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AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The present social and economic structure of Southern Africa is the product of the movement of the internal contradictions of this region, and the action upon these contradictions of external factors. Many social formations inhabited the region before its contact with European mercantilism. With this contact the development of the region, (much of the rest of the continent, for that matter) was subjected to the influence of a cataclysmic external factor, a mode of production, which already in its infancy, was accustomed to plunder, pillage, and treachery.

Virtually, the whole continent was brought under the sway of this nascent mode of production. By the end of the 19th century, the sporadic but no less plunderous activities that characterized the mercantilist era, had given way to formal colonialism (i.e., to more systematic and planned exploitation) in response to the objective laws of capitalist development.

As in all other parts of the continent, repression, slavery, colonisation, and racism in Southern Africa have always been resisted by the oppressed social forces. The history of the region is replete with numerous accounts of popular resistance by the indigenous peoples, against their dispossession, enslavement, and colonisation.¹ But these struggles did not succeed in arresting the overall consolidation of colonialism. The whole area from the Cape to the Zambezi was appropriated by Great Britain, with Portuguese colonies to the east and west. The character of the formal juridical arrangements which clothed colonialism in this region, differed slightly from the typical patterns of the east, west, and central Africa. The form of the colonial "superstructure" could not but be influenced by the peculiarities of the region's political and social reality.

The 1931 Statute of Westminster gave South Africa complete freedom to legislate in domestic and foreign matters. In 1934, South Africa became an "independent sovereign state within the Commonwealth". In this way, the ground was prepared early for the further changes in superstructure which took place in 1961. In that year, as the crowd of 50,000 who welcomed Verwoerd back from

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London must have realised, the internal forces of repression in South Africa regained all that they had lost in 1902, namely, relative autonomy in fashioning the political and social structure of South Africa within the context of the basic interests of imperialism; indeed they had gained a lot more, for, before the wide eyes of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Verwoerd had managed to slip the mandated territory of South-West Africa also into his pocket! With a feeble but ferocious bourgeoisie in Portugal holding on stubbornly to "overseas provinces" in Angola and Mozambique, and with a racist petty-bourgeoisie formalising its control over the colonial state machine in Zimbabwe in 1965, the development of Southern Africa continued to be dominated by the objective interests of imperialism, behind a facade of jingoistic juridical structures.

The struggle against exploitation and oppression continued in various forms throughout the continent during colonialism. But both in their tactics and in their strategy-in day to day practices and the conception of the ultimate ends of liberation - the struggles were influenced by the narrow interests of petty bourgeois and/or semi-feudalist social forces, who on account of the relative inexperience of the truly oppressed classes, provided the leadership of the progressive movement.

By the end of the 1960's, all but the Portuguese colonies had become independent sovereign states in a purely formal sense. South Africa itself became independent as far back as 1934. With the collapse of formal Portuguese colonialism in Angola and Mozambique this year, all the states of Southern Africa except Zimbabwe have become sovereign states. But independence has not always brought genuine liberation. Although independence did not always come to the colonised peoples without struggle, nowhere did it signal a total destruction of the colonial state machine, the institutionalisation of the power of the oppressed forces and the evolution of a radically different socio-economic system. Even so, West, East and Central Africa neo-colonialism reproduces itself under a regime of political and legal structures that ensure the removal of all legally removable obstacles to the entrenchment of the capitalist relations of the periphery, in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe, imperialism continues to realise its historical interests through the agency of the most backward chauvinist elements in bourgeois society.

In contrast to these trends in Africa, the anti-colonial struggles in Asia, have brought about radical transformation. In Vietnam and Korea, liberation has meant the total destruction of the state machines erected by imperialism and the beginning of the creation of a qualitatively different form of social organisation.

What is the reason for this contrast? What has been responsible for the relatively slow progress made against imperialism and its superstructures in apartheid? What has been the role of ideology in these developments? What should be the function of ideology in the liberation of Southern Africa?

