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## *Alliance Politics of a Special Type: the Roots of the ANC/SACP Alliance, 1950-1954<sup>1</sup>*

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*The relationship between the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party has long been a subject of controversy and little analysis. This paper seeks to redress the imbalance by returning to the point at which the alliance was forged, in the early 1950s, and studies the ideological basis of the alliance. The roots of the modern ANC lie in the changes it underwent in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the present ANC leadership emerged as militant young African nationalists, committed to mass action and opposed to all organisations which impeded the growth of African nationalism — including the Communist Party. The disbanding of the Communist Party of South Africa in 1950, and the success of the African National Congress-led Defiance Campaign two years later, forced communists to reassess their relationship with the ANC in particular, and with nationalism more generally. As the struggle against apartheid intensified in the early 1950s, a new theory was evolved to fit South Africa's 'unique' conditions. That theory, 'Colonialism of a Special Type' or internal colonialism, was the ideological glue which held the African National Congress/South African Communist Party alliance together for the next four decades.*

The historical alliance between the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) is currently at the heart of an intense political debate, both because of the changing circumstances in South Africa and because of the collapse of the communism in Eastern Europe. For a long time it was believed by many that the ANC was dominated by the SACP. This suspicion was fuelled by the effective integration of ANC and SACP membership, and the prominent role played by the SACP in the armed wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe. Since the unbanning of the political organisations, however, the SACP has both been overshadowed by the ANC and overwhelmed by its organisational needs.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is taken from a chapter of my D.Phil. thesis, 'The Politics of Nonracialism: White Opposition to Apartheid, 1945-1960', Oxford 1990. I am extremely grateful to Stanley Trapido for all his guidance and helpful criticism, and to Shula Marks.

In the fluid state of contemporary South African politics, there is a question mark over the future of the alliance.

In order to understand the relationship between the two organisations, it is necessary to go back to the 1950s and the circumstances in which the members of the disbanded Communist Party of South Africa regrouped in the SACP and constructed an ideology which enabled them to come to terms with African nationalism. This was known as 'colonialism of a special type', and posited national liberation as the correct first stage of a broader social revolution in South Africa.<sup>2</sup> Contrary to the received wisdom which sees the SACP as an unproblematic continuation of the Communist Party of South Africa underground, the birth of the SACP occasioned a prolonged and intense debate over the relationship of the class struggle to nationalism. In part this was informed by the different regional experiences of the Communist Party of South Africa, which was dominated by Cape Town members, and that of the founders of the SACP, who were largely from the Transvaal, and who were therefore closer to the newly radicalised ANC Youth League. The Youth League played a significant role in influencing the theory of 'colonialism of a special type'. As a result of the decision of the SACP leadership to adopt this theory, a number of former members of the Communist Party of South Africa who adhered to the primacy of the class struggle and feared its dilution by 'bourgeois nationalism' did not join the new Party. The focus of this paper is on the nature of this debate.

### **The Wider Context.**

The years between 1946 and 1953 witnessed two major developments within the forces opposed to apartheid. First, the ANC radicalised its demands and methods of protest; and, in the process, the leadership of the 1940s was largely replaced by a younger generation of more assertive and militant African nationalists. Second, the period witnessed a growing unity amongst black organisations. Thus, the African and Indian Congresses moved into an alliance and, with representatives of the largely 'Coloured' Franchise Action Committee, co-ordinated the 1952 Defiance Campaign. 'Coloureds' and whites joined the Congress Alliance through the South African Coloured People's Organisation, formed in September 1953, and the South African Congress of Democrats, formed the following month.

These twin processes of unity and the radicalisation of the national liberation forces, however, exacerbated ideological differences amongst socialists and communists. By the late 1940s, the Communist Party of South Africa was divided in its understanding of and response to the growth of African nationalism and the ANC. Some party members, located largely in the Cape, warned of the dangers of African nationalism and called for a greater concentration on the pursuance of class struggle. Others, predominantly from the Transvaal and Natal, began to develop a theory of internal colonialism which saw national struggle as a natural and

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<sup>2</sup> A broader assessment of the alliance from the perspective of the ANC is offered in chapters 3 and 4 of Everatt, 'The Politics of Nonracialism'.

necessary response to colonial forms of oppression by which the white minority controlled the black majority.<sup>3</sup>

The context within which South African socialists and communists operated in the early 1950s was marked on the one hand by the growth of the ANC, and on the other by the dissolution of the Communist Party of South Africa in 1950 and the secret formation of the SACP in 1953. Debates which began to emerge in the Communist Party of South Africa in the late 1940s over the relationship between class and national struggle were taken up nationally in the early 1950s as communists and non-communist socialists sought an adequate response to the growth of African nationalism. At issue was the role of theories of class struggle and of working-class organisation in the changed conditions of the early 1950s. At the heart of the debate lay an attempt to marry the theories of class and national struggle.

In the face of the Suppression of Communism Bill, passed at the end of June, the Communist Party of South Africa disbanded itself on 20 June 1950. Contrary to a conventional wisdom which suggests that the dissolution of the Party was based on consensus, the inevitable result of the legislation, it seems to have represented a hasty decision taken by the Central Committee; the general Party membership was left confused and without direction at the same time as the ANC and the South African Indian Congress were successfully mobilising support for the Defiance Campaign.

Rank and file Party members appear to have believed overwhelmingly that dissolution was a 'ploy'<sup>4</sup> to suggest that 'the Party had been dissolved, whereas actually it would continue'.<sup>5</sup> The great majority of the Central Committee members supported dissolution believing there to be 'little alternative at that stage'.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, they had different understandings of their future role, which only became clear once the Communist Party of South Africa had been disbanded. While some Central Committee members saw dissolution as a tactical manoeuvre, for others it was final. For Fred Carneson, 'all sorts of arguments were put forward but basically they didn't want to get mixed up in anything illegal, didn't want to stick their necks out'.<sup>7</sup> The unpreparedness of the Communist Party of South Africa Central Committee resulted in confusion and anger amongst Party members, particularly in the Transvaal; it was from this situation that the SACP emerged.

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed treatment of this issue, see Everatt, 'The Politics of Nonracialism', chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>4</sup> A term used by Communist Party of South Africa members Rusty and Hilda Bernstein, Rowley Arenstein, Fred Carneson, Ben Turok and others.

