

An Injury to One is a Commercial Opportunity for Me

In his address to the SA Transport & Allied Workers Union's congress last year, **Jeremy Cronin** argued that the majority are not "historically disadvantaged" but "are oppressed and exploited." He looked at how this plays out in the transport system and suggests alternatives.

The Satawu Congress takes place in a turbulent time, after the conclusion of the security strike and in the midst of the cleaning strike. It is also a turbulent time politically. The SACP perspective is that the real cause is the crisis of a particular political project that took hold with good intentions around 1996. At the time Cosatu and the SACP said the route of Gear (Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy) and all that is associated with it would take the country into disaster.

The Gear perspective was that the only way forward was to stabilise capitalism, based on the assumption that the capitalist growth path would

result in an ability to redistribute to the poor. It was based on the illogical notion of the sun rising in the west and never setting. In this way, the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Project) was turned on its head. The Gear proponents looked at problems statistically such as promising the delivery of two million houses. The result was houses, but not homes, and not communities.

The notion of the sun rising in the west and never setting took us away from an understanding of oppression as a system. The talk of "historically disadvantaged individuals" relegated the apartheid system to history. The message is that individuals must just find a way to take a piece of the action. While there may be some spaces to get a slice of the capitalist action, it is very limited. As a result of this language we have created an unseemly bunfight around the boardroom table, and a belief in "An Injury to One is a Commercial Opportunity for Me!" We no longer see the clenched fist, but the elbow to move others out the way.

The majority is not historically disadvantaged, they are oppressed and exploited. Unemployment now stands at 40%, which is almost half the working class. There are hundreds of thousands of workers who have lost their permanent jobs since 1994 and the wage gap has grown. These are not historical disadvantages, they are real and current, system-created problems. It is not that the government is not trying, but that the policies are wrong.

We are not disagreeing that we

should be careful with public resources, but those who told us we were macro populists at the time of the Gear debate have themselves spent R50 billion on arms procurement. The claim was that 65,000 jobs would be created, but the latest report is that 15,000 have been created, and even these figures have not been verified. Some people have got very rich out of the arms deal such as the old elite, international arms dealers, and a number of new elite. The same people who accused us of being macro populists and who told us to tighten our belts have also spent billions of wasted rand on Coega, on the disastrous privatisation of Telkom and now on the Guatrain.

The same forces have leapt into denialism. In particular they have been in denial on the issue of HIV/AIDS. At least 400,000 people are dying every year of AIDS which makes even the war in Iraq look like a birthday party.

So the turbulence is about the necessity to change policies and in the SACP we are not pessimistic. The sun actually rises in the east! The conditions are there for change. The fact that the vast majority in the ANC's National General Council are calling for a major shift to the left is very significant.

Satawu has taken a leading role against privatisation, through action as well as through advancing the sharpness of policies that come from the working class, not from technocrats. You have shown your ability to lead. But in order to achieve

shifts, we need to be united. It must be a principled unity, based on the understanding that the key force of the ANC is the working class.

Now to comment on Satawu's draft political resolution on the NDR (National Democratic Revolution), SACP and State Power. The SACP does not agree with the position that the national liberation movement has limitations. There is no reason why it couldn't become a socialist movement. The limitations are the limitations of a capitalist project. Only the the working class allied with other forces can deliver.

On the question of participation in elections, the SACP is discussing the issue. But the debate must be serious and based on principles, and not emotional. One principle is not to confuse state power with winning elections. A second principle is to recognise that neither the SACP nor Cosatu are the working class. Socialists don't own the working class.

Thirdly, the terrain of elections in a capitalist country is very difficult. The main point though, is that as different options are considered, the strategic alliance with the ANC is not going to be broken. In many countries huge energies are spent in putting together alliances and coalitions. In South Africa we have the unique reality of having an organisation which can win national elections with a 70% victory. If the ANC didn't exist in SA, the SACP would have to invent the ANC. This doesn't mean we don't have to struggle to reinvent it in the present.

The masses need to be organised and mobilised throughout South Africa. Over 90% of Cosatu's members are workers in permanent jobs. Satawu has played an outstanding role in tackling difficult sectors of workers who lie below the

radar screen. It is no accident that the security strike was so long, given the absence of co-ordinated organisation across the working class, and how easy it was for employers to recruit scab labour. Community based organisations become important in this context. We must deploy all our own existing resources so for example, our constituency offices must be used as a resource to organise and collect struggles together wherever we are.

