality that women are living, and it is the task of the liberation movement to develop cultural attitudes that are more in keeping with the values and realities of the 1990s.

What I am getting to here is that emancipation of women involves transformation of the family, household relations, legally, culturally, socially and economically.

It is not a transformation that comes through the stroke of a pen, nor through a piece of policy. Rather it is an ongoing part of the democratisation of our society, of moving away from oppressive relations and structures and allowing the people themselves to determine how they wish to live,



work and struggle.

**How do we prioritise women's emancipation alongside the struggles for democracy and socialism?**

Now we are faced with the question of how we prioritise the women's struggle alongside the struggle for democracy, or later on, in the struggle for socialism. Part of the answer should be clear - it is not a question of a balancing act between different struggles. The issue of women's emancipation is not on the back burner. How we take up these issues is defined by the material conditions we face and our ability to gain ground on such issues. It is a bit trite to say that our strategy and tactics are determined by the objective and subjective factors facing the liberation movement - everybody has heard that a thousand times. But it is no less valid because it is oft repeated.

The present conjuncture is one in which enormous gains can be made on issues pertinent to women's emancipation. We face, in a very real and immediate sense, the opportunity to redefine the relations in our society. The process of drafting a democratic constitution over the next few years is one which calls for open and public debate of all these issues. But we also need to ensure that our approach to women's emancipation and to democracy is embedded in this process. We are not going to be satisfied if an elite sits around a table to produce a perfect democratic blueprint - we want debate in every household about all aspects of the way we wish to govern ourselves, run our lives, the conditions under which we are going to work.

This process of taking the issues into our people's homes and hearing from the grassroots how men and women want to live is stage one of raising consciousness

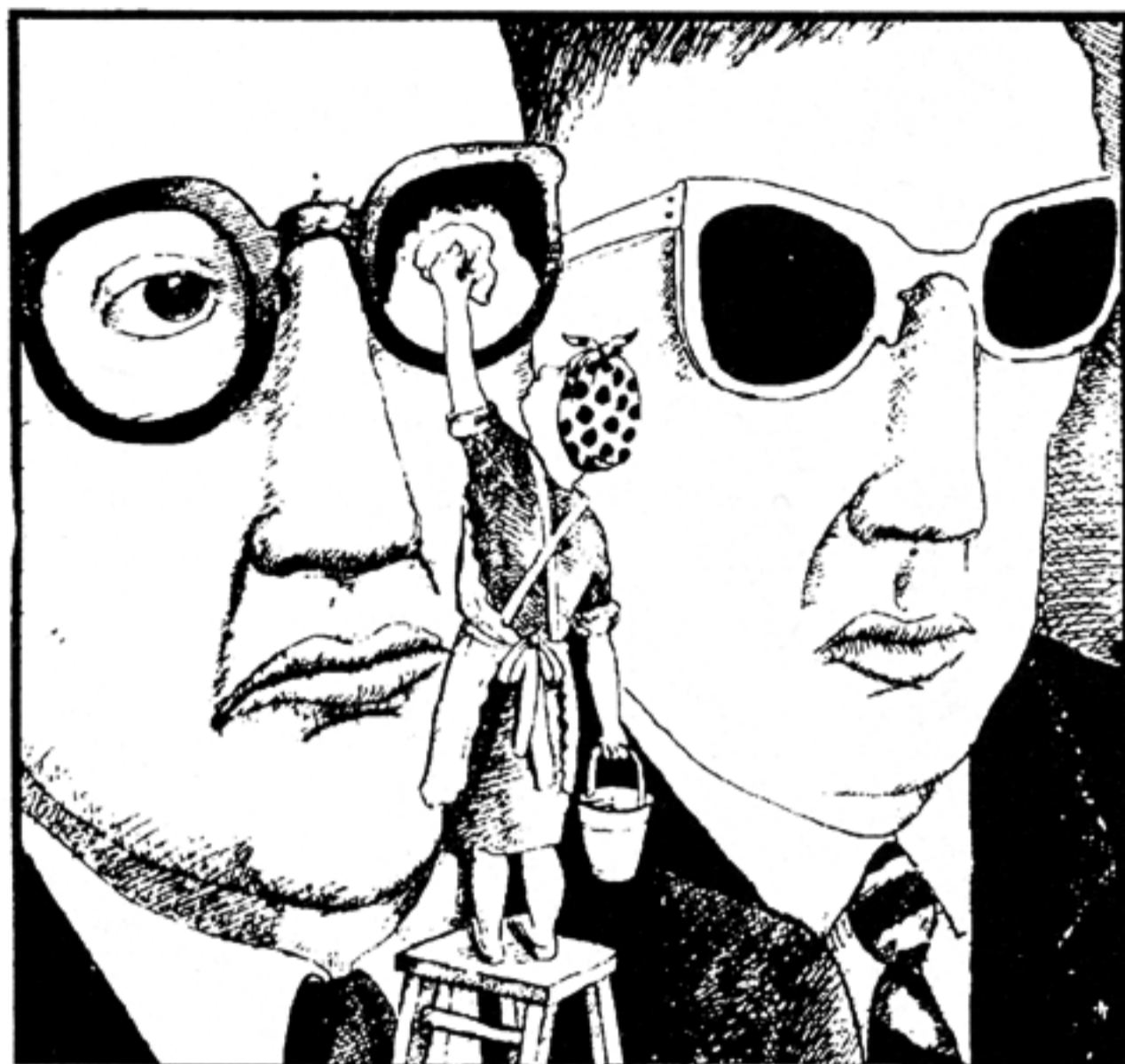
around oppression and the need for democratisation of our lives. Making laws compatible with people's realities and aspirations is another step, and securing people's rights in a constitution takes us further. But as soon as we believe that the process of changing laws and constitutions answers social problems, we are losing our way. What I am saying is that the present context gives us openings for raising issues of women's oppression and emancipation in a new and creative way and we will be doing the nation a disservice if we do not follow this through.

There is no blueprint of a suitable form of organisation of women, we have to find what is most useful today, and here. In fact, there are many possibilities of how to organise women, and many that fit alongside each other. There are different tasks facing us in different organisations, different places - we can quite easily find that what works for one task does not work for another.

I want to isolate four forms of organisation that are relevant to those committed to women's emancipation in South Africa in the 1990s.

**i) The need for an autonomous mass women's organisation:**

The majority of women in South Africa are hampered from political involvement by household responsibilities, lack of political skills, lack of confidence to voice out their problems, and the negative attitudes of men towards politically active women. This situation is made worse by the legacy of illiteracy imposed on our women by the apartheid education system and the prevailing attitudes to women's needs for education. In poverty-stricken households, it is the girl children who are the first to leave



school to add to the household income, and the scarce family resources are often directed first towards the boy children.

These obstacles to women's involvement amount to a serious lack of empowerment of women. It is crucial that a vehicle of mass struggle, aimed at organising amongst women, is built to address these obstacles and to empower women.

What do we mean by empowering women? In part this entails building an organisation which can represent the aspirations of women, hear their views and articulate their demands. It means finding ways to train and equip women for an active social role in all aspects of society. It also means exploring solutions to the practical obstacles such as the double day, the danger of late night meetings, etc.

The answer lies in campaigning for shared housework, organisations to provide transport from late night meetings

and to ensure that meeting lengths are made more suitable to women's schedules. All of this is political work, victories to be secured. They are not secured through individuals saying them from platforms, but through organisations building a political practice which is appropriate to women's lives and insisting that such practices are generalised through organisations reaching out to the mass of women.

In the process of building a women's organisation aimed at mobilising the mass of women into the liberation struggle, we are

embarking on a another process at the same time. How do we mobilise women? What are the issues around which we choose to organise women? And what is the effect on the women we reach out to in this way? The actual process of organising women into mass campaigns involves a consciousness-raising process, a politicisation process, which through itself generates a force for women's emancipation within the liberation movement.

An issue such as campaigning for a creche in Sobantu is not necessarily going to raise political consciousness, or raise awareness within the liberation movement that society does not address the needs of women. But in the way in which the Women's League campaigns for a creche, and links this to demands around local government and welfare services, we not only teach women that through action we can change our lives, but women also learn that we have the

power to intervene in the larger social and political processes.

If our campaign work is mass work, going door to door, speaking to the women of every street through house-visits, pamphlets, newspaper and area meetings we are forging a new kind of woman who is aware of her environment and her power to change it. In addition, by coming together in an organisation, women begin to realise that problems which they have experienced previously as their own individual problems are in fact common experiences of other women sharing their class and colour background, and at times even across those divisions.



To try and condense what I am saying here about the need for the Women's League - the transfer of power to the people is only achievable through mass action, and mass democratic action which excludes the majority of women is neither mass nor democratic. Secondly, through the very process of mobilising women into the liberation struggle, we are empowering women and raising consciousness, thereby setting the basis for women to voice out their demands and their particular perspective on the issues of the day - albeit maternity leave, talks about talks, counter-revolutionary violence, or women's rights for the democratic constitution.

Too often we understand the call to organise women (as half of our fighting force) into the liberation struggle as a call by Marxist men to use women as cannon fodder or voting power to put the men into power. I reject this distortion of our ap-

proach completely, and our organising experiences I think point to this as being a distortion. For in the process of building women's organisations that have seen their prime aim as organising women into the struggle for democracy, we have seen how those organisations have brought with them, through articulating the voice of women, a qualitatively new element.

**ii) The role of a gender department in a political organisation:**

Within the SACP there has been for many decades a commitment to the emancipation of women, a goal which is only fully realisable once democracy and socialism have been built. The Party has seen the need for a vehicle of mass women's struggle outside of the party - a position first articulated in the 1930s and 1940s; and for a department within the party which will ensure that the policy on women's emanci-

pation is put into practice.

The current debate within the party reinforces the commitment to the SACP-ANC alliance, recognising the leading role played by the ANC in this phase of struggle for a national democratic constitution and state. The party therefore is committed to building the ANC and ANC Women's League and sees its role as different from these organisations.

