

HAS SOCIALISM FAILED?

The South African Debate



IFAA Progressive History Series

*Select Essays in Response to Joe
Slovo's "Has Socialism Failed?"*

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Editor's Note



In the early 1990's, Francis Fukuyama claimed that the world had reached "The End of History". For Fukuyama, the collapse of the Soviet Union spelt the end for the socialist vision of society. His views were well supported at the time. Thatcherism and Reaganism ran triumphant in the Global North, and structural adjustment entrenched liberal free market capitalism in the Global South. The horrors of Soviet totalitarianism were becoming too clear to deny, even for the most ardent Stalinist. Was this really, then, the end of the radical left and the historic victory of liberal capitalism over its rivals?

Nearly two decades later, the world has not been blessed with the fruits the "End of History" was meant to deliver. Inequality between and within nations has steadily increased. Geopolitical struggles for resources in the Middle East has spawned new religious fundamentalisms and terror. Financial crises wreaked havoc on the global economy in 2008, leading to mass unemployment, poverty and all of its related social ills.

In 2017, neoliberalism lies in tatters. Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF), once the apostles of the free-market, has conceded the point and now recognizes that unbridled faith in the benevolence of capitalism is untenable.

The left has been slow to respond to the failings of neoliberalism. Worryingly, nativist and far-right forces are on the rise across the globe. As the promise of liberal democracy wanes, right wing ethnic nationalism is becoming increasingly popular among the disenfranchised, represented by the emergence of figures such as Trump, Le Pen, Modi and the Brexit campaign. Moreover, in Asia and some states in Africa, alternatives to neoliberalism have taken the form of authoritarian, state-driven capitalism.

In this concerning climate, positive symbols for the Left are few and far between. Yet the surge of Sanders and Corbyn in the US and UK, the experiments of radical feminist democracy in Rojava, and the work of committed working class activists across the globe, offer some hope.

In response to growing chauvinism and nationalisms, the left continues to present socialism as the way out of the neoliberal mess. But in order to build power and influence global and national politics the left must have a sense of history. Most importantly, it must have a sense of the history of its own failings. And no failing looms larger than the experience of 20th century socialism, in its Stalinist, Maoist and other incarnations.

Fortunately, the left has taken on the burden of examining this before-not least of which in South Africa. In the early 1990's, South Africa had the largest class conscious movement in the world, spearheaded by COSATU and left wing forces within and outside the liberation movement. However, the country abandoned the principles of the Freedom Charter and RDP, embraced a neoliberal macroeconomic agenda and now suffers from widening racial inequality, endemic poverty and consistent social conflict. As a response, and due in no small part to the absence of a principled left, South Africa is also dealing with a spike in nativist, racist invective, often packaged in pseudo-revolutionary language.

It is in this context that we publish the debate arising from Joe Slovo's 1990 pamphlet "Has Socialism Failed?" The debates sparked by Slovo's pamphlets presented to offer the new generation of activists and scholars an historically grounded appreciation of the current global and national political epoch. This reader offers a variety of ideological perspectives on the failings and future of socialism, from self-described Marxists-Leninists, Trotskyists and Social Democrats.

After reading this publication the reader should have the tools to answer the following questions:

- What were and are the competing traditions of socialism in South Africa and the rest of the world in the 20th century?
- How did the Soviet Union influence South African left-wing politics in the 20th century?
- How did South African socialists respond to collapse of Soviet Union?
- How might socialism be rebooted and the left reorganized in South Africa?
- What lessons might be learnt from the experience of socialism in the 20th century?

We will not tell you which perspectives to accept and which to reject, that responsibility falls on you the reader. What we can tell you however is that each of these essays contains salient points on the past, present and future for a resurgent left in South Africa to consider.

Rekang Jankie
and
Michael Nassen Smith

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by Z Pallo Jordan

Crisis of Conscience in the SACP

By Z Pallo Jordan

“Has Socialism Failed?” is the intriguing title Comrade Joe Slovo has given to a discussion pamphlet published under the imprint of ‘Umsebenzi’, the quarterly newspaper of the SACP. The reader is advised at the outset that these are Slovo’s individual views, and not those of the SACP. While this is helpful it introduces a note of uncertainty regarding the pamphlet’s authority. The pamphlet itself is divided into six parts, the first five being an examination of the experience of the ‘socialist countries’, and the last, a look at the SACP itself.

Most refreshing is the candour and honesty with which many of the problems of ‘existing socialism’ are examined. Indeed, a few years ago no one in the SACP would have dared to cast such a critical light on the socialist countries. “Anti-Soviet,” “anti-Communist,” or “anti-Party” were the dismissive epithets reserved for those who did. We can but hope that the publication of this pamphlet spells the end of such practices.

It is clear too that much of the heart-searching that persuaded Slovo to put pen to paper was occasioned by the harrowing events of the past twelve months, which culminated in the Romanian masses, in scenes reminiscent of the storming of the Winter Palace, storming the headquarters of the Communist Party of Romania. It beggars the term “ironic” that scenarios many of us had imagined would be played out at the end of bourgeois rule in historical fact rang down the curtain on a ‘Communist’ dictatorship!

We may expect that, just as in 1956 and 1968, there will flow from many pens the essays of disillusionment and despair written by ex-communists who have recently discovered the “sterling” qualities of late capitalism.

Comrade Joe Slovo remains a Communist, convinced that the future of humankind lies in the socialist development of society and the social ownership of property. He therefore feels compelled to explain what could have gone so terribly wrong as to bring about the events we witnessed on December 22nd and 23rd 1989.

Missing Questions and Answers

I read and re-read Comrade Slovo’s pamphlet in the hope of finding such an explanation. It proved well-nigh impossible to discover a coherent account of what had

gone wrong. Reducing the arguments advanced in his pamphlet to their barest minimum we are left with a handful of causes, which however beg a number of questions, rather than answer them.

Slovo points to the economic backwardness of a war-weary Russia, forced to build socialism in one country because the European revolutions it had hoped for failed to materialise. He also attributes a degree of blame to the necessities imposed upon the Bolsheviks by the intervention of the capitalist powers in 1918. He discerns too, a rather mechanical dismissal of the virtues of bourgeois democracy by Lenin in his "The State and the Revolution." He detects also some responsibility attaching to the non-existence of "democratic traditions" in Tsarist Russia. Lastly, he faults all the ruling Communist Parties for institutionalising their role as 'vanguard' through law rather than on the basis of popular endorsement by the working class and the majority of society.

The combination of these factors, acting upon each other and inter-penetrating, by Slovo's account, led to the one party dictatorship over the proletariat and society.

To sum up, he offers one major objective factor (economic backwardness in the context of war-weariness coupled with political isolation) plus four subjective factors.

What of Democratic Traditions?

Slovo argues that the lack of a democratic tradition in Tsarist Russia contributed to the absence of democracy after the revolution. This implies that in other countries of Europe bourgeois democracy had been achieved and provided traditions that foster democracy.

It is one of the perennial weaknesses of South African Communist theorists that they appear to have accepted as gospel the much touted lie that capitalist societies are either basically democratic, or require democratic institutions, or thrive best within a democratic political order. The experience of both the 19th and more so, that of the 20th century, demonstrate that this is untrue. This was equally so in the case of the leading capitalist powers on the eve of the First World War!

In 1914 the state of the art with regard to democratic institutions among the capitalist powers was as follows:

Britain was a constitutional monarchy in which universal male suffrage was a mere 39 years old. The supremacy of Parliament had only recently been established, at the instance of the Asquith government in 1911, whose legislation ended the Royal prerogative to veto Acts of Parliament. Female suffrage was still some years away.

France was the classic bourgeois democracy in which the universal male suffrage was well-established since the Second Empire (1851). French women still battled for the vote.

Germany and Austria: the monarchs of the two German states were indeed Emperors. Both possessed inordinate powers (which a British monarch last enjoyed in 1688!) *vis a vis* their parliaments. Yet a balance of power, arrived at through compromise, gave parliament power over fiscal policy. The franchise was restricted to men only.

Japan was still a classic oriental despotism, though much reformed by the ruling Meiji dynasty. The Japanese Diet, very much like the Tsarist Duma, possessed little real power in relation to the crown.

The United States was the closest thing to a White-male-capitalist republic, in which people of colour were regularly lynched for daring to express the wish to vote.

Most other capitalist nations were either constitutional monarchies (like Sweden, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy), clerical authoritarian states (as in the case of Portugal, Spain, Greece and Turkey) or dominions (as were Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa.) On the face of it, Tsarist Russia was not as exceptional as Slovo would have us believe. In 1914, democratic traditions were extremely thin on the ground, existing more in the rhetoric of politicians' war speeches than in substance.

To give Slovo the benefit of the doubt, he is perhaps referring to the institutions of "liberal constitutionalism." In this case he might be able to make out a strong case for France, Britain and some of the smaller constitutional monarchies of Europe. However, I would urge him against too hasty a judgement even in that respect.

However, a different kind of democratic tradition existed in all the countries referred to. This democratic tradition was part of a counter hegemonic popular politics that had evolved among the middle classes, the urban working people and (especially in France and the United States) among smallfarmers, in the wake of the French Revolution. The ruling classes were compelled to respond to this, especially in their efforts to win support for the First World War — an act of cynical manipulation — but one which nonetheless institutionalised democratic practices.

Tsarist Russia was no exception to this pattern. Since the Decembrist Rising of 1825, radical intellectuals had spread the ideas of the French Revolution and subsequent revolutionary thought among the popular classes. The vibrancy of these popular traditions is evidenced in both the practice of the Soviets (i.e. the Workers and Peasants councils of 1905 and 1917) and in the militias and neighbourhood committees that arose during the course of the 1917 revolution.

In this respect, I would say, Slovo has confused the democratic traditions among the people with the ruling ideology in the leading capitalist states. What needs to be

explained is how and why the healthy democratic currents in the radical Russian political culture were subverted and finally extinguished.

Slovo acknowledges that there were terrible abuses of political, civil and human rights in all the countries of the socialist bloc. He admits also that during the days of the Comintern (and perhaps even after) the interests of other Parties and peoples were often subordinated to the perceived interests of the Soviet Union. He does not dispute the mounting evidence of corruption and moral degeneration among the CP leaders in many of these countries — leading to the scandalous charges of graft, money-laundering and skimming off the top!

He has identified the symptoms of the illness but not its basic causes. He has, perhaps, also provided us with evidence that in a particular economic and social climate the viruses that give rise to the illness may thrive and prove more lethal, but we remain with the illness itself undiagnosed.

Marxism prides itself in its ability to uncover the reality that lies hidden behind appearances. Marxists therefore cannot be content with expressions of shock, horror and condemnation. It is our task to explain what has led to the atrocities we condemn! This is the missing element in Slovo's otherwise very useful pamphlet.

A Forgotten Tradition

Among the Marxist-Leninist parties that once constituted the World Communist Movement, attempts to come to grips with the problems of socialist construction are extremely rare and have for decades been muted if not actively suppressed. This is as true of the South African CP (perhaps more so) as it is of the Communist Parties that have achieved power and the others. The exceptions to this pattern were the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), in the immediate aftermath of the uprisings in Poland and Hungary during 1956; and the Italian Communist Party (CPI), which began to define a new identity for itself, after the death of Palmiro Togliatti in 1964.

Previous to this, the only other attempts were undertaken in the ranks of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) itself, by the two oppositions associated with Trotsky-Zinoviev and Bukharin respectively. This tradition has been almost totally suppressed in the Communist movement, and despite the political rehabilitation of Bukharin and the judicial rehabilitation of Trotsky, Zinoviev and the other Left Oppositionists, is still largely forgotten. Latter day Marxist oppositionists have been branded as 'counter-revolutionaries', 'spies' and 'provocateurs' by the Communist Parties, in much the same way as their predecessors (Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin, etc) were so

labelled in the frame-up trials of the 1930s. Their works have consequently been ignored, only to be taken up by the real counter-revolutionaries, spies and provocateurs, as sticks with which to beat the left in general. It is striking that the Soviet press, which has in recent years elevated Bukharin to the status of a Bolshevik martyr, prints little of his analysis of Soviet society during the 1930s!

The concept “the Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” which owes more to French revolutionary practice than to Marx and Engels, may indeed have to bear some blame for the horrors perpetrated in its name. It was precisely this that the CCP attempted to examine in 1957 in a short pamphlet titled “On the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.” It is an index of the extremely unhealthy climate that prevailed in the Communist movement at the time (which was exacerbated during the Sino-Soviet dispute) that this remarkable piece of writing is virtually unknown except among specialists.

In analyzing the previous forty years (1917 to 1957) the Chinese Communists drew analogies between the socialist revolution and the bourgeois-democratic revolution. They correctly assert that for the first 100 years of its existence bourgeois democracy was in fact precisely that — democracy for the bourgeoisie — as only property-owners had the vote. In addition, at that very moment (1957) the leading bourgeois democracy still excluded African-Americans from the franchise on racist grounds. The pamphlet went on to argue, that while the proletarian dictatorship was imperfect and deformed in many ways, most of these distortions were attributable to the security considerations imposed by capitalist encirclement and active hostility. Its basic character, however, was sound because of its commitment to the creation of a classless society. In what was then an amazing departure from conventional orthodoxies, the CCP argued that “the dictatorship of the proletariat” had already given rise to a variety of institutional forms. Among these it enumerated the Yugoslav system of workers’ councils, the Chinese ‘People’s Democratic Dictatorship’, etc. This was among the first official CP documents to suggest that the Soviet model was not universally applicable!

The Italian Communists in many respects followed a line of argument similar to the Chinese until the mid-1980s, when Enrico Berlinguer castigated the Soviet model as a failure which should be abandoned. During the 1970s a whole range of other parties also took the plunge, but most of their writing was unoriginal, repeating the formulations of others.

The class character of the Soviet model (which was emulated in most socialist countries) has been precisely the central focus among those Marxists who take their inspiration from the Bolshevik oppositionists and other east European critics of Stalinism. In their polemics against Stalin and Stalinism both Trotsky and Bukharin

make reference to the class character of Soviet society at the time. The same is true of the Yugoslav oppositionist, Milovan Djilas in his “The New Class”; Karol Modzelewski and Jacek Kuron, two Polish left oppositionists from the 1960s also point up the class roots of the degeneration of the Socialist countries, as does Rudolph Bahro, the most recent left critic of Stalinism from inside a ruling Communist Party, in his “The Alternative in Eastern Europe.”

While Slovo recognises that the socialist countries degenerated into police states, with their administrative and repressive organs possessed of inordinate powers, he never seems to broach the rather obvious question: What gave rise to the need for such practices? Was it not to contain and suppress a fundamentally explosive contradiction in these societies that the ruling parties constructed such formidable armouries of police powers?

Are Caste and Class Useful Concepts?

The most famous critic of Stalinism was doubtlessly Leon Trotsky. Setting aside for a moment our opinion of him and his political career, we can nonetheless agree that, employing the method of historical materialism, he provided one of the most original critiques of the Soviet system. It was Trotsky’s contention that the backwardness of Russia, the depredations of the War of Intervention followed by the famine, and the failure of the European revolution conspired to so isolate the young Soviet republic that it was compelled to fall back on its own meagre resources in order to survive. The price exacted was that a bureaucratic caste, drawn from the working class leadership itself, reinforced by the NEP-men and other non-working class strata, was permitted to usurp power from the proletariat, because it required their expertise and skill to maintain the state. This caste, having developed from within the working class and ensconced in its party, employed the language of socialism and was compelled to defend the gains of the October Revolution (on which its very existence depended) was nonetheless a parasitic layer battenning on the surplus produced by the working class. According to this account, a relationship that was historically unprecedented thus developed, — it was not exploitative in the true sense, since the bureaucracy did not own the means of production; yet it was exploitative in the sense that the bureaucracy was above the class of direct producers and consumed the surplus. According to Trotsky, the dictatorship of Stalin was the political expression of this fraught internal contradiction.

While Bukharin would have parted company with Trotsky as regards his conclusions, he nonetheless sought to employ the same method, historical materialism, to explain

the problems of Soviet society. Bukharin stressed the social character of the alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry, which underlay Soviet power. According to him, the problems arose as a result of the abandonment of the NEP in favour of the five year plans. All these, Bukharin charged, were premised on the accumulation of capital at the expense of the peasantry and were bound to rupture the alliance. Having ruptured the worker-peasant alliance, the Soviet state lost the support of the vast majority of the population (the peasants) and was consequently tempted to act no differently than the Tsarist state before it - in a dictatorial manner.

Bukharin and Trotsky concurred that Stalin had become the leader of this omnipotent state and epitomised its cruelty and callousness.

Most subsequent oppositional writings, with the exception of the Chinese and Italians, derive from these two main sources or at any rate regard these as their baseline. Milovan Djilas, for example, contended that the process of socialist construction had brought into being a "new class," unknown to the Marxist classics and to the experience of bourgeois sociology. This new class's power derived from its control (rather than ownership) of the means of production and its capacity to command the labour power of others, in much the same way as the high priests of Sumeria had commanded the labour of their fellows. The locus of this "new class," Djilas contended, was the leadership of the Communist Party.

The two Poles, Modzelewski and Kuron, recapitulate the essence of Trotsky's argument except that they insist on greater freedom for small property-owners and private enterprise in the tradition of Bukharin. They agree that this deep seated cleavage is potentially explosive and could lead to loss of power by the bureaucracy/new class/Stalinist state. As a result, the state acts in a paranoid fashion, fearful of any criticism or dissenting voices, irrespective of the intent of the critics. The one-party state, based on the false claim that only one party can correctly interpret the interests of the proletariat, enhanced the authoritarianism of the system by pre-emptively silencing oppositional voices.

