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THE FREEDOM CHARTER AND THE THEORY OF NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

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Last year, 1985, the 30th anniversary of the Freedom Charter, saw an impressive regrouping, through the United Democratic Front, of political forces which identify with the Congress Alliance of the 1950s and with the Freedom Charter itself to which this movement gave birth. It seems appropriate then, at this juncture, to examine some of the ways in which the Charter has been interpreted.

One very influential interpretation of the Freedom Charter, based on the view that South Africa is a colonial society 'of a special type', identifies it as calling for the establishment of a 'national democracy' in South Africa. It is widely held on the South African left that racial oppression in South Africa is best understood when considered as an instance of colonial oppression. Because the South African case differs in some significant respects from other instances of colonialism the term 'colonialism of a special type' (CST) or 'internal colonialism' is used by subscribers to this view. This analysis, which seems to be regaining inside South Africa the currency and eminence it once had for many on the South African left, holds that there can be no direct transition to socialism in South Africa. A 'national democratic' stage must be transversed before socialism can be constructed.

One searches in vain, however, for a satisfactory account of the theory of national democratic revolution in the literature in support of the CST analysis of South Africa.

One of the principal objectives of this article therefore is to elucidate the theory of national democratic revolution by researching its origins in the recent history of marxist-leninist theory and to appraise certain of its central claims. The theory of national-democracy was developed by Soviet and allied Marxists in an effort to deal with problems confronting the struggle for socialism in societies in which the level of development of the productive forces is considered comparatively very low and in which the working class is both numerically and

politically insignificant. Although it is acknowledged by adherents of the CST thesis that neither of these conditions obtain in South Africa it is nontheless still maintained that the theory of national-democratic revolution is applicable to South Africa.

A second central objective of what follows is to criticise the arguments advanced by adherents of the CST thesis in support of their claim that revolutionary class struggle in South Africa must, of necessity, assume the form of a struggle for national-democracy until the system of national domination has been destroyed.

The attempt to refute these arguments is not based on a retreat to the principle of the necessary determination of political identity by class interests. The refutation operates instead through a critique of the internal logic of the CST analysis. Neither should it be read as 'ultra-leftist' or 'workerist'. On the contrary, nothing in what follows denies the imperative need for the formation of broad alliances in the struggle for socialism (in South Africa and elsewhere). It is the interpretation of the Freedom Charter through the perspective of application of the theory of national-democratic revolution that is subjected to criticism. This does not entail either the dismissal of the demands of the Freedom Charter as irrelevant to the struggle for socialism, or the denial of the importance of the articulating and unifying role it currently plays in the co-ordination of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa.

Adopted by the Congress of the People in Kliptown in the Transvaal 30 years ago, the Freedom Charter continues to play a central role in South African politics. There seems currently a de facto obligation on all social movements and political organisations struggling to transform the South African state to define at some point their position vis-a-vis the Charter. This almost seems to be a condition of their being able to establish a political identity in the South African context. Defining a position vis-a-vis the Charter involves more than its simple endorsement or rejection. Despite its brevity (less than 1 500 words), its simplicity and transparency of language, the Charter is a notoriously ambiguous document. The range of possible

meanings contained within the Charter has resulted in it being interpreted in a variety of (sometimes contradictory) ways. Such semantic disputes are by no means politically inconsequential however, as they involve fundamental theoretical and strategic questions.

It is the meaning of the principal economic clauses of the Freedom Charter that has generated most dispute to date. These call for the 'national wealth' of South Africa to be 'restored to the people', for the ownership by 'the people as a whole (of) the mineral wealth, the Banks and monopoly industry'; for the control of 'all other industry and trade ... to assist the well-being of the people'; for 'all people (to) have equal rights to trade where they choose, to manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts and professions'; for the ending of 'restrictions of land ownership on a racial basis' and the redivision 'of all the land ... amongst those who work it'.

Although the first demand of the Freedom Charter is 'The People shall Govern', the inclusion of the above clauses in the Charter makes it impossible to define it as demanding nothing more than the establishment of a classical bourgeois democracy. On the other hand it is clear that the Freedom Charter invokes neither the socialisation of the means of production nor the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat in South Africa. This however has never prevented its being construed as 'socialist' or at least 'anti-capitalist'.

At the annual congress of the ANC in Bloemfontein in December 1955 the 'Africanists' opposed the endorsement of the Freedom Charter on the grounds, inter alia, that it was a socialist document and thus foreign to African Nationalism (Bunting, 1975). In his riposte to this charge, Nelson Mandela denied cogently that the Charter constitutes 'a blue-print for a socialist state'. Moreover he stressed that the dispossession of the white 'mining kings' and 'land barons' called for in the Charter would result, not in socialism, but would, on the contrary, '... open up fresh fields for the development of a prosperous non-European bourgeois class'. Consequently he argued 'for the first time in the history of this country the non-European bourgeoisie will have the opportunity to own in their own name and right mills and factories, and trade and private

enterprise will boom and flourish as never before' (Mandela, 1956:248).

In spite of the efforts of the 'Africanists' the Freedom Charter was adopted by the ANC as its official programme in 1956 and has become its lodestar. However, controversy over the Charter's meaning has never abated among opponents of apartheid. Surveying the role of the Charter over the last 30 years, Raymond Suttner acknowledges that after the outlawing of the ANC in 1961 the Charter remained largely dormant in South African politics until the emergence after 1976 of a political movement which identified itself with the Congress tradition of the 1950s (Suttner, 1984:3). During the 1960s, neither liberals nor adherents of the Black consciousness movement, which emerged towards the end of the decade, accorded the Charter any pertinence to their struggles against the South African state. More strikingly the renascent black trade union movement of the early 1970s never perceived the Charter as relevant to its exigencies. Such non-appreciation of the Charter by a workers' organisation was, in Suttner's view, erroneous. Whilst not challenging Mandela's denial in 1956 that the Charter was a blue-print' for a socialist state', Suttner, both in ***The Freedom Charter – The People's Charter in the Nineteen Eighties*** and in ***Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter*** (Suttner and Cronin, forthcoming), advances the thesis that the Charter is 'anti-capitalist'.