The record of struggles in the other half of capitalism makes these questions even more pressing. In the metropolitan countries themselves, the oppressed social classes have waged a relentless struggle against capitalist development. Civil wars and insurrections raged through Europe in the middle of the 19th century - 1848 -1850. But like the sporadic struggles in the periphery, these uprisings of the working classes were crushed. Even so the dialectic of capitalist development did not fail to induce developments in social theory and in ideology. Poets, artists, and philosophers continued to protest against the misery and impoverishment of the oppressed classes. The more action-oriented reformers of the 19th century even tried setting up small experimental colonies in which production would take place without the exploitative relations of Capitalism. In all these ideological currents, liberation was seen simply as an ideal alternative to the absolute impoverishment of the working classes. They lacked a scientific understanding of the motive forces of historical development; they failed to see the connection between the new social and economic structures and the technical and economic changes that had taken place in the methods of production. Moreover, they tended to see liberation in terms of the spontaneous development of class consciousness within the oppressed classes. It was Marx and Engels who put the new level of social consciousness created by capitalist development on a scientific basis; beginning with the publication in 1848 of the Communist Manifesto.

Despite the development of social science in the middle of the 19th century, it was not until the beginning of the 20th Century that any section of humanity, on the basis of a study of society's social structure and its roots in the economy, succeeded in creating the political conditions for genuine liberation. By the close of the 1950's about a third of the world's people - Russia, China, Korea, Cuba, etc., had succeeded, under the leadership of political organisations embodying this ideology in breaking free from the stranglehold of imperialism.

The history of struggle in the centres and outposts of imperialism thus shows that only some of those revolutions which have been guided by scientific ideology have succeeded in overthrowing the old order. A discussion on liberation and ideology in Southern Africa must take account of this historical reality.

The question of the role of ideology - the liberation of Southern Africa (the very meaning of liberation), has assumed particular importance with recent political developments in the region.

The official position of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and therefore that of the petty-bourgeois social forces who run the governments of the member countries, sees liberation in terms of changes in the superstructure ("majority rule" etc.). Accordingly, it relegates ideology to a position of insignificance. The opportunism of petty-bourgeois concepts of liberation is brought out starkly in the OAU official position on Angola, which has been directed exclusively to getting the three liberation movements to unite in order to achieve independence. A more fanatical fringe of this position, sees liberation in terms of the intervention of an outside African army. That both these positions are popular with the average African today is clear evidence of the hegemony of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology in the continent!

Because these class positions see liberation in such superficial terms i.e. in terms of changes in the superstructure that do not affect the concrete social relations, they seek the co-existence of all ideologies or simply deny the need for ideology. Already, the more brazen of the reactionary forces in Africa have begun to urge dialogue and accomodation with Apartheid.

In the realm of theory, petty-bourgeois concepts of liberation and ideology have achieved greater sophistry but they are always decidedly anti-Marxist. B.D.G. Folson, one-time head of the Political Science Department of the University of Ghana, argues in an article on "Ideology in African Politics" that it is not necessary or desirable that people or political parties should have ideologies.² Ali Mazrui on the other hand counsels that "... a continent like Africa which is still feeling the heavy burden of external intellectual dominance, should permit itself the possibility of indigenous experimentation in diversity rather than enslave itself to yet another foreign closed intellectual system".³

On the other hand the national liberation movements particularly in their initial stages, tended to also disparage ideology. In "The Weapon of Theory", Cabral complains: "The ideological deficiency, not to say the total lack of ideology, within the national liberation movements - which is basically due to ignorance of the historical reality which these movements claim to transform - constitutes one of the greatest weaknesses of our struggle against imperialism, if not the greatest weakness of all".⁴

If we are to speak about the liberation of Southern Africa in non-mystical, i.e. materialist terms, it must involve more than changes in the superstructure, no matter how significant these may be. It must involve the overturning of the basic social relations - the destruction of the social and economic manifestations of imperialism in Southern Africa.