Unlike the ANC, the party is committed to socialism, and as such there is a need for empowering women in relation to socialist theory and practice, a task that the Women's League does not identify for itself. In addition, the party has identified the need to theorise around organising strategies aimed at drawing working-class women from different cultural backgrounds into the organisation. Over and above this, the party has a policy of affirmative action within its own ranks and sees the need for special deployment of comrades to ensure that this is carried out.

The party debate has excluded the option of a Women's Section, comparable to the Women's League, as this would compete with the Women's League and would place an additional burden on women party members. The double day and double organisational tasks would be a sure way to cripple party women's involvement in the liberation movement! What we are arguing for is the establishment of a Women's Department, or as some prefer to call it a Gender Department within the Party, consisting of men and women, with the task of both empowering women, educating men and women members around gender issues and the need for women's emancipation, and theorising around such issues.

This structure seems to be appropriate to the present context given the alliance

and the role of the Women's League. It is a different way of organising women politically, while at the same time actively working against the possible ghettoisation of gender issues onto a women's only agenda.

The role mapped out for such a Gender Department would also encompass a contribution to ideological struggle around women's emancipation and women's rights. I have already pointed to the variety of approaches to the topic, and there is a need for a deepening of the debate in this regard. Women are notoriously weak on theorising around social issues, and understanding events in their full context. Our socialisation equips us to be far more practically oriented. The Party has an important role to play, given the correct understanding in the party that theory is crucial to strategising around our struggle. This can best be achieved not through a mass women's section, but through structures more suitable to strategic thinking and theorising around the practice of women's struggle.

### **iii) An alliance of women's forces is crucial:**

What about the very many women who are neither part of the ANC Women's League or the SACP? How do we reach out to include those women in the building of a national democracy and in working towards women's emancipation? Here is where the argument for a broad front of organised women comes into play. There are numerous issues which are of common concern to women whose organisational homes are very varied. We cannot expect every woman to be involved in all organisations - some will choose to be active in the church, some in service organisations such as Rape Crisis structures, some will be tied up with trade union responsibilities, others will choose to

find their home in a political organisation - the liberation movement, the parliamentary parties, etc.

How do these women maximise their ability to win gains around those issues which they hold in common? The Malibongwe Conference brought together a wide range of democratic and anti-racist women in Holland in 1989, and the result of sharing experiences was a call for a women's alliance around particular, limited issues.

Recently in Cape Town, a conference of 22 women's organisations was held to discuss this call, resulting in positive support for the idea. The key areas that the women delegates outlined for action were women's rights and women's participation in the process leading up to a democratic constitution; internal education and organisational empowerment of women; campaigning against violence against women. It was agreed that one issue should be taken up at a time, and that very limited objectives should be set for each campaign. The strength of this alliance will be its ability to unite women across the political spectrum, from the DP, ANC, AZAPO, SACP, with women from the trade unions, with women from the churches, and to provide a very real voice of South African women on particular issues.

Obviously before this can really reflect South African women, we in the Western Cape are dependent on the Women's League and women from other nationally based organisations taking the lead in forming up regional alliance structures. This is not only important in raising the issues of women's rights strongly now, but also in uniting women in support of democratic forces, and isolating the government's attempts to draw women closer to them.

#### **iv) Organising women within the labour movement:**

A final and brief comment is necessary on the position of women within the trade unions, and how to organise there. Some of the trade unions, and I mention the Food and Canning Workers Union particularly, have a rich history of organising predominantly women workers, politicising them and drawing them into the liberation movement, while at the same time uniting women union members with the women's movements. FCWU was part of the Federation of South African Women, part of SACTU and encouraged very close relations with political organisations of the time.

Women workers do have very specific problems at work, that are not experienced by men workers. Equally with women in the political organisations, the women workers face practical and cultural obstacles to organisational involvement. COSATU has addressed these issues both within the trade union affiliates and through COSATU structures.

The struggles waged in negotiations with employers have increased the power that women have within the unions. Women workers have taken their issues right onto the COSATU Congress floor - demands around working conditions, around sexism that they experience within COSATU, and their political demands as working-class women.

The COSATU Women's Forum is also not aimed at being a mass-based women's structure, but has surely shown the way in terms of a lobbying force for women's rights within an organisation with men and women members.

As I have already mentioned, some of the trade unions in the Western Cape which



have predominantly women members are joining in the discussion around the women's alliance. The Women's Forum needs to prioritise the task of ensuring that the majority of women workers are organised into trade unions, eg. farm workers, and domestic workers, and unemployed workers.

The struggle is not won through political organisation alone, and there is a very important role for trade unions to play within civil society of a democratic South Africa.

It is COSATU women with the support of their allies in the ANC and SACP, who have to ensure that women workers are playing an active role in the economic aspects of civil society through their trade unions.

I have discussed the topic of organising women in the present context of working for the transfer of power to the people and the building of a participatory democracy. It is appropriate then that I make a final comment on the question of whether we should be aiming for a Women's Ministry in a democratic South Africa.

I hope the logic of my argument has made it clear that this would be of no service (and potentially much disservice) to the cause of women's rights.

The setting up of a Women's Ministry is the ultimate ghettoisation — all issues that relate to gender, to women, children, the home, would be referred there.

And furthermore, the dan-

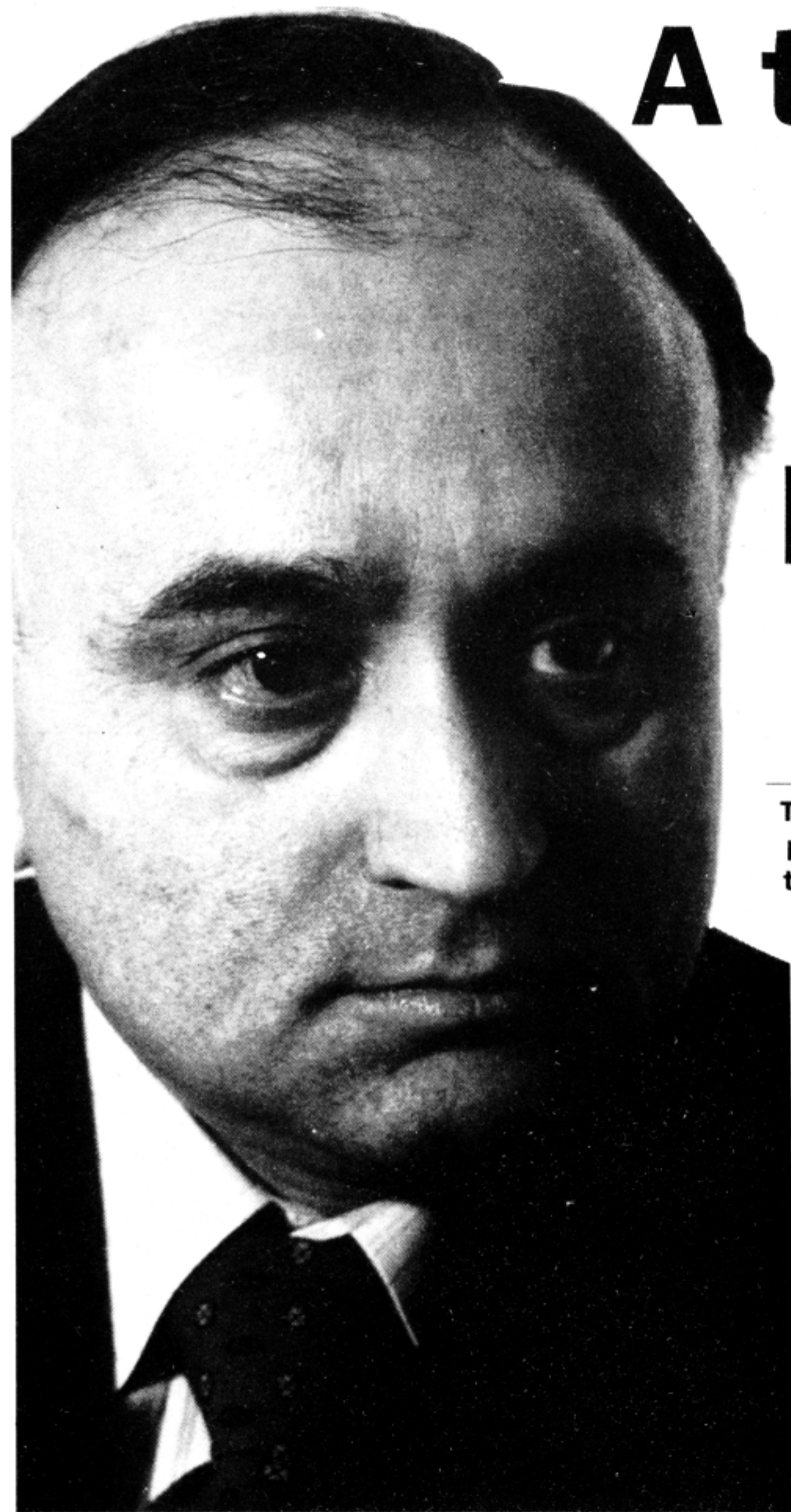
ger is that the resources of the country would be allocated to "far more important matters" such as the economy, defence force, local government etc, all of which are denuded of their gender content.

What I think we need instead is a Women's Desk within each government department, with the task, not of implementing policy and projects that relate to women, but ensuring that within policy-making and the implementation of policy, gender issues are integrated into the analysis and practice.

These desks would not need an independent resource allocation, beyond employing the individuals and equipping them to act as a lobby within the department.