Cronin and Suttner define the Freedom Charter as a 'people's charter'. It is not, they contend, to be defined as socialist, petty bourgeois, or bourgeois in nature. It articulates the interests of all those oppressed by and opposed to apartheid. The Freedom Charter 'is a document that seeks to win the support of all those who oppose apartheid, all classes and strata who have an interest in its destruction' (Suttner & Cronin, forthcoming). They insist furthermore that the Freedom Charter, although not socialist, is 'anti-capitalist'. A national liberation struggle in South Africa must, in their view, be anti-capitalist because 'national oppression and capitalist exploitation are inextricably interlinked in South Africa'. In a country in which 'nearly all the land and other assets' have been appropriated by members of the oppressing white nation, it is necessary that the oppressed nation acquire control of its

economic resources in order to attain authentic autonomy.

There is, however, a non-sequitur in this attempted rendering of the Freedom Charter as anti-capitalist. That the oppressed nation needs to reappropriate from the oppressing nation its economic resources if it is to attain a proper independence does not guarantee the anti-capitalist character of such a reappropriation. The resources in question could conceivably be transferred into the control of a class of black capitalists and state functionaries. This is precisely what seems to have been envisaged by Nelson Mandela in 1956.

There is another version of the thesis outlined above. This argues that certain sectors of the South African economy - mining, agriculture and non-monopoly manufacturing - are dependent upon 'backward and highly coercive forms of labour exploitation backed up by a high level of state control' (Davies & O'Meara, 1983:73; Wolpe, 1983).

Mining and agriculture are moreover South Africa's principal earners of foreign exchange. To the extent to which capitalism in South Africa is dependent upon such a cheap labour force, the elimination of apartheid in this perspective is incompatible with the reproduction of capitalist relations of production in South Africa. Therefore a successful struggle for national liberation might be said to be anti-capitalist, even if not socialist, in that it would undermine the conditions of capitalist reproduction in South Africa.

Any such attempt to interpret the Freedom Charter as anti-capitalist is weakened however by the 'class essentialism' which informs it. It assumes that without the oppressive structures of apartheid the black South African working class would immediately cease to tolerate capitalist subjection. It remains however to be demonstrated that national liberation is a sufficient condition for the emergence of a revolutionary proletariat in South Africa. In any case this latter interpretation of the Freedom Charter is not that advanced by Cronin and Suttner. Even if it were, their case that the Freedom Charter is anti-capitalist would not be any stronger.

There exists yet a third interpretation of the Freedom Charter. This agrees that the Charter does not express a project for the construction of a socialist society. However it argues

that the realisation of the Freedom Charter would not simply produce a deracialised capitalism. In fact on this interpretation of the Charter such a society would not be capitalist at all. It would be a transitional social formation, a national-democracy, located chronologically between capitalism and socialism and its path of development would be 'non-capitalist'. This is how the South African Communist Party interprets the Freedom Charter in its programme ***The Road to South African Freedom.*** In both this text and in more recent usage the terms 'national-democracy and 'national democratic struggle' are inadequately defined as is their articulation with the corpus of marxist theory. Before any assessment can be attempted either of the coherence of the concept 'national-democracy' or of its pertinence to South African conditions and its capacity to elucidate the Freedom Charter, it will first be necessary to trace this concept's theoretical and historical genesis and to identify the function attributed to it by the political tradition supporting it.[3]

NATIONAL-DEMOCRACY - THE GENEALOGY OF A CONCEPT

From the 7th Congress of the Comintern in 1935 until 1947 (excepting the period of the German-Soviet pact of 1939-1945) the international communist movement practised a strategy of alliance with all social sectors and states which were anti-fascist. This expressed itself in the pre-War Popular Fronts, in the war-time Grand Alliance of the USSR, the USA and Great Britain as well as in other anti-facist alliances during the war. At the close of the war this strategy was maintained and resulted in the formation of governments of national unity and reconstruction (in which communist parties participated) in France and Italy during the immediate post war honeymoon period. (1945-1947) (Birchall, 1975, p 42, Chs. 1-6; Claudin, 1975, p 49, ch. 5; Spriauo, 1985, Chs. 15-18)

At the same time, the situation in the countries of Eastern Europe was characterised by the eminent Hungarian economist Eugene Varga as 'absolutely new in the history of humanity'. It was argued that in these countries there did not exist a dictatorship of the proletariat. In some cases in fact coalition

governments existed comprising communist parties as well as parties representing other classes, including the national bourgeoisie. Such states were defined as 'neither a bourgeois dictatorship nor a proletarian dictatorship' and were variously referred to as 'people's democracies', 'new democracies' and 'democracies of a special type'. Private capitalist property in the means of production was seen as still having an important role to play in their economies which were defined as mixes, i.e. combining three sectors, viz the state, the capitalist and the peasant and handicraft. These societies were defined as developing 'in the direction of socialism' but not as yet 'building socialism'. Theirs it was held was a unique route to socialism (and eventually communism); one that had never been travelled before in that it involved not an immediate movement from capitalism to socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat but the prior traversing of an additional transitional period. (Johnson, 1972: 13-16; Kase, 1968:15-19; Spriano, 1985:279-304)

Additionally it is arguable that another contemporary model for the future concept national-democracy lay in the arguments for 'new democracy' developed by Mao Zedung. Mao argued in 1940 that under Chinese conditions 'a new type of revolution' is possible - one 'led by the proletariat or with the participation of the proletariat in the leadership and having as its aim, in the first stage, the establishment of a new-democratic society and state under the joint dictatorship of the revolutionary classes'. The Chinese bourgeoisie was a 'revolutionary class imbued with a spirit which leads it to fight against foreign imperialism and the domestic governments of bureaucrats and warlords'. The form of this new democratic state would be neither 'the old European-American form of capitalist republic under bourgeois dictatorship' nor a 'republic of the dictatorship of the proletariat' but a third (state form) namely the 'new democracy' republic (Mao, 1972:252-254) Mao characterised the 'new democracy' revolution as entailing 'nationalisation of all big capital and big enterprises ... distribution of the land of landlords amongst the peasants, and at the same time the general preservation of private capitalist enterprises.' (Johnson, 1972:12)

