

**MARXIST ANALYSIS OF STATE CAPTURE
TOWARDS A RECONFIGURED ALLIANCE**



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3. **Editorial Notes**
12. **Towards a Marxist analysis of state capture**
23. **Central Committee Political Statement**
30. **October 1917 and the survival of capitalism**
Prabhat Patnaik
49. **South Africa & 'the Great Events in Russia'**
Blade Nzimande
66. **The Revolution, Lenin & the National Question**
Jeremy Cronin
75. **The Bolsheviks & women's emancipation**
Jenny Schreiner
91. **Zimbabwe: opportunities for transformation**
Samukele Hadebe

Cover art: *Women's Emancipation Day. Poster 1920, Adolf Strakchov.*
– *From Art of the October Revolution, Mikhail Guerman (Harry H. Abrams 1979)*

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EDITORIAL NOTES

ANC: decisive turning point – or further decline?

What will be the outcome of the ANC's December 2017 Conference? One way or another, for better or for worse, it is a conference that will have an impact on the Alliance and on the future of our country. It will certainly determine whether the ANC has some hope for a sustainable future or is doomed to perpetuate its own onward decline.

In this uncertain context, with what strategic and organisational assumptions do we, as the SACP, and as a broader range of progressive forces, engage with the short- and medium-term future? Part of preparing for this uncertain future is to disabuse ourselves of certain common assumptions about the ANC and its history.

The ANC and all those who have contributed to its struggle – not least communists and the Communist Party in South Africa – can be justly proud of our struggle legacy. However, often in its own telling of its history, the ANC gives the impression that from its launch in 1912 down to the present, it has been the pre-eminent revolutionary formation leading an unbroken century of struggle. But there is nothing pre-ordained or God-given about the ANC's recent pre-eminence, still less that it is guaranteed to rule “until Jesus returns” as President Zuma has frequently boasted.

There have been periods in which the ANC has been exceedingly weak and largely moribund. In the late-1920s it was the Industrial and Commercial Union (with important Communist Party leaders – before they were expelled) that was, in reality, the effective leader of the strug-

gle against national oppression. The ICU led a countrywide uprising of black labour tenants and for a few years was much larger and far more dynamic than a rather conservative ANC. In the early 1930s, in the Cape provinces, popular organisation and mobilisation was undertaken not by weak ANC structures, but by a left split from the ANC known as the Independent ANC. It was after contact with the work of the Independent ANC that Kotane wrote his celebrated Cradock Letter to the CPSA, urging the Party to become more grounded in the actual struggles of the urban and rural poor.

It was only in the late-1940s and through the 1950s, as the leader of the Congress movement, that the ANC could first really be described as the cohesive strategic centre of national popular resistance.

This important achievement was soon to suffer a major setback with the mid-1960s strategic defeat of the broad liberation forces. With its leadership decimated, and its survivors in prison, or in distant exile, it was far from clear that the ANC would be able to re-emerge as the pre-eminent force representing the national democratic aspirations of the majority of South Africans.

Indeed in the late 1960s and through much of the 1970s, with the vacuum left by the brutal wave of apartheid repression, it was often other resistance currents that provided leadership to popular struggles – notably the black consciousness movement and various “workerist” or syndicalist currents active in the re-emergence of militant trade-unionism. These currents were often dismissive and even hostile to the ANC and SACP. Of course underground ANC and SACP units, and ANC supporters played a role in the re-emergent popular and worker struggle in this period – but it would be wrong to claim, for instance, that “the ANC led the 1976 student uprising”.

From the late-1970s, through the rolling waves of semi-insurrectionary struggle of the 1980s and into the negotiated transition of the early-

1990s, it was the ANC (supported, of course, by its Alliance partners) that increasingly played the outstanding role as the strategic political centre of our National Democratic Revolution (NDR), on both the domestic and international fronts.

The successful 1994 democratic breakthrough and the constitutional abolition of decades of white minority rule owed much to the organisational strengths, the popular support, and the strategic effectiveness of the ANC in this period.

So what is the point of this very brief survey on the eve of the ANC's national conference?

Programmatically, the SACP remains committed to the strategy of a radical national democratic struggle as the most direct approach to a socialist South Africa. The point of the brief historical reflections above is that the NDR does not belong to the ANC. The ANC does not have timeless, monopoly ownership rights over the ongoing struggle to address the stubborn persistence of racialised inequality, poverty and unemployment. The ANC has played an outstanding role, but it is not the eternally ordained leader of the struggle for democratic national sovereignty for South Africa in an often hostile, imperialist-dominated world.

Sadly, increasingly over the past 20 years, and now at an accelerating pace in the past five years or so, the ANC has shown itself incapable of unifying itself, let alone its Alliance, still less our society in general around an emancipatory, non-racial democratic project as envisaged by the Freedom Charter.

Will the ANC's National Conference be able to reverse this trend? Unfortunately it is far from certain. What is certain is that even the best possible of outcomes from the December conference will merely open the space for the beginning of serious corrective measures within the ANC. But it will be a long-haul process.

What would be the best possible outcome from the ANC conference?

As the SACP December Augmented Central Committee's official statement said: "In wishing delegates to the Conference well, we urge them to elect a leadership collective that will move the ANC out of its current leadership paralysis. The Alliance, and indeed our country, require an ANC leadership collective that is finally prepared to lead decisively not just in words but in action."

The December CC statement then listed the issues on which a hopefully better ANC leadership collective should focus:

- the struggle against corporate capture of the state, other forms of corruption, and general leadership arrogance;
- the establishment of an independent judicial commission into state capture;
- support for the criminal prosecution, without fear or favour, of all those exposed in the Gupta e-mail and parliamentary hearings; and
- the removal of serially incompetent ministers.

The statement went on to say that all of the above required decisive interventions to turn around the National Prosecuting Authority, the Hawks, the South African Revenue Service, and the South African Social Security Agency, among others, as well as intensifying the first early steps in rebuilding honest and effective governance of key state owned enterprises.

There is a chance that a leadership collective, including a broader National Executive Committee, can emerge from the ANC's national conference that is committed at least to the above urgent interventions.

But even if this does happen, we cannot take for granted that there will be the capacity or steely determination needed to carry through these measures.

The systemic nature of the problem

As the extract from the Political Report of the December CC published in this issue of *The African Communist* argues (“Towards a Marxist Analysis of State Capture”), it is important that we appreciate that the problems of corporate capture of the state and generalised corruption and factionalism within our movement are not just about individuals. They are systemic. They have become deeply entrenched within the organisational culture of the ANC.

A relatively positive outcome in the ANC’s December conference, the possible election of a new leadership collective that starts immediately to implement anti-state capture corrective measures of the kind noted above – these will just be the beginning of a long-haul and bitter battle. Fundamentally, in class terms, this means defeating the current bourgeois/petty bourgeois axis, that has become hegemonic within the ANC, and that is grouped around a primitive accumulation agenda.

The SACP must advance the perspective of an alternative popular bloc that locates the real interests of the emergent (and debt crippled) middle strata with those of the proletariat in its most general sense: the millions of employed, under-employed, and the radically unemployed.

For this reason the SACP must increasingly advance the perspectives of a re-configured Alliance and of building, in active struggle, a left popular front. A re-configured Alliance will have to break with the current trajectory of the ANC, and perhaps, therefore, it may even have to break with a recalcitrant ANC, hanging on to a name and a legal status, but incapable of self-correction.

We must not think of a re-configured Alliance and a left popular front as alternative options. A left front is not a fall-back position if an effective re-configuration is not achieved. Both options are inter-related and must be pursued simultaneously. We must not think of a re-configured Alliance as essentially transactional (powers over deployments – not

that this is unimportant). We must also not conceptualise a left front as necessarily a Left Front in capital letters – it may or may not assume a more formalised character, but it might also be a shifting front or a series of fronts that coalesce around particular working class and popular struggles. Already this is happening in practice, both inside of the ANC itself and beyond. Above all, we must not reduce either a reconfigured Alliance or a left front into electoral modalities. They may or may not be appropriate forms through which the SACP might contest future elections. This, too, will be determined by struggle and not by abstract calculations.

We are at a very volatile and uncertain moment in our post-apartheid reality. The SACP has a critical role to play in this situation.

The centenary of the Bolshevik Revolution

Last month the SACP, with a major rally in Durban and commemorative events throughout South Africa, joined progressives in our country and around the world in marking one hundred years since the historic 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. The Bolshevik-led Russian Revolution was arguably the most decisive event of the 20th century. For some 70 years it defined the contours of global geo-politics.

The history of the Communist Party in South Africa is inextricably linked to the Bolshevik Revolution. Here in our country, the Independent Socialist League (the ISL) split from the South African Labour Party (SALB) in 1915, refusing to support the inter-imperialist 1st World War that engulfed Europe from 1914. In breaking from the pro-British colonial chauvinism of the SALB, the ISL was following Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and other radical socialists in taking a stand for principled internationalism. Inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution, it was the ISL that formed the core of the Communist Party of South Africa in 1921.

This issue of *The African Communist* carries articles looking at some

of the many dimensions of the Bolshevik legacy and its impact on and contemporary relevance for South African struggles. What is the relationship between democratic and socialist tasks? Blade Nzimande's article in this issue is taken from a paper he delivered to an international commemorative event of communist and workers parties held in Cyprus. He reminds us that central to Lenin's April 1917 theses, was the conviction that in Russia, only the working class (in alliance with the peasantry) could provide consistent strategic leadership in the democratic struggle to abolish Tsarist autocracy. This meant, according to Lenin, that there was the necessity of an "uninterrupted advance" from the democratic to the socialist revolutions.

Clearly, in our somewhat different circumstances, the Leninist perspective in 1917 has interesting resonances with our own debates about the relationship between a national democratic and a socialist revolution. Are they two separate stages? Or are they, as the SACP has been insisting, different phases in what needs to be an uninterrupted process ("Socialism is the Future, Build it Now!"). Jeremy Cronin's article takes up a similar theme by noting the lived inter-connection, as the Bolshevik Revolution unfolded, between the democratic, the national and the socialist tasks. Jenny Schreiner's contribution reminds us of the important role of women in the Bolshevik revolution and the advances made in the early years after 1917 in women's emancipation.

The Bolshevik Revolution marked a decisive moment in the 20th century. But the society that emerged from that revolution, the Soviet Union, was not afforded a moment's peace throughout its existence, from a bloody civil war, through blockades and economic sanctions, the Nazi invasion that cost over 20-million Soviet lives, to the attrition of the Cold War. Despite great suffering and the failure of the anticipated socialist revolution in more developed countries, notably Germany, the Soviet Union showed remarkable progress in building a modern economy. It was in the house-to-house battlefield of Stalingrad that the

course of World War II was settled with the eventual rout of the Hitler's Nazi army. In the 1960s and 70s, the Soviet Union played a major role in supporting anti-colonial struggles, not least the national liberation struggles against colonialism and white minority rule in southern Africa.

But the enforced isolation of the young Soviet Union in the late 1920s and a growing siege mentality increasingly fostered a culture of intolerance, brutality and eventually mass purges that wiped out a generation of veteran revolutionaries. Contrary to one version of the Revolution, the Bolshevik Party of 1917 had not been a regimented apparatus, under the autocratic thumb of its leadership, but rather a deeply democratic formation characterised by sharp debates and shifting inner-party allegiances. Despite Lenin's general authority within the Party, according to one recent study, dozens of his interventions were declined by the Party's publication in the course of 1917! Under the pressure of events and the emergence of Stalin, a forced march into an accelerated and militarised industrialisation was undertaken from the late 1920s. The boisterous local organs of popular and worker power, the soviets, which had played the leading role in the Bolshevik revolution, were suppressed and subsumed under a highly centralised state.

With the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989, the then-SACP general secretary, Cde Joe Slovo, played an important internationalist role in criticising two forms of denialism. The one variant of denialism, which proliferated within the ANC, led by a faction of former SACP members, hastily abandoned the Party and disowned the whole Soviet experience. This group soon went on to become the core leaders of the neo-liberal 1996 class project. The other form of denialism came from those who simply refused to accept that anything had gone wrong in the Soviet Union. In his important 1990 intervention (*Has Socialism Failed?*), Slovo argued that it was not socialism that had failed, but that

it was an heroic project that had lost its way, partly as a consequence of unending external pressures and partly as a result grave internal errors. Socialism, Slovo argued, cannot sustain itself and cannot thrive unless it constantly deepens and enriches its democratic character.

In April 1917 Lenin argued for the imperative of winning the democratic revolution by advancing uninterruptedly to socialism – or else there would be failure. In 1990, Slovo, looking back over 70 years of struggle, argued for the imperative of socialism uninterruptedly deepening democracy – or else socialist construction (not socialism itself), too, would end in failure.

As we mark 100 years of the Bolshevik Revolution both perspectives are surely absolutely relevant to our contemporary struggles. ●

CC REPORT

Towards a Marxist analysis of 'State Capture'

An excerpt from the Political Report tabled at the SACP's December 2017 Augmented Central Committee meeting

“State capture” has now become a household term in South Africa. It was the SACP that first coined the term, as a short-hand for what we more accurately described as “corporate capture of the state” (or, at least, of strategic parts of the state). Since then, an avalanche of information, including the Gupta e-mails, Jacques Pauw’s book *The President’s Keepers*, and the important Parliamentary hearings currently underway, has contributed to a deepening appreciation of just how widespread and systemic the problem is.

However, while we have been deluged with information, there has been very little attempt to provide an effective analysis of the problem – and therefore a sustainable strategy to defeat “state capture”.

There are various limited explanations for “state capture” – ranging from **racist perspectives** (“you see what happens when they take over”), which is more or less openly expressed by right-wing elements, and more subtly by many so-called liberals of the radio talk show caller “Mike from Newlands” (“standards are slipping”) variety. Apart from its repugnant racism, the trouble with this line of “explanation” is that it provides an easy diversionary target for scoundrels on the other side (“you burn our flag, we’ll burn yours”) and an alibi for their own wrong-doing (“what about the Ruperts?”)

On the other hand there are various explanations that blame the **inevitable post-colonial decline of national liberation movements** – “the SACP betrayed the working class and socialism by being in alliance with the ANC”, etc. The problem with some of these more leftist arguments is that they then tend to abandon the whole terrain of the national question to narrow Africanist and other right-wing versions of the national struggle (see for instance pop-up formations like the Gupta-funded Black First Land First grouping).

Nonetheless, the argument about the tendency for post-colonial national liberation movements to decline needs to be engaged with seriously. Clearly there is a pattern of serious post-colonial degeneration in many former national liberation movements. But is it inevitable? And why does it tend to happen?

Moral decay and “bad apples” – some of the above “analyses” of state capture, lacking further explanatory power, tend to fall back into what is the most common explanation: state capture is the result of “moral decay”, of bad personalities, etc. This is where Njabulo Ndebele’s key-note address to the ANC Veterans National Consultative Conference ends up. While we certainly cannot deny that there is moral decay and there are corrupt personalities – this kind of explanation fails to illuminate the systemic nature of the problem, and therefore effective interventions that go beyond the necessary criminal prosecution of those involved in corruption. The narrow moral argument also has dangers for the SACP – we might imagine that we are immune to the “state capture” syndrome because of our “moral superiority”, our “communist ideology”, our “political education” – forgetting what Marxism has always said about these matters, namely that it is the material conditions that largely determine morality and ideology.

Needed: A Marxist analysis of the state capture phenomenon

Primitive Accumulation

Since 1994 much of the ANC from the branch level up has been systematically converted into an instrument for what Marx described as “primitive” accumulation.

Marx was referring largely to the process through which, in an earlier phase, capital was accumulated through non-capitalist means – the plundering of colonies through sea-borne mercantile trade, for instance. Primitive capital accumulation provided the resource base that fuelled the rise of capitalism in its stricter sense of a productive system extracting surplus from “free” labour (workers dispossessed of independent means of production) selling their labour for a wage. (It is also the basis on which the active under-development of the imperialist periphery was set in motion).

