

https://dspace.org/

The origins of multiracialism

Everatt, David

1990-4-30
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8696

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

AFRICANA LIBRARY

EVERATT

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

A F R I C A N S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

African Studies Seminar Paper
to be presented at Seminar in RW 319 at
4.00pm on Monday 30th April 1990

.....

Title: **The Origins of Multiracialism.**

by: David Everatt

No.: 270

This paper may not be quoted without
the permission of the author

The Origins of Multiracialism.

David Everatt.

Introduction.

Resistance politics in the 1950s was dominated by the Congress Alliance, made up of the African National Congress [ANC], the South African Indian Congress [SAIC], the Coloured People's Congress [CPC] and the white South African Congress of Democrats [SACOD]. The Alliance mobilised people of all races against apartheid in a manner previously unseen in South African history. The internal politics of the resistance movement, however, was dominated by wide-ranging and bitter disputes over the form that racial co-operation should take. That dispute centred on the **multiracial** nature of the Congress Alliance - that is, an alliance of separate Congresses comprising members of a single ethnic group, co-ordinated at regional and national levels.

Multiracialism afforded each Congress equal representation on all co-ordinating structures. As a result, SACOD, with an average membership of 250, was equally represented on Alliance structures with the ANC, which had an average paid-up membership of between 30 000 and 50 000.[1] Multiracialism stood in marked contrast with the **nonracialism** of organisations such as the disbanded Communist Party of South Africa [CPSA], the South African Communist Party [SACP] and the Liberal Party, which contained members of all ethnic groups within a single organisation.

Multiracialism generated a wide range of criticism. At the centre of such criticism lay SACOD, "the white wing of the Congress Alliance."[2] SACOD was a small, militant white organisation which supported extra-parliamentary campaigns in pursuit of equal rights, and which included a number of former CPSA members. SACOD's place in the Alliance provided a focus for a wide range of organisations which regarded SACOD as a 'communist front' and multiracialism as the means by which communist influence was being entrenched in the Alliance. Liberals and Trotskyists in Cape Town stated:

> COD is a boss organisation in an alliance of racial organisations and is a great believer in the big stick. The organisations allied to it are boy organisations. COD dictates its instructions to them. They never meet as equals: theirs is simply to obey...[3]

In essence, multiracialism was seen as a mechanism of control engineered by white communists following the disbanding of the CPSA in 1950, who were unable to gain individual membership of the black Congresses.

Existing explanations of the emergence of multiracialism stress its strategic content: that is, the fact that it acknowledged the differing material conditions affecting ethnic groups which had been politically and geographically divided under both segregation and apartheid. As leading SACOD member Helen Joseph recently put it,

> The feeling ... was that it was important for work to be done amongst the different groups of people who whether we like it or not are separate - the bloody Group Areas [saw] to that. It corrals us in separate areas so that we **are** living apart from each other and we can't deny it.[4]

The ideological content of multiracialism has been ignored. This paper explores the ideological roots of multiracialism, and argues that they lie in large part in the hostility which characterised relations between

---

[1] Lodge: Black Politics in South Africa (1983), p.75.
[2] Helen Joseph: Side By Side (1987) p.40.
[3] Bus Apartheid Resistance Committee in **New Age** 21-8-1956, p.8.
[4] Interview with Helen Joseph.

the CPSA and the ANC Youth League [ANCYL].

Both the CPSA and ANCYL called for the radicalisation of the ANC and the development of a mass base as the only means to a successful national revolution. However, the CPSA Central Committee [CC] warned that nationalism obscured class oppression, and called for the transformation of existing organisations "into a revolutionary party of workers, peasants, intellectuals and petty bourgeois"; that single organisation would co-operate with the CPSA in opposing racial discrimination and "develop[ing] class consciousness in the people."[5]

The ANCYL brought to the ANC a strident (and at times exclusive) African nationalism and a strong anti-communism. Youth Leaguers strongly resisted nonracialism, which they saw as a CPSA-inspired attempt to by-pass existing national organisations and create a permanent "unity movement" emphasising class above national consciousness.[6] In contrast, the League insisted that racial co-operation "can only take place between Africans as a single unit and other Non-European groups as separate units."[7]

Leading Communist Party member Brian Bunting, speaking of the distinction between the CPSA's nonracialism and the ANCYL's multiracialism, stated: "let us not be confused by semantics."[8] The distinction, however, was more than semantic. The hostility between the ANCYL and the CPSA resulted in the strategic debate over nonracialism or multiracialism being imbued with heavily ideological overtones.

This paper analyses the dispute between the CPSA and the ANCYL in order to locate the ideological roots of multiracialism. In so doing, tensions within the CPSA over the relationship between class and national struggle are discussed. Those tensions grew in the late 1940s as a result (in part) of CPSA/ANCYL hostility. As one Party member put it:

> [in] the late 40s you'll find that the Party got itself into a bit of a bind. On the one hand there was the classic class communist analysis. On the other hand there were people ... who were terribly sensitive to the national liberation struggle ... So these two things had to be reconciled.[9]

The Communist Party and the African National Congress.

The ANC in the 1940s and early 1950s was transformed from a small organisation concerned to enroll "distinguished university graduates,"[10] to a mass-based nationalist organisation pursuing national liberation by extra-parliamentary means including stay-aways and passive resistance. Those changes were largely brought about by the ANC Youth League, formed in 1944 and comprising a group of highly able students of law, medicine, and teaching; non-professionals such as former miner and bakery worker Walter Sisulu were important but rare.

---

[5] SC.10-53: Report of the Select Committee on the Suppression of Communism Act Enquiry: Central Committee Report to the CPSA Annual Conference, January 1950 [hereafter 1950 CC Report].

[6] See Nelson Mandela, in **The Guardian** 29-7-1948, p.5.

[7] Anton Lembede: Policy of the Congress Youth League in **Inkundla ya Bantu**, May 1946.

[8] B.Bunting: Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary (1987) p.159.

[9] Interview with Ben Turok.

[10] Resolutions of the 1942 Annual ANC Conference: in Tom Karis: Hope and Challenge (1977), p.199.

Congress politics in the late 1940s was dominated by the ANCYL as it set itself the twin tasks of "impart[ing] to Congress a truly national character," and opposing those who sought to provide "foreign leadership of Africa."[11] Youth Leaguers stressed "the need for vigilance against Communists and other groups which foster non-African interests."[12] In practice the ANCYL programme entailed gaining control of Congress, while isolating organisations and individuals who exerted influence over the ANC, or sought to develop their own African support base outside the ANC.

The transformation of the ANC took place in the years following the second world war. Influenced by the liberal ethos of the war years, the ANC concentrated on drawing up and popularising **Africans' Claims in South Africa**, a major statement of principle which attempted to delineate the ideological path that should be followed by a government which appeared to be backing away from segregation. In so doing, the ANC continued the constitutional petitioning of the pre-war years. Grass-roots organisation around civic issues was left to other organisations. Black trade unions grew, while squatter movements and bus boycotts represented a spontaneous popular response to the hardships faced by the black population.

In contrast with the wartime ANC, the Communist Party was directly involved in grass-roots organisation in some townships, most notably on the East Rand. As Hilary Sapire has demonstrated in the case of Brakpan location, the CPSA mobilised residents around immediate local concerns such as wages, employment practices, the extension of passes to women, the shortage of housing and pass law raids. The CPSA contested Advisory Board elections and used the Boards and Vigilance Associations as means of establishing "footholds in location communities."[13] Through the work of CPSA members such as David Bopape and Gideon Ngake in using such elected positions as platforms to defend local interests, the CPSA in Brakpan instituted itself as "the undisputed political force in the region." The CPSA also ran night-schools in the major centres which, according to the Johannesburg District Party secretary, were "a very big factor in the development of the membership of the Party."[14] Elsewhere in the country the CPSA successfully contested Advisory Board elections, winning all six seats in East London in 1942, as well as local council seats in Cape Town, East London and Johannesburg.[15]

The CPSA, with organisations such as the Springbok Legion and Friends of the Soviet Union, successfully mobilised large sectors of the white population.[16] CPSA members were active in the burgeoning black trade union movement, while Hilda Watts won a seat on the Johannesburg City Council in the whites-only Hillbrow ward. As a result of its high political profile and success in various spheres of operation, some elements within the CPSA began to think of the Party in terms of a potential mass movement.[17]

---

[11] Provisional Committee of the Congress Youth League: Congress Youth League Manifesto, March 1944 in Karis: Hope pp.300-308.

