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The Nature and Function of Utopianism in the Communist Party of South Africa 1921-1950

Sarah Meny-Gibert

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Master of Arts
Department of Sociology, University of the Witwatersrand

May 2007

Declaration

I declare that this is my own original work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

_____

Sarah Meny-Gibert
29 May 2007

Abstract

The following study is concerned with the nature of utopianism in the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). The presence of utopianism is explored over the whole of the Party's history from 1921 to 1950. The study is essentially a historical sociology piece, and is based on the assumption that ideas are constitutive of social reality, and in particular, that utopianism is an active ingredient in society.

The CPSA's utopian vision for a future South African emerged amidst the excitement generated amongst socialists worldwide by the success of the Bolshevik Revolution. Over the years CPSA members drew on a range of traditions and identities that shaped the content and form of the CPSA's utopianism. This utopianism was influenced by a modernist discourse of Marxism, which was characterised by a strong confidence in the realisation of a socialist future. The CPSA's vision was also shaped by the political landscape of South Africa, and by the influence of the Communist International. The discussions of the CPSA's form and content provide background to an analysis of the function of utopianism in the CPSA.

An investigation of utopianism's function in the Party informs the most significant finding of the research. Utopianism played a positive role in the CPSA: it was a critical tool, and a mobilising and sustaining force. However, utopianism in the CPSA also revealed a destructive side. The negative role of utopianism in the CPSA is explored via two themes: the 'Bolshevisation' or purging of the CPSA in the 1930s under the directive of the Communist International, and the CPSA's often blind loyalty to the Soviet Union.

The presence of utopianism in the CPSA is thus shown to have been ambiguous. In conclusion it is suggested that utopianism is an ambiguous presence in society more generally, as it has the potential to function as both a positive and a negative force in society. This is an under explored topic in the literature on utopianism. The role that utopianism will play in any given social group is context related, however. The study argues for a more contextualised approach than is adopted in many of the seminal texts on utopia, to understanding the way in which utopianism is manifest and functions in society.

The study sheds new light on the history of the Party, by revealing a previously unexplored story in the CPSA's history, and makes a contribution to sociology in providing a detailed exploration of the nature and function of utopianism.

Preface

I left university after my Batchelor's degree fairly sure of my principles, or at least of certain assumptions. But over the last few years life has delivered challenges to my assumptions. People appeared to me as increasingly complicated, ambiguous, and often contradictory beings and thus social issues became more difficult to understand, and solutions to these issues seemed less clear. It appeared to me that there was no escape from living with constant tension and ambiguity.

For idealists, contradiction is difficult and life may be lived in a quest for a marrying of all of its spheres: a search for holism. Contradictions between this value or that, between words and deeds, between different spheres or areas of ones own life, are a sometimes a profoundly felt tension. It is possible that in a search for some kind of relief, a life where holism and few contradictions are possible – a better world – is imagined and held in one's mind's eye. Utopia is for many of us a life without this tension.

The inspiration to research the topic of utopianism was a fascination with those who were able to continue to imagine the *real possibility* of a far better world. One with fewer tensions and less pain, where the contradictions of life could be lessened. Members of the Communist Party of South Africa believed that this was possible. I, on the other hand, seem constantly pulled between a sceptical and a utopian frame of mind.

My initial intention was to study the utopianism of the South African Communist Party (a research project which I believe is still worthy of undertaking). When first skimming through the literature on the SACP's origins in the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), however, I was struck by the incredible utopian hopes that characterised the labour movement worldwide at the beginning of the 20th Century. In the second decade of the 1900s, members of the International Socialist League (a forerunner to the CPSA) stood beneath the statue of Jan van Riebeck in Adderley Street, Cape Town proclaiming the dawning of a new world. This was the period I was most fascinated by – as it seemed so different to our own.

My original proposal for this thesis was a rather celebratory piece on the presence of utopianism in society – and I remain celebratory of its potential. Having settled on the CPSA as the subject of my study however, I discovered a facet of the internal politics of the CSPA that struck me as a direct contrast to the vision of a harmonious, just, and democratic society the Party imagined. The 1930s period in the history of the CPSA was deeply, and in some

instances tragically, affected by the influence of the Communist International. It was at this stage marching to the tune of the brutal policies of Stalin. The CPSA blindly followed the authority of the Communist International in carrying out a purge of its own Party in the 1930s. It also remained loyal to the Soviet Union, despite evidence of the atrocities perpetrated in the Soviet Union. At first I wondered if the positive role of utopianism had only a limited reach but I began to understand the purging (or 'Bolshevisation') of the Party and the CPSA's loyalty to the Soviet Union – as part of a discourse of utopianism. An exploration of this idea forms the most important part of this study. I have nevertheless included much detail on the content and form of the CPSA's utopianism in order to provide a full sense of the nature of the CPSA's utopianism.

At certain points in the past year this project has felt rather utopian. I chose a slippery topic and there are a number of people I wish to thank who helped me to retain a grip on both the subject and my sanity. I am particularly grateful for the help of Dr Keith Beavon who generously offered his time, expertise, and sharp eye in commenting on the final draft of this report. A special thanks to my friend Simon Dagut for his valuable advice and common sense during a particularly busy time in his life. Dr Ivor Sarakinsky's expertise on the subject of utopianism was a great help to me, and his obvious enjoyment at returning to the subject of utopianism (about which there are so few people in South Africa to talk to) was very encouraging. Thanks go to Tanya Barben, Brian Bunting, Irena Filatova, and Ilse Wilson who generously gave their time, opinion, and experience when I interviewed then earlier this year and in late 2005. Thank you to Jeremy Cronin for such an interesting conversation. Alison Drew of the University of York provided very useful leads during the early research phase of this study and Michael Gardiner generously provided helpful contact details for finding relevant interviewees.

My parents' (Rose and Chris) labour of love in editing the report was much appreciated! Thank you to family and friends who offered advice and a sympathetic ear, particularly Tristan and Margot, who supported me through the constant ups and downs of this rather character building process. Finally and most importantly thank you to my supervisor, Paul Germond, who despite being under intense pressure himself, calmed me during frequent bouts of panic. Thank you so much for your belief in this eccentric topic I chose, for your academic insight and especially for your strong and expressed confidence in me.

Sarah Meny-Gibert
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Chapter One:
Introduction

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail.
(Oscar Wilde, 1891)[1]

South African society at the turn of the 20th Century was harsh and limiting for many people. It was a society built on discourses of racial and class hierarchy, which privileged a few at the expense of many. But ruptures developed in the hegemonic discourses of the time (regarding race, gender, class), where people perceived that life did not have to be the way it was, and that social divisions were constructed rather than natural. Members of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) were such people. In 1921 when the CPSA was formed, they set sail for a utopia where democracy flourished, and material deprivation and social inequality no longer plagued society.

In the following study the CPSA's vision of a socialist non-racial society is characterised as utopian and the activity directed in attempting to bring this about, as an expression of utopianism.[2] The study is an exploration of the nature of utopianism in the CPSA, specifically the form, content and function of utopianism in the CPSA are explored. The study's contribution is twofold. First of all, it sheds new light on the history of the Party, by revealing a previously unexplored story in the CPSA's history. Second, it also makes a contribution to our understanding of the nature of utopianism in society more generally.

A label is thrust upon the CPSA from which they themselves would probably have been at pains to distance themselves. The critique of utopianism by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and the construction of their analysis as 'scientific', has caused many Marxists to see the mention of utopianism as a pejorative label, one that implies lack of a realist approach to analysis and the development of solutions. Such possible concerns are spoken to sensitively in this study by developing a more nuanced definition of utopianism in contrast to its common and negative association.

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[1] Cited in Levitas, R. 1990. *The Concept of Utopia*. New York: Philip Allan, 5.

[2] The differences between the term 'utopia' and 'utopianism' will be discussed in Chapter Two.

The nature of utopianism in the CPSA is traced throughout the Party history, from 1921 to 1950 when it was disbanded.[3] The decision to cover the whole of the CPSA's history was based on the assumption that utopianism would change in form, prevalence, content and function over time. Due to the fact that the Party's was in existence for only twenty-nine years, an exploration of these changes was possible over the whole of its history.

Rationale for the Study

South Africa has a rich history of drawing on visions of an alternative society to carve out spaces of dignity and hope and to provide inspiration to rally against conditions of economic and political subjugation. The Freedom Charter is such an example. The CPSA's vision of a classless, non-racial South Africa is another.

Bundy and Beinart's work on the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) in the Eastern Cape and former Transkei makes reference to utopian elements in the discourses of the trade union in the early 20th Century.[4] Helen Bradford shows that millenarian undertones were common in ICU speeches and combined with "the messianic traditions of Christianity".[5] Millenarian movements may be considered a sub-set of utopian movements: with a concentration of utopian hopes projected onto an other worldly place or being.

Utopianism has also informed the (dys)utopia of apartheid, and the politics of contemporary social life in South Africa across a spectrum of political orientations. The post-apartheid state was envisioned as a utopian place by many – one in which all South Africans would be equal politically, socially and economically. The community of Orania in the Northern Cape

[3] Many consider the South African Communist Party a continuation of the CPSA, and though there were indeed a number of continuities, including that the majority of the founders of the SACP were from the CPSA, David Everatt has argued that first of all, the SACP was an underground party and second, that the SACP's adoption of the 'Colonialism of a Special Type' thesis provided a different ideological framework for the organisation. Everatt, D. 1991. 'The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party: 1945-1955' in Bundy, C. (Coordinator). *The History of the South African Communist Party.* Lectures presented at the University of Cape Town Summer School. Cape Town: Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, UCT, 33.

[4] Beinart, W. and Bundy, C. 1987. *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape 1890-1930*. Raven Press: Johannesburg.

[5] Bradford, H, 1987 cited in Kelley, R.D.G. 1991. 'The Religious Odyssey of African Radicals: Notes on the Communist Party of South Africa, 1921-34' in *Radical History Review*, 51, 5-24. See Bradford, H. 1987. *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924-1930.* Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Province, a separatist and exclusive community based on discourses of racial and cultural purity, provides another example of a utopian project (however dystopian it may seem to many people). Utopianism can also be found in the hope and the discourses of some of the new social movements in South Africa, which Patrick Bond has described as, "both protest-orientated and utopian, in the sense of attempting to construct the community as a future society in the decay of the old…".[6] Many of these social movements interact with the anti-globalisation or transformationalist[7] movement, whose utopianism is captured for example in the World Social Forum's slogan, "Another world is possible."[8]

Utopianism has thus been an active ingredient in the making of South African history. In fact, political scientists Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor consider "utopianism as an expression of fundamental social impulses and as an ingredient of modern political movements" around the world.[9]

The study of utopia is prominent in both literary and social studies in France and America, whilst an under explored subject in Britain.[10] Influenced more by Anglo-Saxon academic

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[6] Bond, P. 2003. 'Johannesburg's Resurgent Civil Society: For- or Against- Globalisation and World City Status?' Paper presented at the Free University, Berlin, 3.

[7] "Transformationalists" refers to those activists and social commentators who believe that institutions of governance, particularly global institutions, should (and can be) transformed into more democratic institutions to create a more equitable society.

[8] The World Social Forum was established in 2001as an alternative global gathering to the World Economic Forum.

[9] Goodwin, B. and Taylor, K. 1982. *The Politics of Utopia: A Study in Theory and Practi*ce. London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 10.

[10] British scholar Ruth Levitas is one of the most prolific writers on utopianism in contemporary utopian studies however. See for example Levitas, R. 2005. 'The Imaginary Reconstruction of Society or Why Sociologists and Others Should take Utopia More Seriously', Inaugural Lecture, University of Bristol, 24 October, http://www.bris.ac.uk/sociology/staff/pubs/levitasinaugural, Levitas, R. 2001. 'Against Work: a Utopian Incursion into Social Policy' in *Critical Social Policy*, 21(4), November, 449-465; and Levitas, R. 1990. *The Concept of Utopia*. New York: Philip Allan. The reasons for the lack of concentration on utopian studies in Britain is not clear, though Goodwin and Taylor comment that, "It would be interesting to unearth the cultural reasons for this isolation of a mode of thought which many others consider central." (Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 11). It would be equally interesting to explore why utopianism is considered in France and America. It might have something to do with the possibility that the constructions of the French (from the time of the French Revolution) and American nations were more overtly imbued with a utopian project than many other nations. Non-western interest in utopian studies is rarely mentioned in the literature. In fact, the casual reader of literature on the subject of utopianism might be forgiven for thinking that utopianism is a purely western phenomenon (which it is not), due to the dearth

traditions than any other, scholars in South Africa have echoed Britain in its neglect of utopianism. There is no tradition of "taking utopia seriously"[11] in South Africa as a force active in society, or as a useful analytical tool for understanding the competing projects of state and community construction around the world.[12] The negative association of utopianism with dreamers and Marxist critiques of utopianism may to some extent account for the dearth of South African literature on the subject. Marxism and other left-orientated political frameworks have been highly prevalent in academic circles in South Africa, and constituted an ethical commitment as much as a framework for analysis in the context of apartheid.

Passing reference is certainly made to utopia in academic writings about South Africa, but usually the term it is used pejoratively, to dismiss a discourse or vision as unrealistic. Many scholars in the town planning discipline recognise the importance of utopian thinking and normative planning theories for urban planning in South Africa.[13] South African historians have developed a few rich narratives of millenarian movements in the country. For example, J.B. Peires's *The Dead Will Arise* tells the tragic story of Nongqawuse and the Xhosa Cattle-Killings of the mid 19th Century.[14] Nongqawuse told the Xhosa to slaughter their cattle and destroy their corn and to wait in preparation for the coming of the ancestors, after which food and clothing would be plentiful, the blind would see and the cripples would walk.[15] Nongqawuse's promise of "a perfect world in which 'no one would ever lead a troubled life'" was certainly utopian.

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of literature on utopianism in non-western society. An exception is Plath's *Aware of Utopia*, where Japanese and Indian utopian visions are discussed (Plath, D.W. (Ed) 1971. *Aware of Utopia*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press). There are no doubt other works on utopianism in non-western societies, but they were not found after an extensive literature review. In addition, there may well be literature on utopianism in languages (or known by another term in languages) other than European languages and English.

[11] Title of a chapter in Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*.

[12] Ivor Sarakinsky, who has written on utopian theory, is an exception. See Sarakinsky, I. 1993. 'Utopia as Political Theory' in *Politikon*, 20(2), December, 111-125, and Sarakinsky, I. 1992. 'The Implications of Freud's Theory of Human Instincts for the Utopian Visions of Hegel and Marx'. Masters Dissertation. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand.

[13] See Vanessa Watson's discussion of utopianism and normative planning theories: Watson, V. 2002. 'The Usefulness of Normative Planning Theories in the Context of Sub-Saharan Africa' in *Planning Theory*, 1(1), 27-52.

[14] Peires, J.B. 1989. *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

[15] Peires, *The Dead Will Arise*, 312.

Few academics, however, have analysed in any depth the presence and function of secular utopianism in social and political life in South Africa, despite the fact that, as mentioned above, it has been a part of community and state construction in South Africa.[16] There is therefore a gap in the South African literature that this study will fill.

The study fills a number of gaps in the literature. Researching utopianism in the CPSA also adds a new dimension to our understanding of the history and sociology of the CPSA, as will be shown. In addition, whilst there is a wealth of literature on utopian novels (literary studies and critical theory), and theoretical writing on the concept of utopia (which examines questions like, how should utopia be defined?), empirical research is lacking and theory in the literature on utopia is not always easy to relate to practice. Few texts on utopianism are particularly grounded in anthropological and local historical data.[17] Lucy Sargisson's work on small utopian communities (to be discussed in the next chapter) is an exception.[18] This has made conducting this research difficult, as there are few similar studies from which to draw, but it has meant that this study makes a contribution by adding to an as yet small body of detailed work on how utopianism actually looked and functioned in a particular group.

The majority of the recent literature on utopia is celebratory of the role of utopianism in society, particularly in its role as a critique of the *status quo* in society, and as a challenge to

[16] There may be exceptions. For example, Neil Reid and Gary Lowe explore "the nature and force of the Afrikaner nationalist movement that has been the source of the utopian vision of apartheid" and the negative impact this vision had on the economic development of South Africa. See Reid, N and Lowe, G. 1987. 'Ethnic Utopianism and Market Reality in South Africa' in *Cato Journal*, 6(3), 869-888.

[17] Millenarianism has attracted a great deal of attention from historians and anthropologists, who have produced careful reconstructions around these millenarian movements. The same cannot be said of secular utopian movements in the West.

[18] Sargisson, L. 2005. 'Utopia in the Twenty-First Century, Part One: Anti-Utopianism, Religion and Fundamentalism.' Draft paper for discussion presented at a conference entitled: 'Is there a Role for Utopia in Twenty-First Century Ideology?', Centre for Political Ideologies, University of Sheffield and Centre for Political Ideologies, University of Oxford, University of Sheffield, 17 June, and Sargisson, L. 2004, 'Utopia and Intentional Communities'. Draft Paper for discussion ECPR Conference, Uppsala. 'Utopian communities' are small-scale communities that attempt to create an ideal community along the lines of certain principles. It should be noted that there is no doubt other detailed sociological research on how utopianism is manifest and functions in particular social groups, but such work was not found after an extensive literature review. It is certainly the case that detailed empirical work on utopianism in social and political life is not common.

the 'taken for granted' in society.[19] Writings of the forties, fifties and sixties are usually highly critical of the utopian impulse, which is claimed to inevitably lead to totalitarianism.[20] This literature was written after the horrors of Nazism and Stalinism were revealed (where dystopias were created in pursuit of someone's vision of a perfect society). These bodies of literature will be looked at in more detail in Chapter Two. The purpose here though, is to highlight the often polarised debate around the function of utopianism in society. The potential *ambiguity* of utopia is seldom highlighted, in other words, that utopianism might play both a positive and a negative role in society. There are a few exceptions. Paul Ricoeur makes brief mention of utopia's ambiguity in *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, but does not explore the idea in any detail. Sociologist Lucy Sargisson examines the internal group dynamics in small utopian communities in New Zealand, where a vision of a good life became distorted, and she concludes that a certain form of utopianism can be dangerous, but that utopianism can also be a positive force in society.[21] Leszek Kolakowski claims that a utopian vision can be dangerous if used as a constitutive ideal (if people attempt to realise a blueprint for an ideal society) but is vital as a regulative idea (i.e. in providing goals towards which activity can be directed, or ideals against which the present can be judged).[22] This

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[19] See for example: Bauman, Z. 1976. *Socialism: The Active Utopia*. London: Allen & Unwin; Fournier, V. 2002. 'Utopianism and the Cultivation of Possibilities: Grassroots Movements of Hope' in Parker, M. (Ed) *Utopia and Organization*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing / The Sociological Review, 189-216; Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*; Grey, C. and Garsten, C. 2002. 'Organized and Disorganized Utopias: An Essay on Presumption' in Parker, M. (Ed) *Utopia and Organization*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 9-23; Jameson, F. 2004. 'The Politics of Utopia' in *New Left Review*, 25, January to February, 35-54; Levitas, 'The Imaginary Reconstruction of Society', Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*; Mannheim, K. 1936 [1929]. *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Harvest Books; Ricoeur, P. 1986. *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. Edited by Taylor, G.H. New York: Columbia University Press; and Sarakinsky, 'Utopia as Political Theory'.

[20] Dahrendorf, R. 1958. 'Out of Utopia: Towards a Reorientation of Sociological Analysis' in *American Journal of Sociology*, 64(2), 115-127; Popper, K. 1945. *The Open Society and its Enemies: Volume I: The Spell of Plato*. London: Routledge; Popper, K. 1945. *The Open Society and its Enemies: Volume II: The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Shklat, J. 1965. 'The Political Theory of Utopia: From Melancholy to Nostalgia' in *Daedalus*, 94(2), 367-381; Rouvillois, F. 2000. 'Utopia and Totalitarianism' in Schaer, R, Claeys, G, Tower Sargent, L. *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*. New York: New York Public Library / Oxford University Press (New York Oxford), 316-331; and Talmon, J. 1961. *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*. London: Mercury Books.

[21] Sargisson, L. 2005. 'Utopia in the Twenty-First Century'.

[22] Kolakowski, L. 1983. 'The Death of Utopia Reconsidered' in McMurrin, S. (Ed) *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Volume IV*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 227-247.

study makes a contribution to the literature on utopianism by explicitly exploring in detail the ambiguous presence of utopia in a social group. In addition, the study makes a new contribution to the literature in studying utopia's function 'in the round' by exploring the varied ways in which utopianism played both a positive and negative, constructive and destructive role in a social group.

To summarise: the study makes a contribution to an under-explored topic in the South African literature in studying the presence of utopianism in social and political movements. It further makes a contribution in providing a detailed study of the varied ways in which utopianism functioned in a group, by grounding the study in historical and sociological detail. In particular, the ambiguous nature of utopianism (as under explored topic in the literature on utopianism) is explored in detail. Finally, a contribution is made to the historiography of the CPSA.

The study is essentially a historical sociology piece. Its subject matter is historical, but its contribution is to both to historical and social studies. The choice of subject matter was based on the assumption that ideas, as much as the material reality, are constitutive of social reality and profoundly affect the direction of historical events. More specifically the choice of study was based on the conviction that utopianism is an active ingredient in society, and thus an appropriate subject of sociology.

The CPSA was a very small party – at times its membership numbered just 175 people. This small group nevertheless had a disproportionately large effect on South African politics (seen in their contribution to the national liberation struggle). Most interestingly they stood out in the context of a segregated society: they held remarkably progressive views on race and gender relative to the rest of society in the first half of the 20th Century, constituting a small space of multi-racial integration where women could play an active role in politics.[23] This difference from the rest of society, along with their frequent explicit articulation of an alternative vision for society, pointed to the possible presence of a particularly strong strand of utopianism, making the CPSA an ideal candidate for the investigation of utopianism in political and social movements. In addition, there appeared to be an untold story in the historiography of the CPSA: that of the power and presence of utopianism in the Party, throughout its 29 years existence.

[23] Some racism and sexism certainly did exist in the Party however.

Outline of Chapters

In Chapter Two a definition of utopia is developed for the purposes of the study that can justifiably be used to describe the CPSA's vision of a future South Africa. The chapter provides a general discussion of utopia: it explores what the wide ranging literature on utopia has to say about utopia's nature and function in social and political life.

The discussion of utopia is narrowed down in Chapter Three by exploring the development of a particular form of utopianism: modern political utopias in the West. These are political manifestoes for change based on the belief in humankind's ability to affect the future for the good. Socialism is arguably the most prominent of modern political utopias. This subject is explored because socialism, and in particular Marxism, were significant ingredients in the CPSA's utopianism.

A roughly chronological exploration of utopianism in the CPSA begins in Chapter Four. The CPSA was established amidst the excitement generated in socialist communities around the world by the success of the October Revolution in Russia. At the beginning of the CPSA's history hopes for the imminent transformation of society were high. This sense of imminence was not to last, but the CPSA's utopianism continued to be characterised by an incredible confidence in the future. The reasons for this confidence are discussed. Chapter Four is essentially an investigation of the form that CPSA utopianism took, and how this changed with changing contexts in the CPSA's social environment. Not only does the chapter add to an understanding of the nature of the CPSA's utopianism, but it provides a vital backdrop to understanding the function that utopianism played in the CPSA, to be discussed later in the study.

In Chapter Five the content of the CPSA's utopian vision is addressed. The chapter discusses the personalities, traditions and events that influenced the development of the CPSA vision of socialist, democratic future South Africa. The development of the CPSA's vision is contextualised with a concentration on the late 1920s, when the CPSA adopted the Native Republic Thesis. (This thesis saw a shift towards national liberation politics and away from a sole concentration on class issues). Once again, Chapter Five adds to an understanding of the nature of the CPSA's utopianism, and provides further background to the discussion of the function of the CPSA's utopianism. Chapters Four and Five demonstrate the contingent circumstances in which utopianism operates.

An exploration of the function of utopianism in the Communist Party leads to the most significant finding of the study. In Chapter Six the positive contribution or function of the CPSA's utopianism is discussed. Utopianism is shown to have played an inspiring, mobilising and sustaining role for members of the Party. CPSA's vision of an alternative society also played a role in wider South African society by challenging the *status quo*.

Utopianism also functioned in a destructive manner in the Party, however. In Chapter Seven the destructive role of utopianism in the CPSA is explored via two themes in the Party's history: the 'Bolshevisation' or purging of the CPSA in the 1930s under the directive of the Communist International (Comintern), and the CPSA's often blind loyalty to the Soviet Union. The purging of the Party in the 1930s and the CPSA's often blind loyalty to the USSR had devastating consequences for the Party. It is shown that one of the reasons for the purging of the Party and loyalty to the Soviet Union was the presence of a certain form of utopianism in the discourses of the CPSA. Utopianism in the CPSA is shown to have been an ambiguous presence. The implications of these findings for an analysis of utopianism more generally are teased out in the conclusion to Chapter Seven and in the last chapter of the study.

The study contains a detailed historical narrative of the CPSA in order to provide a full contextualisation of the development and presence of the CPSA's utopianism. The inclusion of this detail was an explicit choice based on the conviction that any sociological study should be grounded in a thorough knowledge of the historical and social context in which the research subject exists.

Methodology

The research on which the study is based was gathered from a close reading of a range of primary documentary sources on the CPSA, supported by a few interviews with primary and secondary informants. Sources include both Party documentation and personal accounts of the CPSA's history and experiences of being involved in the movement, in the form of autobiographies, biographies, memoirs, letters, and political writings. Party documentation consulted includes: policy statements, minutes of meetings, Party constitutions, programmes, manifestos, editorials and other newspaper articles from the CPSA's press (such as *The International* and *Umsebenzi*), internal party reports, letters, and reports to the Comintern in Moscow. Archival material was gathered from a number of documentary histories and relevant collections in the University of Witwatersrand's Historical Papers Library and the

University of Cape Town's Manuscripts and Archives Department.[24] A list of primary sources can be found on page 163 of the study.

A variety of sources (from the most public to more private forms of communication) were consulted – first, in order to ensure a spread of primary material across the period studied,[25] and second, because the expression of utopianism in the CPSA was not assumed to be confined to a particular kind of text. Utopianism was assumed, however subtly or mildly, to be infused in the range of experiences of the CPSA members.

Only one CPSA member was interviewed as very few CPSA members are still alive. Former CPSA activist Brian Bunting was interviewed. Bunting is currently a member of the South African Communist Party's (SACP) Central Committee. Tanya Barben, the daughter of prominent CPSA and SACP activists, Ray Alexander and Jack Simons, was also interviewed regarding her recollections of her parents' involvement in, and motivations for, activism in the CPSA. Ilse Wilson (nee Fischer) was interviewed for her recollections of her parents' involvement in the CPSA. Bram Fischer was a prominent CPSA and SACP activist and his wife Molly was also an active member of both Parties. Jeremy Cronin, SACP Deputy General Secretary, was interviewed for his historical knowledge of the CPSA,[26] and as an intellectual of the SACP who has given the philosophies and discourses of the CPSA and SACP considered thought. Dr. Irena Filatova and Dr. Ivor Sarakinsky were consulted for their knowledge of Soviet Union political and social life and utopian theory respectively.[27]

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[24] Namely, the Simons Collection from the University of Cape Town, and the South African Race Relations Political Collection, the Edward Roux Papers, and the S.P. Bunting Papers from the University of the Witwatersrand.

[25] Systematic records of official CPSA documents were not kept in a CPSA (or later SACP) archive. Researchers have had to rely mostly on the personal collections of CPSA or SACP members. These collections include party documents, letters, and minutes etcetera, ranging from private correspondence to official party documents. As these are not official archives, however, documents could not systematically and equally gained for each period or document type.

[26] See for example Cronin, J. 1991. 'Origins and "Native Republic"' in Bundy, C. (Coordinator). *The History of the South African Communist Party.* Lectures presented at the University of Cape Town Summer School. Cape Town: Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, UCT, 7-20.

[27] Dr Irena Filatova is Russian and was Professor and Head of Department of African Studies at Moscow State University. She moved to South Africa in the 1990s and was Professor at Durban-Westville University (now University of KwaZulu Natal). She is a co-author of the documentary history: *South Africa and the Communist International* (Davidson, A. Filatova, I. Gorodnov, V. Johns, S. (Eds.) 2003. *South*

It should be noted that official party statements were not necessarily the opinions of the rank and file members. The leaders shaped much of the direction, policy, and propaganda of the Party, though influenced by the Party's general membership (to varying degrees at different times). It will be on these prominent men and women that the study concentrates. This is partly because it is they who primarily shaped its trajectory and developed its vision of an alternative future society, and more mundanely because opinions of the rank and file and less prominent membership were not easily ascertained. Historical documents, biographies, and autobiographies that have been kept on the Party and its members, document the statements and lives of the more senior, or prominent members.[28] It is the more senior members, often better educated and with better access to resources, who articulated, in a form accessible to us now, what the Party and a socialist future meant for them.

A few words of qualification are needed regarding the study of the function of utopianism. Studying the function of utopianism in the CPSA is essentially a study of impact. It demands teasing out and isolating the causal factors at work in the actions and statements of CPSA members. As CPSA members did not identify utopianism as a phenomenon at work in their own lives – an assessment of its impact is difficult. Very few CPSA members are still alive to be interviewed in order to explore pointed questions regarding the role of utopian visions. Such difficulties – how to interpret facts and causes from socio-historical data – are not the preserve of this study, but common to much historical enquiry, and to a lesser extent sociological research of contemporary society, and demand a self-consciousness about methodology and theoretical assumptions.[29]

Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History Volume 1: Socialist Pilgrims to Bolshevik Footsoldiers 1919-1930. London: Frank Cass and Davidson *et al*. 2003. *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History. Volume II: Bolshevik Footsoldiers to Victims of Bolshevisation, 1932-1939.* London: Frank Cass). Dr Ivor Sarakinsky is a lecturer at the University of Witwatersrand. He wrote his masters dissertation on utopianism in the work of Hegel, Marx and Freud and is possibly the only academic in South Africa who has a thorough knowledge of utopian theory. Sarakinsky lectured on the subject for a number of years.

[28] There are a few exceptions, for example Pauline Podbrey, an active but not senior CPSA member wrote an autobiography: Podbrey, P. 1993. *White Girl in Search of the Party*. Pietermaritzburg: Hadeda Books.

[29] For debates on the interpretation of history see for example, White, H. 1985. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Relativism*: Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press; Evans, R. 1997. *In Defense of History*. London: Granta; Appelby, J, Hunt, L. and Jacob, M. 1994. *Telling the Truth about History*. New York: Norton, and many others. See also Rabinow, P. and Sullivan, W.M. (Ed) 1979. *Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look.* Berkeley: University of California Press for essays 'problematising' the study of

For the most part the implications of utopianism in the lives of CPSA members have been teased out based on a careful, wide and sustained reading of the CPSA literature, with sensitivity to the presence of utopianism.[30] The literature shows a deep commitment on the part of the majority of CPSA members to the ideal of socialism and to the vision of a non-racial, socialist future.[31] Such commitment is quite reasonably assumed to have some causal impact on the fortunes of individual members and on the Party. This assumption, coupled with both the occasional mention by a CPSA member of the role of socialism or an ideal future in their lives,[32] and on the function of utopianism asserted by others authors in the field of utopian studies, forms the basis for the conclusions drawn regarding utopias function.[33]

Note on Terminology

In a society with a history of racial segregation one is often forced to deal in terms of race oneself. The terms 'African', 'white', 'coloured' and 'Indian' have been used in the study to designate the racial categories used under apartheid and to a large extent in present society. The term 'black' is used more broadly to refer to people who were not designated as 'white' under apartheid.

The CPSA used a range of terms to refer to race throughout its existence (white, European, black, Native and Bantu for example). These terms will not be utilised in this study except in

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society and social processes, and which point to the need for an awareness of the interpretive, rather than scientific, nature of social enquiry.

[30] The literature includes official party documentation, party histories and CPSA members' autobiographies, biographies, memoirs and political writings, as mentioned. See a list of primary source material on page 163 of the study.

[31] For those of whom there is biographical information.

[32] See for example the biography of David Ivon Jones (Hirson, B. and Williams, G.A. 1995. *The Delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones 1883-1924*. London: Core Publications); the autobiography of Bernard Sachs (Sachs, B. 1949. *Multitude of Dreams: A Semi-autobiographical Study*. Johannesburg: Kayor Publishing House) and Pauline Podbrey (Podbrey, *White Girl in Search of the Party*). See also an occasional reference in Joe Slovo's autobiography (Slovo, J. 1995. *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography*. Randburg: Ravan Press); Eddie Roux's (Roux, E. and W. 1970. *Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux*. London: Rex Collings) and biographical detail of Yusuf Dadoo in Slovo, *Slovo*, Soobrayan, V. 1993. *Yusuf Dadoo*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, and the introduction (written by Dadoo) to Bunting, B. 1981. (Ed). *South African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party 1915-1980*. London: Inkululeko Publications.

[33] See for example Bauman, *Socialism*; Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*; Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*; Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*; and Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*.

reference to proper nouns used by the CPSA (for example: The *Native* Republic Thesis). (Towards the end of the Party's history, the CPSA developed a greater self-consciousness about race terms).

The reader will notice that the terms 'socialism' and 'communism' have been used fairly interchangeably, as with the derivatives such as 'socialist'. In general CPSA members referred to themselves as 'communists' and to the ideology or movement as 'socialist' or 'socialism'. The same practice has been used in the study except where people quoted have used 'communism' to describe the movement or ideology in question. Members of communist parties are referred to as 'communists'. The term 'socialist' is used more broadly. In fact the term 'socialism' is far broader than 'communism'. Communists are Marxist socialists, but there are may other traditions of socialism. Exploring and using a strict delineation between the terms, however, is not necessary in this study.

Chapter Two:
Exploring Utopia

Introduction



Fig. 2.1: Portrait of Thomas More by Hans Holbein the Younger (1527).

The word 'utopia' entered the English language with the publication of Thomas More's famous allegorical book *Utopia*, in 1516.[34] More (see figure 2.1) coined the word from Greek *eutopia*, a good place; and *outopia*, nowhere. More's utopia is the good place which does not exist. The term has taken on a life of its own in the last 500 years, however, and has been used in a number of different ways by scholars and in common parlance since the term was first coined.

In common parlance, utopia is associated with the impossible. Paul Ricoeur notes that, "[The concept of utopia] frequently has a pejorative reputation… It is seen to represent a kind of social dream without concern for the real steps necessary for movement in the direction of a new society."[35] The common usage of the term utopia, as Zygmunt Bauman points out, has stripped "Thomas More's term of its intended ambiguity" and reduced "it to only one of the two originally intertwined meanings – to 'a place which does not exist' (no longer associated

[34] See More, T. 1997 [1516]. *Utopia.* Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited. More was an author, lawyer and politician in England during the reign of King Henry the VIII. More became Lord Chancellor of England, but was executed by Henry the VIII for refusing to sign the Oath of Supremacy which accepted the King as the Supreme Head of the Church in England. More's book *Utopia*, in which a traveller Raphael Hythloday relates his experiences of the living on the island of Utopia, was a veiled critique of England's political and social life, but was also a musing on what the ideal solution to societal and political questions is and whether this could be attained. Some have interpreted it as a critique of the possibility that a better society can be designed. It is a very ambiguous book.

[35] Ricoeur, P. 1986. *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia.* Edited by Taylor, G.H. New York: Columbia University Press, 1.

with ‘a place to be desired’, eutopia)”.[36]

In more scholarly circles, however, ‘a place to be desired’ has remained an important characteristic of utopia. Scholars have used the term utopia to cover a broad range of subject matter. Included in discussions of utopia are: literary fictions and folk legends of perfect places and times (oral or written depictions)[37] and political and philosophical manuscripts and books regarding the ideal society, or an ideal principle.[38] The term ‘utopian’ has also been used to describe small-scale communities (‘referred to as ‘utopian communities’) that attempt to create an ideal community along the lines of certain principles.[39] Political parties and social movements may also share a collective endeavour to create an ideal or far better future. Utopian in this sense refers to the power and presence of imagination, rather than referring to the communities that have actually created utopias. Millenarian and messianic visions and social movements have also been included under the heading of ‘utopian’.

‘Utopia’ has thus been used as a broad umbrella under which a variety of concepts and subjects are discussed. The word utopia is used both as a noun to denote a perfect place and as an adjective to refer to aspirations for a perfect place or society. Given the term’s broad usage, it is essential to clarify the definition of utopia to be used here. In the following chapter a definition of utopia is developed for the purposes of the study. In addition, the literature on the nature and function of utopia in social and political life is discussed and

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[36] Bauman, Z. 1976. *Socialism: the Active Utopia*. London: Allen & Unwin, 10.

[37] The land of Cockaigne (see figure 2.3), a Middle Age English image of paradise, is an example. Literary and oral depictions of utopia are often inverted mirror images of society. In Cockaigne, a land envisioned by peasants, everything is free, cooked larks fly into men’s mouths and rivers run with wine. Interestingly descriptions of Cockaigne feature in the American ballad *Big Rock Candy Mountain.* The song was written during the Great Depression of the 1920s. The lyrics in this song speak of lakes of stew and whiskey, where “The jails are made of tin, And you can burst right out again as soon as they put you in.” (Cited in Levitas, R. 1990. *The Concept of Utopia*. New York: Philip Allan, 190.) For discussions of Cockaigne see Pleij, H. 2003. *Dreaming of Cockaigne.* New York: Columbia University Press, and Kumar, K. 1991. *Utopianism*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

[38] For example, from Plato’s *Republic*, to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’s *The Communist Manifesto.*

[39] ‘Utopian communities’ are also referred to as ‘intentional communities’ in the literature. Examples include, Henri de Saint-Simon’s socialist communities in the 1830s in France or more contemporary communities such as hippie communes of 1960s, separatist feminist lesbian communes, eco-villages etcetera. Lucy Sargisson defines intentional communities as “utopian social experiments in microcosm” – a group of people living and possibly also working together, who share a collective endeavour to create a certain way of life (Sargisson, L. 2004. ‘Utopia and Intentional Communities’. Draft paper for discussion at the ECPR Conference, Uppsala, 4).

analysed. This discussion provides the theoretical foundation for later discussion of utopianism in the CPSA.

Defining Utopia

Certain scholars have argued that the term 'utopia' should be used to denote a particular literary genre only, namely fictional works which depict, with whatever aim, a perfect or near perfect society, thus continuing the tradition of More's famous work.[40] Ivor Sarakinsky however, claims that "Instead of confining these fantastic notions of human happiness or social harmony to the creative arts, it is possible to situate them firmly within the ambit of mainstream political theory."[41] Goodwin and Taylor argue that utopia is part and parcel of political theory and practice,[42] rather that a quirky radical anomaly. Geoffrey Hodgson claims that "social science and politico-economic policy – however pragmatic – can never be entirely free of goals and ends, of visions, and of fragments of utopia."[43] For example, as citizens we evaluate the success or fairness of policies and institutions in relation to some ideal.[44]

Regarding this broader conceptualisation of utopia as more than a simple depiction of a perfect life, Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor note, "In the twentieth century it has become more fashionable to talk of 'utopianism' than utopia, a term that embraces forms of thought incorporating utopian elements while not purveying complete utopian blueprints".[45] The term 'utopianism' is thus broader than 'utopia'. In this study, 'utopia' is used to denote a vision or depiction of an ideal or better existence, whilst 'utopianism' will be used to denote "forms of thought incorporating utopian elements"[46] or an expression of the presence of utopia. For example, there may be utopianism in the *actions* of a social movement attempting to bring about change in society in line with a utopian *vision*.

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[40] See for example Kumar, 1987 cited in Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 166.

[41] Sarakinsky, I. 1993. 'Utopia as Political Theory' in *Politikon*, 20(2), December, 112.

[42] Goodwin, B. and Taylor, K. 1982. *The Politics of Utopia: A Study in Theory and Practice*. London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd.

[43] Hodgson, G.M. 1995. 'The Political Economy of Utopia' in *Review of Social Economy*. 53(2), 196.

[44] For example, in order to say whether the justice system in a country is standing up to our expectations, we compare it to an ideal state of justice: the judiciary should be impartial, disinterested, consider all evidence before concluding and should not swayed by political pressure or personal experiences.

[45] Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia,* 16.

[46] Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia,* 16.

Some scholars have claimed that traces of utopianism and of utopian visions are infused in all aspects of life. Ernst Bloch for example conceived of utopianism as an expression of hope which "permeates everyday consciousness and its articulation in cultural forms"[47] and is found in cultural expressions as varied as day-dreams, fairy tales, music, art, philosophical manuscripts and political activity.[48]

Bloch's work raises important questions about the utility of a broad definition of utopia. Does 'utopia' lose meaning under such a broad definition? Conversely, do we lose a potentially useful tool for social analysis by defining utopia too narrowly – as only depictions of a perfect society? Matters of definition (while they should not constrain discussion of utopia in mindless categorization), are important in refining the exploratory and analytical potential of looking for utopianism in the subjects of social enquiry.

Levitas's suggestion that a definition of utopia should be broad enough "to accommodate changes in the way in which aspirations for a better life may be expressed" seems sensible.[49] It begs the question however as to whether utopia should merely be defined as visions of a

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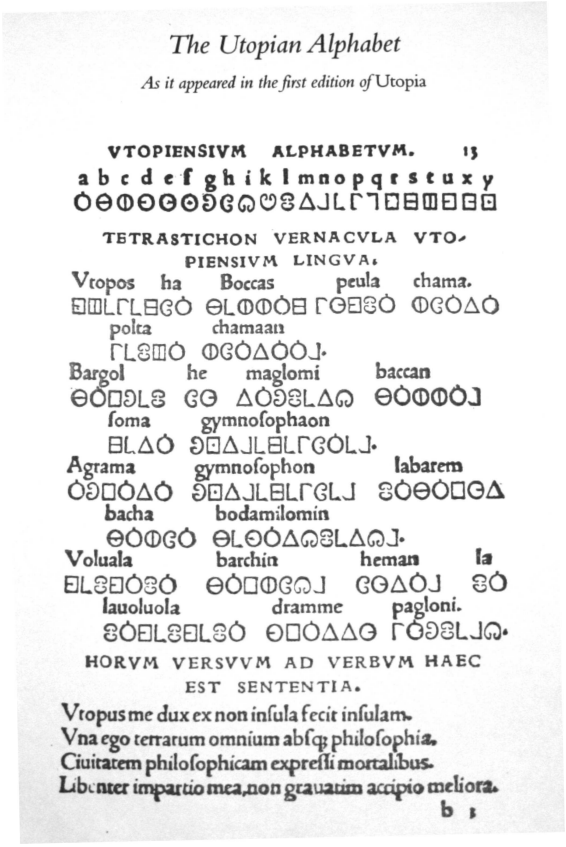
[47] Kellner, D. Undated. 'Ernst Bloch, Utopia and Ideology Critique', On 'Illuminations: The Critical Theory Website': www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell1.htm

[48] See Bloch, E. 1986 [1959].*The Principle of Hope*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell. Bloch sees utopianism as a universal human impulse. Levitas points out, however, that "[T]here is every reason to expect that societies will differ both in the extent to which a gap between needs and available or potential satisfactions is experienced, and in the extent to which there are cultural hypotheses about the potential closure of this gap, as well as the nature of these hypotheses." (Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 184.) Imagining a perfect society may be more prevalent in societies whose conceptualisation of time is orientated towards the future, such as those influenced by Judeo-Islamic-Christian eschatologies. This does not exclude the existence of utopias imagined in other places, rather than another time, but hints at prevalence, function and *effect* of utopianism. But the spread of Islam and particularly of modern Christianity via trade, missionaries and colonialism, meant that by the nineteenth century few peoples had not been influenced in some way by more linear notions of time. Millenarian movements for example, which were varyingly orientated either towards heaven or earth, and varyingly mobilised citizenry, spread to lands where such movements were not documented to have been experienced before. It is beyond the scope of the study to explore why utopias may be produced in any given historical context as this would have broadened the scope and length of this study well beyond the requirements of a course work Masters study. Briefly though, the creation of utopias in society involves a number of factors including but not limited to: an acute sense of alienation or oppression in society (Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 138), or dissatisfaction with society, coupled with an optimist dispossession (in the case of utopias that people wish to realise) or a creative disposition (in the case of only imaginary or literary utopias).