<sup>5</sup> Hilda Bernstein, interviewed by Don Pinnock (1988), transcript p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Bunting, *Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary* (London, Inkululeko Publications, 1987), p. 166.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Fred Carneson (London, 1989), p. 24.

### The Formation of the SACP

Although the majority of Communist Party members had supported disbanding the Communist Party of South Africa as a ploy, their disquiet grew when the Party was not immediately reconstituted. For the general membership it appeared that the decision to dissolve the Party, which they 'didn't believe ... was serious', was in fact final.<sup>8</sup> Members of the Communist Party of South Africa remained active in various organisations while waiting for news of the underground reconstitution of the Party — 'and we waited, and we waited, and we waited, and it didn't happen!'<sup>9</sup> As a result, communists at a local level began 'a slow process of feeling each other's attitudes out'.<sup>10</sup> The different attitudes towards dissolution amongst Central Committee members were reflected amongst ordinary Party members. Many of those who supported the permanent disbanding of the Communist Party of South Africa now ceased their active political involvement.<sup>11</sup> Those who regarded the decision to disband as a ploy, however, found the period disillusioning. In the Western Cape Congress organisers were confronted on the issue. Ben Turok reported coming across

... a Coloured village in the western Cape where the [Party] members buried their cards in a tin box with plastic around it. When I came there for the Congress of the People in 1954, they spoke to us in very angry terms. They said before we talk to you about the Congress of the People you must please explain to us what happened to the Party because we were told to dissolve, we buried our cards — they sent somebody out and brought the cards in — and as far as they were concerned they were totally opposed to dissolution. I'm told this story could be repeated up and down the country. It's quite clear that the membership was neither consulted nor accepted the decision. I can't put a figure on it but I think that a substantial number of members were in that position.<sup>12</sup>

Many former members of the Communist Party of South Africa who had regarded dissolution as temporary formed a number of small discussion groups and ad hoc committees; in some cases, group membership included some who had not formerly belonged to the Communist Party of South Africa.<sup>13</sup> The situation was confused, as new groups began to form and the Johannesburg leadership feared the formation of competing and fragmented communist factions. At this point it decided to regroup and establish an underground Party under a new name.<sup>14</sup> The founders of the new Party were former members of the Communist Party of South

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Rusty Bernstein, interviewed by Done Pinnock (1988), transcript p. 44.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Hilda Bernstein, interviewed by Done Pinnock (1988), p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Ben Turok (London, 1988), p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Ben Turok, pp. 16-17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Hilda Bernstein, p. 48.

Africa Transvaal District Committee, although the idea was 'canvassed around the country' during 1951 and 1952, before the SACP was launched in 1953.<sup>15</sup>

The SACP is commonly presented as the reconstitution of the Communist Party of South Africa.<sup>16</sup> It is implied, in other words, that the ideology of the Communist Party of South Africa, as well as those members prepared to work underground, were taken over intact by the SACP. Because the SACP operated under illegal conditions, the non-appearance within its ranks of some senior Communist Party of South Africa members has been ascribed to an aversion to the stringencies of underground work. Brian Bunting argued for example that later some of them rationalised 'their own weakness' as 'ideological differences' with the party and its leadership'.<sup>17</sup> As the centre of power within the new Party shifted from the Cape to the Transvaal, it came under the control of those former members of the Communist Party of South Africa who had pressed for a closer relationship with the Congress movement and greater support for national struggle. It was at this point that the debate over the relationship between class struggle and national struggle intensified, spurred by the concurrent Defiance Campaign. The ideological differences which emerged therefore represented more than the rationalisations of timorous former Communist Party of South Africa members.

If, as one of its founder members asserted, the SACP 'came out of the old Party',<sup>18</sup> it did so with its headquarters in the Transvaal and with a new leadership dominated by Transvaal members. It was influenced in particular by Michael Harmel, a leading and persuasive proponent of internal colonialism.<sup>19</sup> The theory of internal colonialism was aimed at resolving the debate which, according to one commentator, had 'almost obsessed' the Communist Party of South Africa since its inception — that is, the relationship between class struggle and national struggle, and of a class party to a national liberation movement.<sup>20</sup>

The relationship between national liberation and socialist struggle had been the subject of intense Marxist debate throughout the twentieth century. Early meetings of the Communist International (Comintern) in the 1920s were dominated by debates between Lenin and the Indian Communist Roy over the correct approach to colonial movements which were simultaneously bourgeois and anti-imperialist. Roy argued for the complete separation of working-class movements from national movements, while Lenin supported temporary alliances between the two in the broader anti-imperial struggle. The second Comintern congress resolved to support what Lenin termed 'national revolutionary movements' where they did not hinder working-class mobilisation, but stressed the need for separate working class and

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Rusty Bernstein, pp. 48, 50.

<sup>16</sup> See in particular Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, Chapter 11: 'The Party is Reconstituted'.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p. 50.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Ben Turok, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> T.D. Karis and G.M. Carter, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964, Vol. II Hope and Challenge* (Hoover, Stanford, 1972-77), p. 107; see Everatt, 'The politics of Nonracialism', chapter 3.

national organisations.<sup>21</sup> Positions on these issues fluctuated in subsequent Congresses, largely in response to the needs of the Soviet Union's foreign policy. The Cominform, created in 1947, initially accepted Zhdanov's analysis of a post-war world divided into two hostile camps — the 'anti-imperialist democratic' and the 'imperialist anti-democratic'.<sup>22</sup> Bourgeois-led nationalist movements were seen to be part of the latter category. Two years later the Cominform changed tack, arguing that the national bourgeoisie in colonial situations could best attain their goals through an alliance with the working class and peasantry against imperialism. National movements would bring about 'national democracy' — a state neither capitalist nor socialist, in which the bourgeoisie could flourish and increase the productive forces and size of the working class.<sup>23</sup>

Shifts in Cominform thinking came at the same time as conditions in South Africa were rapidly changing and forcing communists to undertake a domestic review of the relationship between socialist struggle and national liberation. As a result, South African socialists consciously strove to evolve indigenous theories of change, arguing that 'the South African liberatory movement has no exact precedent' and that South African conditions therefore required 'an amended theory of struggle'.<sup>24</sup> Earlier debates within the left were dominated by speakers hostile to nationalism and supportive of class struggle. By the 1950s, however, as we have seen, the broader context within which the debates took place, was that of the underground regrouping of the communists and the formation of the SACP in 1953. After 1953, leading SACP members intervened in the debate, offering the theory of 'colonialism of a special type' as a middle course between the poles of class and national struggle, and arrived at by merging the two.

