

Reformist programmes confuse

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responds to Jeremy Cronin's "The People Shall Govern – class struggles in the post-1994 State in South Africa" summarised on the previous pages. She argues that the time has gone for reforming the capitalist ANC which has created a bourgeois state.

The SACP's analysis emerges at a time when working class frustration and discontent has erupted spontaneously over the last year and a half. Over 6 000 country-wide municipal protests over the lack of housing and service delivery have occurred. The protests including against corruption, lack of accountability of ANC councillors and officials have been met with tear-gas, beatings and arrests. As a result of the Zuma saga tensions within the alliance have never been greater.

Cronin's paper in its attempt to deal with class struggle reflects favourably on the emergence of 'democratic organs of self

government' in the 1980s. But these were alternative organs of power, they were not about dual power. It was at a time when power resided in the hands of ordinary people and street committees. The apartheid government was still in power and we were seeing the beginnings of revolutionary organisation which could lay the basis for alternative centres of power in a new society. But this never happened as it was undermined by the trajectory and politics of the ANC settlement.

The settlement was a compromise which overwhelmingly favoured the ruling class. It favoured monopoly capitalism as record profits in the last six years show. Capital now has access to Africa through Nepad and has been supported by the government's Gear policies. This will consolidate South African imperialist interests in Africa. The working class on the other hand is worse off as demonstrated by these statistics:

- 1 term, from 1995 to 2000, the average working class household has seen a 19% fall in income.
- 37% of households survive on less than R1 000 per month.

Workers have debts of R15-billion with micro-lenders, R10-billion with furniture retailers and R18-billion with their local municipalities.

- There are eight million unemployed.

Since 1994 workers have had access to democratic rights and basic necessities but they are worse off in terms of job losses and a falling standard of living as a result of cost recovery measures such as

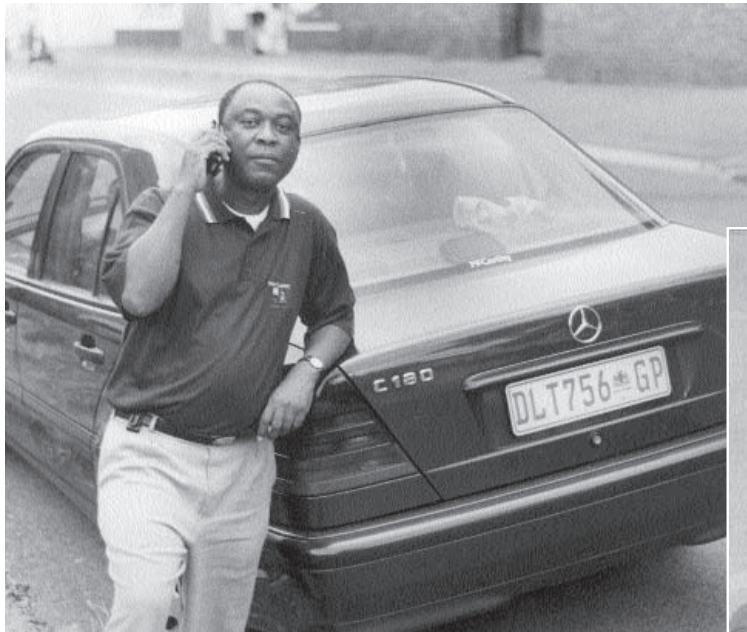
school fees and water.

Cronin's paper goes on to note the emergence of a number of participatory practices and institutions in the tradition of pre-1994 struggles. It is true that the tradition of democratic organs of self government has influenced some institutions. But it must also be noted that these are state determined and directed institutions and are not organs of popular self government that arise as a result of class struggle. They can often be institutions of co-option and can weaken class struggles.

Cronin raises the concept of Bonapartism to explain the negotiated settlement. The important question here is do we see the Thabo Mbeki regime as Bonapartist or do we see Thabo Mbeki as Bonapartist. I do not think it is a Bonapartist state as there is a political crises where the ruling class cannot rule and working class cannot seize power. Mbeki however has Bonapartist tendencies as can be seen by his centralisation of power and decision-making.

An important point raised in the paper on emerging black capital is the issue of the new 'patriotic bourgeoisie'. Resolving the issue of whether the new bourgeoisie can be patriotic to nation building instead of profits will require workers to develop different class relations with them.

Another important point under the section on black capital is the characterisation of the black bourgeoisie. That it is on a path of



crude accumulation is correct and whilst agreeing that they display compradorist features, they are also closely tied into monopoly capital so that there is a convergence of interests which is most starkly seen amongst the senior leadership of the ANC. There is a convergence of monopoly capital and the state. Most senior ANC leaders and their families have business interests and are tied to monopoly capital.