[49] Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 5.

better existence, or more narrowly as visions of an ideal or perfect society. Similarly, are only fantastical or impossible visions utopian, or should potentially realisable goals be included? And in what context might we denote a realisable vision utopian? Should the day-dreams of an individual be included as utopian? Do we include other worldly visions of a perfect place or limit the utopian to the secular? All these questions invariably crop up in discussions of what constitutes utopian, and will be explored below.

For Grey and Garsten utopias are "social and political philosophies about how the world should best be organised."[50] Theirs is a useful definition in that it allows for the utopian to be found not only in detailed descriptions of an ideal life but in social and political discourse in general. It remains agnostic on the question of whether or not utopias are depictions of the perfect society.


The Utopian Alphabet

As it appeared in the first edition of Utopia

VTOPIENSIVM ALPHABETVM.

a b c d e f g h i k l m n o p q r s t u x y

TETRASTICHON VERNACVLA VTOPIENSIVM LINGVA.

Vtopos ha Boccas peula chama.

polta chamaan

Bargol he maglomi baccan

ſoma gymnoſophaon

Agrama gymnoſophon labarem

bacha bodamilomin

Voluala barchin heman la

lauoluola dramme pagloni.

HORVM VERSVVM AD VERBVM HAEC EST SENTENTIA.

Vtopus me dux ex non inſula fecit inſulam.
Vna ego terrarum omnium abſq; philoſophia.
Ciuitatem philoſophicam expreſſi mortalibus.
Libenter impartio mea, non grauatim accipio meliora.

b 5

Fig. 2.2: The Utopian alphabet, invented by More, as it appeared in the first edition of Utopia, *with the Latin translation.*

Levitas claims: "Some utopias may be possible worlds, others not; and while it may be fruitful to reflect on these issues, they are not definitive ones."[51] First, as Levitas notes, our notion of what is realistic is partially socially constructed[52] and one might add, psychologically varied. Second, aspects of a particular utopian vision may be possible and other aspects, impossible. Third, all human beings hold in their minds both knowledge of a real world as they perceive it, and images which are a product of their creative or imaginative abilities. These relate to each other in a complex way. One may hold in ones mind's eye an image of an impossible goal (which one recognises as an ideal which cannot

[50] Grey, C. and Garsten, C. 2002. 'Organized and disorganized utopias: an essay on presumption' in Parker, M. (Ed) *Utopia and Organization*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 9.

[51] Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 5.

[52] Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 5.

be implemented in totality) and yet be inspired by it and attempt to create fragments of the ideal society envisioned. Thus to attempt to draw a line between visions of impossible and possible worlds is first of all somewhat *arbitrary* and second, fails to capture the *complexity of the act of imagining an ideal society*. An investigation of utopianism in social and political life therefore seems best served by including visions of a better life along a continuum of possibility.

If utopias may be possible or impossible visions, are all visions of a better existence utopian? Ernst Bloch for example, places few restrictions on what we might consider utopian. His definition of utopia as expressions of hope, which can be found in a myriad of cultural expressions, is perhaps the broadest. Under his definition the day dream of one individual is utopian.[53] Similarly, Levitas defines utopia as a desire for a better way of being. She attempts to come to grips with an overarching framework that allows one to incorporate the different articulations and possible effects of utopianism – and to explore how variations in form, function, and content relate to "the conditions of the [utopia] generating society".[54]

The definition of both Levitas and Bloch are useful in that they do not limit a definition of utopia to *visions or depictions* of an ideal or perfect life, but include *aspirations* for an ideal existence. This is important, as it is argued here that utopianism is not only present in an image or goal of a better future but (in the case where utopian visions inspire action) in activity directed towards this goal.[55]

Thus the broad definitions of utopia referred to above will inform the analysis in the present study *but*, for the purposes of this study the simple existence of desire or hope does not necessarily denote the presence of utopianism.

The definition of utopia advanced for the purposes of this study is wide (a narrow definition is of little use in the investigation of social and political practice). Utopia denotes either the possible or the impossible: fantastical images (the land of Cockaigne for example) qualify as utopian, as do visions which seem impossible given present circumstances in society (the immediate transformation of South Africa into a communist society) and goals or visions that

[53] See Bloch, *The Principle of Hope.*

[54] Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 8. Note that hope and desire are not the same thing. Hope implies an element of anticipation, whilst desire speaks merely of what we want. Levitas's definition is thus broader than Bloch's.

[55] This is certainly the case in the CPSA, as will be shown.

are obviously possible, even if difficult to attain (the vote for black people in South Africa in the 1940s for example). This answers questions about whether utopia refers to the ideal society or whether it may be broad enough to include merely images of a better society. Both qualify.

The identification of utopia will thus be difficult in practice however: a vision which imagines a radical change in society is easy to denote as utopian but that which wishes for changes within the existing structure of society is less easily denoted as utopian. It is not useful for the purpose here to denote everything that imagines something better than the present circumstances as utopian (for example, a desire for a stress free week at work).

A number of qualifications of the broad definition of utopia advanced by Bloch and Levitas are therefore suggested. First, it is suggested that there are "degrees of utopianism" in existence in society: images of a perfect community for example, show the presence of a radical utopianism, and visions of less extreme changes to existence show the presence of a less radical utopianism (this does not say anything about the relative effect of more or less radical utopian visions in society.)

Second, utopia may be usefully thought of as a phenomenon that is collective or social in its nature. Whilst people may hold fantasies of a beautiful wife, a dream home – a utopian vision is a more communal or shared vision. It may not be envisioned in exactly the same way by all people, and it may begin as the vision of one person, such as Marx. Utopia is not merely a vision of change in ones own life but is a vision of change brought about for a larger group of people, or surrounding environment. The suggestion of delineating social visions versus individual day-dreams and wishes is not intended to be definitive. Dreams and private hopes for improvement in an individual's life cannot be wholly separated from collective or group imagination.

Third, in the interests of consistency in addressing the most fundamental questions posed in the literature about the definition of utopia: a utopian vision may be an image of the future, an idealisation of the past, or an image of a better life existing elsewhere, including heaven. Utopias may be secular or other worldly.[56]

[56] In this regard, there is much debate in the literature about whether millenarianism should be considered utopian. Peter Worsley describes millenarian movements as those "movements in which there is an

The definition developed here, retains one of More's intertwined meanings, *eutopia*, the place to be desired, and remains agnostic about its possibility. Essentially, denoting what is utopian is meaningful when socially and historically located.[57] This is partly because identifying what is possible is partly context related, and a subjective process. What defines something as utopian is partly the gap between what is and what is imagined in a given utopia. What appears utopian now may well not appear so in a hundred years time – or in another place. Thus a certain tension needs to be held in the identification of a utopia or utopianism in society. Utopia (if it is to be useful in research social and political practice) can never be a strictly defined once and for all.

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expectation of, and preparation for, the coming of supernatural bliss." (Worsley, P. 1986. *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of "Cargo" Cults in Melanesia.* New York: Schocken Books, 12). Some scholars claim that utopia and millenarianism are two separate phenomena (see for example Kolakowski, L. 1983. 'The Death of Utopia Reconsidered' in McMurrin, S. (Ed) *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Volume IV*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 230). Millennial visions for example are often about an end to time, the establishment of life outside of human time (Harrison, J.F.C. 1984. 'Millennium and Utopia' in Alexander, P. and Gill, G (Eds.) *Utopias*. London: Duckworth, 65). Yet fictional examples which imagine the establishment of earthly bliss (the Land of Cockaigne for example) complicate the picture. In addition, although millenarian movements are defined by the influence of other worldly conceptualisations of utopia, some millenarian movements have mobilised around very worldly concerns and concrete political objectives (Thrupp, S. 1970. *Millennial Dreams in Action: Studies in Revolutionary Religious Movements*. Schocken Books: New York). Another distinction made is that utopianism involves the agency of humans in order to bring it about, whereas millenarianism involves the work of a supernatural being. However, classical utopias of More's kind simply imagined the perfect place to exist, how it was established was not always considered interesting, and some millenarian social movements saw their own agency as a necessary part of preparing for the coming of heavenly or earthy paradise. Thus the terrain of utopian and millenarian studies seems best served by keeping the distinction in the sense that millenarianism and images of heavenly paradise may be considered a sub-set of utopias, and noting that the distinction is fluid. In addition, there are elements of the millenarianism in utopianism and elements of the utopian in millenarianism. Norman Cohn, who has undertaken detailed research into Medieval millenarian movements, describes Nazism and 'Soviet Communism' as millenarian movements whose lineage lies in Medieval-Reformation millenarian movements (Cohn, N. cited in Barkun, M. 1974. 'Millenarianism in the Modern World' in *Theory and Society* 1 117-146). Barkun also describes Nazism, Bolshevism and Chinese communism as modern millenarian movements.

[57] Conversation with Simon Dagut, Johannesburg, July 2006.

The Function of Utopia

Sociologist Karl Mannheim, who wrote one of the seminal texts on utopia, *Ideology and Utopia*, claims that utopia should be defined in terms of its function.[58] For Mannheim, utopia is not defined by envisioning a perfect world that is impossible to attain but by its potential 'realisability', in other words by its potential for realising change. Mannheim states:

> …we should not regard as utopian every state of mind which is incongruous with and transcends the immediate situation (and in this sense, "departs from reality"). Only those orientations which, when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time.[59]

In Mannheim's definition, utopias are only those visions or movements that change the *status quo* or "shatter a given order". It is not suggested that utopia should be defined in the way that Mannheim defines it (a definition of utopia has already been put forward above) but Mannheim's definition is interesting for exploring what utopianism potentially *does* in society, namely that it has the potential to transform society. The driving force behind utopianism's potential to transform society is due to the following features: utopia's critical function as well as its inspiring and mobilising functions.

Utopia's ability to powerfully critique the *status quo* is possibly its most celebrated function in the literature on utopia. Contemporary scholar Thomas Moore suggests that, "The function of utopia is to highlight the disparity between actual space (how society is) and the imagined space (how society could be under new circumstances)".[60] In so doing an implicit critique of the present is provided. In this vein, Paul Ricoeur writes:

> …the development of new, alternative perspectives defines utopia's most basic function. May we not say then that imagination itself – through its utopian function – has a constitutive role in helping us rethink the nature of our social life? Is not utopia – this leap outside – the way in which we radically rethink what is family, what is consumption, what is authority, what is religion, and so on? Does not the fantasy of

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[58] Mannheim, K. 1936 [1929]. *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Harvest Books.

[59] Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 192.

[60] Moore, T. 2002. 'Downsizing Utopia', abstract to paper presented at the Third International Conference of the Utopian Studies Society, www.biggar-net.co.uk/utopia/art-2002.htm.

> an alternative society and its exteriorization "nowhere" work as one of the most formidable contestations of what is?[61]

Ricoeur thus correctly identifies utopia as a potential critique of the *status quo*, and as a challenge to the *status quo*. Utopias may challenge notions of *what* is possible. For example Valerie Fournier, commenting on contemporary grassroots social movements apposed to capitalism, notes that utopianism, by "opening up spaces for alternatives", "may shatter any notion of 'inevitable' or 'natural' forces…"[62] Utopias may identify social problems, and furthermore they may present innovative solutions to present problems by being unconstrained by the usual parameters of what is imagined as possible.

Bauman also celebrates utopia's critical and transformative potential. In *Socialism: The Active Utopia*, he writes:

> Utopias relativise the present. One cannot be critical about something that is believed to be an absolute. By exposing the partiality of current reality, by scanning the field of the possible in which the real occupies merely a tiny plot, utopias pave the way for a critical attitude and a critical activity which alone can transform the present predicament of man. The presence of utopia, the ability to think of alternative solutions to the festering problems of the present, may be seen therefore as a necessary condition of historical change.[63]

Read literally, Bauman is of course incorrect as it is not the case that utopianism is a necessary condition of historical change.[64] Rhetorically, however, Bauman's point is important: utopianism has been an active ingredient in many radical changes made in society by human beings, for example, revolutions have been fought in pursuit of a vision of a better world, nations' constitutions have been written with an ideal community in mind. Bauman is referring to the extent to which ideas and visions shape the directions of human events (a comment made in the Introduction to this study), specifically when ideas or visions are taken

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[61] Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 16.

[62] Korten, 1995 quoted in Fournier, V. 2002. 'Utopianism and the Cultivation of Possibilities: Grassroots Movements of Hope' in Parker, M. (Ed) *Utopia and Organization*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing / The Sociological Review, 197.

[63] Bauman, *Socialism*, 13.

[64] Human history has been changed by natural disasters, by technological change, by war in pursuit of non-visionary goals etcetera, or simply by the small, mundane, everyday incremental changes in society.

up by a collective and become a force for change.

Utopias have transformative potential partly because they are able to inspire and mobilise people to attempt to bring about the utopia, or fragments of it. Utopias evidently do not constitute the only powerful critical or mobilising tools in society, but they often incorporate symbols and images, mediums beyond dry political language, which conjure up goals more concretely, and problems more vividly. Sarakinsky writes, "[Utopian thought] smashes the concrete barriers of the mundane and allows creativity and the imagination to run free. Utopias grasp the wishes, passions and fantasies of people and realises then in magnificent models of a not-too-distant future."[65]

The imagined space may provide a goal towards which human agency and energies may be directed, and provide hope which sustains political activity. The potential inspirational and mobilising power of utopia however, is contingent upon the circumstances in which utopianism functions. As David Plath notes:

> Utopian image-work does not automatically unlock impulses to action. Often enough the utopigrapher himself is content to describe his otherland, and he does not furnish directions for getting there or bolster men's willingness to try. In order to move men, one must also create roles for them to play, dramas of suffering and salvation in which they may star; and one must co-ordinate their performances. Visions, plans, and motivations are all three necessary for effective group action.[66]

Any attempt to celebrate or define utopia solely in terms of its critical and potentially transformative function misses the variation in utopian expression and reduces the significance of any given utopia's *content* or *form* too much. Though almost by definition

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[65] Sarakinsky, 'Utopia as Political Theory', 111. Sarakinsky's article is essentially making an argument for seeing utopia as an important part of political theory and practice – by showing what utopia has that the dry language of political and social theory and policy do not: "Narrative versus science, imagination versus logic, it is clear which one of the two is more powerful in grasping and resonating the aspirations of people. For Habermas (1986: 146), '…People do not fight for abstraction, but with images. Banners, symbols and images, rhetorical speech, allegorical speech, utopia-inspired speech, in which concrete goals and conjured up before people's eyes, are indeed necessary constituents of movements which have any effect on history at all.'" (123).

[66] Plath, D.W. 1971. 'Introduction: Utopian Strivings' in Plath, D.W. (Ed). *Aware of Utopia*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 68.

utopias are critical of the present by imaging something better, their function – or intention – is not always critical, nor does it necessarily mobilise action for change in society. Utopias may act simply as copying mechanisms, in a similar way to a belief in other an worldly paradise or heaven. If an individual believes that the utopia he or she imagines may, or will come about, this copying mechanism might work in conjunction with activity directed towards changing society (a Marxist activist's belief in a future socialist state for example). The legend of the Land of Cockaigne however, may have been intended as a compensatory image. In addition, the critical function of a utopia may have a limited lifespan – it may lose its critical edge once elements of the utopia have been incorporated into the *status quo*.[67] To celebrate a utopia's critical function outside of the context in which it was imagined, spoken of, disseminated – is incorrect.



Fig. 2.3: Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Land of Cockaigne *(1567).*

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In addition, a particular utopia may develop a critique of the *status quo* but place blame for the evils in society with an innocent group of people (for example, Hitler's Third Reich, a utopian vision, implicitly and explicitly placed blame for the *status quo* on the shoulders of Jews) or may envision a solution to the *status quo* which has negative, or devastating consequences for certain segments of the population.[68]

[67] Though Bauman commented that "one utopia treads on the heels of the other". Bauman, *Socialism*, 140.

[68] One could certainly call Hitler's Third Reich a dystopia. But the vision only had mobilising power because it was an image of the good life for some people, and thus is a utopian vision.

It is when utopia inspires group action, when people believe that society should be radically redone in accordance with a particular plan, that utopianism reveals a more ambiguous nature. Sarakinsky claims that, "Utopias should be understood as the ought that never is and it is this paradox that gives them their critical and prognostic power."[69] He continues that, "The point is not to implement the… blueprints, but to respond to the problems they identify and highlight."[70]

People have attempted to implement the blueprints for a perfect society, however: either on a small scale (see previous mention of intentional communities on page 15) or as plans for the transformation of a whole society or nation. The creation of a perfect plan is, according to Goodwin and Taylor, "unfortunately utopia's undoing, for it provides for disagreement and challenge. Utopia is powerful because we can concur in its criticisms (short-term end) and weak because we invariably disagree on the remedies (the long term ends and the means)".[71] In addition, even within a group of people that share a common vision of an ideal community, disagreements on the method to attain the ideal community can be a major source of conflict.

As has been shown, utopias may be fantastical or fictional visions of a good life or society, never intended to be implemented. But other utopian visions have been interpreted as literal blueprints for a perfect world which can be implemented, particularly those of the modern era, where human being's sense of being able to seriously impact on the world has developed. In fact it seems scarcely useful to speak of fictional utopias such as More's, and political utopianism of the 20th Century in the same breath. It is the latter form of utopia – the political utopia – rather than the literary or folk fiction that has attracted the greatest amount of critique.

Karl Popper refers to the political utopia in one of the most often cited critiques of utopia, *The Open Society and Its Enemies.*[72] In *The Open Society* he argues that:

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[69] Sarakinsky, 'Utopia as Political Theory', 122.

[70] Sarakinsky, 'Utopia as Political Theory', 123.

[71] Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 31.

[72] It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to include all the critiques of the utopianism. For further reading see Dahrendorf, R. 1958. 'Out of Utopia: Towards a Reorientation of Sociological Analysis' in *American Journal of Sociology*, 64(2), 115-127; Kolnai A. 1995. *The Utopian Mind and Other Papers*. London: The Athlone Press; Popper, K. 1945. *The Open Society and its Enemies: Volume I: The Spell of*

> The utopian approach can be saved only by the Platonic belief in one absolute and unchanging idea, together with two further assumptions, namely a) that there are rational methods to determine once and for all what this ideal is, and b) what the best means of its realisation are.[73]

Popper argues that utopianism leads to totalitarianism.[74] He claims that the assumptions just mentioned are impossible for humans to determine. There can never be complete consensus over what is best for society, and thus, any attempt to realise a blueprint for an ideal society will lead to coercion and domination of one group over those who disagree with the blueprint.

Written largely in reaction to the horrors of Stalinism and Nazism, Popper's critique of utopianism, whilst influential, has been criticised by a number of scholars, not least of all those who saw his critique as firmly embedded in a liberal ideology.[75] Critics argue that no

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Plato. London: Routledge; Popper, K. 1945. *The Open Society and its Enemies: Volume II: The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Rouvillois, F. 2000. 'Utopia and Totalitarianism' in Schaer, R, Claeys, G, Tower Sargent, L. *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*. New York: New York Public Library / Oxford University Press (New York Oxford), 316-331; Shklat, J. 1965. 'The Political Theory of Utopia: From Melancholy to Nostalgia' in *Daedalus*, 94(2), 367-381; and Talmon, J. 1961. *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*. London: Mercury Books. It is interesting that the majority of the texts which critique utopianism were published in the 50s and 60s: a period of reflection after the horrors of Nazism and Stalinism. Also see Hayek, F.A. 1944. *The Road to Serfdom.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. For Hayek, utopianism is based on the "fatal conceit" that through "rational calculation and political will, society can be designed in ways that will significantly improve the human condition." (Wright, E.O. 1995 cited in Olssen, M. 2003. 'Totalitarianism and the 'Repressed' Utopia of the Present: moving beyond Hayek, Popper and Foucault' in *Policy Futures in Education*, 1(3), 527). Ironically, Hayek posits what may be called his own utopia in *The Road to Serfdom* where he describes what he names a "catallaxy" – an extreme form of free market society which develops spontaneously and organically.

[73] Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 161.

[74] Totalitarianism may be defined as "a society instituted without divisions that assumes command over its organization, is self reflexive in all its parts, and permeated by the same project throughout." Lefort, C. cited in Rouvillois, 'Utopia and totalitarianism', 320. In addition, Hannah Arendt has argued that the use of mass violence constitutes an integral part of the totalitarian state, as well as extensive social control and state propaganda. See Arendt, H. 1951. *The Origins of Totalitarianism.* New York: Harcourt.

[75] See Sargisson, L. 2005. 'Utopia in the Twenty-First Century, Part One: Anti-Utopianism, Religion and Fundamentalism.' Paper for discussion at a conference entitled 'The Role of Utopia in Twenty-First Century Ideology', Sheffield, 17 June; Olssen, 'Totalitarianism and the 'Repressed' Utopia of the Present' and Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, to name a few.

mention is made of the utopianism implicit in the liberal paradigm in his work: an image of an ideal society as individuals free from coercion, an unquestioned emphasis on negative over positive freedom. Whilst valid, such commentary does not release us from responding to the serious points made in Popper's argument. It appears safe to say that there can never be a perfect society, unless we radically readjust our conceptions of human nature. It is highly unlikely, improbable even, that humans will ever find complete consensus. Suffering and perceptions of injustice are always partially influenced by a particular position, or individual psyche, and made up of different experiences, thus the imagined solutions to the problems of suffering will be different.

J.L. Talmon refers to a phenomenon he calls 'political messianism' in explaining the rise of totalitarianism.[76] Political messianism, a form of utopianism, is the secular messianic belief in a "preordained, harmonious and perfect scheme of things, to which men are irresistibly driven, and at which they are bound to arrive."[77] Marxism is an example. As a result of this belief (that this future is bound to come, and is in this sense natural, and that the right path to the ideal future has been identified), people can be coerced or repressed if "they cannot perceive their long term interests."[78] Talmon continues, "Totalitarian Messianism hardened into an exclusive doctrine represented by a vanguard of the enlightened, who justified themselves in the use of coercion against those who refused to be free and virtuous"[79] (i.e. those who refuse to conform to the 'enlightened' individuals' idea of what the best and 'correct' mode of conduct and living is).

Lucy Sargisson concedes to some of Popper's and Talmon's concerns about the connection of utopianism with totalitarianism, but comments that Popper, and other critics of utopia make the mistake of assuming that all utopias seek perfection and that the primary function of utopia is its own realisation.[80] The critical function implicit in utopianism has already been

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[76] Talmon claims that political messianism developed in the eighteenth century in the West out of the idea of "the natural order (or general will) as an attainable, indeed inevitable and all-solving, end, that engendered an attitude of mind unknown hitherto in the sphere of politics, namely the sense of a continuous advance towards a *denouement* of the historical drama, accompanied by an acute awareness of structural and incurable crisis in existing society." Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, 249.

[77] Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, 2.

[78] Sarakinsky, 'Utopia as Political Theory', 121.

[79] Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, 5.

[80] Sargisson, 'Utopia in the Twenty-First Century'. She also comments that it is mistaken to assume that while some utopias can be totalizing, they do not always produce totalitarian outcomes. This viewpoint is

discussed. Utopias, rather than intending to be perfectly implemented blueprints, may act simply as critiques of society or as goal-posts towards a better future.[81] Even those utopian movements which did mobilise for change along the lines of a particular vision did not necessarily seek perfection. For example the CPSA did not assume *all* suffering or disagreement would disappear in a class free society, but that a far better and more just society would be created if they worked towards the destruction of capitalism. In addition the CPSA's visions of a new society did not always work blindly but changed as new material conditions imposed themselves on CPSA members.

Mark Olssen comments that, "To claim that the ideal of community is inextricably tied to an inexorable quest for unity or totality is a deeply mistaken premise."[82] Not all totalitarianism is caused by utopianism, but also by the will to power, egoism, disregard for individual opinion and human suffering. A utopian outlook does not *necessarily* slip into these things. In addition, the monopoly of society, or oppression of one group over another has been created in pursuit of far less lofty matters than utopian vision, such as money.

Sargisson however, claims that when a utopian thinks that he has access to the truth, and that no other truth exists, utopianism can indeed be dangerous if it is combined with followers with the resources to attempt to realise this 'truth'. Nazi Germany is such an example. Thus it may be the case that in some contexts attempts to realise a blueprint for an ideal society may well lead to coercion and domination of one group over those who disagree with, or do not fit into, the blueprint.

It is thus suggested, as pointed out by Ricoeur, that the presence of utopianism in society is ambiguous.[83] Whilst utopianism may be a force for positive change in society in certain

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not fully explained, but Sargisson possibly means that totalitarianism involves a host of other preconditions to develop.

[81] One could argue that this is how the South African Freedom Charter (1955) has been used.

[82] Olssen, 'Totalitarianism and the 'Repressed' Utopia of the Present', 536.

[83] Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 1. Ricoeur explores utopia in relation to ideology. While a discussion of the nature of ideology will not be entered into here, it is worth noting that Ricoeur said of ideology and utopia that, "both are highly ambiguous. They each have a positive and a negative side, a constructive and a destructive role, a constitutive and a pathological dimension." (Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 1) Ricoeur notes that ideology can at best have an integrative function in society (see the development of this idea throughout the text of Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*) but at worst can become a legitimising force for the maintenance of undemocratic or even totalitarian structures in society. Ricoeur does not explore utopia's ambiguity, but merely points it out.

circumstances, by questioning that which is taken for granted in a society and mobilising action, it may reveal a more destructive nature in others, as discussed by Sargisson. In addition, as Bauman notes, what might begin as a utopian vision for change in society may merge into a conservative ideology and lose its critical orientation to the present.[84] Bauman cites the USSR as an example of a place where the critical orientation of the Soviet vision was lost once the Soviets gained power.[85]

In *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim contrasts utopianism with ideology. He claims that, "In limiting the meaning of the term "utopia" to that type of orientation which transcended reality and which at the same time breaks the bonds of the existing order, a distinction is set up between the utopian and the ideological states of mind."[86] Steve Ackroyd has interpreted Mannheim's polarisation of ideology and utopia as follows: "Ideologies close down and stabilize a social order around particular principles of organization and key institutions, whilst utopias open things up by advancing contentious new principles and claims – especially about forms of organization."[87] Utopias may become ideologies (ideologies as defined by Bauman and Mannheim).

In conclusion, how utopianism works in any given society, group, or individual is dependant on a number of complex criteria.[88] A utopian mentality will not necessarily lead to a totalitarian outlook or approach. The *content* of the utopia is also not insignificant. Compare the content of Hitler's utopia, with that of the utopia of the new South Africa imagined prior

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[84] Bauman, *Socialism*, 16.

[85] Bauman, *Socialism.* See Chapter Six: 'A Socialist Experiment'.

[86] Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 192.

[87] Ackroyd, S. 2002. 'Utopia or Ideology: Karl Mannheim and the Place of Theory' in Parker, M. (Ed) *Utopia and Organization*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 49. Mannheim's concept of ideology and utopia is complex. He claims that there is never just one dominant ideology in society, and that ideology is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. It is not simply about the justification and defense of interests of the dominant group in society. Ideology does correspond to reality to a degree. Utopia does not necessarily unmask reality from behind an ideology, but simply offers and alternative and a challenge to what exists. See Ackroyd, 'Utopia or Ideology'.

[88] This is where the analysis of Talmon and Popper and others falls down: it takes no cognisance of the particular context in the process of the formation of a totalitarian state or leadership. What other factors where active at the time in the Soviet Union for it to become a totalitarian state in which terror featured so prominently? Nor does it take cognisance of the differences in totalitarian governments: the Nazi and the Stalin regimes – both mentioned as totalitarian in the literature – were different. The utopian vision in the case of the former was evidence enough of almost inevitable decent into violence and murder. The Soviet Union was a somewhat different case.

to 1994, as a place free from injustice, racism and poverty. The *form* that a utopianism discourse takes is also significant, as Talmon's writings on political messianism show. Not all utopian movements have taken this form however. In addition, other contingent factors are relevant to an analysis on the potential function of utopianism in any group or society. For example, the strength of existing democracy in a group or society will affect how utopianism mobilises a group. In addition different individuals will be inspired in different ways, and will be drawn to utopian texts or movements for different reasons. What is important is how vested an individual or group's identity becomes in an ideal. Is one open to readjusting the vision of a perfect society, or better future society in light of experience or debate with others? Or has a static vision of the future become so internalised that to consider its impossibility or changes to it becomes psychology disruptive and is thus avoided? Such questions will be explored further in Chapter Seven, where the complexity of utopianism role in society is demonstrated.

Summary

A broad and fluid definition of utopia is proposed for the following study. The definition has been developed based on a critical reading of the literature put forward in this chapter, *and* shaped by the research undertaken on utopianism in the CPSA for this study, to be presented in the following chapters.

Utopias are images or descriptions of an ideal or far better world or existence, existing in another place or time. Utopias are social or collective in their nature: they are visions of a better world for a community or society and not merely a vision of something better for one individual. Utopias may include possible or impossible goals. Utopias may be secular or non-secular or contain elements of both.

Utopianism is a broader term than utopia. It refers to forms of thought which include utopian traces, but do not necessarily include a complete vision of an ideal society or place. Utopianism is present not only in a vision of an ideal or better existence, but in attitude and activity created by the presence of a utopian vision. For example utopianism may be present in the belief in the possible realisation of a vision or in activity directed towards attaining it.

Chapter Three:
Socialism: The Modern Political Utopia

The original utopians, the communal creatures of Thomas More's Utopia*, were never meant to exist. They are written into history as vehicles of satire. The nineteenth century demanded that utopia become a concrete objective. Utopia, elevated to a science, was in the business of political construction. It was thereby dispossessed of its ironic mode…*
(Thomas Moore, 2002)[89]

Introduction

The CPSA's utopian vision, rather than merely being an image of an ideal society, was, to quote contemporary scholar Thomas Moore, "in the business of political construction". Members of the CPSA wished to change society in accordance with their vision. Theirs was thus a thoroughly modern form of utopianism, a defining feature of which is a belief in humankind's ability to affect the future for the good. Chapter Three begins with an historical contextualisation of this form of utopianism. Socialism is perhaps one of the most important of the modern utopias and a vital part of the CPSA's utopianism. Justification for seeing socialism, and in particular Marxism, as a utopian movement is provided.

The Chapter places the CPSA's form of utopianism in the context of a wider socialist utopian movement. The CPSA's utopianism was very much influenced by Marxism and in particular by Comintern interpretations of Marxism. The Influences of Marxism (and Comintern interpretations thereof) on the CPSA's utopianism are briefly mentioned at the end of the Chapter.

The Development of Modern Political Utopias in the West

Although utopias offer valuable insight into the period in which they arise because they are critical of the *status quo*, and despite pointing to an incredible capacity to imagine places and times radically different to the present, they may also take on much of the conceptual framework of the period in which they are created. In this regard, Mannheim stated:

[89] Moore, T. 2002. 'Downsizing Utopia', Abstract to paper presented at the Third International Conference of the Utopian Studies Society, www.biggar-net.co.uk/utopia/art-2002.htm

> Change in substance and form of the utopia does not take place in a realm which is independent of social life. It could be shown rather, especially in modern historical developments, that the successive forms of utopia, in their beginnings are intimately bound up with historical stages of development, and in each of these with particular social strata.[90]

The Enlightenment played a vital role in the development of what may be called 'modern utopias', those created from approximately the nineteenth century onwards. The development of science, movement away from religious authority and increasing confidence in a rational approach to understanding society and nature, led to a new found confidence in people's ability to change society. The majority of utopias became firmly orientated towards the future.

Pre-modern utopias were often orientated towards another place, rather than another time. Utopias were often imagined to be present now, but elsewhere. This was particularly common when voyages of discovery were revealing new cultures and lands. These voyages captured the imagination of writers who depicted ideal small scale societies on islands, whose location was often described in detail. Thomas More's crescent shaped island of Utopia was situated off the coast of America for example (see figure 3.1).[91] Though many utopias of this period were not intended to be read as depictions of actual societies, the discovery of new people and places did not make the idea of discovering harmonious and idyllic societies seem impossible.[92]



Fig. 3.1: Woodcut by A. Holbein for a 1518 edition of Utopia*. Hythloday is depicted in the left-hand corner describing the island of Utopia to a listener.*

[90] Mannheim, K. 1936 [1929]. *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Harvest Books, 206.

[91] Goodwin, B. and Taylor, K. 1982. *The Politics of Utopia*: *A Study in Theory and Practice*. London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd.

[92] Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*. The tradition of utopias of another place is continued to this day in the genre of science-fiction, where ideal societies existing on other planets are sometimes imagined.

Utopias of the classical period included Plato's *Republic* (4th Century BC) which was not explicitly orientated towards a different time or place, but was written as an ideal which should and could exist. Some scholars have included Aristotle's *Politics* and Plato's *Atlantis* and *Laws* as utopias of this period.

Western utopias produced during the Middle Ages were often intimately tied up with a Christian eschatology, and varied in their orientation to time and place. Heaven was imagined as an other-worldly place that exists always, and thus in the present, and yet will be experienced in the future (after death). Many of the millenarian movements of the Middle Ages, however, (as discussed in fascinating detail by Norman Cohn) believed in the imminence of the coming of paradise on earth.[93] Interestingly though, the legend of the Land of Cockaigne was developed in the Middle Ages as well: a hedonistic world which may have been both a reaction to the strictures of the Church's teaching as much as a to poverty.

Renaissance and early modern utopias show a liberation from reliance on the church and Christian doctrine for conceptualising the world, and the beginnings of an engagement with the notions of rationality and science, though religious inspired utopian fictions still feature. Between 1500 and 1700 many utopian fictions were written depicting perfect societies as well ordered communities who allocated resources along some organising principle. Examples of utopias providing goals for real action, versus utopian fictions are scarce in relation to the Enlightenment period that followed, where utopias were often political manifestos for change, rather than literary fictions.[94]

Many scholars have pointed to the French Revolution as a seminal event in the development of modern utopias. Goodwin and Taylor write that the French Revolution

> …suggested to some that the course of history could be diverted, and utopia (of a sort) could be implemented – in other words, that abstract ideals could be incarnated

[93] See Cohn, N. 1957. *The Pursuit of the Millennium.* London: Pimlico. What is interesting about this period is that utopianism here was utopianism as defined by Mannheim, not simply imagined idyllic communities, but often movements with force for change behind them. Though some of these movements (usually of the poor sections of the population) inspired unrest and protest, they relied on an external agency for the final transformation of the world.

[94] Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia,* 41-44.

> in society by deliberate human action. This discovery helps to account for the increased optimism and activism of nineteenth-century utopias. [95]

In this period utopian writings became overtly political.[96] The most significant utopian writings were political manifestos and philosophical works. Utopia became increasingly associated with activism as people imaged the possibility of changing society for the better by applying new scientific discoveries and careful 'scientific analysis' to the remodelling of society. This modern spirit can be seen in the following statement written by Friedrich Engels (see figure 3.3) in 1880:

> Active social forces work exactly like natural forces: blindly, forcibly, destructively, so long as we do not understand, and reckon with, them. But when once we understand them, when once we grasp their action, their direction, their effects, it depends only upon ourselves to subject them more and more to our own will, and by means of them to reach our own ends.[97]



Fig. 3.2: Henri de Saint-Simon.

During the Industrial Revolution in England, and later in Europe, many people believed that technology would eventually create material abundance, and would become the means with which to transformation society. Saint-Simon (see figure 3.2) and Robert Owen are well known utopians of this era. Saint-Simon imagined a parliament of engineers and scientists making decisions to maximise well being for all people, in the context of a highly industrialised society.[98] However, depictions of the ideal commonwealth were varied and based on differing conceptualisations of human nature. Fourier's utopia (see figure 3.5), of the same period, was based on providing everyone with desirable work, and on the satisfaction of supposedly 'instinctual passions' (such as sexual drive) to create harmony and order.[99] Thus not all

[95] Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 15.

[96] Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 44.

[97] Engels, 1880 cited in Bauman, Z. 1976. *Socialism: the Active Utopia*. London: Allen & Unwin, 61.

[98] The phrase, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" was first coined by the Saint-Simon movement. Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 45.

[99] Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 45.

utopian writings elevated rationality to such heights. Fourier's utopia may have been a reaction to the Enlightenment and a perceived cold confidence in rationality and science.[100]

A common base on which almost all modern utopias are built however, is the notion of human progress. Bauman defined utopia as a modern phenomena which developed once change in society was discernable in a lifetime. This developed a sense of "history as an endless chain of irreversible changes, with which the concept of progress – a development which brings change for the better – was not slow to join forces."[101] Bauman correctly identifies socialism as an example of a modern utopia.



Fig. 3.3: Friedrich Engels, 1856.

Many scholars, however, have pointed to the utopianism implicit in other political conceptual frameworks or ideologies. Elements in conservatism may be viewed as utopianism, though interestingly while attempting to build a future conservative society, conservatives often draw on images of an idealised past rather than images of an ideal future. Referring to Margaret Thatcher's conservative reign in the United Kingdom, Vincent Geoghegan said, "Thatcherite conservatism is a glaring example of a right-wing utopianism, with its summoning up of the supposed glories of Victorian Britain."[102]

The utopianism in liberalism has also been explored by a number of commentators.[103] Some writings of the French Revolution are examples of

[100] Sarakinsky, I. 1993. 'Utopia as Political Theory' in *Politikon*, 20(2), December, 111-125.

[101] Bauman, *Socialism*, 19. Bauman sets up a definition of utopia which is similar to Mannheim's in that it must "involve a measure of hazard; for an image of the future to possess the qualities of utopia, it must be ascertained that it will not come to pass unless fostered by a deliberate collective action." (17). Even using his restricted definition of utopia, Bauman is incorrect: utopian movements and images of utopia existed prior to the modern era.

[102] Goeghegan, V, 1987 cited in Hodgson, G.M. 1995. 'The Political Economy of Utopia' in *Review of Social Economy*. 53(2), 196.

[103] See for example Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*.

liberal utopian texts. Liberalism was built on a utopian quest to free man from a feudal society in which family lineage and not merit conferred privilege and to create a free society based on merit and rationalism. Goodwin and Taylor comment that, "The very term 'liberalism' reveals the force of its original utopian propensity: to establish a new social order based on a whole range of new liberties or freedoms as a means of attaining harmony and happiness."[104]

Socialism and Marxism in particular, however, became *the* utopian movement of the 20th Century. Karl Marx (see figure 3.4) and Engels's vision of a socialist (and eventually communist) future which was to follow the demise of capitalism, is perhaps the most influential utopia of the last century. The utopian project envisioned by Marx and Engels was taken up, tweaked or re-imagined by Marxists and other socialists around the world. When the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 erupted in Russia, the USSR became for many, utopia made real: *eutopia*. Goodwin and Taylor comment, however, that "the Russian Revolution diverted socialist dreams from utopianism to the observation and eulogization of Soviet Reality, and then to the criticism and justification of Soviet shortcomings…"[105] It is argued in this study that socialist dreams where not necessarily diverted, but that the eulogization of the USSR became *a part of utopian discourse* for many socialist parties around the world, and certainly in South Africa. This will be explored further in the following chapters.

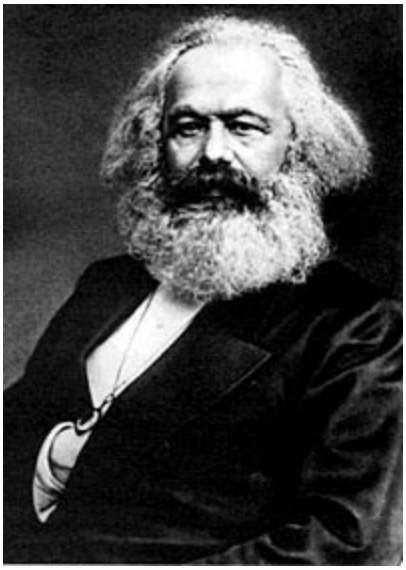


Fig. 3.4: Karl Marx.

Mannheim claimed that "as utopian movements develop and enter the arena of political struggle, they gradually lose their uncompromising opposition to the existing social situation and become more and more conservative in outlook".[106] This is partly because society has changed to incorporate some of the imagined utopia, and partly because once utopian movements have to engage in day to day politics, pragmatic concerns are emphasised,

[104] Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 146.
[105] Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 47.
[106] Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 227.

"detailed decisions replaces [sic] the total, utopian emphasis on complete change".[107]

Not only did utopian movements have to contend with the realities of how to actually implement a plan for an new society, but events in the first half of the century lead to a scepticism about the value of utopian politics. According to Goodwin and Taylor, in the 1920 to 1940s events such as the Great Depression, the rise of Fascism, war and the Holocaust, altered the "prevailing mood from optimism to despair" and support of utopian movements is less widespread, and dystopian fictions feature prominently, such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932). The "realities of Fascism and Stalinism were taken as warnings of what a modern scientific-technological system, established in the name of utopianism, might be like."[108]

Nevertheless, socialism and in particular Marxism, still remained as utopian movements into the 20th Century and beyond. Inequality, oppression and material deprivation were still part and parcel of life for many people, and thus utopian images of a just and harmonious society still resonated with and commanded the attention of people around the world, not least of all those living in South Africa, a very unequal and oppressive social environment indeed.

Socialism, Marxism and Utopianism

…Communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man – the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.
(Karl Marx, 1844)[109]

Socialism in its many guises (Marxism, Bolshevism, Fabianism, utopian socialism, for example) has been considered *the* utopia of the twentieth century. Socialist philosophies and movements are utopian in that they imagine an ideal future society and believe in the possibility of its creation.

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[107] Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 227.
[108] Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 48.
[109] Marx, K. *Economic and Political Manuscripts*, cited in Levitas, R. 1990. *The Concept of Utopia*. New York: Philip Allan, 40.

Bauman defines socialism not so much in the way in which a socialist wishes to organise society, "referring to the structure of the system which socialists propose to institute", but in terms of "the structure of socialism itself, as a body of beliefs and attitudes in its own right."[110] Thus socialism may be understood partly as "the desire for a just society" which, "coupled with the renunciation of the present one as unjust, is the most constant feature of socialism, as well as the key to the understanding of its historical role in modern society."[111] In addition the "socialist message is sent in the name of the deprived and the weak, those who cannot hope to rise above the level of destitution if they rely upon laissez-faire individualism."[112] Socialism may thus be defined as a desire for a just (and egalitarian) society, a particular vision for the organisation of society and an intrinsic and explicit critique of capitalism, articulated in the name of the less fortunate in society. This definition of socialism captures the drive and vision of the CPSA nicely.