But these Women's Desks need the support of, as well as the pressure from organised women within both political society, and civil society to ensure that the Women's Rights which we intend to enshrine in the democratic constitution are in fact put into practice and become part of all South African women's experience. ★





# A tribute to Yusuf Dadoo

By Joe Slovo

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**This tribute was presented as part of a panel discussion on the life and times of Dr Yusuf Dadoo, in the course of the University of the Witwatersrand, September Spring Festival**

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**T**he times of Yusuf Dadoo are well documented, and the main thrust of my short input will be about Yusuf Dadoo himself. The breadth of his contribution was highlighted in a rather heated and, to what might seem to some, a rather odd debate. It was a debate on what words we should put on the head-stone of his grave. We eventually hit on the

words: 'Fighter for national liberation, socialism and world peace.'

The choice of words for Yusuf's headstone was not easy. In fact, it occasioned much debate, and the reason is plain. How do you carve everything Yusuf was into a piece of stone? Could we, indeed, have a grave-stone large enough to do justice to the many layers which made up his many-sided contributions. To scan the whole panorama of his life's endeavours would have needed more than a grave-stone; it would have needed a mountainside!

Those of us who had the privilege of knowing Yusuf well, can imagine that if he could have had a say in his own epitaph, the one addition he would perhaps have insisted upon would have been the words 'simple musket-bearer'. For, above all, this is how he saw himself.

Comrade Yusuf was essentially a man of duty and not privilege; a revolutionary who gave and who expected nothing for himself in return. Indeed he was a musket-bearer who was always ready to be in front - for duty and not for position or honours. And when deserved honours were heaped upon him, they left him genuinely startled and almost embarrassed. He was a most modest person.

This eldest son of a wealthy merchant left no estate of property or other material possessions. A qualified medical doctor, he always spurned the wealth he could so easily have had. He combined in himself the same qualities of abnegation of worldly possessions of a Gandhi or a Trevor Huddleston. And in the process he left the community in which he was brought up and all the dominated people a most rich legacy. In the years since his death, the seeds he helped to plant and to water for well over 40 years of devoted political activism have begun to sprout their foliage.

Included in the testament which Yusuf signed on the day he died was a short reflection on whether his life merited a biography. He said: 'Over many years friends and comrades have urged that I write my memoirs. However, I did not pay much attention to such requests, thinking that my life's work was not that significant. But today, on reflection, I regret that I did not comply with their wishes. I realise that, correctly written, such a book could bring out three crucial developments linking together three motivating ideas of struggle. **Firstly**, the regeneration of the militancy of the political struggle among Indian people after my return from London. **Secondly**, as part of this process, the growth of consciousness for the urgent need for unity with the majority of the oppressed, the African people, which led to unity in action of all oppressed and democratic forces; and **thirdly**, the development of class consciousness during these struggles as an integral part, **in fact the key**, to creating a free, socialist South Africa.'

In each of these areas, in close on 50

## The life of Dadoo

**Yusuf Dadoo was born in Krugersdorp in 1909. After attending school in South Africa and India, he qualified as a doctor in Britain. He returned to South Africa in 1936, and joined the Communist Party in 1939. He served for many years on the party's leadership. He was elected president of the Transvaal Indian Congress in 1945, and president of the South African Indian Congress in 1950. Yusuf Dadoo (or Mota or Doc as he was popularly known) died in exile in London in 1983. He lies buried just a few feet away from the grave of Karl Marx in Highgate Cemetery.**

years of political activism, Yusuf won positions in our history which, in combination, are perhaps unique. He reinjected into the Indian community the Gandhi-like spirit of pride and defiance, and became this community's foremost national leader. But he went further than the Gandhi of the earlier days, he saw more clearly than the young Gandhi that the fate of all the black oppressed is indivisible. And through his endless drive for unity in action between all the dominated peoples, he became one of the foremost heads of all the the black oppressed. In song and speech his name rang out with the Luthulis, the JB Marks's and other national liberation leaders, and not just among Indians. What is more, he never bought his national popularity at the expense of hiding the very driving force of his political life, a devotion to internationalism, to socialism as the ultimate foundation for true freedom and liberation. He was a proud communist and this devotion informed everything he did as a revolutionary nationalist.

Hours before his death he dictated a message to the Central Committee of the SACP which was meeting the following day. In it he said: 'Today, almost as never before, the South African workers are on the march. In this field a great responsibility rests on our Party. We are the revolutionary Party of the working class, whose clear role is that of the vanguard in the fight for socialism. The working class, in essence the black working class in our country, is the pivotal force in the struggle for a revolutionary overthrow of the entire apartheid system. As such our Party must place its main focus and emphasis on organising, uniting and giving clear guidance to this class, which forms the backbone of our struggle. Included in this task is assessing our strength and weakness

in the trade union movement as a whole, assessing (re-defining if necessary) the role of SACTU, and ensuring our future working in this vital field meets the demands of the time.'

His principled refusal to hide his ultimate commitments presents something of an enigma since it seemed in no way to detract from the regard - sometimes bordering on worship - in which he was held by his immediate community. It was not then and is even less so today, an easy mix. He stemmed from a community which, with all its racial wounds, nonetheless suffered a lesser degree of discrimination than the African majority. It was a community in which insecure commercial vested interests, which were attained through individual initiative and imagination, had to be jealously guarded. In addition, it was a minority community filled with the uncertainty of being hemmed in between two major forces, with a degree of some African grass-roots resentment (stoked up by regime policy) against the traders' role in their exploitation. (This found horrific expression in the 1948 Natal massacre).

But Yusuf, more than any other Indian leader, became the beacon of hope and the beacon of growing acceptance that, at the end of the day, the fate of all blacks was a common one. And, in relation to the Indian community, what made this possible was not just his unending political drive to achieve unity, but perhaps even more so in the way he was perceived as a result of his personal example. Like Gandhi before him, he eroded the understandable impotence felt by an apprehensive minority. Moving away from the received orthodoxy of what is really meant by 'revolutionary' struggle, he absorbed one of the indigenous traditions of our own realities - the Gandhite

concept of defiance, of refusal to collaborate even at the risk of incarceration. And he was among the first to offer himself. The 1946 Defiance Campaign against Smuts' anti-Indian laws not only helped to inject a renewed sense of self-regard in the Indian community, but was also a harbinger of the new militancy which spread through the ranks of all the black oppressed.

I recall, on the lighter side, an exchange between Yusuf Dadoo and Buirski, who was a Party veteran from the 1920s. And comrade Buirski poked fun at this 'Gandhite deviation' by describing the campaign as 'squatting on a plot'. Yusuf replied: 'The comrade does not have to squat on his plot: he owns it.'

### Embraced MK

But Dadoo went beyond Gandhi, and when even the little remaining room to manoeuvre was blocked, he embraced with enthusiasm the creation of MK.

Yusuf Dadoo had another seminal quality which helped soften the reaction of those in his community who, because of their economic status, were nervous about his unhidden commitment to a socialist future. He was a passionate internationalist, but equally passionate in his pride and regard for his cultural roots.

He had the most undeviating respect for his community's languages and religious traditions. He saw no conflict there.

Diversity, he understood, was no obstacle to unity, indeed it could enrich the South African nation in the making.

This explains his insistence while in exile in London to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. (I'm not sure whether any other Chairper-

son of a Communist Party can claim the title of Haj!) I remember meeting him on his return to Heathrow airport in London, head shaven, kettle in hand and white robe.

It was with the same genuine respect for his people's beliefs that he expressed the wish to ensure that Muslim rites would also take place at his funeral ceremony.

In summary, there are few figures in our history to match Yusuf Dadoo's grasp, in practice, of the very complex relationship in our country between national struggle and class struggle. His contribution was not in the sphere of theoretical

treatises, but in the practice of struggle and the personal example of his whole life-style.

When we landed in Cape Town for the Groote Schuur Talks in May 1990, Yusuf Dadoo was one of those at the very top of my mind. If only he had lived to see how far we had advanced in the centuries-old struggle to destroy this evil system.

But even though he was fated not to live to the inevitable future of a free South Africa, he truly lived to make it possible.

There is an important lesson in all this, especially at this moment, and especially for those in the Indian community who are today being so assiduously wooed by the National Party which, together with previous white minority ruling parties, kept them as ghetto people for more than a century.

I am confident that the example that Yusuf Dadoo has given will play a very fundamental role in ensuring that those who have been sitting on top do not succeed in weaning those in this community away from their natural allies — their fellow South Africans in the struggle for a true democracy. ★

**'If only Doc had lived to see how far we had advanced in the centuries-old struggle to destroy this evil system'**

# Why national health insurance is not enough

By Cara Jeppe

**F**uture health services in South Africa must be seen against the legacy of apartheid. It is a legacy which was described in the Declaration of the International WHO Conference in Brazzaville on "Apartheid and Health" in the following terms:

"Apartheid and health are incompatible and mutually exclusive...in every group of diseases there is marked social and racial stratification which exceeds anything so far known in the epidemiology (causation) of human disease. This stratification is directly and unequivocally related to the policies of apartheid and hence is the product of design and purpose...Apartheid is an assault on the whole person, on the family and on the community. The health services designed and provided by the apartheid regime have only one purpose, the maintenance of the status quo...The single essential pre-requisite for the establishment of a health care system in South Africa which could meet the needs of all people...is the radical and total dismantling of apartheid."

In spite of statements of intent about desegregation, "white" health services remain inaccessible to most blacks and apartheid administrative structures are still intact. In order to correct the situation, more resources need to be allocated to blacks than whites, and a National Health Service must combine affirmative action with a shift from hospital bed to a community

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**Cara Jeppe, a health worker and NEHAWU member, takes issue with those who are calling for a National Health Insurance Scheme rather than a full National Health Service.**

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based concept of health services. Furthermore positive steps need to be taken to ensure the equal access of workers of all races to jobs and managerial and administrative posts in the health services.

While 3,2 percent of the gross national product is currently spent on 80 percent of the population in the public health sector, 2,6 percent is spent on 20 percent of the population in the private sector. This 2,6 percent does not contribute to meeting the health needs of the population as a whole and is a substantial drain on public resources. Those resources in the private sector need to be incorporated into a system which provides equitable health care for all.