#### **From Communist Party of South Africa to South African Communist Party (SACP) — the Debates of 1952-1954.**

The debates of 1952-1954 were crucial in setting the ideological and strategic context for the resistance movement in the 1950s and beyond, although they have been almost entirely ignored in existing historiography.<sup>25</sup> They have to be

<sup>21</sup> See Fernando Claudin, *The Communist Movement From Comintern to Cominform*, Part 1, chapters 1-4 (London 1975).

<sup>22</sup> Peter Hudson, 'Images of the Future and Strategies in the Present: the Freedom Charter and the South African Left', in Frankel, Pines and Swilling (eds), *State, Resistance and Change in South Africa* (London 1988), p. 262.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, (Johannesburg Discussion Club journal), 'Editorial', 1/3 (February 1954), p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> See R.V. Lambert, 'Political Unionism in South Africa: The South African Congress of Trade Unions, 1955-1965', unpub. PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988. See especially chapter two, pp. 53-100. Although Lambert has analysed the implications of internal colonialism for trade unionism, he has ignored the wider context of Communist Party of South Africa/ANC politics in the late 1940s, of which the debates of the 1950s were essentially an extension. By restricting his analysis to the journal *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, issued by the Johannesburg Discussion Club, he missed the fact that the debates were national and involved the South African left as a whole, not just former members of the Communist Party of South Africa.

understood within the broader context of the period, particularly that of the internal politics of the Communist Party of South Africa and SACP, and the effects of Communist Party of South Africa/ANC Youth League hostility. At the centre of debate lay the ANC: its programme, leadership and tactics were analysed, and its commitment to the fundamental restructuring of society questioned.

The late 1940s and early 1950s saw communists searching for an adequate response to the rapidly changing political terrain of post-war South Africa, which was dominated by the rise of African and Afrikaner nationalism. As the Secretary of the Cape Communist Party of South Africa, Fred Carneson, put it:

Until the African National Congress, or the Congress movement, emerged as a real political force in South Africa, I think there was a tendency among the activists inside and outside the Party, to see things in class terms more than in national liberatory terms. Particularly so, I think, amongst some of the white communists, though it was not confined to the white communists by any manner of means.<sup>26</sup>

In the reassessment generated by the increasing strength and militancy of the ANC, the central point at issue was the place of class struggle in a period dominated by nationalism and nationalist organisations. As we have seen, the debate was intensified during the confusion over the dissolution of the Communist Party of South Africa and formation of the SACP. A major reason for this was that once the Communist Party of South Africa had disbanded, white communists — a very influential minority — were left with no political home while black communists were able to work within the Congress movement.

The increasingly anti-white nature of the late stages of the Defiance Campaign generated fears among communists and whites more generally that extreme nationalist sentiment was spreading within the ANC.<sup>27</sup> As Volunteer-in-Chief of the Defiance Campaign Nelson Mandela may well have been playing on these fears when he called on whites to identify themselves with the Campaign and not unite in opposition to it; if they did so, they would be 'digging their own grave' by 'turn[ing] the whole movement into a racial front with disastrous consequences for all'.<sup>28</sup>

The response to Mandela's appeal was twofold: on the one hand, white organisations such as the Congress of Democrats were formed. On the other hand, socialists and former members of the Communist Party of South Africa debated the best means of highlighting underlying class alignments which, they argued, were being obscured by rising nationalism. Following the dissolution of the Communist Party of South Africa, discussion groups were set up in the major centres across South Africa with the aim of 'furnishing an opportunity for frank theoretical discussion'.<sup>29</sup> Participants in the debates stood 'solidly behind the broad aims of the Liberatory struggle' but were not committed 'to the policies of any

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Fred Carneson, pp. 29-30.

<sup>27</sup> See Everatt, 'The Politics of Nonracialism', chapter 2.

<sup>28</sup> *People's World*, 2 October 1952, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 'Editorial', 1/1 (March 1953), p. 1.

particular group, tendency or movement within the democratic camp'.<sup>30</sup> These debates of the early 1950s were unconstrained as former members of the Communist Party of South Africa, without the discipline of party membership, joined socialists and Trotskyists in debating the place of class struggle in the existing South African situation. In Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and elsewhere, communists and non-communists alike sought to redress the balance which they felt had been threatened by the rise of the ANC Youth League and upset by the Suppression of Communism Act.

As Jack Simons who had been a member of the Communist Party of South Africa Central Committee explained in 1954, the relationship between class struggle and nationalism had:

become even more complicated than it used to be by reason of the attacks which the Nationalist Government has carried on against the working-class organisations. The old balance, arrived at by constant interaction between the two sections, has been seriously upset, and the working class point of view tends to be overlooked.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, the leading members of the new SACP were calling for close relations with the Congress movement. In so doing they alienated a number of former Communist Party of South Africa members and others who warned that nationalist movements would stop short of the complete social transformation desired by the working class. As a result, an alternative call was made for the building of a 'cohesive organisation ... [of] the major protagonist, the industrial working class', in alliance with its 'natural' allies, 'the rural workers and the migrant labourers'.<sup>32</sup>

Almost all participants in the debates of the early 1950s agreed that South Africa was 'unique.' This stemmed from a number of factors of which the most important was the presence of a white community which, while permanently settled in the country, nonetheless controlled a system of exploitation whose main features (discrimination against the entire indigenous population, migrant labour, a racially divided working class) were found in colonial situations elsewhere. Secondly, under this system the growth and development of an indigenous black bourgeoisie had not been encouraged; in fact, all agreed, it had been deliberately frustrated. Moreover, the 'industrial revolution' which had been generated by World War II promised to increase the size and significance of the proletariat; as yet, however, black South Africans were seen to exhibit little evidence of class consciousness.<sup>33</sup>

These developments had considerable implications for the resistance movement in South Africa. As in colonial situations elsewhere, racial discrimination had given rise to a national liberation movement. In South Africa, however, the lack of

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Treason Trial collection, AD1812, Ev1.1.1, Jack Simons, 'Lecture' (to the Durban Study Circle), January 1954, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> Dr Z. Sanders [pseud. Zena Stein], 'Aspects of the Rural Problem in South Africa' in *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/1 (March 1953), p. 36.

