

THE RESOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

## PART I

Introduction

The object of this paper is to analyse the national question in South Africa and from this analysis to develop a framework for its resolution. The first task, therefore, is to establish the content of the national question in South Africa and secondly, the enemy's strategy within this context.

1. What is the national question in South Africa?a) The origins of colonialism and white minority domination

The national oppression of South Africa is a result of over three centuries of emerging Dutch and British bourgeoisie the peoples of South Africa made an important development of capitalism in Europe. With the discovery of raw materials in Africa's importance for the accumulation of capital this process, however, was not without contradictions.

In South Africa the struggle between capitalism, represented by the mining, finance, and commerce, and Afrikaner (agricultural) capital gave rise to a compromise after the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. This took the form of an alliance of these two fractions of capital and their national outlook. The main aim of this alliance was to continue the subjugation and perpetuate the domination over the indigenous majority. The control of the state by the white bourgeoisie facilitated this task. The main function of the colonial state was to continue the expropriation of African land, the control and supply of black labour-power; and the protection and guarantee of white privileges through a monopoly of political and economic power.

b) The impact of the mining and industrial revolution

The mining and industrial revolution of the past hundred years was preceded by two hundred years of colonisation, expropriation and forced labour. The latter assumed the form of slave labour, labour rent, prison labour, compound labour and migrant labour.



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1. What is the national question in South Africa?a) The origins of colonialism and white minority domination

The national oppression of the black peoples of South Africa is a result of over three centuries of European domination. For the emerging Dutch and British bourgeoisie the conquest and domination of the peoples of South Africa made an important contribution to the rapid development of capitalism in Europe. With the discovery of gold, diamonds and other raw materials this domination was intensified and consolidated as South Africa's importance for the accumulation of capital grew in significance. This process, however, was not without contradictions.

In South Africa the struggle between British imperialism, represented by the mining, finance, and commerce, and Afrikaner (agricultural) capital gave rise to a compromise after the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. This took the form of an alliance of these two fractions of capital and their national outlook. The main aim of this alliance was to continue the subjugation and perpetuate the domination over the indigenous majority. The control of the state by the white bourgeoisie facilitated this task. The main function of the colonial state was to continue the expropriation of African land, the control and supply of black labour-power; and the protection and guarantee of white privileges through a monopoly of political and economic power.

b) The impact of the mining and industrial revolution

The mining and industrial revolution of the past hundred years was preceded by two hundred years of colonisation, expropriation and forced labour. The latter assumed the form of slave labour, labour rent, prison labour, compound labour and migrant labour.



The mining and industrial revolution adopted migrant labour as the most appropriate form of exploitation of labour power. This could only be achieved through the creation of African reserves and bantustans which could act as labour reservoirs. Migrant labour was fundamental to capital accumulation in this period. It was this system that made it possible to depress the value of African labour power by transferring the costs of its reproduction from the sphere of capitalist production into the reserves. Thus mining and industrial capital was able to accumulate super profits. This was made possible by an intensive, systematic and brutal form of colonialism. Apartheid is its extreme expression. It is the specific form that colonialism assumes under the given conditions of South African monopoly capitalism. This is a colonialism of a special type where the coloniser and the colonised are in the same country and are distinguishable only by the respective relationship of domination and subordination, where state power, as exercised by the white minority, is characterised by institutionalised violence.

c) The development of Afrikaner and African nationalisms

The alliance between British imperialism and Afrikaner capital did not negate the acute contradictions that lay under the surface. Afrikaners bore a deep resentment against British imperialism which had militarily defeated them and subordinated their interest to the interests of British capital. The struggle against British imperialism and the historical development of the Afrikaners as a culturally homogeneous group combined to give rise to Afrikaner nationalism towards the end of the last century. The Afrikaner bourgeoisie ultimately saw the seizure of state power and the harsh exploitation of the African as a means to rapid capitalist development that would put them on par with British capitalism. This was achieved when the Afrikaner Nationalist Party came into power in 1948 and institutionalised the practice of apartheid.

The antithesis of Afrikaner nationalism, racism and colonialism was the development of African resistance to colonial conquest and the subsequent growth of African nationalism.

Six years after the defeat of the last war of resistance (The Bambata Rebellion) the founding fathers of the African National Congress (ANC) - created in 1912 - explicitly recognised that it was the divisions and contradictions between the different African chiefdoms that facilitated their defeat and colonisation of South Africa. The formation of the ANC implicitly acknowledged that African



disunity are a direct consequence of European colonialism, its oppressive rule and 'divide et impera' tactics. The ANC has always recognised that the biggest obstacle to nation building are colonialism, apartheid and capitalism.

d) The national and class struggles

The political and economic subjugation of the African people meant that the struggle would thereafter be waged by the African majority, employing appropriate methods of struggle. With the rapid growth of capitalism and the massive proletarianisation of Africans this struggle became more pronounced as the African population moved towards greater cohesion and class consciousness while the capitalist state dropped all pretensions at bourgeois democracy and revealed its fascist nature.