The theory of 'the two camps' advanced by Zhdanov in his report to the conference of nine communist parties in Poland (in 1947) at which the formation of the Cominform was announced led however to a fundamental change of strategy. (Birchall, 1975; Claudin, 1975; Spriano, 1985) On Zhdanov's analysis of the international conjuncture (developed largely in response to the 'Marshall Plan' offensive of the USA) the world had become bifurcated into two implacably antagonistic 'camps', the 'anti-imperialist democratic' camp and the 'imperialist anti-democratic' camp. In such a highly polarised world there was no place for the politics of alliance and unity practiced by the international communist movement during the previous decade and a 'left turn' ensued. Accordingly the communist parties in the colonial, semi-colonial and dependent countries were to eschew alliances formed with the national bourgeoisie during the preceding period. Moreover in the dualistic perspective of Zhdanov's analysis, countries which had recently acquired independence under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie were consigned to the camp of imperialism and their claims to neutrality and national autonomy rejected as specious. The following text from 1947 illustrates this Zhdanovite perspective:

> Thus in the colonies, it is not only the feudal upper crust but also the bourgeoisie closely bound up with it which, because of its class nature, is incapable of applying itself consistently and utterly to the struggle to rescue the country from the clutches of political and economic backwardness that stem from imperial enslavement. (Zhukov, 1947:261)

In sympathy with this change, a concerted attempt to redefine the nature of the People's Democracies in conformity with the exigencies of the 'theory of the to camps' had to be made. This entailed a homogenisation of what had hitherto been considered diverse paths to socialism. George Dimitrov, the Bulgarian Communist leader, inaugurated this new phase in his report to the 5th Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1948. (Claudin, 1975:462-63; Jasa, 1968:22-25. 204; Spriano, 1985:304) Dimitrov denied that there was any essential difference between

the People's Democracies and the Soviet state. It was now declared that dictatorships of the proletariat existed in the former and that these were socialist societies. Whatever differences distinguished the Soviet Union from the People's Democracies were relegated to mere differences of 'methods, means, forms and tempos of movement',[4] nothing in other words which undermined the thesis that there exists a unique path to socialism.

This analysis was however before long to be replaced by a novel approach to the question of communist strategy and socialist transformation in the colonies and ex-colonies based on the concept 'national democracy'. The 'switch' of 1947 had not resulted in an increase of communist influence in the colonial, semi-colonial and dependent countries. The behaviour of nationalist regimes, often dominated by the national bourgeoisie, in many newly independent countries was increasingly incompatable with their conceptualisation in the theory of 'two camps'. Their quest for independence and non-alignment showed itself to be more than mere rhetoric and many of them initiated far-reaching social and economic reforms. Not only did the Zhdanovite schema seem inconsistent with developments in the underdeveloped (colonial and ex-colonial) world, but it was politically unfruitful both for the Soviet Union on the international plane and for numerous communist parties in underdeveloped countries.

Gradually the analysis of the nature of underdeveloped social formations changed as did the strategy pursued vis-a-vis such social formations by the Soviet Union and by national communist parties. The Soviet Union ceased demeaning decolonisation as merely formal and began to recognise it as an essential prerequisite for the full emancipation of the colonies. It began to acknowledge the authenticity of the claim by many newly-independent countries to be non-aligned. It strove in co-operation with them to construct a 'Zone of Peace' by bracketing together the 'socialist camp' and the non-aligned countries against the advanced capitalist imperialist countries. (Camère d'Encausse & Schram, 1969, Part 3, Introduction; Cattell, 1963; Cohen, 1972; Dallin, 1963; Dinerstein, 1963; Kapur, 1972, Chs. 1-3; Kinghoffer, Ch. 3; Lowenthal, 1963; Morison, 1964; Ojha,

1970)

The identification of the national bourgeoisie in the underdeveloped world as being compelled by its class nature to ally itself with international finance capital was also eventually jettisoned. It was replaced by a conception of the national bourgeoisie in the underdeveloped world according to which its interests lay in the formation of an alliance with the working class, the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry in order to struggle together against imperialism. As early as 1949, IJ Potekhin (who was in 1956 to become Director of the African Institute of Moscow), presented an analysis of the role of the national bourgeoisie in the underdeveloped world at variance with the dominant contemporary conception based on the theory of the 'two camps'. According to Potekhin, a crucial distinction needs to be made

> ... between revolution in the imperialist countries and revolution in the colonial or dependent countries ... there the oppression by imperialism of the other countries is one of the factors causing a revolution; there such oppression cannot avoid involving the national bourgeoisie as well ... . In the struggle against imperialist enslavement, the interests of the bourgeoisie coincide with those of the entire people ... . The leading role in the national liberation movement in most of the colonies of Tropical and South Africa is now performed by the national bourgeoisie and the national intelligensia. (Potekhin, nd, also see Morison, 1964:2)

A new conception crystallised of the nature of non-aligned newly independent states in which the national bourgeoisie (or any other non-proletarian social force) initiated popular reforms and programs of economic development. By 1956 the dominant view was highly critical of the 'sectarian errors' made in the past concerning the role of the national bourgeoisie vis-a-vis the perpetuation of imperialist domination on the one hand and national liberation on the other.

> ... internal processes have not been analysed sufficiently carefully, and no adequate assessment has been made of the objective tendency towards **independent** capitalist development which has undermined the dominant position of imperialism ... .
> Underestimation of the contraditions existing between the national bourgeoisie and imperialism has led to outright denial of the incontestable fact that at certain stages of the anti-imperialist struggle the interests of this bourgeoisie largely coincided with those of the majority of the people. (Sovetskoye Vostokovendeniye, 1956:285 (Emphasis added))

Ex-colonial social formations under the rule of the national bourgeoisie ceased to be perceived by the international communist movement as irrevocably integrated into the 'imperialist anti-democratic camp'. It was acknowledged that the national bourgeoisie could oppose imperialism and lead the ex-colonies to real national autonomy. Constitutional political independence was no longer seen as bogus but as a necessary precondition for a more extensive autonomy.