[12] Notes of ANCYL drafting committee, in Karis p.100.

[13] Hilary Sapire: African Political Mobilisation in Brakpan in the 1950s: ASI 1989, p.6.

[14] Lionel 'Rusty' Bernstein, interviewed by Don Pinnock [hereafter interview with Rusty Bernstein].

[15] Bunting p.110.

[16] See C.Burns: An Historical Study of the Friends of the Soviet Union and the South African Peace Council. Hons. thesis, Wits, 1987.

[17] Bunting p.111.

By the end of the war, the CPSA had emerged as a significant force in black organisation. However, it remained CPSA policy to work with the ANC and build it up. In 1929 the CPSA had accepted a Comintern directive which stressed the need to work within "the embryonic organisations among the natives, such as the African National Congress" so as to transform the latter into a "fighting nationalist revolutionary organisation against the white bourgeoisie and British imperialists."[18] This remained Party policy despite being affected by the internal ructions of the CPSA in the 1930s, and the anti-fascist 'Popular Front' strategy of the 1940s.

The national organisations, according to the CPSA, were to spearhead a revolution aimed at abolishing racial discrimination and attaining equal rights for all. Thereafter, the struggle for socialism could take place. Nonetheless, in 1940 the ANC was a small, weak organisation of the black elite. As the CPSA complained:

> The year 1940 has arrived with hardships and misery for the oppressed and poor peoples of the Union of South Africa ... Unfortunately the year finds the forces of freedom as scattered as sheep in the presence of wolves. When talking of the forces of freedom, one cannot lose sight of the fact that the African people are potentially the most important of these forces. Therefore, if the Africans do not pull themselves together to face the enemies of freedom vigorously, not only will they let themselves down, but they will let their allies down also.[19]

Black Party members were reluctant to join the ANC. As CPSA Johannesburg District secretary Rusty Bernstein recently noted, some black members "wouldn't join it. They thought the ANC was rather reformist bourgeois nonsense - 'that's not for us, we're revolutionaries!'"[20]

While the CPSA extended its township base during the war years, it remained concerned with the state of the ANC on which it focussed much critical attention. Party members such as David Bopape, J.B.Marks, Edwin Mofutsanyana and Moses Kotane were also ANC members. CPSA literature emphasised that national liberation struggles "fought in the colonial and semi-colonial territories" were "no mere side issue," but rather an integral part of a global anti-imperialist struggle.[21] By the end of the war, signs of change were visible within the ANC. The increasingly prominent Youth League had begun to criticise the moderation of the ANC, and its failure to establish a branch structure and win a mass following.

During the war years black trade unions grew apace and strike action increased markedly over the 1930s. Black militancy increased as black urbanisation and proletarianisation was met with an acute housing shortage, soaring prices and, after 1943, the harsh implementation of influx control. The ANC however failed to capitalise on these conditions. As a result, rival organisations aimed at mobilising black opinion were formed or revitalised.

As Karis has noted, Africans impatient with the ANC for its moderation and failure to develop a mass base "had various courses of action open

---

[18] **ibid.**, p.31: Comintern Resolution on South Africa, 1928.
[19] **Inkululeko**, January 1940 p.2.
[20] Interview with Rusty Bernstein.
[21] AD1181: CPSA: The Foundation of Socialist Teaching from the Manifesto of 1848 to the 1928 Programme. Left Book Club, nd.?1943.

to them in 1943."[22] The Youth League was formed within the ANC, comprising young urban intellectuals who rejected traditional ANC constitutional protest in favour of mass mobilisation and extra-parliamentary action. Outside the ANC, the African Democratic Party [ADP] was formed, while the All-African Convention [AAC] agitated for a 'non-collaborationist' strategy.

The CPSA accepted that the ANC, the largest of the three, remained "the premier political organisation," both because of historical ties and possibly affected by the fact that both the ADP and the AAC were influenced, in differing degrees, by Trotskyist thinking.[23] As a result, CPSA statements in the 1942-1948 period insisted that black communists had a responsibility to work within the ANC and SAIC; the Johannesburg District passed a resolution declaring it "to be the duty of all Communists belonging to oppressed nationalities to join their respective national movements, so as to work for the strengthening of such movements."[24] As we have seen, such resolutions were made necessary through the reluctance of some black CPSA members to join the ANC. As Rivonia trialist Elias Motsoaledi recently stated:

> [the] Party taught me the struggle. I attended ANC meetings but was not happy with it at the time [the late 1940s]. To me, the ANC did not interpret the aspirations of the masses. But the Party taught me that it was my responsibility to tell the ANC about our aspirations ... at the time, the ANC was dominated by sophisticated intellectuals who only spoke in English.[25]

CPSA literature and internal reports during the war reflect three related themes in discussing the ANC and the broader national liberation movement. In the first place, the CPSA acknowledged the progress made by ANC President-General Alfred Xuma in reorganising the ANC, but criticised the Congress for failing to provide political leadership in a period which witnessed black industrial organisation and urban militancy. In a 1943 report on National Movements of the Non-Europeans, the CPSA Executive Committee noted that "the lack of a strong and influential organisation among the Non-Europeans, has been felt time and time again" and criticised the ANC for failing "in its main task - that of uniting its membership and carrying out the formation of branches in a systematic manner."[26] In 1945 the CPSA Johannesburg District called for a "practical plan of campaign and action" to channel popular militancy.[27]

Flowing from this, a second theme of CPSA commentary on national movements was to consistently call for the elaboration of a minimum shared programme between national organisations, the CPSA and the trade union movement. Such a programme, it was argued, would allow for both ideological and organisational unity. The third theme comprised repeated calls for the development of a united front of all organisations opposing racial discrimination. The CPSA argued that "[a]ll genuine movements towards national liberation are progressive," but warned against the tendency to racial exclusiveness which would obscure the

---

[22] Karis p.110.
[23] **ibid.**, pp.107-114.
[24] Democracy In Action!: Proceedings of the Johannesburg District Annual Conference of the Communist Party, 1945 p.30; repeated in 1947.
[25] **New Nation** Supplement, October 27-November 2 1989, p.7.
[26] CAMP Reel 3A:2:CC1:62/2: CPSA Executive Committee Report: National Movements of the Non-Europeans, 6-12-1943, p.2.
[27] CPSA: Democracy **op cit** p.7.

underlying reality of the class oppression of all workers.[28] The CPSA supported the emergence of a "broad fighting alliance"[29] or "wide democratic front"[30] which would oppose segregation while underplaying exclusive nationalism.

The postwar programme of the CPSA was internally contested, as some members called on the Party to capitalise on its wartime successes and concentrate on class struggle in place of its commitment to a 'two-stage' revolution.[31] In part, this flowed from the changing nature of the ANC, as the ANCYL grew increasingly prominent. CPSA members and reports expressed concern that

> the realities of the class divisions are being obscured ... Nationalism need not be synonymous with racialism, but it can avoid being so only if it recognises the class alignments that cut across the racial divisions.[32]

The ANCYL voiced criticisms of the ANC similar to those of the CPSA, calling for the development of a branch structure and mass membership, and the utilisation of extra-parliamentary means of opposition. At the same time, however, the late 1940s saw the spreading influence of the Youth League and its twin hostilities: - towards the CPSA, and towards anything other than "occasional cooperation" with other racial groups.[33]

The ANC Youth League.