## **Evasive and contradictory arguments**

De Beer and Broomberg, of the Wits Health Policy Centre, argue that a National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) would provide the short-term solution to the health challenges facing our country. They argue that there is a need to "expand the range and quality of service without a significant expansion of resources", and they see in an

NIHS the answer. They believe that centralised control of health **financing** will in time integrate privately owned facilities and private practitioners into a National Health Service (NIHS).<sup>1</sup> But they avoid the most crucial issue by simply asserting that how this integration will happen is beyond the scope of their paper. What is more, they argue that control by a central health co-ordinating body is undesirable.

But it is, in my view, precisely only such a body, with sufficient political will, that can incorporate private resources into a universally accessible health care system. How would an NIHS be able to:

- make equitable a two tier (private and public) health care system?
- reallocate priorities?
- direct financing to underdeveloped areas?
- expand the range and quality of services?
- dismantle all apartheid structures?
- create greater administrative efficiency?
- foster commitment to comprehensive health care with sufficient emphasis on the prevention of disease and the promotion of good health?
- integrate privately owned facilities and private practitioners into an NHS?

Frankly, I do not believe that an NIHS, operating on its own, will be able to achieve any of these essential strategic tasks.

### **What about democratisation?**

Nowhere in the de Beer and Broomberg paper is there any attention paid to the democratisation of the health services. The existing structures of health institutions reflect some of the worst features of the apartheid system. Central and local governments have imposed white minority managerial control and have stifled accountability in administration, and democratic par-

ticipation in health policy formulation. Moreover, professional knowledge and skills have been monopolised by a largely white medical profession, which remains inaccessible to the vast majority of South Africans. The medical profession has, in general, regarded itself as having the right to make health-related decisions without consulting other health workers, or the public. They have maintained a highly structured hierarchy, with extreme inequalities in knowledge, power, income and influence.

The strengthening of the public sector depends on the improvement of working conditions there for all health workers, including doctors. Industrial unions have the power to achieve this through their principle of solidarity among all categories of workers. Without the participation of all health workers in administration and policy formulation there can be no structural change.

It is a fallacy that those without formal knowledge or skills lack the ability to participate effectively in the administration of hospitals, clinics and colleges, and in the development of health policy. Existing rigid hierarchical structures in hospitals leave management out of touch with realities, such as corruption, racism and nepotism - ills which workers are constantly confronting. Furthermore, health workers have gained valuable experience in the democratic process through participation in NEHAWU structures.

Medical professionals cannot logically support the oppressed majority in the struggle for a non-racial democracy without challenging the autocratic control of the health sector. One cannot promote progressive primary health care, community based health sciences education, mass-based health education programmes and

people's empowerment, while at the same time denying non-professional health workers guaranteed representation in health administration and policy formulation. For progressive health workers, the elimination of political inequality implies the elimination of professional privileges, too, with an end to the use of medical knowledge and skills as an automatic ticket to domination in both the health and political spheres.<sup>2</sup>

While a NHIS may be a necessary part of transforming the health system, on its own it provides no authority to settle conflicting corporate interests in accordance with democratically accepted goals of health policy nor is it an adequate measure to effect structural change.

An NHIS must not be confused with an NIS - there is no alternative to an NIS. An NHIS or single comprehensive public insurance programme could actually entrench and stimulate the growth of the private sector if used as the sole method because it nationalises the source of payment - guaranteeing payment. It creates the option for the state to provide finance for, rather than building, the services themselves. This could lead to flourishing private practice.

De Beer and Broomberg assume an altruism and good will on the part of the private practitioners who, they say, will find an NHIS "acceptable". We challenge those who propose policies to test their viability and "political feasibility" with us - the community of health workers and patients, in the hospitals and clinics.

Political feasibility cannot be assessed in the confines of the minds of individuals. It has to be won by working people through participation in discussions and honest, open debate. We will not be passive recipi-

ents of policy devised by an academic elite. Peoples' health belongs to the people - we must want it and work for it. Our views must be respected. Advise, don't order or manipulate us.

### **Some effects of privatisation**

The medical establishment has proved to be extremely adept at circumventing political and structural change and at undermining and sabotaging attempts to diminish its control or to interfere with its material interests. The guaranteed central funding of continued private practice through an NHIS may even strengthen private practice and continue to inflate the cost of health care by not providing curbs on over-investigation and the unnecessary use of lucrative procedures on unduly dependent, affluent patients.

Private practitioners earn ten times as much as their peers in the teaching hospitals. Central funding alone will not stem the haemorrhage of medical and paramedical health workers from the public sector and will fail to emphasise preventive and promotive health care. Furthermore, primary health care will fail unless it is seen as a militant concept aimed at the redistribution of resources to the poor. A two tier health system with inferior health care for the poor will continue unchallenged by an NHIS.

Having acquired their lucrative skills in the teaching hospitals, super specialists are "going private" and leaving the country faster than they can be replaced. This has resulted in a marked deterioration in the standard of training and supervision of junior doctors which could have disastrous results. Drug companies and equipment producers will continue to ply the private practitioners (where profits are greatest)



with rewards for the over-use of their products and iatrogenic disease (that is, disease caused by medical intervention itself) will continue to increase. The public sector will remain understaffed and unattractive to both patients and providers. Medical professionals have been sabotaging change towards a just health system for generations by deserting the public sector. Why should we handle them with kid gloves when we can't even afford rubber ones?

The cost of privatisation to the public service has been bankruptcy. The underfunded and demoralised public sector is collapsing together with its training facilities. A particularly dramatic example of this is the radiology department at the Johannesburg Hospital, which may be forced to close down due to a lack of trained radiologists and radiographers. Another example has been the collapse of the JG Strijdom Hospital.

### **The right to health care**

With the exception of the United States and South Africa, the right to health care has been accepted and constitutionalised by most industrialised countries and all socialist countries of the world. After 30 years, Third World Cuba's health indicators are ahead of parts of the developed world<sup>3</sup>. Article 49 of the Cuban constitution is instructive: "Everybody has a right to health protection and care. The state guarantees this right:

- by providing free medical and hospital care, by means of the installations of the rural medical service network, polyclinics, hospitals and preventive and specialised treatment centres;
- by providing free dental care;

**Medical professionals have been sabotaging change towards a just health system for generations ... Why should we handle them with kid gloves when we can't even afford rubber ones?**

- by promoting the health publicity campaigns, health education, regular medical examinations, general vaccinations and other measures to prevent the outbreak of disease.

All the population co-operates in these activities and plans through the social and mass organisations."<sup>4</sup>

In the initial decade after the revolution, in the 1960s, massive efforts were undertaken to train large numbers of health personnel to make up for the exodus of half of the country's 6,000 doctors. As mortality and morbidity rates improved emphasis has changed in Cuba from curative to preventive care.

### **Weaning ourselves of dependence**

The deprivation and tyranny of apartheid and its big business partners will affect black health for years to come. While the medical profession has never made the main contribution to improving health, it has a moral duty in South Africa to do everything possible

to make amends.

Advances in health which began in Europe in the 18th century were initially due to improvements in standards of living, especially diet, and were later supported by hygienic measures.

Health, and specifically per capita calorie consumption, was found by the International Labour Organisation to be the single most significant factor in differences related to economic growth.<sup>5</sup> Real wages in Britain were 89 percent higher in 1910 than in 1850, which improvements were made partly at the expense of the working class in the colonies.

We need a medical establishment that prescribes a living wage, nutritious well-distributed food, safe housing, sanitation, clean water, electricity and education. Furthermore, we need the power to prevent effective political interventions being recycled into ineffective technological ones.

Paging through past copies of the South African Medical Journal has revealed a recent growing social consciousness amongst health workers.

More and more energy is being spent to get to the root socio-political causes of disease. Let us encourage and support this movement rather than wasting our time and resources pandering to the self-interested who are likely to abandon us anyway, in the same way that the medical profession abandoned Allende in Chile and democratic forces in Nigeria and Mozambique, to name a few of the many instances.

### **Our struggle has only just begun**

We need the sort of structural change that an NHIS alone cannot effect. And we need it now. We need democratic control of our health care system and government, making them responsive to the urgent needs of

a people made conscious of an innate ability to recover from illness and thrive on our own terms. The cures have become more crippling than the diseases.<sup>6</sup> We will no longer be held to ransom by an artificially created dependence on a medico-industrial complex which thrives on our ignorance, disabilities and disease.

Why are theorists being so coy about the health demands of the Freedom Charter (a "preventive health scheme for all SHALL be run by the state and free medical care and hospitalisation SHALL be provided for all, with special care for mothers and children")? Only in those countries which have employed the basic principles outlined in the Charter have there been any advances in the accessibility of health services to all people.

Surely in the new South Africa the Charter demands are a minimum requirement to correct the injustices of our past. We cannot allow theories to distract us from our struggle against privatisation. In a sense our work has only just begun. After all there is no "new" South Africa as yet. We cannot give up on our basic demands before we have even begun. ★

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# A thorn can eat up an elephant

## A basic introduction to Marxist dialectics

### 1. Introduction

Marx, Engels, Lenin and all the great marxist revolutionaries have helped to develop dialectics. They did this because they understood that dialectics is a theoretical weapon in the hands of the working class.

But dialectics is not something that was invented by Marx, Engels or Lenin. Dialectics is not something foreign, or sophisticated.

It is not something only for university professors.

In fact, in the wise sayings of all cultures you will often find a deep dialectical understanding of reality. These sayings are born out of the lives and experiences of ordinary working people.

Let us take one example:

In isiZulu there is a wise saying: 'A thorn can eat up an elephant'.

This saying is full of dialectics. In fact, it illustrates an important truth about our own struggle.

### 2. The role of MK in our struggle

When, in 1961, the ANC and SACP turned to the armed struggle there were many voices of doom. 'How can you hope to defeat the SADF and SAP?', they asked. 'The other side is so well armed and trained, it is too powerful,' they said. The same



story has been repeated over and over in the years since.