In common parlance, Marxism is often seen as synonymous with socialism. This does no justice to the diverse streams of socialism, many of which developed prior to Marxism such as Saint-Simon's, Owen's and Fourier's versions of socialism and other forms of communitarianism active in the early 1800s. Engels was apparently influenced by Moses Hess (a socialist philosopher whose work influenced Zionism) and by Owen's followers in Manchester. Marx's writings incorporated some of Fourier's work.[113] Strands of what is

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[110] Bauman, *Socialism*, 50.

[111] Bauman, *Socialism*, 51.

[112] Bauman, *Socialism*, 51. Goodwin and Taylor, as well as Bauman claim that modern socialism grew out of the development of liberalism in the 19th century, and eventually became the "counter-culture" (Bauman, *Socialism*, 47) of capitalism. According to Bauman, "…the socialist utopia, in its starting point and leitmotivs, may be justly described as 'the counter-culture of capitalism'" (Bauman, *Socialism*, 47). However, he continues that, "The notion of a 'counter-culture' contains a dialectic and conflict-ridden unity of continuity and rejection", pointing to both socialism routes in liberalism and the way in which socialism has engaged in the language of liberalism, "the dominant culture" in order to "make the dialogue comprehensible" (47). So, while accepting ideals such as the reign of justice and law, the socialists refuse however, to accept the perceived affects of free-trade and the ultimate sovereignty of private property. In addition in the socialist utopia, freedom "lost its place as the sole, supreme judge of justice, it… acquired a companion endowed with equal power, the principle of equality." (52). Bauman does not mention less dominant streams of socialism such as anarchy – which offer a far more radical break from the "dominant culture", examples of which can be found prior to the establishment of liberalism as a "dominant culture" in the West.

[113] Claeys, G. 2000. 'Socialism and Utopia' in Schaer, R, Claeys, G, Tower Sargent, L. *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*. New York: New York Public Library / Oxford University Press (New York Oxford), 222.

recognise as socialism today can be found in the teachings of religious movements over the ages, and even in the values of the Spartan lifestyle of classical Greece.[114]

Nevertheless it seems fair to say that Marxism has been the most influential form of socialism of the last century, influencing revolutions in a number of countries around the world, and most importantly for the purposes of this study, the eruption of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia which catalysed the birth of the CPSA, thousands of miles away. The CPSA was a fairly orthodox Marxist party[115] and utopianism in the writings of Marx will therefore be briefly touched on.[116]

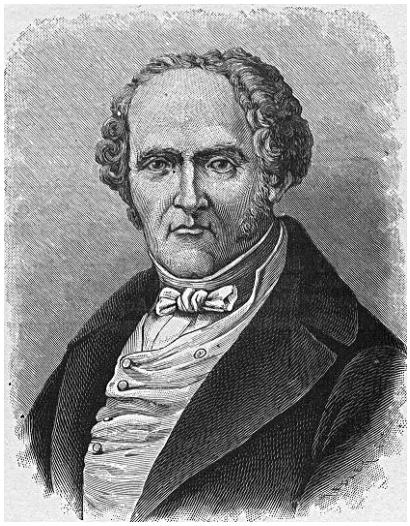


Fig. 3.5: Charles Fourier.

Interestingly, one of the strongest critiques of utopianism, particularly of utopian socialists, comes from Marx and Engels.[117] Marx felt that utopian socialists' approach to socialism was not 'scientific'. For Marx ideology and utopia are of the same nature in that they obscure the true nature of things, thus limiting mobilisation around the real cause of oppression and limiting the possibilities for "real structural change"[118].

Levitas points out that not all Marxists have seen utopianism in a purely pejorative light. Lenin was apparently ambivalent about utopian visions of the future, recognizing that "the rejection of utopia and the need for goals were in constant tension."[119] Bloch and Marcuse for example, attempted to "reintegrate Marxism and Utopia… by defining [utopia] positively rather than negatively as a catalyst for change."[120]

Marx and Engels made it clear that they could not provide detailed blueprints for a future

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[114] Claeys, 'Socialism and Utopia', 207.

[115] Interview with Ivor Sarakinsky, Johannesburg, February 2006.

[116] However, a proper contextualisation of Marx's utopianism is beyond the scope of this dissertation, as it would involve, amongst other things, an analysis of how Marx understood labour, freedom, the structure of society, 'alienation' etcetera.

[117] See Engels *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880) and Marx *The German Ideology* (1847).

[118] West, C. 1991. *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 66.

[119] Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 53.

[120] Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 6.

society because, as Marx claimed, "the thing to be done at any definitive, given moment of the future, the thing immediately to be done depends of course on the given historical conditions in which one has to act".[121] Sarakinsky notes that "Marx's vision of the ideal society is based on an analysis and extrapolation of tendencies in the present. Consequently, it is only possible for Marx to present the general structure of a future society and not the detailed characteristic of a blueprint."[122]


Manifest
der
Kommunistischen Partei.
London.

Fig. 3.6: A first edition of the Communist Manifesto.

Despite not providing blueprints for a communist society, utopianism is latent in Marx and Engels's writings, and even explicit in some places. Levitas notes that, "One of the reasons why Marxism itself can be said to be utopian in exactly the same way as the so-called utopian socialists is that an outline of the principal features of communist society can be pieced together from the writings of Marx and Engels, even though it was never presented by them in a single description."[123]

For example, characteristics of the future communist society can be pieced together from *The Communist Manifesto* (see figure 3.6) in which Marx and Engels describe a future society as one in which politics (defined as the oppression of one class over another) would cease. "Classes and class antagonism" would be replaced by "an association" in which the "free development of each is the condition of the free development of all".[124] This "association" is most definitely a utopia: an image of an egalitarian community, in which people would be able to develop to the fullest of their

[121] Marx, K cited in Lukes, S. 1984. 'Marxism and Utopia' in Alexander, P. and Gill, G (Eds.) *Utopias*. London: Duckworth, 157.

[122] Sarakinsky, I. 1992. 'The Implications of Freud's Theory of Human Instincts for the Utopian Visions of Hegel and Marx'. Masters Dissertation. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand, 97. Marx and Engels state that, "Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real moment which abolishes the present state of things" (Marx, K. and Engels, F. 1932 cited in Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 43).

[123] Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 40.

[124] Engels and Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* cited in Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 166.

potential, no longer alienated from their labour.

The spirit of this community is captured in one of the most often quoted passages from *The German Ideology*:

> …in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.[125]

Marx and Engels's analysis of society described forces within the structure of society that tended towards a particular state of being or structure of society (communism) that they evidently saw as desirable. In this regard, Steven Lukes writes the following in response to claims that Marxism is not utopian.

> …how can one have the one kind of knowledge (of the self-transforming present) without the other (of the shape of future society)? How can scientific observers know that 'what is happening before their eyes', that the result of 'forces already at work within social reality' is the 'realisation of the ultimate objective' the emancipatory transformation of capitalism into socialism, unless they also know, or have good reason to believe, that the 'new society', latent in the old, will take a form that *is* emancipatory… In other words, to assume that they do know the former is to assume that they know, or have good reason to believe, the latter.[126]

In other words, Lukes claims that a utopian image of the future is implicit in Marx's assertion that capitalism would cease to exist, and that society would progress towards an 'emancipatory' state of being. The writings of Marx and Engels, and the Marxist movement which drew on their work, are thus clearly utopian in imaging an ideal state of society, communism.

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[125] Cited in Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 41.

[126] Lukes, 'Marxism and Utopia', 158-159.

Marx and Marxists however, not only imagined an ideal future, but *forecasted* the realisation of this utopia, as Lukes noted. The messianic undertones in Marxism's forecasting of the communist state of being, and the collapse of capitalism has been pointed out by a number of scholars.[127] Both secular and religious modern utopias are often characterised by an incredible hope in the possibility of a better place and a better future. The confidence that the ideal future *will* be realised (as apposed to 'could be') is, however, *messianic* in its forecasting of the future. Derrida has defined messianism as "a specific determination of the emancipatory event within the overarching telos of history".[128] Messianism is certainly present in Marxism. Using Derrida's definition of messianism, Owen Ware illustrates this point by comparing Marxism with a generally accepted messianic discourse – Jewish mysticism:

> …as they stand in their orthodox forms, [Marxism and Jewish mysticism] are highly compatible. Marxist "prophecy" believes the proletariat will give rise to their own Messiah-like leaders who will engage the ruling class in a battle that will determine the fate of humanity. After the fall of capitalist oppression, an entirely new form of social governance will arise, a Kingdom of God *without* God… Jewish Messianism and Marxism are, in their crude versions, translatable discourses because they both carry a strong messianic message.[129]

A strong certainty in the future, due to a teleological concept of history and progress, and the related messianic element in Marxism was an almost defining feature of 20th Century socialism. It was a strong current in Soviet Comintern interpretations of Marxism and in the CPSA's utopianism in South Africa (as will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Four).[130]

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[127] See for example, Ware. O. 2004. 'Dialectic of the Past / Disjuncture of the Future: Derrida and Benjamin on the Concept of Messianism' in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, 5(2), April, 99-114, and the work of Walter Benjamin for example: Benjamin, W. 1968. 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections.* New York: Schoken Books, and Jacques Derrida: Derrida J. 1994. *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning & the New International*. New York: Routledge.

[128] Ware, 'Dialectic of the Past', 100.

[129] Ware, 'Dialectic of the Past', 108. In this report all emphasis in cited work is the original author's own unless otherwise indicated.

[130] According to Michael Barkun, Norman Cohn sees 'Soviet Communism' as messianic in character. Barkun. 1974. 'Millenarianism in the Modern World' in *Theory and Society*, 1, 117-146.

The CPSA believed that Marxism was a 'scientific' framework for understanding the world. They were significantly influenced by the Comintern in this regard. While Karl Marx's work certainly lent itself to being interpreted as 'scientific socialism', and was based on a modernist teleology, the Bolsheviks and in particular the Comintern based in Moscow, turned a "fruitful and interesting conversation" in Marx's work into a dogmatic 'scientific socialism' which confidently imagined a linear, inevitable march towards a communist future. It lost much of the spirit of Marx's utopianism, a desire for a society free from alienation.[131] Comintern interpretations of Marxism ignored the ambiguities in Marx's work, and certainly ignored Marx's warning about producing "cookbooks of the future".[132]

Alison Drew comments that, through the Comintern (1919 to 1943) "the interpretation of Marxism became ritualized in an elaborate hierarchical style reminiscent of Catholicism."[133] The Comintern "set itself up as the supreme authority on and interpreter of Marxism", and directed socialist activity to its affiliated parties around the world.[134]

The Comintern was highly influential in the CPSA's history at one point, as will be discussed in detail in later chapters. These often dogmatic, doctrinaire and authoritarian interpretations of Marxism shaped the CPSA's utopianism. However, another strong trend in CPSA utopianism can be discerned: a gentler, humanist discourse – an ethical Marxism which saw as its mission the creation of a society of people free from alienation and oppression and open to developing as full and contented human beings. This discourse was partly drawn from the humanism in Marx's writings (visions of a communist society quoted above for example), but also from other discourses: a liberating Christianity, possibly a Jewish notion of redemption, and more simply by a desire to be rid of the injustices and harshness of society they experienced (or saw around them) in South Africa, as will be shown in the following chapters.[135]

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[131] Interview with Ivor Sarakinsky, Johannesburg, June 2006.

[132] Interview with Ivor Sarakinsky, June 2006.

[133] Drew, A. 2000. *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2. Drew paraphrases the comment of a British socialist who complained that, "Moscow became the 'Socialist Vatican', 'issuing Bulls and Pronunciamentos on the Gospel according to St Lenin'." Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 2.

[134] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 2.

[135] Many of the CPSA members, while part of an avowedly secular movement, came from religious backgrounds. The prominent African members of the CPSA were mission educated (Kelley, R.D.G. 1991.

Summary

Nineteenth and 20th Century socialism, and in particular Marxism, developed in the period after the Enlightenment as thoroughly modern utopian movements. Not only did socialists imagine an ideal society but they believed that it could be created through human agency. Many socialists directed activity towards achieving this goal. Socialism in general and Marxism in particular, are utopian in terms of the definition proposed in Chapter Two. The form of their utopianism however, must be understood in light of the above: as utopian movements, not just utopian visions. This has relevance for understanding the form that CPSA utopianism took in the first half of the 20th Century, and the role that utopianism played in CPSA history.

The CPSA's vision of an ideal society was much influenced by Marxism, both as interpreted by local CPSA intellectuals themselves, and by the Comintern. The vision was partly based on teleological understanding of history, and of progress. Coupled with Marx's analysis of the inability of capitalism to sustain itself, this lent a messianic and certain vision of the future.

CPSA utopianism carried elements of a narrow, doctrinaire interpretation of strategy and goals in line with Comintern interpretation of Marxism, yet it also carried a strain of a more open-ended humanist utopianism in the spirit of Marx's vision of a society free from alienation and conflict.

'The Religious Odyssey of African Radicals: Notes on the Communist Party of South Africa, 1921-34' in *Radical History Review*, 51, 5-24). A number of the founders of the CPSA came from Christian (Wesleyan, Methodist, Unitarian) backgrounds in England. Many prominent members were Jewish, some from religious backgrounds, although others from secular or Bundist families (see Drew, *Discordant Comrades* for the various traditions and backgrounds from which CPSA members came). These influences will be discussed further in the following chapters.

Chapter Four:
The Form of the CPSA's Utopianism

What we are witnessing is an unfolding of the worldwide Commonwealth of Labour, which if the oppressed of all lands only knew… would sweep them into transports of gladness.
(David Ivon Jones, member of the CPSA, 1917)[136]

Introduction

David Ivon Jones, founding member of the CPSA, wrote the rousing words quoted above in 1917, shortly after the eruption of the October Russian Revolution. It is in this atmosphere of intense excitement that the story of the CPSA begins. The form that the CPSA's utopianism took was characterised by an incredible hope and confidence in the future, as can be seen in Jones's comment. As a thoroughly modern political utopia, this confidence was partly based on a modernist conception of history as progress, as discussed in the previous chapter. In Chapter Four the manner in which this hope and confidence was expressed, and the reasons for it, are contextualised within the social and political life of South Africa in the early 1900s. Utopian hopes in the future did not remain the same throughout the Party's history, however, but changed in relation to changing contexts. Chapter Four provides an introduction to the CPSA, as well as an analysis of the form of the CPSA's utopianism.[137]

The Formation of the International Socialist League

The early 1900s in South Africa was a period of intensifying white labour mobilisation, particularly in the mining areas of the country such as the Witwatersrand.[138] On the Rand, the

[136] Written by David Ivon Jones, member of the CPSA, under the title, 'Dawn of the World'. Cited in Lerumo, A. 1971. *Fifty Fighting Years: The South African Communist Party 1921-1971*. London: Inkululeko Publications, 35.

[137] The chapter headings: 'The Form of the CPSA's Utopianism' and 'The Content of the CPSA's Utopian Vision' do not point to strictly separate dealings of the subject matter in each chapter. The form of the CPSA's utopianism is also mentioned in Chapter Five, and content is described occasionally in Chapter Four.

[138] For a wonderfully atmospheric depiction of life on the Rand in this period, see van Onselen, C. 1982. *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914*, Volumes 1 and 2. Johannesburg: Ravan Press. Johannesburg was certainly no utopia in the early 1900s, and saw massive and stressful changes over a short period of time. van Onselen quotes the following at the beginning the

late 1800s saw a series of short depressions and the fortunes of workers of all backgrounds were cast up and down as the mining industry found stability.[139] Frustrations of white labour with unemployment, decreasing wages and the memory of earlier economic depressions, were channelled against the state and capital, and increasingly towards black workers: capital, particularly the Chamber of Mines, increasingly sought to employ the labour of black workers (often African migrants) at lower wage costs than their white counterparts.

Competition for jobs, now experienced mainly along colour lines (actively created by capital and state) combined with racist ideology on the part of white workers, was to inform the politics of labour protest for decades to come, and created major difficulties for socialists attempting to foster a working class consciousness across colour lines in South Africa.

At this stage in South Africa's history, the country had not yet developed an indigenous socialist tradition.[140] Relative to Europe, socialism developed late in South Africa. Immigrants from Eastern Europe, Britain (and to a lesser extent America) brought their own traditions of socialism to the tip of Africa. Coupled with the influence of local experiences and personalities, numerous socialist groups were formed along different lines in the Boer Republic, Cape Colony and Natal. South Africa's socialism in this period is described as "eclectic" by Alison Drew.[141] These young groups were almost wholly white. Some groups, however, were beginning to grapple with the racially divided reality of South Africa society, such as the small Social Democratic Federation (SDF) in Cape Town.

The birth of the Union of South Africa saw attempts by some labour and socialists groups at unification. In January 1910 the South African Labour Party (SALP) was established, which brought together regional Labour parties and many socialist parties across the Union.[142] The Party was a broad church incorporating socialists and more conservative members who

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volumes: "Ancient Nineveh and Babylon have been revived. Johannesburg is their twentieth century prototype. It is a city of unbridled squander and unfathomable squalor. Living is more costly than one's wildest dreams. All the necessities of life are imprudently dear. Miners of England and Australia, however poor may be your lot, however dark your present prospects, let no man tempt you to South Africa with tales of the wages that are paid upon the Rand! The wages are high indeed, but the price the workers pay for them is paid in suffering and blood." (Pratt, A. 1913. *The Real South Africa*. London cited in van Onselen).

[139] van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History*, volume 1.

[140] Drew, A. 2000. *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

[141] See Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, Chapter 1.

[142] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 28.

simply wanted a better deal for white workers in the Union. The SALP was a member organisation of the Second International.[143]

The cohesion of the SALP however was soon to be tested by the outbreak of the First World War. As with other member parties of the Second International, the SALP was split between those who supported participation in the War (believing that workers should support the 'patriotic line' in their own countries), and those who considered the War a "war of imperialist thieves" in which workers should play no part fighting for capitalist rulers.[144]

As a result of this disagreement, a small group of socialists who were against participation in the War, split from the South African Labour Party (SALP), and joined by the Independent Labour Party and the Industrial Workers of the World, formed the International Socialist League (ISL) in 1915. Smaller groups from other socialist parties joined soon after, such as the Cape Town branch of the SDF. The ISL started publishing a party publishing a party paper, *The International.*[145]

Prominent members of the League included Bill Andrews, David Ivon Jones and S.P. Bunting, who were to play a role in the CPSA's future, as will be shown.[146] The League comprised members who espoused a variety of different ideological interpretations of

[143] The Second International was an international socialist moment that collapsed due to labour and socialist organisation's differing responses to the politics of the First World War.

[144] Cronin, J. 1991. 'Origins and "Native Republic"' in Bundy, C. (Coordinator). *The History of the South African Communist Party.* Lectures presented at the University of Cape Town Summer School. Cape Town: Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, UCT, 8.

[145] *The International* was still published by the CPSA in its first few years of existence. The *International* was later renamed the *South African Worker* or *Umsebenzi* depending on whether the Party was attempting to woo black or white workers. In 1939 it started publishing *'Nkululeko* (Freedom), anglicised to *Inkululeko* (and known for a short while as *Freedom*, and even as *Freedom-Vryheid*). *The Guardian* was not an official paper of the Party, though it was closely aligned to the CPSA.

[146] Bill Andrews was a fitter and a turner who arrived from England as a young man. He was a prominent trade unionist and a Member of Parliament for the SALP before leaving to form the ISL. Jones was a Welshmen who left Britain in search of better climes due to ill health. He joined the socialist movement in South Africa and moved to Moscow in the early 1920s to serve in the new Soviet state. He died there in 1924 of tuberculosis. Bunting first came to South Africa from Britain as a soldier in the Boer War. He stayed in South Africa where he gravitated towards the socialist movement. He was also a member of the SALP before forming the ISL.

socialism, but the dominant current was Marxism.[147] According to Jeremy Cronin, the ISL was the first official non-racial party in the country.[148]

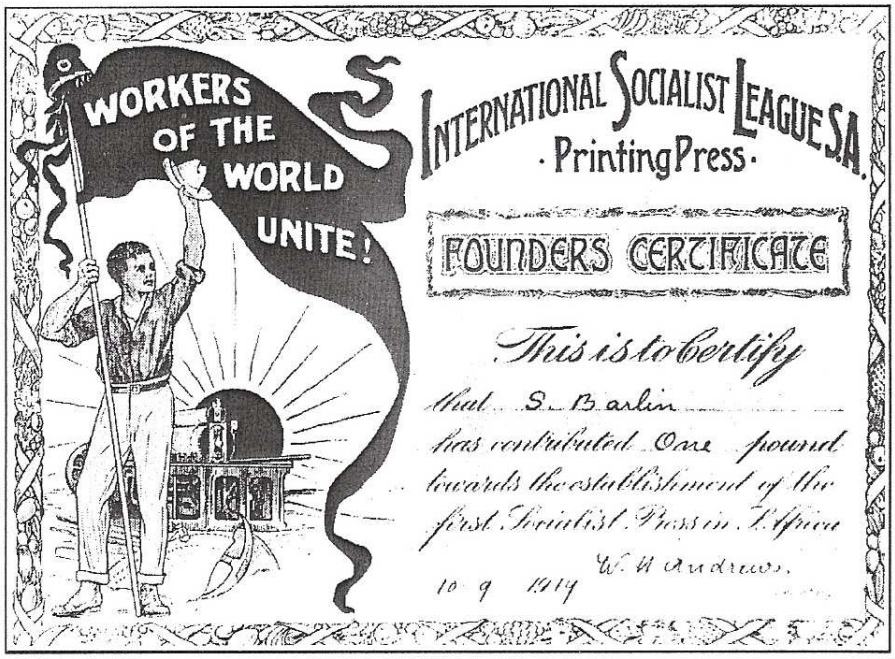


Fig. 4.1: Certificate given to ISL member Sam Barlin for his contribution to the establishment of the ISL's printing press.

The Bolshevik Revolution and the Birth of the CPSA

Two years after the formation of the ISL, the Bolshevik Revolution erupted in Russia. News of the events of October 1917 reached a small group of enthusiastic socialists in South Africa in period in last century's history when sudden and massive change of the social order seemed both possible, and just after the revolution, imminent. If workers could overthrow the ruling class in Russian, then the possibility in other countries seemed certain.

[147] Cronin, J. 'Origins and "Native Republic"'. The ISL, and later the CPSA, did not incorporate all socialist strands in South Africa. For example a small tradition of Trotskyism developed in the Cape. But the CPSA was quick to distance itself from, and often denounce, these groups. This kind of intolerance to other interpretations of Marxism and socialism became particularly strong under the influence of the authoritarian Comintern, to be discussed later. See Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, for an exploration of the varying and diverse traditions of leftist and socialist politics in South Africa, the histories of which are under-explored.

[148] Cronin, J. 'Origins and "Native Republic"'.

A leaflet entitled, "The Bolsheviks are coming" written by the ISL in 1918 proclaimed that,

> The Great War of Nations is over and the Class War against Labour has openly begun… Bolshevism means the victory of the wage-earners. It will soon spread to Britain, France, America and throughout the world.[149]

Russia was seen as the leader in the 'progressive march to world socialism'. Reporting to a sitting of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) in Moscow in 1921, two members of the ISL (and later CPSA), Sam Barlin and Jacob Den Bakker dramatically declared that:

> We feel that objective theories that can be offered by Russia exceed the sum of all previous theoretical knowledge. Fully comprehending that unfolding historical events in Russia represent our future step in the social revolution we ask you to give us a chance to witness personally the colossus of development of the gigantic movement which has been started by the Russian proletariat….[150]

The formation of the Soviet Union played an important role in catalysing the birth of the CPSA. Communist parties around the world wanted to affiliate to the newly formed Communist International (Comintern), based in Moscow. According to the ECCI there could be only one party affiliated to the Comintern in each country.

The Comintern was formed one year after the Bolshevik Revolution, in 1919. Some have described the body as an *international* socialist movement – it was also known as the Third International.[151] It was established to "unify and direct the struggles by revolutionary Socialists world-wide."[152] Colin Bundy points out that at the time of the Comintern's

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[149] Jones, D.I and Greene, L.H., 'The Bolsheviks are coming', leaflet of the ISL circulated in 1918 and 1919. Source: Bunting, B. 1981. (Ed). *South African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party 1915-1980*. London: Inkululeko Publications, 40.

[150] Den Bakker, J. and Barlin, S. Report submitted to ECCI (Extracts from Minutes of Meeting, ECCI), 25 January 1921. Source: Davidson, A. Filatova, I. Gorodnov, V. Johns, S. (Eds.) 2003. *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History Volume 1: Socialist Pilgrims to Bolshevik Footsoldiers 1919-1930*. London: Frank Cass, 60.

[151] Cronin, J. 'Origins and "Native Republic"', 11.

[152] Bundy, C. 1991. 'Left, Right, Left, Right: The CPSA in the 1930s and 1940s' in Bundy, C. (Coordinator). *The History of the South African Communist Party.* Lectures presented at the University of

formation, the Soviets had only been in power for a short while and revolution in other countries seemed imminent.[153] Over the years, however, and particularly under the leadership of Stalin, the Comintern became increasingly dictatorial. Rather than an international movement it became a Soviet lead body primarily influenced by whatever line suited the Soviet Union at any time.[154] Though the Comintern was to be viewed as a guiding light by communist parties worldwide, it served in effect to marginalise interpretations of socialism or communism which did not conform to Comintern line by making the adoption of *The Twenty-One Points* by communist parties a condition for acceptance to the Comintern.[155]

The *Twenty-One Points* demanded a highly centralised and disciplined Party and loyalty to the Comintern. Drew writes that,

> In these points, the Comintern put itself at the centre of the world socialist struggle…All national parties were expected to adhere to the Comintern's policies, and within parties factions were to be subordinated to the Central Committee. Democratic centralism meant that the party centre was to have "complete power, authority and rights". Social democratic and social pacifist principles were to be removed from leadership posts in all labour organizations and replaced with Communists, even at the costs of replacing experienced personnel.[156]

Back in South Africa *The Twenty-One Points* were hotly debated amongst socialists wanting to affiliate with the Comintern. During the course of 1920, the ISL, a group called the Industrial Socialist League, the Communist League, the Jewish Socialist League and other groups united as the CPSA, but divisions surfaced and original members left due to differences of opinion around the Comintern's *Twenty-one Points.* Despite individuals and groups leaving unity talks, the CPSA was officially formed on the 30th July 1921, and named 'Communist Party of South Africa, Section of the Communist International'. The Party comprised 175 people.

Cape Town Summer School. Cape Town: Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, UCT, 21.

[153] Bundy, 'Left, Right, Left, Right', 21.

[154] See Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, and Davidson *et al*, *South Africa and the Communist International*.

[155] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 51.

[156] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 51.

The newly formed CPSA outlined its vision of a new society in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party of South Africa* in 1921:

> …a society of economic and social equals wherein class divisions, privileges and disabilities will for the first time in history be impossible; a system of social ownership of the means of production industrially administered by the workers on an organised and harmonious plan, ensuring from every man according to his needs, under the motto "All for each and each for All".[157]

The Manifesto called on all workers, "black and white" to "join in promoting the overthrow of the capitalist system and outlawry of the capitalist class, and the establishment of a Commonwealth of Workers throughout the World."[158] Many members of the CPSA felt that this would be possible within their lifetime.

'Dawn of the World':[159]
Hope for the Imminent Transformation of Society

The period just after the Russian Revolution was an intensely exciting and hopeful time for young socialist groups in South Africa. Socialist sympathisers were filled with idealistic zeal at the thought of the coming international socialist revolution. Sunday afternoons or mornings in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Germiston were spent by socialists debating and orating on subjects such as the Bolshevik Revolution with speakers calling for a repeat of the Revolution in South Africa.[160] In 1919 a lecture written by visiting Soviets was organised by a member of the ISL, Michael Wolberg-Velmont, a travelling Russian, and delivered in the Johannesburg City Hall. Wolberg-Velmont reported the following in a letter to the Comintern:

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[157] CPSA, Manifesto of the Communist Party adopted at the Cape Town conference, 30-31 July and 1 August 1921. Source: Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 63. The *Twenty-one Points* was appended to the CPSA's 1921 Manifesto.

[158] CPSA, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1921, 62.

[159] Title of a leaflet written by David Ivon Jones, 'The Dawn of the World', cited in Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years*, 35. The title captures the hope in an imminent and better future that the Revolution inspired. It also points to an expectation of the inevitability, the almost pre-ordained process of the change towards a socialist future. This was not another world, a different world, but the 'Dawn of *the* World'

[160] See Wolberg-Velmont, M. Report submitted to the Bureau of the Third International in Moscow, 15 April 1920. Source: Davidson *et al*, *South Africa and the Communist International*, 35-58.

> …after my concluding speech, several thousand voices rang out with the 'International', accompanied by the huge City Hall organ, instead of the British national anthem for which the bourgeoisie who were present had risen from their seats…We dispersed loudly singing 'The International' for the second time and long afterwards walked along Johannesburg streets singing revolutionary songs.[161]

David Ivon Jones had been watching the developments in Russia closely and was attempting to interpret them via Marxist writings. A few weeks after the Russian Revolution he wrote, "Let us look forward with great hope to the entry of the Russian elemental mass into the International class struggle for human emancipation. The day of its coming seems immeasurably nearer by this awakening."[162]

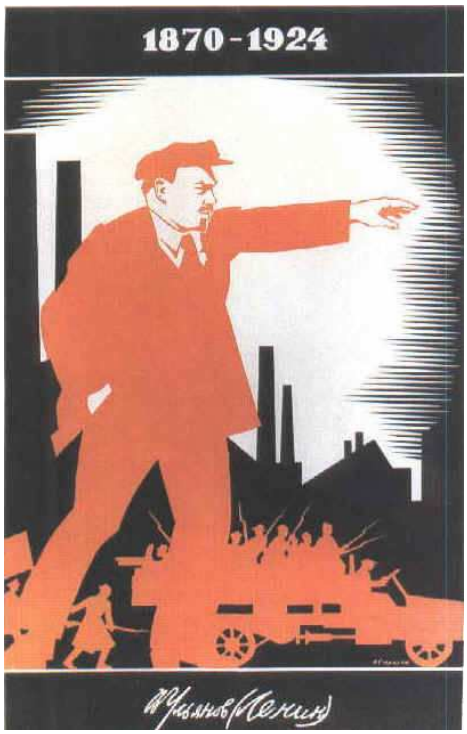


Fig. 4.2: 1920s Soviet poster entitled 'Lenin Leads'.

Even those people that were hardly versed in Marxist discourse where caught up in the fever of this period. Bernard Sachs was a member of the CPSA from 1922 to the early 1930s. He joined after being inspired by the dramatic events of the 1922 Rand Revolt. As a young man he sat in cafés in Commissioner Street in Johannesburg, frequented by "the ragged and the destitute", and listened wide-eyed to locals who debated and lectured about politics, and read aloud from newspapers:

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[161] See Wolberg-Velmont, Report submitted to the Bureau of the Third International, 42. According to Davidson *et al*, the "lecture described by Wolberg-Velmont had the effect of a bombshell on the South African public" and was much debated in the local press (39 n7). Many of those who attended the lecture had expected to hear about how "two noble Russian aristocrats" (41) had fled from the Bolshevik Revolution, and were unaware that the lecturer and its organizers where supports of the Revolution. Wolberg-Velmont comments that, "As the lecture continued the faces of the bourgeois became darker and the faces of our comrades began to light up with joy." (42) Lenin apparently requested a copy of Wolberg-Velmont's report.

[162] Jones, D.I. cited in Hirson, B. and Williams, G.A. 1995. *The Delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones 1883-1924*. London: Core Publications, 164.

> …in the midst of all the squalor and the sordidness and disintegration, I would be aflame with the news that Lenin and Trotsky were breaking a new road into history – were leading downtrodden mankind out of bondage to undreamt of heights. How grandly my spirit soared above circumstances in those far-off days. Even now the memory of that heroic period stirs my heart, palpitating and rather tired, and re-awakens the passion and the drama which thrilled a whole world.[163]

A friend of Bernard Sachs was Eddie Roux, who was a teenager when the Russian Revolution erupted. He and a few other young people formed the Young Communist League, and eager to spread the word about socialism, young Roux addressed a large meeting of African workers who where interested in the ICU in the early nineteen twenties:

> I told them I was a Communist, that the Communist Party believed in the union of all workers irrespective of race or colour, that we were working for the overthrow of the rule of exploiters and the establishment of soviets when the workers would take over the mines and factories and govern themselves through their own elected representatives. I went on to tell them of the great Russian Revolution which had happened and which would in due course be followed by a world revolution in which South Africa would play its part. Then would follow a world of comradeship between black and white in which all would work together for the benefit of all. The revolution, I implied, was around the corner. All that was needed was for the workers of the world to unite. So perhaps my head was in the stars: but as I spoke I believed every word I uttered.[164]

This sense of the imminence of radical change was not only discernable in the personal accounts of this period. Following the lead of the Comintern which declared in the *Twenty-One Points* that, "The class struggle in almost every country of Europe and America is entering upon the phase of civil war",[165] the newly established CPSA's *Manifesto* claimed that "if we play our part unfalteringly we shall in our lifetime see the robber and butcher class

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[163] Sachs, B. 1949. *Multitude of Dreams: A Semi-autobiographical Study*. Johannesburg: Kayor Publishing House, 84-85.

[164] Roux, E. and W. 1970. *Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux*. London: Rex Collings, 35-36.

[165] Comintern, *The Twenty-one Points: Conditions of Admission to the Communist International*, adopted at the Second Comintern Congress, 1920. Source: Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 58-62.

brought low and the *workers' 'Soviets' in power*."[166] It should be noted that the movement did not expect a new order to arrive like manner from heaven, but with sufficient determination and action, they believed they could effect great change in society. In addition economic forces were on their side. The complex and ambiguous position of Marxists on the relative importance of agency versus structure is evident in the Manifesto.

The initial sense of imminence in the creation of a new world produced a particularly strong form of utopianism on the part of members of the CPSA. It was explicit, it was widely pronounced, and it was untempered. This mood of expectation and hope influenced the production of particularly stirring prose and speeches about creating a bright new world.[167] By comparison with the rest of the Party's history, these years stand out as a particularly hopeful and inspired period.

Just after the Russian Revolution, *The International* drew on religious language declaring that, "The Word becomes Flesh in the Council of the Workmen."[168] Traces of messianism are discernable in this period. First, in that certain figures such as Lenin were seen as messiahs, leading the working class to salvation.[169] Second, in the way in which Marx's vision was seen as prophetic: after the Bolshevik Revolution *The International* stated that Marx's vision was in the process of being fulfilled.[170] Last, in that the transformation of society was to be experienced as a *rupture* with the old. Whilst traces of Messianism are discernable throughout the CPSA's history in their confident forecasting of the inevitable salvation of society, the idea of a socialist society in South Africa being ushered in by an emancipatory *event* was less prominent after the Rand Revolt, as will be shown.

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[166] CPSA, Manifesto of the Communist Party of South Africa, 1921, 64. The movement did not expect a new order to arrive like manner from heaven, but with sufficient determination and action, they believed they could effect great change in society. In addition economic forces were on their side. The complex and ambiguous position of Marxists on the relative importance of agency versus structure is evident in the Manifesto.

[167] Brian Bunting commented that the Russian Revolution produced some of the most inspiring writings of the CPSA. Interview with Brian Bunting, Cape Town, January 2006.

[168] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 46.

[169] See the account of Sachs, *Multitude of Dreams*, 132-133.

[170] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 46.

The 1922 Rand Revolt: Hope and Disappointment

The CPSA's interpretation of socialism, and the form a revolution might take in South Africa, was soon to be tested by the 1922 Rand Revolt. Against the backdrop of economic recession and consequent falling gold prices, the Chamber of Mines attempted to reduce input costs in the mining industry. The 1922 Strike was primarily a response by white workers to the Chamber of Mines replacing relatively highly paid white labour (including many semi-skilled jobs) with cheaper black labour.

To the young CPSA, still buoyed by the Bolshevik Revolution, the strike heralded the beginning of the socialist revolution in South Africa.[171] It was indeed an impressive show of strength on the part of white workers on the Witwatersrand. The strike lasted three months and progressed to an armed revolt.

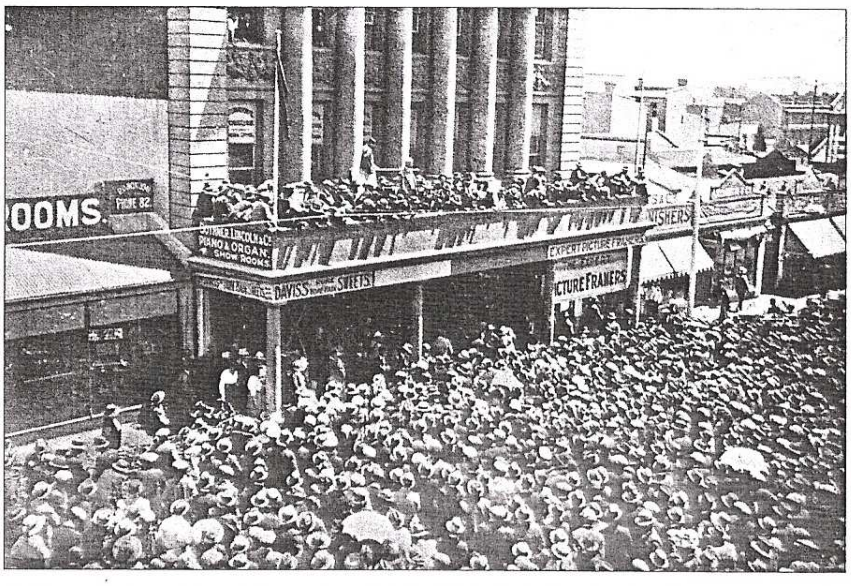


Fig. 4.3: A crowd outside the Johannesburg Trades Hall, 6 March 1922, the day the Strike was called.

Members of the CPSA were actively involved in organising and co-ordinating the strike. The Revolt was all-consuming for the workers and activists involved. The following account, pieced together by Drew, provides a sense of the atmosphere in which the Revolt's supports were immersed:

[171] Jeremy Krikler points out in a recently published book on the Rand Revolt, that the protests in the Strike and the Revolt that followed were not directed primarily at black workers. Despite the prevalence of racism amongst the strikers and even racial killings of up to 40 black people during the Revolt, the strikers were highly class conscious and most of their protests and violent action was directed against capital and the government, however selective their interpretation of socialism was. See Krikler, J. 2005. *The Rand Revolt: The 1922 Insurrection and Racial Killing in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 111.

> The City Hall steps bore silent witness to the many assorted strands bundled together in this revolt and to the extent to which resistance was powered by structures beyond those of formal trade unionism. 'The City Hall steps became the focus of life,' wrote Bernard Sachs, 'and there poured forth from it nightly a spate of wrath compounded of hatreds, spites, disappointments, empty dreams, ambitions'. 'Fight till you drop', exhorted Harry Haynes, recalling the Bolsheviks, while Ernie Shaw uttered only 'Comrade Chairman' before collapsing, coughing blood from his phthisis-ridden lungs. Spendiff and Fischer vowed, on the steps, that they would never be captured alive.[172]

Despite the impressive show of determination and strength on the part of the strikers, the Revolt was violently suppressed by the Smuts government. Up to 250 people were killed and Fordsburg and Benoni (working class suburbs in Johannesburg) were bombed by the government.[173] Eighteen people were sentenced to death and four were executed.[174] They went to the gallows singing *The Red Flag*.

The Revolt and its suppression had a profound effect on the CPSA. The sense of the imminence of revolution, of dramatic and immediate change in society, decreased. First, the CSPA had placed their hopes in the Revolt hailing the beginning of a social revolution for a worker's republic in South Africa. The 'revolution', however, was quashed. Second, South African white labour did not turn out to be the revolutionary force that the CPSA had first assumed. They were fighting for an improvement in their material position via the exclusion of black workers from improved standards of living (evidenced by



Fig. 4.4: The bombing of Benoni, as viewed by the strikers.

[172]Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 61. Based on Sachs, B. 1959. 'The City Hall Steps' in *South African Personalities and Places.* Johannesburg: Kayor Publishing House.

[173] Cronin, J. 'Origins and "Native Republic"', 13.

[174] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 62.

their attitude during the Strike and their support of the Pact government in the 1924 elections). Despite their frustration with their lot, they were not fighting for radical change. White labour was not the vanguard the CPSA had all imagined, and they had a long way to go to create a united working class.

The CPSA thus began to engage more earnestly with the black working class, the new hope for a socialist revolution. Engaging in black protest, however, brought the CPSA in contact with harsh government (and later an often violent police state), and a mainly racist white population. Thus very real obstacles had to be faced and overcome.

Hopes in the imminent transformation of society thus faded. After the adoption of the Native Republic Thesis (to be discussed in the next chapter) the anticipated change in society was not imagined as a rupture, but as incremental: there would be stages in the advancement to socialism.[175] The present was no longer pregnant with change and the ideal society returned to being a phenomenon of the future, rather than a phenomenon about to burst forth from the present.

The CPSA's at first uncompromising stance on the primacy of class and its potential for creating a brand new society changed, and the Party became engaged in the national liberation struggle, sometimes in alliance with other national liberation organisations.[176] In casting their eyes with greater focus upon the immediate South African social landscape, the

[175] After the adoption of the Native Republic Thesis, official CPSA policy stated that bourgeoisie democracy under majority rule would produce the context ripe for the development of socialism. However there is much ambiguity in the CPSA's statements and documents on exactly how the socialist future would be brought about – some people believed that a socialist future would follow a democracy under black majority rule, other believed that the fight for both would merge into one. These differing views are sometimes included in the *same* CPSA documents. See Grossman, J. 1985. 'Class Relations and the Policies of the Communist Party of South Africa 1921-1950'. Doctoral Thesis. Coventry: University of Warwick, 157.

[176] The national liberation struggle was also mobilised by utopian visions of a just and harmonious future society as a reading of ANC and other liberation groups' documents of the time will show. For example in an ANC publication *Inkundla Ya Bantu* in 1949 the president of the Congress Youth League said that "in the course of our forward advance to National Freedom there will be created the democratic forces which will ensure the establishment of a true democratic and a just social order". (Cited in CPSA, 'Nationalism and the Class Struggle', extract from Central Committee report to the National Conference of the Party, 6-8 January 1950. Source*:* Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 208). The Freedom Charter contains utopian elements drawn from the national liberation struggle, socialism and the Charterist movement.

CPSA brought themselves closer to daily struggles for changes in the lives of South Africans. Whilst the Party members were certainly not forced to abandon dreaming of a glorious future, they spend more time concentrating on the present.

CPSA official statements and writings became increasingly critical of the particular nature of capitalism in South Africa: how class and race issues intersected to produce a large, poor and oppressed black majority and a small white privileged minority.[177] The state, capitalists, protectionist white labour, organisations considered 'social reformist' in character, all came under attack. Criticism of the *status quo* was coupled with the articulation of the CPSA's immediate goals and demands.