The roots of apartheid are embedded in the socio-economic system. By and large the racial division of our society coincides with the class divisions. The white minority has not only usurped all political power for itself, but also grabbed all the land, mineral resources, industries and banks, reducing the bulk of the black population to mere wage workers who produce super-profits for both local and foreign capitalists. Thus national oppression and capitalist exploitation impose a double burden on the African population. Black workers realise that the struggle against capitalism is inextricably linked with the struggle for national liberation.

White working class immigrants who initiated working class struggles in South Africa could not ignore the fact that capitalism was based on colonialism and that the overthrow of capitalism meant incorporation of the black working class into the class struggles. On the other hand, the advanced sections of the working class recognised that its struggle was the most effective means of attaining social and economic justice. This perception of the independence of the national and class struggle was reflected in the simultaneous growth of the African National Congress and the Communist Party in South Africa. This was manifested by the fact that all African members of the Communist Party were also members of the ANC.

The African working class represents the dual nature of our struggle. It is the only class that can lead both the national and class struggles in our country. This double role is consequence of the transformation of the vast majority of African people into wage earners.



## 2. Enemy strategems on the national question

The white minority regime has consistently pursued a policy of dividing the population as a whole into racial, ethnic and tribal groups. This policy is central to the maintenance of white supremacy and capitalist exploitation in South Africa. As a means to this end, the apartheid state has resorted to racist ideology and fascist methods. With the steady advance of monopoly capitalism, the real wealth of the country is concentrated in fewer hands. In order to perpetuate this monopoly the white rulers are skilfully exploiting separate "Ethnic nationalisms" to consolidate their social base against revolutionary nationalism and socialism.

The regime relies largely on racism and anti-communist propaganda to rally and keep together rabid racists and fascists within the "white laager". Over the years, the white rulers have been able to co-opt white workers and bribe them to identify with the white ruling class. In this way a white "labour aristocracy" was created acting as junior partners in the oppression of blacks.

Having divided the population into two hostile camps the racists' ideologists and grand strategists have gone further on the road of divide and rule. In this grand strategy the bantustan schemes occupy an important position. At the same time on the mines and in the townships tribal divisions are nurtured by the white rulers to perpetuate their domination. Underlining the urgent need for a concerted struggle for the defeat of the bantustan policies, our President, Comrade O.R. Tambo, declared:

"The bantustans are a weapon to divide the African people into separate tribes as they existed during colonial wars fought against foreign invaders in our country. This separateness facilitated our defeat and subjugation at the time and since. This separation is now being resuscitated hurriedly to ensure our defeat again and perpetuate our subjugation."

(ANC Speaks, p.159)

Apart from its socio-economic objectives the bantustan policy is geared to diverting the broad masses from revolutionary struggle and real freedom by offering them so-called "independence" in their "homelands". According to the Pretoria regime our society consists of minority groups. Each group must be kept in its own "homeland" with its own "independence". By the stroke of the pen the regime is turning Africans into foreigners in the land of their birth. This policy is untenable both for millions of urbanised black proletarians and those in the bantustans who have been deprived of South African citizenship against their will.



In order to further divide the oppressed people, the regime attempted to co-opt Coloureds and Indians in a special tri-cameral parliament formed in 1983-84. This body has no real powers and is only there to bribe these communities into supporting apartheid. The manoeuvre made some headway among a small elite but the bulk of these communities refused to participate in their own oppression.

Naturally, the extension of these apartheid policies has not changed the real conditions of the broad masses. As in the bantustans, the only persons who derive material benefits are the top layers of administrators and bureaucrats. Thus the regime is creating a black middle class.

It is important to note that the white ruling class and the white community as a whole are not homogenous. There are national and class divisions in their ranks and no unanimity of views with the regard to the strategy for maintaining capitalism and white privilege.

The extreme right-wing of the ruling class wants to perpetuate "baaskap" or master-serf relationships. The ruling clique has reached a stage of moral bankruptcy and is caught in the contradiction between economic growth and white domination. It sacrifices economic growth by its policy of apartheid, racial classification, influx control and bantustan fragmentation. The fraud of bantustan independence lies in the basic contradiction between economic and cultural integration on one hand and alleged rights to self-determination, secession and independence. These concepts are being imposed by white rulers and have never been accepted by the people.

We maintain that self-determination as applied by the oppressors is a fiction intended to serve their interests at the expense of a united South African nation. It is in conflict with the aims of our revolution for national unity and equality. The racist policy of federation is a device to protect white interests by preventing the growth of a single, united South African nation.

