

# Nationalism, class and non-racialism in the 1950s and beyond: the search for convergence<sup>1</sup>

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## **Introduction**

*We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: That South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people<sup>2</sup> We, the people of South Africa ... Believe that South Africa belongs who all who live in it, united in our diversity.<sup>3</sup>*

Among the most consistent threads in the discourse of liberation in South Africa was a commitment to non-racialism. How strong that thread was – unbreakable<sup>4</sup> according to some, distinctly fragile according to others<sup>5</sup> – can be debated. But from the 1955 Freedom Charter to the 1996 Constitution non-racialism has featured significantly in the canon of all anti-apartheid organisations. The same applies internationally.

But it has also become clear since democracy was ushered in, in 1994, that a critical weakness was the failure to *define* non-racialism, to give it content beyond that of a slogan or a self-evident 'good thing'.<sup>6</sup> It made intuitive sense, uniting races where apartheid divided them. But beyond that, what was the meaning of non-racialism? How should it be implemented? What was it, in practice?

And, we should ask, *why* was (and is) such a central concept undefined? Why was the African National Congress (ANC) committed to non-racialism, but practiced multi-racialism, where races were separately organised? Why did the United Democratic Front (UDF) mimic the ANC in this regard? Was the notion of 'equality under African leadership' in any way an adequate translation of non-racialism?

This paper argues that non-racialism could not be realised in practice because beneath it lay a contradictory and bitterly fought out set of ideologies within the

Congress Alliance, including most obviously the exclusive African nationalism of many prominent Youth League members (some of whom stayed with the ANC, while others left), and demands for immediate class struggle and the rejection of national liberation as entrenching a black bourgeoisie not liberating the working class. These tendencies existed within the ANC and its allies, and the concept of 'Colonialism of a Special Type' was developed to stitch together a conceptual blanket that could be thrown over the shoulders of all anti-apartheid forces, promising both national (first) and class struggle (the famous 'second stage' of the struggle), and cleaving to non-racialism while refusing to permit it to take organisational form. Those calling for organisational non-racialism demanded 'One Congress', and in the 1950s this demand was intimately associated with calls for class-based struggle and equally strongly associated with white leftists; and as such non-racialism was injected with ideological, racial, and other overtones that left it stranded as a slogan but nothing more.

And things haven't improved much since then. The 1996 Constitution implicitly defined non-racialism as a democratic state where the rights of every citizen are equally protected by the law. But is non-racialism the same as formal equality? Is there no more to it than that, nothing to do with the actions or moral base of individuals? Is it a passive or an active state? Are there specific types of action required of a non-racialist, or is it all left to the state or political parties or courts to resolve? For example, should the erstwhile non-racialist follow the advice of Warren Beatty (in *Bulworth*) when he suggested that non-racial democrats should pursue '...a programme of voluntary, free-spirited, open-ended proactive racial deconstruction', by which was meant, he explained, '... everybody just gotta keep fuckin' everybody till we're all the same colour'<sup>7</sup>?

If for some reason this fails to appeal, does non-racialism require (some other types of) pro-action on the part of the would-be non-racialist? And if so, what form should these take? Is equity or redress involved, whereby the non-racialist can or should make amends for the racialism of the past? How, and to whom, and for how long? Who decides when enough is enough? And most importantly, how can this be done at an *ethical* level? How do we move beyond repentance and redress – the latter currently the focus of much state activity – and look to building new citizens and a new society on a new moral basis, where individuals are not immediately pigeonholed socially, economically, psychologically, intellectually or morally, by their race? How do we create spaces where citizens can leave behind the trappings of race and

engage as fellow South Africans? There are no guidelines for being a genuinely non-racial citizen of the new South Africa.

Worryingly, no-one – including the ANC-led government – seems to know what a ‘normal’ post-apartheid state looks like, or how we will know when we reach it. Many indulge in demographic reductionist games, and see ‘normal’ to be a state where every sphere of life and sector of the economy is an exact mirror of the racial make-up of the country. Not non-racialism at all, but also not ‘wrong’, given the need for redress and transformation. But South Africa has been in a ‘transition’ or undergoing ‘transformation’ since 1994 – overwhelmingly, and appropriately, based on racial redress. How will we know when South Africa has stopped *becoming* and has arrived?

