**POL 3013: South African Political Thought**

**Lecture 45: ANC, SACP and national democratic revolution**

**1. Armed struggle, exile and Third Worldism:** In June 1961, a group within the ANC and SACP decided to prepare for armed struggle, and Umkhonto weSizwe’s first sabotage attacks were made that December. Around the same time, Oliver Tambo was sent out of the country to establish a foreign mission for the ANC, which could continue its work despite repression within South Africa. At first Tambo struggled to get support from newly independent states in Africa. He found increased support as ideas of Third World liberation spread, in response to events such as the Vietnam War. The Western left increasingly put their hopes for a global challenge to capitalism in Third World struggles and the anti-apartheid struggle came to be seen in this light.

**2. Background to ANC conference at Morogoro in 1969:** By the mid-60s, the ANC had established training camps and offices in Tanzania and Zambia. The leadership in exile had started as a temporary measure, but had become entrenched. There was increasing dissatisfaction among the rank and file after the failed attempt to infiltrate MK soldiers back to South Africa through Rhodesia (Wankie campaign). This was captured in a March 1969 memorandum by Chris Hani and six others, which spoke of a corruption, self-interest and unaccountability among ANC leaders, and the organization adjusting to exile rather than preparing to go home. The Morogoro conference was called by Tambo and the NEC in order to address these grievances and make a fresh start.

**3. “Strategy and Tactics”:** The Morogoro conference established the ANC leadership in exile as its elected leadership, under Tambo’s presidency. It admitted non-Africans to membership of the ANC for the first time (they had been members of MK from the beginning), but specified that only Africans could be members of the National Executive Committee. But it was most significant in setting out a new perspective for the ANC, which now described its armed struggle as part of a strategy for revolution (*From Protest to Challenge*, p. 388). Although the focus of the document is on South Africa, the ANC sees itself as part of an “international context of transition to the socialist system” (pp. 387-88). Its account of its own role in this process is shaped by the theory of national-democratic revolution (p. 390). It recognizes the special role of the working-class in the struggle and the need for the struggle to “economic emancipation” if it is to represent more than the “shadow” of liberation (p. 392). These perspectives shaped the anti-apartheid struggle until around 1990.

**4. NDR as a theory of the transition to socialism:** The theory of national democratic revolution (NDR) emerged as a response by the Soviet camp to the rise of the Third World in the 1950s and the needs of the Cold War. NDR was meant to provide a theory of the transition to socialism in the specific conditions of underdeveloped countries—colonies, semi-colonies, former colonies—in which the working class was too weak to be an independent political force, and could not feasibly put forward a socialist programme. Rather than opposing capitalism, it needed to ally itself with the peasantry (usually the large majority of such societies) and the national bourgeoisie. These three classes (and the petty bourgeoisie) were held to have interest opposed to the interests of imperialism. NDR was intended to create a state which was “neither socialist nor capitalist,” but orientated towards socialism at the same time as it promoted the growth of a new (national) capitalism. This is often seen as the first stage of a two-stage revolution. NDR was included in the SACP programme of 1962—along with an account of South Africa as a “colonial society of a special type”— and the ANC “Strategy and Tactics” of 1969, thereby cementing the alliance that had evolved between ANC and SACP since 1950 at a theoretical level.

**5. Debating NDR:** On the face of it, South Africa was not a colonial society and did not meet the conditions for NDR. To the extent the terms of the NDR was unclear, it relied on the leadership of a communist party, which substitutes itself for the class it represents. That is, an alliance is made on the basis of a programme of democratic capitalism, while the party plans for the second stage, instead of mobilizing the class to struggle for socialism.