The ANC began to show signs of change following the formation of the Youth League in 1944. The ANCYL Manifesto, issued in March 1944, noted criticism of the ANC as "a body of gentlemen with clean hands" which had failed to organise the mass of the African population.[34] The ANCYL was formed as "a protest against the lack of discipline and the absence of a clearly-defined goal in the movement as a whole" and was committed to "rousing popular political consciousness and fighting oppression and reaction." More significantly, it stressed that "the national liberation of the Africans will be achieved by Africans themselves. We reject foreign leadership of Africa." The ANCYL programme was based on an interpretation of African nationalism which rejected non-African leadership and "the wholesale importation of foreign ideologies," while emphasising African pride and self-sufficiency.[35]

The ANCYL was influenced in part by the growth of anti-colonial movements in the postwar period. Anton Lembede, a lawyer and leading Youth League ideologue, noted that

> the history of modern times is the history of nationalism ... All over the world nationalism is rising in revolt against foreign domination, conquest and oppression in India, in Indonesia, in Egypt, in Persia and several other countries. Among Africans also clear signs of national awakening, national renaissance, or rebirth are noticeable...[36]

The ANCYL saw its "immediate task" as the need "to overhaul the machinery of the A.N.C. from within," remoulding the ANC into a mass-

---

[28] CAMP Reel 3A:2:CC1:14/2: Programme of the Communist Party of South Africa (draft), nd.1941, p.7.
[29] **The Guardian** 9-1-1947 p.1: 1947 CPSA Annual Conference.
[30] **The Guardian** 24-6-1948 p.5: CPSA CC statement.
[31] See **The Guardian**, January 1945.
[32] 1950 CC Report.
[33] Lembede: Policy **op cit.**
[34] ANCYL: Manifesto **op cit.**
[35] **ibid.**
[36] Lembede: Policy **op cit.**

based organisation pursuing national liberation and mobilising support by means of a militant African nationalism.[37] The ANCYL stressed **"the divine destiny of the African people"**[38] and the need for "high ethical standards" to "combat moral disintegration among Africans."[39]

One aim of the ANCYL - as of the CPSA - was to radicalise the ANC. For the Youth League this entailed the provision of nationalist leaders who rejected constitutionalism in favour of mass-based extra-parliamentary action. Part of that task was seen to be the removal of non-African nationalists from influencing Congress. Lembede, the League's first President, argued:

> No foreigner can ever be a true and genuine leader of the African people because no foreigner can ever truly and genuinely interpret the African spirit which is unique and peculiar to Africans only. Some foreigners Asiatic or European who pose as African leaders must be categorically denounced and rejected.[40]

In calling for the development of African nationalism as a mobilising force sufficient to challenge the **status quo**, the Youth League came to see both liberalism and communism as competing ideologies.[41] In attaining its objectives - providing a radical African nationalist leadership intent on developing a mass base - the ANCYL came to see the CPSA as a competitor.

The ANCYL and the CPSA 1944-1949.

The conflict between the ANCYL and the CPSA between 1944 and 1951, and its resolution in the 1952 - 1955 period, has been widely discussed.[42] That discussion has nonetheless remained within the bounds set by Youth Leaguers themselves, who stressed that Africans in South Africa suffered national, and not class oppression, and therefore rejected CPSA analysis as spurious. The ANCYL opposed 'Vendors of Foreign Method' who

> seek to impose on our struggle cut-and-dried formulae, which so far from clarifying the issues of our struggle, only serve to obscure the fact that we are oppressed not as a class, but as a people, as a Nation.[43]

However, a closer analysis of Youth League antipathy towards the CPSA is required in order to elucidate the precise nature of the conflict between the two organisations, and the ramifications of that conflict. Such an analysis questions the acceptance of the ANCYL simply as an expression of anti-communism or exclusive nationalism (or both), and sheds light on the internal politics of the resistance movements in the 1940s and 1950s.

The conflict between the ANCYL and CPSA operated on two main levels. On the one hand, the ANCYL reacted strongly to the Communist Party's repeated calls for a broad nonracial alliance of organisations opposed to segregation. The broad front proposed by the CPSA was to "conduct

---

[37] A.P.Mda to G.M.Pitje 10-10-1948: in Karis p.321.
[38] Lembede: Policy **op cit** (emphasis in original).
[39] ANCYL: Manifesto **op cit.**
[40] Lembede: Policy **op cit.**
[41] The first task of 1948 ANCYL President A.P.Mda was to clarify the ANCYL stand in relation to liberalism and communism: see Karis p.103.
[42] See **inter alia** Bunting, chapter 8; Karis, pp.98-110; Lodge, chapter 1; P.Walshe: The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa (1987) chapter XIII. In contrast, Meli: South Africa Belongs To Us (1988) makes no mention of the conflict.
[43] Basic Policy of Congress Youth League 1948, in Karis p.330.

mass struggles against race discrimination" while underplaying exclusive nationalism by "develop[ing] class consciousness in the people" and "forg[ing] unity in action between the oppressed peoples and between them and the European working class."[44] The ANCYL rejected the class content of nonracialism as proposed by the CPSA. Rather, the League insisted that "the national liberation of Africans will be achieved by Africans themselves"[45]; co-operation between the oppressed groups was acceptable only when the racial groups were organised in "separate units."[46]

On the other hand, both organisations were seeking to influence the development and direction of the ANC at a time of growing black militancy. As will be seen, the programmes of the two organisations were in many respects not dissimilar. As a result, the conflict appears to have mixed ideological disputation with elements of a power struggle. That conflict moreover worked itself out over a particular issue: the form that racial co-operation should take.

The programmes of the Youth League and the Communist Party had many points of similarity. The ANCYL, in insisting on the national basis of black oppression in South Africa, argued that black South Africans "suffer national oppression in common with thousands and millions of oppressed Colonial peoples in other parts of the world."[47] Moreover, Lembede argued: **"After national freedom, then socialism."**[48] In this he was joined by Ashby Mda, a lawyer and leading Youth Leaguer, who argued that the interests of the mass of Africans could be protected only by "the establishment of a true democracy and a just social order."[49] By 1951 Mda defined 'a just social order' in terms of "full political control by the workers, peasants and intellectuals" combined with "the liquidation of capitalism" and "equal distribution of wealth."[50] While the ANCYL as a whole did not explicitly endorse socialism, Lembede argued that "Africans are naturally socialistic as illustrated in their social practices and customs," and concluded that "the achievement of national freedom will therefore herald or usher in a new era, the era of African socialism."[51]

In essence, nothing in the above programme conflicted with the CPSA's understanding of the South African situation. Strategically, both called for the radicalisation of the ANC leadership and the development of an ANC branch structure and mass base as necessary preconditions for a successful national revolution. Ideologically, the CPSA had accepted the primacy of the national question following adoption of a 1928 Comintern thesis which placed South Africa within the ambit of 'colonial and semi-colonial countries.' The 1928 thesis endorsed

> an independent native South African republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' republic, with full equal rights for all races, black, coloured and white.[52]

The vision of a socialist revolution taking place in phases meant that

---

[44] 1950 CC Report.
[45] ANCYL: Manifesto **op cit.**
[46] Lembede: Policy **op cit.**
[47] **ibid.**
[48] Lembede: Policy **op cit** (emphasis in original).
[49] A.P.Mda: Statement to the Youth League of Congress **Inkundla ya Bantu**, 27-8-1949.
[50] A.P.Mda: The Analysis (nd.1951) in Gail Gerhart: Black Power in South Africa (1978) p.130.
[51] Lembede: Policy **op cit.**
[52] Quoted in Bunting p.31.

the CPSA programme largely tallied with Lembede's vision of national revolution followed by (African) socialism. Finally, the CPSA accepted the premier position of the ANC in the national liberation struggle.

The ANCYL, with a belief "in the unity of all Africans from the Mediterranean Sea in the North to the Indian and Atlantic Oceans in the South," saw the struggle for equal rights as part of a pan-African anti-colonial movement.[53] For the CPSA, the notion that black South Africans were colonially oppressed was at least implicit in the 1928 thesis. The idea of internal colonialism was hinted at but not developed by CPSA member Eddie Roux in 1928:

> we have a white bourgeoisie and a white aristocracy of labour living in the same country together with an exploited colonial peasantry. Here the participation of the workers of the ruling class in the exploitation of the colonial workers is very apparent ... the exploitation occurs within the confines of a single country.[54]

Caught up in the factionalism of the 1928-1935 period, and thereafter in the Popular Front politics of the anti-fascist period, internal colonialism and its implications were not assessed by the CPSA until the period under study.