### **The ideological associations of non-racialism**

Part of the problem is that non-racialism was as undefined in the 1950s as it is now. During the 1950s, non-racialism and the issues associated with it – what it meant as well as how it should be reflected organisationally, the place and function of African nationalism, and so on – were fought out within and beyond the Congress movement. In the late 1940s and early 1950s multiracial, non-racial, interracial and similar terms were used interchangeably. ‘Race relations’ was the core focus of white liberals associated with the South African Institute of Race Relations in particular, but the term was widely used in progressive circles. All these terms, at that time, referred to formal equality between the races – very similar to the way the 1996 South African Constitution resolved the issue – although not necessarily substantive equality. There was a common goal of equality under the law, but many paths to achieving it, as well as different ways of defining it. By the time the Second World War ended the African National Congress was campaigning unequivocally for full equality and increasingly used extra-parliamentary methods such as passive resistance campaigns in support of their struggle. White liberals – academics and professionals linked to the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), the Hofmeyr Society and other small organisations, elected native representatives and others – overwhelmingly supported a qualified franchise for ‘civilised’ natives and insisted on this being attained through gradualist, constitutional, parliamentary means. Other white activists – members of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), non-CPSA Marxists and socialists, as well as a new, younger generation of

white liberals and social democrats radicalised by the Second World War and the ideals they had fought for – supported the demand for full, immediate equality for all and were happy to use extra-parliamentary methods. As the decade unfolded the demand for full equality became common to liberals and radicals alike.

But what was less clear was how African nationalism and non-racialism would commingle – both in the struggle and later in a democratic state. While the ANC led the struggle for freedom it insisted on separate, race-based congresses, led by the ANC and joined under what was to become known as the Congress Alliance. This was multiracialism – racially distinct congresses allowing all races to participate in the struggle for freedom, but under African and ANC leadership. Whites were not allowed to join the ANC until the late 1960s, and could not sit on the National Executive Committee until 1985. The United Democratic Front (UDF), which spearheaded legal internal resistance to apartheid in the 1980s (while the ANC was banned and exiled), retained the multiracial approach of the Congress movement.

Multiracialism was one approach. The Communist Party – in both its pre-1950 CPSA and post-1953 South African Communist Party (SACP) forms – had a nonracial structure, where people of all races belonged to the same organisation. The Liberal Party was organised in the same way. Many whites sitting in the South African Congress of Democrats (SACOD), the white wing of the Congress Alliance, were deeply uncomfortable with their racial structure and the ANC structure that their task was to organise whites, the community to which they supposedly had easy access. (Many white activists, of course, were ostracised by other whites, who had no interest in their ‘communist’ message or ‘kaffirboet’ lifestyles.) As we see throughout this book, many white liberals and leftists wanted little or nothing to do with their fellow white citizens – they wanted to identify with, be seen with and work among black South Africans – ‘the path of least resistance’, ANC/CPSA stalwart Moses Kotane labelled it.

Marxists and socialists not in the SACP also resisted the whites-only basis of SACOD and the Congress Alliance more broadly, arguing that the struggle for equal rights for all races was obscuring the ‘real’ struggle, which was class based and aimed at substantive equality for all. Non-racialism, in other words, was not merely a different way of structuring an organisation or political party but had (or obtained) distinct ideological overtones.

Over time the race-based structure of the Congress Alliance became a highly politicised issue. Liberals and Africanists saw the multiracial structure of the alliance as a vehicle designed by communists – white ones - through which they were able to exert overweening influence over the ANC. Lacking any significant numeric base, the argument went, white communists were still able to lead Congress by the nose via its multiracial structure, which gave them seats on the co-ordinating structures at the apex of the Alliance, regardless of their tiny numerical base. Non-SACP Marxists attacked multiracialism and the ANC for elevating national liberation above class struggle and socialist revolution; since 1928 the CPSA had supported the need for initial national liberation preceding a class-based struggle.

The dispute heated up throughout the 1950s and, as a result, people became more sensitive to the terms they used and what the different terms actually meant. By the end of the decade, ‘interracial’ had largely disappeared. ‘Race relations’ had largely returned to the Institute named after it. Multiracial referred to the way the Congress movement was organised, while non-racialism was both the way the SACP and Liberal Party were organised *and* the stated goal of all anti-apartheid forces.

### **1959-1960: The politics of non-racialism**

This paper looks at multi/non-racialism debates from the 1950s, because that is where the terms gained specific content – in terms of organisational form and methods of struggle. The 1950s were dominated by nationalism. Liberals, socialists and others opposed to apartheid were forced to re-orientate their ideological and strategic standpoints in relation to the ANC as it emerged as the representative African political organisation, and to the increasingly brutal National Party (NP) government. ANC leaders, noting that ‘fighters for freedom in this country are continually being drawn from all sections of the population’,<sup>8</sup> sought to amend the militant African nationalism of the Youth League to facilitate building a broad anti-apartheid front. The role of leading Indian activists, including Yusuf Dadoo, ‘Monty’ Naicker and others, was key, as passive resistance provided a model of struggle and the 1947 ‘Doctor’s Pact’ signalled a

By the late 1950s, however, those hostile to the ANC and/or the Congress Alliance – including Liberal Party members, former Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) members, Trotskyists, Africanists, and a variety of maverick individuals – attempted to capitalise on the power vacuum in the ANC. Although their long-term

objectives differed markedly, all focused hostile criticism on the same immediate target: the preponderant influence members of the SA Congress of Democrats – the white wing of the Alliance -were accused of wielding over the ANC through the multi- racially structured Congress Alliance. By simultaneously ignoring black communists and insisting that SACOD was a front for white communists, a disparate array of forces identified the abolition of multiracialism with the excising of communist influence.

