

MANAGERS AND THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS

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One of the most significant phenomena accompanying the transition to monopoly capitalism is the massive growth of an intermediate stratum consisting mainly of professional and managerial employees. In spite of the accelerated growth of this grouping in South Africa, very little work has been done to analyse its social and political significance in the national liberation struggle in South Africa. Rather, there has been a proliferation of writings by liberal bourgeois scholars on the black managerial stratum. This stratum has been seen as providing allies for monopoly capital in the maintenance and reproduction of the existing capitalist social relations of production:

I believe if we seriously want to solve our problems especially those of polarisation between black and white, we have to re-assess our whole social structure We are at the moment concerned about socialism in the world, but at the same time we do not do those things that will inhibit or contain that socialism ... and I believe that in order to provide a buffer between the so-called exclusive classes on the one hand, and the perceived oppression on the other, you need to develop and encourage (a black) middle class. (Mokoatle, 1977:27)

Some South African progressive scholars have dismissed the black middle classes as petty bourgeois, and thus incompatible in purpose to the working class.

In doing so they have overlooked the tradition of resistance and struggle facilitating the formation of strong alliances between the working class and sections of the black middle class in South African history. Others have dismissed their potential role as a conservative force by virtue of their small numbers. Numbers are important, but the relatively small size of the black middle classes cannot be used as a reliable criterion to assess their influence and power. Homeland bureaucrats,

community councillors and other sections of the black middle classes have been successfully co-opted on to the side of the ruling bloc. Although it can be argued that their co-option has been unsuccessful because they are unpopular with the masses (except perhaps in Natal), the ruling class has shown great willingness to give them power and legitimacy to ensure their continued survival and service to the dominant interests in the country. Moreover it is a mistake to underestimate the potential for deracialisation within the South African social formation. Given the dynamic nature of the struggle, the increasing pressure on the state by the masses, and some already existing tendencies towards deracialisation, the size of the black middle classes should not be taken as static. Finally, the ideological influence of the black middle classes over the black masses should never be taken lightly.

Despite the small size of this group, it serves two clearly identifiable political and ideological functions in favour of the ruling class. It legitimates an ideology of professionalism and careerism; and reinforces the belief within the working class that their only salvation out of shop²floor exploitation and repression is by becoming professionals.

Although there is a growing rejection of middle class values within the dominated classes, the above process has over the years tended to maintain the elite position of the black middle classes.

The issue must be engaged seriously. One cannot form opinions on the subject without thorough and rigorous analysis of the class location and practices of the African middle class in the context of racially oppressive state policies. Since African personnel practitioners (APPs) are becoming a significant fraction of the African middle class, the aim of this paper is to analyse their position in the capitalist relations of exploitation and racial domination in South Africa. The lack of homogeneity within the African middle class calls for an analysis of its different strata and fractions as the only theoretically viable route to arrive at a proper understanding of the class as a whole. The importance of personnel practitioners in the formation of the African middle class can be assessed from the following summary points:

- (a) The research done thus far on African managers tends to indicate that of all the African managers employed in industry and commerce, personnel officers/managers form a significant portion. (Wella, 1983)
- (b) There has been a phenomenal growth of personnel management over the past decade in South Africa. The personnel function has been diversified and professionalised with a corresponding increase in the number of APPs, particularly after the 1973 Durban strikes.³
- (c) The fact that APPs are that strata of the black middle classes which is located within the sphere of production (albeit marginally), results in their daily and direct contact with the workers.
- (d) They have formed their own professional organizations to represent the interests of APPs and other African managers in industry, in particular the Johannesburg-based Black Management Forum (BMF) and the Durban-based Personnel Practitioners Association (PPA).