Recent examples of this are firstly, the deputy president's trip to Dubai. She explained the purpose of the trip as being to study the construction industry without explaining her husband's links to the industry through interests in Basil Read Constructions. Secondly, the Gautrain was pushed ahead at huge costs at the expense of upgrading trains used by the working class more generally. Several senior politicians and their families have vested financial interests in securing the proposed transport link between Johannesburg and Pretoria. Thirdly the R50-billion Arms Deal to acquire weapons saw several senior leaders benefiting financially. And finally there is the Democratic Republic of Congo where Mbeki led a business delegation to secure deals in diamonds, tele communications and

in parastatals.

On the way forward Cronin argues that capital has succeeded in exerting considerable dominance over the state with which I concur. But this cannot lead to his conclusion that the state is not inherently capitalist as it contradicts an earlier point in the paper on how the current reforms entrench the present accumulation path. As a majority ruling party over the past 12 years the ANC has served as a capitalist government.

We should be bold enough to admit that the ANC has crossed the class line and is a nationalist party which serves the interest of the bourgeoisie despite popular mass support. Bourgeois parties throughout the world have mass support. The ANC is implicitly leading a capitalist programme and the black bourgeoisie in senior leadership positions in the party are tied to capital.

Cronin's paper asks how to strengthen a different kind of class hegemony over the state. This question does not lead to revolutionary answers. The overthrow by the exploited classes under capitalist rule and replacing its bourgeois institutions with popular institutions of self rule is revolutionary. We have to stop

proposing reforming the existing state which is not a neutral organ.

Cronin's paper proposes some immediate tasks. The first is the rebuilding of the ANC. Ten years down the line we cannot continue to advocate fighting for the heart and soul of the ANC. How successful have we been in achieving this thus far? The ANC is dominated by capitalist interests. What is the ANC's programme for revolutionary transformation? They have only seriously compromised workers.

Secondly, he proposes dealing with the axis between ANC elected representatives and managers on the one hand and emerging capital on the other. How do you do this if people are elected on an ANC programme which is in the interest of the bourgeoisie? The SACP has elected representatives on an ANC ticket. Several are senior leaders of the Party including the Party chairperson. What have they done other than follow the government programme? Have they had an alternative programme? What has been their track record over the last 10 years? Clearly this reformist strategy has failed and therefore we need revolutionary alternatives.

Thirdly, Cronin proposes strengthening the bourgeois



parliament which has never had real power as the power early on shifted to the executive. A recent example is the revolt of the ANC branches to the proposed neo-liberal policies put forward at the ANC National General Council. Despite ANC branches new found confidence the government announced that it would consider more flexible labour laws. The newly found working class strength of the branches also dissipated during the drawing up of candidate lists for local government elections. There were several claims made that Cosatu and SACP candidates were sidelined. So how do you stop this other than opposing and resisting through mass action and proposing revolutionary alternatives?

We need a revolutionary programme such as the SACP campaign against the finance houses which can draw the petty bourgeoisie in as an ally. The fault in this case was that the campaign was not promoted and taken up on a mass base. It's true that the petit bourgeoisie and individual working class elements are corrupt in councils but it does not negate the need to win over the petit bourgeoisie to a revolutionary programme.

On the issue of the second economy the question is how does this develop in a sea of capitalism? Monopoly capitalism in a period of rampant globalisation does not allow poorer sections of the petty

bourgeoisie to thrive let alone support production for social needs. The second economy cannot compete with monopoly capitalism as the paper correctly argues.

On Cronin's analysis of taxi re-capitalisation, here are some points. Taxis depend on finances for vehicles and fuel whose price increases affects them. They practice appalling labour standards and are based on profit. There is a centralisation of ownership and control and a drive for expansion. The indirect consequences of this is that the taxi industry is the worst form of public transport in the world with a history of violence. How is this to be addressed? The state must be asked to provide cheap, accessible and safe public transport.

Reformist programmes however well intended have only served to confuse and deviate from the real task at hand. What then are the immediate tasks?

- We must wage, and encourage class struggle around the consequences of Gear. We need a united front to develop a serious campaign to oppose capitalism.
- We must draw the long overdue conclusion of the bourgeois

nature of the ANC. We must arm the working class with correct information on the class contradictions of the alliance and its implications for class struggle.

- We must mobilise people around local service delivery. We must organise at the community level.
- We need a united front against poverty.
- We must actively build grass-roots organisations to become organs of people's power for struggle.
- We must revive the Cosatu locals.
- We must build a united front against neo-liberalism.

Reformist delusions never work. They only serve to confuse and disarm us so that we cannot alter the balance of forces.

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