While by the end of the decade the forces hostile to SACOD were focusing their attacks on the multiracial structure of the Congress Alliance, Congress itself continued to emphasise the *organisational form* that would allow Africans to lead the struggle of all races for equality for all. No doubt, decades-long loyalty to white communists – whose unqualified support for black freedom predated and outstripped that of white liberals – was also a factor. But so, too, was sensitivity to nationalism – to the anti-white (and anti-Indian) hostilities that lay fairly close to the surface, and to the need for full African leadership in the face of energetic support from other race groups with better resources and better access to resources.

But the drive for African control was overlaid with ideology and politics. ANC leaders argued that multiracialism was critical to ensuring that the struggle was, and was seen to be, African led; and that each race group had a better entrée to its own areas, languages and cultures than did other race groups – however exciting organising blacks – the ‘path of least resistance’, according to Moses Kotane - may have been for white activists. But from outside, and from within the ANC, came a growing series of attacks on multiracialism, claiming (wrongly) that it had been designed by white communists in SACOD to secure a disproportionate influence over the ANC. Multiracialism, in short, was seen as a (white) communist ploy where it was in fact a nationalist manoeuvre to maintain the goal of non-racialism under African leadership and avoid claims that whites, Indians or coloureds were in any way leading it or the ANC.

To drive the point home there emerged a growing discourse of ‘race blindness’, a forerunner of later thinking about race. But the closeness between much contemporary analysis and what was happening in this particular group five decades ago should not blind the reader to the fact that the proponents of non-racialism had a very clear political project in mind, much as the multiracialists did. The attack on multiracialism, led by Patrick Duncan and the newspaper *Contact*, argued that

Non-racialism and multi-racialism are two very different things. The non-racialist sees each human being as first and foremost a human; less important facts about him are education, his race, etc. But the multi-racialist, like the out-and-out racialist, sees each human being first and foremost as a member of a racial block.<sup>9</sup>

*Contact's* lead was followed by former members of the Non-European Unity Movement, (oddly) close to Duncan and his anti-communist coterie, who published *The Citizen*, a fortnightly Western Cape newspaper. *The Citizen* asked: 'Where is this country, "Non-Europe", from which four of every five South Africans would appear to have come?'<sup>10</sup>

Multiracialism was criticised for transplanting apartheid into the Congress Alliance; in this, the criticism echoed much more that would be thrown at the ANC over time. But the real target of attack, once again, was SACOD:

It is multi-racialism – a gratuitous concession to apartheid – which is at the root of all other evils in Congress ... And it is precisely the multiracialism of Congress which enables the 'Whites-only' Congress of Democrats to dominate the Congress 'racial' alliance and to subordinate its struggle against oppression to the interests of 'sympathetic', 'White' patronage.<sup>11</sup>

It took a degree of wilful misliteration to insist that by sitting on joint coordinating committees SACOD led the ANC by the nose while shoving communism down its throat. Nonetheless, the view was widely repeated and widely supported. In an ironic twist, in the late 1950s multiracialism came to be seen by a wide range of forces as the creation of white communists who sought to direct the ANC. It suited those wanting to oust whites from positions of leadership or influence; those wanting communists out of the way; those wanting a single, class-based liberatory body; and yet others. As a result, attacks on multiracialism commingled with anticommunist, anti-white and anti-SACOD sentiments, among others. One critic of the Congress movement argued enthusiastically:

The phenomena of Stalinist multiracialism originally arose as an adaptation to the NEUM. Thinking Non-Europeanism to be the rising force the Communist Party, at that time of largely 'white' composition and predominantly 'white' orientation, with characteristic opportunism abandoned its old 'non-racial' organisational form in favour of working in and building racial organisations, to be aimed at making political capital out of the stirring 'black masses'.<sup>12</sup>

Attacks on SACOD and multiracialism were led by the Africanists, whose criticisms had a legitimacy that was absent from those of white leftists. Following the expulsion of Potlako Leballo and James Madzunya from the ANC for expressing hostility to white domination of Congress via SACOD, Africanist hostility to SACOD was extended to include the entire ANC leadership, and a showdown appeared inevitable. In a leader article *Bantu World*, which championed the Africanist cause, wrote of the ANC leadership:

