

# Congress Militant and the ANC: waiting for the inevitable

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The first General Election in which the black population of South Africa can vote has seen the vast majority flock to the side of the ANC. Lesley Day argues it was wrong for the left to follow them.

Six years from the end of the twentieth century, South Africa became a bourgeois democracy. The black population get the right to vote in the first elections under universal suffrage, becoming real citizens of the state in which they live. It has taken decades of struggle and sacrifice to overthrow apartheid.

The working class worldwide, indeed all sincere democrats, must rejoice at the final overthrow of a political system based on racial inequality. But revolutionary Marxists must also say clearly and without hesitation that the nature of the political settlement agreed between the ANC and De Klerk's National Party will preserve the social and economic content of racial inequality for the vast majority of South Africa's population.

This settlement reveals the extent to which the South African bourgeoisie has succeeded in preserving its property, wealth and even political privileges. And it is these privileges that will make it 'impossible' or 'premature' for a Mandela government to make any radical changes in the starvation wages, the chronic unemployment, the squalor of the townships, the lack of decent health care and education.

The new constitution provides for guaranteed power sharing with the tiny white minority. The constitution curtails the power of parliament preventing it acting as a sovereign constituent assembly. It protects capitalist property and employers' power in a Bill of Rights and it guarantees the position of existing senior bureaucrats.

The big South African business monopolies have every reason to be pleased. Ten years ago they were on the defensive. A stream of mass strikes, boycotts and demonstrations rocked the regime. The Transvaal General Strike of late 1984 united unions and townships in action. The union federation COSATU was formed in December 1985. The May day strike and the 16 June 1986 protest on the anniversary of the Soweto uprising all forced the apartheid state to fight for its very life.

A string of 'reforms' after 1982 had failed to stabilise the National Party government's rule. The 1983 constitutional reforms, rather than appeasing and dividing the black masses, spurred them to greater mass action aimed at bringing the regime down. The white rulers themselves were increasingly divided in the face of this tide of revolt. The government was paralysed as it faced the competing demands of the reform and anti-reform wings of the white minority.

The possibilities lodged in this revolutionary situation were enormous. With a revolutionary working class leadership, white minority rule could have been smashed. Not only black majority rule free of any undemocratic concessions to white power, but a workers' government was within reach, a government

that could have gone on to expropriate the major capitalist farms and the key industrial and mining monopolies.

But the tide turned. Repression played a major part; the unrelieved brutalisation of the townships told on the masses. But this was not the main reason. The fact is that the revolutionary democratic advance succumbed to a process of democratic counter-revolution. Instead of pressing home the fight, the ANC used the mass movement to enter into negotiations with the regime.

They thereby allowed Botha and then De Klerk to stabilise the political situation. The increasing bureaucratisation of COSATU, the inducements and pressure of imperialist states on the ANC and the government, contributed to a controlled demobilisation. The ANC went from a strategy of 'ungovernability' to one of 'responsible opposition' and finally proclaimed themselves 'partners in transition'. After the elections they will be entrusted with the trappings of high office.

This development was foreseeable. We foresaw it. Starting from the political character of the ANC and its Freedom Charter we have predicted the course of events since 1986. In 'Apartheid? From Resistance to Revolution?' published in June 1986 we stated:

'The demands of the [Freedom] Charter do not aim to break the power of the capitalists and establish a socialist state in South Africa, rather their purpose is to establish a black capitalist class alongside the white capitalists . . . For all their talk of uninterrupted revolution this is the programme the SACP endorses and fights for.'<sup>1</sup>

We observed the first beginnings of contacts with the regime and said plainly that this gave evidence of 'the ANC leaders' appetite for a counter-revolutionary deal with sections of the bourgeoisie'. We warned:

'If this strategy is victorious inside the black trade unions and opposition movement, it could tie the working class into a fatal alliance with their present exploiters. In this way the ANC/SACP, for all their talk of destroying 'apartheid capitalism?', could actually abort the South African revolution.'<sup>2</sup>

At that time various sections of the international and South African left laughed at this prediction. Obviously, the supporters of the ANC/SACP insisted that we slandered them; in their defence they emphasised the 'uninterrupted' process of revolution that would begin with the complete destruction of white rule and the grip of the 'transnational monopolies' and would develop through mass struggle to the creation of socialism.