Since the mid-1990s in South Africa access to the state has been used as an instrument to drive a new wave of primitive accumulation on behalf of capitalists without capital, aspirant capitalists. It, too, has served to perpetuate the crisis of under-development in working class and poor communities.

Back in 1969, at its Morogoro conference in Tanzania, the ANC could declare: *“our nationalism must not be confused ...with the classical drive by an elitist group among the oppressed people to gain ascendancy so that they can replace the oppressor in the exploitation of the mass.”*

Back then the ANC listed two key factors for this reality - *“an international context of transition to the socialist system...”,* and *“the existence in our country of a large and growing working class whose class consciousness complements national consciousness.”*

By the early 1990s, the first factor (an international transition to socialism) was obviously not the dominant global trajectory. However,

the South African working class and wider popular strata, emerging from over a decade of trade union and community-based struggles, were significantly stronger and more militant than in the late-1960s. The internal Alliance ideological and policy battles through the 1990s and early 2000s centred around the continued relevance of Morogoro's socialist-oriented, national-democratic strategic vision for a post-liberation South Africa.

First phase of post-apartheid primitive accumulation – the 1996 class project

Under an unstable Mandela-Mbeki hegemony, the idea of a South African national democratic struggle was reconfigured as a matter of “normalising”, that is “de-racialising”, our capitalist political economy. And this, so they argued, required the leadership of a new “patriotic bourgeoisie”. Enter the first phase of post-apartheid primitive accumulation. This was black economic empowerment (BEE) – a variant of primitive accumulation in which a new stratum of capitalists was created using state regulatory power to leverage encumbered (not free) shares from established monopoly capital.

This represented an implicit social accord between South African monopoly capital and the new ANC-aligned political elite. In exchange for monopoly capitalist, “investor friendly” macro- and micro-economic policies (notably GEAR), big capital agreed to accommodate BEE policies – the better to forestall any fundamental socio-economic transformation.

A rising ANC-linked elite was accommodated by the incumbent economic elite (giving the latter access to the new political reality). By 2010, Jenny Cargill (a prominent supporter, by the way, of BEE) estimated that BEE share-holders had acquired an estimated R500-billion, “far more...than in other key areas of socio-economic transformation, such as low-income housing and land redistribution.” The expectation

was that “since the stock market (supposedly) always rises”, BEE beneficiaries would be able to pay off their debt within a matter of years. R500-billion was taken out of potential productive (and therefore employment-creating) investment and the major beneficiaries were the big financial firms who earned mega consultative fees in putting together complex BEE deals.

For the new BEE elite, money and the appearance of ownership was created out of thin air, without any effort or necessary capacity, other than having links to those in political office. By and large, this first “BEE” phase of primitive accumulation was not marked by large-scale criminality, although there were major exceptions (the arms deal, the Kebble-Agliotti-Selebi-Youth League axis, etc). It was, generally speaking, “legal” primitive accumulation, played within the rules of neo-liberal capitalist governance. Which is why in today’s conjuncture most Mbeki-ites like Chikane can parade themselves as morally superior to the post-Polokwane ANC.

Insofar as we can speak of “state capture” in this period it was more corporate capture of the hearts and minds of much of the leading ANC cadre (Smuts Ngonyama: “I didn’t struggle to be poor”, Saki Macazoma: “You can’t expect BEE capitalists to behave differently from capitalists in general. If not the market will destroy us”, etc.) There was a major ideological shift away from the programmatic perspectives of Morogoro, for instance, with the increasing embrace of capitalist values.

Petty-bourgeois primitive accumulation – state procurement

Already in this period, the ethos of primitive accumulation filtered all the way down to the ANC branch level with petty accumulation for micro-entrepreneurs. If at the high-end of BEE, primitive accumulation largely took the form of BEE share-holding, at the lower end it tended

to involve all manner of procurement of goods and services from the public sector, especially, but not only, from the municipal and, increasingly, provincial spheres. Neo-liberal macro-policies and the related “new public management” paradigm forced massive staff cuts on the public sector. Increasingly, basic public services were tendered out, often to black-owned start-ups, or to white SMMEs with black fronting partners. Ironically, this often (more often than not) led to the procurement of services from the private sector at greater cost to public sector budgets (see for instance the Department of Public Works closing of its work-shops and a growing dependence on grossly over-charging private sector maintenance and repair enterprises). There was also very often a serious decline in the quality of assets and services provided to the working class and popular strata through outsourcing public functions (the delivery of school text-books in Limpopo, or rural road maintenance, for instance).

Public sector trade unions were not always innocent partners in this process either. Apart from there being some evidence of their members sometimes being directly involved in the influencing of contracts (school-feeding, text-book supplies, refuse removal, water tankers), in the municipal sphere, especially in metros, wage bargaining has meant that municipal workers have priced themselves out of the manual labour categories, with municipal manual labour now increasingly contracted out to casual workers (or supplied by Expanded Public Works Programme participants).

Steadily from the mid-1990s, the predominant reason for the existence of ANC organisational machinery shifted from popular struggle to a narrow electoralism, and then, in a further debasement, to winning elections in order to occupy office in order to reproduce and expand primitive accumulation. There are of course many contrary tendencies and battles going on within the ANC, but the dominant organisational

gearing is to primitive accumulation.

It is hard to see how the December conference will fundamentally change this culture. It even raises difficult challenges for the SACP especially as we enter the electoral terrain more independently – will we be able to avoid these systemic deviations engulfing us? Of course a communist morality and political education will be important insulators – but will they be enough?

The crisis of phase one of primitive accumulation – the Polokwane moment

Phase one of this accumulation process entered into crisis from around 2007. The global economic meltdown impacted on primary commodity prices. Suddenly with share values and dividend flows down, the debt on encumbered BEE mining shares could not be redeemed on schedule. Beneficiaries (like Sexwale) and their proxies (Malema's ANCYL) were calling for the “nationalisation of the mines” – meaning a bail-out for themselves at public expense. An additional reason for the Mbeki BEE project running into trouble was that not every aspirant BEE consortium could be included within his favoured inner-circle. Many frustrated aspirants were ready to rally around another presidential figure. Things played themselves out at an ANC political level through 2007 (the Polokwane conference), 2008 (the Mbeki recall), and 2009 (the commencement of the first Zuma administration).

A second phase of primitive accumulation

After 2009 both primitive accumulation and BEE policies continued but Zuma's initial concern was with the criminal justice system. The focus from the side of the presidency was on the NPA, the Hawks, the intelligence services, and, for related reasons, SARS – the stay-out-of-jail option. Between 2009 and 2014 some important progress was made

in dealing with Aids denialism, and on state-driven infrastructure and industrial policy.

But it was particularly in the second Zuma administration from 2014 that a new variant of primitive accumulation, “state capture” in its current form, took off on a truly industrial scale. This was less about leveraging encumbered shares out of existing monopolists (although that has continued), and more the parasitic looting of the public sector, particularly key state-owned enterprises. Whereas Mbeki had endeavoured to drive some privatisation to expand the scope for dispensing of BEE share-holding (see the partial privatisation of Telkom and the Elephant Consortium), now under Zuma SOEs remained nominally public - the better to plunder them.

The petty-bourgeois primitive accumulation process has also been intensified with the new public sector procurement regulations, requiring 30% of all procurement over R30-million to go to SMMEs and co-ops. On the face of it, these requirements have a progressive content – they can help to de-concentrate the excessively monopolised economy. They can, in principle, help to build local economies in both urban settings (the “township economy”) and in rural areas where, for instance, social grant money flows in and straight out again, without circulating locally and thus stimulating localised productive activity.

But as Marxists we must always assess policies and their implementation from a **class** perspective. There is no straightforward answer as to whether or not the 30% public sector procurement set-asides for SMMEs and co-ops is a progressive, transformational intervention from a working class and indeed national democratic revolutionary perspective.

The danger is that these procurement policies will unleash an intensified wave of petty-bourgeois primitive accumulation, the further ten-derisation of the state and the possibilities of greater cost to the fiscus.

One recent example illustrates the dangers. Government's planned 1-million solar-water heater (SWH) roll-out was correctly put on hold in 2014, because there was insufficient local content in the solar-water panels. While the SWH roll-out was an important pro-poor intervention, because of insufficient localisation we were using public money to create jobs outside of South Africa. A new process of tendering was initiated specifying much higher levels of local content. However, the only qualifying tenderers turned out to be white-owned local companies – mainly small to medium-sized enterprises. So the roll-out was further delayed as a new round of tendering was initiated but this time with lower local content requirements – i.e. in the name of BEE we reduced the number of potential South African jobs and allowed for greater importation of components. This second round of tendering, which further delayed the SWH roll-out by more than a year barely resulted in any improvement in terms of ownership profiles – only one BEE enterprise now qualified along with the original ten or so white-owned medium-sized enterprises.

The SWH roll-out targets are now hopelessly behind with all of the consequences in terms of lost job-creation opportunities, the potential for on-the-job skills development, both in assembly as well in installation, and the positive impact on the lives of the originally targeted 1-million poor households because of non-delivery.

This is not to say that transforming racialised ownership patterns, or the use of public sector procurement to stimulate black-owned SMMEs and co-ops are not, in principle, potentially progressive interventions. However, there is often the illusion that these measures are necessarily to the benefit of the majority of South Africans when, in specific circumstances, over-emphasis on these factors might actually compromise greater localisation, or job-creation, or pro-poor social interventions. Given the emerging dominant class character and class interests

of much of the ANC-aligned political elite (both in the executive and in the legislatures) there is the very real danger that job-creation, industrialisation based on localisation, skills training and pro-poor social programmes will be trumped and overwhelmed in both policy development and in implementation by other primitive accumulation agendas, both of a petty-bourgeois kind as well as on a much wider scale.

Re-configure the class re-configuration of the Alliance underway over the past two decades!

Anti-SACP forces within the ANC like to preach to us about the “multi-class” character of the ANC. But from the outset of our engagement with the ANC nearly a century ago, the Communist Party in South Africa has understood and appreciated the multi-class character of the ANC. However, the **character** of the ANC’s multi-class character has changed dramatically over the past 20 years.

You will not find a single reference to Black Economic Empowerment in any ANC document prior to the 1990s. The 1955 Freedom Charter calls for the “right to trade” for all, regardless of race, but it certainly does not envisage the transfer of R500-billion to BEE share-holders, or dodgy tendering out to corporately captured ANC factions. Insofar as the Charter concerns itself with ownership, it is not individual black capitalist ownership that it promotes, but rather collective national ownership. Its focus is not remotely on share-holding, but rather on empowering productive workers (“land to the tillers”).

At its 1969 Morogoro Conference the ANC clearly envisaged its multi-class character to require working class leadership, in alliance with the peasantry and the marginalised middle strata (black professionals, students, petty traders). It is this multi-class popular axis that lay at the heart of the revolutionary struggles of the 1980s and early 1990s.

This multi-class character has now been actively and dramatically re-

configured through the unleashing of a primitive accumulation process within the state and ANC. This re-configuration represents the growing hegemony of a new black bourgeois stratum over the ANC and over a wide range of middle strata, aspirant petty-entrepreneurs of all kinds. It is a thoroughly unstable and unsustainable hegemony. The turmoil wracking the ANC at present is testament to this fact.

What is required is a different alignment of class forces, based on social solidarity and not dog-eats-dog accumulation. This re-configuration of class forces requires a different multi-class axis centred on the proletariat in its widest sense (the employed, the under-employed, and the radically unemployed) together with a broad range of popular forces, emerging middle strata, productive entrepreneurs, the land-hungry, and productive SMMEs and co-ops.

Our class re-configured ANC-Alliance requires a new class re-configuration. Without it the ANC will continue on its downward spiral of decline. ●

CC STATEMENT

Towards a reconfigured Alliance

The SACP's last CC of 2017 focused on the need to reconfigure the Alliance - including through lessons from the Metsimaholo election

The Augmented SACP Central Committee was held in Ekurhuleni from 1 to 3 December. As is customary, the last CC of each year is expanded to include a wider representation from SACP provinces and districts, and from the Young Communist League.

In the political report presented by General Secretary Cde Blade Nzimande, the central focus was on progress made in regard to the key resolutions of our 14th Congress held in July, and specifically on questions related to:

- the current deteriorated state of the ANC-headed Alliance;
- the importance for the SACP of working for a serious reconfiguration of the Alliance; and
- the simultaneous and related task of actively building a mobilised left progressive front.

Our 14th Party Congress resolved that the SACP should engage our Alliance partners and other progressive forces on these perspectives and on the future possible modalities of SACP and more generally left electoral participation. It was further resolved that these engagements should be at all levels – national, provincial and local.

It has not been easy to have a constructive official engagement with the ANC on these issues, although from many quarters of the ANC there are expressions of interest in taking these discussions further. Clearly, and understandably, the ANC is currently caught in the run-up to its own highly contested national elective conference.

While there is interest from the side of our other Alliance partners, COSATU and SANCO, it is clear that there, too, a better sense of what they will regard as the way forward will only become clearer in the new year. However, there is strong support from both for pursuing actively the desirability of a reconfiguration of the Alliance. The SACP is certainly not alone in believing that the ANC on its current trajectory is unable to offer unifying leadership to our Alliance and, indeed, to the country.

The CC agreed that while the ANC's December conference will, for better or for worse, have a major impact on the future viability of our Alliance, it would be a mistake for the Party to over-invest expectations in the conference. Contrary to much media reporting, the SACP is not supporting a particular slate or presidential candidate.

We do however have some basic and principled expectations of the conference. In wishing delegates to the Conference well, we urge them to elect a leadership collective that will move the ANC out of its current leadership paralysis. The Alliance, and indeed our country, require an ANC leadership collective that is finally prepared to lead decisively not just in words but in action:

- the struggle against corporate capture of the state, other forms of corruption, and general leadership arrogance;
- the establishment of an independent judicial commission into state capture;
- support for the criminal prosecution, without fear or favour, of all those exposed in the Gupta e-mail and parliamentary hearings; and

- the removal of serially incompetent ministers.

Needless to say, this will also require dealing with the NPA, the Hawks, SARS, and SASSA, amongst others, as well as intensifying the first early steps in rebuilding honest and effective governance of key SOEs.

The SACP notes and commends the increasingly effective role that the majority in the ANC parliamentary caucus has been playing in leading parliamentary investigations into corporate capture of key parts of the state. We urge that the Energy Portfolio Committee investigate alarming evidence of probable gross financial criminality in PetroSA and the Strategic Fuel Fund.

Metsimaholo by-election

The CC congratulated the SACP Free State comrades on their performance in the Metsimaholo by-election and thanked communities for their support to the Party. While the SACP had hoped to achieve a marginally better result, winning three council seats after only campaigning for two weeks was a remarkable achievement. We also achieved this result in the face of considerable destabilisation efforts and threats emanating from Ace Magashule and his corporately captured Free State ANC faction.

This is the first time in the post-apartheid period that the SACP has contested an election independently. It has sent a strong signal that we are indeed prepared to do so, and we refuse to be taken for granted.

In the course of campaigning the SACP encountered considerable anti-ANC hostility from working class communities. Notwithstanding this, the SACP did not run an anti-ANC electoral campaign – although this might well have won us considerably more votes. We ran a campaign focusing on the socio-economic conditions and aspirations of working class communities and on the principled basis that the ANC

does not belong to the corrupt and corporately captured. Already there are signs that this local action, occurring weeks before the ANC's December Conference, has the capacity to contribute to a more sober engagement about the imperative of a radical re-configuration of the functioning of the Alliance, if we are to arrest the continued precipitous decline of the ANC.

The SACP warns the Magashule and the Free State corporately captured faction that any punitive action directed against SACP members in the province will be vigorously countered and will only backfire against him and his faction within the ANC itself. We also note that this faction has threatened another re-run of the by-election. The SACP is not scared of such an eventuality – it would give us much greater scope for campaigning this time around. However, plunging the Metsimaholo municipality into prolonged paralysis for narrow party political electoral purposes would be a gravely irresponsible position to take.