They speak of Alliance with the C.O.D. and with the so-called Indian and Coloured Congresses, when in fact it is these very alliances which makes them work against African Nationalism. It is the C.O.D. together with the Indians and Coloureds who have expelled the African Nationalists from our own home, the A.N.C. We must, therefore, dismiss these foreigners from our A.N.C. and with them the present leadership. All of them must march out for we have no time to pick and choose between them.<sup>13</sup>

The mounting attacks attracted Cape-based ex-communists Joe Nkatlo and John Gomas, both of whom had become increasingly vocal critics of the Communist Party and increasingly sympathetic to the Africanists.<sup>14</sup> Nkatlo stated: 'I accept being called an "Africanist" if it means an "African" who refuses to be politically subservient to "European" leadership and who refuses to entrust his destiny to some "European" careerists who exploit him.'<sup>15</sup>

Patrick Duncan recruited into the LP Nkatlo and former NEUM members grouped around *The Citizen*. He also began talks with the (tiny) NEUM, noting that 'it may be that this will lead to a fusion' which would 'immensely strengthen the [Liberal] party'.<sup>16</sup>

In 1958, in an attempt to resolve disputes with the Africanists, ANC conferences were held in the Transvaal and the Western Cape. The attempt failed: three Western Cape branches broke away from the ANC, while both sides brought 'strong-arm stewards' to press their case at the Transvaal conference.<sup>17</sup> Transvaal Africanists left the ANC, stating: 'We are launching out on our own as the custodian of A.N.C. policy as formulated in 1912 and pursued up to the time of Congress Alliance.'<sup>18</sup> Duncan welcomed the break, noting with characteristic reserve that if it led 'to a national rejection of the COD alliance by the ANC ... it will in South African terms be as important as was the rejection of the Communists by the Chinese in 1927'.<sup>19</sup>

A year later the Pan Africanist Congress was launched, with university lecturer and former member of the ANC Youth League, Robert Sobukwe, as its president. PAC speakers argued that the ANC was led by a 'white pseudo-leftist directorate', as a result of which it had '... betrayed the material interests of the African people. They have sacrificed these interests upon the political altar of an ungodly alliance, an alliance of slave-owner, slave-driver and slave.'<sup>20</sup>

An Africanist former Youth League colleague of ANC secretary-general Oliver Tambo appealed to him to return to the policies of the league:

It was and it still is the first duty of an African Nationalist, to destroy a Communist in every possible way. Right from the founding of the ANC to the principle and practice to annihilate Communists under all situations and circumstances ... African Nationalists, then as now, believed strongly that Communists had no interest in African Freedom, except to use us as pawns of Russian foreign policy, and as revolutionary expendables ...

At the centre of PAC hostility lay SACOD, which, it was argued, had forced on the ANC a policy which 'consider[s] South Africa and its wealth to belong to all who live in it, the alien dispossessor and the indigenous dispossessed, the alien robbers and their indigenous victims'.<sup>22</sup> In statements like this, it is virtually impossible to separate out issues of race, class, ideology and political manoeuvring. Africanists were in it for Africanists. Trotskyists and other 'ultra-leftists' were in it for historical reasons – to oppose perceived (former) Communist Party influence and to unhook

liberation from the two-stage theory of revolution, which required a nationalist to precede a socialist revolution. Liberals were in it for these and their own political and organisational reasons. What welded them all together was hostility to the multiracial structure of the Congress Alliance, even though it was, itself, a creation of ANCYL nationalists.

### **'One Congress' or 'One Class Struggle'?**

Attacks on SACOD reached a point where a participant in the third SACOD National Council meeting in May 1959 'asked if we did in fact lead the A.N.C. by the nose?'.<sup>23</sup> By the end of the 1950s SACOD had been badly weakened: Transvaal chairperson Vic Goldberg and fifty-one members, roughly one-fifth of its total membership, had been banned. The organisation was also weakened by 'continual disagreements among ourselves as to the role we have to play', which stemmed from 'the fact that many members have not accepted the original role of the C.O.D.' – to organise whites.<sup>24</sup> The disagreements flowed, in part, from frustration at having to attempt to win white support, described by one member as 'slow, slogging and tenacious political work amongst our mentally depressed brethren, the Europeans'.<sup>25</sup> SACOD's internal problems were exacerbated in the late 1950s by a resurgence of calls for the prosecution of class struggle. As in the late 1940s these calls were couched in the language of non-racialism or 'One Congress'.

Baruch Hirson, a university lecturer later imprisoned for sabotage, noted that members of the Socialist League of Africa, a tiny Johannesburg Trotskyist group, joined SACOD because 'we were terribly isolated, a small handful of people'; within SACOD, members 'could put a socialist line and win friends'.<sup>26</sup> SACOD was a forum in which battles within the white left were fought out and, ironically, where the anticommunism of the Liberal Party and Africanists was mirrored by the Trotskyists and others who loathed the Communist Party and scorned communists for 'abandoning' class in favour of national struggle. Like other ideological disputes in South Africa in the 1950s, the locus of this one was the form racial co-operation should take.

