

## NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE AND THE QUESTION OF TRANSFORMATION

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My most important objection to Hudson's article ('The Freedom Charter and the theory of national democratic revolution', in *Transformation 1*) is his handling of the strategy of national democratic revolution. He fails to reflect anything of the long history of the concept in our own South African struggle. The question of a socialist strategy for South Africa goes back to at least 1915 with the formation of the International Socialist League. Since the 1920s there have been intense debates about the relationships of the socialist struggle to the struggle against national oppression. Needless to say, these debates were not simply academic; they were rooted in questions of organisation, co-operation and campaigning. The significance of the national democratic strategy in South Africa today cannot be understood independently of this long, indigenous tradition.

To be sure, these South African debates and struggles have, at times, been significantly influenced by the international socialist movement. Undoubtedly the most notable occasion (strangely not mentioned by Hudson) was the 6th Comintern Conference in 1928. It was at this conference that, after a fierce ideological debate within the CPSA, communists like Jimmy La Guma were supported by the Comintern in their contention that the path to socialism in South Africa lay down the road of struggle against national oppression. From then on the CPSA was to 'work within the embryonic national movements', especially the ANC, to transform it into a 'fighting nationalist revolutionary organisation against the white bourgeoisie and British imperialists, based on trade unions and peasants organisations, etc' (in Davies *et al*, 1984: 292).

Not only does Hudson ignore the specific South African history of this strategy, but he also fails to notice how, in the last 24 months of mass struggle, it has become necessary to deepen our understanding of national democratic struggle. In particular, the countrywide emergence of rudimentary organs of democratic people's power has greatly enriched our understanding of transformational possibilities on the terrain of a relatively advanced capitalist country.

Hudson displays a consistent inability to distinguish between political strategies, tactics (choices, if you will) that deal, scientifically we hope, with probabilities on the one hand, and metaphysical arguments about logical necessities on the other. He consistently mistakes the former for

the latter. When portraying the national democratic (ND)/colonialism of a special type (CST) strategy the little word 'must' is constantly used to cover up the traces of his own confusion. 'Must' can mean *should* (Comrades, you really must do this). It can also mean the inescapable, the unavoidable ('We all must die sometime'). This might seem like an academic point, but for political struggle the difference is crucial.

Any serious organisation must know that to delay action until there is one hundred percent certainty is always to postpone political action forever. This does not mean that we must not approach each concrete political situation scientifically, weighing up honestly all objective factors, strengths and weaknesses, constantly testing our assessment in and through organised practice. All of this helps to establish a more accurate strategy, a clearer idea of general probabilities. But it is seldom that we can ever possess total certainty about the outcome of a particular course of political action.

Unfortunately, Hudson is completely unclear about this crucial distinction between (a) *must number one*: we should do this because it will probably have this outcome; and (b) *must number two*: it is unavoidable, this is the only logical possibility. It is by using his *own* confusion of 'must number one' with 'must number two' that Hudson tries to describe and thus to argue against the ND/CST strategy:

their claim that revolutionary class struggle in South Africa *must, of necessity*, assume the form of a struggle for national democracy ..(p7).

The ... CST analysis of South Africa advances the following thesis: given the specific structure of South African society, the struggle to establish socialism *must* first assume the form of struggle to establish national democracy and that this struggle *must* be successful before there can be any transition to socialism' (p 23) (my emphases).

There are similar cases of *musts* scattered throughout the article (cf pp 6, 9, 25 and 27). The trend of all this is to turn the ND/CST's approach into a deductive argument about logical necessities. Having performed this transformation, Hudson's fundamental argument becomes the entirely circuitous and pointless 'proof' that the ND/CST's *musts* are not logical necessities, are not axiomatic. The concluding two sentences of the article round off perfectly the circle he, but he alone, has been building:

Clearly the transfer of state power as envisaged (in the

Freedom Charter) would very significantly modify the mode of constitution and composition of the capitalist class as well as the form of capitalism itself in South Africa. Whilst this might be a necessary condition of the transformation and the mode of production, it is not, and should not be seen as a sufficient condition of such a transformation (p 32-3).

Exactly! Give or take a few shadings, this is precisely the view that I and, I believe, most of those who are in broad agreement with the ND/CST approach would endorse. So with what shadow has Hudson been boxing?

Hudson's article ends where, to be useful, it should have begun. The real questions confronting progressive organisations in South Africa at present are:

I. How do we ensure the most rapid realisation of this 'necessary condition'? In other words, how in the current struggle do we mobilise, organise and strategically lead those social forces capable of realising the basic demands like the Freedom Charter?

II. How, at the *same time*, here and now, do we begin to ensure that the realisation of such national democratic demands creates not just the necessary, but also the sufficient, conditions for the uninterrupted transformation of our society through a fundamental change in the mode of production?

On these questions Hudson is silent.

Fortunately, answers to these questions are daily being provided, at least in broad terms, in the strategy and tactics of mass struggle, as well as in the programmes of the leading organisations in the field. To summarise these in broadest terms:

I. In the first place these strategies and tactics are based on the need to form a broad, fighting alliance around basic national democratic demands (as contained in the Freedom Charter, for instance). To understand the meaning of the terms 'national' and 'democratic' no genealogical trip eastward is required.

Simply put, the *national* aspects of the current struggle are encompassed within the goals of building national unity and national independence. In other words, the national aspect of the current struggle includes the fight against all forms of racism and tribalism. It is a struggle to end the forcible denationalisation of the African majority, to end the bantustan system, and to reject all federal, confederal and other regionalised confections designed to perpetuate, in one form or another, white minority rule. The national aspect of the struggle also includes the tasks of national construction, of nationalising and redistributing the wealth of

the monopolies. Finally, it embraces the struggle for the national sovereignty of South Africa, the struggle to free our country from imperialist control and manipulation.