> That the peoples of the former colonies and semi-colonies win political freedom is the first and essential pre-condition of their achievement of economic independence. (Khrushchev, 1969:282)

Political independence had to be complemented by a series of economic measures if the newly independent nations were to achieve balanced, autonomous economic growth - considered necessary if they were to eventually consummate their autonomy. These measures included: the nationalisation of foreign owned enterprises and financial institutions, or at least their subjection to strict control by the state; the creation of state-controlled enterprises and the introduction of state economic planning. In practice, state control of foreign-owned enterprises can take many different forms. In some cases, where it is deemed in the interests of the national economy, this may allow the encouragement of foreign investment via the granting

of certain privileges to foreign investors such as tax exemptions or the provision of raw materials on preferential terms. (Chirken & Yudin, 1978;25, 33-34; Tabarin, 1975:53, 65, 318-19) The possibility of economic growth in ex-colonial social formations, (and thus of real national autonomy) came no longer to be seen as contingent upon the prior destruction of capitalism. In fact it was argued that capitalist ownership of the means of production should at this stage be maintained as it still had a positive contribution to make to economic development.

> It seems ... that it would hardly be expedient to put a total ban on the development of private capital, even in countries which have already moved further than others along the path of social progress. The public sector is not yet able to guarantee a country the necessary goods. So great is these countries' backwardness that it is necessary to use all available resources, under state control, of course, for economic development. Total prohibition of private capital might also do political damage. The revolution is at a democratic stage. This would be a sectarian policy, which might result in the defeat of the progressive forces and ultimately in the victory of imperialism. (Mirovaya Ekinomika Meshdinavodniye Otnosheniya 6, 1964:349)

> ... the restructuring of social relations (in such social formations) is accompanied by a simultaneous extension of the private sector ... experience ... shows that when subjected to government controls the private sector can contribute to the development of the economy. (Tabarin, 1975:66; Valkreiner, 1983:99)

The specific development strategy associated with the construction of such a 'multi-structural', economic system (in which elements of private capitalist ownership of the means of production still have an organic and significant role to play) was identified as an example of the 'non-capitalist road' to-

wards socialism and social formations engaged on such a path of development were conceived as 'transitional social structures', neither capitalist nor socialist. Similarly the state in social formations of this type is neither capitalist nor socialist but reflects 'the interests not of any one particular class, but of the widest strata of the population of the newly-free nations'[5]

Such forms of social structure and of the state were novel vis-a-vis the conceptual corpus of classical marxism. Here were states which could not be defined as dictatorships of either the bourgeoisie (and thus capitalist) or of the proletariat (and thus socialist). Correspondingly the respective positions of the dominant and dominated classes had been so altered as a result of state economic intervention and control that the social structure was no longer capitalist but not yet socialist either.

In order to fill what was considered to be a significant conceptual breach in marxist-leninism the concept national-democracy was introduced. The growing international links between the Soviet Union and the ex-colonial world were given a doctrinal basis and justification. In the declaration of the meeting of 81 Communist and Workers parties in Moscow in 1960 the term 'national democracy' was formally introduced into the theoretical repertoire of the international communist movement in order to designate that category of ex-colonial (and dependent) countries which could be identified as engaged on a non-capitalist path of development in opposition to imperialism and towards national autonomy.

A national democracy was defined in the declaration as committed to the

> strengthening of national independence, land reforms in the interests of the peasantry, abolition of the remnants of feudalism, extirpation of the economic roots of imperialist rule, the limitation and ousting of foreign monopolies from the economy, the foundation and development of a national industry, the raising of the standard of living of the population, democratisation of public life, an independent, peace-loving foreign policy. (Lowenthal,

1963:56)

In such countries, local communist parties should not aim in the first instance at the socialist transformation of society because of the 'very low level of development of the production forces and social production' (39) which characterises these countries and renders immediate socialist revolution impossible.

> The conditions for immediately carrying out revolutionary socialist transformations and for embarking on the socialist path have today not matured in all the countries. Not all countries have a sufficiently organised working class, a peasantry ready to accept the leadership of the working class, and a marxist-leninist Party. Does this mean that in these countries social development must slow down or even come to a halt? Of course not. Revolutionary Marxists, having studied the special features and tendencies in the life of the young state, have established that they can have a progressive development along a non-capitalist path that will eventually lead to socialism.[6]

The establishment of a national-democracy in an ex-colonial country and the pursuit of a non-capitalist path of development are seen as creating conditions propitious for an eventual transition to socialism. The industrialisation strategy of non-democracies is held to alter their social composition in favour of the proletariate.

> At this moment, then, it is necessary to wait for the national bourgeoisie to mature, since they clearly cannot appear overnight ... . With a strong bourgeoisie there is a strong proletariat. Since national industries are still too weak, there are not the necessary conditions for a revolution. (Brookfield, 1981:132-133)

At the same time such states establish cultural and political

conditions under which communist parties can be formed (if not already in existence) and acquire a hegemonic role amongst the proletariat (and its allies). The interests of the national bourgeoisie and the working class are thus conceived as converging in underdeveloped social formations. The national bourgeoisie has an interest in the struggle against the international capitalist monopolies which seek to stifle its growth. It has moreover an important role to play in what is referred to as the 'non-capitalist' path of development. Capitalist ownership of the means of production is an integral feature of this mode of development. The forms of state intervention which are part of this 'non-capitalist' path of development are not seen as in conflict with the interests of the national bourgeoisie or with capitalist property ownership. On the contrary a large and energetic state sector in the economy is conceived in the theory of national democracy as the best defense available to the national bourgeoisie against the international monopolies. (Brookfield, 1981)

The working class in underdeveloped social formations is viewed as in most cases incapable of initiating and sustaining a struggle aimed at socialist revolution. It should not however forego the objective of socialist revolution but should instead aim to construct via the implementation of a complex set of socio-economic measures '... a new social structure transitional to socialism'. (Tambarin, 1975:305)