The Politics of Nonracialism.

The above discussion should not imply that there were no differences between the ANCYL and the CPSA. Rather, it should serve to focus analysis on the precise location and nature of the ANCYL/CPSA conflict. The CPSA switch from opposition to active participation in the second world war following the invasion of the Soviet Union had generated widespread hostility. The CPSA expended much energy during the war in popularising the Soviet Union and was seen by the ANCYL to have an agenda which stretched beyond national liberation and was informed by a 'foreign ideology' using "methods and tactics which might have succeeded in other countries, like Europe."[55]

The issue on which Youth League suspicion of the CPSA came to focus most directly was the question of nonracialism. The CPSA was concerned to avoid the emergence of a racially exclusive African nationalism which would obscure and retard class struggle. As we have seen, the Communist Party stressed the need for the liberation struggle to be waged by a broad front of organisations led not by the black bourgeoisie but by "the class-conscious workers and peasants of the national group concerned" so as to foster class-conscious racial unity.[56] While both the ANCYL and the CPSA called for the development of the ANC, the latter supported the emergence of a broad front of organisations (including the ANC) representing Africans, Indians, Coloureds and trade unions.[57] In co-operation with such an alliance, the CPSA could

> carry out its task of exploring the class purposes of race oppression, creating a working class consciousness, breaking down national prejudices and providing leadership in the struggle for socialism.[58]

As Lodge has noted, joint CPSA/ANC members on the whole enjoyed the support of more conservative and established members of the ANC national

---

[53] ANCYL: Manifesto **op cit.**
[54] Quoted in Bunting p.35.
[55] ANCYL: Basic Policy **op cit.**
[56] 1950 CC Report.
[57] See **The Guardian** 9-1-1947 p.1: CPSA Annual Conference.
[58] CC Report to 1949 CPSA Conference in Bunting p.155.

executive.[59] Both rejected the Youth League call for a complete electoral boycott, while the more pragmatic ANC leaders supported broad unity in opposition to racial discrimination. Black unity increased markedly in the late 1940s. In 1947 Doctors Xuma, Naicker and Dadoo, representing the ANC, Natal Indian Congress [NIC] and Transvaal Indian Congress [TIC] respectively, signed the 'Doctors Pact' which accepted "the urgency of co-operation between the non-European peoples and other democratic forces for the attainment of basic human rights..."[60] In 1946 the NIC began to mobilise support for a passive resistance campaign against the 'Ghetto Act' which lasted for two years and saw over 2000 resisters of all races (predominantly Indian) imprisoned. Rallies and public meetings began to be held under the joint auspices of the African and Indian Congresses, as well as the (Coloured) African People's Organisation [APO].

The Youth League position on racial co-operation was complicated by the presence of both an exclusive approach which rejected such co-operation, and a more inclusive approach. The leadership of the League, however, was drawn increasingly from the latter category, comprising men who accepted greater racial co-operation while laying stress on the centrality of a strong African nationalist organisation. In 1946 Anton Lembede stated that co-operation between Africans, Indians and Coloureds "can only take place between Africans as a single unit and other Non-European groups as separate units."[61] The ANCYL thus endorsed the 1947 Pact, stating in its Basic Policy: "The National Organisations of the Africans, Indians and Coloureds may co-operate on common issues."[62]

The CPSA had endorsed a similar position in 1943, calling for separate organisations representing Africans, Indians and Coloureds, co-ordinated at regional and national levels.[63] With the rise of the Youth League and the spreading influence of its nationalist programme, however, the CPSA increasingly supported the idea of one mass organisation which would co-operate with the Party. At the end of the decade, the CPSA called for the transformation of the existing separate national organisations

> into a revolutionary party of workers, peasants, intellectuals and petty bourgeoisie, linked together in a firm organisation ... guided by a definite programme of struggle against all forms of racial discrimination in alliance with the class-conscious European workers and intellectuals.[64]

The language of the report was imprecise and unclear. For the Youth League, however, it implied the creation of a single nonracial organisation and served to cement their rejection of the CPSA approach as the 'importation' of methods and tactics which originated in conditions prevailing in Europe. As a result, the question of racial co-operation - that is, the form that racial co-operation should take - became an issue of contention between the Youth League and the Communist Party.

The nature of this conflict became apparent in the CPSA/ANCYL dispute

---

[59] Lodge p.29.
[60] AD1189/5/Fa/17: **Joint Declaration of Cooperation** 9-3-1947.
[61] Lembede: Policy **op cit.**
[62] ANCYL: Basic Policy **op cit.**
[63] CPSA: National Movements **op cit** p.4 Proposal 1: "We should strive for one organisation for each of the three racial groups. Unity among these groups should be based on the basis of a joint Committee, both on a national and regional scale."
[64] 1950 CC Report.

over the 1948 People's Assembly for Votes for All. In 1948 the Transvaal branches of the ANC, CPSA, APO and TIC proposed the calling of a nonracial People's Assembly as a means of highlighting the franchise issue on the eve of the general election. However, the Assembly soon became caught up within the ANCYL/CPSA conflict. Youth Leaguers on the ANC Transvaal Executive declared themselves willing to participate in the Assembly only if the organising committee was restricted to representatives of the ANC, TIC and APO - in other words, accepting co-operation between national organisations but not with the CPSA.

As a result of Youth League agitation, the ANC refused to officially participate in the Assembly. Transvaal ANC President C.S.Ramohanoe later faced a motion of no confidence for issuing a statement in support of the Assembly. The point at issue was not mere anti-communism. Rather, as law student Nelson Mandela of the Transvaal ANC Executive (and a leading Youth League member) made clear in a report carried by **The Guardian**,

> the Working Committee of the People's Assembly had invited the African National Congress to send delegates to the Assembly. The A.N.C. Executive was not in opposition to the general aims of the People's Assembly, but felt that it was being summoned in an incorrect manner, in that the established national organisations were being by-passed ... The organisers of the People's Assembly had departed from ... agreed methods, and there were suspicions that a permanent "unity movement" was being formed.[65]

The 1948 clash between the ANCYL and CPSA is important in two respects. The Assembly dispute highlighted the way in which ideological differences were being fought out over the issue of nonracialism - not simply because of Youth League exclusivity or racism, but because moves towards nonracialism were seen to be part of an ideology which stressed class above race, and would retard the emergence of a strong African National Congress.

Both anti-communism and exclusive nationalism existed in the ANCYL. The League however was led by men such as Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela, who emerged as leaders of the Congress Alliance in the 1950s. Their position in some degree parallelled that of CPSA member James La Guma who first proposed national democratic struggle as the initial phase of a socialist revolution in the 1920s. From different perspectives, both stressed the fact that, as the Simons put it with reference to La Guma,

> equality could be achieved only when Africans were powerful enough to win respect from the whites.[66]

Secondly, the dispute reflected the changing fortunes of the ANCYL and the CPSA. In the late 1940s, the influence of the Youth League spread within the ANC, while that of the CPSA diminished. The League had initially set itself a three to five year programme to change Congress[67], but over the next four years the ANC made few moves towards developing a mass base or radicalising its methods of opposition. At the same time, the squatter movement was organised by Mpanza into the Sofasonke party and contested Advisory Board elections, the ADP gained representation on the Native Representative Council with the election of Paul Mosaka, and the CPSA extended its township base. In 1948, in far more assertive

---

[65] **The Guardian** 29-7-1948, p.5.

[66] Simons & Simons: Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950 (1983): p.404.

[67] ANCYL: Manifesto **op cit.**

terms, the League claimed that the ANC required "drastic and revolutionary changes," which it was to bring about:

> From the very outset, the Congress Youth League set itself, inter alia, the historic task of imparting dynamic substance and matter to the organisational form of the A.N.C. This took the form of a forth right exposition of the National Liberatory outlook - African Nationalism - which the Youth League seeks to impose on the Mother Body.[68]

In a private letter, 1948 ANCYL President Mda acknowledged that a clash between the ANC and the Youth League was "inevitable" because "the Congress Senior leadership reflects the dying order of pseudo-liberalism and conservatism, of appeasement and compromises."[69]

The Rise of the Youth League.