THE CONTENT WITHIN WHICH AFRICAN PERSONNEL PRACTITIONERS HAVE EMERGED

The post World War II period was marked by the transition to monopoly capitalism, massive state intervention in the economy and the smashing of black popular and trade union organizations. The subjugation of the black masses by the state created favourable conditions for the unprecedented economic boom and industrial peace of the 1960s. It is in this respect that the transition to monopoly capitalism in South Africa radically differs from similar transitions in Western capitalist countries. In these countries, the employers were faced with the problem of 'organizational uncoupling ... whereby the growing division of labour and fractionation of work at headquarters and on the shop floor progressed more rapidly than did the newly required co-ordination and reintegration of these tasks'. (Goldman and Van Houten, 1980:110) This crisis brought about by lagging managerial strategies, forced capital in these countries to seek assistance from the social scientists, in an attempt to achieve voluntary compliance from the working class. (Baritz,

1965) It was the contradiction between management's need to control the labour process through internal rules (bureaucratic control) and the desire to generate workers consent to those rules (voluntary compliance), which gave birth to personnel management. (Goldman and Van Houten, 1986) '... Personnel practitioners do not by and large concern themselves with the organization of work, but rather with the conditions under which the worker may best be brought to co-operate in the scheme of work ...' (Braverman, 1874:140)

However, because of the existence of a powerless and conquered working class in South Africa, personnel management only got off the ground in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Instead, capital was primarily anxious during the post-War period over the selection of 'trainable' African workers to fill in the rapidly expanding category of semi-skilled workers. Hence the formation of the National Institute of Personnel Research (NIPR) in 1946, and its pre-occupation with finding ways and means of improving selection techniques for black workers while improving productivity. The major concerns of the NIPR between 1947 and 1961, are revealed by the characteristic titles of its reports: 'The psychologist and selection'; 'Personnel selection tests for Africans'; 'The study of African ability'; 'The measurement of occupational aptitudes in a multi-racial society'; and 'Human efficiency and happiness: Some contributions by personnel research'.⁴ The bulk of the NIPR's work consisted of assignments by private companies.

Personnel management in South Africa thus remained insignificant, mainly concerned with testing and routine administrative functions. The overall growth of membership of the Institute of Personnel Management (IPM) between 1946 and 1969 (from 147 members to 870) was low. (Webster, 1980) Factory control in South African industry between 1950 and 1973 can best be described as a despotic regime based on a racial hierarchy of control and the white foreman at the apex assisted by *izinduna* (supervisors) and *izimpimpi* (informers). 'Because of problems of communication between black and white the supervisor was often a figure-head with real control being exercised by the *induna*'. (Webster, 1985:124)

It was not until 1973 that this system was seriously chall-

enged by the working class. The eruption of strikes in Durban, with an estimated 100 000 workers involved, unleashed a crisis in control resulting in a number of changes and significant measures of restructuring, as SS Lemmer, Director of Personnel, Sigma Motor Corporation, observed in 1977:

Because of our paternal attitude towards the Black and Brown workers, we have not developed skills in the handling of industrial conflict. In this respect I refer to sophisticated and proven industrial relations systems, effective bargaining systems, grievance procedures. Recent occurrences have indicated that conflict between management and labour is likely to increase, and we are going to have to learn these skills fast if we are to remain on top of our jobs. (Lemmer, 1977:5)

One of the most important changes was a massive introduction of liaison and works committees, ushering in an era of bureaucratic control by management. Although there was liaison and works committees in existence before 1973, these were not legally recognised and were very few in number. The promulgation of the *Bantu Labour Relations Regulation Amendment Act*, Gazetted on 4 July 1973, made provision for the establishment of such committees and gave them a legal status.

Between July 1973 and 31 August 1974 the number of liaison committees increased from 120 to 1 211, and works committees (during the same period) increased from 43 to 200. (Verster, 1975) There were two main reasons why these committees mushroomed after 1973. Firstly, they were to be the forum for 'pseudo-negotiations' on the bureaucratic rules set up to control workers. These bureaucratic rules included grievance procedures and discipline codes, whose success depended on establishing their legitimacy within the working class. Secondly, the liaison committees were formed to 'improve' communication between workers and management. Such a role was not surprising during this period given capital's identification of communication as the most serious obstacle to 'common understanding' between management and workers:

The need for effective communications is nowhere more sharply evident than in relations between management at its various levels and Black employees. In the past communications were largely a matter of tribal procedures. These obviously do not provide efficient industrial communications in a changing labour scene, and they are being replaced by a series of committees with both nominated and elected members to meet formally and regularly with management at different operational levels. (Optima, 1973:83)