The high prominence of overtly or explicitly utopian writing, in other words writing which depicted, or referred to, an ideal future society, faded and was replaced (though certainly not entirely) by a concentration on more immediate concerns, for example objecting to the pass laws, particular pieces of legislation, and demanding increased wages for workers.[178]

The prevalence of overt utopianism was thus affected by the reality of daily activity in the political arena. The Party was engaged with the day to day politics and strategy involved in building alliances with other organisations, developing trade union movements and gaining electoral support. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Goodwin and Taylor note in this regard that, "the kinds of compromises made in the course of political struggle" involve a "pragmatic concern with isolated issues and detailed decisions" which "replaces the total, utopian emphasis on complete change."[179]

Though utopianism was still present in the discourses of the CPSA, fewer references were made in the majority of documents and statements to a specific utopia. To illustrate: after the adoption of the Native Republic Thesis, the CPSA attempted to tap into the frustrations of black people and the energy of black protest. For example, in 1929 the CPSA founded the

[177] The conditions under which poor white people lived were sometimes included when the CPSA discussed the situation of the 'oppressed classes' in South Africa. In addition propaganda was still directed at both black and white workers.

[178] The term 'explicit utopianism' or 'overt utopianism' has been developed for this study to refer to those instances where reference is made to an ideal future society or state, or in which an ideal future society is described in some detail. Later in the chapter, this will be contrasted with 'implicit utopianism'.

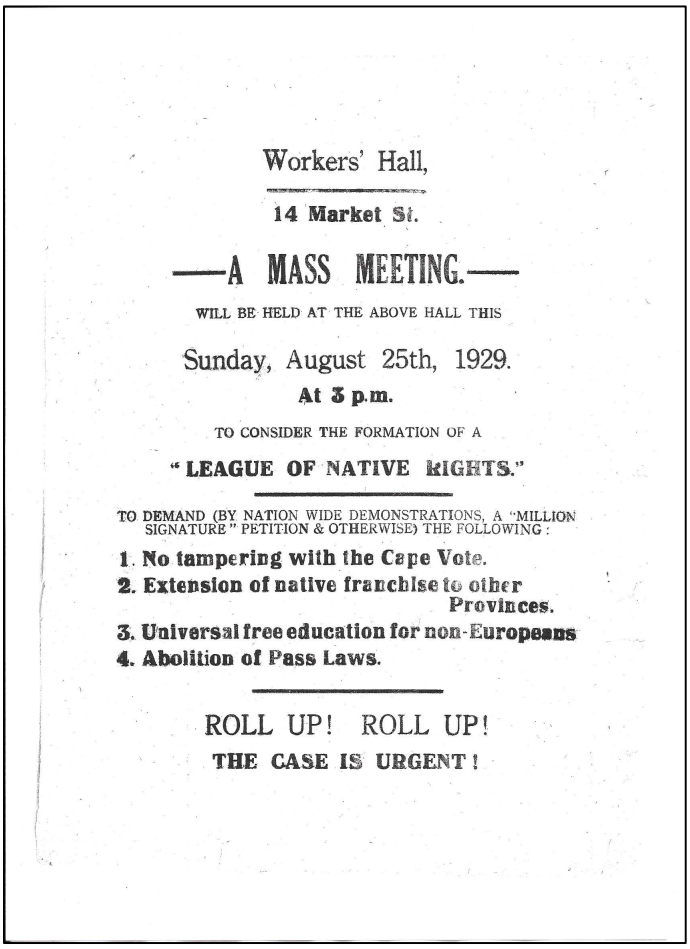
[179] Goodwin, B. and Taylor, K. 1982. *The Politics of Utopia*: *A Study in Theory and Practice*. London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 227.

League of African Rights (see figure 4.5), which was essentially a petition demanding franchise for black people, abolition of the pass laws, universal free education for black children (which white children were receiving), and the right to free speech. Prominent leaders from the ANC and other liberation organisations were members. In the League the CPSA specifically steered clear of references to a socialist future, and concentrated on concrete demands which were sure to resonate with almost all black citizens.

Demands made in election campaigns were even more immediate. The CPSA contested the municipal elections in Johannesburg in October 1937 for example. A letter sent to the Labour Party by CPSA activist Issy Wolfson outlined the 'Communist Party Programme of Action' entitled, 'Make the Rich Pay!' The Programme included the following:

> 1. Active and adequate slum clearance, without the repetition of the inhuman evictions of poor people at Bertrams.
> 2. Reduction in tram and bus fares for workers by the following methods:
> a) weekly seasons tickets at reduced rates.
> b) monthly season tickets at reduced rates.
> c) reduced fares between 6a.m. and 8:30a.m. and between 4:30p.m. and 6:30p.m.
> […]
> 9. Public Hot and Cold Baths in working class areas at reduced fees for the workers.
> 10. Municipal Bakeries organised to produce good, wholesome bread at greatly reduced prices.[180]

[180] CPSA, Letter from Issy Wolfson to the South African Labour Party including election programme, reproduced under the title 'Johannesburg Municipal Elections: Communist Party asks Labour Party for Working Arrangement', published in *South African Worker*, 12 June 1937. Source: Drew, A. (Ed) 1996. *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History. Volume One: 1907 – 1950*. Cape Town: Buchu Books, Mayibuye Books, UCT Press, 269-270.



Workers' Hall,

14 Market St.

—A MASS MEETING.—

WILL BE HELD AT THE ABOVE HALL THIS

Sunday, August 25th, 1929.

At 3 p.m.

TO CONSIDER THE FORMATION OF A

"LEAGUE OF NATIVE RIGHTS."

TO DEMAND (BY NATION WIDE DEMONSTRATIONS, A "MILLION SIGNATURE" PETITION & OTHERWISE) THE FOLLOWING:

1. **No tampering with the Cape Vote.**
2. **Extension of native franchise to other Provinces.**
3. **Universal free education for non-Europeans**
4. **Abolition of Pass Laws.**

ROLL UP! ROLL UP!

THE CASE IS URGENT!

Fig. 4.5: A CPSA poster announcing a meeting of the League of African Rights, 1929.

No mention is made of what the CPSA stood for in terms of its greater goals: the creation of a non-racist socialist society. The CPSA had to provide the electorate with potentially immediately achievable demands, and a sense that small but *immediate* change to their lives could be achieved. Whilst references to an ideal future society can often be inspiring for people, it is at the same time, difficult for some people to hold on to more distant goals. In addition, it should be noted that the letter was written to the SALP, with whom the CPSA hoped to contest the election. The SALP was an exclusively white labour party and the majority of SALP members would have been repelled by the image of a non-racist society. The CPSA was very small, and such collaboration would give them a greater chance at electoral success. Thus compromises were made in the course of political struggle.

These compromises, however, were made in the hope that they were correctly serving their end goal. Some members of the CPSA grappled with these kinds of compromises. For example the CPSA's support for 'immediate demands' for improvements in the position of workers versus a revolutionary purity was debated in the Party in 1923. The CPSA, it must be remembered, considered itself a revolutionary party: this was an important part of their identity. They were not seeking palliatives for workers for the sickness of capitalism. They wanted a transformation of society, and not merely a better standard of living for the workers.

S.P. Bunting (see figure 4.6) pondered over the significance of this support in a letter published in *The International* in March 1923. He said that by "supporting 'immediate

demands' the Party will gain the support of the masses – even though these demands appear on the surface to be 'reformist' and not 'revolutionary'…".[181] He continued:

> The communist Party, with revolution as its prime aim, certainly endeavours to emphasise and intensify the struggle as such, the demands themselves, rather than any supposed remedies.[182] […]The alternative to this real support of daily demands is, especially in times of crisis, not merely to ignore them or stand aloof from them, but to oppose them, in other words to support the other side.[183]



Fig. 4.6: S.P. Bunting, founding member of the CPSA.

As can be seen in Bunting's comments, the fight for a radically transformed society was important to the CPSA even if not evident in all of their public statements and publications. In this sense utopianism was implicit throughout this Party's history and in the discourses of the Party. Utopianism can be traced in the CPSA discourses in both their criticism of the present and even in the less radical calls for changes to society i.e. not only in their depictions of an ideal society (explicit utopianism). The CPSA were particularly critical of the *status quo*: the present was full of that which *should not*, and *did not have* to be. The majority of the CPSA members did believe in the possibility of a radically transformed society, and they used this ideal society as one of the ways in which they judged the present. *Implicit utopianism* is therefore evident throughout the Party's history.

The categories 'explicit' and 'implicit' utopianism are developed here for use in the specific case of the presence of utopianism in the CSPA, and not necessarily for use in utopian studies more generally. It is not the case that utopianism is implicit in *all criticism* of the *status quo*. In the case of the CPSA, utopianism was implicit in their criticism of the *status quo* and in their immediate demands for small changes in society, because they used a particular ideal

[181] Eddie Roux paraphrasing Bunting in Roux, E. 1944. *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography*. Cape Town: Self-published, 60.

[182] By remedies, Bunting was referring to "social reformist" measures. Roux, *S.P. Bunting*, 60.

[183] Roux, *S.P. Bunting*, 60-61.

against which to judge the present. This ideal (gleaned from explicit articulations of utopianism) was articulated with varying frequency throughout their existence.

At times, explicit utopianism – the articulation of what the ideal society they were fighting for looked like – was less common. More frequent expressions of explicit utopianism in the first few years of its existence were probably a reflection of the heightened sense of expectation for change in society, and the particularly strong or radical utopianism that this generated. It was also influenced by the fact that the CPSA had yet to be drawn into the level of daily political struggle that developed a concentration on "isolated issues and detailed decisions".[184]

It is not suggested however that there was a constantly lower expression of explicit utopianism after the mid-twenties. Certain events or a particular social atmosphere brought more radical utopian sentiments to the fore. The Second World War and the fight that the CPSA took up against fascism produced some very overtly utopian texts, for example, particularly in relation to the USSR in the mid-1940s. A victory for the USSR, so the CPSA believed, could swing history's fortunes more quickly in the direction of socialism.

It is possible that when a society is on the brink of something potentially new, when change seems imminent, or in times of social upheaval, that we find the emergence of utopianism, or stronger forms of utopianism developing, as was the case with socialists after the Russian Revolution, and during the social upheaval of an international scale war. When society is more stable – even if the conditions people live under are harsh – we may find the creation of utopias less prevalent even if the desire for some kind of change in society exists.[185]

Fredric Jameson suggests that as movements for change begin to reach pre-revolutionary peak their demands become more "precise in their insistence and urgency" but that they also tend to lose their utopian vision and get replaced by more concrete demands.[186] This is not always the case. It may be in the case of a movement which is beginning to see aspects of its utopian vision put into place, such as the labour movement in Europe, which won greater concessions for workers. Once people gain aspects of their utopian vision, the need for

[184] Reference to a quote from Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 227 quoted on page 59 of this study.

[185] Millenarian movements for example certainly predominated in times of particular social *upheaval* and change, rather than simply times of oppression.

[186] Jameson, F. 2004. 'The Politics of Utopia' in *New Left Review*, 25, January to February, 44.

radical change may lessen, and activism in the daily political arena is taken up with arranging the practical details of these small gains or concessions.[187] It is not because movements reach pre-revolutionary peak that they lose their utopian character, but because the utopian vision has been (to an extent) mainstreamed into society.[188] In fact when society reaches a pre-revolutionary peak (a sense of being on the brink of radical change) utopianism (the articulation of depictions of an ideal or far better society) may become more pronounced and forms of messianism or millenarianism within the utopian vision may become enhanced, as we have just seen in the case of the CPSA.

The CPSA's Confidence in the Future

Do not forget Molotov's clarion cry on the thirtieth anniversary of the glorious Soviet Revolution: 'We are living in an age when all roads lead to Communism'.
(Bill Andrews, Chairman of the CPSA, 1948) [189]

Despite fading hopes for the imminent transformation of society, CPSA members still believed in the *inevitable* triumph of socialism. This sense of *certainty*, rather than hope in a socialist revolution, can be seen in the official statements of the CPSA throughout its history, and in a number of individual CPSA accounts.

In 1949 the CPSA issued a statement under the title "End the Nationalist Tyranny".[190] The CPSA's confidence in the future can be seen in the following rousing words:

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[187] Perhaps South Africa around the transition to democracy in the early nineties also provides an example. The specific historical context needs to be taken into account: what are the balances of forces operating in the society at the time of transition and change? How radical was the utopian vision and the revolutionary content of the movement? Did compromise rather than complete change (which comes with high costs) seem more feasible, etcetera?

[188] See Bauman, Z. 1976. *Socialism: the Active Utopia*. London: Allen & Unwin, for commentary on this phenomenon.

[189] Cited in 'Communists Election Policy Defined: National Conference Decision' in *The Guardian*, 8 January 1948. Source: Drew, A. (Ed) 1997. *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History: Volume Two: 1943-1964.* Cape Town: Buchu Books, Mayibuye Books UCT Press.

[190] CPSA, 'End the Nationalist Tyranny', Resolution adopted by the meeting of the Central Committee of the CPSA, Cape Town, 9-10th July 1949 and issued 13th July 1949. Source: Simons Collection, BC1081: 08.2, Manuscripts and Archives Department, University of Cape Town, Cape Town.

> The Communist Party, which has been the spearhead of the fight for genuine democracy and for the defeat of Fascism in South Africa, feels confident of the future…Communism as a world force is getting mightier every day, winning new millions for the cause of peace and socialism. The Communist Party feels confident that out of the present attacks of [the South African] Government will emerge a powerful, united working class, determined to resist and defeat the enemies of peace and progress, liberate our country from racial tyranny and class oppression.[191]

What reason did the communists have to be confident? It was not yet five years since the end of a devastating world war. The National Party had recently been elected to power and immediately begun instituting further racist and oppressive legislation. It should be noted, however, that many voters in the West did turn to the left after the Second World War, and labour parties secured victories in many countries. This was, however, seen by the CPSA as a trajectory towards a particular future, rather than a trend which could be reversed again.

The document, "End the Nationalist Tyranny", was possibility written to inspire people to action – it was rousing and confident rhetoric.[192] Confidence in the inevitability of securing a socialist future is nonetheless evident in CPSA discourses and can be seen in internal as well as external documents and statements, including analytical essays and letters.[193]

A number of factors influenced the CPSA's tendency to believe in the inevitability of a socialist future. Some CPSA members appear to have thought that the levels of oppression experienced by the working class could only be tolerated for so long. In addition the CPSA offered a vision of society so tantalising (so they felt) that mobilisation towards its achievement would eventually develop. In 1944 a report to the Central Committee of the Party, published in their newspaper, *Freedom*, declared confidently that, "We are moving in

[191] CPSA, 'End the Nationalist Tyranny'.

[192] However, propaganda or publicity pieces intended to inspire rank and file membership or potential new recruits may also have had the effect of inspiring CPSA leaders and helped keep the flame of activism burning.

[193] See for example, Jones, D.I, Extract of letter from Comrade Jones to Trotsky's questionnaire, 2 June 1921. Source: Davidson *et al*, *South Africa and the Communist International*, 71-73; Simons, J. 'Report on Capitalism in Crisis'. Submitted to the Meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of South Africa, Cape Town, 9 – 10 July, 1949, Source: Simons Collection, BC1081: 018.1; and Central Committee of the CPSA, 'Nationalism and the Class Struggle', extract from the Central Committee report to the National Conference of the Communist Party of South Africa, Johannesburg, 6-8 January 1950. Source: Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 200-211.

the direction of history; we express the deep-seated needs of the people; and must therefore eventually obtain the support of the people."[194] The perceived moral 'correctness' of the socialist ideal and the vision of the socialist future relative to the oppressive and unjust nature of the *status quo,* were sufficient to make some CPSA activists believe that the change they envisioned would come about. This belief was also build on an evolutionary perspective of history and a sense that history had ordained the socialist future.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, Marxism was an evolutionary teleology in which society's historical development was seen as tending towards the collapse of capitalism and the establishment of communism. Such evolutionary perspectives gave many Marxists confidence in the eventual realisation of a socialist order. Members of the CPSA were no exception, as can be seen from the CPSA's 1921 Manifesto:

> All recorded history is the history of class struggles and consequent evolutionary changes in the form of society; the class divisions and institutions varying from age to age according to the current economic basis, and each form being superseded by another when its mission is fulfilled. Today this is more true than ever.[195]

The following is an excerpt from a Draft Party Programme (written in 1941 during the Second World War) that speaks of the predictive powers of Friedrich Engels.

> The present war, a continuation of the 1914-1918 war, is the violent and murderous product of the incurable disease that has stricken capitalism in its imperialistic stage; it may well prove also to be the midwife of new socialist societies. […] The collapse of capitalism is being accompanied by violence over a whole historical period, an era of wars of the most varied kind, - imperialist wars, civil wars, national wars. It is an era that was foreseen 55 years ago by Frederick Engels, one of the founders of the socialist movement. Writing in 1887, he described a future world war "of an extension and violence hitherto undreamt of". […] Engels prediction is being fulfilled to the letter. His prophetic words were in reality conclusions drawn from a

[194] CPSA, Extract from 'The Struggle for Freedom, Equality and Security', Report of the Central Committee to the CPSA conference, Johannesburg, published in *Freedom*, January 1944. Source: Bunting, *South African Communists Speak,* 183-184.
[195] CPSA, Manifesto of the Communist Party of South Africa, 1921, 62.

> scientific analysis of the tendencies in capitalist society that have resulted in this major disaster. [196]

The evolutionary language of 'scientific socialism' is evident in this excerpt. The Second World War was interpreted as heralding the collapse of capitalism, which was predicted in Marx and Engels writings. Society was seen as tending progressively towards an inevitable conclusion.



Fig. 4.7: A 1920s Soviet poster entitled 'The Last Decisive Battle!'

A year after the end of World War Two, the Party published a report to the CPSA Central Committee in *Freedom* stating that, a social revolution had taken place in "the agrarian counties bordering on the Soviet Union" where the land of the ruling classes had been confiscated. They commented that the Second World War had thus been a revolutionary process in some places, in which power had been "transferred to the workers and the peasants. In Western Europe, on the other hand, *that process has still to be worked out to its conclusion* [emphasis added]."[197]

Referring to what Mannheim named the 'socialist-communist utopian mentality', Mannheim commented in *Ideology and Utopia* that "Only through the union of a sense of determinateness and a living vision of the future was it possible to create an historical time-sense of more than one dimension […] It is not only the past but the future as well which has virtual existence in the

[196] CPSA, Draft Programme of the Communist Party of South Africa, 1941. Source: Simons Collection BC1081: 03.2.

[197] CPSA, 'National Front and Class Struggle: Report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of South Africa' published in *Freedom*, August-September 1946. Source: Drew, *South Africa's Radical Tradition*, volume 1, 373-374.

present."[198] This observation may be applied to the CPSA, for whom the present was latent with the future, as can be seen in the quote from *Freedom.*

One more reason for some members continuing belief in the inevitability of a socialist future is tentatively advanced. It may have been too difficult for the some individuals to conceive that the ideal future that they imagined and had invested so much in fighting for would not come about. The imagined utopia simply had to come about. For many members of the CPSA, what 'ought not to be' became what 'will not be'. This may have been an expression of determination or of hope, but it was also perhaps a mechanism for some individuals in the CPSA to cope with what was a world filled with injustice, inequality, and general hardship. South Africa was a divided, unequal society, in which a few profited off the backs of many. It is within this context that many of the men and a few women of the CPSA clung to a vision of a more gentle, humane and dignifying society. The belief in the possible realisation of a socialist utopia played an important role in the lives of many members of the CPSA. This will be further explored in Chapter Six.

Summary

CPSA utopian discourses contained desire for a better society, and hope and expectation that the society they envisioned would be realised. At the beginning of the CPSA's history, members felt a heightened sense of expectation for the imminent transformation of society. This sense of expectation influenced the CPSA to produce dramatic propaganda which frequently contained articulations of explicit utopianism. The sense of expectation also catapulted them in the upheaval of the Rand Revolt.

Hopes for the imminent transformation of society faded, and the CSPA became increasingly involved with day to day politics. The high prevalence of overtly utopian statements decreased as a result, but utopianism nevertheless remained implicit in the discourses of the CPSA. Whilst the sense that radical change was imminent was not constant throughout their history – their confidence in the eventual realisation of their vision was a defining feature of their utopianism, and lent it a sometimes messianic character. As will be shown later in the study, the confident form that the CPSA's utopianism took affected the manner in which utopianism functioned in the Party's history.

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[198]Mannheim, K. 1936 [1929]. *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Harvest Books, 245-246.

Chapter Five:
The Content of the CPSA's Utopian Vision

Introduction

Images of a society in which people would be free from conflict, oppression, want for material things, a world in which all people could develop to the fullest of their potential, are described in many of the CPSA's documents, and mentioned by individual members of the CPSA in interviews, letters, biographies and autobiographies. In light of the definition of utopia developed in Chapter Two, the CPSA's images of a future society were utopian.

The CPSA fought for concrete, immediate changes, such as the abolition of the pass laws in South Africa, and for more distant and far more radical changes in society. The CPSA's ultimate aim was the creation of a socialist society, in which they believed class and racial conflict would disappear.

The imagined utopia did not remain the same throughout the Party's history, however: changes in the socio-economic and political environment in South Africa affected the way in which members conceived of an ideal society. In addition, as new people joined the Party, they brought with them new traditions and experiences and influenced the CPSA's utopian vision. As will be shown, the CPSA's official vision of the future was also strongly influenced by the Comintern. Essentially the following chapter describes the CPSA's vision for a future and analyses the events, traditions and people that shaped it.

The following chapter is not a detailed textual analysis of the CPSA's utopian vision for a future South Africa, nor a detailed analysis of shifts in CPSA policy over the years, as this is beyond the scope of this study. Rather it is a sketch of the imagined utopia and the factors that influenced its formation, included to provide a fuller understanding of the nature of the CPSA's utopianism, and further background to the following chapters on the function of this utopianism. It was because the content of the imagined utopia resonated with many South Africans' hopes that the CPSA's utopianism was to play a role in South African society.

Influences on the CPSA's Utopian Vision

The International Socialist League (ISL) and the other small socialist groups which were to make up the CPSA, started as a small group of mainly white men, whose connections to Europe (England, Wales, Lithuania for example) were still strong.[199] Jewish immigrants from Lithuania brought a Bundist tradition to South African socialism.[200] British immigrants brought diverse interpretations of Marxism, often combined with what has been called an 'ethical socialism'.[201] De Leon's writings and Syndicalism had some resonance with South African socialists in the first decade or so of the 1900s.[202] Whilst South African socialist groups incorporated different interpretations of Marxism, the ISL – and other small socialist organisations' – decision to apply for affiliation to the Comintern (the birth of the CPSA) and its signing of the *Twenty-One Points* had the effect of narrowing the CPSA's interpretation of Marxism often to that of the Comintern's.

The vision of an alternative just and harmonious socialist society also drew its inspiration directly from Karl Marx's work, as mentioned in Chapter Three. Their utopian vision often echoed Marx's humanism in their desire for a world free from alienation and want, a world that secured human dignity. This spirit can be seen in the following excerpt from the CPSA's 1921 Manifesto:

> We hold aloft the glistening banner of the World Commune to be, when the class war shall have been forever stamped out, when mankind shall no longer cower under the bludgeon of the oppressor, when the necessities and amenities of life, the comfort and the culture, the honour and the power, shall be to him who toils not to him who exploits, when none shall be called master and none servant, but all shall be fellow

[199] According to Drew, William Thibedi was probably the only black member of the ISL in 1921 shortly before the ISL and other organisations united to form the CPSA. Drew, A. 2000. *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 53.

[200] The Bundist movement developed as a Marxist movement amongst the Jewish working class and intelligentsia of Russia in the context of anti-Semitic repression. The 'Bund' was the General Union of Jewish Workers in Russia and Poland.

[201] The influence of this 'ethical socialism' in South African can be seen in the approach of Olive Schreiner. Alison Drew writes of Schreiner that, "Her life and writings epitomized the values of the oranganizationally eclectic socialism of the late nineteenth-century Britain – most importantly, a profound concern with moral dilemmas and with the relationship between the personal and the political." Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 9.

[202] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 9-10.

workers in commune.[203]

The CPSA utopian vision was also influenced by the spirit of the Second International, in envisioning an imminent *international* socialist future. This spirit was intensified by the Russian Revolution.

Whilst the CPSA's analysis of capitalism in South Africa was drawn primarily from Marxism, CPSA members were varyingly versed in Marx's writings. For example David Ivon Jones became steeped in Marxist and Bolshevik writings, as did Lazar Bach who was to play a major role in Party affairs in the 1930s. Eddie Roux (see figure 5.1) on the other hand, was not convinced by some of Marx's analysis. He thought that his "theory of value was at variance with obvious economic facts." Yet this did not shake his "faith in Marxism as a whole".[204] He was later to move away from Marxism. S.P. Bunting was apparently not particularly interested in understanding the details of Marxist theory.[205]



Fig. 5.1: Eddie Roux, member of the CPSA.

The CPSA drew on a number of discourses (apart from socialism) in developing their vision for a future South Africa. This can be seen in the language in which utopianism was expressed by members of the CPSA. For example, religious language features in some of the depictions of an ideal society and in the utopianism of the CPSA. Shortly after the Bolshevik

[203] CPSA, Manifesto of the Communist Party adopted at the Cape Town conference 30-31 July and 1 August 1921. Source: Bunting, B. 1981. (Ed). *South African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party 1915-1980*. London: Inkululeko Publications, 64-65.

[204] Roux, E and W. 1970. *Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux*. London: Rex Collings, 34.

[205] Bernard Sachs writes, "Bunting shared Roux's aversion for the capricious twists and turns of dialectical materialism. His rugged spirit was more like the Russian peasant revolutionary Zhelyubov, who left his home and decided to participate in the struggle against Tsarism. Zhelyubov said that liberalism wasn't enough and that it was necessary to give history a shove forward. This was the spirit in which Bunting approached the movement. The complexity of doctrine was for him less important that that courage, sincerity and devotion with which history could be given a shove forward or a mountain moved". Sachs, B. 1949. *Multitude of Dreams: A Semi-autobiographical Study*. Johannesburg: Kayor Publishing House, 141.

Revolution in 1917, *The International* claimed that Karl Marx's vision was in the process of being fulfilled, and proclaimed, as mentioned, that, "The Word becomes Flesh in the Council of the Workmen".[206] In 1928 CPSA member James La Guma (see figure 5.1) and ANC leader Josiah Gumede visited the USSR. On their return Gumede addressed a meeting of the CPSA in Johannesburg. Using religious language, Gumede proclaimed that, "I have seen the new world to come, where it has already begun. I have been to the new Jerusalem."[207]

Many of the members of the CPSA were brought up in religious households or in communities where religion was part and parcel of daily life. Virtually all African CPSA leaders were missionary educated for example, and a few remained Christian.[208] A number of the British born CPSA members were brought up in Christian communities and many Eastern European CPSA members were brought up in religious Jewish communities.

Official CPSA documents that mentioned the imagined future were written using secular language, and often using Marxist terminology. *Personal* references to, or accounts of, the imagined future, sometimes incorporated religious language. The use of religious language can be seen in the writings of David Ivon Jones, particularly in his references to socialism and to the imagined future.[209] Jones was an intense and angst ridden intellectual, who came to socialism via a sometimes tortured and ecstatic journey from the Methodist and then Unitarian faiths. Jones's biographer, Barauch Hirson says that, "Ivon Jones was steeped in the language of the Bible and his writings reflected that absorption."[210] Two weeks after the Russian Revolution Jones wrote the following to a friend in Wales, "The World is going through great changes, the greatest in the history of human society…the light that is breaking forth from Russia will illuminate the dark places of the Earth. The Russian autocracy was the

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[206] Cited in Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 46.

[207] Cited in Bunting, B. 1975. *Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary*. London: Inkululeko Publications, 30. Josiah Gumede was President-General of the ANC from 1927-30. Though Gumede was never a member of the CPSA, he was a communist sympathizer and he collaborated closely with the Party, making him very unpopular with some ANC leaders in the late 20s and early 1930s. Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 30.

[208] Kelley, R.D.G. 1991. 'The Religious Odyssey of African Radicals: Notes on the Communist Party of South Africa, 1921-34' in *Radical History Review* 51, 5-24.

[209] Early Christian teachings and lifestyle contained communal values that we might today recognise as socialist.

[210] Hirson, B. and Williams, G.A. 1995. *The Delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones 1883-1924*. London: Core Publications, 93. Hirson and Williams write separate sections of Jones's biography.

shadow across the world, but the Russian Revolution is the light of the world."[211]

S.P. Bunting too came from a religious background. His great-great grandfather and great-grandfather were both Wesleyan Ministers, and his mother was brought up in a Methodist household. On the occasion of the CPSA's adoption of the Native Republic Thesis, in a meeting in Johannesburg in 1928, Bunting said: "We [the CPSA] preach good tidings to the poor, liberty to the captives and the opening of the prisons to them that are bound" (reminiscent of early Christian teaching).[212]

In a country where the majority of black South Africans were Christian, black CPSA leaders drew on the religious language of their youth to appeal to black people. For example, during a political demonstration in Potchefstroom in 1929, Edwin Mofutsanyana "equated Communist political goals with Christian principles, but insisted that those principles must be implemented on earth rather than heaven".[213]

Despite the fact that many of the African members of the CPSA were brought into the CPSA after a period of tutelage in Marxism in CPSA organised night schools, and remained committed Marxists, Kelley points out that religious language was not only a rhetorical device: "The African cadre turned to the text they knew best in order to make sense of their movement, drawing their arsenal largely from Ethiopianism and other versions of Africanized Christianity."[214] This was not only the case for African activists. For example, La

[211] Hirson and Williams, *The Delegate for Africa*, 178.

[212] Cited in Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 90. Drew notes, "The influence of religion on socialism took different forms. In the nineteenth-century Britain, a culture of ethical socialism was built on a Protestant Tradition…" Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 2. This can be seen in the case of S.P. Bunting and David Ivon Jones.

[213] Kelley, ''The Religious Odyssey of African Radicals', 15. Edwin Mofutsanyana joined the CPSA in 1927. He was also a member of the ANC. He was active in the CPSA until it disbanded and was General-Secretary of the Party for a period.

[214]Kelley, 'The Religious Odyssey of African Radicals', 16. Kelley's article is fascinating because it deals with the influence of Christian discourses on the CPSA members, and because it provides some insight into the traditions that African CPSA intellectuals brought to the socialist movement. This topic is unfortunately seriously under explored. The majority of CPSA's rank and file membership was African – but about them we know little. This is partly because, as Kelley points out, the CPSA's mass base was so transient and partly because, as with so many archives, concentration has been on more prominent leaders. Kelley's remarks on this topic are speculative rather than conclusive. The interaction of Christian discourses with Marxism and socialism, and the traditions that black South Africans brought to the socialist movement in South Africa is an area in need of further investigation. Apart from the dearth of archival material with

Guma a coloured activist and prominent member of the CPSA, published a poem in the *South African Worker* which was derived from Psalm 68 of the Bible:



Fig. 5.2: James La Guma, member of the CPSA.

Hark ye comrades, fellow workers,
The cry throughout the land.
Ethiopia lifts her weary head
And stretches out her hand…

Arise ye' African workers,
Strip ready for the fray,
In the rosy East is dawning
The long awaited day,
The day of emancipation.
From the bitter galling [c]hains,
Of capitalist oppression,
That sucks the life blood from your veins…[215]

Religion influenced the content of the imagined utopia for some CPSA members. For example, the imagined future may have been seen by some Christian members as the Promised Land (in a similar manner to Christian prophecies of a promised land) as shown in La Guma's poem.[216]

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which to explore this topic, it may have been neglected due to association of Marxism with an anti-religious position or with secularisation.

[215] La Guma, 1928 cited in Kelley, 'The Religious Odyssey of African Radicals', 16. James (Jimmy) La Guma joined the CPSA in 1925. He founded the Luderitz branch of the ICU as a young man. He played a role in developing the Native Republic Thesis to be discussed later in the Chapter.

[216] The following quote is taken from an article entitled 'What is the Communist Party? Lesson 4: What Will be Done in the Bantu Republic?' which was written by the CPSA and published in a 1934 edition of *Umsebenzi*: "Everyone who wants land will be able to get it, and so no one will starve. The people's government will help the peasants in many ways, with ploughs and tractors and oxen and seed and with irrigation works. The whole nation will unite to fight the drought and the locusts, and the pests will no longer cause misery and death to thousands." (Source: Drew, A. (Ed) 1996. *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History. Volume 1: 1907 – 1950*. Cape Town: Buchu Books, Mayibuye Books, UCT Press, 215). While this passage contains no religious references, the prose of the passage is reminiscent of biblical prose and of millenarian visions of a better society in the promise of a harmonious, peaceful rural life (millenarian movements were usually rural based, and thus references to a harmonious society were often rural). Whether or not this passage was in fact influenced by religious visions of a better society is not clear, though quite likely.

Commitment to the socialist movement was to some CPSA members a moral and righteous choice to serve humanity and set it free, and some individuals' speeches and writings that included utopian references or images thus took on the evangelical tone of Christianity. [217] In addition, religious language provided them with references and language with which to articulate their utopianism. It is possible that even for those who were not religious, religious language gave them a vocabulary that expressed the hope and excitement they felt in the future.

The humanitarianism found in certain Christian traditions, such as the Wesleyan community in which S.P. Bunting was bought up in, may also have influenced the content of the CPSA's utopia – as one in which people would be free from poverty, oppression and associated social indignities. [218] This humanitarianism was not of course exclusive to Christian traditions, and as mentioned, can be found in Marx's work too.

Importantly, the CPSA's vision of a future society was also moulded by the experiences of activism in South Africa: and in particular a sense, or experience of the injustices of racial oppression. The CPSA's closer engagement with black protest in the mid 1920s placed the goal of producing a non-racial society, where black people would be free from racial oppression, at centre stage. As already suggested in the previous chapter, however, the young CPSA was at first focused on creating an international socialist utopia.

The Early Vision: An International Utopia

David Ivon Jones and Sam Barlin, South African delegates to the Comintern in 1921, reported that, "We white colonists are a shifting population. For some of us, the only tie with South Africa is the Communist Movement itself."[219] They did not of course speak for all CPSA members at the time. Nevertheless, though very much involved with labour issues

[217] It is possible that Judaism influenced the CPSA's utopian vision. Redemption and salvation are certainly a part of Jewish religious discourse, and the similarity between Marxism and Jewish mysticism where mentioned in Chapter Two.

[218] For example, Molly Fischer, a member of the CPSA and later the SACP, grew up in a family where the values of humanitarianism and compassion were important, a tradition which continued from Molly's grandmother's work as a missionary. Interview with Ilse Wilson, Johannesburg, September 2006.

[219] Barlin, S. and Jones, I., Memorandum to the Small Bureau of the Comintern on the Situation in Africa, Statement of the South African Delegation to the Comintern, 16 July 1921. Source: Davidson, A. Filatova, I. Gorodnov, V. Johns, S. (Eds.) 2003. *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History Volume 1: Socialist Pilgrims to Bolshevik Footsoldiers* 1919-1930. London: Frank Cass, 76.

(mainly white at the beginning) in South Africa, most of the socialists looked northwards for answers, including South African born communists like Eddie Roux.

Their foreign roots or orientation were reflected in the references used in writings and propaganda, which would probably not have appealed to a large segment of the South African population. By way of illustration: the language and references in the ISL's leaflet, "The Bolsheviks are coming" (written after the Russian Revolution) were decidedly English: "Why do they send British armies to Russia to fight the Bolsheviks? Have they not had enough killing? Or is it a thirst for righteousness that makes them pack Tommy Atkins off to freeze in the snows of Archangel, just when he was looking forward to Home and Blighty?"[220]

In addition to their foreign orientation, the Party also had a decidedly internationalist outlook, which they shared with many socialist groups around the world at this time. They believed that all workers around the world shared a common desire (to rid themselves of oppression) and destiny, and could be united in their fight for a new world. This internationalist outlook can be seen in the name of the Party's paper at this time: *The International*.

The utopia imagined by the CPSA when it was first established also reflects this international (and sometimes foreign) orientation. They imagined a community whose economic equality and well being were assured via the communal ownership, production and distribution of assets and wealth. It was a worldwide commonwealth of labour. Grand scale international revolutionary change was to bring about a harmonious and just society. It was a society in which all men, irrespective of colour, where to be equal, and all 'races' where called to join in the fight for socialism.[221] As shown in the previous chapter, the Russian Revolution played

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[220] Greene, L.H. and Jones, D.I, 'The Bolsheviks are coming', leaflet of the ISL circulated in 1918 and 1919. Source: Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 40. The leaflet was translated in isiZulu and Sesotho (Bunting, 38). It would be interesting to see how such phrases were translated! As they stand, they would hardly have been the words to prick the ears of Afrikaner and South African black workers. Nevertheless the fact that they were translated into African languages shows that the Party was *attempting* to reach black workers at the time.

[221] See an extract from a letter from David Ivon Jones to Trotsky (Extract of letter from Comrade Jones to Trotsky's questionnaire, 2 June 1921. Source: Davidson *et al*, *South Africa and the Communist International*, 71-73); the CPSA's 1921 Manifesto; 'The Fight to a Finish' (CPSA, 'The Fight to a Finish', Manifesto to the striking workers of the Witwatersrand, 30 January 1922. Source: Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 68-69), their 1924 Draft Party Programme (CPSA, Draft Communist Party Programme adopted by CPSA conference, for submission to the branches, 30 December 1924. Source: Bunting, *South*

a large part in increasing hopes for a worldwide transformation of society.

The following is taken from the Party's Draft 1924 Programme, their first:

> The only remedy for the evils of the capitalist system is the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the establishment of a Communist society based on social as opposed to individual ownership. THIS HAS BECOME THE RECOGNISED OBJECTIVE OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. Its realisation means that with the disappearance of private profit and exploitation, all unemployment, starvation, slums, so-called over production, wars, the subjection of man to man and THE CLASS STRUGGLE ITSELF, WILL DISAPPEAR IN A CLASSLESS SOCIETY.[222]

The Programme sketched the outlines of an alternative society by contrasting it with the perceived evils of the present capitalist system. The majority of the Programme was dedicated to rousing talk of the worldwide exploitation of workers, and included little on analysis of the *particular* nature of class divisions in South Africa and their interaction with issues of race.

It was however, critical of the white labour movement. Referring to the SALP, the Programme stated that, "By its failure to recognise the exploited native workers it forfeits all claims to be a true working-class party."[223]

Bill Andrews (see figure 5.3) was still a member of the SALP when he spoke in the Union Parliament on the conditions under which miners were working. He concluded by saying that,

> We believe there are more important things than dividends, and they are the life and well being of the people of his country….Ruskin, who was not a tub-thumper,[224] said: 'There is no wealth but life. In fact, it may be discovered that the true veins of

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African Communists Speak, 80-84). See also the biography of Jones, (Hirson and Williams, *The Delegate for Africa*), autobiography of Sachs (Sachs, *Multitude of Dreams*) and Roux (Roux, E. and W, *Rebel Pity*) for ISL and CPSA members' hopes in the creation of a worldwide socialist order.

[222] CPSA, Draft Communist Party Programme, 1924, 81.

[223] CPSA, Draft Communist Party Programme, 1924, 82.

[224] A tub-thumper refers to a noisy ranting speaker.

wealth are purple- and not in rock, but in flesh- perhaps even that the final outcome and consummation of all wealth is in the producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed and happy-hearted human creatures.' That is the policy of the Labour Party."[225]

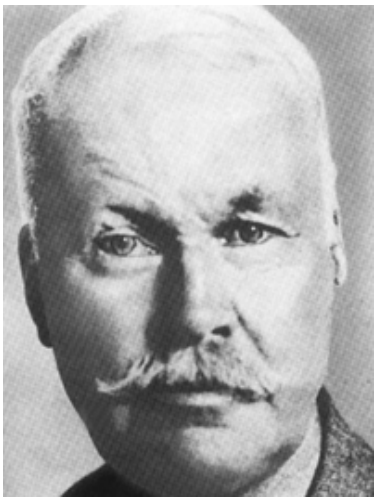


Fig. 5.3: Bill Andrews, founding member of the CPSA.

The SALP's statements showed a commitment to building a better society and included utopian statements about the future. The SALP included in its objectives, the "socialisation of the means of production… in the interests of the whole community". But the 'community' referred to white people only.[226] The utopia of the majority of the white labour was implicit: while the majority of its members looked forward to the full develop of men, it was an exclusive utopia that they imagined, in which white privilege was assured and sustained. The slogan under which many of the workers revolted in 1922: "Workers of the World Fight and Unite for a White S.A." was not contradictory if black workers were not considered part of society.

By comparison with the SALP and white labour in general, and in comparison with the whole of South African society, the CPSA's call to black and white to unite against capitalist oppression really stood out. The often poor conditions under which black South Africans lived and their lack of rights under South African law were included in CPSA statements in this period, though often in the patronising and stereotyping language of the time, particularly regarding African people.[227] In 1923 the Party called on all workers to "associate… with the

[225] Cited in Cope, R.K. 1944. *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W.H. Andrews, Workers' Leader*. Cape Town: Stewart, 128.

[226] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 28.

[227] See for example David Ivon Jones commentary on 'The South African Native' in a report to the ECCI of the Comintern in 1921 on behalf of the ISL: "Yet in spite of it all [few rights and the experience of poverty], the Bantu is a happy proletarian. He has lovable qualities. 'His joy of life and fortitude under suffering,' to quote Lafargue's words on the negro: his communal spirit, his physical vitality, his keen desire to know, despite his intellectual backwardness, make him an object of lurking affection to the whites who come into contact with him." Jones, D.I., 'Communism in South Africa', presented to the ECCI of the Comintern on behalf of the ISL, 1921. Source: Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 51. Not all white members used such patronizing language however: Eddie Roux and S.P. Bunting for example.

demands of the SA Native National Congress"[228] and the 1924 programme included a call for the abolition of the pass laws and "Equal justice, irrespective of colour."[229]

There was no specific analysis of racial oppression in either the CPSA's first manifesto or their first party programme, however. The CPSA's initial lack of concentration on the particular plight of black workers and the patronising tone in which black workers were often written about in this period, implied a utopia in which the equal participation in society by black people was not yet an important part of the imagined future. At this stage the socialist utopia was imagined by a group of predominately white males. This was to change.

Towards a More Focused and Inclusive Utopian Vision

By the time the CPSA drafted its second party programme it was 1929, the year the Party adopted the Native Republic Thesis. The young CPSA's gaze had shifted from its constant scanning of the international horizon to a greater focus on the local South African situation. In addition the sense of imminence of a world revolution had decreased, as shown in the last chapter. Attention became focused on fighting for a transformation of the South African society, even though they still looked forward to a world free from capitalism.

The introduction to the 1929 Programme remained the same as the 1924 Programme: the CPSA claimed that capitalism, the individual ownership of land and other means of production, led to the exploitation of workers. But in the 1929 Programme new sections were inserted under the titles, 'The Native National Cause', 'Class and race emancipation' and 'non-exploiting whites'.[230] The CPSA stated that "the Party devotes special attention to the national cause of the native people as such, not indeed in the sense of a campaign 'to drive the white man into the sea', but in the Leninist sense of underlining the prime importance of supporting movements for complete national liberation of colonial peoples…".[231]

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[228] CPSA, 'A Helots Bill of Rights', editorial in *The International*, 1 June 1923. Source: Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 72.

[229] CPSA, Draft Communist Party Programme, 1924, 83.

[230] In this section the position of white labour was discussed. The CPSA attempted to get white labour to see the advantages of a united working class.

[231] CPSA, Programme of the Communist Party of South Africa adopted at the seventh annual conference, 1 January 1929. Source: Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 102.