Now it's true, compared to the SADF and SAP, MK is a small thorn. And on its own MK has not ever delivered a knock-out blow to the apartheid armed forces. But the exploits of MK in the 1970s and 1980s have helped to inspire millions of our people. These exploits have helped to mobilise our people into active mass struggle. MK actions have helped win popularity and respect for the ANC and SACP - at home and in the world. MK, along with other factors, also forced the regime to overextend itself in the southern African region.

**Taken TOGETHER all these things have helped to plunge the apartheid regime into deep crisis. It is no longer able to rule in the old way. It has been forced to come to the negotiating table with the enemy it swore to bury once and for all.**

This example helps us to explain the first important rule of dialectics:

The importance of one factor in a situation can only be understood accurately if we see its connections to a general process. We can only understand one factor if we understand its connections to all other factors. And if we understand how all of these things change over time as a result of their interconnections.

If you were asked: Which is more powerful an elephant or a thorn? You would obviously say an elephant. And you would be right.

But

If a thorn happened to stick into an elephant's foot, and

If that small sore became infected as the elephant walked about in the veld, and

If the infection spread poison throughout the elephant's body, then

After many months that small thorn could kill the elephant.

**THE FIRST LESSON OF DIALECTICS: YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF A THING BY ISOLATING IT. YOU MUST SEE IT IN ITS INTERCONNECTIONS. YOU MUST SEE IT AS PART OF A CHANGING PROCESS OVER TIME.**

### **3. Did anything change on February 2 last year?**

On February 2 last year, FW De Klerk announced the unbanning of our organisations, and a commitment 'to end apartheid'. Since then most political prisoners have been released, and thousands of exiles have returned. Banned organisations and banned publications are now legal. Talks about talks have reached an advanced level, and we have signed a multi-party Peace Accord.

But have things really changed?

Even within the ranks of our liberation movement you will find contradictory views.

- Some people have tended to argue that change is now irreversible. That we can trust the other side. That we must get on with negotiations and not play around with mass struggle and self-defence units, and other 'diversions'.

- Other comrades have argued that **nothing has changed**. Archbishop Tutu said, jokingly, that the only difference between PW and FW is the letter 'F'. Some comrades say that since 'nothing has changed' we were crazy to suspend the armed struggle, and we are crazy to be talking to the regime.

So have things changed? Or has nothing changed?

**In fact, BOTH positions are PARTLY correct.**

In many ways things remain unchanged. The apartheid regime is still in power. The armed forces, the prison services, the SABC,

the courts, the administration, the parliament - all of these are commanded and controlled by the same white minority. Millions of our people are still homeless, without jobs, without proper health care. Apartheid oppression continues. Capitalist exploitation rages on.

But

Things have also changed in important ways. The unbanning of organisations, the fact that De Klerk has been forced to talk to the ANC - all of this is not unimportant. Unless we are able to adapt to the new terrain of struggle, De Klerk will outwit us.

To say: 'Nothing has changed' disarms us.

But to imagine that the struggle against apartheid is now over is an even more serious error.

**THE SECOND LESSON OF DIALECTICS: REALITY IS COMPLEX. ONE-SIDED VIEWS ARE USUALLY WRONG OR VERY LIMITED.**

**4. Capitalism and the working class - the unity of opposites**

We have already seen that dialectics tells us that

- To understand something accurately you must see it in its interconnections with other things.

These interconnections are very often **CONTRADICTORY**.

The capitalist system gives us a very good example of dialectical contradictions.

In fact, capitalism is based on a contradiction: **SOCIAL PRODUCTION** versus **PRIVATE PROFITS**.

These big words are easy to explain, because they are part of every worker's own daily experience.

**SOCIAL PRODUCTION:** Modern industrial capitalism is about 170 years old. It has been a very revolutionary system. Before industrial capitalism most production took place in small workshops, or on small peasant farms. Production was scattered.

Working people were isolated from each other. Seldom was a work-force more than ten or fifteen people.

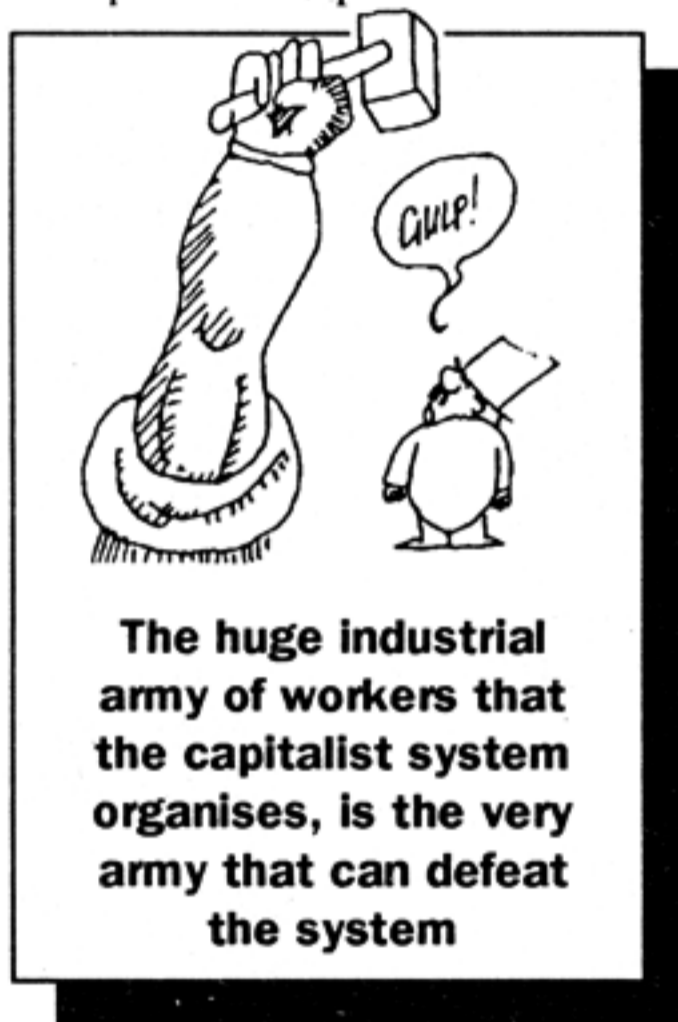
Capitalism changed all of this. It introduced modern machines and factories. It introduced huge production networks - with massive transport infrastructure. Here in South Africa, millions of our people were sucked into huge industrial complexes. For the first time they began to think of

themselves as **South Africans** and not in narrow clan or tribal terms.

Capitalism has also united the world. Right across the globe millions and millions of people have been pulled into a single world market. All over the world we drink Coca Cola or write with Bic pens.

But all of this **SOCIAL PRODUCTION**, this uniting of millions of people into a massive network of capitalist production and consumption is based on one ugly fact: **PRIVATE PROFITS**.

The capitalist class has opened up these world-wide social forces with one aim in mind : **private profits for themselves**. So capitalism is a **contradictory dialectical**



process. It brings progress, it unites millions of workers together in social production.

But it is based on exploitation, on a system of private profits for a few from the work of millions.

It is capitalism that in the course of this century united a number of different tribal and colonial societies into one country: South Africa.

But it is equally capitalism that has divided our country into an exploited, impoverished majority, and an extremely wealthy capitalist minority.

The same applies on a world-scale. A single world capitalist system has united our world. But it has also **divided** our world into a First World and a starving Third World.

The main point we are trying to make here is that **CAPITALISM IS BOTH THESE THINGS AT THE SAME TIME.**

It unites and it divides.

It draws together in collective production, and it creams off private profits.

It brings progress, and terrible suffering.

This is what Marxism calls the **DIALECTICAL UNITY OF OPPOSITES.**

**THE THIRD LESSON OF DIALECTICS: A SINGLE REALITY IS DRIVEN BY ITS OWN INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS.**

### **5. Negation of the negation - capitalism creates its own gravedigger.**

But a contradictory process (like capitalism) does not necessarily go on and on forever. Its own internal contradiction can be the basis for its abolition. It can sow the seeds for its own transformation.

The huge industrial army of workers that the capitalist system itself organises, is the very army that can defeat the system. This industrial army of workers is carried on a daily basis into the very heart of the capitalist system. Workers have their hands on all the levers, pulleys, brakes and power switches of the system. **AND** they are exploited by this system.

So the working class is given power, and it is oppressed by capitalism. In other words, workers are given both the **POWER** and the **MOTIVATION** to get rid of capitalism and replace it with socialism.

This does not happen automatically, of course. It requires a clear understanding, solid work, a powerful struggle, **AND** the right conditions. But with these **THE NEGATION** (the capitalist system of oppression, of private profits) **CAN BE NEGATED** (transformed) **BY THE VERY FORCES THAT IT HAS UNLEASHED. AND THIS IS THE FOURTH LESSON OF DIALECTICS. ★**

## **In their own words...**

### **THEOLOGY LESSON**

**"There is a danger that Marxism will be replaced by another form of atheism, which, by worshipping freedom, tends to destroy the roots of human and Christian morality." - Pope John Paul.**

# How the Left got it wrong in the Philippines

## (or The 12 part mini-series that wasn't)

Edicio de la Torre

One of the most outstanding, and certainly creative Marxist theorists of our times is a Catholic priest.

Edicio de la Torre, or simply Ed to all those who know him, was born in the Philippines in 1943. He was ordained a priest in 1968. When martial law was declared in the Philippines he went into hiding, but was detained in 1974. He was charged with conspiracy to commit rebellion, and particularly of heading the Preparatory Committee for the National Democratic Front. He was never brought to trial, but spent five years in jail. He was arrested again in 1982, and charged with rebellion. He was released from prison in March 1986, when the Cory Aquino regime replaced the Marcos dictatorship.



Ed de la Torre paid a fleeting visit to South Africa in the course of September: 'We in the Filipino left are studying two struggles with particular interest. The struggle in El Salvador, and your own struggle here in South Africa. We believe there are many parallels, and much we can learn from each other.'