It should aim in other words for a 'gradual development of revolution, stage by stage, (for) the possibility of non-capitalist development towards socialism'. (On the Necessity, nd:340)

In the mid-1970s the term national-democracy was replaced by 'socialist orientation'. This terminological substitution was introduced in order to remedy what was felt to be the 'non-socialist' connotation of the term 'national-democracy'. (Steele, 1984:171; Valkreiner, 1983:97)

A socialist-orientated social formation like a national democracy is defined as pre-socialist. In the document released by the first meeting of the Communist Parties of Tropical and Southern Africa in 1978 entitled ***For the Freedom, Independence, National Rebirth and Social Progress of the Peoples of Tropical***

and Southern Africa states of socialist orientation are defined inter alia, by the fact that they pursue policies aiming at 'the gradual creation of the political, material, social and cultural preconditions for the transition to building socialism'. (Yearbook, 1979:430)

Let us now consider the identification of 'national democracies' and societies of a 'socialist orientation' as transitional non-capitalist social formations. Is this a legitimate qualification? Are such social formations 'transitional' and 'non-capitalist'? Does the role of the state in such societies justify this description of them? In short, are they really 'orientated towards socialism'? In order to address this issue it is first necessary to consider very briefly (a) the nature of a transitional social formation in marxist theory; and (b) the nature of capitalist relations of production themselves:

(a) For both Marx and Lenin the transition from one mode of production to another could not occur immediately but necessarily takes the form of a process. In the case of the transition from capitalism to communism Marx and Lenin refer to the process as 'socialism'. Here, throughout the duration of this process, the relations of production of the preceding mode of production (eg the capitalist 'private' appropriation of the means of production), are progressively replaced by new relations of production (eg communist 'social' appropriation of the means of production). (Lenin, 1963; Marx, 1974) Transitional thus denotes a period during which the relations of production of the preceding mode of production are progressively transformed. This transformation, in the case of the movement from capitalist to communism, begins with the appropriation of the means of production by the workers' state. Thereafter this appropriation must pass into the hands of the direct producers themselves in order for the social appropriation of the means of production to be consummated.

Socialism, the period of transition, is defined as 'the first phase of communism', a phase marked by the residues, the 'defects' of capitalism. These are identified as inter alia, the continued existence of certain inequalities in the relations of producers to the means of production and in the division of labour as well as the continued existence of money and commodity

exchanges. (Lavigne, 1978; Lenin, 1963; Marx, 1974:347)

On the other hand, socialist societies are also said to be characterised by the existence of elements of communism in the form of the nascent social appropriation of the means of production via collective ownership and state planning. A society such as Poland in which more than 80% of the cultivated land is under private ownership can therefore still be considered as 'socialist' on condition that it can be established that this situation is being progressively reversed, not simply in the sense of coming under state ownership but passing into the control of the direct producers themselves. What qualifies a society as 'socialist' and therefore also as 'transitional' for Marx and Lenin is thus the fact that in it 'every form of exploitation is **on the way** to disappearing, to the extent that its material foundations are disappearing'. (Balibar, 1977:139)

(b) The capitalist mode of production, defined at the most general level by a double separation of the units of production from one another and of the direct producers from the means of production, assumes different historical forms. In each of these the 'content' of capitalist private property, ie control by a single class of the means of production, has a different 'form'. The capitalist class can comprise a multiplicity of individuals each exercising powers of economic property, (competitive capitalism) or a multiplicity of groups of property owners, (monopoly capitalism). Economic property may also be held in the hands of state functionaries who derive their powers from their place in the state apparatus (state capitalism). In this latter case it is clear that the mode of constitution and reproduction of the dominant (capitalist) class differs significantly from the form assumed by these processes in competitive and monopoly capitalism. To the extent however (1) that control of the means of production is not wielded by the direct producers themselves; (2) that commodity exchange still obtains and the units of production remain separated from one another preventing a planned economy from being possible; and (3) that neither (1) nor (2) above is being progressively transformed, the capitalist mode of production still exists and the transition to socialism has not begun.

As we have seen in national-democracies and societies of a

socialist orientation not only is capitalist private property not eliminated but it is in addition (and in view of the above discussion of the nature of socialism in marxist theory more importantly), allocated a potentially expanding role.

Given this, it is impossible, (barring of course an indulgence in 'dialectical logic')[8] to characterise them as either transitional or non-capitalist. This characterisation would only be appropriate were it possible to identify the conditions of existence of the relation of exploitation of the preceding mode of production as being progressively undermined in such societies. It is therefore only on an indefensibly narrow definition of capitalism that the terms 'national democracy' and 'socialist orientation' can be granted the meaning attributed to them in the political tradition supporting it.

It amy well be the case that increased state power over production is a necessary preliminary to the eventual social appropriation of the means of production. A necessary condition of the latter is however that the proletariat and its allies exercise state power. Unless this is the case it is even arguable that the establishment of a national-democracy and the pursuit of the 'non-capitalist' path of development are likely to facilitate the eventual consolidation of (an admittedly somewhat modified form of) capitalism in South Africa rather than enable a transition to socialism.

COLONIALISM OF A SPECIAL TYPE AND THE NON-CAPITALIST ROAD TO SOCIALISM VIA NATIONAL DEMOCRACY

The 'colonialism of a special type' (C.S.T.) analysis of South Africa advances the following thesis: given the specific structure of South African society, the struggle to establish socialism must first assume the form of struggle to establish a national-democracy and that this struggle must be successful before there can be any transition to socialism in South Africa. Through the prism of this analysis the Freedom Charter appears as a 'national democratic' text. It is undeniable that the definition of the term national-democracy in the lexion of Soviet Marxism makes it possible to construe quite plausibly the demands of the Freedom Charter as 'national-democratic'.[9] For

example the demand for the nationalisation of foreign-owned monopolies and for other forms of state intervention in the economy on behalf of the interests of 'the people' are archetypal national-democratic demands. In South Africa, 'a colonial society of a special type', (ie in which colonisers and colonised inhabit the same political territory), the demand for the nationalisation of foreign-owned monopolies comes to include the demand (which figures centrally in the Freedom Charter) for the nationalisation of monopolies owned by white South Africans.