A full-scale inquiry into Naspers & MultiChoice buying government policy

The SACP has for some years been calling for a full-scale inquiry into the corruption surrounding government's decision to change its Set Top Box (STB) policy to remove encryption to solely benefit Multi-Choice. Current government policy is in contradiction with ANC policy in favour of encryption to reduce monopoly power and encourage competition in the pay-TV sector. We note Naspers's Koos Bekker's high-handed dismissal of the STB matter as a marginal issue. Of course he would – the failure to move to encryption entrenches the absolute domination of our media sector by the Naspers-MultiChoice monopoly born and bred in the apartheid-era. Related to this, we have also called for a full inquiry into the corruption surrounding the agreement between SABC and MultiChoice in which a private monopoly was gifted the valuable public archive. Monopoly capital cannot be allowed to corruptly buy

government policies and public assets!

The revelations this week of the minutes of SABC Board meetings with MultiChoice have reinforced our call for this inquiry. It is unacceptable for Naspers and MultiChoice to carry out an investigation into themselves. We call on Parliament to initiate a full-scale inquiry and for other independent statutory bodies to do so. Koos Bekker from Naspers, Imtiaz Patel from Multi-Choice and their cohorts must face the music.

The Gupta emails also point to suspicious payments by MultiChoice to ANN7. Knowing how Naspers and Multi-Choice operate, we also call for this to be investigated.

We have repeatedly said neither the Guptas nor the Ruperts! Now let's tackle the monopoly capital of the Bekkers!

Electricity and water tariff increases

Over the past 10 years the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (Nersa) has approved electricity tariff increases of almost 353%. These increases are way beyond initial justifiable levels and are without policy guidance. The increases also reflect years of mismanagement and corporate looting of Eskom. The proposed 19,9% increase for 2018/9 cannot be justified. It will have a seriously negative impact on the lives of ordinary South Africans as well as on mining and industrial users with further retrenchments a likely outcome.

Water tariff increases are now scheduled to be increased by 14,4% with even greater impact on the working class and poor. This cannot be allowed. This proposed increase comes on top of the Minister of Water and Sanitation announcing that she proposes to cut off water supply to some 30 municipalities. This high-handed pronouncement fails to address the underlying problems of municipal sustainability as well as massive irregular spending in her own Department.

Stop gender-based violence! Build community safety and cohesion

Over the coming year, and following our 14th Congress resolution, the SACP will be intensifying our “Know and Act in Your Neighbourhood” campaign around the struggle to deal with gender-based violence, and all other symptoms of social alienation and disintegration in our communities. The SACP will intensify our work with many local and sector-focused formations in building community police forums, neighbourhood watches, safe-houses for those abused, support for victims in the courts, and other community initiatives to deal with the scourge of patriarchal and other forms of violence. The militarisation of the SAPS is aggravating the crisis. Weak institutional capacity to provide effective support in our government community safety and criminal justice also needs to be addressed.

Morocco

The SACP is deeply concerned at news that government has abandoned its longstanding and principled opposition to Morocco’s continued colonial occupation of West Sahara. We will be engaging with our Alliance partners on this matter.

Centenary of the Bolshevik Revolution

The CC noted the important commemorative events organised by the SACP throughout South Africa on the occasion of the centenary of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. For the first time in human history workers overthrew the oppressive rule of the bourgeoisie and embarked on the difficult route towards socialism in the face of unceasing destabilisation by the imperialist powers. In the course of these commemorations the SACP noted the absolutely central and selfless role played by the Soviet Union in the struggle against colonialism and white minority rule in Southern Africa. Whatever its own failures and ultimate stagna-

tion, the Bolshevik Revolution remains a clarion call to the workers and oppressed of the world, still suffering under the grim heel of imperialist oppression, in a world facing the prospects of capitalist-driven ecological and civilizational collapse. A world based on social solidarity and environmental care is both possible and imperative. ●

THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

October 1917 and the survival of capitalism

Prabhat Patnaik argues that the Russian revolution was the first revolution in history that was theoretically conceived and planned, and dwells on its contemporary relevance

The October Revolution was the first revolution in human history that was theoretically conceived and executed according to a plan. While the February Revolution, like the earlier bourgeois revolutions in England and France, had occurred spontaneously, this was not true of October. At the same time, it certainly was not what its detractors often suggest, namely a mere Blanquist uprising. It was not an uprising of the “revolution is a wonderful thing, so let us have a shot at it” variety. On the contrary it was based on a precise theoretical assessment of the conjuncture, and on a development of this theory to a level where, to borrow Georg Lukács’s words, “theory burst into praxis.”¹

It is this theoretical comprehension of the conjuncture underlying the revolution that explains its sweep, the enormous energy it generated, the profound changes it wrought in the world, and the extent to which it threatened the very existence of capitalism. That this threat proved ultimately to be evanescent is because the conjuncture itself got altered in a way which the earlier theoretical understanding of it had not anticipated.

The worker-peasant alliance

This theoretical understanding of the conjuncture developed in stages. Two steps were of particular importance. The first, going back to the early twentieth century, and expressed in V. I. Lenin's polemic against the "New Iskra" trend of Alexander Martynov and others within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, to which all of them belonged, was the understanding that in countries coming late to capitalism, the newly emerging bourgeoisie was no longer capable of completing the bourgeois revolution against the feudal order, the way for instance the French bourgeoisie had done in the revolution of 1789.² This was because in the new situation that confronted it, it was afraid that an attack on feudal property could well rebound into an attack on bourgeois property itself. It therefore tended to make compromises with the old feudal order, which implied that the task of carrying forward the bourgeois revolution, and especially of freeing the peasantry from its feudal yoke, now fell upon the proletariat in these countries, despite its relatively small size and its belated appearance on the historical scene.

This necessitated a worker-peasant alliance under the leadership of the working class. But such an alliance, having carried forward the bourgeois revolution against the feudal order, could not just stop there, with the working class merely reverting to the role of an exploited class within the new, now-unleashed, capitalist order whose unleashing it had itself helped to bring about. The working class, having carried forward the bourgeois revolution, would obviously push on toward socialism in an uninterrupted revolutionary process, during which of course the precise constituents of the worker-peasant alliance would keep changing. As Lenin put it in his *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (1905), "The proletariat must carry the democratic revolution to completion, allying to itself the mass of the peasantry in order to crush the autocracy's resistance by force and par-

alyze the bourgeoisie's instability. The proletariat must accomplish the socialist revolution, allying to itself the mass of the semi-proletarian elements of the population, so as to crush the bourgeoisie's resistance by force and paralyze the instability of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie.”³

This concept of a proletariat-led worker-peasant alliance with changing class composition over time, carrying the democratic revolution to completion and moving beyond it to socialism, was not just a major step in understanding the conjuncture. It represented a fundamental advance within Marxist theory itself in several ways: first, it was a shift in the attitude toward the peasantry, an inclusion of it within the ranks of the revolutionary forces which the working class could lead. The bourgeoisie's ability to get the support of the peasantry in the French Revolution had stood it in good stead not only at that time but also later, in defeating the Paris Commune (with Adolphe Thiers instilling the fear among the French peasantry, beneficiaries of the 1789 revolution, that an attack on bourgeois property would also entail an attack on petty property); in the new conjuncture, however, the peasantry could become a part of the proletarian camp. Second, this shift in attitude toward the peasantry also made Marxism, till then confined to Europe, a revolutionary doctrine of relevance to the entire world, no matter how limited the degree of its capitalist development had been. And third, the transition through stages to socialism was now the course that all countries in the world had to follow for the liberation of the people. Socialism was not just a matter concerning advanced capitalist countries; it could also be inscribed on the revolutionary agenda of underdeveloped capitalist countries, which amounted to a total rejection of any attempt to reduce Marxism to a “stage theory” where different modes of production had to succeed one another in a pre-determined manner as a matter of historical inevitability. True, the journey of the advanced

capitalist countries to socialism could be a direct one, while that of the underdeveloped capitalist countries had to be a prolonged historical transition passing through different phases; but socialism could be the ultimate goal of all revolutionary struggles everywhere.

Imperialism

The second important theoretical step for understanding the conjuncture came with Lenin's theory of imperialism, developed in the context of the First World War. The fact that centralisation of capital in the realms of finance and industry, an immanent tendency under capitalism according to Karl Marx, had led to the formation of monopolies in these spheres, and of a small financial oligarchy that straddled both spheres and controlled vast amounts of "finance capital," and the fact that it developed a "personal union" with state personnel, exercising control over the state and altering its character, constituted the essence of the new phase of capitalism. In this phase, competition between capitals took the form of rivalries between different monopoly combines, belonging to the different advanced capitalist countries, to acquire "economic territory" across the world at each other's expense; and in a world already partitioned among them, such rivalry necessarily took the form of attempts at repartitioning it through wars.⁴ These wars, of which the First World War was an instance, forced workers of these different countries to kill each other across the trenches; they also drew in the oppressed people of the colonies, semi-colonies, and dependencies, as cannon-fodder for promoting the interests of the different financial oligarchies. Capitalism in other words had arrived at a stage where periodic wars for repartitioning an already partitioned world, to reflect the changing relative strengths of the different powers (which necessarily occurred because of the ubiquity of "uneven development" under capitalism), had become inevitable.

This understanding of the latest stage of capitalism, which Lenin, following J. A. Hobson, called “imperialism,” had several implications. First, an important element of Marxist theory had been a recognition that no mode of production got superseded until it had become historically obsolete. Typically, however, this “historical obsolescence” had been defined in narrowly economic terms, in terms of engulfment in a protracted crisis. Eduard Bernstein had asked for a “revision” of Marxism, to substitute an agenda of reforms within the capitalist system for a revolutionary overthrow of it, on the grounds that no such protracted crisis or “collapse” was on the horizon; and Rosa Luxemburg had asserted the revolutionary vision by developing a theory of accumulation of capital that pointed to an eventual collapse of the system. The Leninist argument altered the basis of this debate altogether.⁵ Capitalism had become historically obsolete, or “moribund” as he called it, because in its imperialist stage it engulfed humanity in periodic and devastating wars. The only choice it offered the workers in the advanced countries was between killing fellow workers across the trenches and turning the guns on the system itself, between “socialism and barbarism” (to use Luxemburg’s words).

Second, it was not the workers in the advanced capitalist countries alone, but the “working people” of the oppressed countries too, who were victims of imperialist exploitation and were used as cannon fodder in these wars, who also underwent a change because of these wars. Their consciousness as well as training (including military training) developed by leaps and bounds because of these wars, and they too rose up against the rule of capital because they too were faced with the same choice, between barbarism and liberation.

Third, not only had the system become historically obsolescent in this general sense, but it had brought a world revolution on to the historical agenda as an imminent phenomenon. The choice between bar-

barism and socialism had to be made right then, as a practical choice that had been thrust on humanity because of imperialism and its attendant wars.

If the first step in understanding the conjuncture was to see that all countries within this conjuncture had to proceed through various routes toward socialism as a condition for the liberation of their peoples, then the second step in understanding was that their journeys were interconnected, that imperialism had linked them in a chain, whose breaking at the “weakest link” would set off a collapse of the chain altogether. And such a break in the chain was imminent within this conjuncture. A consequence of this understanding was the setting up of an International, the Communist International, the like of which the world had never seen, where delegates from France, Germany, and Britain rubbed shoulders with their comrades from China, India, Mexico, Egypt, and Vietnam.

Understanding the conjuncture

The view underlying the October Revolution that capitalism had reached a climacteric, that it simply could not go on as before, was shared by many thinkers of the time, including even staunchly anti-communist ones, which suggests that it was a fairly accurate understanding of the conjuncture. Thus, John Maynard Keynes, writing in 1933, had this to say: “The decadent international but individualistic capitalism, in the hands of which we found ourselves after the war, is not a success. It is not intelligent, it is not beautiful, it is not just, it is not virtuous—and it doesn’t deliver the goods. In short, we dislike it, and we are beginning to despise it. But when we wonder what to put in its place, we are extremely perplexed.”⁶ Even Keynes had begun to “despise” the capitalism of that time.

Earlier, in his book *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, Keynes

had given a vivid description of the disintegration of world capitalism, which Lenin had quoted at length at the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920 to argue that the time for a world revolution had arrived. As Lenin put it: “If on the one hand the economic position of the masses has become intolerable, and, on the other hand, the disintegration described by Keynes has set in and is growing among the negligible minority of all-powerful victor countries, then we are in the presence of the maturing of the two conditions for the world revolution.”⁷ The perception of Lenin and the Bolsheviks with regard to the state of world capitalism, of which they considered the October Revolution to be the first significant product, was thus shared by many; and it represented a valid understanding of the conjuncture.

This conjuncture was to last from the run up to the First World War to the immediate post-Second World War years when decolonisation began. Among its many features, the key one related to inter-imperialist rivalry. The First World War, the ruthless Treaty of Versailles (whose lambasting by Keynes was highlighted by Lenin), the Great Depression, the rise of fascism, the massive annexationist drives by the fascist countries, and the Second World War, were all expressions in one way or another of a state of acute inter-imperialist rivalry.

Even the survival of the Soviet Union was attributed by Lenin to the fact of inter-imperialist rivalry. In one of his last articles, “Better Fewer, but Better,” he attributed the failure of the joint military intervention by several imperialist countries in support of the Russian counter-revolution during the Civil War to the conflicts between the imperialist countries of the West and the East, and wondered if these conflicts would “give us a second respite.”⁸

The conflicts between the imperialist countries of the West and the East, and those between the victors and the vanquished in the First World War, which the Treaty of Versailles had exacerbated, reached their

climax in the Second World War. However, this climax also marked the end of the very historical conjuncture that Lenin and the Bolsheviks had grappled with, whose theoretical understanding had been developed by them to a level where it had “burst” into the revolutionary praxis of October and the subsequent struggles for a world revolution.

The end of the war saw a great advance of communist rule; an assertiveness of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries, of which the defeat of Winston Churchill by the Labour Party in the British elections, and the enormous strength acquired by the French and Italian communist parties were obvious manifestations; and an unprecedented restiveness among the people of the colonies, semi-colonies, and dependencies. Metropolitan capital, weakened and disoriented by the war, was forced to make several concessions, of which the three most significant ones were: decolonisation; state intervention in demand management for maintaining high levels of employment, which finance capital, always opposed to such direct intervention and responsible for preventing it in the pre-war years, was nevertheless forced to accept; and the institution of democratic governments formed through elections based on universal adult franchise (which, even in France, came only in 1945).

These concessions created the impression that capitalism had “changed,” that the old capitalism had given way to a new “welfare capitalism.” This idea persisted despite the fact that state intervention to achieve high levels of employment in the United States, the leading capitalist power, took the form of large-scale military expenditure, and also despite the fact that notwithstanding formal decolonisation (which itself was often incomplete), metropolitan powers were everywhere reluctant to cede control over third world resources to the new post-colonial states.⁹ Nevertheless, the perception remained that capitalism had fundamentally changed, because some of the gains made

by the workers in the metropolis, and by the people of the third world, were indeed real and substantial.

But alongside these changes, the postwar conjuncture was also marked by something that went beyond what Leninism had visualised, namely a replacement of acute inter-imperialist rivalry by an overarching domination of one power (which some called “super-imperialism”). The fundamental perception of the Communist movement about the imperialist stage of capitalism, on the basis of which the proposition about the imminence of world revolution had been argued, namely that it would be characterised by inter-imperialist rivalry and wars, ceased to be valid in the postwar conjuncture. No doubt the Cuban and Vietnamese Revolutions occurred during this conjuncture, but they were more a belated product of the earlier conjuncture, rather than a specific product of the postwar one.