Rudolph Bahro, a former member of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) of the GDR, who had held a number of responsible posts under both Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker, while acknowledging an intellectual debt to Trotsky, holds that Stalinism was inevitable in the context of a backward Russia that still awaited the capitalist development of the productive forces. "Despotic industrialisation" was the necessary outcome of the drive to transform an agrarian into an urban industrial society. Stalinism, by his account, had outlived its historically necessary role once such an industrial base had been established. However, because the bureaucracy that had been created to manage this earlier phase of economic development had acquired a vested interest in power, it resisted change to the point of violence, as in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

This bureaucracy, Bahro argued, behaved like a class in that it is able to reproduce itself, through easier access to better education; favoured treatment for its members and their families; special status in all spheres of public life.

These explanations apart, it is true that Stalin's policies were actually supported by the overwhelming majority of Soviet Communists in the 1920s and '30s. Both the Trotskyists and the Bukharinists were outvoted in the Party congresses. It was precisely because he had such support that Stalin found it possible to perpetrate the abuses of the late 1930s and 1940s.

The only anti-Stalinist who acknowledges and has sought to explain the pro-Stalin consensus in the CPSU is Isaac Deutscher, who asserts that by a skilful combination of Marxist rhetoric and an appeal to atavistic Russian nationalism, Stalin was able to weld together an alliance among the party apparatus and the basically conservative bureaucracy at the expense of the CPSU's revolutionary traditions.

Whether one agrees with it or not, this oppositional intellectual tradition must be taken into account by a Marxist who wishes to understand the 'socialist countries'.

The Implications of Class

The question we have to pose is: Could a new class of bureaucrats, responsible for the smooth functioning of the state, who have however, acquired an identity and interests apart from the rest of society, possibly have come into existence?

Historical materialism teaches that the basis of class lies in the social productive relations, and not in the real or apparent relative affluence of individuals. To answer this question leads us straight back to the classical Marxian conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which Frederick Engels said he discerned in the institutions of the Paris Commune of 1871.

Apart from democratising the state, the Paris Commune attempted to create a legislature and administration that would remain close to the working people. This was institutionalised in the rule that no law-maker or civil servant shall earn a salary higher than that of a skilled workman: This was intended, in the first instance, to discourage those who saw government service as a means of self-enrichment; and to contain the tendency for legislators to become alienated from their constituencies. A second provision, linked to the first, subjected all legislators to immediate recall by the electors, thus imposing on them greater accountability to the voters.

One would be hard put to find a single socialist country that has adopted these very sound principles as the basis of government. If the evidence of the recent events is to be

believed, it seems clear that they were honoured in blatant breach. The hunting lodges, the exclusive suburbs and ornate palaces of the “proletarian dictators” indicate gross violations of the principles handed down from the Paris Commune. If one were to judge by the evidence of this alone one could indeed be persuaded that we had witnessed the emergence of a new class.

What then are and were the social productive relations in the existing socialisms?

It is clear that a number of modes of production existed side by side in the socialist countries and that among them one could point to a variety of social productive relations. While this is true, we can also refer to a dominant mode, based on state-owned property. The Stalin model, whose roots lie in the specifics of Soviet history, shall for purposes of this paper serve as the universal model.

The Stalin model had its origins in the defeat of the left and right oppositions to Stalin during the 1920s and ‘30s. It involved a dramatic reversal of all the policies pursued during the NEP and the near total statization of the economy. The task of the state, as understood by the pro-Stalin majority in the CPSU, was to set in motion the processes of primitive socialist accumulation. The techniques employed to achieve this were not altogether different from those related to the early phases of capitalism. Coercion and extra-legal methods became the order of the day. These in turn created their own dynamic. The egalitarian ethos, which had been the hallmark of the Communists during the period of War Communism, was replaced by a strongly anti-egalitarian ethic, decreed from the topmost leadership of the CPSU. The rationale for these steps was elementary — there was no other way of enforcing work discipline other than the methods that had served capital so well?

Christian Rakovsky, a Bulgarian by birth but a Bolshevik by persuasion, explained the transformation that occurred in the following terms:

“When a class seizes power, a certain part of this class is transformed into agents of the power itself. In this way the bureaucracy arises.”

Rakovsky continues:

“... that part of those functions which formerly the whole party or the whole class itself carried out has now shifted to the power, i. e. , to a certain number of people from this party, from this class.”

The impact of the war and the famine had in fact drastically transformed the Bolshevik party since October 1917. At the end of the Civil War it had become a Party of committeemen, professional revolutionaries, administrators and state functionaries rather than a

party of working class militants rooted in their factories and in their neighbourhoods. It was less and less the working class, but the committeemen, the cadres and functionaries who served in these capacities, who framed policy. The extent to which this was true is evident from the census of party membership published by the Central Control Commission of the CPSU in 1927:

- Workers engaged in industry and transport: 430, 000.
- Agricultural workers: 15, 700.
- Peasants: 151, 500. Government Officials of Peasant origins: 151, 500.
- Other Government Officials: 462, 000.

The disproportionate representation of state officials (one and a half times the number of shop-floor workers) was perhaps unavoidable in light of the demands of the moment, but it has to be admitted that it changed very fundamentally the character of the CPSU. It was these realities that persuaded Rakovsky that:

“Neither the working class nor the party is physically nor morally what it was ten years ago. I think I do not exaggerate when I say that the party member of 1917 would hardly recognise himself in the person of the party member of 1928...”

Such were the imperatives imposed by the rhythms of primitive socialist accumulation!

However, once we posit the category “class” we are by implication also positing its corollary, “conflict.” I am still not persuaded that a social class of owners and controllers of the decisive sectors of the means of production existed in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Which leads in the direction of an examination of the nature and character of this conflict.

Primitive Socialist Accumulation

As early as 1921, the “Workers Opposition,” led by Alexandra Kollontai, complained bitterly about the introduction of one person management in all the factories. The relegation of the Committees for Workers’ Control at factory and plant level, though important for efficiency, stripped the working class of a most fundamental conquest of the October Revolution — the power to determine the character and rhythms of the labour process. The Soviets (the democratically created councils of workers, soldiers and peasants) too saw their powers diminished by appointments made by the apparatus. The Bolsheviks harvested the bitter fruits of these developments when the sailors of

the Kronstadt garrison, known from the days of October and throughout the War of Intervention for their heroism and revolutionary zeal, mutinied in March 1921, denouncing the Soviet government as a new tyranny.

“... The most hateful and criminal thing which the Communists have created is moral servitude: they laid their hands even on the inner life of the toilers and compelled them to think only in the Communist way,” declared the Temporary Revolutionary Committee of Kronstadt.

“With the aid of militarized trade unions they have bound the workers to their benches, and have made labour not into a joy but into a new slavery.”

In both his seminal works, “From NEP to Socialism” and “The New Economics,” written during the 1920s, the left oppositionist, Eugene Preobrazhensky makes clear that in the absence of massive capital inflows from advanced countries, the Soviet Union would have no option but to construct its industrial base at the expense of the peasantry. It was his contention also that the proletariat, at the lathe and the bench, would have to submit itself to the most rigorous work discipline in order to construct an industrial society at breakneck speed.

By 1934, Lazar Kaganovich, one of Stalin’s leading henchmen, could remark that “the earth should tremble when the director is entering the factory. “ This new style ‘socialist’ director was a petty tyrant on his own patch. All other structures in the factory - such as the Trade Union -existed not to obstruct or contain his power, but rather to assist it in realizing its objectives.

The demands of constructing an industrial society in conditions of economic backwardness in a huge territory, surrounded by extremely hostile enemies, placed enormous strains on the political institutions of the young Soviet republic. The Bolsheviks had never been a mass party, even of the working class before or after the October Revolution. The party had indeed won the confidence and support of millions of workers and soldiers. The land reforms, taken over holus-bolus from the programme of the Social Revolutionaries (SRs), had also earned them support among the peasants. The nationalities programme gained them the confidence of the Asiatic peoples formerly oppressed by Tsarism, enabling the Bolsheviks to hold the line against the White guards and their foreign allies for three solid years of war.

It was only at the end of that war that one can properly say the Bolsheviks began to rule.

Though they had fought to defend the conquests of the revolution — especially land — the peasants in fact had not become solid supporters of the Bolshevik party. The

illegalisation of the SRs and the other right-wing socialist parties during the war did not assist matters either. The dispersal of the urban proletariat, as factories ground to a halt and mass starvation threatened the cities, meant that the Bolsheviks also lost their sheet anchor in the working class. Kronstadt was an indication that even among its most stalwart supporters the Communist government's base was no longer secure.

Taking fright at these developments, the Tenth Party Congress of the CPSU, in March 1921, instituted the most fateful reforms of the Party statutes, outlawing factions. The sixth thesis of the Resolution on Party Unity explicitly prescribed expulsion for anyone who did not observe this new rule. More fateful were the 'Resolutions on the Syndicalist and Anarchist Deviation in Our Party', adopted by the same congress. It was these resolutions that, for the first time in the history of the Communist movement, designated a 'deviation' as treason to the working class. The relevant section, which deserves to be quoted in full, stated:

“Hence, the views of the ‘workers opposition’ and of like-minded elements are not only wrong in theory, but in practice are an expression of petty bourgeois anarchist wavering, in practice weaken the consistency of the leading line of the Communist Party, and in practice help the class enemies of the proletarian revolution.”

The result of these reforms was the reversal of long-standing Bolshevik practice, which had permitted like-minded members of the party to combine and present a common platform to the party for debate and resolution. Such a debate, on “The Trade Union Question,” had just been concluded a few weeks before the Tenth Party congress. During the course of the debate, “Pravda,” had published a series of articles representing differing viewpoints from among the CPSU leadership. At least three public debates had been held in Moscow and Leningrad, at which the various viewpoints were aired before an audience of party militants and the public.

Many who voted for the resolutions of the Tenth Party congress and subsequently became oppositionists had those fateful words flung into their faces with a vengeance by the torturers and bully boys of the NKVD (Soviet Intelligence and Security, renamed the KGB in subsequent years)! But while wiser counsels prevailed in the Politburo of the CPSU no party member needed to fear for his/her safety. The Congress resolved “... to wage an unswerving and systematic ideological struggle against these ideas;...”

As yet the struggle was aimed at the incorrect ideas — the sin, so to speak, but not the sinner. However, the malignancy had been planted in the body of the party and all it required was a new environment, provided by the death of Lenin, for it to become dangerous. Just as Zinoviev and Trotsky supported the outlawing of the ideas of the “work-

ers Opposition” in 1921, so too in 1927 Bukharin supported the outlawing of those of the “Left Opposition.” In 1933, others supported the outlawing of those of the Right Opposition. Each of these successive layers prepared the ground for their own demise by compromising the intellectual climate in the party and subverting its traditions of debate and ideological contestation.

Thus, once the CPSU succumbed to the imperatives of primitive socialist accumulation there was no mechanism available to break out of the logic of this grim cycle. Once caught on this demonic treadmill, the party membership either kept going or went under.

The regime this system imposed in the factories, plants and fields was as authoritarian as it was rigid. The concept “alienation,” employed by the young Marx to describe the plight of the worker in capitalist industry, has been borrowed in this instance by Slovo, to explain the profound scepticism (if not cynicism) of the Soviet workers about their employers — the ‘socialist’ state. In the capitalist countries the attitude of the workers is determined by their age-old recognition that no matter how much their immediate conditions might improve, the relationship with their employers remains exploitative.

There appears to have been a similar feeling in the Soviet Union, fuelled no doubt also by the regime of lies and falsehood that the logic of monolithism persuaded the CPSU leadership to embrace. If deviation equals the ideology of the class enemy, was it not logical to conclude that the bearer of that ideology was also the class enemy?

Thus did the wheel come full circle - since the Party felt it could no longer rely on the working class, it fell back on its own resources and instituted a system of control essentially no different from that of the capitalists. But, having chosen that option, it left itself no means to reconquer working class confidence and, though ruling in that class’s name, both it and the working class knew that this was a lie, eroding further the working class’s confidence in the Party.

In a heart-rending reflection on his past, Rudolph Bahro said inter alia:

“You’ll find it difficult to imagine how proud we were then, I and countless other young comrades, to wear this party badge with the intertwined hands set against the red flag in the background. And now I ask myself and I ask all those young comrades from those thirty years: How has it come about that today we are ashamed to pin on this badge? The essence of the matter is that we learned quite gradually to be ashamed of the party to which we belong, this party which enjoys the notorious distrust of the people, which holds people in political tutelage day in and day out, and which still feels obliged to lie about the most ridiculous trivialities.”

Rulers bereft of the confidence of the ruled lack legitimacy. In that respect the Communist Parties have indeed failed!

Inevitability, Necessity and Accident

The question does arise: Was it inevitable, given the complex of circumstances and the historical legacy of Tsarist Russia that the first socialist state should evolve in this direction? Related to this question is a second, did Stalinism and its horrors flow logically from Leninism and Marxist theory?

Throughout this paper I have sought to demonstrate that the Soviet leadership faced a range of alternatives at all the crucial turning points of its history. Inevitability is, therefore, not part of the question. I am persuaded that a number of circumstances — among which we cannot exclude personality — conspired to influence their choices in particular directions. Having chosen those specific options, the Soviet leadership by that action, renounced others. Rather than inevitability, what we are dealing with is necessity.

This implies an element of choice, but not unlimited choice, for the alternatives themselves were structured by previous choices and inherited circumstances. To speak with the Karl Marx of “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”:

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.”

Necessity, Marx tells us, plays itself out in the shape of accidents. In this regard one may say that it was an accident that Lenin died at a moment when his leadership qualities might have prevented the tensions he detected within the CPSU from spilling over into splits. Equally, it may be counted as an accident that the man who became General Secretary of the CPSU was a ruthless, de-frocked, Georgian priest. Yet another accident was the murder of Kirov immediately after the 1935 “Congress of Victors.” But it was all these accidents that conspired with given circumstances and those created by the CPSU’s own choices, to place inordinate powers in the hands of Stalin and his henchmen. It is this uncanny synchronization of chance and causality that constitutes necessity.

Restoring Confidence in Socialism and the Communist Movement

If Comrade Slovo’s pamphlet (and remember, it does not necessarily reflect the SACP’s views!) is to serve any useful purpose it must at the very least assist Communists in

coming to terms with the history of their movement. This requires that they begin to settle accounts with the oppositionists, left and right, who have stood up, very courageously, against the degradation of the ideals of Communism. South African Communists would do well to turn to the works of the anti-Stalinist Marxists and Communists to rediscover the true meaning of this vision which has, over centuries, persuaded thousands of militants to lay down their lives; which has inspired thousands with the courage to storm the citadels of power even when the odds appeared insuperable; which moved great artists to create magnificent works. The South African Communist Party owes it to itself and to the cause it espouses that it boldly grasp this nettle!

One cannot lightly accept at face value Comrade Joe Slovo's protestations about the SACP's non-Stalinist credentials. Firstly, there is too much evidence to the contrary. Any regular reader of the SACP's publications can point to a consistent pattern of praise and support for every violation of freedom perpetrated by the Soviet leadership, both before and after the death of Stalin. *It is all too easy in the context of Soviet criticisms of this past for Comrade Slovo to now boldly come forward. Secondly, the political culture nurtured by the SACP's leadership over the years has produced a spirit of intolerance, intellectual pettiness and political dissembling¹ among its membership which regularly emerges in the pages of the Party's journals. If we are to be persuaded that the Party has indeed embraced the spirit of honesty and openness, expected of Marxists, it has an obligation to demonstrate this by a number of visible measures.

As a token of the SACP's commitment to a new path and political practice, Comrade Slovo's pamphlet could serve as the opening sally in a dialogue among South African socialists — including every persuasion — to re-examine the meaning of socialism and the implications of its distortion in the Socialist countries. I submit that it is only by an unsparing interrogation of this past that we can hope to salvage something from the tragedy of existing socialism.

¹ By way of explanation of this past it has been suggested that these were necessities imposed by diplomatic considerations. I insist that after the dissolution of the Comintern there was no requirement that any CP blindly support the crimes of Stalin or his successors. Silence was an option that would have given no offence but at least would not have compromised the SACP's moral integrity.

The SACP's restructuring of Communist Theory

by Adam Habib

In January 1990, Joe Slovo, General Secretary of the SACP, published a lengthy discussion paper entitled, 'Has socialism failed?' (Slovo, 1990). The purpose of this paper, prompted most immediately by the collapse of the 'Communist' regimes of Eastern Europe, was to grapple with and explain the incredible circumstances that led to the popular overthrow of the SACP's counterparts. This painful task was undertaken to enable the party and its supporters to come to terms with what had gone wrong in the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc countries, and accordingly restructure its theoretical paradigm and practice in order to avoid the pitfalls that eventually engulfed much of the socialist world. Slovo's intervention provoked a surprising number of incisive and innovative responses. But the one that clearly stands out is Pallo Jordan's 'The Crisis of Conscience in the SACP' (1990)¹ Jordan's principal critique of Slovo is that he confines himself to a mere description of the crises and the atrocities of Stalinism. Yet the task facing Marxists is to 'uncover the reality that lies hidden behind appearances', and to explain what had led to the atrocities we now condemn. In attempting to fulfill this task, Jordan draws extensively on the analysis of the Soviet oppositional movements to Stalin that collected around Trotsky/Zinoviev and Bukharin in the 1920s and 1930s.