But why in the first place should the theory of national-democratic revolution be considered pertinent to South Africa? Why in other words should the process of socialist transition in South Africa have to traverse a national-democratic state? This is the first question that needs to be addressed. Secondly, is the definition of 'national democracy' cogent? For even if it were established that a direct transition to socialism is not possible under South African conditions it would still remain to be demonstrated that national-democracies are transitional, non-capitalist social formations 'orientated towards socialism'. It has been argued elsewhere that these concepts are essentially apologetic, that they merit no scrutiny because their unique function is to provide a justification, ex post facto, for an opportunistic political policy, on the part of the Soviet Union and national communist parties of alliance with non-socialist nationalist regimes. (Dallin, 1963; Lowenthal, 1963; Steele, 1985:165) This is not however the approach adopted here. Instead an attempt is made to treat the concept of 'national democracy' as theoretically serious and to appraise theoretically the concepts in question.

Prima facie South Africa is not a colonial society and the theory of national-democratic revolution would seem for this reason to be irrelevant in the case of South Africa. The concepts of national democratic struggle and revolution were, as has been shown above, initially developed to deal with the problems confronting revolutionary class struggle in contexts very different to South Africa. This, it needs to be said, is not made as clear as it should be by those who defend the applicability of the theory of national democratic revolution to South Africa. Consequently the justification as to why revolu-

tionary struggle in South Africa must, for the present, assume a national-democratic form cannot be the same as is put forward in the theory for other colonial social formations, **viz.** the political weakness of the proletariat and its consequent need for more time to expand in size and develop politically.

It is acknowledged by adherents of the CST thesis that South Africa is unlike other colonial societies in some important respects. Not only do the colonising and colonised nations occupy the same territory but in addition, unlike in other colonial societies, adherents of CST have made it clear that the material prerequisite for socialism exists in South Africa. They have characterised this as: a certain level of industrialisation, socio economic contradictions and the force to carry out the revolution (the working class) exists. (Denga, 1985; SACP, 1963)

Yet is spite of such significant differences between the South African social structure and that characteristic of (other) colonial social formations it is still maintained that black South Africans are subjected to a **colonial** form of oppression. There would appear to be two reasons for this. The first may be characterised as explanatory. In the ***Road to South African Freedom*** recourse is had to the classical analysis of imperialism and colonialism developed by Lenin in an effort to elucidate the structure of political oppression in South Africa. Lenin's theory of imperialism and colonialism seems attractive to anyone wanting to explain national oppression in South Africa because what Lenin appears to have achieved is to have identified the conditions under which capitalist exploitation produces a loss of political autonomy for certain 'countries and peoples'.

Under what conditions according to Lenin does this occur? It occurs, he argues, when finance capital, in order to maintain satisfactory profit levels in an advanced capitalist economy which has become 'overripe', exports capital to countries in which there is an available supply of cheap labour and raw materials. These countries are then deprived of their political autonomy, ie colonised, in order to guarantee the supply of these commodities. Finance capital now benefits from the exploitation of two proletariats (its 'own' and that created in the colony) and as a consequence reaps what Lenin refers to as

'superprofits'. (Lenin, 1968:128, 146)

How is Lenin's analysis applied in the ***Road to South African Freedom***? Firstly 'white South Africa' is identified with an advanced monopoly capitalist economy and state. Such an economy and state, are, on Lenin's analysis, driven to colonise, ie to deprive of their political autonomy, other 'peoples and countries' in order to extract superprofits via the exploitation of two proletariats. Secondly, it is suggested that because it is possible to identify in South Africa a category of agents who have been deprived of their political autonomy, therefore a **colonial** relation of domination exists between white South Africa, and the 'non-white majority'. The conclusion is then drawn that South Africa is a colonial society 'of a special type', one in which the colonial relation occurs within the boundaries of a single political territory. (SACP, 1963)

As South Africa is not obviously a colonial society the burden of demonstration must be with those who claim that it is. It has to be said however that their analyses tend frequently to be more assertive than demonstrative. To characterise the specific political domination of black agents in post 1910 South Africa as 'colonial' is not to **demonstrate** that this is a colonial mode of domination. It is therefore also not to explain it, ie to identify its specific conditions of existence. I will cite only one issue by way of example, as illustrative of this flaw in the CST thesis. In order to demonstrate, for example, that black workers in South Africa are not only subject to a specific form of political domination but that this is a **colonial** form of domination, it must be possible to distinguish two proletariats without simply **assuming** the existence of a colonial relation of political domination dividing the working class. Yet this is exactly what the CST thesis has done. It assumes the fact of 'colonial domination' and then uses this assumption to prove the validity of its conclusion. This is circular reasoning. Perhaps ways of avoiding this circularity may exist but they are not to be found in the ***Road to South African Freedom***.[10]

In the second place CST theorists claim that they draw attention to the centrality of national domination in South Africa. Other (marxist) theories of South Africa society fail to fully appreciate the strategic importance of this specific relation of

political oppression under South African conditions. Two distinct arguments (which are not always as clearly distinguished as they deserve to be) can be identified with respect to this issue.

It is sometimes argued that 'colonial' oppression in South Africa frustrates the pursuit by non-proletarian 'colonially' oppressed classes (ie the 'colonially' oppressed bourgeoisie and petite-bourgeoisie) of their specific class interests. Consequently this makes possible an alliance of all 'colonially' oppressed classes in a struggle for national liberation and the construction of a national democracy. (SACP, 1963; Slovo, 1976:135) Apart from the fact that this is an increasingly questionable claim in view of the changes that have taken place in legislation and state strategy over the last ten years vis-a-vis these classes (Hudson & Sarakinsty, 1985) it clearly does not explain why the struggle for socialism must and therefore 'will necessarily pass through' the national democratic state. (Mzala, 1985) The 'convergence of class interests' thesis (if it is accepted) does (and can do) nothing more than indicate the possibility of a political alliance amongst all 'colonially' oppressed classes in South Africa. It cannot demonstrate why the struggle for socialism **must** traverse the national-democratic stage. Yet this is the essential claim of both the CST analysis of South Africa and the theory of national-democratic revolution in colonial social formations.