<sup>33</sup> See *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/1 to 1/3.



a significant indigenous bourgeoisie affected both the nature and goals of the national movement which, some argued, was overwhelmingly working class in composition and increasingly in its leadership. Moreover, while the working class grew in size, its ability to organise was restricted by the lack of basic black citizenship rights. As a result, according to the trade unionist and member of the Communist Party of South Africa/SACP, Eli Weinberg, African workers had 'developed a class consciousness tinged with nationalism'.<sup>34</sup> All this led participants in the debates of the early 1950s to conclude that orthodox models of resistance in colonial and semi-colonial countries did not apply to South Africa.

Thus Jack Simons argued in 1954 that 'the solution to our problems here will call for a great deal of Original, Independent, Creative thinking'.<sup>35</sup> He exhorted the left to think critically about non-South African models: 'In order to be true Marxists ... we must be truly Africanist ...'.<sup>36</sup> Focusing on questions of race and class in South Africa, Communist Party of South Africa and SACP members questioned the usefulness to South Africans of both Stalin's contribution to thinking on the national question, and the various positions adopted by the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform).

It would be inaccurate to characterise the whole process of debate in the early 1950s as polarised between two coherent and well-defined opposing positions. Nonetheless, by the time the last edition of *Viewpoints and Perspectives* was issued in 1954, two clearly different theoretical positions had been defined by members of the Communist Party of South Africa, which depended differing understandings of the nature of exploitation in South Africa, and whether it was 'capitalist' or 'imperialist'.<sup>37</sup>

These opposing analyses of South African society generated alternative strategies of the best means of pursuing class struggle — through an intimate working alliance with the Congresses, or by building an independent working-class organisation which would enjoy limited co-operation with the Congresses while retaining its separate structures.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Minority View: the Primacy of Class Struggle.**

Myrtle Berman, a former member of the Communist Party of South Africa, has summarised the two differing perspectives on the South African liberation movement which, it was argued, flowed from South Africa's 'unique' position in

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<sup>34</sup> Eli Weinberg, 'Problems of Trade Unionism in South Africa' in *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/3 (February 1954), p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> Treason Trial collection, AD1812, Ev1.1.6, Jack Simons, 'Economics and Politics in South Africa', p. 7 (lecture to the Durban Study Circle), nd. 1954.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/2, 'Editorial'. Lambert, 'SACTU', pp. 70, 80 suggests that the two positions represented 'subtle' differences of 'emphasis'; those who called for the independent organisation of the working class are described as marking 'a shift of emphasis *within* the dominant position'. This analysis is questionable.

<sup>38</sup> See below.

having 'neither a well-developed Non-European bourgeoisie nor a class conscious Non-European proletariat'.<sup>39</sup>

The first argued that:

in the course and realisation of the National Liberatory Struggle an African bourgeoisie will develop, and the classic pattern will follow from then onwards. The proletariat will have gained certain political freedoms but not its economic freedom ... only when this political freedom has been achieved, will the proletariat become truly aware of the nature of their still present economic disabilities and develop class consciousness.<sup>40</sup>

The second, in contrast, argued that South Africa's specific conditions would directly affect the nature and course of the national liberation struggle:

just because there is no well-developed bourgeoisie it is just as likely that the class conscious elements will assume leadership and that the interests of the bourgeoisie will be pushed aside. In this case, the nature of the struggle will broaden to include economic demands, ie. the demands will be not only for the extension of existing freedoms and privileges to all, but a fundamental change in economic relations.<sup>41</sup>

The Communist Party of South Africa in the late 1940s had stressed the primacy of class struggle and the dangers of nationalism in obfuscating class oppression by racial divisions.<sup>42</sup> Resistance to this was led by Transvaal communists who were closely involved in Congress politics. In the changed conditions of the early 1950s, with a more militant ANC leading the Defiance Campaign, support for continued stress on class struggle and the development of separate working-class structures lacked the support (and thus legitimacy) of leading black communists, and emerged as the minority viewpoint. Moreover, it lacked the coherence provided by a single leading theoretician (as Michael Harmel was for the SACP).<sup>43</sup> Rather, in response to calls for close working links with the Congress movement, a number of counter arguments were put forward. Some argued that South Africa was a capitalist country in which national struggle served to obscure class oppression. Others focussed critical attention on the dangers of nationalism generally, and on the weaknesses of the ANC in particular. All reached the same conclusion: that the interests of the working class could not be safeguarded by the ANC.

Those who contended that nationalist movements were a home for bourgeois emancipation but not for working-class freedom argued that the focus of left-wing activity should be the organisation of the working class in separate working-class structures. In the first place, it was argued, as the size of the working class grew, its independent organisation became possible. With rapid industrialisation and the

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<sup>39</sup> *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/1, Myrtle Berman, in minutes of discussion, p. 25.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> See Everatt, 'The Politics of Nonracialism', chapter 3.

<sup>43</sup> See below.

emergence of modern factories with large concentrations of workers, 'the possibility and likelihood of powerful, stable, mass social and political working-class organisations coming into being is created'.<sup>44</sup> The size of the working class within the population as a whole was growing rapidly, conditions were seen to exist which allowed for non-racial class unity: 'the immediate value of the colour bar has become much less by comparison with the long-term value to the white workers of working-class unity'.<sup>45</sup>

Industrialisation, it was argued, had transformed South Africa into a capitalist country. The massive growth of secondary industry with its need for a stable, urban labour force, its stated opposition to migrant labour, and the higher wages it paid to black workers, was seen as a turning point in the economic development of South Africa. Surveying the 'industrial revolution' brought about by the war, the Communist economist, Guy Routh, argued that migrant labour and the colour bar were directly challenged as '[w]hole new industries have come into being, staffed almost entirely by non-whites, whilst others have been converted from a white to a non-white working force'.<sup>46</sup>

Routh's assessment of the economic changes of the late 1940s was taken by some to mean that colonial forms of exploitation — migrant labour, the racial division of the working class, the industrial colour bar and so on — were no longer determining factors in the economy. All those involved in the debate agreed that secondary industry was too closely tied to mining capital to mount a serious challenge to existing relations; some, however, argued that what had formerly been seen as colonial exploitation had been exposed as mere '*forms or external appearances*'.<sup>47</sup> According to one commentator:

The fact that the ruling class was overwhelmingly white and the working class overwhelmingly black should not affect the conclusion that this is a class society and that it is a class struggle that is being waged.<sup>48</sup>

Colonial forms of exploitation, it was argued, obscured the underlying reality of capitalist exploitation. As a result, the nature of the resistance movement had to be reassessed. As one participant put it:

To my mind, the absence of a *conscious* class struggle should not obscure the fact that a class struggle actually exists. If one accepts as I do that South Africa is a capitalist country it should be clear that however the struggle manifests itself, it

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<sup>44</sup> D.Holt, 'White and Black Relationships in South Africa', *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/3, p. 14.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> G. Routh, 'Class Conflicts in South Africa', *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/2 (October 1953), p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Hathorn, minutes of discussion, *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/1, p. 14 (emphasis in original).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

nevertheless remains a class struggle ... it is only lack of experience and technique that holds back the development of the class struggle.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, because South Africa had 'no [black] bourgeoisie worth speaking of', the needs of blacks were said to be 'largely in accord'.<sup>50</sup> Taken with the claim that white workers had a diminishing interest in the maintenance of the colour bar, it was concluded by some that national struggle was obfuscatory: 'the problems are those of a capitalist country with remnants of colonialism still existing, and the chief opposing forces are the capitalists and the industrial workers'.<sup>51</sup> As such, the first task of the liberation movement should be to concentrate on organising 'the major protagonist' in the struggle, the industrial proletariat.<sup>52</sup>

While some participants argued for class struggle as the correct response to post-war South African conditions, others focused on the dangers to working-class struggle of nationalism and nationalist movements. Critics ranging from the Trotskyist Non-European Unity Movement to former members of the Communist Party of South Africa argued that '[e]very national movement has as its objective the triumph of capitalist democracy'.<sup>53</sup> The weakness and slow growth of the ANC before 1952 was ascribed to 'its failure to bring the economic (or class) issues before the people'.<sup>54</sup> This failure was in turn traced back to the class composition of the ANC leadership. According to Danie du Plessis, who was formerly the chairman of the Communist Party of South Africa in the Johannesburg District and an official of the Building Workers Union, the ANC leadership was overwhelmingly bourgeois:

In South Africa, where a strong local capitalism has developed, the aim of the incipient bourgeoisie among the oppressed people is to integrate themselves into the existing local capitalism rather than to oust the oppressors. The demand is for equal rights and not 'quit South Africa'.<sup>55</sup>

Du Plessis further argued that as a result of its bourgeois leadership, the ANC would by no means be immune from the crises which would afflict capitalism as decolonisation speeded up. Strongly echoing Lenin, Du Plessis argued that capitalism had reached its highest stage, imperialism, and, as access to colonial markets contracted, so opposing classes would coalesce into two hostile blocs. Such a situation, he argued, provided 'the necessary conditions for working-class

<sup>49</sup> *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/1, Dr Z.Sanders in minutes of discussion, p. 15 (emphasis in original).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>53</sup> Kenny Jordaan, 'What are the National Groups in South Africa?', p. 4 in Treason Trial collection, AD1812, Ev2.2/Et.1, Forum Club, 'Symposium on the National Question', June 1954; and Danie du Plessis, 'Notes on Certain Points Raised in the Discussion', *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/3, p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> Du Plessis, cited in *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 'Editorial', 1/3, p. viii.

<sup>55</sup> Du Plessis, 'Notes on Certain Points Raised in the Discussion', p. 44.

unity'.<sup>56</sup> It also allowed for a closer alliance between working-class organisations and the national liberation movement, but with an important caveat: the leaders of the national movement would not be unaffected by the polarisation of society:

it must be remembered that businessmen, financiers, landlords, etc., place their vested interests first ... The Liberatory Movement is to be assessed by its leadership and policy, irrespective of its constituent membership. The leaders are bourgeois or bourgeois-agents. The class composition of its leadership, the slogans adopted by them, the passive methods of struggle, are proof of the weaknesses of the movement ... In a depression [the leaders] would join forces with the government against the workers and would first protect their own interests.<sup>57</sup>

Du Plessis's comment highlights a number of key assumptions which informed discussion of national movements in the early 1950s, many of which had been raised in the Lenin/Roy debates. The first was that national liberation movements were launched by the oppressed national bourgeoisie, who maintained control of the movements even where they gained a mass following. The second assumption, flowing from this, was that the aims of the movement reflected the aspirations of the oppressed bourgeoisie — that is, the desire for unfettered integration in existing economic and political structures.<sup>58</sup> Consequently, national liberation movements were seen as characterised by political rather than economic demands, and this distinguished them from working-class organisations. As Kenny Jordaan of the Non European Unity Movement put it in 1954:

a national liberatory movement must not be confused with the movement for the social ownership of the instruments of labour. The one involves a political revolution, nothing more, nothing less; the other argues a social revolution to change the very economic basis of society.<sup>59</sup>

Du Plessis argued that in South Africa the realisation of national liberation would result in a situation where '[s]egregation between the races may disappear but social segregation between classes will remain'.<sup>60</sup>

As a result, those who called for greater stress to be laid on class struggle than on national struggle called for the development of working-class structures separate from what was characterised as a bourgeois-launched and led national movements. While limited co-operation on specific campaigns was possible, it was stressed that:

the two classes can and should retain their separate identities. Also, it is clear that the two classes can only co-operate when, and in so far as, their interests are the

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<sup>56</sup> Danie Du Plessis, 'The Situation in South Africa Today', *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/3, p. 41.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> See for example D. Holt, 'Nationalism and Internationalism in South Africa', *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/2, p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> Jordaan, 'What are the National Groups in South Africa?', p. 4.

same. This situation has never and can never last for long. The bourgeoisie only wishes to carry the democratic struggle far enough to remove the restrictions on their business interests.<sup>61</sup>

The early debates of the period took place while the SACP was being formed; after 1953, the debate was quickly dominated by the ideological perspectives of leading SACP theoreticians and the theory of 'colonialism of a special type'.