For Jordan, it was 'the uncanny synchronisation of chance and causality' that led to the dictatorship of Stalin. Utilising the tools of historical materialism, he explains the emergence of the phenomenon of Stalinism as the product of the imperatives of primitive socialist accumulation. The low level of economic development in the Soviet Union, the disintegration of the urban proletariat through war and famine, the outlawing of factions in the Bolshevik Party, together with accidents of history such as the death of Lenin, all contributed to the emergence of a bureaucratic stratum, which, while not owning the means of production, nevertheless controlled and consumed the social surplus produced by the working class. This bureaucratic caste ruled in the name of the

¹ Part of my analysis of the SACP's reassessment of Communist theory and practice is based on Slovo's paper, 'Has socialism failed?' It could be argued that this is unfair to the Communist Party since the publication of the paper was qualified by the statement that the paper represented only the first reflections of Joe Slovo. However, the central arguments are also contained in an official interview with the party leadership after the 7th Congress in 1989 (see *Work in Progress*, 60).

working class, and eroded its confidence in the party. It is this lack of legitimacy in the party that constitutes the essential core of the crisis faced by the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe (Jordan, 1990). But whilst 'The crisis of conscience in the SACP' is an impressive alternative analysis of the emergence of Stalinism, it is not a complete critique of 'Has socialism failed?' Jordan purposefully limited his critique to providing an alternative analysis of the bureaucratic degeneration of the October Revolution and the emergence of Stalinism. He did not subject Slovo's immediate proposals for the SACP to a critical review. But this is imperative, for Slovo's task in trying to understand the failures of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is to learn from these lessons and restructure the theory and practice of the SACP.

The objective of this paper is to analyse this restructuring of communist theory and practice. Attempting to build on the critique of Jordan, it subjects Slovo's theoretical and practical proposals for the SACP to a critical review. In its attempts to identify the major features of this theoretical restructuring, it does not only confine itself to 'Has socialism failed?' but also looks at other documents and statements of the party and its leadership.¹

The SACP: reassessing communist theory and practice

The reassessment of Communist theory and practice has been prompted by the desire to distance the SACP from the heritage of Stalinism over the last few years. In 'Has socialism failed?' Slovo blames Stalinism for the tattered condition of the 'socialist world'. Stalinism, viewed by Slovo as 'socialism without democracy' (Slovo, 1990:12), is seen as having deprived producers of real control and participation in economic and political life, and thereby entrenching a form of 'socialist alienation'. It is this 'socialist alienation' that lies at the root of the structural crises that confront the socialist world today.

This rejection of Stalinism has forced the SACP to come out clearly and unequivocally in support of inner-party democracy and political pluralism.

Rejecting those that defend Stalinism as a dying breed, Slovo, in 'Has socialism failed?' commits his organisation to the principles of inner-party democracy.

This commitment was reaffirmed in a recent issue of *Umsebenzi* which argued forcefully for the right of criticism, self-criticism, free and fair elections to leadership, and the maximum possible information flow and consultation within the organisation. The journal goes on to say that 'it is vital that the spirit of democratic tolerance should be understood and practiced by every member at whatever level of our structures' (Umsebenzi, nd:3). This re-emphasis on democracy also extends to the organisation's external relations. The Path to Power, the programme adopted at the 7th Congress of

the Party in 1989, argues that a Communist Party does not earn the honoured title of vanguard by proclaiming it. Nor does its claim to be the upholder and custodian of Marxism-Leninism give it a monopoly of political wisdom or a natural right to exclusive control of the struggle. At each stage of its political life, guided by a correct application of Marxist revolutionary theory, a Party must win its place by its superior efforts of leadership and its devotion to the revolutionary cause (1989:43).

Slovo carries a similar message in 'Has socialism failed?', when he says (1990:28): ...because experience has shown that an institutionalised one party state has a strong propensity for authoritarianism, we remain protagonists of multi-party post-apartheid democracy both in the national democratic and socialist phases.

But what is the nature and form of this political pluralism? Indications of what is meant are expressed when Slovo questions (but does not refute) the historical validity of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the transition to socialism. It is further suggested, when he argues that should there exist real democracy in the post-apartheid society, then 'the way will be open for a peaceful transition towards our ultimate objective - a socialist South Africa.... It is perfectly legitimate and desirable for a party claiming to be the political instrument of the working class to lead its constituency in democratic contest for political power against other parties and groups representing other social forces' (1990:28).

The essential message that Slovo tries to impart here is that it is possible to achieve socialism through participation in a real democratic political process.

But what does Slovo mean by the existence of 'real democracy'? Posing this question is imperative, for the concept of democracy has today become a political whore passionately embraced by ideological clients of all political persuasions.²

In any event, does Slovo's use of the term denote 'bourgeois democracy' in the form of a representative system - a system on which the advanced capitalist democracies of the 'First World' are modelled? Or does Slovo use the term to mean a form of working class or socialist democracy which is based on the delegate system and allows the producers of society unfettered control over the economic and political destiny of that society? If Slovo used the term to mean the latter, then this form of democracy is only truly attainable within a socialist society. However, since Slovo attempts to distinguish between a post-apartheid and socialist South Africa, it seems fair to presume that he uses the term to denote some form of bourgeois democracy that guarantees all citizens, without exception, the right to vote and elect representatives to the governing political structure.

² This is easily demonstrated. Many state leaders, such as PW Botha, Margaret Thatcher, and even Ronald Reagan, pay lip-service to democracy, whilst simultaneously committing the most anti-democratic acts against their own working classes.

The essence of Slovo's message then is that it is possible to achieve socialism through participation in the channels of a 'normal' bourgeois political process.

The conquest of state power is conceived here as occurring primarily through winning a substantial majority within parliament. This line of thinking seems to be in accordance with that of the majority of the SACP leadership. The latter, when confronted with the question of the viability of the parliamentary road to socialism after the achievement of national liberation, responded by saying: the struggle against capitalism and for an advance to socialism, will obviously be taking place in a completely new context.... the parliamentary road can never be separated from extra-parliamentary struggle, but it is certainly a possible projection (WIP, 60).

Clearly then, the organisation views a parliamentary transition to socialism as a concrete possibility if 'normal' democratic rights are achieved within a post-apartheid society.

The revision of Communist theory, however, is not only limited to strategies for the transition to socialism. It also extends to the form and nature of the socialist society itself. In an article published in the *Weekly Mail*, Slovo argues that 'if we have learnt anything from the economic ravages of capitalism and the economic failure of existing socialism, it is surely that the "plan" and the "market", seen as exclusive categories, have fallen on evil days'. He goes on to suggest that we should now search for a mix between the two, 'although the balance between the "market" and the "plan" must accord pride of place to the latter' (Slovo, 1990a:2). This view is clearly in line with that of the dominant thinking in the Soviet Union. Perestroika, the official economic policy of the Soviet leadership, envisages precisely this mixture between the 'market' and the 'plan'. This is what distinguishes it from 'market socialism', for unlike the latter, its use of market mechanisms in the economy is subservient to its overall commitment to central planning.³

In any case, Slovo's commitment to the Soviet leadership's current economic programme is clearly evident when, in arguing against critics of the latter economic policy, he accredits Perestroika and Glasnost by describing them as diagnosis and prescription for the ailments of socialism. And he is not alone in this view. The SACP, as an organisation, seems to hold a similar perspective when it suggests that Glasnost and Perestroika 'make the passage to socialism easier, less hazardous...' (Seventy Year of Workers Power, 1989:28).⁴

³ This distinction between Perestroika and 'Market Socialism' is drawn from Catherine Samary (1988).

⁴ This publication, entitled 'Seventy years of workers' power', was published in 1988. The striking feature of this document is that its analysis of Soviet society from 1917 to the present, neglects to even mention the Stalinist atrocities and distortions of socialism committed by the bureaucracy.

Slovo's and the Party's reassessment of communist theory and practice, then, has resulted in the establishment of a new path of politics for the organisation. This new path contains an emphasis on inner-party democracy, a commitment to a particular interpretation of political pluralism that leads the organisation to consider the parliamentary road to socialism as a viable strategy and a reassessment of the nature of the socialist economy which is now viewed as taking the form of one dominated by central planning, but making substantial use of market mechanisms. The question that now confronts political commentators and activists is, how viable is this new path of politics? In order to answer this question, it is imperative that we first critically reflect on the foundation of these proposals, namely, the organisation's understanding of Stalinism.

What is Stalinism?

Joe Slovo (1990:12) views Stalinism as 'the bureaucratic-authoritarian style of leadership (of parties both in and out of power) which denuded the party of most of its democratic content and concentrated power in the hands of a tiny, self-perpetuating elite'. Stalinism, then, is 'socialism without democracy*.

Two problems exist with this definition. The first, which underlies Jordan's critique of 'Has socialism failed?' is that Slovo's definition is abstracted from a historical materialist analysis of Soviet society. Slovo views Stalinism as a distortion of socialism amongst higher echelons of the party or country's leadership. But this is an inadequate portrayal of Stalinism. It is unable to account for the duration and depth of the phenomenon, and falls into the trap of bourgeois thought by explaining the degeneration of the Soviet Party and state through the mere actions of 'great men'. However, presenting an alternative, materialist, analysis of the phenomenon of Stalinism need not detain us here, for it is already impressively conducted in Jordan's 'The crisis of conscience in the SACP'.

The second problem with Slovo's definition is that it views Stalinism only in an organisational aspect. But Stalinism, as a political counter-revolution, occurred at both an organisational and ideological level. With the rise of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, the theoretical premises underlying the October Revolution of 1917 were disfigured so as to justify and legitimate the new ruling stratum. This process began in 1924 when Stalin challenged the Marxist commitment to proletarian internationalism with his theory of 'socialism in one country'.⁵ Until then almost all Marxists were unanimous in the belief that for the final victory of socialism, the efforts of one country would be insufficient and that the efforts of the proletarians of several advanced countries would

⁵ This theory was first forwarded in the second edition of Stalin's *Fundamental Problems of Leninism*.

be required. Stalin's thesis suggested that socialism could be realised in the Soviet Union because of its immense riches and the support the revolution generated.

The theory of 'socialism in one country' promoted Soviet national messianism which justified the subordination of the interests of world revolution to that of the supposed interests of the Soviet Union. Mandel argues:

"The conservative character of the bureaucracy, its fear of the international repercussions of any advance of the revolution elsewhere in the world, its awareness that the passivity and depoliticisation of the Soviet proletariat constituted the foundation of its power and privileges, and the risk that this passivity and depoliticisation could be placed in question by any major progress of the world revolution - all these factors inclined the bureaucracy towards a policy of peaceful coexistence with imperialism, attempts to divide the world into spheres of influence, and determined defence of the status quo" (1979:117).

It was in fulfilling this policy of peaceful coexistence that the bureaucracy proceeded to reverse the theoretical advances made by the Bolshevik Party in the long build up to the Russian Revolution. One of the first such reverses related to the nature of the transition to socialism. In 1928, the Comintern, which by then had been completely cowed into submission by Stalin, reverted to the previous Menshevik position of the transition to socialism occurring over stages.

This position argued that it was incorrect for a Communist Party in a 'backward country' to try and lead a socialist revolution. The strategy was: first achieve national liberation, and then we can begin the battle for socialism.⁶

This theoretical position was transported to the Communist parties affiliated to the Comintern. The bureaucracies of these parties submitted blindly to the orders of the Comintern for they saw no alternative either because of their political and material dependence, or because of their view of medium-term national and international perspectives. These Communist parties were instructed, in line with the theory of revolution by stages, to form popular fronts with the national bourgeoisie. This entailed the submerging of the Communist party's programmes to that of the national bourgeoisie with disastrous results.⁷

⁶ The impact of this reversal on South Africa was reflected in the adoption of "The Black Republic Thesis' by the CPSA. This of course committed the organisation to the slogan 'an independent native republic as a stage towards a workers and peasants republic'.

⁷ In 1927, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was forced to join the Kuomintang under Chang Kai-Shek, who massacred communist cadres and drowned the revolution in blood. In 1936 the Spanish Revolution was similarly defeated. In 1959, when Fidel Castro led the Cuban Revolution, the official Communist Party, under the strict instructions of Moscow, opposed him. When the Sandinistas led the victorious revolution in Nicaragua in 1979, the official Communist Party, under the same instructions from Moscow, once again, opposed the revolution.

Stalinism, then, cannot simply be reduced to an undemocratic and bureaucratic style of leadership. Stalinism must be seen as the usurpation of political power by a bureaucracy that enables the latter to direct the planning of the economy in a direction that benefitted it materially. This ruling stratum produced an ideology to achieve and justify its goals. The theory of 'socialism in one country', the strategic conception of socialism being a product of revolution in stages, and the tactic of the Popular Front as a particular form of alliance, are all inextricable parts of the Stalinist whole. Stalinism must be viewed as a counter-revolution which has developed its own organisational practice, political programme, strategy and tactics. The task then, of destalinising the Communist movement must be based on this understanding of Stalinism.

Disinheriting the heritage of Stalinism

How successful has the SACP been in distancing itself from the heritage of Stalinism? Does the establishment of a new path of politics signal the organisation's break with its past history? The SACP would of course answer in the affirmative. It would cite its commitment to inner-party democracy and political pluralism as proof of its efforts of destalinisation.

And to a limited extent this is true. The notions of a party without internal dissent and the single-party state have perhaps been the greatest and most blatant distortions of socialist theory and practise. The organisation's rejection of these notions and its commitment to inner-party democracy, political pluralism, and a non-sectarian attitude to activists both inside and outside the party, is of immense symbolic and practical value and represents some movement towards the destalinisation of the SACP. But the organisation still remains wedded to a conception that views the transition to socialism occurring over stages. The essential content of this strategy, first fully formulated in its present form in the SACP's 1962 programme, 'The road to freedom', views South Africa as a 'colony of a special type', and thus calls for the initial establishment of a national democratic state. 'Has socialism failed?', reaffirms the organisation's commitment to a two-stage transition to socialism - the first being, according to Slovo, the construction of a post-apartheid state, and the second being the establishment of a socialist South Africa.⁸

Whilst Slovo and the SACP have recently begun to refute the theory of 'socialism in one country', they have declined to reject its South African manifestation, namely, the

⁸ Slovo's recent publications, and the Party's current programme, 'The Path to Power', have insisted that there is no Chinese Wall between the national democratic and socialist phases. However, both the party programme and Slovo's publications have refused to define the social character of the national democratic state, whose nature would have to be proletarian if the transition to socialism is to be effected (see Slovo, 1986).

conception of the transition to socialism occurring over stages. And for good cause. Rejection of this strategy would of course require the organisation to jettison the theory of National Democracy. And an abandonment of the theory of National Democracy would immediately compel the organisation to review its strategic alliance with the ANC and abandon its tactic of broad popular or anti-Apartheid Fronts with bourgeois parties; a tactic to which the SACP is committed. Complete destalinisation by the SACP would lead to abandonment of its current theories, programmes, strategies, and tactics. The entire foundation of its current practise would disintegrate.

The move to Eurocommunism

The SACP's refound commitment to political pluralism has expressed itself in the organisation's consideration of the 'parliamentary road to socialism' as a viable strategy, should 'normal' democratic rights be achieved. The adoption of this strategy, termed Eurocommunism, is in line with developments in the European Communist parties, which have long participated in the democratic contest for parliamentary majorities. The attractions of this strategy are obvious.

It is simple and it seems to contain no messy or violent confrontation with the capitalist class. Yet the viability of this strategy is clearly questionable.

Eurocommunism is based on the premise that the state is an impartial arbiter above the selfish contention of classes. It believes that it is possible progressively to empty the parliamentary institutions of their class content so that they cease to be props for the class rule of the bourgeoisie. But this is either a Utopian conception or a deliberate mystification of the nature of the state.

The flaw in the Eurocommunist strategy is that it dislocates the state from the socio-economic environment within which it is situated. It neglects to take into account the bourgeoisie's control of the state apparatus. And it is also deficient in that it underestimates the consequences of the bourgeoisie's command of political and economic power on the proletariat. In capitalist society workers live and act under conditions of material dependence on the bourgeoisie. As Mandel indicates, 'workers' jobs, incomes and living standards are determined in the final analysis by economic mechanisms which function on the basis of the objectives pursued by the bourgeoisie' (1979:192). Just as important is the latter's command of political power which enables it to manipulate the ideological apparatuses of the state so that daily workers are bombarded with ideas, values, and historical distortions, that are compatible with the maintenance of the status quo. It is for this reason that Marx concluded, 'the ruling ideas of each age, have been the ideas of its ruling class' (Feuer, 1984:68).

This of course questions the viability of the Eurocommunist notion of gradually reforming the capitalist system. Workers will often act in unison with their class enemies against their long-term class interests. But this is not to suggest that the hegemony of the ruling class can never be threatened. At precise moments in history, objective conditions weaken the ideological, political and economic hegemony of the ruling class and compels the proletariat to engage in the struggle for state power.⁹ But these moments, known as 'revolutionary crises', never last very long. And they provoke extreme tension for they involve attempts to dismantle the mechanisms that run bourgeois society. This, of course, involves a direct conflict with the ruling class; a strategy that Eurocommunism precisely attempts to avert.

The essential kernel of the Eurocommunist strategy is the achievement of a parliamentary majority that would provide Communists with the supreme power to gradually usher forth reforms that will lead to a transition to socialism. But all indications are that even if Communists achieved a majority in parliament, they would still be powerless to determine the direction of that society. Elected chambers of parliament all across the world have very little effective control over what the government does. Much of the running of the state is left in the hands of the permanent administrative bureaucracy who, unlike governments, are not prone to being ousted from power. Moreover, capitalist societies are progressively witnessing power being passed into the hands of the executive.

The more representatives of the workers' movement gain admittance into parliament, the more the role of parliament in the ensemble of mechanisms of the bourgeois state tends to narrow. The executive is now becoming the ultimate guarantor of the bourgeois order.

Even if Communists captured control of the executive, they would still be unable to initiate substantial transformations of the status quo. This was clearly evident in June 1981 when Francois Mitterrand and the French Socialist Party swept into power and proceeded to implement a programme of large-scale nationalisation. The bourgeoisie responded by refusing to invest, transferring liquid capital out of the country, causing an acute financial crisis. The franc slumped and Mitterrand was forced to surrender by adopting a programme of austere measures involving retrenchments, closures, and cuts in real wages and in welfare services.

But what if these intimidatory tactics had failed? What if Mitterrand held out?

Historical experience indicates that the bourgeoisie would have responded with the armed apparatus. That is the principal lesson of the Chilean experience.