Nevertheless, this postwar conjuncture itself proved to be only an interregnum. Centralisation of capital, the tendency underscored by Marx, led to the formation not just of multinational corporations, but of enormous blocs of finance. These blocs were fed from several sources: through continuous US current account deficits during the Bretton Woods years, when the US dollar was deemed “as good as gold,” exchangeable at \$35 for an ounce of gold; through huge petro-dollar deposits after the Opec price-hike; and through savings pouring in as deposits into the financial system during the prolonged postwar boom that was engineered through state intervention in demand management. Finance capital in this new situation, keen to have the unrestricted freedom to move all over the globe, sought to break down national boundaries. It succeeded in its effort and instituted a regime of “globalisation” that, in contrast to the earlier postwar regime, entailed freer mobility of goods, services, and capital flows, including of financial flows, across national boundaries.

The regime of globalisation

Inter-imperialist rivalry remains muted in the regime of globalisation for a further important reason, not just because of the overwhelming strength of one imperialist power, as was the case in the postwar conjuncture, but also because finance capital itself gets globalised and hence opposed to any partitioning of the globe into spheres of influence of particular powers that may hinder its free global mobility.

While this fact of muted inter-imperialist rivalry has been noted by many, they have interpreted it as signifying a vindication of the position of Karl Kautsky, who had visualised the possibility of an “ultra-imperialism,” against Lenin, who had emphasised the existence of a perennial state of inter-imperialist rivalry. This however is erroneous. Both Lenin and Kautsky had in mind a context of national finance capitals, where the finance capital that occupied center-stage was nation-based and nation-state-aided. This is not the case today, when finance capital itself is international, an altogether different entity from the finance capital of which both Lenin and Kautsky spoke. The muting of inter-imperialist rivalry in the era of globalisation is not because of a “joint exploitation of the world by *internationally united* finance capitals,” as Kautsky had suggested, but because of the emergence of an *international* finance capital.

This fact is also lost sight of in a good deal of the discussion on “multi-polarity.” Here, it is often suggested that in a world where “multi-polarity” appears to be emerging, we may witness a revival of inter-imperialist rivalry. But what such a prognostication misses is that it is not just the political factors that have to be taken into account in this context but also, above all, the economic phenomena that underlie them; and a key element of these economic phenomena is the hegemony of international finance capital.

The fact that we have international finance capital in a world of

nation-states, contrary to Keynes's prescription in the 1933 essay that "finance above all must be national," constitutes a defining feature of contemporary globalisation. This implies that the nation-state willy-nilly has to accede to the demands of finance, for otherwise finance would simply leave its shores en masse to move elsewhere, precipitating a crisis. The fact that no matter what the complexion of the government that the people elect, it must follow the same economic policies, namely those that are favored by international finance capital, in order to prevent such an occurrence, implies a basic undermining of democracy. In addition, however, being caught in the vortex of globalised finance has several important economic implications.

First, it entails a change in the nature of the state. Instead of positioning itself, notwithstanding its class character, as an entity standing above society and apparently looking after the interests of all, the state now becomes more concerned with promoting exclusively the interests of globalised finance capital, on the plea that the nation's interests coincide with interests of such capital. (Moody's upgrading of the credit rating of a country becomes a matter of national pride.) A major fall-out of this, especially in a third world context, is the withdrawal of state support and protection from the petty production sector, including peasant agriculture, and exposing the vast mass of petty producers to encroachment by big capital, including multinational corporations.

The anti-colonial struggle over much of the third world had enlisted the support of the peasantry on the promise that the post-colonial regime would protect peasant agriculture from encroachment by big capital, and also from world market price fluctuations; and most post-colonial regimes had in varying degrees protected and promoted peasant agriculture and petty production generally. The beneficiaries of such measures no doubt had been to a much greater extent the prosperous segments among such producers; but the sector as a whole, though

subject to tendencies toward capitalist development *from within*, had been protected from incursion by big capital *from outside*. The neoliberal state withdraws such support and protection, plunging this vast sector into a crisis. Large numbers of petty producers, and labourers dependent upon such production, either linger on, sinking deeper into misery, or migrate to cities in search of non-existent jobs, or (as is happening in India) take recourse to mass suicides.

Second, there is an increase in the relative size of labour reserves because the increase in labour demand, even with high rates of GDP growth, is not large enough even to absorb the natural increase in work-force, let alone the displaced petty producers. Hence, the real wages of workers, even of organosed workers, scarcely increase, despite increases in labour productivity. This raises the share of surplus within the third world, which is saddled with large labour reserves, and hence increases income inequality.

Nevertheless, this is not true only of the third world. Since capital becomes mobile between the advanced and underdeveloped countries, even advanced country workers become subject to competition from the low-wage workers of the third world, and hence to the baneful effects of third world labour reserves that keep these wages low. This means that the real wages of advanced country workers also do not rise (though of course they do not actually fall to third world levels), even as labour productivity rises in these economies. There is an increase in the share of the surplus and hence in income inequality in these countries too as a result. (In the United States, according to Joseph Stiglitz, the real wage of an average male worker has not only not increased between 1968 and 2011, but has even decreased slightly.)¹⁰ What happens in short is a rise in the share of surplus in world output.

Third, since the marginal propensity to consume out of wage incomes is higher than that from incomes derived from the economic

surplus (which typically accrue to the rich), the rise in the share of surplus gives rise to a tendency toward over-production in the world economy, exactly the way that Baran and Sweezy had argued in the context of the US economy in the 1950s and '60s.¹¹

Fourth, the capacity of any nation-state to intervene against this ex ante tendency toward overproduction (which, according to Baran and Sweezy, is what the United States had done through larger military expenditure in the fifties and the sixties) is thwarted in the regime of globalisation. For state intervention to offset this tendency toward over-production, it must be financed either through a fiscal deficit, or through taxes that fall mainly on savings, which means taxes on capitalists (whether on profits or on capital stock) since their propensity to save is high. But no nation-state in an economy that is caught in the vortex of globalised finance can either run a fiscal deficit (beyond a legislated 3 percent of GDP in most countries), or tax capitalists, for fear of causing an exodus of capital. And the United States, which neither has any “fiscal responsibility legislation” (limiting fiscal deficit to 3 percent of GDP), nor needs to worry about capital flight, as its currency is still considered, even in the post-Bretton Woods world, to be “as good as gold,” is reluctant to run fiscal deficits. This is because in the regime of globalisation, in which US corporations have been locating plants abroad to take advantage of low wages, a fiscal stimulus would entail generation of employment abroad, for importing goods into the United States which would raise that country’s external debt.

The tendency toward an ex ante overproduction therefore creates a structural crisis that can at best be restrained by occasional asset-price “bubbles,” but manifests itself when such “bubbles” collapse.¹² Thus, the regime of globalisation entails growing inequality, stagnating wages, a decimation of petty production causing absolute immiseration of large segments of the working population of the third world, and a ten-

dency toward a structural crisis that can at best be kept at bay through occasional “bubbles,” whose collapse worsens further the conditions of the working people of the world through larger unemployment. Fiscal conservatism acts in the direction of not only accentuating the crisis (since it has a so-called “pro-cyclical” effect), but also effecting cuts in welfare expenditure and the “social wage.”

In contrast to the postwar conjuncture of *dirigisme*, which had seen a muting of inter-imperialist rivalry together with concessions that capital had been forced to make, thereby creating the impression that “capitalism had changed,” the globalisation regime, though it continues to witness a muting of inter-imperialist rivalry, entails a “turning back of the clock” when it comes to the welfare state, the so-called “human face of capitalism,” both in the advanced and in the underdeveloped capitalist economies. The ascendancy of international finance capital, while muting inter-imperialist rivalry, brings to the fore once more the extremely predatory nature of capitalism, the fact that, to use Keynes’s language, “it is not just,” “it is not virtuous,” “it does not deliver the goods,” and it is capable only of being “despised.”

Transcending the conjuncture

Overcoming the distress of the working people in the current conjuncture requires state intervention toward this end. This in turn requires not just that the state should be sensitive to the plight of the working people, but that it must also have the autonomy from thralldom to the caprices of international finance capital to be able to pursue an agenda that benefits the working people. This autonomy can be achieved in only one of two ways. One is through the coming together of the major nation-states (creating, as it were, a surrogate world-state) that could overcome the opposition of international finance capital to the implementation of an agenda favoring the working people; the other is

through countries, singly or as a group, breaking away from the vortex of globalised finance, and putting in place capital controls that would give them the autonomy to pursue an alternative agenda.

Let me elaborate. An increase in the level of aggregate demand is essential to reduce unemployment in the world economy; in the absence of such an increase, any particular country's trying to raise employment through mere protectionism, such as what Trump is doing, amounts to a "beggar-thy-neighbor" policy, i.e., to an export of unemployment, which would necessarily invite retaliation from other countries, undermining capitalists' "confidence" further, and hence accentuating overall unemployment and crisis.

But in a situation where, not surprisingly, monetary policy has proved incapable of raising demand, an increase in world aggregate demand can occur only through fiscal means, of which there are only two possibilities.¹³ One is through a coordinated fiscal stimulus by several major nation-states in defiance of the wishes of international finance capital. But such a move (which incidentally was also mooted in the 1930s by a group of German trade unionists, and also by Keynes) can only occur as a result of pressure exercised by the coordinated struggles by the workers of these countries, of which there is no sign at present.¹⁴

The second way to raise aggregate demand (other than by "beggar-thy-neighbor" policies) is for individual countries to delink themselves from the vortex of globalised capital flows by imposing capital controls and providing an expansionary fiscal stimulus to their respective economies through larger government expenditure financed by a fiscal deficit or a tax on capitalists. Since the possibility of forging a worker-peasant alliance that can sustain such a state is far greater within a particular country than across countries, transcending the current conjuncture requires delinking from the existing regime of globalisation (the exact extent of such delinking will have to be determined by circumstances).

Of course, transcending the current conjuncture through the building up of a worker-peasant alliance within a particular country (which would typically be a large third world country with sizeable petty production) cannot be the end of the story. Just as, in Lenin's analysis, the carrying forward of the democratic revolution to completion by a worker-peasant alliance was not the end of the story, as it became part of a process of transition to socialism, likewise delinking from globalisation, to reverse its baneful consequences upon the workers and petty producers, by a state based on a worker-peasant alliance, will be part of a transition, through stages, toward socialism.

Transcending the conjuncture, in other words, becomes part of a process of transcending the system itself. Even if perchance the revolutionary forces constituting the worker-peasant alliance become oblivious to this necessity, the opposition of international finance capital to their (apparently modest) effort to transcend the conjuncture itself would (in Marx's words) "drum dialectics" into them, by reminding them of the need to go beyond the system even for going beyond the conjuncture.

The current conjuncture in short revives once again the relevance of the Leninist agenda that informed the October Revolution, though for reasons that are not identical with the earlier ones. To the peasants' desire for freedom from the feudal yoke is now added the peasants' desire (and that of other petty producers of the third world as well) for freedom from the oppression of the neoliberal regime imposed by international finance capital under globalisation. The democratic revolution now must encompass delinking from the regime of globalisation so that the nation-state acquires an autonomy vis-à-vis international finance capital, which in turn is a condition for any political intervention by a worker-peasant alliance to be effective. Globalisation has created both the necessity and possibility of a worker-peasant alliance, and has

brought the world to such a pass that the choice is between moving forward through the forging of such an alliance or remaining mired in crisis where finance capital will increasingly rely on the prop of fascism to sustain its hegemony.

However, an important question arises here. While capitalism has once more assumed a form where it deserves only to be “despised,” the muting of inter-imperialist rivalry makes sustaining any effort to escape the hegemony of international finance capital that much more difficult, unlike even in Lenin’s time. Transcending the conjuncture itself becomes difficult in the absence of disunity among the major capitalist powers. Or, put differently, the muting of inter-imperialist rivalry appears to create a “no-exit” situation, where despite the oppressiveness of the current conjuncture any escape from it seems impossible.

While the answer to this question must lie in praxis, what it does suggest is that the preservation of a strong worker-peasant alliance becomes that much more important for transcending the current conjuncture, even though it may make the transition to socialism that much slower. A major cause for the debility of the Soviet Union, which the October Revolution had created, was the difficulty of maintaining the worker-peasant alliance; in fact its rupture through forced collectivisation is what left a permanent scar on the new system. That weakness must be avoided.¹⁵ The need for delinking from the current regime of globalisation is often not appreciated within the left, which makes significant segments of the left, no doubt unwittingly, subject to the hegemony of neoliberalism. Breaking out of that hegemony is the first priority for transcending the current conjuncture. ●

Notes

1. Georg Lukács, *Lenin* (London: New Left, 1970).
2. V I Lenin, *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, in *Selected Works*, vol 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977).
3. *Ibid*, 494.
4. V I Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, in *Selected Works*, vol 1.
5. On this, see Paul M Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1956).
6. J M Keynes, "National Self-Sufficiency," *Yale Review* 22, no 4 (1933): 755–69.
7. V I Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 397.
8. Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol 3, 724.
9. See Harry Magdoff, "Militarism and Imperialism," *Monthly Review* 21, no 9 (February 1970): 1–14.
10. Joseph Stiglitz, "Inequality Is Holding Back the Recovery," *New York Times*, January 13, 2013.
11. Paul A Baran and Paul M Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966).
12. This argument has been set out in greater detail in Prabhat Patnaik, "Capitalism and Its Current Crisis," *Monthly Review* 67, no 8 (January 2016): 1–13.
13. Michał Kalecki had noted the inadequacy of monetary policy for stimulating activity in a classic article, "Political Aspects of Full Employment," reprinted in *Selected Essays on the Dynamics of the Capitalist Economy 1933–1970* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1971).
14. C P Kindleberger, *The World in Depression 1929–1939* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986).
15. A view, widely prevalent on the left, that contributes to this weakness is that any petty production for the market is a progenitor of capitalism. This is neither theoretically nor historically true. See Prabhat Patnaik, "Defining the Concept of

Commodity Production," *Studies in People's History* 2, no. 1 (2015): 117–25.

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THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

South Africa and “The Great Events in Russia”

Blade Nzimande discusses the seismic impact of 1917 on the nascent national democratic struggle in SA

The dramatic events unfolding in Russia in late 1917 were eagerly followed, as best as they could be, by a small group of radical socialists in the far south of the African continent. On 16 November 1917, less than two weeks after the beginning of the Bolshevik revolution, their weekly newspaper, *The International*, published an editorial titled, “The Great Events in Russia”.

“The cable news regarding the revolution in Russia is so confusing and every day so contradictory that it is hopeless attempting to build on them”, the editorial noted. Nonetheless, sensing something important was happening, it observed accurately that the “Maximalist [Bolshevik] wing of the Social Democratic Party has been gaining strength since the political revolution”. The editorial ended on a cautionary note, “should the Social Democrats fail, we can expect the most bloody massacre of the working men of Petrograd that history has ever recorded. Long live the Social Revolution, the light of the East.”

A few months later, in March 1918, with the imperialist-directed counterrevolution unleashed in Russia, *The International* called on the South African working class to show solidarity with their Russian comrades: “Workers of South Africa! Arouse from your submissiveness and lethargy, and show that you see through this foul conspiracy of Inter-

national Capital against the Russian workmen. The cause of the Russian workmen is your cause. Workers of the world UNITE. You have a world to win.” The references to South African working class “submissiveness” and “lethargy” suggest that *The International* collective felt somewhat isolated in South Africa in their enthusiasm and concern for the events unfolding in Russia.

The International was the organ of the International Socialist League (ISL) which, like other splits in the socialist movement at the time, had broken away in 1915 from the South African Labour Party. The break was in principled opposition to the South African Labour Party’s support for the newly formed Union of South Africa government’s participation in the inter-imperialist First World War. The ISL was the nucleus of what, in 1921, was to become the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), affiliated to the Communist International.

Radical socialist traditions were brought into South Africa by white workers and professionals drawn largely to the country by the mining industry, which experienced a massive boom in the late 19th century and then, again, following the end of the Anglo-Boer War at the turn of the century, and the establishment of the Union of South Africa as a British Dominion in 1910. Another early radical socialist influence was from Jewish immigrants fleeing pogroms in Tsarist Russia and Eastern Europe. This latter group had ties with protagonists involved in the revolutionary events unfolding in faraway Eastern Europe.