During his visit, comrade Ed did a three-hour presentation on the struggle in the Philippines for the ANC Department of Political Education. The presentation turned out to be a lesson, not just on the Philippines, but also a lesson in dialectics, and, above all, a lesson in popular education.

The following is an extract from the presentation. It is obviously impossible on a page to capture the lively presence of the presenter. At least the reader should try to imagine Ed de la Torre's half ironic, half impish grin that constantly accompanies this whole presentation.

**C**omrades, In the spirit of contextual theology (or even better in the spirit of historical materialism), and of a conjunctural analysis, let us look at the exact context of the last six or so years in the Philippines. You see, this goes to the heart of our problem. That is, how to combine a structural analysis (of classes, of relations of production, and so forth) which every left movement does, with a concrete, conjunctural analysis. By a conjunctural analysis I mean coming to grips with the specific interplay of the forces who are organised and active at a particular moment.

This is very important because the temptation in any complicated situation is to look for a simple answer. The temptation is to fall back by saying: 'These are all minor realities, let's get back to the BASICS. We are still oppressed, liberation has not yet come. If the people are confused, later they will get clear, then we will get back to the revolution, they'll come back to us.'

It was exactly this tendency that was prevalent among the left in the Philippines during the collapse of the Marcos dictatorship. Some comrades even said, in effect: 'This is a card game. I don't have any good cards - Pass! I preserve my cards, because I might lose them.'

That is the dilemma. You get out of the conjuncture to get back to your structure and your strategy. But, in the meantime, the game proceeds and people are wondering where are YOU? And you are still waiting for that game to finish so you can get on to the REAL game, the one you decided on with your structural analysis. This was our dilemma in the Philippines.

So in the Philippines, when Cory Aquino came and Marcos fell ahead of everyone's expectations, the left was saying: 'What happened?? Why did this happen?'

And the initial reaction, which I use as a joke, but it had enough truth to it, was this. You have, on the one hand, a conservative church, and on the other a kind of infantile, or at the very least a LAZYLEFT. And they had exactly the same analysis! I call it the Holy Spirit theory, meaning ONE GREAT POWER decided all this.

If you are religious - it is a miracle. That's what Cardinal Sin actually said: 'Don't analyse, believe'. It wasn't people's power that brought down the dictatorship, it was prayer power. Even General Ramos would talk to charismatics and say: 'When I was there I felt I was being an instrument of the Holy Spirit - Ayyymen!'

Once they put it to prayer and remove the people, it's very convenient, because whom do you check for miracles? - the church hierarchy, of course.

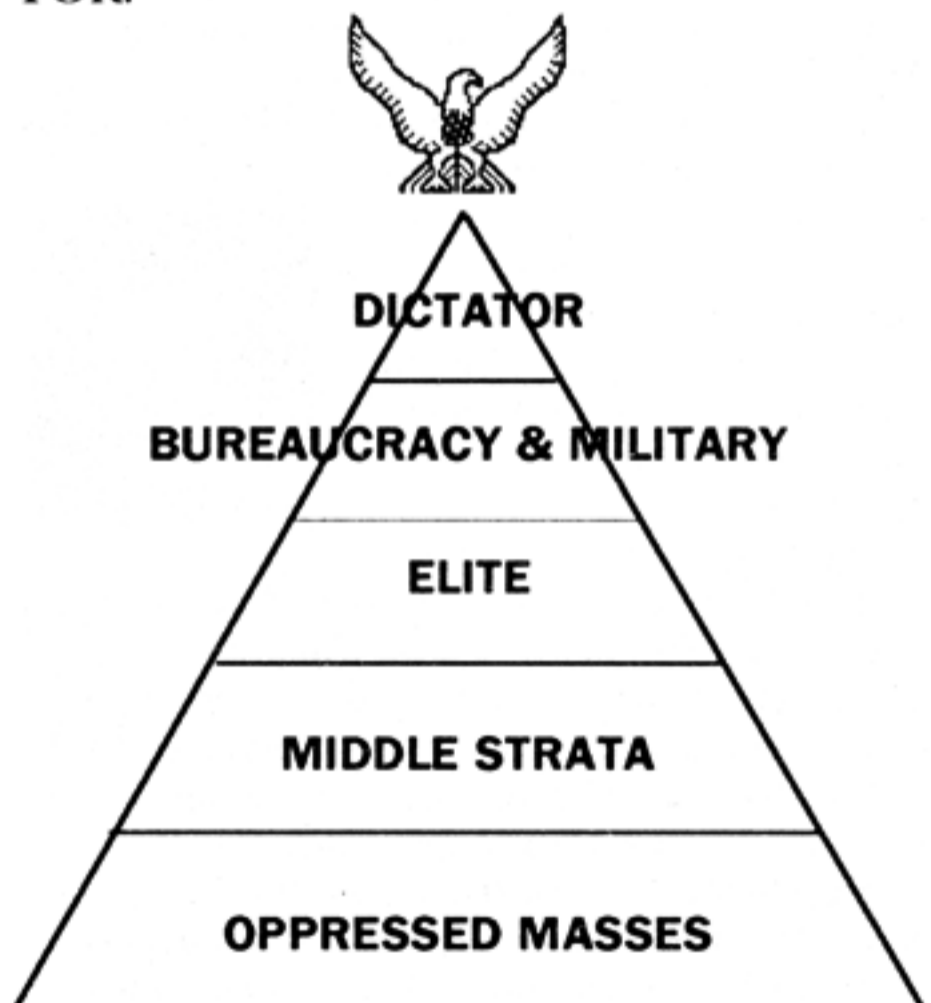
But some of the lazy left had exactly the same theory. But they did not believe in the Holy Spirit, so they said it was the CIA! There is this very calculating power, with agents all over. And we were doing things, but we were really actors and actresses following a script that someone else wrote.

There is enough truth to both the conservative church's position and the lazy left's position to make them dangerous.

Especially if you give an explanation that is lousy, better the Holy Spirit theory. It's a miracle, or it's the CIA. So let's check if we have contacts in the CIA to find out what was the script!

Now, I am firmly convinced that both the Holy Spirit and the CIA were there. But there were more things there. So let's have a look at the complicated conjuncture in which the dictatorship was brought down. This is my personal presentation. This is an exercise in popular education, so don't criticise me, comrades, for lack of 'scientific' precision, for being too loose. The intention here is to communicate.

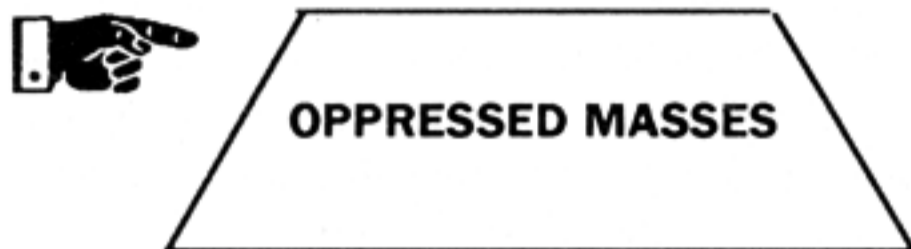
I use the following, I always say: Okay, TEN STEPS TO REMOVE THE DICTATOR.



If you have roughly a pyramid of power, with a dictator on top, in this case Marcos, it obviously rests on a base where you have, very roughly, the oppressed masses; you have those who are somewhere in the middle; and, using a very loose term, you have the elite (including the business elite and



the church hierarchy) ; then the bureaucracy, including the military, then that's the power structure. And if you put quantitative value to it, then I will call this 1 to 5:



This is 6 to 7:



This is 8:



This is 9:



Where's the tenth? The tenth is the foreign power.

Now in a schematic and mechanical approach to struggle you imagine that we go from one to ten, and then we get him (Marcos, the dictator) out. Meaning - we organise the masses, we win over the middle, we split the elite, we split the bureaucracy, we split the imperialists, and then Marcos is gone. That was the ongoing theory. So we were organising in different ways, legal, illegal, armed, but with this perspective.

Now, just to show the difference between that mechanical view and what actually happened.

We were starting number one, to some extent number two, maybe twenty percent of work was happening in the mass level of one to five. So nobody would have expected that six and then seven would have happened. No.

But things did start happening higher up the pyramid of power, ahead of the left's expectations. Especially in 1983 with the assassination of one of the opposition leaders, with the economic crisis, the censorship, the corruption (Imelda Marcos) and all that, and in part as a result of the work of the church - the middle class started getting very active, more than the effect of the left on them. So there was no three and four and five. And yet six was starting to happen, and seven was not yet there, but somehow the elite started splitting.

The first split in the elite came in the form of political opposition. Marcos had no elections, but they wanted to have a chance to share in power. So parts of the elite were very angry: 'Restore democracy, so that we can have a share!' No? They were the first ones who were opposing and one of them was assassinated - Aquino (Cory's husband).

The economic elite came first (the Church hierarchy was actually the last). The business people were not initially too disturbed about the repression, until Marcos made a fatal mistake, he started stealing from the rich! He started favouring a section of the business class and alienated the others. He started mismanaging the economy. By 1981 the economy had negative growth, so the business class started saying: 'This government promised progress, but it cannot deliver. Worse, it is stealing from us!'

Then finally, very late, the Church elite pronounced that Marcos 'no longer has

moral grounds to rule'. That was in February 1986. But in September 1985, just to show you the difference, there is this joke which is one tenth joke but ninety percent truth. On September 11 Marcos had his birthday and Cardinal Sin, who was already becoming critical, shocked everyone by having a public mass for Marcos's birthday, a kiss of peace. Everyone was saying: 'You are supposed to be critical.' And the Cardinal replied: 'Well, I am sometimes a prophet of denunciation, and sometimes a minister of reconciliation.'