The problem with this strategy is that the process of revolution is always being 'interrupted' by real social forces, by parties and leaderships. It is not a purely objective process, guaranteed to succeed because of the spontaneity of the masses.

It is therefore no surprise that the selfsame forces who could not foresee the inevitable treachery of the leaders of the ANC/SACP and COSATU, are now unable to see or fight the democratic counter-revolution when it stares them in the face.

The left and working class organisations have as yet to develop a programme 'strategy and tactics' to rally the South African working class against this betrayal. The beginning of wisdom is to state what is; that this settlement is a betrayal of counter-revolutionary proportions. An ANC/coalition government will act with the banks and industry to subdue workers' demands for radical social change in order to reverse the flight of capital from the country and restore the profits of the multinationals.

Given the agreement between the opponents of apartheid (ANC) and its architects (National Party) on

what is to be South African capitalism's future, revolutionaries have to make the working class conscious of its own separate class interests from the other forces gathered under the ANC umbrella, without separating themselves for a moment from the struggles of the masses.

It is here that Militant's supporters in the ANC fall down. The Marxist Workers' Tendency (MWT) publish the paper Congress Militant. Over the last decade the MWT has pursued an orientation to the ANC that has centred on bringing the latter to power at all costs, regardless of its nature or the political circumstances.

For the MWT the South African revolution had to pass through the stage of an ANC government. Any real development of the class struggle that threatened this had to be opposed in the name of this schema.

The reason for this was relatively simple, if totally wrong. For the MWT, 'apartheid and capitalism are inseparably bound together'<sup>3</sup> and as a result it would be impossible for the ANC to negotiate with the capitalists and the National Party to reform apartheid away while leaving capitalism intact. Thus they wrote:

'it would be impossible for talks to succeed . . . even if the ANC leadership, on the one hand, and the SA regime on the other wished to achieve a negotiated settlement with each other . . . because the constituencies, the respective class bases on which the two sides rest, are irreconcilable, even temporarily'.

Even more dogmatically, the MWT argued that:

'There could never be a coalition government between the ANC and the bourgeoisie although many ANC leaders might earnestly desire it . . . We cannot conceive of a condition which would permit of an ANC government on a bourgeois basis.'<sup>4</sup>

For the MWT the inextricable link between apartheid and capitalism would trigger off an objective process whereby the ANC's mass support in the working class would force it to move against capitalism as a consequence of fighting apartheid. At some point the right wing in the ANC would prove themselves incapable of doing the job and the 'Marxists' in the ANC would come to the fore as the masses cast the right aside.<sup>5</sup>

Naturally, any attempts to establish an independent workers' party in this context would be a diversion and premature—an attempt to derail the pre-ordained trajectory of the revolution. In addition, the MWT were also highly critical of the political independence of the emerging black trade unions in the early 1980s and covered up the weakening of the ANC in the same period.

In the years of pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations (1984-86) the MWT systematically denied the maturity of revolutionary developments and offered no tactics for generalising the township and union organisations as the basis of a workers' government. Why? Because all this threatened, or lay outside of, their schema.

As the revolutionary situation subsided the growth and grip of the ANC strengthened. Unfortunately for the MWT's schema, so did the grip of the bourgeois, pro-imperialist elements within the ANC.

Simultaneously, the political structures of apartheid and the social relations of South African capitalism were unpicked. What was 'inconceivable' and 'impossible' for the MWT came to pass in the years following Mandela's release in 1990.

An honest political tendency would have openly admitted its mistakes and revised its perspective for the

ANC. It would inevitably have become more sympathetic to the formation of a workers' party. Alas, not the MWT. The schema must be defended, modified perhaps, but not rejected.

In the run up to the 1994 elections there were three main elements in the MWT's justification for supporting the ANC: an 'optimistic' perspective for the South African revolution, a false analysis of the nature of the ANC and a misapplication of the tactic of critical electoral support.