Within SACOD the strictures of working with whites generated incessant complaints and frustration. As part of the alliance strategy pursued after 1956 SACOD was called on to 'broaden out or stagnate';<sup>27</sup> to tone down its dogmatic adherence to the Freedom Charter in favour of forming alliances with other organisations working in the white areas.

Further removed from grassroots black work SACOD members were reported to be 'bored to tears' with 'an almost incessant round of jumble sales'.<sup>28</sup> (These were days when 'struggle organisations' largely funded themselves.) Disagreement about the organisation's role was given a dramatic focus by Cape member Ronald Segal, the flamboyant editor of *Africa South*. Segal was invited to address the 1958 Workers Conference on the economic boycott; in place of his speech, however, he called for a single non-racial Congress. According to Segal, 'I took a pound out of my pocket and I said – "I hereby apply to join the ANC – will you accept me?" And there was a tumultuous "Yes! Yes!"'.<sup>29</sup>

Within a year SACOD's student branch, based at the University of the Witwatersrand, voted to disband itself and form a non-racial youth congress which would include African and Indian students.<sup>30</sup> SACOD members in Johannesburg made moves to organise African domestic workers. The Cape Town branch questioned whether alliances were important enough to water down policies.

This we are putting a stop to. If our policy is right and we offend – then we can't help it. Being broad, we have decided, means nothing more than working with other organisations and individuals on agreed issues while disagreeing – and not working together – on others.<sup>31</sup>

SACOD saw attacks on multiracialism from non-Congress members as the actions of those 'never friendly to us [who] have now found a stick with which they hope to beat us, a "policy" with which they hope to sow dissension'.<sup>32</sup> They were right: the LP's Peter Hjul noted that criticism of multiracialism was 'our point of argument – I wouldn't say it was a huge ideological point of difference but it was a very good stick to beat the Congress movement with'.<sup>33</sup> Within SACOD calls for 'One Congress' resulted in part from dissatisfaction about working with whites, and from calls for broad alliances. The organisation's leaders pointed out that all SACOD members would rather belong to a non-racial body but that 'there were many obstacles in the way of this', the most obvious being the unchanging opposition from ANC and SAIC leaders. 'Change', they argued, 'would only be possible when the other Congresses were strong and confident enough' to instigate it.<sup>34</sup>

Calls for a non-racial Congress, however, were soon given a class content by leftwing SACOD members, who argued that by pursuing alliances and concentrating

on electoral politics, liberal ideology had 'already seeped deeply into the movement'.<sup>35</sup> In a series of broadsheets and in the pages of (SACOD newsletter) *Counter Attack*, building alliances was equated with neglecting the militant organisation of blacks and with 'treating S.A.C.T.U. [the South African Council of Trade Unions] as an unwanted foster-child',<sup>36</sup> both assertions neatly aimed to get a reaction from the communists in the organisation. Hirson, writing under a pseudonym, argued that the planned ANC anti-pass campaign should emphasise

... that passes are part of the capitalist system ... The passes are one link in the chain that binds us: Again and again it is necessary to explain that in fighting to break these links in the chain of oppression, our objective is to get rid of the whole chain. Our goal, which we must keep ever in sight, is to change the whole social system in South Africa.<sup>37</sup>

Vic Goldberg, also writing in *Counter Attack*, argued that SACOD's work among whites should focus on organising white workers rather than forming alliances with middle-class intellectuals in the LP and elsewhere. Goldberg, echoing debates on the topic a decade earlier, argued that the organisation of the working class – regardless of race – should be the first priority of the liberation movement. Class politics, he argued, could not be pursued in a multi-racial alliance: 'We are agreed that whites and non-whites are inter-dependent in the developing of this country, in the struggle for freedom this must be even more applicable.'<sup>38</sup>

The supporters of class struggle also fought against the ideology of the South African Communist Party (SACP), particularly the theory of internal colonialism through which socialists were called on to work with and for the national liberation movement. That battle was also fought over calls for non-racialism, which resonated with existing frustration about SACOD's role in the Alliance. Goldberg argued that South Africa was a capitalist country, exploited by and for local capitalists; as such, all had a stake in a common struggle. However,

If we conceive of white South Africa being a colonial power and non-white South Africa being the colonial people, then the struggle can only be likened to one of national liberation. In this context, it is obvious however that the Africanist position of 'Africa for the Africans' would be correct

and that a black versus white struggle would be the one progressives should support.<sup>39</sup>

In response, SACOD and ANC leaders argued that they all supported the ideal of One Congress.