In order to successfully implement its programme, the Youth League had to transform the ANC. To achieve this, it had to gain a position from which it could determine Congress policy. In the first instance this entailed building up its own ranks, and branches were established in Durban, Cape Town and at Fort Hare (although the majority of Youth Leaguers remained in the Transvaal). At the same time, League members moved into ANC provincial structures. Secondly, as we have seen, it entailed combatting the competing ideologies which sought to influence the development of the ANC. In the first place, the Youth League turned on white liberals such as the Ballingers, Edgar Brookes and members of the Institute of Race Relations who had influence over certain leading Congress personalities. Hostility towards the liberals was exacerbated by the 1946 dispute over the NRC adjournment and the League's call for the boycott of all 'Native Representation' elections. The weaning of Congress from the influence of white liberals was largely completed by 1947.

Finally, if the Youth League were to direct a militant movement for national liberation under the aegis of the ANC, competing organisations had to be isolated. The AAC remained a small, Cape-based organisation increasingly dominated by the Non-European Unity Movement to which it had affiliated, while the ADP had begun to collapse by 1947. Both the AAC and ADP were accused of causing "rift[s] on the national unity front at this critical moment" which would have the effect of "invit[ing] more oppression for Africans."[70] In essence, all those who sought to mobilise Africans in support of organisations other than the ANC, or ideologies other than African nationalism, were attacked. This included the CPSA, which had largely set the pace in township organisation in the 1940s, and which stated:

> Our first task is to continue building the Party, to strengthen it so that we can play a decisive part in shaping the future of South Africa. We must draw in thousands of members of each racial and national group, provide them with a Socialist education, and organise them for work among their own people...[71]

ANCYL power and influence within the ANC grew markedly in the late 1940s. For much of the period, older ANC leaders revealed a preparedness to work with Communists. The League failed in 1945 and 1947 to have all CPSA members removed from Congress, and were outvoted by CPSA and conservative ANC members on their call for an electoral boycott.[72]

---

[68] ANCYL: Basic Policy **op cit.**
[69] A.P.Mda to G.M.Pitje 24-8-1948, in Karis pp.319-320.
[70] ANCYL: Manifesto **op cit.**
[71] CC Report: 1944 Annual CPSA Conference, in Bunting p.112.
[72] Walshe p.357.

Nonetheless, Leaguers occupied increasingly important positions within the provincial structures of the ANC, and by 1948 were sufficiently entrenched to stop ANC participation in the People's Assembly.

By 1949, the League was powerful enough to insist that endorsement of the **Programme of Action** should be a precondition for election to the post of President-General of the ANC. At the 1949 ANC Annual Conference, the League succeeded in ousting Xuma from the post and securing the election of Dr.James Moroka, while six ANCYL members were elected to the National Executive Committee (Sisulu as Secretary-General). Two years later, Leaguers were able to remove A.W.G.Champion as ANC President in Natal, securing in his place the election of Albert Lutuli, later elected President-General of the ANC.

While the Youth League grew in importance and influence within the ANC, the fortunes of the CPSA declined markedly. Following the 1946 African miners strike, the CPSA Executive Committee was tried for sedition, in a case which lasted from 1946 to 1948. White support for the CPSA, visible during the war, disappeared as the Cold War gathered force, and organisations such as the Springbok Legion, Friends of the Soviet Union and the Left Book Club either shrank or disappeared. The Trades and Labour Council was divided as the Nationalist Party made a concerted bid for white working class support. The attacks on the CPSA by both the UP and NP governments culminated in the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 which outlawed the CPSA and any doctrine 'which aims at bringing about any political, industrial, social or economic change within the Union.'

Finally, the rise of the ANCYL threatened to remove CPSA influence within the ANC. This was clearly of central importance in view of the CPSA commitment to a 'two-stage' revolution. As we have seen, the dispute between the CPSA and the League comprised a number of interrelated factors. Central to the dispute was the growing stress placed on class struggle by the CPSA in reaction to the apparent rise of an anti-communist petty-bourgeoisie in the shape of the Youth League. Moreover, on the critical issue of the Party's approach to the national question and relations with national organisations, differences appear to have existed within the CPSA.

<u>The CPSA and National Democratic Struggle, 1947-1950</u>.
Few documents are available relating to the internal workings of the CPSA in its final years, or to the activities and debates of the underground SACP during the 1950s. The ensuing discussion is made up from those documents which do exist, the journals attached to the discussion groups of the early 1950s, and interviews with leading CPSA/SACP members.

The CPSA in the late 1940s revealed differing approaches to the national question and the national movements in South Africa. According to Rusty Bernstein, "political tendencies had developed which began to separate to some extent." Crudely put, the differences revolved around the emphasis laid on the place of class struggle in relation to the national struggle waged by the Congresses. As Bernstein put it, "it related to the significance to be attached to the national liberation movement."[73] Differences moreover revealed themselves (allowing for generalisation) in largely regional terms, with the Party in the Cape differing from the Transvaal and Natal regions.

---

[73] Interview with Rusty Bernstein.

The headquarters of the CPSA had been moved from the Transvaal to Cape Town following the internal vicissitudes of the 1930s. Cape members dominated both the Executive and Central Committees. Throughout the late 1940s, the Transvaal without success exerted pressure for Party headquarters to be returned to Johannesburg, arguing that the centre of political developments was located in their region.[74] More pertinently, Party members in the Transvaal and Natal (and some in the Cape) argued that the Cape leadership revealed an approach to the national organisations that was grounded in "traditional concepts of Communist Party activity" and did not "adequately understand the national movement."[75]

The differing emphases placed on class and national struggle by the Cape CPSA appear to have resulted from a number of factors. Firstly, the Cape Town branch of the ANC was small and weak in contrast with similar centres elsewhere. This was in part the result of demographic factors, Cape Town being the only centre where Africans were a minority, in addition to which migrant labourers made up a large part of the African population. As the Cape District Secretary Fred Carneson put it,

> the majority of the population were coloureds ... they were articulate, they had been well organised for years, they were used to participating in trade unions and the whole atmosphere was different in the Cape. So certainly, Johannesburg and Durban and PE, we were each operating in a different political ambience.[76]

The Cape Town branch of the ANC was led by Thomas Ngwenya, who later worked closely with the Liberal Party. Leading Congress and Youth League personalities were concentrated in the Transvaal and, to a lesser extent, Natal. As a result, the CPSA in Cape Town worked with a small ANC, and an even smaller Youth League.

The major political battles of the late 1940s were largely fought out within the Transvaal ANC, where Youth Leaguers clashed with ANC/CPSA members over a series of initiatives including the People's Assembly.[77] Leading Transvaal CPSA members such as Marks, Bopape, Mofutsanyana, Tloome, Dadoo and others worked within the Congress movement and supported moves to radicalise the Congresses. Communist Party politics in the Transvaal was to a large extent bound up with Congress politics, as Party members rejected the strand of exclusive nationalism within the ANCYL while supporting the militancy it injected into the ANC. Black Party members involved in Congress politics emerged as leading CPSA personalities in the Transvaal and Natal.

In contrast, the dominant personalities in the Cape CPSA were white. As Ben Turok put it, compared with the Cape, Johannesburg

> was a different world. In Cape Town the whites were the strongest personalities, around **The Guardian** - you could on two hands pick out a good number of intellectuals, very experienced political cadres - Simons, Bunting, Carneson, Ray Alexander, a whole group of them. Whereas the African group was small, inexperienced, and much less senior.[78]

The Cape-based CPSA Executive Committee, as well as the CC, were predominantly white, which added fuel to Youth League attacks on

---

[74] **ibid.**
[75] Interview with Ben Turok.
[76] Interview with Fred Carneson.
[77] Similar clashes took place over the 1950 Defend Free Speech Convention and May Day stay-away.
[78] Interview with Ben Turok.