Ten years ago the MWT's schema determined that the revolution was not on the agenda. Today, in an opposite but equal error, they insist that the revolution is actually here and is advancing, even if a little more slowly than in the past:

'The revolution has not been 'aborted', diverted into 'safe channels' but is presently going through a democratic phase. Such periods, when there is a lull or the movement appears to have receded is an unavoidable phase in any revolution.'

Moreover, Congress Militant (CM) claims that

'While the forces of reaction have been weakened, the forces of revolution remain intact.'

This claim, made by the British Militant Labour leader Peter Taaffe, is strange in a period which has seen the working class acquiesce in a constitutional settlement that preserves capitalist rule and privileges for whites in the civil service and reserves a place for the National Party in government.

As the election date drew ever nearer Mandela made one concession after another to the 'forces of reaction'. Deadlines were extended, dates revised. Inkatha was allowed to have dual voting lists for Natal as it demanded. Whites were extended even more local powers in an attempt to pacify them.

Are the forces of reaction weaker than ten years ago? Yes, if like CM, one believes that apartheid was the only strategy for defending capitalism and imposing super-exploitation on the black working class.

No, if one recognises reality that the real ruling class of South Africa, the great banks and corporations, not the Afrikaner die-hards, have changed their strategy. The dysfunctional nature of apartheid for the future of South African imperialist capitalism led them to negotiate it away whilst providing the white monopoly capitalists with enormous political guarantees to protect their economic power.

Are the 'forces of reaction' really weaker than five years ago when Mandela and the ANC said that nationalisation of the monopolies was a central demand for a government if it was to effect radical distribution?

Are they less strong than one year ago, when they insisted that the ANC would not concede to the National Party's demands on the limits of constitutional change?

Taaffe is blind to reality. The reactionary forces have gained an enormous accession of strength from the ranks of the liberation movement itself, namely its entire leadership.

It has even made unwarranted concessions to the redundant far right and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) rather than arming and mobilising the masses to crush them. In Taaffe's schema the revolutionary process must always march forward. This facile optimism fails to address the consequences of the political defeat presently being inflicted by the leadership of the ANC and COSATU on the working class.

Of course, Taaffe's analysis of the period since the mid-1980s cannot but recognise that the South African bourgeoisie has turned to the Mandela leadership, offering reforms to avert revolution. But he fails

completely to explain how the working class has been drawn into support for the settlement. In particular, he is silent on the role of the South African Communist Party (SACP).

In the wake of the defeat of the township risings of 1986, the leaderships of the black trade union movement and black community organisations, most of them sincere and heroic activists of the preceding decade of struggle, were unable to develop a revolutionary strategy for the defeat of the regime. This was not their fault since no nucleus of militants fighting for such a programme existed in South Africa fighting for it.

Without the perspective of building a revolutionary party on a revolutionary programme, the 'workerist' wing of the leadership gradually ceded leadership to the pro-ANC/SACP 'Charterist' wing.

With the collapse of the Stalinist regimes, the stage was set for a democratic settlement brokered by the western imperialist powers and the Gorbachev leadership of the USSR. This pressure on the ANC popular front intensified greatly and immeasurably increased the bourgeois element in the alliance.

On the one hand, the continued strength of the South African workers' movement forced De Klerk, after various constitutional manoeuvres and a bloody campaign to split the black masses along 'national' or 'tribal' lines, to concede full universal suffrage.

On the other hand, the South African trade unions, becoming steadily more bureaucratised, have been won to open collaboration with the leaders of the future bourgeois government. COSATU has put forward candidates for the Alliance electoral list and helped draw up the Reconstruction and Development Programme of moderate reforms. Meanwhile, the Civics (local committees) are being drawn into the official local government structures.

This political defeat has allowed the negotiators in the World Trade Centre to trample on the previous pledges and programmes of the unions. The absolute rights of capitalist property are enshrined in the constitution and plans for nationalisation and social ownership have been abandoned.

The 'independence' of the Reserve Bank is guaranteed. Development plans must have the World Bank/IMF seal of approval. Black business will get some encouragement, the black middle class will be allowed into the professions and management posts, greater differentiation will be promoted in the ranks of the black working class i.e. a stratum of higher paid skilled workers will be trained.

All in all this is indeed a 'diversion' of the revolution. In fact, it is a betrayal!

