

# Nuclear war fears out in the cold

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**N**AGASAKI became a city of death where not even the sound of insects could be heard. After a while, countless men, women and children began to gather for a drink of water at the banks of the Urakami River, their hair and clothing scorched and their burnt skin hanging off in sheets like rags. Begging for help, they died one after another in the water or in heaps on the banks. The testimony of the mayor of Nagasaki still horrifies. But the end of the Cold War took much of the passion out of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Now, however, fears of nuclear conflict are rising again.

The new nuclear paranoia is based on three ideas. First, the technology to produce nuclear weapons is becoming ever easier to master. Second, some of the new nuclear powers are likely to be dangerously unstable. Finally, there is the nightmare that terrorists will get hold of nuclear weapons.

The idea of a nuclear weapon going off in a big city is so appalling that it is perfectly rational to worry about it a great deal. But if you examine the three ideas behind the new nuclear paranoia more closely, we still seem reassuringly distant from the apocalypse.

In the early 1960s, John F Kennedy predicted that by 1970 there would be 15-20 nuclear weapons states. There are still only nine. The Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty has clearly had an inhibiting effect. And nuclear technology, even though it dates back to the 1940s, has proved surprisingly hard to master.

It is true North Korea has succeeded in producing nukes. On the other hand, Iran — a relatively rich and sophisticated country — still seems years away from producing nuclear weapons.

Assume, however, that Iran will eventually get there — and that other developing nations will join the nuclear club. Would that be such a bad thing? The experience of the Cold War suggests that the possession of nuclear weapons creates a "balance of terror" that makes war less likely.

Nuclear pessimists say the analogy with the Cold War is misleading. Once you increase the number of countries with nuclear weapons, you also hugely increase the risk of war by miscalculation.

Nevertheless, the limited

Business Day  
27 June 2007

TERMS OF STRUGGLE/Frederik van Zyl Slabbert

# Dazzled by the dialectics of history

**T**HE amazing thing about the meetings of the African National Congress (ANC) and South African Communist Party (SACP) that took place in the past 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 cheek, what a good old-fashioned Bolshevik analysis of our predicament is, according to the SACP and President Thabo 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 and SACP conferences, it appears as if the members of the trinity that is entrusted by history to deliver SA from the evils of capitalism and imperialism are becoming increasingly confused and perplexed about how to go about their respective missions.

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" — the ANC, SACP and Congress of South African Trade Unions (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 was that of Cosatu. This, as Mbeki 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 it will inevitably all come about.

What worries two of the partners of the trinity — the SACP and Cosatu — is whether Mbeki is still equally aware of it. Is he still sticking to the plot of history as revealed in Bolshevik scripture and conducting the national democratic revolution as the holy writ of revolution commands?

After all, the two-stage theory of



THABO MBEKI

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revolution requires that the national democratic revolution "consolidates the gains of the revolution" in such a manner 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 "ultraleftists 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 in which capitalism had 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 SA, 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 downtrodden — peasants, traditional chieftains, workers with or without "class consciousness", gangs, "bergies", Dakar Afrikaner liberals, progressive Afrikaner poets, etc.

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 its faltering brothers in the developing world, is no more! Pope Putin has de-consecrated the Kremlin and all the other holy shrines of the proletariat, and is presiding over an emerging thug-tocracy that harbours 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 doing — running it with a fair mix of social equity and market principles.

Mbeki rightly thinks he is doing a good job with the economy. So do the captains of industry in SA; also the international banking fraternity, the multinational companies, the World Bank and other lending institutions such as the IMF, and certainly the black plutocrats emerging under the benign terms of BBBEE.

But this is precisely where the SACP feels that Mbeki is betraying the national democratic revolution.

Any "revolutionary" worth his salt in Latin America — Fidel Castro or Hugo Chavez, for example — will tell Mbeki 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 Mbeki 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," he told the communists.

For conventional Marxist-Leninists, conducting a national democratic revolution 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 Mbeki 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" could 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, the bourgeoisie.

The SACP is 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 and Patrice Motsepe are commended by history to become rich and bourgeois, to become the organisers and reproducers of capitalist relations of production, so that the conditions that provoke a "real socialist revolution" can be advanced. (Imagine, under conditions mature enough for a "real socialist revolution", capitalists such as Sexwale, Khumalo, Motsepe, et al being led to the scaffold by Jeremy Cronin and Blade Nzimande singing the Internationale.)

If Mbeki is not a Menshevik and not an old-fashioned Marxist-Leninist, then what do he and the ANC high command mean by the words "national democratic revolution"? Why do they dismiss the SACP for persisting with its 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, 17 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 mobilised 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?

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# Arts & Leisure

## FILM

**T**HE movie CATCH AND RELEASE veers disconcertingly between tragedy and comedy without reaching great heights in either genre.

Written and directed by Susannah Grant, who wrote Erin Brokovich and In her Shoes, two films that suggested a leaning towards female self-assertion, this movie does little for the cause, presuming that Grant intended it to make a point.

Gray (Jennifer Garner) has her wedding day marred somewhat by the sudden, accidental death of Grady, her husband-to-be. Understandably grief-stricken, she has to come to terms with the fact that she is unable to pay the rent for the house she had shared with her late partner; she also finds herself surrounded by his friends, each of whom has his own particular way of mourning the loss of their pal.

Then comes the news that Grady had kept a small secret from her, to wit that he had been sending money regularly to a woman who had borne him a son. Maureen (Juliette Lewis), a massage therapist, is far more relaxed about the duplicity than Gray, whose delicate emotional state is strained further by the individual, varied reactions of Fritz (Timothy Olyphant), Sam (Kevin Smith) and Dennis (Sam Jaeger), Grady's principal mourners, and the demands made by Mrs Grant (Fiona Shaw), his mother.

Being deprived of a future without the difficult Mrs Grant as her mother-in-law is one consolation, another is finding a new romance with one of Grady's mates who, in the tradition of romantic comedies, appears to be the least likely to win her affection.

The cast does its best with the unpromising material and uninspired direction. Smith is on hand to provide a measure of light relief but he is even less effective here than he is in Die Hard 4.0, where he plays, against type and expectations, a computer geek. Lewis, over-plays embarrassingly and Olyphant shows some promise but Garner is a disappointment in a role that asks too much of her limited abilities.

However, the picture's main fault lies in its uncertain tone, its trying to be both funny and sad resulting in a failure to achieve either.

**I**T IS unfortunate that the southern hemisphere winter coincides with the American summer, the prime season for the release of blockbuster movies there and local exhibitors are forced to synchronise their schedules because they fear that illicit DVD copies will be out on the streets before more suitable dates can be arranged.

The result is a dearth of adult entertainment as the companies concentrate on major releases at the expense of those patrons who want more than special effects laden pictures aimed at younger, less discerning and more impressionable audiences. It seems every week there is another assault on mature sensibilities as Pirates, Potter, Shreks, Transformers, Fantastic Fours and others yet to come compete for pocket money in much the same way that theatrical producers currently vie for disposable income by presenting an over-abundance of musicals and neglect serious plays.

There was a time when film distributors spurned the idea of showing foreign films on the grounds that there was too small an audience to support them. In recent years, however, the once-derided art houses are more profitable in proportion to their cost than the