⁹ Examples of such moments were in the Soviet Union in 1905 and 1917. Germany in 1918 and 1923, France in 1968, Chile in 1972/73, Nicaragua in 1979, Poland in 1980 and in Romania and East Germany in 1989.

Here, Salvador Allende and the Chilean Socialist Party came into power through the bourgeois parliamentary game. When workers took the offensive and threatened the material interests of the bourgeoisie, Allende was forcibly overthrown by the military and the revolution crushed.¹⁰ Such is the neutrality of the bourgeois state.

The final flaw in the Eurocommunist strategy is that they view the class struggle purely in its political aspect. As Mandel says, 'relations between classes are reduced to relations between political parties, or rather, between leaderships of political parties. A handful of "chiefs" is supposed to represent and faithfully articulate the social interests of millions of people in all their complex interconnections, solely on the basis of election results' (1979:197). Added to this is the belief that it is this handful of 'chiefs' that will institute measures that usher forth the socialist society. But this is a substitutionist conception of the transition to socialism. Socialism is the product of the self-emanipation of the working class. The implication of this fundamental premise of Marxism is that no variety of socialism is possible unless through the self-activity of the working class.

This is the principal difference between Utopian and scientific socialism.

The Eurocommunist strategy then, is a questionable one. Socialism can only be achieved with the forcible overthrow of both the bourgeoisie and its state apparatus. As Engels says, '...the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy' (Feuer, 1984:401). At another point in the same pamphlet, he says, '...from the very outset the Commune was compelled to recognise that the working class, once come to power, could not go on managing with the old state machine, that in order not to lose again its only just conquered supremacy this working class must, on the one hand, do away with the old repressive machinery previously used against itself and, on the other, safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials, by declaring them all, without exception, subject to recall at any moment' (Feuer, 1984:399). The SACP's flirtation with the strategy of a 'parliamentary road to socialism' can but only weaken the working class when the decisive contest for political power emerges. This is the principal lesson imparted by the rich history of the international working class struggle.

Redefining the vision of the socialist economy

The SACP's latest vision of a 'socialist economy' envisages an economy characterized by a mixture of 'plan' and 'market'. Whilst the precise mix between these two categories

¹⁰ The defeat of the revolution in Chile plunged the country into a military-dictatorship, and submerged the Chilean working class into a vortex of demoralisation and passivity for over 15 years.

is as yet unclear, general guidelines espoused by the promoters of this vision indicate that the 'market' will be subservient to the 'plan'. If current experiments in the Soviet Union are anything to go by, then what is envisaged is that, while the overall thrust of the economy will be determined by central planning, a substantial use of market mechanisms will be made in micro-economic decision-making and day-to-day management of enterprises.

This vision of market mechanisms being an integral part of the socialist economy has been prompted by what is perceived as being the failure of 'socialist planning' in the Soviet Union. The gist of the argument is simple. The Soviet experience indicates that command planning (which is equated with central planning)¹¹, while achieving structural change, causes stagnation in productivity and living standards. The 'market' is the only mechanism capable of combating this economic stagnation. Being an 'objective' agent, the 'market' will impose an efficiency and discipline on producers and will achieve the variety and quality of goods required to satisfy consumer demands. But because the 'market' imposes high social costs, the use of market mechanisms need to be carefully supervised; thus, the 'market's' subservience to the 'plan'.

Before proceeding critically to analyse this thesis, certain preliminary remarks need to be made. First, defining the nature of the socialist economy is not simply a matter of semantics. The road we adopt to realise our end goal must be informed by an understanding of the nature of our immediate circumstances and the proposed end goal. Thus, a general vision of the socialist economy is a necessary yardstick for assessing current economic proposals and strategies.

Second, a critique of the SACP's vision of a socialist economy does not automatically mean that an immediate radical suppression of market relations is being suggested. This contribution recognises that socialism is the ultimate product of a long transition process; a process characterized by revolutionary reforms that gradually lead to social control over the economy. Thus, market mechanisms will prevail for a considerable period after the overthrow of capitalist society. On this there is complete consensus amongst the extra-parliamentary left. However, the departure of revolutionary socialists from the SACP emerges on the issue of the social character of the state on and after the day of liberation. Whilst the SACP remains silent on the nature of the state, revolutionary socialists insist that a pre-requisite for the transition to socialism is the establishment of a workers' state. For revolutionary socialists, liberation marks the capture of state power by the working class which then creates the political and social conditions for the gradual transformation of the economy and wider society.¹²

¹¹ The protagonists of this argument neglect to consider that central planning does not only take the form of command planning, but can also occur within a decentralised and democratic framework.

¹² This position is in line with that of Marx in *The Communist Manifesto* (see Feuer, 1984:69).

Moreover, for the SACP, market mechanisms are not limited to the transition period. They are now being incorporated in the organisation's vision of the future socialist economy. For a critical analysis a critique of current Soviet thinking about utilising market mechanisms within the framework of the 'plan', commonly known as Perestroika, is pertinent.

According to Abel Aganbegyan, Gorbachev's chief economic advisor, Perestroika is the attempt to replace 'the economy of administrative command and fiat methods of management' by 'an economy with predominantly economic methods of management, a market economy, an economy with developed financial and credit relations' (1988:77). He says, 'from wage-levelling and neglected material incentives, we are working towards an economic system orientated to take due account of economic interests based on economic self-reliance and material encouragement' (1988:77). But this does not convey the overall thrust of the model. A more balanced picture of Perestroika is provided by the documents of the Central Committee Plenum of April 1985 which committed the regime to act against corruption and the black market; to extend the market in agriculture and services; to give priority to technological and scientific development; to promote greater work discipline through the use of material incentives; and to eliminate the middle-level management bodies while simultaneously strengthening the central organs of planning and the powers of enterprise directors. This latter policy, which is the essential kernel of Perestroika, involves the re-organisation of ministries to deal with macroeconomic decisions, whilst simultaneously granting individual enterprises greater autonomy with day-to-day management affairs, with the hope that these enterprises will be run 'on the principles of full self-accounting, self-financing, and self-administration' (Aganbegyan, 1988:78).

The essential aim of this managerial reform is to increase the efficiency of individual enterprises in the hope that the economy could be uplifted from the bureaucratic impasse that it has become submerged in. But can enterprise efficiency be guaranteed by simply granting greater powers to local directors?

It is extremely doubtful. In capitalist society the motivation to increase the efficiency of individual enterprises emerges from the entrepreneur's ownership of private property. This enables them to increase their personal consumption and maximise their wealth, all of which they can transmit to their children and other heirs. However, this is not possible in the Soviet Union. In the 'best' of cases, local managers' material remuneration for their enterprise's efficiency would merely be some form of increase in bonuses which would increase their access to consumer goods. But this is an insufficient material incentive to promote the typically entrepreneurial behaviour that would be required to boost enterprise efficiency. As Mandel says, 'the reform will only be

effective and coherent if the material interests of managers, linked to profit, goes beyond the realm of current income, and is linked also to the long-term performance of the enterprise as a whole. His fate, as well as that of his children, is tied to the enterprise; he is no longer a manager, but an owner' (1989:155). But this would constitute a reversion to capitalism, a situation that Gorbachev cannot and will not realise.¹³

Moreover, the attempt to realise enterprise autonomy within the framework of the Soviet Union's current economic structure is bound to fail. Yes, management will be able to retain a part of the profit for reinvestment. Yes, they will be able to enter into contracts with other enterprises. But their ability to determine the prices of products produced is severely curtailed. The central planning mechanisms still retain the power to determine prices of raw materials.

This curtails enterprises' abilities at price-fixing for if they can't negotiate the price of their inputs, then their freedom to determine the price of outputs is severely limited. The same goes for the determination of wages and resource allocation. Both are controlled by the central planning mechanisms, severely inhibiting local enterprises' attempts at achieving self-accounting, self-financing and self-administration.

Thus, Gorbachev's policy of Perestroika, which represents a massive recourse to market mechanisms within the framework of the 'plan', is economically incoherent. It is unable to realise its aims of greater economic efficiency for the simple reason that its two constituent categories, the 'plan' and 'market', continually pull in different directions. The result: much of the practical initiatives embarked upon are often haphazard, contradictory and self-negating.

Mandel's warning is incisive here: 'within the framework of planning, the market cannot rule, just as the plan cannot rule within the framework of a market economy' (1989:153).

But what are the social implications of this implementation of Perestroika?

These are obvious even to the most naive. The systematic implementation of the principle of financial self-sufficiency in individual enterprises would lead to the closure of thousands of factories and the retrenchment of millions of workers. This is already evident. Current Soviet estimates of unemployment have already surpassed the three million figure, and PRAVDA suggests that the continued utilisation of market mechanisms could see this figure rise as high as sixteen million.¹⁴ The extension of the principle of financial self-sufficiency to the fields of social services (health, education,

¹³ This is so because a reversion to capitalism would threaten the material interests and existence of a substantial proportion of the bureaucracy. Gorbachev as its representative cannot usher forth its decline.

¹⁴ These estimates were published in Pravda Moscow News, quoted in Mandel (1989).

etc) threatens to further accentuate the immiseration of the Soviet working class. This, together with the fact that subsidies have been eliminated from basic goods and services, is bound to reduce the buying-power of workers and thereby dramatically lower their standard of living.

Workers are aware of this. In general, they have remained sceptical of the economic measures implemented in the Soviet Union. This scepticism is now turning to overt hostility because of the growing poverty that has begun to afflict greater and greater sections of the workforce. In the past two years, the Soviet Union has registered the greatest rise in labour conflicts in a quarter of a century.

The first nine months of 1989 witnessed seven million days lost through strike action.¹⁵ At present, more than 40 million people live on or below the official poverty level. For the Soviet working class, Perestroika means nothing more than austerity, greater poverty, greater social inequality, and greater social strife.

Yet it is on this economic framework that the SACP's vision of the 'socialist economy' is modelled. The utilisation of market mechanisms, even if subjected to the framework of a 'plan', works to the disadvantage of the proletariat and accelerates social inequality within society. This is so because it does not provide an alternative logic to the system of bureaucratic rule. On the contrary, it merely attempts to increase the efficiency of that system at the expense of the producers of society. Thus, the SACP's current vision of a 'socialist economy', like that of its predecessor, is a reductionist one that would be unable to realise the Marxist goal of an egalitarian society. But what is the alternative? The revolutionary socialist alternative is premised on the foundation of an entirely different logic to that of the Soviet system. It is structured to serve, primarily, the interests of the producers of society. This system known as democratic socialism, or what Mandel calls 'self-articulated management', involves the coordinated allocation of resources democratically determined by the producers themselves. A federal body, elected by universal franchise, would be responsible for allocating proportions of the Gross National Product (GNP), according to consciously formulated priorities. Since this would require different coherent alternatives to be presented for discussion and eventual adoption, political pluralism and the enjoyment of all basic democratic freedoms and human rights must be guaranteed. Once proportions of the GNP are allocated, sectorial and territorial bodies would be responsible for the distribution of these resources in their own field. This devolution of power would extend further to provide individual enterprises with the right to organise production as they see fit. The latter would also be given power to dispose of parts of the current output and social surplus product. To ensure consumer

¹⁵ The most notable of these strikes were conducted by the Ukrainian and Siberian miners.

satisfaction, models and quality of products produced would be subject to a veto power by consumers. This entire system, then, is premised on the practice of political pluralism, a serious reduction of the workday, and a precise combination of political and economic mobility.¹⁶ Only such a system, (that allows the producers of society the freedom to choose what to produce, how to produce it, and to determine the destiny of that output), can realise the goal of a classless society. As such, it is the only system that can truly be described as the vision of the socialist economy.

The new path of politics: reformism or Marxism-Leninism

How then should we view the SACP's restructuring of Communist theory and practice? A critical overall assessment of the party's new path of politics indicates that it represents a shift to the right. The organisation's break with Stalinism to date can at best be described as formal. This assertion is easily defensible. Whilst condemning the atrocities of Stalin, and denouncing sectarian practices, undemocratic behaviour and one-party rule, the SACP still remains wedded to crucial pillars of the Stalinist orbit. The theory of 'Colonialism of a Special Type', the strategy of National Democracy, and the tactic of Popular Fronts, all derivatives of Stalin's theory of 'socialism in one country', still remain at the heart of the organisation's programme. This essential core of the party programme is supplemented by two new features; the adoption of the Eurocommunist strategy of achieving socialism through the ballot box, and the redefinition of the vision of the socialist economy to incorporate market mechanisms within the framework of the 'plan'. Both new features represent a reformist project incapable of realising the socialist order they set as their task. The strategy of Eurocommunism is based on the understanding that it is possible to gradually reform the capitalist state and system without effecting an overthrow of the bourgeoisie's monopoly of political power. However, as mentioned earlier, a critical analysis of this strategy and the results of its consistent application for over 80 years indicates that this is a project that is doomed to failure. Similarly, the SACP's latest vision of the socialist economy is an incoherent economic programme that will accelerate social inequality and inhibit the realisation of the classless society. It would thus be unable to realise the dreams of those countless of fighters for emancipation.

The vision of the classless society can only truly be brought into realisation if our theories, strategies and tactics are derived from the rich tradition of authentic Marxism-

¹⁶ For a greater exposition and explanation of this system, see Mandel (1989 and 1986).

Leninism. The failure and collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe does not invalidate these tools of thought. On the contrary it re-affirms its historical accuracy for it is the only paradigm that consistently explained, criticised, and predicted the downfall of this nightmare. The task of revolutionary socialists now is to rejuvenate the authentic traditions of Marxism- Leninism. The SACP's new path of politics does not do this. Its members need to heed the words of Pallo Jordan:

South African Communists would do well to turn to the works of the anti-Stalinist Marxists and Communists to rediscover the true meaning of this vision which has, over centuries, persuaded thousands of militants to lay down their lives; which has inspired thousands with the courage to storm the citadels of power even when the odds appeared insuperable; which moved great artists to create magnificent works. The South African Communist Party owes it to itself and to the cause that it espouses that it boldly grasp this nettle (1990:88).

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“Has Socialism Failed? The Debate Continues”

by Mike Neocosmos with responses by various others

WOSA¹

The contribution from the Trotskyist WOSA is perhaps the easiest to deal with. They rehash tired old formulae concerning the ‘sin’ of ‘socialism in one country’. They see this as the universal explanation for all the evils of Stalinism as if socialism could occur in all countries at the same time. They trot out crude statements that a united front is ‘good’ while a popular front is ‘bad’ and that a conception of stages necessarily leads to bourgeois domination. They need to go beyond the vulgar notion that all that exists is capitalism. For them an ideal (not to say idealistic) opposition between the working class and capitalists is the only possible contradiction.

They fail to understand the simple that there are many different forms of capitalism, some of which are more in the interest of the working class than others. They also forget that people in capitalist societies as in ‘actually existing socialism’ - are in reality divided into many more classes and groups than the two they always talk about. The result is that not only have their organisations been historically staggeringly ineffective (there has never been such a thing as a successful Trotskyist revolution in any country), but also that they have been guilty of the kind of sectarianism and contempt for debate with which they now smugly taint the SACP. One would have expected a little more self-criticism from the comrades of WOSA than simply jumping on the ‘let’s have a bash at the SACP’ bandwagon. Because WOSA gives no hint of any self-criticism of the Slovo kind, it is very difficult to take their arguments seriously.

Pallo Jordan

Although Cde Jordan makes many important points, he is not immune from the above kind of criticism either. He accuses the SACP’s publications of a “consistent patterns of

¹ WOSA is the Worker’s Organisation for Socialist Action” of which Adam Habib was a member. Neocosmos’s response is in relation to the previous article in this reader.

praise and support for every violation of freedom perpetrated by the Soviet leadership, both before and after the death of Stalin” (P74). He also remarks that “the political culture nurtured by the SACP’s leadership over the years has produced a spirit of intolerance and political dissembling which regularly emerges in the pages of party journals.” (P74). These points may be correct, but one searches in vain through the publications of the ANC for a serious critique of ‘actually existing socialism’. It is to Cde Slovo’s credit that he was the first in Southern Africa to provide a thoughtful public reassessment of ‘actually existing socialism’, whereas leadership Oll this question did not come from ‘non-party Marxists’ within the ANC.

The crucially important point however is not just to berate communist parties (or other organisations on the Left) for their lack of democratic practices. The point is to understand the reasons for the lack of democracy in order to combat it. Centralist and anti-democratic practices generally are features of all political organisations without exception, including those of the working class. Like all political organisations, working class political organisations are products of capitalist relations. The political organisations of the bourgeoisie are themselves anything but democratic. We have to understand this and not fall into the trap of believing that undemocratic practices are the results of Marxism itself, or the results of socialism. They are the result of bourgeois relations (including a bourgeois division of labour between mental and manual labour and between state and civil society) against which no party is immune.

Communist parties may have been guilty of not struggling against such tendencies with enough strength, or of not recognising them.

However, they cannot be held accountable for the ‘muck of ages’ which, as Marx: said, affects the proletariat itself, born and produced as it is within the confines of capitalist oppression and exploitation.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Cde Jordan’s dismissal of the Marxist concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat (DOP) must also be commented upon. The dictatorship of the proletariat was abandoned as a guiding principle of the CPSU as long ago as the 1960s and thereafter by most communist parties. This principle was replaced, by the party under Khrushchev, with the supposedly more correct notion of the ‘state of the whole people’. A number of points need to be made here: The abandonment of the

DOP slogan did not contribute fundamentally to the democratisation of the Soviet state. ‘Statism’, ‘commandism’ and ‘violations of socialist legality’ continued unabated. It is far too simplistic to blame the DOP “for the horrors perpetrated in its name” (p69).

The dictatorship of the party continued in the absence of the DOP. Some, like the present writer, would argue that in reality the DOP i.e. proletarian democracy had ceased to exist long before it was officially abandoned. It is far too convenient to see the concept of the DOP itself as an expression of Stalinist dictatorship. Krushchev's slogan of the 'state of the whole people' may sound more democratic (after all the term dictatorship does sound nasty!), but the slogan had more in common with bourgeois ideology than with the views of Marx, Engels and Lenin, for whom all states implied class rule. This slogan therefore contributed to confusing the masses by asserting that a 'classless State' could exist.