Taaffe and Congress Militant leave out of account the decisive role of political leadership in a revolutionary crisis. Of course, there will be bitterness and anger at dashed hopes because it is absolutely certain that South African capitalism cannot provide the masses with a meaningful reduction in poverty and unemployment for the majority. But Taaffe's position is one of a spectator from the sidelines who simply waits for a renewed mass upsurge of the kind we have seen over the last ten years, not an active revolutionary..

Social differentiation within the black masses will be a mechanism for promoting acceptance of the status quo. Those who postpone their hopes to the future in return for the vote will find that when their illusions are shattered the masses may be divided, their unions weakened, the forces supporting a new black bourgeoisie stronger. The masses need political leadership, revolutionary leadership to shape their consciousness in an alternative direction. But the MWT wait for history to solve the tasks that are set for revolutionaries.

Does this mean that working class resistance is over, or that further revolutionary opportunities will never occur? Far from it! For one thing the danger of reactionary violence from the right wing and Inkatha remains. The ruling class has not yet brought its erstwhile supporters to heel. For another, we agree that the crisis of expectations will produce working class action.

But for this to succeed in forcing substantial concessions, let alone pose a serious challenge to bourgeois rule, then the working class will have to identify its enemy more clearly and will need a new political leadership. It will have to break with the bourgeoisie.

The second error of the MWT concerns its appreciation of the class character of the ANC. For years, the MWT adhered to its schema of an exclusive orientation to the ANC and fetishisation of the Freedom Charter, a democratic programme with vague economic and social commitments. It is now struggling unhappily with the remnants of this strategy.

Congress Militant 107 was still repeating the old refrain 'Forward to an ANC government with power to carry out the demands of the Freedom Charter' despite the fact that the ANC had already ditched the Charter. A year later, with the ANC poised for participation in a coalition with the National Party, CM was still playing a variant of the old tune:

'The ANC must fight in government for the working masses who defeated Apartheid. The demands of the Freedom Charter must be implemented to transform peoples' lives'.<sup>8</sup>

Once it saw that the ANC could end up in a coalition, CM adapted its schema to portray an ANC leadership under pressure from a working class base being pushed into conflict with the bourgeois parties:

'the coalition government will be composed of two blocs based on conflicting interests. The NP and its surrogates represent the interests of the capitalist minority, while the ANC is supposed to represent the working class majority'.<sup>9</sup>

CM acknowledges the pressures on the ANC to capitulate, but fails to point out that the agents of finance capital inside the coalition will include the ANC itself! For CM the enemies are all outside the ANC:

'Defeated parties must not be allowed to stand in the way. Nor must racists, the IMF, the World Bank or South Africa's ruling class. They have had their day. Now it's our turn to rule!'<sup>10</sup>

CM's picture is of an embattled ANC, struggling against its coalition partners on behalf of the South African masses.

Peter Taaffe has modified this schema. He acknowledges that in entering the coalition 'the ANC leadership is increasingly seen as the bourgeois wing of the movement'. Taaffe sees that the South African bourgeoisie now see Mandela 'as a bulwark against the aroused expectations of the black masses'.<sup>11</sup>

But Taaffe's conclusion is an extension of the original perspective and strategy. He envisages a future when either 'The ANC in the course of time could become the main instrument for the political rule of the bourgeoisie' or the ANC will split and a realignment take place.

But instead of raising the need for the working class now to break with the bourgeoisie, 'the working class have first to test out the ANC in action'.<sup>12</sup> Proposals for a workers' party are 'premature'.

Since the late 1980s the ANC has been undergoing a process of transformation. Originally like most national liberation movements it was a multi-class alliance, with a petit-bourgeois nationalist and Stalinist

leadership, but whose mass base was amongst workers and the township and rural poor.

The rallying of the COSATU leadership to the ANC brought out even more strongly its character as a popular front, that is, a class collaborationist bloc where the workers' organisations are subordinated to their bourgeois and petit bourgeois allies and their programmes. As the ANC approaches power it is undergoing another, and this time decisive, transformation into a fully bourgeois party.