The experience of liberation struggles everywhere and throughout the successive phases of Capitalism suggest that liberation in this fundamental sense has in all cases been brought about through protracted struggle by the oppressed classes under the leadership of political organisations guided by a specific ideology - Marxism-Leninism. These experiences would seem to suggest that liberation in Southern Africa would be impossible without the aid of this ideology which give it this historical demonstrated superiority over bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologies.

SCIENTIFIC AND FALSE IDEOLOGY

Ideology first arises from the conflicts between men, from conflicting social interests. As such its historical development predates Marx. The term "ideology" was first employed by Cabants, Destutt de Tracy and others for whom it designated a genetic theory of ideas. It meant a slightly different thing for Marx. In the German Ideology Marx conceives ideology as false consciousness, an image of reality standing on its head, as an illusion. "Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness ... no longer retain their independence. They have no history..."⁵ Elsewhere, Marx says that ideologists "inevitably put things upside down and regard their ideology both as the creative force and as the aim of all social relations, whereas it is only an expression and symptom of these relations"⁶.

Ideology then is the consciousness of a class or individual, but consciousness which is more or less false. Because all known ideology was idealist, Marx and Engels counterposed ideology to knowledge. But by applying scientific methodology (dialectical materialism) to the study of society, they created the possibility of ideology being correct in the sense of approximating to the objective reality. Lenin developed the concept of a materialist ideology more fully. In Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, he writes "... every ideology is historically conditional, but it is unconditionally true that to every scientific ideology (as distinct, for instance, from religious ideology) there corresponds an objective truth, absolute

nature".⁷ Only Marxism is scientific in this sense. It creates the possibility of a system of correct ideas through the aid of its theory of knowledge. It is this quality which sets it apart from other ideologies and which also explains why only movements based on it, have succeeded in destroying the "old order".

It is interesting that Cabral saw the effect of the "ideological deficiency" or lack of "ideology" among the liberation movements as "ignorance of the reality which these movements claim to transform". The implication is obvious: movement can succeed in liberating the oppressed forces in any society, unless it clearly understands the structure of the society, its internal contradictions as well as any external influencing these. This is why Lenin in What is to be Done and Cabral in Weapon of Theory insist that there can be no revolutionary movement without revolutionary theory. It is also for this reason that the racist regimes in Southern Africa following the example of metropolitan bourgeois governments, have been anxious to ensure that scientific socialism does not penetrate the consciousness of the oppressed forces whereas they continue to show some degree of tolerance to religious ideology for instance.

A revolutionary movement must appropriate this ideology not only formally; it must guide all its practices - the recruitment and training of cadres, analysis of the society's economy, the classes within it, the formulation of long-term strategy and day to day tactics. Marxism has been the only ideology through which revolutions have succeeded because unlike other ideologies it represents a unity between scientific theory and ideology. It is a system of ideas, like other ideologies but all its theories are correct in the sense that they correspond to reality; they derive from social practice.

Petty-bourgeois objections to Marxism as the ideology for liberation in Africa usually converge at one point: Marxism (ideology in general!) is a European phenomenon and therefore suits only these countries. This position, of course, objectively represents class interests opposed to those of the oppressed social forces. It is also a mystification which results from a failure to appreciate the essence of the scientific ideology. A revolutionary African movement founded upon Marxist ideology must study the peculiar features of the society it seeks to transform. This is why the position that Marxism should be rejected in Africa on account of its being foreign is clearly an unscientific one. In fact, only by adopting the Marxist ideology would a movement be able to avoid mechanicism in its analysis and comprehension of the society's class structure. In

South Africa, it is only by adopting this scientific ideology, that the liberationist forces can assess the exact weight of racism in the superstructure (the extent to which it clouds the basic class interests) and fashion tactics aimed at demystifying it.