According to a related line of reasoning the existence in South Africa of a relation of national oppression is sufficient to render the theory of national-democratic revolution pertinent to South Africa. This is **not** because it generates a putative convergence of class interests amongst all 'colonially' oppressed classes but rather because it results in the necessary dominance of racial/national (and not class) subjectivity in South Africa, where, it is argued, all social agents spontaneously identify themselves as well as the structure of their society in racial terms.

The specific form assumed by capital accumulation in South Africa is held to explain why certain social agents are excluded from the franchise and subjected to a bettery of coercive practices whilst others are included in the franchise and exempted

from such practices. The fact that those agents subjected to this form of political oppression are black, and those exempted from it white has the effect however of concealing the class determination of national oppression in South Africa and of establishing the primacy of racial/national subjectivity in South Africa. What social agents perceive in South Africa are racial subjects and various relations of discrimination and oppression amongst them. Each social agent identifies himself by locating himself on the spectrum of available racial identities and places in the matrix of racial domination. The experience of racial difference is thus attributed here a pivotal role in the formation of political identity in South Africa.

The members of the 'colonially oppressed' proletariat, (like all 'colonially oppressed' subjects, experience their place in South African society in racial (and not class) terms. This is held to be of paramount importance by those who would defend the argument that revolutionary class struggle in South Afrca must necessarily traverse a national-democratic stage. For example, Denga (1985) argues that production relations (in South Africa) express more than mere economic relations. They reflect also the political position of the various sections of society. Therefore, exploitation manifests itself first and foremost in the context of the place the black worker occupies in the racial equation, in the specific way production relations manifest themselves under internal colonialism. The black worker in this view not only sees his position on the factory-floor through the colonial screen, but also identifies with all who belong to the lower 'caste'. In Denga's argument, this is not a false consciousness but a reflection of the most immediate contradiction within South African society - between the oppressed people and their rulers. Likewise, in another similar perspective, it has been stated that to expect workers to understand that the real struggle is against the bosses rather than apartheid is to give way to abstract intellectualism. ("Transvaal Indian Congress", 1983:16)

The struggle for socialism in South Africa in this view cannot for the present assume the form of a proletarian class struggle having as its immediate objective the transition to socialism. The structure of South African society is such that the subjec-

tive conditions for such a struggle do not exist and to argue that they can be brought into existence before the dismantling of national oppression is to indulge in voluntarist flights of fancy. The members of the nationally oppressed proletariat identify themselves (in the first instance and primarily) not in terms of their class identity but in terms of their identity as nationally-oppressed racial subjects. This, it is argued, is the essential reason why under present South African conditions there can be no direct (**class**) struggle to construct socialism.

But why then must the struggle for national liberation go beyond the struggle for a bourgeois democracy? Why must it have as its objective the establishment of a national-democracy? Here the argument re-establishes contact with the theoretical tradition we have been examining.

It is only on condition that the struggle for national liberation goes beyond the struggle to establish a bourgeois democracy and has instead as its objective the establishment of a national democracy that it can be identified as revolutionary. For in this tradition a national-democracy is a transitional social formation which is orientated towards socialism whilst a bourgeois democracy is not. The nationally oppressed bourgeoisie have more to gain from the construction of a national democracy than from the construction of a bourgeois democracy; for the former case involves the expropriation of foreign owners of monopoly capital as well as a vigorous defense by the national-democratic state of the interests of the indigenous national capitalist class against the aggressive economic incursions of international finance capital.

Leaving aside the somewhat controversial view that the national bourgeoisie in South Africa wish to be, let alone that they can be, severed from international monopoly capital, the underlying basis of this argument rests on the primery of racial/national subjectivity in the formation of political identity.

Ultimately the thesis that the South African social structure causes racial identity to be the dominant form of political identity (in South Africa) is based upon the theory of ideology embodied in Marx's analysis (in ***Capital***) of the fetishism of commodities.[11] Fetishism is a characteristic of commodity pro-

ducing modes of production, in particular the capitalist mode of production (CMP). Such modes of production are characterised by a dual structure. They comprise an essence and an appearance and only the latter can be perceived. The essence is invisible and its phenomenal form misrepresents it. The perceptions of the surface level of the CMP (eg the apparent connexions between wages, rent and profits), comprise ideology whilst science cognises the **relationship** between the essence (the relations and forces of production and the extraction of surplus value based on them) and its phenomenal form.

Here ideology is defined as a representation of direct experience. There is a sense in which it is illusory but there is another in which it is not. It is not based on a defective act of perception. It is the internal bifurcation of the CMP itself into essence and appearance which imposes on social agents determinate perceptions and experiences. Vis-a-vis the level of appearance, which is no less 'real' than the essence, ideology is not 'false'. According to this theory of ideology, both capitalists and workers acquire their respective social identities and thus simultaneously learn how to identify their class interests via the experiences which their places in the relations of production impose on them. Capitalists learn through experience how to calculate the relationship which appears on the surface of the CMP between prices, wages and profits and thus how to maximise profits, which is precisely the behaviour required of them as personifications of capital. Similarly members of the working class acquire, via their experience of antagonism vis-a-vis capital, a collective class identity.

CST analysis sees a 'colonial screen' intervening between social agents and their experiences of their places in the relations of production. The concept of 'experience' is called upon to play the same role it plays in the analysis of the fetishism of commodities. The constitution of racial subjectivity is explained as a consequence of the experience of racial difference and domination. When social agents in South Africa identify themselves in racial/national terms this is said to be because they experience racial/national domination. Racial subjectivity in South Africa is at once illusory and non-illusory - illusory because it conceals the class determination of

racial domination in South Africa but veridical because it expresses the experience of these (objective) relations of racial oppression. Thus racial subjectivity cannot therefore be characterised as 'false consciousness'.