Its programme, self-confessedly, was never a socialist one, but the ANC undertook left wing turns to accommodate the pressure of mass action and politicisation, most notably in the mid-1980s. The South African Communist Party, long influential within the leadership, was in the forefront of restricting the goals of the ANC to removing apartheid, postponing the struggle for socialism. The SACP/ANC, using left phrases, acted in reality to check the revolutionary movement of the masses.

During the long period of constructing the settlement, with the ANC now a legal organisation, the existing leadership consolidated its hold, winning support for compromises on the constitution and ditching nationalisation pledges. Its headquarters are fittingly in Shell House??progressive? bosses are keen to form alliances for the next phase of South African capitalism.

The ANC leadership has courted business at home and internationally. Sharp-suited young executives have joined it and shot to positions of influence. It has maintained an alliance with the chiefs and homeland leaders who are keen to ensure some of their privileges remain once the homeland system disappears.

Whether it is Shell, or the nascent black bourgeoisie whose members recently signed an agreement with the ANC?the Mopani Memorandum?to further black business interests, South African capital is turning to the ANC to guarantee it a new lease of life. The ANC is only too happy to oblige. ANC delegations meet governments and businessmen throughout Europe, Japan and the US, drumming up trade and investment, promising a good commercial climate.

No wonder that the British business weekly *The Economist*, cheerfully reported that 'Main Street is coming to believe in at least the possibility of a stable and productive relationship with the ANC'.<sup>13</sup>

A recent business poll showed most leaders preferred Mandela for President over De Klerk. The constitutional guarantees of coalition government are bolstered by the ANC's own indication that it wants to keep some key ministers in place.

The ANC's trajectory is clearly towards becoming the main party of bourgeois rule. It has some features left from its past as a national liberation movement, and the significance of the organised working class in the struggle against apartheid has given the ANC and its Alliance mass working class support at the moment. But this does not itself make the ANC a workers' party. The US Democrat Party and the Argentine Peronists also have the allegiance of the majority of organised labour at the polls but they are bourgeois parties representing big business, who also finance them.

The ANC always drew considerable financial support from external imperialist sources, and with the fall of the Soviet bureaucracy has been obliged to do so more and more over the past few years. The parallel which the MWT and others draw with the West European Labour, Social Democratic and Stalinist parties is a false one.

The argument goes that if it is permissible for revolutionaries to give critical support to these lackeys of imperialism why not do the same for the ANC, a heroic national liberation movement? Of course, it is true that reformist parties such as the British Labour Party also serve the interests of capital. They too have thoroughly bourgeois programmes. However, certain features of these parties, and those of the social

democratic type such as in Germany, mean that we can most accurately call them bourgeois workers' parties.

They indicate that they have a historical relationship to the working class and have often been created by workers' organisations in opposition to the major open parties of the bourgeoisie. By their very names and by certain, purely rhetorical, elements in their programmes and propaganda, they claim to be workers' or socialist parties.

The mass of the workers see them as, in this sense, 'their' parties. This historic relationship may continue to be expressed in a variety of ways such as mass worker membership, financing or a close political relationship to the trade union bureaucracy.

This contradictory nature means that, whilst revolutionaries remain a small minority in the workers' movement, they can apply a series of tactics towards such reformist parties' critical electoral support, placing demands on the leadership, building action to force measures in favour of workers' interests. In this way, revolutionaries can fight alongside the majority of reformist workers who still believe that 'their' party is better than the open parties of the bourgeoisie, testing these illusions in practice and winning workers over to the side of the revolutionaries.

Does the Alliance between COSATU and the ANC create the kind of relationship that turns the ANC into a bourgeois workers' party? No. The Alliance expresses the popular front relationship built up by the ANC as a national liberation movement. At present, the Alliance is a method by which the bourgeois forces in the ANC tie the workers' movement into supporting the leadership through a series of consultative meetings and conferences.

The SACP, despite its right wing role within the workers' movement and the ANC, is still a bourgeois workers' party with a distinct existence. Its relationship with the ANC has some peculiarities. The SACP is part of the formal Alliance, but its members are also within the ANC and its leadership.