'foreign' bearers of non-African ideologies.[79]

To some extent, the dominance of whites in the Cape arose from the political activities undertaken by the Party in Cape Town, which differed from those of Communists elsewhere. As Fred Carneson put it, "we had to tailor our approach, it had to be completely different in the different areas, and so it was."[80] Cape Town was the headquarters of **The Guardian**, a leftwing newspaper which focussed on the struggle against racial discrimination and carried news of the Congresses largely ignored by mainstream newspapers. Its foreign news was consistently pro-Soviet and anti-American. In the late 1940s **The Guardian** was edited by CC member Brian Bunting, and its editorial board comprised many leading Party personalities in the Cape. A large number of CPSA members worked for **The Guardian** as journalists and in selling the newspaper. **The Guardian** was in itself a major focus of activity - as Turok put it, "you ... joined **The Guardian** when you joined the movement ... you joined **The Guardian** and its circle."[81]

Lacking a strong Congress presence, the focus of CPSA activity in the Cape was divided between **The Guardian** and trade union work in which Ray Alexander, James Phillips and others had been involved for many years. A third distinguishing feature of Cape activity was continued and successful participation in parliamentary and provincial council elections. The wartime electoral successes of the CPSA had disappeared elsewhere; in the Cape the CPSA continued to win seats on the city council, and in 1948 won the Cape Western Native Representative and Provincial Council seats.

The political milieux in which Cape Communist Party members moved was in many ways different from elsewhere. Debates in the nonracial Forum Club, the Africa Club, and in organisations such as the Modern Youth Society, centred on class struggle and hostilities between Communists and Trotskyists.[82] The major ideological conflict faced by the CPSA in Cape Town was not with nationalist Youth Leaguers, but with the Trotskyist Non-European Unity Movement, the major political influence among coloured intellectuals. NEUM intellectuals such as Benny Kies and Kenny Jordaan produced a sustained critique of national struggle and its supporters (including the CPSA) for having "as its objective the triumph of capitalist democracy."[83]

Some CPSA members in the Cape expressed similar opinions regarding the limitations and dangers of nationalism. Fred Carneson noted that

> it was not only the communists that did not see things, at that stage, as a struggle for national liberation. Africans themselves did not see it as clearly as they see it now.[84]

CC member Jack Simons stated in 1954 that "the history of nationalism, whether of the progressive or imperialistic kind, is intimately bound up with the history of capitalism ... and the rise of bourgeois

---

[79] In 1950, 10 of the 17 CC members were white; for an acknowledgement of criticism of its racial composition, see AD1812 Ev.1.1.6: Jack Simons: Economics and Politics in South Africa nd.1954, p.8.

[80] Interview with Fred Carneson.

[81] Interview with Ben Turok.

[82] Interviews with Ben Turok, Amy Thornton and others.

[83] AD1812 Ev2.2/Et.1: K.Jordaan: What are the National Groups in South Africa? p.4.: Forum Club: Symposium on the National Question, June 1954.

[84] Interview with Fred Carneson.

democracy."[85] He continued:

> Communism is not necessarily the antithesis to Nationalism. It is the antithesis to Capitalism. But it must be remembered that the rise of capitalism is closely associated with Nationalism.[86]

Simons argued that "nationalism is progressive in so far as it is aimed at the removal of discrimination and the achievement of democracy"; at the same time, however, nationalism "can be exploited by an aggressive movement directed towards the suppression of another group or nation."[87]

A similar viewpoint was strongly evident in the 1950 CPSA CC report, which stressed that

> South Africa is entering a period of bitter national conflict ... On all sides the national and racial divisions are being emphasised and the realities of the class divisions are being obscured.

In such a situation, the Report argued, "nationalism need not be synonymous with racialism, but it can avoid being so only if it recognises the class alignments that cut across the racial divisions." The need to emphasise class struggle was heightened by the accession to power of Youth Leaguers within the ANC, and the anti-communist agitation of Selope Thema and other ANC members. In response, the CPSA called on its members to "make a practice of issuing immediate and critical comment on the statements of the bourgeois leaders" and disallow "the bourgeois elements in the national movements" from attacking "the working class movement ... the Party or ... adopt[ing] a negative or hostile attitude to the international working class forces."[88]

In contrast, the CPSA in Johannesburg debated with those to its right rather than its left, and engaged with African nationalists. As we have seen, many leading members of the Party were simultaneously ANC or SAIC members. Where CPSA members in Cape Town emphasised the primacy of class struggle, in the Transvaal and Natal Party members in the Congress movement fought to prove the Party's commitment to national struggle.

The Transvaal, and in particular Johannesburg, was the centre of political developments in South Africa. This was reflected in CPSA activity in the region. The squatter movements, bus boycotts and the 1946 African miners strike (and their resultant politicising effects) had all been located in the Transvaal. The Transvaal ANC was the largest and most radical ANC branch in the country. As we have seen, the Johannesburg CPSA urged black Party members to join the Congress movement, while leading Party members were at the forefront of moves to radicalise the Congresses. CC member Yusuf Dadoo was a leading figure in the SAIC which he led into alliance with the ANC. The ANC in the Transvaal was led by men such as J.B.Marks and David Bopape, joint ANC/CPSA members.

Bopape, as we have seen, succeeded in making Brakpan location the political centre of the East Rand, and establishing the CPSA as the dominant force in its politics; however, he was at the same time Transvaal ANC Secretary and a member of the Youth League. The organisational skills of J.B.Marks were demonstrated in the 1946 miners strike (Marks was President of the African Mine Workers Union) and were largely credited with the successful stay-away on May Day 1950, which

---

[85] AD1812 Ev1.1.5: Jack Simons: Lecture, nd.1954, p.18.
[86] Simons: Economics **op cit** p.7.
[87] Simons: Lecture **op cit** p.18.
[88] 1950 CC Report.

resulted in his election as Transvaal ANC President.[89] As we have seen, conservative ANC members frequently co-operated with CPSA members in opposition to Youth League radicalism; joint ANC/CPSA members worked closely with Transvaal ANC President C.S.Ramohanoe, who supported the calling of the People's Assembly for Votes for All. Ramohanoe expressed little or no support for the ideological battle waged by the ANCYL against the CPSA, characterising Leaguers as "armchair politicians who keep on going from place to place preaching Congress and doing nothing."[90]

The Transvaal ANC, however, was also the political home of leading Youth League members such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and Oliver Tambo. As a result, the conflict between the Youth League and the CPSA was to a large extent fought out in the Transvaal. The late 1940s were a period of political ferment within the Congress movement, which saw the ANC grow in size and militancy and seek alliances with Indian and Coloured organisations. In this ferment, according to Rusty Bernstein, Transvaal Communists sensitive to the Congress movement

> began to adjust the Party's view of the significance of the national liberation movement. It placed the national liberation movement much more in the forefront than it had done.[91]

This was made easier at the end of the decade as leading members of the Youth League began to show signs of changing their former hostility towards both racial co-operation and the Communist Party.

The resolution of the ANCYL/CPSA conflict.

In the early 1950s, the Youth League began to divide into two camps; one remained strictly Africanist, while the other supported racial co-operation in the form of the Congress Alliance. In the same period the conceptual language of leading Youth Leaguers came to resemble that of the CPSA, particularly the language of anti-imperialism. By 1953 Nelson Mandela spoke freely of the ANC "uncompromisingly resist[ing] the efforts of imperialist America and her satellites to draw the world into the rule of violence and brute force," and condemned "the criminal attacks of the imperialists against the people of Malaya, Vietnam, Indonesia and Tunisia."[92] As Mandela, Tambo, Sisulu and others moved into senior positions within the ANC (Mandela was co-opted to the ANC NEC in 1950), leadership of the Youth League passed to a younger generation of Fort Hare intellectuals, of whom Z.K.Matthews' son Joe Matthews was the most prominent.