Important changes in the content of the utopian vision are thus discernable. The future society envisioned in the 1929 programme was one in which "land and liberties" were restored to black people, and equality, emancipation, independence and self-determination were assured for all black South Africans; a society in which exploitation and domination of "man by man" was abolished, and all men were "socially, economically and politically free to share alike in the fruits of their joint labour, with equal opportunity and equal access to all the comforts of life."[232]

By seeing all people, whatever their 'race', as equal members of society, and in seeing both black and white workers as central in the fight for the radical transformation of society the young CPSA was pushed in the direction of imagining a more inclusive utopia.[233] The CPSA's vision was never exclusionary per se but the lack of concentration on black liberation may have had the effect of being a less attractive or inspiring vision for those beyond a small circle of white socialists.[234] The vision of a future society was now 'inclusive' in that the imagined community explicitly included the equal participation of all people irrespective of race, and that the CPSA's imagined utopia now comprised a society in which the liberation of black South Africans was a *key* feature of a future community.

Thus the CPSA's utopian vision did not remain static, but changed with changing contexts. The following section takes a more detailed look at the process in which CPSA utopian visions shifted in content and focus.

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[232] CPSA, Programme of the Communist Party of South Africa, 1929, 101.

[233] This did not however mean that the CPSA's white (majority) members held no prejudiced views, and some of the language of CPSA writings and statements still included some patronizing and stereotyping language.

[234] Due to limited time and space, the inclusive or exclusive nature of the CPSA's vision in terms of other identities, such as gender, has not been looked at. Regarding gender, the CPSA was in principle a non-sexist organization, but in practice the CSPA did not give the active recruitment of women, and their mentorship, much thought. Far fewer members of the CPSA were women than men, and Josie Mpama was the only leading black women in the CPSA. (Mpama was a communist from the 1920s to the 1940s. She was a student in Moscow. She eventually left communism and turned back to Christianity. She was married to another prominent CPSA member Edwin Mofutsanyana). Some of the personal relationships between men and women were egalitarian (Jack and Ray Simons for example), others were fairly traditional. The Party nevertheless stood out in the context of the day for providing a space where women could engage in the political arena.

The CPSA's Closer Engagement with Black Protest

Many socialists of the early 1900s believed that the white workers, increasingly militant and vested in the urban industrial experience, were the vanguard of the potential socialist revolution. It is this belief, coupled in the minds of many (though not all) white socialist and labour activists with racial prejudices about 'stages of advancement of different social groups' which in part explains the sometimes confused, oscillating attempts by white socialist to mobilise black workers in the fight for a socialist future in the first few decades of the 20th Century.[235]

However, during the 1922 Rand Revolt some Party members such as S.P. Bunting were caught between supporting an enthusiastic protest against the capitalist government and condemning white labour's attempts to retain white privilege at the expense of black workers. In a statement issued to the striking workers, the CPSA said that, "To maintain the 'white standard' to build a 'white South Africa', is impossible under capitalism, whose nature is to degrade every class it employs."[236] The call during the strike for a "Workers' Republic of the World for the common and equal benefit of all workers"[237] was a naïve attempt to unite workers across colour lines.

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[235] A fuller understanding of the CPSA's reaction to the Rand Revolt however demands earlier historical contextualisation of the broader landscape of white and black labour. In the late 1800s small scale Afrikaner farmers began to lose land to large landowners as a result of the consolidation of farmland after the mineral boom in the Transvaal and Orange Free State. In addition the Anglo-Boer War left many Afrikaner boers unable to farm again, and Afrikaners, many of them destitute, were forced into employment in the cities. They joined English workers, whose numbers had been swelled in the Witwatersrand by the discovery of minerals. By comparison, Africans were brought under the influence of industrial capitalism later, and by a more engineered process. The Masters and Servants Ordinance of 1904 and the infamous Land Act of 1913 negatively affected African farm owners and workers, increasing the exploitation of the later, and destructively curtailing the development of black farming. Legislation and increasingly levels of taxation on African rural dwellers slowly forced Africans (at first mainly men) into South African towns and cities, either permanently or as migrant labour. (Based on Drew, *Discordant Comrades* and van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, Volumes One and Two*). It was these real and apparent differences between white and black workers experiences and rates of proletarianisation that led many socialists of the early 1900s to believe that the white workers were the vanguard of the potential socialist revolution.

[236] CPSA, 'The Fight to a Finish', 69.

[237] CPSA, 'The Fight to Finish', 69.

After the strike, some CPSA members, such as Bill Andrews, still supported the thesis that white labour was the vanguard of the struggle. On the other hand, people like S.P. Bunting and Eddie Roux, felt that the CPSA should turn to organising black labour.[238]

In 1924 the Pact Government was elected: the SALP and the National Party (NP) in alliance, and what were known as 'civilised' labour policies were introduced to co-opt white labour. The gap between the standard of living of white and black workers widened and animosity between black and white workers, already heightened by the 1922 Revolt, worsened. It was in this atmosphere that some CPSA members, particularly Young Communist League activists such as Eddie Roux, made contact with organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU), at one time a successful mass protest movement, with a large rural following. At the CPSA's 1924 conference the Party began to grapple with 'The Native Question'. But many white members were unhappy with the shift in policy, saying that it alienated white workers to hammer on about the Native Question, and many left the party as a result.

Nevertheless, attempts at attracting black membership via night schools in Marxism, trade union work and public meetings soon bore fruit. Black membership increased from one to 1600 between 1925 and 1928.[239] Notable new recruits included J.B. Marks, Albert Nzula and Moses Kotane (who was to play a major role in party politics, eventually as General Secretary of the CPSA and then SACP from 1939 to 1978, see figure 5.4).[240] The Party's paper, *South African Worker*, started printing articles in African languages.[241] Black communists also became involved in the work of the ICU, as the CPSA moved more directly into black protest. [242]

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[238] This shift was in fact driven at first not by a full appreciation of the national oppression of black people and their desire for national liberation, but by a fuller appreciation of the potential of black workers in the struggle against capitalism, and a shift away from the notion that white workers could be the vanguard of the struggle against capitalism.

[239] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 77-78.

[240] Alfred Nzula was a school teacher who joined the CPSA in the late 1920s. He was an intellectual of the Party who travelled to the USSR to study. He died in Moscow. J.B. Marks was a prominent CPSA member and a trade unionist who joined the Party in 1928. He was chairman of the SACP in the 1960s. He was also a member of the ANC.

[241] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 78.

[242] Relations between the ICU and the CPSA soon soured however, and the CPSA was expelled a few years later from a troubled ICU.



Fig. 5.4: Moses Kotane, General-Secretary of the CPSA and SACP from 1939-1978.

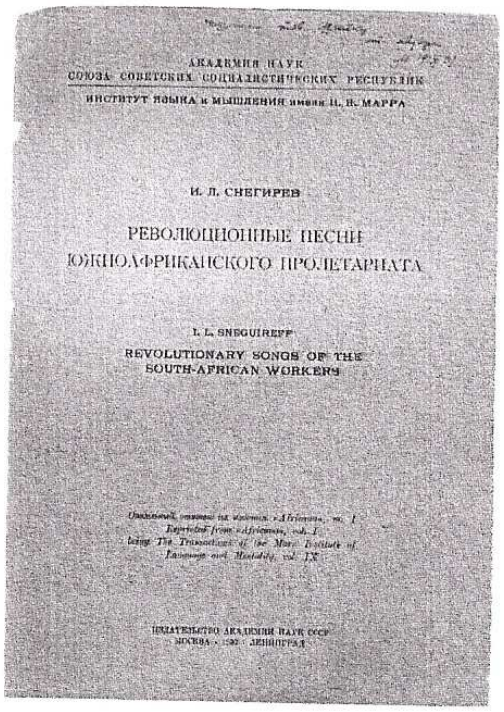
From the mid twenties onwards the daily injustices experienced by black people became a central part of CPSA's utopian message. Sometimes the *status quo* was contrasted with a future society in which people of all races were free to join in the fruits of labour. For example, in the booklet, *What is the Communist Party? A Word to African Workers* (after detailing the hardships under which African workers lived and worked) the workers were told that their oppression would lead them to organise to take over all productive property, "for the common benefit of all, establishing a "co-operative commonwealth" where "ALL MEN SHALL BE SOCIALLY AND POLITICALLY FREE AND SHALL SHARE ALIKE IN THE FRUITS OF THEIR JOINT LABOUR, WITH EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND EQUAL ACCESS TO ALL THE GOOD THINGS IN LIFE."[243]

As mentioned, the closer engagement with black protest and the increasing black membership in the Party pushed the white CPSA members towards a greater appreciation of the particular plight of black people in South Africa and may well have challenged prejudiced thinking within the Party. Black communists brought new avenues and methods of recruitment of new Party members. African members spoke African languages and were more closely connected to the mass of South Africa black workers by virtue of shared experiences of racial and class injustice and shared traditions, as seen in the way they propagandised for the party using the language and metaphors of African Christianity.[244] The extent to which the rank and file of the CPSA members affected the Party's *official* vision of the future is not easy to discern. But other strands of utopianism must have featured in the Party. For example meetings and protests were often accompanied by song. The lyrics of this 'song culture' appear to have had elements of utopianism which drew on traditions such as

[243] CPSA, *What is the Communist Party? A Word to African Workers*, 1932, published by the Party. Source: Simons Collection, BC1081: 018.1.

[244] However, Kelley comments that that in a sense these mission educated Africans remained slightly outside of traditional African culture, or "became outsiders in the eyes of non-Christian Africans" and mainly outside of the European culture, and created a sub-culture which combined both African and European culture. Kelley, 'The Religious Odyssey of African Radicals', 11-12.

local African folk stories and Christianity.[245] About these alternative and more fluid expressions of utopianism than those found in the CPSA's programmes and manifestos, we unfortunately know too little.[246]


АКАДЕМИЯ НАУК
СОЮЗА СОВЕТСКИХ СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКИХ РЕСПУБЛИК
ИНСТИТУТ ЯЗЫКА И МЫШЛЕНИЯ имени Н. Я. МАРРА

И. Л. СНЕГИРЕВ

РЕВОЛЮЦИОННЫЕ ПЕСНИ
ЮЖНОАФРИКАНСКОГО ПРОЛЕТАРИАТА

I. L. SNEGUIREFF

REVOLUTIONARY SONGS OF THE
SOUTH-AFRICAN WORKERS

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО АКАДЕМИИ НАУК СССР
МОСКВА — 1937 — ЛЕНИНГРАД

Fig. 5.5: An essay by Russian Soviet I.L. Snegirev entitled, Revolutionary Songs of the South African Workers*,1937. The essay contained Russian translations of South African revolutionary songs. Held in the Comintern Archives, Moscow.*

The Native Republic Thesis: Changes in the Utopian Vision?

The CPSA was to be pushed into a further re-orientation of its utopian vision by the adoption of the Native Republic Thesis, developed primarily by the Comintern. In the mid to late twenties, a number of changes in the Soviet Union and international politics saw an unprecedented level of intervention by the Comintern in Southern African affairs. First the extreme dictatorial and authoritarian rule of Stalin replaced Trotsky's in the ECCI. Second, the Soviet Union was increasingly interested in anti-colonial and national liberation movements as hopes for a socialist revolution in Europe waned and the Soviet Union became increasingly internationally isolated.[247]

[245] Interview with Jeremy Cronin, August 2006.

[246] No doubt archival material in this regard does exist. Due to the limited time one is able to allocate to a research report, this avenue was not explored, however, it would however be a fascinating area of research.

[247] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 95.

Accounts of the development of the Native Republic Thesis differ as to the exact origination of the Thesis: whether it was developed primarily by the Comintern, or whether it was developed by CPSA member La Guma, on a number of trips to Europe and Moscow, in consultation with the Comintern.[248] Both Drew and Grossman point out, however, that the Thesis followed the Comintern's more general approach to anti-colonial and national liberation struggles: its theoretical roots lay in Moscow.[249] Davidson *et al*'s interpretation, written after close examination of Comintern documents accessed after the Comintern archives were opened in 1991, is that the ECCI never took the time to explain the meaning of the Native Republic Thesis to the CPSA, "its line for the CPSA was shaped less by South African realities than by its global interests. Despite what the slogan itself might lead one to believe", they continue, "the specific situation was hardly taken into account."[250]

Drew summarises the Comintern's view as follows:

> The Native Republic Thesis proposed national self-determination through a struggle against British imperialism, but it was an imperialism defined not so much by its capitalist nature as by it colonial character, which included both foreign and racial domination. From its emphasis on the colonial character of South African society, flowed the assumption that the land hungry peasantry was the moving force of the South Africa revolution…. the Native Republic Thesis offered a particular solution to South Africa's national question: majority rule as a stage towards socialism.[251]

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[248] Jack and Ray Simons appear to support the later (Simons, H.J. and R.E. 1969. *Class and Colour in South Africa: 1850-1950.* Hammondsworth: Penguin African Library). The Simons were far less critical of the negative role played by the Comintern than people like Eddie Roux and non-party historians, and celebrated the Thesis, seeing it as a positive move towards unifying the national and class struggles in what was to become fundamental SACP policy and strategy (See Legassick's discussion of Simons's position in Undated. 'Class and Nationalism in South African Protest: The SA Communist Party and the "Native Republic", 1928-34' in Bozzoli, B. (Complied by) *Collected Papers of Martin Legassick Volume 2*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand). Roux however, claimed that the CPSA was "forced to adopt the slogan of a 'Native Republic'." (Roux, E. 1964 [1948]. *Time Longer than Rope*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 256.)

[249] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 95 and Grossman, J. 1985. 'Class Relations and the Policies of the Communist Party of South Africa 1921-1950'. Doctoral Thesis. Coventry: University of Warwick.

[250] Davidson *et al*, *South Africa and the Communist International*, 13-14.

[251] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 96.

The slogan of the Native Republic Thesis read, "An independent South African Native Republic as a stage towards the Workers' and Peasants' Republic, guaranteeing protection and complete equality to all national minorities".[252]

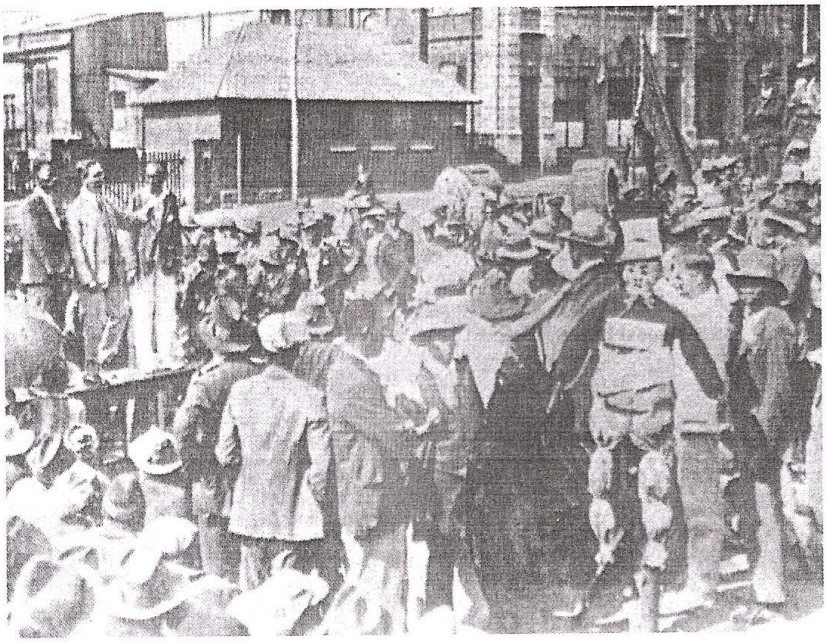


Fig. 5.6: CPSA rally in the late 1920s. Edwin Mofutsanyana is standing on the right side of the platform.

The Party was split between those who supported the adoption of the Thesis and those who either outright dismissed it or objected to certain interpretations of the South African situation and the path towards a socialist future. S.P. Bunting led those who objected. He particularly objected to the assumption that the peasantry were potentially the vanguard of a revolution in South Africa, claiming that colonised people in South Africa were becoming 'proletarianised', and that anyway the category peasantry was complicated by the reality of the migrant labour system. He was also worried that the Thesis depicted all white people as imperialists, thus limiting co-operation in class struggle across colour lines.[253] Bunting felt that democracy would be won via 'joint black and white proletarian struggle'.[254] He was joined in his objections by Eddie Roux and others. This change in focus for the CPSA was not only resisted by white members of the party. Thibedi took a long time to have come round to supporting the thesis, and stated in a letter to the Comintern that, "consider the Black Republic slogan a mistake, and that a 'Workers and Peasants Republic' would really

[252] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 21.
[253] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 98.
[254] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 98.

rally the black and white workers in this country."[255]

The La Guma camp, which included Molly and Douglas Wolton, soon to play a major role in CPSA history, believed that revolutionary potential lay in the increasing national consciousness of black people in South Africa, irrespective of class, to overthrow imperialism and instil democracy, the route to socialism. La Guma was understandably tired of CPSA concerns about alienating white workers. He sarcastically wrote, "Yes, you will be allowed to march into the promised land at such time as it can be considered without wounding the susceptibilities of the 'Baas'."[256]

Bunting, his wife Rebecca and Eddie Roux travelled to Moscow to attend the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in July 1928 and presented their objections to the Thesis. They received an icy cold reception. Despite their misgivings Bunting and others accepted the Native Republic Thesis, such was their faith in the Comintern's interpretations of Marxism, and their loyalty to communism, expressed in towing the Comintern Party line.[257] Significantly however, it was also accepted because the CPSA has not yet developed its own clear programme for how to work with black workers and organisations in order to forward the socialist project.[258]

The CPSA was, however, confused about what exactly the Thesis meant and developed contradictory interpretations of the Thesis. The following two contradictory passages are taken from the same CPSA programme:

> This double burden of exploitation carried by the native masses calls for a democratic revolution… Such a revolution does not by itself mean the final liberation of the broad masses of South Africa. The stage remains to be traversed to the final

[255] Thibedi, W. 1929 cited in Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 104. Bunting and other's scepticism in the revolutionary potential of all black classes was not produced within a vacuum. The ANC at this stage was still a relatively conservative party of black professionals and 'petty bourgeoisie'. In addition, many members of the ANC were suspicious of socialism.

[256] La Guma, J.A. 1928. 'Who's for the Third International Thesis on SA' cited in Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 98. This comment points to existing tensions in the Party around issues of race. Despite the CPSA's incredibly open and non-racial history relative to the surrounding South African society, racial tensions surfaced in party debate and activity: the imagining of a non-racial utopia did not mean the complete transcendence of the bifurcation of South African life.

[257] The CPSA constant deference to the Comintern on matters of policy and the reasons for their loyalty to, and faith in, the Comintern will be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.

[258] Grossman, 'Class Relations and the Policies of the Communist Party of South Africa', 160.

abolition of exploitation and domination of class by class.[259]

And: "…the conception and realisation of the native republic rule merges into that of the workers and peasants republic, non Capitalist, non racialist, and in effect socialist".[260] Such evident confusion at this stage does lend some support to the position that the Thesis was largely imposed on the CPSA 'from above'.[261]

The CPSA adoption of the Native Republic Thesis was thus not an easy transition to a more overtly pro-national liberation stance. Many of the Party members initial weariness is expressed in Eddie Roux's words in a letter to the editor of the *South African Worker*. At the time, it appeared to some South African communists that adopting the Native Republic Thesis would mean a rejection of the very kind of society that the communists were fighting for:

> Communism, as I understand it, does not aim at a Black Republic any more than it means a White Republic or Yellow Republic. […]Communism stands, I take it for Industrial Republicanism, where competition ceases and co-operation takes its place. No privilege, no class…. […]The idea of a Black Republic is dangerously near to racialism, pure and simple. It can easily become the antithesis of International working class solidarity. There is no rule, apart from that of a class basis, by which it can be claimed that the future would be better than the past, and this rule is abandoned as soon as we drop class and take up race.[262]

Manny Lopes was a CPSA member based in Cape Town, who had been very active in the early South African socialist groups in the early 1900s. In a letter to *Umsebenzi* in 1930, Lopes wrote that, "Marcus Garvey[263] stands for bourgeois Negro republics in Africa and that is what Messrs. Bunting, Roux and La Guma stand for. If they stood for anything else, for

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[259] CPSA, Programme of the Communist Party of South Africa, 1929, cited in Grossman, 'Class Relations and the Policies of the Communist Party of South Africa', 157.

[260] CPSA, Programme of the Communist Party of South Africa, 1929, 157.

[261] Martin Legassick pointed out that this confusion remained in struggle circles. See Legassick, 'Class and Nationalism in South African Protest'.

[262] Roux, E. Letter to the editor of *South African Worker*, Pietermaritzburg, 7 December 1928. Source: Edward Roux Papers A667: B1, Historical Papers Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

[263] Marcus Garvey was an African American who developed the notion of a black worldwide racial and national identity.

example, an independent Socialist republic in South Africa they would scrap their present reactionary slogan…"[264]

In the context of a racially divided working class, adopting the Native Republic Thesis involved a re-examination of how socialism could be achieved, but more importantly for some CPSA members, a re-examination of what socialism as a future community meant to them. Grossman notes that, "Once the Comintern programme had been accepted by the 1929 Conference, the individuals who supported Bunting's opposition applied themselves to promoting it as diligently as possible. In so doing, they rested on the (self-) assurance that the programme really represented a new formulation of the socialism they had always been fighting for."[265]

The difference between strategy and goals in a utopian movement is not always easy to isolate. Some members of the CPSA convinced themselves that the Native Republic was a *strategy* for achieve a socialist South Africa and not a goal in itself. We see the same process at work in the 1930s. Under the New Line policy of the Comintern, the Native Republic Thesis was subject to a reinterpretation.[266] Instead of seeing the Native Republic as a united democratic state, the Native Republic was to be a federation of different nations or tribes. Drew writes the following:

> At a meeting of the Central Committee in December 1931 Joseph Sepeng introduced the new version, which called for 'a Government of the Bechuana, of the Basutos, Swazis etc. and all of these will federate in one Union, free from the domination of any one nation, as is the case in the U.S.S.R., where every nation has the right of nationalism, to speak its own tongue, the right to maintain its own customs and traditions.' Molly Wolton explained that the new version would ensure that the various South African tribes did not have to worry about the possibility of domination by any single tribe. Moreover, she added, it would not dilute the Party's socialist objective, as the struggle would not simply stop with the achievement of

[264] Lopes, M. 1930 cited in Grossman, 'Class Relations and the Policies of the Communist Party of South Africa', 559 n66.

[265] Grossman, 'Class Relations and the Policies of the Communist Party of South Africa', 182.

[266] The New Line was the policy of the Comintern in the late twenties and early thirties: communist parties were to break all ties with 'reformist' organisations, and to demand loyalty from activists and increase the centralisation of authority in communist parties. Stalin's rise to power in the Comintern was a major reason for this shift as will be shown in Chapter Seven.

national liberation for the various groups.[267]

At first the CPSA had assumed that a revolution would once and for all change society into an egalitarian, just and harmonious community. For members such as Roux, Bunting and Thibedi the acceptance of the Native Republic Thesis implicitly meant that the realising the utopia that they imagined would require patience, time and compromise. They managed by consoling themselves that the final objective had not been lost. Others felt that the utopia they had imagined had been abandoned. Still others, such as La Guma and the Woltons may have felt that changes in the method of reaching a socialist society reflected the material conditions in South African society, and that they where closer to achieving the imaged society in refining their methodology.

Part of the tension we see building around the adoption of the Thesis is because tension is inherent in a utopian movement. The following statement by Goodwin and Taylor, relevant to the analysis here, was quoted in Chapter Two: "Utopia is powerful because we can concur in its criticisms (short-term end) and weak because we invariably disagree on the remedies (the long term ends and the means)".[268] Factions emerged in the CSPA as people grappled with how to achieve their utopia: a utopian vision cannot be pursued without tension and disagreement.[269] In addition disagreement surfaced because people imagined the ideal future society in different ways. For some people, changes in strategy even meant contemplating changes to what they felt was the best remedy to South African society's problems. A continual negotiation about strategy in the CPSA entailed a continual negotiation about the content of the utopian vision.

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[267] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 128-129. Based on a report of the meeting of the Central Committee of the CPSA, 28-30th December 1931. How precisely this federation based on different "ethnicities" was to unite the working class across these lines to implement a socialist future was not well explored by the CSPA, but the proposal was accepted nonetheless. In the 1930s the role of the dictatorial Comintern was strong and debate was not encouraged. Changes in policy and the strategy identified for attaining the socialist utopia, where highly influenced by the Comintern.

[268] Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 31.

[269] 'Intentional communities', mentioned briefly in Chapter Two, provide some interesting case studies in this regard. Lucy Sargisson explores conflict and co-operation in small scale communities attempting to live according to a set of ideals or principles – and the constant negotiation involved in trying to produce a community that resonates with all the inhabitants. See Sargisson, L. 2004. 'Utopia and Intentional Communities'. Draft paper for discussion at the ECPR Conference, Uppsala.

Before concluding, it should be noted that the official line or policy that stated the form of a future society and the strategy involved in realising the imagined future, were to an extent the CPSA's utopian vision. This official vision, however, did not always capture the spirit and the form of the utopia that CPSA men and women held in their minds' eye. The form and content of these more personal utopias, for lack of a better description, is more difficult to access. The spirit and the form of these imagined futures can be picked up in more personal accounts, such as autobiographies.[270] As mentioned near the beginning of the chapter, such visions may have also been expressed in revolutionary songs, and in poems such as that written by La Guma. Individual CPSA members would have differing pictures the future South Africa in their minds: for some, freedom from racial oppression would have been the most important feature of a future society, for others economic equality would have been vital, for still others a collective ethos and a general regard for fellow citizens would have been the most important feature.[271]

Summary

The exact content of the CPSA's official utopian vision did not remain the same but changed under the influence of changing socio-political circumstances, changing Comintern policy, different personalities active in the CPSA, and new analyses of the South African situation by South African communists. It is safe to say, however, that in general the CPSA remained committed to the creation of a united, socialist, non-racist and democratic South Africa.

The CPSA's utopian vision drew on the writings of Marx, a tradition of ethical socialism, Bundism, frustrations with personal experiences of oppression, or a deep empathy for the plight of the less privileged, often expressed in religiously influenced language. Their backgrounds (whether religious or secular, European or African) were not necessarily abandoned in their adoption of Marxism and socialism (as a framework for understanding class and racial oppression and as a solution to these problems). These differing traditions

[270] See for example the biographies and autobiographies of Bill Andrews (Cope, *Comrade Bill*), S.P. Bunting (Roux, *S.P. Bunting*), David Ivon Jones (Hirson and Williams, *The Delegate for Africa*), Naboth Mokgatle (Mokgatle, N. 1971. *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African*. Johannesburg: AD. Donker), Pauline Podbrey (Podbrey, P. 1993. *White Girl in Search of the Party.* Pietermaritzburg: Hadeda Books), Eddie Roux (Roux, E. and W, Rebel Pity). The next chapter will explore more personal engagements with this utopian vision.

[271] It was probably the case that the imagined future was not particularly important to some members: people join political movements for a host of reasons, not least of all ambitions of power, or simply a need to belong somewhere.

and backgrounds influenced the content of the utopian vision. The CPSA also drew heavily on Comintern interpretations of Marxism, however, as can be seen in their attitude regarding the Native Republic Thesis. The sometimes dominant influence the Comintern meant that more open ended and less orthodox versions of a socialist future were sometimes submerged. It should be remembered however, that the CPSA derived strength from identifying themselves as a 'scientific' socialist party, one that had found the right tools with which to understand society, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter.

The official vision of the future was often contested. Differences of opinion over the best method to attain the imagined future were sometimes acute, and were to amplify in the 1930s, when Comintern interference in CPSA affairs reached its peak. The story of these tensions within the Party will be retuned to in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Six:
The Positive Contribution of the CPSA's Utopianism

In a racist and authoritarian society, in which capitalist relations of exploitation were constructed upon colonial relations of domination, a tiny core of people retained a vision of a quite different society – one in which both racialism and capitalism were abolished. Against great odds, it was this vision that sustained South African communists. … the Party kept alive the vision of an alternative social order – one more rational, more democratic and more equitable than any offered by capitalism… The vision of an alternative social order… shaped the commitment and creativity displayed by individuals…
(Colin Bundy,1991) [272]

Introduction

Zygmunt Bauman claims that "...whatever inspiring power socialism can justly boast is drawn from its utopian status."[273] This proposition is explored in relation to the CPSA in the following chapter, where the function of the CPSA's utopianism is discussed. In addition to utopianism's inspirational power it is argued that utopianism mobilised and sustained activism in the CPSA against the racist state and economic inequality. Visions of an alternative and ideal society provided CPSA activists with hope for a better future and provided a coping mechanism for members of the CPSA to deal with the social injustices they experienced or saw around them. The CPSA's utopian vision also played a role in wider South African society in offering a challenge to the *status quo*. This challenge was offered first, by simply positing an alternative to the *status quo* and second, in mobilizing protest.

There is thus much to be celebrated about the presence of utopianism in the CPSA, and much of the literature on the positive function of utopianism in society mentioned in Chapter Two, is supported by an analysis of utopianism in the CPSA. Utopianism in the CPSA was Janus-faced, however, in that it also revealed a destructive side. The destructive or negative role of utopianism in the CPSA is discussed in the next chapter.

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[272] Bundy, C. 1991. 'Left, Right, Left, Right: The CPSA in the 1930s and 1940s' in Bundy, C. (Coordinator). *The History of the South African Communist Party*. Lectures presented at the University of Cape Town Summer School. Cape Town: Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, UCT, 32.

[273] Bauman, Z. 1976. *Socialism: The Active Utopia*. London: Allen & Unwin, 36.

The CSPA: A Whole New Way of Life

The CPSA attracted a wide range of people to its cause and people joined the Party for different, though not mutually exclusive reasons. Some joined out of an intellectual conviction with the analysis of Marxism. For others, joining the CPSA was an ethical commitment, a moral way of life, and a way to live a consistent life in the context of injustice and inequality. Still others joined because they found a movement that allowed them to channel frustration with their daily oppression in the direction of fighting for change in South African society.

For some people joining the CPSA became a new way of life, and a rupture with the old. Stephen Yeo writes that in the late eighteen hundreds in Britain socialism "involved a whole change in way of life. It was not just a question of being entered on a party's membership list… A separation from older jobs, friends, places and habits was succeeded by acquisition of new ones".[274] This appears to have been the case in South Africa a few decades later for some members of the ISL and other small socialist groups, and then the CPSA, particularly for S.P. Bunting and David Ivon Jones.[275] For white members in particular, joining a non-racial organisation which protested against the establishment would have ostracised them from mainstream white South African society.[276]

Joining the socialist movement, and in particular the CPSA, was akin in many ways to the conversation experience of joining a new religion: the separation from old ties and associations, the adoption of a new way of life, a new set of friends, a new framework for understanding the world.[277]

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[274] Yeo, S. 1997 quoted in Drew, A. 2000. *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 8.

[275] See Hirson, B. and Williams, G.A. 1995. *The Delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones 1883-1924*. London: Core Publications and Roux, E. 1944. *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography*. Cape Town: Self-published.

[276] Some CPSA members joined having already been emerged in socialist circles. For example many Jewish members of the CPSA arrived in South Africa already part of the Bundist socialist movement.

[277] Jeremy Cronin commented that many of the European communist parties in the first half of the last century were a world unto themselves. Sports and social clubs, youth movements etcetera were all formed within communist circles. They were 'preparing socialism in the wings' and living a new way of life that permeated all spheres of their lives. Interview with Jeremy Cronin, August 2006. This intensity and isolation of experience does not seem to have been as strong in South Africa, partly because of the nature



Fig. 6.1: Joe Slovo, member of the CPSA and SACP.

The CPSA became a new home for people when they joined the Party. David Ivon Jones for example, felt lonely and isolated in the often insular, narrowly educated, yet snobbish culture of white South Africa after arriving from New Zealand. In the Party he found a meeting of minds and developed firm friendships including those with Bunting and Andrews.[278] Joe Slovo's (see figure 6.1) autobiography is full of references of the comradeship experienced in the CPSA,[279] and shows that members did not only continue to engage in CPSA activism out of a desire to change society, but also out of the sense of belonging that the group created.[280] In addition, Slovo and Pauline Podbrey's autobiographies show that much fun was had, particularly by young members of the CPSA, in between serious intellectual debate and political activism.[281]

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of the struggle in the country. Communists were forced to engage with a number of groups and discourses via their engagement with the cause of national liberation in a multicultural society. The socialist movement still constituted a small sub-culture in South Africa however. This sub-culture included a wider socialist social network, including organisations such as the Jewish Workers Club. The Jewish Workers Club was formed in the late 1920s and comprised primarily immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe many of whom had been involved in the Bundist movement prior to immigration. The Club provided a social place where members meet to relax, play chess, table tennis, discuss politics and listen to political lectures. See Adler, T. 1979. 'Lithuania's Diaspora: The Johannesburg Jewish Workers' Club, 1928-1948' in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 6(1), 70-92.

[278] Hirson and Williams, *The Delegate for Africa*.

[279] Slovo, J. 1995. *Slovo: the Unfinished Autobiography*. Randburg: Ravan Press. Joe Slovo arrived from Lithuania as a young boy. He was introduced to socialism via immigrants form Eastern Europe he lived with in boarding houses in Johannesburg. He joined the party in 1942 and became a prominent member of the CPSA and the SACP. He was the first Minster of Housing in the post-apartheid democratic government.

[280] See for example Jones's biography (Hirson and Williams, *The Delegate for Africa*), Pauline Podbrey's autobiography (Podbrey, P. 1993. *White Girl in Search of the Party*. Pietermaritzburg: Hadeda Books), Bernard Sachs's autobiography (Sachs, B. 1949. *Multitude of Dreams: A Semi-autobiographical Study*. Johannesburg: Kayor Publishing House).

[281] Podbrey, *White Girl in Search of the Party* and Slovo, *Slovo*. See also Roux, E. and W. 1970. *Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux*. London: Rex Collings. See Harrison's autobiography for accounts of socialist

For the young Bernard Sachs (see figure 6.2), who had grown up in a poor family in Ferreirastown, Johannesburg after immigrating from Lithuania – joining the Party conferred on him a sense of dignity and pride, and he was struck by the egalitarian culture of the Party:

> What pleased me most was the way we mingled on terms of equality with the leaders of the movement…It was the sort of sanguine atmosphere that must have pervaded the catacombs of the early Christians. […] What impressed me most of all was the manner in which one of the leaders of the International Socialist League, a certain Sidney Bunting, the son of an English knight, had completely merged with this band of humble men and women. What finer illustration of the magnetic force of this ideal of Socialism that was sweeping the world? When I addressed Sidney Bunting – and I chose every pretext to do so – I felt that in the words "comrade Bunting", my world of poverty, slums and gloom was dissolving and that I had grown in stature.[282]

Sachs also comments that the majority of the members of the CPSA were, "mostly ragged outcasts to whom the Communist Party was a sort of clan for pariahs where the bitterness and isolation of their lives could be softened – the warm contact with other human beings that the Party afforded them was more real than the exegesis of Marxism."[283] This could not be said of all members however – as different members joined for different reasons: Johnny Gomas commented that, "We didn't meet together as friends, you see. We met together as members of a Party who had a job to do, to carry through a mission."[284] The fact that Johnny Gomas was a black man living under the daily realities of racial oppression and was filled with a desire to rid himself and others of this oppression, may have been responsible for his pragmatic, task orientated approach to his involvement in the Party.

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groups in the early 1900s in Cape Town. Harrison seems to have had a great deal of fun during what he calls his "socialist propaganda days", particularly in getting up the noses of government officials. However, one also gets the sense that Harrison could afford to take interactions with the state less seriously than many other members, particularly black, could. He was white and thus less of a target, and also (judging from his memoirs) not as personally invested in the struggle for socialism as many other CPSA members, and certainly not in the struggle for national liberation, in which he thought the socialist movement should take no part. Harrison, W.H. 1948. *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa: 1903-1947*. Cape Town: Self-published.

[282] Sachs, *Multitude of Dreams*, 134.

[283] Sachs, *Multitude of Dreams*, 139.

[284] Musson, D. 1989. *Johnny Gomas: Voice of the Working Class*. Cape Town: Buchu Books, 135.

The socialist and national liberation movement, and membership of the CPSA, also provided members with a sense of purpose, something so many people crave. The socialist and national liberation movement, as with religion, allowed members to place themselves and their lives within a framework of meaning. Sachs comments that moving away from religion as a young man (he came from a particularly religious Jewish community in Lithuania) had "left a vacuum" and "Bolshevism… rushed in like a whirlwind to fill it."[285] Socialism also replaced religion in the lives of David Ivon Jones and Pauline Podbrey.[286]

Socialism and in particular Marxism, offered tools with which to understand the world and in particular the nature of class and racial oppression in South Africa. For example in a letter by Alfred Nzula to the editor of the *South African Worker* in 1928, Nzula comments that he had always found capitalist literature (on which he was brought up) unsatisfactory in trying to "explain working class misery", whereas Marxist literature offered a satisfactory explanation.[287]



Fig. 6.2: Bernard Sachs, member of the CPSA.

Thus the CPSA, as with many other movements or groups, including religious ones, provided CPSA members with: a new way of life, a home, a network of friends and support, a sense of belonging and purpose, as well as a strong sense of meaning to their lives. Socialism (in particular Marxism) also provided a tool with which to understand the society in which they lived.

The Function of Utopianism in CPSA Members' Lives

The *visionary or utopian aspect of the CPSA movement* played a role in CPSA members' lives. As mentioned in Chapter Two, visions of an alternative and better society may give voice to frustrations with the present, by showing how lacking the present is in relation to an ideal future. The CPSA's provision of a clear and often articulated goal allowed for the

[285] Sachs, *Multitude of Dreams,* 132.

[286] See Hirson and Williams, *The Delegate for Africa* and Podbrey, *White Girl in Search of the Party*.

[287] Nzula, A. Letter to the editor of the South African Worker, 24 October 1928. Source: Bunting, B. 1981. (Ed). *South African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party 1915-1980.* London: Inkululeko Publications, 89.

channelling of members' frustrations with the present towards change in society. The socialist and non-racial utopia imagined by the Party thus played a role in mobilising action on the part of CPSA for change in society. Utopianism functioned as a mobilising force in setting up a desirable goal towards which activity could be directed.

The utopian visions of the Party not only mobilised action in the first place, but also sustained activism in often very arduous circumstances.[288] Referring to his acceptance into the CPSA in the 1940s, Joe Slovo commented, "I threw myself into Party work with a great vigour in the certainty (which I still have) that the revolution was around the corner. It is this triumph of will over pessimism of intelligence that has always sustained me."[289] The "revolution" would bring about the realisation of the imagined socialist democratic utopia. No doubt, the particular nature of the CPSA's utopianism, which was characterised by a strong confidence that the imagined future would be realised, (as discussed in detail in Chapter Four), was partly responsible for the sustaining power of the CPSA's utopian vision.

The inspiration and sustaining power of a vision of a better society played a role in the life of Ray Alexander (see figure 6.5).[290] Alexander ends her autobiography with the following words: "Nikolai Ostrovsky Soviet Novelist reflects my life's philosophy: 'All my life and all

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[288] Activism in the Party was sometimes dangerous and sacrifices were made by the men and women of the CPSA. In the early days of the CPSA's propaganda activity many members were beaten and chased by mobs of men who disagreed with their stance (see Wolberg-Velmont, M. Report submitted to the Bureau of the Third International in Moscow, 15 April 1920. Source: Davidson, A. Filatova, I. Gorodnov, V. Johns, S. (Eds) 2003. *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History Volume 1: Socialist Pilgrims to Bolshevik Footsoldiers* 1919-1930. London: Frank Cass, 35-58). CPSA members were imprisoned, watched and harassed by the police, and as racist legislation and practice became increasingly entrenched in South African life, black members in particular were subject to harassment and imprisonment (See Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 119). Some white CPSA activists sacrificed a better a standard of living and good career prospects for the cause of socialism and national liberation. For example, S.P. Bunting, lawyer, accomplished Oxford scholar, and the son of a knight, would no doubt have been able to pursue a very successful career in law had he not devoted so much to the cause of socialism and national liberation. See Roux, *S.P. Bunting*.

[289] Slovo, *Slovo*, 23.

[290] Based on interview with Tanya Barben, Cape Town, December 2005, and a reading of Alexander's autobiography (Alexander Simons, R. 2004. *All My Life and All my Strength*. Edited by Suttner, R. Johannesburg: STE Publishers). Ray Alexander arrived from Lithuania as a young woman of fifteen, already having been immersed in socialist and Marxist literature and underground movements and promptly formed a trade union in Cape Town. She remained an active and prominent trade unionists and played a major role in the CPSA and later the SACP.

my strength were given to the finest cause in the world: the liberation of Mankind.' For me, the finest cause in the world is the struggle for freedom and a full and satisfying life for our people."[291] The vision of a better society combined with a deep compassion for the plight of the oppressed, and a strong idealism, sustained Alexander's activism.

The vision of a better future appears to have played an important role in the activism of Bill Andrews for example, who made many references to a utopian future in his statements and writings,[292] and in the life of Yusuf Dadoo (see figure 6.3). Dadoo commented in 1948 at a meeting in Durban that, "I am proud to be a communist. As a communist I have dedicated my life to the principles of Socialism, of eventually ending the rotten system of capitalism, which brings untold misery to millions."[293] The vision of an alternative society, which will put an

[291] Alexander Simons, *All My Life*, 357. Nikolai Ostrovsky, a young Soviet who lived just 32 years, wrote a semi-autobiographical novel called *How the Steel was Tempered* which was inspirational for Ray Alexander (see Barben, T. 2005. 'A Women and Her Labours: The Importance of Reading (and Writing) in the Creation of a South African Revolutionary' in *Bibliophilia Africana 8: From Papyrus to Print-out: The Book in Africa: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. Cape Town: Centre for the Book and the National Library of South Africa, 118-126). Alexander's daughter commented that the book captured the idealism of some of the members of the CPSA (Interview with Tanya Barben). The story (which virtually mirrors the young man's life) is about a young Russian man who dedicates his life to becoming a 'good' Bolshevik and 'fighter' for socialism. He was tragically wounded in the Civil War in Russia and was bedridden as a result. The hero then decides to write a book about his and other young peoples' fight for socialism, in the hope that once the book was published it would be a way for him to stay part of the building of a new society in Russia. It is a highly idealistic, even romantic book. See Ostrovsky, N. 1979 [1933]. *How the Steel was Tempered*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

[292] See Andrew's biography, Cope, R.K. 1944. *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W.H. Andrews, Workers' Leader*. Cape Town: Stewart, and Andrew's statements when Chairman of CPSA in the 1940s when he often ended his speeches with rousing words about a socialist future. For example in 1948, he claimed that, "[A] hundred and fifty million or more of our fellow men and women in this great content of Africa have started on the road to liberty. Do not forget Molotov's clarion cry on the thirtieth anniversary of the glorious Soviet Revolution: 'We are living in an age when all roads lead to Communism'." Cited in CPSA, 'Communist Election Policy Defined: National Conference Decision' published in *The Guardian*, 8 January 1948. Source: Drew, A. (Ed) 1997. *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History. Volume Two: 1943-1964.* Cape Town: Buchu Books, Mayibuye Books, UCT Press). See also his speech in the Union Parliament when still a member of the SALP (pages 77 of this study).