Federalism is seen as a strategy that will preserve capitalism while creating conditions for the emergence of a black bourgeoisie, which it is hoped, will have a vested interest in the present economic system. Certain circles in the USA and Britain favour federation to protect their interests. Self-determination, secession and federation can only serve the interests of the enemy in our situation. We therefore reject them.



The South African national democratic revolution is two dimensional. It seeks to resolve the national question through the struggle for freedom from white domination. This implies the destruction of the apartheid state and socio-economic emancipation.

The first objective presupposes victory of the national democratic revolution and the second, a more equitable distribution of the wealth of the country. Both objectives must be tackled simultaneously.

### 3. Immediate and long term perspectives

#### a) The immediate stage: the national democratic state

##### 1) The transfer of political power to the majority

The seizure of political power by the majority means government by the people. "The people shall govern" says the Freedom Charter. The destruction of apartheid requires both legal and constitutional upheaval and a revolutionary transformation of habits, attitudes, institutions and social relations.

##### 2) The transformation of social consciousness

After centuries of colonial oppression and racism stress will be placed on the creation of a new person with a social consciousness based on the principles of social equality, justice and respect for all persons irrespective of race or culture. To achieve this objective, the revolution will introduce an alternative system of education. It will include:

- \* universal, compulsory, free democratic education;
- \* the abolition of illiteracy;
- \* the introduction of political education on a mass scale. Participation by the mass media and other institutions in this campaign will be deemed necessary.

##### 3) Economic reconstruction

The solution of the national question lies in eradicating the root causes of the racial, tribal tensions and national oppression. This means redressing the economic imbalances and inequalities in the existing system.



The liberation alliance (ANC/SACP/SACTU) focuses attention on two fundamental issues: land ownership and exploitation of labour.

With regard to land ownership and agriculture the proposed measures include:

- \* restoration of land to the people;
- \* removal of the reserve/bantustan system and racial restrictions on land ownership;
- \* the confiscation of land held by monopolies and its transfer to the state;
- \* uplifting the standards of living of the rural communities by affirmative action;
- \* changes in the ownership and use of tribal and communal land;
- \* promotion of cooperatives and collectives;
- \* introduction of advanced agricultural methods such as mechanisation, electrification, conservation and irrigation.

Measures to improve the status and deployment of workers will include:

- \* abolition of laws and structures that restrict the black worker;
- \* measures to give women equal rights and opportunities in the labour market;
- \* the abolishing of all forms of forced labour, contract, migrant, prison, compound and labour tenancy;
- \* radical improvements in the living standards of workers;
- \* elimination of wage gap between black and white workers;
- \* pension and disability schemes, adequate housing, transport and health facilities;
- \* vigorous measures to close the gap between white and black workers in skilled occupations.

Measures aimed at eradicating the economic roots of apartheid, will involve far reaching state control of economic resources, their utilisation and distribution. While not advocating socialism at this stage, the national democratic revolution will undoubtedly institute large scale measures to narrow the gap between rich and poor, and provide housing, education, land and social welfare for the oppressed. Only in this can we lay a firm material basis for the resolution of the national question.

b) Long term perspectives

No one can predict with certainty what form the new South African state will assume. It will depend on the balance of class forces and the strength of the working class component of our revolution.



The main thrust of the national liberation movement has been achieved by mobilising the black working class. This is the basis and mainstay of the national liberation movement. The black working class has always been the most consistent and progressive force in the approach to the solution of the national question. The liberation alliance has always recognised that the working class is the most important and conscious element in the oppressed community and the leading force in the struggle.

The struggle for national liberation reinforces the class struggle. The Freedom Charter which demands people's power - "The people shall govern" - articulates the aspirations of the working class as an independent force. It calls for unity of the democratic forces in the struggle. This unity is centered around bread and butter issue; equality, land, work and security. These concrete demands reflect the simple reality that our future cannot be based on abstract notions alone; it will be the result of our actions, thinking and struggles today.

The black working class is the backbone of our struggle for national liberation and social emancipation. As a class it is at the base of our Movement's perception that political and economic transformation is a continuous process.

#### 4. Nation building

The ANC and its allies oppose the enemy's strategy of divide and rule on the basis of race and tribe. It is our policy to combine all the different national groups into a single nation with provisions protecting their separate cultural heritage and identities. These communities are bound by a single economy and the growth of a common culture. Therefore, the South African national democratic revolution aims at the elimination of national inequalities imposed by the whites who oppress the black majority, and the creation of an independent national state based on majority rule.

Nation building is an historical process..It is the duty of the national democratic forces to create favourable conditions for this process. Upon the seizure of state power the national liberation movement led by the ANC must set out principles of elimination of national inequality and minority rule.