The other major post-1973 development was the massive employment of personnel practitioners. This development was mainly reflected in the swelling of ranks of the IPM membership, from a meagre 870 in 1969 to 4 000 in 1976. (Webster, 1980)

During the period 1975 to 1980 people doing personnel work increased more rapidly than the total staff establishment in many companies. Although the overall number of APPs was considerably lower than whites, they grew 40% between 1975 and 1980 as opposed to 34% for whites. (Langerhoven, 1981) The one major function of the personnel practitioners was to ensure the successful operation of the liaison and works committee system:

The personnel department is often responsible for explaining the system to new Black workers, and (personnel department) officials frequently serve on the liaison committees. In Works Committees personnel department officials often represent management, by way of invitation The type of information handled or communicated by the committees mainly concerns hygiene factors such as, conditions of service, wages, working conditions, and safety As these criteria are largely centred around personnel administration, it is clear that, by improving this function in an organization, the committee will become less of a grievance procedure, and more of **an effective information** exchange procedure. (Verster, 1975:8)

It is within this context that the emergence of the African

personnel practitioners should be located and understood. The transition to monopoly capitalism in America for instance was characterised by the erosion of the foremen's functions which included personnel policy and its implementation, eg hiring, training, motivation and discipline.

As the size and complexity of the industrial workplace increased and operations became more rationalised, the job grew too large for a single individual. Many of these functions were taken over by personnel management. Although similar tendencies were evident for the white foremen in South Africa, they were protected from such an erosion of power by the entrenchment of the racial hierarchy in the social division of labour. Thus personnel departments, instead displaced the *isinduna*, by taking over some of their functions, and became the vital link in management-worker communication. The displacement of the *isinduna* was also facilitated by the growing contradiction between, on the one hand, their function as first line 'managers' of the labour process, and, on the other hand, their role as a communication link. This contradiction was also brought about by capital's attempt to give credibility to liaison committees as effective means of communication.

One way of giving legitimacy to liaison committees was to allocate the responsibility for setting up the rules of communication to an 'outsider', someone not in the direct line of command in the hierarchy of exploitation and domination. These developments ushered the APPs onto the centre-stage of industrial relations in South Africa. The *induna's* job was further eroded by the transfer of hiring of black labour to the African personnel practitioners. The first line supervisor today is nothing more than a gang leader or a 'working overseer'.

The African personnel practitioners were therefore initially employed as a **means to facilitate communication** and as part of personnel management's strategy to improve the image of liaison committees in order to prevent the formation of trade unions. A typical job of an African personnel practitioner at this time included interpreting in liaison committee meetings, hiring of black labour, and clerical routine functions pertaining to the smooth functioning of personnel departments. Therefore, the entry point of the African personnel practitioners was their

role in helping management contain worker action through, amongst other things, the setting up of bureaucratic rules and interpretation of workers' 'needs' to management.

Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to attribute the continuing existence and employment of the African personnel practitioners only to their role in industrial 'communication'. The original basis on which such practitioners were employed have changed quite drastically since the Soweto uprisings in 1976, coupled with the impact of worker action. The state and capital's response to this crisis - which resulted in a change of strategy towards the black working class and the middle classes - is best captured by Morris (1981) in his argument that

(The) issue of the long term threat of the working class, if it was left outside of the state apparatus of industrial relations, became of paramount importance in the context of the 1976 student revolts. Faced with a petty bourgeoisie in revolt both inside and outside the schools ... capital in South Africa, particularly monopoly capital, pushed strongly for a strategy of limited reforms to satisfy some of the aspirations of the 'new black middle class', and to try to separate the latter off politically from the black working class. All this ... involved a policy of division (dividing workers from the 'new black middle class', economic struggles from political struggles) as opposed to the previous policy which tended to unite all classes in the black population and polarize them against capital and the state. (Morris, 1981:71)

It was within this context that the employment of, not only African personnel practitioners, but other 'senior' black employees as well, became increasingly identified as a terrain on which to build a stable new middle class. It is also against this background that 'black advancement' and 'social responsibility' emerged within the discourses of the ruling class. The editorial comment of the journal *People and Profits*, whose audience is the white personnel managers responsible for black advancement programmes, clearly reflects these changes:

We can continue to spell out useful guidelines for the development of Blacks till we are blue in the face ... without success ... unashamedly they (Blacks) must be sold the benefits (of 'the free enterprise system'). In this regard let us put aside the morality and get on with the job ... Blacks and Whites together ... both benefiting. (*People and Profits*, 1978:3)

However, the state's strategy towards the promotion of a black middle class has been characterised by inconsistencies and contradictions, largely due to its reluctance in encouraging a class whose growth is a potential political threat to the state itself. The reluctance to come out with a coherent, clear-cut strategy, particularly with regard to the professional managerial stratum, is due to the state's loosening of its grip over industrial relations after 1979. The restructuring of industrial relations after the Wiehahn recommendations, left the ball in capital's court. Although capital was beset with the same contradictions as the state, it has adopted a more aggressive posture to promote a black middle class.

Capital's strategy has been problematic because the capitalist class itself does not manage black advancement. Instead, the people who are to ensure black advancement are white middle managers, whose position and interests are threatened by a growing black middle class. Despite these contradictions efforts are made by both capital and the state to encourage a black middle class. These attempts, on the part of state and capital, are of course carried out within the context of state reforms to modernise apartheid. The 1980s in particular have witnessed a more co-ordinated approach on the part of the state to co-opt the middle classes of the black population culminating in the introduction of the 'new' constitution and the 'revamped' community councils.

THE CONTRADICTIONARY LOCATION OF THE AFRICAN PERSONNEL PRACTITIONER IN THE RELATIONS OF EXPLOITATION AND DOMINATION

The contradictory location of the new African middle class can

best be captured through an analysis of the dynamic interplay between class exploitation and racial domination.⁵

Class should be the central concept in understanding the new African middle class in South Africa. However, any analysis which does not take into account the relative autonomy of racial domination would be inaccurate, since racial domination is more crucial in understanding the class consciousness of the new African middle classes, rather than the creation of class structure per se. An additional distinction must be made between the role of racial domination in assigning agents to class places as opposed to its role in determining those class places as such. I will therefore argue that class places are largely determined by the mechanisms of capital accumulation, while allocation of agents to class places in South Africa, is largely influenced by race. Therefore it is only at the level of the political struggle that one can talk of the **unity** of class and race, rather than at the level of class differentiation, as Posel seems to suggest.⁶

The contradictory location of APPs within the relations of production manifests itself at a number of levels through a number of closely related factors and processes. I briefly discuss three of these factors:

(i) contradictory location of the middle classes under monopoly capitalism; (ii) The relationship of African personnel practitioners to black workers and white management; (iii) contradictions within the personnel function itself.

The contradictory location of African personnel practitioners can firstly be situated within the context of the location of the new middle classes in all capitalist social formations. (Wright, 1978) In South Africa the location of this grouping is also over-determined by the peculiar interpenetration of race and class and the relative autonomy of racial domination. Over and above the ambiguous location of this new middle class in capitalist relations of production (the non-coincidence between ownership and management), the African personnel practitioners are caught between their isolation from the black working class and also at the same time their marginalisation at the fringe of white management. This dynamic interplay between race and class does not easily lend itself to a structural analysis of classes

in South Africa. For instance Erik Olin Wright's (1978) proposition that the new middle class is differentiated from the working class mainly through the former's control over labour power and control over the physical means of production, in the South African case applies more to white artisans than to the new African middle class. Artisans have more control over labour of African workers than, for instance, many of the African managers. Thus an analysis of the new middle class which operates only at the abstract level of the capitalist mode of production is inadequate in this instance.

The contradictory nature of the role of APPs within the relations of production becomes clearly articulated when their relationship to the black working class is examined. For instance racial discrimination in South Africa has produced a situation where members of the African middle classes share many of the humiliating conditions with black workers. Members of this group have been, together with the working class, victims of forced removals, influx control, tight and autocratic control of their lives, to mention a few examples. This has over the years tended to blur the class differences between the two, particularly on the social and political terrains. However, within the enterprise, African personnel practitioners are performing an objectively capitalist class function, which is fundamentally contrary to working class interests and perceived by workers as such. Hence the co-existence (amongst the members of the African middle class) of, on the one hand, hostility and suspicion towards capital and whites in general, and, on the other hand, elitism towards the black working class, as a Mr Shuenyane comments in response to a question on the black middle class:

There is no such thing as the 'black middle class'. We are all blacks. **Legally, we suffer from the same restrictions: economically, we are standing on the pavements watching the mainstream go by: socially, even the 'cocktail set' still go back to the ghettos. So why is there this cry that we're selling out. It is a cry from the frustrated hearts of mediocrity, from the forces of low-standards and of non-achieve-**

ment - the forces of laziness? (in Beckett, 1985)

Eric Mafuna, President of the BMF, while agreeing that Blacks blame practically everything on white oppression **and use this as a handy excuse for every failing**, at the same time quickly adds that such an attitude is understandable:

(blacks) blame the white man because they have to look for their pass every morning before going to work ... We are as black as anyone else. We still have to say 'baas' at the pass office. We still have to strip for petty officials ... and for us (black managers) its more painful. There's no sane black man who doesn't believe there's going to be a violent end to this whole thing ... What are they (the black community) scared of? That we're going to end up fighting on the side of whites? They must be crazy. (Beckett, 1985:14)

Mafuna's words are consistent with the argument that the petty bourgeoisie does engage in 'battles' with capital in order to advance their own class interests, rather than together with, or on behalf of, the working class. (cf Poulantzas, 1978)

The relationship of APPs to white management is also revealing. The jobs of African personnel practitioners are structured and closely controlled, with variations of course, by white middle management. Control over the labour process effectively remains in the hands of white managers. While one of the primary reasons why an African practitioner is employed in this capacity is to facilitate 'communication' (largely for the purposes of control and subordination) with black workers, those practitioners themselves rarely have the freedom of interacting with workers independently.

As a result their sphere of operation is restricted, with very little decision-making powers. Expansion of the sphere of African managers threatens the extended reproduction of the white middle classes in South Africa. This is the source of the major dilemma in black advancement initiative facing capital and white management: promotion of an African middle class is an attrac-

tive political investment in terms of stability, but simultaneously offers political risk given the history of black resistance.

The contradictory location of African personnel practitioners is also a reflection of the nature of the personnel function in capitalist enterprises. One of the contradictions in the social position of personnel practitioners is that they, like other 'professionals', '... have become both agents of capitalist control and also the professionally trained servants of capitalism'. (Esland, 1980:229) The personnel function is located outside the direct line of command in the production process, yet it is gradually becoming a key function in trying to resolve fundamental antagonisms between capital and labour. Like many of capitalism's functions classified as 'service' functions (eg public relations, advertising, research and development, etc), their contribution to the company's balance sheets are not easy to measure. The personnel practitioners, as servants of capital, are therefore always faced with a situation of trying to prove the contribution they make to the profitability of business. Personnel practitioners must 'deliver the goods' to capital as employees themselves, and, on the other hand, must maintain a neutral image with workers in order to enhance the legitimacy of the function.

In South African personnel management this contradiction came to a 'boiling point' with the mass uprisings of 1976, precipitating an unprecedented crisis of legitimacy within the personnel function. This crisis is best captured in the following extract from a key paper presented at the 1977 IPM National Convention held at the Rand Afrikaans University:

The Soweto riots and removal of squatters at Modderdam are no longer static events to be conceptualized from the print of a newspaper. The great disparity in National affluence, the potential for violence and disorder have been seen by many of us, and we have had to integrate new experiences and develop a new perspective ... Political regimes around us have changed and will continue to change ... If then there is one major mission for resolution of conflicts ... We can

no longer afford to live with passive workers, nor can we risk unrest, turnovers or absenteeism. Industrial relations became a philosophy of management: the system calls for a major integration into our whole personnel function ... **There has emerged among the Black people, moreover, a new breed of leaders who are tough, outspoken, and aware of their strength.** We in business will come to terms with them ... The question then ... which I would like to set you is **simply this:** What ideology can we offer to the **dispos-
sessed in our land?** I do not believe such an ideology will emerge with ease and without pain. Historical forces will work through the fabric of our society. And our success will depend on our ability to learn, and to start afresh, even though the conflict around us will touch our most violent political emotions. This is the self-sufficiency we have to discover in ourselves. (Cortis, 1977:28-29)