### **The Majority View: 'Colonialism of a Special Type'**

As the ANC grew in size and significance in the late 1940s, the Communist Party of South Africa was obliged to reassess its approach to nationalism and nationalist organisations. This was led by the Transvaal and Natal Districts of the Communist Party of South Africa, where Party members worked closely with the growing Congress movement.<sup>62</sup> The divergence of views within the Communist Party of South Africa in the late 1940s led its Central Committee to introduce a new theoretical perspective in 1950. South African society, it argued, represented 'colonialism of a special type' — that is, it exhibited:

the characteristics of both an imperialist state and a colony within a single, indivisible, geographical, political and economic entity ... The Non-European population, while reduced to the status of a colonial people, has no territory of its own, no independent existence, but is almost wholly integrated in the political and economic institutions of the ruling class.<sup>63</sup>

The implications of 'colonialism of a special type' were spelled out at the Johannesburg Discussion Club by two SACP founders — Michael Harmel, SACP chairperson throughout the 1950s, and Rusty Bernstein. Significant contributions to its elaboration, however, came from outside Johannesburg. Jack Simons gave an important series of lectures on the subject in 1954, while the Cape Town Forum Club hosted a symposium on the national question in the same year.<sup>64</sup> 'Colonialism of a special type' also drew on the analysis of South African oppression proposed by ANC Youth League theorists; its first public elaboration was made by the former President of the ANC Youth League, Joe Matthews, in 1954.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Du Plessis, 'Notes on Certain Points Raised in the Discussion', p. 44.

<sup>61</sup> Holt, 'Nationalism and Internationalism in South Africa', p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> See Everatt, 'The Politics of Nonracialism', chapter 3.

<sup>63</sup> South African Parliamentary Papers, SC.10-53, *Report of the Select Committee on the Suppression of Communism Act Enquiry*, 'Central Committee Report to the Communist Party of South Africa Annual Conference', January 1950.

<sup>64</sup> Simons, 'Lecture', 5-13 January, 1954; Forum Club, 'Symposium on the National Question', June 1954.

<sup>65</sup> CAMP Reel 12A, 2:XM65:81, Joe Matthews, 'African Nationalism To-Day', January 1954.

The propounders of the theory started from what they saw as an essentially pragmatic position. South Africa, they argued, had entered a period of heightened national conflict, while the Communist Party of South Africa had been forced to disband. The situation imposed its own constraints on the actions of socialists generally, and whites in particular. As Rusty Bernstein explained:

We could, in other times ... have blueprinted ideal schemes, and formulated ideal organisational arrangements. To do so today would be to isolate ourselves from the forces that are already in action for democratic advance.... *We have to work with what we have.*<sup>66</sup>

Bernstein, Harmel and others initially set out the relationship between class and national struggle as they saw it. As founding members of the SACP, they recognised that the debates of the left were in large part a product of the confusion generated by the disbanding of the Communist Party of South Africa. The elaboration of 'colonialism of a special type' should thus be seen in context: it was the first public elaboration of the ideological stand-point of the (secret) SACP. It was an ideological intervention specifically aimed at resolving the confusion engendered by the disbanding of the Communist Party of South Africa and the tardy formation of the SACP.

Transvaal communists, having taken the initiative in establishing the SACP, had also to counter the expressed hostility towards the national struggle. Both Bernstein and Harmel roundly attacked those 'who stand outside the struggle; who stand on a lofty peak of class purity, and condemn the struggle for the alliance and the co-operation of classes within it'.<sup>67</sup> Stressing the need to tailor strategies to existing conditions, supporters of the theory turned on those 'even amongst former Communists who reject the movement because it does not conform to their ideas of a pure exclusive working-class movement, struggling alone and unaided against all other classes'.<sup>68</sup> Those hostile to national struggle were seen 'to disrupt the movement, confuse the active people in it, and if unchecked and uncountered in the field of ideology will destroy it'.<sup>69</sup>

'Colonialism of a special type' had as its starting point the assertion that South Africa was unique, marked by singular social and political arrangements flowing from the sizeable and settled white community: 'The whole character and aims of the national question is complicated by this white element which is not a feature of any other colonial or dependent country'.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, Harmel, argued that there was:

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<sup>66</sup> Treason Trial collection, AD1812, Ef3.1.2, Rusty Bernstein, 'The Road to Liberty', October 1953, p. 1 (emphasis added).

<sup>67</sup> Rusty Bernstein, 'The Role of the Bourgeoisie in the Liberatory Struggle', *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/2, p. 28.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>70</sup> *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/3, 'Editorial', p. 5.

no qualitative difference between the status of the Africans (and, in the main, the other non-white population groups) in the Union and those elsewhere in Africa — or the people of any other colonial territory. 'Colonial' living standards, deprivation of political rights and constitutional liberties, the deliberate efforts to prevent their economic and cultural developments — all these are characteristics of colonialism. Similarly, the relationship between the white rulers of South Africa and the non-white masses is essentially imperialistic. In a word: there are two nations in South Africa, occupying the same state, side by side in the same area. White South Africa is a semi-independent imperialist state: Black South Africa is its colony. This almost unique dualism has its roots in our history.<sup>71</sup>

The historical roots of internal colonialism were traced back to the discovery of gold in the 1880s: thereafter, the main drive of the South African state had been the maintenance of 'a mass, stable, cheap labour force' which was crucial 'if they were to derive maximum profits from gold-mining'.<sup>72</sup>

Supporters of 'colonialism of a special type' accepted that 'of course, every question is at its roots "a class question"'.<sup>73</sup> They also agreed that the organisation of race relations in a capitalist society facilitated racial exploitation which 'serves the same purpose as the usual type of class exploitation'.<sup>74</sup> According to Jack Simons, however, South Africa did not fit such a pattern: 'the special features of race exploitation are often so numerous and marked, as is the case in South Africa, that it is almost qualitatively different from class exploitation'.<sup>75</sup> Because of the special features of racial discrimination in South Africa, which were seen to stem from the essentially colonial relationship existing between black and white, 'the class struggle is greatly affected by divisions based on racial features'.<sup>76</sup> Most significantly, black South Africans — in response to colonial forms of oppression — had launched an increasingly popular national liberation struggle. As a result, the ANC lay at the heart of the 'colonialism of a special type' debate.

### **The ANC: Bourgeois Nationalism or Peoples' Movement?**

A central argument used by those hostile to or suspicious of national struggle was that colonial movements comprised an alliance of classes which was dominated by the oppressed national bourgeoisie which sought inclusion in capitalist structures, not their overthrow. For Harmel, the ANC comprised such an alliance, 'a familiar characteristic of such movements among oppressed colonial peoples everywhere'.<sup>77</sup> He also noted that colonial movements were commonly 'marked by the dominance of the bourgeoisie' which, at times of crisis, 'betrayed the movement in order to

<sup>71</sup> M. Harmel, 'Observations on Certain Aspects of Imperialism in South Africa', *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/3, p. 29.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>73</sup> M. Harmel, 'A Note by the Speaker', *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1/3, p. 38.