Following Brewster, Balibar and Hirst, the theory of ideology upon which Marx's analysis of the fetishism of commodities is based appears however to be both empiricist and economistic. (Balibar, 1974B; Brewster, 1976; Hirst, 1974) It conceives of the capitalist economy as itself determining the way in which it is perceived and experienced by social agents and as forming their identities via this experience. Thus the capitalist economy determines a set of necessary perceptions and experiences for social agents depending upon their places in the relations of production which endows them with determinate subjectivities (capitalist, petty bourgeois, proletarian) and to which correspond paradigmatic forms of political practice. Class subjectivity is here a direct 'structural effect' imposed and acquired via experience. Here subjects are therefore empty and blank until filled with this set of perceptions and experiences. This construction depends on an untenable construction of experience as univocal, ie as having only one meaning and being unambiguous. But experience is always subject (and open) to interpretation and therefore contains a range of possible meanings. The 'immediate experience' in terms of which Marx tries to conceptualise ideology and science does not exist. An empiricist conception of the subject is therefore operative here.

Whatever its shortcomings, the recent attempt by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe[12] to 'recast' marxism by developing an analysis of the constitution of social identity which leans heavily on post-Saussurian discourse theory has underlined the impossibility of deriving from an agent's place in the relations of production his dominant 'subject-position'. Although there may not yet exist a satisfactory theory of the formation of social identity in marxism it has become clear that 'the social' enjoys a degree of openness and fluidity which classical marxism finds it very difficult to acknowledge. The process of subject-formation and the constitution of political antagonisms cannot be reduced as they very often are in classical marxism, to

effects of experience.

It is clear then that the concept of experience is assigned a theoretical role in the CST thesis which it is impossible for it to fulfil. If social agents in South Arica identify themselves in racial terms, this **cannot** be attributed to an experience of racial domination. If it is the case that social agents in South Africa spontaneously identify themselves as racial subjects this is a function of an already constituted racial subjectivity, itself the product of ideological struggles. The dominant role of this racial subjectivity vis-a-vis other social identities (eg child/adult, man/woman, capitalist/worker) in the constitution of the fundamental political line of demarcation and antagonism in South Africa is therefore not guaranteed by the existence of racial domination in South Africa.

The principal claim of the CST analysis of South Africa to the effect that there exists a **necessary** primacy of racial over class subjectivity within the black working class in South Africa rests upon untenable theoretical principles. Its subsidiary thesis, that revolutionary class struggle in South Africa must under present conditions assume the form of a national-democratic struggle and that the road to socialism in South Arica must, of necessity, traverse a national-democratic stage, is reduced to an assertion. National/racial identity has not been shown by the CST analysis to enjoy an inevitable primacy in South Africa. In fact a much wider range of political identities can and does exist in South Africa than is able to be acknowledged by the CST analysis. Any attempt to inscribe the demands of the Freedom Charter in such a teleology has to be rejected.

Contrary to the claims of the theory of national-democracy and the CST thesis derived from it, the transfer of state power demanded in the Freedom Charter cannot be seen as inaugurating a non-capitalist putatively protosocalist path of development. Nothing in the Freedom Charter entails the elimination of capitalism and the establishment of a transitional social formation in South Africa. In fact the fundamental question from the point of view of the transition to socialism of specifically working class power within the state is not addressed in the Freedom Charter. Clearly the transfer of state power as envi-

saged there would very significantly modify the mode of constitution and composition of the capitalist class as well as the form of capitalism itself in South Africa. Whilst this might be a necessary condition for the transformation of the mode of production in South Africa, it is not, and should not be, seen, as a sufficient condition of such a transformation.

FOOTNOTES

1 For example, see the programme of the South African Communist Pary adopted at their sixth national conference in Johannesburg in 1962, 'The Road to South African Freedom' (South African Communist Party, 1963). See also 'Colonialism of a Special Kind' 1983; 'National Democratic Struggle', 1984; 'Transvaal Indian Congress', 1983; 'Working Class Leadership', 1982.

2 This has been pointed out by Du Toit (1981:190). What Du Toit apparently fails to recognise however is that answers to the questions he poses concerning the theoretical raison d'être of these concepts can be found elsewhere.

3 This issue should be kept separate from that concerning the role of members of the South African Communist Party in the formulation of the Freedom Charter. With respect to this, Joe Slovo has, in a recent interview (***The Guardian Weekly***, 28 July 1985), discussed, apparently for the first time, his clandestine participation in its actual writing.
For more recent usage of these terms see the references cited in footnote 1 with the addition of Manzi, 1984.

4 NP Farberov - ***The Government of the People's Democracies***, (Moscow, 1949:33) cited in Kase, 1968:24.

5 See Valkreiner, 1983:85; Tabarin, 1975:205; VL Tiagunenko - ***Bypassing Capitalism*** (Moscow; Novoste Press Agency, 1066:65) cited in Kase, 1968:121.

6 G Starishenko, in ***Kommunist***, September 1962, cited in Klinghoffer, 1969:193.

7 For a discussion of different forms of capitalism, see Bettleheim, 1976; Chavance, 1980; 1982.

8 See Balibar's critique of the use of such (Hegelian) 'dialectical logic' by marxist theory in the analysis of

the transition from feudalism to capitalism (1974a).

9 This is how they are defined in South African Communist Party, 1963.

10 There are defenders of the CST analysis of South Africa who are aware of and recognise this problem. Hence Slovo, for example, does not hesitate to emphasise the provisional status of the CST thesis from a theoretical point of view. Identifying 'white South Africa' with an imperialist state and 'non-white South Africa' with the 'colony' is, he suggests, a 'useful shorthand **at one level**' (emphasis in original) (Slovo, 1976:135).

11 The best exposition of this theory is probably still that of Rancière (1973). See also Hirst (1974). Its application is explicitly located in the theoretical introduction to O'Meara (1982).

12 Laclau and Mouffe (1985). For a critical discussion see Jessop (1982), and Hudson (1985).

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