The escalation of conflict was far beyond the capacity of skills possessed by management in handling it. One potential avenue for the resolution of the conflict appeared (to capital) to lie in professionalisation of the personnel management function. The IPM set up its own commission of enquiry in 1977 under Prof H P Langerhoven to investigate this possibility. This, it was hoped, would help to acquire a neutral image so crucial in propagating ideology. This would sunder them, in part, from the major sources of political and economic hegemony within the factory. Professionalisation would also help establish its legitimacy in the eyes of the working class by stressing 'autonomy', thus directing attention '... away from the ways in which they themselves feature in the larger structures of capitalist power and organization. They lead us, in fact, to overlook the ways in which the professions as concentrations of middle class culture have become generators of ideology which legitimates the operation of social order in society'. (Esland, 1980:219) But professionalisation is unlikely to resolve the contradictions inherent in personnel practice. Instead new paradoxes come out, one of them being that

'... although as a whole they (professions) constitute an ideologically powerful group, their members act frequently in the role of bureaucratic functionaries'. (Esland, 1980:223)

THE POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL POSITION OF THE NEW AFRICAN MIDDLE CLASS

It would be incorrect to analyse the location and role of the African personnel practitioners and other African managers only in terms of the demands of their situation, without looking at their response. Harry Braverman (1974), the regenerator of labour process studies in recent times, has been criticised mainly for his tendency to restrict the class analysis of managers to a functional study of internal organisational structure. Thus Salaman (1982:53) points out that

... position within the division of labour and differences in location within the authority system of the enterprise, represent an important basis of class structuration. But the influence of these factors is greatly increased when they are allied to extra organizational factors affecting the class of these groups.

The same question arises when one is dealing with APPs as a class strata of the African middle classes. It therefore becomes crucial to examine the political and ideological position(s) of these groupings.

It has been observed that it is difficult to present a coherent picture of the political and ideological position of the new African middle class. (Wolpe, 1976) Firstly, the different components or strata that make up this class do not exhibit any coherence in political and ideological outlook. Secondly, organisations explicitly expressing its political and ideological position are not well established. Thirdly, contradictory location between capital and labour makes for incoherence.

It can be argued that African managers were more or less spectators to their own genesis but they have begun to respond to their situation. The formation of the BMF and the PPA is a

landmark in the consolidation of the position of the new African middle class in South African Industry. It is in the practices and philosophies of these organisations that the political and ideological positions of the new African middle class should be sought.

The BMF sees its role as that of reconciling 'black community needs' (whatever that means) and those of white businesses, and in the meantime hopefully resolving their contradictory position. According to its founding statement:

The aim of the BMF is to serve the mutual needs of the black community, on the one hand, and those of business management on the other. It is a black initiative that seeks to place black managers on an equal footing with managers from other backgrounds. (BMF, undated:2)

The growing intensity of working class and community struggles has, however, caused a shift in the policy of the BMF towards political issues. While they started as a 'strictly non-political' organisation, the 1984/85 struggles led to the appointment of an internal commission of enquiry in 1985, which, amongst other things, suggested that:

The recommendation of the commission is that we should address such political and economic issues as affect our people and communities and remove from our objectives the words 'strictly non-political'. We should do the following without being copy-cats or bandwagon jumpers ... (1) Protest against the presence of the SADF in Black townships (2) Call for the upliftment of the state of emergency (3) Support the call for the release of political prisoners (4) Reject institutions which are created in order to perpetuate apartheid ... The point is, the government must adopt a viable process of reform. (BMF, 1985:1)

At the same time their class interests come out clearly when the same report deals with the question of disinvestment:

Total disinvestment is seen as a non-viable strategy in the long run and it contradicts the existence of a Black management forum - who are we fighting for and what for if at the same time we call for total disinvestment? (1985:2)

In spite of the fact that the BMF appears to be placing equal emphasis on the needs of both labour and capital, there is a very clear identification with capitalism:

... existing studies would seem to indicate that the black does not, as readily as his white counterpart, accept **legitimate spirit of competition** in a managerial role ... what academic training black potential managers receive appears to have little relevance to business ... In these instances many Blacks seem to lack the drive to achieve ... For these reasons **the Black manager is disadvantaged by his lack of corporate customs and conventions** which are automatically accepted and assumed by Whites (BMF, undated:2)⁸

The internalisation of capitalist ideology by the BMF, reflects a certain measure of success in capital's and the state's attempts at dividing the oppressed and co-opting the middle classes. Such 'success' is an outcome of aggressive manoeuvres mainly by capital in the post-1976 period to draw a distinction between apartheid and the 'free enterprise system'. The deracialisation of industrial relations after Wiehahn was marked by an 'apparent' rupture between **state power** and capitalist **class power**. Capital now had to negotiate directly with black unions to set up terms and conditions of employment. These changes created space for capital to embark on a major offensive in legitimising the 'free enterprise system'. This was done mainly through programmes like the GM and later 'Project Free Enterprise' designed for the working class, and 'Need for Achievement Training', designed for black managers. The 'sphere of production' was now presented by capital as a neutral arena 'bedevilled' by the state apartheid practices. It is in this manner that **both** capital and the state sought an ideological incorpora-

tion of the black middle classes coupled with certain concessions, eg relaxation of influx control regulations for black professionals, and of late, the opening of central business districts to all races.¹⁰

A number of other obstacles remain, nevertheless, before this incorporation can triumph. One notes:

- (i) The entrenched racial division of labour within the dominant relations of production. As pointed out earlier, since the extended reproduction of the white middle classes has been **dependent** on the exclusion of blacks, this racial hierarchy prevents an accelerated incorporation and **growth** of the African middle classes.
- (ii) There has not been adequate reform and deracialisation needed to facilitate the co-option of the black middle classes. Instead, because the Nationalist Party is essentially caught in its racial ideology and practices (despite some shifts in this regard), its reform interventions are still largely racially based. For example, instead of leaving the allocation of houses to 'market forces', the Group Areas Act remains in force.
- (iii) The intensification of the class struggle and other community struggles have exerted pressure on the black middle class to adopt political and ideological positions not inconsistent with those of the exploited masses.

Caught within the 'whirlwind' of the struggle, the formation of the BMF and its oscillating political and ideological positions, should therefore be understood as an attempt by the new African middle class to organise themselves and 're-enter' the terrain of the class struggle in their own terms. This is an embryonic form of class consciousness development which realises that the class interests of the new African middle class, and its survival, is inextricably linked with the continued survival of capitalism in its deracialised form.

Given this particular political and ideological position, what are the prospects of a working class led alliance in the struggle for democracy in South Africa, and what is the relevance of the African middle classes in the struggle? Can they be co-opted onto the side of the power bloc, or conversely form part of an alliance with the working class?

There are two clearly discernible positions within this debate on the co-optation of the African middle classes. One postulates that racial domination creates common conditions for all blacks such that the middle classes cannot align themselves with the ruling bloc. A version of this position uses the theory of 'internal colonialism' to stress that because the African middle classes are hampered and restricted by laws which favour their white counterparts, they have an equal interest in radical social structural change.

A recent argument along these lines is made by Nolutshungu (1983). He concludes with regard to the African middle class that:

This greatly qualifies the degree to which they can be said to form a class, or classes, or to belong, in common with whites, to the larger South African bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. This deprives them of that privileged access to state power so essential to accumulation ... and thus makes most of them subject to economic oppression of an order not endured by any of their white counterparts but, in many ways, comparable to the exploitation and economic oppression of workers and peasants. (1983:199)

The second position is represented by Wolpe (1976). It emphasises the incorporation of the African middle classes into capitalist structures, and sees these developments creating objective conditions for eroding the basis of an alliance with the working class.

Following from Wolpe one cannot assume that just because blacks are subject to oppression, they therefore are **all** equally interested in the total and complete transformation of South African society. Moreover, Nolutshungu's position accords political and ideological relations a determining role in their own right in class differentiation. The logical consequences of Nolutshungu's position is that we are now back to **race relations** instead of **class relations** in understanding the dynamics of South African society.