By late 1918 the ISL collective began to feel greater optimism about the Russian revolution. The collective published a pamphlet titled *The Bolsheviks are coming*, in English as well as in isiZulu and seSotho, and addressing itself: “To the workers of South Africa – black as well as white ... The hope of the workers is coming from Bolshevism. The free commonwealth of labour is an actual fact in Russia today”, the pamphlet proclaimed.

“Bolshevism means the victory of the wage-earners. It will soon spread to Britain, France, America and throughout the world. Get Ready for the World-wide Republic of Labour.”

Clearly, the ISL collective at the time shared the same belief as the Bolsheviks that the October Revolution was a catalyst in a semi-peripheral society that would soon ignite socialist revolutions in the more developed capitalist societies of the West. The strategic calculation was that the westward spread of the revolution (and, presumably, only the westward spread), would create the conditions both for the defence and consolidation of socialism in Russia, and for a future world revolution.

Yet, as we know, a different trajectory was to emerge out of the October Revolution. It was a trajectory with significant implications for the socialist struggle in South Africa and, indeed, through much of the world.

The October Revolution & the critical strategic role of Lenin

Compared to all other preceding social revolutions, both the timing and character of the October 1917 Russian Revolution was informed by a strategic programmatic theory. As Prabhat Patnaik has written (see page 30), the Bolshevik Revolution was not a coup, nor was it an unplanned and purely spontaneous event. Unlike the Paris Commune, or the February 1917 Russian uprising, the October Revolution was guided and led by a programmatic strategy, based on a Marxist analysis of the concrete reality. Lenin’s strategic and organisational role in this regard was absolutely central.

At the heart of Lenin’s contribution was his appreciation of the thoroughly dialectical nature of capitalism’s combined and uneven development. Lenin developed several inter-related core organising concepts that were critical for the October Revolution. In the first place, in

his polemical engagement with the *New Iskra* tradition, Lenin argued that in societies coming late to capitalism, the national bourgeoisie was not capable of abolishing the yoke of feudalism and of completing the bourgeois revolution. This leadership task fell to the working class in alliance with the peasantry, and, accordingly, the strategic agenda became a proletarian-led, uninterrupted advance beyond capitalism towards socialism.

This strategic perspective grounded the necessity for a worker-peasant alliance against feudalism in the first phase of the struggle. It, in effect, broke with a mechanical and stage-ist, evolutionism. As Patnaik puts it neatly: “this shift in attitude...made Marxism, till then confined to Europe, a revolutionary doctrine of relevance to the entire world, no matter how limited the degree of its capitalist development had been.”

The second and related insight was Lenin’s analysis of imperialism. In this he differed both with the reformist evolutionism of a Kautsky, who had argued that the imperialist stage of monopoly capital constituted a short and relatively painless stepping stone to socialism, and the more radical argument advanced by Rosa Luxemburg that the crises of imperialism, exemplified by the inter-imperialist First World War, signalled the imminent global collapse of capitalism requiring more or less spontaneous mass strikes to bring it down.

For Lenin, imperialism for all of its chronic instability, was not necessarily on the verge of systemic collapse. Rather, its crises and its uneven development created weak links within its global chain. In 1917, Tsarist Russia, staggering under a multiplicity of contradictions, was the “weakest link” and an active revolutionary advance there would set off a chain reaction across the system – with expectations particularly vested in countries like Germany, with a large working class and a mass socialist party.

The October Revolution turns eastward

The expectation shared by the Bolsheviks and their distant supporters in South Africa that the Russian Revolution would quickly herald successful socialist revolutions in the more developed West was not to be fulfilled. As Lenin and the Bolsheviks were to increasingly appreciate in the aftermath of the October 1917 revolution, there was at least one more national democratic task (historically associated with the emerging bourgeoisie in Europe) that, in the age of imperialism, would now require working class, socialist leadership if it were to be carried through with any degree of effectiveness— the resolution of the “national question” in colonial and semi-colonial societies.

While the Bolsheviks, and Lenin in particular, had, in advance of October 1917, correctly appreciated the imperative of working class leadership in alliance with the peasantry in the first phase of advancing a socialist revolution in the conditions of Russian society, there was initially less clarity about the revolutionary potential of national liberation struggles.

It was at the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920, that the issue received closer consideration. Lenin and the Indian communist, MN Roy, played leading roles in the “Commission on the National and the Colonial Question”. In his report back to the Congress on the commission’s work, Lenin wrote: “We have discussed whether it would be right or wrong, in principle and in theory, to state that the Communist International and the communist parties must support the bourgeois-democratic movement in backward countries. As a result of our discussion, we have arrived at the unanimous decision to speak of the national-revolutionary movement rather than of the ‘bourgeois-democratic’ movement.”

We can see here the origins of the communist strategy of supporting revolutionary national democratic struggles in colonial and semi-co-

lonial conditions. As Lenin goes on to explain, the idea of a “national-revolutionary movement” was advanced to distinguish between two diverging tendencies within national liberation struggles – the one national-revolutionary, the other a “bourgeois-democratic” reformist tendency: “if we speak of the bourgeois-democratic movement, we shall be obliterating all distinctions between the reformist and the revolutionary movements. Yet that distinction has been very clearly revealed of late in the backward and colonial countries...”

The Comintern urged communist parties in countries like India, Persia and China to work closely with, and to help radicalise, the “national revolutionary” tendency in the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist national struggles. This line of march had the additional strategic value in that it struck at the colonial under-belly of the major colonial powers then actively engaged in counter-revolutionary occupation and destabilisation of the Soviet Union.

The National Question in South Africa

The possibilities in this important strategic re-alignment were not immediately apparent to the radical socialist movement in South Africa. A December 1917 statement published in *The International* is fairly typical of both the progressive outlook and limitations of the ISL and of its successor, the CPSA, in the immediate years after the latter’s launch in 1921.

In calling for the abolition of various discriminatory measures directed against black workers (including pass laws, the mine-compound system and the denial of basic civil and political rights) the ISL statement declared that: “Society is divided into two classes: the working class, doing all the labour; and the idle class, living on the fruits of labour. Strictly speaking therefore there is no ‘Native Problem’. There is only a working class problem.”

For the ISL and the early CPSA the strategic line of march was one of class against class. In the South African reality, this strategic posture was accompanied by largely futile attempts to persuade the bulk of white workers that their racial prejudice against black workers was self-defeating.

Matters came to a head in the 1922 Rand Revolt which was inspired in part by the Bolshevik Revolution. White workers on the Rand launched an armed insurrectionary struggle against monopoly capital, and particularly against the Chamber of Mines. The immediate catalyst for the uprising was the imperialist-aligned mining bosses' attempt to employ black workers – at lower wages of course – in semi-skilled and artisanal mining jobs previously the exclusive preserve of white workers.

Many of the white workers were newly proletarianised Afrikaners, forced from the land by the scorched earth policies of British imperialism in the course of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1901). These workers brought to the Rand Revolt traditions of militant struggle, forming themselves into armed commandoes. The 1922 Rand Revolt was simultaneously a militant working class struggle against profit-maximising, imperialist-controlled monopoly capital and a racist struggle to preserve white privilege. It was a contradiction captured in one of the prominent banners displayed by the strikers: “Workers of the World Unite, For a White South Africa!”

The CPSA has sometimes been unfairly criticised as the author of the slogan. It was not. In fact, the Party tried valiantly to halt the white worker violence meted out against black workers who were seen as strike-breaking scabs. This white worker insurrectionary struggle was eventually crushed by the Smuts government but not without bloody clashes including the use of the air force to bomb workers entrenched in positions around Johannesburg. While the insurrection was defeated

and white workers lost the battle, they did not lose the war. In a whites-only electoral system, the Smuts government was ousted from office in general elections in 1924 and replaced by the Pact Government, an alliance of the Afrikaner National Party and the Labour Party. Among its key platforms was the further entrenchment of white Job Reservation and other related measures.

For the newly formed CPSA the Rand Revolt provided many salutary lessons. The Party now set about focusing more effectively on the recruitment of African workers and already by 1924 the overwhelming majority of its membership was black. This went hand-in-hand with communist-run night schools involving literacy and political training. The CPSA was beginning to learn in practice its own Leninist lessons. The majority of white workers were more obviously fully proletarianised, while the majority of black workers were often semi-proletarians, temporary migrant workers still retaining strong connections to their rural villages. However, this did not make the former necessarily more revolutionary than the latter. Lenin had argued against Bernstein that history does not necessarily progress from its apparently more advanced side. In our own conditions, South African communists were learning a similar lesson.

However, the CPSA had still not developed a clear strategic programme relevant to the actual situation in South Africa. The 1921 Lenin-Roy Second Comintern resolution on the potential of “national-revolutionary” movements in the colonies and semi-colonies does not at first seem to have had any resonance locally. Possibly its relevance was seen as applying to largely peasant-dominated societies with powerful remnants of feudalism like China, India and Persia at the time.

South Africa, by contrast, had undergone a dramatic, imperialist led, forced march into monopoly capitalism based on industrial mining from the last quarter of the 19th century. By the 1920s large swathes

not just of South Africa, but much of the region had been transformed into impoverished labour reserves exporting male migrant labour into the mines. The struggle in South Africa appeared still to be one of class-against-class, notwithstanding the reactionary role of many white workers and their political parties.

It was the 6th Congress of the Communist International in 1928 that mandated the CPSA to pursue a national democratic struggle as a “stage” towards a “workers’ and peasant republic”. This mandate called for the recognition that mobilisation around the grievances and aspirations of the nationally oppressed majority of South Africans was the critical motive force in the struggle for socialism against a double colonial reality – the continued hegemony of British imperialist capital and emergent national monopoly capital buttressed by an “internal colonialism” (white minority rule).

While acknowledging that the 1910 Union of South Africa had accorded a degree of political independence to South Africa under white minority rule, the CI correctly argued that South Africa remained an essentially **colonial** reality. This is how the Executive Committee of the CI in its Resolution on South Africa put it: “South Africa is a British Dominion of the colonial type. The development of relations of capitalist production has led to British imperialism carrying out the economic exploitation of the country with the participation of the white bourgeoisie of South Africa (British and Boer). Of course, this does not alter the general colonial character of the economy of South Africa, since British capital continues to occupy the principal economic positions in the country (banks, mining and industry), and since the South African bourgeoisie is equally interested in the merciless exploitation of the negro population.”

The same CI resolution instructed South African communists to pay particular attention to the still small emergent black, nationalist forma-

tions, with the ANC specifically mentioned. This new strategic line was adopted by the CPSA in 1929.

As an affiliate of the Communist International, the CPSA was obliged to accept the Comintern Resolution. This it did, but not without varying degrees of enthusiasm and reluctance. For many, support for what were seen as small elite black formations like the ANC was felt to be a betrayal of the working class struggle, and a threat to inter-racial working class solidarity.

The CPSA had, however, already been working with the ANC. The Party was instrumental in arranging for the President-General of the ANC, Josiah Gumede, to attend the conference of the League Against Imperialism in Brussels in 1927. From there Gumede travelled on to the Soviet Union and visited its Asian regions, witnessing for himself that dark-skinned non-Europeans enjoyed full citizenship rights. On his return to South Africa, Gumede proclaimed that he had seen “the new Jerusalem”. But his growing closeness to the communists in South Africa did not endear him to many in the leadership of the ANC, particularly traditional leaders in the ANC’s “upper house”, who argued that the Bolsheviks had killed the Tsar in Russia and that was the fate that awaited them here in South Africa if the communists were to come to power. Gumede was ousted from the leadership of the ANC in 1930.

Notwithstanding these and other contradictory dynamics, over the following decades and down to the present, the Communist Party in South Africa has had an alliance with the ANC, a relatively unique alliance with overlapping memberships and important symbiotic influences. While Gumede was ousted from the ANC leadership for his close ties with the Communist Party, in subsequent decades many of the outstanding leaders of the ANC were also Communist Party members, among them Moses Kotane, JB Marks, Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela, Joe Slovo and Chris Hani.

This revolutionary symbiotic relationship owes much to the Great October Revolution and its direct product – the Soviet Union. In South Africa, the prestige of the Soviet Union amongst democratic and progressive forces grew immensely during the World War 2, especially after the entry of the Soviet Union into the war in 1941. The central role of the Red Army in the defeat of fascism received popular acclaim and helped enhance the local profile of the Communist Party. In the post-1945 years with the onset of the Cold War, the newly elected hard-line racist National Party, with ideological links to fascism, sought to disguise its racist ideology by positioning itself as part of a supposed Western crusade against the “global Communist threat”.

The CPSA, hated and feared locally more for its consistent non-racialism and ability to mobilise the growing black working class than for its socialism, was banned in 1950. Its underground successor, the SACP, was consistently portrayed by the white minority regime as local agents of Moscow, as the “rooi gevaar” (the “red peril”). After the banning of the ANC in 1960 and the strategic defeat suffered by the movement in the mid-1960s, most of the surviving leadership was forced into a distant exile. It was in this exceedingly difficult period that the Soviet Union’s selfless solidarity support to the ANC, and indeed to other liberation movements in southern Africa, played an absolutely decisive role in the ultimate defeat of colonialism and white minority rule throughout our region. In popular black culture, the Soviet Union became a legendary reference point in this period. Many 40- and 50-year olds in South Africa today have names like Soviet, Sputnik, Lenin, Russia and even Kalashnikov.

The abiding significance of the Soviet Union in the South Africa reality had its paradoxical flip-side in the late 1980s. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc of countries from 1989, the apartheid regime no longer served a useful purpose for Western imperialism as the pre-eminent

regional gendarme in the Cold War-era regional hot wars of southern Africa costing over a million lives. In fact, thanks to a highly successful global anti-apartheid movement, the apartheid regime had become an awkward embarrassment to ruling imperialist elites. Imperialist pressure on the apartheid regime in the post-Soviet conjuncture was one important factor in propelling the negotiated settlement in South Africa. Of course, the most important factor in the transition to a non-racial democratic settlement was the rolling semi-insurrectionary mass struggles that had been sustained from the mid-1970s, and which were largely led by the ANC-SACP Alliance.

Needless to say, it is an Alliance that has had many ups and downs. And now, at the centenary mark of the Russian Revolution, it is an Alliance that is once more going through one of its more difficult moments.

Why?

Southern Africa in the 1960s-80s: a weak link in the imperialist chain

In seeking answers, as the SACP we have found it useful to (amongst other things) travel back one hundred years to the strategic, and particularly Leninist, advances in Marxism that were forged in the crucible years in and around the October Revolution.

The national liberation struggles against Portuguese colonialism and white minority internal colonial regimes in Zimbabwe, Namibia and pre-eminently South Africa established the entire southern Africa region as a turbulent, unstable, semi-peripheral “weak link” in the post-1945 imperialist chain. Both the imperialist centres and progressive radical liberation forces within our region appreciated the stakes very clearly. The obvious complicity of imperialism and local South African monopoly capital in the vicious national oppression of the African majority meant that the interconnection between the national democratic struggle and the anti-monopoly capital struggle had a direct and obvi-

ous mass appeal.

Could a non-racial, one-person one-vote constitutional dispensation be de-linked from an ongoing anti-capitalist struggle? Could a South African “February revolution” be contained, preventing an uninterrupted advance to a more radical “October”? This was the risk that South African monopoly capital and its imperialist backers took in engaging with the ANC-led Alliance in the negotiations of 1990-1993. They were encouraged by the collapse of the Soviet bloc as well as by the general retreat of post-independence national democratic advances in the rest of southern Africa – largely as a result of brutal apartheid de-stabilisation and the fomenting of proxy civil wars in Angola and Mozambique.

From within the SACP there was no illusion in the early 1990s that the impending democratic breakthrough in South Africa would quickly lay the basis for a rapid and perhaps insurrectionary advance to a socialist “October”. The post-1945 global reality, and especially the post-1989 global conjuncture, were qualitatively different from the global situation so acutely analysed by Lenin in 1915 and onward. Inter-imperialist rivalry and wars were no longer the dominant feature. There was (and is) now a single imperialist hegemon and the dominance of globalised finance capital, rather than rival national monopoly capitals.