<sup>74</sup> Simons, 'Lecture', p. 15.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Harmel, 'A Note by the Speaker', p. 28.



reach a compromise with imperialism at the expense of the masses'.<sup>78</sup> Harmel, Bernstein and Simons all argued, however, that it was wrong 'to generalise mechanistically from overseas experience and assume that the Congresses are mere "bourgeois affairs" which "pure working-class elements" should stand aloof from, or attempt to disrupt'.<sup>79</sup>

In the first place, it was argued, comparisons did not account for the fact that a particular function of racial oppression in South Africa had been to deliberately restrict the development of a black bourgeoisie.<sup>80</sup> As a result, black South Africa had no bourgeoisie, other than 'petty traders, money lenders and landlords'.<sup>81</sup> The ANC, it was argued, was therefore not comparable to colonial movements elsewhere. The difference between the ANC and other colonial movements was further apparent, it was argued, in its demand for equality rather than self-determination. As Jack Simons put it, 'that demand is not the same as the programme of "cultural autonomy" or "secession" ... it contemplates a common society with the Europeans on a completely equal basis'.<sup>82</sup>

Legal equality, however, could be realised within a capitalist state, as Du Plessis and others had predicted would occur. Moreover, the ANC's concentration on formulating political rather than economic demands seemed to point to the dominance of bourgeois elements. Up to this point, differences within the left had to some degree been questions of emphasis; subsequent analyses however diverged sharply. The central argument used by Simons, Bernstein, Harmel and others in favour of working closely with national movements was that the Congress movement was in a transitional phase. ANC leadership, strategies and demands, they argued, increasingly reflected the influence of the working class. The opponents of national struggle argued that the central question was the place of the bourgeoisie in the national movement; those who outlined 'colonialism of a special type', on the other hand, argued that the central point was the place of the working class within a changing ANC.

None of those arguing for 'colonialism of a special type' claimed that the working class led the ANC. For Bernstein, '[t]he question of which class leads is still in the melting pot and may stay there for a long time'.<sup>83</sup> For Simons, the national organisations 'must ... be described as a form of inter-class nationalism which embraces both an exploiting and an exploited class'.<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, all argued that what was significant in the Congress movement was not the position it had already reached, but the future trends evident within it. All called for a close working relationship between communists and nationalists because 'conditions ...

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>81</sup> Bernstein, 'The Role of the Bourgeoisie in the Liberatory Struggle', p. 30.

<sup>82</sup> Jack Simons, 'Nationalisms in South Africa' in Forum Club, 'Symposium on the National Question', June 1954, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> Bernstein, 'The Role of the Bourgeoisie in the Liberatory Struggle', p. 33.

<sup>84</sup> Simons, 'Nationalisms in South Africa', p. 6.

are conceivable where the working class is dominant and therefore tends to assume the leadership of the struggle for national liberation'.<sup>85</sup>

Lionel Forman, a journalist and SACP member, argued that the transformation of the Congress movement was already well under way. Control of the Congresses, he argued, had

[t]o a great extent [been] wrested from the hands of the bourgeois and more conservative elements, and leaders who understand the need for struggle against both national oppression and its imperialist economic roots have come to the fore.<sup>86</sup>

Harmel, although more restrained, argued that 'the militant working-class tendency has wielded increasing influence in our national movements'.<sup>87</sup> The new ANC and South African Indian Congress leadership were offered as evidence; the results of their 'progressive working-class policy'<sup>88</sup> was the use of the Defiance Campaign as a tool for mobilisation rather than the 'consent by submission' of Gandhian satyagraha.<sup>89</sup>

The growing influence of the working class, according to Simons and Harmel, would come to be reflected in the methods and demands of the national movement. As the working class took control of the national struggle, so 'this struggle will develop characteristics of the class struggle'.<sup>90</sup> The political demands of previous years would give way before a growing emphasis on economic demands. For all supporters of 'colonialism of a special type' this point was central: according to Harmel, the ANC represented 'the advanced progressive anti-imperialist tendency in our country'<sup>91</sup> and as such would increasingly highlight the economic aspects of national liberation:

The liberation movement has concentrated on formulating political demands. But the economic content of national liberation in South Africa must centre on the redivision of the land and the nationalisation of the principal means of production (for the power of imperialism in this country can only be broken by divorcing the imperialists from the means of production). As the movement grows in strength, confidence and political clarity it is bound to give expression and emphasis to such demands.<sup>92</sup>

Both communists and non-communist socialists clearly shared a similar set of assumptions regarding the national movements in South Africa, but reached very

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<sup>85</sup> Simons, 'Lecture', p. 21.

<sup>86</sup> Lionel Forman, 'Nationalisms in South Africa', in Forum Club, 'Symposium on the National Question', June 1954, p. 3.

<sup>87</sup> Harmel, 'A Note by the Speaker', p. 38.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Harmel, 'Observations on Certain Aspects of Imperialism in South Africa', p. 34.

<sup>90</sup> Simons, 'Lecture', p. 21.

<sup>91</sup> Harmel, 'Observations on Certain Aspects of Imperialism in South Africa', p. 33.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

different conclusions. The lack of a significant black bourgeoisie was seen by some to clear the way for working-class unity in a socialist struggle. For the SACP, however, it offered the possibility of merging national liberation and class struggle into one. Those who remained hostile to nationalist movements because of their perceived incompatibility with working-class demands were accused of an 'undigested and misunderstood reading of a formulation by Stalin that "the slogans of nationalism arise in the market place"'.<sup>93</sup> According to Bernstein, the slogan's implication that only the bourgeoisie had a stake in national liberation was, in South African conditions, incorrect.