Every Congress leader of today would be willing – and even eager – to belong to and join a multi-racial [sic] Congress. But political success in the fight against race domination is not to be won by the leaders alone. For success, leaders need the masses. Are the masses ready for a multi-racial [sic] Congress? Would the tribes people of Sekhukhuneland or the dock labourers of Durban feel that a multi-racial body was 'their' organisation, as they today feel about the A.N.C.?<sup>40</sup>

ANC leaders argued that however attractive a single congress might appear, 'would there not immediately be a need felt amongst Africans for a purely African organisation to put forward the views of Africans?'<sup>41</sup> This was borne out by the formation of the PAC, whose founders argued that the new organisation was made necessary 'following the capture of a portion of the black leadership by the white ruling class'.<sup>42</sup>

Multiracialism – the alliance of separate racial organisations and (oddly) SACTU -had given rise to what Ben Turok described as a 'quite horrendous' build up of committees, with a large degree of wastage and duplication of effort.<sup>43</sup> The local, provincial and national consultative committees, which lay at the heart of claims that SACOD dominated the ANC, had begun to break down by 1958. The committees had been given no executive powers precisely in order to avoid the encroachment of one congress in the affairs of another; because of their lack of power, however, the committees had 'fallen short of what was desired' and were largely replaced by joint meetings of Congress's executive committees.<sup>44</sup>

To the class content being injected into calls for one congress, however, Congress leaders responded with a defence of the two-stage theory that underlay 'colonialism of a special type'. On the one hand it was argued that similar debates over class and national struggle had taken place when SACOD was formed in 1953, but 'ideological questions were put aside ... for the sake of unity on the main

questions before us in the country'.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, an anonymous SACOD member argued that 'the winning of full democracy ... is an essential stage in the progress of the popular movement', whereas critics sought to

... skip the historic stage of the achievement of full democracy in South Africa, and 'go it alone' towards the final break down of all economic restrictions on the working class. In this [they] should realise that [they] would lose the co-operation of broad masses of the population not particularly affected by or desiring such an economic change.<sup>46</sup>

### **The end of the decade**

Disputes over non/multiracialism grew throughout 1959 and were covered in a variety of Congress journals. In part they represented a resurgence of disputation over the place of class struggle in a decade dominated by nationalism. Combined with the hostile attacks of the PAC and LP, however, disputes over the form the struggle should adopt and the goals for which it should aim were blurred.

Debate was soon overtaken by events. The Sharpeville and Langa massacres in March 1960 led to the declaration of a state of emergency and the banning of both the ANC and the PAC. The LP briefly inherited the political centre stage in South Africa and ran successful campaigns against black spot removals in Natal and against the first Transkeian elections in 1962. But it also attracted the repressive attention of the state and by 1964 most of its leading activists – more than 70 of them – were banned. The party disbanded in the face of the Political Interference Act of 1968, which prohibited non-racial political parties.

In 1961 the ANC and SACP jointly formed Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) and began a campaign of sabotage. By the time the ANC was forced into underground and military activity, however, the unity of organisations representing all races in South Africa in the struggle against apartheid had been integrated in its practice and ideology. At the third ANC Consultative Conference in Morogoro, Tanzania, in 1969 individual membership of the organisation was opened to all races. However, while non-racialism was finally adopted by the ANC in exile, multiracialism continued to guide the form of legal organisations opposing apartheid within South Africa until 1990.

From the time the ANC emerged as a leading element in the resistance movement in South Africa it faced an array of problems relating to the nature of the struggle for equality and the form it should take. At the base of those problems – ideologically, politically and otherwise – lay the country's white population. The ANC leadership accepted the permanence of whites in the country, while seeking to mobilise and organise Africans. Multiracialism was the mechanism by which the ANC sought to do this, while co-operating with organisations representing other race groups.

The rise of the ANC initiated political discussion and debate among liberals, socialists and others outside of the organisation who opposed segregation and apartheid. All were forced to acknowledge African nationalism, and to amend their theory and practice accordingly. As a result, the 1950s were a decade of both mass struggle and ideological and strategic debate, as liberals and socialists sought to influence the programme of the ANC. The disputes which followed the rise of the ANC – over the place of class struggle, the efficacy of parliamentary action, and others – were fought about the form that racial co-operation should take, and the place of whites in the struggle against apartheid.

### **Nationalism, socialism, liberalism, communism ... and whites**

During the 1950s, as a result of disputation and argument, the language of inter-racial, multi-racial, non-racial and so on had become clearer. But if terminology had become more precise the same could not be said of the understanding of how non-racialism would be realised under African nationalist leadership. In part this was because beneath the disputes about the structure of the Congress Alliance lay a deeper set of competing ideologies, whose differences were fought out over the multiracialism vs non-racialism debate. In the face of an increasingly vicious apartheid state and security apparatus, moreover, blurry 'non-racialism' had a much-needed feel-good factor and was a rallying cry for all those opposed to the implementation of apartheid.