[293] Cited in Bunting, B. 1975. *Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary*. London: Inkululeko Publications, 151. Dadoo joined the Party in 1939 after spending many years in England studying and being actively involved in labour politics. He was influenced by the writings of Marx, Lenin and Jawaharal Nehru. Dadoo's commitment to Marxism did not exclude the influence of other traditions of resistance on his politics, such as Gandhi's passive resistance. He also drew on a number of other identities- as did most CSPA members- he was an Indian South African for example, he spoke Gujarati at some political meetings

'end to the misery of millions' was a defining feature of the 'principles of Socialism' and sustained Dadoo's activism, along with a sense of injustice about "the untold misery" in which many people lived. According to Bram and Molly Fischer's daughter, both Bram and Molly were motivated by a vision of the future.[294]

As mentioned in Chapter Five, Marxism was varyingly important to the utopianism of different CPSA members. For many of the intellectuals and leaders of the Party, Marxism and socialism were conceptual frameworks with which to articulate their utopianism. For example, when Nzula first joined the Party in 1928, he believed that "religion and communism could be united in a powerful, morally based movement for social justice".[295] He eventually became an atheist, however. In Marxism he found not only a framework for understanding race and class oppression, but a solution to this problem.[296] Moses Kotane's biography is full of references to his commitment to Marxism and socialism. He commented that, "I came to the Communist Party because I saw in it



Fig. 6.3: Yusuf Dadoo, member of the CPSA and SACP.

(Interview with Jeremy Cronin). But his vision of a future South Africa as a socialist state was very much influenced by the principles of socialism. Joe Slovo commented that, "Yusuf was truly one of nature's real Socialists; he not only believed the aphorism that all property is theft, but also lived by it." (Slovo, *Slovo*, 42).

[294] Interview with Ilse Wilson, Johannesburg, September 2006. In 1955 Molly Fischer (then a member of the SACP) visited China. She was inspired by the way in which people were working collectively towards a better future. (Interview with Ilse Wilson). The socialist society which many members of the CPSA felt had been created in the Soviet Union was also a source of inspiration to many CPSA members, such as Bill Andrews, David Ivon Jones, Johnny Gomas, Ray Alexander, Pauline Podbrey, Moses Kotane and many others. The Soviet Union represented a living version of the future they were fighting for. The role that the USSR played as a living example of the socialist future will be further explored in the next chapter.

[295] Kelley, R.D.G. 1991. 'The Religious Odyssey of African Radicals: Notes on the Communist Party of South Africa, 1921-34' in *Radical History Review* 51, 11.

[296] Whether Nzula continued to believe in communism after he travelled to the Soviet Union to study is unclear as he became quite disillusioned with the Soviet State, voicing his opinion when drunk, which he frequently was. He died in Moscow after apparently falling unconscious in the snow while drunk. Rumours circulated in Trotskyist circles in South Africa that Nzula was killed by Soviet State for airing his views about the Soviet Union. No concrete evidence had been found for this position however. Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 135 n79.

the way out and the salvation for the Native people."[297]

The inspirational and mobilising power of both the movement of socialism and the vision of a future society can also be seen in the following statement by David Ivon Jones (see figure 6.4), who as mentioned often expressed his utopianism in religious influenced language:

> I have been swallowed up in the activities of a movement which is more than political, is indeed spiritual in its influence. I came to South Africa without a God in the world… With frequent spells of depression and pessimism unaccountable. Life a futility. I found South Africa permeated with the spirit of snobbery. The cure for my pessimism and South Africa's snobbery has since been found in the entirely spiritual enthusiasm for a new Heaven and a new Earth, in which the publicans and sinners do share, with which labour's awakening fires us.[298]



Fig. 6.4: David Ivon Jones, founding member of the CPSA.

The above quote hints at another valuable role that utopianism played in the lives of some CPSA activists. The creation of utopias (the act of imaging a future better than that actually experienced) acted as a coping mechanism (or a "cure") for some CPSA members to deal with the effects of living in an unjust and unequal society. South African society was psychologically damaging place for many people: for those who were oppressed, maltreated or whose capacity for empathy was strong and for those who found the daily experience of living in a society full of moral contradictions, painful. The imagining of a future utopia and directing activity towards its achievement may have lessened these contradictions, or simply enabled them to cope with present reality. The psychology acts in the following way: if a person cannot restore the tensions they experiences in daily life (for example, being white in a society which privileges white people at the expense of black people, being a black man in a

[297] Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 89.

[298] Hirson and Williams, *The Delegate for Africa*, 45. The fact that socialism replaced religion in Jones's life can be seen in this excerpt.

country that treats black men like boys etcetera) imagining and working towards a utopia (where such tensions disappear) can act as a psychological or therapeutic tool for coping.[299]

The existence of a vision of a better society, which members of the CPSA believed could be realised gave members hope, and thus in turn may have mobilised protest against the *status quo* in society. This sense of hope can be seen in the following extract from a letter written by David Ivon Jones to a close friend who was rather sceptical of Jones new involvement in socialist activity, Jones says in 1915 that,

> Whatever doubts you may have about the 'dangerous' and 'impolitic', and 'materialistic' nature of my strange creed, remember only that it has enough of the light that never was on land or sea to keep your ever idealist, and ethereal friend trustful in life, hopeful of man, and with a growing faith in the goodness some day to be realized of man's destiny which without that 'creed' he would not possess.[300]

In working towards change in society members of the CPSA may have felt that they were beginning to lessen the injustices around them. In addition, the socialist and non-racial ideal became an ideal to live by and not just to live towards. In practice elements of the imagined future society were acted out in the small CPSA, where black and white, men and women, old and young mingled on relatively equal footing, thus helping to lessen the contradictions of living in an unjust society, and enabling people to live a more ethically consistent life.[301]

The existence of a group of people of different genders, 'races' and classes in the context of a highly segregated society (and particularly in the white population, a society riddled with race prejudice and ignorance) was evidence of the utopianism active in the CPSA: the

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[299] Ivor Sarakinsky claims that, "[Utopian] visions of a harmonious society are entrenched in the cultures of all known civilisations and in fact, this longing for felicity and unobstructed gratification is a significant part of the human psyche." Sarakinsky, I. 1993. 'Utopia as Political Theory' in *Politikon*, 20(2), December, 111. Sarakinsky partly bases his claim on a reading of Sigmund Freud, who claimed that "when desires and aspirations cannot be met in reality, imaginary satisfactions are the result". Sarakinsky, 'Utopia as Political Theory', 123 n2.

[300] Hirson and Williams, *The Delegate for Africa*, 156.

[301] Ilse Wilson mentioned that in the 1950s numerous social parties were held by members of the SACP, which Wilson says were often characterized by excitement and enjoyment, which was in part related to the fact that the SACP members had a sense that change in the South African order was imminent and that they were living the future. In the 1960s much of this optimism had faded as the apartheid state managed to infiltrate, incarcerate and weaken much of the liberation movement. Interview with Ilse Wilson.

capacity to imagine and live beyond or outside of the parameters of the hegemonic discourses of race and gender.

An argument is not being made that utopianism was the only factor that attracted people to the CPSA's cause. Nor that utopianism was the only mobilising and sustaining force active in the CPSA, or for that matter, that its role in mobilising people can be easily isolated.

The experiences and sense of persecution (from government, from both the black and white population for being communists); and the sense of belonging created by the movement; both intensified by the small size of the Party; the desire for a just society; frustrations with the present; compassion for other people; images of a better future: *all played a role in mobilising and sustaining activism.*



Fig. 6.5: Ray Alexander, member of the CPSA and SACP.

In fact it may be the case that distant goals alone are insufficient to mobilise or sustain activism.[302] The role of a utopian vision *alone* should not be over emphasised, and utopianism works in conjunction with a number of other factors. Whilst images of a better society mobilised action, in turn, the sense of belonging to a community, sense and experience of injustice, living out elements of the ideal (an egalitarian internal Party culture), the energy created by being involved in a political movement, all created energy which could be directed towards the creation of a better future. These factors all interacted, and influenced each other, in a complex way.

A vision of a better society is often present in a range of social, political and religious movements. Even groups (such as some religious groups) that make no explicit claims to wanting to change society in line with a vision may be motivated by an image of an ideal: an ideal of what a family should be, of what gender relations should be, of what should constitute a community, etcetera. In the case of some social groups, however, such as a religious community, factors such as a desire for a sense of belonging, a space to create

[302] Thanks to Tanya Barben for discussion on this point.

stability and certainty, or to find spiritual meanings, may be primary reasons for joining a group and interacting as a collective. The CPSA was a *utopian movement, a movement for change.* It is suggested that in the case of utopian movements (other examples may include modern social movements, as mentioned in Chapter One) the vision of an ideal or better society is a central mobilising force. In the case of the CPSA, and the lives of its members, the vision of a better society was central to its identity and activity.

A close reading of the autobiographies and biographies of CPSA members shows that many were idealistic people. As idealists they were motivated by a conception of what should be, critiquing what is relation to an ideal. The notion that ideals can become reality, that a matching of reality and of ideals is possible, would have been a motivating force in the lives of many of the CPSA members.[303]

Can the same be claimed for other less idealistic people in the CPSA, however, for whom the motivation for activity in the CPSA may have been a deep frustration with the present (particularly, racial oppression)? Zygmunt Bauman correctly notes that socialism's "intrinsic criticism of the present" is "inseparable from its future orientation".[304] Likewise in CPSA discourses (which where not just a reaction against oppression, but proposed a specific solution), *dissatisfaction and frustrations with the present (which mobilised action) and the ideal future imagined, cannot be divorced*. CPSA members were motivated at the same time by a sense of injustice at the oppression of black South Africans and the working class, by a desire to change it, and by a belief in their ability to change society in accordance with a vision.

Members of the CPSA were people who believed that society could be changed for the better via the application of deliberate human agency. Jack Simons, member of the CPSA and then SACP, for example, was described by one of his daughters as a humanist, who believed in people's potential to change for the better and who believed that "the force of just one individual could change things".[305] *Utopianism was also implicit therefore in CPSA members' activity directed towards transforming society.*

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[303] A claim is not being made that all idealism is necessarily utopian. The term utopian has been used more broadly in this thesis to refer to desire for, or images of, an ideal or far better society. One may be idealistic about only one aspect of one's life, for example, idealistic about romantic relationships. The terms are of course very similar.

[304] Bauman, *Socialism,* 50.

[305] Interview with Tanya Barben.

Mannheim would have considered the CPSA's vision for a new South Africa utopian in terms of his definition (discussed in Chapter Two): an image which was incongruent with reality and which in "passing over into conduct" began to "shatter a given order".[306] The next section of the chapter turns to an analysis of the role of CPSA utopianism in wider society as a critique of, and challenge to, the *status quo*.

'There is an alternative!' [307]
The Function of CPSA Utopianism in South African Society

Utopias share with the totality of culture the quality – to paraphrase Santayana – of a knife with the edge pressed against the future. They constantly cause reaction of the future with the present, and thereby produce the compound known as human history.
(Zygmunt Bauman, 1976) [308]

The criticisms intrinsic to CPSA utopianism and the Party's explicit criticism of the *status quo* have been mentioned throughout this study. Critique of the inequitable distribution of wealth in society, the exploitation of workers by capitalists, racial oppression of black people, and the consequent unequal concentration of power in the hands of a few, was overt and impassioned, or implied in their vision of an alternative society.

The most widely written about function of utopianism in the theoretical literature on the subject, is its critical function in social and political life. As mentioned in Chapter Two, utopianism acts as a critique in highlighting "the disparity between actual space (how society is) and the imagined space (how society could be under new circumstances)".[309] In addition, the construction of utopias, particularly ones which a group of people propagate as possible, can challenge notions of what is possible, and become a force for change, even if the *exact* utopia imaged is never implemented.

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[306] Mannheim, K. 1936 [1929]. *Ideology and Utopia*. New York: Harvest Books, 192.

[307] As the CPSA claimed in: 'Fight for Freedom', A declaration to the People of South Africa from the National Conference of the Communist Party, January 1950. Source: Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 212-213. As mentioned in the Introduction to the study, the World Social Forum's slogan is "Another world is possible!"

[308] Bauman, *Socialism*, 12.

[309] Moore, T. 2002. 'Downsizing Utopia', abstract to paper presented at the Third International Conference of the Utopian Studies Society, www.biggar-net.co.uk/utopia/art-2002.htm.

Paul Ricoeur suggests that "the fantasy of an alternative society and its exteriorization "nowhere" work[s] as one of the most formidable contestations of what is".[310] How does one measure the efficacy of this possible function of CPSA utopianism in South African society, however? To what extent did the CPSA's criticisms fall on deaf ears? To what extent were South Africans who came into contact with the CPSA or its message challenged by the imagined utopia?

Utopianism, so Bauman, Levitas, Mannheim, Ricoeur and others have written, essentially challenges the taken for granted of the *status quo* – the naturalisation of what is socially constructed.[311] As mentioned in Chapter Two, however, *the potential power of the utopian critique is context related*. Specifically, the CPSA was challenging, amongst other things, the ideology of race in which white South Africans had a vested and self-serving interest. Thus it was very difficult for the CPSA (in effect) to challenge this ideology in the white population. Beyond the few activists the CPSA attracted or the sympathisers who watched their movements, which were few in number, they barely changed mainstream white thinking. But they evidently offered a challenge to the *status quo*, specifically, to racial and economic inequality and white privilege.

As mentioned, the CPSA mobilised protest against the racist state and the exploitation of labour. Mobilisation within the CPSA was influenced by frustrations with the present, coupled with an alternative vision of the future, as mentioned. The CPSA organised bus boycotts, anti-pass campaigns (including pass burning demonstrations), political rallies, petitions (such as the League of African Rights), trade union activity and other forms of protest. For a brief period the CPSA challenged the *status quo* in National Parliament. In 1948 Sam Kahn won a seat in the House of Assembly as one of three representatives of a group of black people that had been removed from the voters roll in 1936. Joe Slovo claims that Kahn's constant criticism of the *status quo* was "a thorn in the side of the most powerful of white institutions – the House of Assembly."[312]

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[310] Ricoeur, P. 1986. *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. Edited by Taylor, G.H. New York: Columbia University Press, 16.

[311] See Bauman, *Socialism*; Goodwin, B. and Taylor, K. 1982. *The Politics of Utopia: A Study in Theory and Practice.* London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd; Levitas, R. 1990. *The Concept of Utopia*. New York: Philip Allan; Mannheim, K. 1936 [1929]. *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Harvest Books; and Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia.*

[312] Slovo, *Slovo*, 41.

The fact that the CPSA offered a challenge to the establishment can be seen in the level of state repression experienced by the Party and especially in the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950. To what extent though, was it the CPSA's utopian vision that challenged the *status quo* and not merely the protests against the government that the Party organised? First, the CPSA not only offered a challenge to racial segregation in South Africa but also to racial capitalism upon which white privilege was built. Despite the small size of the CPSA, the vision of an egalitarian society in which there was no private property, was perceived by the establishment as a serious challenge, perhaps even more so than by the challenge offered by organisations such as the ANC at the time.

Second, the CPSA's vision of an alternative society may have been a "powerful contestation of what is"[313] for black people who came into contact with the Party's work and message (either in person or via their press: at certain points in the CPSA's history they sold a few thousand copies of their newspaper every month). The CPSA's images of a new society may have resonated with very many people, and instilled the notion that things did not have to be the way they were, that one could image something radically different and that the *status quo* was not forever fixed.

For rank and file members, many of whom hardly engaged with Marxist literature, the image of a future without racial oppression, a society of peace and democracy where all people (or perhaps all men) would be equal and "free to share alike in the fruits of their joint labour"[314] may have had an intuitive pull.[315]At rallies, after rousing speeches about the *status quo* in South Africa, and the solution that the CPSA proposed in the vision of a future society, the Party sometimes signed up hundreds of people. The level of interest seldom translated into committed activism for the Party however. The CPSA was small, often not well organised and lacked a consistent strategy for maintaining activism due to its frequent policy changes in line with Comintern directives rather than an analysis of the South African situation (as will

[313] Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 16.

[314] CPSA, Programme of the Communist Party of South Africa, 1929 in Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 101.

[315] Whether the society's well-being would be better catered for under collective ownership and distribution of resources may not have been something that was dwelt upon by all members. In 1934 Moses Kotane described the CPSA as "something like a church congregation, very loose, politically illiterate and knew nothing about Communism save that it stood and fought for their rights." Moses Kotane, Letter to a Comrade, 31 July 1934 cited in Edgar, R. 2005. *The Making of an African Communist: Edwin Mofutsanyana and the Communist Party of South Africa 1927-1939*. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 14 n33.

be shown in Chapter Seven). Infighting in the Party also affected the Party's ability to concentrate on maintaining interest in CPSA activities.

Dominic Fortescue has argued that the CPSA's message had limited appeal and relevance for most Africans, for a number of reasons.[316] These include: the limited development of a class and even race consciousness in South Africa at the time (Fortescue concentrates on the 1940s period); the fact that activity in the CPSA exposed black people to risk and offered "very little assistance in the central struggle of their lives: that of sheer economic survival";[317] and because the CPSA's "emphasis on total emancipation" seemed "absurdly unrealistic and even scarcely imaginable to most Africans".[318] Fortescue claims that black South Africans did not sense that radical change was possible and that the South African system was seen as "brutally permanent".[319]

The CPSA did not have mass appeal in South Africa. At its height its members numbered a few thousand in a country of a few million, but as mentioned the Party sometimes signed up hundreds after political rallies. The reasons Fortescue cites for this lack of mass popularity are true to an extent. However, the CPSA's message of "total emancipation" was almost always (after the early 1920s period) combined with demands for changes to immediate economic and social conditions, from an end to pass laws, to better wages, and social support, so that the CPSA's message was unlikely to have been perceived by Africans as "absurdly unrealistic" in the 1940s. It is very possible that had the CSPA maintained a consistent strategy for campaigning amongst black South Africans (instead of following the vacillating policies of the Comintern) they would very likely have had much larger appeal.

According to Kelley, "The rank-and-file usually joined the Party on the basis of single-issue politics, which might include pass burning campaigns, non-racial trade union activities, efforts to win the franchise for Africans, organizing the unemployed, or nettling racist government police repression."[320] Whilst it is likely that many members "joined on the basis of single-issue politics", the committed and active members that remained became inspired by the CPSA's utopian vision as was shown in the previous section of the Chapter. In

[316] Fortescue, D. 1991. 'The Communist Party of South Africa and the African Working Class in the 1940s' in *The International Journal of Historical Studies*, 24(3), 481-512.
[317] Fortescue, 'The Communist Party of South Africa', 484.
[318] Fortescue, 'The Communist Party of South Africa', 482.
[319] Fortescue, 'The Communist Party of South Africa', 496.
[320] Kelley, 'The Religious Odyssey of African Intellectuals', 10.

addition, many of the rank and file may have been attracted to more than immediate political demands and "single-issue politics". Samantha Abercrombie comments that, "The utopian power to persuade, inspire and motivate (politically), arises out of unmet… political needs that reach far beyond short term utility and gratification."[321]



Fig. 6.6: Naboth Mokgatle, member of the CPSA.

The power of utopian language, the conjuring up of a life of dignity and material satisfaction, did attract members to the Party. The story of Naboth Mokgatle (see figure 6.6) provides an example. Mokgatle was first introduced to the CPSA in night schools run by the CPSA. He was attracted by the Party's detailed analysis of the South African situation, and by the stress they laid on the need for action on the part of oppressed black people. But he was also attracted by the CPSA's vision of the future. In his autobiography he claimed that the CPSA, "...impressed me as being the only [party] in the country working for a happy society in which all inhabitants would have the right to vote… a society in which all children would have free education and equal opportunities."[322]

The spread of millenarian movements throughout Pondoland, Natal and the Transkei (often attached to the mobilising of the ICU) in the 1920s says that utopian visions did have resonance amongst many black South Africans.[323]

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[321] Abercrombie, S. 2001. 'The Poetics of Politics', Unpublished Honours paper, Department of Political Studies, Rhodes University, Grahamstown (paper loaned by Ivor Sarakinsky), 29.

[322] Mokgatle, N. 1971. *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African.* Johannesburg: AD. Donker, 234. Mokgatle joined the CPSA in 1941 amidst the politics of the Second World War. He was active in the CPSA and trade union politics before going into exile in the UK, where he died in 1985.

[323] See Bradford, H. 1987. *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924-1930.* Johannesburg: Ravan Press. Dominic Fortescue sees the spread of millenarian movements where salvation was predicated on "supernatural intervention" as a sign of the "essential powerlessness felt by most blacks when confronted with the South African state." (Fortescue, 'The Communist Party of South Africa', 498 n61). While black South Africans no doubt did often feel powerless when confronted with the South African state, two points can be made. First, millenarian movements in these areas in the 1920s often combined with the *resistance* politics of the ICU. Helen Bradford mentions that millenarian undertones were common in ICU speeches. Second, religious and supernatural frameworks for understanding the world and in

It may well be the case that the majority of black South Africans believed that the South African system was "brutally permanent". Breaks in the perceived hegemony of the social order did occurred, however, (as in the case of the CPSA) and the CPSA was responsible for developing a small, though influential group of people who challenged the *status quo*.

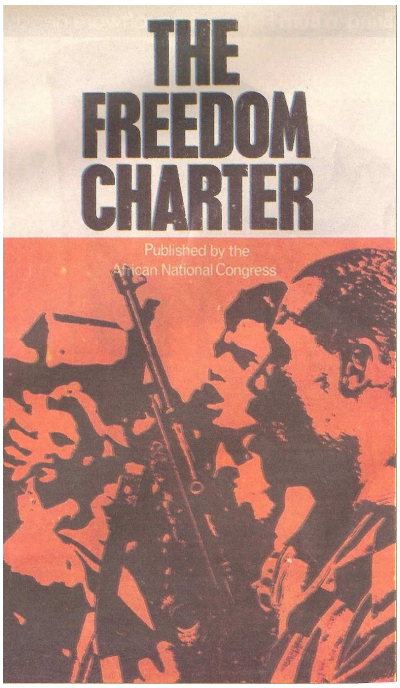
Despite the limited appeal of the CPSA's utopian vision to the masses of black South Africans in the first half of the last century, what started off as a radical vision of a small party with a small following was slowly incorporated in a more popular and far reaching discourse. For example, traces of the CPSA's socialist, non-racial utopia can be seen in the Freedom Charter (see figure 6.7) drawn up in 1955.[324] Although SACP member Rusty Bernstein wrote the rough outline of the Charter, the Charter expressed many of the heartfelt desires of oppressed black South Africans, as it was based on demands and hopes of thousands of black South Africans jotted down on pieces of paper and collected by the Charter organisers.[325] The fact that elements of the CPSA's vision of a new South Africa were incorporated into this democratically drafted document, which has resonated with many South Africans ever since, speaks to the appeal of the Party's vision beyond its small and committed band of activists. The CPSA utopia, whilst imagined and heard by relatively few South Africans, slipped into popular discourse and provided a critical and programmatic tool (against which future policy options could be judged) in South African society, far beyond what the small Party's history will show.

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particular, cause and effect, were *already* a part of African traditional life, and did not merely reflect a sense of powerlessness. Had the CPSA's utopian vision drawn more heavily on Christian discourses or language, they may well have experienced greater popularity, given the importance of Christianity in South Africa. The CPSA's utopian message seems to have greater appeal with educated or literate black South Africans. Many prominent black communists were school teachers for example, who had been exposed to other conceptual frameworks for understanding the world.

[324] Alison Drew points out (in *South Africa's Radical Tradition Volume 1*, 327 n2) the similarity between Clause 8 of the Freedom Charter which reads, "The doors of learning and culture shall be opened" and the following statement from a 1934 lecture written by the CPSA: "The doors of the middle and higher schools will be thrown wide open for all the toilers." (CPSA, 'What is the Native Independent Republic?', 1934. Source: Drew, *South Africa's Radical Tradition Volume 1*, 205). The content of the Freedom Charter was however, influenced by a number of discourses, including for example the ANC's notion of being able to 'forge a new identity' (a modern idea) and a common African identity in opposition to discourses of ethnic difference. Interview with Jeremy Cronin. The Charter was also based on the international Charterist movement.

[325] And as pointed out by Jeremy Cronin, elements of the ideal that the Charter imagined were lived out in the process by which the Charter was drawn up: it was a broadly participatory and democratic process. Interview with Jeremy Cronin.



In conclusion then, claims to the power of the CPSA utopianism in wider South African society are tentative. It should be noted however, that though the Party was small and attracted relatively few people to its membership list, it had a disproportionate impact on the politics of South Africa, the cause of which it is suggested, is partly the critical, inspirational and constructive elements in the CPSA's vision of an alternative society: the ability of the CPSA utopia to speak to frustrations with the present, and the mobilising power of its utopian vision.

Fig.6.7: A recent publication of the Freedom Charter published by the African National Congress.

Summary

Utopianism played a role in the lives of CPSA members and in the Party itself. Utopianism gave voice to frustrations with the present, provided a goal towards which these frustrations could be directed. It mobilised and sustained activism. It may well also have acted as a coping mechanism for members of the CPSA to deal with the frustrations and contradictions of living in an unequal and racially divided society.

The CPSA's utopian vision critiqued the *status quo*, specifically the racial and class stratified nature of South African society. It may well have provided people beyond the small circle of activists in the CPSA with hope for changed and better circumstances by contesting the *status quo* in imagining an alternative. In addition, the power of the vision of a non-racial, just, society in which the welfare of all was ensured, resonated with many oppressed black South Africans. There is evidence of this in the echoes of the CPSA's vision for a new South Africa in the Freedom Charter. The Charter in turn (a utopian document itself) has remained a significant articulation of ideals against which realities in the new-South Africa are judged.[326]

[326] Despite being a contested document. See for example the debate between Peter Hudson and Jeremy Cronin in *Transformation:* Hudson, P. 1986. 'The Freedom Charter and the Theory of National Democratic Revolution' in *Transformation* 1, 6-38; Cronin, J. 1986. 'National democratic struggle and the question of

About the function of utopianism in society, Bauman writes that:

> Utopias do exert enormous influence on the actual course of historical events. Sometimes they are so promptly incorporated into political practice (as was the case with Harrington's *Oceania* and the American Constitution laid down by his admirers) that there is hardly time for the glue to dry under the utopian label; sometimes they are decreed to have been brought into reality and then they imperceptibly merge into conservative ideologies. But in most cases they just linger in the publics mind as guides for social action, as criteria marking off the good from the evil, and as obstinate reminders of the never-plugged gap between the promise and the reality, too slow to catch up with its own constitutive ideals.[327]

Bauman's comments are relevant here in two respects: first, Bauman is strong in his assertion that utopianism plays a *vital and significant function* in society. In addition, he points to the different ways in which utopianism might function in a society: that whilst utopian visions may remain as a guide for action, as constitutive ideals (as we have just seen) utopian visions may also "imperceptibly merge into conservative ideologies." This notion is explored in the next chapter.

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transformation' in *Transformation,* 2, 73-78 and Hudson, P. 1987. 'Cronin and national democratic revolution' in *Transformation*, 4, 54-59.

[327] Bauman, *Socialism*, 16. By, "Too slow to catch up to its own constitutive ideals", Bauman is possibly referring to the fact that a) reality can never come close to the ideal but that b) these ideals are nevertheless constitutive (part of the building blocks) of reality as human's keep pushing for change in accordance with an ideal and thus realise aspects of the ideal envisioned.

Chapter Seven:
The Destructive Function of Utopianism in the CPSA

Introduction

The vision of an alternative society free from racial oppression and capitalism played an important role in the lives and fortunes of the CPSA and its members as already shown. An articulation and commitment to this vision remained throughout the Party's existence. But a closer look at the Party after we left them in the late 1920s in Chapter Five, tells a more complicated story. Colin Bundy says that in the 1930s, "Obedience to the successive Comintern lines provides the backbone of the history of the CPSA in this period."[328] Obedience to the Comintern line, displayed in the CPSA's adoption of the Native Republic Thesis, took an ugly turn in the 1930s – when the ripples of Stalin's purges reached South African shores.

Bundy comments that an accurate assessment of the 1930s and 1940s in CPSA history must capture the CPSA's creation of a sustaining vision of an alternative social order, but also, "it must recall the political blindness and perversity involved in the Party's obedience to a Comintern which itself was subservient to Stalin's brutal and ungenerous version of socialism." He continues that "a history of the period should also measure how much the second damaged the first."[329]

The following account does just that. It is suggested however, that we might better understand the whole of the CPSA's history and in particular the role of the Comintern through exploring the role of utopianism in the CPSA. An exploration of the presence and function of utopianism in the CPSA shows how the CPSA managed to keep alive a sustaining vision of a better and alternative order, and yet at the same time, allowed the influence of the Comintern to so negatively influence the Party as a result of their blindness to the failures of the Comintern and the Soviet Union. *An analysis of utopianism is a key ingredient in understanding why*, as will be demonstrated in this chapter.

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[328] Bundy, C. 1991. 'Left, Right, Left, Right: The CPSA in the 1930s and 1940s' in Bundy, C. (Coordinator). *The History of the South African Communist Party*. Lectures presented at the University of Cape Town Summer School. Cape Town: Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, UCT, 32.

[329] Bundy, 'Left, Right, Left, Right', 32.

The first two sections of Chapter Seven are a description and analysis of the 1930s period in the CPSA, when the Party was 'Bolshevised' under Stalin's directive. The third and fourth sections describe and analyse the CPSA's perception of the Soviet Union, and their (lack of) reaction to Stalin's purges. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ambiguous nature of utopianism, as shown by an analysis of the constructive and destructive functions of utopianism in the CPSA. The historical detail in this chapter is included so that the reader may form an appreciation of the atmosphere that infected the Party during the 1930s, and the effects on the Party and its members.

The 'Bolshevisation' of the CPSA[330]

Whilst the story of the CPSA cannot be told without reference to the history of the Comintern, the fate of the CPSA was not wholly in the hands of the once powerful Soviet body. Communists in South Africa were geographically far enough removed from Moscow[331] to make their own decisions and choices about the struggle for socialism in their own country,[332] and they frequently did. Nevertheless CPSA members often chose to loyally follow Comintern line. Though debate about Comintern instructions and interpretations of the South African situation took place, the Party usually eventually came round to the Comintern position.[333] During the 1930s, debate in the CPSA became stifled as the authoritarian leadership style of Molly and Douglas Wolton 'Bolshevised' the CPSA and implemented the Comintern's New Line in South Africa.

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[330] For accounts of the 'Bolshevisation' of the Party and of the internal atmosphere in the CPSA in the 1930s see for example: Bundy, 'Left, Right, Left, Right'; Drew, A. 2000. *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left*. Aldershot: Ashgate; Edgar, R. 2005. *The Making of an African Communist: Edwin Thabo Mofutsanyana and the Communist Party of South Africa 1927-1939*. Pretoria: Unisa Press; Grossman, J. 1985. 'Class Relations and the Policies of the Communist Party of South Africa 1921-1950'. Doctoral Thesis. Coventry: University of Warwick; Roux, E. and W. 1970. *Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux*. London: Rex Collings; and Sachs, B. 1949. *Multitude of Dreams: A Semi-autobiographical Study*. Johannesburg: Kayor Publishing House.

[331] Geography became a significant factor in the 1930s when the horrifying reach of Stalin's purges swept through the Comintern in Moscow, and to communists of other country's called to the Soviet Union. However, few CPSA members in South Africa at this stage knew about or were willing to accept the possibility of Stalin's purges. (Socialists in Trotskyist circles were highly critical of the Soviet Union by this period.)

[332] See Drew, *Discordant Comrades*.

[333] It is not assumed that the party remained a static, homogenous body. Members came and left – and sometimes exited due to objections to Comintern policy.

In Chapter Five, the historical chronology of the CPSA was left in the late 1920s – shortly after its adoption of the Native Republic Thesis. The following historical account picks up where Chapter Five left off. The late 1920s saw the CPSA go through a period of infighting, partly over the different positions taken on the Native Republic Thesis, but it appears, also due to personal clashes and dislikes.

Between 1924 and 1928 the Comintern put forward the theory that a period of 'capitalist stabilisation' was underway internationally and that efforts should be directed towards defending the Soviet Union rather than revolutionary activity.[334] Alliances with reformist groups were 'allowed'. However by the end of the decade Comintern interpretations of international events did an about turn. The Comintern argued that capitalism was moving towards a state of crisis, as shown by the Great Depression of 1929, and that all efforts should now be spent on revolutionary activity. All alliances with reformist, non-revolutionary bodies should be broken. Social democratic tendencies were seen as 'counter revolutionary'.[335]

Stalin had finally come to almost complete power in the Comintern. Through the policy of 'Bolshevisation', Stalin attempted to create a tight, strong and obedient following, which sent ripples through communist parties worldwide. Davidson *et al* point out that, "The policy had devastating results everywhere. Hundreds and hundreds of foreign communists disappeared into the Gulag."[336]

Starting with the Native Republic Thesis, the Comintern sought to take direct control in CPSA activities. According to Davidson *et al*,

> This control took different forms: letters demanding adherence to Comintern directives, interference in internal party struggles, the sending of emissaries to South Africa and finally the creation of the commission to study the situation within the party and decide its fate.[337]

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[334] Bundy, 'Left, Right, Left, Right', 22.

[335] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 112.

[336] Davidson, A. Filatova, I. Gorodnov, V. Johns, S. (Eds.) 2003. *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History Volume 1: Socialist Pilgrims to Bolshevik Footsoldiers 1919-1930.* London: Frank Cass, 14.

[337] Davidson *et al*, *South Africa and the Communist International*, 12.

The implementation of the New Line was carried out by the Woltons (see figures 7.1 and 7.2), who were sent by Moscow to 'Bolshevise' the CPSA, after a period of study in the Soviet Union.[338] Bundy writes:

> In November 1930, Douglas Wolton returned to South Africa from Moscow, claiming the status of Comintern "representative". He spearheaded the task of bolshevising the party. Bunting was ousted as Acting General Secretary, and a new Central Committee was dominated by Wolton and his wife Molly, and Lazar Bach. In 1931, this grouping engineered a series of expulsions from the Party so as to secure total dominance of the new line. The expulsions were justified in terms of ridding the Party of all "right wing, social democratic and vacillating elements". The Comintern approved: the "right opportunist chauvinist Bunting clique" (it explained) has "openly become agents of imperialism".[339]

One of the first causalities of 'Bolshevisation' in South Africa was the League of African Rights. Denounced as reformist, the League, on instruction from the Comintern, was disbanded. Though this did not go unchallenged at first by CPSA members,[340] CPSA members attempted to follow the New Line, believing in Comintern's superior interpretation of the needs of the socialist struggle.

Considered to be one of the greatest tragedies of this period in many writings of the CPSA, was the expulsion of S.P. Bunting. Eddie Roux and Bunting's son, Brian, believe that the expulsion from a party he had dedicated years to build so distressed him that it contributed to his early death in 1936.[341] His involvement in an identity and life-giving movement had been violently cut off. Some black members saw Bunting as too slow to change towards new policies in the party,[342] but he was in any event the victim of numerous incorrect allegations.

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[338] Davidson *et al*, *South Africa and the Communist International*, 14.

[339] Bundy, 'Left, Right, Left, Right', 25.

[340] Irritation at the Comintern's continual chiding of the CPSA for its formation of the League was expressed by Nzula in a letter to the ECCI in 1929: "[W]e would ask you to not be always seeking occasion for vilification of us on the one hand or public laudation of yourselves on the other…It is not impressive nor is it comradely… we do not only our best but better than, if we may say so, you can teach us to do when it comes to local details." Quoted in Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 116.

[341] Interview with Brian Bunting, Cape Town, January 2006 and Roux, E. 1944. *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography*. Cape Town: Self-published.

[342] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 118.

Bunting, who had been the first in the ISL to direct the small party's attention to the plight of black workers, was now denounced as a white chauvinist and an 'imperialist bloodsucker',[343] who engaged with right-wing activities.[344] Other notable members expelled included Bill Andrews, accused of white chauvinism and Trotskyism, and William Thibedi and Gana Makabeni for 'Buntingism'.[345] Grossman writes that "La Guma was expelled, then reinstated, then expelled again".[346] Ray Alexander recounts how Joe Pick, who sold the Party's paper *Umsebenzi*, was expelled for claiming to have sold all the copies of *Umsebenzi*, when in actual fact he sold all but three, putting in the money for the last three copies himself.[347] Experienced cadre were thus lost when expelled for ridiculous reasons, and energy in organising political protest was sucked into internal fighting and acrimony.[348]

The Party even attempted to interfere in peoples personal lives: Eddie Roux was forbidden to marry another CPSA member, Winifred Lunt who was considered a 'petty bourgeois intellectual'.[349] Senior members attempted to ensure the backing of the Comintern for their faction by secretly reporting other's "treachery" to the Comintern.

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[343] Roux, E. and W, *Rebel Pity*, 104.

[344] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 119 and124. Diatribes against Bunting followed in numerous publications of the party paper.

[345] Davidson *et al*, *South Africa and the Communist International*, 15.

[346] Grossman, 'Class Relations and the Policies of the Communist Party of South Africa', 193.

[347] Expulsions on weak or non-existent grounds continued for years. In 1935 another group of loyal and active members were expelled for "attacking the line of leadership", sowing discontent in the ranks of the Party and in mass organisations sympathetic to the CPSA. See Roux, E. and W, *Rebel Pity*, 145.

[348] During this period the state's oppression of political protest in South Africa was increasing. Communist members were deported, arrested, and banished to various areas of the country. The attacks on the CPSA increased its popularity and many black members joined in protest. But this effect was counteracted by the destructive effect of internal politics: expulsions and intolerance of debate. Many branch members left the Party. In addition the CPSA was moving further and further from connecting with increasing black protest and frustrations on the ground. The League of African Rights for example captured the frustrations of a broad range of black people in the rural areas, and linked them with concrete demands. The CPSA's access to much of the energy of this resistance was lost when the League was disbanded. "Purifying" the Party by cutting ties with reformist, nationalist or social-democratic groupings in practice meant that the CPSA was instructed by the Comintern to isolate itself completely.

[349] See Roux's autobiography: Roux, E. and W, *Rebel Pity* and Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 129.

Whilst the CPSA had always subscribed to the Leninist strategy of democratic centralism[350] debate within the Party had been active in the first few years of the Party's history. In the 1930s however, debate became stifled and members were criticised simply for disagreeing with the leadership – however absurd their actions. Criticism of the New Line was not allowed. When Bunting was censured in the Friends of the Soviet Union, (a society aligned to the CPSA which was also affected by 'Bolshevisation') and named 'an imperialist bloodsucker', he apparently leaned across the table to young communist Winifred Lunt (Eddie Roux's wife to be), and asked her if she thought he was indeed such a thing. She replied, "No, it's ridiculous!" For this reply she was sharply reprimanded by the Politburo of the CPSA.[351] S.P. Bunting remained loyal to the Party even after his expulsion.[352]



Fig. 7.1: Douglas Wolton and Alfred Nzula in the late 1920s.

Not all CPSA members succumbed to the atmosphere of the time. Some members left in

[350] Lenin argued that a successful revolution required a disciplined and loyal group of revolutionaries who abided by the rules of democratic centralism. Democratic centralism meant that communist party members could debate and disagree within the party, but that once a final decision had been reached, all members should abide by it, and defend the decision against non-party members.

[351] Roux, E. and W, *Rebel Pity*, 104.

[352] Bunting's loyalty to and faith in the Comintern also remained even after his expulsion. He and his wife, Rebecca Bunting, and son, Brian, put the period down to the personalities involved – particularly Douglas Wolton (see letter from Eddie Roux to Brian Bunting: Roux, E. Letter to Brian Bunting, 6 June 1943. Source: S.P. Bunting Papers A949, Historical Papers Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg) in a manner which Grossman has referred to as the "individualisation of the political process." (Grossman, 'Grossman, J. 1985. 'Class Relations and the Policies of the Communist Party of South Africa', 10-11). Roux on the other hand aims all the blame for the 1930s period at the Comintern, and not nearly enough on the particular leaders of the time. Both the Comintern and the Woltons and Bach were, in a sense, mutually supportive.

disgust, or with great sadness, and Party members in smaller branches such as Bloemfontein watched in dismay at the behaviour of their more senior comrades. [353]

It was not simply the blind adherence to Comintern directives and authority that enabled the Woltons to expel so many people, and 'purify' the Party. Drew writes that, "The CPSA was squeezed between the pressure of increasing legal repression, on the one hand, and organizational weakness coupled with increased intervention by the Comintern, on the other."[354] Under this pressure, some members turned on each other. In addition, tensions and personal feuds had been mounting since disagreements over the Native Republic Thesis. It also appears that a kind of destructive fever infected some of the members who were swept along by the extremist tide of the Woltons' 'Bolshevisation'. Sachs writes the following of that period:

> Twenty years have not erased from my mind a certain Party meeting – a veritable Witches Sabbath – with everybody shouting Bunting down and calling him "Lord Bunting" as he tried to make himself heard.[355] An elderly women, whom Bunting had befriended over the years, turned her posterior towards him with her dress lifted high. One quails at describing what appears as ordinary billingsgate. If I do so, it is that the very same thing was happening on a much grander scale at the very summit of the Bolshevik movement, that at one time gave promise of ushering in a new age. In the highest court of the Soviet State, Vyshinsky told Bukharin that he was a cross-bred between a sow and a bull. And yet it is this old woman who is more baffling to me than Vyshinksy. For she was only one of our strays, actuated by no motives of self-advancement as was the case with many of the others. But some how she caught the infection and it dehumanized her… It was a night of many dramatic moments. There still rings in my ears the cry of a Native member of the Party: 'Bunting is my God. Leave Bunting alone. He is my God, I say'.[356]

Sachs's quote illustrates the atmosphere that infected the Party at the time. A form of group hysteria appears to have developed in the Party.[357] It also points to the fact that events in the

[353] See Drew *Discordant Comrades*.

[354] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 116.

[355] Bunting's father was knighted. This fact was used against Bunting in the campaign against him.

[356] Sachs, *Multitude of Dreams*, 164-165.

[357] Why precisely this group hysteria developed is not easy to understand, and a full explanation will not be offered here.

Communist Party in South Africa were echoing (to an extent) events in the Soviet Union. Referring to this period in the CPSA and to the Soviet Union, Sachs commented that, "ideology had ceased to count against the flood of ribald inhumanity which marked the rise of apparatus men and the exit of idealists."[358] It will be claimed in the following section however, that idealists had not all left, but that a different kind of idealist gained prominence (as well as ambitious and blinkered bureaucrats).



Fig. 7.2: Molly Wolton addressing a crowd in the 1930s.

The New Line not only affected internal dynamics, as shown above, but also official policy regarding the struggle for a socialist future. The Native Republic Thesis also underwent changes and further contradictory interpretations, as briefly mentioned in Chapter Five. The Native Republic was interpreted as a group of different nations – a federation of different republics – in a manner which now looks distinctly like Bantustan policy.[359] There were few dissenting voices to this interpretation.[360]

[358] Sachs, *Multitude of Dreams*, 165.

[359] The reasoning was that it would ensure that one nationality or tribe did not dominate the other, but this was hardly interrogated.