The *democratic* aspect embraces the struggle for basic democratic rights - including full franchise, equal and relevant education, trade union rights and social security.

Around these basic national democratic demands an alliance of social forces can be assembled that, in the medium term, has the capacity to create (one should rather say, *is already beginning to create*) the necessary conditions for *meaningful* change in South Africa.

II. But within this alliance, in order to ensure that the national democratic struggle also creates the *sufficient* conditions for substantial transformation, we need to build the correct balance of forces (physically, organisationally and ideologically). This involves, amongst other things:

a. the strengthening of working class mobilisation, organisation, participation and leadership on *all* fronts of the national democratic struggle - on the shop floor, in the rural areas, on the civic front, and in education;

b. the deepening and extension of mass based democracy, including trade unions, shop steward locals, street committees, parentteacher associations, SRCs;

c. the popularisation and deepening of a scientific approach to struggle, and the ability to apply this approach to South African conditions;

d. the popularisation and deepening of an internationalist perspective within the national democratic struggle itself.

Because these two major levels of work (the national democratic and the more fundamentally transformational) need to be conducted *simultaneously* we do not (or should not, if we do) subscribe to the simplistic theory of social identity that Hudson attributes to the CST approach. According to Hudson, the CST thesis believes that black workers are constituted with an oppressed black identity, and not with the social identity of exploited proletarians, for instance. I agree entirely with Hudson's own alternative formulation that the formation of social identity, the way people think of themselves, 'enjoys a degree of openness and fluidity' (p 31). It is for this very reason, as well as for sound objective reasons that it is possible (and advisable) to mobilise, organise and educate large numbers of South African workers *simultaneously* as (1) oppressed blacks needing to wage, indeed, lead a national liberation struggle alongside other classes and strata, and (2) as exploited workers needing to ensure that such a national liberation struggle creates the necessary and sufficient condi-

tions for the rapid, uninterrupted transformation of the mode of production. There are numerous objective grounds to make such interpellations possible.

There is equally nothing inherent in the CST analysis that obliges its proponents to see 'a "colonial screen" intervening between social agents and their experiences of their places in the relations of production' (p 30). This is naive in the extreme, not least because national (colonial-type) oppression in South Africa is not a 'screen' or an 'appearance', but a complex material reality.

Finally, a few words on Hudson's appraisal of the book I recently co-authored with Raymond Suttner (Suttner and Cronin, 1986). Once again the little word 'must' plays its part:

A national liberation struggle must, in their (Suttner and Cronin's) view, be anti-capitalist because 'national oppression and capitalist exploitation are inextricably inter-linked in South Africa' (p 9).

He then proceeds to the following counter-argument:

There is, however, a non-sequitur in this attempted rendering of the Freedom Charter as anti-capitalist. That the oppressed nation needs to reappropriate from the oppressing nation its economic resources if it is to attain the proper independence (that is Hudson's clumsy rendering of the CST position - not ours. JC) *does not guarantee* the anti-capitalist character of such a reappropriation. The resources in question *could conceivably* be transferred into the control of a class of black capitalists and state functionaries (p 10) (my emphases).

'Does not guarantee ...', 'could conceivably ...', the language betrays Hudson's scholastic preoccupations. In the real world a great many things are not guaranteed. It is conceivable that Reagan will plunge the whole of human kind into a star wars holocaust that will turn our little debates about the best course for South Africa's struggle into so much ash. If Suttner and I have argued that the national liberation struggle in South Africa must (ie *should*) assume an anti-monopoly, and indeed, increasingly an anti-capitalist character it is because:

(1) It is conceivable that certain elements currently within the broad national liberation struggle will seek, with help from other quarters, to

arrest the liberation struggle, being content with a board-room shuffle. That is, in the first place, we are making a *political intervention*. We are arguing for a particular, political understanding of the Freedom Charter, and the national liberation struggle.

(2) We are making this political intervention, advancing this particular line, because we believe it is both desirable and objectively possible. It is, we believe, the most effective strategy to achieve meaningful transformation. The national democratic struggle is not a delaying tactic on the road to social emancipation, it is a major propellant towards it in the particular conditions of our society.

(3) In making this intervention we are also seeking to persuade all patriots, especially those motivated by a strong desire to end their racial oppression, that full social emancipation requires further transformations. We believe that the consolidation of national independence, national self-determination, and the deepening and extension of democracy lie down the path of substantial transformation in the mode of production. The history of our struggle is replete with examples of militant nationalists who have made the small hop to a more thoroughgoing, scientific approach to this struggle. Our political intervention (not our's alone) is addressed also, then, to the millions of oppressed, patriotic South Africans who wish to see their country united, and a democracy established, free of racial, colonial and imperialist manipulation. We are suggesting that the fullest realisation of these patriotic and democratic goals lies down the path of substantial transformation.

#### EDITORIAL NOTE

1. Due to the current political circumstances we were unable to submit our editorial changes to the author prior to its publication. Nothing was added to the article. All changes were the result of deletions in line with our stated editorial policy. Although, in our opinion, nothing substantial in the author's argument has been edited out, we nevertheless take full responsibility for publishing the article in this form. (The Editors)

#### REFERENCES

- Davies, Rob, Dan O'Meara and Siphon Dlamini (1984) - *The Struggle for South Africa*, vol 2 (London: Zed)
- Hudson, Peter (1986) - 'The Freedom Charter and the theory of national democratic revolution', in *Transformation*, 1
- Suttner, Raymond and Jeremy Cronin (nd, 1986) - *30 Years of the Freedom Charter* (Johannesburg: Ravan)