It was a public mass and the diplomatic corps was there, especially the papal nuncio and the American ambassador. And someone (maybe he was a product of some institute of liturgy?) had the bright idea to give one white dove each to Marcos and to Cardinal Sin, which they released after mass as a symbol of reconciliation.

Now what happened is that Marcos's dove flew straight up to heaven. But not Cardinal Sin's dove. It started circling around in confusion. This is true! And then the next thing is true too. It landed on the shoulder of the American ambassador! And now the next part is the joke that Cardinal Sin tells against himself. He says the dove was asking the American ambassador: 'What really IS the policy?'

Well, in September 1985 the American ambassador would have told the dove: 'Support Marcos. Marcos is part of the problem, but Marcos should be part of the solution.'

But in February the next year US policy had changed, and the bishops finally issued their statement that Marcos no longer had moral grounds to rule. According to one bishop, during the whole debate, and this bishop swears it is true (he was a middle-of-the-road bishop) he says that the conserva-

tive bishops caucus received a xeroxed copy of a telegram from the American Joint Chiefs of Staff: 'WE WILL SUPPORT WHAT THE BISHOPS DECIDE.' So the moral courage of the bishops had an extra geopolitical boost. More important, in the debate, the bishops were saying that if we don't speak clearly now our people, who are against the dictatorship, will turn to the radical clergy for leadership.

And so the decision of the bishops to condemn Marcos was motivated by at least three powerful emotions. One: they were really pissed off with Marcos, they really HATED him. Secondly, they had in Cory Aquino a limited democrat, someone they could relate to. So there was a LOVE of limited democracy. And third, a FEAR of revolution.

So hatred, love and fear moved together, the bishops had no way to go but to say: 'Marcos must depart!'

And so, after blocking the struggle for so long, the bishops joined up right at the end. And even better, they got the best credit for it! That's why it was a miracle!

Now the upper layers were splitting. But if the military had remained united, I don't think Marcos would have fallen. What happened, and this is a whole debate in the Philippines, is that in 1984 there were already discussions in the National Security Council about managing the transition and we do not know if it was purely internal, or whether there was Pentagon or CIA encouragement. A group of officers in the elite Counter-Insurgency Unit in the Philippines, under the Minister of Defence (Ramos), who was being alienated by Marcos, started plotting to have a coup d'etat. And their starting point was this: 'To do our counter-insurgency work well we need government reforms. We cannot de-

feat the guerrillas militarily if our politicians are corrupt.' So they too started saying Marcos has to go, not in the name of democracy, but so as to have a better counter-insurgency policy!

From 1984 there was already a conspiracy for a coup, and these right-wing plotters were very good. They even brought in some special British SAS agents to train them. Then they realised they needed anti-tank weapons. So they approached their contact in the US embassy and the CIA conveniently informed Marcos: 'Some people are planning to attack you.' But at the same time the CIA said: 'Don't arrest them!' (The Americans wanted to maintain military unity!)

Marcos, however, began to arrest the coup plotters. And this was to be the trigger for Marcos's own overthrow. The Minister of Defence (Ramos) and the Head of the Constabulary, finding themselves about to be arrested and killed, declared they were 'fighting the dictatorship'! And so they 'rose in rebellion'. But they were only 400, and they were so scared, and people who were there saw they were trembling. And this was the time when the wife of Ramos talked to some Catholic women, who talked to Cardinal Sin, whom they woke up in the early hours of the morning. They told him he had to speak to the people. He had to be forced to speak! And when he spoke, the people were just waiting for a focus. The left was not providing any focus. It issued no call whatsoever. The left was saying: 'Must we go to support those soldiers who have been trying to kill us? And who are now rebelling against Marcos?'

And so the first people who went there in support of the rebels were either very reformist, or conservative, or were just angry at Marcos and would support anyone pre-

pared to fight him. The Defence Minister and the Head of the Constabulary helped their own case when, knowing they were not themselves popular, they declared their 'support for Cory Aquino'. 'She really won the elections,' they said. 'We cheated,' they said! Enrile even said: 'I cheated'! And so they started to rally a lot of people around them.

Now that was a crucial moment. But even if that broke, if there had been no division in US policy, I think Marcos might have stayed on. Right up to the end Reagan had to be convinced to release Marcos. But the Pentagon, State Dept etc. saw more clearly and earlier on that he had to go. (Incidentally, technically Marcos did not fall, Marcos was carried away by the eagle to Hawaii!)



So, in short, a whole series of events happened above the heads of the left and the mass democratic organisations. And, in a way, we contributed to this by having an analysis that collapsed the anti-dictatorship line-up with the national democratic line-up.

In other words, the left in the Philippines believed that the dictatorship would only fall when the progressive forces were mature enough to replace it. And after all, it was the left that had really been fighting the dictatorship.

But not only had our struggle not matured sufficiently to take full advantage of the situation, we also committed one major tactical error. The Communist Party, and the leadership of the National Democratic

Front, when the elections were called, decided not to participate. So we handed to the ruling class, by our lack of electoral involvement, the best miracle possible.

The anti-dictatorship sentiment of the people was led by a coalition of military rebels, alternative opposition forces, and a section of the liberal middle class. This was to be the shape of the Aquino government.

So the setback for the left in the Philippines was partly by the DESIGN of the other side, and also partly by DEFAULT. The default was our's, it was the result of a strategic line that collapsed the anti-dictatorial struggle and the national democratic revolution.

The United States certainly did not script the whole thing. But they had a definite advantage over us. They had a number of

alternative scripts. And they could adjust quickly.

The left had only one script. We had a 12 episode mini-series, meaning the climax is meant to be in the 12th episode: Marcos falls and we raise the Red Flag. Marcos fell in the fifth episode. And the left was saying: 'But that is not part of the script! He was meant to fall when we were about to win. What happened?'

It was not a minor tactical error, I tell you. At that moment could we have done more? In Christian language it is easy to identify sins of commission, but sins of omission are much harder to identify.

Could we have taken more if had invested our strengths correctly in that conjuncture? (I say MORE, not all.)

Could we have? ★

## CUBA

# Nelson Mandela in Cuba

**W**e come here with great humility. We come here with great emotion. What other country can point to a record of greater selflessness than Cuba has displayed in its relations with Africa!

I was in prison when I first heard of the the massive assistance that the Cuban internationalist forces provided to the people of Angola when they came under the combined attack of South African, CIA-financed FNLA, mercenary, UNITA and Zairean troops in 1975.

We, in Africa, are used to being victims of countries wanting to carve up our territory or subvert our sovereignty. It is unparalleled in African history to have another people rise to the defence of one of us.

We know also that this was a popular

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**During his recent visit to Cuba, Nelson Mandela shared the platform with Fidel Castro at a massive rally to mark the anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. These are brief extracts from Mandela's speech**

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action in Cuba. We are aware that those who fought and died in Angola were only a small proportion of those who volunteered. For the Cuban people internationalism is not merely a word, but something that we have seen practised to the benefit of large sections of humankind.

We know that the Cuban forces were willing to withdraw shortly after repelling the 1975 invasion, but the continued ag-

gression from Pretoria made this impossible. Your presence and the reinforcement of your forces in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale was of truly historic significance.

The crushing defeat of the racist army at Cuito Cuanavale was a victory for the whole of Africa. It provided the possibility for Angola to enjoy peace and consolidate its own sovereignty. The defeat of the racist army allowed the struggling people of Namibia to finally win their independence. The decisive defeat of the apartheid aggressors broke the myth of the invincibility

of the white oppressors. The defeat was an inspiration to the struggling people inside South Africa.

Without the defeat of Cuito Cuanavale our organisations would not have been unbanned.

The defeat of the racist army at Cuito Cuanavale has made it possible for me to be here today!

LONG LIVE COMRADE FIDEL CASTRO!

LONG LIVE THE CUBAN REVOLUTION! ★

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# Community control of the economy

**COMMANDING HEIGHTS AND COMMUNITY CONTROL: NEW ECONOMICS FOR A NEW SOUTH AFRICA.** By Patrick Bond (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1991)

**JS:** The essence of your book is an attempt to retrieve the classical economic analyses of Marx and Engels, in order to understand both the crisis in the South African economy, and to forge a progressive solution. In fact, many South African socialists in the contemporary period have argued for a fresh reappraisal of the classics in the light of the distortions which were generated by the Soviet regime's stranglehold over Marxist theory for many decades. How successful do you think the South African left has been in its venture to reclaim Marxist tools

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**Jonny Steinberg interviews Patrick Bond on his book**

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of analysis from Stalinism?

**PB:** The legacy of 'mainstream' South African Marxism is rich and interesting. From colonialism of a special type, to 'articulations of modes of production', to the Poulantzian fractions-of-capital theory, to 'racial capitalism', to French regulation theory, there seems to have been tremendous intellectual flexibility, vibrancy and

forward development over the past few decades, related in each case to changing objective conditions. My assertion is that the present situation - a structural crisis in the economy matched by prospects for political reform - gives Marxists a perfect opportunity to test whether what we think of as underlying 'laws of motion' of capitalism actually correspond to reality. Is the South African economic crisis, at its roots, one of overproduction, overaccumulation, and financial speculation? I think so, and hope that more comrades will find these classical tools useful.

**Much of your book presents a debate between your interpretation of classical Marxism and the analyses of regulation theory, an influential component of the theoretical base upon which Cosatu and the ANC have developed economic policy and strategy. Regulation theory is a Marxist revisionist framework. It refutes Marx's assumption that the operation of the market throws capitalist economies into crisis upon crisis. It attempts to explain capitalism's tremendous flexibility and resilience over the course of this century. As such, it argues that South African capitalism is not in its death-throes and that, moreover, any socialist strategy based on this assumption is doomed to failure. Arising from this, you claim that regulation theory (and ANC economic policy) can only offer a reformed capitalism. Surely this is a grossly inaccurate caricature of both regulation theory and ANC economic policy? Surely you should attempt to show its errors, rather than put words in its mouth?**

It's a shame that Regulation Theory has been applied here before we have had a full assessment of how capital has displaced, but not resolved its problems. By that I

mean we must be critical about the system's capacity to move the crisis around, for example, through creative state spending, geographical expansion and enormous build-up of debt and speculation.