This is an unstable situation which, as the ANC prepares for government, clearly cannot last. At this moment we believe that the ANC still retains the character of a 'peoples' front in the form of a party?' the term Trotsky used to describe the KMT in China in the 1920s and the APRA (Peru) in the 1930s.

This character derives historically from its role as a national liberation movement and in particular from the part played by Stalinism in welding the working class and its organisations to what was the revolutionary petit-bourgeoisie. The popular front, in its main, that is, its mass form, is now expressed by the Alliance.

The tactics to be applied to a popular front'an open and unashamed class collaborationist bloc with the bourgeoisie'are quite different from those revolutionaries should use with a bourgeois workers' party. Certainly, these tactics will include putting demands upon the workers' leaders, including demanding that the COSATU and SACP leaders on the ANC list commit themselves to fighting against the rigged constitution.

But this cannot be done through calling for a vote for the ANC. This would either contradict or obscure the main task of calling for a break with the bourgeoisie now. How can we oppose a coalition government with bourgeois figures if we vote for them on an ANC list?

The urgent task confronting socialists is to fight for working class independence, for an independent political party of the workers, for the workers' organisations to break with the bourgeoisie, and rally around a revolutionary programme. The tactic of 'critical support' would work against this task rather than aid it.



Returning from a recent visit to South Africa, Peter Taaffe endorsed the MWT's current position which opposes proposals to build a workers' party. The MWT and Taaffe argue that the time is not right. Workers must stay in the ANC and maintain the Alliance to fight for the 'life and soul of the ANC':

'The slogan of the workers' party which is played with by some sects on the outskirts of the movement, is premature at this stage. The working class have first to test out the ANC in action. It is vital therefore that the greatest possible majority, giving the ANC leadership no real excuses for delaying action on the demands of the masses, is achieved during the election.'<sup>14</sup>

This is completely wrong. First, the size of the majority is irrelevant. It will be huge anyway. The fact is that the settlement supported by the masses to the extent that its full implications are not understood by them includes a prior agreement that regardless of the size of the ANC's vote there will be power sharing and guaranteed protection for white 'rights' (i.e. privileges) and wealth.

The ANC's 'excuses' derive from this, not the size of the vote for it. Bereft of this argument, Taaffe and MWT are left with nothing more than the old argument that the masses must go through the experience of the ANC government in order for their class consciousness to develop.

But, as we have argued, this 'experience' will be implemented and interpreted by conflicting political forces and does not lead automatically in the direction of revolutionary conclusions. The masses may well, given this rotten leadership, have to go through this experience. But they do not need revolutionaries to recommend this experience or to seek to prolong it in any way.

On the contrary, real revolutionaries will try with all their might to help the masses avoid the experience of betrayal, and, if it cannot be avoided, to shorten and put an end to it.

Workers need an alternative now to the ANC's betrayal, before and after the elections. The call for a workers' party, far from being premature, is decisive in the pre-election period because working class independence and pressure from outside the ANC and Alliance is the best 'indeed only' guarantee that workers' rights and demands would be given any attention in the pre-election period.

As it is, only the right wing's demands are conceded to, while the workers' movement is regarded as 'in the bag' by the ANC leaders. That is the first fruit of the loss of class independence.

Even in the framework of immediate demands, if COSATU had not been tied to the electoral chariot wheels of the ANC, had it, like Buthelezi, threatened civil war or declared its intentions to boycott the elections if its democratic and class demands were not met, then it would be to the working class that concessions would have to be made. The workers' party slogan thus has an immediate practical value; it is not just a 'promissory note' for the future as Taaffe claims.

Indeed, Taaffe argues that the workers' party slogan can only be used when the forces within COSATU have recognised the need for it—that is, precisely when there is no longer any need for the revolutionary vanguard to raise the slogan as a weapon of class independence and the struggle would focus on the fight for a revolutionary programme and structure for such a workers' party.

For the MWT the slogan becomes useful when it has become completely inadequate if not redundant. In short Taaffe wants to tail not only the working masses but their leaders. This is a posture unworthy of a revolutionary. The existence of small groups of revolutionaries is only justified if they do indeed act as a vanguard, blazing the trail for the strategy and tactics which the mass movement must adopt if it is to achieve victory.