After Krushchev, 'statism', 'commandism', and the dictatorship of the party were justified. No longer in terms of the need to maintain a 'class dictatorship' as before, but in terms of 'defending the gains of socialism against imperialist aggression'. Thus the DOP is not a necessary precondition for the dictatorship of the party. How the DOP came under Stalin to be equated with the dictatorship of the party, is (party) a theoretical question which has still to be adequately resolved. Jordan's assertion that the DOP owes more to French revolutionary practice than to Marx and Engels" (p69) is not supported by evidence. On the contrary, evidence shows the opposite. Marx himself writes to his friend Weydemeyer in New York (March 5, 1852) that he himself did not discover the class Struggle, which had been described by bourgeois economists long ago. Rather Marx says he proved that the existence was linked to the development of production, that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat... and this dictatorship itself only constitutes a transition to the abolition of all classes (Marx and Engels, ~selected works 1 vol:669, emphasis in original). There is nothing here, of course, regarding the dictatorship of a political.

Opportunism

Cde Jordan may be correct, and Marx might have been wrong in his estimation of his own work. The point however is that his dismissal of the DOP shows a lack of theory seriousness towards theory, a failure to produce evidence and pandering to the same opportunistic tendencies with which the majority of communist parties' 'encouraged' from Moscow 'abandoned' the notion themselves (accompanied by a greater or lesser degree of soul searching of course).

This may sound harsh, but how else are we to understand the fact that the communist parties and Jordan forget that the DOP was meant for - classical Marxism-to imply a greater form of democracy - a proletarian form - which bourgeois society never experienced and can never produce. This concept was meant to refer- to objective

reality- and not to a slogan that can be abandoned by party decree. It has similar status to that of the party's leading role, which as Cde Slovo correctly points out has to be proven through an objective analysis of the party's political practice rather than simply asserted. Abandoning the DOP is similar to abandoning the class struggle. The class struggle exists objectively whether we like it or not. To abandon it would however, indicate that the party has failed to recognize that objective reality. In fact Cde Slovo himself is less than convincing (and seems less than convinced) that it was a correct decision for the SACP to abandon the DOP. Noting that the word dictatorship opens up the way to ambiguities and distortion (Labour' Bulletin Vol 14 No 6. p20). Unfortunately too much time has been spent considering the word itself rather than the content of the historical period which the term was meant to refer to. There is only one shortstep from abandoning the DOP to asserting that the 'class struggle' is an unfortunate term which is 'out of place in the present world' or 'out of date' as it is 'incompatible with democracy'. While the SACP has fortunately not taken this step, other communist parties, such as those dominated by 'Eurocommunism', have.

Van Holdt

Karl Von Holdt whose interventions are often politically stimulating, asserts that Lenin did not "develop a theory of the State, politics and democracy ... "(p96). However he makes this pronouncement without providing evidence for his assertion. According to his own account, he comes to conclusions such as this on the basis of a reading of only two of Lenin's works, "What is to be done?" and "State and revolution", (and of/or other secondary sources); whereas 45 volumes of Lenin's works have been published in English, arguably over 60% of which was devoted to the issue of democracy. This is especially true of his writings on the Agrarian and National Questions which for Lenin were the most important democratic issues of the day.

The issue is not whether von Holdt is correct or not. The essential point is that his mode of argument is based purely on assertion without reference to any evidence, and that an extremely important theoretical contribution by a major socialist writer is dismissed out of hand. The point is not that writers in the Labour Bulletin should adopt academic styles of writing (academics often confuse rather than clarify issues with their multitudinous references). It is rather that unsubstantiated theoretical assertions are precisely a feature of the Stalinism which Von Holdt and Jordan are concerned to criticise. Such crude assertive contents are characteristic of the various texts on the so called fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism churned out in millions of copies by Progress

Publishers through which countless dedicated activists had their first contact with 'Marxist theory'. Unfortunately Marxist theory as practised in the USSR never scaled any new heights, nor did it give rise to any important contributions which revolutionised our thought. It could not do so in an atmosphere where vulgarity in theory became the general line of the CPSU and where Stalin's famous book *A History of the CPSU* (short course) for long had the status of a bible. The most important contributions to the development of Marxist Leninist theory in recent times have emanated from Western Europe and the Third World.

Theoretical work should be serious. Unfortunately none of the above three contributions to the debate on socialism in the *Labour Bulletin* really seem to approach theoretical work with the seriousness it requires. Their assertive form of argumentation and their (conscious or unconscious) ignorance of evidence is misleading. It denotes at the level of theory, a kind of fear of contestation. This fear corresponds objectively, in all essential respects, to the fear of democracy which 'commandism' and 'statism' show at the level of practice.

Intellectuals have a duty not to belittle theoretical work. They should be prepared to struggle against their own limitations – as well as against bourgeois ideological practices - in the same way that the working class and the masses have so gallantly struggled and continue to struggle against oppression. Anything else is a negation of their responsibilities and of their duty to In the absence of a struggle for democratic practices in theoretical work. (which includes rigorous standards of argumentation) there is the real danger that Von Holdt's laudable call to intellectuals to "reinvigorate the theory and practice of social transformation (p96), will remain an empty platitude, and that the debate on the future of socialism in South Africa will be stillborn.

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WOSA replies to Cde Neocosmos'

On reading Cde Neocosmos' response to the debate generated by Cde Slovo's article in the South African Labour Bulletin (Vol 15 No 3), we were struck not by the theoretical contributions he made (if any) but by the form and nature of his response.

Neocosmos accuses us, Cde Jordan, and Cde Von Holdt of belittling intellectual work. Yet it is he who is guilty of this. The tone of his response goes against the spirit of Cde Slovo's paper. It is an example of that tendency Cde Slovo warns against, which substitutes name calling and jargon for healthy debate with non-party activists. In fact, the tone of Neocosmos' response creates the conditions for the embattled ghosts of Stalinist practices to rear their heads again.

Despite these characteristics of Neocosmos' contribution we will respond, starting with two points of clarification. The first charge by Neocosmos that needs to be answered is that our initial contribution was an attempt to join the "let's have a go at the SACP bandwagon" This is an unfair charge. It was actually Cde Slovo who called for and prompted the debate on the future of socialism.

Our article in the Labour Bulletin clearly stated that our response was intended as a comradely contribution to a debate initiated by a comrade organisation. The national aims of their struggle to be successfully achieved, they had to transcend capitalist relations of production. And that is indeed what happened in these countries. Because of the balance of social forces nationally and internationally, these revolutions developed from their national democratic beginnings to proletarian results. This process was described by Trotsky as the -permanent revolution.

WOSA on national and class oppression

Our main response, however, is to the substance of Neocosmos' charge that we are "idealistic" because we view "the opposition between the working class and capitalists as the only possible contradiction in society. This is a gross misrepresentation of our position. WOSA's political programme states that -in our country, for reasons connected with the technical problems of diamond and gold mining, racism, racial discrimination, racial oppression and segregation became, for the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a necessary aspect of the production of profit and thus of the capitalist system. The WOSA programme then goes on to note the racial division between black and white which serves as a vertical scissors to divide all classes within society. Our programme clearly insists and explains how the black working class in our society labours under

both national oppression and class exploitation. These positions on national exploitation do not, however, lessen our critique of the “two stage theory” on the South African struggle. To the contrary, it enhances it. National oppression facilitated the development of capitalism in South Africa. This historical legacy makes the disentanglement of capitalism and racism extremely unlikely. It is extremely difficult to envisage the establishment of a non-racial capitalist society in South Africa. The theory of permanent revolution has a real application to South African historical and social conditions. Thus, our conclusion is that the national liberation struggle can only culminate in victory if it transcends capitalist relations of production.

Lenin and ‘socialism in one country’

Neocosmos’ other charge is that we view “the sin of ‘socialism in one country’ as the universal explanation for all the evils of Stalinism - as if socialism could occur in all countries at once.” Two points need to be made here. The first is that Lenin, and subsequently the Len opposition, always maintained that, in the face of international capitalism, it was impossible to establish a fully developed socialist society in the Soviet Union. This, however, does not necessarily lead us to the conclusion that socialism must occur in all countries at once. Since revolutions are largely influenced by the dialectic of contradictions within national boundaries, they are bound to occur in different countries at different periods. However, such revolutions are limited to transcending capitalist relations of production. They will not be able to realise a fully developed socialist society within the confines of their national boundaries.

The second point that needs to be made is that it is striking that at a time when most committed socialists, including Cde Slovo, are rejecting the theory of ‘socialism in one country’ Neocosmos’ letter borders on a half-hearted defence of it. Once again, he seems to be trapped in a time warp of past theories and practices. This response to Neocosmos’ letter is not intended to convince him of the correctness of our position, nor to engage in debate with him. Our response is aimed at clarifying for the worker leadership, which is the main readership, the misrepresentations contained in Neocosmos’ letter.

Pallo Jordan Response to Neocosmos

I shall refrain from the sterile trading of quotations from Marx or Engels which M. Neocosmos seems to relish and merely recap the issues I tried to address in my review of Slovo's "Has Socialism Failed?"

- (i) I do not dismiss the dictatorship of the proletariat nor did I imply this in my article. It is nonetheless historical fact that the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat - comes from the practice of the French revolutionary socialists beginning with Gracchus Babeuf and the Conspiracy of the Equals during 1795, and Phillippe Boumarotti, who was a participant in that movement. The term was first explicitly employed by Auguste Blanqui, Bounarotti's most famous disciple, during the 1840s. Marx and Engels admit their debt to these pioneer revolutionary socialists, which is why Marxism is referred to as deriving from three sources - German Philosophy, English Political Economy and French Revolutionary practice.

Not least among the concepts Marx and Engels borrowed from this tradition is the dictatorship of the proletariat. In their own writings, they employ it in only a few places - the letter to Weydemeyer, referred to by Neocosmos, the Critique of the Gotha Programme, Engels' introduction to the Civil War in France. When I pose the possibility that the concept might bear some responsibility for the crimes perpetuated in its name, it is because of an awareness that use of the term 'dictatorship' indeed planted in many minds the notion of absolute power.

- (ii) Neocosmos misses the essence of my article, which is that in the socialist countries, material conditions of economic backwardness, compounded by the options chosen by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union when confronted with the crisis of legitimacy it faced after Kronstadt, and the objective need for a bureaucracy to supervise both the state and the economy, resulted in what Bahro called "despotic industrialization." What Krushchev chose to call it is neither here nor there. Our concern is the content of the political institutions not the labels stuck on them.

I insist too that Stalinism is neither the inevitable outcome of Marxism-Leninism nor a product of the "muck of the ages" but rather the result of the uncanny synchronization of a number of objective factors - as economic backwardness capitalist encirclement, the war of intervention and the devastation that caused; and subjective factors - the war weariness of the people, the decimation of the best working class cadres during the civil war, the crisis of legitimacy of 1921.

(iii) My purpose in giving such a long exposition of the views of various Marxist critics of Stalinism was neither to score points nor to berate the Communist parties. I proceeded from the premise that only by understanding the material basis of a system can we hope to change or prevent it. I fear Neocosmos prefers to ignore this and seeks refuge in vacuous generalities.

He, in my view, has avoided dealing with the issues. The issue today is how to rescue socialism and its revolutionary democratic content from the muck and mire through which Stalinism has dragged it.

(iv) However, there are one or two points which one should take up. The crude Trotskyist baiting Neocosmos resorts to can only be described as puerile. Really, how many arguments does Neocosmos hope to win in this fashion? It betrays an unwillingness to make the much needed admission that the Marxist critics of Stalin and the Stalinised CPSU were right all along and that it is time that South African communists re-examined the work of these critics. The only reason why such an admission assumes any importance is because the SACP invariably joined in the chorus of vicious lies, calumnies and slanders, orchestrated in Moscow, every time a critical voice was raised. If its publications were to be believed, the makers of the Russian Revolution (with the exception of Lenin, Krupskaya, Svedlov and Stalin) were all traitors! (Until they were judicially rehabilitated in Moscow during the late 1980s!)

The leader of the Yugoslav partisans was an agent of imperialism (until Krushchev re-established links with Yugoslavia after the death of Stalin!). Wladyslaw Gomulka was, in succession, first a vicious spy in the employ of imperialism, then a brave working class leader (after he was released from prison!), then an incompetent leader (after he fell from grace!). Matyas Rakosi used to be the intrepid leader of the Hungarian proletariat until 1956 when (after Janos Kadar came into office!) he was transformed, by edict, into a monstrous brute who had tyrannised his people. In like fashion, the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, previously regarded as the brave offspring of Julius Fucik, were in 1968 branded as, at best, dangerous revisionists deserving to be overthrown by military force from without! Both the slanders and their retractions make a mockery of Marxism. They would test the credulity of even the most gullible. Yet people who were otherwise very rational, decent, honest, generous and brave repeated them like a catechism.

(v) The Communist Parties in Eastern Europe (with the exception of Yugoslavia and Albania) did not make revolutions but came to power on the bayonets of the Red Army. There can be no denying though that they bear responsibility for the revolution that has swept socialism from the face of Europe for at least another decade! It was the crimes and corruption of the Communist Party led governments

that so disgusted the working-class as to make it the ideological prey of explicitly rightwing bourgeois parties (like Kohl's Christian Democrats in Germany). After the triumph of fascism in Germany during the 1930s, the events of 1989 will probably be recorded as the second greatest defeat sustained by the working-class in Europe during this century. As such it merits serious attention which I feel Slovo's pamphlet fell short of because of its silences. I sought also to draw attention to an intellectual tradition within Marxism that has been consistently opposed to Stalinism and therefore deserves the critical appraisal of those who are looking for alternatives to Stalinism.

Karl Van Holdt replies to Neocosmos

Apart from his comments on my mode of argument, Neocosmos makes two substantive points I would like to comment on.

The first is that undemocratic practices are inevitable because they are the results of "bourgeois relations". Communist parties cannot be held accountable, he argues, for this 'muck of ages' which affects the proletariat itself. With this one comment Neocosmos negates the whole of Slovo's courageous attempt to take responsibility - as a communist - for Stalinism's brutal assault on democracy, and his attempt to understand how this happened. I still believe that socialists need to critically examine the works of Marx and Lenin in order to establish the extent to which theoretical weaknesses facilitated the rise of Stalinism under specific historical circumstances.

Theory also needs to take responsibility for practice! The second comment I would like to make is on the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Neocosmos believes abandoning this concept is similar to abandoning the class struggle. I would like to suggest that this concept maybe the single greatest obstacle to achieving socialism and not just because the word 'dictatorship' has nasty implications, as Slovo and Jordan argue.

The concept 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is linked to its opposite, the idea that the state in all capitalist societies is also a dictatorship - a 'dictatorship of the bourgeoisie'.

This concept has created enormous confusion in communist ranks, since it does not allow a distinction between bourgeois democracy and various forms of undemocratic bourgeois rule, such as fascism, military dictatorship, colonial rule, etc. Nor does it allow analysis of different kinds of bourgeois democracy - say the difference between Swedish social democracy and Thatcherism.

The two concepts –dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and its ‘antithesis’, dictatorship of the proletariat - are reductive and mechanistic. They leave no space for an analysis of the role of hegemony and the relation between hegemony and coercion. This has had disastrous strategic, tactical and organisational consequences, both in the struggle against capitalism and in the struggle to build socialism.

Even a careful reading of all of Lenin’s works, in English and Russian, will not solve this problem. We had better start reading other books too!

Is the SACP Still Communist?

By David Kitson

What is it that makes a communist party different from all other parties, including parties that claim to represent the masses or the workers? It is adherence to Marxism-Leninism as a guide to action.

The spokespersons of the SACP have repeatedly announced that their party is Marxist-Leninist. However the espousal of Marxism-Leninism does not necessarily mean that the theoreticians of the party have correctly used the theory to illuminate the problems before them. Of course, they should not woodenly apply the principles used by their predecessors, Marx, Engels, Lenin and others, in different ages and in different struggles.

Yet there are some principles at least which have become almost self-evident truths. These include that society ultimately has an economic basis. The history of society is the history of class struggles. The Communist Party should lead and serve the working class in the capitalist epoch. The aim is socialism.

Socialism is a period of transition between capitalism and communism.

If it is a Marxist-Leninist party, the SACP should uphold at least some of the tenets of Marxism-Leninism, even though the situation in South Africa may be regarded by them as unique. Nowadays party spokespersons have produced statements and documents concerning socialism.

This might be thought odd as they do not regard socialism as being on the agenda for the time being. However, eventually the aim is socialism, and one must react to the setbacks which the socialist cause has received in various parts of the world. Let us see if their reactions are Marxist-Leninist.

In his pamphlet 'Has Socialism Failed?' (HSF) (London, Inkululeko Publications, 1990) Joe Slovo quoted Rosa Luxemburg on freedom. It is the fashion nowadays to quote her (see Cronin in SA Labour Bulletin, Volume 15 No. 3). However the SACP claims to be Leninist. Whatever Lenin's regard for Luxemburg as a person of integrity and as a revolutionary might have been, what was his opinion of her grasp of Marxism? In his 'Notes of a Publicist' published in 1922, Lenin said: 'Rosa Luxemburg was mistaken on the question of the independence of Poland; she was mistaken in 1903 in her appraisal of Menshevism; she was mistaken on the theory of the accumulation of capital; she was mistaken in July 1914, when, together with Plekhanov, Vanderveldt, Kautsky and others, she advocated unity between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks; she was mistaken in

what she wrote in prison in 1918 (she corrected most of these mistakes at the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919 after she was released)'. (Lenin Collected Works, vol 33, p 210. Lawrence and Wishart London) (hereafter LCW33.p210).