But, in the SACP’s analysis, this reality did not mean that Lenin’s insistence that, in semi-peripheral societies within the imperialist chain, the national bourgeoisie is incapable of consummating a National Democratic Revolution (NDR) was irrelevant. On the contrary, we have continued to argue that the advance, deepening and defence of our NDR requires working class and semi-proletarian popular hegemony.

The SACP has accordingly advanced the strategic perspective of an uninterrupted anti-monopoly capital struggle for deep-seated structural transformation from the bridgehead of the 1994 democratic break-

through (our “February”). We saw this more as a protracted struggle, a “war of position” rather than an insurrectionary “war of manoeuvre” (to evoke Gramsci’s terms). In our post-1994 situation it was not a question of abolishing our democratically-elected Constituent Assembly, as the Bolsheviks had once done. Rather, it was a question of using its hard-won constitutional outcomes, the space opened by these gains to advance, deepen and defend a NDR which would necessarily have to have an anti-imperialist and anti-monopoly capital character.

Favouring such an advance were two important factors. First, South African monopoly capital, long nurtured behind the protective barriers of white minority rule, was relatively off-balance following the landslide ANC-led Alliance electoral victory in 1994. Second, the anti-apartheid national liberation forces had sustained semi-insurrectionary mass struggles over the better part of a decade-and-a-half. The trade union movement was relatively large and ideologically radical and there was a strong mass struggle tactical and organisational repertoire that linked community-based with work-based struggles. In the mid-1990s these mass forces remained mobilized.

What was to be way forward?

The two tendencies in third world national movements

As Lenin and MN Roy had correctly recognised in 1920, national movements in the semi-periphery of the imperialist world are likely to exhibit two divergent tendencies, a bourgeois-democratic and a national-revolutionary tendency. From the mid-1950s through to the early 1990s, it was the national-revolutionary tendency that was clearly the dominant but never the exclusive current within the ANC.

Since at least 1994, a sharp internal debate has been at play within the ANC-led Alliance around these two tendencies. For a variety of reasons, it is the bourgeois-democratic tendency that has prevailed over

the past two decades. And in its prevailing we can recognise all of the problematic illusions that Lenin so acutely critiqued in his polemics with Bernstein, Kautsky and the *New Iskra* tendency – notably the assumption that progress is essentially evolutionary, stage-ist, un-dialectical – that progress is made from its most “developed” side and never from the weak-link, never as result of the thoroughly uneven, underdevelopment inherent in capitalist accumulation.

In South Africa this evolutionist tendency has conceptualised our democratic breakthrough as a “return” of a formerly ostracised South Africa into the bosom and “normality” of a happy family of nations (as if the relative and always only partial isolation of apartheid South Africa was not exactly one of the key strategies of the ANC itself). Archbishop Tutu, in his foreword to the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, proclaimed that the demise of apartheid marked the end of the three great “anomalous crimes” against humanity of the 20th century – which he characterised as fascism, supposedly abolished in 1945, Communism supposedly abolished with the fall of the Berlin Wall, and now apartheid in 1994. Radically absent from Tutu’s worldview was any sense of the persisting reality of imperialism and its centuries’ long existence in a variety of colonial, semi-colonial, and indeed internal colonial forms as in white minority rule in South Africa. Apartheid was, of course, never a stand-alone reality but an integral part of a persisting and wider imperialist system which, if anything, had grown stronger and more arrogant with the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

Although Tutu has never been an ANC member, this kind of perspective was generally shared by successive ANC leadership figures after 1994, including many who had formerly been SACP members. The “completion” of the National Democratic Revolution was now conceptualised as “normalising” South Africa capitalism by “de-racialising” (but not socialising) private ownership and control of monopoly capi-

tal. A supposedly “patriotic”, emergent black capitalist stratum promoted through a variety of state interventions has been invoked as the leading class force in the National Democratic Revolution. Any serious anti-monopoly capital, anti-imperialist, socialist-oriented advance is deferred to a distant and largely symbolic future “stage”. Lenin’s call for an uninterrupted advance has been forgotten in these quarters.

Sadly, but inevitably, these strategic and programmatic illusions have now resulted in the significant stagnation of democratic advances and of the ANC itself. The supposed black “patriotic” bourgeoisie has inevitably proven to be essentially a parasitic and compradorist force, dependent for its primary accumulation on pillaging public resources through increasingly criminal means that have factionalised the ANC and polluted our hard won democracy. National sovereignty, a key task of the NDR, is betrayed through illicit capital transfers to Dubai and other tax havens.

The deep structural distortions of our capitalist political economy remain untransformed – among them, extraordinarily high levels of monopoly concentration; a racialised spatial economy now perpetuated by the property market as effectively as any apartheid era social engineering; and our continued semi-peripheral primary commodity exporter status within the global capitalist chain. These structural features, in turn, are reproducing crisis-levels of largely racialised unemployment (currently at 27,7% in the narrow definition), inequality and poverty.

The current cul-de-sac into which our NDR has run, and the current turmoil within the ANC and between the ANC and its Alliance partners, are not sustainable. Turmoil born of social crisis is, we know, not least from the Great October Revolution, the terrain on which both further set-backs or major advances might be achieved. As the SACP we are well aware that our 2017 reality both locally, regionally and inter-

nationally is, in many respects, quite different from the reality of 1917. Yet there is still much to celebrate and, above all, to learn from that defining moment of the 20th century when, for the first time in human history, working men and women abolished capitalism and held imperialism at bay, against the odds and at huge human sacrifice for some seven decades.

Long live the living example of the Great October Revolution! ●

Cde Nzimande, SACP General Secretary, gave this talk recently at a conference organised jointly by Akel (the Communist Party of Cyprus) and the University of Cyprus

THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

The Revolution, Lenin and the National Question

An enduring lesson of the Bolshevik revolution is that in the midst of an NDR it is possible – and imperative – to build the momentum for and elements of socialism, writes **Jeremy Cronin**

The Bolshevik revolution made an important if often neglected contribution to the national question. Needless to say, this contribution has had a singular, if contested and often misunderstood, importance in South Africa.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks' understanding of national struggles evolved through the turmoil of the inter-imperialist World War I (WWI) (1914-1918), the revolutionary events in Russia in 1917, and the subsequent imperialist-backed civil war and unceasing attempts at undermining the October Revolution. The development of these perspectives is a good example of the interaction between theory informing revolutionary engagement, and practical struggle in turn compelling further theoretical development. In short, there is no timeless theory of the national question that can simply be plucked out of context and dogmatically recited as “true Leninism” in the present.

Lenin's first major intervention on the national question (“The Right of Nations to Self-Determination”) was published in April-June 1914, literally weeks before the outbreak of WWI. As the major imperialist powers lurched towards their bloody conflict, they sought to rally their respective populations on the basis of a patriotic national chauvinism.

The question of nationalism was, therefore, very much in the air. Lenin's 1914 intervention is mainly a critique of the outstanding Polish-German revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg's perspective on nationalism. Lenin admired Luxemburg's untarnished militancy, but he disagreed with her contention that nationalist demands were always necessarily reactionary and, therefore, antagonistic to working class struggles.

Most of contemporary Poland, at the time, was part of the sprawling, multi-ethnic Russian Tsarist empire with literally dozens of oppressed national minorities. Luxemburg argued that support for Polish national self-determination, for instance, would be tantamount to supporting "bourgeois nationalism" against the interests of a unified, Russian and internationalist proletarian struggle. Lenin responded that this was "a case of blaming other people for one's own nationalism; in her fear of the nationalism of the bourgeoisie of oppressed nations, Rosa Luxemburg is *actually* playing into the hands of the Black-Hundred nationalism of the Great Russians!" (Lenin is referring here to an ultra-right, anti-revolutionary and anti-Semitic nationalist movement formed during the earlier 1905 Russian Revolution).

Lenin distinguished between the nationalism of oppressor nations and the nationalism of oppressed nations. He robustly condemned Greater Russian nationalism but argued that the national struggles of oppressed nations had a potentially progressive democratic character. However, at this stage, Lenin's formulations were still ambivalent. He argued for the right of all nations equally to self-determination and secession. He saw the national question, and particularly the right to self-determination, as an inherent element of the struggle for democracy. But, at the same time, he argued that the proletariat must "combat nationalism of every kind".

Reality was soon to add complexity to this view.

The April Theses

The February 1917 Russian revolutionary outbreak in Petrograd unleashed revolutionary uprisings throughout the Tsarist empire. These uprisings were a ferment of democratic, cultural, socialist, nationalist, and, sometimes, feminist aspirations. In Siberia in the Far East, the predominantly Buddhist Buryat region voted for independence. In the Caucasus, Ossetians convened a congress calling for independence, and on the Black Sea, Cossacks proclaimed their Rada the supreme local authority. In April 1917, as noted by China Mieville in his stirring account, “October”: “members of the progressive, modernising Muslim Jadidist movement set up an Islamic Council in Tashkent, Turkestan... helping to dismantle the local government structures...at the end of the month the council convened the first Pan-Turkestan Muslim congress in the city. Its 150 delegates recognised the Provisional Government [in Petrograd] and unanimously called for substantial regional autonomy.” This gathering had been preceded earlier in the month by a meeting in Kazan in Tartarstan, of a Muslim Women’s Congress that debated the status of Sharia law, women’s rights and the hijab.

This outpouring of revolutionary democratic fervour across the empire, inspired by a proletarian uprising in faraway Petrograd, required a re-calibration of Marxist thinking.

In some ways this was already happening. On 3 April 1917 Lenin had finally made it across the frontier of warring imperialist forces to arrive from exile in revolutionary Petrograd. He surprised his Bolshevik comrades the next day with an impassioned perspective which has come to be known as “The April Theses”. The prevailing Bolshevik view at the time was that the February 1917 uprising was essentially an anti-feudal, democratic revolution which, by its nature, needed to be led by the Russian bourgeoisie, then dominant in the Provisional Government, which had been established following the fall of the Tsar.

Lenin turned this argument on its head. The Russian liberal bourgeoisie, represented by their Constitutional Democracy party (the Kadets), was too weak, too complicit with the Tsar's repressive machinery, and too committed to Russian imperial interests in the war to lead a democratic revolution. Russia was by far the most backward of the warring imperialist powers, "the weakest link" in the imperialist chain. In these conditions, Lenin argued for worker leadership of the democratic revolution and, accordingly, the displacement of the Provisional government by the organs of working class and popular power, the Soviets.

But, if the workers in alliance with the peasantry were to lead the democratic revolution then why stop at bourgeois democracy? We can see in Lenin's April Theses the emergence of two ideas. One, in conditions of backwardness, in an already developed global capitalist system, a national/ "patriotic" bourgeoisie would not be capable of leading, let alone deepening and defending, a democratic revolution. Two, therefore, the national democratic and socialist revolutions were not necessarily two separate stages, but possibly part of a single if complex but potentially "uninterrupted" (Lenin's word) revolution.

In April (with the October seizure of power just months away), Lenin was not necessarily seeing this "uninterrupted" struggle as a short-term process. In his April Theses he is still calling on his Bolshevik comrades ("a small minority" in the Soviets) "*to present a patient, systematic, and persistent explanation*" of the errors of the dominant petty-bourgeois forces in the Soviets.

To recap: in the years before February 1917, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had consistently argued that the national question was an inherent part of the democratic revolution. Now, in April 1917, Lenin is asserting that the democratic revolution has to be led (in backward Russia) by the working class in alliance with the peasantry. So, did that mean

that the national democratic revolution in “backward” countries would have to be led by the working class? In 1917 Lenin doesn’t go this far. In fact, for a few years, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were still characterising national democratic struggles as bourgeois democratic struggles. That was soon to change.

The Communist International

One of the early outcomes of the Bolshevik Revolution was the formation in 1919 of the Communist International (the CI). A new turning point on the national question and in Lenin’s own thinking on the matter occurred at the Second Congress of the CI held in Moscow in 1920.

As Cde Blade Nzimande’s article elsewhere in this issue notes, at the 1920 CI Congress there were intense debates within a Commission on “The National and the Colonial Question” in which Lenin and the Indian communist, MN Roy played leading roles. In his report back to the Congress on the commission’s work, Lenin wrote: “As a result of our discussion, we have arrived at the unanimous decision to speak of the national-revolutionary movement rather than of the ‘bourgeois-democratic’ movement.”

Lenin went on to explain that: “if we speak of the bourgeois-democratic movement, we shall be obliterating all distinctions between the reformist and the revolutionary movements. Yet that distinction has been very clearly revealed of late in the backward and colonial countries...”

The CI called on communist parties in countries like India and China to work closely with, and to help radicalise, the “national revolutionary” tendency in the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist national struggles.

This important strategic shift had a delayed arrival in South Africa

despite its obvious relevance to a post-1910 Union of South Africa that was a colonial dominion of Britain with a local white minority government and a nationally oppressed black majority. It was only in 1928, at the 6th CI conference and its “Black Republic” thesis for South Africa that the strategic perspective of a national-revolutionary movement, and, therefore, of a national democratic struggle was first applied programmatically to our own local reality.

Stages or an uninterrupted process?

The 1928 CI resolution on South Africa (formally adopted by the CPSA in 1929) called for “an independent native South African republic as a *stage towards* a workers’ and peasants’ republic, with full equal rights for all races, black, coloured and white.” The 1962 SACP programme has a similar formulation: “The destruction of colonialism and the winning of national freedom is the essential condition and the key for the future advance to the supreme aim of the Communist Party: the establishment of a socialist South Africa, laying the foundation of a classless, communist society.”

A great deal of ink has been spilled in polemics around the question of “stages” and “stage-ism”. In some left circles the SACP is still criticised for our supposedly “Stalinist two-stage theory”. Some on the left, claiming the authority of Trotsky, argue that “stage-ism” has led us on to the erroneous path of supporting a national democratic revolution. Interestingly, those who argue in this vein ignore what the *actual* Trotsky had to say in a letter criticising some of his South African followers: “A victorious revolution is unthinkable without the awakening of the Native masses; in its turn it will give them what they are so lacking today, confidence in their strength, a heightened personal consciousness, a cultural growth. Under these conditions the South African Republic will emerge *first* of all [my emphasis] as a

'black' Republic...the proletarian party should in words and in deeds openly and boldly take the solution of the national (racial) problem in its hands...When the thesis [advanced by Trotsky's local followers] says that the slogan of a 'Black Republic' is *equally* harmful for the revolutionary cause as is the slogan of a 'South Africa for the whites', then we cannot agree with the form of this statement." (quoted by Martin Legassick, *Towards Socialist Democracy*, UKZN Press, 2007, pp.163-4)

Trotsky, quite correctly, consistently critiqued the notion of mechanical stages, but as the letter of rebuke to his local followers in South Africa shows, he did not make the mistake of dismissing the national struggle of the oppressed.

It is obvious and undeniable that the 1928 CI "Native Republic" thesis uses the term "stage", clearly envisaging two (and possibly three in some versions) "stages" between national liberation and socialism. It is also undeniable that through the 1960s, 70s and 80s official SACP documents referred to "stages".

But were these stages envisaged as water-tight compartments with a first stage having to be led by a "national bourgeoisie" with the proletariat and popular forces holding back? In other words, when the SACP invoked stages was it falling into the error of letting the bourgeois lead – the very error that Lenin had so passionately condemned in his April Theses? Does invoking the term "stage" necessarily mean that a first stage has to be "completed", before embarking on a "second" stage?

Even a superficial reading of the SACP's 1962 programme will show that the National Democratic "stage" is envisaged as an active, transitional phase towards socialism (and not as the plodding "completion" and "consolidation" of bourgeois democracy). At its 1969 Morogoro Conference the ANC itself implicitly rejected a mechanical notion of stages when it argued that "our nationalism must not be confused with

chauvinism or narrow nationalism of a previous epoch...with the classical drive by an elitist group among the oppressed people to gain ascendancy so that they can replace the oppressor in the exploitation of the mass.” It added that, in South Africa, “a *speedy progression* from formal liberation to genuine and lasting emancipation is made more real by the existence in our country of a large and growing working class whose class consciousness complements national consciousness.”