[360] A Party member by the name of Washington Nchee voiced dissent to the new interpretation. Drew paraphrases Nchee's objections, "…there are too many tribes and we would too many republics… if

Drew has interpreted the leadership's unquestioning acceptance of this interpretation in the 1930s as evidence of the lack of "intellectual autonomy in the Party after the purges".[361] Changes in policy about how to reach the desired future were indicative less of the wishes of and desires of its members, or of their critical analysis of the South African situation, than the unhealthy atmosphere of the time.

The results of the 'Bolshevisation' of the Party were devastating (though not permanently crippling). By the mid thirties most day to day activity of the CPSA had stopped.[362] Accounts differ but membership appears to have dropped to a few hundred, perhaps even less – from a height of a couple of thousand in the late 1920s. Party paper circulation dropped as writings became more and more theoretical and abstruse. Most significantly, party theory and action had become increasingly removed from black protest in South Africa.

In 1933 the Woltons left South Africa for England, apparently owing to the ill health of Molly. Lazar Bach took over the leadership, but he was soon to be challenged by Kotane who returned from studying in Moscow in 1933. Kotane was shocked at the state of the Party on his return. He was particularly critical of how far removed the CPSA had become from black popular organisations.[363] He began to build support in the Party for the position that the CPSA needed to build a strong and broad alliance with black organisations. He believed that, "the black majority could be mobilized on the basis of democratic demands"[364] towards a democratic state, and that CPSA policy should become rooted in the specific context of South Africa. His return coincided with a shift in Comintern policy. The rise of Fascism in Italy and Germany lead Stalin to seek allies in the West. The Comintern now did another about turn and instructed communist Parties to do the same in developing a united front with other liberation and labour organisations.

German, French, English and other people can live together why cannot we be a nation.' He also referred to Basutoland, where 'there was never peace… because they are divided under so many chiefs'." (Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 129). Drew points out that the federation interpretation was put forward at a time when the ANC was "striving to unite Africans across tribal lines, not fragment them" (Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 129).

[361] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 128. Washington Nchee said at a meeting in December 1931 that, "We had this discussion in Durban and I was beaten and given to understand there…I only brought it up for discussion and I though I might get support, but now I give up." (Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 129 quoting the report of the meeting of the Central Committee of the CPSA, 28-30th December 1931).

[362] Davidson *et al*, *South Africa and the Communist International*, 16.

[363] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 169.

[364] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 169.

Tensions between factional groups in the CPSA now rose again, partly around interpretations of the Native Republic Thesis, who the Party should work with and towards what. But the disputes seem to have been overlain with personal acrimony and the results of previous periods of infighting and lack of trust, sown to a large extent by the Comintern's authoritarian interference in Party affairs. The Party turned to the Comintern to resolve the dispute, and Kotane, Bach and others travelled to Moscow to appear before the Marty Commission (named after the French Comintern official who headed the commission).[365]


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Fig. 7.3: An article on Lazar Bach and the Richter brothers in the Soviet Union newspaper, Izvestia. *Bach is pictured at the bottom.*

Bach did not return from Moscow. He was now, unbeknown to him at first, working against the Comintern line. He was found guilty of participation in counter-revolutionary organisations, counter revolutionary propaganda and assistance to the international bourgeoisie. He died in a concentration camp in the Soviet Union. Two other members of the CPSA, the Richter brothers, who had moved to Moscow a few years earlier – were tried with him and later executed in a concentration camp for allegedly being part of a 'secret terrorist anti-Soviet organisation' with the other prisoners (see figure 7.3). A South African communist Joe Glazer who had moved to the USSR in 1932 died in a camp in 1936.[366]

Though the worst of the 'Bolshevisation' period was over, tension, expulsions and accusations along various lines (e.g. Trotskyism, attacks on Party leadership) continued, and the Comintern still played a notable role in Party affairs by sending an agent by the name of George Hardy. The Comintern encouraged the CPSA to build relations with white labour unions and parties – even those who were decidedly racist and protectionist – in order to create

[365] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 174.

[366] Davidson *et al*, *South Africa and the Communist International*, 20.

a broad anti-fascist front. The Simons say that in this period, "Substituting reformist phrases for leftwing slogans, Hardy guided the Party into making a great turn right."[367] Bundy says that the CPSA at the time suffered from a "kind of organisational schizophrenia", by splitting its efforts "between People's Front activities alongside white working class racists, on the one hand and somewhat half-hearted work with black petty bourgeois nationalists, on the other hand."[368]

By 1938 the CPSA, fraught with tension in the Johannesburg office, was a small Party, whose newspaper had recently stopped publishing.[369] In the same year, the head office was moved to Cape Town. Hardy had left, and with the move to Cape Town, the weakening of the Comintern in Moscow and the outbreak of the Second World War, the Comintern's influence on the CPSA finally weakened and disappeared. A healthier period in the CPSA appears to have followed under the leadership of Kotane, Bill Andrews, Jack and Ray Simons, Cissie Gool and others.

In 1943 the Comintern was disbanded by Stalin. USSR's efforts where focused on fighting fascism and defending the Soviet Union in the War. It appears however that by beginning of the 1940s few Comintern officials remained. In affect the Comintern had been quite literally erased, hundreds of Comintern officials were executed in the purges or died in the Gulag.[370] In Drew's words, the revolution had devoured its own.[371]

Though the disbanding of the Comintern appears to have been unexpected for CPSA members, the Comintern's slow and earlier demise under Stalin's purges meant that its dissolution did not have the traumatic effect on the CPSA one may have assumed. The

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[367] Simons, J. and R. Source unreferenced in Bundy, 'Left, Right, Left, Right', 28.

[368] Bundy, 'Left, Right, Left, Right', 28. The Popular Front policy, which saw the Party splitting efforts between white (often racist) labour work and national liberation organisations, appears to have exacerbated existing racial tensions within the Party. In a CPSA meeting in 1930 some members even debated splitting the Party in two and creating an African and a white wing. See Edgar, *The Making of an African Communist*, 39-42. Detail about this very serious matter in the Party has not been provided as it is not central to the argument put forward this study.

[369] See Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 188 for details.

[370] The Comintern appears to have been a threat to Stalin – many of the older leaders had not been chosen by him and he was not in complete control of the organisation. This partly explains why so many Comintern officials were murdered in the purges, though of course understanding the purges themselves is another matter.

[371] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 184.

USSR's active involvement in CPSA affairs in the 1940s was far weaker than the preceding two decades. However, the influence of the Soviet Union – both as a symbol of actualised socialism and more practically on CPSA activities, did not disappear.[372]

'My Party, Right or Wrong!': Political Messianism in the CPSA

Arbitrary expulsions, uncorroborated accusations, public trashing of members' political integrity, interference in people's personal lives, distrust, turning on years long friendships, authoritarian and dogmatic leadership, blindness to what was happening in the USSR: all became part of the 1930s period. Faint echoes of what the Soviet Union had become under Stalin's leadership reverberated in South Africa.

What where the reasons for the development of this internal culture in the CPSA in the 1930s, and why was there insufficient criticism by CPSA senior members of the gap between what they claimed to be fighting for and what their internal culture and politics portrayed? Even when the internal politics of this period had serious negative consequences for some member's lives and for the health and progress of the whole Party?

A number of interrelated and complicated factors explain this unhealthy period in the Party's history. These factors included: the CPSA's deference to Comintern authority; loyalty to the Party; the role of particular personalities in the Party; the intensification of personal dislikes and feuds under the pressure of state oppression and Comintern interference; and tension around the interpretation of how to effect the imagined future. These factors are briefly touched on in the following section. They in turn interacted with what is put forward as a central factor in explaining this period – the role of utopianism.

A look at the role of the Comintern in CPSA affairs is central to this analysis. The Comintern's striving to "ensure that the leadership of the local Communist Parties accepted its ultimate authority" played a central role in the destructive atmosphere of the 1930s.[373] Had

[372] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 236. The Soviet Union was to become an important supporter of SACP and ANC activity.

[373] The 1930s in the CPSA's history did not form a discrete period – and elements of the 1930s internal culture (intolerance of debate, unquestioning loyalty to the Comintern and to Party leadership, personal feuds, expulsions of members for not following party line etc) can be seen in the 20s and 40s – but not nearly to the same degree.

the Comintern in the USSR not become the dictatorial, intolerant and doctrinaire interpreter of Marxism that it did in the late 20s and 30s, the fact it had such power in the CPSA might not have mattered so much.



Fig. 7.4: 1920s Soviet poster entitled, 'Under the banner of Lenin and Stalin forward to the victory of Communism!'

Alison Drew offers an explanation as to why the Comintern came to exert such an influence in the CPSA and on communist parties throughout the world. First, socialists across the world were "bedazzled by the Russian Revolution of 1917 that led to the Comintern's formation." Second, the revolution that communists expected to spread internationally never did, thus enhancing the status and power of the Russian Comintern delegates. Communist parties experienced numerous setbacks in attempting to spread socialism in their countries and this sense of vulnerability "made them susceptible to imposition of doctrine from above."[374]

With specific reference the CPSA, by the time of the Comintern's formation, socialism was still young and South African socialists had yet to develop traditions and most relevantly theories of their own. Drew writes that "the Comintern inevitably became the measure by which South African socialists judged themselves and each other. South African Communists were awed by the Comintern's apparent theoretical mastery and political accomplishments."[375] In addition, the backing and involvement of the Comintern in CPSA

[374] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 2.

[375] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 2. Not all members believed that the Comintern was infallible however. The CPSA did attempt to come to grips with what the fight for socialism in their own country meant, and spoke with confidence on many issues. Kotane's famous Cradock letter to the Party in which he states that the Party was "beyond the realm of realities… simply theoretical" and that the Party should Africanise, was written in a very confident manner, based on his increased confidence gained whilst studying in the USSR but also on a careful consideration of the South African situation. (See Kotane, M. Letter to Johannesburg District Committee of the CPSA, Cradock, 23 February 1934. Source: Bunting, B. (Ed) 1981. *South*

affairs gave the small Party a much needed sense of confidence in a country generally hostile to communism.

Whilst all the reasons stated above explain why the Comintern might be held in such high regard it does not fully explain the obedience to Comintern line at great cost to themselves. The level and nature of the Comintern's influence was only possible due to the CPSA's often uncritical loyalty and deference to the Soviet led institution, *and this in turn was due to the CPSA's perception of the USSR as the embodiment of the socialist utopia*. This will be explored in some detail in the last two sections of the chapter.

CPSA members were not only loyal to the Comintern. Loyalty and discipline of action in general was an all important value in the CPSA. Eddie Roux writes the following:

> It is hardly possible, I believe, for any person who has not actually been a member of the Communist Party to understand the tremendous scope and power of Party discipline. This was a rule, often harsh and always unyielding, to which all members submitted. The rule covered our every activity; in effect we had no private life but in every detail must serve the Party. To learn the perfect obedience required was at first a hard lesson… A feature of our loyalty was that every act of sacrifice and self-denial served always to bind us more strongly to the ideal we served. Hardship could not weaken resolve but strengthen it.[376]

The notion of loyalty and obedience to the Party partly explains why many members continued to support and remain active in the Party even in its nastiest days. Brian Bunting commented that as members of the CPSA one "didn't turn ones back for frivolous reasons" and that one had to "rely on an understanding of the Party more generally", that it went through good and bad times.[377]

As demonstrated in Chapter Six, the socialist utopia for which the men and women of the CPSA were fighting, meant an incredible amount to many active members of the CPSA.

African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party 1915-1980. London: Inkululeko Publications, 120). But when it came to the crunch even Kotane looked to the Comintern for final adjudication on matters.

[376] Roux, E. and W, *Rebel Pity*, 127.

[377] Bunting joined in the 1940s, when the Party was going through "a good period" and much of the "hostility" of the 1930s had "evaporated". Interview with Brian Bunting.

Roux was slowly pushed out of party work and then expelled in 1936, about which he comments: "The dream was over, the *vision had faded* [emphasis added]."[378] He continues, "I knew that the efforts of some seventeen years of my life now counted for almost nothing."[379] Bunting's devastation at being excluded from the Party points to a similar reaction. This vision of an alternative future and the fight directed to attaining it was, as mentioned in the previous chapter, vital in providing a sense of purpose and meaning to life. To leave the Party was to lose this along with the friendships and sense of belonging that the Party developed.[380] Roux comments in his autobiography that, "No member could conceivably be tempted from the Party by any lure of luxury or pleasure. And this is the grand error of those who think to fill empty churches by making the seats more comfortable or by providing jazz music. It is not pleasure or comfort that is man's deep desire but meaning."[381]

It should be noted that a culture of loyalty and obedience to the official line of the Party was present in the CPSA prior to the 1930s period.[382] Whilst the 1920s and the 1940s were more democratic periods in which debate was active, the CPSA's acceptance of the *Twenty-One Points* in 1921 (and of the implicit values that went with adherence to the Comintern) laid the foundations for the unthinking obedience that predominated in the 1930s. In addition, like many communist parties, the CPSA also accepted the notion that the fight for socialism demanded a disciplined and centralized party, continuing Lenin's philosophy of 'democratic centralism'.

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[378] Roux, E. and W, *Rebel Pity*, 147.

[379] Roux, E. and W, *Rebel Pity*, 147.

[380] Remember that at that time many of the liberation organisations including the ANC were not open to white people to join. Other small socialist groups were active at this time. Black communists who left the Party had more options in terms of the liberation organizations they could join. Trade Unionist (black and white) also had other political homes, but many CPSA members were not trade unionists and were not interested in being so – for example Moses Kotane. (Bunting, B. 1975. *Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary*. London: Inkululeko Publications).

[381] Roux, E and W, *Rebel Pity*, 127.

[382] S.P. Bunting was convinced that loyalty to the Party and the Comintern would prevent the splitting of the socialist movement. He said that, "The C.I [Comintern] and its sections rightly claim a monopolistic position – there can only be one machine, and isolated groups only confuse the masses." (Minutes of a meeting of Communist Delegates, November 1932. Source: Simons Collection, BC1081: 08.1, Manuscripts and Archives Department, University of Cape Town, Cape Town). Roux's biography of S.P. Bunting recounts rumours of Bunting having thought about starting a new communist party. S.P. Bunting was however, dead set against the idea of a new communist party.

The intensity of experience created by belonging to a small group, which was in a sense of sub-culture, added to the internal dynamics of the Party. The CPSA may have felt (and indeed, was) beleaguered, under threat (from state repression, from general societal hostility to communism), and this was intensified by their small size. This sense of fragility may have influenced the creation of clear and inflexible boundaries and codes of conduct that designated one in or outside of the group. Notions of what constituted loyalty in the CPSA were part of these codes.

Eddie Roux asks: "What was it that caused so many of the young and intelligent thus to surrender their freedom? It was ultimately a choice of becoming accomplice by consent or of joining in revolt. The choice of revolt may stem from a deep feeling of guilt and from what Ignazio Silone has called 'that pride which makes poverty and prison preferable to self-contempt'."[383] But Roux does not interrogate the fact that working towards change in society did not have to involve the levels of loyalty expected of CPSA members in the 1930s. What is important to note with regards to the role of utopianism in the history of the Party is that loyalty to the cause of liberation and socialism was equated to loyalty to the Party in the minds of some. The Party embodied a vision of a future South Africa, and to leave the Party was to abandon this vision.

The dynamics of the 1930s period must also be explained with regards to the particular personality types which gained prominence in the Party during the 1930s. A range of personalities were active in the CPSA, from the idealistic Jones and Bunting, to the focused, driven and grounded Kotane. Members of the early socialist movement in South Africa, such as Olive Schreiner, included (but was certainly not limited to) people who grappled with moral dilemmas, and how to marry the personal and political spheres of their lives,[384] people who examined their own conduct in an effort to live a consistent ethical life. Very little of this spirit and tradition can be discerned in the CPSA in the 1930s period. The CPSA in the 1930s, when the free reign was given to the autocratic and divisive influence of the Comintern, created room for authoritarian and doctrinaire personalities such the Woltons and Lazar Bach to come to the fore. Drew comments that "the Woltons were precisely the type of local leaders chosen by the Comintern during the New Line years for their loyalty to

[383] Roux, E. and W, *Rebel Pity*, 127.
[384] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 9.

authority above all else, and they had been empowered by the Comintern."[385]

In addition the involvement of the Comintern created room for a more doctrinaire tradition of Marxism to dominate. In chapters Four and Five, the different traditions of Marxism that members brought to the CPSA were mentioned. One of these was a fairly narrow, doctrinaire interpretation of Marxism that in the case of Lazar Bach continued (along with a degree of religious fervour) the Talmudic tradition of preserving the ideological purity of original founding texts.[386] In addition: a certain style of engagement in politics can be seen in the writings of important figures in the Marxist movement such as Marx, Engels and Lenin, which was characterised by a highly polemic writing style in which opponents were verbally dismissed and often destroyed. This style of engagement in politics may also have influenced the small party in South Africa, under the influence of the Comintern which had certainly adopted a polemic and destructive style of political writings and political practice, and under

[385] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 122. Regarding the Woltons and Bach, Drew comments that, "Together, the triumvirate acted as the Comintern's interpreters, pointing fingers at all those who had at any time challenged authority." (Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 122). All three appear to have been authoritarian people: Molly Wolton is described by Drew as "an authoritarian personality" who according to Roux "could not endure contradiction, not even in the smallest detail. She had to be right, always right." (Roux cited in Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 122). Bach was a dogmatic person (Davidson *et al*, *South Africa and the Communist International*, 20 n27) and described by Brian Bunting as "a Talmudic type of Communist who could quote chapter and verse from the Marxist classics and the Comintern manifestoes on any issues under debate, irrespective of relevance." (Bunting, Moses *Kotane*, 61). (It was not only these three figures who played a destructive role in the Party in the 1930s. Many members such as Roux turned a blind eye to what was going on until the late 1930s. Mofutsanyana was a supporter of Bach's actions. Many people in head office entered the fray, informed on their fellow comrades to others including the Comintern, and did little to stop the creation of factions within the CPSA). It may be the case that utopian movements which are characterized by a strong confidence in the imaged future may attract dogmatic and authoritarian personalities, partly because they offer a certain view of the world and of the future, but it is suggested that there is no necessary link between authoritarian personalities and utopianism. There appears to have been an interactive process between dogmatic and authoritarian personality types generating a particular internal culture in the CPSA in this period (in the context of the Comintern's authoritarian influence) and the possibility that these personalities were attracted to the movement because they found a sure and certain framework with which to interpret the world. As has been made very clear, however, a *range* of people (and personality types) were attracted to the CPSA.

[386] Interview with Jeremy Cronin, August 2006. Once again this tradition existed in the CPSA prior to the 1930s, but was balanced in the earlier period by the more empirical approaches of figures such as S.P. Bunting, Kotane and Roux.

the influence of some of its own members.[387]

As mentioned in Chapter Five, the imaging of a utopia must to some degree see the emergence of factions as people attempt to interpret how to achieve the utopia. But it is when certain individuals believe that the vision necessitates a particular interpretation of strategy, and when this process of understanding present society and imagining the future becomes doctrinaire, that understandable tensions and disagreements over strategy become overlain with a nastier and more destructive antagonism, and gives licence – at least in the minds of those that hold this opinion – to a range of otherwise unacceptable practices (cushioned by people's reluctance to criticise). The goal of creating a particular, and the 'correct' future became the means with which to justify the ends.[388] Armed with the truth they could do whatever was necessary to forward the cause. Expulsions of experienced comrades, hurtful accusations, the creation of distrust and tension within the Party, interference in people's personal lives, were all justified in the quest to build a disciplined and loyal force to begin to mould society into the only possible future. Sacrifices had to be made now for the success of the future. In addition, a kind of fundamentalist zeal appears to have driven a few members of the CPSA.

The critics of utopia were mentioned in Chapter Two: utopia was seen to tend towards totalitarianism. Seeing there will never be consensus over what exactly the ideal society is, and how to get there, any attempt to implement a utopian vision will always lead to domination of one group over another. This analysis has been criticised for assuming an inevitable descent into totalitarianism in the presence of a movement attempting to implement its utopian vision. The content of the utopian vision, the level of existing democracy and the extent to which people have become (too) vested in a particular vision or ideal – were all mentioned as influencing factors. The form that a utopian vision takes also affects the role that it potentially plays in society.

It is the form of the CPSA's utopianism took which goes a long way to explaining the events of the 1930s. The work of utopian critics, such as Talmon, do have some value in the analysis of how utopianism functioned, first and primarily in the Soviet Union (which had an impact

[387] Interview with Jeremy Cronin.

[388] Roux and Winifred Lunt debated this between themselves when Bunting was expelled. Roux tried to convince his wife that Bunting's expulsion was correct because of "political necessity and the need for obedience to leadership". But he asked himself in his autobiography, "Does the end justify the means?" Roux, E and W, *Rebel Pity*, 129.

of South African communist affairs via the Comintern) and secondly, to a lesser extent in the events in the CPSA itself.

Talmon's concept of political messianism is relevant to the analysis here. The doctrine or philosophy propagated by the Comintern did indeed take the *form* of political messianism: a secular messianic belief in a "preordained, harmonious and perfect scheme of things, to which men are irresistibly driven, and at which they are bound to arrive."[389] As mentioned in Chapter Three, the Comintern set themselves up as the high priests of Marxist doctrine (a doctrine which predicted a certain future outcome): the ultimate authority on matters of theory and practice in the international socialist movement. This authority was accepted by many communist parties around the world, including the CPSA. By the late 1920s this attitude took a nasty turn.

Once the authority of the leaders, as supreme interpreters of doctrine and strategy had been established, many people in the communist movement lost their capacity, or became unwilling, to apply a critical and analytical eye to events around them. Roux recounts a story of his trip to Moscow for the 1928 Comintern Congress after Trotsky had been expelled and banished to Siberia, and denounced as a traitor to the movement. A communist delegate commented to Roux: "Trotsky's analysis is of course correct, but I'm sorry to say that Trotsky is no longer a communist."[390] Roux says that, "The implication was clear: a communist must follow the line and failure to conform, even objection on the soundest theoretical grounds, put one outside the fold. The policy was now, 'My Comintern, right or wrong."[391] It was not only that the dictum had become, 'My Comintern right or wrong' but that a kind of circular logic was needed in order to ensure the integrity of the leadership and its decisions. In the *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* Talmon says,

> An exclusive creed cannot admit opposition. It is bound to feel itself surrounded by innumerable enemies. … From this sense of peril arise their continual demands for the protection of orthodoxy by recourse to terror. Those who are not enemies must be made to appear as fervent believers with the help of emotional manifestations and engineered unanimity at public meetings or at the polls. Political Messianism is bound to replace empirical thinking and free-criticism with reasoning by definition,

[389] Talmon, J. 1961. *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*. London: Mercury Books, 2.
[390] Roux, E. and W, *Rebel Pity*, 63.
[391] Roux, E. and W, *Rebel Pity*, 63.

> based on *a priori* collective concepts which must be accepted whatever the evidence of the senses: however selfish or evil the men who happen to come to the top, they must be good and infallible, since they embody the pure doctrine and the people's government: in people's democracy the ordinary competitive, self-assertive and anti-social instincts cease as it were to exist: a Worker's Sate cannot be imperialist by definition.[392]

Or its reverse: Trotsky cannot be a good theorist because he is no longer a communist as defined by the Soviet leaders. Within the Comintern and within the leadership of the Soviet Union, totalitarianism did indeed develop based on a discourse of political messianism (as well as other factors: the will to power on the part of certain leaders for example).[393]

To what extent does the existence of a discourse of political messianism, an essentially utopian discourse – explain events in the 1930s in the CPSA so many thousands of kilometres away? Two comments are relevant here: first that this destructive and doctrinaire political messianism affected the CPSA via the powerful influence of the Comintern. It has been shown how the New Line and the process of 'Bolshevisation' which the Party was to follow was unveiled to the CPSA as the only and correct way to proceed. This was then accepted by the CPSA.

Some members saw the word of the Comintern as gospel. This is illustrated by the following story. Shortly after the Marty Commission in 1936 when the findings of the Commission and the new Popular Front policy had been communicated to the CSPA back in South Africa, Mofutsanyana convened a meeting of the Politburo. The purpose of the meeting was to "absorb the lessons of the Comintern directive".[394] Robert Edgar writes the following:

> Willie Kalk took up much of the meeting with a long discourse on why the Comintern was infallible, and how it was based on Marxism-Leninism and dialectical materialism and adapted its strategies to changing conditions. The rise of European Fascism dictated a new line 'not because the line was wrong, but because of the development of the struggle and change of circumstances. It is a mistake to say that

[392] Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, 253.

[393] Large scale violence (a means to 'protect' the 'gains' of the revolution, i.e. to 'protect the people from themselves'), propaganda and extreme state control (all characteristics of a totalitarian regime as defined by Hannah Arendt) had been a part of Soviet Rule since the early 1920s under Lenin's leadership.

[394] Edgar, *The Making of an African Communist*, 30.

the CI [Comintern] made mistakes'.[395]

Under the leadership of authoritarian, and certainly in the case of Bach, doctrinaire personalities themselves, the process of 'Bolshevisation' was carried out with great confidence and vigour. Bach and the Woltons (and perhaps others active in the Party at the time about whom we have little information) appear to have styled and seen themselves as the "vanguard of the enlightened"[396] who would lead the movement forward along the correct and only path to the future. This attitude is alluded to in statements made by the leadership in the 1930s. When a number of activists were expelled in 1935 on the grounds of "attacking the line of leadership", the statement announcing their expulsion in *Umsebenzi* read, "Now that the situation has been clarified, we sincerely hope that all those who have been previously confused will now see their way clear to following the Party line and leadership."[397]

In addition it appears that on the part of those communists who accepted the process of 'Bolshevisation', a fair amount of *a priori* reasoning was carried out: in the same way that the "Worker's Sate cannot be imperialist by definition,"[398] the leadership and direction of the Comintern could not be misguided or destructive by definition. This process can also be seen in the CPSA's attitude to the Soviet Union, described in the following section.[399]

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[395] Edgar, *The Making of an African Communist*, 30. Not all CPSA leaders took this view of course. Edgar notes that "not all the Politburo members joined in this ritual of self-flagellation", including for example Johnny Gomas and later Moses Kotane.

[396] Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, 5.

[397] Statement in *Umsebenzi* cited in Roux, E. and W, *Rebel Pity*, 145. A year after Bunting was expelled, Douglas Wolton wrote to the ECCI that, "Since the expulsion of Bunting in September last he has continually tried to make use of Native members of the Party (very backward politically) to carry on his counter-revolutionary activities and before the Party could take disciplinary action against any of the Native right wing elements a very wide enlightenment campaign had to be conducted amongst the backward elements in the Party." Wolton, D. Extracts from: Report to the ECCI, 7 April 1932. Source: Davidson, A, Filatova, I, Gorodnov, V. and Johns, S. 2003. *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History. Volume Two: Bolshevik Footsoldiers to Victims of Bolshevisation, 1932-1939*. London: Frank Cass, 22-23.

[398] Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, 253.

[399] It could be asked in what way the political messianism active in the CPSA differed from religious fundamentalism. Lucy Sargisson suggests that "religious fundamentalism might well spring to mind as the dominant form of utopianism today." (Sargisson, L. 2005. 'Utopia in the Twenty-First Century, Part One: Anti-Utopianism, Religion and Fundamentalism.' Draft paper for discussion presented at a conference

To summarise: a host of complicated and interacting factors explain the 1930s period, some of which have been briefly mentioned: the small size of the Party, the pressure under which they operated, personal dislikes of fellow members,[400] not to mention very real and understandable differences over strategy and method to attain the utopian future. The influence of the Comintern, loyalty to Party leadership and the influence of particular personalities were shown to be vital factors in explaining the 1930s period. These in turn interacted with the presence of utopianism in the Party; the presence of a particular *form* of utopianism, that of political messianism. It was not the vision itself, the *content* of the vision. This remained a positive force in the Party. In addition, the ideal for which members of the CPSA were fighting had become equated with the Party itself, (and seeing that criticism of

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entitled: 'Is there a Role for Utopia in Twenty-First Century Ideology?', Centre for Political Ideologies, University of Sheffield and Centre for Political Ideologies, University of Oxford, University of Sheffield, 17 June, 5). In a sense political messianism is the secular equivalent of religious fundamentalism. They share common features: those who see the world through either paradigm are dogmatic and certain that they have found a (or even the) universal truth. Authoritarian leadership usually plays a significant role in both paradigms. Social dynamics are characterised by internal group cohesion (Sargisson, 'Utopia in the Twenty-First Century', 5) and clear boundaries defining insiders and outsiders of the movement. In addition, certain central texts may be treated as infallible or interpreted in a doctrinaire way (such as the Bible in the case of Christian fundamentalism, or the writings of Marx and the Comintern in the case of those in the CPSA caught up in a discourse of political messianism). In Chapter Two it was suggested that the boundary between secular and religious utopianism is fluid (for example, millennium movements may be thought of a religious forms of utopianism). It should be noted however that *utopianism* cannot be equated with religious fundamentalism. It is when utopianism takes the form of political messianism that it becomes a fundamentalist discourse. In addition, Sargisson comments that "not all religious fundamentalism is utopian". (Sargisson, 'Utopia in the Twenty-First Century', 5) Fundamentalist groups do not always have a clear vision of the future, or an ideal society, and may be greatly motivated by dissatisfaction with (or alienation from) contemporary society rather than image of an alternative. The relationship between fundamentalism and utopianism is a point for debate, and a conclusion is not suggested here.

[400] For example, whilst the leadership appear to have felt fully justified and righteous in expelling Bunting on the grounds of 'right wing chauvinism', part of the reason that the attacks on Bunting from Douglas Wolton were so vicious was because Wolton disliked Bunting, and was possibly jealous of him. In a letter to Eddie Roux in 1930, Bunting wrote, "Wolton is leaving tonight for Cape Town to introduce the "new line" to the Cape Town branch. At the Johannesburg branch meeting last night at which I was absent owing to stomach trouble (my first absence this year) he held forth something along the lines of the enclosed. It reminds me of the Conference of two years ago when he made a violent attack on me, and the rank and file said they did not want to listen to all this quarrelling." Bunting's suspicions were correct. Bunting, S.P. Letter to E. Roux, 29 November 1930. Source: Drew, A. (Ed) 1996. *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History. Volume 1: 1907 – 1950*. Cape Town: Buchu Books, Mayibuye Books, UCT Press, 113-114.

the Party in this period lead to expulsion) people did not criticise sufficiently for fear of abandoning the ideal and the cause.

It should be noted that in the final analysis the existence of a negative form of utopianism in the CPSA does not alone account for the unhealthy atmosphere of the 1930s.[401] In addition, whilst this atmosphere prevailed, they still remained committed to a future of justice and harmony, engaged (even if to a lesser extent) in resistance politics and sometimes managed to produce some valuable insight into strategy regarding their involvement in South African politics.[402] They drew on a number of discourses and traditions in forming a utopian vision and in expressing utopianism, as shown in the previous chapters. The narrow, confident, political messianism discussed in Chapter Four (derived from the Comintern, aspects of Marx's writings and to some extent the tradition of literal interpretations of texts) was only one of the strands in the CPSA's utopianism – though a powerful one.

In Chapter Four the following quote taken from a 1944 CPSA report to the Central Committee of the Party, was cited, "We are moving in the direction of history; we express the deep-seated needs of the people; and must therefore eventually obtain the support of the people."[403] The quote shows the confidence that the CPSA always displayed (beyond the 1930s period) in its vision of the future, based on an evolutionary perspective of history and the belief in having found the right answer to society's problems. This confidence was evident right from the beginning of its formation. To illustrate: in 1921 when the small socialist groups in South Africa met to form a united communist party and debated the Comintern's *Twenty-One Points*, the Social Democratic Party (formerly Social Democratic Federation) issued a prescient statement, saying that the Comintern's insistence on "subordinating factions to central authority" would mean, "constant suspicion, distrust, strife, and the stifling of all personal generosity within any movement imbued with the spirit of the

[401] In fact developing a full understanding of the atmosphere that affected the CPSA in this period, would require the tools of psychology utilized in understanding group psychology.

[402] See for example Moses Kotane letter to the CPSA from Cradock mentioned on page 125 (footnote 375) of this study (Kotane, M. Letter to Johannesburg District Committee of the CPSA, Cradock, 23 February 1934).

[403] CPSA, Extract from 'The Struggle for Freedom, Equality and Security', report of the Central Committee to the CPSA conference, Johannesburg, published in *Freedom*, January 1944. Source: Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 183-184.

Third International."[404] This is exactly what happened. The ISL's reaction to the SDP's statement published in *The International*, is telling. Sheridan Johns writes the following:

> The International was quick to reply to the SDP attack, and its response reveals much about the attitude of those who were struggling for a new united communist party linked to the Communist International… the author of the article displayed the assurance of a firm believer marching into a long and difficult battle for the true faith: 'The SA United Communist party will not compromise in order to attain a spurious importance but by virtue of the fact that it is in line with the development of human society and is based on the immutable laws of human progress, must attract to its ranks all that is worthy in the working class in South Africa.'[405]

The above mentioned confidence in their vision of the future, and analysis of society partially sowed the seeds for the development of a discourse of political messianism. Yet it was only within a certain period that the internal culture of the CPSA was so authoritarian and doctrinaire, and that the above mentioned confidence in their imagined future turned into a destructive discourse of political messianism. In the forties for example, the Party was a far healthier organization, and far more democratic. This points to the complex set of factors that saw the development of a discourse of political messianism: the increased dominance of the Comintern and particularly authoritarian leadership, for example. Thus there is a fundamental weakness in an argument, such as Talmon's or Popper's, that claims that utopianism *will lead* to totalitarianism. *The contingent circumstances in which utopianism develops affects the function of utopianism.*

What remained consistent throughout the Party's history was the high regard in which members of the CPSA held the Soviet Union, despite the dictatorial influence of the Comintern, and despite increasing rumours of Stalin's purges beginning to filter into the South African press. It is to this theme the chapter now turns.

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[404] Durban Social Democratic Party, 'Socialist Unity in South Africa', 1921 in *Communist Review*, 1(4), August, 73-76 cited in Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 53.

[405] Johns, S. 1976. 'The Birth of the Communist Party of South Africa' in *The International Journal of African Studies*, 9(3), 393-394.

The Soviet Union: Utopia Realised?

A year after the CPSA moved head office to Cape Town in 1938 the Party became immersed in the politics of the Second World War, and in its efforts to defend and support the Soviet Union. After the outbreak of the Second World War, the CPSA came out in vocal and loyal support of the Soviet Union, which intensified after Hitler invaded Russia in 1941.[406] In the context of the rise of fascism and Hitler's terrifying racism, the USSR was a beacon of light for the CPSA and many of its sympathisers. Brian Bunting, who joined the CPSA in 1940, commented that the mere existence of the USSR was assurance that the world would not "go fascist".[407]

The Party published and wrote numerous pamphlets and articles calling on South Africans to play their part at home or on the battlefield, in defending the Soviet Union. In June 1941 the CPSA's Central Committee issued a statement calling on the "working class and all democratic and freedom-loving people to give their unqualified and wholehearted support to the Soviet Union in its struggle against the Nazi aggressors."[408] They said that, "The Soviet Union is today not only defending the home of Socialism, but is fighting for the cause of freedom of all nations and peoples."[409]

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[406] According to Drew's account of the period, the CPSA was confused and somewhat divided in their reaction to Stalin's signing of the non-aggression pact with Hitler (Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, Chapter Ten). Party branches were certainly divided on whether to encourage South Africans to join the war, echoing some of the tensions around ISL's position regarding the First World War. Eventually the CPSA decided on an anti-war stance, called for resistance to fascism and Nazism in South Africa and combined this call with demands for rights for black South Africans (Bundy, 'Left, Right, Left, Right', 28). When Germany invaded the USSR, the CPSA's stance was much clearer (Bundy, 'Left, Right, Left, Right', 28). The Party claimed that South Africans should fight for the defense of the Soviet Union, democracy and the defeat of fascism. It should be noted that not all Party members were happy with this stance, particularly some black Party members such as Kotane (Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 233). Many black people, if not most, whilst anti-fascist in stance, were not willing to fight in a war for democracy when they had no democratic rights in their own country (Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 225). The CPSA enjoyed great popularity amongst the white (mostly English speaking) population during the war years, due to the USSR's alliance with the allies. The CPSA would apparently fill up the Johannesburg City Hall at their meetings. Interview with Ilse Wilson, Johannesburg, September 2006.

[407] Interview with Brian Bunting.

[408] CPSA, 'All Support for the Soviet Union', Official statement of the Central Committee, published in *The Guardian*, 26 June 1941. Source: Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 163.

[409] CPSA, 'All Support for the Soviet Union' in Bunting, *South African Communists Speak*, 163.

In October of the same year the Central Committee published another statement with "A Call to Action! Workers and People of South Africa…Smash Fascism NOW!" on the front cover. In rousing words, the CPSA declared that, "For fifteen weeks the two mightiest armies in the world have been locked in deadly struggle. Soviet Russia, the land of Socialism and Workers' Rule, faces Fascism, the enemy of civilisation and human progress."[410]



Fig. 7.5: A Durban District of the CPSA poster, in support of the War effort, 1942.

Under the sub-title, "Make it a People's War", the pamphlet continued:

> The Soviet Union, being a Socialist country, has no imperialist aims, nor territorial ambition. Throughout the 24 years of its existence, it has constantly stood for a policy of peace and for rights of nations and of national groups. These facts will inevitably have decisive influence on the reconstruction of the world after Hitler's defeat. The Soviet Union is the guarantee for us that there will be no repetition of Versailles with all its horrors and terrible consequences. *The Soviet Union, by reason of its Socialist structure, provides the basis for a real People's War against Fascism.*[411]

[410] CPSA, 'Smash Fascism Now', official statement of the Central Committee of the CPSA, issued 13 October 1941. Source: Simons Collection, BC1081: 08.5.

[411] CPSA, 'Smash Fascism Now' in Simons Collection, BC1081: 08.5. For glowing reports of the Soviet Union written during the Second World War also see page 37 of the booklet *We South Africans: 1652-1943*, published by the CPSA, circa 1943. Source: South African Race Relations Political Collection: AD 2182: A1.10, Historical Papers Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

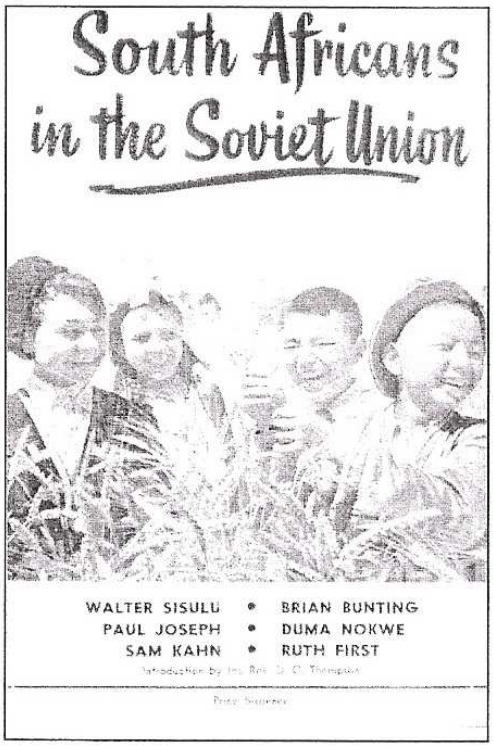


Fig. 7.6: A CPSA booklet, written by prominent South African communists about their visit to the Soviet Union.

The incredibly high regard in which the CPSA held the USSR can be seen from these statements. This regard can be seen throughout the CPSA's history, having begun with the success of the Russian Revolution in 1917. For the CPSA the Soviet Union was a vital symbol of what was actual and possible, and not only imagined: a socialist utopia already in existence. *For this reason the USSR was for many members of the Party, almost indispensable to the continuing belief in socialism itself.*

In addition, the backing and interest in CPSA affairs of the powerful Soviet Union, gave the small and oppressed Party at the tip of Africa a great deal of confidence. Brian Bunting commented that the constant support from the USSR gave the CPSA the sense that they had strength behind them and that this "fraternal action" profoundly influenced the CPSA members.[412]

By claiming the USSR was seen as a kind of utopia, it is not argued that CPSA members thought that a perfect place, the complete realisation of the communist state of being prophesised by Marx and Engels, had been realised. For example, in 1934 in, 'A word to the African workers' the CPSA said that not even in the Soviet Union had real communism come about.[413] They knew too about the mass starvation endured by Russians in the first few years after the Bolshevik Revolution. Bill Andrews visited Moscow for the 1922 Comintern Congress. Andrew's biographer, R.K. Cope wrote that "Moscow of 1923 was anything but

[412] Interview with Brian Bunting. Bunting was a patient in Russia for a while in a special section dedicated to international communists in the hospital in which he stayed. Bunting also mentions an appreciation of the support received by the SACP (especially financial support), as well as the support of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Bunting commented that the support of the USSR was disinterested and due to their commitment to bring about international socialism.

[413] CPSA, *What is the Communist Party? A Word to African Workers*, 1932, published by the Party.
Source: Simons Collection: 018.1

the Socialist Utopia": the devastation of the Civil and First World wars were apparently very evident. Andrews wrote in a letter to Johannesburg that, "There are many unsatisfactory features in Russia I see around me…".[414] What precisely these features were is not elaborated on. But in another letter from Moscow Andrews wrote, "In Moscow… everyone looks happy and well fed; everyone is hopeful and confident. There is an air of buoyancy not to be felt anywhere else in my experience, and this is the feeling that everyone has."[415]

Many members of the CPSA felt that in the Soviet Union a new, just, equitable social order had been created, where oppression, dictatorship and terror could not exist. The exploitative and undemocratic government of the Tsar had been replaced by a community of workers who were working for the benefit of all. Freedom of movement and expression, and access to resources were assumed to be enjoyed by all. Soviet citizens were "builders of the glorious future".[416] If the USSR was not utopia, their conceptualisation of the USSR was certainly utopian.[417]

This kind of romanticism was to be tested by both personal visits to the USSR by CPSA members and by a flood of information in local and international Western press about the lack of democracy in the USSR and the violence of the Soviet State.[418] Sometimes members

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[414] Cited in Cope, R.K. 1944. *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W.H. Andrews, Workers' Leader*. Cape Town: Stewart, 289.

[415] Cited in Cope, *Comrade Bill*, 288. Roux travelled to Moscow for the 1928 Comintern Congress. In his autobiography he notes that in Russia he saw beggars, overcrowded housing, lack of sanitation, but he never wrote about any of this in his articles on his trip in the South African Worker, but describes instead the great Soviet films they saw. Roux, E. and W, *Rebel Pity*, 63-64.

[416] Pauline Podbrey referring to her expectations of the future society Soviet Citizens were building in Hungary, where she was to live for a while with her husband, H.A. Naidoo. Podbrey, P. 1993. *White Girl in Search of the Party*. Pietermaritzburg: Hadeda Books, 163.

[417] The point here is not to deny the real changes for many of the Russian people after the Bolshevik Revolution. The life standards for millions of people improved under Soviet reign, relative to their existence under the Tsar. Interview with Irena Filatova, Cape Town, March 2006.