As we have seen, the central point at issue for SACP theorists was the place of the working class (and working-class demands) in South Africa's national liberation struggle. For Bernstein and others, the working class represented 'the most energetic, whole-hearted and thoroughgoing section of the fighters for bourgeois democracy, for national liberation' because it had 'nothing to fear from a revolutionary solution to the crisis of liberation'.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, the working class would make specific gains with the realisation of national liberation, including political experience, conducive conditions for organising on class lines, the abolition of the colour bar 'and the clearing away of the race versus class issue, which will leave the class issue clear and exposed for all to see'.<sup>95</sup>

For these various reasons, SACP theorists argued that it was incorrect to call for separate working-class structures. Rather, they argued, the national movement was growing in appeal and militancy precisely because of the influence of the working class within it: 'It is such an alliance — an alliance of the working class and the petty-bourgeois strata of the colonially oppressed peoples of South Africa — that is now gaining ground and conducting the defiance campaign'.<sup>96</sup> From this essentially pragmatic perspective, those elaborating 'colonialism of a special type' called for the broadening of the Congress Alliance, rather than a concentration on working-class politics.

The preparedness of the SACP to move towards the ANC was made easier by changes within Congress and especially its Youth League by the late 1940s. By that time, the ANC Youth League had come to see itself as part of a Pan-African anti-colonial movement, and was both anti-imperialist and anti-American.<sup>97</sup> When Leaguers moved into the ANC leadership they sought allies from amongst 'Coloureds' and whites; this was done explicitly in terms of an analysis of internal colonialism. As the League's journal *Afrika!* explained:

The path of liberation for the colonial people in the twentieth century lies in the building of powerful national movements which, united with progressive forces in the metropolitan countries, will defeat the imperialists. South Africa is both

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<sup>93</sup> Bernstein, 'The Role of the Bourgeoisie in the Liberatory Struggle', p. 31.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>97</sup> See Everatt, 'The Politics of Nonracialism', chapter 3.

colonial and imperial at the same time, the liberation movement having to be built in close proximity with advanced elements in the oppressor group.<sup>98</sup>

For the SACP, 'colonialism of a special type' was a means of marrying class struggle to national liberation. For the Youth League, internal colonialism performed a similar function in reverse, incorporating both a nationalist analysis and the growing class analysis utilised by Youth Leaguers in the late 1940s.<sup>99</sup> In his outline of 'colonialism of a special type' from a nationalist perspective in January 1954, Joe Matthews's approach was close to that of Bernstein, Harmel, Simons and others who stressed South Africa's 'unique' conditions. He argued that South Africa was a colonial country: 'But it is not a typical colonial country'.<sup>100</sup> Its atypicality derived from the white population which, because it was permanently settled, was able to exert 'a more complete control of political and economic power than is possible in a typical colonial country'.<sup>101</sup> White South Africa did not have to win the support of 'a middle or capitalist class from among the oppressed' and so 'no middle class (or capitalist class) worth talking about among the Africans has emerged, nor is there ever likely to be one'.<sup>102</sup>

For Matthews, an analysis based on internal colonialism served to emphasise the Youth League assertion that Africans suffered dual oppression — 'economic exploitation as workers and labourers and oppression and humiliation as a Nation'. To remove both necessitated an anti-imperialist struggle, in alliance with 'all oppressed and colonial peoples' against 'the major Western powers who are supported in their plans by the U.S.A'. The aims of the national liberation struggle in South Africa were, in Matthews' words, 'Political Power and Independence; Complete Equality, Land, Economic Progress and Culture for all peoples in Afrika'.<sup>103</sup>

'Colonialism of a special type' was a pragmatic theoretical tool evolved by a variety of activists in the 1950-1954 period. It was a means of resolving what Jack Simons described as '[t]he major problem confronting the Non-Europeans', that is, 'the relationship between the national liberatory struggle and the struggle for socialism'.<sup>104</sup> Two decades later, Simons argued that the elaboration of the theory marked a turning point in the South African liberation struggle: 'The class struggle had merged with the struggle for national liberation'.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>98</sup> *Afrika!* quoted in *Advance*, 17 December 1953, p. 1.

<sup>99</sup> See Everatt, 'The Politics of Nonracialism', chapter 3.

<sup>100</sup> Joe Matthews, 'African Nationalism To-Day', p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>104</sup> Simons, 'Lecture', p. 17.

<sup>105</sup> H.J. Simons and R.E. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950* (Baltimore, 1969), p. 609.

### Conclusion.

The theory of internal colonialism was a self-consciously pragmatic analysis of South African oppression and the form that the resistance movement should take. It drew on an analytic framework which had been implicit in the programme of the Communist Party of South Africa following its endorsement of a 'two-stage' revolution in 1928. Under pressure from a growing national movement, however, the Communist Party of South Africa in the late 1940s had been unable to balance the requirements of national struggle and class struggle. One section of opinion within the Communist Party of South Africa stressed the primacy of class struggle while another was 'much more sensitive to colour issues and the national question'.<sup>106</sup> As SACP member Ben Turok put it: 'these two things had to be resolved and clearly they were slowly resolved through the internal colonialism theory'.<sup>107</sup>

'Colonialism of a special type' had a contemporaneous political project. It was developed by Transvaal communists who had called for a close relationship between the Communist Party of South Africa and the national movements, and who later emerged as SACP leaders. The SACP was formed in a context marked by confusion amongst communists brought about by the disbanding of the Communist Party of South Africa and dominated by the Defiance Campaign. The first aim of 'colonialism of a special type', therefore, was to resolve differences over race and class. The second, equally important function, was to establish a rapport with former Youth Leaguers who had taken up senior ANC positions. The SACP sought to ally itself with African nationalists; according to Ben Turok, this was 'the first issue on the agenda'.<sup>108</sup>

For the SACP, the adoption of the theory brought about 'a very perceptible difference' in its approach to the ANC compared to that which had prevailed in the Communist Party of South Africa.<sup>109</sup> It provided an ideological mid-point at which both nationalists and communists could meet. Assessments of the point at which the alliance between national and class struggle would end were central to the development of both 'colonialism of a special type' and the ANC/SACP alliance.

The theory of internal colonialism developed in the 1950s provided the ideological glue which has held the ANC/SACP alliance together. Any serious analysis of the alliance today will have to assess the ideological crisis facing the SACP following the collapse of communism in eastern Europe as well as the practicalities of an alliance in which the ANC has swallowed the SACP. It must go further, however, and investigate the common ideological perspectives which held the alliance together; the disintegration of these perspectives may well signal its demise.

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Ben Turok, p. 19.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Ben Turok, quoted in Lambert, 'SACTU', p. 74 (emphasis in original).

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Miriam Hepner (1990) transcript p. 1.

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