As Walshe has shown, by 1951 Matthews was clearly linking the South African struggle to a broader international struggle against the "indirect enemy," the United States.[93] According to Matthews, Africans were exploited under capitalism in "the final stage of monopoly capital gone mad, namely fascism." Support for socialist countries amongst some Youth Leaguers grew because of the clear opposition to racism and support for decolonisation which distinguished them from the western countries. Joe Matthews stated:

> I must say I am pretty fed up with the U.S.A., their stand is rotten and the Eastern nations have beaten the West on the colour issue ... I ... think America has lost African friendship. As far as I am concerned I will henceforth look East where race

---

[89] Karis p.409.
[90] **The Guardian** 29-7-1948, p.5.
[91] Interview with Rusty Bernstein.
[92] Mandela: 1953 Transvaal ANC Conference speech, in Bunting p.187.
[93] Joe Matthews: 1951 ANCYL Presidential Address, in Walshe p.361.

discrimination is so taboo that it is made a crime by the state.[94] At the same time, leading Youth Leaguers supported extra-parliamentary and industrial action. With Mda, Bopape and others, Matthews argued that the "labour power of the African people" was the key to success in the struggle.[95]

The relationship between CPSA and Youth League members in the late 1940s and early 1950s was clearly more dynamic than earlier in the decade, as both organisations underwent significant changes. During this period some sections of the Communist Party adjusted their understanding of and relations with the national organisations as those organisations became increasingly prominent and active. At the same time, the Youth League was itself changing, and ANCYL members such as Mandela, Matthews, Sisulu and others increasingly utilised the tools of Marxist analysis.

As we have seen, some CPSA members argued that the ANC had emerged as an anti-communist petty-bourgeois nationalist organisation, aimed at the maintenance of capitalist relations in a nonracial society.[96] As such, it was argued, there existed the danger of a rapprochement between the ANC and the 'progressive industrialists' which had emerged during the second world war. Joe Matthews rejected the argument, asserting that "the possibility of a liberal capitalist democracy in South Africa is exactly nil" because the "political immorality, cowardice and vacillation of the so-called progressives ... render them utterly useless as a force against fascism."[97] Mda went further: the removal of legally enforced discrimination

> might under certain circumstances very well mean that the African middle class joined hands with the European, Indian and Coloured middle class in order to impose further chains and to exploit the black peasants and toiling millions ... It has happened before in many Colonial territories even in Africa. It must not happen here.[98]

More significantly, Youth League members who had taken up positions within the ANC began to accept the strategic need for alliances. The passing of laws which discriminated against the entire black population, such as the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act, and in particular the implications for all resistance movements in the Suppression of Communism Act, led to a reassessment by Leaguers of the need for a broad alliance of anti-apartheid forces. The reassessment included some of the most virulently anti-communist League members. For example, Jordan Ngubane, editor of **Inkundla ya Bantu**, castigated the CPSA in 1950 for "stampeding our people into the May Day demonstrations" in which 18 Africans were shot by the police. Nonetheless, Ngubane argued, while "Communism and apartheid are two similarly vicious evils"

> the most dangerous of those at the moment is apartheid. The African Nationalists will do well to exercise a little more statesmanship and realise that they can carry their fight against the Communists only up to a certain point if they are not going to play right into the hands of [Prime Minister] Malan ... it is more important to exercise statesmanship in our dealings with the

---

[94] CAMP:Reel12A:2:XM65:47/15: J.Matthews to Z.K.Matthews, 20-11-1952.

[95] **ibid.**; see also Karis p.103.

[96] See Danie du Plessis: The Situation in South Africa Today, p.41, in **Viewpoints and Perspectives** [hereafter **V&P**] 1/3, February 1954.

[97] Matthews: Address **op cit.**

[98] A.P.Mda: African Nationalism: Is It a Misnomer? **Inkundla ya Bantu**, 27-8-1949.

> Communists than to help the Malanites by weakening their political enemies.[99]

Attempts to build the existing ANC/SAIC alliance to include trade unions and Coloureds threatened by disenfranchisement failed. Following the 1950 May Day murders, and facing the imminent enactment of the Suppression of Communism Bill, June 26th was declared a Day of Protest and a stay-away was called. This followed consultation with the SAIC, the CPSA and the APO. The aim of ANC and SAIC leaders was to create a Co-Ordinating Committee of Congresses and trade unions, but in the event the CPSA disbanded while the APO and trade unions sent only moral support. By June 26 1950, the alliance remained limited to the ANC and SAIC.

By the end of 1950, Youth Leaguers were in control of the ANC, which was committed to a programme of extra-parliamentary action. In 1951 plans were laid for the Defiance Campaign, which transformed the ANC into a mass movement. The CPSA disbanded in June 1950, and individual black communists worked increasingly within the ANC. By 1952, debates taking place amongst former CPSA members across the country highlighted the growing emphasis amongst communists on national liberation struggle. The power struggle which it has been argued partly characterised ANCYL/CPSA relations in the 1940s had been settled in the Youth League's favour.

Existing explanations of the resolution of the CPSA/ANCYL conflict stress the diminution of hostility following the election of Youth Leaguers to the ANC National Executive Committee, where "their personal experiences of close co-operation" with communists resulted in their "anti-communist tendencies ... [being] modified."[100] It is suggested here that such explanations are partial; although undoubtedly significant, the context in which CPSA/ANCYL hostility diminished was one of ideological shifts on both sides and the entrenchment of the ANCYL within the ANC hierarchy.

Class and race in South Africa: The CPSA in 1950.

The relationship between the ANCYL and the CPSA at the end of the 1940s, it has been argued, was dynamic. Youth Leaguers made increasing use of Marxist analysis and shared anti-imperialist attitudes with Communists. Once in control of the ANC, they included the CPSA in their search for allies. In response, sections of opinion within the CPSA began to adjust the Party's understanding of and approach to national struggle. In doing so, regional differences within the CPSA again became visible.

Despite changes within the ANC and the Youth League, the CPSA in the Cape maintained what one member described as "a long tradition of suspicion of the ANC" as a bourgeois, anti-communist organisation.[101] This was a perception by no means restricted to the Party in the Cape, or shared by all Cape Party members.

Former CPSA Johannesburg District chairperson Danie du Plessis argued that the ANC should be assessed not in terms of its constituent membership, but its leadership. The latter represented an "incipient" black bourgeoisie which aimed "to integrate themselves into the existing

---

[99] J.K.Ngubane: Post-Mortem on a Tragedy **Inkundla ya Bantu**, 20-5-1950.

[100] See **inter alia** Karis p.409; Walshe p.359; Gerhart p.117.

[101] Interview with Ben Turok.

local capitalism rather than to oust the oppressors."[102] The ANC leadership, du Plessis argued, were "bourgeois or bourgeois agents" who, at a point of crisis, "would join forces with the government against the workers, and would first protect their own interests."[103]

Nonetheless, the characterisation of the ANC as a reformist bourgeois organisation was strongly identified with the Cape CPSA. According to some former Party members, the Party in the Cape placed a lesser emphasis on national liberation struggle than elsewhere. Bernstein recently stated:

> In Cape Town, where the national movement was really not significant [as in the Transvaal] the same emphasis did not exist and there began to be an emphasis on the Party as the leading element in the whole struggle and the national liberation movement to be somewhat insignificant. So this political difference began to show itself.[104]

In contrast with the Cape, sections of the Transvaal CPSA began to argue that black South Africans suffered both capitalist and colonial oppression, and that the growing national movement was a natural response to colonialism. Eddie Roux, who had hinted at this in 1928, stated in 1952:

> I do not agree that South Africa is a capitalist country. I think one may say that here we have an imperial and colonial relationship coexisting in the same country. The African people cannot only be considered to be the subjects of proletarian exploitation as in other countries; they are subjected to an extra exploitation because of their colour, something which is not usually found in other countries with laissez-faire.[105]

Over the next two years, leading members of the new SACP developed the theory of 'Colonialism of a Special Type' [CST].