[418] Many CPSA members traveled to the USSR to study at the International Lenin School and the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), including: Moses Kotane, Alfred Nzula (see figure 7.11), Edwin Mofutsanyana, J.B. Marks and many others. The experience that communists underwent in these universities appears to have been ambivalent. For black CPSA members it was a chance to receive an education they were denied in South Africa. Kotane comments that at the Lenin School he was taught to argue and to think (Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 58-59). In addition the history of Africa taught at the universities was told from the perspective of the oppressed African, a very rare occurrence in the 1930s anywhere in the world. However according to Filatova, based on archive material, black students

of the CPSA wavered in their belief that all was well in Russia, but few members of the Party became openly critical of aspects of the Soviet Union, and the defence of the USSR's integrity remained an important part of CPSA propaganda and internal policy.

This was more than an official Party stance. The fact that the USSR was seen as a beacon of hope can be seen in the narratives of individual CPSA members' lives. Moses Kotane's regard for the Soviets can be seen in the fact that his son, Joseph, born in 1940 was named after Joseph Stalin.[419]

Pauline Podbrey and H.A. Naidoo, both CSPA members, worked in Budapest in the 1950s, when Hungary was under Soviet rule. They left feeling disillusioned by how far Hungary fell short of their expectations of a Soviet ruled country. Their reactions say much about the way in which they had initially conceptualised the USSR before leaving South Africa. Podbrey writes the following of her initial reactions to arriving in Budapest in her autobiography:



Fig. 7.7: A Soviet poster entitled, 'Long live the international Proletarian Revolution!' 1925.

complained of the racism they experienced at the universities and in the Soviet Union in general. Mofutsanyana was one of the students who made a formal complaint of racism at the KUTV (see Edgar, *The Making of an African Communist*, 22). These experiences were rarely mentioned by CPSA members on their return to South Africa. In addition students were subject to extreme levels of secrecy once in the universities: at the KUTV they could not for example give their real name to anyone during their stay at the university, nor tell anyone outside the university about life at the university. See Filatova, I. 1999. 'Indoctrination or Scholarship? Education of Africans at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in the Soviet Union, 1923-1937' in *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education*, 35(1), 41-66.

[419] Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 86.

I searched the faces of the passers-by for signs of eager, enthusiastic commitment. Where were all those happy, determined men and women, marching forward in triumph, with red banner held high? Where were the models for the people who'd inspired me on all those Soviet posters? The strong rosy cheeked women, the determined, confident men? Were these dejected, suspicious citizens the builders of the glorious future?[420]



Fig. 7.8: Pauline Podbrey, member of the CPSA.

David Ivon Jones was also to live under Soviet rule in the early 1920s, shortly after the Revolution when the young state was in the beginning stages of its transformation. The Welshman travelled to Moscow in 1921 and lived there for the remainder of his short life. He spent the three years learning Russian, translating local press into English for visiting delegates to the Soviet Union, writings articles about the transformation of Russian society in the communist press in Britain and South Africa, and reading and interpreting Marxist and Bolshevik texts. He died at the age of 41 of tuberculosis and was buried in Moscow.[421] Jones's biographer, Baruch Hirson writes that:

The road that took David Ivon Jones to Moscow was paved with hope. Not to find a release from the disease that had taken him from his beloved Aberystwyth[422] – but the possibility of restructuring society in which he believed so fervently. This was, at

[420] Podbrey, *White Girl in Search of the Party*, 163. Podbrey and Naidoo fell in love and were married in the 1940s. Such was the (usually racist) antagonism to 'mixed' marriages in many of the communities in South Africa, particularly in the white suburbs, that the young couple was urged by the CPSA leadership to leave for England. They soon travelled to Budapest in order to offer their support and labour in the new socialist state. Their experiences of life under Soviet rule in Hungary (including experiences of state surveillance, oppression and corruption) left them disillusioned and bereft, exacerbated by the isolation they received from many communist friends who refused to believe the possibility that life under Soviet rule was not as they imagined.

[421] Hirson and Williams, *The Delegate for Africa.*

[422] A town in Wales where Jones had formed a close and lifelong friendship and where he had been immersed in the Unitarian faith.

least in metaphorical terms, the 'new Jerusalem' and he had entered it.[423]

Far more of a pragmatist than Jones, Johnny Gomas (see figure 7.9) was a member of the CPSA, and earlier, a member of the ISL. He became a Marxist, and an admirer of Stalin, a picture of whom hung on his bedroom door for years.[424] Gomas was moved to activism by a sense of injustice, deep personal anger at the humiliation and racial domination wrought upon black lives in South Africa, which he personally experienced. If he was spurred on by dreams of a better society, these dreams were not made explicit in his writings, though implicit in his commitment to activism. Gomas retained an immense regard for the Soviet Union all his life.[425] Gomas's biographer, Doreen Musson, writes the following:



Fig. 7.9: Johnny Gomas, member of the CPSA.

> According to Cornelius Gomas, her husband had few regrets in his life, but one was definitely the fact that he had never been sent to Russia, the land of "freedom only" and "mighty Volga". The thought of not having been to this "great workers' state" could move old Gomas to tears.[426]

Thus in South Africa, a country where society was far from the ideal future they imagined, the USSR sustained hope that the future they were fighting for would be realised.[427] The ideal of socialism became embodied in the USSR (and even possibly in certain figures such as

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[423] Hirson and Williams, *The Delegate for Africa*, 210.

[424] Gomas was very active in trade union politics, as well as the All Africa Convention, and was one of the founding members of the National Liberation League. (Formed in 1935, the League was launched by La Guma of the CPSA and Cissie Gool, a prominent activist in Cape Town. Gomas was later to move towards the Black Consciousness movement and joined the Pan African Congress in the 1950s. See Musson, *Johnny Gomas*.

[425] Based on readings of Musson, D. 1989. *Johnny Gomas: Voice of the Working Class*. Cape Town: Buchu Books.

[426] Gomas was particularly resentful apparently of not having been given the chance to travel to Moscow for the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928, when the Buntings and Roux presented their position on the Native Republic Thesis. Musson, *Johnny Gomas*, 49.

[427] Tanya Barben agrees that the USSR undoubtedly played a role in the CPSA as an example of what was possible. Interview with Tanya Barben, Cape Town, December 2005.

Lenin and Stalin). The regard in which the CPSA held the USSR goes a long way to explaining the powerful role that the Comintern was able to play in the CPSA, so many thousands of miles away.

Defending the Soviet Union: Protecting the Ideal

The Soviet Union was a dream of utopia common to right-thinking persons all round the world, the Fatherland to which we all owed allegiance for moral, ethical and ideological reasons.
(Pauline Podbrey, member of the CPSA, 1993) [428]

The CPSA's attitude to the Soviet Union was one of the ways in which the CPSA's utopianism was expressed. For many CPSA members, the Soviet Union was utopia in another place, and a representation of the utopia of the future. All hopes were projected onto the Soviet Union, to the extent that for some individuals in the CPSA, discovering that the Soviet Union was not as they imagined was profoundly disillusioning and even devastating.

The Party's belief in the correctness of the vision of an ideal society in socialism, and seeing the USSR as a kind of utopia, was partly responsible for creating blindness to certain events in the Soviet Union. The lack of democratic practice in the USSR, Stalin's purges, and the gulag, the terror it created – were dismissed by the CPSA as Western propaganda.[429] There

[428] Podbrey, *White Girl in Search of the Party*, 186.

[429] Rumours of Stalin's purges were circulating in South Africa at the time that the CPSA leaders were called to Moscow in 1935, and some members became wary. For example J.B Marks (see figure 7.10) was also called to Moscow in 1936. He was apparently warned whilst on route in Paris not to continue to Moscow by French communists. He made an excuse not to go to Russia. On his return to South Africa he blew his cover (he and other communists had to travel under pseudonym to Russia, and on false passports) by claiming for a lost piece of luggage in his own name and putting the CPSA's office address as his own. Such action could not have been absentmindedness and Davison *et al* surmise that he wished to make future trips to the Soviet Union in the next while impossible. (Davidson *et al*, *South Africa and the Communist International*, 21). Marks was expelled from the CPSA as a result (Edgar, *Edwin Mofutsanyana*, 28) and reinstated a few years later. Louis Joffy apparently advised Bach not to go to the Soviet Union. He was reprimanded for this by CPSA leadership – but he claimed that "he had a nervous condition that made him say things that he did not really mean as they sounded [sic]." (Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 184). Thus rumours of what was happening in the USSR did make some CPSA members pause for a while, but were usually eventually brushed aside. That one should take such rumours seriously enough to consider not going to the Soviet Union, or advise others not to go, and yet remain faithful to an ideal of the Soviet Union and not voice criticism of any aspect of the Soviet Union, is telling.

was, to be fair, much misinformation in the South African (and other nations') press about the USSR.[430] But reports of the atrocities in the press were sustained and often detailed, and yet the CPSA made little effort to find out more about what was really happening in the Soviet Union. It appears that the reality of what was happening in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s was too much for the CPSA activists to take in.[431] To outsiders of the CPSA this may have made their criticism of South African society and their descriptions of an ideal future society seem somewhat hollow.[432]

Not only did their blindness lead them to implicitly condone horrendous practises in the USSR, but this blindness also had devastating effects for some CPSA members, as the reach of Stalin's stretched to South African shores. Had the Party taken rumours of Stalin's Terror more seriously, rather than dismissing them simply as Western propaganda, they might have spared the lives of their members who travelled to Moscow at the insistence of the Comintern and who never returned.[433]

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[430] Interview with Ilse Wilson.

[431] Interview with Irena Filatova.

[432] Naboth Mokgatle described himself as a "Communist at heart" but he kept hesitating in joining the CPSA in the late thirties due to the rumours of the purges in USSR: "While I was hesitating whether I should apply for membership of the Communist Party, newspapers came along with reports that the Communist party of the Soviet Union was being purged of its best and leading figures who had brought it into being…The newspaper said that they were being arrested because they opposed Stalin and those who supported him. Some were sentenced to death by firing squads. After reading the verdicts I remember asking myself, how can I join the party which destroys its cream, the party with no future because its leadership is destroyed? I convinced myself that it was just a matter of time before the Communist party of the Soviet Union would cease to exist and all the arguments for a World Communist Movement would collapse." (Mokgatle, N. 1971. *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African*. Johannesburg: AD. Donker, 211).

[433] Drew recounts the following in regarding the news of Bach's death reaching South Africa: "Ray Adler Harmel [a CPSA member] had lived with Lazar Bach before he went to Moscow. Much later, she heard that he had been accused of Trotskyism and had died while imprisoned. She was anguished but her reaction reveals the seemingly unshakeable faith many Communists had in the Comintern: 'I said once at the group to which I belonged that if that was the decision of the Comintern I would have to accept it but that never, never had I heard Lazar express Trotskyist views. I couldn't argue with the Comintern. I wasn't there." (Harmel, R, 1993 cited in Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 195-196 n83.)

Not all CPSA members shut their eyes so tightly.[434] Bernard Sachs recounts his feelings when he began to see the first signs of the growing intolerant and doctrinaire culture in the Soviet Union, as early as the nineteen twenties:

> I shall never forget the day when the "Imprecorr" the official organ of the Communist International, arrived some time in 1927, its pages filled with nothing else but a succession of violent tirades against Trotsky written by the other Bolshevik leaders… It was like a flash of lightning in a sky full of foreboding. … I spent many anguished hours hoping that the differences would be patched up. But the division in the Russian Party grew within months. One of the saddest moment of my life was the news which now reached us though the regular Press that Trotsky had been banished first to Siberia and then to Turkey. A whole world, into which had gone my most precious dreams and the full ardour of my spirit, was visibly collapsing before me. I continued to hang on to my membership of the Party. But there was no longer any enthusiasm or a will to sacrifice myself.[435]

For most members however, loyalty to the Party, mentioned in the section above, included loyalty to the USSR.[436] Though criticism of the Soviet Union was sometimes voiced by CPSA members, public criticism was seriously frowned upon. For example in an incident in the early forties Pauline Podbrey (see figure 7.8) publicly mentioned her objection to a Soviet policy that forbade Russian women who had married British men in the forties during the War to join their husbands outside the Soviet Union. Her conduct was referred to two disciplinary hearing in the CPSA and she was reprimanded.[437]

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[434] According to Ilse Wilson, Ruth First, member of the CPSA in the 1940s and a member of the SACP, was one of the first active members of the Party to question whether the information about atrocities and lack of democracy in the USSR were in fact true. Interview with Ilse Wilson.

[435] Sachs, *Multitude of Dreams*, 159.

[436] This sense of loyalty was not produced in a vacuum: for example some of the CPSA members were immigrant Jews who had experienced the anti-Semitism of Tsarist Russia first hand or whose family had lived under this oppression. The USSR liberated Jews in Russia, and memories of this influenced some Jewish CPSA members to continue to defend the integrity of the Soviet State, which it seemed, had put an end to a history of Jewish persecution in Russia.

[437] On this occasion, Moses Kotane commented to Podbrey that, "We can differ and argue as much as we like inside the Party…but once a decision is reached we must all abide by it. That is democratic centralism." Podbrey, *White Girl in Search of a Party*, 105.

When the rumours of the fate of Bach and the Richter brothers reached South Africa, Ray Alexander attempted to find out what happened to Lazar Bach on trips she made to the Soviet Union.[438] Alexander claimed that she did not know that she was shown a façade when she visited the USSR. Her husband, Jack Simons, however was somewhat more wary and critical.[439] No systematic investigation to find out what had really happened was launched, however, and the stories in the South African press were essentially dismissed by many members, and the implications of wondering about the rumours were not taken to their conclusion by prominent CPSA members.[440]



Fig. 7.10: J.B. Marks, member of the CPSA and the SACP, in Moscow in 1971. Marks died and was buried in Moscow.

Despite the idealism and utopianism inherent in their constant criticism of South African society, they failed to sufficiently self-criticise their own actions in supporting the USSR without qualification. This can partially be explained in CPSA activists continuing belief and faith in the ideal of socialism. Abstract goals (such as the ideal of socialism, the imagined future society) may, as mentioned, be difficult to hold on to, and thus people or places may come to embody these ideals.[441] The socialist utopia was embodied, in the minds of many CPSA members, by the USSR. To criticise the person (for example Stalin) or the place (for

[438] Not all the blame for CPSA members' lack of determination to find out what happened to the Richters and Bach can be laid at the feet of the CPSA's attitude to the USSR. The three men were from Eastern Europe, despite having spent time in South Africa and members may have assumed they returned home. Interview with Irena Filatova. Bach however, had been an active member of the CPSA for quite some time and was involved in a relationship with another South African communist, and some concern about his well being could be expected, particularly in light of the press reports about his trial and death.

[439] Interview with Tanya Barben.

[440] A local South African paper the *Sunday Express* carried news that the three men had been sentenced to death. The CPSA's *South African Worker* described the news as "lying and false", emanating from a small Trotskyite group in Cape Town "claiming to have underground connections with the Soviet Union. But the *Sunday Express* has been proved through cables received from Reuter and the British Embassy in Moscow to have published a lie fabricated by the enemies of the working class." Bunting, *Moses* Kotane, 291 n49.

[441] This process does not of course only develop in utopian movements, but also in religious beliefs and movements for example. This process may have a graduated effect depending on how deeply people are involved or implicated in a particular discourse.

example the Soviet Union) was to criticise the ideal of socialism, by challenging the fullest expression of the socialist utopia. This would mean a loss of the ideal for which they were fighting, and which gave meaning to their lives – and a feeling that their actions and investment had been in vein.

This can be seen in the emotional devastation caused for those who did lose faith in the vision. Pauline Podbrey comments on losing her faith in the socialist ideal after living in Hungary under Soviet rule: "I'd lost my God many years ago but then I found the Party. Now I was stripped of my Party and it left me feeling naked and bereft. There was a gaping hole where my faith had rested, my centre of certainty."[442]

In *South Africa and the Communist International*, Davidson *et al* tell a story relevant to this point. Comintern officials in Moscow were housed in the time of the height of Stalin's Terror, in the Hotel Lux.

> In the late 1930s foreign Comintern officials who lived in the Hotel Lux in the centre of Moscow could not sleep at nights. At three or four in the morning there would be a sound of a car stopping at the entrance and heavy steps of NKVD guards would echo in the long empty corridors leading to one or two doors and then returning with the arrested victims. People behind the closed doors sat fully dressed listening: whose door would they go to today? Sometimes their nerves gave way, and, unable to take the terrible waiting any longer, they shot themselves. Some jumped to their death from their windows into the courtyard far below. Always into the courtyard, never into the street where Soviet passers-by might see the suicide and get the wrong idea. Soviet citizens' ideals had to be protected at all costs, and the internal courtyard was safely surrounded by the hotel walls. [443]

[442] Of her husband, H.A. Naidoo, who was possibly even more devastated, she writes: "I knew that H.A. felt even more abandoned than I and his groping for a way out was as doomed as mine…he became apathetic and depressed, a complete contrast to the man he was. At first gradually and then more rapidly his mental health declined. Tragically he didn't live long enough to overcome his bitter disappointments and to forge for himself a new life. He never came to terms with his past." (Podbrey, *White Girl in Search of the Party*, 200).

[443] Davidson *et al*, *South Africa and the Communist International*, 22. Filatova commented that "the idea was considered right" and that what was happening in the Soviet Union during Stalin's Terror was seen by


Пролетарии всех стран, соединяйтесь!
Красный Интернационал Профсоюзов
Die Rote Gewerkschafts Internationale
Red International of Labor Unions
L'Internationale Syndicale Rouge
Москва—Moscou.
Мандат № 45
Предъявитель сего тов
Исп. Центрального
Совета Красного Интерна-
ционала Профсоюзов на 1932—1933 гг.
Генеральный Секретарь
Профинтерна
Зав. 715
Подпись владельца
мандата
Личность и подпись руки тов.
удостоверяется
Генеральный Секретарь
Профинтерна

Fig. 7.11: A page from Alfred Nzula's identification document for his period of stay in the Soviet Union

This story illustrates the power of a radical commitment to an ideal. If the Soviet Union, as an expressed of the ideal of socialism, failed, then there is nothing, a life dedicated to an illusion. Thus in jumping to their death in the courtyard rather than the street, the Comintern officials attempted to maintain the integrity of the ideal.[444]

This extreme form of loyalty and investment in an ideal (socialism as the ideal form of social organisation, and the realisation of a dream in the form of the Soviet Union) was not present to this extent in the CPSA in South Africa. But it appears that the utopian vision of a future ideal society in South Africa, and in the vision's present incarnation in the Soviet Union, became so internalised by some CPSA members that to consider changes or challenges to this ideal or its representation, became psychologically disruptive, and was thus avoided (an idea mentioned in Chapter Two). This is the power of a utopian vision – of an ideal – if it is strong enough to mobilise, to sustain activism and to help people cope with life in an imperfect society, it may also become indispensable, an ideal to be protected at all costs.

Referring to the critical and transformative power of utopia, Bauman commented that, "Utopias relativise the present. One cannot be critical about something that is believed to be an absolute. By exposing the partiality of current reality, by scanning the field of the possible in which the real occupies

some as an aberration, not something more internal to the structure of the Soviet society or governance at the time. Interview with Irena Filatova.

[444] Filatova commented that in the USSR, the Soviet Union, and its protection became "the major value" in the Soviet Union government, and even the value of life was at times subordinate. Interview with Irena Filatova.

merely a tiny plot, utopias pave the way for a critical attitude and a critical activity…"[445] This transformative and critical power of utopia is however, not always active: in the case of the CPSA, the USSR became an absolute for many CPSA activists, and they were thus unable to sufficiently criticise it, nor the influence of the Comintern.

The Ambiguity of Utopianism

The utopianism of the CPSA acted as a positive force in both South African society and in the lives of Party members. Furthermore, the critical orientation of the utopian impulse was very evident in the CPSA in its constant criticism of the *status quo* in South Africa. This critical orientation, however, did not extend to all spheres of the Party's engagement as seen in the uncritical relation to the USSR and the Comintern. In addition an intolerant, authoritarian, undemocratic, period existed in CPSA's history, in contrast to the future they were fighting for. These two phenomena, the uncritical relation to the USSR throughout the CPSA's history and the authoritarian and intolerant internal culture of the 1930s are related: the CPSA's perception of the USSR affected the role that the Comintern was able to play in the Party's history and *because they can both be understood partly as a result of the presence of a certain form of utopianism.*

Through an analysis of the role of utopianism in the CPSA's history, utopianism has revealed an ambiguous nature, both as a *potentially* positive and negative, constructive and destructive force, as was suggested in Chapter Two.

Utopianism can change from being a critical, challenging and transformative discourse (as celebrated in much of the literature discussed in Chapter Two) to being an ideological discourse, *in the sense that* it closes down debate, and justifies a given situation, no matter how removed that situation might be from the originally imagined utopia. This is particularly the case in those places, communities or societies where elements of the utopian vision have been said to be realised, as mentioned in Chapter Four.

The utopian movement of Bolshevism in the USSR certainly became an ideology in that once changes in line with an aspect of a utopian vision had been realised, the discourse of Bolshevik socialism became hegemonic, and lost its critical edge, becoming as Bauman

[445] Bauman, Z. 1976. *Socialism: the Active Utopia*. London: Allen & Unwin, 13.

noted, a conservative ideology.[446] Samantha Abercrombie, writing about utopianism, comments that:

> A liberating narrative can in time become so embedded within the society it challenged that it becomes a metanarrative, constraining that society and actively maintaining the status quo. Communism, which began as a little narrative against imperial capitalism, was ideologicalized into a constraining system. After liberating workers… it was used to enforce an ideological viewpoint which protected the bureaucratic autocracy of the USSR.[447]

Whilst the USSR offers a case study of a utopian movement turned into an ideology (as defined above) on a grand and international scale, this small study of the CPSA shows something slightly different. It has revealed that the CPSA's utopian vision functioned as both a transcending, critical force, a movement for change, and that certain elements of the utopian discourse became constraining, uncritical paradigms. The ambiguous nature of utopianism is active both across a long period of time, as seen in the Soviet Union, but more interestingly, within the same historical moment.

It is not necessarily in utopia "becoming ideology" that utopia moves from the positive into the negative, but rather that both positive and negative, creative and destructive impulses potentially lie *within utopia*.

Drawing on the analysis in the above sections on the Soviet Union and the 'Bolshevisation' of the Party, this is first of all because of the potential for a political messianic kind of utopianism to develop within a utopian movement. This involves the development of an authoritarian and doctrinaire interpretation of the utopian vision, and the strategy needed to achieve it. It bestows on some of members of the movements a sense that they are the

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[446] See Bauman, *Socialism*, 16. This process of utopia turned into ideology is hinted at in Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (though he never explicitly states it and it does not seem to have been his intention to posit this idea) where he discusses a number of utopian 'mentalities': including 'liberal-humanitarianism' and 'socialist-communism'. He notes that liberalism was at one stage a utopian quest to create a free society based on merit and rationalism. This became part of mainstream thinking in the West, and liberalism became associated with a defence of the existing order. Mannheim, K. 1936 [1929]. *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Harvest Books, Chapter Four.

[447] Abercrombie, S. 2001. 'The Poetics of Politics'. Unpublished Honours paper, Department of Political Studies, Rhodes University, Grahamstown (paper loaned by Ivor Sarakinsky), 21.

enlightened vanguard, leading people towards a self-evident truth, a future salvation which must and is bound to come. They thus feel justified in either coercing people for 'the good of the community', or they are justified in making sacrifices of people now – for a better future.

Second, utopia may critique the *status quo*, opening "things up by advancing contentious new principles and claims",[448] yet at the same time become such an organising principle in the mind of those who hold it that it also "closes down and stabilizes"[449] and limits critical faculties. This appears to have been the case in relation to the CPSA's perception of the Soviet Union and all that that meant for the Party and its members. Certain places or people (the USSR for example, or Stalin) that symbolised ideals, in the utopian discourse of socialism and national liberation of the CPSA, were internalised, uncritically used, to the extent that the existence of something far removed from that they imagined for a future South Africa was justified and emulated. This is because, (and this is barely mentioned in the literature on utopianism) the utopian impulse cannot be divorced from other socio-psychological phenomena, such as identity formation, loyalty to an ideal, the construction of life discourse, and how these processes interact. When a utopian vision or ideal becomes important in individual's life, or when people come together as a community on the basis of this ideal, the utopia becomes part of their life paradigm, or life's narrative.[450] In becoming a vital, integral part of people's discourses and identity in the Party, utopianism revealed a more ambiguous nature, because people are not always able to criticise the ideal.

It may be the case that certain content of a utopian vision may be more given to critique, to inspiration (in the case of the CPSA – this was drawn from the vision of a future society described in Chapter Five), and other aspects of the utopian discourse (such as its form) may be more given to lack of criticism and closing down debate. For example those elements in the utopian discourse of the CPSA that spoke of a wonderful society and that were critical of

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[448] Ackroyd, S. 2002. 'Utopia or Ideology: Karl Mannheim and the Place of Theory' in Parker, M. (Ed) *Utopia and Organization*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 49.

[449] Ackroyd, 'Utopia or Ideology', 49.

[450] In *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Erik Erikson provides a definition of an "ideological system" that we might just as well term 'a paradigm' or a 'discourse': (in fact it would be preferable given that ideology is used in a different way in this study!): "a coherent body of shared image, ideas, and ideals which… provides for the participants a coherent, if systematically simplified, over-all orientation in space and time, in means and ends." (Erikson, E. 1968 cited in Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 258). This is in a sense what socialism, and the utopian vision which is implicit in socialism, came to provide many members of the CPSA.

the *status quo*, were inspiring (this speaks to utopia's critical and inspiring function illustrated in Chapter Six). But *certainty rather than hope and desire* in a particular future may create a potentially negative utopianism. In addition, those elements which *projected this vision onto something in existence* (the USSR) became its downfall. Defining the Soviet Union as the embodiment of the utopian vision meant an ethical compromise: this is partly because no reality could be utopia.

Chapter Eight:
Conclusion

When I am asked where I would like to live, my standard answer is:
deep in the virgin mountain forest on a lake shore at the corner of Madison Avenue
in Manhattan and Champs Elysées, in a small tidy town.
(Leszek Kolakowski, 1983) [451]

Research Summary

In line with Colin Bundy's suggestion mentioned at the beginning of the previous chapter, an account has been taken in the history of the CPSA of both the "political blindness and perversity involved in the Party's obedience to a Comintern which itself was subservient to Stalin's brutal and ungenerous version of socialism", and also of the inspirational and sustaining power of a vision of an alternative society.[452] Instead of seeing these as two disjointed sides of the CPSA, they have been shown to be connected: both are partly a result of the CPSA's immersion in a utopian discourse.

In exploring the role of utopianism, a hidden history of the CPSA has emerged. In addition, the study has added to the analysis of how utopianism functions in society more generally.

Utopianism was evident in the discourses of the CPSA throughout its history. It was explicitly expressed in the CPSA's articulation of an ideal or far better future society (particularly in the first few years of their existence when change in society seemed imminent). The content of this vision of a future South African was discussed in Chapter Five. An argument has been made that utopianism in the CPSA was evident in more than the detailed depictions of an ideal or better society. Utopianism was implicitly expressed in the CPSA's constant criticism of the *status quo*, and in their demands for small changes in society, as demonstrated in Chapter Four. As mentioned, utopianism was generally implicit in the CPSA's activity directed towards change in society. The category 'implicit utopianism'

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[451] Kolakowski, L. 1983. 'The Death of Utopia Reconsidered' in McMurrin, S. (Ed) *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Volume IV*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 229.

[452] See Bundy, C. 1991. 'Left, Right, Left, Right: The CPSA in the 1930s and 1940s' in Bundy, C. (Coordinator). *The History of the South African Communist Party.* Lectures presented at the University of Cape Town Summer School. Cape Town: Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, UCT, 32.

demonstrated that a vision of an ideal or far better future (and the belief that it could be realised) permeated much of the discourses and activities of the CPSA members.

Utopianism in the CPSA revealed an ambiguous nature. It was both an inspiring, mobilising and critical force, constructive and creative and at the same time, but under the influence of particular circumstances, utopianism revealed another side. It showed that utopianism can also act as a destructive force which closes down debate, limits self-criticism and criticism of its own leading figures. This ambiguity may be seen in the transformation of a liberating utopian vision into a limiting and conservative ideology as in the case of the USSR, or in the case of the CPSA: this ambiguity may be present at the same time.

It is suggested that utopianism is an ambiguous presence in society more generally. Small and detailed case studies of how utopianism functions in a group, such as the study presented here, allow for a more detailed and comprehensive commentary than larger cases studies on Bolshevism or Nazism for example (about which sweeping statements are often by necessity made).[453] They allow for a more nuanced and contextualised argument than those provided by the either the anti-utopian critics, or those who celebrate utopia without qualification.[454]

In the final analysis the anti-utopian critics were both right and wrong. They were right in claiming that utopian visions have lead to the oppression of one group by another or to a totalitarian outlook, but wrong in assuming that utopian visions would always lead to this outcome. Talmon's analysis was more astute in identifying a *particular* utopian discourse, political messianism, as the one which will lead to totalitarianism. The belief in a pre-ordained future and in being part of an enlightened group which will help to bring it about is more likely to see the emergence of totalitarianism and oppression of one group over another than a vision that says nothing about whether their view is right – but merely that it is one possible desirable goal. The CPSA's utopianism, with its roots in Marxism and its faith in the Comintern – clearly had elements of the former.

The CPSA however, also drew on other discourses, as mentioned. An ethical and moral commitment to building a society that was just, equal and humane, based on a desire to see

[453] It would be interesting to compare utopianism active in other communist parties in the same period, to understand whether utopianism functioned in a similar manner.

[454] This is not to say that the work of Karl Popper or Jacob Talmon was not nuanced in themselves – they provided detailed and sophisticated arguments but due to the lack of concentration on anthropological findings, their analysis was too generalizing.

people rid of pain, frustration and oppression, as shown in Chapter Five. Though it may seem incredible having seen the state of internal politics in the 1930s, they drew on a commitment to democracy, and this can be seen in the way in which they managed to climb out of the slump of the 1930s to build a more democratic institution in the 1940s.[455] In addition their most immediate cause, to free black people in South Africa from oppression, was still unfulfilled. Their commitment to this ideal pulled them through this period and towards a re-engagement with black protest and towards strategy more rooted in the South African context. This speaks once again of the positive, inspiring and sustaining power of a utopian vision.

As noted in Chapter Two, the role that a utopian vision will play in any group appears to be context related – and may well change over time in the same group or society. The role that a utopian vision may play will be affected by the particular personalities involved in a utopian movement, the levels of existing democracy (is authority in the hands of a few and how easily can it be contested?), the content of the utopian vision (compare the Third Reich with environmentalist vision of a green future), how vested people are in a vision, and how open they are to changing it. Lastly the *form* of a particular vision is vital, as this thesis had shown: is the imagined utopia a future that is desired or one that is both desired and seen as bound to come, in a sense *the only* future?

Leszek Kolakowski's ideal place, described in the quote at the beginning of the chapter, captures the essence of the utopian impulse: a desire for an idyllic existence, which does not have to contend with the restrictions and tensions of life, which captures the best of all circumstances. Yet an ideal utopia is unattainable, and herein lies a primary cause of utopia's ambiguity, alluded to in Thomas More's coining of this rather frustrating word. Utopia might be a good place that is nowhere.

To expand on this idea, one of the central ingredients in understanding the complex and ambiguous way in which utopianism functioned in the CPSA was the presence of the Soviet Union: the presence of a state or place *in reality* which embodied the socialist utopia. Referring to the communist utopian vision, Francois Furet says that, "[The communist idea's]

[455] See the Constitution of the Party adopted in 1944. The Constitution lays the basis for democratic decision making in the Party. Chairman Bill Andrews's introduction to the Constitution shows that the Party was mindful of the detrimental effects of the undemocratic decision making in the 1930s. See CPSA, Communist Party of South Africa: Constitution and Programme, 1944. Source: Simons Collection BC 1081: 03.1 Manuscripts and Archives Department, University of Cape Town Cape Town.

voyage through the century would never stop depending on discussion of the regime that was supposed to illustrate it. The communist idea was no longer free, as it has been in the preceding century, but subordinated to the constraints of a constant affirmation of the veracity of its Soviet incarnation. This was its strength – that the idea has taken root in history – but also its weakness, for the idea was dependant upon its manifestation in reality."[456] Reality cannot be utopia, and any attempt to claim that it has been or can be created in totality must lead to all manner of *a priori* and selective reasoning in order to keep the ideal intact.

The CPSA's utopia was nowhere near to being fulfilled, unlike in the USSR where attempts were made to defend a system which purported to be the socialist ideal in existence. What makes the CPSA such an interesting case study is that it involves an investigation of the interaction between a group of people using a utopia as a goal against which the present is judged and a goal to work towards, and also engaging with a society, the Soviet Union, in which it was claimed that the ideal had been brought into existence. The CPSA's relationship with the later involved a defence of the supposed ideal (despite its distorted incarnation) and here developed a legitimation of a very imperfect *status quo*. The CPSA was engaged with both a distant utopia, where it could remain a regulative ideal and a goal, and with the contradictions inherent in engaging in or with a society which claims to have found an answer to the tensions, antagonisms and alienations of a previous life.

Despite the tension inherent in utopia, society needs the space to create utopias. It was briefly suggested that the construction of a utopia where the contradictions, tensions and injustice of society are erased, provides a psychological coping mechanism, particularly when (as seen in the case of the CPSA) elements of the utopian vision have been put into practice within a social group.

As Kolakowski reminds us, we cannot dispense with utopia, because life without the utopian spirit would "condemn us to hopeless stagnation" and the justification of any existing *status quo*.[457] The power of utopia may function at its best when those who are moved by a utopian vision, know well its fallibility, and if its creators are well aware that the *ideal* imagined will never be created. In this case a utopian vision can be a tool against which to judge the represent and a reminder that all in society is not fixed. In addition it can provide a goal to

[456] Furet, F. 1998. 'Democracy and Utopia' in *Journal of Democracy*, 9(1), 69.
[457] Kolakowski, 'The Death of Utopia Reconsidered', 247.

work towards. Whilst Kolakowski reminds us of the necessity of utopia, he deplores political programmes that have ended in violence due to a group attempting to realise a utopian vision. He comments that society needs the "shaking coexistence" of both the utopian and sceptical type of mind.[458] This coexistence will always be a tension within society, and as mentioned in the Preface to this study, for some of us, a tension within our own lives.

From Past to Present Utopias: Questions for Further Research

The story of the CPSA was left off in the early forties, when the Party had recovered somewhat from the mess of the 1930s and was immersed in the politics of the Second World War. The late 1940s saw the closer merger of the CPSA activity with national struggles. The new leadership of the ANC: Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu, began utilising Marxist analysis in trying to understand the nature of racial oppression in South Africa.[459] Notable CPSA members were also ANC officials, such as J.B Marks, Yusuf Dadoo and Edwin Mofutsanyana.[460]

By 1946 the State's temporary easing of attacks on communist activity as a result of the USSR's role in the Second World War on the side of the allies, had lifted. The end of the Second World War heralded the beginning of a new kind of conflict in the form of the Cold War, which Drew describes as "a war for hearts and minds, one of ideological battles and localized but virulent military conflicts."[461] In South Africa, the state's real and propaganda war against the 'rooi gevaar', took its ugly shape with the election of the Herenigde National Party (later simply the National Party) in 1948. Combined with its fight against what it saw as the 'swart gevaar', the early 1950's saw the tabling of some of Apartheid's most horrendously discriminatory laws, such as the Mixed Marriages and the Group Areas Acts. The National Party government gazetted the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950. The CPSA disbanded shortly after.[462] In his closing speech in parliament, CPSA Member of

[458] Kolakowski, 'The Death of Utopia Reconsidered', 247.

[459] Everatt, D. 1991. 'The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party: 1945-1955' in Bundy, C. (Coordinator). *The History of the South African Communist Party.* Lectures presented at the University of Cape Town Summer School. Cape Town: Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, UCT, 43.

[460] Everatt, 'The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party', 39.

[461] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 263.

[462] The Party appears not to have taken cognisance of the warning signs and prepared itself in any way for underground activity. The majority of the Central Committee agreed to disband and Party members were

Parliament, Sam Kahn said that, "Communism will outlive the National Party. Democracy will be triumphant when members of this government will be manuring the fields of history. Millions in South Africa will echo my final words: 'Long Live Communism'."[463]

The SACP was established in 1953, an illegal underground party.[464] The SACP's adoption of the Colonialism of a Special Type Thesis which fore grounded the national liberation struggle to a greater extent than the earlier Native Republic Thesis, partly laid the foundation for the intertwining of SACP and ANC histories in the second half of the century.



Fig. 8.1: The logo of the South African Communist Party.

An investigation of utopianism in the SACP would make for an interesting comparative study to this one. The SACP now operates in a society which is partially the realisation of their utopian vision (a democratic South Africa). The SACP is now in government however, and a whole new set of contradictions and complexities have opened up before them (and before many others in South Africa). They are now faced with the task of redefining strategy towards a socialist future in the context of an international world order that creates little space for a socialist state to exist. It would be interesting to trace the possible re-imagination of the SACP's utopian vision of a socialist future within this context.[465]

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urged to unanimously support the decision. The decision to dissolve the Party was received with mixed opinions by CPSA members (See Drew, *Discordant Comrades* and Everatt, 'The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party'). It appears that some rank and file activists may have thought that this was a front, and that the Party would immediately go underground (Everatt, 'The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party', 45). This did not happen.

[463] Cited in Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 172. Joe Slovo comments that Sam Kahn was the first Member of Parliament in South Africa's history to be expelled from parliament for political reasons. He continues, "But before the machinery of the law could bring this about, Sam managed to insert in the record of the Hansard the full text of the Communist Manifesto, ostensibly to demonstrate to the select committee the true nature of the aims of the Party. And this most fundamental text of Communist theory is available for all time, by courtesy of the Government Printer." (Slovo, *Slovo*, 41).

[464] Everatt, 'The Banning and Reconstitution of the Communist Party'.

[465] Their slogan "Socialism is the future, build it now" speaks of continuing hopes in a socialist future. Jeremy Cronin points out that, "build it now" is intended to call people to begin to build elements of socialism in present society in the form of co-operatives for example, or greater rights of access to

The CPSA's vision of a future society did not altogether fade into the past, however. As mentioned, echoes of the CPSA's vision of a future South Africa can be seen in the Freedom Charter. In turn, elements of the Freedom Charter have been incorporated into the Bill of Rights and the South African Constitution. Much of the CPSA's vision was continued in the vision and activism of the SACP, and echoes of this vision (which was shared by some members of the ANC) were incorporated into the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The RDP and the Freedom Charter remain critical and programmatic tools in South African society, in that they are used as ideals against which the present is judged and future policy objectives and options are explored. In addition, they have been used as documents which show the gap between the promise of post-apartheid democracy and its reality: witness the protests new social movements and the cases regarding 'democratic rights' brought to the Constitutional Court.



Fig. 8.2: The entrance to the Constitutional Court of South Africa. 'Constitutional Court' is inscribed on the entrance wall in all eleven of South Africa's official languages.

As mentioned in the Introduction, utopianism is part and parcel of contemporary society, and specifically, part and parcel of contemporary South African social life. Utopianism can be seen in the competing ideas and strategies put forward by social commentators and policy makers regarding the best way to run the country.[466] For example, an edition of the magazine, *Maverick*, carries an article by Peter Bruce, editor of *Business Day*, entitled "Saving Capitalism".[467] Bruce proposes changes to the way in which capitalism in South Africa presently functions, which would require a round of negotiations between different stakeholders in South Africa, akin to the Codesa (Convention for a Democratic South Africa) talks of the early nineties. He writes, "Here's what my perfect economic Codesa would look like: 1) The state makes [sic] all property assets …over to democratically elected and regularly audited community trusts where poor people live… 4) Companies are required to redesign their boards… 8) All companies listed

resources and institutions for the poor. Cronin comments that the idea behind it is to get people to engage with the here and now, and not only to see socialism as a distant goal. Interview with Jeremy Cronin, August 2006.

[466] Utopianism is not of course to be found in all such strategies.

[467] Bruce, P. 2006. 'Saving Capitalism' in *Maverick*, 1(12), 2 November, 40-43.

on the JSE donate one percent of their issued shares to a pool."[468] And so continues a list of suggestions for changing the way in which companies and capital-labour relations function in South Africa. Bruce comments, "The real barrier to a stakeholder economy and a happier country is perception." [469]

The point here is not to debate the merits of his suggestions but to show that his article is essentially a venture into the utopian model of problem solving, and is essentially creative and pragmatic, and counters the idea that utopianism is a) a foray into useless fantasy (as this study has shown) and b) only present on the extreme left or right. Utopias exist across the political spectrum.



Fig. 8.3: A shop in Singapore called 'Utopia'. Much of contemporary branding and marketing sell society the consumerist utopia.

Utopianism is present in more than just explicit articulations of an ideal society, as shown in the case of the CPSA. The statements and actions of different political parties, and other actors in the social and political stage may be read for traces of the utopian (as defined in this study) project they have in mind. For example, what is the utopian vision underpinning Thabo Mbeki's idea of African Renaissance? Further questions for research could include: how does it speak to different sections of the African population, if at all? With whom does the SACP's socialist utopia resonate in South Africa? Is it competing with a consumerist utopia which appears to be so strong amongst South Africa's youth? What kind of society is implicit in the Democratic Alliance's criticisms of the way that the ANC government is handling labour policy, health policy, crime or Black Economic Employment for example? What kind of imagined future society is implicit in the ANC's policy of Black Economic Empowerment or of their policy on immigration and foreign nationals? Or in the lobbying of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa around land reform?

Elements of contemporary South African society may thus be fruitfully examined via the *lens of utopia.* Ruth Levitas claims that academics can use the concept of utopia as a useful

[468] Bruce, 'Saving Capitalism', 43.
[469] Bruce, 'Saving Capitalism', 43.

critical and analytical tool, in what she calls the Imaginary Reconstruction of Society.[470] She says that revealing the underlying utopias implicit in political thinking (she looks at New Labour and European Union policies on 'social inclusion') can be a useful analytical tool for understanding contemporary politics. For example one can construct, by analysing policy documents and speeches, the implicit utopia of a government or political party for example, in order to lay bare the values and assumptions on which a particular policy or political plan is built. (Bauman claims that "Utopias… help to lay bare and make conspicuous the major divisions of interest in a society"[471]). Levitas claims that "by making future options explicit, it can also expose them to public scrutiny and democratic debate."[472] Levitas sees this 'method' as having activist utility.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the choice of subject matter for this study was based on the conviction that utopianism in an active ingredient in social and political life, and is constitutive of our social reality. The definition and understanding of utopia and utopianism developed in this study may help refine the exploratory and analytical potential of using the concept of utopia as a tool for social enquiry.

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[470] See Levitas, R. 2005. 'The Imaginary Reconstruction of Society or Why Sociologists and Others Should Take Utopia More Seriously'. Inaugural Lecture University of Bristol 24 October http://wwwbris.ac.uk/sociology/staff/pubs/levitasinaugral and Levitas, R. 2005. 'Looking for the Blue: the Necessity of Utopia'. Paper presented at 'Is There a Role for Utopia in Twenty-First Century ideology?' conference, Centre for Political Ideologies, University of Sheffield and Centre for Political Ideologies, University of Oxford, University of Sheffield, 17 June.

[471] Bauman, Z. 1976. *Socialism: The Active Utopia*. London: Allen & Unwin, 15.

[472] Levitas, 'Looking for the Blue', 7.

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