The election system, naturally enough, is not designed to enable workers to vote in a class fashion. Although there will be a universal franchise and proportional representation, the 'list system' means that voters cannot specify who they support on the ANC's list. COSATU and SACP nominees will be undifferentiated from the ANC's bourgeois candidates. It is not even possible to call for a vote for the candidates from workers' organisations separate from others on the list.

Already sections of militant workers have shown their unease with the Alliance and recognised the need to break from the ANC. Last year's NUMSA conference (hardly a sect on the outskirts of the movement), had a significant debate on the formation of a Workers' Party. A resolution calling for a conference of workers' organisations to discuss proposals including the formation of a workers' party was passed against the wishes of the NUMSA leadership.

Although this resolution was much watered down from the original, committing NUMSA only to 'new forms of organisation', it was a sign of the dissatisfaction felt by worker leaders, at a rank and file level with the extent to which their organisations are being tied to the ANC leaders.

The LRCI first raised the call for a Workers' Party in South Africa during the period of massive growth within the trade unions and the revolutionary ferment of the mid-1980s.

The massive crisis of leadership combined with the highly politicised trade union movement made it possible for revolutionaries to join with reformist and revolutionary nationalist workers in seeking to build an independent political party. At the same time, it was possible to win these workers to a revolutionary programme for such a workers' party. This was a specific application of the Trotskyist 'labor party tactic' applied by Trotsky and the SWP (US) in the late 1930s.

In the event, the opportunity was missed and the political vacuum filled, as we predicted, by the forces of Stalinism and petit-bourgeois nationalism. During the crackdown and retreat of the late 1980s, the SACP recruited key political leaders, including Moses Mayekiso, a previous advocate of the workers' party.

Using and encouraging the increasing bureaucratisation of the trade union leadership, the SACP and pro-ANC leaders consolidated their political influence. Once the SACP was able to operate legally, it appeared as the workers' party. Mayekiso urged other militants to join the SACP. In this period it was not possible to raise the workers' party slogan in a united front fashion.

By last year, however, the way in which the SACP had tied itself to the bourgeois forces in the ANC meant that the slogan for a really independent party of the working class once again had a resonance in the class.

The LRCI has argued over the last period that fielding a workers' party list/workers' list is essential to alert the working class to the need to organise independently and fight to force its representatives to break from the bourgeoisie. The position of some trade union militants, for instance the leadership of the South African Textile Workers Union, against all party ties will not achieve this.

This position is derived from the old 'workerist' wing of South African trade unionism which in its most economist variant accepted the divide between trade unionism and 'politics'. The problem with this position is that it leaves the field of politics free for the bourgeoisie and their allies.

In the event, the argument for a workers' party has not been enough to realise the project in the pre-election period.

Revolutionaries will have to continue to propagandise against the sell out and for class struggle using what platforms the election period allows, and continue the fight to break workers' organisations from the

Alliance. NUMSA remains committed to fighting for COSATU to break with the Alliance once the ANC is in government.

The danger is that this will mean breaking the formal links without constructing an alternative. Already the COSATU policy of insisting that its nominees for their electoral list resign their COSATU positions has left those candidates prisoners of the ANC rather than under COSATU control.

This tactic may have won support from some delegates because it seemed to flow from the old radicalism of the 'workerist' days. But it results in the working class losing its independent voice altogether.

Dissatisfaction with this, along with revived class struggle in the post election period, will provide new opportunities for those trying to build a revolutionary party in South Africa.

## NOTES

1 'Apartheid; from resistance to revolution?', Permanent Revolution 4, 1986, p25

2 ibid p29

3 Inqaba

4 ibid p30

5 For an account of the roots of this 'revolutionary processism' in the British Militant's politics see 'Militant after Grant?the unbroken thread?? Permanent Revolution 10, 1994.

6 P Taaffe, 'Apartheid ends?a new chapter opens?' in Militant International Review (MIR), 55, January-February 1994, p6.

7 ibid

8 Congress Militant November-December 1992

9 Congress Militant 14

10 Congress Militant 11

11 Congress Militant 14

12 P Taaffe, op cit p5

13 The Economist 18.12/93

14 P Taaffe, op cit, p7

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