In particular, Lenin castigated Luxemburg in his "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination" dubbing her 'the practical Rosa Luxemburg' for her approach to the national question, a matter of some importance for South African liberation politics. A Leninist should not take Luxemburg's view points for granted but subject them to Marxist analysis. Thus Slovo quotes Luxemburg: 'Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently *'. (HSF, pl4) Firstly, one can observe that this does not square with Engels' definition of freedom - namely, that freedom is the appreciation of necessity. Secondly, it lacks a class attitude, implying that freedom to differ should apply to everybody, including those who think differently because of their class.

One of the finest democracies that ever existed, with complete freedom of speech, was that of ancient Greece - provided that one was a member of the polity and not a slave. There is freedom in class society for the rulers and their hangers on only. Under socialism, whatever the defeated bourgeoisie might think, they cannot be permitted to act differently from the needs of the people.

Rousseau, in describing the action of his concept of die General Will, understood this in saying that after a policy had been decided on by the majority, the minority might have to be forced to be free.

What Luxemburg should have made clear is that under socialism, all members of the ruling proletariat and its allies, the overwhelming majority, should be free to think differently, even, in some cases (the nutcases), in disregard of necessity. Failure to respect this in Soviet society under Stalinism contributed to the difficulties it faces today. Ultimately, in Luxemburg's sense, there can be no freedom until classless society appears. As Leninists, the SACP should not espouse Luxemburg's opinion in this respect but Lenin's.

Despite her propensity towards theoretical error, Lenin had great respect for Luxemburg, comparing her to an eagle, which could attain heights no hen could aspire to. She got it right when she said of German socialism that it was 'a stinking corpse'. Were she in South Africa today she would recognize the stench.

Once the programme of the SACP was entitled 'The South African Road to Freedom'; now it is 'The Path to Power'. 'Power' is preferred to 'Freedom'. Of course, the SACP has not enjoyed power, unless one counts its domination of the upper echelons of the ANC. Perhaps one could modify Acton's aphorism 'the desire for power corrupts' to explain the stink of corruption characteristic of the practice of the Stalinist approach to politics.

Slovo and Marx

Slovo complains that ‘there was not enough in classical Marxist theory about the nature of transition period to provide a detailed guide to the future’ (HSF p12) and quotes Gorbachev to this effect. Some people want everything presented to them on a plate. However Gorbachev was not saying anything new: the first to point this out was Marx himself, in his concern not to be regarded as a Utopian socialist.

Scientists base themselves on observed data. Marx analysed the capitalism of his day so thoroughly that his analysis still stands. Because of this we know dial if the multi-party democracy advocated by the SACP is a superstructure on the base of a capitalist society, it will not avoid the inexorable crises that are endemic to capitalism, even an enlightened capitalism envisaged as a part of South Africa’s future. Thus, Plekhanov says: ‘We must study the facts of the pastlife of mankind in order to discover in them the laws of its progress. Only he is capable of foreseeing the future who has understood die past’ (The Development of the Monist View of History, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1980, p40).

If one prefers a more contemporary authority, one can quote Harry Braverman: ‘In this, as everywhere else in Marx, the limits of speculation are clear and definite; analysis is used to lay down the principles and never to speculate on the eventual result should those principles continue to operate indefinitely or over a prolonged period of time. It is also clear that Marx grasped the principles with his customary profundity and comprehensiveness, in a manner which neglected no part of the architecture of the capitalist system and its dynamics of self-reproduction. (Labour and Monopoly Capital, Monthly Review Press. New York and London. 1974.)

This is what Marx did. Lenin sums this up in his ‘What the “Friends of the People” Are and How They Fight the Social Democrats’ written in 1894, nearly 100 years ago, before the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party renamed itself the Communist Party (partly because the Bolsheviks wanted to disassociate themselves from the ideological turpitude of the leaders of die Second International like Kautsky and Bernstein). He said: ‘Everybody knows that scientific socialism never painted any prospects for the futures such; it confined itself to analysing the present bourgeois regime, to studying the trends of development of the capitalist social organization, and that is all... Marx wrote as far back as 1843 (and he fulfilled this programme to the letter): ‘We do not say to the world: ‘Cease struggling - your whole struggle is senseless’. All we do is to provide it with a true slogan of struggle. We only show the world what it is actually struggling for, and consciousness is a thing die world must acquire whether it likes it or not’. (Marx’s letter to Ruge, Sept 1843). Everybody knows that ‘Capital’ for instance - the chief and

basic work in which scientific socialism is expounded restricts itself to the most general allusions to the future and merely traces those already existing elements from which the future system grows (LCWUP184).

Everybody knows, that is, except, apparently, Slovo. Thus he should not complain, but think for himself. Of course, now there is an accumulation of detailed knowledge about the nature of socialism, much of it cautionary, in view of the events in Eastern Europe. However one can recommend, for instance, *Che Guevara: Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism* by Dr Carlos Tablada (Pathfinder Press, Sydney, 1989.) This book has sold 250 000 copies in its Latin American editions. It makes it clear that it is not enough to transform the basis of society into a socialist one. One must also simultaneously transform the superstructure of the society concerned by consciously involving the workers, in particular, and the people, in general, in full and continuous participation in the running and developing of socialist society, as part of the process of creating a communist attitude to life by everyone.

The dictatorship of the proletariat

Whilst recognising that the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' reflected the historical truth, the term has been abandoned by the SACP due to its unpleasant connotations (HSF p15-16). It is not mentioned in the new party programme, 'The Path to Power', although the need for workers' power to establish socialism is. This is like wearing a transparent fig leaf. One can still see the beastly thing, and it will be assiduously pointed out by the enemies of communism.

Workers in particular must grasp the nettle of truth, especially as truth is biased in favour of the working class. Absolutely central to the concept of socialism is the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In 'The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky', a pamphlet which should be read by all interested in the current departure from Marxism-Leninism by the SACP, Lenin said: 'The fundamental question that Kautsky discusses in his pamphlet, is that of the very essence of the proletarian revolution, namely the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is a question that is of the greatest importance for all countries especially for advanced ones, especially for those at war, and especially at the present time. One may say without fear of exaggeration that this is the key problem of the entire proletarian class struggle.' (Marx Engels Lenin, *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1984, p331).

In passing, it may be said that Kautskyites prate of revolutionary fervour, while practising reformist opportunism. Despite his distaste for it, Slovo complains that the

concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat was dealt with rather thinly by Marx as a transition to a classless society without much further definition. (HSF p13). However, Progress Publishers have published a collection from the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin on the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, of which 130 pages are occupied by the writings of Marx and Engels on the subject. Is his rather thin? Maybe Slovo expects it to be as thick as two planks? 360 pages of the same collection are devoted to Lenin's writings on the topic. This is to be expected as Lenin actually lived through three revolutions. Since the Bolshevik revolution, other countries like China, Vietnam and Cuba have experienced revolutions leading to socialist systems. Whatever might have happened subsequently, there is much data on the necessity of workers' rule exercised through a type of state entirely different from any preceding form of state if socialism is to be built. However, in view of the experiences of Stalinism in the Soviet Union, Rakosi in Hungary, Ceausescu in Romania and the Khmer Rouge in Kampuchea, among other, it is clear that there is a tendency to Thermidor, to put it mildly, in countries where revolutions have succeeded.

On the other hand where they have failed, as in Chile, Indonesia, or Germany, the consequences are even more disastrous, especially for communists. The SACP is walking a tight rope and needs to take careful stock of what to do. The consequences of developing theory incorrectly can be very painful.

Slovo and Lenin

Slovo says: 'Lenin, for example, believed that capitalism was about to collapse worldwide in the post-October period' (HSF p10). In his 'Slogan for a United States of Europe', Lenin said in 1915: 'Uneven economic and political development is an absolute law of capitalism. Hence the victory of socialism is possible first in several or even in one capitalist country alone. Also in his 'The importance of Gold' written in 1921, which is post October, he wrote: 'After the victory of the proletariat, if only in one country, something new enters into the relation between reforms and revolution. In principle, it is the same as before, but a change in form takes place, which Marx himself could not foresee, but which can be appreciated only on the basis of the philosophy and politics of Marxism' (LCW 33, pi 15).

Thus it is most unlikely that he believed there would be a worldwide collapse of capitalism. On the other hand, he observed that there was a worldwide crisis of capitalism in 1917 (after all crisis is endemic to capitalism) called World War 1 and keenly followed events in such countries as Germany and Italy, which caused him to

believe that workers' rule might be established in such countries. Indeed the equivalent of rule by Soviets did emerge in Bavaria and communists came constitutionally to rule in Hungary. All put down by force leaving the Soviet Union to attempt to build socialism alone, even though Lenin saw 'that the joint efforts of the worker of several advanced countries are needed for the victory of socialism'. (LCW 33, p206).

Of the chances of building socialism in the Soviet Union, he said in 'Notes of a Publicist' in 1922:

'Those communists are doomed who imagine that it is possible to finish such an epoch-making undertaking as completing the foundations of socialist economy (particularly in a small-peasant country) without making mistakes, without retreats, without numerous alterations to what is unfinished or wrongly done. Communists who have illusions, who do not give way to despondency and who preserve their strength and flexibility "to begin from the beginning" over and over again in approaching an extremely difficult task are not doomed.' (LCW 33, p207)

So it looks like the whole of Eastern Europe will have to begin again as, in view of Marx's analysis of capitalism, no long lasting panacea can be gained from a return to a market economy, or to capitalism itself. Slovo says Lenin did not address '... in any detail the nature of established socialist civil society...' (HSF pl4). In the early stages of Soviet socialism, Lenin left copious writings of the problems which confronted the Soviet Communist Party. In *State and Revolution*, written on the eve of the October Revolution, Lenin wrote: 'Until the "higher" phase of communism arrives, the socialists demand the strictest control by society and by the state over the measure of labour and the measure of consumption; but this control must start with the expropriation of the capitalists, with the establishment of workers' control over the capitalists, and must be exercised not by a state of bureaucrats, but a state of armed workers*'. (CW25, p474).

In the event, the Soviet Union did not escape the grasp of bureaucracy. Many of Lenin's specific proposals were not put into effect. He said, for instance, that all representatives should be subject to immediate recall, and all public officials should not be paid more than the average wage of a skilled worker. Lenin advocated proportional representation, which implies the presence of more than one candidate in elections, and considered the problem of implementing this in the face of a policy of immediate recall.

He realised that it is not enough just to transform the economic basis of society into a socialist one and to expect that desirable changes in the social and political superstructure will automatically follow. Everybody should be consciously and continuously drawn into the building of communist society and into the understanding of its nature.

Most important is that socialist democracy should be built. On the occasion of marking 30 years of the Cuban revolution, Castro said: 'To some of the Western countries that question democracy in Cuba we can say there is no democracy superior to that where the workers, the peasants, and the students have the weapons. They have the weapons!

To those Western countries that question democracy in Cuba we can say: give weapons to the workers, give weapons to the peasantry, give weapons to the students, and we'll see whether tear gas will be hurled against workers on strike, against any organization that struggles for peace, against the students: We'll see whether the police can be ordered to attack them while wearing masks and all those contrivances that make them look like space travellers; we'll see whether dogs can be turned loose on the masses every time there's a strike or a peace demonstration or a people's struggle.

*I believe that the supreme test of democracy is arming the people!! When defence becomes the task of the entire people and weapons become the prerogative of the entire people, then they can talk about democracy'. *(Fidel Castro, In Defence of Socialism, Pathfinder. New York, 1989, p81). That is an endorsement, from experience, of Lenin's proposal (and Marx's) on arming the workers! That puts the cat among the pigeons! That would ensure that the way will be open for a peaceful progression towards our party's ultimate objective – a socialist South Africa (HSF p27).

Is the SACP communist?

It is clear that the SACP has made serious departures from the principles of Marxism-Leninism in their repeated and ill-informed denigration of the doctrines of Marx and Lenin. Yet there are countries where the leaders of the people struggling for liberation and socialism appreciated necessity correctly through their understanding of Marxism-Leninism and through their ability to apply its tenets to their problems, thus gaining victory. Why should one bother with an organisation that has lost its way so thoroughly? It is because one wants to see the victory of liberation and the victory of socialism in South Africa. One knows, from the experience of history, that victory can be won with the correct guide to action through the application of Marxism-Leninism. Many people see the SACP as the vehicle that will produce this guide. There is a discussion going on, to which this piece is a contribution, that might provide such guide. There might be little hope for aged and crusted Kautskyites, or for the members of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia given to intellectual hawing.

But the SACP also has members who are respected workers' leaders, steeled through struggle, who if theoretically informed can lead the workers of South Africa to victory.

They must read the works of Marx, of Engels, of Lenin and of their successors. Then perhaps the struggle for socialism in South Africa will win victory too in South Africa one day.

What is needed is a Marxist-Leninist party to lead the struggle for workers' power. It remains to be seen if the SACP can fit that bill. It's certainly is not communist at the moment in the sense that Lenin intended it. Perhaps a more accurate appellation of its current theoretical approach is to call it Kautskyist-Luxemburgist.

Democratic Socialism or Social Democracy?

by Alan Fine

The extensive debate on the history and future of socialism that has occurred, since the publication of Joe Slovo's "Has Socialism Failed?" in February 1990, has focused almost exclusively on political questions (see Labour Bulletin Vol 14 No 6, Vol 15 Nos 3 and 7). The debate hinges on the extent to which (if at all) the absence of democratic political structures and practices contributed to the collapse of eastern bloc socialist regimes, and whether future forms of socialism in South Africa and elsewhere are sustainable if not based on traditional liberal democratic political systems, including multiparty elections and safeguards for individual human rights.

But participants in the debate have been conspicuously silent about drawing from this commitment to civil liberties the logical conclusions about socialist economics. The reason for their silence lies, it would seem, in the fact that a commitment to civil liberties requires a fundamental revision of socialist economic thought by those who call themselves democratic socialists. This article does not attempt to engage with those like Harry Gwala and David Kitson for example - who reject the idea that there is a need to democratise socialism.

As will become apparent, this article also disputes the majority SACP view that socialism is inherently democratic.

It is not only political theory which demands the transformation of socialist economic thought. Any attempt seriously to get to grips with the potential and limits of economic transformation in South Africa leads to the conclusion that the most realistic goal is far closer to the system traditionally described as social democracy, than to any form of socialism compatible with orthodox Marxist thought.

Arguments for democratic socialism

In his paper Slovo eloquently spelled out a set of political goals and the means for achieving them: "A post-apartheid state which will guarantee all citizens the basic rights and freedoms of organisation, speech, thought, press, movement, residence, conscience

and religion; full trade union rights for all workers including the right to strike, and one person one vote in free democratic elections... Because experience has shown that an institutionalised one party state has a strong propensity for authoritarianism, a multi-party post-apartheid democracy, both in the national democratic and socialist phases, is desirable.”

Having stated this, it is insufficient for Slovo (and many others, including non-SACP socialists, like Pallo Jordan, and socialists formerly hostile to the SACP who are now members, such as Moses Mayekiso), to argue that socialism did not fail but was distorted by the (undemocratic) methods used to implement it. None attempt to debate whether “democratic socialism” can be attained through democratic means.

In his conclusion, Slovo spelled out four broad fundamentals of socialism as he sees it,

- “Humankind can never attain real freedom until a society has been built in which no person has the freedom to exploit another person;
- The bulk of humanity’s resources will never be used for the good of humanity until they are in public ownership and under democratic control;
- The ultimate aim of socialism, to eliminate all class inequalities, occupies a prime place in the body of civilised ethics even before Marx;
- The all-round development of the individual... can only find expression in a society which dedicates itself to people rather than profit.”

Questions

What he and other democratic socialists now have to do (if they are to merit the label ‘democratic’) is to examine these fundamentals and ask whether they can be attained democratically.

The most basic question is: How is the “bulk of humanity’s resources” to be brought into public ownership while simultaneously retaining multiparty democracy?

Can democratic socialists explain how relations of production are to be altered without resort by the state to the full might of its security apparatus - the resources of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, a concept glibly abandoned by the SACP, among others? How would a hypothetical elected SACP government convince the owners of productive property to hand over their assets? Will the owners yield merely because the majority of voters has voted that they should? Or will they be convinced that it would be in the national interest? Most unlikely.

Alternatively, will they be offered ‘fair compensation’ for these productive assets?

This may be a possibility if the target is only a small part of the country’s productive

capacity. It could be argued that certain strategic state owned enterprises are necessary to the process of economic development. But that is a far cry from Marxist socialism. The same question applies, obviously, to other basics of socialism. The Marxist concept is that wage labour is, by definition, exploitative, and that class struggle can and must be resolved by total victory over and elimination of the capitalist class. Democratic socialists have a duty to explain how this is to be achieved through the liberal political structures and instruments outlined by Slovo and others.

It is true - to return to Slovo's third and fourth points - that class inequalities (not to mention society as a whole) came closest to elimination in a place like Cambodia. But democratic methods were abandoned, to put it mildly, and society left little room for the "all-round development of the individual".

Debating socialism for South Africa

The most methodical attempt so far to begin debating socialist economic structures for a future South Africa has been carried out by Rob Davies (African Communism 2nd Quarter 1991), in which he criticises Eastern Bloc (and Yugoslav) economic structures and suggests adjustments which would be advisable in SA.

In brief, he argues that:

1. Socialisation means far more than state ownership of the means of production. It "implies social processes in which working people assume powers of economic ownership.... the power to organise and control the actual labour process".
2. More attention must be given to the establishment of co-operatives and other forms of "collective production."
3. There must be a greater say for organs of civil society. He makes a criticism of centralised economic planning.
4. Since socialism is but a transitional stage between capitalism and communism, there is no need to abolish markets. Rather, interventions by the state and other organisations like unions can be used to influence markets.