And of course at the heart of the issue were white South Africans. In the face of growing oppression, drawing together African, Indian and coloured activists and organisations in an anti-apartheid alliance was an obvious step. But what about whites? What to do about whites generally, since they were not colonial servants who would flee back to the metropole come independence, as was happening across the African continent,<sup>47</sup> but were rooted permanently in the country? And what to do

about those whites who wanted to join the anti-apartheid struggle? Liberalism, socialism, the internal colonialism thesis of the South African Communist Party, the nationalisms of the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) – all had to recognise and accommodate whites, both as permanent residents of the country and as participants in an African-led liberation struggle. All had to consider, debate, wrestle with and take a position on non-racialism, and on what to do about white participation.

Some did so more easily than others. Few, if any, managed to move beyond the general notion of equality under African leadership – exactly the approach of all post-1994 governments. That remains a partial, under-developed and ham-fisted interpretation of what non-racialism could, and should, mean.

Whites were members of the Communist and Liberal parties and SACOD; well-known anti-apartheid whites also tried to join the ANC (Ronald Segal) and PAC (Patrick Duncan, who had previously tried to join the ANC), while others (particularly on the far left) maintained an ongoing critical commentary on the follies of nationalism and of racially discrete congresses.

This latter group – proponents of an immediate class struggle, rather than a class struggle to be initiated after the national liberation struggle had been executed successfully – are arguably as marginal in the post-apartheid political discourse as they were during the struggle years – even as their predictions seem to be coming true, and (former) ANC leaders defend instant wealth because ‘we did not struggle to remain poor’.<sup>48</sup>

As the ANC’s dominance within the tripartite alliance became increasingly pronounced in the post-apartheid era, during which it formed successive governments, there has been contestation over the number and depth of redistributive measures and the growth path chosen by the ANC, while the adherents of class struggle seem as few and as disparate as they were 60 years ago. The warnings issued then – that class struggle would be postponed indefinitely by a national bourgeoisie anxious to maximise personal wealth and advancement at the expense of the urban and rural poor – are repeated, though with less ‘we told you so’ than might have been expected, suggesting that history does indeed need to be revisited and its lessons re-learned. During the 2009 general election campaign, some media attention was given to arguments – some from within or close to the ruling party, others from more predictable economic sectors and their think-tanks – that affirmative action and black

economic empowerment – the two premier vehicles for either redistribution or an instant national bourgeoisie, depending on your viewpoint – should be done away with, as they were harming the economy. But the lesson has been learned the hard way: race classification linked to economic advancement has utilitarian, political and vote-catching value. It would be a harsh historical irony if arguments about the economic irrationality of race classification linked to job reservation and redistribution were to find purchase in the ANC, the party that (with the SACP) so strongly argued that capitalism and apartheid were mutually functional and rejected all arguments to the contrary as gutless liberalism.

The ANC conference in Polokwane in December 2007, which saw the demise of the Thabo Mbeki era, heralded much change. At the time of writing, it is impossible to know if this will translate into substance. Post-Polokwane, the ANC and government speak more forcefully about redistribution and pro-poor growth. The tetchy impatience with (real or perceived) colonial stereotyping that marked the Mbeki era seems to be declining, and hopefully this decline will be accompanied by more open-mindedness to debate and discussion about race, identity, and non-racialism. That such a discussion is urgently needed was made clear by the murderous xenophobic violence of May 2008 and the ethnic undertones of the ANC/Congress of the People (COPE) election battle in 2009.

The current generation of political leaders – and many of their voters – were all affected by apartheid, and may have a race-bred consciousness that will never entirely fade away. But the next generation – those born long after apartheid's demise – deserve so much better. We currently lack any pointers as to *where we are going*, or when – if ever – the need for racial classification will fall away. And with it, when racial pigeon-holing (ideologically, socially, inter-personally, discursively) will be sloughed off. The result is that non-racialism has retreated to the realm of the individual and the private, rather than being societal and, by definition, public. Non-racialism has no common pro-active moral content in post-apartheid South Africa. Our challenge is to find the courage to break decisively with the past, the mindsets and the identities it created for and ascribed to us all, and enter a new discursive space where as Walt Whitman (in *The Mystic Trumpeter*) would have it, it will be “enough to merely be! Enough to breathe!”.