But capital cannot displace crisis tendencies forever, and the present period of huge retrenchments and massive destruction of economic capacity is just one reflection of capital's inability to self-regulate production and consumption in its long-term interests.

This doesn't mean the final death-throes of the mode of production are in sight. But it does mean that the supposed resilience has been achieved only through pushing the burden of crisis onto weak and defenceless sectors, and through the vast expansion of instruments like credit, as well as through periodic, self-destructive purges.

The qualms that some people have about regulation theory are that it seems to offer hope that a social contract can be installed here, perhaps through questionable measures such as wage restraint.

I'm a bit pessimistic about the conditions for this, given that poor and working people will probably continue to take the brunt of the crisis even in the post-apartheid era, and will remember how to protest.

And there's little scope for restructuring the economy quickly in the image of big business, and getting exports into ever tighter world markets on favourable terms. Moreover, I'm not aware of social contracts actually proving sustainable in cases where devaluation of overaccumulated capital remains so high on the agenda, as is the case here.

**ANC and Cosatu economic policy both call for the extensive democratisation of investment decisions, anti-trust legislation,**

**selective nationalisation and sanctions on unpatriotic investment. They intend to struggle for an economy where market forces are subordinated to the plans of state and civil society, and this only as a start. Is this simply a reformed capitalism, as you glibly characterise it?**

Well, until you get right down to relations of production, what you're talking about is reforming not overthrowing the system. But clearly democratisation of investment, if actually carried out, will support progressive struggles immensely.

The ANC and its international comrades showed this with the financial sanctions campaign against bank loans to Pretoria a few years ago, which was perhaps the key external ingredient in knocking some sense into the Nats.

The question now is whether that same anti-corporate spirit can be applied to the huge parasitic financial institutions in South Africa, which will do everything in their power to resist true democratisation of the economy. That's a fight worth really gearing up for.

**You talk of overthrowing, rather than reforming the system. In your book your long-term solution stresses wide-scale nationalisation. Clearly, a change of ownership will not inherently effect a revolutionary transformation of the mode of production. In fact, if historical experience is anything to go by, we might find the working class as disempowered as before. What guarantee do we have that a nationalised economy will be a popularly controlled one? In other words, what assurance do we have that the commanding heights won't fall into the hands of a group of 'experts' and bureaucrats? It seems that, despite the glamorous rhetoric about it, there is noth-**

**ing intrinsic to wide-scale nationalisation which will erase the evils of capitalism.**

That's right, except that nationalisation does reduce the incessant drive of capitalism to produce purely for profit. The need for ultimate public ownership of the means of production is a basic tenet of socialism, and always will be.

But will there arise a bureaucratic class that, as in the Soviet Union, hijacks worker control, in the name, even, of socialism? That mainly depends on the kinds of struggles waged from below. In the book I document a few of these that are most portentous in that they focus on the most obvious flaws in the system.

Those happen to be in the sphere of finance, and I would guess that insurance companies and even a bank would therefore be the most feasible targets for immediate post-liberation nationalisation. Others say the building materials industry, which is highly monopolised, should be the first target.

It mainly depends on how experienced cadres are in performing the vital functions, like redirecting investments from the stock market or land speculation, and into real production, or producing good quality materials for cheap houses rather than for fancy post-modern skyscrapers.

**Much of modern socialist thought argues that the crisis of the Eastern European economies is partly rooted in those states' attempts to destroy the market. This school argues that the retention of market forces (subordinated by democratic planning), to regulate allocation and distribution in certain sectors of the economy, is a pivotal component of any viable socialist economy. Yet your analysis of South African capitalism seems to argue that crisis and misery**





of markets.

But markets can be misleading. Anglo American, for instance, engages in planning all the time, keeping many transactions within the conglomerate far from the discipline of the market.

The Soviet planning system, like Anglo's, was engineered to maintaining a particular class structure, and not to meeting social needs, especially on the consumption goods side.

Where would a market be useful? In providing a range of signals to socialist planners.

But if the underlying class relations don't permit people access to the market, as is so blatantly obvious here today, then the first arena of struggle is removing basic goods like housing and land and electricity from market determinations.

That's why some communities are exploring mechanisms like land and housing trusts, instead of the bourgeois ideal of indi-

are endemic to any market economy. Do you advocate the total destruction of the market? And if so, how do we avoid the mistakes of the past?

On the question of planning versus the market, I think we should look at the way capitalism actually operates. Marx looked for the deeper class relations, while Max Weber described capitalism in terms mainly

vidual home ownership, so that poor people aren't shut out.

I think that combining the state subsidies necessary for 'housing for all', perhaps R30 billion or so, with local empowerment and democratic planning, is the essence of community control of capital.

The market becomes less and less relevant under such circumstances. ★



## Some advice from Lenin

**J**oe Slovo's recent attempts to analyse the problems of 20th century socialism are a very welcome and healthy development, but his contribution in *AC* 124 suffers, in my view, from some of the weaknesses which he is trying to criticise and from a too superficial thrashing around instead of analytical depth.

For example, when the Soviet working class were repressed in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat, he calls this the 'perpetuation' of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The phrase was certainly perpetuated but the practice ceased to be what Marx and Lenin meant by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Were the working class, from the rank and file upwards, really leading and directing society, or were they repressed by a bureaucracy which claimed to represent them?

Of course, the bureaucracy didn't get it all their own way. The working class was not wholly impotent and they resisted the bureaucracy and achieved many social demands. But, despite these 'gains of socialism', the working class itself did not actually rule or lead society. It was rather under the hegemony of non-working class forms of socialism. And the most outspoken advocates of working class socialism were ruthlessly suppressed and several thousands of them imprisoned or murdered. Working class socialism stands not only in antithesis to capitalism but also antithesis to bureaucratic, bourgeois socialism.

Comrade Slovo's alternative fails to stress the participatory nature of socialism democracy and tends rather to non-participatory representative democracy, where the role of rank and file workers is simply to

vote and support every few years rather than really to have a direct say in the day to day running of their lives. He says that 'it is the elected representatives of the people that must have full power to rule'. This is simply to repeat the problem of the very lack of genuine grassroots socialist democracy.

His discussion of the relevance of Lenin's book *What is to be done?* is also rather sloppy. He says it 'became our organisational bible'. He is probably confusing it with Lenin's *One step forward, two steps back*, which dealt primarily with the organisational principles of a vanguard party, rather than *What is to be done?*, which deals primarily with its ideological basis. He says it became a 'kind of catechism'. He is quite right to criticise the religiosity with which many treated Leninism. However, he goes to the opposite extreme of saying that Lenin's book was 'wholly inappropriate and inapplicable in conditions of legality and even more so when power is achieved'. That's going too far.

Comrade Slovo backs himself up by saying that *What is to be done?* 'catered for the building of an illegal or semi-legal Party in Czarist conditions'. That is simply not true. It argued that the principal aim of a marxist party is to develop the hegemony or leading role of the working class in society. If the working class is to become the leader of society, then it must be concerned with every social issue and not only its own immediate interests. That is not unique to Czarism at all. In fact, Lenin's detractors at the time said that this proposal of Lenin's was all right in legal conditions like Germany or for where the working class was better educated, but not in backward Russia! Gramsci took up this work of Lenin's on the role of the party and the hegemony of the working class as central and the greatest

merit of Lenin's contribution to Marxism.

I don't see how the legality of the Party stands in the way of trying to get the working class to become involved in general democratic struggles which help to develop the political consciousness and the hegemony of the working class.

I would say that this is extremely pertinent for South Africa, particularly the relationship of the working class to the national democratic struggle. (Incidentally, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the publication *Umsebenzi* as a fine example of communist journalism which put Lenin's *What is to be done?* into practice brilliantly.)

Comrade Slovo provides no argument as to why Lenin's *What is to be done?* is 'wholly inappropriate and inapplicable', just mere assertion. I would argue on the contrary that the problem with 20th century socialism is that it has insufficiently developed the hegemony of the working class in society, both in our work in the capitalist countries and in the socialist countries, where Comrade Slovo asserts that Lenin's book is 'even more' inappropriate.

If you examine Lenin's writings in the last year of his life, you will see that his main concern was the fact that after six years of the Soviet Revolution, the hegemony of the working class was still underdeveloped in Soviet society and it was subject to a still predominantly feudal culture. And this conflict was the central class nature of Lenin's struggle with Stalin, who was one of those representing the old bureaucratic culture against the development of working class hegemony. (I base this interpretation on the articles and private correspondence which Lenin wrote from his deathbed and which Stalin's supporters tried to dismiss as the ravings of a sick and dying man — the pretext for not reading Lenin's last letter to

the Party Congress denouncing Stalin and calling for his removal. It is astonishing that Lenin's class analysis of the bureaucratic culture inherited from Czarism seems to be ignored in current debates about Soviet socialism. People just talk about 'socialism' without any class analysis, as if class analysis ends with capitalism. This makes the behaviour of representatives of those classes and strata outside the working class seem like 'mistakes' or 'evil' or 'betrayal', and the failures of non-working class forms of socialism are seen as failures of socialism in general. The question 'has socialism failed?' should not be answered with a yes or a no, but with: 'Those forms of socialism not led by the working class have failed.'

In other words, the Soviet Communist Party went wrong after Lenin's death precisely by departing from the main tenet of *What is to be done?* And the main thing wrong with the socialist movement this century has been that the socialist movement itself has not expressed working class hegemony but has rather tended to be dominated by non-working class forces.

We ought not to be put off by this. It will change as the political consciousness of the working class develops in the coming period. And Lenin's works, provided we read them critically and not treat them as a bible, can help us with the advice of a great revolutionary. — *Martyn Stevens, Sydney, Australia.*