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## WHO UNDERSTANDS?

The amazing thing about the meetings of the ANC and SACP that took place during the last month, is the persistence of a political rhetoric that flourished during the reign of Lenin, Stalin and the early years of Soviet rule. It is a history that is totally inaccessible to the vast majority of South Africans, who only wish to hear in simple and clear terms how delivery of jobs, houses, education, health and security is going to be provided. Let me illustrate with tongue in the cheek, what is a good old fashioned Bolshevik analysis of our current predicament according to SACP and President Mbeki. We are told we are waiting for a revolution. How is it going to come about?

Judging from the tensions that simmered under the surface at the ANC, SACP conferences it appears as if the trinity, that is entrusted by history to deliver South Africa from the evils of capitalism and imperialism, is becoming increasingly confused and perplexed about how to go about their respective missions.

President Mbeki had the tedious task of reminding the ANC gathering how the "laws of history" had given special responsibilities to the different agencies that made up "the liberation trinity" (i.e.: ANC, SACP, COSATU). The task of conducting the "National Democratic Revolution" (so far never clearly articulated)

was the province of the ANC. The "Socialist Revolution" (also so far not clearly articulated), to inaugurate the workers paradise, was the province of the SACP. The task of fighting, (how?), for workers rights and benefits, that of COSATU. This, as the President said was the "ABC of our movement."

To old style Bolsheviks and the "vanguard of the proletariat" this was old hat. (I am sure every voter in Khutsong knows exactly what I am talking about). The "two stage revolution" the trinity had imbibed with their mother's milk, and they know that in the fullness of time, this will inevitably all come about. What worries two of the partners of the trinity i.e. SACP and COSATU, is whether Mbeki is still equally aware of it. Is he still sticking to the plot of history as revealed in Bolsheviks scripture and conducting the National Democratic Revolution as the holy writ of revolution commands?

After all, the two stage theory of revolution, requires that the National Democratic Revolution "consolidates the gains of the revolution" in such a way, that the way is prepared for the "dictatorship of the proletariat." To usher in the workers' paradise. Who are the victims of "false consciousness" here? The "ultra leftists and adventurers", ("infantile leftist fanatics" ( Lenin), or Mbeki himself and the retinue of empowered black plutocrats sprouting about him.

Once upon a time these disputes could easily be settled. When the "benign leadership" of the Soviet Union was still intact, liberationists could confidentially rely on the vision, contained in Marxist/Leninism, to clear the air.

Bolshevism preached that in a world where capitalism has entered the imperialistic phase of its development, the capitalist system became international. Thus exploitation became international. Internal class war took a back seat to interstate war. The decisive battles, important as they are, were not the ones between classes, but between the exploited and exploiting nations on the planet, between the "socialist states" under Soviet Leadership and the imperialist states in "the west".

In such a world there was a clearly designated place for the agency of the ANC in conducting a National Democratic Revolution. In countries such as South Africa where the proletariat is still rather "lumpen" and much of the peasantry languishing in the "idiocy of rural life" (Marx), the proletarian agencies of revolution are ill equipped for the historical task of emancipating the "wretched of the earth" (Fanon) from the strictures of imperialism. Under such conditions a revolutionary agency could appropriate far and wide and could be entrusted to any "progressive political entrepreneur" that could be drawn from the ranks of the down trodden. Peasants, traditional chieftains, workers, with or without "class consciousness", gangs, "bergies", Dakar Afrikaner liberals, progressive Afrikaner poets etc, etc. Any "useful idiot" could be used to hasten that glorious day.

This is all very well when the world socialist system is intact, and can assume the functions of the international proletarian vanguard to prevent the liberation movement from lapsing into wicked ways.

But, the keeper of the keys to the earthly paradise is no more! The Soviet host to the catechism of revolution is no more! The "Comintern" that could comfort and assist their faltering brothers in the developing world, is no more! Pope Putin, has deconsecrated the Kremlin and all the other holy shrines of the proletariat, and is presiding over an emerging thug-tocracy that harbors urgent and enthusiastic players, in the global theatres of casino capitalism. What is to be done?

What is to be done indeed! As far as the economy goes probably most of what the Mbeki administration is, in fact doing – running it with a fair mix of social equity and market principles. In his speech, the President rightly thinks he is making a good job of the economy. So do the captains of industry in South Africa; also the international banking fraternity, the multi-national companies, the World Bank and other lending institutions like the IMF and certainly the black plutocrats emerging under the benign terms of BBBEE.

But this is precisely where the SACP feels that President Mbeki is betraying the National Democratic Revolution. Any "revolutionary" worth his salt in Latin America e.g. Castro or Chavez will tell the President that deploying these policies

will lay the groundwork for a deep and lasting restoration of the forces of international capitalism to the very heart of the South African economy.

So why does the President tease the SACP: "go ahead with your socialist revolution inside, or outside the ANC! We in the ANC are responsible for a National Democratic Revolution: we can achieve it with or without the SACP".

For conventional Marxist-Leninists, conducting a NDR while at the same time increasing one's technology dependency, capital dependency, and market dependency on the suppliers from the largest capitalist economies of the world, is a bit like mixing cow dung with ice-cream: it does not do much for the cow dung, but it definitely spoils the ice-cream.

But does our President know something that the SACP and COSATU overlook? Is Thabo perhaps a Menshevik? The Mensheviks claimed to have a better grasp of the dialectics of history than Lenin and the Bolsheviks. They claimed that before a "backward country" can proceed towards the stage where "real" socialism became feasible, the groundwork for this great leap had first to be laid by a phase of capitalist development; by precisely the class enemies of the proletariat i.e. the bourgeoisie: The SACP are immature and impatient. Wait for capitalism to mature and a National Democratic Revolution to take place before the "real socialist revolution" can happen.

That is why, even unbeknown to themselves, the likes of Tokyo Sexwale, Mzi Khumalo, Patrice Motsepe are commandeered by history to become rich and bourgeoisie, to become the organisers and reproducers of capitalist relations of production, so that the conditions that provoke a “real socialist revolution” can be advanced. (Ooh Boy!). (Imagine, under conditions mature enough for a “real socialist revolution” capitalists like Sexwale, Khumalo, Motsepe etc being led to the scaffold and by Jeremy Cronin and Blade Nzimande singing the Internationale)

If the President is not a Menshevik and, not an old fashioned Marxist-Leninist, then what does he and the ANC high command mean by the words “National Democratic Revolution”. Why do they dismiss the SACP for persisting with their idea of a socialist revolution? Do they dismiss the possibility of such a revolution in any case, or have they a special meaning for it? If so, what is it?

But, finally, who understands what they are talking about? The homeless, unemployed, unskilled, the destitute? Is it not possible, seventeen years after the collapse of organised communism, to dispense with this tired old rhetoric and formulate practical policies, that ordinary folk can understand and be mobilized to make real in their daily lives. Is this not more exciting and challenging than trying to revive a corpse that died almost two decades ago?

**P.S. Although I wrote the article it is the result of a vigorous discussion between myself and old friend and colleague from Stellenbosch: J.I.K Gagiano.**

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