

South Africa: Socialist wish and neoliberal reality

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Focus of the presentation

- The negotiated settlement and securing and protecting white minority rights and white monopoly capitalist interests in post-apartheid South Africa
- The structural dimensions of corruption in South Africa

De Klerk's (state president) speech on 2 February 1990 in parliament

- February 1990 stands out as the most important month in South Africa's history.
- This month divides South Africa's history into two parts;
- The first, **1652 to 1990**, represents the period of institutionalised racism and political oppression of black and indigenous people.
- The second period, **1990 to the present**, represents a period of political freedom and self-determination of black people in South Africa.
- Now, 33 years into the new era, large sections of the black population are asking questions about the real meaning of the freedom that was ushered in in February 1990.

National Party sets terms of the transition to democracy (1990-1994)

- De Klerk had ensured **continuity with the past** by insisting that any agreement during negotiations with the ANC had to be ratified first by the apartheid parliament and consequently by a democratic parliament.
- The liberation movement(s) had initially demanded a democratically elected constituent assembly to write the constitution.
- De Klerk also ensured that all the leaders of the Bantustans (and discredited Chiefs and traditional leaders) were involved in negotiations and their interests were secured in the new constitution.

The constitution of South Africa

- Through negotiations **34 constitutional principles** would bind any party that drafted a constitution after apartheid.
- Especially important was the protection of ‘minority rights’ which included property owners, white people (cultural and linguistic rights) and traditional leaders and so on.
- De Klerk was also able to entrench the independence of the Reserve Bank, which was essentially an economic policy question and not a constitutional question.
- In the final analysis the writing of a new constitution took place **before a democratically elected parliament** could write such a constitution.

Economic Policy for a new South Africa

- De Klerk was insistent that the reforms, “should not be interpreted as a deviation from the Governments principles, [or]... against our economic policy.”
- The central message was that the new South Africa will have to make, “certain structural changes to the economy...to reduce the role of the public sector...restricting capital expenditure in parastatals... privatisation, deregulation” etc.
- For the past 33 years, the core of De Klerk's speech has been echoed by every single finance minister in post-apartheid South Africa.
- This is key to understanding why the majority of black people feel that their dreams have not been realised and why there is such confidence by white racists.

Why did we achieve political freedom and not economic freedom?

- De Klerk was clear that, “ the events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe...weaken the capability of the organisations which were previously supported” by them.
- The serious threat posed by Cuban and Russian military intervention had come to an end in Angola by 1991.
- The apartheid government had also understood that the ANC was not able to build a strong military infrastructure and could not pose a serious threat to the apartheid defence force.
- The most important challenge came from working class communities. During 1990-1994 over 14 000 people were killed due to politically related violence.

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- The ANC had called for the dismantlement of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1991 which was made up of 400 public organizations including trade unions, students' unions, women's and parachurch organizations.
- Due to organisational weaknesses the ANC was unable to provide leadership to the killings and being unable to challenge the regime it gave credence to the notion of a “third force”.
- Due to the ANC’s lack of faith in its mass base it was unable to put forth clear alternative to the National Party economic policy.
- By 1993 the ANC had adopted the views of de Klerk and big business which became official policy by 1996.

The political economy of corruption

- Today the cadre of the ANC is associated with stealing from the mass of people they used to die for.
- Despite corruption wealth has become more concentrated and has remained deeply racialised.
- The average black households income is equal to 5% of a white household.
- The 1996 class project of Thabo Mbeki has resulted in the formation of a precarious black middle class and no serious black bourgeoisie to speak of.

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- Corruption became rife through, “reducing the role of the public sector [and giving] the private sector (and market forces) maximum opportunity for optimal performance.”
- Under Mbeki, Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment, brought market forces into the state and public service provision and became the key vehicle for the plundering of state resources.
- The Jacob Zuma presidency came in 2009 during the global economic crisis which greatly accelerated the plundering.
- A) The major handouts by white monopoly capital to the selected black elite was drying up and B) black participation on the JSE had dramatically declined.
- The black middle class now became even more reliant on the state to secure their class interests.
- Former finance Ministers Nhlanhla Nene is on the board of Allan Grey (which is linked to the social grant crisis), Trevor Manuel is on the board of Old Mutual, and after leaving the Reserve Bank, Tito Mboweni joined Goldman Sachs etc...
- The ANC has remained firmly in the hands of white monopoly capital.

Conclusion

- With the Marikana Massacre marking the end of the ANC as a liberation movement, South Africa (like much of the world) has entered a whole new historic period.
- Once being the lead disruptor of apartheid capitalism the labour movement is highly fragmented and left political forces are at their weakest.
- The task for the coming period is to reclaim our proud and militant tradition for social justice and to reforge a socialist vision for a future South Africa.

The Writings Of Oupa Lebulere

Publications and Archives

THE CORRUPTION OF A DREAM (2017)

THE LONG SHADOW OF THE DE KLERK REGIME (2017)