Further questions

That, for Davies, is an outline of our socialist future, a future which itself is merely a step towards a higher goal. There is just one problem. He has spelled out, in more detail than any other South African democratic socialist, ideas about socialist economic structures. However, he too has not attempted to explain how the transition to

socialism - including the nationalisation and/or socialisation of property - can occur through the use of democratic political instruments, assuming he believes this to be desirable. Furthermore, socialism is not a precondition for the establishment of co-operatives.

Many in SA came into existence under the most repressive phase of National Party rule. Their long term viability depends now, as in future, on whether they are able to compete with other parts of the private sector.

And interventions in the market by governments, labour organisations and other elements of civil society are common to any market economy - not just transitional socialist ones.

Would it be tendentious to assume that it is slowly beginning to dawn on those socialists who are serious about their commitment to democracy that there are no satisfactory answers to these questions, and that the only way for them to remain socialists is drastically to transform the very meaning of the term? This is all quite apart from the fundamental economic questions related to the sustainability of a Marxist socialist national economy (whether democratic or otherwise) in a modern, high tech, competitive international economy.

The question becomes even more stark when the inevitable destabilisation of the economy and society that accompanies socialist transformation is brought into the equation. Even though it is difficult to jettison the faith of a lifetime, the germs of this transformation are there.

Davies himself, while continuing to pay homage to a reformed form of socialism, also takes a look at the real world and asks what is to be done in the “immediate post-apartheid period” when the emphasis will be on the national democratic struggle.

He talks of:

- Redistribution and the provision of basic social needs for the poor;
- The acceptance, even in broader society, of an effective though limited state sector;
- Workers’ right to organise, and the establishment of democratic decision-making bodies to deal with aspects of economic policy at various levels.

Social democratic project in SA

Strangely enough, these tentative suggestions are wholly compatible with what one could call - dare one say it? - a social democratic project.

Even more strange is the fact that this entire agenda is already in operation. Large parts of it have been a focus of the work, particularly, of organised labour, and also of community organisations, since the second half of the eighties.

The entire Labour Relations Act issue, culminating in the tripartite agreement of September 1990, was just the most dramatic sign of the emergence of a more democratic economic system. A critical part of that agreement was the undertaking by parties to it to establish a forum where all labour issues could be negotiated (see Geoff Schreiner - 'Restructuring the NMC'. SA Labour Bulletin, July/August 1991).

While it may take time, there is little doubt that this body (or a mutually acceptable substitute) will eventually become the forum for negotiations on economic strategy in its broadest sense.

The establishment of an economic negotiating forum, as demanded by COSATU, is now merely a matter of time.

It has the support of influential sections of organised business and even of some cabinet ministers. Details over appropriate participants and structures are the issues still to be negotiated.

One weighty question that all parties still have seriously to confront is: who will represent the interests of the unorganised, largely unemployed, marginalised members of society? This aside, though, redistribution questions are already being addressed through, for example, the Independent Development Trust, and the Development Bank. Once an interim government and an economic negotiating forum are established, any shortcomings in consultation and accountability in the operations of these projects can be addressed, and new ones established if and where this is considered necessary.

Advances

At a less centralised level, debate and negotiation on micro economic issues are almost as old as modern day trade unionism itself. The early nineties have, however, seen substantial advances and more are promised. Last year's job security and training agreements in the metal and motor sectors, and the social and union rights agreement in the mining industry are examples.

The recent clothing and textile sector agreement on industrial policy, in which the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union played a central role, is another highly sophisticated example of the potential that exists for labour's participation in schemes designed to enhance economic growth and job creation. Bilateral agreements of this sort are not the limit of what can be achieved in a social democracy, of course.

Worker participation in the firm's decision making can occur through decentralised agreement or it can be legislated for. This is the meaning of the term 'worker control' in these circumstances – as close to 'socialisation' of the means of production that social democracy can achieve.

It is a lot less than traditional socialists would want.

It assumes the continued existence of the private sector. It certainly does not mean the end of conflict between management and labour. In the most advanced social democracies - where there is an underlying acceptance of the status quo - industrial and social conflict is fought out over complex shifts in balances of power and advantage, either through mass mobilisation, the legal system or the legislature, or a combination of these.

South African socialists have, at this stage, given the absence of any credible socialist model anywhere in the world, little realistic option but to pursue, in the short to medium term, what amounts to a social democratic agenda. As much of the eighties in Europe - as well as recent events in Sweden - show, social democracy itself has to undergo a serious re-examination of its priorities, limits and goals. The irony is that - as the experience of western and northern Europe shows - the more comprehensively these goals are achieved, the more will wither on the vine of improved quality of life the revolutionary consciousness of the working class on which the socialist revolution depends.

A Survey of the South African Debate on the Decline of Socialism in Eastern Europe

By Z Pallo Jordan

Socialism, as it was understood by Marx and Engels, would be the first phase in the process of creating a society that would have no need for repression and oppression because it had overcome economic scarcity. Marx and Engels envisaged a society in which the social productive forces had developed to a point that they would be capable of producing such a surplus of goods and services that the majority of people would no longer have to spend the greater part of their lives in work. The planned allocation of resources and human labour, in such a future society, would also ensure that no one would have to degrade themselves by working for another human being in order to survive. Instead of work being something we all try to avoid, it would gradually be transformed into one of a wide range of creative activities people engage in to make their lives meaningful.

For centuries the wisest human minds and the most far-sighted of our thinkers had thought about and tried to work out plans for a human society not dominated by exploiters, be they slave-owners or captains of industry: A society in which human beings could enjoy the fullness of life without the need to make others their servants, or to be servants of others. Marx and Engels predicted that the development of the productive forces under industrial capitalism would for the first time in human history build the material basis for such a fundamental transformation of society.

Marxists have always stood opposed to the proposition that it is the destiny of most human beings to live an unfulfilled life. For example, Marx in his essay, "The Future Results of British Rule in India" wrote:

"When a great social revolution shall have mastered the results of the bourgeois epoch, the market of the world and the modern powers of production, and subjected them to the common control of the most advanced peoples, then only will human progress cease to resemble that hideous pagan god, who would not drink the nectar except from the skulls of the slain."

Marx's statement implies that human progress has until our day relied on the grossest forms of oppression and misery. But it also says that such economic exploitation, oppression and repression, though regrettable, are unavoidable features of human history as long as the combined output of human labour, science, the machines and technology people have created, is not large enough to provide sufficient food, shelter, recreation, education and necessary luxuries for everyone. Socialists call this condition "economic scarcity." Economic exploitation, oppression and repression, to the Marxists, therefore, pose not an unchanging human problem, but are historical problems which could disappear when our productive forces have developed to an extent that nobody goes without what they need for a fully human life.

The realization of that vision today seems even more remote after the collapse of "existing socialism" in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Its deep crisis in China, Cuba and the post capitalist states in Asia means there is an increasing likelihood that it might completely disappear. There are many enemies of socialism who hope it will destroy itself because of its internal contradictions. One cannot however rule out the possibility of imperialist intervention, tempted by the crisis of socialism, especially in the case of Cuba, to bring down socialist governments.

Unusually, it was from a non-governing Communist Party in the third world that the most searching critical appraisal of this crisis has emerged. The work in question has excited a great deal of comment precisely because it was produced by the General Secretary of the South African Communist Party, Joe Slovo.

Joe Slovo's intervention is important in other ways as well. The SACP is among the oldest Communist Parties, founded in 1921, four years after the October Revolution. The SACP is a highly respected ally in the national liberation alliance, in marked contrast to the discrediting of both socialism and Communist Parties in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. As one reporter remarked, as fast as red flags come down in Eastern Europe, an equal number are raised in South Africa. At the very moment of the decline and collapse of its sister parties in Europe the SACP appears to be on the verge of success. The White liberal press might make nasty jokes about it as the "last Marxist-Leninist Party." But, unlike the trend in most other capitalist countries, in South Africa the Communist Party is not irrelevant, it is in fact a political force that cannot be ignored. In this article I shall be addressing the responses to Joe Slovo's pamphlet, "Has Socialism Failed?," especially among writers in this region and the debate his intervention has initiated about both the crisis of socialism and the nature of socialism itself.

Slovo called for "an unsparing critique" of existing socialism so that socialists could "draw the necessary lessons." Frankly, though his pamphlet was a refreshing breeze, Slovo did not live up to his words in his analysis of the Soviet experience. This does not

merely reflect subjective weaknesses but suggests an unfortunate underestimation of the severe damage Stalinism has inflicted on both the ideals of socialism and the societies on which it was imposed. This shortcoming is the result of too long an association with the least attractive traditions in Marxism which discouraged a critical look at “existing socialism,” above all, as it was practiced in the Soviet Union.

Responses to Slovo’s invitation varied in both their general thrust and in quality. A number of Marxists not associated with the SACP, who are active in the democratic and the labour movement came forward to engage him specifically on the distortions of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. A considerable number of writers in the Trotskyist tradition saw this as a long awaited opportunity to reopen the old debates, not only about the nature of socialism but also the line of march of the liberation movement. One or two writers, among them supporters of the SACP, came to the defence of the time worn empty phrases of orthodoxy, while a few others seized the occasion to vent their anger on the SACP and all its doings.

Slovo himself was afforded the opportunity to respond to these critics on the occasion of the Monthly Review anniversary in November 1990. He has also developed and elaborated on his views in a number of interviews carried in left-wing magazines such as “New Era,” “The South African Labour Bulletin” and “Work in Progress.”

The hardest hitting among Slovo’s critics was Professor Archie M. Mafeje, an Oxbridge trained South African social scientist, who has become a regular contributor to “Southern Africa Political and Economic Monthly” (SAPEM), a regional journal published in Harare.

Mafeje unfortunately did not engage with Slovo, choosing instead to scold the SACP and its ally, the ANC, about the policies they are pursuing to bring down apartheid. Although Professor Mafeje could have made a number of valid points, these got lost because of the Africanist stance he adopted. This was unfortunate because South African Marxism has an extremely under-developed theoretical tradition to which Mafeje might have made a more substantial contribution if he had contained his bad temper. In this instance his eagerness to settle accounts with ideological opponents got the better of him. He was even tempted into making factually incorrect assertions, that are easily disproved, that the SACP is a White party.

Few other writers followed Mafeje down this ill-chosen path, the overwhelming majority chose to conduct their arguments with restraint.

Defenders of Orthodoxy

Given the traditions of the SACP, Slovo’s essay must have arrived as a major shock to a number of the old-guard Communists and former party members. Slovo was ready to

drop a number of ideas and criticise many practices that had been considered beyond reproach in the Communist Party. His pamphlet, however, was published as a “discussion document,” explicitly not as a document representing the SACP’s collective views. This perhaps reflects the reluctance of the majority of the leadership to come to grips with the true character of the crisis and the implications it has for the cause of socialism in South Africa and the world.

In the past South African Communists had usually explained away the glaring shortcomings of Soviet socialism by appealing to the fact that the Soviet Union was the first ever socialist society. No road-maps, so we were told, had been provided to assist the young socialist republic to find its way on the unknown terrain it had ventured into.

This is the main line of argument in an apologetic article written by Harry Gwala, a veteran SACP leader from the Natal Midlands, published in the “African Communist” (No. 123. Last Quarter, 1990.)

Relying on the standard arguments, Gwala urges Slovo to “Look at History in the Round,” suggesting that he has focused too narrowly on one aspect of a complex process. Gwala argues that Slovo is being wiser after the event and moreover is overlooking the economic and political circumstances under which socialism had to be built in the Soviet Union. Economic backwardness was bound to lead to a backward form of socialism, Gwala asserts.

A similar line of reasoning is followed by Mike Neocosmos, who ironically joined the debate with a view to defend Slovo against two of his critics. The Communist Parties, Neocosmos claims, cannot be held accountable for “the muck of ages” which resulted in the bureaucratic degeneration of socialist countries and their institutions. Neocosmos gives us a clue to his political preferences by permitting himself a rather vicious swipe at the Workers’ Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA), a Trotskyist group. The most hardline defence of orthodoxy came from a very unlikely source, David Kitson, a former member of the SACP underground during the 1960s who served a 20 year sentence for his role in the activities of Umkhonto weSizwe. Writing in the Johannesburg based monthly, “Work in Progress,” (No 73, April 1991) Kitson asks: “Is the SACP Really Communist?.”

Kitson’s answer is implicit in the question. To prove his assertion, Kitson subjects Slovo’s pamphlet to a comparison with certain writings of Lenin. Kitson says that by abandoning the concept “the dictatorship of the proletariat” Slovo has joined the revisionists and class traitors who have given up the fight for socialism. He rests a large part of his argument on Slovo’s use of Rosa Luxemburg’s critique of the Bolshevik Party, which Rosa Luxemburg wrote shortly after the October Revolution, “The Russian Revolution.” In that book, while recognising the achievement of the Russian working class

movement, Rosa Luxemburg, referring to the banning of free political debate during the Civil War, criticises the Bolsheviks for arguing that such an unpleasant necessity is a good thing. This, Kitson charges, demonstrates that like Rosa Luxemburg, Slovo (and by implication the SACP) has abandoned a class approach to the question of freedom.

The defence of orthodoxy amounted a plea for understanding of the vast discrepancies between the original vision and the reality of existing socialism. Gwala reminded us of the continued presence of an armed enemy at the gates of all socialist countries. In 1918 there came first of the nine capitalist powers that invaded to assist the old ruling classes of Russia. Then in 1941 the Nazi hordes invaded the USSR. After that war and until quite recently, the socialist countries were ringed with aggressive alliances — NATO, SEATO, CENTO and the other arms of US world hegemony. The socialist countries, Gwala argues, lived under an unrelenting state of siege and therefore never experienced stability. It escapes these apologists that this permanent state of emergency might have been relieved had the Communist Parties taken the working class into their confidence and not tried to force them to support socialism. That would have proved its most effective line of defence. That the methods they prescribe have in fact failed has taught the orthodox nothing. At best they will concede that the CPs administered too much of it, but they insist the medicine they were applying is good.

The Left Oppositionist Critique

Trotskyism, as in most countries, is a minority trend among democratic activists of the left. Crises in the Soviet bloc have inevitably made many who resisted it in the past, rethink what the Trotskyists have said in their criticisms of Soviet political practice. For instance, after the uprisings in Poland and Hungary in 1956, Trotskyism attracted a number of left students. Those who escaped imprisonment during the repression that followed the Rivonia Trial in 1964, gradually drifted out of active politics. The crude repression of left and right wing critics in the Soviet Union at the height of the Brezhnev era drove most of the rising left intellectuals who came into the movement during those years away from socialism.

South African Trotskyists had been forced into an uncomfortable silence during the 1980s as the SACP's influence and visibility grew within the mass democratic movement. Slovo's intervention helped to make it legitimate to criticise the Soviet Union in the eyes of many activists and the Trotskyists were not slow to seize the opportunity.

Since the mid 1980s the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA), led by Neville Alexander, has provided a political home for those Trotskyists operating

outside the Charterist camp, while the so-called “Marxist Workers’ Tendency” has been the rallying point for those within it. Writing in the non-sectarian “South African Labour Bulletin” (SALB Vol. 15. No 3.) WOSA linked the degeneration of socialism in the Soviet Union, to Stalin’s policy of building “Socialism in One Country.” This, WOSA argued, was the result of a counter-revolution in the Soviet CP and marked a crucial retreat from Leninist principles and practice, which led to a lack of commitment to proletarian internationalism, on the part of the Soviet leadership, if not outright appeasement of international imperialism for the sake of peace.

After the defeat of the Left Opposition (in 1927), so WOSA argues, the Soviet Union became a country which was not prepared to upset the international order and became more concerned to secure its own international boundaries and was therefore prepared to buy peace with imperialism by discouraging revolutions in other countries. WOSA relates this to the SACP’s own strategic line, the theory of Colonial of a Special Type (CST), adopted by the SACP after the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928. This, they argue, is the South African face of Stalinist appeasement of the bourgeoisie as it committed the SACP to the pursuing of bourgeois-democratic goals, — such as the franchise, redistribution of the land, the right to trade anywhere, etc — rather than posing a socialist alternative to apartheid capitalism. Only by abandoning this theory will the SACP demonstrate its turning away from Stalinism, they say.

A more thoughtful critique from the Trotskyist perspective came from the pens of Themba and Mathole, two writers who pose the question: “Has Socialism as Yet Come into Being?,” published in SAPEM alongside Archie Mafeje.

In sixteen tightly argued theses Themba and Mathole subject the practice of both the SACP and the Soviet Union to a searching critique. They generously acknowledge that the SACP’s newssheet, “Umsebenzi” has begun to break out of the Stalinist mould but nonetheless point up the SACP’s decades-long record of abject apologetics for the CPSU and former Soviet bloc countries.

“The Party and its press,” they jeer, “imposed silence on those who wished to voice their reservations about all these.”

The main points of their argument are that it was incorrect to refer to the eastern European countries, China, North Korea, Cuba and the Soviet Union as socialist because socialism had not been realised by any of these countries. Socialism, Themba and Mathole assert,

“... would be a society of free producers, working under a rationally planned economy and no longer made up of buyers and sellers trading products

through the market, but a community of people who turn out goods for society at large and receive them for personal consumption from society's common pool, This vision posited a society so wealthy, so educated, so cultured that there would be no need or necessity for instruments of direct or indirect coercion. "Socialism, ... would thus be a post industrial society."

Communist-led revolutions, however, came first in under-developed and semi-colonial countries and led to the creation of "post-capitalist" societies in places which lacked the industrial infra-structure capitalist development would have created. The task of primitive accumulation — that is, assembling the material and human resources for industrial development — consequently had to be undertaken by these post-capitalist societies, resulting in the betrayal of the working class and other working people whose struggles had brought about change.

In an innovative departure from the orthodox Trotskyist approach, they cite three contradictions within the post-capitalist societies, using Russia, China and Cuba as their examples. The first is the requirement, imposed by economic backwardness, that the working class party and state supervise the extraction of surplus value from the workers. The second, deriving from the first, is the role the workers' state assumed as the central player in the economy. The third, they say, derives from the character of the working class itself, which is a constantly changing class made up of persons from a number of different backgrounds . The consciousness of the working class, as a result, is always altering, and this fact makes it necessary that a vanguard party assume the role of custodian of its revolutionary role.