Arguments such as his underplay the fact that alliances are

class alliances, and not just an aggregate of commonly oppressed people. Unless the class components of alliances are clearly identifiable, there is always a danger and potential for the working class interests to be subsumed under a 'people's' alliance that is racially defined and led by the middle classes. People subscribing to such positions should be reminded that '... popular unity under the hegemony of the working class can only be based on class differences between classes and fractions that form part of the alliance; unification goes hand in hand with the gradual resolution of the 'contradictions among the people''. (Poulantzas, 1978:335)

It should be re-affirmed that the class interests of the African middle classes are materially different from those of the working class. One cannot focus too strongly on the current relative weakness of the African middle classes and the tendency towards racial polarisation as providing the historically inevitable basis for an alliance against the ruling bloc. Indeed capitalism is going to rely more on the 'skills' of the APPs and managers in its dealings with black workers. Coupled with further reformist initiatives by both state and capital, their class base is likely to be substantially strengthened. One of the consequences of this will be a sharpening of the conflict between them and the black workers, and, in drawing clearer class lines, laying bare the hollowness of personnel management's ideology of neutrality and the rhetoric of 'black unity'.

In fact African managers can best be described as **reluctant partners** of capitalism. They are **partners** in the sense that for many of them it is only racial discrimination which is a problem, otherwise they embrace capitalism's 'legitimate spirit of competition'. However, they are **reluctant** partners because racial domination interferes with the advancement and consolidation of their class position within South Africa's capitalist structures.

FOOTNOTES:

- 1 Meth (1983:193) argues that 'Even though the black middle class is growing quite rapidly it does so from a very small base and in the context of a large number of black unem-

- ployed. This in itself would be sufficient to suggest that if the black middle class continues to grow at the same rate it is unlikely to become a ... very influential group in South Africa.'
- 2 In this very important work Sennett and Cobb (1973:171) demonstrate how the dominant ideology can influence the working class through the incorporation of bourgeois values and accepting their position as an unchangeable given - workers deserve to be workers. 'The badges of inner ability people wear seem ... unfairly awarded, yet hard to repudiate. That is the injury of class in day to day existence ...'
- 3 See LP Jangerhoven (1981).
- 4 See the relevant sources in the reference section.
- 5 In this article the new middle class is defined as 'those salaried mental workers who neither own the means of production nor, strictly speaking, produce surplus value directly, and whose major function in the social division of labour may be described as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations' (adapted from the Ehrenreichs, 1979).
- 6 Posel (1983) argues that the source of structural differentiation of South African society is the **unity** of class and race. Although it is outside the scope of this article to engage with this debate, I would nevertheless point out that Posel's major error is that of according **race** the same status as **class** in analysing South African society (or rather a lack of differentiation between the two).
- 7 The EMF is based in Johannesburg whilst the PPA is based in Durban. The membership of both organisations is exclusively African, although the EMF's membership is open to other blacks, and the PPA is non-racial.
- 8 This statement also reflects the internalisation of the ideological explanations developed by liberal academics and personnel consultants in justifying the slow advancement of blacks in industry. For example, 'Blacks have a low need for achievement'; 'Blacks cannot think three-dimensionally and they don't have a conception of (temporal) time'; 'Blacks do not understand business principles'; etc. For a

- detailed critique of these conceptions see Nzimande (1985 and 1986).
- 9 The 6M is a training course which explains basic business principles, primarily to black workers. 'The rationale underlying this training approach is based on the assumption that if workers have a better understanding of these principles and how they are affected by them they would tend to adapt themselves more effectively to their own work environment'. (Van Niekerk, 1983:2) The course content is based on the six 'Ms' of an organisation: Money, Men, Management, Machines, Material and Market. Essentially its aim is to make workers 'understand' capitalism. For further details see Van Niekerk (1983); on 'Need for Achievement Training' see Nasser (1981).
- 10 In spite of the African middle class' sharing of common oppression with the workers, there are certain significant differences between their positions in the order of racial domination. For instance, many African professionals do not **personally** have to go through the labour bureaux registration procedure as workers do. They also do not necessarily have to obtain section 10 rights in order to get employment in the urban areas. Although influx control measures are not strictly enforced in their case, they are technically subject to these laws, and in fact are frequently harrassed if they are perceived by the state to be political activists.

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