The security strike also showed how important it is to contest the ANC - not in a factional way, but in a concrete way. There are senior ANC leaders who are security company owners, and who kept very quiet in the security strike. This is not in itself a crime, but they cannot be allowed to oppress workers. There is now discussion in the ANC about disclosure and transparency, which is good. But if people are involved in the gross exploitation and oppression of workers then their membership must be terminated. They must be made responsible for what they do.

In conclusion, the SACP will be launching a public transport and road safety Red October Campaign. We will be seeing Satawu as our key ally. Since 1994 public transport has worsened. Taxi working conditions are counterproductive to a good service. Metrorail is seriously underfunded. The bus services are unreliable. Tens of thousands of households are spending more than 20% of income on transport. Why is the situation like this?

The majority of our people are still trapped in apartheid townships and that all the transport modes are working against each other makes matters worse. But above all, the needs of the workers and poor have been marginalised since 1994. When transport is talked about, there is talk of "lowering the cost of doing

business", not of lowering the cost of living. The focus is on cars, with 39,000 new cars sold last month alone. Cars occupy people's space and pollute our environment. If we are building a society where the car is king, we are building an anti worker society. And when we do spend public money, we spend it on an unsustainable, non working class system such as Gautrain.

The Red October Campaign will have five demands:

- Active public participation in developing integrated transport plans.
- A Commuter Charter of Rights, including rights for pedestrians, cyclists, disabled, school children, and workers in the industry.
- Safety on our roads. There were 17,000 fatalities in SA last year, mostly working people and 40% were children. Only 2% of prosecutable driving offences end up in court. Speed limits outside of places where people congregate such as schools and factories need to be reduced.
- Sustainable public funding, where the funding goes to integrating public transport, not to separate streams.
- A major review of the Taxi Recapitalisation Programme. The operating system will be left intact, and the fleet will have to be recapitalised again in five years.

The SACP will be meeting with Satawu and hopes to work with its members in taxi ranks.

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This is a summary of Cronin's speech delivered at the Satawu 2nd National Congress in September last year. See over for an excerpt from a recent Cronin speech.

End to history and politics

In a January 2007 address to the Chris Hani Institute, **Jeremy Cronin** reasserted the importance of engaging with “real” politics and highlighted the denialism that has permeated South Africa’s, and the world’s approach to politics. Here is an extract.



At the beginning of the 1990s, at the time that Joe Slovo was defending socialism by advancing a socialist critique of “actually existing socialism”, triumphant neoliberal ideologues were proclaiming “an end to history”. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc there were, apparently, now no more fundamental ideological or social antagonisms, no serious policy debates to be waged. In short, the “end of history” was also the end of any real politics. There was now a global consensus among all “reasonable men and women” about how states should be run. Politics was reduced to

management techniques.

These themes were taken up with zest locally, at first by our domestic liberals. In the early 1990s, during the negotiations, Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, warned against “overburdening our new democracy” with the issues of socioeconomic inequalities. Those issues were best kept out of politics and left to the market and technocrats. Politics for Van Zyl Slabbert was reduced to constitutional “rules of the game” – a multi-party dispensation, regular elections, the separation of powers. These matters are important, but the big substantive issues were displaced.

The same de-politicisation was also detectable in our movement. In the midst of the negotiations, those who urged against mass mobilisation, against “rocking the boat”, told us that the “National Party now agrees with every single clause of the Freedom Charter” (cde Aziz Pahad). There was nothing more to talk about other than technicalities.

When the 2nd Quarter 1994 *African Communist* had as its front cover the slogan “A Luta Continua!” many feathers were ruffled in the ANC.

The idea of a conflict-free, national and global consensus was taken forward in many other discourses. Gear was floated on

this presupposition – “there were no other alternatives”, and besides the Washington Consensus was “the high-road to a prosperous new South Africa”. In defending Gear, and belittling its left-wing opponents, liberal journalists... returned to the theme that there was no more substantive politics to be debated. Politics, in Howard Barrell’s view, was now reduced to leadership contests and factional rivalries – a position that has become, it seems, the near official view of the ANC leadership.

Archbishop Tutu’s introduction to the TRC report spoke of South Africa emerging into a new global order in which the three great “crimes” of the 20th century had been defeated – “Nazism, Communism and Apartheid”. We were now living not just in a “normal” rainbow nation, but in a rainbow world of shared rational values.

Tutu’s perspective was little different from many leading ANC comrades... As recently as June 2002, President Mbeki announced “the end of the epoch of colonialism and neo-colonialism” (*Sunday Times* 30/6/ 2002). Even the *Sunday Times* political gossip columnist Hogarth was moved to ask: “Just how many ends will this colonialism have?”