However, it is true that the word “stage” *can* lead to an exceedingly mechanical and evolutionist understanding of history and struggle. And, indeed, this is exactly what began to happen from within anti-SACP quarters in the ANC after 1990. To make matters worse, many of the leading anti-SACP personalities were ex-Party members, schooled in the Soviet Union, notably Thabo Mbeki. They appropriated Marxist terminology but for entirely reformist objectives. The NDR was transformed into a bourgeois democratic stage to “complete”, that is, to “de-racialise” monopoly capitalism in South Africa. It was a stage requiring the leadership of a new, black “patriotic” bourgeoisie.

In the face of this revisionist evocation of Marxism, since 1993 the SACP has advanced the slogan: “Socialism is the Future, Build it Now!” – meaning that in the midst of a national democratic revolution it is both possible and imperative to build capacity for, momentum towards and elements of a future socialism. In this, the SACP has taken up Lenin’s evolving understanding of the national democratic struggle – from his 1914 distinction between the nationalism of the oppressor and that of the oppressed; by way of his April 1917 theses arguing for the necessity of a working class-led, uninterrupted struggle for democracy towards socialism; through to his 1920 recognition of the two tendencies within national liberation struggles in colonial countries.

Of course, 2017 is a different world from 1917. Pretoria is not Petrograd. In drawing inspiration from Lenin and the Russian Revolution we

also need to learn to find our own way by emulating the Bolsheviks, not mechanically, but in their collective ability to ground theory in struggle, and to let the hard knocks of struggle teach and re-fresh theory. ●

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THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

Lessons on the struggle for women's emancipation

The Bolsheviks recognised gender equality as an 'inalienable part of the revolutionary transformation of society', writes **Jenny Schreiner**

As we celebrate the centenary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, what can we learn from it in terms of the struggle for the emancipation of women? This is not an abstract question for us in South Africa where the struggle to eradicate patriarchy is far from over.

Against the background of South African women's rich involvement in struggle, the post-apartheid democratic Parliament and the ANC government have advanced the cause of the socio-economic empowerment and safety of women. And yet policy gains have either not been effectively implemented, or have been rolled back. Maternity leave is a right in law but not always in practice. Equal access to jobs and equal pay are enshrined in law, but the gender gap and the employment of women in particular economic sectors remains prevalent. Banks and development finance institutions still do not enable women's access to finance on the same footing as men. Gender-based violence continues to make women unsafe and unable to participate in society without fears and fetters. Working class women, in townships, informal settlements, rural areas, in factories, in informal sector enterprises, on farms, in mines, and in the home, have political freedom and equality in law.

They can vote and shape the social contract with the governing party. But the burdens of gender-based violence, inequality, poverty and unemployment bear down on them with unrelenting force.

As Lenin advised: “Revolutions are not made to order, they cannot be timed to any particular moment. They mature in a process of historical development and break out at a moment determined by a whole complex of internal and external causes.”¹ He also pointed out that revolutions “break out when tens of millions of people come to the conclusion that it is impossible to live in the old way any longer”.² But as will be demonstrated in this article, revolutionary situations are also matured through the mobilisation and organisation of the motive forces, and are consolidated by sustained political education of the masses, ongoing mobilisation and organisation, both through and outside of the state.

Women’s lives in pre-Soviet Russia – Work among women begins

The position of women in the pre-Soviet Russia under the rule of the tsars was precisely the kind of oppressive situation in which the hardship that women had to endure would generate a potentially revolutionary situation. In Tsarist Russia, women had no rights either in the family or in society and women workers experienced merciless exploitation. Women could not divorce men, because men were legally and in every sense the heads of the household. The Code of Laws of the Russian Empire required women to “live with him in love, and treat him with the esteem, utmost respect, obedience and humility due to him as the master of the house”. Women had no right to vote, nor to be elected to bodies of local government or those of state power. The Tsarist law stated bluntly: “Women are not eligible for election to the State Duma.”

Women workers had extremely long working hours, whether in heavy industry, in cottage industries, or as peasant labourers. Women

were paid lower wages than men. Foremen abused women; there were no labour safety regulations for women; and often pregnant women were fired, or expected to work until they gave birth on the shop floor and to return to work the next day. All of this was made worse by the appalling living standards of the working class and peasantry in Russia, with poverty and food shortages.³

The first Programme of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, formulated by Lenin and adopted at the Second Congress of the Party in 1903, outlined the immediate tasks of the working class in a period on the threshold of a democratic revolution. As part of its demand for a democratic republic, the programme stipulated equal political rights for women and men. In addition, the programme stated: “To avert the physical and moral extinction of the working class and to stimulate its activity in a revolutionary struggle, the Party demands: the prohibition of women’s labour in industries harmful to their health; the release of women from work for four weeks before and six weeks after giving birth to a child with all the wages paid; the organisation of crèches for babies at all factories and plants which employ women; the release of women from work to breast feed their babies for at least half-an-hour every three hours; the appointment of women-inspectors in those industries where female labour is used.”⁴

“In making their revolution, the Bolsheviks had to grapple with more than the class-on-class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the workers. The Tsar’s Russian Empire, stretching from eastern Europe to far east Asia, included very many oppressed nationalities ... the Tsar’s Russia was known as “the prison house of nationalities,” an SACP publication recorded in 1990. In this situation, the revolutionary struggle of the working people in 1917 also unleashed a wave of national liberation struggles against the common enemy – Tsarist autocracy.⁵

But the oppression of nationalities also brought additional challeng-

es for the emancipation of women. Within the oppressed Eastern regions, women were described as the most oppressed of the oppressed, and the most enslaved of the enslaved. These women, predominantly living in patriarchal feudal conditions, were not allowed to own or inherit property, and they were deprived of the most basic human rights and were completely excluded from social life. Their existence in the home was at the beck and call of the men. Girls in the eastern region were married off between the ages of 10 and 12. In a society where polygamy was rife, the third and fourth wife of the wealthy had a torrid time. Whereas among those of Russian nationality in the early 1900s just 16,6% of women were literate, in the eastern regions nearly all women could not read or write.

By the beginning of the 20th century, socialist women from various countries were uniting, sharing their experiences, and developing a common platform around women's rights, in particular the right to vote. The Second International Women's Conference of 1910, a conference of 100 women delegates from socialist parties and labour movements from 17 countries (which included the first three women elected to the Finnish Parliament) unanimously resolved that: "In agreement with the class-conscious, political and trade union organisations of the proletariat of their respective countries, the Socialist women of all countries will hold each year a Women's Day, whose foremost purpose it must be to aid the attainment of women's suffrage. This demand must be handled in conjunction with the entire women's question according to Socialist precepts. The Women's Day must have an international character and is to be prepared carefully."⁶

In Tsarist Russia, agitation and mobilisation of women started in this period, with the Party producing leaflets directed to working women. In January 1912 Pravda, later the Party newspaper, ran a column specifically addressed to working women, recommending topics that could be

discussed at public meetings building up to the first celebration of International Women's Day in 1913. International Women's Day became a regular feature of the political mobilisation of women. Pravda carried many letters received from working women and carried Party messages to working women.

Across the Tsarist empire there was a revolutionary upsurge of activity. A special journal for working women was started. The first issue of this magazine, *Rabotnitsa* (Woman-Worker), was published on International Women's Day 1914. A leading Bolshevik, Nadezhda Krupskaya mapped out the approach of the journal, recommending that it cover current politics, the working class movement and participation of women workers, women's working conditions at factories, workshops, in shops and in cottage industries, the conditions of domestic workers, labour protection for women, news of events in political and working life, a section on women's struggles abroad, and the family and the working woman. In the first editorial, the call to working women was to join forces with the entire working class and to own the *Rabotnitsa* journal, making it their own by writing letters and indicating topics about which they wished to read. Of the seven issues printed in 1914, two entire editions were seized by the police. But despite the harassment, the publication specifically speaking to women marked an important advance.

Women in the 1917 revolutionary upheaval

Against the backdrop of the imperialist war, against which many socialist women in Europe had been effectively organising since 1913, Russian women protested and went on strike for "Bread and Peace" on International Women's Day, February 1917. A massive demonstration by the women of Petrograd, led by Alexandra Kollontai, took place against deteriorating living conditions, lack of basic food supplies and

the shortage of goods that had resulted from the extended period of oppression by the Tsar. The protesters were overwhelmingly women.

This mobilisation by women played a key role in the February 1917 Revolution and helped to define the agenda and the strategies of revolt. These women approached the soldiers deployed to suppress the protest to say: We are your sisters and mothers, do not turn your guns on us; turn your guns on those who oppress us. The four-day February Revolution forced the Tsar to abdicate and a provisional government was established to fill the vacuum. It immediately granted women the right to vote. Working class and poor women, due to their particular experience of the impact of capitalist exploitation, are a very significant catalyst the world over in revolutionary situations – but the active mobilisation, political education and organisation under the leadership of a vanguard Party is required to give direction to this revolutionary potential.

The February 1917 Revolution unleashed changes that fell short of the working class demands, causing dissatisfaction among the working class and the creation of conditions for a further revolution in October 1917 (7 November 1917 in the Gregorian calendar then still in use in Russia) – the socialist revolution which initiated the transition to socialism.

The Great October Socialist Revolution

The Great October Socialist Revolution gave birth to the first ever socialist state, the most significant single event in the 20th century and one which was path-breaking for the emancipation of women. This first socialist state continues to serve as an inspiration and concrete vision the world over, and to teach us invaluable lessons in the struggle for socialism. As articulated by Prof Alex Mezyadev in a recent seminar organised by the Institute for the Scientific Study of Society and held

in Cosatu House, a communist society embodies the emancipation and awakening of the higher powers of a human being. Communism, he said, is about a new man, a new woman and new children. The challenge facing socialists the world over is: How to awaken the higher powers of people? How to organise society to emancipate and awake that potential of people? Very importantly, he reminds us that socialist struggle is not merely for a different economic system; it is a struggle for a higher quality of life for all people, achievable precisely because of the end of an exploitative economy.

The theory of socialist revolution is a major element of Marxist-Leninist science, developed initially by Marx and Engels in mid-19th century, developed further through practice by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and further developed through communist parties and socialist states in the 20th century. It has been argued that “the experience of the revolutionary movement in each country is a most valuable material for a creative elaboration of revolutionary theory.”⁷

Apart from the mass mobilisation role of women in the revolution, women were also taking their place in leadership roles. Alexander Kollontai, a member of the Bolshevik Party by 1915, returned from exile to join the revolutionary movement. In March 1917 she was elected a member of the executive committee of the Soviet in Petrograd. Later that same year, while she was arrested for again being involved in organising popular demonstrations that were suppressed by the Provisional Government, she was elected in her absence to the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party and honorary Chairperson of the 6th Party Congress. Kollontai organised the first Petrograd conference of working women. She was appointed as the Commissar of Social Welfare, and was appointed Director of the Women’s Department, the Zhenotdel. Later she served as People’s Commissar of Propaganda and Agitation of the Ukraine. From the 1920s onwards, Kollontai had extensive periods

as a diplomat for the Soviet Union in various countries, ultimately serving as Advisor to the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1946 until her death from a heart attack in 1952.

The socialist state that was given life by the October Revolution, abolished private ownership of the means of production and replaced it with public ownership; it outlawed all forms of oppression including the oppression of women. This equality was consolidated in the first Soviet Constitution on 10 July 1918, which entrenched the right of women to elect and be elected to bodies of power. The immediate task of the fledgling socialist state was to tackle the practical tasks of building a new society, and within that solving the women's question in practical terms. The Soviet state passed a number of decrees/laws in the interests of working women, establishing economic, political and civil equality, regardless of sex, race and social origin. In brief the immediate policy decrees of the Soviet state included:

- Decree on Introduction of the Eight Hour Working Day which also put a ceiling on overtime and night shifts for women (October 1917);
- Decree on Civic Marriage, Children and the Introduction Of Civic Registration and on Dissolution Of Marriage, which introduced equality between men and women within the family. (December 1917);
- Decree on Wages and Salaries of Workers and Office Employees, through which women were granted equal remuneration as men for work. (September 1918);
- Decree on Insurance in Case of Illness (December 1917), which gave women access to paid maternity leave;
- Decree on Mother-and-Child Care (January 1918) set out a programme for reorganising all maternity and child care institutions;

- Abortion was legalised in 1920.

Moreover, the Soviet republics had to address specific features of women's oppression unique to their environment – for example in Turkestan a decree was adopted abolishing the payment of bride money and raising the eligible age for marriage.

At the time of their passing, these emancipatory laws were unprecedented anywhere in the world.

Moreover, the signing of these progressive decrees was recognised as only a platform for the real work of building of a socialist society. The complete emancipation of women required their full participation in the building of a socialist society, including specifically developing of social production; teaching women how to use the laws; improving their industrial skills; eliminating illiteracy; and overcoming the entrenched patriarchal customs and attitudes towards women, taking into account the different conditions in those areas where people had gone through the capitalist stage of development and other areas where people still lived in a largely feudal way of life. This marked divergence of levels of development required different organisational strategies to build the new society.

The socialist state enabled transformation of family relations but found that “it is one thing to proclaim equality of women and men but quite another to achieve it in practice. For this it was essential not only to create the necessary material conditions, but also to mould public opinion accordingly. In the Central Asian republics, for example, the establishment of equal relations was largely hindered by age-old traditions and prejudices. Older people, who had for many years lived according to the laws of their ancestors, closely adhered to those traditions. Young people, naturally, broke with humiliating traditions more readily.”⁸

The 1918 First All-Russian Women's Conference recognised that the

lesser political awareness and the special position that women held in society and in production, and addressed the Organisational Question, recommending the setting up of special commission reporting to the Central Committee to conduct political agitation and propaganda amongst women to draw working women into the task of building the new socialist society. This commission was replicated at local levels. The organising approach of these commissions is very informative. They included organising meetings and rallies; setting up circles of political agitators and propagandists, and circulating books and newspapers among women workers and peasants. Given the illiteracy level of women, they organised group readings of newspapers and magazines, and set up literacy and worker schools among these women. With time, these commissions were turned into separate departments of Party committees for working among women, called Zhenotdels, which were then also rolled out across all Party structures, with three sub-divisions, focusing respectively on organisation and instruction; political agitation and propaganda; and on the press. In addition, the Central Committee set up a special sector for agitation work among the women of the East; and continued extensive work in the international communist women's movement.

A key aspect of the Zhenotdels' work was to ensure that women workers were elected as delegates in local Party committees and in the industrial enterprises. This included training women as delegates in the Soviets so that they learned in practice how to participate in running a socialist state.

The choice of forms and methods of work was not centrally prescribed; decisions were made by Zhenotdels in accordance with the local conditions and specific features of women's experience, which the organisers learnt through active discussion with the women on the ground. So, for example, in the Eastern feudal regions the organisation

of women was subject to counter-revolutionary attention to the extent that local people's militia needed to protect the women. Over the first few years after the 1917 October Revolution successful women's congresses were held in the Eastern Republics.

Three major forms of activity were carried out among women workers and peasants:

- **Agitation and propaganda** which included public meetings, dissemination of leaflets, working women's days and excursions to cities and museums that women had never visited, the establishing of "Reading Huts" in the rural areas where talks were held to expose peasant women to new information and experiences, monthly women's days in factories in which educative speeches were held on the factory floor, the annual celebration of International Women's Day;
- **Organisational and educational forms and methods of work among women**, which included women's congresses, conferences of non-Party women workers and women peasants, meeting with women delegates. This area of work raised the ability of women to become more socially active and enabled a feedback loop from these women to the Party structures, raising the class consciousness of these women.
- **Voluntary work on Saturdays and Sundays (called subotniks)**, with different focuses such as Peasant Week, Child Week, Protection Week, and concentrating on participation of women in nationwide drives against famine, epidemics, etc. The women sewed uniforms for soldiers in the Red Army, washed linen in military hospitals, orphanages and childcare centres as part of building a socialist society. When social problems erupted it was through the subotniks that, for example, women collected food from each household, packaged the food and distributed

relief packages, or set up special detachments to combat child vagrancy.