The petty-bourgeois position espoused by the OAU, which aims at simply forces everywhere, is a typically opportunistic one. Such eclecticism would not advance the cause of liberation at all. The liberation movements in Angola, for instance, are guided by different ideologies: since these differences are not matters for personal taste they cannot simply be swept away.

True unity in the liberation struggle can only be built on a correct understanding of the political, social and economic reality. A "United front" is viable only if all the movements within the "front" are guided in all their practices by the principles of dialectical materialism.

This is not to say, of course, that a revolutionary movement waging a struggle side by side with other movements must not under any circumstances join forces with these. The Marxist tradition has always considered and laid down the conditions under which revolutionary movements may co-operate with non-revolutionary ones. Marx himself counselled that such alliances must not be made at the expense of the basic strategy.⁸ A revolutionary movement may make these alliances to achieve certain tactical goals without compromising its overall strategy for liberation and without losing sight of the fact that the opposing ideologies represent class interests that are irreconcilable with those of the truly oppressed strata.

The tasks of a revolutionary movement in Southern Africa, one whose practices are guided by scientific methodology, must not be viewed purely from an organisational standpoint. They must involve theoretical work, aimed at raising the understanding of its cadres among the oppressed classes whom it represents. If the creation of an organisation or party espousing the scientific ideology was a sufficient condition for liberation, the African workers in South Africa, and their allies would be free today. A Communist Party existed in South Africa from 1921 till the suppression of Communism Act (No. 44 of 1950) made it an "unlawful organisation".

When a movement is guided by this ideology, it is better able to detect opportunism in its ranks and to maintain the correct line through the dialectical development of the struggle - a struggle that would go on even after the progressive forces have won political power. In particular, it is only when the movement's

practices are based on knowledge of the 'local' reality only when the movement is rooted in the oppressed classes and is able to retain their confidence through the correctness of its line, that it can resist the disruptive influences of foreign benefactors. This is particularly important in the light of the objective situation in the international revolutionary movement today.

Before 1920, the international revolutionary movement suffered from extreme eurocentricity. However, from the beginning of the 20th Century, events in Java, India, Turkey, Persia, China, etc., changed its outlook. At the second Congress of the Third International (1920) Lennin argued vehemently against the chauvinism of western European communists and cautioned that the international revolutionary movement should never involve itself in any national struggles in circumstances that would jeopardise the objective interests of the oppressed classes. Today, when there seems to be a resurgence of chauvinism in the international revolutionary movement, the need for scientific ideology in the liberation struggle in Southern Africa cannot be overemphasised.

That the proletarian struggles in Asia have achieved remarkable successes while the relatively little progress has been made in the Southern African struggle despite the tremendous sacrifices made by the toiling workers and other oppressed forces, is not an accident. Neither is it the product of invincibility of South Africa's army. The Vietnamese people have been able to crush imperialism's most monstrous army. It is largely a function of ideology. The Asian struggles have been guided by scientific theory whereas in Southern Africa, the struggles, have tended to neglect ideological and theoretical work. The struggle against imperialism and its jingoistic politico-legal structures will not succeed unless it is guided by movements which apply scientific methodology to the analysis of the national situation, base their practices on knowledge of this reality and draw on the experiences of working class struggles in other parts of the world. Only in this way will the people's struggle be protected from the petty-bourgeois reformism of the OAU and the cynical advances of Vorster and his masters.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 See Hepple; South Africa, 1966, pp. 39-93.
- 2 In Transition, No. 43 1973, p. 11.
- 3 In Transition, No. 46 1974, at p. 69.

- 4 In Revolution in Guinea, 1973 Ed., 1975.
- 5 In Marx, Engels, Lenin: On Historical Materialism, Progress Publishers, 1973, p. 23.
- 6 German Ideology Moscow 1964 p. 472-2
- 7 Lenin, Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, Moscow 1964, pp. 122-3.
- 8 See Lenin, What is to be Done, in Selected Works, Progress Publishers, 1970 p. 138.