Like many others, Themba and Mathole, charge that Slovo's account of the roots of Stalinism is inadequate, personalized and not consistent with historical materialism. At the end of their article they pose a challenging question: Is the Soviet Union (and by implication, similar social formations) deserving of the international solidarity of the working class?

They answer their question in the affirmative, invoking Trotsky's defence of the Soviet Union on the eve of World War II. Trotsky had argued that despite Stalinism, it was the duty of the international proletariat to defend the Soviet Union because, deformed though it was, it was the only existing alternative to the barbarism of imperialism.

Unlike WOSA, Themba and Mathole do not draw negative conclusions about the SACP's programme on the basis of their critique of the CPSU. By concentrating on the silences and the weaknesses they detect in Slovo's pamphlet they do, indirectly, pose serious questions about the real possibilities of the socialist revolution in South Africa.

They make out a strong case to demonstrate that in the absence of an industrial base plus the experience of the economic and political struggles of a modern proletariat, it is well-nigh impossible to construct socialism. It is a pity they did not follow this up by looking at the implications this has for the prospects of socialism in South Africa itself.

WOSA, on the other hand, appears to treat the notion of Socialism in One Country as an original sin, which led to a fall from grace in every other respect. CST, and many other 'sins' are thus attributable to it. But this is rather hard to understand because WOSA itself presently advances the immediate strategic objective of a democratic revolution with a socialist transformation growing out of it. Leon Trotsky, from whom WOSA presumably derive their inspiration, in his letter to South Africa written in the 1930s, warmly commended the 1928 Black Republic, the basis of CST, to his followers in South Africa. One is left wondering what immediate strategic tasks WOSA wishes to pose for the South African left.

Themba and Mathole, on the other hand, leave the distinct impression that they support the idea that Stalinism was inevitable, when one takes account of all the circumstances surrounding the Russian Revolution. Citing the fictitious character, Boxer, created by George Orwell in his satire "Animal Farm," they claim:

“... the working class is betrayed, and has to be betrayed in this process, because in order to create a better tomorrow, it must be deprived today...”

If there is indeed this element of inevitability, does this not imply that socialism was indeed a failure?

The challenges Themba and Mathole address to Slovo at the end of their article will be with us for a long time. These are the dilemmas every left movement has had to grapple with in assessing not only the Soviet bloc, but also the newly independent ex-colonial states and revolutionary movements that are still engaged in the struggle for power. They correctly warn against the trend to treat all dictatorial regimes as if they are one and the same and the adoption of “a plague upon both your houses” as impractical options in a world where imperialism seeks to establish global dominance. Though there are no easy choices, choices have to be made.

The Independent and New Left

I was among the few members of the ANC who took up Slovo's challenge to debate the issues raised by his pamphlet, in an article titled "Crisis of Conscience in the SACP," published first in "Transformation" and SAPEM and later republished in both Work in Progress and the SALB.

My line of argument was that though Slovo's pamphlet signalled the emergence of a refreshing critical spirit in the ranks of the SACP, he offered an incomplete explanation of the root causes of Stalinism. I reminded readers of a long tradition within Marxism that was critical of Stalinism, dating back to the writings of Soviet leaders such as Trotsky, Rakovsky and Zinoviev during the 1920s, down to those of Rudolf Bahro, from the former GDR, in our day. These writers had sought to explain the phenomenon in terms of the material conditions in Soviet Russia after the Civil War, especially the need to industrialize and, given the insufficient numbers of personnel possessing managerial skills, the growth of a class of bureaucrats who took charge of the state and the economy. I stressed the dispersal of the working class in the chaos occasioned by the civil society and the political crisis the Bolsheviks faced in the cities in the early 1920s when some of most revolutionary workers and sailors refused to recognise the party's leadership.

I said the Bolsheviks faced dilemma. They took decisions which they hoped would be short-term expedients, but because the international situation did not change were forced to adapt these to long-term policies. I suggested that this was perhaps one of the elements that made them lose sight of their original goal. An extreme pragmatism, that took little account of principles, was one of the hallmarks of Stalinism. I specifically challenged the argument put forward by the liberals that Stalinism was the logical outcome of Marxism-Leninism and invited the South African Communists to have a second look at the work of anti-Stalinist Marxist writers.

Karl Holdt, one of the editors of the SALB, approached the problem from a different direction, the thrust of his argument being that Lenin and the Bolsheviks had a rather weak conception of civil society and consequently tended to regard the party as the principle active element of society. In Holdt's view, this encouraged the trend to vest too much authority in the party.

Ironically, when Slovo was afforded the opportunity to respond to his critics he appeared to ignore all the others to concentrate only on mine. Even here, however, he excluded the greater part of my arguments from consideration choosing the unfortunate course of challenging me that a critique of Stalinism from a Trotskyist perspective is less than useless since Trotsky himself was not committed to democracy. This gave the impression that my point of departure was Trotskyist. While Trotsky was one of the many Communist opponents of Stalinism I cited, there were others, such as Bukharin, Djilas, Kuron and Bahro, to name a few.

The weakness of Slovo's reply is that it raises even more questions than his original pamphlet. He seems to base a large part of his argument on a quick reading of Isaac Deutscher's "The Prophet Armed" and a less than certain grasp of the issues

involved in the Trade Union Debate which took place in the Soviet Union between 1920 and 1921.

Slovo suggests that the seeds of Stalinism were in fact sown by the future oppositionists themselves — and he specifically names Trotsky, Bukharin, Kamenev and Radek as among those responsible for sowing them long before Stalin was in the saddle. The barbs he directs against the opponents of Stalin amount to petty debating points when one considers that the terror of the mid-1930s would probably have descended on the Soviet Union at least a decade earlier had these Bolshevik leaders not been there to frustrate Stalin's plans. I find it strange that Slovo cannot give them credit for trying to defend what was best in Lenin's party.

None of Slovo's critics, let alone I, suggested that Stalinism appeared like mushrooms after the rains during the 1930s. But the question must be posed: by seeking to spread the blame, is Slovo not indirectly letting Stalin, its chief architect, off the hook?

Whatever faults in Bolshevik theory and practice assisted Stalin's rise to a leading position in the Party, there was a point at which a crucial transformation — a qualitative change occurred — separating Stalinism from all that preceded it. That critical point entailed, among other horrors, the slaughter of precisely the oppositionists Slovo suggests should now share the blame with their murderer!

None of Slovo's critics played down the responsibility that the old Bolsheviks bore for that outcome. On the contrary, I stress the grave error they all committed by supporting the outlawing the ideas of the Workers' Opposition in 1921. Unless Slovo wishes to suggest that Stalinism was latent in Bolshevism, his arguments on this score are extremely shaky.

Slovo evades the most important points of my argument, which he dismisses as "class reductionism." In opposition he argues that since economic rewards under socialism are still determined by the contribution the individual makes rather than need, those who contribute more will receive more and that is bound to lead to some being more privileged than others. This is uncontested by myself or others. More to the point, however, a distinction must be drawn between a system that recognises the unavoidable and unpleasant necessity of such differences in incomes and power and one that glorifies it, as Stalinism did.

Slovo does not even mention the empowerment of factory directors (beneath whose feet Kaganovich expected the earth to tremble) and their superiors (before whom the planets presumably trembled), at the expense of the working class, with a glibness that I find alarming. It is evident that these state and government officials were not merely persons who received larger pay packets because of the value of their contribution. They had in fact been transformed into petty tyrants with great powers over the working class.

According to Bahro, members of this stratum could pass these privileges on to their children from generation to generation, just as rich people pass on their property to their children under capitalism. The wide gulf between them and the working class can be measured by their showy, privileged life style — the hunting lodges, exclusive suburbs, holiday homes, special shops, limousines. But more importantly, I pointed up the position they occupied, as early as the 1920s, within the CPSU itself, as indicated by the census of party membership for 1927!

The way in which this caste functioned, the manner in which its members related to each other and the rest of society are not the small matters Slovo seeks to reduce them to. They lie at the root of the mass dissatisfaction with socialism that finally persuaded millions of east German workers that it was preferable to be governed by Kohl, the Conservative Prime Minister of West Germany, rather than by the Communists, Erich Honnecker or Egon Krenz.

In the Soviet Union itself the “unthinkable “ has happened. Socialism, in whatever shape or form, is totally discredited and pro-capitalist, nationalist and Russian chauvinist elements have acquired the upper hand. The democratic version of socialism, let alone the views of the Bolshevik opposition to Stalinism, has been completely marginalised and receives very little hearing. For the time being, it can be said that socialism has been defeated in the former socialist countries of Europe.

By the early 1990s Perestroika had failed and existed only in name. The social and political forces whom Gorbachev had welded into a winning coalition in the CPSU had all but abandoned it or were exhausted. The liberal intelligentsia, oddly dubbed the “left” by the western media, had become explicitly pro-capitalist and their leader, Boris Yelstin, had taken up the banner of Russian nationalism.

Part of the explanation for this reverse is that in Eastern Europe, with the exceptions of Yugoslavia and Albania where it had won wide spread popular support through the anti-Nazi war of liberation, “communism” was regarded as an imposition by a much hated foreign country. It had never been a popular cause. Ordinary people’s view that communism came from outside was reinforced especially by the events of 1956 in Poland and Hungary and yet again in 1968 with the suppression of the Prague Spring. Communists could be portrayed as collaborators who persecuted their countrymen to please a foreign government. The right-wing, including rabid anti-Semites and racists, and anti-Communist liberals were cast in the role of patriots. Continued reference to these pro-marketeters and laissez faire capitalists as the “left” also helped to obscure the fact that in western countries the views they hold are associated with politicians on the far right — Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan.

Even the harshest critics of Stalinism had not expected such an outcome in the Soviet Union. But the true extent of the degeneration of “communism” became evident when a tiny group of narrow-minded government officials, this time identified as “Communist hardliners” by the western media, attempted a coup to get rid of Gorbachev in August 1991. Not only did the CPSU prove powerless against these would-be-coup-makers, no one in the entire country came out onto the streets in opposition to the junta to defend socialism, let alone the CPSU. It was the explicitly pro-capitalist Yelstin and his supporters who organised demonstrations and were able to mount any mass resistance to the coup. The public’s participation in these events was uneven and it would appear most Soviet citizens were too confused to react, except passively. After the coup was crushed and Gorbachev returned to Moscow, his first action was to resign as General Secretary of the CPSU then to shut down the CPSU’s entire central apparatus. On November 7th, the anniversary of the October Revolution, Yelstin banned the CPSU in the Russian Federation!

These events that changed the shape of the world, have their roots embedded deep in the history of the Soviet Union and the countries of eastern Europe after World War Two. Socialists are called upon to study and analyse this Stalinist past without fear or favour. This is a task we must approach with the utmost seriousness and we cannot shrink from what such study discloses because it might ruffle feathers in certain high places. Slovo’s reluctance to rise to the demands of the occasion was not of service to the South African Communist movement.

Spin-Off and Derivative Critiques

The majority of liberal and right wing social scientists did not bother to address the issues raised by Slovo. The media and spokespersons of big business crowded with satisfaction because they thought these events demonstrated the bankruptcy of socialism. The pro-capitalist politicians waxed eloquent about the virtues of the free market. Among the liberal scholars, Heribert Adam, a visiting professor from the University of British Columbia, Canada, entered the debate.

Herbert Adam is a German sociologist. He has written extensively on South Africa since the early 1970s and though he is an outspoken opponent of racism, has also been a severe critic of the national liberation movement and seems more comfortable in the company of the liberal opposition.

Adam appears to be opposed to socialism as such rather than being a critical partisan. He criticises Slovo from the point of view of one who is fundamentally

opposed to what Slovo stands for. Though many of his points are well taken, — for example, the sense of betrayal felt by the common people of eastern Europe, — he is off the mark on other counts.

Adam charges that Slovo's argument boils down to that there was essentially nothing wrong with the socialist system except for the persons placed in charge of it, i.e. Joseph Stalin and the men who followed him. As Adam would have it, pilot error and not the design of the craft was responsible for the disaster.

From this point Adam goes on to criticise the SACP and the ANC's policies for South Africa's future. He even seems reluctant to defend the principle of state intervention in the economy, which has been extensively applied in even the most devoutly "free enterprise" systems, lest someone accuse him of secret Bolshevik sympathies. He does however agree that affirmative action, to redress the racial imbalances produced by decades of White privilege, is necessary. But in the next breath he reduces the true significance of affirmative action by suggesting that it is a clever way to secure the plums of public office for a Black *petit bourgeoisie*. That affirmative action, which has only been tentatively applied in the US, could be extended to make more meaningful inroads into areas of White privilege and thus benefit not only the Black poor but all disadvantaged people, does not occur to him. Adam also suggests that the leadership of the national liberation movement must inevitably sell-out its poor constituency in order to reach agreement with the White ruling class. Indeed, if he sees any use in the SACP, it is that it could more easily persuade the young militants, the working class and the poor to accept such a sell out because they have faith in the SACP.

Quite a startling lesson to draw from the experience of Stalinism!

Stalinism and the unfortunate tradition among many Communists, including the SACP, to extol it as "existing socialism" have, certainly, made socialism an easy target for attack by liberals, social democrats and, nowadays, even by the right. Nothing Adam says distinguishes him from this chorus of complacent fat cats who seem to feel the demise of the Soviet Union vindicates their own short-sighted contempt for the most elementary principles of social justice.

Adam, unfortunately, added nothing to our understanding of either the phenomenon of Stalinism or the movement that had spawned and embraced it. He does not offer serious criticism, on which one could build and improve the national liberation movement, but chooses instead to find fault. As a result his criticisms contributed nothing to the search for solutions which could assist socialists in South Africa in creatively recasting communism in a democratic mould.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

Slovo's pamphlet, with all its weaknesses and faults, was able to initiate a much-needed dialogue among South African socialists. Few others enjoy the moral and political authority to have done this. No one suggests that the debate about the character of socialism and the impact Stalinism has had on it has now been completed. But the seriousness with which the subject was approached is indicative of the profound questions which the experience of 1989, 1990 and 1991 has raised in the minds of those activists who see socialism as the future of our country.

Despite the differences in emphasis and the awkward defense of orthodoxy, all the participants showed a concern to learn from the errors of the past and to get to the root of the problems of socialism in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe. They appear to agree that a socialism that is not democratic ceases to be socialism. They differ among themselves on the exact character of the democratic institutions that should be the basis of a socialist society. While none of the contributors dismiss parliamentary democracy, few of the contributors regard it as the ultimate solution to the problem. They agree that there must be a role for an autonomous civil society and democratic accountability to the working class, written into the law, in a socialist society.

With the exception of the left oppositional critics, the other authors tend to down-play the dangers of the emergence of a "new class" or bureaucratic caste and the new contradictions this generates in a society that is attempting to build an egalitarian socio-economic order. This is rather ironic because in almost every newly independent African state the class of people who acquired control of government used it as their chief means of accumulating wealth and becoming capitalists. This bureaucratic bourgeoisie has become the bane of African countries, and many liberation alliances (including those that say they are socialist) have produced one. In South Africa, where the majority of the working class are deliberately under-educated, kept unskilled and denied basic knowledge about the world because of racial oppression, extreme concentrations of power, knowledge and skill in the hands of an elite is very likely. When we add to this that the best educated, most articulate and skilled, even in the liberation alliance, are likely to be Whites rather than Blacks, the gap between those who lead and those who are led is likely to be even wider.

South Africa moved to become an industrial capitalist country one hundred years ago. But by world standards it still needs to develop much, much more than it has up to now. Primitive accumulation will remain among the many tasks a democratic or socialist regime in South Africa will have to undertake. The existence of a White South Africa, that looks and lives like an advanced capitalist country, cheek by jowl with a Black

South Africa, that lives and looks like any third world country, will act as a spur to solve these problems by the fastest possible route. Under such circumstances, leaders will be tempted to cut corners and to silence critical voices that insist on counting the costs. These dangers should not be played down. An historical materialist analysis of the sources and class forces responsible for Stalinism could assist us to avoid them.

Is There a Way Forward?

The decline and the fall of “existing socialism” has been a severe setback for the forces of socialism internationally. The worst defeat suffered by socialism this century was the crushing of the working class movement in Germany and Austria by the Nazi juggernaut. The disintegration of socialism in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are probably the second only to that. Yet it would be foolish to abandon hope in the promise held out to humanity by the socialism of Marx and Engels. Even in the leading capitalist countries, such as the USA, Japan and Germany, late monopoly capitalism has proved incapable of solving even the basics of human existence — such as decent housing, health-care, schooling and work — for all citizens. Few Black working people in South Africa have any illusions about the benefits of capitalism. The idea that it shall dominate the entire world can only fill one with dread.

Socialism must be saved from what the CPSU and its sister parties throughout the world reduced it to. There seems little likelihood that such a revival could come from the small and discredited Communist parties of Europe and north America. As the one country in which the working class still has faith and hope in the party, the SACP could take the lead in restoring the original vision to socialism. But in order to do this the SACP will have to look back over its own political record and that of the Soviet party from which it took its inspiration.

I would therefore repeat my challenge to the SACP to begin a thorough re-examination of the meaning of socialism that draws in all South African socialists. Such an exercise will assist the SACP to discard those aspects of Stalinism it still carries and put new zest into its intellectual life. Those socialists who saw and spoke up about the shocking shortcomings of “existing socialism” never lost hope that socialism can be achieved, despite the stinging criticisms we made of the Soviet Union, China or the eastern European countries. The collapse of Stalinism offers all socialists, including those who blindly followed Stalin and his successors, to make a new beginning. Hopefully this time no one will demand that they show “solidarity” with the “vanguard of vanguards.”

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