<sup>1</sup> This paper is adapted from various chapters in a forthcoming book on the origins of nonracialism, to be published by Wits University press later this year. <sup>2</sup> Preamble to the Freedom Charter, taken from J Cronin & R Suttner 1986, *30 years of the Freedom Charter*, Johannesburg, p 262. <sup>3</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996, p 1 (preamble). <sup>4</sup> From the title of a book on non-racialism: J Fredrickse 1990, *The Unbreakable Thread – Non-racialism in South Africa*, Johannesburg. <sup>5</sup> H Bernstein 1991, 'The breakable thread', *The Southern African Review of Books* 3, March/April, pp 20-21, quoted in N Ndebele 2002, 'The African National Congress and the policy of non-racialism: a study of the membership issue', *Politikon* 29(2), p 145. <sup>6</sup> W C Sellar & R J Yeatman 1931, *1066 and all that: A Memorable History of England, comprising all the parts you can remember, including 103 Good Things, 5 Bad Kings and 2 Genuine Dates*, London. <sup>7</sup> Warren Beatty in *Bulworth* (Twentieth Century Fox 1998). <sup>8</sup> Luthuli, 'ANC', op cit, p 11. <sup>9</sup> Editorial, *Contact* 16 May 1959, p 6. <sup>10</sup> 'Introducing "The Citizen"', *The Citizen* 31 March 1956, p 1. <sup>11</sup> Kenneth Hendrickse 1958, 'The Opposition in Congress', *The Citizen* 4 March. <sup>12</sup> P Dreyer 1959, *Against Racial Status and Segregation. Towards the Liquidation of Multi-Racialism and Non-Europeanism*, Cape Town, p 7. <sup>13</sup> *Bantu World* 28 June 1958. <sup>14</sup> See D Musson 1989, *Johnny Gomas: Voice of the Working Class*, Cape Town. <sup>15</sup> Quoted in *The Citizen* 4 March 1958; see also Musson, *Gomas*, op cit, p 121. <sup>16</sup> Duncan papers DU 5.14.42: P Duncan to P Brown 3 May 1959 and 30 June 1959. <sup>17</sup> Benson, *Birthright*, op cit, p 206. <sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p 207. <sup>19</sup> Duncan papers DU 8.9.10: P Duncan (nd)1958, 'Assessment of the victory of the Africanists in the Transvaal ANC' (mimeo). <sup>20</sup> Quoted in Francis Meli 1988, *South Africa Belongs To Us: A History of the ANC*, Harare, p 137. <sup>21</sup> Micr. Afr. 484 Reel 8: P Tsele to O R Tambo 25 May 1958. <sup>22</sup> Micr. Afr. 484 Reel 8: Manifesto of the Africanist Movement: Africanist National Convention 4/5 April 1959, p 2. <sup>23</sup> SACOD papers AD1196/D: Minutes, SACOD National Council 30/31 May 1959, p 3. <sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p 1. <sup>25</sup> Treason Trial collection: AD1812 Ef.2: B Gottschalk to Y Barenblatt 17 August 1956. <sup>26</sup> Interview with Baruch Hirson 1986. <sup>27</sup> SACOD papers AD1196/D: Some Suggestions (internal discussion document) (nd)1958, p 2. <sup>28</sup> 'Organisational Problems of the S.A.C.O.D.', *Counter Attack* August 1956, p 4. <sup>29</sup> Interview with Ronald Segal. <sup>30</sup> SACOD papers AD1196/D: SACOD National Council 30/31 May 1959, p 7. <sup>31</sup> 'Discussion Corner', *Counter Attack* December 1958, p 2. <sup>32</sup> 'Treason Trialist 1959, 'Other Thoughts on One Congress', *Counter Attack* May, p 9. <sup>33</sup> Interview with Peter Hjul. <sup>34</sup> SACOD papers AD1196/D: SACOD National Council 30/31 May 1959, p 7. <sup>35</sup> K Shanker (Baruch Hirson) 1958, 'The Congresses and the Multi Racial Conference', *Analysis* 1 January, p 3. <sup>36</sup> *Ibid*. <sup>37</sup> *Ibid*. <sup>38</sup> 'V' (Vic Goldberg) (nd)1959, 'After Conference', *Counter Attack* supplement, p 2. <sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p 3. <sup>40</sup> 'Trialist', 'Thoughts', op cit, p 9. <sup>41</sup> NEC Report to the ANC National Conference December 1959, in Karis and Gerhart, *Challenge*, op cit, p 485. <sup>42</sup> Africanist Manifesto, op cit, p 2. <sup>43</sup> Interview with Ben Turok.

<sup>44</sup> Auden House collection AD1180 Eo 3.1.5: NCC, Report to Joint Congress Executives (nd)1957, p 1. <sup>45</sup> 'Communism and C.O.D.', *Counter Attack* January 1959, p 1. <sup>46</sup> 'R.A.L.' (nd)1959, 'After Conference: Another Viewpoint', *Counter Attack* Supplement. <sup>47</sup> The salience of 'Colonialism of a Special Type' under post-apartheid conditions which have indeed seen hundreds of thousands – or millions, depending on which source is used – of whites flee the country, remains a topic to be investigated. <sup>48</sup> Quoted in *Business Report*, 4 March 2009.