The significance of CST for the present discussion lies in the approach to national struggle implicit in the theory. Those who emphasised class struggle argued that the "businessmen, financiers, landlords" and others in the ANC leadership would always "place their vested interests first", characterising them as a 'traitor class.'[106] In contrast, Bernstein, CC member Michael Harmel and others argued that apartheid, in oppressing all blacks equally, had successfully stunted the growth of an indigenous black bourgeoisie. As a result, the 'traitor class' was not to be found amongst blacks - rather, "the traitor class in South Africa is the European bourgeoisie."[107]

The adumbrators of internal colonialism argued that the Congress Alliance, and the ANC itself, represented "an alliance of the working class and the petty-bourgeois strata of the colonially oppressed peoples of South Africa." Within that alliance, the working class represented "the most energetic, whole-hearted and thoroughgoing section of the fighters for bourgeois democracy, for national liberation."[108] Moreover, it was argued, precisely because of the colonial oppression of blacks

---

[102] Danie du Plessis: Notes on certain points raised in the discussion, **V&P** 1/3, p.44.
[103] du Plessis: Situation **op cit** p.41.
[104] Interview with Rusty Bernstein.
[105] Eddie Roux: Notes on discussion, **V&P** 1/1 p.14.
[106] du Plessis: Situation **op cit**, p.41.
[107] Bernstein: Bourgeoisie **op cit**, pp.31-33; see Michael Harmel: A Note by the Speaker in **V&P** 1\3: p.38.
[108] Bernstein: Bourgeoisie **op cit** p.32.

and the lack of a significant black bourgeoisie, the working class predominated in Congress membership and increasingly in leadership positions. Pointing to the adoption of extra-parliamentary strategies by the Congresses, Harmel argued that "[i]n recent years, the militant working class tendency has wielded increasing influence in our national movements." As a result, "the policy of genuine workers' leaders" should not be "to drive out the allied classes, but rather to broaden out the movements."[109]

In the postwar years, black CPSA members began to emphasise black demands such as abolition of the pass laws above the traditional CPSA concern with the white working class.[110] The latter, according to Fred Carneson, derived from "the fact that your most active section amongst the working class was either your white workers or your coloured workers."[111] The change in direction for the CPSA was supported by Harmel, Bernstein and others, who castigated

> the pedantic arm-chair socialist types of "theoreticians" who are apparently unable to see that on practically every main issue of home and foreign policy, the outlook and aims of such bourgeois elements as, for example, Dr.Moroka, are far more progressive in content than such working class elements as the Mineworkers Union, the S.A.R. Staff Association or the S.A.T.L.C. [Trades and Labour Council][112]

Transvaal communists argued that while colonial oppression blurred class oppression, it also ensured that the national movements were overwhelmingly working class in composition.

According to Harmel, changes in ANC policy and strategy - brought about in part by the ANCYL - were evidence of growing working class influence. As the struggle intensified and working class influence became even stronger, Harmel argued, so the national movements would move away from formulating political demands and concentrate on economic issues. Moreover, because of internal colonialism, such demands would not represent the interests of the bourgeoisie; rather, they would highlight the economic content of national liberation. For Harmel, this included land redistribution 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)."[113] The Transvaal Communists who put forward the notion of internal colonialism concluded that the role of communists was to work with the national movements for the attainment of national liberation. This would lead to "the clearing away of the race versus class issue," thus highlighting class oppression and leaving it "exposed for all to see."[114]

In brief, differences existed within the CPSA in the late 1940s as to the nature of the ANC (especially as the Youth League grew in significance), and thus over the role of the Communist Party viz a viz the national liberation struggle. In the event, the tensions were not resolved before the CPSA dissolved in June 1950; it was only when members of the new SACP began to elaborate internal colonialism that a balance between the two began to emerge.

---

[109] Harmel: Note **op cit** p.38.
[110] Lodge p.29.
[111] Interview with Fred Carneson.
[112] Harmel: Note **op cit** p.37.
[113] Harmel: Imperialism **op cit** p.34.
[114] Bernstein: Bourgeoisie **op cit** p.32.

The 1950 Central Committee Report - the last it issued - revealed the tensions within the CPSA. The Report tentatively put forward the notion of internal colonialism, arguing that South Africa exhibited "the characteristics of both an imperialist state and colony within a single indivisible, geographical, political and economic entity." The black bourgeoisie, which could be expected to lead the national struggle, was

> small, fragmentary, pinned down in the poorest areas, forced to use subterfuge and illegalities to evade discriminating laws, starved of capital, and exposed to constant insecurity. It is not a class that could provide effective, militant leadership.

Transvaal Communists argued that this meant that the ANC "is not dominated by the unstable and potentially treacherous elements which have led similar movements elsewhere," and that Communists should therefore work in and with the national organisations.[115] The 1950 CC Report, in contrast, argued that the black Congresses were vague, contradictory and revealed a "tremendous capacity for evasiveness and ambiguity."[116]

In essence (and allowing for generalisation), the 1950 Report attempted to weld together the colonial analysis of the Transvaal with the class bias of the Cape. The Report concluded that while nationalism need not be racist, the only way it could avoid being so was through the transformation of existing national organisations into a single party of "workers, peasants, intellectuals and petty bourgeois ... in alliance with the class-conscious European workers and intellectuals."[117] The aim of such a party, which would work in co-operation with the CPSA, would be to strive for national liberation. However, it would have to be led by "the class-conscious workers and peasants of the national group concerned" so as to "develop class consciousness in the people, and to forge unity in action between the oppressed peoples and between them and the European working class."

In contrast, Transvaal Communists acknowledged the class content which was attached to nonracialism and against which the Youth League reacted. Rusty Bernstein claimed that while "[t]here is no doubt scope for an organisation representing all races," it was "only possible under a philosophy of socialism." In present circumstances, he argued,

> It is difficult to believe that the national liberatory struggle can be waged by any organisation other than that representing the people who are nationally oppressed.[118]

The CPSA was a heterogenous organisation participating in a variety of forms of struggle including parliamentary elections, black trade unionism and Congress politics. Throughout the 1940s the CPSA called for the emergence of a militant mass-based national organisation to prosecute the first stage of the 'two-stage' revolution. However, when the ANC began to grow in size and militancy, it was largely at the instigation of the Youth League, which endorsed a strident African nationalism and hostility towards the Communist Party. The CPSA was divided in its response.

One section of opinion within the CPSA, strongly associated with the Cape-based Party leadership, called for a greater emphasis on class struggle, arguing that the rise of African and Afrikaner nationalism was, in the words of Jack Simons, "camouflag[ing] the Universal

---

[115] Harmel: Imperialism **op cit** p.33.
[116] 1950 CC Report.
[117] **ibid.**
[118] Bernstein, quoted in du Plessis: Notes **op cit** p.46.

Exploitation of All Workers, whatever their race."[119] In response to Youth League insistence on multiracialism, the supporters of class struggle called for one Congress for all, claiming: "Real and absolute unity between all races can only be achieved in a workers' struggle."[120]

A second strand of opinion within the CPSA, which assumed leadership of the SACP after 1953, stressed the working class content of national liberation in South Africa, and called on socialists to work in close co-operation with the emerging Congress Alliance. The 1950 CC Report represented an attempted compromise between the two; it utilised an analysis of oppression in South Africa developed in the Transvaal, but reached conclusions which stressed the primacy of class struggle and the need to under-emphasise nationalism. The Party remained unsuccessful in attempting to balance the requirements of national and class struggle.

Conclusion.

Multiracialism was commonly seen by many outside the Congress Alliance (and some within it) to be a mechanism of control engineered by the CPSA after it disbanded in 1950. In fact, multiracialism represented a clear setback for those CPSA members who claimed that class struggle was obscured by nationalism. The strategic aim of multiracialism - that communities should be organised by activists drawn from their own ethnic group who best understood local conditions, sensitivities and issues - was seen by some CPSA members to represent the final victory of nationalism over class. With the formation of SACOD, whites were called upon to organise whites. This generated particular hostility from some white CPSA members who warned that "there is no such thing in social movements as freedom by the instalment plan" and refused to join SACOD.[121] Far from being the consensual act of white communists concerned to dominate and direct the Congress Alliance, the formation of SACOD highlighted tensions which had marked the CPSA in the 1940s and occasioned a major split amongst former CPSA members.

---

[119] Simons: Economics op cit p.3.
[120] du Plessis: Situation op cit p.42.
[121] Simons: Economics pp.7-8.