In the Eastern regions the Party developed special forms of work among women due to the fact that the traditional customs prohibited women from even appearing in public places. There was the deliberate establishment of women's clubs in venues where only women were involved. These clubs had a production skills section in which women were taught a range of craft skills and stenography, typing and telegraphy skills. This also enabled these women to start receiving some income. The political section of the women's clubs organised lectures on revolutionary events and holidays and they set up Young Pioneer organisations and Young Communist League schools and political education circles. These schools also addressed literacy skills and training for functionaries in cooperatives. The juridical section of the women's clubs provided legal advice on the rights of women, and enabled women to study law. The mother and child section of the women's clubs set up maternity health centres, crèches and pre-schools and provided advice on hygiene and sanitation. Houses for Dekhan Women supported

ADDITIONAL READING

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Foner PS (ed) 1984 *Clara Zetkin: Selected Writings* (International Publishers)

Holt A 1977 *Selected Writings of Alexander Kollontai* (Allison & Busby, London)

Porter C 1980. *Alexandra Kollontai a biography* (Virago Limited, London)

peasant women as they moved into cities by offering them accommodation for two weeks, during which time information was shared with these women. “Reading Huts” were also established on the same principle, being exclusive to women. Even in areas where the population was largely nomadic, Red Yurtas (tents) were set up, providing reading classes, education about sanitation and hygiene and professional advice to live-stock breeders.

Importantly the involvement of women in social activity was based on drawing women into economic and social production on an equal footing with men, which meant changing the manner in which women workers participated in household work. The conditions in which women could hold a job and have a family were critical to the emancipation of women to liberate the higher powers of women, men and children. In 1921, 756 out of every 1 000 women could neither read nor write. This was part of the constraints to women’s equal participation in society and in production. A massive literacy campaign was launched across all of the Soviet republics, enabling women workers and peasants to read. Political awareness of women was also taken forward through the schools of political science attended by both men and women, where Marxism, the policy of the Soviet state, Lenin’s works and the Party Programme were studied.

Principles of a Marxist-Leninist approach to the women question

The end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th Century generated seminal works on the position of women under capitalism, on organising working class women, and on what is required to ensure the total emancipation of women. Clara Zetkin (a German communist), Vladimir Lenin, August Bebel (a German communist) and Alexander Kollontai are four seminal theorists and activists, among others, on the emancipation of women through socialism.

Lenin, who worked closely and collectively with Zetkin, Kollontai and Krupskaya in advancing the working class and peasant women's struggle, outlined key principles which inform communist parties' approach across the globe, and informed the programme of the social emancipation of women.

According to Lenin: "The first and most important provision of this programme was to bring about the emancipation of women and their complete social equality as an inalienable part of the revolutionary transformation of society. This required the elimination of the exploitation of man by man, the development of the national economy, the accomplishment of a cultural revolution, and so on." He added: "This and this alone opens the way towards a complete and actual emancipation of women."

A key pillar of Lenin's approach to the emancipation of women was the extension of equal rights to men and women in all spheres of life. Capitalism combines formal equality with economic and social inequality. "And one of the most glaring manifestation of this inconsistency is the inequality of women..." Lenin wrote.

One of the conditions for the social emancipation of women, and consequently one of the principles for solving this question was, in Lenin's view, the wide use of female labour in social production. He said that "to effect her complete emancipation and make her the equal of the man, it is necessary for the national economy to be socialised and for women to participate in common productive labour. Then women will occupy the same position as men."

Lenin believed that women should take an active part in administering all the affairs of society: "Working women must take an increasing part in the administration of socialised enterprises and in the administration of the state. ...".

He argued that the test of the freedom of a society is the degree of

freedom of the women. As clear from the policy changes introduced in the early stages of the first socialist state, socialism is not purely a new economic system, but also incorporates new political life and structures, and changed ideological and cultural practices with different forms of family life. The relationship and balance between all aspects of people's lives should change under socialism, thereby enabling the emancipation and full awakening of the higher powers of women.

Women's oppression and discriminatory gender relations will persist even in socialist societies unless it is consciously dismantled. Conscious eradication of class, racial and gender oppression requires concrete programmes, organisation of women and the LGBTI community, as well as the establishment of the legal framework, the infrastructure, and services that enable gender equality and the emancipation of women. Continued oppression and exploitation of women through patriarchy, sexism and gender oppression will undermine and distort the building of socialism. Ending exploitation of men and women and eradicating all forms of oppression of men and women must consciously be part of building socialism and communism.

What is clear from the October Revolution is that the level of mobilisation of working women into the revolutionary forces, the promotion of women into leadership of the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet government, and the raising of consciousness of the mass of women in society created a massively changed lived reality for working women. But gains made can readily be rolled back as circumstances and priorities change. Strong organisation is needed to ensure forward movement of the economic, social and political development of a country. Socialist state power cannot be achieved without popular power and nor can the transformation of society be achieved using the levers of state power unless supported by popular power. This is a critical element of what makes socialist society different from bourgeois democracies – the re-

lationship between the people and the state in the daily practice of transformation and building of a different society. In particular, the ongoing organisation, political education and mobilisation of working class women is a critical part of building socialism.

Given women's unique child bearing potential, and the impact of poverty, low wages, joblessness, and oppression that working class women feel most acutely, it is only when women are mobilised and organised into revolutionary forces that the interests of the working class as a whole will be protected. It is only under a socialist political economy that the conditions are created for all women to be able to develop to their full potential. ●

Comrade Schreiner is an SACP Politburo member

Notes

- 1 A Sertsova, Y Shishikina, L Yakovleva 1986 *What is Revolution?* Progress Publishers, Moscow
- 2 VI Lenin "Fourth Conference of Trade Unions and Factory Committees of Moscow, June 27-July 2, 1918. Reply to the Debate on the Current Situation, June 28, 1918" *Collected Works Vol 27*, p 480
- 3 Yelena Yemelyanov 1985 *Revolution in Women's Life*. Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, Moscow
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 SACP 1990 *The Red Flag in South Africa: A Popular history of the SACP 1921-1990* JET Printers, Johannesburg
- 6 Clara Zetkin, August 27, 1910. (*From a proposal to the Second International Women's Conference at Copenhagen, August 27, 1910*)
- 7 Sertsova, Shishikina, Yakovleva *What is Revolution?*
- 8 M Korchagina and Y Sorokina. 1985 *Women in the Modern World*. Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, Moscow

ZIMBABWE

On opportunities for transformation

Samukele Hadebe assesses the opportunities Robert Mugabe's ouster offers Zimbabwe's working class

At the height of Zimbabwe's recent political drama culminating in the exit of Robert Mugabe, there was a united demand for genuine political change by ordinary people who poured out into the streets on Saturday, 18 November 2017. Notwithstanding that the call was first made by the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA), an organisation notorious for violence against opponents of the regime, the people heeded their call. The dreaded Zimbabwe Defence Force (ZDF) had no qualms about interfering in political affairs – but its unconstitutional action was warmly welcomed by the majority of Zimbabweans, including pro-democracy activists, many of them victims of past security force brutality. Zimbabweans cooperated and cheered on the ZDF. Why? Perhaps the masses perceived future possibilities for advancing their own cause for genuine change. This article interrogates possible terrains of struggle for the Zimbabwean working class.

The historical context

Contrary to the anti-imperialist rhetoric of its ruling elite, Zimbabwe has been struggling since independence to overcome the limitations of narrow nationalism¹ and associated triumphalism. As in many Af-

rican countries, the working people, through the National Democratic Party (NDP) and subsequently the Zimbabwe African People's Union (Zapu), were the driving force for national liberation. But in time a tiny political and military elite, especially under the breakaway Zimbabwe African National Union (Zanu) buoyed by nationalist fervour, usurped the leading role in the name of the struggling masses. In Zimbabwe the trade union movement gave the struggle some of its luminaries like Charles Mzingeli, Benjamin Burombo and Joshua Nkomo. Contemporary pro-democracy politicians like Morgan Tsvangirai from the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU), are trying to follow in their footsteps, although with neo-liberal economic leanings. At independence, there was no revolution in Zimbabwe, merely a substitution of white faces with black ones, typical of neo-colonial African states².

Succession politics and decisive entry of the military

Amid the public outpouring of joy and heroisation of the ZDF at the fall of Mugabe, some analysts did express anxiety. But the succession narrative has generally been superficial, rarely interrogating the causes of factional fights beyond the ambition to succeed the octogenarian. The reality that policy failures and economic collapse triggered internal friction within the ruling party is often ignored. The security elite intervened ostensibly to 'protect the liberation legacy'. It did so to protect its economic interests, especially in mining. Accusation and counter accusation from the then-warring factions, made it clear that competition over access to state resources was central to the conflict. The security elite has long been suspected of involved in major sectors of the economy. Leading protagonists on both factions – Grace Mugabe, Savio Kasukuwere and Ignatius Chombo on one side and on the other Emmerson Mnangagwa and Constantino Chiwenga among others – are some of the wealthiest people in Zimbabwe.

Opportunities for genuine change

The resolution of the Zanu PF succession issue through a bloodless coup does not approximate genuine change. The question thus arises: Are there opportunities for a genuine change that would lead to radical socio-economic and political transformation? According to Ferguson, “If we are aspiring to link our critical analysis to the world of grounded political struggle – not only to interpret the world in various ways, but also to change it – we should move beyond ‘denunciatory analyses’ to ask ‘what do we want?’ (Ferguson 2009:167). In this instance, we have to ask: What do ordinary Zimbabweans want?

To understand what most want, it is imperative to understand the current conditions of working people in Zimbabwe. The majority languish in poverty, joblessness, ill health with poor healthcare facilities, and broken families due to migration. But the transition opens up possibilities to advance the cause of the struggling masses.

The mass demonstrations of 18 November 2017 were not the first public expression of dissatisfaction with Mugabe’s rule, but they had a massive impact. For the first time in many years the working people took to the streets with one voice and one mission. In the same manner that the military sanctioned the “Mugabe must go” march across partisan, regional and ethnic lines, future public campaigns by working people through their organisations should strive for unity. Zimbabwe needs regional and international solidarity and the support of social movements that mobilise across the partisan and ethnic divide to advance the struggles of the working class towards pro-people change in Zimbabwe.

Compliance with the constitution as a terrain of struggle: An essential aspect of Zimbabwe’s struggle has been for a new constitutional order. Pro-democracy groups led by the trade union movement constituted themselves into the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA)

and pushed for a new and pro-people constitution which passed into law in 2013. The Zanu PF regime under Robert Mugabe (with Emmerson Mnangagwa as Justice Minister) had no political will to comply with the new constitution. The demand for constitutional compliance should be pushed as a matter of urgency and it is a terrain for advancing a genuine change. Renewed citizen engagement and heightened patriotic fervour should be utilised to rekindle the demand of full compliance to the constitution.

Economic justice as a terrain of struggle: Economic dispossession and insecurity have been the hallmark of demobilising and enslaving the working people. The new administration of President Mnangagwa is likely to prioritise economic recovery through increased austerity measures that force already emaciated working people to tighten their belts even further. Apart from the need to urgently address the crisis in the banking sector and to restore a viable currency, there are two areas that could be sites of struggle: state owned enterprises and the special economic zones.

There are currently more than 80 state owned enterprises, across all economic sectors. They were originally established to drive development, but have instead been reduced to sources of political patronage and grand corruption by the ruling elite and the military. Unfortunately, the debate on public enterprise reform seems to focus on privatisation as if it is panacea to corruption. Privatisation through so-called indigenisation could be pursued by the new administration's neo-liberal economic agenda further stripping the country's assets for private and personal gain. Also, the recently legislated³ Special Economic Zones would be the vehicle for economic recovery – and hence a terrain for struggle, especially for organised labour. It is instructive to note that on his return to Zimbabwe from a two-week exile President Mnangagwa spoke of 'jobs, jobs and jobs'. But does job creation translate to reduc-

tion in poverty? The fallacy that economic growth inevitably means development and that job creation means poverty alleviation is endlessly repeated. But it is clearly false⁴. Inevitably, Zimbabwe's Special Economic Zones are theatres of battle between labour and capital.

Fighting gender oppression as a terrain of struggle: The dog-eat-dog factional fights in the ruling Zanu PF party exposed the entrenched conservative patriarchal tendencies in Zimbabwean society in general and in the government⁵ sphere in particular. Women have been and remain grossly underrepresented in political positions. The few who managed to get something tend to be token, and pawns in the male-dominated political arena. The marginalisation of women in Zanu PF during the liberation war has received scholarly attention⁶, while the party has done little since winning power. The Zanu PF Women's League has not been keen on mobilising, let alone being led by, working class women. Twice, in its short history it has been led by presidential spouses Sally Mugabe and Grace Mugabe merely because they were married to the president. The two only female aspirants for the highest office in the land, Joice Mujuru and, recently, Grace Mugabe, did not only lose out in the internecine fights but also suffered severe attacks from male chauvinistic imagery – also articulated by women – that characterised them either as witches or sex perverts.

The fight against women's and gender oppression should not just be about the inclusion of women in positions of influence or numerical parity but should lead to the transformation of patriarchal society and its male chauvinistic mindset. Zimbabwe needs a new trajectory on gender relations, especially after the poisoned atmosphere from internal succession politics in Zanu PF. Also, in spite of the famed land reform in Zimbabwe, women who actually work on the land do not control it. The fight against gender oppression is yet another terrain for disadvantaged classes as part for the struggle for equality and genuine

socio-economic and political transformation in Zimbabwe. The struggle for social inclusion extends to youths who have been most disadvantaged and rendered voiceless by economic dispossession and its attendant insecurity.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the elitist transfer of power in Zimbabwe – offering little, if anything, to the struggling masses – there are opportunities to advance the struggle for genuine democratic change that could usher a broad socio-economic justice for the impoverished masses.

We must bear in mind that what is largely perceived as a political crisis was essentially an economic one as the competition for and quarrel over control of state power by the ruling elite was in fact a manifestation of dysfunctional economic policies and limitations of an ultra-nationalist ideology. There is a need to interrogate how the Zimbabwean state could be restructured to promote and protect the democratic aspirations of the majority citizens rather than strangle the will of the people. ●

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Notes

- 1 Pan Africanism was alive to the risks ahead after independence, for example Amilcar Cabral (1969:75) became worried about the ideological deficiency of the decolonisation movements.
- 2 See Samukele Hadebe (2016) *Unpacking the role of literature in nation-building in Zimbabwe: 2000-2016*, presented at LAN Conference, Rainbow Hotel, Bulawayo, 20th October 2016.
- 3 In 2016 President Robert Mugabe signed into law the Special Economic Zones Act after amending the bill by adding clauses to safeguard labour rights. But the

“safeguards” contradict the essence of SEZ and employers would naturally pay only lip service to them.

4 Jacklyn Cock (2016:61) “Alternative Conceptions of a ‘Just Transition’ from Fossil Fuel Capitalism” in Bieler A. et al. *Challenging Corporate Capital: Creating an Alternative to Neo-liberalism*, Chris Hani Institute.

5 Zimbabwe Government policy has largely been oppressive of women, for example, in 1983 an operation allegedly to clean-up streets of prostitutes saw more than 6 000 women arrested indiscriminately – old women, school girls some as young as 11, young women with babies on their backs, nurses coming from duty. See Godfrey Kanyenze et.al (2011) *Beyond the Enclave*, Harare: LEDRIZ.

6 Josephine Nhongo-Simbanegavi (2000), Tanya Lyons (2004) *Guns and Guerrilla Girls*, Carol Thomson (1982) *Women in the Liberation Struggle: An interview of Naomi Nhiwatiwa*.



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